

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Creating a Multiplying Micro Group Discipleship Model Beyond the Church Building

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
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Doctor of Ministry

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LIBERTY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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The DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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The proposed thesis project on discipleship presents an effective discipleship making plan in fulfillment of the Great Commission through a parachurch ministry. The researcher believes that many churches have replaced disciple-making efforts with programs and platitudes. The purpose of this project is to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make disciples through micro group ministries. It consists of three stages. Stage one consists of the research design component, stage two includes the intervention design component, and stage three involves the intervention delivery process. The goals of this project include teaching believers the biblical mandate regarding discipleship, equipping project participants with the tools to lead a micro group, and establishing multiplying micro groups upon the completion of the curriculum. The research methods used in this project include survey research, questionnaires, and focus groups. This thesis project will influence others in this field by providing a duplicatable tool for discipleship.

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Abbreviations

RE *Ripple Effects*

REG *Ripple Effects Group*

P12 *Power of 12*

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In February 2020, the United States entered a global pandemic that had an instant impact on the church's ability to minister to their congregations. Before the pandemic, the standard metrics of success for church achievement were based on the size of buildings, the number of people in the seats, and a large operating budget. Sadly, the pandemic revealed what was concealed by many churches as it pertained to making disciples. The pandemic revealed an underlying need to change the scorecard on ministry accomplishments. Instead of asking the question of how many people showed up, the pandemic revealed how many disciples were being produced. Unfortunately, many churches found themselves scrambling to find their identity because evangelism and discipleship were missing parts of their church structure. It became evident that ministries needed to readjust how they aimed to fulfill The Great Commission.

The Great Commission is the Church's "marching order."¹ The charge is to "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."² The best evaluation metrics for determining a ministry's growth, maturity, and impact should be based on how effective the church is in making disciples that make other disciples. George Barna states, "The strength and influence of the church are wholly dependent upon its commitment to true discipleship. Providing transformed lives, and seeing those lives reproduced in others, is a core challenge to believers and the local church."³

¹ Terry Bowland, *Make Disciples* (Joplin, MO: College Press Publications, 1999), 18.

² Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

³ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press 2001), 24.

Many church attendees operated under the false belief that ministry growth and evangelistic efforts were the responsibility of pastors and missionaries. However, the Bible teaches that evangelism and discipleship are the responsibility of all born-again believers; it is not limited to those in leadership roles or paid positions inside the church. The work of the ministry has always belonged to the people. It needs to be conducted systematically to allow for reproducing and multiplication so that the Great Commission is fulfilled. More and more ministries are embracing a new metric of success that emphasizes sending over seating members.

The Hartford Institute estimates there are roughly 350,000 religious congregations in the United States spread amongst 217 denominations; however, there are still many persons who have not been exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴ Beyond those never exposed, many profess Christianity yet are not being disciplined in the teachings of Christ. There is a growing group between those introduced to programs with a church campus lifestyle and those who believe it is time to adapt the current mode by creating ministries that reflect the first-century model micro-church that adheres to Biblical reproducing disciples.

The pandemic forced the organized church to reexamine how it serves believers, the community, and the lost community it strives to reach. Church buildings closed for months, and ministries felt the pain of the extended closure both financially and relationally. It has been predicted that the church, as many know it, will never return to the way that it was before the pandemic. Because of the inability for large gatherings, the idea of smaller groups gathering for fellowship and Bible study has become the obvious solution. Micro fellowships and gatherings are not a new concept; it was the foundation of the first-century church.⁵ Before the COVID-19

⁴ http://hrr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html

⁵ Acts 2:46

pandemic, many churches offered a version of a micro group ministry; however, it was not viewed as the primary model for discipleship and spiritual formation but only a way to find a connection but not necessary accountability. The author believes that there is a growing movement for a micro model that will result in micro groups and churches that will minister throughout local communities.

Ripple Effects is a parachurch ministry operating in a rural community that has developed into a body of believers that serve hurting and broken people. What began as community outreach efforts in high schools and low-income areas have grown into an organization with a community resource center, transitional homes for homeless families, and a resource center to provide various services for persons facing desperate situations and hopelessness.

Ripple Effect's offerings consist of programs that promote hope, holistic wellness, and new beginnings. In addition, it currently has multiple Bible Studies offered throughout the week, Street Church services that are held in the community, and bi-monthly worship celebrations. Ripple Effects is committed to share the love of Christ with the lost and to lead Christians from simply believing to living out the life of a devoted disciple who intentionally makes disciples. It was birthed due to seeing hurting people seek help and temporary fleeting solutions instead of the one answer that would change the trajectory of their lives and create a legacy that would extend beyond them.

When Ripple Effects first began, it encouraged the community participants to attend area local churches; however, this resulted in persons feeling alienated and rejected in local ministry bodies. Often the guest left feeling underdressed, unprepared, and unwelcomed into a place that often said that all persons would be welcomed. After several failed attempts to connect street

outreach persons with local ministries, Ripple Effects decided to fill the gap. It began to operate as an unconventional local body of believers that met people where they were in life by addressing practical needs and helping them develop personally, professionally, and ultimately spiritually through micro group opportunities.

Therefore, this researcher contends that the church is more than a group of people meeting in a designated building; it is a committed body of believers who understand the Great Commission and the responsibility of all believers to fulfill it. The purpose of this project is to identify how a parachurch ministry can establish a duplicatable discipleship model that reaches local unreached people groups.

Ministry Context

Ripple Effects was initially founded in 2016 as an outreach effort to minister to an impoverished forgotten-about community. From vacant parking lots to fun days with children to eventually providing housing for homeless families, it branched into an organization that serves various people from different walks of life, communities, races, socioeconomic backgrounds, and life experiences. Ripple Effect's ultimate vision is to see people disciplined by the Word of God and serving in their local community.

The Great Commission says, "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And

surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age."⁶ The Great Commission is the main mission of the Church and everyone who professes Christ as Lord. Matthew's emphasis in this text is making disciples, which included the development and maturity required after conversion. David Howard states that "the command to 'make disciples' means that we must help people not only to confess Jesus Christ but to develop a life of true discipleship."⁷

This life of discipleship is to be shared with others locally and abroad "unto the uttermost part of the earth."⁸ Jesus gave His disciples the New Commandment, which states, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have a love for one another."⁹ Jesus declares that the identification mark for true disciples would be their love for one another. Those who love God will love their neighbors and one another. Beyond loving one another and following him, Jesus called his disciples to become fishers of men.¹⁰ However, studies have shown that "less than one percent of evangelical church members are involved in disciplining those who are won to Christ."¹¹ These discouraging numbers identify a gap in the process of transforming service attendees and converts into disciples.

Based on the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and startling reports of decline, Ripple Effects is committed to seeing people saved, set free, discipled, and serving.

⁶ Matthew 26:16-20 (NIV)

⁷David Howard, *The Great Commission for Today* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1976), 68.

⁸ Acts 1:8 KJV

⁹ John 13:34-35 ESV

¹⁰ Matthew 4:19 ESV

¹¹ Bowland, 124.

Discipleship is not a program or an event; it is a way of life that extends throughout someone's entire lifespan.¹² God's work on earth is put on display through the lifestyles of his disciples.

What began as an opportunity to show love became a means to equip people with an understanding of salvation, leading them on the journey to spiritual growth, teaching them the value of serving through suffering, and eventually landing in the position in which their lives bear much fruit. The process connects them upward to Christ, inward to others, and ultimately connecting them outwardly to missions. The purpose behind every effort is to develop disciples that are committed to making other disciples. The organization's aim is discipleship and development so that people are equipped to fulfill the great commission. Oswald Sander stated, "It is not without significance that the word disciple occurs in the New Testament 269 times, Christian only three times, and believer two times. This surely indicates that the task of the church is not to make 'Christians' or 'believers' but disciples."¹³

Because of the pandemic of 2020, churches could not orchestrate mass worship gatherings with persons packed into a weekly service at one location. Some areas of the country allow for corporate meetings; however, it is predicted that it will be long before persons comfortably attend them again. Gatherings of fifty or more are perceived as dangerous and may remain that way for months, possibly years. These changes have challenged the evangelical church to pivot and to think differently regarding discipleship efforts. The Covid-19 pandemic has churches across the United States evaluating their current ministry models and recognizing

¹² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 24.

¹³ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 18.

the need to educate and increase numbers of leaders who embrace the call to grow ministry congregations and reproduce and multiply people in micro groups.

Ripple Effects recognized gaps in how ministry was currently being conducted before the pandemic exposed them. It realized that people were lonelier, more distracted, and searching for significance and meaning in their lives. The answer to their sadness and isolation was a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Ripple Effects discovered that the effectiveness in many churches was being measured by attendance numbers, faith engagement, and not necessarily with spiritual formation and maturity. Throughout Scripture, God repeatedly lays out the vision for the Church, and Jesus modeled it during his ministry on earth. Jesus focused on developing healthy individuals knowledgeable of the components of their faith and capable of sharing it with others.

Problem Presented

This project will present an effective discipleship model for making disciples in fulfillment of the Great Commission through a parachurch ministry. The researcher believes that many churches have replaced disciple-making efforts with programs and platitudes. It is believed that America is in the process of becoming a post-Christian nation with a declining commitment, interest, and concern for biblical matters.

The New Testament passage that challenges all believers in Jesus Christ to make disciples states, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*¹⁴ Jesus began his

¹⁴ Matthew 28:19-20 ESV

public ministry by recruiting twelve men who would become known as his disciples. He spent the remainder of his time on earth pouring into them and preparing them to understand his life's purpose and carry out His mission on the earth.

The Great Commission is not just about evangelism; it is also about discipleship. It is about reaching and equipping. It is a both accountability and methodology. Matthew 28 gives the command; however, an image of what it looks like is found in the book of Acts. Luke said, *"And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved."¹⁵* In the text, the followers of Jesus Christ are worshipping, learning, relating, sharing, serving, evangelizing, and praying.¹⁶ They were committed to being disciples and producing disciples of Christ simultaneously.

An additional New Testament Scriptures that reiterates the importance of discipleship states, *"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."¹⁷* The responsibility is released in Matthew 28:19-20, and the reality is described in Acts 2:42-47.

¹⁵ Acts 2:42-47 ESV

¹⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 26.

¹⁷ Acts 1:8 ESV

Scripture makes it clear that man has an active and intentional role in the discipleship process to be conducted on the earth.

Therefore, this researcher's position is that the fulfillment of the Great Commission begins with conversion and extends into spiritual formation. This process is the responsibility of all professing Christians. Discipleship is the mutual responsibility of all believers that crosses the boundaries of vocation, age, gender, ethnicity, and social economic status.¹⁸ Every member of the body of Christ is called to a life of service and multiplication. Effective discipleship efforts require a strategy to equip people for ministry and mission.¹⁹

Purpose Statement

This Doctor of Ministry project aims to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make disciples through micro group ministries on an introductory level. The participants will need to develop a biblical understanding of discipleship, the Great Commission and obtain the knowledge required to facilitate micro groups through Ripple Effects.

The research project will consist of three stages. Stage one consists of the research design component, stage two includes the intervention design component, and stage three involves the intervention delivery process. The stages will collectively and quantitatively answer the following research questions:

Research Question #1:

How did the participants define discipleship?

¹⁸ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003),162.

¹⁹ <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2012/august/laypeople-and-mission-of-god-part-ii--reclaiming.html>

Research Question # 2:

What was the participants' understanding of the Great Commission?

Research Question #3:

What role did participants believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?

Basic Assumptions

Participants in this study will answer the anonymous survey and interview questions authentically and factually. Other assumptions include that the interview participants recognize and understand specific definitions for the terms used during the interview. Another hypothesis is that the participants have an interest in becoming active disciples in the kingdom of God.

Definitions

Words and phrases are best understood when presented in their proper context. Words such as disciple, discipler, community, and discipleship are often perceived differently based on the audience. The definitions of these terms as they are intended to be understood for this project follow.

The word *disciple* refers to a reborn learner or follower of Christ who is committed to orient their life around the life and teachings of Christianity.²⁰ A disciple is more than a regular church attendee because there were followers of Jesus before the first church was every planted and the first pastor assumed the role. Disciples are active in spiritual disciplines and engaged in

²⁰ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress 2006), 12.

evangelizing and training others.²¹ Disciples recognize their responsibility to develop their relationships with Jesus Christ and mature in their faith. The word disciple means 'learner.'²² Being a disciple requires sacrifice and a commitment to follow the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.

The word *discipler* refers to persons who have begun to disciple other people in their walk with Jesus Christ. They recognize their responsibility to remain connected to the persons that they have committed to lead and teach. Disciples build relationships with those they disciple as they continue to develop their relationship with Jesus. They have a desire to reach and teach people biblical truth. An individual is not a discipler until they are participating in making a disciple. One of the reasons that the church has not been effective in making disciples is because people attend Bible classes without outreach efforts. Christians who live with an understanding of informational based discipleship instead of an obedience-based discipleship are not disciplers.

The term *community* refers to people who interact in the same space and time with a shared culture and mutual trust.²³ Churches, outreaches, and ministries all fit the definition of community. Communities are built on commonality and trust. Building community refers to helping people develop relationships by openly sharing their lives, faith, and experiences.

Discipleship refers to the journey of transformation from a secular lifestyle and thinking into a life based on the gospel that embraces Christ's life and principles. Barna defines discipleship as "becoming a complete and competent follower of Jesus Christ" and that "disciple making is not optional."²⁴ It is the process of training people in the Biblical disciplines of the

²¹ Ibid, 33.

²² David Yonggi Cho, *Successful Home Cell Groups* (Gainesville, FL: Bridge-Logos Publishers 1981), 49.

²³ <https://www.igi-global.com/dictionary/community/4696> (NOTE: ACCESSED April 2021.)

²⁴ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 18.

Christian life, and it is a charge to all believers. Discipleship results from the development of a growing follower of Jesus who reflects his character and a commitment to make other disciples.

Micro Groups are defined as "an intentional gathering of a varied number of people who commit themselves to regular meetings to become better disciples of Jesus Christ."²⁵ Micro groups are built upon relationships, accountability, and a common goal for spiritual maturity to make disciples for Christ. The size of the group dictates the size of the accountability which is lacking in most churches.

Disciple-making is a commitment to fulfill the mandate of the Great Commission by consciously and consistently moving toward spiritual maturity personally and seeking opportunities to assist others in their spiritual formation journey.

Discipleship courses are curricula designed to educate the body of Christ, equip them to fulfill the Great Commission, and mobilize them in their efforts to expand the Kingdom of God through being a disciple that makes disciples.

Spiritual formation describes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer as they surrender and conform to the image of Christ.²⁶

Spiritual Maturity is the gradual process of becoming more like Jesus Christ. After salvation, Christians begin the process of spiritual growth, which is a process that will never end in this life.²⁷

Para-church Ministries are defined as faith based Christian organizations that work across denominations to engage in social welfare, evangelistic, and discipleship efforts. They

²⁵ Jeffrey Arnold, *Starting Small Groups: Building Communities that Matter* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 23.

²⁶ 2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV

²⁷ Philippians 3:12-14 ESV

seek to come alongside the local church and specialize in areas that individual churches may not offer services and training.

Limitations

Limitations beyond the researcher's control that place restrictions on the methodology and conclusions include personal and cultural biases that may be reflected in the collected data. This limitation will be addressed by being extremely clear in stating the issue and representing their authentic responses to the questions. Another potential limitation is the sample size. This limitation will be addressed by ensuring a larger sample size to ensure a representative distribution of the actual population of Eastern North Carolina. Persons from at least three counties with varying backgrounds and experiences will be included in the interview pool.

Delimitations

Discipleship is a broad topic that incorporates varying aspects of spiritual formation and the development of an individual's walk with Jesus Christ. This project intends not to explore discipleship practices within a particular local church or to compare the established curriculum with other discipleship methods.

Delimitations regarding this area of study focus on perceptions of Christians within rural communities on the Biblical mandate for believers to be disciples that make disciples. These perspectives will be viewed through the lens of laypersons within the body of Christ and church clergy. The researcher has served in both populations and will intentionally bracket pre-existing views so that the participants' opinions can be heard and received.

1. This study does not seek to develop a new discipleship model but rather to understand better Christians' existing perceptions on the meaning of discipleship based on their personal beliefs and experiences.
2. This study will focus on gaining clarity of how the meaning of discipleship translates into the lifestyle of believers.
3. This study will address discipleship methods beyond the local church building.
4. This study will intentionally include a variety of denominations, races, socioeconomic groups, and ages.
5. This study will create a curriculum to address information gaps and areas of confusion that hinder individuals from fulfilling the Great Commission.

Methodology

This project advocates the preparation and development of believers to serve as true disciples committed to making disciples. It will be conducted in three phases.

Phase one, the research design component, will invite persons to participate in an anonymous survey on discipleship. The researcher will construct an anonymous survey designed to identify biblical knowledge gaps and areas of confusion that hinder professing Christians from growing into a disciple that makes disciples. The survey questions will provide quantitative data for comparison purposes and short answer questions to allow participants to expound upon their answers. The anonymous survey establishes the baseline of understanding of how Christians define discipleship and the role in which they believe they are to be engaged in the process of discipleship making. It will inquire whether they recognize the value of micro groups, feel

equipped to facilitate a micro group, and their thoughts as to whether micro groups are vital to the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Phase two, the intervention design component, will involve a quantitative analysis of the data collected in phase 1. Based on the data results, a curriculum will be created to address the information gaps and areas of confusion that hinder persons from being active disciples and disciple-makers.

Phase three, the intervention delivery process, will consist of the participants in the focus group taking an abridged version of the original survey to establish a beginning benchmark. The curriculum will be taught to the focus group participants. During class, group discussions will be conducted to identify further challenges and reasons that hinder confessing Christians from fulfilling the Great Commission. After the discipleship course, the focus group participants will take the same survey that they took before the class begins to determine the effectiveness of the discipleship curriculum.

According to Barna, churches in America indicate a discipleship deficit reflected in the fact that "less than one-tenth of adult believers said that they have ever intentionally built a relationship with someone in the hope of being able to lead the person to Christ."²⁸ Another alarming factor is that "most unchurched people have never been invited to a church by a Christian or told by a Christian what it means to believe in Jesus Christ."²⁹ Barna research further shares that only "a small number reported that their church helps them develop specific

²⁸ George Barna, George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 130.

²⁹ Ibid.

paths to follow to foster spiritual growth."³⁰ Studies have shown that the ultimate goal of the Great Commission, disciple-making, is often abandoned and neglected.

Thesis Statement

The proposed solution of this thesis involves utilizing a parachurch ministry to develop disciples who are committed to making disciples through micro group ministry in partnership with the local church according to Ephesians 4. The COVID-19 pandemic challenged the body of Christ to pivot and return to the early micro groups model for discipleship. It awakened the world to the biblical reality that kingdom expansion is not a church obligation; it is a Christian responsibility that extends beyond the church building walls to every born-again Christian. Research shows that an underutilized answer to reaching the lost is micro group ministry through multiplication strategies instead of addition. The Bible commands followers of Christ to reproduce and multiply through discipleship efforts. According to the Bible, the way to expand the Kingdom of God is to obey Jesus' command of making disciples and through this action, the Church will reproduce and multiply, ultimately fulfilling the Great Commission.

³⁰ Ibid.

Chapter 2

Research began with the English Standard Version of the Bible. Additional research was conducted utilizing Liberty University's electronic database. The Global Organization of Oriented Group Language of Earth (GOOGLE) search engine was used in the extrapolation of current business knowledge pertaining to documentation integrity benchmarks using the terms "parachurches," "The Great Commission," "discipleship programs," "born-again," "discipleship," and "missions" The search limiters used in the search were studies and articles that ranged from 2011-2021, and included full-text online articles, and scholarly and peer-reviewed articles.

The combination of research, opinion articles, and briefings came from subject matter experts in the private sector. Approximately 55 sources including books, articles, and studies that met inclusion criteria were identified appropriately to the subject of ministry practices improvement. This educational intervention intends to provide an educational program for future disciples. The intended population includes individuals who have accepted Jesus Christ and are exploring discipleship. This chapter will review the evidence-based research that describes the effects of the Ripple Effects Training program for these individuals to provide teachings on how they, as disciples, might contribute to fulfilling the Great Commission. The conceptual framework of Jesus' approach to discipleship and the impact of COVID-19 on the world to develop disciples are discussed. The theoretical approach behind micro group leadership training is noted.

Conceptual Framework

Jesus' approach to discipleship was from a "with him" perspective. He selected those he would train and equip. Jesus' disciples spent time with him learning to be like him. His disciples were progressively and actively engaged in what he was doing. After training, the disciples were sent to do the things that they had heard and seen in Him. This process included consistent evaluation of efforts and a commitment to learning. Their efforts continued beyond Jesus' trial, death, and resurrection. His final instructions to his disciples were to make disciples of all nations, as stated in Matthew 28:19-20. The 'Being With' method is passed on through the disciples and is best explained in Colossians 3:1-17. The Body of Christ was charged with the responsibility to share the gospel and make disciples.

The Body of Christ is composed of every person who has accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. It is a body that has been called into a special relationship with God.³¹ Every Christian is a part of the body, and this body makes up God's Church. Understanding this perspective of the spiritual family is the premise for understanding the disciple-making process. Every member of the body of Christ has specific gifts and talents that are required for the body to function correctly, excellently, and completely. Every person is needed and commissioned to serve the Kingdom of God through their gifts and abilities.³² Discipleship begins when someone is introduced to the love of Jesus and his saving grace. Every member of the body of Christ has the responsibility to share their life-changing testimony with others. Discipleship is a mutual responsibility that crosses the boundaries of vocation, age, and gender.³³ Beyond sharing, every

³¹ Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life: The Book that Inspired a Return to the Church's Real Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Discover House), 23.

³² 1 Corinthians 12:27-28

³³ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 162.

member of the body of Christ is called to a life of service³⁴. God has gifted each person individually and uniquely for the upbuilding of his kingdom. Every member of the body of Christ is called to speak the truth and to promote unity.³⁵ The body of Christ is the equipping mechanism for disciple-making. It was a mandate to be executed intentionally and corporately for the upbuilding of the Kingdom of God. Jesus commissioned his disciples to take the Gospel message to the world and make disciples.

The Great Commission was granted; however, utilizing the traditional church model of assembling a large crowd once or twice a week has led to more significant numbers gathering but fewer people being disciplined. Research shows that people are lonelier, more distracted, more consumed with self, and searching tirelessly for meaning in their lives. According to Cigna, America's loneliness epidemic is getting worse with three in five adults (61%) reporting that they are lonely, which is a seven percentage-point increase from 2018.³⁶ As Christians aim to fulfill the charge of sharing the gospel to the lost, more effective approaches to discipleship efforts are of the utmost importance as it addresses the issue of loneliness.

Before COVID-19, many churches considered themselves doing well when it came to discipleship efforts. However, once the doors were shut and communication methods shifted, many discovered that their attempts to gather persons had limited their efforts to teach them how to scatter and share the gospel. The pandemic challenged local churches and organizations to revisit the first-century church model found in Acts 2:46, in which "Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house." It was apparent that the goal needed to remain the same as that of the early church, which was to

³⁴ Romans 12:1-12

³⁵ Ephesians 4:25

³⁶ www.Cigna.com

disciple fellow believers to be more like Christ through biblical community and studying God's Word. History places society amid a turning point in which a new normal must be established as the traditional church can no longer offer groups and fellowships as an option. The pandemic has shifted the former large worship gatherings with people assembling in one mutual location for service. Even though some churches have returned to their weekly assembly, there is anxiety associated with attending them. Gatherings of over 50 people are still considered dangerous in some regions of our county and could remain that way for years to come. Adjustments such as these require that the church and the body of Christ pivot in its approach and become more strategic in its efforts. These efforts will include releasing the work of the ministry to lay leaders and allowing them to facilitate micro discipleship groups so that spiritual formation continues to occur as disciples are being made. The Bible teaches us that micro groups are how the gospel was spread in the past, and it is the same way it shall be extended in the future.

Many local churches do not have the staff they had before the pandemic and are uncertain of how to serve their current congregation, which leaves little thought on how to continue reaching the lost and hurting. Parachurch ministries like Ripple Effects can become extensions that serve the community and provide avenues to foster spiritual formation, discipline development, and discipleship efforts beyond the organized church. The current times have driven the body of Christ to focus on becoming an Acts 2 church in which the focus is not about buildings or numbers but about meeting together in smaller groups, sharing life, and becoming more like Christ together. Micro groups within the Body of Christ are the vehicle for the church to return to its Biblical roots and responsibilities.

Literature Review

In researching the subject of discipleship, a variety of sources have been analyzed. Among these resources, several themes and subthemes manifested with similar and contrasting schools of thought about the meaning of the word disciple and how disciples are expressed. According to Dave Early, bringing God glory should be the aim of every disciple and evident in every facet of their lives.³⁷ Most sources agreed with that statement; however, they had different perspectives on what the definition of the disciple truly meant. Earley identifies being a disciple as abandoning the things of the world and following Jesus.³⁸ Breen defined a disciple as someone who learns to be like Jesus and learns to do what Jesus could do.³⁹ Mitchell recognizes a disciple as someone committed to change and is willing to be transformed into the image and behavior of Jesus Christ.⁴⁰ Thompson compares a disciple to an ambassador and recognizes ambassadorship as the motif for which a disciple should approach their lifestyle.⁴¹ Stanford emphasizes that a disciple maintains the standard of following the cross because of his fellowship with the Lord, making him free from the old and for the new.⁴²

Barna approached discipleship with a question to believers. He asked, "What would happen for God's kingdom if we did not consider our job complete when people confessed their sins and said a prayer inviting Jesus to be their redeemer?"⁴³ He further explored the possibility of using their new commitments to Christ as a launching pad to become individuals who are

³⁷ Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, (Nashville: B& H Publishing, 2013), 14.

³⁸Ibid., 22.

³⁹ Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (South Carolina: Mike Breen, 2012), 2.

⁴⁰ Michael Mitchell, *Leading, Teaching and Making Disciples* (Indiana: Crossbooks, 2010), 5.

⁴¹ W. Oscar Thompson, *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven States for Making Disciples* (Tennessee: B&H Publishers, 1999), 29.

⁴² Miles Stanford, *The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 69.

⁴³ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Waterbrook Press, 2001), 2.

wholly sold out to Christ. Barna's approach to discipleship encourages leaders to ignite people's passion for God and then get out of the way. He shares that the discipleship process includes two components. The first component is an individual becoming a knowledgeable, committed, and practicing follower of Jesus, which fulfills the second component with entails instilling that same passion into others.

Dave Early and Rod Dempsey explored discipleship through the lens of stages. These stages begin with abandoning the things of the world and its patterns and following Jesus. When the proper steps of discipleship are embraced, then born again believers become multipliers by producing reproducers. Early emphasizes that God's Church exists to spread the gospel and develop believers to the point that they become missionaries of God's movement. They defined the Church as simply a gathering of called-out ones, which aligns with this study's aim to utilize the church according to its biblical definition. These thoughts aligned with Ray Stedman in *Body Life*. It declares that true Christianity is not a matter of organizations or groups; it is not an independent organization existing on its own. Instead, it is a body called into a special relationship with God. He explains that he believes that the modern-day church has attempted to exist on its strength and numbers and deviated from the divine strategy outlined in the Bible. Stedman further states that the early church only had one plan, message, and force: love. It is through love that lives are changed, and disciples are made.

Greg Ogden discusses the role of individuals within the body of Christ by emphasizing that every born-again believer has been assigned spiritual gifts that are to be used individually and collectively for Kingdom purposes. Ogden believes in equipping leaders to share the responsibility of ministry, which coincided with Michael Henderson's view that the primary function of spiritual and educational leadership is to train others to lead and minister, not to be

responsible for ministry efforts personally. Henderson explains that human nature is perfected by participating in groups, not by acting in isolation. He believes that group strategies multiply accountability and foster personal development. Mike Breen also shares in *Multiplying Missional Leaders* that living a balanced life according to scripture is expressed through one's community life. Through community connections, people can be recruited to the kingdom of God, trained in Christian disciplines, and deployed to continue the multiplication efforts. John Koessler further explores the model of relational discipleship in *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus*. He uses Jesus' example of relationally making disciples. He states that disciple-making is not a matter of programs but people. Jesus' example of disciple-making with his twelve disciples shares the responsibility of each disciple to gather and train disciples to become the next generation of disciples and leaders.⁴⁴ Michael Mitchell expounds on this principle further in *Leading, Teaching, and Making Disciples*. He explains that Christian leaders first follow Jesus so that their lives can provide a path for others to travel as they learn to follow Jesus and become a fisher of men. According to Mitchell, followership is more than being in a position; it is a commitment to changing as an individual and a willingness to be transformed into the image, style, and behavior of the leader you are following.

In Christianity, leaders follow in the footsteps of Jesus, which requires the utilization and application of skills that influence other followers. Mitchell believes education is vital in promoting and attaining growth so that believers can comprehend Bible truth and ultimately contribute to the community and the Kingdom of God. Joseph Hellerman shares that a group of individuals took priority over individuals in the New Testament world. The group came first because believers understood that they were their brother's keeper and had a vested interest in the

⁴⁴ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 154.

wellbeing of others. Oscar Thompson's thoughts in *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven Stages for Making Disciples* align with Hellerman's school of thought. Thompson added that the gospel always moved outwardly on lines of relationship throughout the New Testament. The Holy Spirit sheds the love of God into believers' hearts, and it penetrates through their actions toward others.

Larry Stockstill's thoughts on discipleship and community aligned with many other authors, but Stockstill classified unfruitfulness as a dysfunction in the American church that impacts discipleship efforts. He believes that weekend efforts of local churches accomplish addition by adding numbers. Still, it is not the multiplication efforts required to produce fruit that remains in believers' lives that eventually lead to the discipleship process and spiritual maturity. Only through growing mature believers does the multiplication that is required to fulfill the great commandment.

Beyond the contrasting definition of discipleship were the conflicting thoughts regarding the church's role within the process. Stockstill states that unfruitfulness is the dysfunction of the American church because it has lost perspective on the components of the Great Commission.⁴⁵ Moreau expounded upon that concept by explaining that missions have been relegated to the specific work of the church and agencies that are tasked for these efforts. However, the mission is broader than reaching a particular group of people for Christ; it expands beyond all that is being done that points toward the kingdom of God.⁴⁶

Throughout the review, other themes such as leadership, obedience, missions, and the disciple-making process were explored in detail; however, there was a gap in information on

⁴⁵ Larry Stockstill, *The Remnant: Restoring the Call to Personal Integrity*, (Florida: Charisma House, 2008), 20.

⁴⁶ A. Scott Moreau, Gary Corwin, and Gary McGhee, *Introducing World Missions* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 17.

how to merge those four factors together in a fashion that fulfills the great commission and equips disciples to be disciple-makers. Much of the material was directed toward recycling what is currently being done instead of exploring potential opportunities to maximize ministry efforts and expand capacity beyond the church walls. Of the fifty-two sources, only one discussed ministry beyond the confines of a local church. Several sources encouraged the pastors and ministry leaders to equip others, but only a few discussed empowering the masses.

Breen encouraged leaders to train and deploy leaders like Paul to release a missional movement of leaders who are committed and capable of accomplishing more than one can imagine.⁴⁷ Stockstill shared that growing mature believers is what guarantees multiplication, not addition.⁴⁸ Stanford expresses that when the believer takes up his cross for discipleship, the process of death begins to set in. The disciple finds himself a seed sown by the Son, planted in a home, office, hospital, church, or mission station.⁴⁹ This thought is a launching pad into the purpose behind this thesis.

Thompson shares that the key to a fulfilled life is relationships. The first relationship is with the Father. He expounded on this thought by emphasizing that the gospel moves through relationships. In the New Testament Church, the gospel always moved on relationship lines to Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, the uttermost parts of the earth in waves that seemed to move outwardly.⁵⁰ Since the church's inception, the gospel has always been shared through relationships lines and will continue to do so now more than ever. Through untapped

⁴⁷ Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (South Carolina: Mike Breen, 2012), 75.

⁴⁸ Larry Stockstill, *The Remnant: Restoring the Call to Personal Integrity* (Florida: Charisma House, 2008), 21.

⁴⁹ Miles Stanford, *The Green Letters: Principles of Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 75.

⁵⁰ W. Oscar Thompson, *Concentric Circles of Concern: Seven States for Making Disciples* (Tennessee: B&H Publishers, 1999), 16.

connections beyond the traditional church doors, one can build upon this premise of doing and sharing life in the process.

The Need for Community

Dave and Jon Ferguson identify the rationale behind the need to create micro groups. They state that "reproducing small groups connect the unconnected and spread a missional movement."⁵¹ The first value they emphasize is connecting the unconnected based on God's desire from the very beginning was to satisfy man's relational, emotional, and spiritual needs through the community. They express that community is a relational oneness experienced vertically with God and horizontally with other human beings. The ultimate oneness was first displayed through Adam and Even's relational connectedness with God and with one another. When there was a separation between God and man, they experienced a void and brokenness that could only be rectified through a relationship with him and humanity. Throughout Scripture, God utilizes micro group structures to reveal what it means to experience authentic community with him and with one another. God's people have been charged with the mission of connecting the unconnected since the perfect community was broken in the Garden of Eden.⁵²

Christian Maturity

Spiritual formation is a vital part of discipleship. Micro groups create theological meaning and develop opportunities for people to connect their faith to everyday events and

⁵¹ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *Exponential*. Liberty University Course DSMN 830 Week 4, Fall 2019.

⁵² Ibid.

issues in their individual lives.⁵³ According to Roger Walton, micro groups deepen one's knowledge of God while building meaningful relationships through accountability. Research studies were conducted on the conceptualization of mature discipleship and how it is revealed as evidence in the life of a believer. The responses indicated that only 36.3% strongly agreed that spiritual maturity included witnessing your faith to your non-Christian friends, 34% strongly agree that maturity included sharing in the suffering of others, with only 32.9% strongly agreeing that spiritual maturity is ranked by inviting others to become a Christian.⁵⁴ These findings are alarming and indicate how far the body of Christ has drifted from actively fulfilling the Great Commission. These findings also confirm the need to create and establish micro groups as vehicles for discipleship.

Leslie Francis emphasized in his research the importance of taking discipleship learning seriously. His focus area was rural churches and their need to reprioritize their efforts to emphasize discipleship. Francis shares how Mark's Gospel places the call of discipleship at the heart of Jesus' ministry. He further aligns this with Matthew's Gospel, in which Jesus commissions his followers to make disciples of all nations. The study addresses equipping disciples for the future by establishing a model that utilizes theological learning and group activities that bring individuals together to extend the range of their understanding and experiences.⁵⁵ A model that encompasses these components would significantly impact an individual's spiritual formation and maturity in Christ.

⁵³ Roger Walton, "Disciples Together: The Small Group as a Vehicle for Discipleship Formation." *Journal of Adult Theological Education* 8.2 (2011):99-114.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Leslie J. Francis. "Taking Discipleship Learning Seriously: Setting Priorities for the Rural Church." *Rural Theology* 13.1 (2015):18-30.

The Discipleship Process

In 2011, Mike Breen said that "The reason the missional movement may fail is because most people/communities in the Western Church are pretty bad at making disciples. Without a plan for making disciples (and a plan that works), any missional thing you launch will be completely unsustainable." Discipleship is identified as the cornerstone of a renewal process that will restore growth and health because it is the essential factor of the church.⁵⁶ Discipleship is the building block for the church, and it is found within the practices of disciples.

According to Beard, the church has become more of an event and less of a community of believers. Spiritual formation in the Western church has adopted the event and program model, which considers a person a disciple at their conversion experience.⁵⁷ Spiritual growth is a process that happens through studying God's Word and incorporating spiritual disciplines into one's life. Discipleship is an organic process that is not completed at baptism or a series of studies; it continues as a Christ-follower submits their lives to God. The discipleship process is not a linear progression but rather a journey.⁵⁸ The discipleship process includes God, the disciple, and the disciple-maker. The discipleship process is not completed while a disciple remains on earth, which affirms the need to be a part of a micro group that allows individuals to grow and do life together, as revealed in Acts 2 in the Bible. The ultimate work of disciples is to serve as communicating agents of God's love to the world through the Word of God and our personal witness.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Christopher Beard. "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement." *Missiology: An International Review* 43.2 (2015):175-194.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Yiner Josue Huaycani Cotrado. "Principles of Discipleship and Church Growth from Acts 2:46-47." World Council of Churches (2020):328-339

Micro-Group Trends

The micro group movement was initiated in the 1960s as micro groups replaced the Sunday School model for spiritual formation in the local church. However, micro groups can be traced back to the New Testament with Jesus and his disciples, through the reformation and post reformation movement, and John Wesley's system of disciple-making groups. Lifeway Research found that about 60% of churchgoers were involved in a small group at least once a month.⁶⁰

Experts suggest that cultural trends have created a sense of fragmentation and detachment that will continue to impact and influence people to look to micro groups as sources of intimacy and a sense of community.⁶¹ As societies become more hostile toward Christian values and beliefs, born-again believers will need to seek experiences that foster a deeper level of faith and community with like-minded people. According to Harley Atkinson, micro groups unite diverse cultures and ethnic groups, facilitating multicultural interaction amid racial diversity and racial unrest.

Upon source review, it is apparent that this research is necessary and will fill a gap due to several discipleship struggles and issues facing American churches today. This project will provide a model beyond the church building for discipleship efforts to be multiplied. By creating reproducing micro groups, people will become equipped to be a disciple that follows Christ. According to the Great Commission, they will recognize their responsibility to be a disciple maker and be prepared to fulfill the Great Commission.

⁶⁰ Harley Atkinson and Joshua Rose. "The Small Group Ministry Movement of the Last Four Decades." *Christian Education Journal* 17.3 (2020):547-559.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Theological Foundations

An array of data provides insight into why creating healthy micro groups is vitally crucial to ministry. Multiple Biblical examples and principles are expounded upon for their reasoning. Joel Comiskey stated that "Jesus has given his Church the problem of rapid reproduction" and challenges them to assess how to take his mission to the ends of the earth." The commission, challenge, and call to multiply for Kingdom purposes were revealed in the way Jesus did ministry and how his disciples continued with ministry in the development of the church after his resurrection.

Jesus said, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."⁶² If the church desires to solve Jesus's mission of sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth, it will be accomplished through a missional church movement which is the first Biblical reason for creating healthy micro groups. The second Biblical reason is that the followers must be apprentices of Jesus Christ for a missional movement to occur. "As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once, they left their nets and followed him."⁶³ On several occasions, Jesus beckoned others to follow him. Believers are individuals who have answered the call to follow Jesus who must be committed to living in such a way that others follow them as they follow Jesus' example. Jesus invested in people and has commissioned his Church to do the same. The third Biblical reason is expressed in Acts 2:42-47, in which Luke explains the beautiful picture of the Biblical community. As the people devoted themselves to teaching, sharing life, and

⁶² Acts 1:8

⁶³ Matthew 4:18-20

fellowshipping with one another, the Lord continued to add to their number daily. Through micro group connections like these, the unconnected become aware, affirmed, and a part of the missional movement.

The Great Commandment, the Great Commission, and the New Commandment provide the foundation for precisely what followers of Jesus Christ have been commissioned to do. The Great Commandment found in Matthew 22:34-40 tells us that believers are to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. The way people are taught to love God and love people is through relationships which requires that they be close enough to observe Christ-like behavior through people in micro group settings. The Great Commission commands us to "go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creations." Fulfillment of this commission is accomplished by teaching the truth, preaching the gospel, and multiplying ministry efforts by building leaders. The New Commandment found in John 13:33-34 says, "love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples if ye have love one to another." The very heartbeat of ministry is an extension of God's love which is the simplest way to explain the Biblical mandate for micro group development.

Theoretical Foundations

Many Christians have become comfortable attending church and supporting ministry initiatives without understanding their responsibility as a disciple. According to the Great Commission, Christians are responsible for being disciples and intentionally and strategically making disciples. The ability to reach the lost and hurting worldwide and in our local cities will happen through multiplying efforts, not addition. Pastors must train up leaders who are equipped

and committed to share the gospel and teach others to do the same thing. Kingdom expansion is limited if persons believe that ministry only happens in certain places during specific times.

In almost forty years of walking with the Lord, the researcher has only heard a few pastors or leaders share God's model for ministry growth and spiritual formation through the lens of the body of Christ within their ministry. Because of the limited teaching on the subject, far too many people believe that ministry growth and evangelistic efforts belong to pastors and missionaries. Evangelism and discipleship are the responsibility of believers, not just persons in specific leadership roles or positions. The work of the ministry belongs to the people. It needs to be conducted systematically to allow for duplication and multiplication so that the Great Commission is fulfilled. True discipleship empowers people to lead others as they grow spiritually personally. Empowered disciples are motivated to grow.

This problem is both researchable and significant due to the number of materials, articles, and books available on micro group ministry and discipleship efforts. There is a great deal of information regarding the traditional church model and the micro group model. The problem that will be addressed in this project is that people do not recognize their responsibility and role within fulfilling the Great Commission. Many Christians believe that evangelistic efforts and discipleship duties belong to pastors instead of all persons in a relationship with Jesus Christ. For the gospel to reach the ends of the world, that body of Christ must use multiplication efforts instead of addition. Ministries must equip their congregations with the education and the empowerment to do the work of the kingdom.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Intervention Design

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 shook the Christian community to its core. The church was awakened to the revelation that it was not effectively making disciples. In *The Great Commission*, Williard shares that the church has focused on making converts instead of making disciples.⁶⁴ The church has succeeded at sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ; however, it has fallen short in teaching people to live out Biblical principles that make Jesus Lord in everyday life. In an interview with *Christianity Today*, Tom Albin shared that he understands "discipleship to involve three interrelated dimensions: knowledge, experience, and a small group that can support me as I grow in grace and discover my place in the body of Christ."⁶⁵

This project aims to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make healthy disciples through micro group ministries. For this to occur successfully, believers need to understand the call to discipleship, acknowledge the significance of micro group ministry, and obtain the skills required to facilitate a micro group.

This project will focus on equipping the body of Christ with biblical knowledge and insight into opportunities to become disciples who make disciples. The objective is to establish multiplying micro discipleship groups within Ripple Effects that consist of individuals growing closer to Jesus Christ and sharing this growth with others. These established groups will create a discipleship model that incorporates Bible study, fellowship activities, community outreach, and personal reflection to help participants become committed disciples who make disciples. This

⁶⁴ Dallas Williard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 141.

⁶⁵ Tim Stafford, "Finding God in Small Groups." *Christianity Today* 47.8 (2003):42-44. CLEAN UP

project will be conducted in three stages, with the results being the establishment of multiplying groups that gather, grow, and serve together.

As stated, the research project will consist of three stages. Stage one consists of the research design component, stage two includes the intervention design component, and stage three involves the intervention delivery process. The stages will collectively and quantitatively answer the following research questions:

Research Question #1:

How did the participants define discipleship?

Research Question # 2:

What was the participants' understanding of the Great Commission?

Research Question #3:

What role did participants believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?

Upon approval from IRB to begin this project, a flyer will be created to announce the opportunity to participate in a research project on discipleship. The flyer will be shared locally at the Ripple Effects office, area churches, and social media avenues. Ripple Effects currently has weekly resource counseling appointments with persons in need in the community. The intake form includes questions regarding the client's belief system and allows them to ask any questions they may have regarding discipleship and Christianity. When questions are posed in response to those questions, further discussion is conducted between the client and the counselor. Those questions are shared with the researcher for further insight and investigation. Persons who submit questions through the resource counseling portal will also be offered an opportunity

to participate in this project. In addition, emails will be sent through the Ripple Effects email distribution list inviting participants to participate in the study.

The anonymous surveys will be emailed to persons who verbally agree to participate in this data collection effort. The population will consist of adult Ripple Effects clients, staff, volunteers, members of area churches, and persons from the community. All responses from the survey will be received anonymously through Google Forms without any reference to the respondent's identity. Participants will be granted ten days to complete the survey. The survey is designed to discover the participant's perceived definition of discipleship and their understanding of terms and Biblical text associated with the discipleship process. In addition, it will uncover the participants' perceived comfort level with leading a micro group and gauge their commitment level to the Christian community.

This project utilizes anonymous surveys because respondents are more inclined to provide honest feedback without fear or embarrassment when answers are not attached to their identity. In addition, surveys represent one of the most efficient and inexpensive research methods available to collect representative, accurate data from research participants. According to George Barna, anonymous surveys are best for deeply personal topics and receive better response rates.

A reminder email will be sent to prospective participants two days before the deadline. On the close of the deadline day, all responses will be tabulated in Google Forms in the researcher's cloud storage drive. The questions that required participants to fill in the blank will be compiled into an excel spreadsheet for comparison purposes. All multiple-choice answers will automatically be charted and graphed through Google Forms. The data details and reports will be stored in the researcher's private documents, which are password protected.

The data collected will then be reviewed and evaluated to identify gaps in understanding, areas of confusion, and hindrances to becoming disciples that are committed to making disciples. The information will then be used to create a nine-week curriculum that addresses those issues, intending to remove the barriers through knowledge and understanding of Biblical commandments and life application methods.

The researcher will select twelve adult persons from varying backgrounds to form a focus group to complete the curriculum. The focus group will be called Power of 12 (P12) based on the discipleship model of Jesus Christ. Jesus selected twelve disciples to share the gospel, and through their efforts, the gospel is still being spread.

The participants in the focus group will participate in the informed consent process as established through IRB for this research project. Participant information will be stored in the researcher's private documents, which are password protected. Upon acceptance into the P12 focus group, participants will complete an abridged form of the initial survey to the general population. Nine questions that capture the essence of discipleship and fulfilling the Great Commission were pulled from the comprehensive survey to gauge participants' level of understanding regarding discipleship before and after the completion of the curriculum.

Upon completing the P12 pre-curriculum survey, the data will be compiled and tabulated for comparison after the curriculum has been taught. The Power of 12 (P12) participants will attend an introductory class and nine instruction classes through Zoom. The classes will be held on Monday nights at 6:30 pm for one hour for nine consecutive weeks. Participants will be required to have internet access to attend each class.

After the last curriculum class, the P12 participants will complete a post-curriculum survey. The pre-curriculum and post-curriculum surveys are the same surveys. The pre-survey

data and post-survey data will be compared to evaluate understanding, preparedness, and commitment levels to becoming disciples that make disciples. The data will indicate if the nine-week curriculum achieved its objectives in instructing and equipping its participants to participate in micro groups, maintain discipleship efforts, and create multiplying micro groups that fulfill The Great Commission.

At the close of the class, the hope is that participants will be encouraged to initiate new discipleship micro groups based on affinity, interest, and goals. The newly trained micro group leaders will be encouraged to share the information they learned through P12 with their micro groups and incorporate one of the recommended workbooks or books into their micro group fellowship.

The evaluation for the success of this intervention will be based on direction, health, growth, maturity, team relations, and faithfulness. Direction addresses whether individuals are moving in the direction of understanding and fulfilling the Great Commission. Health evaluates an individual's desire to know God and spend time in His presence to cultivate a personal relationship with Him. Growth recognizes multiplication efforts in numbers and involvement. Maturity captures the increase in the percentage of persons leading micro groups and sharing their faith. Team Relations monitors the cohesiveness and fellowship that occurs within the micro groups. Faithfulness identifies if individuals and micro groups are being true to their assignments within micro groups.

According to the Great Commission, successful implementation of this intervention will achieve the organizations' goal of equipping disciples that make other disciples. The intervention will create a platform for individuals to experience transformed lives that bear fruit for the Kingdom of God and points people to Jesus through parachurch ministries.

This research project is quantitative in nature because each participant's personalities, spiritual maturity, and personal experiences are different. The numerical data can be collected and calculated separately from biases and differences. Quantitative methods were chosen for this project because they recognize a participant's individual objectively and are still able to establish accuracy with fewer variables. For this project, data collection can be automated and provide statistics for execution.

This intervention establishes solutions regarding the problem presented in this project through instruction and personal application. It allows for the creation of a strategic discipleship program that connects persons based on a shared affinity. Further data that support this need for nontraditional ministry efforts are identified through Barna Group's research findings in 2018 which states the following:

- 51% of churchgoers do not know of the Great Commission
- 17% of the population is familiar with the passage in the Bible that references it
- 6% of churchgoers are simply not sure whether they have heard the term "the Great Commission" before.⁶⁶

This data was established before the pandemic of 2020 when churches were meeting regularly and had their customary weekly attendance. In addition to these church statistics, the 2021 State of the Bible says that 95 million American adults are "test driving" the Bible. The disengagement from the Bible is down over 26 percent since 2018.

⁶⁶ <https://www.barna.com/research/half-churchgoers-not-heard-great-commission/>

Implementation of the Intervention Design

This project utilizes a monitoring and evaluation research method to track implementation progress against the stated problem. The evaluation will identify information gaps, areas of confusion and allow for implementation process adjustments if necessary.

Questionnaires, surveys, and structured observation are the data collection strategies.

Quantitative data will be collected using a structured questionnaire and survey.

Standardized forms will be developed at baseline and will include the following categories: 1) Understanding of Christianity; 2) Socio-demographic characteristics; 3) Church Attendance; 4) Knowledge on Discipleship; 5) Familiarity with The Great Commission; 6) Insight into Micro Groups.

Measurement Tools

Descriptive statistics will be generated from the structured questionnaires to identify baseline characteristics of participants who complete the anonymous survey and those who participate in the Power of 12 (P12) Focus Group. Responses will be evaluated based on commonality, frequencies, and deviations to identify barriers that prevent participants from being disciples that make disciples. Incorrect information will be addressed and presented descriptively to explore root causes further. Confounding variables will be controlled by using a categorical approach and analysis.

The discipleship questionnaire is comprised of twenty-three questions. The questions consist of a combination of multiple-choice and short-answer responses. The fifteen multiple-choice questions will provide options for the respondent to make their selection. Those questions will be tabulated based on response and utilized in presenting quantitative data. The

eight short answer questions will require the respondent to explain their answers in their own words to reveal the depth of their understanding. Those responses will be captured in an excel spreadsheet and categorized based on similarity.

The P12 Discipleship survey will consist of nine of the original questions taken from the Discipleship Survey. These nine questions include six short answer responses and three multiple-choice selections. These questions will provide insight into the participants' knowledge regarding the project's previously stated research questions. All twelve focus group members will take the P12 Discipleship Survey before participating and upon completion of the intervention.

Focus Group Interviewing will be conducted during the weekly instruction classes. The classes will consist of a time of instruction, discussion, and a question-and-answer session. The information shared during each curriculum module will be documented and included in the intervention outcome summary.

The delivery method used to collect data is Google Forms. Google Forms collects data from respondents and compiles all the standard questionnaire fields into one document. It eliminates the need to decipher and tally responses on sheets of paper which protects the validity of the data. It creates charts based on percentages of responses and provides a reliable account of the collected data. All individualized responses that are not tabulated are compiled into a list so that those items can be categorically addressed and included in the data collection process. This project will consist of data triangulation from a questionnaire, surveys, a focus group, and observation during class instruction.

Upon collection of each phase, data will be reviewed for completeness, repetitive themes, information gaps, and areas of uncertainty. The participant responses will identify themes

through the questionnaire and surveys as well as during class discussions. Information gaps will be visible through unbiblical and incorrect answers presented during the data collection. Areas of uncertainty or confusion will be seen through 'I don't know' responses and no response at all.

Data Collection and Analysis Plan

As stated earlier, data for implementing the intervention design will be collected through anonymous surveys and focus group interviews. Participants will include a randomly sampled population of Ripple Effects clients, supporters, and other persons from the community who express a desire to participate in this project.

Ripple Effects offers weekly resource counseling appointments with persons in need, crisis, and transition in the community. The intake form includes questions regarding the client's belief system and allows them to ask any questions they may have regarding discipleship and Christianity. When questions are posed in response to those questions, further discussion is conducted between the client and the counselor. Those questions are shared with the researcher for further insight and investigation. Those questions are stored in the client files at the Ripple Effects office in a secure filing cabinet behind a locked door.

A variety of backgrounds and age groups will be included in the sampling population to provide a more comprehensive view of the mindset surrounding discipleship and disciple-making. The objective is to accurately represent authentic expression regarding the role, responsibility, and process for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Phase 1 of the data collection process for this study will be initiated with a general email to the compiled purposeful sampling group who consented to participate in the study. The email will remind the persons of the reason for the study and extend gratitude for their willingness to

participate. It will also remind them that the responses will not be attached to any form of their identity. The email will contain a link to the anonymous Discipleship Survey and the actual form for them to complete. Participants will be granted one week to complete the survey. An email reminder will be sent to all persons one day before the deadline, encouraging them to complete the study by the end of the day on the following day. Once the deadline passes, the survey results will be quantified based on the respondent's answers. The multiple-choice responses will be tabulated based on percentages, and the short answer questions will be categorized based on similarity. The results of this survey will be included in chapter four's findings.

Phase 2 of the data collection process will include an email being sent to the twelve participants who agreed to participate in the focus group designed for this project's implementation. They will receive an email outlining the project's process and the researcher's expectations for its participants. The email will also include a link to the P12 Discipleship Survey. The email will be sent out one week before the first class is scheduled to begin. One day before class begins, a reminder email will be sent to complete the survey and remind them about the scheduled class. Once the deadline passes, the survey results will be quantified based on the respondent's answers. The respondent's answers will be further explored and discussed during the nine-week curriculum. The multiple-choice responses will be tabulated based on percentages, and the short answer questions will be categorized based on similarity. The results of this survey will be included in chapter four's findings.

Phase 3 of the data collection process will include completing the P12 Discipleship survey after completing the discipleship curriculum. The P12 Discipleship Survey taken before the intervention is the same P12 Discipleship Survey taken after the intervention. The

intervention will then be completed upon receiving the post P12 Discipleship Survey forms from all twelve participants. The responses from the pre-survey will be compared to the post-survey responses to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.

Intended Outcomes

Beyond this intervention project, Ripple Effects desires to create a minimum of twelve healthy micro groups whose effectiveness is measured by the following characteristics: direction, health, growth, maturity, team relations, and faithfulness. Direction addresses whether individuals are moving in the direction of understanding and fulfilling the Great Commission. Health evaluates an individual's desire to know God and spend time in His presence to cultivate a personal relationship with Him. Growth recognizes multiplication efforts in numbers and involvement. Maturity captures the increase in the percentage of persons leading micro groups and sharing their faith. Team Relations monitors the cohesiveness and fellowship that occurs within the micro groups. Faithfulness identifies if individuals are being true to their personal assignments within micro groups.

According to the Great Commission, successful implementation of this intervention design will be instrumental in achieving the organizations' goal of equipping disciples that make disciples. Establishing an effective curriculum creates a platform for individuals to experience transformed lives that bear fruit for the Kingdom of God and point people to Jesus. The ultimate objective is to establish a system that cultivates discipleship multiplication efforts that can be duplicated through parachurch ministries such as Ripple Effects.

Conclusion

This quantitative pre-intervention and post-intervention phased research project is designed to address the need to create disciple-makers and answer the three previously stated research questions. Chapter 4 will discuss the results of the project design intervention implementation.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

Ripple Effects began as an outreach ministry that became a community transformation organization serving clients from a variety of congregations as well as persons who are not affiliated with any church or religion. Over the past six years, it recognized the common denominators of loneliness, isolation, dysfunction, and trauma. The further study discovered that many persons they served were connected to local ministries; however, they were not actively being discipled.

An anonymous survey was sent to fifty random adults from various local churches, businesses, and organizations to gather information regarding their beliefs, mindsets, and opinion regarding discipleship. Of the fifty surveys shared, twenty-five anonymous responses were received. The survey results indicated that 100% of responders identified as being a Christian. Eighty-four percent were male, and 16% were female. All responders were adults, with the most significant percentage being between the ages of 40-55, which was 52%. Eight percent were between the ages of 18-25, 12% between the ages of 25-40, and 28% were over the age of 55. The findings indicated that 0% of the responders confessed to Christianity less than one year, 4% confessed between 2-5 years, 4% confessed between 6-10 years, and 92% confessed to Christianity for more than ten years.

When asked how they were introduced to their Christian faith, 60% indicated through the local church, with the remaining 40% indicated other sources of introduction. The survey asked for each responder to tell how long they had been saved, which revealed a discrepancy between how long they had been a confessing Christian and the period in which they classified

themselves as saved. Ninety-two percent of responders identified as a Christian more than ten years; however, only 88% categorized themselves as saved more than ten years.

The survey was generated to determine the level of clarity and competency of its responders in the process of discipleship making. The questions were designed to identify areas of uncertainty and incorrect information for those professing Christianity and an authentic relationship with Christ. The benchmark of 20% has been established for identifying areas of uncertainty and incorrect information within the responses. This number was established based on 100% of responders identifying themselves as Christians. In addition, 100% of the survey responders acknowledged that growth in their faith and as a disciple of Christ was important.

The survey posed the question, "How do you define Christianity?" The rationale for incorporating this question is that to become a disciple, they must first profess Christ. Dave Early defines a disciple as one who has abandoned the things of this world and is committed to following Jesus.⁶⁷ Without one understanding the surrender to God and the responsibility a believer has to the kingdom and not this world, the discipleship process is not understandable or possible. Thirty-six percent of the responders replied to this question, which incorporated belief accompanied by personal responsibility. Sixty-four percent responded with partial answers that indicated uncertainty and incorrect information regarding the Biblical definition of discipleship. The benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information were met through the responses to this question, so this question will be utilized in the project's next phase.

The survey asked, "How often do you attend church physically or virtually?" This question was posed because the church is the usual means by which disciples are developed. The

⁶⁷ Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*, (Nashville: B& H Publishing, 2013), 22.

aim was to establish the value individuals placed on church attendance and its role in their personal development as disciples. Joseph Hellerman believes that people in America are running from the gospel and organized church, leading to the breakdown in the disciple-making process.⁶⁸ John MacArthur credits the breakdown of information within the local church as part of the growing issue within creating disciples. He shares that the church is increasingly in danger of equating religion with Christianity and the process of simply attending church with salvation.⁶⁹ The survey results revealed that 84% of its responders attended church weekly, 12% every two weeks, and 4% attended church multiple times in one week. This survey question did not meet the benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information, so it was not utilized in the project's next phase.

The survey asked, "How important is it to you to keep growing in your faith and as a disciple of Christ?" This question was included because it was necessary to establish one's prioritization for their Christian walk and their thoughts on the value of personal growth as a believer. Of the 100% response recognizing the importance, 84% of the responses classified growth as a disciple as extremely important, with the remaining 12% ranking it as particularly important. No one responded with somewhat important, not so important, or not important at all. In, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus*, John Koessler proclaims that spiritual maturity and growth in their walk with God are the goals of every serious disciple of Christ.⁷⁰ The data revealed that there was no uncertainty or incorrect information about the value of

⁶⁸ Joseph Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 75.

⁶⁹ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 13.

⁷⁰ John M. Koessler. *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003) 121.

growing in their walk as a disciple of Christ. This question failed to meet the benchmark qualification and was not utilized in the next phase of this project.

The survey asked the question, "How do you define discipleship?" This question speaks to the heart of the study by establishing the core belief system of participants regarding their meaning of the term disciple and how the term translates into one's way of living. All twenty-five participants responded with an array of answers. The answers were categorized into four different components. These components consisted of evangelism, personal discipline, instruction, and fellowship. The most significant number of responses were in the category of evangelism with 32%, followed by 28% reflecting personal discipline and lifestyle choices, 24% responded with answers reflecting receiving instruction and learning, with 8% identifying discipleship as a form of fellowship. Only two persons (8%) responded with answers of discipleship that aligned with the established definition in this project. Those answers were "teaching others doctrine while engaging in theological development and sharing life as we grow in Christ so that we can then do the same with others" as well as "being a witness for the Lord, loving God and your neighbor while working for the will of the Lord to be done to spread the good news. As defined in chapter 1, Discipleship refers to the journey of transformation from a secular lifestyle and thinking into a life based on the Gospel that embraces Christ's life and principles. It is the process of training people in the Biblical disciplines of the Christian life. Discipleship results in the development of a growing follower of Jesus who reflects his character and a commitment to make other disciples. Larry Stockstill's explanation of discipleship incorporates all four components of the answers received from participants; however, they must be combined to establish an accurate definition. He believes the evangelistic efforts of winning souls in conjunction with the disciplines of Christlike living and proper Biblical instruction leads

to fellowship, which creates multiplication in the kingdom of God.⁷¹ The survey results revealed that 92% of the responders did not answer the question correctly. These statistics did meet our benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information, so that they will be utilized in the next phase of the project.

The survey asked the question, "Do you know what the Great Commission is?" This question was asked to connect the participants' understanding of the Biblical mandate to make disciples with the insight of their role in the process. Of the twenty-five responses, 84% responded with yes, and 16% responded with no. The next question expounded upon the above-stated question and asked participants to "Describe the Great Commission in their own words?" Although 84% of the participants responded that they knew what it was, only 9 (36%) of the population provided an answer. Of the nine responses, 3 (33%) answered, indicating that they did not know by explicitly stating "do not know," "not sure," and "not for sure." Only 1 (9%) of the responses identified the Great Commission correctly, as stated in Matthew 28:16-20. Two participants (8%) had a general understanding of the Great Commission. Although 84% of the participants responded yes to knowing the great commission, only 3 (12%) could transfer their knowledge into describing it in their own words. This survey question met the benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information, so it was utilized in the project's next phase.

The survey asked the question, "How do you define disciple?" This question speaks specifically to the role of one who follows Christ and requires the responder to reveal their level of knowledge. The twenty-five responses were categorized according to likeness resulting in seven distinct components. The most significant representation of answers was 44% classifying

⁷¹ Larry Stockstill, *The Remnant: Restoring the Call to Personal Integrity*, (Florida: Charisma House, 2008), 20.

a disciple as a 'follower of Christ.' Twenty percent responded that disciples 'share Christ and his teachings.' Twelve percent responded that they did not know. Eight percent responded with helping others. Eight percent defined a disciple as one 'growing in Christ.' Four percent responded that a disciple is obedient. Four percent responded that disciples please God. This study defines a disciple as one who is working to orient their life around the life and teachings of Jesus Christ by spending time seeking God through Christian practices and disciplines. According to the survey results, 88% of the responders had insight into what it means to a disciple, with only 12% expressing uncertainty. This survey question did not meet the benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information; however, it provided insight into preparing materials in the next phase of the project.

The survey asked the question, "Who do you believe the Bible identifies as the responsible person to make disciples?" The responders were presented with four choices and an option to write in their response. The choices included pastor, local church, Christians, and not sure. This question was included with these options to identify the source or person the respondent saw as the responsible party in the disciple-making process. Of the 25 responses, 80% identified Christians as responsible, 8% identified the local church, and 12% stated not sure. This survey question did meet the benchmark criteria for uncertainty and incorrect information, so it was utilized in the next phase of the project.

The survey asked the question, "How do you believe disciples are developed?" This question was included to connect the participant's knowledge of spiritual formation practices with the disciple-making process. Of the twenty-five responses, 52% identified micro groups as the primary way disciples are developed, 8% identified church services, 4% identified attending classes, with 36% choosing 'other.' No further explanation was provided by those stating other.

This data confirms that more than half of the participants completing this survey recognizes the role micro groups play in discipleship efforts. The participants' value on micro groups was further demonstrated through the next question that asked if they had ever personally attended a micro group. Eighty-eight percent of the responders had participated in a micro group, with 12% responding no they had not participated in a micro group.

The survey asked the question, "What do you believe is the main reason that people do not attend micro groups?" The question was asked to identify the root causes that hinder participants from attending the group that data reveals is instrumental in the disciple-making process, yet often not explored. Of the twenty-five responses, 44% identified a lack of options and opportunities as the most significant cause. Secondly, time restraints were identified for 40% of the responders. The remaining responses included 12% for family reasons, 8% for work-related reasons, and 7% identified other. No further information was provided for other. This survey was an exploratory question to gather insight into how to train and equip persons to navigate these hindrances. The data will be incorporated into the next phase of the project.

The survey asked, "Do you feel equipped to lead a micro group?" This question was included to establish whether the participants felt equipped and prepared to lead or facilitate a micro discipleship group. Of the responses, 48% said yes, 28% said no, and 24% stated maybe in the future. Based on those responses, 52% of the participants did not feel equipped, although 88% have been saved for more than ten years.

The survey asked the question "why or why not" they did not feel equipped to lead a micro group. This question was included to identify the participants' reasoning for questioning their ability and how this project could better prepare or equip them. The survey results revealed that 56% felt equipped and 48% not feeling equipped. Of the 48% who did not feel equipped,

36% identified their reason as a lack of confidence, 4% stated time, with the remaining 4% stating health reasons. This survey question was not based on the benchmark data; it was for exploratory purposes for the project's next phase.

The survey asked the question, "What characteristics do you believe a micro group leader needs to possess." This question was asked to identify the character and personality traits that the responders had regarding micro group leadership. This question received 100% participation. The responses included various attributes such as discipline, commitment, passion, faith, compassion, and honesty. Beyond these traits, other factors such as authenticity, teaching ability, being personable, approachability, and being a good listener were identified. This survey question was not based on the benchmark data; it was for exploratory purposes for the project's next phase.

The survey asked the responders to "Please share how you would describe a successful Christian?" This question was included to establish data to connect the lifestyle of a Christian and the attributes of a micro group leader. This question received 100% participation. The responses included living the Word and representing Christ to the world, leading others to Christ, being a person of integrity, exercising discipline, following Christ, loving the Lord, and living a life that witnesses Jesus. One respondent shared that "A successful Christian is led by the Holy Spirit, understands his purpose, and understands the gospel." This response provided visibility into all components represented in the definition of disciple and discipleship as established in this project. This survey question was not based on the benchmark data; it was for exploratory purposes for the project's next phase.

The final survey question asked, "Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding your faith, Christianity, or discipleship?" This question was included to provide a

space for the respondent to share any information that they felt was not covered in the listed questions that they felt was pertinent to the study. The question received 25 responses. Of those responses, 16% stated they did not have anything further to share. Other responses included placing its responsibility with the body of Christ. One respondent said, "Discipleship is our greatest calling after loving God." Others expressed a commitment to their personal growth and development. One response requested more classes and opportunities to help Christians feel equipped and ready to share their faith with others. This survey question was not based on the benchmark data, it was for exploratory purposes for the next phase of the project.

Phase 2 Process

The responses from the survey in phase 1 were the foundation of phase 2. Based on the data, all twenty-five respondents identified themselves as Christians. Ninety-two percent of the responders proclaimed to have been a professing Christian for more than ten years. Of the twenty-five responders, 84% stated that they knew what the Great Commission was, but only 48% believed they were equipped to lead a micro group. The survey results indicated that 88% of the participants shared that growing in their faith and as a disciple of Christ was extremely important; however, only 42% saw the value of micro groups.

These findings confirmed the need to effectively establish a nine-lesson training program to equip leaders to facilitate micro group discipleship groups through a parachurch ministry. The micro groups are formed around shared affinities, challenges, and needs. Each group aims to provide support, personal development and to serve the community. This study aimed to train twelve potential micro group leaders on how to implement a discipleship model that incorporates

healing, study, projects, and personal reflection to help individuals grow as disciples of Jesus Christ who are equipped to make other disciples while serving the community.

Training Participants and Process

The researcher selected twelve students to participate in the micro group discipleship training sessions. The group was called the Power of 12 (P12) and consisted of twelve females ranging in age from the early 20s to the late 60s. It was comprised of 4 (33%) married women, 3 (25%) divorced women, and 5 (42%) single women. Of the participants, 9 (75%) were mothers, and 3 (25%) were not mothers.

All persons in the group had obtained a high school degree and had pursued additional education at the college level. The participants ranged from 3 years to 50 years as professing Christians. Eleven (92%) participants had become believers as a child, and one (8%) participant became a believer as an adult.

Before the opening session, the P12 participants were asked to complete a pre-training survey to collect data on their knowledge and understanding of discipleship, the Great Commission, and their ability to lead a micro group. The survey consisted of nine questions taken from the original anonymous survey.

The survey asked, "How do you define Christianity?" This question was asked to establish participant's understanding of the Christian faith. The survey results indicated that the participants defined discipleship according to five different components. Christianity was defined by belief, following, belief and following, relationship, and religion. Four responses (33%) indicated belief as the foundation of its definition, two responses (16.6%) indicated

following, two responses (16.6%) stated belief and following, two responses (16.6%) indicated relationship, and two responses (16.6%) indicated religion in their definition.

The survey asked, "How do you define disciple?" This question was asked to establish the connection between being a Christian and living as a disciple. The survey responses indicated our key terms in their definition. Those terms included following, discipline, lifestyle, and work. Six responses (50%) defined disciple through the lens of following Christ. Four responses (33%) indicated a walk disciplined by the Word of God, one response (8.3%) defined discipleship through the lens of one's lifestyle, and one response (8.3%) defined discipleship as doing the work of ministry.

The survey asked, "Do you know what the Great Commission is?" This question was asked to establish the link between one's knowledge of discipleship and the biblical mandate to create disciples. Of the twelve responders, ten (83.3%) responded yes, and two (16.7%) responded no.

The survey asked, "How would you describe the Great Commission in your own words?" This question was asked to challenge the responders to expound upon their yes answers. The survey results indicated that of the 83.3% who stated that they knew what the Great Commission was, ten responses (83.3%) confirmed the validity of those that stated they knew what it was. Only two (16.7%) stated they were not sure.

The survey asked, "How do you believe disciples are developed?" This question was asked to identify the model the responders believed was the most effective in the discipleship-making process. Nine responses (75%) stated micro groups, two responses (16.7%) indicated attending classes, with one response (8.3%) stating other. There was not any further explanation provided to identify the source of the stated other.

The survey asked, "Do you feel equipped to lead a micro group?" This question was asked to establish if the respondents felt qualified to facilitate micro group ministries. The responses indicated that nine respondents (75%) stated yes, they felt equipped to lead a micro group, one (8.3%) stated no they did not feel equipped to lead a micro group, and two (16.7%) stated they might feel equipped in the future.

The survey asked the participants to expound as to why they felt or did not feel equipped. This question yielded five different categories of answers. The categories included qualified through God, previous experience leading a micro group, personal responsibility, not comfortable in front of a group, comfortable inside of a group, and a need to learn more. Five responses (41.7%) stated that they were qualified through God to lead a micro group. Two respondents (16.7%) shared that their previous experience leading a micro group qualifies them. One respondent (8.3%) believed it was the personal responsibility of all Christians to lead micro groups and others to Christ. One respondent (8.3%) did not feel comfortable in front of people, one respondent (8.3%) felt comfortable in front of people, and two respondents (16.7%) indicated they needed to learn more to feel equipped.

The survey asked, "What role do you believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship-making process?" This question was asked to serve as the bridge from understanding discipleship to individual life application. All twelve respondents (100%) indicated that all confessing Christians share the responsibility of making disciples.

Research Question #1

Research question one asked, "How did the participants define discipleship? The answers to this question ranged in three different components. These components included

believing, following, and doing. Of the responses, 4 (33%) reflected an understanding of discipleship through the lens of 'following' Christ. The answers consisted of "following after Christ and his ways, following religion-based teachings, being a follower of Jesus Christ, and following Jesus' example. Three participants (25%) viewed discipleship through one's belief system. Their responses included "Belief in Jesus Christ and believing in the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit." The greatest number of participants, 5 (42%), viewed discipleship through the lens of doing. Their responses included "modeling Jesus for the world around us to see his glory, upholding God's word daily and asking for forgiveness, doing what Christ did and living like Christ, and being a doer of the Word."

This interview discussion question expounded on the participant's understanding of their relationship with Jesus and their responsibility to adhere to biblical principles. The participants' comments also included their explanation of their relationship with God and their belief in his death and resurrection. They believed that discipleship is expressed through a commitment to God and a turning away from one's sins. Upon this turning, participants also referenced living out their beliefs and practices daily through the power of God.

Research Question # 2

Research question two asked, "What was the participant's understanding of the Great Commission?" Two (17%) of the participants did not know what the Great Commission was and were not sure how to explain it in their own words. The responses from the other 10 (83%) of the participants presented answers that ranged from "being a disciple that makes disciples, spreading the Word, going into the world to make disciples for Jesus Christ, witnessing to the lost, being baptized, and bring all nations together without judgment."

This interview discussion question aimed to express the participant's biblical understanding of the mandate given to all Christ-followers. The P12 participants disclosed that they were comfortable explaining or describing the components of the Great Commission. They had heard the terms and knew it was necessary, but they were unsure whom it applied and how it applied to Christ-followers. They were interested to learn more about it and how to implement it into their daily lives.

Research Question #3

Research question three asked, "What role did participants believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?" This interview question aimed to provide insight into the participant's understanding of personal biblical responsibility pertaining to the body of Christ. Of the participants, 9 (75%) acknowledge that the discipleship process belongs to Christians, 2 (17%) were not sure, and 1 (8%) identified the work of discipleship as the responsibility of the local church.

Based on the data collected from the original survey and the P12 survey results, a nine-week curriculum outline was established with the following lessons:

- Lesson 1: Discipleship 101
- Lesson 2: The Characteristics of a Disciple
- Lesson 3: Spiritual Disciplines
- Lesson 4: The Christian Journey
- Lesson 5: Obstacles to Discipleship
- Lesson 6: Marketplace Ministry
- Lesson 7: Missional Living

- Lesson 8: The Responsibilities of Discipleship
- Lesson 9: Micro Group Formation & Dynamics

The sessions began on Monday, January 3, 2021, with an opening session of fellowship, followed by nine instruction classes, concluding with a closing fellowship on Monday, March 14, 2021. The process consisted of nine lessons and two connections held on Monday nights at 6:30 pm EST conducted via Zoom. The study utilized a qualitative methodology consisting of completing an abridged anonymous survey completed by the original twenty-five participants. An emphasis was made each session on the three research questions included in this study with discussion amongst the class participants.

Training Lessons & Descriptions

Lesson 1: Discipleship 101

The objective of lesson 1 was to establish the biblical definition of discipleship. It addressed the data collected from survey questions numbers 2 and 3 on the P12 Discipleship survey and questions 10, 11, 12, and 13 on the original random survey. During the class, students admitted to attending church for years without clearly understanding the components of being a disciple and how pivotal it was to the kingdom of God.

Lesson 2: The Characteristics of a Disciple

The objective of lesson 2 was to identify the biblical characteristics of disciples and discuss their manifestation through micro group leadership. It addressed the data collected from survey questions 2, 7, and 8 on the P12 Discipleship survey and questions 9, 18, 20, and 21 from the original random survey. During the class, participants identified characteristics of disciples.

Lesson 3: Spiritual Disciplines

The objective of lesson 3 was to identify biblical disciplines required for spiritual formation and maturity. It addressed the data collected from survey question 6 on the P12 Discipleship survey and questions 9, 15, and 20 from the original random survey. During the class, students shared that they believed the disciplines of a disciple included Bible Study, prayer, and giving. Students were very receptive and open to learning how to develop inner and outer disciplines.

Lesson 4: The Christian Journey

The objective of lesson 4 was to connect followers of Jesus to the teachings of Jesus. It addressed the gap between the participants' understanding of what is required with the actual requirements based on the teachings of Christ. This lesson provided oversight and insight into Jesus' teachings by connecting followers to the mandates modeled through his example. Students struggled with reducing their Christian walk to the basics of priorities, motives, and decisions during the class.

Lesson 5: Obstacles to Discipleship

The objective of lesson 5 was to address the challenges and obstacles that prevented individuals from growing as disciples and not fulfilling the Great Commission to be and make disciples. This lesson addressed data from questions 4 and 5 on the P12 survey and questions 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 from the original random survey.

Lesson 6: Marketplace Ministry

The objective of lesson 6 was to expose participants to the reality that all believers are called to the ministry of reconciliation. This lesson addressed the uncertainty expressed in question 14 on the original random survey

Lesson 7: Missional Living

The objective of lesson 7 was to introduce participants to their responsibility to live as missionaries for Kingdom expansion. This lesson bridged the gap between the church, the Body, and the community of people in need of salvation and discipleship. During the class, participants discovered that missional living recognizes the importance of love, identifying opportunities, and reflecting on the people you serve in your everyday life. Discipleship is not a title or posture that one picks up and drops off. It travels with them into every component of their lives.

Lesson 8: The responsibilities of Discipleship

The objective of lesson 8 was to connect the definition, requirements, and ownership of personal responsibility in the discipleship process. This lesson pulled data from questions 10, 11, 12, 14, 14, and 15 from the original random survey and questions 2, 3, 4, 5, and 9 from the P12 discipleship Survey. During the class, participants were exposed to the responsibilities of loving, serving, giving, forgiving, and living the life of a disciple.

Lesson 9: Micro Group Formation & Dynamics

The objective of lesson 9 was to combine Biblical education and application. This lesson utilized questions 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 from the original random survey and questions 6, 7,

8, and 9 from the P12 discipleship survey. During the class, participants were instructed on the mission of micro discipleship groups, the expectations of those in the facilitator role, the details on completing a micro group plan. They were escorted through the process and procedures required to launch their initial micro group. In just a few short weeks, the participants went from being uncertain and unsure to having a level of confidence in their understanding of the Bible's stance and the believer's responsibility regarding discipleship.

Post Training Survey Results

The P12 post-training survey indicated increased understanding and clarity of discipleship, the Great Commission, and the responsibility of Christians in fulfilling the mandate. In response to their knowledge of the definition of discipleship, 100% of the 12 participants included the term 'follow' in their responses. When asked to define discipleship, 100% of the 12 participants utilized the word 'live for' in their responses. The answers included, "living their lives based on the teachings of Jesus," "shaping their life around Jesus' teaching," "live based on Jesus' example," "live and do what Jesus taught," "living for Jesus," and "living like Jesus." The question was asked whether the participant knew what the Great Commission was, and 100% of the responses were yes. When asked to expound with describing the Great Commission in their own words, 100% of the 12 participants referenced some form of "go" and "making disciples" in their responses. The question was asked how disciples were developed, and 100% of the 12 participants selected "micro groups" as their response.

After completing the curriculum, 92% of the participants indicated that they felt equipped to lead a micro group with one student, 8%, sharing "may in the future" they will feel equipped.

The final question on the survey asked, "What role do you believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?" The responses were as following:

- "It is our responsibility."
- "Christians are given the charge to disciple other people in the Great Commission."
- "Jesus told disciples to do it."
- "We are to lead the charge. It is our job."
- "It is what we are supposed to do as believers."
- "Every Christian should be discipled and discipling other people."
- "Christians are to be disciples who make disciples; it is what the Bible says to do."
- "It is our job as Christians to make disciples."
- "The Bible tells us to do it."
- "Christians are to share the gospel, live the Word, and help others mature in Jesus."

Summary of Major Findings

The open-ended questions in the questionnaire allowed the participants to share authentic responses on their understanding of discipleship. It allowed the researcher to identify gaps in their knowledge and areas of confusion. The curriculum provided an opportunity and environment in which the participants were able to learn Biblical truth and connect the responsibility of Christians as it pertains to discipleship efforts in the fulfillment of the Great

Commission. The weekly classes provided a means for the participants to dialogue about their questions, concerns, and apprehension on being equipped to lead a micro discipleship group.

The significant findings in this project include the following:

1. A biblically based curriculum on discipleship equips participants with the understanding they need to lead a micro group effectively.
2. Once individuals can connect The Great Commission and The Great Commandment to born-again believers, they are more likely to participate in discipleship-making.
3. The key to transitioning converts into disciples is education. Believers must be educated on the process of spiritual formation, and the Bible mandate to be disciples who make disciples.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Problem and Purpose

The growing decline of Christians being disciples that make disciples challenges the body of Christ to rediscover how to effectively equip believers on making disciples instead of creating converts who reduce their relationship with Jesus to church attendance and activities. This Doctor of Ministry project aimed to establish a strategy that cultivated healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make disciples through micro group ministries. The participants were presented with a curriculum that established a biblical understanding of discipleship, the Great Commission, and the knowledge required to facilitate a micro group. The research project consisted of three stages that quantitatively answered three research questions:

Research Question #1: How did the participants define discipleship?

Research Question # 2: What was the participants' understanding of the Great Commission?

Research Question #3: What role did participants believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?

The project's goal was to equip twelve participants with the knowledge, skills, and resources to develop and deepen their walk with Christ. Upon completion of the curriculum, the participants were challenged to facilitate new multiplying discipleship groups to fulfill the Great Commission.

Project Goals

Before the completion of the curriculum, none of the twelve participants were actively leading a discipleship group. The participants were all actively attending church; however, none participated in any form of discipleship development. This project aimed to establish a strategy that cultivated healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make disciples through micro group ministries. The project consisted of three goals.

Goal 1: To teach believers the biblical mandate regarding discipleship.

Goal 2: To equip the participants with the tools to lead micro groups.

Goal 3: To establish multiplying micro groups upon completion of the curriculum.

The project yielded both expected and unexpected results. The initial anonymous survey results indicated that most of the participants had not been biblically taught about the Great Commission and the role that every Christian must play in fulfilling it. Without an understanding of discipleship and its components, discipleship does not get prioritized. People do not feel compelled to lead others in their spiritual formation efforts because of a lack of knowledge about the Bible, a lack of knowledge regarding personal responsibility, and a lack of knowledge regarding kingdom expansion. Without knowledge, micro groups are not formed, and people continue to attend church without being changed, failing to continue the command to make more disciples. According to the American Bible Society research, the findings in this project confirmed the rationale that America is moving further away from being a Christ-centered nation, with generation Z having the most unanswered questions and the most significant lack of understanding.⁷²

⁷² Lisa Cooper, Jeffery Fulks, John Plake, and Alyce Youngblood, "State of the Bible" American Bible Society, May 2021 edition.

Answer and Discussion of Research Questions

The responses to the anonymous survey and the Power of 12 pre-survey established the foundation for the information to be included in the curriculum. Each question directly correlated with a premise of the three research questions. The responses were statistically stated in chapter 4 based on the research conducted in stage one of this project.

Research Question #1

Research question one asked, "How did the participants define discipleship? According to the findings stated in chapter 4, discipleship was defined as "following Christ," "believing in Jesus," and "being a doer of the Word." This research identifies that discipleship is consistently viewed through the lens of personal responsibility to God. As stated in chapter 4, 33% of participants defined discipleship through following Christ, 25% of participants associated discipleship with an individual's belief system, and 42% of participants aligned discipleship with doing. Based on these survey findings, discipleship is executed though how a person chooses to live their individual life. This research project identifies the need for churches to evaluate their current discipleship efforts and to incorporate outreach and evangelism efforts to transition from informational based discipleship to actual obedience-based discipleship based on the mandate for Christians to mature into disciples who make other disciples. This research question clearly identified that church assimilation processes and programming are not effective at making disciples. The implications of not properly making disciples who make disciples will ultimately lead to the demise of the church. Disciples are not crafted through attending; they are created through relationships and imitation. The revelation obtained through research question #1 solidified the need for Ripple Effects to establish duplicatable multiplying micro groups who

understand that discipleship has a personal inward component as well as an outward component that focuses on reaching others.

Research Question # 2

Research question two asked, "What was the participant's understanding of the Great Commission?" Only two (17%) of the participants in this project study did not know what the Great Commission was and how to describe it. The responses from the other 10 participants clearly identified components of the Great Commission and the need for the gospel to be shared. The answers to this question revealed that 90% of the sampling were familiar with the terminology of the Great Commission; however, they were not familiar with their individual responsibility to fulfill it. The implications of believers having an information-based understanding without obedience attached to it has created a society in which the church is viewed based on misunderstood roles of leadership and lay people. Believers are vaguely aware of the components of the Great Commission without recognizing their specific role in fulfillment of it. Ripple Effects' response to this dilemma is to ensure that all micro groups are actively engaged in Bible Study as well as Bible sharing so that their lives are a reflection of what they believe and what they have been commanded to do as Christians.

Research Question #3

Research question three asked, "What role did participants believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process?" This research question aimed to provide deeper insight into the participant's understanding of personal biblical responsibility pertaining to the body of Christ. As indicated in chapter 4, 9 participants (75%) in the focus group pre-test

acknowledged that the discipleship process belonged to Christians; however, no one was actively involved in discipling anyone prior to this project. It provided the participants an opportunity to connect their definition of discipleship, the Great Commission, and the Church. At the conclusion This project allowed participants to activate what they knew they should be doing with the knowledge and tools required to do it consistently and intentionally. The impact of the answers to this research question creates a society of people who are aware of their role in building the kingdom of God, but who do not feel prepared to do it. This research question identified the gaps between what people understood in their minds as compared to what they executed through their disciplines.

The above research findings and implications were the basis for establishing a curriculum that provided a biblical understanding of discipleship, the role it plays in the fulfilling of the great commission, and to identify the responsible persons of its implementation.

The discipleship program was designed to evaluate the program participants' current level of understanding and offer insight into their spiritual formation processes while establishing intentional strategies to grow as an individual while fulfilling the Great Commission. This project utilized the Delphi technique to answer the research questions to identify the consensus of views, gaps, and needs.

Lesson 1: Discipleship 101

The objective of lesson 1 was to establish the biblical definition of discipleship. It addressed research questions one, two, and three. The class defined salvation, sanctification, and introduce participants to systems of discipleship. It expounded on the benefits for the disciple, the discipler, and ultimately to the body of Christ. This class described the disciple making

process and concluded with explaining discipleship through the lens of obedience and multiplication.

During the class, students admitted to attending church for years without clearly understanding what the components were to being a disciple and how pivotal it was to the kingdom of God. Their responses included comments such as:

- "I thought I understood"
- "Why did I know this?"
- "Shouldn't this be taught at church?"

Lesson 2: The Characteristics of a Disciple

The objective of lesson 2 was to identify the biblical characteristics of disciples and discuss their manifestation through micro group leadership. It addressed research questions one and three. Lesson two addressed belief systems, attributes of a disciple's heart, and concluded with a discussion on identity contrasting the old nature of man before a relationship with Jesus and the new nature after entering a personal relationship with Jesus. During the class, participants identified characteristics of disciples as:

- "Kind"
- "Compassionate"
- "Loving"

The participants identified characteristics associated with outward actions and behavior, they did not consider the conditions of their mind, hearts, and identity as identifying markers. This lesson encouraged self-reflection and the realization that all believers can exhibit these characteristics regardless of how long someone has been in a relationship with Jesus.

Lesson 3: Spiritual Disciplines

The objective of lesson three was to identify Biblical disciplines required for spiritual formation and maturity. It addressed research questions one, two, and three. Lesson three identified the inner and outward spiritual disciplines for Christians. During the class, students shared that they believed the disciplines of a disciple included the following:

- “Bible Study”
- “Prayer”
- “Giving”
- “Fasting”

Students were very receptive and open to learning how to develop inner and outer disciplines.

Lesson 4: The Christian Journey

The objective of lesson 4 was to connect followers of Jesus to the teachings of Jesus. It addressed research questions one, two, and three. It addressed the gap between the participants' understanding of biblical requirements based on the teachings of Christ. It discussed Christian priorities, motives, and decisions. This lesson provided oversight and insight into Jesus' teachings by connecting followers to the mandates modeled through his example. Students struggled with reducing their Christian walk to the basics of priorities, motives, and decisions during the class. The Christian Journey lesson led to discussions that included the following comments:

- "I have been making my walk with God too hard."
- "I didn't realize how my everyday decisions impacted my being an ambassador for God."

- "Why didn't I learn this in church? I have been going to church for years."

This rich discussion led to self-reflection, personal critiques, and new commitments to reflect the teachings of Christ.

Lesson 5: Obstacles to Discipleship

The objective of lesson 5 was to address the challenges and obstacles that prevented individuals from growing as disciples and not fulfilling the Great Commission to be and make disciples. It addressed research questions one, two, and three. Lesson three established lacking components that lead to yielding to the obstacles that hinder discipleship. The lack of knowledge, lack of commitment, and lack of confidence were analyzed and discussed. During the class, participants shared their excuses for not sharing the gospel with other people. These obstacles included:

- "I don't know how to talk to people about what I believe."
- "I do not know enough about the Bible to talk about it."
- "What if I mess up and tell them something wrong."

This class addressed uncertainty, qualification, and the excuses that hinder persons from being discipled and discipling other people. At the end of class, participants were able to transition from what they lacked in knowledge, commitment, and confidence, to what they believed and committed to through their faith.

Lesson 6: Marketplace Ministry

The objective of lesson 6 was to expose participants to the reality that all believers are called to the ministry of reconciliation. It addressed research questions one, two, and three.

Through expounding on God's purpose for man, participants were introduced to how to proclaim Christ in their workplace, how to build bridges, and how to walk through open doors of opportunity to share the gospel. During the class, participants discovered God's purpose for man and how to live out their faith in the marketplace. Some of the fears expressed during class included:

- "At work, I have work to do. I don't have time to build relationships."
- "Is it ok to talk about Jesus on your job if your boss isn't a Christian?"
- "Why isn't inviting people to church not enough?"

This class opened rich dialogue regarding honoring Christ, your company, and your co-workers. Participants learned that their responsibility to be a disciple that makes disciples is not limited to ministry events; it is a lifestyle that accompanies them everywhere that they go.

Lesson 7: Missional Living

The objective of lesson 7 was to introduce participants to their responsibility to live as missionaries for kingdom expansion. This lesson bridged the gap between the Church, the Body, and the community of people in need of salvation and discipleship. It addressed research questions one, two, and three through the lens of love and relationship. It explained that participants existed in a mission field in every component of their lives. Lesson seven challenged participants to live missionally and to enjoy the process. During the class, participants discovered that discipleship is not a title or posture that one picks up and drops off; it travels with them into every component of their lives. Participants shared comments such as:

- "Being a disciple just means living my life like Jesus."
- "Discipleship isn't something that we got to do; we get to do it."

- "I have been looking at this from the wrong perspective."

Lesson seven allowed participants to relax as they realized that discipleship is more of a reflection of who they love, serve, and share and not tasks that need to get checked off a working to-do list.

Lesson 8: The responsibilities of Discipleship

The objective of lesson 8 was to connect the definition, requirements, and ownership of personal responsibility in the discipleship process. It addressed research questions one, two, and three. During the class, participants were exposed to the responsibilities of loving, serving, giving, forgiving, and living the life of a disciple. The participants thought this class was going to include:

- "More stuff that I have to do."
- "I thought we were going to talk about how I need to get myself together."
- "I thought I would leave out of here feeling like a failure."

Lesson 8 included a time of reflection that challenged participants to look upward, inward, and outward. At the close of class, participants grasped the reality that kingdom work required all persons in the body to "recognize the playbook, which is the Bible," and "to do what it is that we say we believe." At the close of lesson 8, participants shared responses such as:

- "I can do this with Christ's help."
- "It is not about me; it is about me allowing God to work through me."
- "God is the source; He brings the wisdom; He has the answers... I am just the vessel."

Participants were encouraged and expressed confidence in God to do through them what they did not believe they could do. After eight weeks of class discussions, all nine students shared that they were ready to advance to the final class.

Lesson 9: Micro Group Formation & Dynamics

The objective of lesson 9 was to combine biblical education and application. This lesson addressed research question 3. During the class, participants were instructed on the mission of micro discipleship groups, the expectations of those in the facilitator role, the details on completing a micro group plan. They were escorted through the process and procedures required to launch their initial micro group. In just a few short weeks, the participants went from having a partial understanding of discipleship and an uncertainty of their qualifications to recognize that they are commanded and equipped for the process. Their responses at the completion of the class included the following:

- “I can do this.”
- “Once I get my group started, how do we keep it growing?”
- “All I needed was a plan.”

Project Outcomes

Before this project, none of the twelve participants were leading micro groups. Upon completion of the curriculum, four participants began facilitating their own micro discipleship groups. All twelve participants are now actively involved in discipleship programs. What started as a project centered in a rural region has expanded into other states and into Africa. Ripple Effects recently opened an office in Kenya with three discipleship groups meeting

regularly, with two additional ones on the horizon. As a result of this project, seven new discipleship groups have begun, with others preparing to launch.

This project solidified the need for the church to expand its capacity by connecting with and utilizing organizations beyond an organized church to participate in the discipleship-making process actively. It was said multiple times during the curriculum discussions, "No one has ever told me this." This statement exposes the need for Christians, churches, and para-church ministries to evaluate the role we are commanded to fulfill through the Great Commission. It further emphasizes that the solution is education. As participants were informed, instructed, and challenged, their minds were enlightened to the truth and the personal responsibility that every born-again believer has with being disciples that make disciples.

The project supported the literature review shared in chapter two, which confirms that people's involvement in church, leadership, and other ministry activities did not directly correlate with them living a lifestyle of discipleship. Spiritual formation and discipleship disciplines need to be cultivated through relationships, education, and application. It must be intentional with the understanding that making disciples is not a suggestion but a biblical mandate.

Implications of Findings

The research findings support that the project curriculum is an effective program for educating, equipping, and empowering laypeople to learn and to lead discipleship groups. It will be a tool that can be used and duplicated with other organizations and churches that desire to incorporate micro discipleship groups into their current model.

Ripple Effects' missions team presented the project curriculum during a 10-day discipleship training summit in Oyugis, Kenya. The course offerings included discipleship

training for pastors, leaders, and laypersons on establishing multiplying discipleship groups. Over 40 pastors from different churches in attendance received this information and dispersed it through their congregations.

The P12 curriculum has become the standard for Ripple Effects and will be taught three times a year in America and Africa. Each course will be conducted with twelve participants, meaning a minimum of 72 people will receive the knowledge and resources to facilitate multiplying discipleship groups. If each of those participants commit to leading a micro group, within one year, 864 will participate in a discipleship program initiated through a community organization located in a rural region committed to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited because each of the twelve participants was selected by the researcher. This is considered a limitation because of the researchers' previous experience with the participants. Another limitation was that it was conducted in the eastern rural region of North Carolina, which is considered part of the "Bible Belt". The "Bible Belt" area is heavily influenced by evangelical Protestantism which results in higher church attendance rates than other regions in the United States.

This project happened during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2021, which required that all classes be conducted via Zoom sessions. The class discussions did not occur in a classroom where students could physically interact; it happened through a computer screen and the chat box. The information was exchanged; however, the typical camaraderie that is established when all participants are in one central location was not feasible.

Unexpected Observations

The researcher was surprised to find such a large portion of class participants did not have a biblical basis for understanding the Great Commission. Although the participants were faithful church attenders, their baseline of understanding discipleship and God's mandate to believers was minimal. Many participants were familiar with the need to actively participate in spiritual formation disciplines. Still, they did not understand that the root cause for exercising the disciplines was found in discipleship.

The researcher approached the project believing that one of the primary reasons people were not disciples committed to making disciples was fear or complacency; however, according to the research findings, it was a lack of understanding. Once participants understood what discipleship was, who was responsible for doing it, and how easily it can be done, each of them became open to the process and were willing to take an initial step. For some, it was directly into launching new discipleship groups; for others, it was becoming more familiar with the process to facilitate their own later.

Recommendations

Further study in this area should focus on how churches and organizations can connect to build bridges from the assembly of people to the assimilation of disciples into the community, workplaces, schools, and affinity groups. The solution is not found in one entity, but by increasing the capacity of both entities through collaboration and intentional opportunities to teach what discipleship is, the role every member of the body of Christ has, and to create avenues in which the work can be done through multiplication efforts.

Discipleship groups are vehicles to assist individuals in fulfilling the purpose and calling that God has on their lives individually and fulfilling the Great Commission. When properly trained and well executed, these groups achieve the charge that God issued to every born-again believer.

Project Alignment Outcome

There are three University-based program outcomes that this assignment helps to fulfill.

The outcomes are:

1. Construct a theological foundation that interacts with precedent literature to evaluate ministry.
2. Evaluate a ministry idea or context demonstrating advanced observation and analysis.
3. Develop a research project to address a specific ministry objective.

Conclusion

This project addressed the problem regarding the deficit in biblical discipleship through creating a curriculum that addressed knowledge gaps and positioned Christians to become active participants in fulfilling the Great Commission. The research findings support the need for a standardized, yet personalized way to teach the principles of discipleship and ways to put this into practice.

This project meets Liberty University's programming standards for a thesis project. The project relates to the researcher's current area of ministry and addresses a ministry need. The project provides a clear correlation with relevant literature in the literature review. The project was conducted by utilizing acceptable research methods as established in the program and thesis

project handbook. The project includes focused and measurable results through its findings. Lastly, the project presents evidence of careful planning, execution, and outcomes.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Project: Discipleship Beyond the Organized Church

Principal Investigator: Keisha B. Spivey, Doctor of Ministry Graduate Student
Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make healthy disciples through micro group ministries.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Complete an anonymous survey. The online survey will take approximately 10 minutes of your time.
2. Conduct an interview upon completion of survey. The interview will consist of you sharing your definition of terms and any additional information that you care to share regarding faith, discipleship, and Christianity. The interview will be recorded for information collection purposes; however, it will not be shared beyond this project research purposes. Any information shared will be considered confidential by researcher.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include established duplicatable strategies to assist ministries, non-profit organizations, and businesses in sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ and fulfilling the Great Commission.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records

- Participant survey responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

What are the costs to you to be part of the study?

Participants will not incur any cost to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser.
Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Keisha B. Spivey. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at _____.

You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Gary Moritz at _____.

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

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

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records.

The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Date

APPENDIX B

EMAIL SUBMISSION

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree, The title of my research project is Discipleship Beyond the Organized Church and the purpose of my research is to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make healthy disciples through micro group ministries.

I am writing to check your interest in participating in an anonymous survey about discipleship understanding and practices.

If you choose to participant, you will be asked to click on a link and complete the attached anonymous survey.

Thank you for considering my request.

Sincerely,

Keisha B. Spivey
Liberty University Research Student

APPENDIX C

FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Discipleship Beyond the Organized Church Study

- Are you a Christian?
- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Do you attend church at least once a month?

If you answered yes to these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a research study on discipleship.

The purpose of the study is to establish a strategy that cultivates healthy disciples who recognize their Christian responsibility to make disciples through small group ministries. Participants will be asked to complete a survey containing questions about their relationship with God, their understanding of what the Gospel is, and the Biblical mandate to make disciples.

The Survey will be emailed to the participants and once it is completed, an interview will be conducted to discuss concerns, thoughts and opinions not expressed on the survey.

Keisha B. Spivey a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Keisha B. Spivey at [REDACTED] for more information.

APPENDIX D

Pre-Intervention Survey

Online Survey Questions

Title of the Project: Discipleship Beyond the Organized Church

Principal Investigator: Keisha B. Spivey, Doctor of Ministry Graduate Student
Liberty University

Discipleship Survey Questions

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

Are you a Christian?

- Yes
- No

How long have you been a confessing Christian?

How were you introduced to the Christian faith?

How do you define Christianity?

Do you attend Church?

Why or why not?

How important is it to you to keep growing in your faith and as a disciple of Christ?

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

How do you define discipleship?

Do you know what the Great Commission is?

- Yes
- No

How would you describe the Great Commission in your own words?

How do you define disciple?

Who do you believe the Bible identifies as the responsible person to make disciples?

- Pastor
- Local Church
- Christians
- Other: _____

How do you believe disciples are developed?

- Church Service
- Micro Groups
- Attending Classes
- Other: _____

Have you ever attended a ministry micro group?

- Yes
- No

What are some reasons you do not attend a micro group now?

- Family reasons
- Work related reasons
- Time constraints

I would like to do so but haven't been invited

Lack of options or opportunities

Other reasons (please specify)

Do you feel equipped to lead a micro group?

Yes

No

Maybe in the future

Why or why not?

What characteristics do you believe a micro group leader need to possess?

Please share how you would describe a successful Christian?

Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your faith, Christianity, or discipleship?



Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. All research participants will be contacted for an interview. Your survey results are anonymous and will not be able to be identified by your interviewer.

APPENDIX E

P12 SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey Questions

P12 Discipleship Survey Questions (Pre and Post)

How do you define Christianity? *

Your answer

How do you define disciple? *

Your answer

How do you define discipleship? *

Your answer

Do you know what the Great Commission is? *

Yes

No

How would you describe the Great Commission in your own words? *

Your answer

How do you believe disciples are developed? *

Church Service

Micro Groups

Attending Classes

Other

Do you feel equipped to lead a micro group? *

Yes

No

Maybe in the Future

Why or why not? *

Your answer

What role do you believe that professing Christians have in the discipleship process? *

Your answer

Thank You. Your survey results are anonymous and will not be able to be identified by the recipient.

APPENDIX F

LESSON PLANS

Discipleship Program Principles

1. Plan with the end in mind. What are the desired outcomes from program?
2. Evaluate current maturity and level of understanding for program participants.
3. Develop curriculum based on survey data results.
4. Establish a spiritual formation and growth strategy.
5. Create duplicatable model for discipleship multiplication.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson 1: Discipleship 101

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Pre/Post Questionnaire Requirement
- Program Expectations
- Weekly Accountability
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. What is discipleship?
 - A. Salvation
 - B. Sanctification
 - C. System
- II. Why is discipleship so important?
 - A. The benefit to the disciple
 - B. The benefit to the discipler
 - C. The benefit to the body of Christ
- III. How are disciples developed?
 - A. Transitioning from convert to disciple
 - B. Christ's example
- IV. What is the goal of discipleship?
 - A. Obedience
 - B. Multiplication
- V. Open Discussion

Lesson 2: The Characteristics of a Disciple

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. The Right Belief
 - A. Basic understanding of salvation
 - B. Bible believing follower of Jesus
- II. The Right Heart
 - A. New Heart because of being born again
 - B. Seeking Heart desiring to know God's Word and will
 - C. Obedient Heart yielded to following God's leading
 - D. Teachable Heart willing to learn from others
 - E. Sharing Heart that loves and witnesses to others.
- III. The Right Identity
 - A. Old sinful nature and God's new nature
 - B. Being Spirit Led vs Being Flesh Led
- IV. Open Discussion

Lesson 3: Spiritual Disciplines

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Inner Spiritual Disciplines
 - A. Live in the Truth of God's Word
 1. Bible Study
 2. Prayer
 3. Fasting
 4. Meditation
 - B. Live by Faith
 1. Denying Self
 2. Seeing the Unseen
 3. Hope & Assurance
 4. Weapons of Warfare
 - A. Live in Love
 1. Love is the identifying mark of Christians
 2. Misuse of the word love
 3. The nature of God's Love
 4. The Love God expects of Believers
- II. Outward Spiritual Disciplines
 - A. Service
 1. Service to God
 2. Service to man
 - B. Submission
 1. Submission to God
 2. Submission to persons in authority
 - C. Separation
 1. Strategy (In this world but not of it)
 2. Simplicity
 3. Solitude
- III. Open Discussion

Lesson 4: The Christian Journey

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Living Out Jesus' Teachings
 - A. Priorities
 1. Setting the right priorities
 2. Choosing to make a difference
 3. Living in obedience to God's laws
 4. Loving the unlovable
 - B. Motives
 1. Testing our motives
 2. Living in a material world
 3. Letting go of anxieties
 - C. Decisions
 1. Seeking God in prayer
 2. Making the right decisions
 3. Bearing Good Fruit
 4. Building on the true foundation
- II. Open Discussion

Lesson 5: Obstacles to Discipleship

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Lack of Knowledge
 - A. Knowledge of the Word
 - B. Knowledge of what to do
 - C. Knowledge of how to do it
- II. Lack of Commitment
 - A. Fear of time requirements
 - B. Fear of unknown
 - C. Fear of commitment
 - D. Fear of responsibility
- III. Lack of Confidence
 - A. False humility
 - B. Lack of preparation
 - C. Feeling unqualified
- IV. Open Discussion

Lesson 6: Marketplace Ministry

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. God's purpose for man
 - A. The Call of God
 1. Vocation is not Occupation
 2. Vocation = vocare = call
 - B. The Plan for man
 1. Be Fruitful
 2. Multiply
- II. Proclaiming Christ on your Job
 - A. Respect your employer
 - B. Work with all your heart
 - C. Watch your conversations
 - D. Witness through your example
- III. Building Bridges
 - A. Love your neighbor
 - B. Lift and encourage your coworkers
 - C. Look for opportunities to shed light
- IV. Walking Through Doors
 - A. Magnetic Personality
 - B. Make friends and build relationships
 - C. Model Christ
- V. Open Discussion

Lesson 7: Missional Living

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Love
 - A. Upward – Loving God
 - B. Inward – Loving Yourself
 - C. Outward – Loving Others
- II. Mission Field
 - A. Live
 - B. Work
 - C. Plan
- III. Embrace & Enjoy Your Journey
 - A. Magnetic Peace
 - B. Meaningful Approach
 - C. Motivated Mission
- IV. Open Discussion

Lesson 8: The Responsibilities of Discipleship

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Responsibility of Love
 - A. Love God
 - B. Love Yourself
 - C. Love Others
- II. Responsibility of Serve
 - A. Serve God
 - B. Serve Others
- III. Responsibility to Give
 - A. Time
 - B. Treasure
 - C. Talents
- IV. Responsibility to Forgive
 - A. Yourself
 - B. Others
- V. Responsibility to Live
 - A. Set apart Life
 - B. Surrendered Life
 - C. Submissive Life
 - D. Sacrificial Life
- VI. Open Discussion

Lesson 9: Micro Group Formation & Dynamics

Agenda:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap from Last Week
- Application Update
- Lesson & Assignment
- Prayer

Lesson Outline:

- I. Micro Group Mission
 - A. Relationships
 - B. Accountability
 - C. Spiritual Formation
- II. Micro Group Facilitator Role
 - A. Shepherding
 - B. Leading Discussion
 - C. Accountability
 - D. Transparency
 - E. Multiplication
 - F. Communication
 - A. Leadership Team
 - B. Members of Micro Group
- III. Micro Group Plan
 - A. Micro Group Structure
 - B. Yearly Schedule
 - C. Group DNA
- IV. Next Steps
 - A. Development of Micro Group Proposal
 1. Mission for Specific Affinity Group
 2. Meeting Day, Time, & Location
 3. Metrics: Number of participants
 4. Materials: Proposed materials
 - B. One-on-One with Pastor to present proposal
 1. Present Proposal
 2. Proposal Discussion
 3. Proposal Recommendations/Suggestions
 4. Proposal Accepted/Rejected
 - C. Recruitment per Approval
 - D. Update Meeting with Leadership Team
 - E. Launch Micro Group
- V. Open Discussion