

Liberty University

Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus in the Local Church

A Thesis Project Submitted to
The faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

By

Clyde David Headley

Lynchburg, VA

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Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Steve Vandergriff

Dr. Michael Eiras

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

Clyde Headley

Liberty University School of Divinity, 2022

Mentor: Dr. Steve Vandegriff

Abstract: George Barna has researched the state of discipleship in the American church. His results reveal that "Most believers say their faith matters, but few invest much energy in the pursuit of spiritual growth." The spiritual growth he is referring to requires effective discipleship. His research indicates that most church members agree with the tenants of the Christian faith, but very few are applying those truths to their daily lives. If the current discipleship process is not producing mature disciples (as it appears it is not), there are two possible explanations. Either the process itself is flawed, or those leading the process fail to follow the process correctly. The premise of this research is that the leadership is flawed because they are not following the model Jesus provided in Scripture.

The research will be accomplished by examining the progression of the discipleship process, beginning with the record of the model Jesus provided in scripture up to modern texts and research on the topic. There have been many eras of the church throughout history, and each era had a specific emphasis. This research will attempt to discover whether there was a consistent emphasis on the model of discipleship emulated by Jesus Christ through those eras.

Keywords – Discipleship, disciple, church history, Edict of Milan

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The church in America is in decline and has been for several decades. Alvin Reid speaks of “the waning impact of the church on society in the West.”¹ Bill Hull argues that the lack of impact Reid is speaking of is due to a lack of discipleship in the church. Hull says, “Unfortunately non-discipleship ‘Christianity’ dominates much of the thinking of the contemporary church.”² Most local churches in North America have discipleship programs and fail to impact the world around them and fail to see lost souls come to salvation. Many books are available concerning the mechanics and motivation for discipleship, and still, the results are grim. The widespread problem is not a lack of effort in discipleship but misplaced, ineffective discipleship.

Ministry Context

The church in America is in decline. J. D. Greear of the North American Mission Board indicates a decline in baptisms across the Southern Baptist Convention. Greear claims, “baptism numbers serve as one of the best indicators of evangelism in our churches.”³ Alvin Reid points out, “Even the Southern Baptist Convention, known for its conservative and evangelistic heritage, has seen historic decline in evangelistic effectiveness and more recently a drop in total membership.”⁴ Individual churches and, more importantly, individual church members are

¹ Alvin Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 3.

² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 1.

³ Greear, J. D. "Why Baptism Sunday?" *North American Mission Board*. August 12, 2019. <https://www.namb.net/news/j-d-greear-why-baptism-sunday/> (accessed November 28, 2020).

⁴ Reid, *Evangelism Handbook*, 4

failing to make disciples. Additionally, many of the disciples they have made are leaving their faith and the church.

David Kinnaman introduces his book, *You Lost Me*, with this statement, “Many young people who grew up in church and have since dropped out do not hesitate to place blame. They point the finger, fairly or not, at the establishment: you lost me.”⁵ Kinnaman’s work specifically addresses young people, but his claim is interesting to consider. Without question, a percentage (and the percentage is likely large) of these young people were never saved and left the church as soon as they could. The remainder left for varied reasons, some being legitimate and others selfish. Statistics around the country and the world indicate that this exodus is not unique to young adults but also involves older church members.

The church has little impact on society in America. People are leaving the church, and society has a generally negative view of the church. Dallas Willard warned, “But there is a great deal of disappointment expressed today about the character and the effects of Christian people, about Christian institutions, and – at least by implication – about the Christian faith and understanding of reality.”⁶ A Gallup poll released in 2019 shows that church membership in America has declined 20% in the last 20 years.⁷ There is a trend toward no religious affiliation in America. The Barna Group released an article in December 2014 claiming nearly half of the

⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 9.

⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teaching on Discipleship*. (New York: HarperOne, 2006), ix.

⁷ Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades." *Gallup*. April 18, 2019. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx> (accessed October 10, 2020).

American population is “churchless.”⁸ The report defines “churchless” as a person who has not attended a Christian church service in the preceding six months. The same report says that 77% of the “unchurched” adults have left the church; only 23% have never been a part of a church. The church is failing to reach the community in which it exists, and even worse, it is losing its members.

There are examples of local churches in America that are growing and have a tremendous impact on the community they serve. America's overall picture, however, is a failing, ineffectual church. Concerned followers of Jesus Christ must be willing to set aside pride, tradition, and even their income if necessary to make corrections.

Problem Presented

The problem this project will address is the church is failing to produce mature disciples. The last instruction Jesus gave his disciples was, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18b-20). The problem in the church today is that members are not making disciples. Will McRaney says, “The church in America is failing to impact the pool of people who do not claim to possess a personal relationship with Jesus Christ,” and goes on to claim that “95 to 97 percent of American Christians do not share their faith with others.”⁹ A casual survey of the New Testament reveals

⁸ David Kinnaman, "10 Facts About America's Churchless." *Barna Group*. December 10, 2014. <https://barna.com/research/10-facts-aout-americas-churchless> (accessed November 27, 2020).

⁹ Will McRaney Jr, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture*. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 5.

the opposite actions by Jesus' followers. They spoke about Jesus even when threatened with imprisonment or death.

This research project will address the problem that the church has placed discipleship in the wrong place in a person's faith journey. The church today approaches discipleship as beginning after a decision to follow Jesus. J. D. Greear of the North American Mission Board claims, "Baptism is a believer's first act of discipleship."¹⁰ The goal, it appears, is to get people saved and then try to get them to submit to discipleship. That approach stands in stark contrast to Scripture.

Jesus called all to repentance, but he only invested his time in a few faithful men. Jesus drew large crowds but did not consider all who showed up as his followers. The apostle John describes Jesus feeding over 5,000 men, not including their wives and children, and then preaching a message that was difficult to hear. Most of the people walked away after the message. Today, the church would have considered these people as members of the church because they had made a profession of faith. These people knew that Jesus could perform miracles, and they wanted what he could provide. They were not willing to submit to the teaching of the master and would not consider changing their lives for him. Bill Hull describes the problem this way, "a vast throng of people think they are Christian/saved/born again when they really aren't! We've made the test for salvation doctrinal rather than behavioral, ritualizing it with walking the aisle, praying to receive Christ, or signing a doctrinal statement."¹¹ Jesus taught all and invested in the few that responded and submitted to him.

¹⁰ Greear, 2019.

¹¹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 43.

The problem in the church today is that it focuses on leading people to Christ and then attempts to begin discipleship instead of initiating discipleship that leads to salvation. The model found in Scripture is that proper discipleship leads to a decision to follow Christ. The result is that those who choose to follow Jesus as a result of discipleship obey the commands of Jesus without hesitation. Discipleship today is not producing mature disciples as described in Scripture, demanding the church examine how discipleship has changed throughout the church's history.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry study is to examine discipleship throughout the history of the church to determine factors that have led to the lack of mature disciples in the church today. The church in America is in decline, which, at least in part, is a result of churches filled with “Christians” who have never become disciples. “Since Christ-centered discipleship results in transformation, we can confidently assert that most churches are deficient in discipleship.”¹² For far too long, the emphasis has been on “leading people to Christ” instead of discipling people. The Southern Baptist Convention measures its member churches, in part, by the number of baptisms they perform. “Growth” is the focus and is counted by “decisions for Christ.” Jesus focused on growing a few committed followers who would, in turn, grow a few committed followers. Numbers were not important to Jesus, only committed souls.

Jesus makes a claim at the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount that emphasizes his concern of commitment over quantity. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it” (Matt 7:13) David

¹² Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation. *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), 10.

Turner suggests that the “many” are those who are spiritually complacent, who take the easy way.¹³ Jesus often exposed the complacency of those who followed him only for what he could provide. One example of the exposure is the “Bread of Life” discourse recorded in John chapter 6. When Jesus concluded his discourse, John records the reaction of the crowd, “From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more” (John 6:66). Those people were the spiritually complacent disciples Turner describes. Carson notes that Jesus “would not shape his comments to pander to their taste.”¹⁴ Jesus also dissuaded people from following him, explaining the commitment necessary to fulfill such a task:

“Then a certain scribe came and said to Him, ‘Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Foxes have holes and birds of the air *have* nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay *His* head’” (Matt 8:19-20).

“Then Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: Go your way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me.’ But he was sad at this word, and went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Mark 10:21-22).

“Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And

¹³ David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 5342.

¹⁴ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 303.

whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple”

(Luke 14:25-27).

“So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called but few chosen”

(Matt 20:16).

Jesus had many opportunities to glory in the number of people following him, but he challenged every person to commit fully or return to their own lives.

Today's amount of literature on discipleship, church growth, and church revitalization reveals the church's poor state. A positive reality is that it also indicates church leaders' desire to have an impact. The problem is that if these leaders attempt to begin a discipleship process beginning with church members who have never exhibited obedience to Christ but believe they are mature disciples, it is unlikely they will have success obtaining obedience now. Church leaders must focus their energy on a discipleship process that resembles Jesus's model. The success of Jesus' ministry is that it produced disciples who were willing to die for the gospel's sake. Luke 13:22-33 illustrates the view Jesus had for his church, “Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able” (vs. 24). A parallel passage is Matthew 7:13-14. Craig Blomberg comments, “The fulfillment of the Great Commission does not imply that a majority will respond with genuine faith. The percentage of true believers in places and times in which being ‘Christian’ is popular is perhaps not that different from the percentage of Christians in times of persecution when few dare to profess who are not deeply committed.”¹⁵ According to Scripture, the number of baptisms or church members is not a measure of church growth; mature obedient disciples are the measure of Jesus' model.

¹⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*. The New American Commentary. (Nashville: B&H, 1992), 132.

Basic Assumptions

The state of the church in America today is not the result of malice or evil intent. Current leaders and church members continue the traditions and beliefs through the same flawed institution they now occupy. These people desire to see the kingdom of God expand, and their loved ones come to salvation. The problem is not intent or desire but in churches filled with members who are not disciples of Jesus Christ. Bill Hull suggests that Jesus employed a different strategy than current efforts at “leading people to Christ,” “He did not employ the misguided habit of twenty-first-century Christendom of ‘quick-pitching’ people into commitments.”¹⁶ The presupposition this research is based on is that most church members today are not born-again believers and do not follow the model of Jesus. The members are not disciples, and they do not expect “new converts” to be disciples. Conversely, the members consider the few who take the scriptures seriously and desire to follow the commands of Jesus as zealots or legalists.

The church in America is ineffectual and in decline. For decades now, church leaders and authors have offered possible corrections to no avail. Every person who claims to be a disciple of Jesus Christ must dispense with tradition and personal thoughts about Christ and turn to the Bible for guidance. Martin Luther was exiled from the temporal church because he pointed out the contrast of the church's traditions and rituals and the clear teaching of Scripture.

Definitions

A worthwhile study of any topic cannot occur without a clear understanding of terminology. The definitions in this section provide clarity for using the terms in this paper.

¹⁶ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 33.

Disciple

Jesus commanded his followers to make disciples in the Great Commission. The goal of every believer must then be to make disciples. The problem the church is experiencing today is a result of how the term disciple is defined. A disciple cannot be made if there is no clear definition of the term.

The word disciple found in scripture is a translation of the Greek word *mathetes* (math-ay-tes'). James Strong offers the following definition of *mathetes*, "a learner – indicating thought accompanied by endeavor...A 'disciple' was not only a pupil but an adherent; hence they are spoken of as imitators of their teacher."¹⁷ Strong's definition, coupled with the picture provided in scripture, demands a definition that goes far beyond "student, follower." Jesus did not gather people to pass information. The New Testament writers were not satisfied with casual acknowledgment of truth from those they trained; they anticipated changed lives.

Jesus called all to repent and turn to him for salvation, and many followed after him as a result. When the crowds gathered, he explained the full extent of what it meant to be his disciple. The oration commonly called the "Sermon on the Mount" includes Jesus equating anger in a person's heart to murder and a lustful glance to adultery. Jesus makes forgiveness a centerpiece to receive forgiveness, "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matt 6:14-15) Jesus clearly defined what it meant to be his disciple before he asked people to commit to him. John chapter 6 describes a large crowd gathered because they had witnessed Jesus healing many people. After feeding the crowd through a miracle, he taught them who he was and the cost involved in following him. "From that time many of His disciples went

¹⁷ James Strong, *The New Strong's Expanded Dictionary of Bible Words*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 1218.

back and walked with Him no more." (John 6:66) The demands Jesus made were too great for many to accept, and Jesus allowed them to walk away. Even though the word disciple appears in this verse, "Jesus will make it clear in due course that only those who *continue* in his words are *truly* his 'disciples' (John 8:31)."¹⁸ The use of the term "disciples" in this text stirs up some controversy. John Calvin suggests that these "disciples" are converted followers of Jesus, claiming the phrase "walked with Him no more" indicates they only receded from close contact with Jesus.¹⁹ Calvin's view reveals the problem in the church today. He assumes a person can be born-again and yet refuse to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The term "disciple" is used several times, referring to followers of other's indicating the term does not exclusively designate regenerate believers. Matthew 9:14 speaks of the disciples of John, Mark 2:18 refers to the disciples of the Pharisees, and Matthew 22:15-16 says the Pharisees sent their disciples to talk to Jesus. Judas Iscariot is called a disciple, one of the twelve, but Jesus calls him a devil. The apostle John also offers clarity on the issue by claiming, "They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us" (1 John 2:19). Daniel Akin comments on this verse, "These people who left the community had shared in its external life but were never truly a part of its internal existence due to the fact that they had never truly been born from above."²⁰ There were followers of Jesus who turned away because they were never truly committed to him.

¹⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 300.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *John*. The Crossway Classic Commentaries. (Wheaton: Watermark, 1994), 177.

²⁰ Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*. The New American Commentary. Vol. 38. (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2001), 115.

Jesus often taught in parables, and when his disciples inquired why he chose to teach in this manner, Jesus explained that only those who were genuinely seeking the appearance of the Messiah could understand the parables. "It was precisely because they had accepted the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah who would bring in the kingdom that the disciples were able to understand and respond to the teaching in the parables."²¹ Jesus did not intend for all people to understand his teaching, only those who were seeking him.

A man who had recently lost his father received an invitation from Jesus to follow him. The man had only one request before following Jesus that he be allowed to follow his people's tradition and attend his father's funeral. Jesus demanded that the man forego tradition and commit to him immediately by telling him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." (Luke 9:60). Those who chose to follow Jesus made the decision based on who he was instead of their needs.

If the church is to make disciples, it must have a working definition of the term "disciple" consistent with the meaning Jesus had when he gave the command to make disciples. The term "disciple" carries more weight than the modern western world definition. A student in America today is expected to accumulate and regurgitate a specified amount of information, and those who do so most accurately are considered to have learned the most. A student in the eyes of Jesus was very different. "Jesus did not merely ask us to teach everything He commanded. He asked us to teach people to *obey* everything He commanded, and the difference is mammoth."²² Jesus often chastised the religious leaders of his day for following the letter of the law without following the spirit of the law, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and all

²¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 340.

²² Geiger, Kelley and Nation, 18

manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone" (Luke 11:42). To Jesus, a disciple was more than a person who attended the requisite number of classes and passed the tests at the end, therefore demonstrating how much information they had committed to memory. A disciple in the days of Jesus was expected to become a replica of the master in the way they thought and felt, which would result in a change in behavior resembling the master. The Hebraic picture of a disciple is very different from the modern western world, but it appears that the western church applies the western view of a disciple to obey the Great Commission. A change of perspective is necessary if the church is to produce mature disciples of Jesus Christ. Mature disciples of Jesus display at least four qualities that distinguish them from other people: 1) A disciple is a person who is learning to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ, 2) A disciple is a person who is learning to be obedient to the Master, Jesus Christ, 3) A disciple is a person who is learning to love others as Christ has loved him, 4) A disciple a person who is learning to make other disciples. A person does not become a disciple when they surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ; they become a disciple when they first hear about Jesus. Each individual then decides whether they will continue to be a disciple or if they (like many in the Bible) will turn away.

A disciple is a person who is learning to be a committed follower of Jesus Christ. Jesus did not merely ask people to believe in him; he called them to follow him. James stated in his letter, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!" (James 2:19). Belief in Jesus is not sufficient to distinguish one as a disciple or follower. Jesus expected the twelve men he called to leave everything they knew behind them and submit their entire lives to him. Jesus called his followers to leave all distractions behind, "But Jesus said to him, 'No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God'"

(Luke 9:62). Jesus left no middle ground for his followers. He expected his followers to be focused primarily on him, "He who is not with Me is against Me, and He who does not gather with Me scatters abroad" (Matt 12:30). Spending time with the master is not optional for a disciple but is unquestionably important. Jesus did not compel his disciples to follow him against their will. Each person committed themselves to follow Jesus on their own accord.

A disciple is a person who is learning to be obedient to the Master, Jesus Christ. Jesus said that his followers would demonstrate their love for him in their obedience to his commands. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word: and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him'" (John 14:23). Those who claim to be his disciples and do not obey him are not his. A disciple understands that obedience to the Word of God is not optional. While no one can achieve perfection on this side of heaven, disciples strive toward perfection intentionally and actively.

A disciple is a person who is learning to love others as Christ has loved him. Love is a central tenant of the Christian faith. Jesus set the example for those who would be his disciples by loving them before they ever loved him. Jesus indicated that the world would identify his disciples by their love for one another (John 13:35). A disciple understands that love is a verb, it is an action word, and therefore they are capable of choosing to love or not love others. Jesus understood that it is easy for people to love others when they receive love. A true disciple's mark is that they love others whether or not the recipient of their love reciprocates. Disciples of Christ are not only to love other disciples, but they are to love their enemies with the same intensity. "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you" (Luke 6:27). Because love is a verb, the only way any person can claim to love others is through their actions and not their words.

A disciple is a person who is learning to make other disciples. The church did not grow from the first century to today only because the first-century disciples committed themselves to follow Jesus, were obedient to all that Jesus commanded, and loved one another as well as those who hated them. The church grew because the first-century disciples told others about Jesus Christ and his salvation plan, beginning the discipleship process. As a result of the discipleship process, some committed to Jesus, but many refused. Through love for others, Disciples tell others about salvation and the transforming relationship with Jesus Christ. Dallas Willard claims that the church in America today has produced congregations of people who only consume Christian services and believe that demonstrates their faith.²³ The people he describes do not apply the truth of scripture to their lives; they do not follow the Great Commission and make disciples. Mike Breen adds, “You can’t be a disciple if you aren’t willing to invest in and disciple others.”²⁴

Any person who claims to be a Christian should equally demonstrate each of these factors in their daily lives. (see figure 1) Bill Hull rightly points out that there is no difference between a disciple and a Christian and that disciples understand they are not perfect but continually progress.²⁵ Jesus not only taught his followers the truths he wanted them to know; he also demonstrated those truths in his own life and encouraged his followers to imitate him.

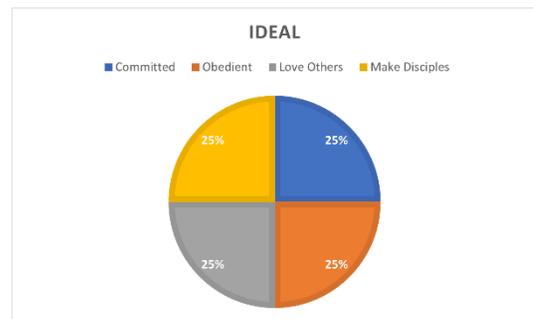


Figure 1 – Marks of a Mature Disciple

²³ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 52.

²⁴ Mike Breen, *Building A Discipling Culture*. (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2011), 39.

²⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 33.

The working definition of “disciple” for this project is: "A committed follower of Jesus who demonstrates their love for Jesus through their obedience to his commands, love for others, and making other disciples."

Church

“Church” is a term used by many and can have several meanings. The common understanding and use of the word today is twofold. “Church” refers to the local gathering of people at a particular place and refers to professing believers of all times and places. Neil Cole suggests that the possibility exists that people today read their preconceived understanding of words into scripture.²⁶ Cole’s point is that tradition and practice alone should not be the basis of defining biblical terms and ideas.

The first three uses of the term “church” in scripture are in Matthew's gospel and come from the mouth of Jesus Christ. Matthew 16:18 appears to refer to the church in the universal sense, and Matthew 18:17 appears to refer to the local gathering of believers. There is no other use of the word “church” in the gospels. Luke uses the word 22 times in Acts, and Paul uses the word 55 times in his epistles. A brief examination of the uses of the term is necessary to understand what Jesus had in mind when he said “church.”

The English word “church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia* (ek-klay-see-ah). Strong’s dictionary defines the term as a compound word that “stresses a group of people called out for a special purpose.”²⁷ This definition implies a small group called out of a larger group with a particular or unique purpose separate from the larger group. The dictionary adds, “*Ekklesia* was used among the Greeks of a body of citizens ‘gathered’ to discuss the affairs of

²⁶ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 11.

²⁷ Strong, 1068.

state.”²⁸ It is more likely that Jesus had this definition in mind when he claimed, “on this rock I will build My church” (Matt 16:18). Roy Ward advises, “It should be noted that in ordinary usage, *ekklesia* meant the assembly, and not the body of people involved.”²⁹ If this is the meaning Jesus had in mind, consistent with contemporary Greek thought, there must be a specific assembly to which he referred.

Jesus said he “will build” the church indicating construction had not yet begun, ruling out any prior constituents. David Turner reinforces the forward-looking sense, “Jesus’s use of this word for his future community of disciples evokes the rich heritage of Israel as God’s assembled covenant community.”³⁰ The community Jesus looks forward to does not include non-believers. “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:23). However, J. W. Roberts rightly points out that the New Testament has a twofold meaning of the word.³¹ The other use is of a local or community sense, a local gathering.

The Apostle Paul develops this sense of the word in his epistles, referring to gatherings in specific locations such as “The church of the Thessalonians” (1 Thes 1:1) or the “churches of Galatia” (Gal 1:1). Paul’s use of the word always indicates a gathering of people instead of designating certain people. Robert Banks claims, “the idea of a unified provincial or national

²⁸ Ibid, 1068.

²⁹ Roy Bowen Ward, "Ekklesia: A Word Study." *Restoration Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (1958): 164-179, 165.

³⁰ David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 9177 kindle.

³¹ J. W. Roberts, "The Meaning of Ekklesia in the New Testament." *Restoration Quarterly* 15, no. 1 (1972): 27-36, 79.

church is as foreign to Paul's thinking as the notion of a universal church."³² Banks' assertion eliminates the idea of being a Christian while refusing to gather with other believers. The assertion that there is no universal church appears to contradict the statement made by Jesus in Matthew 16, where he does not appear to be indicating any specific local gathering of believers and yet, in keeping with the Greek understanding of the word, requires a physical gathering. The gathering Jesus spoke of must not be temporal. One can find harmony in the intent and meaning provided by Jesus and Paul.

Paul uses "church" to speak of people's gatherings in a local setting for worship and encouragement. However, those gatherings' makeup is not exclusive, as he occasionally guides expulsion from the assembly. The reasons Paul offers for expulsion center on unacceptable behavior rather than any mention of a public claim of faith. Paul encouraged churches to exclude professing believers from the assembly based on their willingness, or lack thereof, to submit to correction and modify their behavior. Paul wrote to the believers in Corinth, "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person" (1 Cor 5:11). John MacArthur points out that Paul does not indicate a person can lose their salvation, but that a true believer should be cut off from all fellowship until they repent, which a true believer will.³³ However, the church, the gathering of believers, must protect itself from the influence of sin.

³² Robert J. Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Cultural Setting*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 30.

³³ John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*. The MacArthur New Testament Commentary. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 2923 kindle.

Every Christian denomination has its unique definition of “the church,” and finding consensus is nearly impossible. This paper will allow scripture to define the term for clarity. The word church (*ekklesia*) always refers to a gathering, not individuals. Jesus used the word to refer to the gatherings in two ways; 1) the gathering of believers in heaven (which will happen in the future), and 2) the gathering of living believers in a common geographic area. Additionally, the apostle Paul used the word church in two ways; 1) the gathering of believers in a universal sense as a primary way of identifying them³⁴ and 2) the local gathering of believers in geographic locations.

This paper will distinguish between the two uses based on the meaning of the word implied by Jesus and Paul. The “true church” is the yet future gathering of believers in heaven (which will not include non-believers), and “church” is the local gathering of professing believers (which will always include non-believers.)

Discipleship

The mission of the church is to make disciples. The standard description of the disciple-making process is discipleship. Once again, a clear definition of the word is necessary to accomplish the task. The word “discipleship” is never used in scripture, but there is a picture of the disciple-making process. The authors of *Transformational Discipleship* accurately state, “If a church or an individual has an inaccurate view of discipleship, the resulting impact is horrifyingly huge.”³⁵ Clarification is essential to avoid frustration and deviation.

³⁴ Banks, 30.

³⁵ Geiger, Kelley and Nation, 18.

One of the critical factors in defining the word is understanding who is responsible for discipleship. Some authors appear to place the process on the shoulders of the individual. Dietrich Bonhoeffer argues that every person begins their journey with Christ by a simple decision to obey Jesus' call as Matthew did.³⁶ The individual's actions make them a disciple, and their continued obedience is discipleship (the disciple's growth). Lesii White also places the responsibility of discipleship on the disciple, "Discipleship calls us to live by faith in Him in the everydayness of life by the Holy Spirit's power."³⁷ The individual disciple is responsible for learning how to live by faith.

Others view the responsibility of discipleship on the church. Bill Hull indicates that the church invites people into a discipling relationship.³⁸ Mike Breen places the responsibility on the church by claiming that most church members are not taught to disciple others.³⁹ Jesus did not invite the apostles into membership in a group or club; he invited them into a relationship where he could teach them about who he is and how he would have them live.

Jesus did not haphazardly teach his disciples. On the other hand, Jesus did not have a program the disciples went through like an assembly line. Jesus taught in different ways at different times to different groups of people. He used every experience as an opportunity to teach. Jesus taught with intentionality and purpose. He did not wait for opportunities to arise or for his disciples to come to him with questions; he actively taught them and expected them to

³⁶ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*. (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 58.

³⁷ Lesii White, "What Discipleship Is and Is Not." *beliefnet*. n.d. <https://www.beliefnet.co/faiths/christianity/articles/what-discipleship-is-and-is-not.aspx> (accessed December 5, 2020).

³⁸ Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 33.

³⁹ Breen, *Building A Discipling Culture*, 11.

apply what he taught to their lives. Jesus determined when, where, and how he taught; it was not up to the disciples to decide when they were available.

Discipleship is the active teaching about Jesus Christ and his commands through oration and participation. While every disciple grows at their own rate, the teacher determines the process. Some will argue that this definition is too narrow and too limiting. The truth of scripture is that the true believers did not hesitate to obey Jesus. Those who followed Jesus for selfish reasons left when he taught the truth; they would not submit to him (and yet they were called disciples), and he did not change his plan to accommodate them.

The method Jesus used for discipleship involves a four-step process. Jesus' entire ministry was constrained to Palestine and the Jewish people. The Jews believed in God and his plan of salvation, including a messiah's eventual arrival. His audience had some knowledge of the Messiah upon which he could build. The first step of discipleship is Jesus explained to the Jewish people that he was the Messiah they had been anticipating. The reaction to his message was varied from complete rejection to complete acceptance. Many people were in the middle and needed more information and time to process the claims Jesus made before they would submit to him. The first step of Jesus' ministry was teaching about who he was.

After people had the opportunity to understand who Jesus was, he called them to follow him. The first apostles Jesus invited to "come and see" in John 1:39 had learned about Jesus and had some understanding of him. "Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said, 'Behold the Lamb of God'" (John 1:35-36). Jesus invited the men to enter into a more committed relationship with him. Luke records Jesus healing Simon's mother-in-law and many others in Simon's house (Luke 4:38-40). After the account of the healing, Jesus used Simon's boat to preach to the crowds and then told Simon to cast his nets

into the water. After the great catch, Luke says that Simon Peter submitted to the Lordship of Jesus (Luke 5:8). At that time, Jesus called Simon to follow him. The second step of discipleship is salvation.

Once the apostles committed themselves to follow Jesus, they observed Jesus minister to others. They witnessed Jesus turn water into wine (John 2:1-11), cast out demons (Matt 8:28-33), command the elements (Mark 4:37-41, heal the sick (Luke 8:40-48), and pray (Luke 11:1) Jesus ministered and modeled the life he would have his followers live. The apostles had an opportunity to ask questions and get answers. Jesus provided an example for them to follow. The third step in discipleship, according to the model of Jesus, is demonstration/ministering together.

The third step of discipleship transitions from the disciple only observing initially to the disciple leading the ministry. The more the disciple grows in understanding and ability through action, the less the disciplers presence is required until the disciple can lead others.

The final step of discipleship, according to the model of Jesus, is releasing the disciple to minister on their own. Jesus told his disciples that he would no longer be with them one day and that they would need to do the work of the ministry alone. Jesus expected his disciples to replicate the model he used with them. He sent the disciples out to minister while he was still on earth (Matt 10:5) to give opportunity for them to act independently but still have the opportunity for evaluation by Jesus. Just before leaving earth, Jesus told his disciples to continue the work he started with them. The fourth step in discipleship, according to the model of Jesus, is release to ministry.

The teaching opportunities may vary from disciple to disciple. However, the method must remain consistent with the model Jesus provided to realize the expected result of producing

mature disciples: 1) teach about who Jesus is, 2) salvation (commitment to follow Jesus), 3) demonstration/ministering together, and 4) releasing to minister. (see figure 2)

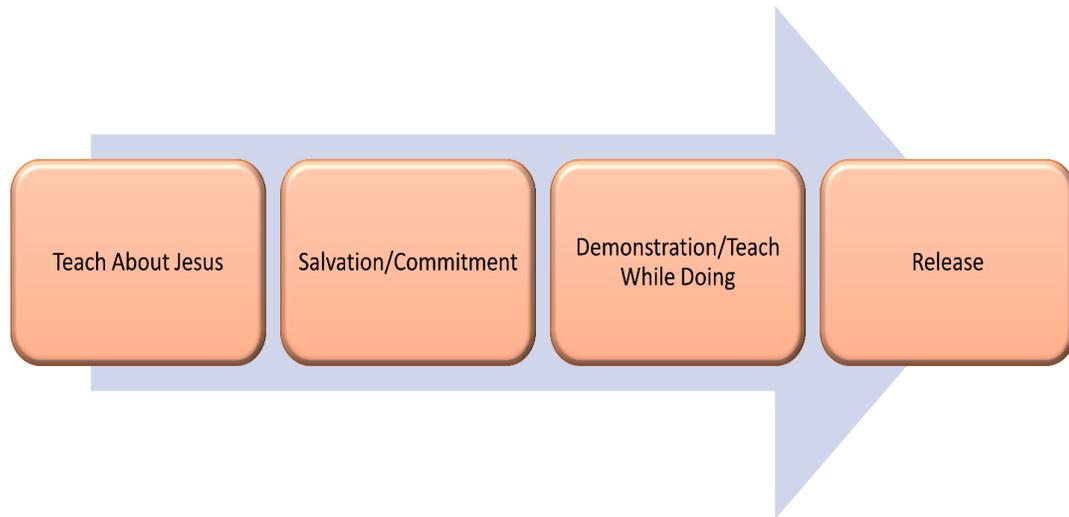


Figure 2 - Biblical Order of Disciple-Making

Limitations and Delimitations

This research project relies entirely on the writings of authors throughout the ages, from the post-apostolic period through the present day. The subject of this research project is discipleship. Authors in the various periods researched wrote on topics that were significant to their specific time, and as a result, those authors may not specifically address discipleship. However, the writings addressing different topics may reveal basic assumptions or opinions on elements of discipleship as defined in this paper.

Each period to be studied presents different doctrinal issues that were important or contested during that period. The material review will attempt to study authors on opposing sides of the doctrinal issues seeking similarities or differences in discipleship. The review of any author's writing does not indicate support or agreement with their position on specific doctrinal issues.

Thesis Statement

The claim this research project seeks to address is that the church produces mature disciples when it follows the model of Jesus Christ in placing primacy of discipleship over “decisions for Christ.” The modern American approach to discipleship is failing to produce mature disciples. The volume of literature available on the mechanics and methods of discipleship over the past several years has not resulted in a significant change in the church’s condition. Significant changes occurred in the church when Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 313 A. D. The leaders of the Reformation attempted to “return to the sources of the Christian faith, and that this would result in a reformation of existing doctrine and practice.”⁴⁰ That work is not yet complete.

Conclusion

The church in America is unhealthy and ineffectual. The church must take a different approach to discipleship if there is to be any change in its ability to satisfy the commission given by Jesus. Discipleship begins before salvation and continues after. Disciples are willing to be taught and make themselves available for instruction. Disciplers must include disciples in the ministry of the local church outside the boundaries of the physical building. Jesus modeled discipleship as teaching while ministering instead of the typical approach today of teaching in a classroom to prepare for ministry. Students in medical school are only considered doctors after they complete a period of practicing the skills and techniques they have learned under the close supervision of an experienced doctor. Any student unwilling to apply the training and submit to

⁴⁰ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day*. Vol. 2. (New York: Harper Collins, 1985), 7.

the supervision is disenrolled, removed from the program. A focus on discipleship instead of salvation is the model Jesus set and the model the church should adopt.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

Since the church's inception by Jesus Christ and the consummation recorded in the book of Acts, the church has experienced diverse challenges. The church responded to those challenges just as nations or businesses do today; the church diverted resources and energy toward those challenges. At times, the attention the challenges received resulted in growth and unity; at other times, it moved away from God's plan. The operation of the church today is a result of the changes brought on by these challenges. Every person who claims the banner of Christian must concern themselves with the plan Jesus laid out for his church and resist the temptation to accept and follow traditions put in place by men that lead the church in the wrong direction.

Literary Review

This research will survey the writing of church leaders in four epochs of time. A review of literature provided in this chapter is divided into the following sections: Post-apostolic, Post-Edict of Milan, Post-reformation, and the release of the Authorized Version of the King James Bible. The post-apostolic era will reveal issues within the church during its infancy. A primary concern during that period was the persecution the church experienced. The Edict of Milan removed the persecution and ultimately resulted in Christianity being declared the official religion of Rome. The impact of that decision resulted in a tremendous influx of "church members" who became members for other reasons than making Jesus Christ Lord and Master of their lives. The Reformation was an attempt for the church to return to its original purpose and function. Shortly after the release of the King James Bible, the establishment of America resulted in challenges similar to those seen in Rome by making Christianity the official religion. The church has many members who are not born-again, regenerated believers in Jesus Christ.

Post-apostolic authors

Clement of Rome

Clement of Rome wrote a letter to the church in Corinth, likely written sometime between AD 90-100.⁴¹ Clements' letter is similar in form and substance to the letters of the apostle Paul. Clement met Paul in Philippi and later became influential in the church in Rome. One of the themes apparent throughout the letter is obedience. Clement praises the Corinthians, "Adorned by a thoroughly virtuous and religious life, he did all things in the fear of God. The commandments and ordinances of the Lord were written upon the tablets on your hearts."⁴² Clement anticipated action and obedience in the lives of those who claimed the title of "Christian." Benjamin Bacon points out that "Clement has upwards of forty-seven echoes of Hebrews..."⁴³, indicating his reference to chapter 11 of the book of Hebrews. Clement points to the actions of the saints listed in Hebrews 11 as the factor by which the Lord found them justified or righteous. Clement does not stress belief in God as the way to salvation, but obedience to God through action. Although Clement offers no direct statement regarding teaching or discipleship, it is not realistic to conclude that he anticipated obedience in the absence of teaching or instruction.

Clément's letter includes a chapter concerning the death of both Peter and Paul. John may have still been alive on the island of Patmos at the time of this letter, but it appears to be one of

⁴¹ Jonathan Hill, *Handbook of the History of Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 39.

⁴² Clement of Rome. "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 282-1243 Kindle. Crane, MO: Defender, 2011, 317 kindle.

⁴³ Benjamin W. Bacon, "The Doctrine of Faith in Hebrews, James, and Clement of Rome." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 19, no. 1 (1900): 12-21, 19.

the first writings of the post-Apostolic period. The church was still facing severe persecution. Obedience demonstrated through action is a theme stressed by this student of the apostle Paul.

Polycarp

Polycarp was a disciple of the apostle John. Irenaeus said of Polycarp, “he would speak of the conversations he had held with John and with others who had seen the Lord. How did he make mention of their words and of whatever he had heard from them respecting the Lord.”⁴⁴ Polycarp's letter to the church at Philippi does not rise to the level of inspired scripture but still maintains credence due to his close relationship to the apostle John. The letter is similar to Paul's letters in the New Testament in form and content, revealing the ongoing emphasis of the early church leaders. Polycarp repeats a theme several times in this epistle relevant to discipleship; obedience through action. He anticipates the display of good works as a resultant expression of salvation. A person's actions were the measure of salvation, not mere words. Spiritual growth only results from studying God's word and gathering together with other believers. Like many early church leaders, Polycarp was very concerned with heresy creeping into the church and leading individuals astray.

Ignatius

Ignatius was a contemporary and friend of Polycarp. Several letters bear his name; however, many of those writings are in dispute. There also exist short and long versions of his letters, of which the long versions are in dispute. For these reasons, only the short versions of the letters not in dispute appear in this review. Ignatius wrote the letters after his arrest and sentence

⁴⁴ Polycarp. "The Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 1633-1844 Kindle. Crane, MO: Defender, 2011, 1594 kindle.

for execution issued by Trajan. His letters are quoted by Polycarp, Irenaeus, and Origen, offering legitimacy to the source and content of the letters.

Ignatius repeatedly emphasizes that actions identify Christians. Obedience to the commands of Jesus is a demonstration of salvation. Obedience is one of the marks of a disciple. “The Christian is not the result of persuasion, but of power. When he is hated by the world, he is beloved of God.”⁴⁵ A true believer does not need to be coerced into obedience but accepts direction and willingly follows the commands of the Lord.

Ignatius was also concerned with heresy, especially from within the church. All heresy must be addressed and refuted. A heresy that arises within the church can be more challenging to identify and address because it is generally not far from the truth. The problem is that a deviation of the slightest amount from the intended mark results in missing the mark by a greater distance as time passes. Ignatius states that studying God’s word is the best protection from allowing a heresy to enter and corrupt the church. A person must commit to following the Lord Jesus Christ instead of a particular teacher or church leader.

Finally, Ignatius stressed the importance of unity and the gathering of the church together. Unity in thought and practice identified the Christian community of his time. Unity in the source of information led to unity in the church, and the practice and actions of the community demonstrated unity. Strict adherence to the teaching of Jesus and his apostles was essential for both personal growth and the advancement of the kingdom of God.

⁴⁵ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 3522-3762 Kindle. Crane, MO: Defender, 2011, 3575 kindle.

Origen

Origen was a student of and successor to Clement of Alexandria. Like his predecessor, Origen embraced an allegorical interpretation of scripture, and therefore he differed from his contemporaries in many areas of doctrine.⁴⁶ His input here is not an endorsement of his theology but his view of discipleship. Origen explained that the Holy Spirit only works in those already moving toward Jesus Christ, implying that discipleship begins before salvation. After salvation, a believer requires ongoing and continuous training and instruction. People either grow towards God or decline into destruction; for Origen, there is no middle ground. Commitment to Jesus and obedience to his word are two themes apparent throughout his writings.

Concerning discipleship, a common thread in the early church father's writings is unity in thought resisting heresy. The heresy the leaders warned against was usually similar to the apostolic doctrine but somehow led away from the truth. The leaders warned about the heresy because the heresy could deceive believers. The congregation members did not elect the bishops of the local church; established leaders who had proven their complete acceptance of the apostolic teaching appointed them. Eusebius records the primary leaders of the larger churches in his work *Church History* as being appointed by presiding leaders.⁴⁷ The practice of appointing leaders limited the possibility of a heretic from having authority in the church. The idea of denominations within the church is not consistent with the demands of unity of the early church fathers.

⁴⁶ Stephen Tomkins, *A Short History of Christianity*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 37.

⁴⁷ Eusebius. *The Complete Works of Eusebius of Caesarea*. Toronto, 2016, 26 kindle.

Tertullian

Tertullian was a Greek-born in Carthage around 155 AD. He went to Rome to study law, and there converted to Christianity. He returned to Carthage and became a priest there. He was “the first major Latin theologian.”⁴⁸ His extant treatises primarily address apologetics and heresies within and without the church. He was greatly influenced by Irenaeus and was a contemporary of Clement of Alexandria and Origen. He eventually became disenchanted by, in his view, the complacency of the Roman Church that he joined the Montanist movement.⁴⁹ His writings continue to impact the Western Church.

Concerning discipleship, Tertullian did not specifically address the topic. He did, however, speak frequently about the relationship between the love of God and obedience. Christopher Bounds describes Tertullian’s view this way, “Sanctification entails the love of God and neighbor. Tertullian teaches that God is a ‘perfect father’ who must be loved with dutiful affection. Love of God produces obedience to God.”⁵⁰ For Tertullian, learning and discipleship resulted in an outward expression of the inward growth. Discipleship results in an observable change in behavior. Tertullian’s decision to join the Montanists was due, in part, to the Roman Church’s laxity in holding members accountable for their actions, the behaviors that demonstrate the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁸ Bounds, Christopher. "Tertullian's Doctrine of Christian Perfection and its Theological Context." *Theological Journal* 51, no. 2 (2016): 125-139, 126.

⁴⁹ Walter A. Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*. 2nd. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 1176.

⁵⁰ Bounds, 132.

Post-Edict authors

The church fought against heretical teaching during a time of severe persecution. Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan in 314 AD. “Christianity was not made the official religion of the empire, but Constantine promoted the faith and now it would flourish like never before.”⁵¹ The promotion of the faith by the emperor led a vast number of people to join the church. Constantine, however, “saw Christianity not as negating his old faith but completing it.”⁵² The attitude Constantine and his followers brought to the church had a lasting impact.

Eusebius

Eusebius of Caesarea is considered the “father of church history.”⁵³ He was a student of Pamphilus and became a prolific writer. His most famous work was *Church History*, a church chronicle from the Apostles to about the Council of Nicea in 325. Eusebius appears to have had contact with Constantine himself, but the extent of that contact is not certain. His writings include a chronicle of Constantine's life and an *Oration in Praise of Constantine*.

Church History includes numerous comments concerning discipleship as defined in this paper. Eusebius addresses heresies that arose throughout the existence of the early church and repeatedly indicates that the preventative measure for (as well as the antidote against) heresy is the regular study of scripture. Additionally, Eusebius connects personal actions to true faith in Jesus. Whether or not a reader agrees with his theology, the marks of a disciple are commonplace throughout his writing. Eusebius greatly influenced Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo

⁵¹ Hill, 72.

⁵² Tomkins, 46.

⁵³ Elwell, 404.

through his writings.⁵⁴ His inclusion here, as a post-edict author, stems from his unique position in history as one who wrote before, during, and after the conversion of Constantine.

Eusebius was involved in many of the church councils brought about by the direction or influence of Constantine. He served as president of the Council of Tyre in 335.⁵⁵ Henry Percival indicates the aim of these councils was not to interpret scripture, but to agree upon and confirm by consensus what had been taught and passed down from generation to generation. “the question was not whether it could be proved to the satisfaction of the assembled fathers from Holy Scripture, but whether it was the traditional faith of the Church.”⁵⁶ Eusebius’ involvement in such councils reinforces his inclusion of obedience and action as indicators of true believers.

Augustine of Hippo

Augustine of Hippo is one of the most influential church leaders impacting the Western Church. His journey to the position of Bishop of Hippo prepared him to be a prolific writer. “Foremost among Augustine’s writings are: *Confessions*, a unique record of his life and spiritual journey, presented as a prayer; *The City of God*, in which he wrestles with the issues raised by the fall of Rome to the barbarians in AD 410; and the monumental *On the Trinity*.”⁵⁷ As a student of Ambrose, Augustine adopted the allegorical approach to interpreting scripture. Elwell says of Augustine, “The bishop’s life was one of constant activity; ecclesiastical duties, preaching, encouraging monastic life, training future bishops, and battling against enemy

⁵⁴ Matthew R. Crawford, "The Influence of Eusebius' Chronicle on the Apologetic Treatises of Cyril of Alexandria and Augustine of Hippo." *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 71, no. 4 (2020): 693-711, 695.

⁵⁵ Elwell, 404.

⁵⁶ Henry R. Percival, *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 1398 kindle.

⁵⁷ Hill, 90.

doctrines within and outside the church.”⁵⁸ Two of those “enemy doctrines” important to this research is Augustine’s refutation of the Donatists and his response to Coeletius, *Treatise Concerning Man’s Perfection in Righteousness*.

Augustine’s refute of the Donatist movement, *A Treatise Concerning The Correction of The Donatists*, centers on one primary issue; Augustine’s claim that the Donatists separated themselves from the Catholic Church; “For they prefer to the testimonies of Holy Writ their own contentions, because, in the case of Caecilianus, formerly a bishop of the Church of Carthage, against whom they brought charges which they were and are unable to substantiate, they separated themselves from the Catholic Church,-that is, from the unity of all nations.”⁵⁹ This primary issue of the contention between the Donatists and the Catholic Church was the conduct of the church members during persecution. The Donatists held that any action in conflict with the scriptures removed a person from membership in the church and required they submit to baptism again to regain admission.⁶⁰ While both the Donatists and Augustine relied heavily on the teaching and tradition of Cyprian, they came to differing views on the conduct of church members. Augustine favored grace and mercy, while the Donatists favored strict adherence to the Bible.

Augustine’s response to Coeletius addresses man’s ability to achieve sinless perfection on earth. Augustine’s position is that sinless perfection is not possible, but he believes that intentional effort will be apparent in the lives of faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Augustine asserts, “For no one, after going hence, shall arrive at fulness of righteousness, unless, whilst

⁵⁸ Elwell, 122.

⁵⁹ Aurelius Augustinus, *Saint Augustine of Hippo Collection*. Translated by Dr. Walls. (London: Aeterna Press, 2016), 169702 kindle.

⁶⁰ Elwell, 352.

here, he shall have run his course by hungering and thirsting after it.”⁶¹ For Augustine, the Christian faith is not passive but purposeful and active, requiring growth and application of the scriptures to one’s life. Good works are the evidence of salvation for Augustine.

Jerome

Eusebius Hieronomus, known as Saint Jerome, was born in modern-day Yugoslavia in AD 347. His most noted work is the Latin translation of the Bible known as the *Vulgate*. He also authored various letters and treatises against heretical teaching. The church experienced an influx of people due to Constantine’s promotion of the Christian faith. This rapid growth had some adverse effects as illustrated by Jerome, “The Church, as you know, welcomes penitents, and is so overwhelmed by the multitude of sinners that it is forced, in the interests of the misguided flocks, to be lenient to the wounds of the shepherds.”⁶² The leadership and expectations of the church members changed during this time of exponential growth. The effect this growth had on the biblical model of discipleship is notable.

Gregory I the Great

Gregory was born into a wealthy family and spent most of his adult years in the administration and political offices of the church. He became Pope in 590, and his “papacy is generally considered the beginning of the medieval period.”⁶³ Gregory believed that pastors must teach people according to their personality traits. His *Pastoral Rule* provides an extensive list of conditions into which people may fall. Gregory devotes one chapter to the need for pastors to set

⁶¹ Augustinus, 2760 kindle.

⁶² Jerome. *The Complete Works of Saint Jerome*. Toronto: public domain, 2016, 13494 kindle.

⁶³ Elwell, 525.

an example for the people in their care. However, he does not call for the intimacy demonstrated in the relationship Jesus had with his disciples.

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas was a teacher, theologian, philosopher, and writer. He is one of the most influential people in church history. Two of his most notable works are *Summa contra Gentiles* and the *Summa Theologiae*. These works, written in the style of a Greek philosopher, provide Aquinas' "systematic presentation of Christian doctrine."⁶⁴ Topics germane to this research include his explanation of the will, knowledge, and virtues.

The will moves toward good and has good as its end. The means toward that end are controlled by the will as well. Resisting or ignoring the will has evil as its end. "Accordingly, the will is referred both to good and evil: but to good by desiring it: to evil by shunning it."⁶⁵ Those who desire God will consequently desire good things and pursue them with good (or pure) motives and actions. The means cannot conflict with the end. His view supports Jesus' claim, "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (John 14:15) Those who are faithful followers of Jesus Christ will desire and therefore pursue "good" things.

Aquinas posits that knowledge is acquired through experience. He argues that children are born with no knowledge of anything and only acquire knowledge through their senses. Over time, they acquire knowledge through discovery (experiencing things on their own) or learning (being taught by another). Aquinas claims that it is impossible to know God through natural

⁶⁴ Ibid, 1197.

⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. Claremont, California: Coyote Canyon Press, n.d., 1169 kindle.

means; only through faith can a person experience, and therefore know, God. Possession of information only does not result in knowledge; that requires experience.

Aquinas classifies good habits as “virtues.” Based on his premise that the will desires good, virtues are the habits that lead a person closer to God. “...we are said to merit by something as by the principle whereby we merit, as we are said to run by the motive power; and thus are we said to merit by virtues and habits.”⁶⁶ Habits result from good use of free will, which requires an active thought process leading to a choice. Good behavior results from seeking or desiring God and acting according to his will. One must understand the will of God and his commands in order to develop those virtues.

Reformation Authors

Voices of discontent and outright opposition began to be heard by the end of the 14th century into the 15th. John Wycliffe was one of those voices. Wycliffe had concerns regarding the ecclesiastical leadership within the church.⁶⁷ The corruption within the leadership had reached the lowest levels, exemplified by the fact that local priests were required to purchase their position. “The ancient monastic discipline was increasingly relaxed as convents and monasteries became centers of leisurely living.”⁶⁸ Wycliffe went beyond calling for Reformation of the church's leadership; he also sought Reformation in the church's doctrine. Considered very radical at the time, Wycliffe “declared that the source of all Christian doctrine is the Bible, and that it could be read and understood by anyone without the need for the church’s

⁶⁶ Ibid, 1513 kindle.

⁶⁷ Hill, 217.

⁶⁸ Gonzalez, 7.

interpretation.”⁶⁹ Wycliffe never saw the Reformation he called for, but his influence led to the Reformation many years later.

Wycliffe, in part, influenced Jan Hus in Bohemia. He was a Catholic priest but adopted many of Wycliffe’s views. As a result, Hus was excommunicated and eventually burned alive for his “heresy.”⁷⁰ His influence did not end with his earthly life, however. His emphasis on the biblical model for the church and the teaching of Christ rather than the teaching of the Catholic Church continues to influence the movement known as Protestantism today.

The moment the Reformation began is widely accepted as October 31, 1517, the day Martin Luther posted his infamous 95 theses. Hill correctly asserts, “The causes of the Reformation were certainly myriad and complex, and of course no single individual can really be responsible for the whole thing. But Martin Luther was the catalyst, if not the sole cause for the remarkable religious upheaval of the sixteenth century.”⁷¹ The primary voices of the Reformation challenged the organization and doctrine of the Catholic Church by pointing those who would listen to them to the scriptures. They all desired a church filled with people seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ and desired to follow his commands through that relationship. Differing views of interpretation and application of scripture emerged during this period. However, the fundamental desire each leader had was a membership of active participants who studied the Bible, resulting in a behavioral change to align with the model of Jesus.

⁶⁹ Hill, 217.

⁷⁰ Elwell, 582.

⁷¹ Hill, 249.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther became a monk in 1505. During his time in the monastery, Luther studied the scriptures carefully. After teaching philosophy and theology for several years, he traveled to Rome. “While in Rome he was shocked by the worldliness of the clergy and disillusioned by their religious indifference.”⁷² After that trip, he completed a Doctor of Theology degree in Wittenburg in 1512. Five years later, Luther would write the “95 theses” that is credited with beginning the Reformation. The first theses of the 95 reveals his view of Christianity and closely ties to discipleship as defined in this work; “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying ‘Repent ye, etc.’ meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance.”⁷³ Luther states that repentance leads to a changed life that is outwardly apparent and righteous. Luther came to this conclusion through his study of the scriptures.

Luther supports his position that faithful believers must study the scripture as he did in his rebuttal to a treatise written by Erasmus, *The Bondage of the Will*. One response to Erasmus claiming that there are some truths revealed by the Bible that should not be shared with everyone, Luther says, “As I have said before, those things which are either found in the sacred Writings, or may be proved by them, are not only plain, but wholesome; and therefore may be, nay, ought to be, spread abroad, learnt, and known.”⁷⁴ Luther reveals that a teacher and a learner must be eager to understand and apply what is taught.

⁷² Elwell, 718.

⁷³ Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder. *Documents of the Christian Church*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 206.

⁷⁴ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*. Translated by Henry Cole. (London: T. Bensley, 1525), 605 kindle.

Ulrich Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli led the Reformation in German Switzerland and was a contemporary of Luther. Zwingli became a priest in Zurich in 1518, around the time of Luther's "95 theses." Through his study of the Bible and possibly the influence of Erasmus, he came to the same conclusions Luther had. Gonzales indicates he came to his understanding of the faults of the church through "the study of Scripture according to the method of the humanists, and his zealous outrage against the superstition that passed for Christianity, against the exploitation of the people by some leaders of the church, and against mercenary service."⁷⁵ Zwingli found no biblical precedence for the ceremonies on which the church was focused, "Then I showed that the simple-minded people could be led to the recognition of the truth by other means than ceremonials, to wit, by those by which Christ and the Apostles had led them without any ceremonials as far as I had been able to learn through the sacred writings...."⁷⁶ Zwingli was convinced that many of the traditions and ceremonies passed down in the church had no foundation in scripture. He challenged the leaders of the Catholic Church to defend the traditions and ceremonies they relied on using scripture. Zwingli did not specifically address discipleship in his dispute, but his premise is equally valid in the study and execution of discipleship.

John Calvin

John Calvin accidentally became one of the leading voices of the Reformation. Calvin's father held an important position in the Catholic Church in his hometown and used that position to his son's benefit. John Calvin attended the University of Paris from the income he generated through positions his father secured for him. Calvin became involved with the Protestants and

⁷⁵ Gonzales, 48.

⁷⁶ Ulrich Zwingli *Selected Works*. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2012), 308 kindle.

left the Catholic Church at some point. “What he sought was not to become one of the leaders of the Reformation, but rather to settle in a calm environment where he could study Scripture and write about his faith.”⁷⁷ Calvin published the first edition of the *Institutes of the Christian Faith* in 1536. He is considered the “Father of Reformed and Presbyterian doctrine and theology.”⁷⁸ Luther focused most of his energy on salvation, Calvin focused on sanctification.

Calvin expected people who claimed to be Christians to exhibit behaviors in line with the scriptures. Among his proposals, Calvin suggested, “district overseers would report those whose lives showed ‘they do not belong to Jesus’, who would be excluded from communion and ostracized.”⁷⁹ The lives shown by Christians come from their faith. Calvin describes the faith this way, “when we recognize God as a propitious Father through the reconciliation made by Christ, and Christ as given to us for righteousness, sanctification, and life.”⁸⁰ According to Calvin, following the oracles or traditions of the church without knowledge of the scriptures is the opposite of faith. A true believer submits to the training of the Scriptures and others to grow in Christ, and as a result, their behaviors change to align with the will of God.

Modern Era Authors

For this work, the modern era commences at the release of the Authorized Version of the King James Bible, 1611. The Reformation resulted in the origination of several denominations within the Protestant movement. Each faction of Christianity emphasizes or focuses on a different portion of scripture. Discipleship is necessary for the propagation of any denomination,

⁷⁷ Gonzalez, 63.

⁷⁸ Elwell, 200.

⁷⁹ Tomkins, 150.

⁸⁰ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. (V Solas Press, 1536), 10329 kindle.

regardless of the form or source of that discipleship. Johann Arndt's *True Christianity*, released in 1610, became the foundation for pietism. Elwell defines pietism, "A recurring tendency within Christian history to emphasize more the practicalities of Christian life and less the formal structures of theology or church order."⁸¹ The emphasis on conduct and behavior is the basis for many of the leaders of the modern era. Phillip Jacob Spener is considered the "father of Pietism" because he started small groups of believers whose responsibility was to hold one another accountable in their Christian growth through Bible discussion and discussion about their personal lives.⁸² John Wesley required membership in small groups he called "class meetings" to be a church member. Deitrich Bonhoeffer stated obedience to Christ is the only mark of a true Christian, "An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge on the subject of grace or on the forgiveness of sins, render discipleship superfluous, and in fact they positively exclude any idea of discipleship whatever, and are essentially inimical to the whole conception of following Christ."⁸³ The central issue is obedience to Christ through reading scripture and accountability with other believers.

Jacob Spener

Jacob Spener read a great deal as a youth. Books written by English Puritans greatly influenced him. These books were critical of conventional Christianity and called for believers to strive for holiness, purity, and a life that overtly separated them from their neighbors.⁸⁴ Spener felt that Luther had left the Reformation half completed and went on to set up "*collegia peitatis*

⁸¹ Elwell, 924.

⁸² Gonzalez, 205.

⁸³ Bonhoeffer, 59.

⁸⁴ Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1964), 9.

(‘pious assembly’) to meet on Wednesdays and Sundays to pray, discuss the previous week’s sermon, and apply passages from Scripture and devotional writings to individual lives.”⁸⁵ The goal of these meetings was a change in behavior through regular interaction with the Bible and other believers. Spener wrote *Pia Disideria* in 1675, calling for reform in the church, more use of the Scriptures, an emphasis on the practice of Biblical concepts instead of knowledge of them, and sermons that result in the hearer being capable of directly applying the message to their daily lives.

John Wesley

John Wesley created a blueprint for discipleship in a movement later coined “Methodism.” Wesley grew up in a Christian home and became an evangelist. After a missionary trip to Georgia, where he met some Moravians, he found salvation in Jesus Christ. He was “the primary figure in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival and founder of Methodism.”⁸⁶ The most significant factor influencing the effectiveness of Methodism as it relates to discipleship is the “class meeting.” “The class meeting was not to be a voluntary unit adjunct to the society but a subdivision of it. Every Methodist became a member of a class and attended it regularly – or else he or she was no longer a member of the society.”⁸⁷ The “society” was the congregation, and therefore one could not be a member of the church without being a member of a class meeting. The class meeting required a level of intimacy not available in a preaching setting where the conversation is one way and very generalized. The close involvement in one another’s lives the class meeting demanded resulted in changed lives leading to a changed community. Whether or

⁸⁵ Elwell, 924.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 1266.

⁸⁷ D Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples*. (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 1997), 93.

not the intimacy of these small groups of believers is equal to the intimacy Jesus had with his disciples, it was a move in the right direction.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian during the second world war. He opposed the Nazis and led many to join his opposition on moral grounds. He was captured in Germany in 1943 and was hanged in 1945 before Berlin fell.⁸⁸ Bonhoeffer committed himself to teaching others to follow the example of community life described in the Bible. The unity in Christ he strove for is described this way, “how in the twentieth century a Christian life should be lived in a spirit of genuine brotherhood, and how such a life could naturally and freely grow if there were only men who entirely belonged to the Lord and, therefore, in brotherly love to one another.”⁸⁹ The Christian life is lived in a community of believers, not in isolation. The community must include intimacy and interaction, resulting in changed lives.

Theological Foundation

Throughout Scripture, discipleship is the foundation of any future faith. Salvation does not initiate discipleship, nor does discipleship necessarily lead to salvation. Many people gathered to hear Jesus teach, but few followed him. The concept of discipleship begins with the first family, Adam, Eve, and their children, and continues through Revelation. God always called on his people to teach others about him and his ways. The result of the lessons taught has always been left to the student.

⁸⁸ Hill, 428.

⁸⁹ Bonhoeffer, 17.

The First Family

After expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had three sons. Because the only experience Adam and Eve had was with God and Satan, it is unrealistic to consider that the parents did not teach their children about God. The two eldest sons reveal different attitudes toward God in Genesis 4. Abel offers an acceptable gift to God, while Cain makes an unacceptable offering. The reason one gift is acceptable to God and the other is not cannot be attributed to the nature of the gift as both are later confirmed as required offerings to God. “Cain’s immediate display of anger when God did not look on his offering with favor is an evidence of his lack of faith.”⁹⁰ John Davis adds, “The Old Testament teaches that God will reject the most perfect sacrifice if that sacrifice is offered by an apostate heart.”⁹¹ The same discipleship that took place for each of these men did not result in faith for both.

Because both Cain and Abel offered gifts to God, they both must have been taught about making offerings. Whether the instruction came from their parents or directly from God need not be considered for the purpose here. Both were taught and, even if by God, reacted differently from one another. God dealt directly with Cain after he rejected the older brother's offering. Even with the direct intervention of God, Cain still chooses to allow sin to overwhelm him, and he killed his brother. God again talks directly with Cain after he kills his younger brother. The discipleship resulted in faith and obedience in one brother and lack of faith and disobedience in the other.

⁹⁰ Wilbur Glenn Williams, *Genesis: A Commentary for Bible Students*. (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 79.

⁹¹ John J. Davis, *Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis*. (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1975), 99.

Moses and Jethro

The book of Exodus introduces Moses, a Hebrew child raised in the house of the Pharaoh who later leaves the protection of the monarch to serve his people, the people of God. God uses Moses to convince Pharaoh to free the enslaved Hebrew nation. God then tasked Moses with leading the freed slaves in their journey to the promised land. Along the way, many disputes arise among the throngs of people. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, notices the amount of time Moses spends sitting in judgment over the people's disputes. Moses explains in Exodus 18:15-16, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. When they have a difficulty, they come to me, and I judge between one and another; and I make known the statutes of God and His laws." Moses clearly states that he takes on the responsibility of discipleship for the entire nation of Israel by saying that he makes known the statutes of God. Jethro rightly points out that one man should not bear the responsibility and suggests Moses assign small group leaders to settle matters they are capable of in saying that Moses should select men capable of being over groups of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. (Exod 18:21) Kaiser points out that the men selected must pass several qualifications and "are to be arranged in a graduated series of multiples of ten, with Moses being the court of final appeal."⁹² The "capable men" can teach others the statutes of God and make decisions about proper conduct. These men are also assumed to have authority, and submission to them is expected. The more knowledgeable members of the community are placed in a position to teach and lead the less knowledgeable. The size of the groups goes down to as little as ten members. This small number assures that the group leader knows the group members very well and can follow any situation because they do not have many people to divide their time.

⁹² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Exodus*. The Expositors Bible Commentary. Edited by Tremper Longman III, & David E. Garland. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 5444 kindle.

Discipleship is never mentioned in the book of Exodus, but the principles are demonstrated. The less knowledgeable members of society go to local leaders to have their disputes settled according to God's statutes. This passage comes before giving the Ten Commandments requiring the knowledge of God's statutes to be communicated from one person to another. Moses taught all the people the statutes (vs. 20), but it was left to the "capable men" to interpret, explain, and apply them to everyday lives. The Scripture is silent regarding the people's response to the judgments of the various leaders, but the continuation of the disputes indicates that some people submitted to the teaching and some did not. Each of the Israelites had access to the same teaching; they did not all respond in the same way.

Deuteronomy 6

God's direction to the nation of Israel to train their children requires some discussion to understand this passage as a blueprint for discipleship. This passage illustrates how discipleship leads to commitment and obedience instead of following commitment. The nation of Israel was on the verge of entering the land that God had predetermined to give them. God had conditions regarding the success the people would experience in the land. "Israel was to go into the land and conduct itself according to God's instructions for God's glory. If they lived the way God instructed them to live, their lives would be blessed, and their enemies would be defeated. The boundaries of Israel would expand."⁹³ The purpose for teaching (discipling) others, whether their children or other Israelites, compelled their attentiveness to the task.

The commands God gave the Israelites were not intended to be a list of behaviors to be followed. God intended the commands to change each person's heart toward him and become an

⁹³ James M. Hamilton Jr, "That the Coming Generation Might Praise the Lord." *The Journal of Family Ministry* 1, no. 1 (2010): 10-17, 11.

inherent part of the people. “Spiritual zeal is above all to be personal. God’s commandments are not to be treated as a list of the acts we perform but as a description of who we are.”⁹⁴ The command to teach the commands to others is an effort that “directs the attention of Israel to the inner heart, in both deeds and words.”⁹⁵ Discipleship for the Israelites led people to commit to God that each person expressed in their thoughts and behaviors.

The discipleship described in Deuteronomy was not limited to teaching in a classroom setting. Parents are told to teach their children and others in every aspect of life, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk to them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deut 6:7-9). Jesus demonstrated the same approach to discipleship, teaching his Apostles as they walked through towns and hillsides.

King Solomon

Solomon succeeded his father David as king of the Israelites. God granted him more wisdom than any other human being of all time. Solomon still spent a lifetime searching for meaning and purpose. Ultimately, he wrote down his conclusion for generations to come, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments. For this is man’s all” (Eccl 12:13). Sometime later, Solomon wrote many proverbs concerning his journey. Proverbs chapter 2 describes discipleship in his view. “My son, if you receive my words, and

⁹⁴ Doug McIntosh, *Deuteronomy*. Holman Old Testament Commentary. Edited by Max Anders. (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2002), 1925 kindle.

⁹⁵ Ming Him Ko, "Fusion-Point Hermeneutics: A Theological Interpretation of Saul's Rejection in Light of the Shema as the Rule of Faith." *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 7, no. 1 (2013): 57-78, 60.

treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding;" (Prov 2:1-2). One person teaches another to lead them to a heartfelt change.

The discipleship process described in Proverbs 2 culminates in understanding God and his righteousness and judgment. "The chapter is a carefully designed rhetorical unit that instructs the pupil in wisdom while informing the mature reader about the nature of the learning process. In so doing, it expounds a thoughtful and subtle idea of learning and teaching."⁹⁶ Instruction leads to commitment and the desire to follow the instruction of God. One must not overlook the condition Solomon offers in the first verse of this chapter, "...if you receive." Therefore, the student may not receive the instruction and will not come to knowledge and understanding of God.

King David

David is introduced as the boy who would become king in 1 Samuel, the king to follow Saul in the first half of 2 Samuel, and the king who suffered the consequences of his sin in the second half of 2 Samuel. David was a musician, "And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him" (1 Sam 16:23). His musical background reinforces his recognized authorship of many of the Psalms. Psalm 44 offers some indication of discipleship and its lasting effect.

"We have heard with our ears, O God, Our fathers have told us, The deeds You did In their days, In days of old:" (Psalm 44:1). David states that his knowledge of the actions of God in history came from hearing those stories from his father, Jesse. The stories David heard about

⁹⁶ Michael V. Fox, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 2." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 113, no. 2 (1994): 233-243, 234.

God led to his belief and faith in God. Jesse's discipleship of David brought the future king to understand that Israel's victories are not due to him but entirely to God. The instruction David received as a young man resulted in him believing in and trusting God and recognizing his place before God. His understanding of God did not prevent him from sinning, however.

2 Samuel 11 depicts the turning point in the reign of David. He allowed lust to lead him into adultery and murder. God took the child born as a result of the adulterous relationship David had with Bathsheba. David rightly understood that the loss of his son was the righteous judgment of God, and he repented. His response to the consequences of his sin demonstrated his belief and trust in God.

The Prophets

Jesus

Jesus took advantage of every opportunity he had to teach people, but he only taught those willing to exert effort to understand his teaching and apply it to their lives. Jesus often attracted large groups of listeners. "Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him – from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan." (Matt 4:24-25) "And again He began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea." (Mark 4:1-2) "So it was, when Jesus returned, that the multitude welcomed Him, for they were all waiting for Him." (Luke 8:40) When large groups gathered, Jesus spoke in difficult terms. D. A. Carson explains the discourse recorded in John chapter 6 as difficult for the hearers to accept. The difficulty came from the "hard teaching" they had heard. The teaching was not hard

because it was difficult to understand, but that it was harsh or offensive.⁹⁷ The result is that many of the people listening left. Jesus was willing to teach all but invested most of his time in a few who were eager to learn and were willing to accept everything he taught. N. T. Wright explains the method Jesus used as “stories designed to tease, to clothe the shocking and revolutionary message of God’s kingdom in garb that left the hearers wondering, trying to think it out, never quite able (until near the end) to pin Jesus down.”⁹⁸ The stories Jesus told included familiar experiences or objects the audience related to easily.

The stories Jesus told frequently confused his listeners, including the twelve disciples. On the occasion of Jesus teaching the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, the disciples ask Jesus why he taught in such a confusing way. Jesus’ response reveals his understanding of the crowds that gathered to hear him, “Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled...” (Matt 13:13-14) Jesus specifically taught in this way to reveal the truth about their understanding of who he was. God revealed the truth to those who accepted Jesus as the messiah but withheld the truth from those who rejected Jesus.⁹⁹ The prophecy in Isaiah Jesus is referring to is Isaiah 6:9-10, “And He said, ‘Go, and tell this people: Keep on hearing but do not understand; keep on seeing but do not perceive. Make the heart of the people dull, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and return and be healed.’” Jesus knew that the people God had chosen to

⁹⁷ Carson, 300.

⁹⁸ N. T. Wright, *Simply Jesus*. (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 87.

⁹⁹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 341.

understand his teaching would have understanding, and those God had not chosen would not understand.

Jesus taught as he participated in everyday activities. He used examples of a mustard seed to teach about faith (Matt 17:20), a vine covering a wall to teach about the need to “be diligent and careful in keeping the grace which they had been given,”¹⁰⁰ (John 15:5) and eating grain from the field on the Sabbath to teach about the meaning of the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28). The use of the familiar objects and events indicates that his disciples were in his presence daily. Discipleship demands a continuing presence to allow teaching the application of biblical truths to a wide array of life's aspects. The twelve disciples were with Jesus so much that he often awoke early in the morning to go away by himself to speak with God. The close relationship Jesus had with his disciples also allowed him the opportunity to correct or rebuke the disciples when they misstepped.

Correction and discipline are essential to discipleship, following the model Jesus demonstrated. Peter was the most outspoken disciple and, as a result, was the most frequent recipient of the recorded rebukes by Jesus. “From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’ But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.’” (Matt 16:21-23) This exchange exemplifies the immediate correction of misguided thought. David Turner explains, “This is due to Peter’s mental fixation on human priorities, not divine revelation. Matthew 6:23 is the polar opposite of

¹⁰⁰ Calvin, *John*, 354.

16:17: Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah because of divine revelation, but he opposes Jesus's passion because he thinks in lines with human interests, not God'.¹⁰¹ Jesus rebukes Peter for challenging God's plan. Jesus was then able to teach all of his disciples about thinking with eternity in mind.

The night before his arrest, Jesus rebuked Peter for refusing to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Jesus was teaching the disciples a lesson on servant leadership, but Peter's pride railed against Jesus's example. "Peter didn't want to accept this concept of leadership that serves, but Jesus insisted. The Master delivered a sharp rebuke when he said, 'Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.'¹⁰² Jesus was able to immediately respond to Peter's wrong thinking because they were together. Additionally, Jesus was willing to confront the issue without hesitation directly. Jesus had to teach his disciples difficult lessons such as this one because he knew he would be leaving shortly, and the growth of the church depended on these men's ability to teach others the things he taught them.

Jesus called men to follow him, taught them as they lived, corrected them as needed, and finally trained them to teach others. Jesus's disciples learned through observation, asking questions, guided discussions led by the Master, and replicating the actions they observed. Jesus invested in those who committed themselves to his teaching. He confronted people with their sins, pointed out corrective action, and allowed each person to decide whether to submit to his correction or reject him. The story of the rich young ruler reveals this aspect of Jesus' teaching. The story is found in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. The story ends with the young man walking away from Jesus because he was unwilling to submit to the command of Jesus. Jesus made no

¹⁰¹ Turner, 9307, kindle.

¹⁰² Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 200.

attempt to stop the young man from leaving but turned to his disciples and continued to teach. Jesus taught everyone who came to him but taught in such a way that only a few, the few his father had chosen, submitted themselves to his instruction.

Paul

The Apostle Paul followed the example Jesus provided for discipleship. Paul invested his time with people who submitted to his teaching. Paul taught in classroom settings, but he also lived and worked with people to develop faith communities for extended periods. Paul traveled with a group of people providing him ample opportunity to teach them along the way. “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (1 Tim 2:2). Timothy learned directly from Paul, and here, Paul wants Timothy to teach those same things to others.¹⁰³ The culture Paul experienced shaped his ministry. Paul’s letters include terms such as “brother,” “family,” and “building.” His use of these terms impacted his original audience differently than a Western audience today.

“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. Then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.’ And some of them were persuaded; and a great multitude of the devout Greeks, and not a few of the leading women, joined Paul and Silas.” (Acts 17:1-4)

Paul’s arrival in Thessalonica depicts his standard approach to reaching the people in a new place. “as was his custom,” he went into the synagogue of the Jews first and taught them for several weeks about Jesus. He then invested his time with those who accepted his message and were willing to hear more. The passage in Acts goes on to describe the violent reaction from the Jewish men who did not believe and the Gentiles. Their response demonstrates the effectiveness

¹⁰³ Walter L. Liefeld, *1&2 Timothy, Titus*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999, 5470 Kindle.

of the time Paul spent with those believers. After the Jews stir up a riot among the Gentiles, the group knows exactly where to find Paul and Silas. Paul lived with and spent time with the people to whom he ministered.

The time Paul spent in Phillipi demonstrates how his manner of living brought others to faith in Jesus. The jailer who was in charge of Paul and Silas witnessed their devotion and then the work of the Holy Spirit. “Their religious claims must have registered with him when the quake came and they preserved his life by staying.”¹⁰⁴ Paul was well known in the communities he served because he was actively involved in the people's lives.

Paul uses building metaphors throughout his letters, illustrating the necessity of people working together to produce a structure able to withstand fierce opposition. “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation. And another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it” (1 Cor 3:10). Paul introduces himself as a “master builder.” Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in part to address division within the church. He laid the foundation by faithfully teaching the gospel to the people in Corinth for eighteen months. “Paul knew why he had been sent to Corinth. He was sent to build the foundation of the church there, and that is what he carefully and skillfully did.”¹⁰⁵ After he left, someone else began building on the foundation. Craig Blomberg rightly points out, “Because Paul applies his metaphors of farm and construction workers to church leaders, some are tempted to limit the application of this imagery to a minority of believers.”¹⁰⁶ The building is not an inanimate object; however, each member has an active role in constructing the building.

¹⁰⁴ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007, 541.

¹⁰⁵ MacArthur, 1835 Kindle.

¹⁰⁶ Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, 44.

Paul had invested enough time in another person that they could teach others, adding them to the number of people capable of “building” the community. “Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is” (1 Cor 3:12-13). “Building” with gold, silver, or precious stones will produce a structure that can withstand the fire. MacArthur stresses that the primary object of the reference to “anyone” is evangelists, pastors, and teachers because they bear the responsibility of teaching sound doctrine. Still, he points out that every believer shares responsibility through their speech and conduct.¹⁰⁷ Robert Banks refers to this idea as “the interdependence of the members of the community and their growth to maturity.”¹⁰⁸ Each person relied on the others to help them to grow. The growth rate is directly proportional to the amount of time spent with other believers. Living near others allows opportunities for instruction, encouragement, correction, and discipline; “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). Paul’s use of family metaphors better explains the intimacy required for growth.

Paul’s use of familial terminology throughout his letters demands an expectation of experiential discipleship as normative. Joseph Hellerman claims there were “three central social values of the ancient Mediterranean world. 1) In the New Testament world the group took priority over the individual. 2) In the New Testament world a person’s most important group was his family. 3) In the New Testament world the closest family bond was the bond between

¹⁰⁷ MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 1846 Kindle.

¹⁰⁸ Banks, 47.

siblings.”¹⁰⁹ These values inform Paul’s use of familial terms such as “brother,” “fellow heir,” and “children of God.” Acceptance into the family of God affirmed an individual’s desire to quickly change and take on the values and habits of the new family. Paul expresses this anticipation by chastising the church in Corinth, “I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able;” (1 Cor 3:2). Paul’s frequent reference to “family” would have caused his original audience to consider their words and actions based on how they reflected on the family and not only on themselves.

Paul, like Jesus, committed some of his time to teach large groups of people. The result of teaching in this manner is the listener understanding doctrine. Paul sought more than communicating sound doctrine; orthopraxis (proper behavior) was his goal. Behavior change does not take place in a classroom setting. Paul encouraged the people at Corinth, “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). This line is the closing statement of an argument Paul presents in 1 Corinthians 10:23-33. MacArthur claims, “Paul’s central message in this passage, and the Bible’s central message for believers in all ages, is summarized in verse 31: whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”¹¹⁰ Paul argues that he can do anything he desires, but he makes every effort to do only those things that will bring glory to God. Paul then encourages his audience to follow his example, just as he follows the example of Jesus. Jesus once told the Jews, “I can of Myself do nothing. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me” (John 5:30). Jesus only did the things God wanted him to do and only said the things God wanted him to say. Paul did his best to imitate Jesus and called on others to imitate him.

¹⁰⁹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009, 64.

¹¹⁰ MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, 5352 Kindle.

Conclusion

Scripture depicts discipleship as an active relationship that includes instruction along with demonstration or illustration of application. Moses told the fathers to constantly teach their children through their words, actions, and everyday conduct. Jethro taught Moses the importance of teaching others to invest in other people so that they can replicate the discipleship process. Jesus lived with his disciples, teaching them with everyday experiences, allowing them to observe how he taught and served others, so they were able to replicate his ministry. Paul traveled much but made time to live and work with the people he encountered along the way. The time he spent allowed the people to observe his character and the manner in which he served others. They were able to perform the things they witnessed along with the instruction they received.

The picture of discipleship in scripture is an intentional relationship with those who are willing to submit to the training. Jesus inverted the traditional Jewish form of discipleship in which potential disciples sought out a master to follow; Jesus sought out disciples to follow him. Jesus invited everyone, but only a few were willing to submit to his teaching. Jesus knew the difference between people who were committed to following him because of who he was from those who followed him because of what he could do for them. He always ministered to and invested in the first group and rebuked and chastised the latter group.

Theoretical Foundation

The topic of discipleship has been the focus of a great deal of research and discussion for several decades. New discipleship programs are developed and implemented continuously.

Researchers like Paul Chapman focus on training leaders¹¹¹, while others like Thomas Keinath focus on developing a new curriculum.¹¹² Research groups such as the Barna Group survey churches and individuals to determine factors influencing individual and corporate spiritual maturity. Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Klaus Issler, and others produced works on spiritual disciplines necessary for Christian maturation. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, and Martin Luther's *Bondage of the Will* teach Christian doctrine and behavior. The concept of discipleship has been present in the church from its inception in the New Testament, but the focus and method of discipleship experienced significant shifts at specific times in church history.

Modern research most commonly begins with the assumption that evangelism is separate from discipleship. The thought process is to evangelize the lost to "lead them to Christ." Once saved, discipleship can begin at the will and pace of the disciple. Alvin Reid speaks of presenting the gospel to lost people in a way they can understand,¹¹³ Will McRaney offers a list of common objections to the gospel,¹¹⁴ and William Fay offers "Response scripts to objections."¹¹⁵ Each of these authors presupposes evangelism is separate and distinct from discipleship with a goal of salvation or conversion in mind. Scripture shows a pattern of transformation occurring during the discipleship process.

¹¹¹ Paul Chapman, "Equipping Members in Basic Discipleship Principles and Practices at Christian Community Discipleship Church in Prince George's County, Maryland." *Order No. 28264175, Regent University, 2020* In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 6.

¹¹² Thomas Wayne Keinath, "The Barnabas Discipleship Method and Model: A Quest for True and Effective New Testament Discipleship." *Order No. 3023274, Regent University, 2001* In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 2.

¹¹³ Reid, 395.

¹¹⁴ Will McRaney Jr, *The Art of Personal Evangelism: Sharing Jesus in a Changing Culture*. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2003), 241.

¹¹⁵ William Fay, *Share Jesus Without Fear*, (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1999), 155.

The topics covered during the discipleship process remain the same today as they were in the biblical account of Jesus with his disciples. This research attempts to understand the model or mode of discipleship through the different eras of church history. Recent efforts to improve discipleship effectiveness include small groups and relational discipleship with similar results as previous foci. This research reveals little focus on the demonstration model Jesus used in discipleship. Some modern research includes attention to active discipleship but does not focus on that aspect in depth.

Conclusion

From the post-apostolic era to the modern era, Church leaders recorded their thoughts and opinions regarding Christian life in writing. Terminology changes from generation to generation and writers generally focus on the essential issues of their time. Some of the most widely recognized writers in church history will be considered in this research, with specific attention to what they may have written regarding discipleship. Modern discipleship is not producing the expected results as claimed by numerous authors of today. A careful examination of the historical model of discipleship reveals significant shifts in the importance and method of discipleship within the church.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Intervention Design

The church is failing to produce mature disciples who obey the command of Jesus to make disciples. The response of the church in the most recent decades was centered on church growth, church revitalization, church models that are appealing to those outside the church, and discipleship curriculum. The results reveal a lackluster response by the membership. The discipleship most frequently described by modern authors is almost entirely accomplished in a classroom or discussion setting with little or no active application exercises included. Jesus modeled a discipleship process that is almost entirely accomplished in active application of the truths he taught with very little classroom-type instruction. Jesus taught as he ministered while the church today teaches people to minister. The beginning point for these opposing methods is significantly different.

Jesus took every opportunity of everyday life to minister and teach. Any person who would listen for any period of time is referred to as a disciple in Scripture. Jesus initiated discipleship with all people and as the process continued, some chose to leave and others chose to commit their lives to him. Jesus showed his disciples how to minister, how to teach, and how to love others. Jesus did have the advantage of knowing the heart of every person and knew before they did how they would respond. Jesus demonstrated a great deal of mercy and grace such as the woman at the well (John 4:1-26), the blind man (Mark 8:22-26), raising the dead to life (Luke 7:11-16), feeding the hungry (Mark 6:30-44), and many other examples. Jesus also demanded a great deal from those who chose to follow him; “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (Matt 12:30), “But He turned and said to Peter, ‘Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men’” (Matth 16:23), and in the parable recorded in Matthew 25:14-30

Leon Morris says of verse 30 that the servant who failed to use the talent he was given received punishment and that punishment “is not here pronounced over someone who has done some particularly heinous crime. It is the final result for the man who had only one talent and who steadfastly refused to use it.”¹¹⁶ Jesus began with people who did not know who he was and ministered to them, teaching them as he served. As the people who chose to continue following learned, they committed their lives to following him.

In contrast, the church today attempts to lead people to make a commitment to Jesus and then tell them to minister to others without having had the benefit of being ministered to or watching other believers minister to anyone. The process is completely reversed from the model Jesus presents. This research will focus on the discipleship method utilized in the church throughout history.

Origin of This Research

This research project came about due to the researcher’s observation of several local churches. Raised in a family that attended church regularly, awareness of contradictions in the behavior of church members and the message the pastor preached increased in the late teen years. One example is when the pastor once preached a sermon about drunkenness, yet two lay leaders owned and operated liquor stores in town. After submitting to the Lordship of Jesus Christ as an adult, similar disparities were observed in other churches. Personal study of the Bible revealed truths that appeared absent in the church, and any presentation of the anomalies to the leadership resulted in ridicule and scorn. The majority of church members never attended any church function other than the Sunday morning worship service, and less than 1% of the membership participated in ministry outside the walls of the church building.

¹¹⁶ Morris, 632.

Other challenges occurred, such as the pastor preaching about the need for personal evangelism resulting in overwhelming shame and guilt because there was biblical truth behind the pastor's message. Still, there was never a real-life demonstration of how to share a person's faith. Discussion with other church members revealed they experienced similar feelings for the same reason. Further study of scripture caused more questions to arise. Why do churches hold dinners for the members when Jesus says, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just" (Luke 14:12-14). Fellowship is necessary, but not at the expense of service.

Eventually, finding the opportunity to lead a men's Bible study, God revealed the radical transformation of men who were sent out in pairs after a year-long study of Acts to do what they had been studying – share the gospel. Some were very nervous as they went out that night but found great joy when they began to talk to a stranger about their faith in Jesus Christ. For many of the men who attended that night, sharing the gospel as they lived life became a normal part of their lives. The men had a firm understanding of the book of Acts, but the true transformation came from doing what they had learned.

The Bible describes a discipleship process that affected the Roman Empire in many ways. Governments do not give much attention to groups with views that differ from the leaders if those groups are not committed to their beliefs enough to take action. The Christian faith received a great deal of attention from the Roman government, revealing the spread of the faith and the followers' commitment. Today, the church proclaims millions of followers, but most authors say it has little impact on the world and garners little attention from those who oppose

the Christian faith. Most modern research on the topic of discipleship deals with the content of the process. Some research deals with the vehicle or setting for discipleship to occur but remains focused on similar content. The remarkable difference in the discipleship results of the early church and discipleship today requires attention. The focus of most research on discipleship is content. The focus of this research is the process following the model of Jesus. A study of discipleship through the ages should reveal the times and possibly the reasons the method Jesus demonstrated changed. Understanding when and why the model changed may assist in understanding how the church can return to discipleship according to the model of Jesus.

Overview of Contemporary Research

The majority of recent commentary on discipleship ranges from detailed explanations of the habits that lead to maturation in the discipleship process to long-term investigative research. Four distinct categories of information are identified: 1) explanation of components of discipleship, 2) anecdotal experiences, 3) short-term research (almost exclusively dissertation projects), and 4) long-term research.

Anecdotal

This category includes stories of individual churches that have excelled in maturing disciples consistently. Many authors in this category developed the process they describe over time, but the focus of their work is the inner working of their church. Ray Stedman's *Body Life* describes a system of fellowship and ministry activity where newer members can learn what their spiritual gifts are and how to implement them within the overall activity of the church. He chooses to begin the book this way, "This book is about the church. Not the church as it often is, but the church as it originally was. The church as it can be. And yes, the church as it must be

again.”¹¹⁷ Stedman focuses on fellowship, members spending time together getting to know each other, having opportunities to teach each other. In *The Church of Irresistible Influence*, Robert Lewis describes a church whose sole purpose is to help members identify the needs they see in the world and help facilitate them acting on those needs. Lewis focuses on “Small groups serving needs in the church, small groups serving needs in the community, and small groups serving needs around the world.”¹¹⁸ Dave and John Ferguson describe the growth of the church they founded in *Exponential*. Community Christian Church has grown exponentially, as the title of their book states. The method they describe is quite different from Stedman’s or Lewis’ and yet is quite effective. Tim Keller of Center Church and Rick Warren of Saddleback church describe very different approaches to church growth, and both claim thriving churches doing the work of God.

Components

The works in this category are books providing information on the “spiritual disciplines” or descriptions of discipleship. The contents are descriptive of behaviors that lead to spiritual maturity. Dallas Willards *The Spirit of Disciplines* and Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline* focus entirely on teaching the “disciplines” and incorporating them into an individual’s life. Other works present discipleship as an in-depth compilation of long-term ministry. Bill Hull (*The Complete Book of Discipleship, Jesus Christ – Disciplemaker, The Disciple-Making Church, and The Disciple-Making Pastor*), Dave Earley (*Disciple Making Is...* and *Pastoral Leadership Is...*), and Greg Ogden (*Unfinished Business* and *Discipleship*

¹¹⁷ Ray Stedman, *Body Life*. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1995), 11.

¹¹⁸ Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins. *The Church of Irresistible Influence*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

Essentials) and others have written several books on discipleship. These sources are the culmination of study, application, and examination of ideas to determine which ones have the desired effect.

Short-term Research

The work placed in this category is largely dissertations. The authors developed eight-to-thirteen-week classes to present different aspects of discipleship to church members. Participants almost always submit a pre-class survey and a post-class survey. Comparison of the results of the surveys helps determine any measurable growth. A high percentage of the participants in these studies are active members of the churches examined. While it is understandable that the research projects are limited in time, they cannot provide information on the long-term impact of the curriculum on the lives of the participants. Thad Harvey's research included training leaders in ten lessons.¹¹⁹ Harvey's study and others like it can uncover areas needing further study but fall short of demonstrating a lasting change in behavior or attitude on the participants. The participants' excitement due to being involved in the research and their desire to aid the researcher can have an exaggerated impact on the pre and post-course surveys.

Long-Term Research

The Barna Group represents an organization invested in long-term research on several church issues. George Barna's *Growing True Disciples* and David Kinnaman's *You Lost Me* provide detailed information derived from decades of research regarding discipleship. Their research is multi-faceted and covers several issues affecting church life. The group includes

¹¹⁹ Thad Harvey, "Growing Together: A Study of Christian Discipleship." *Order No. 10156646, Asbury Theological Seminary, 2016* In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, no. <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fgrowing-together-study-christian-discipleship%2Fdocview%2F1818474523%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>

surveys, personal interviews, and follow-up studies to derive the most accurate information possible. Kinnaman details the research process in his book, stating that over 50,000 participants filled out surveys or gave detailed interviews.¹²⁰ The long-term research provides more accurate information due to the size of the participant pool but is limited in demonstrating a change in individuals' lives.

The research done for this work seeks to identify concepts mentioned or evident in discipleship from the New Testament through every era of the church to today. Culture may influence the application or manifestation of the concepts, but culture does not change the concepts themselves. The church in Ephesus was different in make-up and behavior than the church in Corinth, but the process of producing mature disciples remained the same.

Identification of Authors Included in Research

The research subjects are not available in most cases to interview or question. The material available to glean their view of discipleship is limited to the letters, treatises, and books they have left behind. Many modern authors are still alive and available for comment, but treating those authors differently from those not available for comment or clarification would skew the research. The volume of writings available for examination expands from era to era creating difficulty in selecting which authors are examined. The selection of authors included in this study was influenced by availability and notoriety.

Post-Apostolic Authors

The authors from the post-apostolic era include men referred to by other authors throughout history. Clement of Rome, Irenaeus, and Ignatius are names often referred to today

¹²⁰ Kinnaman, 247.

by followers of different denominations within the Christian faith. Time impacts doctrine and belief; the greater the time from the apostles, the greater the variation in doctrine. Origen presented ideas different from his predecessors and contemporaries. Doctrinal issues are not the focus of this research however, only the view of discipleship or its components. Some consideration is given to the interpretation of the original texts by other authors, but the primary focus of research is on the original writings of the authors. Gathering translations from different sources of those original texts is essential to assure the accuracy of the translations reasonably. Many of the texts from this category are available in the public domain and published books.

Post-Edict Authors

The Edict of Milan created an influx of people into the Christian church in a very short time. Church leaders were selected from the period immediately following the edict, after the establishment of the Roman Catholic Church, and near the Reformation. This singular event impacted the church profoundly. This period, defined for this project, covers 1,200 years. The research is focused on the leaders immediately following the edict and immediately preceding the Reformation. These periods were chosen due to the concerns created by the massive increase in church membership following the edict. Church leaders were divided on how to handle the changes. The leaders closer to the Reformation revealed any significant changes in discipleship during that time.

Several ecumenical councils were called to settle issues over several hundred years after Constantine issued the Edict of Milan. The composition of those councils influenced the outcome and the direction of the church. The problems leading to Constantine calling for the Council of Nicea center on doctrinal points not directly pertinent to discipleship. The church heralds the council as the origin of a unifying statement; the Nicene Creed. Elwell suggests that a great

schism in the church was healed “theologically and politically by the almost unanimous production of a theological confession by over three hundred bishops representing almost all the eastern provinces of the empire and by a token representation from the West.”¹²¹ Examination of leaders from the East and the West during that period reveal a significant shift in discipleship and the expectation of disciples. Leaders from both sides are selected to display differing views.

Eusebius was chosen because of his proximity to Emperor Constantine and his work on the history of the church leaders up to the Edict of Milan. He witnessed and recorded the important issues church leaders were concerned about before, during, and after the edict. He wrote only as an observer, but his insight aids in understanding which issues were important.

The schism between the Donatists and the Western church was primarily due to the recognition of church leadership. Donatus and Augustine viewed Cyprian as a great church leader yet found themselves on the opposite side of theological issues. One of those issues concerns discipleship and mature disciples. These three men represent the progression of thought on discipleship during this tumultuous time. “Thousands of new converts flooded into the Church, but many of them were perceived by their contemporaries to be lacking the depth of faith that had been possessed by the pre-Constantinian community.”¹²² The depth of faith is an issue of discipleship.

Gregory the Great wrote *The Book of Pastoral Rule* and sent copies to specific individuals at the beginning of his service as Pope in 590. The work includes the qualifications of church leaders and their expected responsibilities. This work was chosen because of its broad acceptance of authoritative literature when it was written. Any remarks concerning discipleship

¹²¹ Elwell, 839.

¹²² Gregory the Great. *The Book of Pastoral Rule*. Edited by John Behr. Translated by George Demacopoulos. Vol. 34. (Yonkers, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007), 6.

or marks of a mature disciple would reveal the importance and possibly, the church's approach to the topic. The absence of information regarding this topic will also indicate the importance of the topic to the church of his time.

Thomas Aquinas wrote *Summa Theologica* between 1265-1274 as a comprehensive doctrinal work for students of all levels within the Christian religion. Aquinas covers 119 questions concerning the existence of God to the propagation of man. The work will primarily be examined for insights into discipleship before the Reformation beginning in 1517.

Reformation Authors

The Reformation came about because of corruption within the Catholic Church. Splinter groups were present from the Edict of Milan to Martin Luther's *95 Theses* but did not impact the church as a whole. Luther's bold request for public debate concerning corruption in the clergy resulted in the Reformation. This period saw a significant revolt against the established Catholic Church and the formation of denominationalism. Diversity of thought on a myriad of doctrinal issues produced numerous denominations. During the early part of the Reformation, the writings of key leaders reveal their concern for their adherents to defend their position. The differences in doctrine are not important to this research, only the expression of the need for and mode of discipleship. Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, and John Calvin differed in their theology, but those differences impacted how they viewed their disciples.

Martin Luther brought the corruption within the Catholic Church to the forefront of people's thought through his *95 Theses*. Luther did not desire to break away from the Catholic Church; he only wanted reform. His study of Scripture brought him to understand that church leaders were attempting to take the place of God. Doctrine, according to Luther, must be taught

solely from the Bible, and believers must reject any other doctrine.¹²³ He promoted Christians discussing doctrinal issues to aid one another in forming a proper understanding of the Bible.

The Father of reformed doctrine, John Calvin, differed from Luther by separating from the Catholic Church and joining the Protestant movement. Calvin was a prolific writer, and his influence remains to this day in the church. He pointed his followers to the Bible for truth and, like Luther, claimed that all doctrine must come from scripture. Calvin argues that falsehood prevailed under the Papacy.¹²⁴ Calvin's position was so radical that anyone who accepted his teaching did so, knowing it could result in their death.

Ulrich Zwingli also saw many contradictions between church tradition and scripture. “He was one of the first upon whom the vision of the purer, more unshackled, less hide-bound church fell.”¹²⁵ Zwingli openly debated Catholic leaders using the Bible as the basis for his arguments. He approached the scriptures from a more academic view as opposed to spiritual. Zwingli was a preacher and loved the gospel, but his approach to contending with the established church was academic from the study of the Bible. In one disputation with a representative of the Pope, Zwingli was equated with other dissenters of the past and declared to be a heretic. Zwingli urged his followers to read, study, and interpret scripture.

Modern Era Authors

The Reformation resulted in the creation of many denominations. The constant tension between the denominations resulted in King James ordering a new translation of the Bible that

¹²³ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*. Translated by Henry Cole. (London: T. Bensley, 1525), 196 kindle.

¹²⁴ John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. (V Solas Press, 1536), 19738.

¹²⁵ Ulrich Zwingli, *Selected Works*. Edited by Samuel Macauley Jackson. (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 2012), 86 kindle.

would take the place of all other translations. The Authorized Version appeared in 1611. The dissemination of the King James Version (Authorized Version) serves as the beginning of the modern era for this research. The modern era contains the most voluminous and diverse availability of writings. The number of scripts available poses a challenge in selecting a fair representation for this study.

Richard Baxter was a Puritan pastor in the 1600s who opposed the Church of England. Baxter stressed the importance of diligent study and the application of scripture for every Christian instead of tradition. Baxter describes discipleship primarily in didactic knowledge and understanding, but he also mentions the importance of setting a good example. Baxter continues to influence many church leaders today.

Philip Jacob Spener released *Pia Disederia* in 1675 as a commentary on the state of the church at that time. The outward appearance of the church members was indistinguishable from those outside the church. Spener laid the blame for the moral laxity at the feet of the church leaders and laid out a reform plan. Spener influenced future church leaders to focus on behavior change rather than memorization. Spener also “suggested that there be less emphasis on the differences between laity and clergy and more on the common responsibility of all Christians.”¹²⁶ Spener’s approach to discipleship led to one of the largest movements in church history, Methodism.

The Methodist Church is so named because of the particular method of discipleship arranged and implemented by John Wesley. Wesley centered the church around preaching the gospel and discipleship. Any study of discipleship should include consideration of Wesley’s thoughts and design. Wesley faced opposition and persecution regularly and yet was able to

¹²⁶ Gonzales, 206.

impact the world by not wavering. Discipleship was more important to Wesley than worship. No person could be a member of the church without being a member of a small group where discipleship took place. Anyone was welcome to the general services, but members had expectations.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer is widely recognized as an authority on discipleship not only because he practiced discipleship but also because he ultimately gave his life for the cause of discipleship. Obedience to the commands of Jesus is paramount to Bonhoeffer and is an indicator of true belief, “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”¹²⁷ Bonhoeffer did not limit discipleship to “leading someone to Christ,” he unashamedly proclaimed the gospel and taught all who would submit through instruction and personal action.

The most recent decades have produced such a wide array of authors, any selection will undoubtedly result in the omission of authors others will consider significant. For this project, the list includes Ed Stetzer, Dallas Willard, Robert Foster, Bill Hull, Greg Ogden, Joel Comiskey, Neil Cole, Dave Earley, David Kinnaman, and others. Some of these authors focus on “spiritual disciplines,” some on “small group ministry,” and others on discipleship content. Evangelism is another topic related to discipleship, so authors such as Alvin Reid, Will McRaney, William Fay, and Robert Coleman are examined.

Evaluation of Authors

Evaluating writings from different periods on discipleship is difficult because each author wrote on important topics in their period and may have used different terminology. A system had to be developed to fairly evaluate the writings in consistent terms. The researcher will approach each author with the presumption that their main or major points will not be hidden in the depths

¹²⁷ Boenhoeffter, 63.

of their work but instead will be prominent and easy to discover with a survey of their content. The goal is not to ridicule, condemn, praise, or promote any author or view but to gain a general understanding of the importance and method of discipleship through the years.

This research cannot rely on questionnaires or interviews due to the non-availability of most of the authors under consideration. The researcher will make every effort to minimize the impact of personal bias on evaluating the available texts. The research in this project is more subjective than most forms of research. Readers should keep in mind that the purpose of this research is only to trace the method and importance of discipleship to discern, if possible, where and how discipleship changed over the years. The research seeks to identify trends vs. objective data points.

The researcher developed a form to evaluate each author's writings. Because authors in antiquity did not use the same terminology that is predominant today, they will be evaluated based on their mention of the four marks of a disciple as outlined in this paper: 1) Committed follower of Jesus, 2) Obedience, 3) Love others as Christ loves you, and 4) Make other disciples, assigning a score of 1 to 10 for each mark. A score of 1 means little or no attention to the mark, and a 10 means great emphasis or discussion of the mark. The first category, committed follower of Jesus, will include items listed as "spiritual disciplines" today such as prayer, reading the Bible, worship, fasting, fellowship, and similar items. Obedience will be limited to expected behavioral evidence. Fasting is taught in scripture but is a personal discipline that may or may not result in behavioral change. Conversely, changing behavior can result from simple effort (at least for a short period of time) without using or applying the disciplines. The goal of the disciplines is to result in a changed life, but obedience is also necessary for a disciple to mature. Discipleship aims to create mature disciples who bear these four marks. The author's attention to

each of these elements provides some understanding of their view of the church when they wrote. Additionally, each author is evaluated on their comments, if any, on the method of discipleship.

The method of discipleship will be evaluated in two ways. First, the four steps of discipleship determined in this paper will be evaluated: 1) Teach about Jesus, 2) Salvation/commitment, 3) Demonstration/teach while doing, and 4) Release to minister. A score from 1 to 10 will be assigned for each step based on the author's attention to each step, with a score of 1 meaning little to no attention and a score of 10 meaning great emphasis or discussion. The order of the steps will also be considered because the order may significantly affect the effectiveness of the discipleship. Secondly, each author will be evaluated on how they describe discipleship taking place. Three categories were selected to evaluate this item, classroom or lecture-type instruction, teaching while living/ministering or a combination of the two.

Finally, to understand each author's picture of discipleship, two other important notes will be considered; 1) the cultural influence on discipleship the author experienced and 2) the author's attitude or remarks on the relationship of discipleship and salvation. Each of these factors can influence the content of their writing but may also explain the exclusion of information.

The cultural influence will include items such as whether the society was more individualistic or communal, the level of persecution anticipated by followers, the spiritual attitude of the culture involved, and other influences each author may offer. The introduction in Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* includes a section labeled "Baxter's Voice in His Context."¹²⁸ Books on hermeneutics warn that the first step in interpreting scripture is to

¹²⁸ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: Updated and Abridged*. Edited by Tim Cooper. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 12.

understand what the original author was saying to the original audience in the original setting.¹²⁹ Attempting to interpret writing without considering the setting the writing occurred in can lead to dramatic misinterpretation. Obedience to scripture may be emphasized more than sharing a person's faith during extreme persecution. Conversely, during periods of extreme acceptance of the Christian faith, authors may stress evangelism more due to apathy in the membership.

The relationship between discipleship and salvation greatly influences the approach to discipleship. Rod Dempsey defines disciple in *Disciple Making Is...* this way, "A disciple is a person who has trusted Christ for salvation and has surrendered completely to Him. He or she is committed to practicing the spiritual disciplines in *community* and *developing to their full potential for Christ and His mission*."¹³⁰ The definition Dempsey offers demands the position that discipleship begins after salvation. Conversely, Greg Ogden notes, "we have made discipleship for super-Christians, not ordinary believers."¹³¹ Ogden suggests that many in the church view discipleship as optional or unnecessary. Alvin Reid explains, "There are enough extrabiblical accounts of the life of Christ to demonstrate that he lived, but a person must come to the Scriptures to find any significant information about God's final self-revelation."¹³² Reid reveals that a person must be a disciple before committing their life to Christ. The view someone has as to when discipleship begins can impact the spread of the gospel and the church's growth. The steps of discipleship defined in this paper may be different from an author's perspective. The order of the steps may be changed in their picture of discipleship, or they may use different

¹²⁹ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2012), 117.

¹³⁰ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey. *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2013, 28.

¹³¹ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2016, 49.

¹³² Reid, 131.

terminology to express similar ideas. Figure 3 is the form used to evaluate each author. Additional pages may be necessary to record additional notes. The question of whether discipleship begins before or after salvation may appear of little consequence. Still, it can dramatically impact how individual church members approach those outside the church and other members. Jesus had many disciples that walked away when he called them to make a serious commitment to him, but they are still referred to as disciples. They are called disciples because they were sitting under the instruction of Jesus for a time, even though they never made a commitment to him and eventually walked away.

Data will be gathered for authors from the four eras outlined in the introduction. Scores will be tallied, and data entered into a spreadsheet. The data will be evaluated by era as opposed to individually. The purpose is not to determine differences in writers from the same periods but to assess if there is a general change in attitude or application of discipleship from period to period. Due to the subjectivity of the evaluation process, input from other contemporary authors will be compared to the results of this evaluation. The nature of this research project prohibits the detailed study of the many authors included in the research. Input from more in-depth studies of these individuals may provide useful information for the evaluation.

IRB approval is not required for this research because the research is limited to written information that is publicly available. No persons were questioned or studied for this research project.

Author		
Marks of Mature Disciple	1-10	comments
Committed Follower of Jesus		
Obedience		
Love Others		
Make Disciples		
Total Score		
Elements of Discipleship	1-10	comments
Teach Jesus		
Salvation		
Demonstration		
Release		
Total Score		
Discipleship begins before salvation?	Y / N	
Method of Discipleship *		
Cultural Influence		
Attitude of Salvation/Discipleship relationship		
<p>*Score for "Method of Discipleship" 1=classroom or lecture-style instruction 2=ministry-based discipleship, teach while doing 3=combination of 1 and 2</p>		

Figure 3 – Author Evaluation Score Sheet

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The research design of this project attempted to view the topic of discipleship through the lens of church leaders at different points in church history. The evaluation of available literature was limited due to the enormous amount of writings to consider. The research relied solely on data triangulation by examining the topic of discipleship from different eras. The purpose of this examination was to identify if there were any shifts in the church's approach to discipleship, when those shifts occurred, and significant events that caused those shifts.

Writers were selected from each era studied in an attempt to obtain a fair cross-section of views for the era they represent. An unintended bias is revealed in the list of writers selected for the modern era. All of the authors are Baptist or, at the very least, Evangelical. Each author was evaluated using the definition of disciple and discipleship presented in this project and not their own definitions.

Conclusion

The research project in this paper presents a historical survey of discipleship seeking to determine changes in the primacy of discipleship through the eyes of the church leaders. Every era in church history presented challenges, and how the church responded to those challenges shifted its direction. The leaders wrote extensively about the issues they were most concerned about; Irenaeus wrote *Against Heresies* to counter false teaching that was causing division in the church, while Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *The Cost of Discipleship* in response to the lack of commitment to Jesus he saw in the church. Today, leaders would be wise to examine the past to avoid erroneous thought processes that result in an ineffectual church.

Chapter 4: Results

Scoring a representative group of authors from each era described in this project is provided below. A brief discussion of each era is provided to clarify the scoring process and consider factors influencing the content of the author's writing. The second section of this chapter compares the average scores for each era. Again, a discussion is provided to consider influences in changes from era to era. The researcher is confident that each reader will feel that specific authors from each era are not included in this research and should be included. This research aims to provide an overview of the climate of each era, and therefore, the list of authors is limited.

The meaning of the column labels is:

- CF = Committed Follower of Jesus
- OB = Obedience to Jesus
- LO = Love others as Christ loved you
- MD = Make other Disciples
- TJ = Teach about Jesus
- CS = Commitment/Salvation
- DM = Demonstration/Ministry (teaching while doing)
- RM = Release to Ministry

Results by Era

A graph including the authors reviewed and their scores for the areas of “Marks of a Disciple” and the “Elements of Discipleship.” The four eras reviewed are 1) Post-Apostolic, 2) Post-Edict, 3) Reformation and 4) Modern.

Post-Apostolic

Author	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Clement of Rome	10	9	10	8	37	5	8	9	1	23
Polycarp	8	9	8	4	29	4	8	9	1	22
Ignatius	9	9	8	3	29	6	10	10	3	29
Origen	8	3	3	3	17	3	9	3	3	18
Cyprian	10	10	8	4	32	8	10	8	4	30
Tertullian	10	10	8	4	32	8	8	5	3	24

Figure 4 – Post-Apostolic Authors Scores

Marks of Mature Disciple

All of the authors in this group stressed the importance of being a “committed follower” of Jesus by emphasizing many Christian activities commonly referred to as “Spiritual Disciplines” today. Prayer, fellowship, study, and active ministry are a few examples.

All of the authors, except for Origen, also stressed “obedience.” The score of 9 is given because the authors placed the obedience expected toward the pastors in addition to Jesus. “Let us be careful, then, not to set ourselves in opposition to the bishop, in order that we may be subject to God.”¹³³ The most likely reason the authors pointed their readers to obedience to their pastors is that they had the apostles' writings. The authors encouraged their readers with scripture and pointed to obedience to Christ and their pastors. Established church leaders appointed local church leaders to minister at a particular church. The pastors were not elected or continued to serve due to the congregation's approval.

“Love for others” received slightly less attention from most authors. The concept of love is often indirectly addressed. One example is Clement of Rome, “Every kind of faction and schism was abominable in your sight. Ye mourned over the transgressions of your

¹³³ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 2312-2818 Kindle. (Crane, MO: Defender, 2011), 2408.

neighbors: their deficiencies you deemed your own.”¹³⁴ Only love for a person’s neighbor could result in such a response.

The expectation of “making other disciples” was not prominent in the writings reviewed for this section. Several factors may have influenced the omission of expanding the church. First, the writers may have expected their call to obedience to the commands of Jesus included making other disciples, and so there was no need to mention it directly. Secondly, there was great persecution of the church during this period. The persecution restricted the openness of the Christians. Cyprian went into hiding due to the persecution, although he encouraged other believers through letters. The score assigned in this research only reflects the direct mention of making disciples in the author's writing but does not likely reflect their attitude towards the concept.

Elements of Discipleship

The authors reviewed for this era, except for Origen, stressed the marks of a mature disciple with “making other disciples” receiving the lowest grade. The elements of discipleship are related to the marks of a mature disciple. The score for this section is affected by the author’s view of the order of the elements.

“Teaching about Jesus” was not directly mentioned with this group. Indirect statements increased the score for some authors such as Clement of Rome, “Let us clothe ourselves with concord and humility, ever exercising self-control, standing far off from all whispering and evil-speaking, being justified by our works, and not our words.”¹³⁵ The possibility of a person

¹³⁴ Clement of Rome. "The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 282-1243 Kindle. (Crane, MO: Defender, 2011), 317.

¹³⁵ Ibid, 751.

behaving, demonstrating works, as a Christian without being taught the precepts of Jesus Christ is low. Therefore, Clement likely anticipated that teaching about Jesus and his commands preceded salvation. Similarly, Polycarp says in his letter to the Philippians, “And when absent from you, he wrote you a letter, which, if you carefully study, you will find to be the means of building you up in that faith which has been given you, and which, being followed by hope, and preceded by love towards God, and Christ, and our neighbour, ‘is the mother of us all.’”¹³⁶ Polycarp places love towards God and Christ before faith in Christ. No one can begin to love without knowledge and understanding the heart and motivation of another. Therefore, according to Polycarp, love for God leads to salvation, and salvation leads to hope. Ignatius follows this pattern by speaking of God, “so that He may both hear you, and perceive by your works that ye are indeed the member of His Son.”¹³⁷ Cyprian is more direct, quoting Old Testament scripture about reaching the lost and teaching them the precepts of Jesus Christ.¹³⁸ The early church fathers placed teaching about Jesus and his precepts before salvation; some authors were clear and direct in their position while others only referred.

All of the authors scored high on their expectations of a salvation experience. The expectation of commitment (salvation) is closely related to their view of obedience in followers of Jesus. A person was not considered a true convert to Jesus Christ by these men without evidence in their conduct, reflecting submission to everything Jesus commanded. None of these leaders expected perfection in obedience, but they viewed salvation through a person's actions. Cyprian led the church in northern Africa during a time of intense persecution. Some church

¹³⁶ Polycarp, 1683.

¹³⁷ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," 2393.

¹³⁸ Cyprian of Carthage. *The Complete Works of Saint Cyprian of Carthage*. (Toronto: Public Domain, 2016), 848.

members, including bishops, denounced their faith in Christ to avoid persecution. When the persecution waned, many of those who had left the church desired to return. Cyprian refused readmittance without a demonstration of sincerity through action for several years. Donatus took this same position and would later be declared a heretic by the church in Rome.

The “demonstration/teach while doing” method of teaching new converts was the chosen method for these authors. Ignatius calls on believers to follow the example of Jesus in this teaching method, “It is good to teach, if he who speaks also acts. For he who shall both ‘do and teach, the same shall be great in the kingdom.’(Matt 5:19) Our Lord and God Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, first did and then taught, as Luke testifies, ‘whose praise is in the Gospel through all the Churches.’(2 Cor 8:18)”¹³⁹ Jesus first had his disciples witness how he ministered and then included them in the ministry before sending them off to minister alone. He explained what he had done and why he had done it after allowing the disciples to observe his actions.

The authors in this era received low scores for the “release to ministry” category. This category is closely related to the “make other disciples” category in the mature marks of a disciple. The reasons for the low scores in that category apply here as well. The persecution and the anticipation that following Jesus’ precepts included making other disciples may be reasons the concept is not mentioned directly in the writings reviewed for this research.

¹³⁹ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," 2675.

Post-Edict

Author	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Eusebius	10	5	8	9	32	8	8	7	4	27
Augustine of Hippo	10	5	9	7	31	10	9	5	8	32
Jerome	10	5	3	4	22	10	9	4	3	26
Gregory the Great	7	3	5	4	19	10	7	7	1	25
Thomas Aquinas	10	4	5	4	23	10	4	4	2	20

Figure 5 – Post-Edict Authors Scores

Marks of Mature Disciple

The scores in the Post-Edict era reflect changes in the views and emphases of the church leadership due to a tremendous surge in church membership and political expediency. The church became intertwined with the government and eventually became the government in many respects during this era. The authority and power gained by the church silenced any opposition to the direction the church moved. Jerome points how the leadership was affected by the instant growth, “The Church, as you know, welcomes penitents, and is so overwhelmed by the multitude of sinners that it is forced, in the interests of the misguided flocks, to be lenient to the wounds of the shepherds.”¹⁴⁰ Jerome's statement explains the shift in the prerequisites for church membership. Evidence of a changed heart through actions was required up to this time.

The writers of this era scored very high on the “committed follower” mark. Each author stressed the importance of prayer, worship, fellowship, and personal accountability. Thomas Aquinas claims that there is a connection between an individual's desire to see God and their knowledge of God.¹⁴¹ He argues that in order to know God, one must desire God. The

¹⁴⁰ Jerome. *The Complete Works of Saint Jerome*. Toronto: public domain, 2016, 1010.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. (Claremont, California: Coyote Canyon Press, n.d.), 116.

knowledge will come from the “spiritual disciplines,” but only those with a commitment to know God will discipline themselves.

The “obedience” scores in this era are noticeably lower than those of the previous era. All of the writers stress the importance of obedience, but the object of that obedience shifted in this era. Obedience to the church was stressed more than obedience to Christ. The scriptures were not available to each church member the way they are today. The members had to rely on the bishops, pastors, and other church leaders for exposing the truth of scripture. Groups did emerge during this period that opposed the Catholic Church’s teaching and were declared heretics for their efforts. John Wycliffe denied the concept of transubstantiation and taught that the source of sound doctrine was the Bible and not the church.¹⁴² Wycliffe influenced Jan Hus, who began preaching the same ideas in Germany. As a result, he was excommunicated from the church.¹⁴³ Neither of these men was declared a heretic because they taught doctrines contrary to scripture; they were contrary to the Catholic Church.

The need to “love others” is apparent in this era's earlier writers but wanes as time passes. Fidelity to the church became the primary goal. Augustine emphasizes love, often including loving one’s enemies. Eusebius, who mainly writes a historical account of the church, frequently comments on their love for others.

Similarly, “making disciples” receives more attention in the early part of this era than in the latter part. The change may be due in part to the fact that most of the population in Europe were members of the Catholic Church during that period, and as a result, there was not a great need to evangelize. The shift from the church being persecuted to being so closely linked with

¹⁴² Hill, 217.

¹⁴³ Elwell, 582.

political leadership made it expedient for the average citizen to become a church member regardless of their attitude toward sin and Jesus Christ.

Elements of Discipleship

“Teaching about Jesus” received very high scores for this era. The early writers were still influenced by the scriptures and the earlier church leaders who taught the need for a person to have a thorough understanding of Jesus before salvation. The introduction to Gregory the Great’s *Book of Pastoral Rule* illustrates the impact the Edict of Milan had on the church. “thousands of new converts flooded into the Church, but many of them were perceived by their contemporaries to be lacking the depth of faith that had been possessed by the pre-Constantinian community.”¹⁴⁴ The result was that many more committed Christians withdrew into monastic communities to pursue their faith with other like-minded Christians. The relationships in the monastic communities more closely resembled the teacher/disciple model presented in scripture while the rest of the church evolved into the clergy teaching doctrine through sermons to laity who may or may not apply the truths they heard (if they attended) to their lives with no accountability. The purpose of Gregory’s book was to call church leaders to more effectively monitor the spiritual growth of the members in their charge.

“Commitment/salvation” received high marks also. The comments about the lack of “depth of faith” mentioned earlier must influence how these scores are viewed. The writers emphasized the need for and evidence of a commitment to follow Jesus Christ due to knowledge of him. The church, however, became full of people who had not made a serious commitment to Christ.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory the Great, 6.

The method of discipleship appears to have shifted in this era. Studying and listening to sermons replaced active ministry as the method of choice. Eusebius scored higher than most in this group due to his account of early church leaders relying on the “demonstration/teach while doing” method. Gregory titles one of the sections in his book, “That the spiritual director should always be the first in service.”¹⁴⁵ He explains that leaders must demonstrate or show the members how to do what he teaches them. Aquinas places the responsibility of learning and growing on the disciple and the degree of effort they put forth. “Experience shows that some understand more profoundly than do others; as one who carries a conclusion to its first principles and ultimate causes understands it better than the one who reduces it only to its proximate causes.”¹⁴⁶ Aquinas stresses effort on the disciple rather than a demonstration by the teacher as the primary model of growth and understanding.

Augustine was the only author of this period who emphasized “release to ministry.” The lack of attention may be due to factors indicated earlier, such as the percentage of the population who declared membership in the church. There is no need to make disciples if the overwhelming majority of the population is converted. Additionally, the church leaders were viewed as the ones who ministered to the membership.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 33.

¹⁴⁶ Aquinas, 808.

Reformation

Author	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Martin Luther	10	10	7	8	35	7	9	9	8	33
John Calvin	8	9	7	3	27	5	9	5	5	24
Ulrich Zwingli	9	10	7	4	30	10	9	5	5	29
Desiderius Erasmus	10	10	10	4	34	10	9	7	7	33

Figure 6 – Reformation Authors Scores

Marks of a Mature Disciple

The representative authors from this period scored high on the first two marks of a mature disciple. The reformation brought the origin of denominationalism due to various doctrinal beliefs, but the leaders consistently reinforced the behaviors evident in the life of a mature disciple. These authors also called believers to obedience to Jesus Christ and his commands recorded in the Bible. Fidelity to the Catholic Church was misplaced obedience according to these men.

People reading and understanding scripture for themselves was a key issue for these men. Martin Luther said, “If there be any who have not drank more deeply into, and more firmly held my doctrines, which are supported by such weighty Scriptures, than to be moved by these light and trivial arguments of Erasmus, though so highly ornamented, they are not worthy of being healed by my answer.”¹⁴⁷ Luther disagreed with Erasmus on doctrinal points, but both men called for personal study of scripture. “Learning or knowledge fenceth or armeth the mind with wholesome precepts and honest opinions, and putteth thee ever in remembrance of virtue, so that neither can be lacking to the other. These twain cleaveth so together like friends, the one ever requiring the other’s help.”¹⁴⁸ One of the primary reasons Luther called for reformation of the

¹⁴⁷ Martin Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 205.

¹⁴⁸ Desiderius Erasmus, *Collected Works of Desiderius Erasmus*. (Hastings: Delphi Publishing, 2018), 695.

Catholic Church was that the leadership had assumed authority it did not have according to scripture. The first two articles of his *Ninety-Five Theses* demonstrate his point: “1) Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in saying ‘Repent ye, etc.,’ meant the whole life of the faithful to be an act of repentance. 2) This saying cannot be understood of the sacrament of penance (i.e. of confession and absolution) which is administered by the priesthood.”¹⁴⁹ Authority could only be found in scripture, and therefore, to understand scripture, believers must read scripture for themselves. John Calvin and Ulrich Zwingli taught differing doctrines, but each man spoke of the need for personal study of scripture and prayer and other behaviors of a committed follower of Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther’s *Ninety-Five Theses* is widely recognized as the beginning of the Reformation. Richard Serina Jr. claims Luther’s work was a reflection of a continuing activity at the time, “they were nonetheless concrete examples of interscholastic debate between medieval schools of theology on contested questions that entered the public realm through, of all things, University disputation.”¹⁵⁰ The public attention gained by Luther’s theses did indeed set into action the movement away from the Catholic Church. Luther refuted the authority of the Catholic Church over the scriptures.

“As Paul, 1 Cor. Xiv., teaches ‘Let others judge.’ Are you not pleased that there should be any one to judge the decrees of the church, which, nevertheless, Paul enjoins? What new kind of religion and humility is this, that, by our own example, you would take away from us the power of judging the decrees of men, and give it unto men without judgment? Where does the Scripture of God command us to do this?”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ Bettenson and Maunder, 206.

¹⁵⁰ Richard J. Serina Jr., "A Debatable Theology: Medieval Disputation, the Wittenberg Reformation, and Luther's Heidelberg Theses." *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83 (2019): 85-96, 92.

¹⁵¹ Luther, 289.

Obedience must be placed in scripture and the commands of Jesus Christ rather than in a man or institution. John Calvin opposed the supremacy of the Papacy and the Catholic Church and presented his arguments this way, “This proof confirmed, 1. By examples and passages of Scripture; 2. By reason and the authority of Augustine.”¹⁵² Calvin included Augustine to demonstrate how the Catholic Church had changed over time but stressed the primacy of scripture demanding obedience to Christ rather than man.

“Love others” is a topic not lost on these authors but did not garner the same attention as commitment and obedience to Christ. Ulrich Zwingli connected Christian love to relying solely on scripture as the foundation for behavior and belief. Included in a debate Zwingli held publically with a representative of the Pope in Zurich known as the “First Disputation” is this argument posed by Zwingli: “This we desire to know from you. Therefore I beg you for the sake of Christian love, do this with plain unadulterated, divine Scripture, as you boast to have done in the case of the priest imprisoned at Constance.”¹⁵³ The argument Zwingli had been making was against praying to saints. The point here is that Zwingli is equating the love of Christ with relying solely on the source of love, Christ, as shown in Scripture. Erasmus described the love of God as the means to reach others, “I do not care if it be not so quick, so it be godly: let it not make them instruct and ready to disputations in schools, so that it make them apt to keep Christ’s peace.”¹⁵⁴ Knowledge of scripture is necessary but not for the sake of debate; it should result in behavior that reflects the love or peace of Christ.

¹⁵² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 19739.

¹⁵³ Zwingli, 1526.

¹⁵⁴ Erasmus, 180.

“Make disciples” received significantly less attention from this group, except for Luther. Luther contended that speaking about Jesus and defending one’s faith in him should be typical behavior of every Christian.¹⁵⁵ It is unlikely that the other writers took a lighter position on this topic than Luther did; it did not receive direct attention in their writings as it did in Luther’s.

Elements of Discipleship

Each author in this era received high scores for “Teaching about Jesus,” except for John Calvin. Luther claims that a person who claims to be a follower of Jesus and yet fails to follow the commands of Jesus should not be considered a Christian, “For how will he believe that which he does not follow?”¹⁵⁶ Belief, then, is requisite on a solid understanding of the object of obedience. A person must have ample knowledge of Jesus and his commands to believe in him. Calvin places the faith sufficient for salvation in the hands of God. “We must remember that while ‘life’ is promised to everyone, to ‘whoever believes’ in Christ, faith is nevertheless not common to everyone. Christ is made known to everyone and seen by everyone, but only the elect have their eyes opened by God to seek him by faith.”¹⁵⁷ In the introduction to the *Selected Works of Ulrich Zwingli*, the writer says of Zwingli, “And without passing through any profound spiritual experience, entering rather as a devout scholar than as a religious enthusiast into the temple of God, he arrived at those conceptions of the truth which bear the name of Protestant.”¹⁵⁸ Knowledge of Jesus and his precepts led Zwingli to believe and focus on faith in scripture rather than faith in the Church.

¹⁵⁵ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 259.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 301.

¹⁵⁷ Calvin, John. *John*, 77.

¹⁵⁸ Zwingli, 78.

Luther's score is somewhat lower due to his reasoning for baptizing children. He argues that reason and knowledge hinder faith, and therefore, children who have not yet begun to reason are in a better position to place their faith in Jesus than adults. Pointing to 1 John 2:13, Luther says, "From this it follows that the apostles also baptized children and held the view that they believe and know the Father, just as if they had begun to reason and could read" and goes on to say, "and excludes nobody down to the first year, for all these are called 'children.'"¹⁵⁹ The position Luther takes here is a departure from the teaching of Tertullian, who said, "The Lord does indeed say, 'Forbid them not to come unto me. Let them come.' Then, while they are growing up; let them 'come' while they are learning, while they are learning whither to come; let them become Christians when they have become able to know Christ."¹⁶⁰ Tertullian argues that children must first learn about Christ before committing to follow him. Luther places teaching after commitment.

Whether knowledge of Jesus comes from revelation by the Holy Spirit or communication through human agents, salvation includes a commitment to Jesus Christ. Each author links committed behavior to true salvation in this era, but a proper understanding of Jesus produces that commitment. Robert Kolb claims, "Luther turned instead to the definition he found to be biblical – a life of trust in the Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, who is a God of conversation and community, a life which proceeds from God's address to his human creatures in his Word, in all its several forms."¹⁶¹ Faith comes from hearing and understanding scripture. Luther appears to have all of scripture in mind in Kolb's understanding. Calvin also contends that believers are

¹⁵⁹ Martin Luther, "Infant Baptism and Faith That is not Ones Own." *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 111, no. 1 (2014): 32-43, 39.

¹⁶⁰ Tertullian. *The Complete Works of Tertullian*. (Toronto: public domain, 2016), 20264 Kindle.

¹⁶¹ Robert Kolb, "Discipleship in the Lutheran Tradition." *concordiatheology*. March 26, 2012. <https://concordiatheology.org/2012/03/discipleship-in-the-lutheran-tradition/> (accessed April 8, 2021).

fully committed to Jesus Christ because “the faith of the elect is certain and indubitable.”¹⁶² Only the saved are committed, and only the committed are saved for all of these men. Luther holds those who claim to have had a salvation experience to a high standard, “For not to delight in assertions, is not the character of the Christian mind: nay, he must delight in assertions, or he is not a Christian. But, (that we may not be mistaken in terms) by assertion, I mean a constant adhering, affirming, confessing, defending, and invincibly persevering.”¹⁶³ It is unlikely he contends that those who bear the name Christian ought to be perfect, but he anticipated constant attention to progress towards perfection.

Learning about Jesus and his character leads a person to the point where he will respond to the conviction of the Holy Spirit. The moment described is when the individual submits to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and God justifies the individual. The teaching and assistance in applying the truths found in scripture continue for the duration of the person's life. Erasmus and Luther describe a close relationship between the disciple and disciple-maker where demonstration is a large part of the learning process. Erasmus acknowledges the numerous volumes of literature available in his day concerned with diverse areas of doctrine, noting that most people have neither the time nor the compulsion to sift through the information. Therefore, people ought to be taught through demonstration and Christian virtue to stir the love for Christ in themselves, so they live a life pleasing to Christ.¹⁶⁴ Calvin and Zwingli mention living an exemplary lifestyle but come short of tying that example to a close relationship with other believers. Close relationships reveal the flaws in a person's character. Relationships at a distance

¹⁶² Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 10250 Kindle.

¹⁶³ Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 247 Kindle.

¹⁶⁴ Erasmus, 199 Kindle.

allow the unwarranted glorification of an individual because they can present the desired appearance for a short time while hiding or diminishing points of failure or struggle.

The scores for “release to ministry” are similar to the “demonstration/teach while doing” scores. The goal of mature Christians leading others to Christ and propagating the gospel is less visible in the observed writings of Calvin and Zwingli than they are in the writings of Luther and Erasmus.

Modern

Author	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Philip Jacob Spener	10	10	10	8	38	10	10	8	7	35
John Wesley	10	10	9	10	39	10	10	6	8	34
Deitrich Bonhoeffer	10	10	10	10	40	10	10	8	9	37
Bill Hull	10	10	10	10	40	10	10	9	9	38
Greg Ogden	10	10	9	10	39	10	10	9	10	39
Dave Earley	10	10	10	10	40	10	10	9	10	39
Dallas Willard	10	10	10	8	38	10	8	8	8	34
Ray Stedman	10	10	10	10	40	10	8	9	10	37
Ed Stetzer	10	10	10	10	40	8	8	9	9	34
Alvin Reid	10	10	10	10	40	10	10	6	10	36

Figure 7 - Modern Authors Scores

The modern era authors reviewed for this research project offer similar views on most categories. Several authors over four hundred years address the same issues. Phillip Jacob Spener and John Wesley address the same topics as Bill Hull and Alvin Reid, providing the reader with a uniform view of discipleship.

Marks of a Mature Disciple

Every author from this era notes that a mature disciple focuses primarily on Jesus and his commands. Spener offers correction to those who claim to be Christians but fail to follow Jesus, “How many there are who live such a manifestly unchristian life that they themselves cannot

deny that the law is broken at every point, who have no intention of mending their ways in the future, and yet who pretended to be firmly convinced that they will be saved in spite of all this!”¹⁶⁵ Many people have false hope in salvation because they have not been taught to follow Jesus Christ. Dave Earley reminds his readers of the message John the Baptist shared, a message of repentance and change.¹⁶⁶ A steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ is expected of disciples. At first, the commitment will be low but will continue to grow in those the Lord is drawing to him. Greg Ogden describes the disciples' initial interaction with Jesus as a period of examination that made them realize he was the Messiah they anticipated coming one day.¹⁶⁷ The more time the disciples spent with Jesus, the more committed they became. The same is true of disciples today.

The authors of this era universally stress obedience to the commands of Jesus. John Wesley built the structure of the Methodist Church on the premise that behavioral change was as significant in the life of a believer as worship. The “class meeting” was explicitly designed for behavior modification.¹⁶⁸ Ed Stetzer illustrates the absence of obedience by saying, “Something is wrong when churches are filled with people who seemingly haven’t changed their loyalties.”¹⁶⁹ A person demonstrates their loyalty through their obedience. A person cannot be a disciple of Jesus without obeying his commands.

Demonstration of love toward others is also at the forefront of discussion for each of the authors in this era. Jesus told his disciples that the world would recognize they were his disciples

¹⁶⁵ Spener, 64.

¹⁶⁶ Dave Earley, *Pastoral Leadership Is...* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 140.

¹⁶⁷ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*. (Downers Grove: IVP Press, 2016), 63.

¹⁶⁸ Henderson, 91.

¹⁶⁹ Ed Stetzer, *Subversive Kingdom: Living as Agents of Gospel Transformation*. (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), 20.

by the love they showed each other and people who were not disciples. Spener comments on John 13:35, “Here love is considered the distinguishing mark, and this is not merely a pretended love that is hugged to one’s heart in unfruitful embrace but a love that manifests itself openly.”¹⁷⁰ The love of Christ invades the heart of a true disciple and overflows outward toward others. “The early Christians had only one strategy, one agenda, one message, one weapon, one force with which to overwhelm the empire of the caesars: love.”¹⁷¹

Making other disciples is stressed by all of the authors in this era. Dallas Willard claims that if people are discipled the way Jesus modeled, they will have enough confidence to minister the way Jesus did, including making disciples.¹⁷² Alvin Reid admonishes his readers to turn from an attitude of lost people coming to the church to saved people reaching the lost.¹⁷³ Spreading the gospel is the responsibility of every disciple of Jesus Christ, not just a few. “God calls us to become individually responsible to spread the radical, revolutionary, life-transforming good news of Jesus Christ throughout society.”¹⁷⁴ All agree that mature disciples make other disciples.

Elements of Discipleship

Teaching others about Jesus as the first element in discipleship is agreed on by all of the authors of this era. Bill Hull illustrates this point well, “Do not recruit people for anything without first allowing them to have their curiosity assuaged. Jesus was not afraid to reveal the small print in the contract. We get the distinct impression from this passage that Jesus desired to

¹⁷⁰ Spener, 57.

¹⁷¹ Stedman, 33.

¹⁷² Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018), 289.

¹⁷³ Reid, 4.

¹⁷⁴ Stedman, 36.

make it easy to say no.”¹⁷⁵ Hull was referring to John 1:35-40 when Jesus invited two disciples to spend time with him. Jesus wanted the people to fully understand what he was calling them into before allowing them to decide. Dave Earley offers this view of teaching people about Jesus, “Effective evangelism leads people step-by-step to the event of trusting Christ as their Savior.”¹⁷⁶ A person's commitment to follow Jesus is serious and must result from a clear understanding of the expected relationship.

Commitment/salvation comes from understanding who Jesus is and the life he calls individuals to live. That commitment occurs during the process of discipleship. Dallas Willard claims that the church no longer makes disciples but has replaced that command of Jesus with making converts. Those converts may or may not decide to become disciples later.¹⁷⁷ Willard's point is that the described scenario is inconsistent with the Great Commission.

The scores for “demonstration/teaching while doing” are high for this group. The majority of the commentary on this topic is the need for those who disciple others to live an exemplary life for others to follow. Jesus did not only live an exemplary life, but he also invited his disciples to minister with him, teaching them as they ministered. Teaching in a classroom or symposium setting also received attention from this group of authors. Dave Earley explains a process of leading people to ministry opportunities, providing some classroom training, and placing them with others in that ministry.¹⁷⁸ Teaching while doing is an essential part of discipleship; ministry was not optional for Jesus' disciples and must not be for disciples today.

¹⁷⁵ Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 33.

¹⁷⁶ Dave Earley and David Wheeler. *Evangelism Is...: How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence*. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 79.

¹⁷⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teaching on Discipleship*. (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 4.

¹⁷⁸ Earley, 206.

Dallas Willard illustrates the result of teaching without the element of teaching while doing, “We have counted on preaching, teaching, and knowledge or information to form faith in the hearer and have counted on faith to form the inner life and outward behavior of the Christian. But, for whatever reason, this strategy has not turned out well.”¹⁷⁹ Willard alludes to the lack of participation in ministry while teaching. Wesley scored lower in this area because his “class meeting,” while important for accountability, did not provide active guidance of proper behavior. Demonstration or teaching while doing provides a better learning experience for the disciple.

Releasing to ministry is the goal of discipleship for each writer in this group. Disciples of Jesus will begin to make disciples themselves. Bonhoeffer teaches that every follower of Jesus Christ is directed by him to share what they have received.¹⁸⁰ He is referring to the gift of salvation every believer received from God. Bill Hull clearly states, “A disciple finds and teaches other disciples who also follow Jesus.”¹⁸¹ The goal of discipleship is to make disciple-making disciples.

Comparison of Scores from Each Era

The average scores from each era must now be compared to determine any changes. Factors remain that cannot be accounted for, such as the emphasis of a particular point does not directly translate to that point being universally implemented at the local church level, nor does it imply that point is not prevalent in the church at the time the author wrote. Figure 8 is the table of the average scores for each era.

¹⁷⁹ Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teaching on Discipleship*, 69.

¹⁸⁰ Bonhoeffer, 208.

¹⁸¹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, 68.

Era	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Post-Apostolic	9.17	8.33	7.50	4.33	29.33	5.67	8.83	7.33	2.50	24.33
Post-Edict	9.40	4.40	6.00	5.60	25.40	9.60	7.40	5.40	3.60	26.00
Reformation	9.25	9.75	7.75	4.75	31.50	8.00	9.00	6.50	6.25	29.75
Modern	10.00	10.00	9.80	9.60	39.40	9.80	9.40	8.10	9.00	36.30

Figure 8 - Average Score Comparison

Marks of a Mature Disciple

Committed Follower

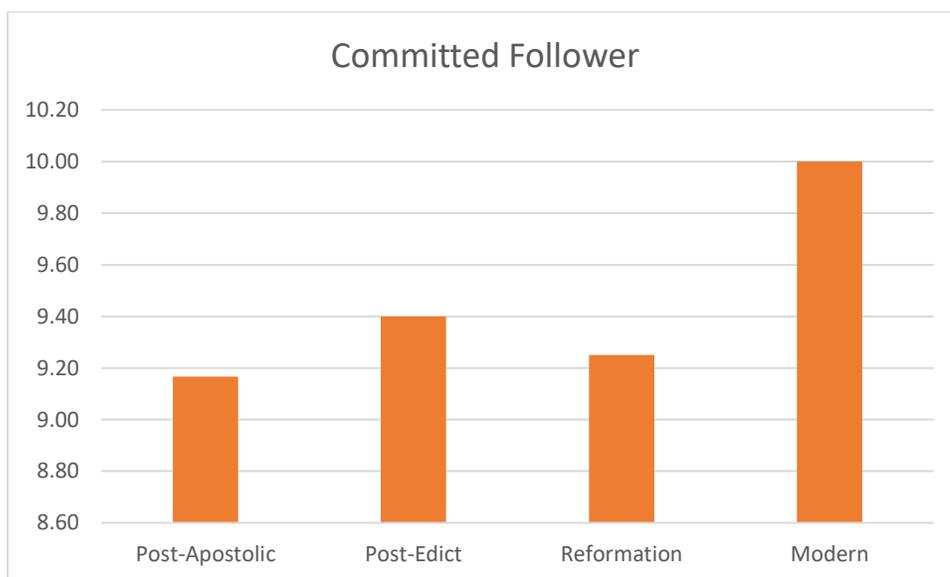


Figure 9 - Committed Follower Scores

The scores for this category demonstrate an increase in the modern era from the other eras. The Post-Apostolic writers were not as concerned with commitment because of the church's persecution during that time. Those who chose to follow Christ were aware of the consequences of their decision and chose to follow Jesus. The Post-Edict authors had the opposite issue: the overwhelming influx of new church members. Managing the church's explosive growth took priority and lowered the expectations of members. The primary focus of the Reformation was refuting the authority of the Catholic Church. The majority of the writings of this time were on doctrinal points. The scores of all eras are high, but the authors in the modern era are concerned

with a lack of commitment among church members. In the first three eras, the church was growing and held an important place in society (for different reasons). The writers in the Modern era opine on the commitment by reflecting on an ineffectual church. The church is not growing and thriving as it did in the Post-Apostolic era, is not the center of political power and authority as it was in the Post-Edict era, and is not the central hub of the community as it was during the Reformation. Today, the church does not hold the significance it has had throughout history, albeit for different reasons.

Obedience

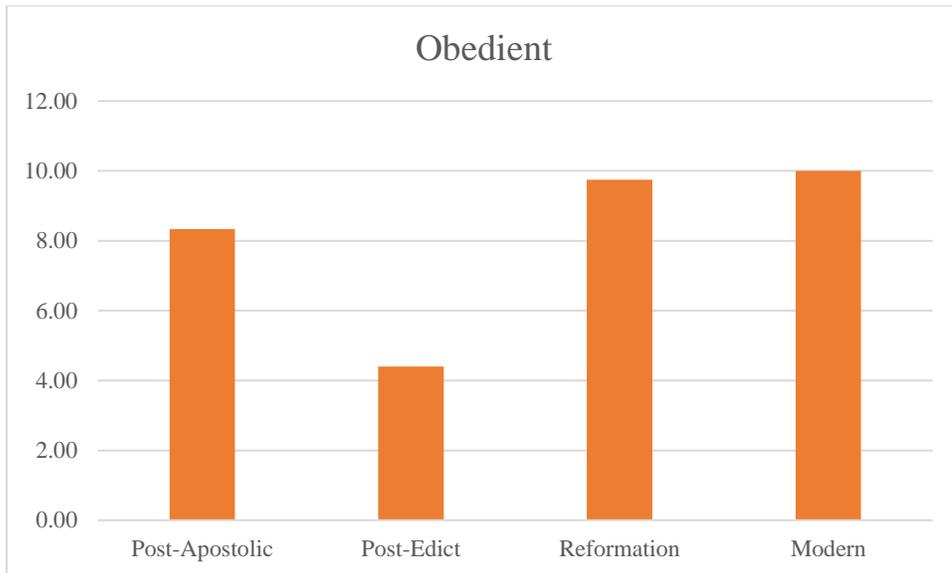


Figure 10 - Obedient Scores

The scores for this category reflect the degree of obedience anticipated by church members and the object of that obedience. The Post-Apostolic authors spoke about obedience to the commands of Jesus often but also called for members to be obedient to their pastor. The church leaders were the only people who had copies of the scriptures that contained the commands of Jesus, and the people had to rely on the pastors to communicate the contents. The score does not indicate obedience was not important to the writers of that period; it only reflects

that the object of that obedience was not always directly applied to Jesus. The score for the Post-Edict era is noticeably lower due to the consistent position of the church leadership throughout this period that members should be obedient to the church and not scripture. The Pope held the authority to change doctrine or tradition, and the members were expected to accept and submit to any change. The Reformation resulted from erroneous doctrine and corruption of the clergy under the Papacy. The Reformation writers scored high in this category for their demand that people turn their obedience to Jesus Christ through scripture. The Modern era authors reflect a similar emphasis on obedience to Jesus and his commands recorded in the Bible.

Love Others



Figure 11 - Love Others Scores

Cultural issues partly impact the scores in this category. The Post-Apostolic era was a time of close community connections. People were very close to one another, and personal decisions were based on the greater good instead of personal comfort. Demonstrating love for one another was important to the writers of this time but did not receive the same emphasis as other topics. The Post-Edict writers did not comment on love as often as in other eras. Church

members could live as they desired and occasionally go to their priest for absolution of their sins. The Reformation authors often tied loving others to holding one another accountable for obedience to the scriptures. Love is also spoken of in terms of kindness and helping others. The Modern era received the highest score in this category. The authors consistently speak of love in all of its aspects. Every author reviewed for this research mentioned Jesus’ declaration that the world would know his disciples because of their love for others.

Make Disciples

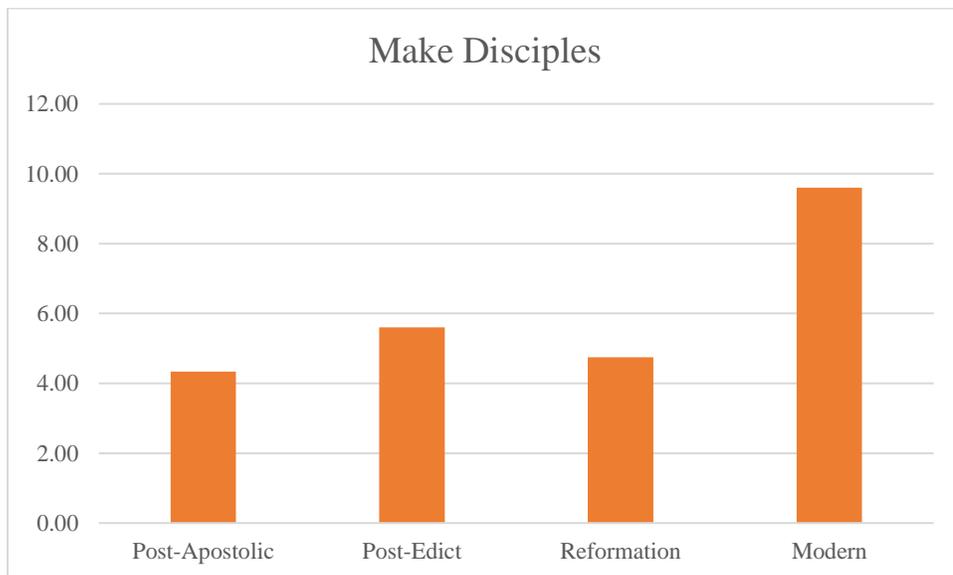


Figure 12 - Make Disciples Scores

This category received the lowest marks of all “Marks of a Mature Disciple” sections. The propagation of the gospel did not receive much attention by the Post-Apostolic writers, likely due to their focus on encouraging the existing members to hold firm in their faith during the persecution they experienced. The church did grow during this period revealing the members were making other disciples. The Post-Edict score is higher than the previous era due to the earlier writers' strong emphasis on the topic. In the later part of this era, the writers gave little attention to the topic because almost every citizen was a church member. The Reformation

writers directed their comments primarily to doctrinal issues rather than evangelism. The Modern era reflects a significant shift to recognize that mature disciples make other disciples. The number of books and articles written on evangelism reflects the importance the topic has acquired in this era.

Elements of Discipleship

Teach About Jesus

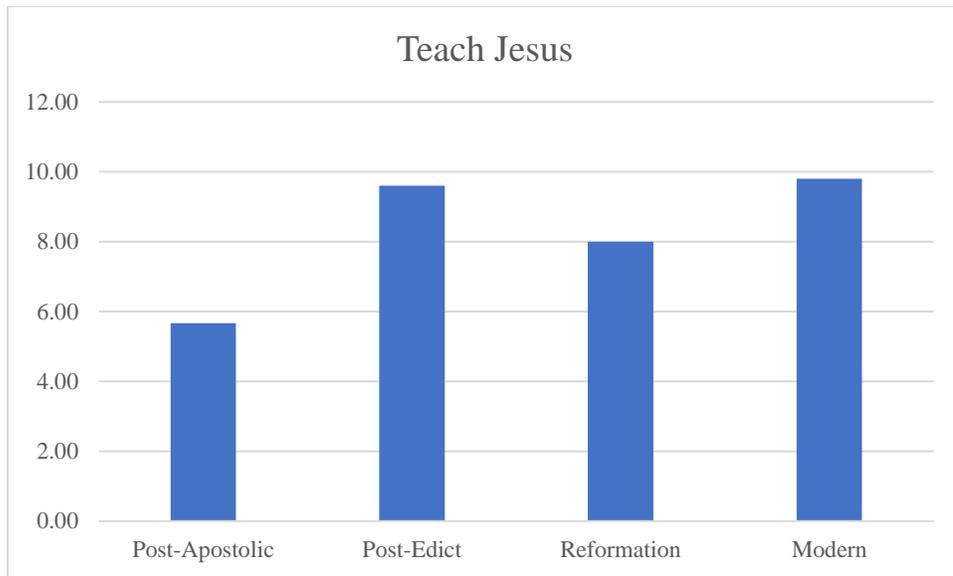


Figure 13 - Teach About Jesus Scores

The scores for this category were surprising to the researcher. The Post-Apostolic era received the lowest score for this category. The score reflects the same issues noted in the “Make Other Disciples” category above. During this period, the focus of the writing was encouragement for current members to maintain their faith. The church did grow, and that fact demands acknowledging that teaching about Jesus did occur. The score only reflects the content of the writings reviewed for this study. The Post-Edict era scored high in this category. The writers consistently referred to teaching others about Christ to bring them to salvation. The attention this topic received may reflect the lack of the activity by the membership and does not indicate any

actual change. John Calvin negatively impacted the score for the Reformation era. His view of election almost eliminates the need to teach about Jesus prior to salvation. If his score were excluded, the score would be 9.00. The Modern era writers stress the need to teach people about Jesus prior to committing to Christ. Their writing also indicates that many in the church do not hold the view they propose. These writers are calling for a change in the church.

Commitment/Salvation



Figure 14 - Commitment/Salvation Scores

The scores for this category are consistent throughout history. Thomas Aquinas's low score impacts the lower score in the Post-Edict era. With his score excluded, the era would receive a score of 8.25, which is similar to other eras. Commitment to Jesus follows learning about him in all eras.

Demonstration/Teach While Doing

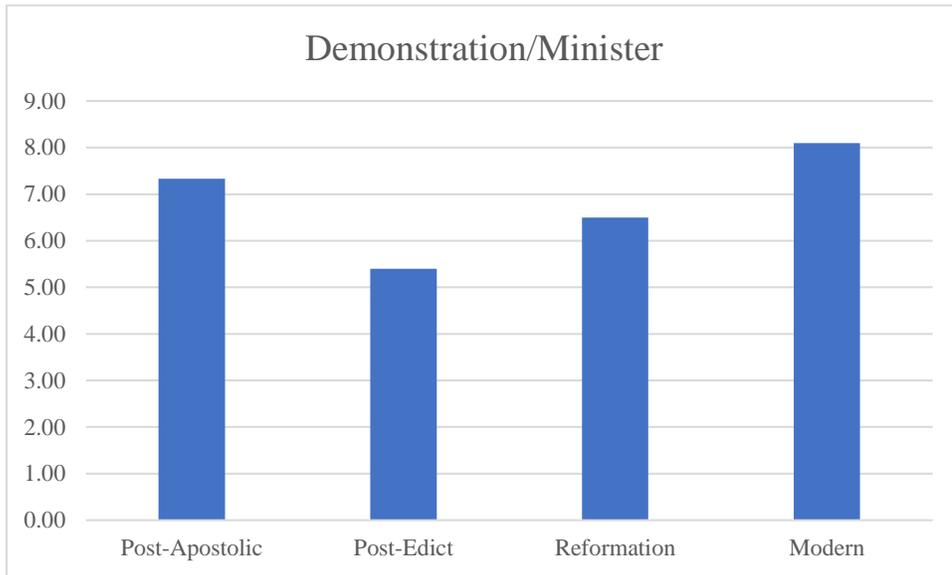


Figure 15 - Demonstration/Teach While Doing Scores

The Post-Apostolic era is alone in receiving the highest score in this category of “Elements of Discipleship” categories. The Modern era received its lowest score in this category, and the Post-Edict and Reformation eras received their second-lowest scores. Cultural norms impact the Post-Apostolic score. The Master-Disciple relationship was commonplace during that era for all trades. “Teaching while doing” was the typical form of instruction. The scores for the Post-Edict and Reformation eras reflect the advent of the University. The classroom setting replaced hands-on learning. Teaching occurred from the pulpit and in classrooms during these eras. The same method is prominent in the Modern era. “Teaching while doing” is another topic the Modern era writers encourage because it is not the method most churches employ.

Release to Minister

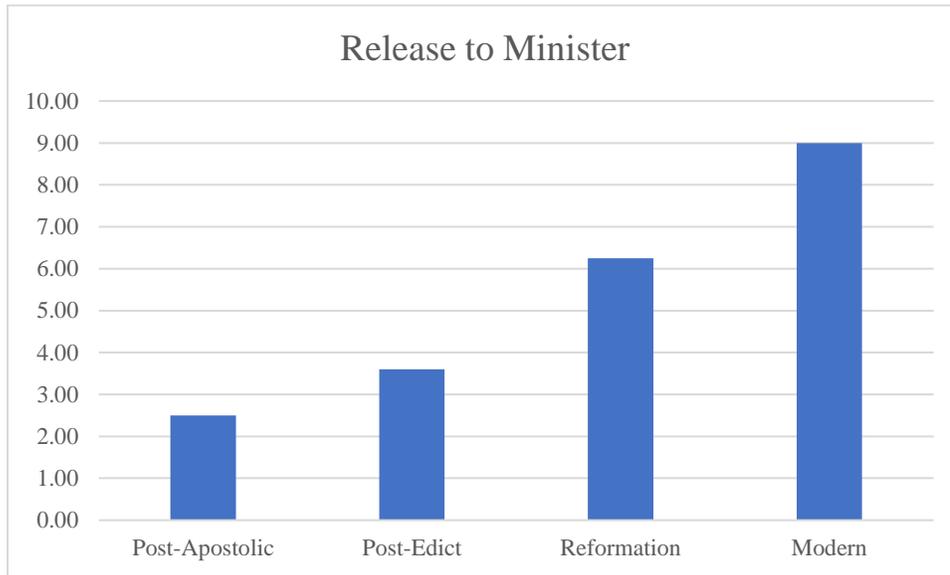


Figure 16 - Release to Minister Scores

This category is the only one that shows a consistent increase in attention over the eras. The low score the Post-Apostolic writers received is mainly due to the factors that influenced many of the other scores they received, persecution. Another factor that may account for the low score is the leader's expectation that faithful followers of Jesus Christ minister to others without prompting. The Post-Edict authors did not address the topic due to the lack of need for individual ministry because the church provided relief for people's needs. The Modern era authors comment on this topic (once again) because of the apathy they see in the church.

Noteworthy Statistical Findings

Figure 17 provides the individual score for each element reviewed for each era. The highest score for each era is backlit green, and the lowest score is backlit red. All scores above the average for each element are bold.

Era	Marks of Mature Disciple				Total Score	Elements of Discipleship				Total Score
	CF	OB	LO	MD		TJ	CS	DM	RM	
Post-Apostolic	9.17	8.33	7.50	4.33	29.33	5.67	8.83	7.33	2.50	24.33
Post-Edict	9.40	4.40	6.00	5.60	25.40	9.60	7.40	5.40	3.60	26.00
Reformation	9.25	9.75	7.75	4.75	31.50	8.00	9.00	6.50	6.25	29.75
Modern	10.00	10.00	9.80	9.60	39.40	9.80	9.40	8.10	9.00	36.30
Average	9.45	8.12	7.76	6.07		8.27	8.66	6.83	5.34	

Figure 17 - Scores By Era With Averages

The Modern Era received the highest score in every category reviewed. The researcher did not expect the Modern Era scores because that same era is described by the authors of the era where the church has the most negligible impact on society and is in a state of decline or plateau. The Post-Apostolic historical record shows a church that was growing and thriving even while experiencing persecution. The Post-Edict record reveals a church closely aligned with the government directly influencing society. The Reformation reveals people aligning with different denominations, but the church was still the central entity in the culture. Without exception, the authors within the previous fifty years of this research speak of an ineffectual and declining church both in numbers and esteem.

The score the Modern Era received for each category for the “Marks of Mature Disciple” was the only score in the group above the average except obedience, meaning that score is significantly higher than the other scores in that group. Conversely, the scores for the “Obedience” category show the disparity of the Post-Edict era, which is significantly lower than the other eras.

The scores for the “Elements of Discipleship” group show a more even distribution than the earlier group. The scores for “Demonstration/Teach While Doing” category show a notable difference in scores between the Post-Apostolic and Modern eras compared to the Post-Edict and Reformation eras. The score with the largest difference between the Modern Era and the other

eras in this group is the “Release to Ministry” category. The Modern Era authors consistently mentioned that mature disciples include ministry in their daily lives.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Jesus demonstrated the perfect example (because he is the originator) of discipleship. Jesus began his ministry in Judea and served the people there for a year before inviting men to visit with him. The disciples had time to see who he was and hear the things he taught. The disciples' interest led them to seek a closer relationship with Jesus and came to realize he was the Messiah. Jesus and his disciples lived together and ministered together. At first, Jesus ministered to people while the disciples watched and they had an opportunity to ask questions afterwards. Later, Jesus began to include the disciples in his ministry. The disciples distributed the fish and bread when Jesus fed the five thousand. Jesus taught his disciples while ministering together, helping them understand difficult ideas like forgiveness, love, and humility. Eventually, Jesus sent the disciples out to minister on their own. When the disciples returned, Jesus answered their questions and encouraged them. Jesus knew that he would not be with them much longer, and they needed to launch his church and teach others. The disciples followed that same pattern. Those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ were expected to demonstrate their changed hearts through their changed actions. The Apostle John talks plainly about people who have not submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ within the fellowship of believers. "If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth" (1 John 1:6). Daniel Akin argues, "John introduces a statement concerning God's nature to define the qualifications necessary for fellowship with God. The fact that the ultimate purpose of John's proclamation and writing is that his audience may participate in the Christian (apostolic) fellowship (and joy) with the Father and with his Son obliged him to set forth the conditions of this fellowship."¹⁸² According to the Apostle John, there were conditions or qualifications for

¹⁸² Daniel L. Aiken, *1, 2, 3 John*. The New American Commentary. Vol. 38. (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 2001), 1366 (kidle).

fellowship, and they went beyond a proclamation of faith; they were a demonstration of faith through action. Later, in the same letter, John says, “They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us’ but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us” (1 John 2:19).

John had learned through his time with Jesus that there would be some who claimed to be disciples for the benefits they would receive but who never made Jesus the Lord of their lives. John directly addressed those people and was not afraid of offending anyone. He believed that true believers would not be offended and would not leave the fellowship. Paul and the writer of Hebrews admonished the church members for not growing and being able to teach others all that Jesus had commanded. Believers were expected to grow and mature in Christ continuously. Jude warned his readers to “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered the saints. (Jude 3). The believers lived in close relationships with one another where they could teach and encourage one another.

Tertullian and Cyprian wrote about unity and perseverance in the face of persecution. Tertullian opposed the Roman church because of (in his opinion) their laxity and unwillingness to hold people accountable who were not living according to the commands of Jesus. He taught that anyone who loved God would obey his commands, and a persons’ actions would demonstrate that love. Cyprian studied scripture and the writing of Tertullian to formulate his opinions. He followed his mentor in holding those who claimed to be Christians accountable for living a life that reflected their love of Jesus. Cyprian opposed the Roman church's position for readmitting people who had renounced their faith during the persecution.

The Edict of Milan created a shift in the church that remains today. The promotion of the Christian faith by Emperor Constantine resulted in a massive influx of “new converts” to the

church. The separation in time from the ministry of Jesus Christ brought with it variations in interpretation of his words. The rapid influx of church members caused the leadership to make decisions on doctrine, the canon, and church authority. Constantine attended the Council of Arles in 314 AD, where he excluded several Donatist bishops, therefore, eliminating their influence on the outcome of the council.¹⁸³ Constantine later called a council in Nicea to establish correct doctrine due to different schools of thought apparent throughout the Christian world.¹⁸⁴ Over 300 bishops attended the council, most of whom were from the empire's eastern part, those closest to Constantine. Henry Percival says:

“the question the Fathers considered was not what they supposed Holy Scripture might mean nor what they, from ‘a priori arguments, thought would be consistent with the mind of God, but something entirely different, to wit, what they had received. They understood their position to be that of witnesses, not that of exegetes.”¹⁸⁵

The arguments were not based on scripture but on the traditions passed on from previous leaders. One must consider that some doctrinal points “resolved” at the first council in Nicea were in opposition to recognized leaders such as Justyn Martyr, Tertullian, and Cyprian. One conclusion the Council of Nicea issued was that any deviation in doctrine from what they concluded was proper would place any who followed or taught such doctrine outside of the true church and result in excommunication. One particular canon of the council of Nicea that is important in this discussion is Canon VIII.

There was disagreement regarding the readmittance of lapsed people into the church. The representative clergy from the eastern part of the empire held that any person who had separated

¹⁸³ Eric Wickman, "Shaping Church-State Relations After Constantine: The Political Theology of Hilary of Poitiers." *Church History* 86, no. 2 (June 2017): 287-310, 290.

¹⁸⁴ Hill, 80.

¹⁸⁵ Percival, 65.

from the church during the persecution should receive pardon. The canon specifically mentions Novatian regarding the lapsed, noting that he and his followers also refused any communion with anyone who was married a second time. Keeping with the readmittance of the lapsed into the church, Novatian's position was similar to Cyprian's. Cyprian only opposed Novatian when he assumed the position of pope. Like Novatian, Cyprian opposed restoring the lapsed, at least until a council could meet to decide the issue.¹⁸⁶ The council that did meet heavily favored the leaders in and around Rome who believed all should be restored. Cyprian had been held in high esteem up to this point. Donatus was a close friend of Cyprian and held similar views.

Augustine disputed the Donatists. After Augustine was called to serve as a bishop, he asked for time to study to be more prepared to serve the people. Matthew Gaumer says that in a letter Augustine wrote (Letter 21), “Augustine revealed his inadequacies with Scripture and need for in-depth study in order to better handle his newly appointed duties. But what he states only opaquely is that it was a pastoral reaction to the gravitational force of the opposing Donatist Church.”¹⁸⁷ Augustine, according to Gaumer, needed time to prepare an argument against the Donatists. The position Cyprian and Donatus held was consistent with the Apostle John, while the position of the Roman church and Augustine was in opposition.

The turn away from accountability for previous members, the large influx of new members (whose faith in Jesus Christ is doubtful) into the church, and all authority within the church being placed in the hands of one man changed the structure and mission of the church. The effects of those changes continue to impact the church today. Martin Luther challenged the Catholic Church to reform and return to the foundation of scripture rather than rely on the

¹⁸⁶ Cyprian, 113.

¹⁸⁷ Matthew Allan Gaumer, "Augustine's Feud with the Donatists & Pelagians: A Problem of Interpreting Paul?" *Annali Di Storia Dell'Esegesi* 30, no. 2 (2013): 439-48, 439.

church's tradition. Although the Protestant movement resulted from Luther's challenge, there was little change in the overall structure of the church. Neil Cole says, "The Reformation split the Western church into the Roman Church and the volatile Protestant church, or Church 2.1. In spite of the differences, the institutional system remained mostly unchanged."¹⁸⁸ Greg Ogden clarifies the same position in saying, "the Reformation did not make the break from a clerical conception of ministry and deliver on the promise of the priesthood of all believers."¹⁸⁹ Ogden argues in this book that the church members have been conditioned to be partakers of ministry, and the leadership does the ministry. Ogden provides a clear picture of the lack of biblical discipleship in the church. Ed Stetzer wrote a blog series entitled "Killing the Clergy-Laity Caste System," making a similar claim, "My fear is that we have created a class system in the body of Christ comprised of the 'called' and the 'not so much called.'"¹⁹⁰ Today, many writers express the same sentiments: the church is not making disciples. Jim Putnam offers a profound thought, "We've been handed a box historically, and we're just trying to live within that box, rather than ask if it was the right box to begin with. But the box doesn't make disciples. So we have to look for what's different about the way we're doing things and how Christ did things."¹⁹¹ Putnam is correct in calling church members to turn to the model Jesus demonstrated to make disciples to create the change needed in the church today.

¹⁸⁸ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 6.

¹⁸⁹ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 62.

¹⁹⁰ Ed Stetzer, *Laypeople and the Mission of God, part 1 - Killing the Clergy-Laity Caste System*. July 17, 2012. christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/July/laypeople-and-mission-of-God-part-1__killing-clergy.html (accessed September 3, 2017).

¹⁹¹ Jim Putman, "A Better Way to Make Disciples." *Outreach Magazine*. September 5, 2013. <http://www.outreachmagazine.com/features/4838-jim-putman-needed-shifts-in-making-disciples.html> (accessed October 9, 2017)

Evaluation of Results of Research

The research reveals a moment in time that changed the church so dramatically that the effects of that event continue to impact the church today. The Edict of Milan brought changes to the church that have never been corrected. There are three specific areas identified by this researcher that must be addressed if the church desires to have the impact the first-century church had on the culture, 1) Discipleship begins long before salvation, 2) Those who call themselves Christians must commit to and follow through with receiving discipleship and 3) Discipleship must include a “teaching while doing” element. The majority of modern literature on discipleship only addresses the content of discipleship but fails to address the method or conditions of discipleship. Encouraging people to attend a classroom discussion on spiritual disciplines or evangelism does not satisfy the model of discipleship Jesus demonstrated. Books like *Celebration of Discipline* by Robert Foster provide necessary information about spiritual growth, but they fail to provide accountability or a model to follow.

Discipleship begins long before salvation

Jesus ministered in Judea for over a year before he invited the two disciples to “Come and see” (John 1:39). D. A. Carson says, “Indeed, the promptness with which the disciples, according to the Synoptic tradition, abandon their livelihood (whether the fishing business or a tax office) in response to Jesus’ explicit call, is psychologically and historically more plausible if that was not their first exposure to him or their first demonstration of fealty toward him.”¹⁹² The disciples had not yet committed themselves to Jesus Christ; they wanted to know him. The two men who went with Jesus that night were disciples of John the Baptist, according to John 1:35. John the Baptist always pointed people to Jesus, and Jesus invited them into a closer relationship.

¹⁹² Carson, 154.

Today's most common understanding of discipleship in the Western church is that it begins at salvation. If discipleship begins after salvation, the person has not placed their faith in the right place because they cannot know Jesus without instruction and demonstration of the effects of a relationship with him. Jesus did not expect people to come to him for the forgiveness of sins and then at some later time, when it is convenient for them, to learn about the way Jesus expected his followers to live. When Jesus gathered large crowds, his message was not one of forgiveness; it was a message of the attitude of the heart. Many who heard Jesus speak walked away.

On the day of Pentecost, Peter's message was not about the sins of individuals who needed a savior. Peter's audience was Jewish people who had gathered in Jerusalem for the Day of Pentecost. The Jews were looking for the Messiah promised in the scriptures, and Peter revealed in his message that Jesus was the Messiah for whom they were looking. The audience was people who were already disciples; they were familiar with God and his word. Discipleship began with the people in this crowd when they were children, and only a few came to salvation that day. Acts 2:41 says that about three thousand men were saved after Peter's sermon. It is unknown how many people were in the crowd that heard the message, but Darrell Bock says the city's population increased up to 200,000 during feast time.¹⁹³ While the number of people who came to salvation that day is impressive, it must be kept in its proper perspective to understand the need for discipleship long before salvation.

¹⁹³ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 146.

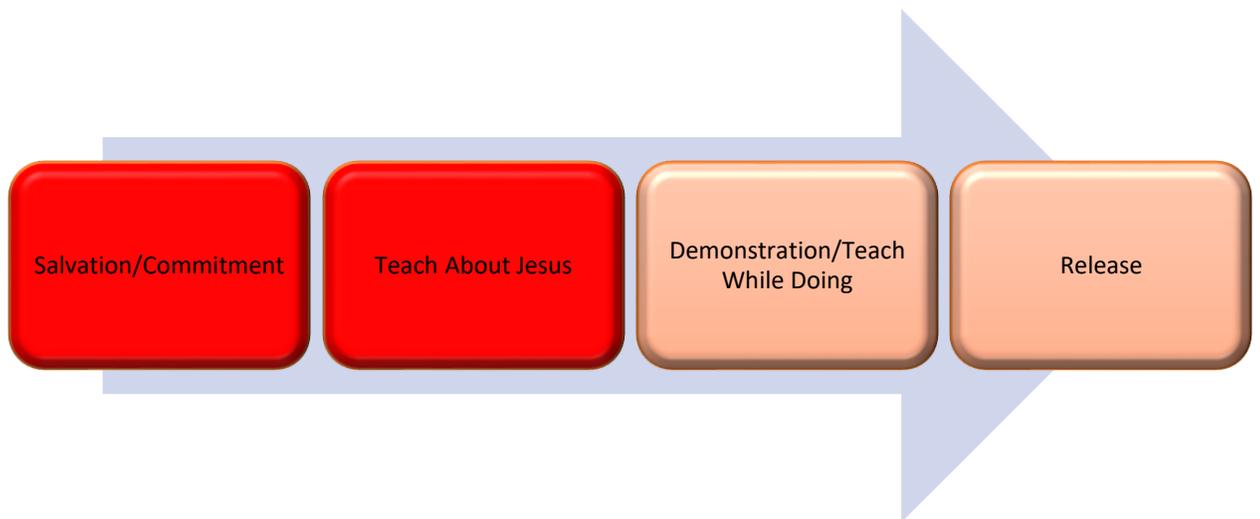


Figure 18 - Incorrect Discipleship Process

Figure 18 shows the incorrect understanding of discipleship. George Barna illustrates the problematic process illustrated above, “What would happen if we were to focus on the four out of every ten adults and one out of every three teenagers who have already asked Jesus Christ to be their Savior – and do everything we can to help them grow into inspired, unmistakable disciples of Jesus?”¹⁹⁴ The question Barna poses claims a person experiences salvation before discipleship begins. Barna’s view (which is the view of many in the Western church) conflicts with the biblical record and the writing of the Post-Apostolic authors. People who were not “unmistakable disciples of Jesus” were not considered followers of Jesus. Salvation occurs for some during the process of discipleship, and therefore the church must teach people about Jesus instead of attempting to “lead people to Christ.”

Kevin Roose shares a story of dating while attending Liberty University. He claims his experience was surprisingly enjoyable because he knew there was no possibility of sexual interaction before the date began, and therefore, he felt more relaxed and enjoyed just talking with his date. “At first, I thought “The Liberty Way” and its rules against physical contact would

¹⁹⁴ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*. (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 2.

ruin the dating experience. But strangely, I'm not feeling frustrated on these dates. In fact, having preordained physical boundaries takes a huge amount of pressure and anxiety out of the process."¹⁹⁵ The same principle should be applied to talking to people outside of the church about Jesus. The main effort should be on starting a discipleship relationship where Jesus and his commands are discussed instead of leading people to salvation. Every date Kevin Roose went on did not lead to a committed relationship but allowed for that opportunity by the two people learning more about each other. It is unlikely Roose would have any dates if his offer was marriage first and then dating.

The biblical record and the Post-Apostolic authors explicitly state or indirectly illustrate the need for talking about Jesus before salvation occurs. The Post-Edict era reveals a vast influx of people who did not commit to Jesus Christ because they knew nothing of him, only the religion the emperor advocated. The church grew only through political authority but demonstrated little evidence of the love of Jesus Christ and obedience to his commands. The Reformation attempted to steer the church to focus on discipleship and salvation through a commitment to Jesus Christ. The Modern era shows the strongest emphasis on evangelism of all eras reviewed and reveals the weakest and most ineffectual church of all time. The members in the church in the Western world today are not impacting the community with the gospel. The church has replaced making disciples with "leading people to Christ."

Robert Coleman contends the church should place "more concentration of time and talents on fewer people in the church while not neglecting the passion for the world. It will mean raising up trained disciplers 'for the work of ministering' with the pastor and church staff (Eph.

¹⁹⁵ Kevin Roose, *The Unlikely Disciple*. (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 228.

4:12).”¹⁹⁶ Coleman’s claim reveals the improper view of discipleship that leads to an ineffectual church. Every member of the church of the first century was a “trained discipler.” People who were not growing and demonstrating their faith through actions, including advancing the gospel, were not considered believers. Polycarp said that only those who followed the commands of Jesus are saved,¹⁹⁷ Ignatius said that God would know those who were “members of His Son” by their works¹⁹⁸ indicating a person's actions reveals their salvation, and in his letter to the Romans said, “For if I be truly found [a Christian], I may also be called one, and be then deemed faithful, when I shall no longer appear to the world.”¹⁹⁹ Every church member should be “trained disciplers,” not just a select few. Each member of the church has unique relationships outside of the church and, therefore, must initiate a discipling relationship with anyone they encounter.

Discipleship begins the first time a person hears about Jesus Christ. Every encounter with another person that involves Jesus is discipleship. Salvation comes at a point during discipleship when the Holy Spirit convicts the disciple, and they surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The expectation of salvation should be relatively low; however, “The disciples are few in number, and will always be few. This saying of Jesus forestalls all exaggerated hopes of success. Never let a disciple of Jesus pin his hopes on large numbers.”²⁰⁰ Bill Hull argues the reason the church is ineffectual is that it is filled with people who are not disciples, “I propose the solution to be obedience to Christ’s commission to ‘make disciples,’ to teach Christians to obey

¹⁹⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 30.

¹⁹⁷ Polycarp, 1651.

¹⁹⁸ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 2312-2818 Kindle. Crane, MO: Defender, 2011, 2393.

¹⁹⁹ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Romans." In *The Researchers Library of Ancient Texts Volume 2: The Apostolic Fathers*, by Thomas Horn, 3522-3762 Kindle. Crane, MO: Defender, 2011, 3575.

²⁰⁰ Bonhoeffer, 190.

everything Christ commanded.”²⁰¹ The research for this paper suggests Hull’s view be reworded slightly, “I propose the solution to be obedience to Christ’s commission to ‘make disciples,’ to teach unbelievers everything Christ commanded so they have enough information to decide to follow him.” The new view places discipleship before salvation. Placing discipleship before salvation also requires a reconsideration of the definition of “disciple.”

The working definition of disciple proposed in the Introduction of this work is, "A committed follower of Jesus who demonstrates their love for Jesus through their obedience to his commands, love for others, and making other disciples." The definition requires the disciple to be a person who has experienced salvation. The research calls for anyone who is learning about Christ, regardless of their spiritual condition, be considered a disciple. The proposed view will likely be uncomfortable for some, but is necessary if the church is going to impact society. Every disciple will not become a Christian, but every Christian must be a disciple. The definition proposed in the Introduction should instead be viewed as the description of a mature disciple, which is the goal of the discipleship process.

Commit to discipleship

Deciding to follow Jesus during his ministry was not a popular decision. Those who did follow Jesus were subjected to ridicule and persecution. During the Post-Apostolic era, the persecution intensified. Church members were encouraged to remain faithful to Jesus and demonstrate their faithfulness in their actions. The only way the people could remain faithful and demonstrate their faith through their actions was to learn the commands of Jesus. Paul admonishes the church members in Corinth to address the immorality of one of its members.

²⁰¹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 207), 23.

“Paul makes clear the action that should have been taken to discipline the man who refused to repent of and forsake his blatant immorality. He should have been excommunicated, removed from your midst.”²⁰² MacArthur’s comment on the refusal of repentance indicates his expectation that the church follows Jesus’s instructions on church discipline in Matthew 18. The issue described in 1 Corinthians 5 is an example of a person who claims to be a Christian refusing to submit to discipleship. The man refused to learn and obey the commands of Jesus. Paul says the corrective action the church should take is to remove the man from membership. The principle in this story can also be applied to less severe offenses.

The Post-Apostolic authors demanded obedience to Jesus’s commands. “Let us be zealous in the pursuit of that which is good, keeping ourselves from causes of offense, from false brethren, and from those who in hypocrisy bear the name of the Lord, and draw away vain men into error.”²⁰³ Polycarp stated that believers should not associate with those who claim to be followers of Jesus but do not obey his commands. Discipleship was not an option during the Post-Apostolic era.

After the Edict of Milan, the object of obedience shifted from Jesus to the Roman church. The only cause for removal from the church at that point was teaching doctrine that conflicted with the church's doctrine. Personal behavior was not a cause for removal. The data in the research indicates the leadership was not as concerned with making mature disciples as it was committed followers of the church.

The Reformation writers show a reinvigorated focus on obedience to Jesus. The marks of a mature disciple are mentioned more overall than in the Post-Edict era. However, there is little

²⁰² MacArthur, 2784 Kindle.

²⁰³ Polycarp, 1748.

indication of the consequences of refusal to submit to discipleship. The majority of the writing centers on the failure (in the eyes of the writers) of the Catholic Church and disputing doctrine issues with other protestant factions.

John Wesley demonstrated his view of the necessity of a person submitting to discipleship as a qualification for church membership in his church structure. A person could not be a member of his church without being actively involved in a “class meeting” where members met to learn the things Jesus commanded and discuss the areas they needed to improve. Over time, this requirement disappeared and is no longer evident in any denomination today.

The Bible depicts believers as active participants in discipleship in two ways. Initially, the disciples in the Bible actively pursued learning the lifestyle Jesus taught and demonstrated. The new converts submitted to the teaching of Jesus or other disciples. Jesus, Paul, and the other disciples invested their time in people who came to hear them or observe them minister to others. The idea of a disciple growing at their own rate and in their own time is not consistent with the biblical record. Modern Era writers speak of churches being filled with members who are not disciples. Robby Gallaty says, “Discipleship is intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to replicate faithful followers of Christ. When people become disciples, they learn what Jesus said and live out what Jesus did.”²⁰⁴ Disciples actively learn, and a person cannot be a Christian without being a disciple.

Secondly, as disciples mature in Christ, they should disciple others. Passing on the knowledge and experience is the only way the church can continue from one generation to the next and is the only way the church can grow in the current generation. Any person who claims

²⁰⁴ Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words our First Work*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 155.

to be a Christian but refuses to disciple others has not been properly disciplined and does not have a biblical view of discipleship.

Church leaders today must turn from counting people members of the church based solely on a profession of faith and instead consider their actions, including submission to a discipling relationship. The biblical and Post-Apostolic records are consistent in only considering a person's actions as evidence of their faith in Jesus Christ. The Ethiopian eunuch recorded in Acts chapter 8 submitted to the teaching of Phillip as evidence of his desire to learn about Jesus before he was baptized. Cornelius sent for Peter and gathered his family and friends to hear about Jesus before he was baptized. These people actively sought out and submitted to learning and were changed as a result. The Phillipian jailer witnessed a miracle and sought out those he could learn from, asked what he must do, and then obeyed the direction of the disciples. Conversely, when Jesus taught difficult messages, many people walked away, and Jesus did not stop them.

Church membership must only be offered to those who actively pursue a discipling relationship. Church leaders must resist the idea of large numbers of people being converted to faith in Jesus Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says

“The little band of men, the followers of Christ, are separated from the rest of the world. The disciples are few in number, and will always be few. This saying of Jesus forestalls all exaggerated hopes of success. Never let a disciple of Jesus pin his hopes on large numbers. ‘Few there be....’ The rest of the world are many, and will always be many. But they are on the road to perdition. The only comfort the disciples have in face of this prospect is the promise of life and eternal fellowship with Jesus.”²⁰⁵

The number of disciples will be few, and church leaders today must keep that in mind. The church cannot impact the culture with the love of Jesus Christ if its members are not disciples.

²⁰⁵ Bonhoeffer, 190.

Jesus, Paul, Polycarp, Ignatius, Clement of Rome, and Augustine indicate that a person's actions demonstrate salvation. Every member of the church should be learning from and teaching others the precepts of Jesus. John Wesley established the most pronounced application of this concept in the Modern era, but even his “class meeting” fell short of the discipleship model Jesus demonstrated.

Demonstration/Teach While Doing

Jesus performed miracles and taught people about the kingdom of God and the application of scripture to their lives. The reaction to his ministry was mixed. Some people considered him a lunatic and walked away, others considered him a heretic and sought to exterminate him, but others were interested in what he taught and sought to learn more from him. Within the group that followed Jesus, some only followed him to gain the benefits of what he could provide (food, healing, deliverance from possession) and others who were committed to him. Jesus spoke clearly about the expectations of anyone who chose to follow him, and many decided the expectations exceeded their willingness to comply. The ones who did continue to follow Jesus entered the next phase of discipleship – “Demonstration/Teach While Doing”

The men who continued to follow Jesus learned to minister in four steps. The men observed Jesus while he ministered, they assisted Jesus in his ministry, they ministered with Jesus’s assistance, and finally, they ministered independently. These steps are progressive and must be followed in sequence.

Jesus did not call men to enroll in a series of classes offering the diploma of salvation after the series. “The call of the disciples was an invitation to undertake an apprenticeship, to

enter on a discipline, learning from the words and works of Jesus.”²⁰⁶ The apprenticeship included a demonstration by Jesus followed by the disciples performing the tasks they witnessed Jesus doing. Thomas Aquinas understands Christian obedience as willful submission to another; he says, “Now those who are being instructed or exercised in order to attain a certain end must needs follow the direction of someone under whose control they are instructed or exercised so as to attain that end as disciples under a master.”²⁰⁷ Aquinas includes instruction (teaching in a classroom setting) and exercising (teaching while doing) as the method to attain the desired end. Discipleship must therefore contain the demonstration element. Ignatius instructs his readers to teach others while doing according to the example of Jesus.²⁰⁸ A person who reads a book on aviation and attends a lecture on avionics is equally prepared to fly a plane across the United States as a person who reads a book on evangelism and attends a symposium on evangelism is prepared to share their faith with those outside the church. The aviation student operates a plane with a well-trained pilot several times before being sent on his own. The seasoned pilot is there to offer instruction, encouragement, and correction as the student pilot learns to fly a plane by practicing. In the same way, disciples in the church need personal guidance as they learn and apply biblical precepts to their lives.

New discipleship programs are not the answer to the lack of discipleship in the church today. The answer is for the discipler to demonstrate the disciplines and truths they teach the disciple. This model helps the disciple as well as the discipler to incorporate Christian values in their daily lives.

²⁰⁶ Vivian Boland, "Truth, Knowledge and Communication: Thomas Aquinas on the Mystery of Teaching." *Studies in Christian Ethics* 19, no. 3 (December 2006): 287-304, 302.

²⁰⁷ Aquinas, 3605.

²⁰⁸ Ignatius. "The Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians," 2675.

Application

Change is never comfortable or easy. If there is going to be a significant change in the church today, church leaders must put aside traditions and attitudes that have brought the church to its current state. Ralph Neighbour speaks of his experience in the traditional church, “The traditional church pastors were not able to prepare each Christian for ministry. Their focus was on training 10 to 15% of the members to fill the positions needed to conduct church programs.”²⁰⁹ Neighbour reveals the issues uncovered in this research but largely blames the church structure. The structure of the church is not the primary cause for the ineffectiveness.

The Catholic Church erred by only considering church tradition when deciding doctrinal issues. The councils that met did not gather to arrive at a consensus of interpretation of Scripture but only considered the tradition handed down to them. Church leaders today must avoid repeating that error and turn to the Word of God “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). The first step in change is likely the most difficult, set aside preconceived interpretations and attitudes toward Scripture and approach it with the faith of a child. Church leaders must take the time to study the characteristics of disciples in the Bible, the method of discipleship demonstrated by the characters in the Bible, and the results of teaching people the truth about Jesus Christ before counting them as a brother or sister in Christ.

Placing discipleship after salvation is comparable to labeling a person an electrician when they realize that many of the items in their homes do not work without electricity. A desire to learn about electricity and how it works is the beginning of the discipleship process, but the disciple is not considered an electrician until they have submitted to learning through study and practice. Some of the students who start the learning process decide they do not desire to be an

²⁰⁹ Ralph W. Neighbour Jr, *Where Do We Go From Here?: A Guidebook for the Cell Group Church*. (Houston: Touch Publications, 2000), 16.

electrician; they were more interested in the benefits of electricity rather than being committed to being an electrician. Jesus describes the same precept in Luke 14:21-33.

William Fay offers an evangelism method in his book *Share Jesus Without Fear*, and the sixth chapter of his work is titled “Bring to Decision.”²¹⁰ The method Fay advocates is that within a brief encounter, a believer can lead someone else to the point of deciding to follow Jesus Christ. He does claim that only the Holy Spirit can bring a person to repentance, but the approach he advocates violates the command of Jesus to make disciples. Believers must engage the world with the truth of Jesus Christ, but the goal must be to make disciples instead of seeking decisions for Christ. As the disciple learns about Jesus and the expectations of followers, they will either decide they cannot finish the tower and walk away or commit their lives to Christ. The church can know if a person’s actions and lifestyle comport with the commands of Jesus and should therefore be counted as a member of the church, but only after a period of observation. Some will argue that the position described here is “legalism,” which requires a response.

“Legalism” is another example of a word used in the church today without a clear definition. The term most commonly refers to earning salvation through works. Kent Yinger points out that the earliest use of the term in the church predates the Reformation addressing Jewish legalism instead of the gospel.²¹¹ This paper promotes not that a person earns salvation by performing certain acts or adhering to certain commands but that a person demonstrates their faith through their actions and obedience. Every doctor does not approach medicine the same way or have the same beliefs. All prospective doctors do go through a period of training where they learn about the field of medicine. The completion rate of medical school is less than 100%.

²¹⁰ Fay, 57.

²¹¹ Kent L. Yinger, "Defining Legalism." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 46, no. 1 (2008): 91-108, 93.

Students who begin the process who drop out have different reasons for not completing the training, but none bear the title of doctor. All police officers do not behave the way society expects them to, and when they do not, they are removed from that position and no longer considered a member of the police force. The United States has laws that prevent children from entering legally binding contracts because they do not have the requisite understanding of the contract's parameters. Faith always produces commitment to Jesus, and commitment to Jesus always produces a desire to obey his commands.

The local church should be a place where all are welcome to hear preaching, to join in Bible studies and service projects, and to enjoy the activities of the church, but church membership should be reserved for those who demonstrate their faith, “Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works” (Jam. 2:18). George Barna’s book, *Growing True Disciples*, reveals that over 50% of church members do not demonstrate any faith through their actions. According to the Bible and the early church leaders, people who do not demonstrate their faith through their actions are not followers of Jesus Christ. Therefore, the majority of church members do not submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ but have the majority voice in congregational decisions regarding the direction and use of resources of the church. The result is a church that “function as a refuge from the world, a sort of Christian ‘club’ that exhausted itself trying to keep its members happy.”²¹²

The climate of the church must change if there is going to be a shift in focus. Church leaders must first accept that discipleship begins long before salvation takes place. Secondly, leaders must teach the same concept to the people God has entrusted to them. Justin Martyr once said, “As many as are persuaded and believe that what we teach and say is true, *and undertake to*

²¹² Lewis, 29.

be able to live accordingly, are instructed to pray and to entreat God with fasting, for the remission of sins that are past, we praying and fasting with them.”²¹³ (emphasis added) Church leaders must teach the people God has placed under their watch what the Bible has to say about disciples and discipleship. Every church member should be able to articulate clearly both words' definitions. The precepts should be included in sermons but not limited to that mode. Jesus had requirements for his disciples, and the church today should as well. John Wesley required anyone desiring to be a member of the church he pastored to be actively involved in a small group. Church leaders must be willing to require individuals to attend discipleship training and participate in ongoing discipleship relationships (both submitting to discipleship and discipling others).

“The traditional church pastors were not able to prepare each Christian for ministry.” The preceding statement reveals that pastors and church members ascribe the title “Christian” to people who do not demonstrate any desire to be a disciple. The church must abandon the thought process of “leading people to Christ” and replace that with teaching people the precepts of Jesus Christ. Teach the truth and invest in the few people who seek further understanding. One of the reasons pastors cannot prepare each Christian for ministry is that the people who are unwilling to be prepared for ministry are not Christians. Jesus says that it is possible to know a person’s heart; “You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles” (Matt. 7:16), “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27), and “But why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do the things which I say” (Luke 6:46)? Disciples obey the commands of Christ and seek to know him more. James says, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works,

²¹³ Justin Martyr, "The First Apology of Justin." In *The Complete Ante-Nicene & Nicene and Post-Nicene Church Fathers Collection*, by Philip Schaff. (London: Catholic Way Publishing, 2014), 7075.

and I will show you my faith by my works” (James 2:18). Kurt Richardson understands this verse as a description of the same error:

“James introduces the voice of an interlocutor. This ‘person’ speaks in support of the community James was confronting. This ‘someone’ is quoting an aphorism as if to settle the matter of the self-sufficiency of a faith even if it fails to act. The interlocutor is not speaking then directly to James but as a leader among the hearers of James. Distribution of labor is how he solved the problem. What perhaps is implied here is something like, ‘No one should act unmercifully; but some of us do the deeds of mercy, and others among us encourage them.’ This is a sign of the kind of clergy-laity split so often observable in lax Christianity: ‘Our pastor evangelizes and visits the needy as he should,’ implying that the necessary actions of the believers have been done through the pastor. This disavowal of personal responsibility to act mercifully is a terribly misguided way of thinking but is characteristic of believers who are self-deceived.”²¹⁴

Those who do not act are not “believers who are self-deceived,” they are lost people who have been deceived into thinking they are believers. The biblical record leaves no room for the thought of a believer who does not live out the commands of Jesus Christ. Additionally, the “lax Christianity” Richardson points out is the attitude of church members and leaders to accept people as Christian who are not involved in a discipleship relationship with anyone and do not actively pursue the advancement of the kingdom of God.

Another term that must be removed from the church is “ministry opportunities.” The term suggests that ministry is optional. Ralph Neighbors' statement above reveals the typical position of local churches; the church establishes “ministries” and then recruits participants for those ministries. Leaders should consider a different approach to ministry. Robert Lewis presents the blueprint for ministry this way, “Our vision of good works was openhanded: Wherever your gifts and abilities could make a difference for Jesus Christ...then go! We will encourage you, support

²¹⁴ Kurt A. Richardson, Kurt A. *James*. The New American Commentary. Vol. 36. (Nashville: B&H Publishers, 1997), 133.

you, serve you, and cheer for you. Go and make a difference!”²¹⁵ Every church member has ideas to impact the world around them, and the church should be their support to see their idea become a reality. The pastor’s role is to equip the members for ministry, not define ministry. Instead of asking people to fill the church's needs, ask the church to fill the members' ministry needs. Help members identify areas of concern in the world and equip them to intervene. Leadership must change the view of the membership from observers to participants by assisting them in creating their own ministry. Membership should be contingent on active participation in ministry, whether in their project or another member’s project, where they can “learn by doing.”

Accept the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, “A little band of men, the followers of Christ, are separated from the rest of the world. The disciples are few in number, and will always be few.”²¹⁶ Large gatherings appear in scripture, but only a few people followed Christ. Discipleship begins the first time a person hears about Jesus and continues until the disciple draws their last breath. According to the Bible, few will commit to following Jesus, and their actions will easily identify them. Church membership must be connected to the demonstration of faith through works, as James suggests, instead of a proclamation of faith in the absence of works.

Conclusion

The Western church is declining in numbers and impact on the community. The conduct of church members has been the subject of writings by church leaders since biblical times. The church has experienced times of tremendous impact and times of little impact. The review of authors of the four eras defined for this research project indicates that during times of greater

²¹⁵ Lewis, 63.

²¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, 190.

impact, three elements were present in the church that are not today. Believers taught others about Jesus regularly, expecting some people to ask about salvation. Discipleship began long before salvation occurred. Disciples were expected to demonstrate their faith through their actions. Christians were not expected to live perfect lives, but they were expected to respond to correction and were considered a heathen if they refused. Discipleship did not consist solely of lecture/classroom-style teaching. Demonstration and practice were part of the discipleship process. Developing methods of increasing church membership has resulted in diminishing church impact. Leaders must return to discipleship the way Jesus modeled for the church.

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