

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

An Examination of Leadership Development to Ascertain the Effectiveness of the Discipleship
Ministry at CrossLife Church and Improve Multiplication Strategies

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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For over 150 years, CrossLife Church has been proclaiming the gospel and serving the community in Oviedo, FL. Within the last 27 years, the church has seen over five thousand people baptized and 150 people commissioned and sent out for ministry and missions. However, the last 15 years has seen a plateau within the fabric of the church in terms of regular attenders. Many churches talk about discipleship and development, but the methods and processes to reach effectiveness in those areas varies. CrossLife Church has certainly seen an ebb and flow to its own methods that leads one to seek to evaluate how its strategies have helped and hindered the current mid-lining of growth. To properly ascertain the effectiveness of discipleship ministry in a church, one must evaluate the development system in place for the current leadership structure. How are leaders chosen? What is the teaching and training leaders go through? What role does the ministerial staff play in the development process? Through the results of this evaluation, the researcher will evaluate through interviews, surveys, and observation the discipleship and development process of CrossLife Church to establish the path forward to effective multiplication of leaders within the church.

Key Words: Discipleship, Development, Small Groups, Multiplication, Discipleship Pathway

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Ministry Context	2
Church Model	2
Church Demographics.....	3
Church Focus	5
Problem Presented	8
Purpose Statement	10
Basic Assumptions	11
Definitions	12
Limitations	14
Delimitations	16
Thesis Statement	17
Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework	19
Literature Review	19
Defining Discipleship.....	19
Effective Discipleship	24
<i>Healthy Leaders</i>	24
<i>Healthy Groups</i>	30
Implementation of Discipleship.....	35
Measuring Success of Discipleship	39
Theological Foundations	43
Old Testament Survey.....	43
The Example of Jesus.....	45
The Great Commission	49
New Testament Survey	52
Theoretical Foundations	56
Wesley Society/Band/Class Model.....	56
Flakes Formula	59
The Replicate Model.....	61
Summary	62
Chapter 3: Methodology	63
Intervention Design	63
Interviews	68
Observation.....	73
Surveys	74
Implementation of Intervention Design	78
Chapter 4: Results	83
Data	83
Senior Pastor Interview	84

Minister of Education Interviews	88
Interviews with Area Pastors	92
Surveys and Observations	94
Young Adults.....	95
Median Adults	98
Senior Adults	101
Summary	104
Chapter 5: Conclusion	106
Creating Proper Pipelines	106
The Mission and Vision Statement.....	106
The Discipleship Pathway	111
Practical Next Steps	113
Bibliography	120
Appendix A.....	125
Appendix B.....	126
Appendix C.....	127
Appendix D.....	128
IRB Approval.....	129

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Abbreviations

CEO	<i>Chief Executive Officer</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FL	<i>Florida</i>
KEEP	<i>Know the possibilities, Enlarge the organization, Enlist and train leaders, Provide Space</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
MARCS	<i>Missional, Accountable, Reproducible, Communal, Scriptural</i>
WIG	<i>Wildly Important Goal</i>

Chapter 1

Introduction

Discipleship is commanded and commissioned by God, but the interpretation of man leads it to be implemented in multi-faceted ways. It would seem the church has drifted into programmatic thinking when it comes to the issue of discipleship as opposed to practical obedience to the calling of Christ and the purposes and plans of God. How then does one move past the drift and into the fullness of what Christ intends for all believers? One must first understand the origin of discipleship and just what Jesus was asking of His followers. That understanding forces the church to evaluate its development and deployment of leaders into the ministry of discipleship within its fellowship. With proper understanding and evaluation, the believer can acknowledge making disciples remains the priority for the church of today. Gallaty contends, “God never intended for your salvation to be an end, but a beginning. God saved you to be a conduit through whom His glorious, life-changing gospel would flow to others.”¹ The saving work of Christ propels the church into the calling of Christ and believers must return to that reality if the gospel is to be declared and the Kingdom of God advanced for His glory and renown.

With the Great Commission being a command and not simply a suggestion, it is imperative for the church to have a plan. As the body of Christ comes to the realization that salvation is not the end but the beginning, it leads believers to count the cost on how to effectively execute a ministry of discipleship that moves beyond just numerical growth and into actual spiritual growth and disciple making. Jesus stated, “Suppose one of you wants to build a

¹ Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), xix.

tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish'" (Luke 14:28-30, NIV).² The foundation of the plans laid by the church are not man-made innovations, but it is the selfless surrendering of one's life in obedience to the call of Christ to make disciples. The will of God is for the church to make disciples and fulfill the Great Commission of Christ.³ Until the day Jesus returns, the church is to move in fullness of power towards the mission of making disciples who make disciples. Due to this reality, the actions of the church must be built upon prayer and the foundation of God's Word. Those fundamental bedrocks serve as anchors for the church to properly examine the effectiveness of its discipleship and see how it is moving regarding the mission of Christ.

This thesis project seeks to explore a specific ministerial context and evaluate the effectiveness of its discipleship ministry through an examination of its leadership development. Within this chapter, the context of the ministry will be explored in addition to a presentation of the problem, the purpose of the entire project, and the thesis for the projected outcome in conjunction with the research and its results.

Ministry Context

Church Model

CrossLife Church is a congregation and ministry that would align with a traditional model. CrossLife could be identified as being large in attendance but small in actual discipleship

² Unless otherwise noted all scriptural references in this paper are taken from the NIV. Nashville, TN, Harper Collins, 1984.

³ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2013), 3.

and multiplication. CrossLife is a typical large Southern Baptist church that relies heavily on pastoral and ministerial leadership with a drive to see people join the church. The budget is over six million dollars consisting of 1.5 million dollars for debt payments each year, 1.5 million dollars for ministry purposes, and three million dollars for personnel. The mission of the church is to see people impacted through the Sunday morning worship service music and message in such a way it would lead people to join a community of 20-25 church members in its small group ministry. Founded in 1869, CrossLife Church experienced growth in numbers and stature during the mid-nineties when it was the only church present in a community undergoing a boom in residential development shifting from a congregation of four hundred to one of 3,000. With the emergence of new churches in the area, CrossLife currently finds itself in the struggle outlined by Earley and Dempsey in their definition of a traditional church as it is operating in an addition mindset as the world around it is multiplying.⁴ The challenges found within CrossLife's model is far too often met with further programming attempts backed by financial investment that simply fail to change the course. Within the last year, CrossLife has sought to place a greater focus on mission and vision along with a more systematic approach to leadership development, but the tendency for complacency drift is there for paid ministerial staff to implement plans and programming they can lead singularly as opposed to effective discipleship ministry that leads to multiplication and engagement and investment from others in ministry.

Church Demographics

CrossLife Church is positioned in Oviedo, FL. five miles from University of Central Florida, one of the largest universities in America, with over 68,000 students. Young adults in the ages of 24-35 are the fastest growing population within a five-mile radius of the church and

⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 242.

Money.com recently ranked Oviedo number forty-three out of the top fifty places to live in the United States.⁵ Part of the appeal to live in the area is due to the school system in which the church is located. The Seminole County public school system was one of sixteen mentioned out of 13,500 school districts mentioned in a GreatSchools.org article on successful school districts. In addition to being an attractive community for young adults and families, the Senior Adult population has grown by 23% within the last three years. The church is positioned in an area of residential and commercial growth thus making the magnitude of the vision even greater in terms of the mission. While people, specifically families, are moving into the area surrounding CrossLife, the spiritual dynamics of the population bring opportunities as statistics indicate that the region is in the top ten in the nation of most unchurched people and in the top twenty-five in the nation of the most dechurched people. Add to that the rising Muslim population and the explosion of entertainment style or attractional churches and it presents the extraordinary need for the vision of the church to be centered on discipleship. The demographics surrounding the church do not match what is taking place within the walls of the church. Within the last five years, as the surrounding area has grown in college students and young adults, CrossLife has seen a decrease in attendance of those 18-35 by 8.7% and an increase in attendance of those 45-69 by 28%. The only way to penetrate the darkness that surrounds the church is with a multiplication of lights for Christ moving out into their worlds with an intensity and focus on who they are in Christ and what they are called to do in the name of Christ. What makes things exciting for CrossLife is the opportunity to engage with the lost in a powerful and personal way which seeks to build relationships to the point where there can be foundations laid in terms of the

⁵ Prachi Bhardwaj, Mayra Paris, Samantha Sharf, and Aly J. Yale, "The Best Places to Live in America," accessed November 3, 2020, <https://money.com/collection/best-places-to-live-2020/>

person of Christ, God's Word, and just who the church is to be. The community around CrossLife is searching, hungry, and hurting which positions the church in a powerful and unique way for such a time as this to make inroads and impacts that will reverberate for generations to come.

Church Focus

CrossLife has two central focuses as a church – the worship service and small groups. The leadership of the church views the Sunday morning worship services as the front door of the church and its vehicle where all emphasis is placed. This has been an evolution of thinking driven by the debt the church incurred twelve years ago when it built a new worship auditorium and facility which currently stands at eighteen million dollars. The services are divided into two separate offerings between traditional music offerings and more contemporary music offerings. The Senior Pastor preaches topical series that are focused on specific exegesis of passages each week. Before the church accrued debt, the philosophy of ministry was one of going to where people were, and the growth patterns demonstrate the strength of that thinking. In the last twelve years, the mentality has shifted to seeking to see people come to CrossLife which has created a stagnation in attendance and engagement. The church has drifted, as Waggoner diagnoses, from its understanding of true biblical community and its formation occurring outside of the context of just a worship service.⁶ Engagement, intentionality, excellence, and involvement will only grow with a focus shift for CrossLife.

The small group ministry of CrossLife Church is the other center point of its weekly programming second only to its two worship services. The messaging is consistent throughout all

⁶ Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come: Spiritual Formation and the Future of Discipleship* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 260.

platforms of the church that members and attenders are to find their place to belong within the confines of a small group. The small group is where the large church becomes small and is the outlet for where true ministry and connection will occur for individuals and families. One cannot mistake that CrossLife is a church with small groups. Even though the effort is given to see people grow in Christ within those groups, the greater effort is given to see people attend those groups and fit into a number that is processed on Monday mornings.

The characteristics of small groups at CrossLife Church are best described as being one ministry of the church focused on discipleship, it occurs only on Sunday mornings at 8:00 a.m., 9:30 a.m., and 11:00 a.m. Groups teach the Word but focus more on fellowship and care, and the purpose of the group never deviates from seeking to see people connected and attend at a greater rate of consistency. There is a clear institutional mindset of the small group ministry and focus that forces a model of dependency as opposed to equipping.⁷ The traditional nature of CrossLife Church fosters the institutional thinking that leads it to operate as a church with small groups most of the time. The model of the church leads the groups to function with a “one size fits all” mentality that fails to assist participants in discovering what is the next step for them and just how to take that step.⁸ It is that traditional nature that has presented a shortfall in proper leadership development and reproduction because everything is processed through the lens of Sunday morning being the front door of the church which diminishes the urgency to develop apprentices to create new groups and form new opportunities to grow due to the process being rooted in nothing more than attendance.

⁷ Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 111.

⁸ Chris Surratt, *Small Groups for the Rest of Us: How to Design Your Small Groups to Reach the Fringes* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 41.

While CrossLife Church maintains this ministry under the umbrella of being a church with small groups, there are minor steps being taken that could move the church into a place of being a church of small groups. The three areas where this is seen most clearly are in the areas of evangelism, missions, and church planting. The church recently engaged in a new study developed from the North American Mission Board's "Who's Your One?" campaign. The goal was to move the congregation out of a mindset of consumerism and into a mindset of investment and invitation to attract their friends, neighbors, and co-workers. CrossLife Church has also seen a renewed interest and investment in missions through challenging people to not only give but to go and take the gospel to its community and the world. In the last year, the church doubled its short-term mission trips and saw its adult participation in short term mission quadruple. Finally, due to the focus on evangelism and missions, the church has witnessed growth in its satellite campus and planted churches in Haiti, Los Angeles, and New York City. While the steps are small in the moment, the opportunity is large for the potential and purpose of God to be unleashed in the small group ministry of CrossLife Church.

Based on the examination and diagnosis of CrossLife Church's small group ministry, the evidence proves the small group model on display is an open group model. The groups are open and available to both visitors and members with no plan to close the group depending on the size. The openness of the groups provides easier methods for outreach simply due to the size of some of the groups, but the disadvantages prove to be real as most of the groups are far too large and thus are more like small churches than they are places of intimate community.

In full evaluation of the current context of CrossLife's focus, there are clearly defined programs but a lack of clearly defined processes. This lack of clarity has created congestion that calls for the church to examine its processes to see if movement is being created for people to

take steps of growth as opposed to just circling dates to attend. For this to occur effectively, the programs of CrossLife have been put under a microscope to see if there is strategy that is promoting and enhancing self-centeredness in community as opposed to challenging it to develop a culture of biblical discipleship.⁹ Currently, 85.9% members and attenders of CrossLife Church are noted in the church's database as sporadic in their involvement and engagement leading to the research of its effectiveness in discipleship.

Problem Presented

The problem is that CrossLife Church has not effectively evaluated its discipleship ministry model and the way it engages its congregation. Within the last fifteen years, the church has experienced a decline in consistency of those participating in Sunday morning small groups better known as Sunday School. The church has seen an average rate of participation decline from 82% in 2005 to 53% at the conclusion of 2019. CrossLife's decline mirrors that of Evangelical churches across America as the Pew Research Institute's Forum on Religion in America shows only 58% of professing Christians to be attending church at least once a week.¹⁰ A deep dive on this issue is necessary if the church is to properly see spiritual and numerical growth. Since 2005, CrossLife Church has undergone a building program that led to the church carrying a debt load of twenty million dollars, changed the name from First Baptist Oviedo to CrossLife Church, experienced the dismissal of staff due to issues of personal conduct, and had to lay off staff due to the debt. Each of these play a factor in the decline of engagement within the congregation, but still do not explain the full story. An initial examination points to the lack

⁹ Jared C. Wilson, *The Gospel Driven Church: Uniting Church-Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 127.

¹⁰ Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study," accessed September 2, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/>.

of a proper pivot from leadership to engage with individuals and families beyond the Sunday morning setting as a reason for the problem. The all-in approach to Sunday mornings has left the church with no innovation for how to better disciple the congregants outside of that time frame. One could also point to the overall abundance of programming that exists within the traditional model and framework of the church that leads people to select in what ways they will participate or not.

The problem also exists due to a lack of leadership development stemming from ineffective discipleship. CrossLife Church knows that the gospel transforms because it alone is the power to save. However, the results of the transformation in one becoming a disciple maker are merely spoken of instead of practically applied to every aspect of life. It must become evident that the identification of one being in Christ is an identification of conviction to engage in discipleship and development.¹¹ CrossLife's problem is as it contends everyone needs discipleship, its teaching and training fail to rise to the declaration of its contention. Teaching and training are essential for discipleship for it is how disciples make disciples who make disciples. The heart to make disciples is formed through the teaching of all that Jesus commanded.¹² Believers at CrossLife must understand God's Word to fully immerse itself in multiplication. The teaching and training of others comes through the saturation of one's life with God's Word and allowing it to marinate on the heart of the believer so that what it passes on to others is not simply information but a revelation of the teachings and commands of Christ that point to just what it means to take up one's cross and follow Him.

¹¹ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2016), 154.

¹² Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary vol. 22 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1992), 433.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMin research is to effectively ascertain the discipleship ministry of CrossLife and evaluate the method and model that needs to be implemented. Those who have been members of the church for the last 25 years and those over the age of fifty-five would look at the problem as an attendance issue and not a discipleship issue. However, there are new leaders who have been members for the last 3-5 years and new professing believers within the last 5 years, who believe there is an opportunity for a shift and have explored possibilities that align with a multigenerational approach that would help CrossLife to further reach its community for Christ. The problem is not lacking in resources as discipleship and small groups are areas where many solid opinions exist within the modern church. Those thoughts and ideas will provide opportunities for proper assessment on what ways might best accomplish the thesis of the overall work. Current writings on small groups and discipleship driven by ministry leaders such as Robby Gallaty, Eric Geiger, Thom Rainer, Ed Stetzer, and Rod Dempsey will be used to help in the research process. Interviews will also be used from pastors of traditional church models that have made a shift in their discipleship ministries resulting in greater engagement from their congregations.

The focus of the research will center in on the current small group and discipleship opportunities provided to adults ages eighteen and older. The ability to compare and contrast between college, young adults, median adults, and senior adults will be an asset to the findings presented and solutions offered to improve the effectiveness of CrossLife's discipleship ministry.

There is also a great need to explore across denominations through papers and journal articles to see what others are doing and what the indicators are for the best practices concerning discipleship in their contexts of ministry. The journey begins for CrossLife through

understanding the church's "Why" so that a proper deduction can be made about the "How" in terms of the overall decline for the church. Elements of the research will require difficult self-reflection from current church leaders, long-time members, and lay leaders. However, that reflection will allow the church to effectively evaluate and ascertain the past, present, and future discipleship ministry of CrossLife Church.

Basic Assumptions

CrossLife Church's mission is to build lives that matter by leading people to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus. The statement is clear and provides an ample roadmap of where the church is seeking to lead people. However, the issue is what is being spoken is not being properly and effectively communicated or modeled. A survey of churches with effective discipleship ministry demonstrates pastoral leadership that has chosen to prioritize disciple making of everyday Christians with the single-minded focus on equipping.¹³ An evaluation of CrossLife Church's website, publications, and social media accounts present a single-minded focus on attending. Without a clear shift in that mentality and thinking, there will be difficulties in achieving broad, far-reaching results throughout the congregation.

Beyond the corrections needed in communication and strategy, there will need to be a dedicated emphasis on leadership development. Many churches and ministries specialize in leadership recruitment to fill vacant slots but fall short when it comes to development of leaders to achieve maximum equipping and multiplication. If the thesis is to be accomplished in the short term and maintain long term viability and stability, CrossLife Church will need to create a pipeline that will develop at least fifty new leaders each year. The most efficient way to multiply

¹³ Bobby Harrington and Josh Patrick, *The Disciple Maker's Handbook: 7 Elements of a Discipleship Lifestyle* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 184.

the impact of the ministry is through a focus on development.¹⁴ Effective discipleship ministry is achieved through the pathway of developing people who are then deployed into service and ministry.

Due to these issues, the approach taken to ascertain the effectiveness of the discipleship ministry of CrossLife Church will have to be one of investigation, implementation, and evaluation of new procedures and processes. Investigating what has taken place in the past is imperative to understanding why the discipleship ministry is in its current state. Implementing new practices is essential to properly witness something different in place of what was once there. Ultimately, evaluating the effectiveness of what was implemented is the critical step because effectiveness is the goal, and the procedures must in place must lead to true measures of growth within the ministry of CrossLife. The lack of a clear pathway to maturity is an issue many churches face. If discipleship is a spoken priority at CrossLife, then it would reason there would be a clarity of purpose to the process.¹⁵ The research journey should bring to focus just how clear the process is for CrossLife Church.

Definitions

Due to the specific context of ministry, there are terms that will be used throughout that need further clarification and definition. The definitions are as follows:

Concentric Circles – This idea was first formulated and presented by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church. The idea is each circle represents a level of commitment moving from the

¹⁴ Micah Fries and Jeremy Maxfield, *Leveling the Church: Multiplying Your Ministry by Giving it Away* (Chicago, IL: Moddy Publishers, 2020), 27.

¹⁵ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 55.

community to the crowd to the congregation to the committed to the core.¹⁶ This is the current standard used at CrossLife Church used to evaluate different ministries with the drive to see people move from the community to the core.

Discipleship – There are many current pastors, leaders, and theologians that provide definitions of discipleship. They all return to the same general premise which will be the lens through which to judge the effectiveness of discipleship at CrossLife. Biblical discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to follow Jesus and subsequently seeks to learn from Him and others how to live a life in Christ and to do what Christ did.¹⁷

Flake’s Formula – In the 1920s, Arthur Flake introduced a formula to Christendom about one hundred years ago that is credited for tremendous Sunday school growth. His methods proved effective in growing churches of all sizes.¹⁸ Flake's five basic principles were as follows: know the possibilities, enlarge the organization, provide space and equipment, enlist and train workers, and go after the people. This strategy remains the priority of the senior leadership of CrossLife Church and is still spoken about with all ministry leaders.

Lag Measure – In conjunction with the WIG, a measurement of performance based on past actions qualifies as a lag measure.¹⁹ A lag measure for CrossLife would be an average of 1,462 attenders in small group for the 2017 calendar year.

¹⁶ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 129.

¹⁷ Bill Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship: You Can't Have One without the Other* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 20.

¹⁸ Kenneth Priest, *Revitalizing the Church through Flake’s Formula* (Tigerville: Auxano Press, 2017), 6.

¹⁹ Chris McChesney, Sean Covey, and Jim Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution: How to Achieve Your Wildly Important Goals* (New York, NY: Free Press Publishing, 2012), 23.

Lead Measure – Any high impact activity, procedure, or process that directly affects the lag measure is a lead measure.²⁰ When the WIG process was implemented within the CrossLife staff, this was the focus of weekly meetings to see if a minister’s lead measures were having any impact on the overall number.

Small Groups – The examination of small groups at CrossLife will prove the model in place is the traditional Sunday School platform. To ensure that healthy small groups are the focus and goal in the research, small groups in definition are aiming to be intent on participating with Christ in building His Kingdom in individual hearts to impact one’s church, community, and world.²¹

WIG – This terminology was used to see church growth at CrossLife throughout age based small groups and is defined as a wildly important goal.²² It is a goal that carries such significant importance that all other goals are unimportant if it is not achieved.

Limitations

In the process of researching the problem presented for CrossLife Church, the first issue that will limit the study is COVID-19. On March 22, 2020, CrossLife shifted all ministry to an online format. Small groups transitioned to meeting through Zoom, FaceTime, Microsoft Teams, Skype, and even conference calls to mix reviews and participation. There are thirty-one groups for adults aged college through Senior Adults with 82% of those groups making the move to gather online. However, by June of the pandemic and in conjunction with the church reopening for worship services, the percentage of groups meeting online dropped to 47%. On Sunday, September 13, 2020, CrossLife will return to regular programming for preschool, children,

²⁰ McChesney, Covey, and Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, 25.

²¹ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 32.

²² McChesney, Covey, and Huling, *The 4 Disciplines of Execution*, 17.

students, and adult small groups along with regular worship services. As small groups return, twenty-four of the thirty-one adult groups will be meeting in a hybrid form with people in the room and people online. CrossLife, much like churches across the globe, now must account for the digital only group, the digitally transitioning, and dual citizens.²³ The challenges COVID-19 present in evaluating effectiveness of discipleship and creating a developing community will influence the research gathered and presented.

The study will also experience limitations in truthfulness and accessibility in interviews. One of the keys in the investigative process will be to speak to past Ministers of Education who gave leadership and established some of the processes and procedures still in place. However, there have been five former Ministers of Education in the last 17 years and four of those did not leave the church under pleasant circumstances. There will be difficulty in securing transparent evaluation and discussions from these gentlemen that will impede proper insight on how the existing pathway of discipleship at CrossLife was formed.

Beyond the discussions with former ministers, the interviews with current leaders and teachers will also experience limitations due to a lack of understanding. Many leaders have been trained in an accumulation and attendance mindset which will thwart the ability to ascertain true insights from them on effective discipleship since they will view their current process as healthy. There must be adequate time and attention given to education of leaders to ensure they understand what is being explored in the research and the goals that are being sought in the examination. This element of time will lead to potential delays that cannot be properly accounted for at the outset of the journey.

²³ Thom Rainer, *The Post Quarantine Church: Six Urgent Challenges + Opportunities That will Determine the Future of Your Congregation* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2020), 31.

The final limitation anticipated is the participation of small group members and attenders over the age of fifty. On the surface there appears to be a willingness and eagerness to evaluate the discipleship ministry of CrossLife from the younger generation, but for those of an older median adult or senior adult age the willingness to participate may prove to be minimum. The engagement with that audience must be approached with a nuance of truly seeking to hear them and understand them as opposed to just explaining what is going to happen. This navigation could provide challenges in the research.

Delimitations

The scope of the research and investigation will encompass adults eighteen and older. There was initial consideration given to incorporating middle school and high school students, but further analysis proved that the extenuating circumstances surrounding the context of that ministry would provide far too many variables to reach proper conclusions. By focusing in on adult ministries, the research will be allowed to engage in depth with interviews, examination, and implementation of procedures and processes for controlled groups to monitor potential improvements and growth.

While CrossLife Church has twenty-eight different ministries that focus on adults eighteen and older, the research will center on the small group ministry. This dedicated scope of study allows the research and researcher to give its attention to the only ministry that is discussed and emphasized at the same level as the worship services. Because discipleship is not a six-week program, narrowing the focus to small groups will allow a proper assessment of the actual investment being made by CrossLife in discipleship.²⁴ Most of the small groups are congregated

²⁴ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 219.

on Sunday morning, but the existence of weekday small groups provides a different sample and lens through which to view the effectiveness of CrossLife's discipleship.

The study will include both men and women and cover an average of 1300-1400 individuals based on pre-COVID-19 attendance patterns. The substantial number will offer a breadth of details and information for analysis with the hope of it enhancing implementation protocols along with the education and development of leaders.

Thesis Statement

If an effective discipleship ministry is reached, then CrossLife Church may experience greater engagement from the congregation. The drive to begin to address this issue arose when a former leader and minister at CrossLife stated that you cannot disciple people who are not here. The overall work of this thesis stands against this statement and disagrees with the sentiment believing there is a better approach than waiting for people to come to CrossLife for discipleship. The fabric of the church indicates there is a foundation for forward movement. While consistency of attendance and engagement for individuals and families has continued to decline for the last fifteen years, the church has maintained strong baptism numbers. In the last twenty-five years, CrossLife Church has seen over five thousand people baptized. The numbers speak to the church's commitment to evangelism, but also points again to the breakdown in discipleship. As models and structures are explored, the implementation of those models will seek to develop proper measurements of success. While a portion of that will include numbers, it will also rely on the spiritual growth of the individual within the discipleship community. Imperative to the church is not just an attendance growth pattern but a spiritual growth pattern that manifests itself in greater consistency of the congregation at CrossLife.

The strengthening of discipleship through the small group ministry of CrossLife Church will prove critical to this research especially in leadership development. The small group environment is a wealth of potential harvest for CrossLife Church because there are over 1,400 people weekly in attendance and out of that group many are hungry and searching for more and to be more in Christ.

In all adult small groups at CrossLife Church, there are sixteen classes poised to birth new groups that are averaging an attendance of thirty or more each week, but in its current iteration there are not enough developed leaders. Development is a part of discipleship, and CrossLife has people within its ministry poised to be developed and released into ministry throughout the church and surrounding community.²⁵ The small groups of CrossLife Church are the largest laboratory within the congregation and must be seen as the fervent and fruitful soil that it represents.²⁶ The lay leaders currently leading groups have not been properly challenged in their role and with proper care and direction have the potential to be released for extraordinary, multiplying ministry not just at CrossLife Church but throughout Oviedo, Central Florida, and the world.

²⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 162.

²⁶ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 176.

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

It is one thing to declare a need for an effective discipleship ministry, but it is another thing to understand what that is and how to accomplish it. What becomes imperative with discipleship is a return to purpose and the “why” behind it all because in doing so it brings clarity to the “how” and the “what.”²⁷ Between current writings, a survey of the Scripture, and an evaluation of past and current models, there is a pathway to the purpose of biblical discipleship that will help to frame the next steps needed to achieve true effectiveness.

Literature Review

Defining Discipleship

Discipleship is a term used with great enthusiasm within the culture of the church, but at times is not properly defined. To accurately assess just what discipleship is, it becomes imperative to understand what a disciple is. According to Breen, a disciple is simply someone who learns to be like Jesus and seeks to do the things that Jesus did.²⁸ Breen contends this step implements an intentionality of purpose in one’s life to pursue in all aspects the heart and character of Christ in what they say and the actions they take.²⁹

The argument can be made that Breen’s description is too simple due to the paramount need to inject the reality of the gospel into the conversation. Dodson stands in contrast to Breen

²⁷ Simon Sinek, *Start with the Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin Group, 2009), 51.

²⁸ Mike, Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force* (Pawley Island: 3DM, 2012), 9.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

by refusing to separate the idea of discipleship from the gospel.³⁰ For Dodson, it is not just learning to be and look like Jesus, but it is having a revelation of the gospel that propels the believer to want nothing else but Jesus.³¹ Core to Dodson's reasoning is the church today is following Jesus spiritually which manifests itself as disciples continuously living in a posture of learning, living, relating, communicating, and immersing themselves in the gospel.³² Dodson argues for a substantive change to have occurred within the life of an individual which guides them into something more.³³ Putman comes alongside the arguments of Dodson and points out that change brings an effect that centers on their head, heart, and hands as a disciple follows Christ.³⁴ Putman's contention is this change results in one committing to the mission of Christ to see people move from death to life through the power of the gospel of Christ.³⁵ What Dodson and Putman point to and should not be missed in any conversation concerning a disciple is the reality of transformative change. Geiger, Kelly, and Nation amplify this reality by acknowledging glossing over the fact that a heart change must occur for a life change to be evident is not going to direct someone to true discipleship.³⁶ Ogden stands in agreement with Geiger, Kelly, and Nation pointing towards the identifying mark of effective discipleship being substantive, accelerated transformation in Christ.³⁷

³⁰ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 28.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

³² *Ibid.*, 41.

³³ *Ibid.*, 48.

³⁴ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches that Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁶ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How Do People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 9.

³⁷ Ogden, *Transformation Discipleship*, 144.

It would reason these descriptions would lead into a proper formation of a definition of discipleship so the church could then establish a process for effective ministry. However, the review points to the attempts of man at a definition as being clouded by two aspects – over-simplification and over-complication. In terms of over-simplification, Arnold argues churches use the term discipleship due to its cultural significance but never assign true foundational meaning to what is being said.³⁸ Arnold’s writing is driven to shed a light on the overuse of the term discipleship that makes it devoid of meaning and purpose aligning it with nothing more than a traditional model of adult Sunday School.³⁹ In contrast to the over-simplification of discipleship, Donahue notes the church’s inclination to overcomplicate discipleship seeking to provide goals but allowing themselves to be lead down the paths that focus on systems, processes, and measurements rather than seeking to be more like Jesus.⁴⁰ Surratt makes Donahue’s case contending the mission of the church is a movement of making disciples of Jesus not a static process of making programs.⁴¹ Donahue further argues a focus on making disciples indicates the direction of the church centers on the character and mission of Christ as the church encourages one another to fully trust and follow Him.⁴²

With this understanding providing a framework for the defining of discipleship, it gives clarity to the lens through which the church can build an effective ministry. At its central core, Gallaty defines discipleship as one follower of Christ leading another to follow the same path to

³⁸ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 23.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁰ Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 28.

⁴¹ Chris Surratt, *Leading Small Groups: How to Gather, Launch, Lead, and Multiply Your Small Group* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2019), 19.

⁴² Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 28.

Jesus.⁴³ The definition provided by Gallaty is influenced by Bill Hull, a leader of discipleship ministry. Hull's contention is that discipleship happens the instant that one answers the calling of Christ to come and learn from Him.⁴⁴ For Hull, it is the preceding submission to live for Christ which results in a life that looks like Him and points others to Him.⁴⁵ Hull and Gallaty provide inspirational definitions that can rally people together. However, it is reasonable to question if their definitions are practical enough. Telling someone the definition of discipleship is one thing, but to lay out the practical application of that definition is another. Leaders, such as, Harrington and Patrick blend the definitions of Gallaty and Hull by arguing that discipleship is the formation of one's life around Jesus and assisting others in the same journey.⁴⁶ Each of these definitions provide an essential foundation to knowing what discipleship is. The critical step, according to Earley, is for churches to define the practice of discipleship within its context of ministry.⁴⁷

Dodson's focus on merging the gospel with discipleship places an emphasis on practice when it comes to defining discipleship. For Dodson, the work of the gospel does more than just merging the works of evangelism with the works of discipleship, but it is the internal and external aspects of a disciple which comes together rationally, relationally, and missionally under the name of Jesus.⁴⁸ Dodson acknowledges the uniqueness of this coalescence and how it accomplishes the work of Christ unlike any other program or system.⁴⁹ What becomes apparent

⁴³ Robby Gallaty, *Growing Up: How to Be a Disciple Who Makes Disciples* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), xxv.

⁴⁴ Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship*, 20.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴⁶ Harrington and Patrick, *The Disciple Maker's Handbook*, 22.

⁴⁷ Dave Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders: Transforming Your Ministry Outside the Cell Meeting* (Houston: CGR, 2006), 125.

⁴⁸ Dodson, *Gospel Center Discipleship*, 43.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

through the review is any attempt to define discipleship through a program is flawed from the start. Hull argues therefore churches mismanage their discipleship ministry because it fails to focus on the practical application of the definition and moves to create a program that is void of the heart of disciple-making.⁵⁰ The review reveals any movement to create a program almost immediately loses its focus on the person which deviates from disciple-making.

With that reality, it allows the person of Christ in the practice of discipleship to stand front and center in the revelatory process of making disciples. Arnold points out discipleship is being rooted in a relationship with Christ that is not stagnate but growing and progressing in Christ.⁵¹ Hull bolsters that opinion though the contention these truths are why discipleship is intentional in its training and accountability and built upon loving and caring relationships between one another within the church.⁵² How then does effective transformation occur based on these working definitions and practices? Geiger, Kelly, and Nation contend it occurs through the understanding that all transformation in discipleship comes not through the system of discipleship but through the centering of discipleship on the person of Christ.⁵³ Putman emphatically notes the reality of transformation and progress being core to the definition of discipleship insisting the focus must be on the gospel message of the cross and the discipleship process modeled by Christ.⁵⁴ The consensus throughout the review focuses on both transformation and obedience as the guiding principles of discipleship revealing that one cannot

⁵⁰ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 269.

⁵¹ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 23.

⁵² Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 36.

⁵³ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 10.

⁵⁴ Putman, *Real Life Discipleship*, 20.

exist without the other. Dodson continuously circles back to this basic principle arguing a disciple who has not been transformed is not truly a disciple, and a disciple who is not taking daily steps forward in their growth in Christ is not truly a disciple.⁵⁵

Effective Discipleship

For discipleship ministry to be effective there is a need for healthy leaders and healthy groups. Ogden believes the ministries most effective will be those comprised of leaders who have been discipled and can disciple others with the same purposeful intent.⁵⁶ This section will examine both aspects to gain insight into the parameters necessary to properly ascertain effectiveness.

Healthy Leaders

Maxwell teaches leadership is paramount in any situation and the church is no exception.⁵⁷ Joy and Shelton observe there is direct correlation to the rise or fall of the depth of the church's discipleship ministry based upon the men and women tasked with the responsibility to lead.⁵⁸ In support of that, Hull believes the church must understand its function of leadership to those within the body operating in a mindset and mentality of equipping others to lead.⁵⁹ Hull's mentality is if the church is to enter into its calling to make disciples then its leadership must be rooted in the foundational purpose of equipping.⁶⁰ Donahue points out what is simple to

⁵⁵ Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*, 75.

⁵⁶ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 219.

⁵⁷ John Maxwell, *The 21 Indisputable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), xi.

⁵⁸ Trevor Joy and Spence Shelton, *The People of God: Empowering the Church to Make Disciples* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014), 11.

⁵⁹ Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship*, 196.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

write and speak can face opposition due to the time needed to give oneself fully to see the fruit on the other side.⁶¹ The review's consensus points to perseverance and persistence as the key for healthy churches engaging in a ministry of equipping. Rainer acknowledges leaders who persevere see the goal of discipleship with great clarity and do not believe giving up is an option.⁶² Surratt believes when expectations are understood, it allows the church and its leaders to more evaluate effectiveness in terms of discipleship and small group ministries.⁶³

Gallaty and Swain reason if the aim of a disciple is to look like Christ, then the effective leader will look and lead like Christ.⁶⁴ Putman and Harrington observe how an examination of Scripture clearly reveals that Jesus modeled relational discipleship in many different environments.⁶⁵ Hull affirms that arguing leaders must align themselves in the way and character of Christ clothed in humility, love, confidence, effective prayer, obedience, understanding of the Holy Spirit, and fruitfulness.⁶⁶ If leaders are to best position themselves for kingdom impact, those leaders will keep the categories, espoused by Putman and Harrington: intimate discipling relationships, personal discipling relationships, social discipling relationships, and public discipling relationships in mind.⁶⁷ Each of these categories are unique and multi-faceted for a leader and the review follows a unified approach to their necessity for healthy leaders. However,

⁶¹ Donahue, *Leading Life Changing Small Groups*, 44.

⁶² Thom Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 37.

⁶³ Surratt, *Leading Small Groups*, 155.

⁶⁴ Robby Gallaty and Chris Swain, *Replicate: How to Create a Culture of Disciple-Making Right Where You Are* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020), 61.

⁶⁵ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps that Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 33.

⁶⁶ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 228.

⁶⁷ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 106-109.

Geiger, Kelly, and Nation point out these qualities are innately formed through personal spiritual growth and not necessarily taught or trained.⁶⁸ While each quality provides an ample foundation to build a ministry of discipleship rooted in wisdom and positioned for strength, Gallaty and Swain maintain it must not just be a strategy but a culture that is forged if it to reach true effectiveness.⁶⁹ Hull maintains effective discipleship ministry will not sustain itself on vagueness but on substance rooted in a covenantal community center on Christ.⁷⁰ Bonifacio points out the essence of that substance is built upon relationships.⁷¹ This is why Putman and Harrington believe it is critical for leadership traits and training to focus on specific qualifications and expectations for health that are relationally centered first in Christ and second with other believers.⁷²

Donahue believes understanding the need for effective leadership is one thing but knowing the gifts and qualifications of effective leaders is another.⁷³ Donahue's contention is all leaders have various gifts and talents that make them valuable within the fabric of the church, but those gifts do not necessarily translate into being effective group leaders.⁷⁴ Stetzer and Geiger believe the critical need is for the leaders of groups to align and identify with the strategy of the church when it comes to its small group ministry.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, many churches do not have a

⁶⁸ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 84.

⁶⁹ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 184.

⁷⁰ Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship*, 58.

⁷¹ Joey Bonifacio, *The Lego Principle: The Power of Connecting to God and One Another* (Lake Mary: Charisma Media, 2012), 8.

⁷² Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 107.

⁷³ Donahue, *Leading Life Changing Small Groups*, 44.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁵ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2014), 119.

proper strategy, or it is flawed strategy. What about these churches? This is a gap in the literature. Analysis is needed on the impact of ineffective discipleship through improper strategy and how the experience sets the church back. A lack of an effective discipleship ministry may very well be linked to improper leadership, but if that leadership is following a flawed strategy, then there are greater issues at hand. Gallaty argues the church is compelled to equip followers of Christ to carry out their ministry given by God and for that to be compatible with its disciple-making strategy if it is going to be effective.⁷⁶ However, as Gallaty and Swain note, that strategy must be aligned properly with the Scripture and communicated clearly to the church.⁷⁷ Kelly maintains the strategy must be properly communicating the pathway of discipleship tying it to one's continual walk with Christ and the reality of the progress made in becoming more like Christ in that walk.⁷⁸

One may think the gift of teaching would be a necessary qualification, but Surratt argues it is not an essential gift for an effective group leader.⁷⁹ Surratt believes what is essential is that the leader of the group be empowered and gifted to shepherd the group towards the mission, vision, and strategy set forth by the church.⁸⁰ Wilson makes the case for Surratt's reasoning being remarkably flawed and shortsighted highlighting leaders are to articulate the gospel and the implications of the gospel in the lives of others because it is the most vital element within the

⁷⁶ Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship: Making Jesus' Final Words Our First Work* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 121.

⁷⁷ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 186.

⁷⁸ Michael Kelly, *Creating a Discipleship Pathway* (Nashville: Lifeway Press, 2019), 11.

⁷⁹ Surratt, *Leading Small Groups*, 11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 11.

discipleship ministry.⁸¹ Hull agrees with Wilson contending healthy leadership is rooted in the ability to communicate the Scriptures clearly and concisely in the process of disciple making.⁸²

Donahue believes the traits of an effective leader ebb and flow in accordance with the work of the Spirit of God within their life.⁸³ However, Earley and Dempsey recognize the skills of all leaders are to be honed through continual development of the biblical, spiritual, and practical in such a way that it strengthens the group.⁸⁴ Donahue advises there are absolutes for leaders to be qualified to lead a group: a growing relationship with Christ, a recognition of the inerrancy and sufficiency of the Word of God, submission to the leadership of the church and the emotional wherewithal to steward and shepherd a group.⁸⁵ While Donahue strikes at the internal qualifications of a leader, Arnold points towards the external skills needed to be effective in the leadership of small groups guiding leaders to establish covenants, learn group dynamics, manage a consistent and purposeful schedule of meetings, ask good questions of the group, care for the group, and properly plan and prepare for the group thinking of the present and the future.⁸⁶ Putman notes, in a combination of the external and internal, healthy leaders communicate to their groups with intentionality because the leader can appropriately speak to the direction the group needs to move for individual spiritual growth.⁸⁷ Harrington and Patrick point out the reality that any qualification or traits put forth that ignore the proper methods of communication skills of the

⁸¹ Wilson, *The Gospel Driven Church*, 141.

⁸² Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 185.

⁸³ Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 44.

⁸⁴ Rod Dempsey and Dave Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg: LU Press, 2016), 68.

⁸⁵ Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 44-45.

⁸⁶ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 52.

⁸⁷ Putman, *Real Life Discipleship*, 37.

leader will lose quality and health due to the inability to customize the principles of discipleship into the context of one's ministry.⁸⁸ The literature reveals these skills and qualifications as the starting points for effective leadership.

Beyond the skills and qualifications, consistency is a necessity for effective leadership as Maxwell maintains it is the small disciplines repeated every day that bear fruit in time.⁸⁹ Earley argues the best way to foster consistent effective leadership is establishing consistent effective habits that lead to bearing fruit for the kingdom.⁹⁰ Earley is a proponent of eight habits for any leader that is striving for multiplication highlighting that they dream, pray, invite, contact, prepare, mentor, fellowship, and grow.⁹¹ Earley stands alone in this push towards building proper habits. It is alarming that so many writers give qualifications, traits, and skills but do not stress the need for leaders to practice. If the demand on every great athlete is to train continuously to build muscle memory for proper skills to be used in the game, then discipleship leaders must also be in training so the habits formed will translate into powerful action when they step in front of the group. Ferguson and Bird maintain what these habits do is empower the leader towards the goal which is multiplication.⁹² For Ferguson and Bird, the habits formed lead the leader to engage with the five-step mentality as follows: 1) I do. You watch. We talk. 2) I do. You help. We talk. 3) You do. I help. We talk. 4) You do. I watch. We talk. 5) You do. Someone else

⁸⁸ Harrington and Patrick, *The Disciple Maker's Handbook*, 37.

⁸⁹ John Maxwell, *The 15 Invaluable Laws of Growth: Live Them and Reach Your Potential* (New York: Center Street, 2012), 18.

⁹⁰ Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 113.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹² Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird, *Hero Maker: Five Essential Practices for Leaders to Multiply Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 133.

watches.⁹³ This is why Stetzer and Geiger hold to the view the only way for multiplication to occur is through healthy leaders who lead healthy groups.⁹⁴

Healthy Groups

Arnold acknowledges not all groups that gather are healthy and there must be careful attention given to differentiate between the healthy and the unhealthy.⁹⁵ Stanley and Willits argue the key to that differentiation is understanding groups are not a program and appendage but are critical to the life of the church.⁹⁶ When put into proper view, Arnold believes this reality places a premium on the church to ensure that groups are built on the qualities that are seen from the practice of Christ in Scripture.⁹⁷ Harrington and Patrick note that by looking through the lens of Scripture, it will provide the proper definition of just what a small group is in the economy of the church.⁹⁸ Hull's view through Scripture points to the defining mark of a small group being intentionality in its existence through its participation with Christ as He established His Kingdom.⁹⁹ For Arnold, the overflow of that work in the church individually and collectively is the sending out of believers to the lost world.¹⁰⁰ Hull believes the church then must examine its spoken definition of a small group and the Bible's written example of healthy groups to properly assess if the practice of small group ministry is aligned accordingly.¹⁰¹ According to Greear, this

⁹³ Ferguson and Bird, *Hero Maker*, 133-134.

⁹⁴ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 200.

⁹⁵ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 32.

⁹⁶ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2004), 13.

⁹⁷ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 32.

⁹⁸ Harrington and Patrick, *The Disciple Makers Handbook*, 64.

⁹⁹ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 247.

¹⁰⁰ Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 32.

¹⁰¹ Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor*, 67.

line of thinking begs the question for the church as to whether it is focused on seating capacity or sending capacity to properly evaluate the health of its groups.¹⁰²

Surratt points out the proper alignment for healthy groups occurs through the understanding that the program of small groups is centered on the purpose of small groups which is to make disciples.¹⁰³ Surratt acknowledges the process of making disciples does not occur accidentally but intentionally.¹⁰⁴ Putman and Harrington agree with Surratt's logic noting that understandably there are different elements and ministries within the church, but the small group ministry and its components of shepherding, teaching, and accountability are the primary vehicles to make disciples who make disciples.¹⁰⁵ Why does the church then spend time and energy on other programming? A collective look at the literature continuously directs the church towards small groups and discipleship and nothing else. Willard argues it would seem the ineffectiveness of discipleship can begin to be highlighted through cluttered church calendars focused on ensuring the programming meets the preferences making discipleship optional.¹⁰⁶ If what Putman, Harrington, and Willard assess is true, then churches and its leadership have much to decipher about what needs to be removed from its programming. For Earley, the Senior Pastor is critical to the endeavors of discipleship as he sets the direction for the church.¹⁰⁷ Putman and Harrington believe a message from pastoral leadership that drives the church to programming

¹⁰² J.D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 20.

¹⁰³ Surratt, *Leading Small Groups*, 20.

¹⁰⁴ Surratt, *Small Groups for the Rest of Us*, 39.

¹⁰⁵ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 184-191.

¹⁰⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teaching on Discipleship* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006), 4.

¹⁰⁷ Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 124.

will meet a preference-oriented people, but a message that drives people to gospel-centered relationships will lead to biblical community.¹⁰⁸ Stetzer and Geiger believe funneling people towards the relational aspect of the church requires more than announcements from the pulpit but an absolute clarity and conviction of values exhibited from all leaders of the church.¹⁰⁹ The contention of Stetzer and Geiger is if properly practiced, then the ministry never deviates from its mission and everyone is accurately equipped, informed, and empowered on what matters most for the health of the group.¹¹⁰ What Stetzer and Geiger present in contrast to Putman and Harrington is an overarching model of communication that includes multiple entities. While pastoral leadership and vision is key, Fries and Maxfield point to one of the dangers the church faces when it comes to effective discipleship is the inclination that it happens only through one person.¹¹¹ Hull sees the biblical model as one that continuously points towards the collected church moving forward in mission and not just a single individual.¹¹² Bonifacio comes alongside this contention arguing discipleship is the one-word purpose of the entire church.¹¹³ Fries and Maxfield point to the reality that pastors and church leaders must begin to take a team-oriented approach if healthy groups are to be formed.¹¹⁴

Gallaty and Swain propose relationships are the key in any small group or discipleship ministry.¹¹⁵ Dodson acknowledges relationships are where people can come together and ask

¹⁰⁸ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 218.

¹⁰⁹ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 143.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 143-144.

¹¹¹ Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 27.

¹¹² Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 191.

¹¹³ Bonifacio, *The Lego Principle*, 19.

¹¹⁴ Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 28.

¹¹⁵ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 233.

questions, share stories of their lives, engage in true confession, and be encouraged in the faith.¹¹⁶ Dodson's deduction of the Scripture is this is the way Jesus made disciples and through that relational process trust can be built.¹¹⁷ However, Hull is quick to conclude the process will not happen by accident but occurs through intentional planning, purposeful praying, and personal sacrifice.¹¹⁸ Putman and Harrington argue this type of planning and preparation goes deeper than taking attendance as they contend it is not the largest groups that are the healthiest but the closest groups where health can be seen.¹¹⁹ Dodson deduces deep relationships are formed through intentional investment exhibited by the leader which is then imitated by the group leading to health and effectiveness.¹²⁰ One of the things that becomes evident through the examination of the literature is the lack of accountability within small group ministry on the issue of relationships. Groups are held accountable for when they meet for teaching, what they are teaching, and who is attending. However, there is no discussion on what groups are doing beyond the regular meeting time to form relationships and grow deeper together. This is a shortcoming in the literature and there is a need to explore further to properly analyze the need for biblical community through the development of healthy relationships in Christ.

With the relational aspect driving the foundation of healthy groups, the natural next step is determining the type of group that is most effective. Earley cautions the decision is not that simple because it requires an understanding of the context of the church body and a proper look through the lens of the history of the church.¹²¹ Should the group be ten to twelve or three to

¹¹⁶ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 144.

¹¹⁷ Harrington and Patrick. *The Disciple Maker's Handbook*, 64.

¹¹⁸ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 247.

¹¹⁹ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 186.

¹²⁰ Dodson, *Gospel Centered Discipleship*, 144.

¹²¹ Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 125.

four? Hull is an advocate for the slightly larger setting of ten to twelve with the driving purpose being one of inviting others in to join in a lifestyle that honors Christ.¹²² Gallaty's recommended model deviates from that of Hull with a focus on three to four shifting away from a traditional Sunday School style lecture structure into one with more intimacy to provide an atmosphere of accountability.¹²³ What becomes apparent the further into the literature and Surratt points out specifically is there are tradeoffs with any model selected by a church.¹²⁴ Surratt advises any small group or discipleship ministry must ensure the groups align with the pastoral leadership and vision so the approach taken fits the church.¹²⁵ There is room for further research in this area as there is a gap of actual data to demonstrate the different approaches churches have taken and the measurement of growth that has occurred.

How then is one to measure success or health of a group? The unified voice of the literature points to multiplication as the measurement. Earley contends groups that are healthy increase in numbers just as healthy plants increase in the output of their fruit.¹²⁶ However, the literature is clear that multiplication is more than just the numbers of those attending. Dempsey and Earley give clarity to this point noting it also encompasses a multiplication of leaders who then move to form new groups from the existing groups and the process continues to unfold in a growth pattern that is bearing fruit that remains.¹²⁷ The literature amplifies the reality of effective discipleship occurring through healthy leaders and healthy groups resulting in multiplication.

¹²² Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church*, 247-248.

¹²³ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 37.

¹²⁴ Surratt, *Leading Small Groups*, 47.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹²⁶ Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 24.

¹²⁷ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 112.

Implementation of Discipleship

It is not enough to just obtain information on what the effectiveness of discipleship looks like. Gallaty and Swain highlight there must be a strategy implemented to take the information and see hopeful transformation within the context of the local church.¹²⁸ Fries and Maxfield's contention is the most effective implementation is rooted in Scripture, reliant on the Holy Spirit, and built upon the gospel.¹²⁹

Comiskey brings to the forefront of the discussion the church's purpose on planet earth is to reflect the glory of God through His perfect triune nature.¹³⁰ For Comiskey that reflection occurs through the engagement in community within the local church as people come together for more than just interaction but for investment in Christ and one another for the sake of the gospel.¹³¹ The literature reveals the delicate nature of implementation. Earley speaks into this delicate nature urging the leadership of the church to understand the preexisting values and structures that have been the fabric of the church from its infancy.¹³² Earley's estimation is every church has a context and to throw away and disregard those constructs and contexts will disrupt the implementation of discipleship and thwart the forward progress into the fullness of what God is seeking it to be.¹³³ The literature provides clarity to understand the development and implementation process cannot be entered into flippantly but rather under great prayer and sensitivity to the Spirit's leading.

¹²⁸ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 190.

¹²⁹ Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 172.

¹³⁰ Joel Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church: New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church* (Moreno Valley: CCS Publishing, 2016), 160.

¹³¹ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church*, 160.

¹³² Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 125.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 125.

Dodson champions the thinking that of utmost importance for the church leaders is the communication to the overall body.¹³⁴ Dodson is adamant in his writing that discipleship must be spoken of in such a way that groups are not just a part of the church, but that groups are the root of the church resulting in everyone in the church knowing what they are and how they work.¹³⁵ Stetzer and Geiger point to leaders as being critical in the implementation because the church will look to them to gauge their vision, understand their mission, and ultimately buy-in to the journey.¹³⁶ The more the review is unpacked, the more it crystalizes if the leader cannot effectively communicate where they are going then nobody will follow.

While lay leadership and its development is essential for implementation, Putman and Harrington maintain pastoral and ministerial leadership in the church will have to lead the way.¹³⁷ Putman and Harrington point towards the critical aspect of ministry leaders needing to accomplish the following: develop a biblical vision, create a common language, develop the disciple making process, live out the vision, assess, correct, and encourage.¹³⁸ By Gallaty and Swain's estimation if there is no true process for growing people up in Christ, then it will point rather strikingly towards the issues at hand.¹³⁹ As Putman and Harrington painted a broad brush for ministry to begin the implementation process, Gallaty and Swain speak more practically exhorting leaders to define the actual reality of their current context, determine a destination of where the church would like to go, and allow the leaders to properly develop a plan for how to

¹³⁴ Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 145.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 145-146.

¹³⁶ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 70.

¹³⁷ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleship*, 216.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 191.

get there.¹⁴⁰ Putman maintains intentionality of the leader is how to move through the process.¹⁴¹ In Putman's evaluation if a leader cannot effectively assess and evaluate all aspects of the ministry, then they will be unable to create the relational environment necessary for true discipleship growth.¹⁴² Gallaty and Swain speak continuously to the leader needing to understand the discipleship process, but Hull is contrasted to that thinking pointing leaders to needing to live the discipleship process.¹⁴³ Hull's belief is implementation happens best through imitation.¹⁴⁴ What is lacking in the overall literature is a call to pastoral and ministerial leadership to move beyond communicating the vision to practicing the vision as an example for others.

Stetzer and Geiger note the accumulation of past and present information coupled with intentionality will not lead to immediate results.¹⁴⁵ In Stetzer and Geiger's estimation integration and implementation will take time in any local church when it comes to discipleship.¹⁴⁶ Dempsey and Earley point out people have preferences and many times those preferences manifest themselves in programs that on the surface give the appearance of being untouchable.¹⁴⁷ Dempsey and Earley believe when programs are held up against the lens of discipleship, it provides opportunities for adjustments, reorganizations, and outright cancellations of programs that fail to accomplish the purpose.¹⁴⁸ The commonality amongst all the researchers, writers, and

¹⁴⁰ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 190-191.

¹⁴¹ Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 37.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁴³ Hull, *The Disciple Making Church*, 143.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹⁴⁵ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformation Groups*, 97.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹⁴⁷ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 181.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

thinkers on discipleship is the need for churches to transition to a church that “is” small groups instead of a church “with” small groups. Harrington and Patrick highlight that process must begin with the Senior Pastor and funnel its way down.¹⁴⁹ Dempsey and Earley maintain the need for churches to move to nothing more than celebration and cells de-emphasizing and minimizing any other ministries.¹⁵⁰ What is lacking in their assessment is the roadmap for the pastor and leadership to follow. Cancellations in church culture are difficult and often met with opposition and hostility. The literature encourages the pastor to press on but fails to direct the pastor on the best way to navigate. The literature is clear that the implementation of an effective discipleship ministry will take time and require patience and perseverance. Ogden argues it will also require vision for a visionary will see the benefit and possibilities of multiplication that transpire only through discipleship.¹⁵¹ Gallaty and Swain argue the question remains for churches and its leadership if it is willing to invest the time necessary for true change.¹⁵²

Hull continues to be a leading voice to churches in the area of discipleship implementation with the constant charge being that ministers and churches need a plan of principles in place and then to begin to apply those principles to reach the desired destination.¹⁵³ Hull’s encouragement is fine, but it also points to a large gap in the overall review of the literature. While the writers on discipleship and small groups give great principles and provide solid models to implement, what they fail to present is just what the transition and practical implementation of small groups looks like for the traditional church. For instance, in many large

¹⁴⁹ Harrington and Patrick, *The Disciple Makers Handbook*, 183.

¹⁵⁰ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 181-182.

¹⁵¹ Ogden, *Transformational Discipleship*, 181.

¹⁵² Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 184.

¹⁵³ Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, 270.

Southern Baptist Churches with tenured Senior Pastors the model for small groups and discipleship is fashioned under Flake's Formula for Sunday School growth. In 1920, Arthur Flake formulized a plan under the acronym of "Keep...Go!" that would provide a strategy for small group ministry still implemented today. Flake's Formula centered on a five-step emphasis as follows: Know the possibilities, Enlarge the organization, Enlist and train leaders, Provide space, and Go after people.¹⁵⁴ Is that formula antiquated and unable to mesh with the models and thinking of the modern church? Can Flake's formula be used for implementation of a discipleship ministry that engages the current culture? Was Flake's formula flawed from the beginning or is there relevance today? These are unanswered and unexplored questions in the literature that would provide even greater insight to understanding implementation.

Measuring Success of Discipleship

With a proper definition given to discipleship, a firm grasp on the effectiveness of discipleship in lieu of the health of the leaders and the groups, and a strategy of implementation, Gallaty believes the critical issue for any church is the measurement of success.¹⁵⁵ Are the plans being implemented and the journey the church is traveling bearing fruit that remains?

Breen acknowledges churches will never be accused of not counting things.¹⁵⁶ Breen analyzes whether it is attendance, buildings, or cash, the primary avenue of measuring success has come through the valuation given to one or all three barometers.¹⁵⁷ Breen argues the issue comes though when holding up what is currently being counted to the reality that Jesus counted

¹⁵⁴ Priest, *Revitalizing the Church*, 1.

¹⁵⁵ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 116.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 116.

disciples and not attendance, buildings, or cash.¹⁵⁸ Fries and Maxfield's contention is consideration must be given to the measurement of effectiveness long before success can be declared.¹⁵⁹ The question becomes – What is the win? For Fries and Maxfield the answer is complex but ultimately it is not seeing more people in the church but the multiplication of those in the church for actual ministry.¹⁶⁰ Every church will want to gauge what they are doing by people in the pews, but Geiger, Kelly, and Nation note consensus is growing that the greater measurement is not people in pews but people in service and ministry to others for the sake of the gospel.¹⁶¹

When it comes specifically to the discipleship or small group ministry, Stetzer and Geiger assess understanding that the mission of the church and its health will be determined by the depth of the disciples made changes the discourse on just what is going to be counted.¹⁶² Donahue is helpful to differentiate between the quantitative and qualitative measurements. For Donahue, quantitative measuring highlights the numbers of groups and group members, the times the group is meeting, and how it fits within the mission.¹⁶³ Donahue espouses qualitative measuring focuses on the feel of the group, the community being developed, and the deepening of the bond between one another in the group.¹⁶⁴ In Donahue's assessment churches are driven by the quantitative measurements because it is tangible and can be visibly seen.¹⁶⁵ However, Donahue

¹⁵⁸ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 116.

¹⁵⁹ Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 31.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁶¹ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 33.

¹⁶² Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 18.

¹⁶³ Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 142.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 142.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 143.

argues the qualitative measurement goes much deeper than counting heads and forces the church to evaluate the heart and actual steps people are taking in their personal walks with Christ.¹⁶⁶

Donahue gives proper guidance for what to measure but does not speak on how to effectively accomplish it. Geiger, Kelly, and Nation stand in contrast to his work through understanding the purpose of discipleship is transformation.¹⁶⁷ Gallaty and Swain stand in agreement arguing if the discipleship ministry of the church is not leading to any transformative action from the people in the church, then people are just obtaining information without obedience resulting in failure of discipleship ministry.¹⁶⁸ Putman contends true transformation through discipleship will manifest itself in a lifestyle of behavior that will answer the needs of the church.¹⁶⁹ Putman's estimation is if the church was practicing discipleship in an effective and purposeful way, then the church's need for leaders would be met through the emergence and development of new leaders.¹⁷⁰ The church seeks many different avenues to find the answer to its problems, but Putman argues the answer lies within the effectiveness of its discipleship ministry as the venue through which success is achieved and needs are met.¹⁷¹

Fries and Maxfield maintain the deployment of more people into ministry indicates the discipleship ministry of the church is accomplishing the goal of reproduction.¹⁷² Hull believes reproduction happens as current leaders invest and demonstrate what it means to be a follower of

¹⁶⁶ Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 144.

¹⁶⁷ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 220.

¹⁶⁸ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 212.

¹⁶⁹ Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship*, 23.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁷² Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 27.

Christ leading those who are following them to imitate what they are witnessing resulting in successful multiplication.¹⁷³ Putman and Harrington acknowledge as leaders stand back and evaluate, the journey to reach success occurred with a shift from seeking to attract to seeking to develop.¹⁷⁴ Fries and Maxfield amplify that deduction assessing the more people are developed the more people can be deployed and that deployment furthers the effectiveness of discipleship allowing the church to remain on mission.¹⁷⁵ Dempsey and Earley stand in agreement in their contention of the ultimate mark of success for any small group or discipleship ministry is the ability to grow the group in both the numbers attending and the depth of spiritual growth occurring as new leaders are developed.¹⁷⁶ Surratt prescribes it requires strong leadership, sensitivity to the Spirit, and an understanding of biblical community that aligns with the mission knowing the only way to make room for more people is by multiplying groups for them to be able to join.¹⁷⁷ Putman and Harrington contend success is not hard to measure, but to achieve that success requires determination and perseverance amongst leaders to keep the purpose in view at all times.¹⁷⁸

Do numbers matter? This is the question and the struggle for traditional churches who have never done anything but base decisions on numbers. Hull assesses while numbers are not the ultimate measurement, they provide an indication on if the vision of discipleship for the

¹⁷³ Hull, *Disciple-Making Church*, 143.

¹⁷⁴ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 202-203.

¹⁷⁵ Fries and Maxfield, *Leveling the Church*, 29.

¹⁷⁶ Dempsey and Early, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 180.

¹⁷⁷ Surratt, *Leading Small Groups*, 138.

¹⁷⁸ Putman and Harrington, *DiscipleShift*, 114.

church is penetrating the hearts of the people.¹⁷⁹ By Hull's estimation, if the people are living out their calling as disciples outside the walls of the church due to the investment of discipleship inside the walls of the church, then reproduction will happen.¹⁸⁰ The literature provides the comprehensive picture that when multiplication is occurring, it signifies the church is meeting the mark in its mission and achieving success.

Theological Foundations

Old Testament Survey

The term "discipleship" is never used in the Old Testament. However, the idea is engrained in the fabric of creation from the very beginning. This is seen most abundantly through the Triune nature of God. Genesis records, "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground" (Genesis 1:26). While there are a variety of positions and interpretations concerning the passage, traditional contention points to divine plurality. The early readers could not have understood this in a trinitarian form, but one can derive from the passage a plurality of unity within the Godhead.¹⁸¹ God, the Creator, is not isolated to individualist isolation, but He is dwelling in perfect unity and community through His Triune nature thus providing an example of the measure of biblical community and discipleship in which the church is to function.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Hull, *Disciple-Making Pastor*, 312.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 312.

¹⁸¹ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, The New American Commentary Vol. 1a (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1996), 163.

¹⁸² Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell Based Church*, 43.

Discipleship is seen perfected by Christ through His initiation of the church, but it was created by God and modeled in His very nature.

Beyond the Trinity, the Old Testament provides a pathway of discipleship seen by the handing down of faith through the avenues of families, relationships, and communities. The nature of the terminology of the church being the “family of God” in connection to discipleship plays a pertinent role in how the church is to move in structure and form. Jesus’ vision for the life of the church was that there would be true Christ-centered community that would be built. The church was never meant to be a place where one attends but to be a family to which one belongs. This way of thinking finds its roots in Old Testament pattern and example of legacies of faith being passed from generation to generation. The command of God is clear in pointing to a parent’s highest priority to be that of helping their children come to know, trust, and follow Him.¹⁸³ Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is recalled by Christ in Matthew 22 and serves as the foundation for an understanding of discipleship as it relates to the family. The command to love the Lord was to not just be on the heart of the individual, but it was to move from there to the family in the home and to the public sector in obedience to God.¹⁸⁴ The pattern of discipleship commanded in the Old Testament to families provides the foundation for the modern church in discipleship today.

There are different relationships recorded in the Old Testament that provided a model of discipleship. The relationship between Naomi and Ruth is powerful depiction of the relational aspect of discipleship. In Ruth 1:15-18, Naomi offers an emphatic statement, “Look” (v. 15), seeking to convince Ruth to return to Moab following the death of Naomi’s son, her husband.

¹⁸³ Matt Chandler, *Family Discipleship: Leading Your Home Through Time, Moments, and Milestones* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 47.

¹⁸⁴ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 137.

What follows is the first recorded dialogue from Ruth with her own emphatic demand that Naomi not urge her to return anymore. Significant in this exchange is Naomi urged Ruth to return as to her god, and yet in Ruth's rebuttal she stakes the seriousness of her commitment with an oath to Yahweh in verse seventeen. What is seen is a commitment of life change from Ruth to turn from her past and toward the one true God.¹⁸⁵ Ultimately, Ruth invokes the name of Yahweh due to the relationship formed with Naomi as she handed down her faith to Ruth. The essence of discipleship is formed through the relational model presented in the book of Ruth.

While the specific details of small group community, in the modern sense, are not discussed in the Old Testament, the idea of a community of faith is seen in the ways the people of Israel traversed in their lives. The most poignant passage where faith community principles are espoused would be in Exodus 18:17-21 in Jethro confrontation with Moses. Jethro's challenge is what the church today must understand when it comes to discipleship and the reality of it being a shared ministry where everyone has a part to play.¹⁸⁶ Healthy communities of faith are those undergirded with a shared mentality of true biblical discipleship as depicted in Scripture.

The Example of Jesus

The discipleship ministry of Jesus occurred within the invitations He gave to "come and see," "come and follow me," "come and be with me," and "remain in me."¹⁸⁷ John records, "Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, 'What do you want?' They said, 'Rabbi'

¹⁸⁵ Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *The Book of Ruth*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1998), 120.

¹⁸⁶ Tony Merida, *Exodus*, Christ Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 115.

¹⁸⁷ Hull, *Conversion and Discipleship*, 149.

(which means “Teacher”), ‘where are you staying?’ ‘Come,’ he replied, ‘and you will see’” (John 1:38-39). The response from Jesus to the disciples was simple yet powerful. It was in the invitation to “come and see” that the men began an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁸ Jesus understood the need for His followers to have their eyes opened to who He truly is to be able to properly follow Him and lead others to the same walk. Effective discipleship points others to this same step. In the beginning, the eyes of the disciples witnessed the miracles of Jesus, experienced a whole novel approach to life, grew in discernment and in doing so grew in their faith.¹⁸⁹ Jesus modeled for the church the priority of the revelatory power of Christ impact people’s vision to see a need for growth in Him.

The next step Jesus presented through His life and example was the invitation to “come and follow me.” Mark records of Christ’s interaction with the disciples, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” At once they left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:18-19). In this statement, Jesus offers an invitation but not a responsibility.¹⁹⁰ The most effective ministries of discipleship do not propagate what a person will need to do, but instead point to what Jesus does and will do if one will simply answer the call to follow Him. The rabbis of that day would be sought out by the student who would then give allegiance to the Law and not the teacher. The call of Christ to discipleship is presented far differently for it is Jesus who seeks out the student with the student placing their allegiance in Him.¹⁹¹ The call is also unique in its form as it reaches back to the Old Testament, specifically

¹⁸⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 155.

¹⁸⁹ Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 53.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁹¹ Danny Akin, *Mark*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 20.

Genesis 12:1-4, and the pattern of God's calling of humans by offering a command with a promise which is followed by obedience.¹⁹² What occurred for the disciples was life-altering and effective discipleship in the modern church must adhere to the model set forth by Jesus.

In Jesus' invitation to "come and be with me," the demands of discipleship move from mere knowledge to practical investment in the life of the followers. Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Matthew 9:37-38). The placement of the word "therefore" in verse 18 points to the demand for action and the reality that is imperative for disciples of Jesus to not only believe but to act on that belief.¹⁹³ The disciple who labors for Christ must do so knowing what is true, persevering in the task at hand, and placing complete trust in the Lord for the harvest.¹⁹⁴ Effective discipleship is active as it has come to Jesus to be with Him and walk out that commitment in Him.

To be a disciple of Jesus is practice and participate in the disciplines of Jesus.¹⁹⁵ Christ serves as the ultimate example of a disciple maker and offers the roadmap to lead people into effective discipleship for their spiritual health and growth. Jesus operated in an environment of intentionality and accountability that is foundational for effective disciple-making and seen through his interaction with the first disciples. The relationship between Peter and Jesus is one of the more beautiful pictures of just how this plays out in a community of faith. Jesus went from affirming Peter to rebuking Peter in Mark 8, predicted Peter would deny Him in Matthew 26, and

¹⁹² David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 70.

¹⁹³ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2004), 348.

¹⁹⁴ Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker*, 167.

¹⁹⁵ Dempsey and Earley, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 26.

then redeems and reinstates Peter to ministry in John 21. All of that occurred within the realm of a discipling community and is the example the church should follow. Disciples are not made without accountability and there is no accountability without a proper structure to foster breakthroughs of transformational life change.¹⁹⁶ An effective culture of discipleship is centered on the Savior for it is through Him where true intentionality and accountability will flourish and thus bear the fruit of health.

The fruit that comes from the disciple happens in a response to Jesus' invitation to "remain in me." Jesus said, "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:7-8). Remain or abiding in Jesus results in the life and word of Jesus marinating and permeating every aspect of the disciple.¹⁹⁷ It is important to understand that discipleship without multiplication is not discipleship, but it is simply informed lecturing that leads to more information and little transformation. Multiplication does not simply occur by happenstance, but it takes place through the intentional discipleship of the believers in Christ for the sake of the gospel and the advancement of the church to the glory of God. Effective discipleship is that which remains in Christ to bear much fruit for Christ to see God glorified in all things.

In John 11, Jesus performs the miracle of raising His friend Lazarus from the dead. While the miracle is amazing, it also provides a view into the missional approach modeled by Christ. Through the four Gospels, Jesus was seeking households willing to commit to the message of the

¹⁹⁶ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 241.

¹⁹⁷ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12-21*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2002), 145.

kingdom of God that would reverberate from those homes into the surrounding communities. Another way Jesus' example leads us into healthy small groups is through the missional approach.¹⁹⁸ Jesus never deviated from His mission. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were a key household in this approach as He even stated on the passing of Lazarus, "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it" (John 11:4). The story of John 11 is not Lazarus but Jesus. The household Jesus would enter on that day accomplished His ultimate mission and the mission of discipleship to lead others to reflect on Christ and wonder at His truth and glory.¹⁹⁹ This example is imperative for churches to follow to ensure the path being walked is one towards biblical health. Christ provided a model and structure for effective discipleship, but beyond that He provided a strategy for every believer and church to follow. It would be easy to read the Great Commission and apply it to individualistic efforts, but the Great Commission is the model upon which churches are to operate to fulfill the mission of the church to the glory of God.

The Great Commission

The critical passage that compels the church towards discipleship is found in Matthew's Gospel where he writes:

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, 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 (Matthew 28:18-20).

This is where it begins and ends for the church. The exploratory journey many churches take to ascertain the will of God for their lives is futile for Christ clearly and powerfully declares that will for all believers. The passage couples the authority of Jesus with a personal invitation to

¹⁹⁸ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell Based Church*, 81.

¹⁹⁹ Gary M. Burge, *John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 324.

discipleship.²⁰⁰ What occurs in the moment is not just simply a command, but it is the revelation of the heart of Christ with the specific method and plan by which God would rescue the world from the death of its sin.

The core practices that are central to the call is that the church must go, tell, baptize, and teach. These cannot be done in isolation of the other for true discipleship to occur because they are not mutually exclusive of the other. The starting point is the call to go. Because Jesus was who he was and had the authority he had, the commission to the early believers was to go and that call was not one based on cultural nuances that would have been taken lightly. The command of Christ was not one seeking to secure nominal belief but one of wholehearted commitment.²⁰¹ The disciples at this time would understand the reality of entering a one-on-one relationship with Christ and thus the command to go would be obeyed because the only measure they knew to undertake was to follow Jesus wherever He led. Going is paramount when it comes to discipleship because it was the implicit command of Christ as He knew everyone would be going somewhere and sought to undergird that movement with a purpose far greater than just simply reaching a destination point.

The second aspect of the passage is that of making disciples or simply telling and proclaiming the gospel. One must note that the practice of evangelism seen in this command is not separated from discipleship but tied to it. When people are told the good news of the gospel, hear it in its fullness, and respond to its power, the church is to not just celebrate the response but engage the responder and make disciples. The preaching of the gospel should result in making disciples.²⁰² One cannot miss this reality for while the term Christian is used ad nauseum within

²⁰⁰ Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 947.

²⁰¹ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746.

²⁰² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 5.

church culture, Jesus was not interested in making Christians but was all about making disciples. A study of the word disciple shows that within the New Testament the term is used 269 times. This indicates that when one goes and follows it by telling the news of the gospel there is more to come. Christ in His saving work is seeking to see disciples made to continue the mission He has given to the church.

The third aspect of the Great Commission that must be put into practice is baptizing. When one believes and confesses Jesus as Lord, it is not the end just because they have responded. The next step is baptism. Baptism symbolizes an identification with Christ making it essential in what it means to truly be a disciple of Christ.²⁰³ To be baptized is to show the Word to the watching world and it is paramount for this step to be included in the command of making disciples for it is part of what Christ intended for His church. However, baptism is not the end, but it is just the beginning.

Teaching and training are essential for discipleship for it is how disciples make disciples who make disciples. The heart of a disciple is formed through the teaching of Christ's commands and obedience to follow those commands.²⁰⁴ Believers must understand God's Word to fully immerse itself in multiplication. The teaching and training of others comes through the saturation of one's life with God's Word and allowing it to marinate on the heart of the believer so that what it passes on to others is not simply information but a revelation of the teachings and commands of Christ that point to just what it means to take up one's cross and follow Him. It is critical to see the passage is not exhorting the believer to simply acquire knowledge but for a

²⁰³ David Platt, *Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2013), 375.

²⁰⁴ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 433.

believer to conform their lives to the teachings of Christ.²⁰⁵ The revelation the disciple receives from the Word of God brings about transformation in the heart of the disciple which propel them into the fullness of the command of Christ to make disciples.

New Testament Survey

Christ Great Commission was the principle that anchored the New Testament church and its discipleship. It must be noted how that command and commission led the church to sacrificial living and to look beyond itself and to the man's need for the gospel. The book of Acts is a continuous narrative on the triumph of the gospel due to man's obedience to the Great Commission. Christ's final words were the first work of the church in all things and speaks powerfully to the church today. The thread throughout the book of Acts is renewal and the disciples sent out to set a pattern of faithful discipleship and biblical commitment to Christ and His church.²⁰⁶ The picture of discipleship in Acts is one constantly embedded with sacrifice.

The sacrifice came because the church believed the words of Jesus and heeded His call and commissioning on their lives. The Great Commission was the foundational principle that guided every aspect of the church of the New Testament, and it was the center piece of the Holy Spirit that ran through its every work and the ultimate movement forward of its mission to the glory of God.

The best discipleship practice of the New Testament church is seen in Acts 11 and the model given to the church of Antioch through the practice of accountability and encouragement. For discipleship to work there must be an accountable end to the relationship that is seasoned with encouragement as the brother or sister move towards growth and maturity in Christ. This

²⁰⁵ Wilkins, *Matthew*, 956.

²⁰⁶ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, The New American Commentary vol. 26 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 1992), 71.

was the role Barnabas played in the life of the Antioch church. The power of the Spirit was on display in Antioch and lives were being transformed by the gospel which led the church to send Barnabas. Luke records of his visit, “News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts. He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith, and a great number of people were brought to the Lord” (Acts 11:22-24). Barnabas arrived on the scene not to force the people to be like him but to encourage the people to remain true to what Christ had done in their lives and to hold them accountable to the instruction given in God’s Word. True disciple makers, like Barnabas, spur others on in the faith to be all that God is seeking them to be in His name.²⁰⁷ This must be the measure for which every church pursues discipleship as it seeks to grow into the fullness of what God is seeking for His church.

The apostle Paul comes out of the narrative of Acts to provide churches of that day exhortation in discipleship that remains powerful and practical for the church today. Ephesians 4:1-16 paints a descriptive picture of the healthy church and in doing so provides a prescriptive road for the church to follow in seeking to be sure it is intentional and effective in its discipling of the saints. Effective disciples are about health and the church that is healthy bears evidence of that throughout the body of Christ.²⁰⁸ The healthy body is what Paul presents to the church in Ephesus and thus demonstrates just what is needed to reach that measure of health. The healthy church as presented by Paul in Ephesians is united, diverse, and mature and the only way forward to those elements is through true Christ-centered, gospel-exalting discipleship.

²⁰⁷ Tony Merida, *Acts, Christ-Centered Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2017), 161.

²⁰⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 211.

In Ephesians 4:1-6, Paul describes a healthy church as a united church. It is not united under the preference of worship, the style of building, the personality of the pastor, or the friends that attend, but the church is united under the name of Jesus Christ. This understanding comes through proper discipleship because when one is discipled in the Word of God then one understands that this life is not about the glory of man but about the glory of God in Christ and those who come around that truth gather in worship seeing Christ and not their personal preferences. The goal within an effective culture of discipleship is equipping the body to reach the place of unity and spiritual maturity.²⁰⁹ When church leaders take a proper view of this role then what takes place in ministry is not a uniting around the leaders' personality but instead a uniting around the person of Christ, who is only one that can truly unify. When unity is reached, the body of Christ carries His identity throughout its community and moves with purpose in the goal of the church.²¹⁰ It is in that unity that the diversity of the church can truly be amplified to the glory of God.

In Ephesians 4:7-12, Paul continues to the church in Ephesus speaking about diversity in the church. The diversity of the church brings unity as the body of Christ with its diverse and unique giftings and callings can carry the church forward in effective discipleship.²¹¹ The ground is level at the foot of the cross meaning all may come, but all who came are not the same and so it is necessary for the church to not seek to create duplicates but to create disciples. The diversity of the church can only be properly approached through the lens of discipleship because it is in those diverse roles that people of divergent backgrounds come together in pursuit of the same

²⁰⁹ Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 129.

²¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* (Minneapolis: Fort Press, 2000), 221.

²¹¹ Tony Merida, *Ephesians*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 97.

goal which is to become more like Christ. You cannot do proper discipleship without the church and a church cannot function as it was intended without engaging in discipleship.²¹² The only true way to wade through the waters of diversity is to properly disciple people through the reality that is our uniqueness. The cross of Christ and the sacrifice of Jesus covered all of humanity and thus we are joined in Christ no matter who we are if we have confessed and professed Him as Lord. It is this reality that leads a healthy church to not seek its desired preference but instead His divine presence. It is in the seeking of His presence that a healthy church then moves towards maturity.

Paul concludes in Ephesians 4:13-16 pointing the church to maturity. Discipleship is about growth. Nobody is truly disciplined and remains in infancy when the church properly centers its focus on making disciples. This reality means that the healthy church is a mature church not because of the efforts of man but because of the equipping and empowering of the Spirit that is leading and guiding the church into a deeper relationship with God.

The goal of discipleship is health, and the health of the church is measured by its unity, diversity, and maturity and one cannot end in those places without true discipleship. The church is faced then with the momentous task of examining its system and processes to determine if the goals and plans that have been set out before its people are properly leading them into a deeper, growing relationship with Christ or just leading them to become more frequent in their attendance and giving.

Another key New Testament passage on effective discipleship is Paul's charge to Timothy and the idea of what the church is called to do as it extends itself beyond its small circle and to truly multiply in the name of Christ. Paul writes, "You then, my son, be strong in the

²¹² Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 52.

grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:1-2). Paul understood what the church must understand and that is discipleship is not measured in the way the one who is disciplined personally grows but, in the way, the one who is disciplined goes out and makes disciples who then make more disciples in a continuous circle of multiplying growth. The church has a responsibility to steward the Word of God in such a manner that what is partaken in Christ is distributed to others in mission and purpose for Christ.²¹³ This passage leads the reader to ask the right questions about the process in which they are involved in personally and the process through which they are leading others towards true biblical discipleship.

Theoretical Foundations

Wesley Society/Class/Band Model

John Wesley is most known in today’s church culture as the founder of the Methodist denomination. His name is linked to the Methodist practice and doctrine much like John Calvin is with Calvinism. While Wesley’s contribution to the founding of the Methodist church cannot be minimized, he provided a picture and model of discipleship and the way a church should implement that model that would serve the church of today to revisit in its current context. Wesley stands along in history post-reformation when it comes to discipleship and development.²¹⁴ The span of Wesley’s life left the church with a model and pattern of discipleship that if implemented today would revive the lifeless spirituality that weighs down the mission.

²¹³ David Platt, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2014), 161.

²¹⁴ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 102.

Wesley's model of discipleship can be broken down into a model that is formed in three areas – Society, Class, and Band. Working from the outside in, the society comprised of all Methodists within a local area and could be best summed up as the congregation of a church. Cognitive instruction was the goal in a society used to reach a larger target audience.²¹⁵ Wesley's idea in the society was for the mass of people to receive the doctrine of what the Methodist was about and stood for in relation to God's Word. One can see the proliferation of this method across denominational lines as there are churches gathering their congregations of 15-5,000 across the globe to take part in a worship service set apart for the cognitive instruction and teaching of God's Word and how it relates to the context and the circumstances of the congregation that has gathered to receive that word of instruction. The first society was formed August 24, 1730, and consisted of Wesley, his brother Charles, and George Whitfield and would earn the nickname of "Holy Club" before being called Methodists.²¹⁶ Due to the bold preaching and fearless pursuit of the power of the Holy Spirit, the Methodist societies would grow. Core to Wesley's ideals for the societies was the principle of holiness. With dominant characteristics of organization and discipline, Wesley desired societies comprised of all those of consistent holy living.²¹⁷ From that place, the Methodist societies of Wesley would have to go further to achieve the goal and vision he ascribed to for the church.

The class meetings of the Methodist church are viewed as the most influential in church history and Wesley's signature contribution to small group and discipleship ministry within the

²¹⁵ D. Michael Anderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 82.

²¹⁶ James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Warner Press, 2007), 89.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

church.²¹⁸ The foundation of the class meeting was its inclusive nature that did not segregate based on age, sex, or level of spirituality, but instead was driven to weave together different classes of people from different walks of life who could help others to come to know Christ better and in a more personal way. Class meetings were comprised of discussions centered on deep personal experience as opposed to doctrine. The goal of the meeting was achieving personal holiness or “perfect love,” as Wesley described.²¹⁹ The manner in which individuals were nurtured and cared for within these classes provided oversight to the pastor but it also served as a leadership pipeline of development as teachers and members grew together in the holiness that Wesley sought out for those within the Methodist church. It is clear that Wesley had a unique understanding of the reality that the only way for transformational life change was through a community where beliefs could be practically applied and expressed in everyday life.²²⁰ Within the community of the class system, people of different ages of life and stages of life could come together for fellowship and the distribution of the gospel to even greater numbers.

Wesley’s model began with the societies went to the classes and ended with Wesley’s favorite part of the model, the band. The band was centered on what Wesley classified as the facilitating of affective redirection.²²¹ In today’s church culture, the band would most resemble that of what is called a discipleship group. It was formed by age, sex, and marital status and was rooted in conversation that was direct, honest, and meant for growth and nothing less. What Wesley was seeking to capture with his model were the steps needed for the believer to move

²¹⁸ Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Reverend John Wesley* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1872), 377-380.

²¹⁹ Anderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 98.

²²⁰ Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 2002), 173.

²²¹ Anderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 110.

from information to revelation and how that revelation brought about transformation was critical for the model because it signified sincere heart change. Wesley's bands were held together by rules that set expectations for anyone joining the group. Those expectations were meant to forge the maturity needed to be included. The group centered around a starting point of questions that would open the dialogue within the groups so that the dream of growth could become reality as the members spoke honestly into the accountability provided. In any discipleship culture there is a need for challenging questions and honest answers to truly cultivate effective discipleship built upon transparency.²²² Wesley placed a confidence in his system that helped to build the Methodist church and further the Methodist doctrine so that others would move towards Christ and holiness within the realm of true biblical community.

Flake's Formula

Flake's formula was developed by Arthur Flake in the 1920's as a formula for Sunday School growth. The argument is made that the formula has yet to be improved upon in its form, function, and purpose.²²³ The first step of the formula is the challenge to know the possibilities. The idea is for leaders to survey their church, community, neighborhoods, and contexts to consider those who could potentially be reached. The step's goal is securing prospects who would then enter the pipeline for Sunday School growth. The step classifies those who are prospects and provides actions to create a pool of prospects from which a church could pull from for future attendance.

²²² Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship*, 194.

²²³ New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, "The Five Step Formula for Sunday School Growth," accessed September 1, 2020, <https://www.nobts.edu/discipleship/downloadable-documents/1/small-groups-folder/SS-The%205-Step%20Formula%20Handout.pdf>.

Enlarging the organization is the second formulaic step. The contention is this step is one of faith because it entails forming new units before the units are needed.²²⁴ The step encourages groups and leaders to ask questions to determine the need for giving birth to a new unit. The goal in creating the new group is to create space and further opportunities for growth. The issue with this step is the discipline it takes for leaders to properly ascertain where their group is and know when the time is right to take the sacrificial step of enlargement.

Flake's third step was providing space and equipment. Of the five steps, step three is purely one of logistics, but the logistics offer a picture for how growth can best occur within a group. The formula focuses in on buildings and rooms and does not seem to provide an avenue to explore the idea of space outside the traditional church setting.

The fourth step is to enlist new leaders. The focus on enlistment comes back to development, but the formula struggles to provide actual clarity. Is the goal of enlistment to be trained to lead a group or is the goal to have new leaders to simply start a group? The step is about accumulating new leaders on a consistent basis to position the organization for growth.

The last step is to go and get new people. The step brings Sunday School into the evangelistic realm pushing leaders and members to be invitational so the result can be growth. The question once again returns to what exactly is being built in the organizational structure. While evangelism is critical for any church, the formula seems to drift from discipleship to see people grow in faith to just seeking to see groups grow in number.

The Replicate Model

The newest voice to the topic of discipleship and the church's call to make disciples is Robby Gallaty. Gallaty has engaged with Wesley's Society/Band/Class model along with the

²²⁴ New Orleans Theological Baptist Seminary, "The Five Step Formula for Sunday School Growth"

concentric circles, developed and espoused by Rick Warren in the *Purpose Drive Church*, to provide what he presents as the disciple pathway. At its core, Gallaty's call for the church to replicate is a call to turn away from the current trends of church growth and to return to the model set forth by Christ.²²⁵ The replicate model contends that the church sees people progress through a pathway that begins with the congregation (worship gathering) and moves through to the community (small groups/Sunday School), the core (discipleship groups), and the crowds (missions and service). The key for this movement is to not just view the areas of the pathway but to rephrase each area and connect it with the outcome. This would alter the pathway's similarities to Warren's concentric circles and instead be viewed as knowing Jesus and His Word (congregation), gathering in biblical community (community), making disciples (core), and going and serving as Christ uses us to impact the world with the gospel (crowds).²²⁶ When discipleship is viewed through this lens, the church is then provided with a "why" and "how" to be able to properly move towards effectiveness.

The replicate model and its discipleship pathway also provide churches four critical elements to be able to properly navigate its objectives to reach true biblical outcomes. The elements of clarity, movement, alignment, and focus offered by the discipleship pathway creates a framework where effective discipleship can not only happen but thrive.²²⁷ The replicate model encourages churches to step outside the reasons why discipleship is not happening to engage in the simplicity of returning to the power of the process of spiritual growth modeled and commissioned by Christ.

²²⁵ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 119.

²²⁶ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 121.

²²⁷ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 127.

Summary

The foundations of Scripture coupled with the theoretical foundations of the past, forge a way forward when it comes to discipleship and development within the local church. As seen throughout the literature, intentionality is critical, training is essential, honest evaluation must be undertaken, and the gospel must be at the forefront to see biblical multiplication occur within the life of the church.

Chapter 3

Methodology

James writes to the church, “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (James 1:22). It is critical for the follower of Christ to follow in the actual path of Christ towards the biblical call to make disciples. This process is incumbent upon transparency due to the nature information will be obtained. The steps to answering the problem

concerning the effectiveness of CrossLife Church's discipleship ministry will be explained and developed with the aim for it to lead towards fruit for the Kingdom.

It will be imperative for analysis to be given towards the answers throughout the various steps to ensure that what is being communicated is not the ideal of what one is hoping for but is in fact an actual present reality. It reasons then those statistics will not paint a full picture of CrossLife's discipleship and development process. The dialogue that occurs with people is the defining benchmark, for the people will be able to communicate about the past, present, and future in a way that speaks beyond the numbers. It is true that effectiveness can be masked by large attendance, but the masking will come undone when the maturity cannot withstand the pressures of church issues, cultural angst, and societal unrest. Understanding how to measure that effectiveness through the responses of the people participating in the study will shape the methodology for moving forward in ministry at CrossLife.

Intervention Design

Currently the effectiveness of CrossLife Church's discipleship can be debated. There are events on a calendar for people to attend but there is not much in the areas of development and deployment that are the natural results of true biblical discipleship. In the last 15 years, the church has sustained the same number of small groups and continued with the same number of leaders. While there have been new groups birthed, those have come because of a group casualty and there has not been sustained growth in groups and leaders in terms of multiplication to better reach the community. The purpose of the methods chosen will help to solidify the reasons for what is the perceived plateauing in the church. The opportunity is there for a detailed examination of the busyness of the church in comparison to the spiritual growth of the church. This investigation will rest on the intervention done with current small group leaders measured

against what is taking place in churches in CrossLife’s geographic radius that is leading to discipleship and development success compared the CrossLife model.

Further, it would be true the definition of discipleship is not properly understood or practiced thus limiting the opportunity for true effective discipleship ministry. Presented and promoted in earnest in 2019, the mission of CrossLife Church is “To build lives that matter by teaching people to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus.” This is the driving force behind everything the church does from its ministry to preschool children to Senior Adults and everything in between. It focuses on what the church does every day and how the everyday ministry is leading to a specific target in the economy of the Kingdom of God. It falls in line with a Dever contention that Christianity’s heart is for the people of God to display his character as they are obedient to His and the manner in which they connect with Him and others.²²⁸ While understanding that not everyone enters into the dynamics of the church in the same way, the simplicity of the vision breaks down in focus by wanting to see preschoolers come to love Jesus, elementary students come to know Jesus, middle school and high school students come to trust Jesus so that as adults they will follow Jesus. It is intentional in its focus and calling and is rooted in the absolute heart of discipleship and gives a greater understanding to everyone within the congregation what the church is seeking to accomplish. While the mission is clearly stated, there appears to be a disconnect on where discipleship can happen, how discipleship occurs, and what are the results of discipleship in the church. This lack of understanding causes there to be both miscommunication of goals and misappropriation of time and resources. If the methodology can meet the proper transparency, the opportunity is real for the mission statement of CrossLife to move beyond vocalized verbiage and into an actual discipleship pathway.

²²⁸ Dever, *Discipling*, 12.

The intervention plan's success will be measured in the following three ways: substantive information retrieved, engagement in the process to form a solution, and sound results from the observations that point towards new processes to be developed for the overall ministry.

The interviews and surveys conducted must be done in such a way that answers given are not just provided to meet a requirement but are completed with purpose of thought and an intent to give true feedback and opinion. Therefore, it is imperative that those interviewed and provided surveys have a true stake in what is taking place at CrossLife. They must see and understand that their answers will impact decisions that impact the church and its ministry to the community in which we live. Substantive information would be defined as detailed answers concerning CrossLife's discipleship ministry as they provided in depth analysis on the definition of discipleship, offer clarity on whether CrossLife is engaged in discipleship, what steps they believe CrossLife should take to engage in more effective discipleship, and provide honest evaluations of the church and themselves when it comes to discipleship. Further, the interviews conducted will be substantive only if they provide a clear historical background and context for how CrossLife finds itself present day in its discipleship ministry. The interviews must give enough detail and information to give an understanding on what has worked, what has failed, and what steps are there to take to move towards a more effective discipleship ministry.

Success is also garnered by seeing those who are surveyed becoming engaged in the process to form a true solution. The research is not just being done for one person to single handedly come to a conclusion, but true success will come when the process become collaborative and people want to engage and invest in reaching a solution. The hope is those being surveyed see the need and want to come alongside to meet that need. It will be imperative

for them to understand the “why” so they can join in on the “how” and for the church to better move forward together towards an effective discipleship ministry at CrossLife Church.

The results of discipleship ministry will be imperative. Seeing those results from the observations will be key to success in the intervention as it will provide a barometer for how to best move forward in implementation with all small groups and leadership development throughout the church. It will be vital for those groups to fully engage with the intervention and implementation plan so that the results garnered are ones that can be applicable to overall ministry of the church.

The collection of data will be a process of understanding the old approach to be able to move towards an innovative approach. The first way the novel approach will be compared to the old approach will be in leadership development. Currently the old approach was to enlist someone to lead and hope that it would work out for the best. In the new approach, the plan would be to apprentice two to three individuals and teach them, train them, watch them lead to give feedback, and then deploy them into the area of ministry where they excel the most to begin the process of discipleship and development on their own. The hope in the new approach would be to see true multiplication in the church. The second way the new approach will be compared to the old approach will be in the measurement of data. Currently the old approach only measures attendance of people filling seats. In the new approach, measurements will extend to how many groups have formed from a group, how many new leaders have been trained and deployed from a group, how many groups are meeting outside of the Sunday morning context, and then what is the numerical impact of individuals who are being discipled and are engaged in the ministry of CrossLife Church. The third way the new approach will be compared to the old approach will be in small group offering. Currently the old approach has the mentality of

discipleship occurring strictly within the Sunday morning context. In the new approach, the idea would be to view discipleship as having the potential and opportunity to take place in different settings which could best leverage the opportunity for the growth and multiplication of the church.

The intervention plan to address the problem concerning the effectiveness of the discipleship ministry at CrossLife Church will be one of interviews, observation, and surveys. The interviews with the Senior Pastor and former Education Ministers will provide insight into how the church got to where it is today. Interviews will also be conducted with influential church leaders and other denominational leaders who are finding success in the areas of discipleship and development to grasp some of the key tools they are using and methods they are applying. The observation of current small groups will provide clarity into how the discipleship process is currently functioning. The surveys with all adult small group leaders will provide answers on their definition of discipleship, their understanding of CrossLife's mission, and see what they are doing to foster discipleship within their groups.

At its core, the intervention would change the problem by illumination. It will shed light onto the issue and engage others in the process of seeing effective discipleship and hopefully invite them into the journey of solving the problem. Further, the intervention will encourage leaders of the church to begin to view the discipleship ministry of CrossLife through a different lens than the last 10-15 years. The intervention will increase participation of leaders in training and development and could create new multiplying groups within the body of Christ at CrossLife. Healthier leaders will result in healthier groups and lead to effective discipleship.

Interviews

The intervention plan will begin with an interview with the Senior Pastor of CrossLife Church to ascertain where he believes the discipleship ministry of the church stands.²²⁹ (See Appendix A) His approval and participation will be necessary to explore the past, evaluate the present, and gain insight into the future. His voice to the project is essential as he has been the Senior Pastor for 27 years and was leading the church when it experienced growth in the mid-nineties from five hundred in attendance to almost three thousand. The goal of the interview will be to receive his definition of discipleship, understand what was taking place when the church grew in the mid-nineties, get a picture of what discipleship looks like in CrossLife's current context under his leadership, and discuss where there are opportunities for growth. The Senior Pastor will be able to articulate the vision and values of the stated mission which will then allow for a side by side look at if what small group leaders believe falls in line with the direction the Senior Pastor is moving.

Under the tenured leadership of the Senior Pastor, CrossLife Church has a high view of church and its place in the life of the follower of Christ. The mentality of the church is in line with Hellerman's opinion that the personal relationship one has with Christ is to be lived out in community.²³⁰ The Senior Pastor understands the aspect of the family one joins when they place their faith and trust in Christ and sees the necessity of that family being together in community to walk out their life in Christ. The idea of being indifferent to the local church is a non-starter because of the shed blood of Christ that gave birth to the church in the economy of the Kingdom of God. It is exactly as the writer of Hebrews states, "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on

²²⁹ See Appendix A for Senior Pastor Interview.

²³⁰ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2009), 125.

toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:23-25). The Senior Pastor believes that every believer needs a church family for fellowship, for growth, for care, and to worship and serve God. The centrality of the church to the faith journey of the follower of Christ cannot and must not be minimized if there is to be true discipleship within the body of Christ.

As a traditional church model, CrossLife Church practices that the Pastor leads the church through the ministerial staff. They are to lead by example and are to equip the saints for the work of the ministry. The Senior Pastor of CrossLife casts the vision and sets the tone to lead, guide, and direct the church towards the purposes and plans of God. However, in his role, there is a drive to not simply see work done through his hands alone but for that to occur through the lives of every member. The goal of the church is that every member would have a ministry within the church and a mission to the world. Paul states the purpose of pastors and leaders is, “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:12-13). The Senior Pastor falls in line with Putman and Harrington insistence that the leader is to equip people in a such a way that they move forward in spiritual maturity.²³¹ To see this result in the body of Christ at CrossLife means that the Senior Pastor must move beyond the preaching of a message and into the process of connecting to the lives of the congregation so that he knows them, understands their gifts, and is able to discern, along with the staff, how to best mobilize the church to ministry and mission.

²³¹ Putman and Harrington, *Disciple Shift*, 115.

Following the interview with the Senior Pastor, the intervention plan will move into four interviews with the former Ministers of Education from the last 30 years of the church's history.²³² (See Appendix B) Each of these men served in unique eras of the church with the first serving during the growth history of CrossLife, the second served in the midst of the over twenty million dollar building plan when the church suffered attrition, the third served during the church changing its name from First Baptist Church of Oviedo to CrossLife when once again attrition came, and the fourth served in a rebuilding period that never saw the church move past the plateau of the past. The goal is to understand the philosophies of each man in terms of discipleship and how they view development and deployment. It will also be essential to align the beliefs and practices of the former Ministers of Education with that of the Senior Pastor to ascertain if the same language was being spoken so that there was actual clarity in the mission of the church. These men's leadership is still felt today in the church, and it is important to understand the nuances of their theological and theoretical approaches to better gauge where CrossLife is with discipleship. The interviews will seek to gauge where CrossLife was and is strongest in discipleship and where CrossLife was and is weakest in discipleship. There is also a need to understand from each man why they feel the period in which they served was either effective or ineffective.

In addition to interviews with individuals associated intimately with CrossLife Church, attempts will be made to have further discussion with key church leaders across the United States to understand their methods and practices when it comes to discipleship and development.²³³ (See Appendix C)

²³² See Appendix B for Minister of Education Interviews.

²³³ See Appendix C for Interview with other churches/ministers with effective discipleship ministries.

The first interview attempt will be with Ed Stetzer. Ed Stetzer is a professor and dean at Wheaton College who also serves as Executive Director of the Wheaton College Billy Graham Center. Stetzer has planted, revitalized, and pastored churches, trained pastors, and church planters on six continents, has earned two master's degrees and two doctorates, and has written hundreds of articles and a dozen books. He is regional director for Lausanne North America and publishes research through Mission Group. Stetzer is a contributing editor for Christianity Today, a columnist for Outreach Magazine, and is frequently cited in, interviewed by, and writes for news outlets such as USA Today and CNN. He is the founding editor of The Gospel Project, a curriculum used by more than 1.7 million individuals each week for bible study. He provides the opportunity for a cross section understanding of what churches of all sizes are doing to effectively develop leaders and disciple the church.

The second interview attempt will be with Thom Rainer. Thom S. Rainer is the founder and CEO of Church Answers, an online community and resource for church leaders. Prior to founding Church Answers, Rainer served as president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources. Before coming to LifeWay, he served at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for twelve years where he was the founding dean of the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism. He is a 1977 graduate of the University of Alabama and earned his Master of Divinity and Ph.D. degrees from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In addition to speaking in hundreds of venues over the past 20 years, Rainer led Rainer Group, a church and denominational consulting firm, from 1990 to 2005. The firm provided church health insights to over five hundred churches and other organizations over that period. Rainer's experience and depth of knowledge would be an asset in the gathering of information relative to CrossLife Church.

The third interview attempt will be with Chris Swain. Chris Swain is the Disciplemaking Pastor at Long Hollow Baptist Church and the CEO of Replicate Ministries. After four years of service in the United States Marine Corps, Chris served in full-time ministry for two decades in Arkansas, Florida, Texas, Georgia, and Tennessee leading ministries ranging from students to collegiate to spiritual formation. He also served as the Director of Student Ministry Publishing at Lifeway Christian Resources, serving the church in its mission of making disciples. Chris has been with Replicate Ministries and Long Hollow Baptist Church since 2016, with a heart to expand the Gospel through disciple making in the local church. Swain's current position of teaching and training other churches in the replication model can provide insight into the model currently in place at CrossLife.

Beyond the discussions with these men, interviews will be sought from two Senior Pastors of local churches within a five-mile radius of CrossLife. Until early 2000, CrossLife Church was one of the few contemporary Southern Baptist Churches meeting within the Oviedo, FL region. However, when the church experienced some trials amid a building project, name change, and staff turnover, there were two non-denominational churches that were started who could provide some of the same worship elements as CrossLife but within a different model church. These churches have experienced growth within that last 20 years due to different philosophies on small groups, evangelism, and missions. Their insight could prove to be valuable to see what they have done and how they have experienced growth in their churches.

The purpose of these interviews is to glean from these individual's implementation ideas that could be used in CrossLife Church's multiplication strategies to see growth in new leaders and the development of a more effective discipleship ministry within the church.

Observation

The observation aspect of the intervention will work in conjunction with every adult small group at CrossLife Church. Within the observation of the 32 Sunday morning adult small groups, the first goal is to see how the group interacts with one another and with the teacher/leader. Does the teacher/leader know those who are in the class beyond their name? How well does the group know the teacher/leader? Is the setting more formal or relational? Is the group engaged in such a way with the teacher/leader that one can see a cohesiveness between the two?

The second goal of the observation will be to gain insight into the teaching style of the class. What is being taught week in and week out? Is the curriculum exegetical in nature or is it topical? Is the teaching informational or conversational? Does the teaching lead to practical application? How is the teaching style fostering spiritual growth? Is there more than one teacher in the group and if so, are the styles different and which receives the best response from the group? What the level of spiritual maturity is within the group dynamic due to the teaching? What is the difference in classes taught by one teacher versus those taught by multiple teachers? What is the difference between classes where the teaching is exegetical versus those where the teaching is topical?

The third goal of the observation will be to explore the groups calendar of life and interaction as a community outside of Sundays. How is the group gathering for fellowship? How is the group gathering for prayer and support? Are there non-church events that impede on the group being together? Are there church events that impede on the group being together? When the group gathers, do they invite newcomers? How does the group engage with those who are new? Do newcomers engage and then attend on a Sunday?

Finally, the fourth goal of the observation will be to explore who are the potential leaders within the groups. In what ways are those who are not teaching being used in service for the group? Does everyone in the group feel a sense of ownership? If not, what is causing the consumer mentality in the group? Have group members been deployed into other areas of service in the church? How are group members being developed for future opportunities of leadership?

Surveys

Surveys will be conducted with every adult small group leader to provide personal feedback and opinions in a confidential manner.²³⁴ (See Appendix C) The survey results will offer a glimpse into the understanding of current leaders' knowledge of discipleship and whether there is clarity on what they are to be accomplishing in their leadership role. The surveys will also give a snapshot of discipleship ministry of CrossLife through a cross section of ages.

While the survey provides a variety of questions, there are three critical ones which are imperative. The first question is, "How do you define discipleship?" It is important to know what the lay leaders think of discipleship and how they are aligned with the ideals of the ministerial leadership of CrossLife. It will also tell a generational story of discipleship as the ages of those surveyed will be in between 25-85. This information is critical to mapping the pathway forward for discipleship and development at CrossLife.

The second question is, "Do you think CrossLife is engaged in discipleship?" It will be fascinating to see replies to this answer and how it connects to the definition of discipleship provided. It is important for CrossLife to understand where people view the church is and just how they believe the church is engaged in discipleship and development. The results from this

²³⁴ See Appendix D for Small Group Survey.

question provide a critical opportunity for follow up to ask why someone provide the response they offered. This specific question opens the door for a collaborative effort to seek out solutions to the problem presented and to build a coalition that will work towards improvement for CrossLife Church. Answers will once again be separated out in a generational divide from the participants which will help the study to glean just how bring everyone into the tent of the changes that will be implemented based on the results.

The final survey question of highlighted importance is, “Do you believe you have been disciplined as a leader?” There is a presupposition to this study that leadership and training must be improved for leadership at CrossLife Church if there is to be growth in discipleship and development. It cannot be understated how pivotal this question becomes and how the answers will pave the way towards the necessary steps needed to be taken from all members of CrossLife Church. This question also opens the door to further questions of the leaders to ascertain what their experience has been when it comes to stepping into the role of small group at CrossLife.

The data will be interpreted through the lens of age, gender, and time served. Viewing the data through the lens of age is imperative for the process as in the current context of ministry the millennial generation is speaking and teaching about discipleship that differs from those in the baby boomer or greatest generation. In a church that is over 150 years old and represented by a multi-generational membership, the ages of leaders will be vast, but it is also becomes imperative to properly bridge those age divides for there to be a definitive strategy and plan implemented to the highest level of effectiveness and efficiency. CrossLife has small groups divided into the categories of Young Adult, Median Adult, and Senior Adult but while the group participants fit into those divisions, there are leaders whose ages vary. For example, in one of the Young Adult small groups, the group is led by men and women who would be of a Median Adult age. This

reality will provide an opportunity for learning for all parties involved as Senior Adults can see what Median Adults are thinking, Young Adults can view the thoughts of Senior Adults, and all of the other variations will then be able to move into the implantation stage with proper comprehension of how a multi-generational church can function holding to the biblical model of discipleship.

In addition to interpreting the data through the lens of age, it will also be viewed considering gender. Under the ministries of Lifeway, there has for years throughout the church been an intentional focus on women's ministries and Bible studies which could potentially impact how a female leader will answer the questions. This potential development will lead to more questions to obtain a proper context through which the results can be understood. This is also the foundation of what exists in the context of CrossLife Church. For men's ministries, there is a yearly large gathering event and two men's bible studies but within the women's ministries there are over fifteen weekly bible studies, a weekly Bible Study Fellowships meeting at the church that reaches over 150 women every Wednesday, and a quarterly women's gathering that prioritizes moving women into discipleship groups. This context of ministry offers the possibility of men and women giving diverse answers and thus interpreting the data through that context and gender is essential.

Finally, the data will be studied through the lens of the length of time served by leaders. Those leaders who have served for 25 years or more have done so under the leadership of the current Senior Pastor and it will be necessary to see how their replies align with his stated goals for discipleship in the church. Those who are new to leadership will come to the survey with a separate set of foundational beliefs and thus it will be important to take their responses and

interpret from a present-day context as opposed to the historical context that those more tenured leaders provide.

The most purposeful element of the surveys will be to gauge where CrossLife is in terms of cohesion between what the Senior Pastor is stating and how it is translating into action and application for small group leaders. The values of CrossLife Church are foundational to who the church has been, who the church is currently, and who the church is seeking to be moving into the future. The values are centered around the key words in the vision – love, know, trust, and follow – and provide the focal point for how a disciple is created within the fabric of the ministry and body of Christ at CrossLife Church. These values are not just words on page, but they are core to the identification of the church and provide the necessary framework from which ministry is accomplished by keeping every minister and every lay person on same page using the same language. Geiger and Peck’s contention is the catchiness of the mission statement slogan is useless if it does not match the convictions held by the leaders within the church.²³⁵ The surveys will serve to provide critical intelligence as to whether the values that quantify and qualify the mission of CrossLife Church have coalesced in a powerful manner within the framework of the church. If so, then what is being said is also practiced across all spectrums of ministry resulting in clarity for everyone within the church on just where it is headed.

Beyond the stated purpose of the surveys, there are two main goals to be achieved. The first is that of seeking to gain information to bolster the observation. With the multitude of small groups at CrossLife and the generational differences that exist, it would be difficult to walk into observations and make judgments without any foundational realities of who the leaders are and how they think and how they are uniquely gifted for their positions of leadership. As surveys are

²³⁵ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 130.

processed, it gives an initial glimpse into the group that will strengthen the observation process by making it an informed one as opposed to viewing groups with no background.

The secondary goal is to use the surveys to assist in the development of a plan of action coming out of the study for next steps. The surveys are to take the responses from leaders and then effectively use those responses to craft a discipleship and development plan that demonstrates that leaders have been heard and their responses are being used to inform the process. As leaders' responses are heard, the belief is that they will then buy into the process moving forward and become greater partners in the ministry of development and discipleship.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

To ascertain the effectiveness of the discipleship ministry of CrossLife, attendance and patterns of attendance are going to have to be a part of the measuring process. When it comes to gathering data, it is going to have to be more than just simply checking a role each week. The tool to use is engagement within the class and within the church. In every step of implementation, the goal is to measure the rate the person is attending followed by the steps they are taking to engage in the church in areas such as baptism, sharing the gospel, serving, giving, leadership development and . This is data that can be gathered using CrossLife's data base system Realm. Realm will be the tool that will help to provide data information and it is also great at being able to give a snapshot of a groups progress week to week and month to month.

The other key element of the implementation plan is to use the tool provided by Robby Gallaty and Chris Swain called MARCS to properly observe and evaluate CrossLife's small groups and the leaders. The MARCS of a healthy discipleship group are guideposts for determining the health of your discipleship ministry and discipling relationships. Each element is meant to be incarnational, not just duplicable, meaning the principles identified from the ministry

of Jesus will work in any church size, age, culture, context, or maturity level. The MARCS are as follows: Missional, Accountable, Reproducible, Communal, Scriptural.

In the implementation intervention design, interviews, surveys, and observations have been used to gather data. The combination of these have proven to be incredibly valuable in the process to provide a wide lens through which to view the problem. The interviews are with ministers which will provide a perspective that involves great investment as the pastor interviewed lead or have led discipleship ministry at CrossLife. They have a great stake in what has taken place or what could and should be taking place.

When those interviews are combined with the surveys provided by adult small group leaders and teachers it brings a combustible energy to the data. The responses in the survey will allow one to see what has been communicated by ministers in the past regarding discipleship and what is currently being communicated by ministers today and how has that communication impacted leaders within the church. It will be fascinating to hold those up in view with the responses from the ministers to glean information on if the leaders have even been discipled themselves and understand what discipleship is based on the leadership of ministers.

When the information gained from the interviews and surveys is gathered, it will provide the appropriate outlet to properly observe small groups in action. The hope is to provide a framework for the observations to be able to know how groups navigate in an environment of discipleship based on what the results of the surveys are, and the information obtained from the interviews. The goal of the observations is diagnosis and understanding of the discipleship problem at CrossLife.

The project began January of 2021. The initial step was the retrieval of data beginning in January of 1990 through December of 2020. The focus was on three aspects of data that are as

follows: salvations, baptisms, and small group attendance. The project needed tables and charts detailing the growth and decline of the church over the last 30 years in these years. Data was provided from the Office of the Pastor and the Membership Assistant office to properly view all the numbers in graph form and see how the numbers have moved up or down. These graphs serve its purpose by providing dates to see when there was growth or decline and allowed the project to be able to dig deeper into that data and understand historically what was taking place in the life of the church. Without that data, there was not a proper lens and perspective to engage in interviews with current and former ministers at CrossLife Church. A true sense of what has happened and is happening forced the issue of transparency to be at the forefront of the discussions.

Following the accumulation of that data, there was the collection of calendaring information from the last thirty years of the church to consider programs, regular events, and special events to ascertain the level of activity within the church on a year-to-year basis. The insight offered from the calendar was used to once again bring about a transparency to see if what is being stated in the mission of the church aligns with what is being asked of the church body. The collection of the data occurred on January 4, 2021.

Upon the completion of the data collection, the next step will be to set up interviews with all the potential participants. Explanation and invitations to desired participants will be sent out on January 4 with an RSVP of participation plans requested for January 18. Initial interviews with candidates who accept the invitation will begin on January 19 with a desire for completion of February 1. The hardest group to provide an explanation will be the ministers in the interview process. Any amount of research one does into the effectiveness of a specific ministry is going to cause ministers to bristle at the thinking of what they did fell short. In the explanation to them,

the stated goal was not to highlight anyone's failures but to learn from the past to improve the future when it comes to CrossLife's discipleship ministry. It was stressed they bring knowledge of the history of CrossLife that is essential to understanding where the church is. There is value in their input and the belief is their work and service at CrossLife is one that has yielded fruit and their input into the research today can be one that leads to more fruit.

The other unknown variable in the presented timeline is the reality of needing to conduct potentially multiple interviews with candidates due to either time constraints, development of new and helpful information, or lack of substantive insight. A cushion in the timeline will be provided for this variable with a desire to have all interviews completed by March 1.

In conjunction with the data collection and interviews, the onboarding of small group leaders took place on January 10. At a leadership summit meeting of CrossLife Church explanation was given on the vision and goals of the thesis and how what is being undertaken can help further the church's mission to build lives that matter by teaching people to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus. In that initial meeting, group leaders were given the survey used in the research and asked to take two weeks to pray and then answer the questions. When it comes to the small group leaders and teachers, the vision of the research which is to take steps of seeing the discipleship ministry become more effective so that CrossLife Church can reach more people for Christ was presented. Imperative in the explanation to them was helping them to see this is not just a research paper but this is a mission for all to join in together. The presentation laid out that challenging questions about the process and system currently in place were going to be asked, there would be exploration of the methods implemented and if they are truly reaching people and attempts at innovative ideas would be undertaken to see if they are worth implementing to be more effective. The explanation to the leaders was one that was clear in the

expectations that they were not asked to do more but were asked to simply share their thoughts openly and be willing to be observed and given honest feedback. The surveys were returned on January 24.

Also, in that meeting, groups learned of the observation of their classes and when those times would occur. Class observations began on January 17 with three classes being observed each Sunday and the observations will conclude on March 7. On the week of March 7, individual follow ups will occur with each class to discuss the initial findings from the observation and suggestions will be offered on how to move towards a more effective discipleship model. Beginning on March 14, a second round of observations will begin and will conclude on May 2.

Chapter 4

Results

After the plan of observation was implemented, the data provided results to give a greater picture of the discipleship culture of CrossLife Church. It relied heavily on history to give a roadmap of how the church arrived where it is today and thus was able to also offer clarity on steps needed moving forward.

Data

The data obtained at the start of the implementation process painted a picture familiar within the Southern Baptist culture. CrossLife Church experienced its most significant growth beginning in 1993 when the Senior Pastor arrived. In 1993, the church averaged in 521 people in attendance with a membership of 1028. The following three years saw the average attendance grow to 678 in 1994, 831 in 1995, and 1022 in 1996 with a membership that year of 2468. Those three years of growth continues throughout the close of the nineties as in 1999 the church averaged 2931 in attendance and the membership rose to 5123. At the close of 1999, members averaged attending CrossLife Church 3.7 times per month. The answer to that growth is noted in the baptism numbers in that six-year span as CrossLife baptized 3288 people. The church possessed an evangelistic personality and much of the calendaring and planning centered in on events that were held to call the lost to salvation. Those evangelistic efforts propelled the church to growth in the small rural area of Oviedo and saw it reach a stature within the state of Florida as one of the leading Southern Baptist Churches.

In the new millennium, the church maintained its efforts in baptizing people as another 2,132 people have walked through the waters of baptism as of the start of 2021. However, the continued baptisms have not resulted in further growth in average attendance or membership. In

2019, the last regular year before the COVID-19 pandemic, CrossLife Church averaged 2418 in attendance and had a membership of 5592. At the close of 2019, members averaged attending CrossLife Church 1.6 times per month.

The data further reveals a picture of the small group culture within CrossLife. With the growth experience beginning in 1993, CrossLife expanded to 28 different small groups by the end of 1999 for ages 18+ consisting of young adult, median adult, and senior adult classes. At the end of 2019, CrossLife had 31 different small groups for ages 18+ in the areas of young adults, median adults, and senior adults. Further data from the small group numbers reveals that of the thirty-one different small groups, eighteen are being led by the same leader from 1999. The numbers go deeper to reflect a hesitancy for the birthing of new groups as 2 groups, comprised of adults 80+, have an average attendance of less than 10, 7 groups have an average attendance of 12-15, 11 groups have an average attendance of 23-28, and 12 groups have an average attendance of 31-47.

These numbers provided questions to attempt to understand the statistics better and how they led the church to where it is currently. Numbers on paper are not just a digit but it represents a person, people, and families when it comes to the church context. Because of this, coming to grips with the nuance of these details became vital to the methodology. The only way to rectify this was to speak with those who have lived it and experienced firsthand.

Senior Pastor Interview

The first interview conducted was with the Senior Pastor of CrossLife Church. He has served the church for 28 years in May of 2021. The interview was imperative to understanding the mission and vision of CrossLife and how discipleship is ensconced within the forward thinking of the church's plans. The pastor defines discipleship as the journey with believers

towards becoming all that Christ intends for them to be. This is central reason for the refocusing of the church's mission statement in 2019 to be more process driven and articulating the road for a new believer to walk. The pastor moved away from the mission statement of, "Building lives that matter by leading people in a growing relationship with Christ" to a mission statement of, "Building lives that matter by leading people to love, know, trust and follow Jesus." This was formulated through the remembrance of his personal discipleship experience when he was new in ministry from the Senior Pastor of his church. The relationship was key in the makeup of who the Senior Pastor is and the way he leads. He was taught and trained to be evangelistic in the pulpit and intentional in his development of those around him. Before his arrival at CrossLife, that was the formula that worked in the church plant he led in the Atlanta area.

The evaluation of CrossLife Church and where it currently sits was paved with many historical recollections that gave needed insight. The Senior Pastor explained the hardest part of the growth experienced by the church was the hiring of staff and the selection, development, and deployment of lay leaders. Upon his arrival, he spent much time reframing and refocusing the deacon ministry of the church to be more in line with scriptural context for their leadership and in doing so raised up a healthier group of men to better serve the church. However, the investment of that time was then met with growth within the church and the need to hire staff and have the right leaders in place to carry out discipleship within the church beyond the pulpit ministry. The Senior Pastor points to two significant hires that aided the growth. Of the two men, one was brought in to lead evangelism and the other was brought in to lead education. The pastor points to those hires as the time when the church was its most effective in discipleship due to the cohesion that existed between them because of the relationship all three had when they served in the Atlanta area and became friends. As people were being won to Christ at CrossLife in the

early nineties, there was an assimilation plan in place to lead those people to growth in their walks with Christ. The pastor indicated there was accountability amongst the staff and the lay leaders that fueled the precision of follow up and follow through on the implementation of the mission and vision being communicated from the pulpit.

Inevitably the conversation had to turn to the lack of the growth trajectory continuing into the year 2000 while baptisms remained steady. The Senior Pastor referenced the continuity of the past when explaining the present. He stated how during the time of growth there was a connectivity between what he was saying and what the leaders were saying and that the lay leaders possessed and carried influence to be a continuation of his leadership into the small group space. He shared how others got involved in leadership and training opportunities because their leaders engaged with them and brought them along for the journey thus providing a replicative model. However, beginning in 2000, the church experienced three noteworthy events that altered that continuity. Beginning at the end of 2000, the church experienced staffing turnover it did not have the previous 7 years. From 2000-2021, the church witnessed twenty-four different ministers come and go throughout the ministry. Not included in that count is the layoffs of another eighteen people in 2016 due to financial hardships experienced in the church. After the staffing turnover, the church experienced member turnover following a building program in 2006 and a name change from First Baptist Church of Oviedo to CrossLife Church in 2013. What became evident to the Senior Pastor through those years is that while previous lay leaders delivered the mission and vision back to their small groups and received buy in from the people, the current lay leadership was not able to accomplish that same task. The Senior Pastor points to the struggles experienced due to lack of accountability and lack of continuity.

When speaking on the last three years at CrossLife Church, the Senior Pastor acknowledged the stagnation but pointed to some highlights that has kept the church in an incremental growth process. He references more intentionality in the hiring of staff as being a critical first step that began with his return to that process in 2017. The church moved the executive pastor role back to the Senior Pastor which allowed for more accountability and refocusing on the messaging of the mission and vision to the staff so that it could be properly translated to the congregation. The other highlight noted by the Senior Pastor centered on the COVID-19 pandemic and what it revealed. While the numbers in the church are not what they were, the consistency in those attending is far greater. Since the church returned to in person worship and small groups, members at CrossLife are attending an average of 2.9 times per month. He attributes this to a return to accountability and continuity between staff and lay leadership. The Senior Pastor did not have anything specific to point to when it came to the current patterns but viewed the days ahead with positivity.

The positivity from the Senior Pastor was related to the leadership development process within the church. The Senior Pastor has engaged the ministerial staff with the concentric circles made popular by Rick Warren and Saddleback Church. The reasoning behind this focus is due to the intentionality of seeing people move through a process and the lead measures implemented to see people make those moves. The Senior Pastor is encouraged by the idea of seeing people move from the community to the crowd to the congregation to the committed to the core and believes this once again brings cohesion and clarity to the mission of the church. The Senior Pastor reasons that the more the church identifies those within the committed and the core that it provides a clear path to engage those people in leadership development. His development process leads these identified people to CrossLife University which is the newly created

discipleship pipeline to see current and new leaders trained and prepared for ministry and service within the church. The Senior Pastor believes this is the key to the future at CrossLife and will be critical if the church is to experience growth.

Minister of Education Interviews

The next set of interviews was conducted with two former Ministers of Education. CrossLife has had four different men in this role since 1993, but only two were willing to be interviewed to discuss the discipleship ministry of the church.

The first interview was with the Minister of Education who served from 1994-2000. This was the minister who presided over the initial growth period of CrossLife and could provide a glimpse into what was occurring within their leadership during that time. The most significant event during the time of his service was only the growth of the church. In his partnership with the Senior Pastor and the Minister of Evangelism the church experienced people being saved and joining CrossLife. What became imperative in the discussion with him was seeking to understand his philosophy implemented during this time. His definition of discipleship was simply assisting people in their growth in Christ. That definition provided the framework for his philosophy because he felt the only way to assist was to gain those who could come alongside with that assistance. However, the minister was not looking for just anyone who to serve.

The exclusivity of leadership was a key attribute and strength according to the minister. His reasoning was that due to the expectations placed upon those who wanted to lead that the quality of the leader was high on initial engagement which followed with intensive training and accountability that furthered that level of excellence. For someone to lead others in small group or discipleship, the minister required the person to have been a believer for at least five years, a member for at least 2 years, a tither, an abstainer from alcohol, and a server in another area of

ministry within the church for at least 2 years. Beyond those requirements, the potential leader was required to sign a leadership covenant detailing their commitment to leadership and the expectations given. Within those parameters, before the individual began their leadership, they were required to attend six initial training sessions, one per month, and then to be active in leadership training that occurred on a bi-monthly basis to continue their development. The process described by the minister was rigorous, detailed, and could be argued to be limiting in who is able to lead. The minister likened anyone who would be leading others in and through the Word of God to the deacons and felt that there should not be different requirements because of his belief in the magnitude of the role.

The minister points to the biggest strength of that time in ministry as being follow through from lay leaders. He describes a picture of the Senior Pastor giving a directive to him and that directive being passed down and the follow through that occurred was unanimous in participation. It was that follow through that connected new families who attended one of the evangelistic events with a group of believers to begin to share life. It was also that follow through that allowed for the leadership training times to not just be informational meetings but actual times to deepen the skills of leaders in the areas of teaching, Bible study, administrative help, and engagement with new leaders.

When it comes to the weakness of that time, the minister acknowledges that they developed strong and capable leaders, but that there was not the multiplication that occurred from those efforts. The exclusive nature that leadership carried due to the requirements and expectations created a club type atmosphere that did not create an atmosphere of replication. In the time he served on staff, he had two leaders equip and train new leaders that resulted in the birth of a new small group. While he took on some blame, he also argued there was not an

emphasis on discipleship for the church at that time. He believes the cohesion between himself, minister of evangelism, and the Senior Pastor was strong, but that week in and week out the driving message was evangelism and not discipleship. The goals were driven to see people come to faith and be baptized and after that it was simply critical to see a person continue to come and engage with church events and not be engaged by leading in the church.

Those who stepped up and into leadership were develop and trained properly according to the minister because he felt his process was sound. The minister looked at his process as discipleship of the leaders enjoying the training session he taught and benefitted from those sessions by growing deeper personally in their faith so they could best lead corporately others to grow in their faith.

The second interview was conducted with the Minister of Education who served from 2017-2019. It is important to note that this minister served CrossLife as its executive pastor from 2006-2017 before moving into the education position. He was able to share his personal experience leading the education ministry but also share the strengths and weaknesses of the other ministers of education who served under his leadership as executive pastor.

The minister served during all three of the significant eras of CrossLife consisting of staff turnover, the building project, and the name change. He says the turmoil and upheaval from those three events created an unsustainable environment for true leadership development and deployment. Due to the uncertainty and volatility that existed within the church from vocal influencers, the opportunities for leadership training turned into seasons of damage control and messaging meetings to communicate properly what was happening in the church. Without a leadership pipeline and with the congregational turnover, leaders were no longer targeted and developed but instead the church moved to volunteer calls seeking anyone willing to come and

serve could find a spot. The two ministers of education preceding him abolished the leadership covenants, requirements, and training sessions and instead sought to fill empty spots by almost promising the commitment would not be great. Because of that, individual leaders decided on the path they felt fit them best resulting in teaching their own material or material that was not properly vetted scripturally, groups became coffee shops to catch up on the latest weekend of sports and local gossip instead of communities of prayer and the Word, and continuity and accountability became words of the past with each person making their own way instead of aligning with the mission and values of CrossLife.

During the turmoil, the minister indicated a strength that emerged from his time as executive pastor and into his service over the education ministry was the biblical knowledge of those tasked with leading a small group. He indicated that there was a strong group of nineteen individuals who took seriously the weekly task of teaching and dedicated themselves to the study of Scripture, the preparation of their lesson, and method of their communication of the knowledge they obtained. These nineteen leaders are still in place today.

The minister did acknowledge that while they had an ability to teach there was never a connection made to what it meant to shepherd the group which was a weakness of the previous two ministers. Group leaders were not trained on what it meant to care for a group and the minister attributes the considerable number of attendees in a small group to that lack of care. The groups took on a lecture platform as opposed to group dynamic and thus more people began to attend based on a preference for a style of teaching as opposed to joining a community of people to engage with in life.

The minister had a background of education ministry in other Southern Baptist Churches before coming to CrossLife and employed the Flake's Formula method in his trainings, but he

was honest in sharing those two trainings a year was not enough to truly engage and enhance the development of leaders.

In an evaluation of whether CrossLife emphasizes discipleship, the minister believes that the church wants to do so but has struggled due to the different issues it has faced. He conceded that time spent on attrition of members from years past and the burden of financial debt from the building program are variables that hinder the church from fully engaging in discipleship and development. He noted that there is a concerted effort to return to more unified language with the updated mission statement and acknowledged that the staff is more cohesive allowing for the opportunity to properly align with the direction the Senior Pastor is leading.

Interviews with Area Pastors

Since 2010, two non-denominational churches have been formed in the Oviedo, FL area that have attracted those within the community to join their body. When CrossLife Church experienced their initial growth, there were not many other churches in the area, but the birth of these new churches provided a different platform for ministry than what CrossLife offers and both churches have seen considerable growth in the last 11 years. Both churches have comparable stories, and the interview took place in tandem and so the reflection of both men will be shared as three specific things stand in contrast to CrossLife's current methods.

The first area of contrast was their process for leadership development. In both churches infancy they began with four staff members. Those four staff members and their wives were charged to begin intentional discipleship relationships with three to four other people. The process of discipleship was the method used to develop new leaders for the church and how the church was birthed. Out of the groups formed, the churches were able to deploy home group leaders in strategic neighborhoods, provide life giving offerings for children and students, and

engage with hospitality for new guests in an aggressive and effective manner. They obtained a multiplication model from the start, and it progressed in the early years of the church to provide the solid foundation they currently have. Both pastors shared the movement has slowed as their church has become larger and new people without a church context have begun to attend.

This provides the second contrast of keeping discipleship in front of the people between these churches and CrossLife. CrossLife weekly encourages people to come back next Sunday and bring someone with you making the focus evangelistic in emphasis. Both churches keep the method of discipleship and development in front of their people. They promote discipleship groups and give opportunities to join, they discuss the people they are discipling and the results from those, and they provide times of testimony of someone moving through the process of discipleship. While CrossLife has begun to continuously mention the mission statement, it is not yet giving testimonial witness to those who have been led to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus.

The final contrast between the churches of these Pastors and CrossLife is the method through which groups meets. They would identify as a church of small groups not just a church with small groups. The groups meet all days and times in a week in people's homes, places of business, or within the community. This makes group life a dynamic part of the church and provides a sense of ownership and investment for leaders to do more than just teach a lesson.

It was apparent the vast differences between two churches who were birthed in 2010 and CrossLife which was birthed in 1869. There are some traditional elements that loom large at CrossLife but the feedback from the pastors within the area provided opportunities for a shift in culture to potentially be explored.

Surveys and Observations

Every adult class leader at CrossLife Church was surveyed in January of 2021. The option was given for the survey to be returned anonymously with the instruction given to provide the age bracket for the class they taught. Out of seventy-eight surveys issued, sixty-three were returned with sixty-two providing a name to accompany their responses. Even more helpful to the research was out of the surveys received, all thirty-one Sunday morning small groups were represented with names attached to allow for observation of the small group and follow up interviews and discussions with the leaders to gain further insight into the discipleship and leadership development culture of the church.

In addition to the survey responses, the observation of the groups will be viewed through the lens of the MARCS formula written about by Robby Gallaty and Chris Swain. The groups were viewed three times each coupled with two interviews with the leaders to ascertain if the groups were Missional, Accountable, Reproducible, Communal, and Scriptural. The definition of these terms and scripture origin would be as follows:

Missional – Living with intentionality and availability to be on mission for God; “Go therefore,” (Matthew 28:19)

Accountable – Fellow believers coming together to assess one another’s spiritual growth; “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20)

Reproducible – Believers who are under the rule of Christ, repeat the Word of God, reflect the image of Christ, and replicate the process of Christ; “make disciples of all nations,” (Matthew 28:19)

Communal – To carry out the commands of Christ by caring for one another in community; “baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (Matthew 28:19)

Scriptural – The Bible is the textbook of the group; “teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28:20)

The MARCS are a measuring tool to ascertain maturity and health in a group when it comes to discipleship ministry and discipling relationships. Gallaty and Swain encourage the use of the tool reminding the user it is to be incarnational not just duplicable as the principles are taken from the example of the ministry of Jesus.²³⁶ Following the observation and interviews, this biblical scorecard was used to provide a glimpse into each group.

Young Adults

Six young adult classes were surveyed and subsequently observed to ascertain the dynamics of the ministry and how it is functioning when it comes to discipleship and leadership development.

A couple of areas were highlighted from the survey. The consensus among those surveyed was there was a deficiency in their own lives when it came to whether they felt they had been discipled as a leader. While most identified as actively discipling someone else, they all answered they did not believe the church has discipled them and went further to indicate on the survey that did not feel they had been trained for the current area of leadership they held.

Beyond the observation gathered that there was no recognition of personal discipleship and training, the surveys also found uniformity in indicating a deficiency in the current discipleship structure of CrossLife. The answers spoke well of the small group culture but felt when it came to the effectiveness of the discipleship ministry of CrossLife Church that was room for growth and improvement. The consistent response when it came to why the need for

²³⁶ Gallaty and Swain, *Replicate*, 233.

improvement pointed to a sense of stagnation from members of the young adult ministry who had grown up in the church.

With the answers from the surveys gathered, observations were done that rendered the following results:

Small Group	MISSONAL	ACCOUNTABLE	REPRODUCIBLE	COMMUNAL	SCRIPTURAL
Young Adult 1	X		X		X
Young Adult 2		X		X	X
Young Adult 3	X	X		X	X
Young Adult 4		X			X
Young Adult 5			X	X	
Young Adult 6	X				X

The Young Adult ministry at CrossLife received new leadership from a Young Adult minister beginning in the spring of 2020. When that leadership began there were just four classes with just five leaders. The challenges of those dynamics forced the ministry to engage in a much different manner as other more established groups within the church. The minister charted a course of replication and multiplication based on his readings of the book *Hero Maker* by Dave Ferguson and Warren Bird. Coming out of the reading and subsequent training of the leadership team, the Young Adult ministry engaged with a plan to multiply through intentional discipleship. As seen in the chart above, that mentality led to the creation of two new groups that were birthed out of other groups. From the spring of 2020 to the end of 2021, the Young Adult ministry of CrossLife Church experienced a growth of 28% in attendance and increased the leadership team from five to seventeen.

The common theme from the observation of the Young Adult groups was the buy in on the mission of multiplication from the leadership team. In every group meeting, discussion was had on the topic of discipleship and encouraging attenders to find a discipleship group to connect and grow in Christ. It was most evident in Young Adult group 1 as it was the pioneer of multiplication. In speaking with the leaders, they caught the vision and were convicted of Jesus’

final words and command in Matthew 28. Their conviction began when the group had grown from 15 to 45 and found themselves crammed into a room struggling for space to add anyone else. Beyond the need for space, there was also a realization from the leaders that others in the group of 25–35-year-old young singles and young married were there to be raised up to take on the mission. Because of that, when Young Adult group 1 gave birth to Young Adult group 5, it added three new leaders to each group.

An interesting development from the observations of the Young Adult groups is the age breakdown within the ministry and how the members of the group are adapting to the strategy. While Young Adult group 1 and Young Adult group 5 are comprised of young professional singles, young engaged and newlyweds, and young families within the ages of 25-35, Young Adult groups 2, 3, 4 and 6 are comprised of families and the groups fall within the ages of 35-45. What was observed was how the groups were highly scriptural in the hour they were together for their group and sought to be communal as the idea of group fellowships were a prominent talking point. This is not to say that discipleship cannot happen as groups age, but it does indicate the need for clarity in pipelines and expectations for leaders as they navigate the groups they have been entrusted to shepherd.

The other critical observation was on the issue of accountability. Young Adult groups 2, 3, and 4 comprised of older members found a better rhythm of accountability than that of the young members. In discussions with the leaders of Young Adult groups 2, 3, and 4, their reasoning for that reality was based on how long many of the members of been together in a group and how they live life together. They believe and the observation supports that there is such familiarity amongst their membership that it naturally leads to relationships built on accountability due to the care that each has for the other and their physical, emotional, and

spiritual well-being. This part of the observation brought to light how discipleship and in turn leadership development hinges not just on the process and pipeline but on the personalization and relationships that must be built so that lives can be forged together to build the church.

With the steps put in place by the Young Adult minister to better train leaders and to be intentional in its discipleship efforts within the groups, the ministry is poised to continue to take steps of growth. The critical issues will be to establish when groups give birth to new groups and what are the key indicators for new leaders to be engaged and trained to take over new groups.

Median Adults

Fourteen median adult classes were surveyed and subsequently observed to ascertain the dynamics of the ministry and how it is functioning when it comes to discipleship and leadership development.

While there are fourteen median adult groups, a collection of thirty-three men and women lead those groups. The group provided 100% participation in the surveys and contained the most extensive answers to the questions. Out of the thirty-three leaders, twenty-eight of them have served for over ten years in the small group ministry of CrossLife Church which informed their detailed answers on the surveys. On the question of what discipleship is, 91% defined it verbatim as the church's mission statement – Leading people to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus. Following that answer there was a clear picture of support and love for CrossLife Church with no real critiques or suggestions provided.

The other interesting note from the surveys was that the leaders could not point to someone they felt as if they were discipling other than the leadership of their collected Sunday small groups and when it came to referencing if they had been disciplined their answers pointed to what they had received from Senior Pastor leadership from the pulpit on Sunday mornings.

With the answers from the surveys gathered, observations were done that rendered the following results:

Small Group	MISSIONAL	ACCOUNTABLE	REPRODUCIBLE	COMMUNAL	SCRIPTURAL
Median Adults 1	X		X	X	
Median Adults 2		X		X	X
Median Adults 3	X	X	X		
Median Adults 4				X	X
Median Adults 5		X	X		
Median Adults 6	X				X
Median Adults 7			X	X	X
Median Adults 8		X		X	
Median Adults 9	X	X		X	
Median Adults 10	X	X			X
Median Adults 11	X	X	X		X
Median Adults 12	X		X	X	
Median Adults 13			X		X
Median Adults 14	X	X	X		

The median adult ministry of CrossLife Church comprises the largest adult group with an average of nearly 440 in attendance each week. The ministry consists of the most consistent tithers in the church along with making up 68% of the volunteers that serve in the church. While the ministry is by far the largest, it is the one area that does not have any specific oversight headed up by a minister or pastor. Due to the nature of the ministry and the participants involved, any leadership provided has come from a Minister of Education role and served more as an information liaison as opposed to providing vision and direction.

While the median adult ministry is the largest in the church, there has not been any increase in groups within the last 15 years but there has been in an increase in leaders. In the observations and subsequent conversations, it was noted that Median Adult 1, 3, 5, 7, 11, 12, 13, and 14 had all added new leaders with the last 5 years to assist with teaching and leadership responsibilities. What also stood out in those groups was a max capacity in the spaces they were using with each group averaging 30-40 in attendance each week. The question was presented to leaders in interviews that followed the observations as to why not divide groups and allow for more consistent leadership and smaller intimate fellowships. What followed was the

acknowledgement of the sense of a lack of training and preparation for the responsibility to lead on one's own. Every leader from every group was grateful for the chance to lead and many have been doing so for over ten years, but all acknowledged there had not been any formal training session before they stepped into the role and had learned while on the job. All welcomed and yearned for more direction to be better prepared and equipped for the leadership they felt called to do.

The observation from all the groups is the potential for reproduction due to the number of groups that are comprised of more than one leader. Median Adult 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, and 14 are all group with more than two leaders and Median Adult 4 and 10 have two leaders. With multiple leaders, the proper training and equipping can lead to the launch of new groups which in turn expands the discipleship opportunities that can be offered outside of the Sunday morning setting.

The other interesting observation from viewing the median adult groups was the age breakdown. In typical Sunday School formats, the ages for median adults would be 35-55 comprised of adults with older elementary children through early college aged children. However, the CrossLife model does not hold to rigid age-based groups thus making groups labeled as median adult misleading. Median adult groups 4, 8, 9 and 10 have an age range of 60-68 in their group thus making the dynamic more fitted for Senior Adult leadership and the stage of the life quite different from the other groups. This does not mean discipleship cannot happen and the development of leaders cannot happen, but it does indicate that a different approach must be taken due to the simple nature of where the group is in its life. The groups containing more traditional age breakdowns for median adults were more open in the interview process to take steps of growth through birthing new groups and breaking out their current groups through a

process of dividing it amongst the leaders to create space for new growth opportunities. The older median adult groups were more resistant to that idea but acquiesced to the need for better training which could open their minds to potential birthing and growth ideas.

The strength of the median adult groups is the communal and accountable nature between the families of the men and women represented. Many have been attending church and serving in the church together for years while sharing in milestone moments in each other's lives. This dynamic is an asset to the potential for discipleship and development as trust has been built through the duration of time and what is missing is leadership to invest and send out to accomplish more for the church.

It will be pivotal to not rest of the reality of the median adult group being the largest in the church and to mobilize the unit out for biblical discipleship and development. Throughout the surveying and observing of this group, it is evident it will need significant leadership focus and a systematic plan to move the ministry beyond a Sunday morning scope. Leaders will have to be trained to invest more than just the lesson preparation to see growth and forward movement. The opportunity exists for an explosion within the ministry as the group is ready for direction and to take a next step.

Senior Adults

Eleven senior adult classes were surveyed and subsequently observed to ascertain the dynamics of the ministry and how it is functioning when it comes to discipleship and leadership development.

There was concern that the senior adult leadership would be hesitant to participate but eight of the eleven groups responded and the three that did not were open to discuss the survey questions in a face-to-face conversation. All leaders pointed to discipleship finding its definition

in church attendance and participation. In speaking with all of them, they harkened back to the time when they were children and raising children and the impact being a member of a church had on their lives. In every conversation, it was apparent that the idea of being committed to a church was central to the fabric of their lives and it was their perceived lack of commitment to the church today by the younger generation that contributed to the societal issues of the day.

The other aspect of the survey that stood out with the senior adult group was their contention that their discipleship responsibility was to their family alone. They spoke of friendships that encouraged them through fellowship and prayers but the topic of being a disciple-maker was relegated to the role they played in the lives of their children and grandchildren.

On the issue of training by the church, the surveys indicated that they believed the church was doing its part and there was no desire for further leadership development. One survey went further and felt the church had too many meetings for leaders and stated they had been teaching for so long that the extra time given to the current two leadership meetings was not redemptive to them.

With the answers from the surveys gathered, observations were done that rendered the following results:

Small Group	MISSIONAL	ACCOUNTABLE	REPRODUCIBLE	COMMUNAL	SCRIPTURAL
Senior Adult 1	X	X			X
Senior Adult 2				X	X
Senior Adult 3		X			X
Senior Adult 4	X			X	X
Senior Adult 5		X			X
Senior Adult 6		X			X
Senior Adult 7	X	X			X
Senior Adult 8				X	X
Senior Adult 9				X	X
Senior Adult 10	X	X		X	X
Senior Adult 11	X				X

The small group leadership of the senior adult ministry is the longest tenured in the church. Of the eleven leaders, ten have been teaching and leading their group for over 25 years. Six of the leaders were teaching before the current Senior Pastor was in place and have witnessed the growth and changes of the church. With that established leadership, the ministry also has pastoral leadership from minister that has been in the church for 20 years. With the ministry having a solid foundation, it also provides great consistency. In the last ten years, senior adult small groups have averaged 144 in attendance and there has only been one class added in that time due to a median adult class being transferred to the senior adult ministry. Of the eleven classes most have smaller groups of 7-9 regularly but Senior Adult 10 has a class average of forty-two. The consistency of attendance was not affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and when facilities were re-opened for in person attendance the men and women were the first to come back.

In observing every group, the standout characteristic was the strict observance to the teaching of the scriptures in their classes. While the young adult and median adult groups are open to topical small group lessons, senior adult leaders do not want to see anything change in small group structure that would take away from the verse-by-verse teaching of the Scriptures. When speaking with leaders, all of them had taught through the Bible more than five times and connected their experience to what they had been taught when in the historical Sunday School setting from childhood to adulthood.

While the groups were highly scriptural, most had a powerful sense of community as they had been together as a group for most of their adult lives. In speaking with the leader for Senior Adult 9, he referenced how many members of their group had passed away within the last five years but also reflected on all they had gone through together. In his remembering, he also

pointed out the difficulty one would have to join the group since there is so much history and life that had been experienced together. All the groups fellowship well together and blend well together, but it is apparent that there is a sense of it being closed for all groups except for Senior Adult 10.

Senior Adult 10 leader believes that is why his group is continuing to grow because while there are members who have been together a long time, they are a group that is proactive in services to invite guests to join them and have witnessed steady growth patterns as a result. It is also why Senior Adult 10 is on the doorstep of being a reproducible group. There is no current group that is reproducing itself but the potential for Senior 10 is there due to the addition of new people and a slight openness to training and development from the leader. All the other leaders were not open to a discussion of birthing new groups or developing new leaders within their groups as they hold tightly to the teaching position and do not want to relinquish or send out in any capacity.

While the opportunity for discipleship and development is currently minimal in the senior adult ministry, the ministerial leadership has the chance to take some in its largest group and move forward with growth if the openness to a discipleship discussion is seized upon and the mission and vision is clearly cast with the practical steps for its leader.

Summary

The depth of information learned from the research conducted has provided a keen sense of three needs for CrossLife Church. The interviews with the Senior Pastor, former Ministers of Education, and local area ministers demonstrated the need for clarity of communication. It is apparent that a necessary step for effective discipleship and multiplication is leadership from the

top of the organization to provide a clear understanding of where the church is going, how it is going to get there, and the role that each member must play to arrive at the destination.

The surveys presented a need for the implementation of a training and development pipeline, so leaders are equipped and empowered to properly execute the ministry of discipleship and development. Many of the surveys revealed a general knowledge that lacked specificity of just what a small group leader is to do to efficiently multiply the group they are leading. The training needed will require time and an investment from ministers and key lay leaders to implement the necessary steps to develop disciples who make disciples.

Finally, the observations revealed that the opportunity for multiplication is currently present and there must be an aggressive mindset in calling out leaders to take next steps and calling up new leaders who are ready for the assignment. Without the observations, the realization of small group sizes and the capability of current participants ready to step into leadership would not have happened. The observations were a critical part of the evaluations throughout this process but further highlights the need for clear ministerial leadership communication and a vigorous training system as there are those ready to enter the pipeline now.

The research in total unearthed the time and investment needed for discipleship and development but through the literary, theological, and theoretical foundations coupled with the data, interviews, surveys, and observations brought about an understanding that discipleship is possible in any ministry context. What became apparent in every step is that the necessary component in those contexts is simple obedience to the prioritization of the command and commissioning of Christ and bringing the church along to walk that same path.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Based on the results garnered from the implementation design, there are several issues that present themselves to CrossLife Church and its ministry context. The examination of these issues provides a framework based on the results being coupled with literature and theological review upon which CrossLife Church can take steps of improvement in its development and discipleship process.

Creating Proper Pipelines

The structure and strategy CrossLife Church take in its discipleship and development is critical to maximize what has been learned through the research done and data gathered. It is not about reinventing the wheel but simply adhering to the call and commands of Christ and normalizing the language of multiplication and reproduction. The two areas of focus will be the church's mission and vision statement and the education department and ministries development process.

The Mission and Vision Statement

The vision and mission of CrossLife Church is "To build lives that matter by teaching people to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus so they may take the gospel where they live, work, play, and go so the sun will not set on the ministry of CrossLife Church." This is the driving force behind everything the church does from its ministry to preschool children to Senior Adults and everything in between. It focuses on what the church does every day and how the everyday ministry is leading to a specific target in the economy of the Kingdom of God. Dever contends, "At the heart of Christianity is God's desire for a people to display his character. They do this

through their obedience to his Word in their relationships with him and with each other.”²³⁷

While understanding that not everyone enters into the dynamics of the church in the same way, the simplicity of the vision breaks down in focus by wanting to see preschoolers come to love Jesus, elementary students come to know Jesus, middle school and high school students come to trust Jesus so that as adults they will follow Jesus. It is intentional in its focus and calling and is rooted in the absolute heart of discipleship and gives a greater understanding to everyone within the congregation what the church is seeking to accomplish.

The values of CrossLife and the steps to take in discipleship and development are centered around the key words in the vision – love, know, trust, and follow – and provide the focal point for how a disciple is made within the fabric of the ministry and body of Christ at CrossLife Church. These values are not just words on page, but they are core to the identification of the church and provide the necessary framework from which ministry is accomplished by keeping every minister and every lay person on same page using the same language. Geiger and Peck contend, “There is a mission-killing divergence between what we say our church believes and what our church actually believes. When the theological statements and catchy slogans don’t match the theological convictions actually held by the people of the local church, the God-honoring hopes of that church will never become a reality.”²³⁸ The values that quantify and qualify the mission and vision of CrossLife Church have coalesced in a powerful manner within the framework of the church so that what is being said is also being practiced across all spectrums of ministry resulting in clarity for everyone within the church on just where it is headed.

²³⁷ Dever, *Discipling*, 12.

²³⁸ Geiger and Peck, *Designed to Lead*, 130.

The first core value is “love.” The desire of the church is to see people know they are loved by God and come to love God themselves. The church believes that this begins in preschool as the building block of raising the children in faith to understand that Jesus loves them, and they need to love Jesus above all else. John wrote, “This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 4:10). Akin writes of this passage, “It is not our love that is primary, but God’s, free, uncaused, and spontaneous. All our love is but a reflection of his and a response to it.”²³⁹ It is imperative that the beginning step for any disciple is understanding that there is nothing they did to earn the love of God, but that God’s love was given freely to them despite their own condition.

While this message resonates with preschoolers, it is also important to note that each of the core values is an expression for any person starting out in faith. There is not a service that occurs where the gospel is not presented and within the last year, every Sunday, the church has seen at least one person believe and confess Jesus as Lord for salvation for the very first time. This is because CrossLife believes the message of the gospel impacts others due to the power and love of Christ and it is core to the values of the church and the starting point of faith and the process of discipleship.

Koessler argues, “The love that Christ commands me to have is the same love that I have experienced. That is why it is such an important evidence of true faith.”²⁴⁰ Within the process of CrossLife, once someone experiences the love of God in Christ and moves to know Him, trust

²³⁹ Danny Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, The New American Commentary vol. 38 (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2001), 180.

²⁴⁰ John Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 24.

Him, and follow Him, the process of sending that person out in ministry is driven by the very love they started out experiencing and it is core to the fuel that feeds the faith and mission.

The second core value for the church is “know.” When a preschool child understands that they are loved by Christ, the desire and goal is to see them move into the elementary ministry where they come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior. It is within the knowledge of understanding who Christ is where revelation occurs, and the revelation is what brings about transformation. Every aspect of what takes place in kindergarten through fifth grade is driven by a focus to ensure that children do not just have mere head knowledge of facts and trivia about God’s Word, but that children who have a knowledge of the God of the Word and surrender their hearts and lives to Him in faith.

The understanding within the ministry of CrossLife is that people must know the pivotal truth about God and that He is the only way to eternal life. Jesus stated, “Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Borchert points out, “One is equally drawn to the fact that this petition of Jesus reflects the purpose statement for the entire Gospel. There it is said that many other signs could, in fact, be given that are not included in this book, but those that have been selected are chosen to promote believing in the intimate relationship of Jesus, the Son, and God the Father in order that the believer might experience dynamic new life because of him.”²⁴¹ Every aspect of the ministry of CrossLife is seeking to be sure that people come to a knowledge of who God is and just what He has done to provide new life to those who would turn to Him for salvation.

The third core value is “trust.” CrossLife Church understand that teenagers today are faced with ever increasing pressure to place their faith in anything and everything but Christ and

²⁴¹ Borchert, *John 12-21*, 191.

so the goal of the ministry to students in sixth through twelfth grade is one that seeks to see them place all their trust in Christ. The desire is to see students and others who have moved through the process of coming to love and know Jesus move to a place of conviction that they are not just putting their trust and hope in a thing, but that their hope and trust is in a person – Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:1, 6). A disciple must live in a place of complete trust in Christ so that they will move out in mission due to that trust. Hull contends, “If someone you do not trust tries to convince you to believe something or change your mind, they almost always fail. However, when someone you admire and trust does the same, you’ll almost always believe that individual.”²⁴² This is why trust is paramount in the core values of CrossLife Church because the leaders believe that to obey Christ and His commands powerfully and properly it will require complete trust in what He is saying and where He is leading.

The final core value is “follow.” As a person begins in preschool learning to love God and Christ, moves into elementary where they come to know Jesus, and complete high school understanding they can trust Jesus, the church believes it will result in mature disciples who move out to follow Jesus in every aspect of life. Jesus called His disciples stating, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed him” (Matthew 4:19-20). Platt writes of this passage:

Consider the cost of what it means to follow Jesus, to live with radical abandonment for His glory, to lay down and leave behind all things in order to live for the King. And this is to be done with joyful dependence on His grace, faithful adherence to His person, and

²⁴² Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 32.

total trust in His authority. Disciples of Jesus ought to live with urgent obedience to His mission.²⁴³

This core value is not the end, but it is the beginning. The disciple who loves, knows, trusts, and follows Jesus does not just come to the finish line, but they run race that was set before them in Christ Jesus to accomplish His mission for the church and live out the purpose of their lives in Christ. CrossLife Church holds the belief that as disciples make their way through the process that the result will be fulfillment and obedience to the Great Commission of Christ. Gallaty contends, “God never intended for your salvation to be an end, but a beginning. God saved you to be a conduit through whom His glorious, life-changing gospel would flow to others.”²⁴⁴ The saving work of Christ propels the church into the calling of Christ and believers must return to that reality if the gospel is to be declared and the Kingdom of God advanced for His glory and renown.

The Discipleship Pathway

If a person choosing to follow Christ is not the end but the beginning, it becomes imperative for the church to establish a pathway where a disciple of Christ can grow to be a disciple-maker for Christ. An established pathway will allow for ministerial and lay leadership at CrossLife to have the necessary clarity and focus to remain steadfast in the task at hand and provide a true sense of alignment of where the church is seeking to lead people with forward movement in mind. The pathway for CrossLife Church can be structured as seeing people move from the seat to the small group to the soul to the streets.

Those who are in the seat part of the pipeline find themselves within the congregation of CrossLife Church as regular attenders to the Sunday morning worship service. They are hearing

²⁴³ Platt, *Matthew*, 87.

²⁴⁴ Gallaty, *Growing Up*, xix.

and receiving the Word on a weekly basis and through their choice and decision are aligning themselves with the body of believers at CrossLife. Currently within the church, there are 1900-2100 who regularly attend worship and 1300-1400 who regularly attend small groups. This points to a pool of 600-700 individuals who are only in the seat at CrossLife and are prime for the opportunity to move forward in the pathway through the practical measures and steps the church takes to emphasize the next step.

The goal is to see people move from the seat to a small group. It must become regular vernacular for the church to stress the need for biblical community that stretches outside the realm of the worship service. It is in biblical community where one finds fellowship, unity, and mutual care amongst other believers and it truly is a place where one can find belonging. The surveys and observation have proven the value of the small group at CrossLife, and it is necessary to highlight that value so people can move forward in the pathway.

It is from the small group where people plant roots and connect in a deeper way to the body of Christ. From that deeper connection one can move to the next step of the soul. Discipleship is the calling and model of Christ and the early church and thus is the soul of the church today. To join a discipleship group is to join the soul and thus continuing moving forward on the pathway. A discipleship group will begin with the investment of the leaders of current small groups into a gender exclusive group of three to five individuals for the next twelve months and pour their lives in one another with the explicit and stated goal of replication. As these people meet and grow together it will foster a true spirit of multiplication and move the small group community beyond just gathering and into a Christ-centered biblical model that invest in others to send others.

As those individuals replicate in the soul step, they are sent to the final part of the pathway which is the streets. This step brings everything back to the mission and vision as the hope is to see people take the gospel of Jesus wherever they live, work, play or go so the sun never sets on the ministry of CrossLife Church. As individuals follow divine appointments in the places where God has placed them, they can step fully into their calling and see people's lives changed by Christ and brought into the fellowship of a body of believers in the church and being to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus and move into the discipleship pathway for further multiplication and replication.

Practical Next Steps

To accomplish the vision of the church, CrossLife Church will have to understand its context and move from the traditional model to the hybrid model. Earley and Dempsey write, "The hybrid model, as the name implies, seeks to blend elements of the traditional, attractational, and organic models. Usually, the hybrid model overlays a new small-group model on top of an existing traditional, or even attractational, church model."²⁴⁵ CrossLife is 150 years old with current Senior Pastor leadership that has been in place for almost twenty-seven years. While steps must be taken to transition out of the traditional model, the idea of wholesale changes would not only disrupt the culture but bring such discouragement that it would destroy elements of the foundation of the church. The generational makeup of the congregation calls for an overlay to the current small group structure that will better engage in disciple making, development, and overall focus.

The hybrid structure would benefit CrossLife and assist the church in moving towards its vision by shifting evangelism efforts from simply "come to church" to "come with me to

²⁴⁵ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 267.

church.” The current statistics of the church indicate that 68% of the over one thousand first time guests from 2019 came to the church due to some form of advertising, 8% checked other, and only 24% came because they were invited by a friend or relative. What is remarkable in those stats is that of the 24% invited by a friend or relative, 78% either joined the church or have become a regular attender to CrossLife. A move towards a hybrid model would better engage the congregation in the mindset of investing in others to invite others and reach others with the gospel.

Another way the hybrid structure would lead CrossLife to greater fruit in its mission and vision is in leadership development. Ferguson and Bird argue, “The practice of multiplication thinking is a shift from thinking that ministry happens through my own leadership to thinking that ministry happens through multiplied leaders.”²⁴⁶ The current traditional model views leadership as ministerial staff only, but the move to a hybrid model would begin to open the door to greater training and leadership development as the mission of the church will not be accomplished through the staff only but through the congregation at large. Through the implementation of what is being called “CrossLife University,” the church is taking steps to further its development to train up new leaders and provide them with the tools needed for success individually and success for the church corporately in achieving the vision.

Dever writes, “A healthy church has a pervasive concern with church growth – not simply growing numbers but growing members.”²⁴⁷ The biggest way in which the hybrid model will shift the heart and focus of CrossLife is by moving away from monitoring only attendance patterns but to also begin to measure spiritual growth patterns. The overlay with the current

²⁴⁶ Ferguson and Bird, *Hero Maker*, 75.

²⁴⁷ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 225.

structure will provide for the first time in the history of the church an understanding of where people are in their walks with Christ and to properly provide them with what their next steps are in the process of becoming a disciple who makes disciples.

While the move from the traditional model to the hybrid model will present challenges, the greatest challenge ahead for CrossLife Church will be the move from being a church with small groups to being a church of small groups. CrossLife carries the moniker for its small group ministry that people should, “Discover Small Groups – A Place to Belong.” The slogan is catchy and looks good on a banner but, the church is operating a small group ministry that is strictly church building based, Sundays only, with no emphasis on training and development. The small groups within CrossLife Church have been functioning as singular entities that seek to care for the people in their group with no concern about how the group is converging with the ministry and mission of CrossLife. Once again, the current structure does not lend itself to assisting in reaching the vision of the church.

What the move from the traditional model to the hybrid model will accomplish is drawing CrossLife out of the shadows of the community and engaging more consistently with the community. It is not enough for the church to rest on being the biggest church in the area with the largest buildings, but the church must begin to see its groups as more than Sunday morning activities and as members of the house of God sent out on mission for God. Earley and Dempsey write, “The hybrid church believes in making disciples, but it goes about this task in a variety of ways.”²⁴⁸ Clearly there will be many facets of ministry within the model change, but in its current iteration there are no facets, and the staleness is an impediment to the vision. The

²⁴⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 233.

focus on becoming a church of small groups places a premium on a hope for quality amid the quantity but the time is now for CrossLife to do something for the sake of the gospel.

As churches understand the biblical calling to small group community, there will be a foundation in place for the inevitable rough spots that come with small group implementation. Biblical community cannot be implemented through the hands of man but must be rooted in the power of Christ and His Word. All churches must effectively communicate the biblical truth as it moves towards small group ministry.

Following the communication of the biblical reasons for small groups, churches must communicate the constructs of their small group ministry. Far too many churches follow models of small group ministry that are not adaptable to their context and thus it is imperative for churches to develop leaders and small groups that fit the nature and character of the body and community they serve. Earley notes, “Every church has preexisting values and structures. Do not just throw these away or belittle them.”²⁴⁹ As the constructs are developed based on the context of ministry, the congregation does not resist the latest ideas but instead comes around the plan because it carries some familiarity with who the church is and is grounded in biblical truth.

Finally, the church must communicate the measure of success for its small group ministry. Far too often, the measure of success is based on the number of attendees, but the more attendance is measured the more the mission is lost. Anyone can attend a small group, but it takes conviction of heart and understanding of calling to step out and start a small group. Small group ministry is not a seating ministry, but a sending ministry and the more leaders and churches come around this measurable the greater the success rate will be in disciple making.

²⁴⁹ Earley, *8 Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders*, 125.

Churches must communicate that the goal for every small group is to give birth to more small groups so that the gospel can advance, and God can receive the glory.

With the goal known and the target set to see people come to love, know, trust, and follow Jesus so the sun never sets on the ministry of CrossLife Church, it provides clear measurables to be able to ascertain if the church is moving in the right direction. The first goal is in declaration. Earley and Dempsey write, “The first stage of discipleship is a series of steps to Jesus leading to repentance from sin and faith in Christ.”²⁵⁰ CrossLife is going to have to win people to Christ to see them enter the process of becoming a disciple. Because of this reality, CrossLife has set a goal of seeing forty adult first time guests each week and of those forty guests for 75% of them to be invited by a friend. To reach new people for Christ, there must be new people coming and those new people must be invited by the congregation of CrossLife. The church is undergoing the North American Mission Board’s “Who’s Your One?” emphasis to mobilize the church in mission to achieve the goals it has set. Out of the first-time guest goal, the aim is to see four hundred people come to know Christ and walk through the waters of baptism in 2020. In 2019, CrossLife saw 162 people baptized and had a record of 229 professions of faith as indicated on a card or by coming forward. The goal in declaration is seeing people repent and confess Jesus as Lord and CrossLife believes that if people are properly being disciplined that there will be enough engaging in the mission to see these goals reached and provide verifiable measurables that the church is progressing.

The second measurement is in development. In examining the adult small groups of CrossLife Church, there are sixteen classes poised to birth new groups that are averaging an attendance of thirty or more each week, but in its current iteration there are not enough

²⁵⁰ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...*, 64.

developed leaders. Because development is a part of discipleship, the following steps will take place: Have leaders of those sixteen groups identify 2-3 people who are true candidates to step out and lead a small group, begin to train and teach the potential leaders in issues of theology, small group management, leadership, and practical application through intentional, biblical discipleship that will grow those identified, as the discipleship deepens and furthers in time, monthly moments will be set aside for those trained to teach within the small groups, the experiences provided for the new leaders to teach will follow with opportunities to build upon those moments in follow up groups to coach them on what they are doing well and ways to improve, and finally those individuals will be released to teach and also released to identify who they will take on as an apprentice so that multiplication and development will continue. Ogden states, “The farm system for other leadership roles inside or outside the church is through the front-line ministry of a small group.”²⁵¹ The goal would be to see the development of forty-eight new leaders in 2020 and the formation of sixteen new groups. Beyond 2020, the goal would be to see twenty new leaders trained each year and four new groups established each year. The establishing of these new leaders and groups would position CrossLife in a way to achieve its vision and move into a model of multiplication.

The final area of measurable goals is in deployment. Hull notes, “The four stages Jesus used to train his disciples show us the value of knowing how to lead others with wisdom and skill. He carefully nurtured and challenged his followers. Then he released them to carry on his work.”²⁵² This is the opportunity and responsibility that lies before CrossLife Church. The ministry of CrossLife must not be a hoarding one but a sending one. The culture of the church

²⁵¹ Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, 176.

²⁵² Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 185.

will mirror that of a sending one as the goals set are achieved and celebrated. CrossLife has planted churches within the last two years in Haiti, New York City, and Los Angeles. The goal starting in 2020 is to plant four new churches a year across America and the world and to send out twenty-five people each year from the congregation to help with these church plants. Beyond the church planting goal, the church has also set a goal of sending out twenty-five people to full-time missions by 2025. If the sun is never to set on the ministry of CrossLife Church, then there must be people scattered to the ends of the earth for the sake of the gospel and CrossLife is intent on training, developing, and deploying those men and women out for the glory of God.

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Appendix A: Senior Pastor Interview

1. How would you define discipleship?
2. Who discipled you in your Christian walk?
3. What made that relationship effective?
4. Who have you discipled in your life?
5. Describe that experience.
6. In your 27 years at CrossLife, how effective has the discipleship ministry been?
7. At its strongest point, what made it effective?
8. At its weakest point, what were the issues connected with the struggle?
9. Do you believe CrossLife is currently engaged in effective discipleship? Why or why not?
10. When the church initially grew, what do you attribute to that growth?
11. In the key moments when the church has suffered attrition, what do you attribute to that attrition?
12. In the last 3 years the church has sustained neither great growth nor great attrition, what you attribute to this reality?
13. Describe CrossLife's leadership development process?
14. Where do you see CrossLife moving in the future?
15. Do you believe discipleship will be critical to that future? If so, how?

Appendix B: Interview with Former Minister of Education

1. What years did you serve as Minister of Education at CrossLife?
2. What were the significant events that occurred during your ministry?
3. How would you describe the discipleship ministry in your time serving?
4. How would you define discipleship?
5. What were the areas of strength in the discipleship ministry and small groups?
6. What were the weaknesses in the discipleship ministry and small groups?
7. If you could change anything you did during your tenure of service, what would it be?
Why?
8. If there was growth, what led to the growth?
9. If there was attrition, what was the cause of the attrition?
10. If the ministry plateaued, what was the reason for the flatline?
11. Do you believe CrossLife emphasizes discipleship? Why or why not?
12. If you do not believe CrossLife emphasizes discipleship, what do you think the main emphasis is of the church and its leadership?
13. Does CrossLife effectively develop leaders? Why or why not?
14. Do you feel you developed as a leader while serving at CrossLife? Why or why not?

Appendix C: Interview with other churches/ministers with effective discipleship ministries

1. How long have served in ministry?
2. How were you disciplined?
3. Describe your personal leadership development process?
4. How are you implementing discipleship and development in your current context?
5. How is that different from you did when you first started in ministry?
6. What have you learned about leadership development and discipleship that has impacted your thinking today?
7. What is your advice to churches seeking to improve their leadership development and discipleship ministries?
8. Why do you feel what you are doing is working?
9. Are there any flaws in the process?
10. Can you provide a significant success story about your process?

Appendix D: Small Group Leader Survey

1. How do you define discipleship?
2. Are you currently discipling someone? Who is that? Why do you view it as a discipleship relationship?
3. Do you think CrossLife Church is engaged in discipleship? Why or why not?
4. If it is not engaged, what steps would you recommend the church to take to be more effective?
5. If you have led a group for more than 10 years, how would you describe the effective of CrossLife's discipleship ministry in the past?
6. Do you believe you have been discipled as a leader? If so, explain that process.
7. What do you believe the future of CrossLife's discipleship ministry should look like?

November 30, 2020

Timothy Dix
Joshua Dugan

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-363 An Examination of Leadership Development to Ascertain the Effectiveness of the Discipleship Ministry of CrossLife Church

Dear Timothy Dix and Joshua Dugan,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

(2) Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(1).

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

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

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

Sincerely,

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