

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

One Church's Apathy Toward Fulfilling the Great Commission

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

by

David T. Williamson

Lynchburg, Virginia

March 2023

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Thesis Project Approval Sheet

Dr. Jacob Dunlow, Assistant Professor

Dr. Robert Massey, Assistant Professor

THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

David T. Williamson

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity, 2023

Mentor: Dr. Jacob Dunlow

Philippians 1:9-11 records Paul's prayer containing four assessments believers can use to measure their progress toward spiritual maturity. These areas include a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows. The purpose of all these qualities is to demonstrate God's glory. Where spiritual maturity is absent, apathy and complacency abound, and this dilemma must be overcome before a church can effectively pursue and sustain a viable focus on church revitalization. Because theological academia has not effectively focused on the partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization, this DMIN research project will address the need for individuals to overcome apathy and complacency by pursuing spiritual maturity. This pursuit is a precursor to and a partner of an effective and sustainable church revitalization focus. The research will be conducted within a small, dying, neighborhood Baptist church that has seen a sixty-one percent decrease in attendance over the past seven years. This research will include one-on-one confidential interviews, before and after spiritual maturity assessments, a ten-week Discipleship Training Course, a focus group study, and a triangularization questionnaire. This project will present the findings highlighted in a before and after snapshot of the life and vitality of this otherwise dying congregation.

Abstract Length: 205 words

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Abbreviations

BGC	<i>Baptist General Conference (now Converge)</i>
BSB	<i>Berean Standard Bible</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
DRP	<i>DMIN Research Project</i>
DTC	<i>Discipleship Training Course</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
FBC	<i>First Baptist Church</i>
HCSB	<i>Holman Christian Standard Bible</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
NET	<i>New English Translation</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
UP	<i>Upper Peninsula (of Michigan)</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Spiritual apathy and church tradition can often hinder the development of spiritual maturity, and without spiritual maturity on an individual level, this researcher posits that church revitalization is not easily sustained. This project addresses the gap in theological academia that partners spiritual maturity with church revitalization. This chapter introduces the geographical and demographical background of First Baptist Church (FBC) of Norway, MI, which is a small congregation struggling to become vital to its community and to the Christ to whom it is called to serve.

The ministry context and background highlight the recent history and the battles which now engulf the current pastor of seven years. This is followed by addressing a problem that is quite common within all of Christendom, that revitalization at the church level cannot be effectively accomplished outside of an enthusiastic pursuit of spiritual maturity at the individual level. In recent years, FBC has had no unified direction for ministry from its leadership, no pursuit of outreach and evangelism, and no structure that supports growth in discipleship and spiritual maturity. It is postulated here that without spiritual maturity, there can be no true and sustainable church revitalization.

The problem statement, along with its supporting narrative, is followed by the purpose of this doctoral project, which is to establish a Discipleship Training Course (DTC) that focuses on overcoming apathy by growing in spiritual maturity. The natural outflow of spiritual maturity should be an overwhelming passion to engage in evangelistic activities, which then results in church revitalization. It is worth noting here that church revitalization does not necessarily mean

church growth, although gaining new members is an assumed outcome. While numerical growth is a bonus, it is not the target of this DMIN research project (DRP). Seeing spiritual maturity overcome apathy with a subsequent excitement for ministry outside of the walls of FBC is the goal.

Realizing that not every church is destined to become a mega church, membership numbers mean far less than does the devotion of its members toward fulfilling the Great Commission. Being a small church is not a terrible thing. As Abraham Lincoln once said, “God must love smaller churches because he made so many of them.”¹ The primary marker of a church which has been revitalized is not seen in the number of people within its doors, but in a church’s healthy DNA that finds folks going outside of those doors to reach its community for Christ. Whereas in a smaller church either one individual (often the pastor) or a small group of folks accomplish much of the work, in a larger congregation it is typical to see a staff member enacting ministry through small groups.² Finally, the reader will be introduced to the thesis statement, which posits that if a solid DTC is established and even eagerly attended, then the problem of spiritual apathy will be addressed and FBC will see the pendulum swing away from imminent church closure. Without pursuing spiritual maturity on an individual level, church revitalization will not occur at FBC, and it definitely will not be a sustainable endeavor.

Ministry Context

This DRP is being conducted by a former pastor who has served three struggling congregations. Partnering with the local church and prior to entering pastoral ministry he served

¹ Gary L. McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won’t Get You There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 181.

² Ibid., 185.

the kingdom of God with an evangelistic outreach ministry as a Christian Illusionist, traveling eight states throughout the Midwest conducting dozens of outreach events per year. He also helped hundreds of churches across the US to reach their communities for Christ as a Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant with Outreach, Inc.³ At the beginning of this research he was serving as a newly appointed elder, drummer, and adult Sunday school teacher, and was administering this DRP under the authority and guidance of the senior pastor of FBC. Beginning the end of June 2022, however, the senior pastor took ill, and the researcher began filling the pulpit and assuming all pastoral duties. Due to decreasing health the senior pastor submitted his resignation on September 28, 2022, and God called him home on November 3, 2022.⁴ The researcher was officially called to serve as the pastor of FBC beginning November 1, 2022.

Geographical and Demographical Background

Before the ministry context is shared, it is important to provide both the geographical and demographic background which currently besets the ministry of FBC. This church is nestled in the Upper Peninsula (UP) of Michigan, just a few miles north of the Wisconsin border. Like many of the small towns throughout the UP, the area was settled as the result of the iron mining industry and the logging industry. Ethnic groups made their journey to this area with the hope of establishing a vibrant lifestyle in the new country, and to this day there is a strong undertone of ethnic boundaries.

³ The official title was that of an Account Manager, but “Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant” was adopted and approved by Jamie Stahler, Vice President – Sales & Partnerships, Outreach, Inc., as it best describes the ministry that was conducted within the sales position.

⁴ To avoid confusion, any reference to the pastor or the senior pastor in this work is done in reference to the pastor who recently resigned and then passed away. In contrast, any reference made to the new pastor is done so by calling him the researcher.

Norway is a small town of almost 3,000 people and is primarily made up of Norwegian and Swedish ethnicities, although there is a splattering of Irish and Italian families intermixed. This church was first established as the Swedish Baptist Church of Norway on December 2, 1888, whereas worship services were held in the Swedish dialect until bilingual services began in the 1920s. The purpose for its existence was to provide a place for Swedes to worship with their kind and to promote a Swedish community for those who have traveled to the United States for work.

The church building was relocated from the north end of town to the southern region of Norway as horses pulled the structure over logs, and in 1923 the name was changed from the Swedish Baptist Church of Norway to FBC. At this point the services became bilingual being conducted in both Swedish and English, and within a couple of years the Swedish dialect was dropped from the worship services. In the 134 years this church has remained in existence, twenty-seven men have served as pastor, averaging a stay of only five years, many of whom were here for less than two years. The longest-tenured pastor served FBC for sixteen years. According to a census taken in 2010, most Norway is made up of Caucasian families (98%), with a median age of forty-two that has since aged to fifty-two years old (per the 2019 census). Today an alarming 12% of the family households are absent a father/husband.⁵

Seven miles west of Norway is a town called Iron Mountain, which is the largest town in Dickinson County and is still predominantly an Italian population. Even closer to Norway is a town called Kingsford, which is the birthplace of Kingsford charcoal,⁶ and whose high school

⁵ Menominee Range Memories, "Early Norway and Vulcan Views, Dickinson County, Michigan, Part 2," accessed January 31, 2022, <https://www.uproc.lib.mi.us/dclpdf/Genealogy/Norpart2.pdf>.

⁶ Karen Harris, "Henry Ford and the Invention of Kingsford Charcoal," accessed March 18, 2022, <https://historydaily.org/henry-ford-and-the-invention-of-kingsford-charcoal>.

mascot is the Flivvers. A Flivver is an inexpensive car from Ford Automotive (1927). Ford needed charcoal, iron, and wood to produce these vehicles. The mining and logging industry is entrenched in this geography, and while ethnic divides are subtle, they are indeed still present.

Ethnic Heritage

While the geography which surrounds Norway has deep roots with the Ford Automotive Company because of the need for wood (logging industry), metal (iron industry), and energy (Kingsford charcoal), pride in ethnicity and family history remains paramount in the persona of Dickinson County. Although having pride in one's ethnic heritage is not bad in and of itself, it is easy for these ethnic divisions to become a hidden obstacle to church growth, or at least to evangelistic activities. There is an unspoken focus on a prideful family heritage that has infiltrated the church and interfered with any evangelism that might cross family lines. Norway once had a Swedish Baptist church and still has an Evangelical Covenant church (Swedish) and a Swedish Lutheran church.

Part of growing in spiritual maturity must be a sound realization that believers are adopted into a new family that holds no geographical or demographic boundaries (Gal 3:28, Col 3:11, 1 Pet 2:9-12). Although the family of God is universal, if one is not from this area or does not have a longstanding family history within a particular ethnicity, then that individual/family will never truly fit in. Outsiders are almost shunned or kept at arm's length, even though the locals may not even realize they are acting this way. Just because someone has lived in the UP for decades, if they were not born here, they would never be a fully accepted Yooper. But family (or ethnic) heritage is not the only obstacle to church revitalization at FBC. Church traditions can also cause problems.

Church Tradition

Church traditions are not bad in and of themselves unless those traditions dictate church life away from the pursuit of gospel activities mandated by Scripture. When the set of Constitution and Bylaws, along with *Robert's Rules for Order*, become the governing documents for the life of the church, especially when some of those traditions do not align with Scripture, there is an imminent problem that cannot be overlooked. Church governance notwithstanding, when parishioners stand firm on the seven deadly words (“we have always done it that way”) and only set foot on the foundations of Scripture when it suits their whims, there is a problem. When someone does not get their way, a fight-or-flight condition becomes present.

Tradition can stand against progress, but it can also help to maintain a firm footing on gospel activities. Smaller churches across the land fight the battles of consumerism, whereas larger churches can offer more to draw the wayward shopper away from the smaller church. Much like how Walmart has put smaller specialty shops out of business, the larger church is drawing the younger crowd away from smaller churches. And when the proverbial church tradition boat is rocked, some will leave for a bigger boat, and this has been happening at FBC.

Families have even become divided in that the parents have chosen to remain at FBC while their children have swarmed to a bigger church. Younger families are also flocking to Redemption Hill (Kingsford),⁷ which is a sister church to FBC within the Converge collection of churches. There are only twelve Converge Baptist churches in the UP, whereas FBC is the oldest and Redemption Hill is the largest.⁸ Both have suffered through nasty church splits but only Redemption Hill has changed to minister to a younger demographic.

⁷ According to the reports given in FBC's Quasquicentennial Celebration report, dated in 2013, families were also leaving FBC to other churches in the mid-late 2000s due to a lack of viable children and youth ministries.

⁸ Redemption Hill is now the largest BGC church in the UP and was birthed in 1884 when the original Swedish Baptist Church of Norway relocated to Iron Mountain. Redemption Hill Church, Iron Mountain, MI,

Technology and a Younger Generation

To highlight FBC's inability to attract and keep a younger generation, one who grew up with technology at their fingertips, the church does not have an operational website. And to the extent of showing life and vitality on Facebook, the last post made to its Facebook page was in 2013, and that was from a now non-existent youth group, followed by a short video posted by a church member who shot a video off sight (April 2020). In visiting this church, a casual observer would readily see a church building that shows wear and a congregation made up of an aged populous. If nothing changes, this church will close its doors in eight-ten years, if even just because of sheer attrition.

These geographical and demographic tidbits provide a backdrop to the problems of vision, structure, motivation, and spiritual apathy, which hampers present ministries and, thus, future growth. They are shared to highlight which besets the ministry at FBC. The never-changing flow of welcome, pray, sing two songs, read Scripture, pray again, sing two more songs, preach, benediction (wet, lather, rinse, repeat) has only recently been addressed (May 2022), but there is absolutely nothing occurring to reach Norway for Christ. Things are changing at FBC, and a solid core group is being called to arms to fight against the recent decay of ministry.

Moving Toward Luke 14:23

Even though there are several obstacles to overcome, such as spiritual apathy, complacency, ethnic divides, trust issues, a lack of vision, and a disregard for outreach and

accessed March 18, 2022, <https://www.redemptionhillup.org/>, accessed March 18, 2022, Converge Great Lakes, "Locate a Converge Church," accessed March 19, 2022, <https://converge.org/great-lakes/about/churches?region=0e625e2f-6931-4d96-b215-520601600ea9>.

evangelism, not all hope is lost. Excitement is building toward what is quickly becoming a new way of life at FBC. A worship committee has been called to evaluate the Sunday morning order of service. An electronic drum set has been added to help increase the energy and atmosphere of the singing portion of the worship service. The pastor is attempting to preach with more vigor and vitality, yet he is still restricted due to poor health. The elder board has been expanded. A small group has been started that meets weekly, and a women's Bible study will commence over the summer months.

Fellowship groups are also forming, such as one that offers classes on painting with watercolors, and a new mover visitation program is soon to be promoted to reach out to the community on a smaller, simplified scale. It is believed that the stage is being set for God to show up and show off amid FBC, and hopefully there are many who would jump at opportunities to serve with an eager heart. But even with the changes that are forthcoming, it will prove to be a challenging task to engage FBC in activities that reach outside of its walls. There is a need for an outward focus, as currently all activities at this church are inwardly focused, with little to no regard for reaching the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Because the pursuit of church revitalization begins with growing in spiritual maturity, and because spiritual maturity results in a new attitude toward evangelism, an outward focus needs to be adopted, first by the leadership team and subsequently by the congregation. This new attitude toward evangelism is one that cries, "I get to" rather than, "I must." The premise for outreach seen in Luke's Gospel is a critical focus for future growth. "And the master said to the servant, 'Go [ἐξέρχομαι, verb, *to go out; come out*] out to the highways and hedges and compel [ἀναγκάζω, verb-aorist-active-imperative-2p, singular, *to compel, force, press*] people to come

in, that my house may be filled”⁹ (Luke 14:23, English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament, English Standard Version).

Going and compelling needs to become the focused vision. Overcoming both a lack of direction from leadership and a lack of caring from the congregation is the dilemma that must be addressed. Evangelism is seldom talked about, and the vision is never spoken of from the pulpit.¹⁰ If the vision is not recitable, it is not excitable. Enthusiasm moving in a unified direction with followers who are in one accord can create a mighty force against the enemies of apathy, complacency, and idleness.

But not all is lost. The current pastor, who has had over thirty-years’ experience in pastoral ministry, has done well to focus his preaching on Christ while promoting an environment where only God is to be worshiped. His foundation for ministry mandates that Scripture is all about God and never about man, but as one learns more of God’s character, the natural result should be growth in one’s worship of Him and in ones’ walk with the Lord. However, his hyper-vigilance has snuffed out joy, enthusiasm, and life. After seven years, it is time to take the next step. This pastor admittedly lacks in administrative prowess, which has contributed in strong part, far more than Covid, to a lack of engaging the flock in disciple-making opportunities that would help facilitate growth toward spiritual maturity.

The long-standing membership of FBC consists primarily of adults who are over fifty-five years of age, with many who are well into their retirement years, along with about a dozen children. In 2014, a Sunday morning service saw closer to 150 who packed the pews for two

⁹ “Go” and “compel” are the two imperative verbs used in this verse. John Schwandt and C. John Collins, eds. *The English-Greek Reverse Interlinear New Testament, English Standard Version: Nestle-Aland Novum Testamentum Graece*, 17th rev. ed., (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2006).

¹⁰ The vision has not been shared in at least the past two years, but some resemblance of a motto is listed in the weekly bulletin: “Our church exists by the will of God, to live as Christ in the power of His spirit [sic], for the glory of the Father.”

services, but so far in 2022 the average attendance has been fifty-six. Because of the Norwegian and Swedish ethnical divide which includes denominational standings (families often remain with the denomination of their ancestors), FBC has not engaged in the Great Commission for years, and the church has seen a gradual decline in membership over recent history because of it.

Hope on the Horizon

There are those who call this their church home who certainly love the Lord and desire to see God move mightily in her midst. Changes, while slow, are on the horizon. One can sense a level of excitement that FBC is about to see something happen, an anticipation that is being prompted in only a small part by this research project, and due to the working of the Holy Spirit. All said, overcoming spiritual apathy by promoting a DTC that focuses on growing in spiritual maturity is critical to FBC's survival. The problem of spiritual apathy and complacency, as well as there being a lack of focus on growing in spiritual maturity, needs to be identified and dealt with at the individual and church levels. This problem is present at FBC due to a lack of administration and leadership that has failed to provide an effective structure for discipleship training.

Problem Presented

No matter the reason or the excuse, the problem is that FBC is apathetic¹¹ toward fulfilling the Great Commission. This apathy is partly due to a lack of historical and biblical leadership that has failed to facilitate a DTC that not only would promote growth in spiritual maturity but also nurture other areas required before or while pursuing church revitalization.

¹¹ To label every individual as being apathetic is not fair. Some are apprehensive, some are lacking the proper training, encouragement, and motivation, and some are dealing with internal struggles and relational conflicts that are due to the pastor's style and hyper-vigilance.

These prerequisites include having an effective outreach strategy, providing for targeted evangelistic events, training in how to share one's faith, and teaching the importance of church membership as well as what it means to be the church according to Scripture. Not having these focuses has resulted in a congregation that has failed to reach its community for Christ.

The problem of apathy can be partly explained by a brief history of FBC's leadership, although fingers should not point in that direction alone. A widespread problem in churches today, and even at FBC, is that many a tenured pastor has learned not to make waves in the face of a congregation that treats their pastor as a hireling rather than as a man called of God to serve (Rom 13:1-2, Heb 13:17). Could it be that the pastor may be trying to survive in his career, or just that he has gained wisdom that years of ministry experience has afforded? When congregants focus on the personal wants of self rather than on the biblical mandates for church life, danger lurks around the corner. As Adrian Rogers put it, lust craves for what it can get, whereas love craves for what it can give.¹² Sometimes a pastor needs to rock the boat by shifting his focus to a different side (John 21:6-11), and at other times he needs to get out of the boat (Matt 14:29). In either case, Jesus is to be the focus, and it is the Holy Spirit who affects any level of success.

It has been shared that the previous pastor, who had limited (and non-pastoral) theological training, drew a crowd because of his charismatic personality. Many who once called FBC their home came solely because of his relatable personality. When he left, so did they. Other former church members were also the so-called doers in the church, although reportedly their focus was more on, for example, the decorations for VBS rather than on decisions for the

¹² This is a paraphrase from Adrian Rogers whose recorded message was recently heard on a local Christian radio station (April 23, 2022).

Lord.¹³ Other faithful members sat by the wayside while these enthusiastic parishioners did most of the work, and when the doers left the church, what remained were those who were used to not having to do much at all. This is not to suggest that the current membership is idle, as many do serve out of their love for the Lord, but the current congregation has not responded to a call to arms in this present-day environment, mainly because this call has not been made by the pastor. In numerous ways just their consistent attendance is viable to the ministry of the church, but is it enough to only show up? Some work out front, some work behind the scenes, and many do not work at all, because of age or apathy. The church has grown and thrived under previous pastors, but the recent history has seen a slow, downward spiral, to include a church split within the past decade. As of this writing, the elder board is meeting to address these issues, and the DTC is timely.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to introduce and lead a DTC that will teach how to self-diagnose one's level of spiritual maturity and to overcome spiritual apathy while considering FBC's need for church revitalization. One way to address apathy is to provide scriptural motivation for growing in spiritual maturity. This in turn should lead to living out the Great Commission, thus seeing the church become revitalized. Using Philippians 1:9-11¹⁴ as the focal text, spiritual maturity is stimulated and the natural result is an overflowing joy that results from having a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows.

¹³ This comment was summarized from a discussion with four different individuals during unrelated conversations. This information was provided without request and the witness thereof was consistent among each of them. Those individuals, for the sake of confidentiality and trust, are to remain anonymous.

¹⁴ "And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God" (NIV, 1978).

These markers of spiritual maturity, when practiced on an individual level, will result in a revitalized church on a corporate level. Therefore, if heavily attended, this discipleship training should prove to be the kryptonite that impedes apathy and complacency's power over an otherwise progressively dying church like FBC. Discipleship leads to spiritual maturity, and spiritual maturity leads to church revitalization with the end goal being an active evangelistic campaign.

The pastor's theology on secondary issues differs from many in the congregation, and this has led to some recent departures from the church. Whereas the pastor holds to covenant theology, this church is filled with staunch dispensationalists. This could be said of the UP region, too. Additionally, the pastor holds to post-tribulation and an old earth age whereas many in the congregation look forward to a pre-tribulation rapture and view the history of humanity and God's creation from a young earth perspective.

Therefore, the DTC might need to address such topics as a how to serve under a pastor who differs from most of the congregation in his theology,¹⁵ how to engage in evangelism effectively, the need to establish a biblically sound leadership structure, how to define and pursue spiritual maturity and the pursuit thereof, what it means to be a church member, how to identify, grow in, and use one's spiritual gifting for the edification of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16), and the need for the church to yield to God's will in revitalization and what that might look like for FBC.

¹⁵ The differences in theology have created a subtle rift within the congregation whereas they hesitate to trust fully what the pastor is teaching. Subsequently, this may potentially lead to problems when it comes to pastoral leadership seeking to advance the cause of Christ through the church revitalization process.

Basic Assumptions

There are three basic assumptions being made while approaching this DRP. The first assumption is that after the questionnaires are completed, there will be enough usable information to create a solid DTC designed specifically to meet the spiritual needs of this congregation. The second assumption is that spiritual apathy is indeed the major problem that is present at FBC. And finally, the third assumption is that by acquiring an understanding of and then engaging in the process of growing in spiritual maturity, individuals will then eagerly engage in the Great Commission, all of which will lead to church revitalization.

First, it is assumed that once the data from the questionnaire is collected, and leadership is consulted, a solid DTC will be developed. This program will promote the value of church membership and the need to become engaged in church life by utilizing one's spiritual gifts and the program will establish a foundation for excitement toward outreach and evangelism, all of which leads to the church becoming revitalized. The questionnaire will help to promote buy-in and a sense of ownership by the congregants. The DTC will not only highlight the need for spiritual maturity, but it will identify what it means to be the church, or more specifically, what it means to be a viable church member. Subsequently, the continual growth in spiritual maturity will prompt the leadership of FBC to provide opportunities for outreach and evangelism, whereas the membership will then eagerly engage in Great Commission activities.

Second, the belief that spiritual apathy is the primary cause why FBC is not fulfilling her role in the kingdom and is not being the church that God has called her to be, one must realize that it is difficult to affix the apathy label upon any one individual, because one cannot see the heart of man (1 Sam 16:7). What is true, however, is that evangelistic efforts and disciple-making processes are not currently occurring, nor have they been an emphasis over the past ten to fifteen years, if not longer. Even though reasons for not engaging in the Great Commission

could be vocalized to justify a lack of trying, these reasons would be nothing more than empty excuses.

Whereas some might say the reason for not inviting friends to church is that they are not excited to be there themselves, and others might look to Covid as their excuse. These are weak excuses, like many others of the same kind. The murmurs of a few in the congregation have been that spiritual apathy is not the problem at FBC, but it is a dwindling level of trust in recent leadership. If the congregation treats their pastor as a hireling, then the remedy for spiritual apathy is elevated to an entirely new level. Spiritual apathy, while believed to be an accurate assessment of the current situation at FBC, is only a surface diagnosis until the layers are peeled back to see either a darkened, unrepentant sin of the church, or a lack of ability to reach Norway solely due to ethnical constraints, or some other restriction that cannot be overcome, that is, unless God shows up and show off in her midst.

Finally, it is assumed that by pursuing spiritual maturity, the natural result will be an excitement toward sharing one's faith. It is one thing to know of the requirement to fulfill the Great Commission and even to uncover a new or renewed excitement for seeing a lost soul come to Christ, but it is another thing to overcome a life of past failures, introverted personalities, a lack of knowledge (as in knowing how to do something based on personal experiences), and a fear of being rejected in a small-town setting.

When spiritual apathy is in play, or even when complacency sets in, it will take more than a subtle prompting from the pulpit to engage the churchgoer to change his or her lifestyle so dramatically. Some use the excuse that because they were not given the spiritual gift of evangelism, they are only required to participate in supplementary ways, such as only praying for the lost or sending money to missions.

Regardless of Covid, physical limitations because of aging, the failure of historical and biblical church leadership to lead by example, or even disputes over doctrine, there is a call to return to what Scripture mandates. Long departed are the former doers (Pareto Principle)¹⁶ who have left the church, leaving a perceived vacuum behind them. The assumption going into this DRP is not only that spiritual apathy is the result of a lack of concern for growing in spiritual maturity, but that this apathy could have been thwarted long ago if a solid DTC were already in place. When reflecting on these basic assumptions alongside the ministry context in which FBC currently finds itself, it is important to find a common ground for approaching the problems of spiritual apathy, a lack of understanding and pursuit of spiritual maturity, and thus not realizing the imminent need for FBC to submit to the revitalization process. The following definitions are provided to help facilitate a common understanding of the terms used within this DRP.

Definitions

This project concerns itself with a gap that exists between spiritual maturity and church revitalization. Some argue these two categories in Christendom have not overlapped to the point of asserting that spiritual maturity is a prerequisite, or at least a direct parallel, to the quest for a church to become re-birthed, revamped, renewed, and revitalized. It is asserted that spiritual apathy is the main obstacle to FBC experiencing church revitalization, and to overcome apathy, an effective DTC needs to be instituted. Because the fields of discipleship, evangelism, church growth, spiritual maturity, and church revitalization can either heavily overlap or in other ways barely coincide, the following terms are significant to encapsulate how spiritual maturity and

¹⁶ The Pareto principle asserts that 80% of the work is done by 20% of the people, or that 80% of the results are related to the efforts of 20% of the people within an organization. Sarah Laoyan, “Understanding the Pareto principle (The 80/20 rule),” August 6, 2021, <https://asana.com/resources/pareto-principle-80-20-rule>.

church revitalization should coexist. These key terms include apathy, change, church revitalization, mentorship, mission/mission statement, sanctification, spiritual maturity, strategic plan, and vision, or vision statement.

Apathy, or more specifically, spiritual apathy, is also known as indifference, complacency, or slothfulness. “Apathy is a psychological and spiritual sickness in which we experience a prolonged dampening of motivation, effort, and emotion, as well as a resistance to the things that would bring flourishing in ourselves and others. It is a sin that expresses itself as restlessness, aimlessness, laziness, and joylessness toward the things of God.”¹⁷

Change is necessary for effective and purposeful growth. Change is something that happens throughout the natural progression of church revitalization. Because change is difficult to define, it is the purpose for change that is in view here. Change within a church faces six obstacles,¹⁸ many which are obstacles to a pastor’s renewed vision. Because the traditionalist will invariably fight change, it is the conviction of returning to the original days of glory that is paramount here. Clarity is key. “Remember that people will follow you if you are uncertain, but they will not follow you if you are unclear.”¹⁹ God glorifying changes are the goal.

Church revitalization occurs when an otherwise dormant body of believers, settled into their comfort zone padded by personal desires, finally realize that church life is not about themselves but about how God wants to use them for His purpose and to His glory. Agreeing with Andrew M. Davis, “We will use the word *revitalization* to describe the effort to restore by

¹⁷ Uche Anizor, *Overcoming Apathy: Gospel Hope for Those Who Struggle to Care* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 63.

¹⁸ Six ways in which churches resist change. For more information, see chapter two, “Church Traditions” in Sam Rainer, III, *Obstacles in the Established Church: How Leaders Overcome Them* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2014).

¹⁹ Todd Adkins, *Leading Change in Your Church* (Nashville, TN: Lifeway Leadership, 2019), 14.

biblical means a once healthy church from a present level of disease to a state of spiritual health, as defined by the Word of God.”²⁰ To truly be revitalized a church must reignite its vigor toward fulfilling the Great Commission.

Evangelism is required for a spiritually mature believer. Without evangelism, maturity is still sorely lacking. Using Donald Whitney’s definition of evangelism, “*evangelism* is presenting Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people, in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Him, to receive Him as their Savior, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of his church.”²¹

Mentorship is the multiplication of ministers who have been developed from laity. For the sake of this work, mentorship is the living out of one’s faith through the disciple-making process. Therefore, it is here that the term “disciple” is also being explained. Mentorship takes place when disciples are being made, therefore, the definition of mentorship is also the definition of a disciple. “A disciple is a person who follows Jesus, is transformed by Jesus, and joins Jesus on his mission; that is the job of every believer. A disciple maker makes disciples. Every Christian has that job. A pastor is more than that. He has been given the task of leading a church in which he is to create a system in which people are taught how to be disciples.”²² That is discipleship, and that is mentorship.

Mission, or *mission statement*, is “a broad, general statement about who you wish to reach and what the church hopes to accomplish.”²³ This is often confused with or used

²⁰ Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 20.

²¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 120.

²² Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, with Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 120.

²³ *Ibid.*, 60.

synonymous to *vision* and can mean various things. Mission is not to be confused with the roles of missionaries or in how the church subsidizes them. George Barna defines mission as being “designed to reflect a heart turned to God in service and obedience in which the church is a vehicle to unite people to do his will.”²⁴ The mission of FBC should be to make disciples, and everything the church thinks, says, or does should point to that mission. Unfortunately, this is not the case.

Sanctification is a word that means to be set apart, or to be made holy. “It is used in two ways: (1) the believer is positionally sanctified; he stands sanctified before God; (2) the believer grows in progressive sanctification in daily spiritual experience.”²⁵ A comprehensive definition of sanctification by the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) states:

We believe that Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness; that it is a progressive work; that it is begun in regeneration; and that it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the Sealer and Comforter, in the continual use of the appointed means—especially the Word of God, self-examination, self-denial, watchfulness, and prayer (Article X).²⁶

Spiritual Maturity—This is not just learning how to live out spiritual disciplines,²⁷ but it is defined by Paul’s prayer in Philippians 1:9-11. Spiritual maturity is marked by having a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, all of which result in a fruit that grows (through evangelism), to the glory of God.

Strategic Plan—Having a strategic plan for church revitalization is crucial for discipling a body of believers through the process of growth and change. Different than what one might call a

²⁴ George Barna, *Without a Vision the People Perish* (Glendale, CA: Barna Research Group, 1991), 145.

²⁵ Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008), 723.

²⁶ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Sanctification,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1898. Logos Bible Software.

²⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, v.

game plan or a plan of attack, “the strategic plan is a written agenda that embraces both mission and vision while setting forth a series of goals and objectives that propels the church or organization toward the desired and envisioned future. It should be specific and measurable and yet high and elevating in its inspiration.”²⁸ The strategic plan includes not only the pastor’s vision, but the ministry of the elders,²⁹ the writing of the DTC, and the follow through after this DRP has been completed.

Vision (statement) is a “clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants, based upon an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances.”³⁰ It differs from a mission statement in that it is “far more precise, detailed, customized, and distinctive to each ministry.”³¹ Having a vision for change, growth, correction, advancement, ministry, and unity is imperative to maintaining a healthy environment for the church.

Limitations

There are five limitations that will affect the research process. These limitations are out of the researcher’s control. First, because the congregation of FBC is the only group being interviewed and given that there are those within the congregation who have declined to become involved in this research study, the scope of the problem can only be defined by a limited sector. Although other pastors of similar geographic, demographic, and church age/size were previously

²⁸ Michael J. Anthony and James Estep, Jr, eds. *Management Essentials for Christian Ministries* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2005), 89.

²⁹ At the onset of this DRP there was no organization to the elder board structure. After this researcher was called to become the pastor, the elders were instructed to assign the membership among them so direct ministry might take place (prayer, care). Just as Jesus had His inner three, the three elders are to minister as an extension of the office of pastor.

³⁰ Anthony and Estep, *Management Essentials*, 64.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 60.

contacted to determine if they were facing the same problem of spiritual apathy,³² they were not interviewed as this was not within this study's purpose.

Second, likeability or a lack of trust in the researcher or in the process toward church revitalization, although not identified on the surface, could very well be another limitation to this study. If an individual being approached to complete the questionnaire has any reservations about providing either accurate information or unguarded responses because of a lack of trust in the process, or because of a lack of belief in the security of their identity (anonymity), then the true problem or problems at hand might not be fully identified. This is in part a limitation due to the method being used to gather accurate data for the direction of FBC.

Third, having a lack of trust in current leadership is another limitation. When it was first disclosed that this researcher was pursuing his doctorate in church revitalization, and that the subject would be overcoming apathy and pursuing spiritual maturity as a precursor to and partner of the church revitalization process, it was shared in confidence that the problem is not so much that folks are spiritually apathetic, but that there is a reluctance to trust in the direction (or lack thereof) provided by the pastor. Because trust is a two-way street, it is important that this DRP uncover such limitations before results can be shared for the future direction of FBC. Either way, Peter Steinke's words from 2006 still ring true today. "The notion that authority cannot be trusted is prevalent today. Leaders are regularly criticized. People in any organization settle into a comfort zone and refuse to budge."³³

³² This research was done as a Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant, before entering the DMIN program at Liberty University.

³³ Peter L. Steinke, *Congregational Leadership in Anxious Times: Being Calm and Courageous No Matter What* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 139.

Fourth, the limitation that is least likely to be overcome in this study is that of personal wants and agendas. It is assumed that answers provided in the questionnaire will be swayed by the individual's wants or desires, and that potential changes to the direction of church life and ministry might run into blockades. There needs to be a differentiation between answers that are filtered by personal desires and those that are founded in the scriptural truths. The question, "What do I want?" should never find precedence over the question, "What does God want?"

Finally, a limitation that is beyond the control of this DRP is in locating and connecting with those who have left the church in recent years. James Emory White calls these disillusioned former church members the *nones*. "The *nones* now make up the nation's fastest growing and second-largest religious category, eclipsed only by Catholics, outnumbering even Southern Baptists, the largest Protestant Denomination."³⁴ There will only be a small sector of those who have left FBC that will be available to ask questions regarding what drew them to FBC, what happened while they were here, the process they went through to make their decision to leave, and if they might be willing to return if their issues were to be resolved. In addition to these five limitations that are out of the researcher's control, there are also three delimitations that are being placed upon this project by the researcher.

Delimitations

There are three delimitations, or constraints, which are being placed on this DRP. The first delimitation is a direct result in that the five main fields of study that encompass church life (growth, revitalization, evangelism, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines) have not been fully developed. This is to say that spiritual maturity needs to be pursued on an individual level as a

³⁴ James Emory White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 17.

partner and a precursor of a church's pursuit of church revitalization. There is a gap where spiritual maturity and revitalization have not been joined. The second delimitation is that spiritual apathy must be addressed before spiritual maturity can be explained. The third delimitation has to do with separating the groups of participants by years of tenure rather than by age. The first is the most predominant delimitation of the three.

First, the need for spiritual maturity on an individual level needs to be emphasized before the church can embark on a revitalization journey. In comparison, church growth and church revitalization can easily overlap, as can evangelism and discipleship. Spiritual maturity also forms a partnership with discipleship training. However, spiritual maturity and church revitalization are seldom discussed within the same work. At best these two categories are mentioned in passing, but the idea that individuals should be at the very least actively pursuing growth in spiritual maturity as a precursor to and partner of church revitalization is missing. Little has been said which would promote the pairing of these two, and this is the gap within theological academia that this DRP looks to address. Unfortunately, trying to gather resources from the fields of church revitalization and any others that discuss the growth process in spiritual maturity have restricted the quantity of works available to fill this gap.

The second delimitation is that spiritual maturity cannot be effectively pursued until spiritual apathy is first addressed, and without these two subtopics working in tandem, the pursuit and establishment of church revitalization would be nothing more than an academic exercise. Old habits would return, and the ongoing work of outreach and evangelism would quickly subside. When spiritual apathy in lieu of spiritual maturity abounds, the sustainability of church revitalization is unfortunately hindered. Apathy toward the Great Commission becomes

the initial obstacle to overcome while fine-tuning the DTC. Removing apathy, or at the very least addressing it, is the first step toward growing in spiritual maturity,

Third, the choice to separate groups by years of tenure at FBC instead of age, is another delimitation placed on this DRP. Given that FBC only has an active congregation of forty to forty-five adults, the primary research questionnaire will be analyzed based on the time that an individual has been a member of FBC (zero to five years, six to ten years, eleven to twenty years, and twenty plus years). These categorical restrictions will also supply additional questions to be asked of, for example, those who have been at FBC for decades as compared to those who are much newer to this local family. The reasoning behind this structure is to determine how FBC's history is viewed based on past successes and recent failures.

Knowing its perceived history and hearing the emotions that may still linger will also allow the researcher to read between the lines or to know when/what follow-up questions to ask while uncovering the inherent sins which might be causing the decline of membership, and more importantly, the gradual declination of being vital to the community per God's desire for this body of believers. What truly caused the church to split? Why did so many members leave when they did not get their way? Was it due to spiritual immaturity or because of a lack of solid biblical leadership, or a combination of the two? Discovering the answers to these questions, and others like them, will also help to refine the thesis of this work. Unfortunately, prior members have not made themselves available for such an interview.

Thesis Statement

The thesis is that if spiritual maturity is promoted through discipleship, then the problem of apathy toward the Great Commission will be overcome and church revitalization will result. This will be measured by two factors. First, there will be two surveys conducted that evaluate

spiritual maturity levels and an understanding of church revitalization. These will be taken and compiled at the beginning and the end of the research project. Second, currently there is no participation in outreach/evangelistic activities, partly because none have been scheduled. Spiritual maturity and church revitalization will thus be measured by the number of folks who engage in the preparations for and then participation in Great Commission endeavors.

The end goal of church revitalization will never be accomplished without first establishing a solid DTC that motivates the believer toward spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity takes place when the believer learns what it means to truly worship God, to follow biblical leadership (Acts 2:42, 1 Cor 11:1, Heb 13:17), to live as a vital church member by overcoming spiritual apathy through the pursuit of spiritual maturity, to engage in evangelistic activities that promote the making of disciples. This process is repeated in a mentorship role while pouring into the life of others. Spiritual maturity is the anchor to an unyielding faith in Jesus Christ. However, spiritual maturity is not necessarily a prerequisite to sharing one's faith, for any new believer should be compelled to tell others of their conversion experience.

Apathy, much like laziness, idleness, complacency, and even a disdain for church leadership, is unfortunately common throughout the American church environment.³⁵ With FBC, as well as hundreds if not thousands of small churches like her, if a pursuit toward spiritual maturity is not promulgated, then apathy will never be overcome. The focus of growing in spiritual maturity through discipleship training is to see the membership of FBC engage in activities that reach outside the walls of the church and into the community which surrounds her (Luke 14:23, Acts 2:42-47, 1 Pet 2:12).

³⁵ As a Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant with Outreach, Inc. (www.outreach.com), it was my job to call on some 1,200 churches across the USA of all denominations, ethnicities, sizes, and geographical settings. I discovered that there is a problem of a lack of spiritual maturity, due to not focusing on discipleship training, and even a man-focused, unbiblical approach to church life (and poor theology!) were monumental in today's church.

The motivation behind this thesis project, therefore, is to advance the kingdom of God by promoting the need to pursue spiritual maturity on an individual level, and to realize that this is to be a precursor to effectively seeing a church's revitalization take place. Because churches are made up of flawed individuals, it is crucial for the church to engage in ministry with God as her guide, and to realize that only He has the final say in the life of the church (Ps 138:8, Phil 1:6, 2:12, Eph 2:10). To pursue an active lifestyle that reflects spiritual maturity (Rom 12:1-2) while giving glory to God alone through Christ alone (Jude 24-25) is the target of this DRP.

Conclusion

Given these circumstances, FBC is poised and ready to see God show up and show off in its midst. This is not to say that God is not present, for indeed He is, albeit silently at times, as Ichabod is not a label for this congregation. However, due to a lack of historical and biblical leadership that has failed to connect with the church family and thus has not been able to affect and nurture the disciple-making process, spiritual apathy (or a lack of trust) has grown while the church has not. The historical, ethnical, geographical, and demographical aspects of the UP in general and Norway in specific can also be labeled as a bit of a hindrance, but God is much bigger than that, for His kingdom includes every tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 7:9).

The problem of spiritual apathy and a lack of pursuit toward spiritual maturity must be dealt with before church revitalization can be started and sustained. This DRP aims to address these problems and institute a DTC that will produce the remedy. In this chapter, definitions were explained, limitations were explored, and delimitations were identified. Overall, this researcher is confident that God will show up and take center stage. What that looks like is unknown; however, FBC rests in His hands. The literature review will explore the gap in theological academia between spiritual maturity and church revitalization.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

There are five theological areas for consideration that make up this DRP in Church Revitalization. These fields of study include evangelism, discipleship, church growth, church revitalization, and spiritual maturity. When contemplating these separate fields, clearly one can see where evangelism and discipleship conjoin, as well as how church growth and church revitalization are easily paired. Surprisingly, it is the latter two that seldom coincide, for without a heightened sense and desire for growth toward spiritual maturity on an individual level, a church-wide pursuit of revitalization would be unsustainable.

While spiritual maturity will often be seen within the teachings of discipleship training or spiritual disciplines, seldom does one find spiritual maturity addressed as a foundational partner to the church revitalization assessment. In the over one hundred sources reviewed throughout this DRP, there was only one that had elevated the union of spiritual maturity and church revitalization,³⁶ but even within this work the partnership is not fleshed out to this researcher's satisfaction. Wherever church revitalization is the primary topic, spiritual maturity is only mentioned as an afterthought.

The resources consulted include recent publications by notable authors in each of these five fields of study, peer-reviewed journal articles, and doctoral dissertations that focus on spiritual apathy, spiritual maturity, and church revitalization. This research has proven that there indeed is a large gap in theological research when it comes to the partnering of spiritual maturity with church revitalization. Of the dozens of dissertations that were reviewed, there were only

³⁶ Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live?: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization*, rev. ed. (Athens, TN: ReClaimed Church Publishing, 2021).

five recent works that could even remotely offer any value to this DRP. While each of these dissertations offer excellence to their respective theses, they do not address the problem, purpose, and thesis of this project. The summary of findings from the books, journal articles, and recent dissertations is that they each focus on the various areas of ministry and church life (see Figure 1), thereby solidifying the realization that there is a deficit in theological research. This gap, while in some ways subtle, has helped to create a chasm that has contributed to the decline of a small church's effective witness and its viability for the future.

Other Dissertations

Of the five dissertations under review, the first one was written from a consultative vantage point. Jeffrey Medina identified that spiritual maturity is “an essential aspect of church consultation and church revitalization,”³⁷ but his bullseye is on the need to measure a congregation's level of spiritual maturity during the consultative event rather than on the partnership between maturity and revitalization. He focuses on maturity and church growth, not on maturity and revitalization, whereas the DRP herein highlights the need for individuals to pursue spiritual maturity as a prerequisite to the church revitalization process. Church growth should be the natural outcome of revitalization. Although Medina's work is more closely related to this DRP than are the others, each has its own merits and contributions to the theological academic world as to their stated purposes.

The second dissertation which alluded to spiritual maturity and church revitalization is one by Joshua Michael Wootton. His dissertation focuses on the book of Hebrews as a model for

³⁷ Jeffrey P. Medina, “Spiritual Maturity of the Individual Believer: An Essential Aspect of Church Consultation and Church Revitalization” (DMIN diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2017). ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

revitalization. His focus from Hebrews calls for a “religious reform”³⁸ by providing six Christocentric sermons birthed from Hebrews 5-10. His work focuses on how the author of Hebrews called the Jewish church into spiritual maturity (esp., Heb 5:11-6:20), but even with spiritual maturity and church revitalization occasionally in the same breath, his writing does not unpack how to measure or grow in spiritual maturity, but only that the church should move in that direction.³⁹

The third dissertation found to have some value to this DRP is by Philip Rolsing, who brought forth an interesting danger when it comes to a church’s promotion of spiritual maturity (he uses the term *growth* instead). He observed how some were “discipled into the life of [the church] rather than life in Christ.”⁴⁰ Clearly he advises that the believer’s focal point of growth is, or should be, in Christ (Eph 4:13), that our growth should be expected as promised,⁴¹ and that Ephesians 4:11-16 offers seven indicators for how spiritual maturity should be measured.⁴² His work is highly valued for the partnership between spiritual maturity and discipleship, but even though his title speaks of revitalization, his content does not. His work promotes the need for spiritual maturity on an individual level, but he does not partner that need with a church’s need to seek revitalization on a corporate level. In his defense, this was simply not his intent.

The fourth dissertation, authored by Kevin Brooks, addresses apathy and evangelism, but he does not align those subcategories to church revitalization. While his suggestion that the

³⁸ Joshua Michael Wootton, “New Life, Better Life: Developing a Model for Church Revitalization from the Book of Hebrews” (DMIN diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 2. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

³⁹ Ibid., vii.

⁴⁰ Philip Rolsing, “Local Church Revitalization Through Christological Discipleship” (DMIN diss., Portland Seminary, George Fox University, 2019), 4. <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/306>.

⁴¹ Ibid., 107.

⁴² Ibid., 110.

disease of apathy not only affects those in the congregation but that it can also affect pastors⁴³ would fit well into the section on leadership found later in this work, his overall contribution to theological academia cannot be forced into the gap that is being addressed by this DRP. He comes close, however, in that he summarizes that because of apathy, spiritual gifts are not being used,⁴⁴ the lost are not being reached,⁴⁵ and believers are not being properly disciplined.⁴⁶ Finally, although Rodney Merrill Sprayberry's work targets church revitalization, his content lacks emphasis on spiritual maturity. Overall, he barely addresses apathy, spiritual maturity, and spiritual health as concerns within a small rural Baptist church that requires revitalization.⁴⁷

As for other dissertations, a search for apathy, spiritual maturity, and church revitalization to uncover other works that have forged this same path found this list of pertinent choices to be sorely lacking. Current scholarly works just do not identify the premise that is being presented herein, and the gap, while subtle under a macro view, is huge when placed under a microscope. Although one will find spiritual maturity mentioned within some church revitalization works, some more than others, theological academia has not pinpointed the partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization, at least not to the extent that is needed. It is this gap in research that this DRP addresses.

⁴³ Kevin Brooks, "Addressing Apathy in the Church: Moving People Towards a Biblical Healthy Discipleship Model" (*Doctoral Dissertations and Projects*, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 1. <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/918>.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 93.

⁴⁷ Rodney Merrill Sprayberry, "The Revitalization Process in a Small Rural Plateaued Southern Baptist Church" (*Doctoral Dissertations and Projects*, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010). <https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/329>.

The Fruit of the Spirit—Is it Character or Evangelism?

The driving motivation behind the idea that spiritual maturity is to be viewed as the forerunner to church revitalization is an offshoot from a sermon first preached by Rev. Malcolm B. Stuart at FBC Kailua, HI in 1986.⁴⁸ The epitome of spiritual maturity is not to be found in the fruit of the Spirit that is often reflected in Galatians 5:22-23, but in producing fruit, or more specifically, being used by God to reach the lost through evangelism and then discipleship training. Fink is on the same page. He suggests, “We can measure, in part, our spiritual maturity by the level of passion we have for evangelism. If one of Christ’s main purposes on earth was to seek and save the lost, it certainly should be one of ours as well.”⁴⁹ While it is agreed that the nine fruit (καρπός, singular in the Greek) are areas of growth in spiritual maturity, the epitome of that maturity is seen in a believer who is engaged in sharing their faith without hesitancy or reservation. The best way to bring glory to God is by telling others about Him (Phil 1:11).

In his prayer for the Philippians, Paul is writing about a fruit that produces new believers, yet standing in contrast to this premise stands Walter Hansen, who like many others, assumes that Paul is speaking distinctly (or succinctly) of a fruit that brings glory to God through displaying a Christ-like character.⁵⁰ It is worth noting here that Galatians 5:22-23 is not the only location in Scripture that provides a list of godly attributes. Aaron Menikoff explains that there is a much greater diversity of character traits listed throughout the Bible. Starting with the call to be

⁴⁸ Although the researcher does not remember the full content of his sermon, he wrote down his outline in the Bible next to Philippians 1:9-11. Later called to pastoral ministry, he developed this into a series of sermons that have tied this text directly to a way of measuring one’s growth and progress in spiritual maturity. People measure our spiritual maturity by a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows, and that this fruit is the fruit of evangelism.

⁴⁹ Todd S. Fink, *Biblical Discipleship: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity* (Chicago, IL: Selah Book Press, 2016), 238.

⁵⁰ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 62.

holy (Lev 11:44, 1 Pet 1:16), he reflects on Paul's teaching in that "Paul mentions purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, love, and truthful speech" (2 Cor 6:6-7, New International Version), and then continues his reflections by referencing such texts as Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 3:11-15, and 1 Peter 3:8.⁵¹ His take on kindness as a fruit contains a crossover between having a godly character and evangelism, or the idea of living out kindness in a godly lifestyle of which shares Christ with the lost.⁵²

Although this researcher agrees that to be spiritually mature one should produce evidence of the fruit of the Spirit, the pinnacle of those characteristics should cause an eagerness to share one's faith. Thus, this project thesis posits the former, whereas the Greek text for having a fruit that grows in Philippians 1:11 specifically points to evangelism and making disciples. This fits well within the inclusio of Jesus' earthly ministry as he called the disciples to become fishers of men (Matt 4:19, Mark 1:17), and He ends it with the commission for His church to continue His mission (Matt 28:19-20). Aubrey Malphurs rightly advises that the pursuit of spiritual maturity should be the primary focus of a believer's journey with the Lord,⁵³ and that to press on while forgetting past failures and sinful ways is crucial to the successful achievement of such.

To accomplish this, Malphurs reflects on the need for Christians to realize their position in Christ Jesus and to fully grasp, as much as one is able to do so this side of heaven, how God sees His children not for who they are in their sinful flesh but as whose they are in and because of His love through Christ.⁵⁴ This truth offers comfort as well as a realization that the spiritual

⁵¹ Aaron Menikoff, *Character Matters: Shepherding in the Fruit of the Spirit* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2020), 22.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 94-96.

⁵³ Aubrey Malphurs, *Developing Emotionally Mature Leaders: How Emotional Intelligence Can Help Transform Your Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

maturation process is not an effort of the ego but a partnership with the Lord (Phil 1:6). Just like with evangelizing the results are not up to man, in seeking to grow in spiritual maturity one participates only to the extent of living to bring glory to God. Paul highlights this partnership when he said, “for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (Phil 2:13, NIV).

The overwhelming theme throughout the literature explored has led to a (re)discovery that salvation, sanctification, spiritual maturity, and subsequent acts of obedience (i.e., Eph 2:10) are impossible outside of God’s control and without the Holy Spirit’s prompting and work. As Andreas Köstenberger and Terry Wilder remind us (cf., Titus 2:11-4), “The process through which the salvation is made effectual is by ‘training’ or ‘educating’ (παιδεύω) believers.”⁵⁵ Discipleship training and spiritual maturity are obviously difficult to graft into the lives of those who attend, for example, a Bible study only on occasion, and even more difficult for those who only occasionally show up for a Sunday morning worship service and never engage in any discipleship programs such as Sunday school or a small group. Therefore, spiritual maturity can be marked by consistent attendance, eager participation, and a subsequent willingness to engage in church outreach activities, but as stated elsewhere, the hallmark of spiritual maturity is actively engaging in evangelism for God’s glory.

There is a predominant truth that has permeated several of the works consulted, while never appearing on the radar of others.⁵⁶ This truth is that spiritual maturity can only be achieved after the believer fully realizes both who they are despite themselves and whose they are because

⁵⁵ Although this work is becoming dated, the value of its content is crucial to the argument for spiritual maturity and church revitalization being partnered together. Andreas J. Köstenberger, and Terry L. Wilder, *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 246.

⁵⁶ This is due to the focus of the individual works, whether it be on discipleship, evangelism, church growth, spiritual maturity, or church revitalization.

of Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6:19-20). This idea is predominant in Ken Nichols' *Masterpiece*⁵⁷ as well as in Robert Stuart's *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*.⁵⁸ Spiritual maturity can never be fully achieved this side of heaven, especially if spiritual maturity is defined as spiritual perfection. The fact that spiritual maturity, or even the pursuit of perfection, is an ongoing and never-ending process can be seen throughout Scripture. Nichols references Proverbs 24:16 as a key verse that helps to define one's journey toward maturity, in that man will always stumble, but the mark of maturity is knowing how to get up, dust off, and move on.⁵⁹ He reminds the believer that defeat is not permanent and the journey toward spiritual maturity is lined with lessons to be learned along the way.⁶⁰

It is to this end, realizing that the results are up to God and that He is the Author and Perfector of our faith, that Stuart inserts the following truth. "Faithfulness includes the adoption of God's perspective, for what happens (whether good or bad) is within his sovereign control. He is always at work accomplishing his good pleasure (Phil 2:13), which will always turn out for good for those who love him and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28)."⁶¹

Pertaining to church revitalization as a whole and spiritual maturity as a preliminary focus, there are some topics that warrant addressing, including spiritual maturity, sanctification, leadership roles in spiritual maturity, obstacles to spiritual maturity and church revitalization (such as apathy and tradition), and church health and vision. Given that the primary focus herein is on spiritual maturity as a precursor to church revitalization, this is the best place to start.

⁵⁷ Ken Nichols, *Masterpiece: Seeing Yourself as God's Work of Art Changes Everything* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2017).

⁵⁸ Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*.

⁵⁹ "For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again." Nichols, *Masterpiece*, 71.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Stuart, 175.

Church Revitalization

Church revitalization happens when pride is dealt with and Jesus Christ is eagerly placed center stage in everything the church thinks, says, and does. Church revitalization requires a collective effort toward growing in unity within the body (Eph 1:10; 4:1-6, 11-13), with the result being an ongoing desire to reach outside of the walls to minister to the community while presenting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Church revitalization is not a singular event, but instead it is an ongoing process. It unites the congregation toward the mission and vision of the church.

Church revitalization should closely align to the mission of the church. The mission of the church is intimately related to how a church functions outside of the church walls, to reach the lost for Christ, to multiply disciples, and to be the hands and feet of Jesus in living out the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. For this DRP, “mission” specifically applies to the identification of how any ministry is to be used to help support or promote the “mission statement.” While a church can and should have different ministries, each of those ministries should in some way point to the overall mission of the church. Promoting a mission statement that the church family can rally around is yet another reason the discipleship program will be instituted. The ultimate mission is to build each other up in the faith (spiritual maturity) and to engage in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission both individually and as a church body.

Church revitalization can also get uncomfortably messy. Changes need to be made, and that must include a willingness to change leadership. Mark Clifton asserts that this change is mandatory. He advises, “That is nonnegotiable. If you do not change the leadership, the church structure, the way decisions are made, and the church culture, the church will get the same

results as it has been getting.”⁶² He continues, “The bottom line must be a willingness to let go of the past and relinquish control. The degree to which they relinquish control, of every aspect of the church, is directly proportional to the probability of the success of the replant.”⁶³ Although church revitalization does not necessarily require new leadership, it does require a change of heart within the leadership and expressly a change of heart and attitude within the congregation, especially for those who are quick to voice opposition to anything that goes against their personal desires that may or may not align with Scripture.

Spiritual Maturity

Although substantial content which partners spiritual maturity and church revitalization has proven to be sparse, at least Tom Cheyney identifies that this partnership is vitally necessary by mentioning that “Churches that are revitalized first begin with a spiritually revitalized laity.”⁶⁴ He does not add flesh to this passing comment, as he fails to provide any substantial content beyond this subtle nod to this dire need. He does not write with a focus placed on spiritual maturity at the individual level, but instead he reviews the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation (c.f., Rev 2:1-3:22) as a focus group to frame his approach to church revitalization. This is yet another example of a lack of focus on spiritual maturity. Unfortunately, the numerous works available, especially in recent years, are isolated from one field over another rather than partnering spiritual maturity and church revitalization together.

⁶² Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2016), 47.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Tom Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal: Biblical Foundations for Church Revitalization* (Middletown, DE: Renovate Publishing Group, 2016), 29.

Coming from a different angle is Malphurs, who offers an interesting observation on the pursuit of spiritual maturity. He views the journey toward spiritual maturity as being worthless without growing in emotional immaturity, as if to say that one cannot be present without the other. He asserts that a spiritually mature Christian is without a doubt an emotionally mature believer,⁶⁵ asserting the two to be inseparable.⁶⁶ This makes perfect sense, for just as spiritual maturity is lived out in this physical world, the character of a man (of God) is displayed in how he acts and reacts to life's circumstances. One can possess the mature qualities seen in the fruit of the Spirit, but if episodes of emotional surface when dealing with the challenges of church revitalization, the results can be devastating. Being spiritually mature aids the believer in realizing his or her maturity in Christ, and this position is displayed in those moments when emotions can otherwise run amuck.

Spiritual maturity also correlates to having emotional maturity in the way one interacts with his fellow man, both inside and outside the church (Gal 5:22-23, 1 Tim 3:2-7, 1 Pet 2:9-12). Understanding how to define, evaluate, participate in the process of, and actively pursue spiritual maturity is at the heart of this DRP. It is being argued that without individuals pursuing spiritual maturity, church revitalization cannot take place, and especially that it cannot be sustained for any length of time. As Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe point out, "Many of us tend to define spiritual maturity by how much knowledge a person seems to have. But unfortunately, knowledge does not equal maturity."⁶⁷ And beyond the topic of knowledge, spiritual maturity should be tied directly to evangelism. Todd M. Fink wholeheartedly agrees. "We can measure, in

⁶⁵ Malphurs, 15.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁷ Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe, *Life on Mission: Joining the Everyday Mission of God* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2014), 82.

part, our spiritual maturity by the level of passion we have for evangelism.”⁶⁸ He continues, “The fact that most Christians don’t share their faith or invite friends to church speaks volumes about their level of spiritual maturity and devotion to Christ.”⁶⁹

To summarize these various authors who have taken different stands on such texts as Galatians 5, there appears to be a contrast between spiritual maturity and emotional immaturity. The inverse is also true. Within the scope of church revitalization, to be spiritually immature can mean to misunderstand ones’ position in Christ. While it may be easier to forgive someone else for their mistakes, it can be quite difficult to forgive oneself for past failures. Malphurs addresses this in saying, “Rather than focus on our past, we are to recognize our new identity and live and rejoice in the present in Christ and all that God has accomplished for us in Christ.”⁷⁰ Adam McClendon and Matt Kimbrough agree. In *Square One: Back to the Basics*, they offer encouragement for someone who is dealing with the reminder of past sins. “For the believer in Christ, your status has been changed from condemned too righteous. No matter how dirty your past is, God made provision in Christ. What a beautiful truth.”⁷¹ This comment fits well within the discussion of pursuing spiritual maturity.

Another precursor to church revitalization is for the church to establish a foundation upon which believers are mentored as well as afforded the opportunity to mentor others in the faith (2 Tim 2:2). Making disciples who make disciples happens when believers journey together toward perfection, through the sanctification process. But either way one approaches it, the pinnacle of

⁶⁸ Fink, *Biblical Discipleship*, 238.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 242

⁷⁰ Ibid., 121.

⁷¹ Adam McClendon and Matt Kimbrough, *Square One: Back to the Basics* (Little Elm, TX: Electio Publishing, 2018), 32.

spiritual maturity is when one's focus turns outward.⁷² Sanctification, while in many ways synonymous to spiritual maturity, is viewed slightly differently than spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is the measure of growth, whereas sanctification is the process for growth.

Sanctification

Sanctification and church revitalization are not emphatically covered within any of the recent publications that were reviewed for this DRP. Noting how Paul wrote more on sanctification than any other New Testament author, in their reflection on Paul's theology Köstenberger and Wilder write, "The God who provides salvation is the God who calls individuals to a way of life that is set apart to him."⁷³ To be sanctified is to be set apart. It includes being set apart from things like the world, sin, and even from oneself. Their teaching on sanctification recalls an illustration that believers are not set apart unto occasional use, like fine China on display in a buffet, but more so like daily dishware and not like paper plates which are thrown out after one use. Philippians 1:6 promises that believers are on a journey with the Lord, and Romans 8:28-30 instructs that this journey will take a lifetime.

Klaus Issler expounds on this idea when he writes that "sanctification and empowerment for ministry are the work of the Spirit."⁷⁴ This work includes bringing about a deeper relationship with God in fellowship, entrusting believers with the charge to live as Christ lived and unifying the family of God by bestowing gifts to be used for each other's benefit.⁷⁵ And Nichols adds that although being in Christ gives us a new nature (2 Cor 5:17), God does not just wipe our slate

⁷² Willis and Coe, *Life on Mission*, 110.

⁷³ Köstenberger and Wilder, *Entrusted with the Gospel*, 129.

⁷⁴ Klaus Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 129.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

clean but takes the time to scrape away our scribbles while vividly painting His character within our lives.⁷⁶ Although totally forgiven, believers are not instantly made perfect in spiritual maturity (2 Cor 5:17, Phil 1:6).

One's involvement in the sanctification process can be confusing, for at one point Paul writes that God does the work of change (Phil 1:6), but soon thereafter he states that believers are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:13). And given that James adds that faith without works is dead (Jas 2:14-26), and Paul explains that Christians are saved unto good works (Eph 2:8-10), it is easy to see where one might become confused as to what their involvement is in the sanctification process.

Grudem advises that redemption “is a *progressive* work that continues throughout our earthly lives. It is also a work in which *God and man cooperate*, each playing distinct roles. This part of the application of redemption is called sanctification: *Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.*”⁷⁷ He adds that sanctification starts at regeneration,⁷⁸ increases throughout life,⁷⁹ and is completed at death.⁸⁰ Thomas Schreiner posits that believers are “sanctified positionally, but not necessarily in terms of personal behavior.”⁸¹ Additionally, J. I. Packer highlights man's partnership with God in the growth process, saying that man is in partnership with God, or “an ongoing

⁷⁶ Nichols, *Masterpiece*, 24-25.

⁷⁷ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 746. Italics are his.

⁷⁸ Grudem provides the following list of Bible verses in his quote: Titus 3:5, 1 John 3:9, 1 Cor 6:11, Acts 20:32, Rom 6:1-18. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 747-49.

⁷⁹ Ibid. See Rom 6:11-18; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:13-14; Heb 12:1, 14; Jas 1:22; and 1 Pet 1:15.

⁸⁰ Ibid. See Rom 6:12-13, 1 John 1:8, Heb 12:23, Rev 21:27; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 5:23; Phil. 3:21, 1 Cor 15:23, 49.

⁸¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 375.

cooperative process in which regenerate persons, alive to God and freed from sin's dominion (Rom 6:11, 14-18), are required to exert themselves in sustained obedience."⁸²

Too often Christianity is turned into Pharisaical rules that place works over grace, rather than to see our works as the fruit of God's working in the life and maturation of the believer (Eph 2:10). Issler states that Christianity is not to be reduced to a set of rules to live by, that Jesus is central to the sanctification process, and that personal intimacy with Him leads to the life change that should be promoted by those who are in leadership roles within the church.⁸³ He also speaks to the works versus grace topic. "Much of Jesus' critique of the Pharisees expressly repudiated that type of rigid rule making that focused solely on external behaviors without the corresponding heart attitudes of compassion and grace."⁸⁴ But if God is the one who facilitates the sanctification process that corresponds to growing in spiritual maturity, what roles do the leaders within a church setting have within this process?

Leadership Roles in Spiritual Maturity

Because the speed of the leader is the speed of the team, the pastor or pastoral staff needs to lead by example in character, speech, direction, and action. This truth is common among several of the authors within the literature review conducted for this project. These authors agree that the leadership role within a ministry setting is imperative to the success in and growth toward spiritual maturity and subsequent church revitalization.⁸⁵ It is also unfortunately true that a church's future can be determined by the quality of pastoral leadership, how well the people

⁸² Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus*, 32.

⁸³ Ibid., 21.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 20.

⁸⁵ Brian Croft, R. Albert Mohler, Terry Rials, Cheyney, and Stuart.

follow that leadership, or a combination of the two. The purpose for addressing leadership roles within the church revitalization process is emphasized here for two reasons.

First, the pastor needs to keep his mind, heart, and desires on the Lord more so than on the cries and complaints of the flock. This is for the sake of maintaining his sanity and remaining refreshed and strong in the Lord. This holds true for the elders, too. Second, the flock needs to see that leadership has been focused on the will of God rather than their own desires as change is introduced to the ways of doing things. Much like how Moses descended from the mountain glowing from being in God's presence, the flock needs to see that God is the author of change, not the pastor or pastoral leadership. The flock may not fully trust the leadership in the church, for whatever reason, but they can more readily learn to trust that God is directing the vision and direction of the leadership, and even find comfort in this realization.

Pastor as Leader

Pastoral leadership is crucial for a flock to overcome spiritual apathy, pursue spiritual maturity, and to change by way of church revitalization. Much of the pastor's influence will take place from the pulpit while delivering applicable messages from the heart of God. It has been said that "Great preaching springs from two wells—life among the people and time alone with God."⁸⁶ Scripture teaches that the relationship between the pastor and his flock should never be one that is authoritarian according to his own right, but instead it should be positional as to the calling to be a servant (1 Thess 5:12-13, Heb 13:17). The pastor, as servant leader, who holds an office of biblical authority but not as an authoritarian, must manage himself well before trying to

⁸⁶ Unknown source

direct and guide the flock placed under his care. Malachi 2:6-7 fits well here.⁸⁷ “The final word in all things remains with the authority of Christ.”⁸⁸ For example, being able to remain tactful and loving while indicating someone else’s need to repent of sin requires a delicate balance. Whether it is church discipline on the grander scale or iron sharpening iron on a much smaller scale, a longstanding relationship of trust and even admiration needs to have been established first (Jas 5:19-20).

Both church discipline and delicate leadership scenarios also require that the pastor have been bathed in intimate fellowship with the Lord. Croft paints an appropriate backdrop to this order of importance when it comes to pastoral leadership. He rightly observes that “The pastor’s relationship with the Lord supersedes the pastor’s relationship with his church.”⁸⁹ That relationship should not only be made evident in how the pastor preaches a gospel message, but in how he inserts sermon illustrations from real-life episodes without placing himself center stage.

Croft’s observation that the pastor’s relationship with the Lord should supersede the pastor’s relationship with the church also presents the need for a delicate balance. “Pastors must first preach the gospel for the gospel to be heard. It is preached for the believer who has come on Sunday so that we might be reminded of the hope we have in Christ. It is also preached for the unbeliever who may be present, for ‘Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ’

⁸⁷ “True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin. ‘For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth’” (NIV, 1984).

⁸⁸ R. Albert Mohler, Jr. ed., *A Guide to Church Revitalization. Guide Book No. 005. RENEW IN THE PEW: Kindling Congregational Passion for Christ*, by Donald S. Whitney (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2015), 27-28. “If a church willingly submits to the authority of Christ, there is no confusions about where the final word lies.”

⁸⁹ Tom Cheyney and Terry Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts of Church Revitalization* (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing Group, 2015), 107.

(Rom. 10:17, BSB).⁹⁰ The point of emphasis is that the pastor should primarily focus on his relationship with God first and then the flock, as both will benefit the church in which he serves. Additionally, the pastor-elder team should focus on four areas of responsibility: “knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the sheep.”⁹¹

Elders as Leaders

As a pastoral leadership team, displaying an attitude and lifestyle of trusting in Christ for all things is mandatory to seeing themselves progress in spiritual maturity and in leading others down that same journey. Stuart states this well: “Trusting God is looking at the issues and problems in our church as part of the Lord’s sanctification process to make us better leaders and our sheep better followers of Christ. We are not to run from conflict but should attempt to see it from God’s perspective of perfecting his people.”⁹² Those in leadership positions should have matured to the point of not being reactive, but instead, responsive, having grown in moral intention and character.⁹³ These characteristics are especially valued during the mentorship process.

Elders as leaders also include elders-in-training, the mentorship process whereby an older man takes a younger man, a future leader of the church, under his wings to nurture him as the future of the church. Clifton’s entire premise in church revitalization is to replant from within, and that requires young male leadership who are indispensable to the future of the church.⁹⁴ Both

⁹⁰ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 55.

⁹¹ Robert Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016), 211.

⁹² Ibid., 176.

⁹³ Steinke, *Congregational Leadership*, 1.

⁹⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 69.

the pastor or pastoral staff, and the elders should focus on loving the existing congregation both in where they are and for who they are, while understanding that the discipleship process treks well into the future. Proper mentorship also refrains from blaming the older members for the church's current struggles,⁹⁵ for that would be counterproductive.

Mentorship

Leadership, whether at the pastoral level, from the elders who teach, or even among the congregants who love on and serve one another, requires mentorship. For this DRP, mentorship is to be understood as a synonym of discipleship. Likened to making disciples, the idea of a mentorship program is born from 2 Timothy 2:2. The central focus of an effective mentorship ministry is to see every individual growing in the use of their spiritual gifts. An effective mentorship ministry is covered by Richard Leyda as he discusses the five-step model for investing in others. He suggests these five steps: step one—model, *I do, you watch*; step two—mentor, *I do, you help*; step three—monitor, *you do, I help*; step four—motivate, *you do, I watch*; step five—multiply, *you do, I do something else*.⁹⁶ Just as Jesus called the Twelve Disciples and then focused his intimate ministry on three, a senior pastor must establish his own mentorship program as he surrounds himself with others who have the gifts and talents in which he lacks.

The establishment of a mentorship program within a church is imperative to the success of church revitalization. Without it, the danger of too many leaders and not enough followers lurks around the corner. Becoming involved in the mentorship process will prove to be a significant role in bringing about unity to the FBC family, thus promoting an atmosphere of church revitalization. But even when a congregation understands the need for spiritual maturity

⁹⁵ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 57.

⁹⁶ Anthony and Estep, 310.

and is united toward church revitalization and realizes the scriptural mandate to pray for and follow the leadership of their pastor/elders, there can still be obstacles that need to be overcome.

Obstacles to Spiritual Maturity and Church Revitalization

Cheyney addresses two major obstacles that interfere with the partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization. He says that without a connection to the community⁹⁷ and until a body is willing to swallow the pride of tradition and apathy “it is useless to become involved.”⁹⁸ This is why the eager pursuit of growing in spiritual maturity is so vital as a precursor to and a partner of church revitalization. The pleasures of this world certainly tend to choke out a believer’s pursuit toward a sold-out-for-the-Lord lifestyle. The broken world system and Satan desire to keep a tight grip on a believer’s foot while reluctantly allowing for a toe to dip in this thing called a spiritual side (John 12:31, Eph 2:2). This is a danger for sure. It is a travesty that worldly influences have infiltrated the church, a point in which Nichols reflects. Likened to the illustration of a frog boiling in a pot of water, Nichols sounds the alarm that “We don’t even notice that we’re slowly being boiled in the world’s values and marinated with the taste for the pleasures of this world!”⁹⁹ That a church would allow for the world to influence its persona to the point of being just slightly holier than the world is a serious disease that parallels the individual who sees spiritual apathy in much the same way.

⁹⁷ Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars*, 14.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁹⁹ Nichols, 26.

Spiritual Apathy

Although a deeper definition of apathy is provided in chapter one's definitions section, a simplified variant of apathy is defined here as a selfishness that refuses to pitch in, become involved, or to do one's fair share of the work that would lead to fulfilling the mission of the church. Apathy carries with it an I-do-not-care approach to anything related to spiritual maturity and church revitalization, and it is often partnered with pride and blame. Several authors have danced around that specific label. Cheyney and Rials speak to the blame game by saying that it is those who "sit around and talk about the 'good old days' and do nothing because they don't agree with what is happening."¹⁰⁰ In short, apathy is an indifference toward the things of God and to the needs of those in one's midst, while pointing a blaming finger to deflect ownership of the problems at hand. Apathy is a silent killer to church unity, ministry, and growth.

Apathy at FBC is not so much defined by the above blame game as much as it is a label of many who are not content with how things are going, yet who have not shown a willingness to step in to help. In Fink's work, *Biblical Discipleship*, he provides a comprehensive review to the lackadaisical approach to discipleship, and while he does not specifically use the term "apathy," his review of Scripture is spot on as he uncovers the many ways in which apathy rears its ugly head. Apathy stands in the way of growing in faith, engaging in ministry, loving God more deeply, and simply growing in ones' understanding of what it means to be a sold-out disciple of Christ. Apathy is a negative stance that opposes everything that brings glory to God, especially when it comes to the attitude of the heart. When speaking of spiritual attitudes and discipleship, Fink reflects that "They are the expression of our inner thoughts, feelings emotions, beliefs, and

¹⁰⁰ Cheyney and Rials, *The Nuts and Bolts*, 16.

values,”¹⁰¹ and these are motivated by understanding our position in the Lord, our relationship with others, and our outlook on our life in the church.

Church Traditions

The seven deadly words in church life, it has always done it that way, should be erased from the unhallowed halls of yesteryear’s glory days. According to James Estep, Jr., change should be approached with “five basic assumptions about the nature of change: Change is natural, inevitable, necessary, a process, and value-based.”¹⁰² All organizations fight through cycles and pendulum swings. The key to effective, godly change is seen in a unified trek toward a desired end goal, and in this case, the end goal is that which overcomes an apathy that stands in the way of spiritual maturity and subsequent church revitalization. But those who hold tightly to church traditions may be holding on tightly for the wrong reason(s). Traditions in and of themselves are not bad if they align with Scripture as opposed to peoples’ preference. Sam Rainer III provides six reasons why a church resists change, all of which have something to do with the pastor’s inability to cast a godly vision or to create an atmosphere of trust, anticipation, and a focus that is placed solely on what God wants to accomplish. He has observed the following nuances within a traditional church setting:

The first thing to realize is that you [pastor] are the change. A second reason churches resist change has to do with leaders who do not properly recognize the type of change they are recommending. A third reason churches resist change has to do with the one proposing the change. A fourth reason churches resist change is the belief that change is not necessary. A fifth reason churches resist change is the belief that change is not feasible. Lastly, people will resist a change effort if it reshuffles the power of alignment.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ Fink, *Biblical Discipleship: Essential Components for Attaining Spiritual Maturity*, 256.

¹⁰² Anthony and Estep, 202.

¹⁰³ Sam S. Rainer, III, *Obstacles in the Established Church*, 18-23.

Cheyney and Rials advise that “pride, selfishness, and self-deception”¹⁰⁴ and “entrenched leadership, church passivity, and congregational age,”¹⁰⁵ are all related, summarizing that “these obstacles are scary to face and difficult to address,”¹⁰⁶ but when they are overcome, church health is attainable when spiritual maturity and church revitalization are pursued.

Church Health and the Focus on Prayer

Church health, while often on the heart of a pastor is seldom on the radar for church members, however, personal comfort is. This creates yet another problem because facilitating church health often requires conflict and stretching. It is a challenging work that requires strenuous endurance and an enthusiastic perseverance. As stated in *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, “Congregations of all sizes increasingly face the alternatives of deep change or slow death . . . providing the effective leadership required to guide a congregation down a path of deep change is more challenging than it has ever been.”¹⁰⁷ Church health is muddled due to the emotional baggage that every individual brings into the fold, and the pastor is not excluded from this danger, either. Humanity brings an undeniable filter of our childhood experiences, misguided decisions made during the formative years, sinful tendencies, emotional scars, and automatic reactions.

The way one thinks, feels, behaves, and believes are all detrimental to church health, that is, unless the Word of God becomes and remains as the primary and sole focus for rebirth, reformation, and restoration (Phil 4:8, Rom 12:2, 2 Cor 5:17). Croft reminds us that church

¹⁰⁴ Cheyney and Rials, 24.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰⁷ Jim Herrington, Trisha Taylor, and R. Robert Creech, *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 10.

health trumps church growth as the primary goal for church revitalization. Along with Croft, Cheyney and Rials have much to say in this regard. Churches must first “create an environment that is safe for their pastor to lead this effort,”¹⁰⁸ “develop an environment for spiritual honesty and confession,”¹⁰⁹ and most importantly, “create an environment of prayer.”¹¹⁰ And although prayer has not been a focus in the writing of this DRP, it should be understood to be an emphatic focus throughout. Prayer is vital to church health. Prayer helps the mind of man to speak the cares of the heart which should focus both to better align with the mind, will, and heart of God. Without prayer, the vision of overcoming spiritual apathy, growing in spiritual maturity, and creating an atmosphere of church revitalization is without substance or hope.

Church health is not defined by man, but by God, and therefore should have a godly focus rather than to grow toward the comforts of humanity. Church health only occurs when the congregation willfully follows pastoral leadership toward a God-centered vision of doing the will of God for the glory of God. Period. It is not to be calculated by the proverbial trinity of measurements for success (butts, bucks, and buildings), and it is not to be evaluated by the triune self-ship (me, myself, and I). Church health, which does not happen overnight, occurs after an ongoing pursuit of God has taken place.

As Thom Rainer explains, after praying to seek God’s strength and wisdom in dealing with the realities of tradition and current misguiding, after having built a core group of key influencers that are now excited about the vision and direction for change, and after communicating a strong message of vision and renewed hope for church’s future, it is now time to deal with those difficult issues that place leadership in hand-to-hand combat with problems

¹⁰⁸ Cheyney and Rials, 20.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 21.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

(and unfortunately, with the people who are presenting those problems) with a sense of spiritual vigor and urgency. “But change will not happen without intentional outward movement.”¹¹¹ If the vision for the future of the church is focused on the comfort of its members (worship style, pews vs. chairs, and what not), then it is not a vision from God.

Mission and Vision

From a distinct perspective, Brian Nall suggests that church health cannot be attained without a strong central vision. This vision is a target upon which the entire congregation can focus upon and unite. Having a strong and memorable vision gives the crowd of all ages a common goal for which to strive, so the vision is better if it is memorable. “The VISION should be short and memorable,”¹¹² he asserts, so that one can easily “repeat it, declare it, communicate it, in multiple ways.”¹¹³ Sometime prior to 2014 the mission of FBC was “to glorify God by establishing and developing fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.”¹¹⁴ The pastor changed this vision/mission to be, “Our church exists by the will of God, to live as Christ in the power of his spirit, for the glory of the Father.”¹¹⁵ The new mission starting 2023 is “Our mission is to make Christ known by evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved.”¹¹⁶ It contains three easy to remember and simple to recite points. FBC Norway exists to make Christ known. This is done in two ways, by evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved.

¹¹¹ Thom S. Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?: Leading Change in the Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2016), 91.

¹¹² Brian E. Nall, *Toward Revitalization: 9 Orderly Steps to Church Health* (Pensacola, FL: Brian E. Nall, 2019), 39.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹¹⁴ This was retrieved from a 2011 church bulletin.

¹¹⁵ This was Pastor Warren Geldmeier’s statement for why FBC exists. The motto, as he called it, was retrieved off a previous bulletin from 2021.

¹¹⁶ This motto/vision is per the new interim pastor and church revitalization consultant.

The vision becomes imperative to the achievement of church health especially when it aligns to the will of God as seen in the Word of God. Nall continues, “God will gauge us according to our faithfulness toward the mission He has given us while He is in charge of the results.”¹¹⁷ In stark contrast, nowhere in Scripture are believers told that God will hold us accountable to the church’s Constitution and Bylaws. The key to a powerful, duplicatable, memorable, and uniting vision is not to make one up, but to mine it from God’s Word.¹¹⁸ Besides, if it does not come from God, will it ever succeed? Casting a vision also requires two crucial components. First, realize that the pastor may not be the best person to present the vision to the congregation. He may not have earned his stripes yet, so to gain the solidarity of an elder or longstanding member who is well-liked might be the better route to take.

Second, the pastor may not have established a foundation firm enough for the vision to be set upon. The problem is identified by Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold. “A large segment of pastors occupy [*sic*] the pastoral position but don’t lead their congregations into fruitful ministry.”¹¹⁹ Any vision that encompasses such texts as Matthew 28:19-20, Romans 12:1-2, and 2 Corinthians 5:17 would work well when transformation, renewal, and revitalization are in play.¹²⁰ But to try to duplicate the successes of the past presents a problem, not only for a renewed vision but also considering the tradition(s) of the church. Henry and Richard Blackaby offer the most insightful information regarding compiling, presenting, and pursuing a vision for the movement of God amidst the mannerisms of man.

¹¹⁷ Nall, *Toward Revitalization*, 105-06.

¹¹⁸ Shawn Lovejoy, *Be Mean About the Vision: Preserving and Protecting What Matters* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 18.

¹¹⁹ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 30.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 36.

God rarely worked the same way twice. God's activity was always unique to the people with whom he *was* dealing and the time in which he was working. God's activity cannot be reduced to a formula because God is more concerned about relating to his people than he is with a specific task or program. Churches erroneously assume that because God worked mightily in a particular way in the past, he will work in exactly the same way today. Many organizations are locked into routines not because they are effective today but because they were effective yesterday.¹²¹

The vision is not something that, biblically speaking, is provided by God to the entire congregation at once. Vision is given to those who serve in leadership roles, and more likely to the pastor. The vision being spoken of here is different from that which is seen in Acts 2:17 (NIV), "Your young men will see visions; your old men will have dreams." A true godly vision is so engrained into the spirit of God's servant that absolutely nothing can thwart his pursuit of its fruition.

Conclusion

The review of literature has focused not only on what notable authors in these fields of study have stated, but also in what was not covered, namely, that there has been a lack of focus on the overlapping of growing in spiritual maturity as a precursor to and partner of a church becoming revitalized. These five major fields of study include evangelism, discipleship, church growth, church revitalization, and spiritual maturity. Although the search has not been replete in each field of study in and of itself, this research focused on how they interact or do not interact with each other, especially in the arenas of church revitalization and spiritual maturity. Recent dissertations have been reviewed and have been found to have immense value for their specific purposes, yet none of them offered viable substance for the work at hand.

¹²¹ Henry and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda*. Revised and Expanded (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2011), 89.

The brief explanation of the fruit of the Spirit and its application from Philippians 1:9-11 was placed under the literature review heading to highlight the lack of correlation between spiritual maturity and church revitalization, or more emphatically, the pursuit of evangelism as a connection between the two. This was done to highlight the gap in theological academia which is focused upon in this DRP. The roles of leadership within the church were reviewed, especially as they interact with helping others to grow in spiritual maturity and sanctification (both of which that are truly God's doing, but even more so for the purpose of overcoming obstacles that often beset the pursuit of a vision for renewal. Apathy and diehard traditions stand in the way of church health and vision.

Theological Foundations

The theological foundations for this work will leverage scholarly resources that reflect upon those Scriptures that deal with apathy, spiritual maturity, evangelism, church membership, and church revitalization. This is not intended to be an exhaustive review as much as it is focused on the specific needs of FBC. The reader will realize that more time is spent on apathy and spiritual maturity than it is on the latter three subjects, and this is on purpose, for it is those two categories that must first be addressed prior to any attempts to be made in church revitalization.

Apathy

The word apathy (Greek *ἀπάθεια* – “Apathy; Complacency; Idleness; Indifference; Indolence; Laziness and Apathy; Lazy; Procrastination; Sloth Acedia; Sluggish”)¹²² is not predominant in the Bible, but the idea of apathy abounds. Apathy is not the absence of maturity,

¹²² “Apathy; Complacency; Idleness; Indifference; Indolence; Laziness and Apathy; Lazy; Procrastination; Sloth Acedia; Sluggish.” Faithlife, LLC. 2023. “Logos Bible Software Factbook.” Logos Bible Software. Bellingham, WA: Faithlife, LLC.

but it is at least a diluter. To be apathetic is to be without feeling about something or to have no emotional desire for involvement. Synonyms include such terms as indifference or slothfulness (Rom 12:11, ESV), lukewarm (Rev 3:16, ESV), idleness (Eph 5:16, NIV), complacency (Zeph 1:12-13, ESV), and dull of hearing (Heb 5:11-12, 14, NIV), and it is often spoken of as spiritual immaturity. Apathy also manifests itself as a sin of omission (“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin,” Jas 4:17, ESV; see also 1 John 3:17-18, ESV), and in those who are stuck on spiritual milk, as in not caring to grow beyond infantile behaviors, although in 1 Peter 2:1-3. Peter uses spiritual milk in the positive sense, in that “all believers should be like infants in this sense—they should ‘crave’ (*epipothēsate*) the ‘pure spiritual milk.’”¹²³ This stands in comparison to rather than in contrast to other texts “where believers are indicted for spiritual immaturity.”¹²⁴

FBC Norway is labeled as being apathetic toward fulfilling the Great Commission for no other reason than because it is not doing so. What is unknown is the cause behind her idleness. Is it because leadership has not provided the proper foundation or environment for outreach/evangelism to take place? Is it because today’s activities have not returned to a pre-Covid norm? Is it because there is a lack of trust in current leadership because of certain events that have taken place over the past five-to-ten years? Or is there a difference in theology at play?¹²⁵

¹²³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, et al., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishers, 2003), 99.

¹²⁴ Ibid. “The reference to ‘milk’ (*gala*) in 1 Cor 3:1-3 and Heb 5:11-14 occurs in contexts where believers are indicted for spiritual immaturity, but we must beware of imposing those contexts on the Petrine usage.”

¹²⁵ The question posed here has to do with either a hyper-Calvinistic stance where God will save whomever He chooses regardless of whether one participates in evangelism, or that there is a feeling of antinomianism.

Regardless of the cause, apathy stands opposed to growth in spiritual maturity and subsequent church revitalization. While apathy is often spoken of within church revitalization and spiritual maturity arenas, it is seldom defined. It is because of this that one needs to consult Scripture in its various contexts to see the warnings pronounced against being apathetic. Scripture is always the primary source when it comes to the definition of and warnings against such topics as spiritual apathy. Although not an all-inclusive list, several verses will be explored that speak to apathy¹²⁶ and complacency,¹²⁷ and to maintain consistency throughout this work, the term apathy will be used. Where apathy is concerned, no study would be complete without looking into the causes of apathy, the warnings against apathy, and the punishments because of apathy.

Causes of Apathy

Although there can be a myriad of reasons that might contribute to the presence of apathy in someone's life, there are four predominant reasons that will be explored here. Those reasons include pride, selfishness, laziness, and self-reliance. Pride is putting one's own desires over those of God's, or even totally denying God in a specific area of life, where the apparent follower of Christ allows no room for God's presence.¹²⁸ First, the pride being spoken of here is not to be confused with the pride that is part of the origin of sin (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, pride of life—1 John 2:16, NIV). A very explicit warning is found in Psalm 10:4, "In his pride the

¹²⁶ Apathy: Ezek 22:30, Hag 1:2-11, Matt 24:12, Luke 10:30-32, Phil 2:21, Jas 4:17, Rev 3:14-22. This list was taken from *The NASB Topical Index*, Logos Bible Software (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1992).

¹²⁷ Complacency: Deut 8:11-14; Ps 10:4; Isa 64:7; Eze 33:31; Dan 9:13-14; Zeph 1:12; Luke 12:19-21; Heb 5:11; 6:12. *NASB Topical Index*, Ibid.

¹²⁸ This description of pride is authored by the writer of this DRP. The idea behind this description comes from an understanding of Adam and Eve's fall in the Garden (Gen 3) as well as John's description of sin in 1 John 2:15-16.

wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God” (NIV). This kind of pride results in not caring for the needs of others. As Keil and Delitzsch note, the one who displays this type of pride (they do not call it apathy) denies “the existence of a living, active, all-punishing (in one word: a personal) God, [which] is equivalent to denying the existence of any real and true God whatever.”¹²⁹ Pride is without a doubt a contributor to spiritual apathy and often reveals its presence in selfishness.

The second cause of apathy, therefore, is selfishness, which could on one hand present itself as a selfish ambition (ἐριθεία)¹³⁰ that is inwardly focused rather than one that is focused on the needs of others. The Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 gives a vivid picture between the contrast of selfish versus selfless, and Philippians 2:3-4 provides the antidote by emulating Christ. It is to this end that Joseph Hellerman examines the use of ἐριθεία in this text along with its variant in Philippians 2:21. Whereas they state that selfish ambition refers to “Philippi’s highly stratified honor culture,”¹³¹ which presents itself as a selfish ambition within the social classes (politics, society), Paul’s use of this word as it aligns to the caution against apathy fits better when contemplating Philippians 2:21. Not only are pride and selfishness causes for apathy, so is laziness.

Laziness, or being sluggish, is a third cause of apathy. It is here that the apathetic individual knows that they should be getting involved in God’s work but chooses not to do so. Proverbs 6:6 provides a warning against laziness (“Go to the ant, you sluggard,” NIV). The

¹²⁹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Psalms*, vol. 5, “Psalm 10:3-4” by F. Delitzsch. Francis Bolton, trans. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 110.

¹³⁰ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, “ἐριθεία” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 392.

¹³¹ Joseph H. Hellerman. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Gen. Eds. *B & H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Philippians* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2015), 99.

antithesis of laziness is perseverance, whereas the warning passage in Hebrews 6:11 is made in a negative sense, “so that you won’t become lazy” (ἵνα μὴ νοθροὶ γένησθε). Dana Harris explains that the ἵνα (*so that*) introduces a purpose clause¹³² and that this text also helps to form an inclusio around the third warning passage in Hebrews.¹³³ To summarize this warning passage, apathy is the problem, laziness is the cause, and perseverance is the cure against self-reliance. For example, shortly after Moses gave the Ten Commandments (Deut 5:6-21) and then told Israel to love the Lord their God (Shema, Deut 6:4-9), he announced a warning to not lose sight of God’s presence in their lives. For today’s believer, the warning is still the same. “Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws, and his decrees . . . otherwise . . . your heart will become proud, and you will forget the Lord your God” (Deut 8:11-14, NIV).

Additionally, Eugene Merrill ties both the warning passage in Hebrews and the warning given by Moses in Deuteronomy to the topic of complacency quite well. He says, “The very blessing and abundance of the land, however, would tend to lull its inhabitants into a sense of complacency and self-sufficiency.”¹³⁴ Finally, the last cause of apathy from this list is self-reliance. Luke 12:18-21 gives a warning to those who would rather be self-reliant in this life, for selfishness or self-reliance leads to being apathetic toward the calling and commands of God. The warning against an apathetic selfishness is to not store up things for oneself and thus neglect

¹³² As noted by Harris, the NIV uses the word *lazy* whereas the ESV, NASB, and NET use the word “sluggish.” Dana M. Harris, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, Gen. Eds. *B & H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: Hebrews* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2019), 145.

¹³³ For a deeper study on the warning passages of Hebrews, see Gareth L. Cockerill, Buist M. Fanning, Randall C. Gleason, Grant R. Osborne, and George H. Guthrie. Herbert W. Bateman IV, Gen. Ed. *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007).

¹³⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol 4, The New American Commentary, Ray Clendenen, et al, eds. (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1994), 187.

the riches of God (“but is not rich toward God,” Luke 12:21, NIV). This parable teaches the need to be heavenly minded rather than to covet the riches of this world while not caring for those in one’s midst.

Selfishness that results in apathy is when one’s focus is on the brevity of earthly riches instead of looking to the eternal security that only Jesus can provide. When the focus on selfish needs results in apathy, the needs of others, especially as it pertains to the evangelistic offer of eternal security, quickly grow out of focus. Apathy carries with it a lack of concern for the lost. Joel Green calls this a “pseudo-security.”¹³⁵ Now that the four primary causes of apathy have been explored (pride, selfishness, laziness, and self-reliance), the next step is to identify and unpack a few of the warnings given to believers in God’s Word.

Warnings Against Apathy

There are several warnings throughout Scripture that provide golden nuggets of wisdom toward avoiding apathy. The ones chosen herein deal more specifically with this DRP, which focuses on evangelism as a major part of spiritual maturity. It is to this end that the two most relevant texts of warning against apathy will be explored. These include Ezekiel 33:31 and James 1:22, which inform the disciple of Christ to not only hear the Word of God, but to do what it says. As simple as that may sound, to put these things into practice can be paralyzing, for seldom do believers grow in their maturity to the point of actively sharing their faith. Ezekiel 33:31 (NIV) says, “My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their

¹³⁵ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, et al. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 489.

hearts are greedy for unjust gain.” More familiar is the New Testament text in James 1:22 “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says” (NIV).¹³⁶

Just as the words of the Lord to Ezekiel offered him encouragement, they can also be comforting to a pastor who feels like his preaching is falling on deaf ears. These words form a stern wake-up call to those who hear but then fail to allow their lives to be changed because of them. The explanation of the Ezekiel text offered by Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr. are words to be heeded as a warning for those who are apathetic in the church today. “They listened to him out of curiosity but had no intention of changing their way of life. They found his words entertaining, but they neglected to put the principles into practice (vv. 30-32).”¹³⁷

Cooper, Sr. provided insight from the Old Testament warnings regarding “Jerusalem’s fall and Israel’s failure to heed (33:21-33)”¹³⁸ that are applicable to the church today. In his reflection on 33:23-39 he says, “God reminded them that they still sacrificed to idols, ate meat with blood (Lev 19:26, NIV), and committed acts of violence and sexual immorality (cf. Acts 15:29, NIV), actions detrimental to the restoration, rather than submitting to the standards of God’s word (vv. 25-26).”¹³⁹ Unrepented sin is a barrier to one’s growth toward spiritual maturity and is often a subtle marker for the downturn of a church’s health and vitality. As to the text in James, what is worth noting as a warning against apathy is seen in the Greek phrase,

¹³⁶ Although the NIV (1978) is used throughout this work, it is noteworthy here to reference two other translations for James 1:22. The ESV says “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves,” and the NASB says, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” Logos Bible Software, text comparison feature.

¹³⁷ Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, et al. (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1994), 298.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 296.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 297.

παραλογιζόμενοι éαυτούς (to deceive oneself).¹⁴⁰ The latter is a reflexive personal pronoun, or “The use of a pronoun to reference the subject as the object of the active verb.”¹⁴¹ When a believer is apathetic toward the ways of God, when they are refusing to pursue spiritual maturity that leads to active evangelism (and thus subsequent church revitalization), they are only fooling themselves. They are suffering from self-deception, which in many ways is the worst kind.

For someone to think they are right, or doing okay, when indeed they are only fooling themselves, is a danger within today’s church. “The deception likely resides in the illusion that the mere hearing of the word secures salvation.”¹⁴² Sometimes apathy is present because the salvific experience was not valid. They do not care because they are not yet compelled by the Holy Spirit to care. Church attendance is something one does because that is what they think is expected of them. Jesus warned that “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven” (Matt 7:21, New King James Version). This is not only a cause for apathy, but it is also a warning against apathy. Hearing without believing or hearing without doing are both dangerous, for they quickly lead to apathy, and quite frankly, apathy deserves to be punished, or at least addressed sternly.

Punishments Because of Apathy

It is worth noting here that antinomianism is a danger when contemplating the legal requirements found in Old Testament texts. Although a believer is under the period of Grace and

¹⁴⁰ *The Blue Letter Bible* breaks down παρά and λογίζομαι to mean from, of, by, besides, near, and to reckon, account, deliberate, and to judge internally. Accessed March 6, 2023, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g3884/mgnt/mgnt/0-1/>.

¹⁴¹ Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary*, “Reflexive Pronoun” (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2007). Logos Bible Software.

¹⁴² Chris A. Vlachos. Murray J. Harris and Andreas J. Köstenberger, Gen. Eds. *B & H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament: James* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2013), 58.

not under the Law, there are still Old Testament mandates that apply today. Antinomianism (*anti*–against, and *nomos*–law) is a “false teaching that since faith alone is necessary for salvation, one is free from the moral obligations of the law.”¹⁴³ The following texts will be explored next to unveil the Old Testament’s narrative for punishment due to spiritual apathy (Isa 64:7, Dan 9:13-14) as well as the danger of thinking that God will sit idly on the sidelines and do nothing (Zeph 1:12).

In context, Isaiah 64 reflects on God’s absence in their midst due to sins that go unconfessed and unrepented. Verse six says, “All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags...” God’s anger toward sin is real, and even though His punishment fell upon Christ on the cross at Calvary, it is man’s relationship with God that is caused to suffer as the result of apathy. Gary Smith’s explanation of Isaiah 64:6-7 applies to apathy today:

People either are too busy with their own affairs, do not recognize the problem that sin has caused in the community, just simply do not care, or do not want to get involved. Possibly some do not know what to do or where to go for help, while others may not think it is any of their business, while a few others may not realize that God could help them if they called.¹⁴⁴

Thinking that God will do nothing while the believer suffers from apathy or is complacent toward his commands is ludicrous. Zephaniah explicitly warns the idle sluggard, or the apathetic and complacent ones, to put into action that which one knows is right. “At that time, I will search Jerusalem with lamps and punish those who are complacent, who are like wine left on its dregs, who think, ‘The Lord will do nothing, either good or bad’” (Zeph 1:12, NIV). Kenneth Barker

¹⁴³ Chad Brand et al., eds. *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, “Antinomianism” (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 75. Logos Bible Software.

¹⁴⁴ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66, vol. 15B*, The New American Commentary. E. Ray Clendenen, et al. ed. (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2009), 691.

and Waylon Bailey offer some keen insights into the Zephaniah text. Verse twelve is the “central indictment of the book,”¹⁴⁵ and the illustration of wine being left on its dregs¹⁴⁶ is quite appropriate to the dangers of apathy. Given these warnings of punishment, it is certainly advisable to do whatever one can to overcome apathy and avoid it altogether in the future, and the motivation should not be to avoid God’s wrath but to bring Him glory.

To Overcome Apathy

Because apathy is also known as indifference, complacency, slothfulness, dull of hearing, and idleness, and even the non-educated Christian should readily see these to be not only sins against God but also detrimental to their journey toward spiritual maturity. The believer receives the blessings and joys which go along with growing closer to the Lord in their faith and in their journey through this life, therefore it is imperative to realize two predominant ways in which to overcome apathy and then to stay far from its shores. The remedy against apathy is found in two primary activities that lead toward spiritual maturity. These activities are to bear good fruit and to do good works.

The concept of bearing good fruit is seen in Matthew 7:16-20, and although the mind will invariably move directly to John 15:1-8 when a discussion of bearing fruit is introduced, the John 15 and Colossian 1:10 texts will be covered under the subheading of evangelism. After giving the warning of a wolf in sheep’s clothing in Matthew 7:15,¹⁴⁷ Jesus explains that bad trees cannot

¹⁴⁵ Kenneth L. Barker and Waylon Bailey, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, New American Commentary, E. Ray Clendenen, et al., eds., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1998), 434.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Barker and Bailey explain that “fermented wine has to be poured from one vessel to another to separate the wine from the sediment (lees or ‘dregs’). If the wine is allowed to settle too long, it thickens and is ruined.” How appropriate this is to the warning of apathy in today’s church.

¹⁴⁷ “This proverbial expression draws on the natural enmity of sheep and wolves (e.g., Isa 11:6; 65:25).” Michael J. Wilkins. Clinton E. Arnold, ed. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 53.

bear good fruit, and vice versa. Focusing on the latter two verses we read, “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them” (King James Version). In context, these warnings have to do with false prophets and measuring their lack of contribution toward a righteousness that is valued by God. As R. T. France notes, “The word ‘righteousness’ does not occur in these concluding pericopes, but that is what they are about. Only those prophets whose lives reveal the righteousness of the kingdom of God are to be credited . . . bad teaching is reflected in bad living.”¹⁴⁸

Here are some words of warning to those who are suffering from apathy and a lack of understanding of what it means to pursue spiritual maturity. Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 15:33 that bad company corrupts good character, and Craig Blomberg deliberates on this passage by offering his own words of wisdom. Because of mankind’s ongoing sinful nature, it is imperative to take the necessary precautions when engaging with the fallen world which is around us to not fall back into old habits.¹⁴⁹ An immature believer is apt to grab hold of anything that sounds good, but just because it sounds Christianese does not make it so.

Not only is bearing good fruit a remedy for apathy, so is doing good works. Realizing that one is saved by grace and not good works is the precursor to this section, but the command to be involved in working for God’s glory is paramount, nonetheless. As Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) explains, “We are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” These are good works of service echoed later in Ephesians 6:6-8 but amplified in Ephesians 2:16 as a reconciliation of man to God, through the cross, and

¹⁴⁸ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 291.

¹⁴⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary, Terry Muck, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 306.

now into a unified family described as fellow citizens and members of God's household (19), built together on the foundation of Christ (20-21). To pursue good works is also a reflection of the good work that God has and is doing in His children, for His children are also His workmanship, or His creation, who are created in Christ Jesus to be made anew into His likeness (Rom 1:20, 2 Cor 5:17, Gal 6:15, Jas 2:14-26, 4:17).

Regarding Ephesians 2:10, John Phillips says that "Good works are part of God's plan. They are not the *price* of salvation, but the *proof* . . . They are the result of God's working in the believer's heart."¹⁵⁰ R. Kent Hughes adds that both belief and holding still are requirements to obeying Ephesians 2:10. "We must submit to the authority of his Word and the shaping influences he brings to our lives!"¹⁵¹ Overcoming apathy is required before the journey toward spiritual maturity can truly take flight.

Spiritual Maturity

Spiritual maturity is the pinnacle of one's existence as believers in Christ. Philippians 1:6 advises that the process of growing toward this end is facilitated by the Lord's working, and Paul revisits this by saying, "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil 2:13, NIV). Paul also advises that believers are to press on toward this goal (Phil 3:12-16) and to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). In J. D. Watson's analysis of this text, he points out that fear (*phobeō*) is used "in the moral sense of awe, reverence, and honor."¹⁵² But what exactly is spiritual maturity? Overcoming spiritual apathy

¹⁵⁰ John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians & Philippians*, in The John Phillips Commentary Series: An Expository Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1995), 68.

¹⁵¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Ephesians; The Mystery of the Body of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1990), 84.

¹⁵² J. D. "Doc" Watson, *A Word for the Day: Key Words from the New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2006), 265.

with a purposed approach to growing in spiritual maturity (love, study, wisdom, discernment, and discipleship) entails becoming engaged in evangelistic activities (Matt 28:19-20, Luke 14:23). The simplest way to engage in evangelism is to follow Jesus' example by engaging others (John 4:5-7).¹⁵³ Spiritual maturity is more than having the will for all to no longer sin. It is more than perfect attendance at church, and more than Scripture memorization. Spiritual maturity is ultimately measured by one's evangelistic endeavors, not as an obligation but as an ongoing desire to partner with God in reaching the lost (1 Corinthians 3).

Spiritual maturity is also multi-faceted. Those who are growing in their spiritual maturity have learned not only to abstain from sinful desires but also to do the things of Christ that one is called to do. Spiritual maturity is not reduced to obeying a list of rules. Scripture clearly reveals that spiritual maturity is not only a destination, but it represents a lifelong journey in service to our Lord. Jesus Christ is the model to be emulated, as Paul asserts when he says to follow him as he follows Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

Spiritual maturity should, therefore, be the primary pursuit of every believer. It is God who causes one's growth as He equips His children, not only through His Word, but also through those who instruct, such as pastors and elders (1 Tim 3, Titus 1, Jas 3:1), for "It was he who gave some to be apostles, [. . .] and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:11-13, NIV).

The terms edify and build up are used interchangeably, along with "uplifting, encouraging, instructive, and even challenging."¹⁵⁴ This is according to Watson. The believer's mark of maturity is proven by a changed behavior and stability in faith. Spiritual maturity is

¹⁵³ Dave Earley and David Wheeler, *Evangelism Is . . . How to Share Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2010), 121-22.

¹⁵⁴ Watson, *A Word for the Day*, 79.

marked by a believer's ability to see this fallen world through the eyes of God and to live with eternity in mind, bringing glory to God in all that he/she thinks, says, and does. Spiritual maturity results in an active and eager pursuit to evangelize the lost and disciple the saved. It desires to make Christ known, no matter the cost.

Jesus Christ is Our Model

F. F. Bruce is both simple and profound in his explanation of Ephesians 2:9-10, as he expounds on the reciprocating function of works and grace. Bruce explains that it is in the grace of God that a believer lives out his/her life through works, and that in doing so the believer is emulating Jesus who modeled a life of both.

Jesus offered grace while working to bring God the Father glory, and that when Christ departed after finishing His work, man's work cannot be accomplished in the flesh, but "to live like this, to accomplish the good works prepared for his children by God, the empowering gift of the Spirit is necessary."¹⁵⁵ God, the Father (John 14:16, 15:26, Acts 2:33) and Jesus the Son (John 10:30, 16:7) both sent the Holy Spirit to help believers on our journey toward spiritual maturity.

Additionally, Ephesians 4:13-15 details how one's "maturity is marked by 'the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God'" (NIV) and that it is this personal knowledge of Christ that leads both the individual and the church toward maturity.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, to emulate the life of Christ as the perfect example and as the perfecter of one's faith (Heb 12:2) is the foremost requisite to obtain spiritual maturity. To emulate Christ, one must not only know Him through

¹⁵⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 291.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 250-351.

His Word, but be transformed in his/her mind (Rom 12:2, NIV, “be transformed by the renewing of your mind;” Phil 2:5, NIV, “have the mind of Christ;” Phil 4:8, NIV, “think on these things”). Indeed, spiritual maturity is the goal, and Christ is the Way (John 14:6).

Spiritual Maturity is Our Goal

Spiritual maturity is *proven* (Phil 1:9-11), it is *participating* (Isa 59:17, Phil 2:12, Jas 2:26, 2 Pet 1:5-7), it is *providential* (Isa 61:10, Phil 1:6), and it is *positional* (Jude 24-25).¹⁵⁷ Man cannot earn spiritual maturity, for his righteousness will always fall short (Isa 64:6, Zech 3:4, Rom 3:23-24), but it is the righteousness given by God is what counts (John 16:8, 1 Cor 1:30). Malphurs explains that spiritual maturity also requires emotional maturity.

He defines emotional intelligence as “an awareness of our emotions and the emotions of others around us so that we can manage well our emotions and theirs (especially the harmful ones), with the result that we relate in a Christlike manner with those within or outside the body of faith.”¹⁵⁸ Philippians 3:12-14 depicts the journey/race toward spiritual maturity.

With Christ being the model of perfection, while also looking toward the great cloud of witnesses that have gone before us (even in their imperfections, see Heb 12:1), and with iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17), the journey is perhaps more important than the destination, for in it the believer will learn, strive, achieve, and yes, also fail.

Yet even with that being the case, Paul’s illustration of a runner rounding the final corner (just as “Paul’s story takes a final turn”),¹⁵⁹ not looking back, and striving, straining, struggling to get to the finish line, with a final thrust of the chest forward to stretch across the tape (“I press

¹⁵⁷ A specific translation of the Bible is not in play here.

¹⁵⁸ Malphurs, 35.

¹⁵⁹ Gordon D. Fee. *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 338.

on” Phil 3:12, NIV), the believer must realize that spiritual maturity is an already-not-yet achievement. Christ has already taken hold of this prize on behalf of the sojourner (this is not our home); the believer just needs to run the race. “In light of what has just been said in vv. 10-11, the ‘goal’ is not ‘perfection’ but the eschatological conclusion of present life, while the ‘prize’ is none other than the final realization of a lifelong passion—the full ‘knowing’ of Christ. To this end all else is not only ‘loss’ and ‘street garbage’ (v. 8) but is to be ‘forgotten’ altogether.”¹⁶⁰

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul encourages believers to “purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God” (NIV). He later revisits this thought in 2 Corinthians 13:11 by saying to “Aim for perfection. Having a reverent fear for God is what motivated Paul’s ministry.”¹⁶¹ This text depicts the partnership that is between man and God toward spiritual maturity. Holiness is given to Christians by God, in Christ, through the working of the Holy Spirit, but it is “also something Christians strive to complete (1 Cor 7:34, 1 Thess 4:1-8, Rom 6:19).”¹⁶²

Paul Barnett adds that the verb for perfection¹⁶³ “probably does not imply a process of perfection in moral holiness. The holiness that is to be perfected is covenantal rather than developmental or progressive in character.”¹⁶⁴ The believer must realize that their participation in growing in spiritual maturity is a matter of faith as well as obedience. While God is indeed the One who causes growth, the proper response by the follower of Christ is to show respect to God

¹⁶⁰ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 341.

¹⁶¹ David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, vol. 29, The New American Commentary, E. Ray Clendenen, et al., ed., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1999), 341.

¹⁶² Ibid., 342.

¹⁶³ ἐπιτελοῦντες, from *epi*, meaning on, upon, or because of, and *teleo*, meaning to bring to completion or fulfill; summary – the completion or fulfillment of perfection is placed upon us by God. <https://biblehub.com/greek/1909.htm> and <https://biblehub.com/greek/5055.htm>, accessed June 18, 2022.

¹⁶⁴ Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 357.

through obedience. “Obeying God’s commands and pursuing spiritual maturity are the best ways to show respect for God.”¹⁶⁵

God Causes Our Growth

While Philippians 1:6 often comes to mind when contemplating the spiritual maturation process, and although Hebrews 10:14 explains that it was the sacrifice of Christ alone that promulgates eventual perfection, it is Paul’s rhetorical question in Galatians 3:3 that will be discussed here. “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort” (NIV)? Just as spiritual apathy is likened to the water that can extinguish spiritual maturity’s fire, trying to attain perfection in the flesh is ludicrous when it is only God who can facilitate such a change in one’s life. Richard Longenecker explains:

In Paul’s mind, therefore, two sets of ideas stand in antithetical relation to one another: (1) the complex of ideas having to do with “the faith/faithfulness of Christ,” “believing what you heard” (i.e., what Paul preached to them), and “the Spirit,” on the one hand, over against (2) “the works of the law” and “the flesh” (whether “flesh” signifies “human effort,” as with the Judaizers, or “sinful ‘passions,’” as with the libertines).¹⁶⁶

As the Lord leads the called through the process of working out salvation through fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), the believer benefits from this partnership when he or she recognizes not only the dangers of spiritual apathy but also the benefits and blessings of growing in spiritual maturity. It is in these activities that one will recognize how God equips His children through His Word to bring glory to Himself (Phil. 1:11).

¹⁶⁵ Bruce B. Barton, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Life Application Bible Commentary, Greg Asimakoupoulos, et al., ed., (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1999), 372.

¹⁶⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary, Bruce M. Metzger, Ralph P. Martin, and Lynn Allan Losie, ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 103.

God Equips Us by His Word and Through Other Believers

God's Word equips the believer with hope. Paul says, "For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom 15:4, NIV). The entirety of canonized Scripture is useful for the spiritual maturation process (2 Tim 3:16-17, NIV), not just the Old Testament to which Paul was referencing in Romans 15:4. It is upon every page of the Bible that a believer can mine words of hope, love, and encouragement, in addition to warnings against idleness and disobedience. Jesus, who is the Word incarnate (John 1:1, λόγος),¹⁶⁷ is centrally concerned with two aspects of His followers' lives, which include a "believers' unity (v. 11; cf. vv. 21-23) and their sanctification in the truth"¹⁶⁸ (John 17:17, NIV).

God also uses fellow believers to admonish one another toward spiritual maturity. Robert Mounce shares that the goal of stronger believers should be to help those who are weaker in the faith to "develop into more mature Christians,"¹⁶⁹ and Galatians 6:1-2 explains that the believer should watch himself to avoid temptation while also carrying each other's burdens. In other words, growing in spiritual maturity is an individual pursuit as well as a group effort. God's Word leads, guides, and directs His children down the path of community. The call to spiritual maturity is also seen in Paul's letter to the Romans. After taking eleven chapters to establish a solid foundation where living under God's grace trumps trying to adhere to the Old Testament Law, Paul transitions to how one should live in God's good, pleasing, and perfect will. One's

¹⁶⁷ C. Marvin Pate, Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton, eds. *Teach the Text Commentary Series: Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 280.

¹⁶⁸ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 162.

¹⁶⁹ Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1995), 259.

understanding of God's Word, while seeking out God's will, reveals that spiritual maturity indeed does result in a changed behavior.

Our Maturity Results in a Changed Behavior

Romans 12:2 is one of the most quoted verses in Romans outside of those verses that make up the Roman Road.¹⁷⁰ To no longer be conformed to the pattern of this world by being transformed by the renewing of one's mind is crucial to growing in spiritual maturity. Rather than behaving the way the world does, the Christian is to be set apart, holy (1 Pet 1:16), and confident in knowing that this world is not our home (Heb 13:14-16). Mounce teaches that "real and lasting change comes from within,"¹⁷¹ and "without a radical reorientation that begins deep within a human heart"¹⁷² change will not be affected in the life of a believer.

This lifelong renewal process works its way from the inside-out and results in a life changed from a selfish pride to a God-glorifying behavior, and even though 2 Corinthians 5:17 promises that the born-again believer is indeed made new, "this 're-programming' of the mind does not take place overnight but is a lifelong process by which our way of thinking is to resemble more and more the way God wants us to think."¹⁷³

As for a life that has been changed, Galatians 5:16-24 (fruit of the Spirit) depicts a do not do this do that schematic. The instruction is to not follow the ways of this world but instead to live with certain characteristics that bring glory to God. Ronald Y. K. Fung explains that "believers have been called for freedom, not in order that they may indulge their sinful nature,

¹⁷⁰ For more information on the Roman Road, see the section on evangelism below.

¹⁷¹ Mounce, *Romans*, 232.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 233.

¹⁷³ Douglas J. Moo. *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 756-57.

but that they should serve one another through love.”¹⁷⁴ The works of the flesh stand in contrast to the fruit of the Spirit, which “refers to the concrete manifestations of the Spirit’s work in the believer.”¹⁷⁵

Again, it is God who works in, on, and through His children for His good pleasure. In addition to the old-versus-new comparison made by Paul in Galatians, in Ephesians 4:22-24 (ESV) he again strongly encourages believers to “put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” And even though the phrase “spiritual maturity” does not appear in the above texts, the idea of maturity is certainly present. God’s Word is replete with instructions such as these.

The most pertinent text for growing in spiritual maturity for this work is found in Philippians 1:9-11. Spiritual maturity, defined by having a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows (re: evangelism), not only helps the believer to be a true disciple of Christ but also to disciple others. This is done first through evangelism and then through mentorship. Jesus is our model, maturity is our goal, God causes our growth, and to do this, He uses His Word as well as other believers. Growing in spiritual maturity not only results in a changed behavior, a change which happens from the inside-out, but it also stabilizes one’s faith.

¹⁷⁴ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament., Ned B. Stonehouse, et al., ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 248.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 262.

Spiritual Maturity Stabilizes Our Faith¹⁷⁶

Paul urges believers to live a life worthy of the calling that has been placed upon the Christian (Eph 4:1). He continues in Ephesians 4:14-15 with an illustration as to what having spiritual maturity might look like in the life of a believer. Being no longer like infants, who are unstable in their walk (babies need to be carried and toddlers certainly will tumble), a mature believer will be able to discern against false teachers and “will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (NIV). Benjamin L. Merkle rightfully parses the Greek text in saying that babies, infants, children, and the like, (Greek, νήπιος) “is used here metaphorically to refer to spiritual immature believers (note the contrast with the ‘mature man’ [ἄνδρα τέλειος] of 4:13.”¹⁷⁷

Hebrews 5:12-6:3 also fits well here, as it speaks to immature believers who still need spiritual milk and who should have long since advanced beyond the Christianity 101. “He intends their faces to burn with shame when he says that milk drinkers are unskilled in discerning and following the correct course of action because they are only ‘infants.’ Thus, he would turn them from such behavior to the maturity so aptly depicted in v. 14.”¹⁷⁸

Evangelism

The pursuit of spiritual maturity finds the believer engaging in evangelistic activities as they share their faith in Jesus Christ who alone can provide salvation for eternity. They do this

¹⁷⁶ The outline for spiritual maturity and many of the Bible verses were drawn in part from Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009), Logos Bible Software.

¹⁷⁷ Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, eds., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2016), 131.

¹⁷⁸ Gareth Lee Cockerill. *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Ned B. Stonehouse, F. F. Bruce, and Gordon D. Fee, ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 259.

not only out of obedience to God's Word, but because of the joy which encompasses a life lived for the purpose of bringing glory to God. Paul warns that those who reject the gospel message "will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people who have believed" (2 Thess 1:9-10). Jesus started and ended his earthly ministry with a call to evangelize (Matt 4:19, 28:19-20), and through the Gospels and the Book of Acts one will see evangelism taking place, and Paul writes to young Timothy with the encouragement to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Watson's comparison between an evangelist in biblical times to that of today is important to share:

Today this is often a guy [evangelist] with six suits and a dozen sermons who goes all over the country preaching. While preaching the true Gospel is certainly paramount, the *biblical* evangelist did far more. He taught people the Word and grounded them in the faith over a period of time. He also, of necessity, founded a local church because that is where the new believer should be. That done, he would move on, leaving a pastor-teacher, the descendent of the prophet, in his place.¹⁷⁹

Whitney declares "that godliness requires that we discipline ourselves in the practice of evangelism."¹⁸⁰ It should be comforting that the outcome of the evangelistic encounter is not up to the one who shares their faith, but it is God alone who facilitates salvation within the heart of the individual (1 Cor 3:5-11). As to the Corinthian text, there is also a warning contained in verses 5-9, which is one of divisiveness according to Blomberg.¹⁸¹ When dealing with apathy as it relates to a non-pursuit of spiritual maturity that would then be reflected in evangelism, too often a church that needs a revitalization process is filled with church-goers who may still align themselves to previous pastors.

¹⁷⁹ Watson, 181.

¹⁸⁰ Whitney, 120.

¹⁸¹ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 73.

Although it has been heard by this researcher many times in the past, one person recently said that they follow Pastor such-and-such, and they have a difficult time believing that their current pastor can be trusted.¹⁸² Paul warns not to follow him or Apollos as champions in the faith (1 Cor 3:6-8), because their influence is of no value outside of pointing others to Christ. As Blomberg notes, Paul is emphatic that it is not people who should be followed or praised, but only God. “Compared to God’s role, humans’ roles are nothing of consequence . . . Indeed, the emphatic position of the word *theos* in all three of its occurrences in the Greek of verse 9 makes it clear that Paul is stressing *God* as the one to whom the ‘fellow workers,’ ‘field,’ and ‘building’ belong.”¹⁸³ Paul said to follow him as he followed Christ to clarify that he did not want anyone to be his disciple, but only disciples of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

The believer’s responsibility is to learn to discern the voice of God and be obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Why is it, then, that so few Christians ever share their faith? It is not a suggestion, it is a “mandate to fulfill whatever the cost.”¹⁸⁴ Why is it that there are few pastors who have developed the habit of sharing their faith with the community in which their church resides? Although the problem of apathy could be due to a lack of training, motivation, or even a lack of pursuit toward an opportunity to serve, apathy nonetheless is a still in opposition to the pursuit of spiritual maturity. And pastors are not free from the temptation to become apathetic, as burn out lurks week after week from the struggles of pastoral ministry. The spiritual maturity spoken of by Paul in Philippians 1:9-11 will always result in the believer being engaged in evangelistic endeavors, regardless of one’s gifting or call.

¹⁸² This is a comment that was shared in confidence by a believer from a different church other than FBC Norway.

¹⁸³ Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 73.

¹⁸⁴ Earley and Wheeler, *Evangelism Is*, 21.

This is not to say that a babe in Christ cannot share their faith because they have not had time enough to mature in their walk with the Lord, either. But if there is not a matured believer who is discipling that individual who can coach them and encourage them to share their new life in Christ with their lost friends, then chances are they will not do so outside of the overwhelming prompting of the Holy Spirit. And the easiest of ways to train a believer on how to share the Good News of Jesus Christ is to use the Roman Road. The verses in the Roman Road include Romans 3:23, 6:23, 10:9, 5:1, 8:1, and 8:38-39. Many will also insert John 3:3, 16, and John 20:31. Some will also add Revelation 3:20, but that is not an evangelistic text. Paige Patterson agrees:

Verse 20 might qualify as the most misused verse in the entire New Testament. The verse has been preached enumerable [*sic*] times as an evangelistic text. In one sense this is no crime. What is depicted in v. 20 is certainly a situation exactly corresponding to what happens in the life of the unredeemed. Christ, never resorting to coercion, stands at the heart's door and knocks. If the individual hears the voice of the Lord (indicating that in addition to knocking the Lord is calling out) and opens the door, the Lord will come in and have the most intimate fellowship with him. But, while that is evangelistically the case, the verse itself is addressed not to the lost but to the church at Laodicea.¹⁸⁵

Finally, Colossians 1:10 reveals two characteristics that will be found in the believer who is marked by spiritual maturity, both of which have at least in part an allusion to evangelism. The first is continued growth in bearing fruit (καρποφορέω—to produce consequences or to cause the inner life to be productive)¹⁸⁶ and the second is growing in the knowledge/recognition (ἐπίγνωσις) of God. The bearing fruit in every good work “refers to the reproductive aspect of the Christian’s calling. This need not be confined to evangelism, though that cannot be

¹⁸⁵ Paige Patterson, *Revelation*. vol. 39, The New American Commentary, E. Ray Clendenen, et al., ed., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2012, 143.

¹⁸⁶ “καρποφορέω,” Arndt, Danker, Bauer, and Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon*.

excluded.”¹⁸⁷ The knowledge being spoken of by Paul is a first-hand understanding of who God is based on life’s experiences.

So, whether it is bearing fruit or having a knowledge of God, both of which come from personal experiences, the question remains as to whether *fruit* (καρπός, also offspring, descendant) means spiritual characteristics or a production of something of value, i.e., a new life (as in new converts). D. A. Carson explains that in John 15, “There has been considerable dispute over the nature of the ‘fruit’ that is envisaged: the fruit, we are told, is obedience, or new converts, or love, or Christian character. These interpretations are reductionistic.”¹⁸⁸

Soon thereafter he explains that this fruit includes obedience to Jesus’ commands (v. 10) experience of Jesus’ joy (v. 11), love for one another (v. 12), and witness to the world (vv. 16, 27).¹⁸⁹ Certainly, the fact that Jesus first called (follow Me, Matt 4:19) and then commanded (go and make disciples, Matt 28:19-20) should be the ruling context.

Church Membership

Understanding church membership is crucial as it can be a vital link between a church’s collective pursuit of spiritual maturity and one’s participation in and value to a church’s movement toward revitalization. Other works are replete with information on the call to church membership, the value of being a church member, and the need for participation in church activities. Church membership is vital to one’s growth. For example, Acts 2:42-47 depicts the

¹⁸⁷ Richard R. Melick, Jr. *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, The New American Commentary, E. Ray Clendenen, et al., ed., (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 1991), 203.

¹⁸⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 517.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

benefits of belonging to a community of believers, as does 1 Corinthians 12:7, which also aligns to the value of working toward the common good.¹⁹⁰

To discover, nurture, and use one's spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3-8, 1 Cor 12:8-10, 28-30; Eph 4:11) toward the unifying of the faith and maturation process is vital to church life, too.¹⁹¹ Besides, the entire Old Testament is framed around God's interaction with His chosen nation, Israel, much in the same way as The New Testament is filled with examples of living out one's faith in community. Church membership is founded in the establishment of it by Christ (Matt 16:18, Heb 10:25).

The reference to church membership as it applies to this DRP deals more with the need to submit to church leadership, the value of being (or becoming) an active and consistent participant in creating an atmosphere within the church setting that calls and draws others to join in, and the need for laity to engage in using their spiritual gifts to elevate the maturity not only of themselves, but of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Church membership, and all that it entails, is also an aspect of those spiritual disciplines that coincide with growing in spiritual maturity.¹⁹² As Rainer states, "...congregations across America are weak because many of us church members have lost the biblical understanding of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ. We join our churches expecting others to serve us, to feed us, and to care for us."¹⁹³ Church

¹⁹⁰ Jan G. Linn, *Rocking the Church Membership Boat: Counting Members or Having Members Who Count* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 24.

¹⁹¹ Chuck Lawless, *Membership Matters: Insights from Effective Churches on New Member Classes and Assimilation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 175-176.

¹⁹² Many of the spiritual disciplines as defined by Whitney in *Spiritual Disciplines* are to be lived out not only on an individual basis, but also in a corporate setting.

¹⁹³ Thom S. Rainer, *I Am a Church Member: Discovering the Attitude that Makes the Difference* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2013), 5.

membership, or better yet, a renewed commitment to engaging in this DRP, is critical to the success of FBC's pursuit toward church revitalization.

Church Revitalization

The goal of this DRP is to create an environment where members of FBC Norway will realize their apathy and then desire to overcome it, pursue growing in spiritual maturity that not only realizes the importance of church membership but that engages in evangelistic activities, and become excited to see what God might do for FBC's revitalization. Church revitalization entails growth (both spiritually and numerically), effectiveness (in witness and vitality), and the establishment of a renewed hope for not only the future but also for the present. Church revitalization creates an atmosphere of hope, an excitement for serving God, and an overwhelming joy that causes a positive rift not only within the church (and the church community). It also calls aloud to the streets of Norway for the lost to see what is so appealing about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Church revitalization is indeed a biblical concept, as is seen in the warning provided by Jesus to the Seven Churches of Asia Minor in the book of Revelation. Additionally, most of Paul's writings are to address problems within the churches in which he planted. Although the word *revitalization* is not found in the Bible,¹⁹⁴ the idea behind it is. Church revitalization is defined by grasping the entire counsel of God in His Word for how believers are to behave both individually and corporately (i.e., 1 Pet 2:9-12). It is here in Peter's letter that the church is given

¹⁹⁴ The only result from a Logos Bible search for "revitalization" came up in Philippians 2:13, "God will continually revitalize you, implanting within you the passion to do what pleases him." Brian Simmons, *The Passion Translation* (Savage, MN: BroadStreet Publishing, 2017), Logos Bible Software.

four titles previously assigned solely to Israel in the Old Testament (a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people belonging to God).

While J. Ramsey Michaels focuses on the fact that the church has not replaced Israel. He notes, “Nowhere in 1 Peter are the readers addressed as a *new* Israel or a *new* people of God, as if to displace the Jewish community.”¹⁹⁵ Greg Forbes sticks to the application of the text. He says, “As a royal priesthood, believers are representing the King, and this priesthood is to be understood as ambassadorial, of mediating God’s presence to the world. . . .”¹⁹⁶ In other words, church revitalization happens when believers behave like they believe (with a right belief according to Scripture), and the church collectively behaves with a focus on worshiping God and giving Him all the glory. If you want God to bless what you do, you must do what God blesses.

Conclusion

Scripture is full of examples and warnings regarding spiritual apathy while promoting the need and benefits of growing in spiritual maturity. It is because these two stand in stark contrast to one another that apathy must first be addressed prior to church leadership being able to promote growth in spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity is depicted by an involvement in evangelistic and disciple-making endeavors that together fulfill the Great Commission. Four causes of apathy were explored as the warnings and punishments that are found in Scripture. Spiritual maturity was explored with Jesus Christ being the model and maturity being the goal. God causes growth by equipping His children by His Word and through other believers. Proof of one’s maturity is seen in a changed behavior, stability of faith, and an eagerness to engage in

¹⁹⁵ J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49, Word Biblical Commentary, David A. Hubbard, Glen W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin, ed., (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1988), 107.

¹⁹⁶ Greg W. Forbes. *1 Peter, B & H Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament*, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Robert W. Yarbrough, eds., (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2014), 68.

evangelism. The importance of church membership was touched on as a segue between the markers of maturity and the need for church revitalization.

Many of the resources¹⁹⁷ consulted were within the five areas of Christianity,¹⁹⁸ and the findings have proven that there remains a gap in theological academia which reinforces the need for this DRP. For example, this researcher consulted the Liberty University Jerry Falwell Library “A-Z Databases: Religion” site¹⁹⁹ to discover journal articles, dissertations, and other works within several databases.²⁰⁰ The desire was to find a proximity between “spiritual maturity” and “church revitalization” by searching for those phrases. The search was then expanded to include such terms/phrases as “spiritual growth,” “discipleship,” and “church renewal” to determine if the gap in research was simply caused by a difference in verbiage. This was not the case. Rolsing’s dissertation²⁰¹ is an example of a dissertation that was found using an alternate word. As noted earlier, instead of spiritual maturity and framed his work using spiritual growth instead. His was a good example of a work that combined maturity and discipleship, but not maturity and church revitalization.

Although this researcher uncovered several dissertations that dealt with one topic or another, only a handful of scholarly dissertations were found to have contained these and similar terms. The works that contained both spiritual maturity and church revitalization are covered in the Literature Review section above. For example, Medina’s dissertation²⁰² skips the

¹⁹⁷ See Bibliography.

¹⁹⁸ See Figure one on page ninety-five.

¹⁹⁹ Accessed June 12, 2022. <https://libguides.liberty.edu/az.php?s=172812>.

²⁰⁰ These databases included EBSCO, the New Testament Abstracts, ProQuest Religion Database, the Southern Baptist Periodical Index, and the Theological Research Exchange Network.

²⁰¹ Rolsing, “Local Church Revitalization Through Christological Discipleship.”

²⁰² Medina, “Spiritual Maturity of the Individual Believer...”

revitalization process and goes from spiritual maturity straight to church growth. While coming close to what this DRP is emphasizing, the idea that revitalization promotes a sustainable element to a church's longevity is missing. The fact that the pursuit of spiritual maturity has not been emphasized as a precursor to and a partner of the church revitalization process remains to be a concern. Without this framework, FBC will not sustain an ongoing pursuit of maturity or revitalization that will ensure her existence far into the future.

Theoretical Foundations

As noted above, the emphatic pairing of spiritual maturity and church revitalization has yet to be developed within theological academia. These two have been mentioned in the same sentence now and again, but not to the extent that this DRP is attempting to achieve. There is a gap between these two categories, and it is necessary to fill this gap for the future health of small churches everywhere, namely to that of FBC Norway. Without spiritual maturity on an individual level, church revitalization will not be sustainable. Without a proper discipleship training program, spiritual maturity will never overcome spiritual apathy at FBC. And without a pastor's understanding of how to navigate the troubled waters common to a small church in a rural setting, the path to church revitalization may never be trekked, especially by those pastors who are content to remain liked and employed until they can finally retire. Anthony Pappas offers some keen insight into the commonalities and differences seen from one small church to another. He says, "Although the issues remain remarkably the same—health, survival, ministry, change—each congregation responds and expresses itself in its own special way."²⁰³

²⁰³ Anthony G. Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2010), 3.

In other words, “Each has its own story, its own script, and its own future.”²⁰⁴ In short, while there is value to be derived from adapting some aspects of another’s how-to when it comes to church revitalization, the nuggets of wisdom obtained from many need to be melted into a new mold to work in a new setting, which in this case is obviously at FBC. What the reader will find in this Theoretical Foundations section is a sampling of how some of the most applicable works in this field of study have been mined for value. At the same time, the reader should concur that these works have barely touched the need for a partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization. Works by Cheyney, Stuart, Henard, (Thom) Rainer, Rick Howerton, and others will be placed under a magnifying glass. The outcome will reveal that a gap does indeed exist between spiritual maturity and church revitalization. This writer will attempt to use a what, so what,²⁰⁵ now what evaluative approach.

After reading the work produced by Cheyney (et al.), who focus on the revitalization of churches in rural America,²⁰⁶ it was surmised that the specific fields of discipleship, evangelism, church growth, and church revitalization are replete with content. The examination of biblical discipleship and spiritual maturity has already been explored. Church Revitalization has been viewed in many ways as a synonym for church growth. It is for this reason that the theoretical foundation contained within this work will focus on the overlapping of church revitalization and spiritual maturity. The hope is to uncover even a hint of a crossover, although it appears that plucking the best of the best will only result in the entirety falling short of this desire.

²⁰⁴ Pappas, *Entering the World of the Small Church*, 5.

²⁰⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 212.

²⁰⁶ Tom Cheyney, et al., *Church Revitalization in Rural America: Restoring Churches in America’s Heartland* (Orlando, FL: Renovate Publishing, 2018).

According to Cheyney, the pastor will face huge obstacles that need delicate handling when dealing with a rural or small-town church. These obstacles often include an unhealthy ruling of a particular family (especially the patriarch) and an attitude of many in the congregation who view their pastor as merely a hireling or, at best, only an outsider, unless the pastor has his roots in the same geography or who has a familial attachment within the church. He advises that “The single biggest factor in the health of a local church is the spiritual health, maturity, strength and character of her leaders.”²⁰⁷

Typically, these congregations are made up with generations of family membership²⁰⁸ and that can maintain an unhealthy emphasis on traditions.²⁰⁹ These are not the same traditions as what is spoken of in the Bible, especially in how Paul used the word “traditions” (παράδοσεις), for example, in 2 Thessalonians 2:15,²¹⁰ whereas Paul is comparing “his” gospel message, shared both in spoken and written format, to the traditions of Judaism and the eclectic cultures which permeated the Roman Empire.

The traditions to which Cheyney alludes to align not only the seven antithetical words of change (it has always done it that way), but to the wills and whims of those in the church who feel they have the ruling voice of what will or will not take place within the church’s governance and direction. Pappas lists the six main challenges that face a pastor who desires to steer the otherwise dying church back toward life. These include, “traditionalism, congeniality, club

²⁰⁷ Cheyney, Kimball, Grant, Hurtgen, and Irving, *Church Revitalization*, 142

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 153, 233, 245.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 36.

²¹⁰ Rick Brannan, *The Lexham Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, “Tradition,” Logos Bible Software (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2011). The list of Bible verses where παράδοσις and its derivatives is found includes Matt 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; 1 Cor 11:2, Gal 1:14, Col 2:8, 2 Thess 2:15, 3:6.

mentality, conflict management, negative self-perception, and finances.”²¹¹ Traditionalism and a club mentality are most common based on this researcher’s pastoral experiences.

Establishing a level of trust with a congregation is required before a vision can be proclaimed, and without a proper understanding of the nuances of small church life, the pastor should never attempt to cast such a vision. And if the vision is not placed before the congregation in such a way as to recruit buy-in and develop momentum, the vision will be met with folded arms and scowled looks, putting the pastor at risk of an early departure.

Additionally, to maintain longevity the pastor will need to befriend those who are the self-appointed gatekeepers and caretakers of the church,²¹² or at least to earn their respect, and realize that power within the small rural church is often held by the ones who control the cash.²¹³ This is unfortunate, but many times can be true. Otherwise, the pastor may fail while having even the most noble of intentions with a deep desire to serve God as an audience of One. Although God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, as well as the hills upon which they graze (Ps 50:7-15), it is the heart of God’s people who need to be pulled together in unifying worship at His Great Throne. These obstacles, and many more like them, form a barrier to the journey of spiritual maturity and church revitalization.

The approach that Cheyney takes toward church revitalization is one that focuses solely on discipleship training, which is good, but he only sporadically references evangelism,²¹⁴ and he does not explain how to make disciples in a rural church. Instead, he focuses more on the nuances of rural church life, for example, the benefits of putting cheerful people at the entrances

²¹¹ Pappas, 127-129.

²¹² Cheyney, *Church Revitalization*, 94, 234.

²¹³ Ibid., 254.

²¹⁴ Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars*, 150, 184.

and exits.²¹⁵ The only direct reference to growing in spiritual maturity as it relates to church revitalization he makes is, “The single biggest factor in the health of a local church is the spiritual health, maturity, strength, and character of her leaders.”²¹⁶ His focus on pastoral and lay leadership, while certainly insightful, still falls short of the goals of this DRP. Cheyney does mention a need for spiritual maturity as a precursor to church revitalization elsewhere, but one would need to sift through his writing to decipher how it is being implied. He certainly does not focus on the need for individuals to attain growth prior to or parallel with a church refocusing its efforts for evangelism.²¹⁷

For example, in *The 7 Pillars of Church Revitalization and Renewal*, he says, “Churches that are revitalized first begin with a spiritually revitalized laity,”²¹⁸ and, “Unhealthy people make for an unhealthy church. We need to bring people to health before we can begin to renew the church.”²¹⁹ But he says nothing as to how to become revitalized spiritually on an individual level. By way of illustration, to tell someone to create a two-tiered chocolate cake is one thing, but to provide them with the ingredients, recipe, a kitchen filled with all the tools needed and the supervision of a world-renowned pastry chef, is quite another. Furthermore, a church that views revitalization as a means for self-conservation does not fully understand the epitome of revitalization. Cheyney’s warning is applicable here:

Too many churches are attended and led mostly by people who are quite happy for their church to plateau and decline. They recognize that they are personally getting older and will eventually die, and their expectation is that their church will decline with them and also eventually die. They have no vision for the church being revitalized and are not

²¹⁵ Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars*, 96-97.

²¹⁶ Cheyney, *Church Revitalization*, 142.

²¹⁷ On ten pages one might see that Cheyney is alluding to the idea of spiritual maturity, but his writing is at best conceptual. Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars*, 29, 30, 59, 65, 66, 69, 77, 84, 85, 86.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

willing to make any of the changes that might be necessary for this to happen. Indeed, they resist change of any kind. They welcome new members, including younger ones, but only if these people conform to the way things have always been done.²²⁰

Robert Stuart's *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out* speaks more to the leadership required for church revitalization and less to the laity and their health "to avoid nine pitfalls that are inherent in weak leaders."²²¹ Similar to what is seen in many other works, he mentions spiritual maturity only once,²²² and refers to disciple making as a skill set that a pastor requires to be successful. But how exactly is success defined? And who (Who!) defines it? It very well could be that a pastor's role in the bigger scheme of a church's existence is to help facilitate her growth from point B to point C, and nothing more.

The title of Stuart's work was misleading for the pastor who is trying to evaluate his own maturity and readiness prior to embarking on the church revitalization endeavor. Stuart's work does have value, for the section on making disciples contributes to this DRP, and his warning is especially helpful. "When we lose the focus of making disciples in the location where God has placed us, a listless torpor sets in that frustrates the congregation. Stagnant or declining congregations have, for the most part, forgotten their mission."²²³ The mission of the church, of course, is the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The pattern being discovered while reviewing these works shows that whether it is individual health or church health that is needed for revitalization depends on the author who is approaching the topic. Cheyney is not the only noteworthy author who elicits engagement.

²²⁰ Cheyney, *The 7 Pillars*, 91.

²²¹ Stuart, *Church Revitalization from the Inside Out*, 31.

²²² *Ibid.*, 47.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 197.

Several books have been authored on church growth, revitalization, and what it means to be a viable church member. Two works that are often consulted when addressing church membership are by Thom Rainer, who admonishes that a major obstacle to the advancement of the cause of Christ is both self (ego) and self-serving attitudes. He sees the major problem in churches today as being church members who look out “for their own needs and preferences.”²²⁴ Rather than buy into the truth of what it means to be a church member, they will form their own likes and dislikes, and with a consumer mentality, will practice “churchianity”²²⁵ rather than Christianity. Rainer adds that in evaluating the churches that have avoided closure, two common traits rise to the top. First, a church must “embrace the reality of the Great Commission and the Great Commandment,”²²⁶ and the second is to overcome “evangelistic apathy.”²²⁷

Jesus started His ministry with a call to be fishers of men (Matt 4:1) and ended it with a command to “Go!” (Matt 28:19-20, NIV). The label of apathy (in general) is one thing, but an apathy that is pinpointed to a specific task, or command of God, is even better, for at least then, it is easier to address a specific problem with a targeted solution. There is a hidden danger in that the label called *apathy* becomes a catch-all term that obscures other scenarios.

For example, instead of apathy, which is often the initial diagnosis, the true and deeper conflict can be with leadership or even with the geography/demographics in which the church resides. One parishioner can claim that apathy is not the problem, but that there is a great reluctance to engage in any Great Commission activity because all previous attempts have been

²²⁴ Rainer, *I Am a Church Member*, 38.

²²⁵ Thom S. Rainer, *I Could I Might I Can I Should I Will!: Nine Traits of the Outwardly Focused Christian* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2015), 93.

²²⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church: Seven Findings of How Congregations Avoided Death* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020), 35.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

squelched by the ridicule of leadership. Another parishioner might claim a small level of agoraphobia or even a fear of being rejected by family members who have made Norway their home for generations.

Rick Howerton, on the other hand, sees the positive side which stands in opposition to apathy's paralyzing disease. He recognizes that "Spiritually mature people have advancing God's kingdom as their primary goal,"²²⁸ and "Spiritually immature people have their own agendas in mind."²²⁹ It is unfortunate that the two reside in every church, and it is because of this reality that the pursuit of spiritual maturity that results in making disciples by engaging in evangelistic activities is without a doubt the most critical foundation to church revitalization. Jesus has not commanded for only the spiritually mature to engage in evangelism and outreach to further His cause; He has instructed the stronger to mentor those who are weaker in the faith.

There are too many church-goers who call themselves Christians who are clueless as to what it means to be a disciple of Christ. Indeed, the Christian label has become watered down in American culture. The journey toward overcoming apathy, growing in spiritual maturity, and seeing a church become revitalized, it is important to introduce a better label for the believer, and that is to be called a disciple of Christ. Greg Ogden offers a core truth in his work on disciple-making:

We have adopted an unbiblical and costly distinction that says you can be a Christian without being a disciple. As commonly understood, a Christian is someone who has trusted Christ for forgiveness of sin and been assured of life forever with Jesus. The focus is on the benefits we receive from Jesus, not relinquishing our life to follow Jesus. Although our current definition of a Christian does not contain a need to actually follow

²²⁸ Kentucky Baptist Convention, *Lead to Revitalize!: 15 Practices of a Church Revitalization Leader*. "Discipling to Revitalize" by Rick Howerton (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2020), 47-48.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

Jesus, a disciple is someone who is following Jesus in order to learn to be more like him.²³⁰

In addition to the above references to Cheyney, Fink's *Biblical Discipleship* and Henard's, *Can These Bones Live* have in some regard offered a parallel to the work that is being done in this DRP. Fink's various assessments and tests at the back of his book provide a comprehensive summary of what it means to be spiritually mature. In comparison, though, whereas Fink provides the perfect overlap between discipleship training and spiritual maturity, the work contained herein seeks to partner spiritual maturity with church revitalization. And then there is Henard's work, whereas he identifies church revitalization as needing spiritual maturity within its flock but from a different angle.

Reviewing Acts 2:41-47, Henard gathers these highlights of what it takes for a church (and her people) to become worthy of God's revitalization. A healthy church contains the following characteristics: "An authoritative view of Scripture, a focus on discipleship and small groups, a strong emphasis on biblical preaching, a connection to the community, a vigorous commitment to prayer, a dedication to genuine ministry, a submission to the work of the Holy Spirit, and a practice of personal evangelism."²³¹ These elements of church health, or markers of a revitalized church, can be applied to both the church as a whole as well as to the lives of those individuals who make up its family.

Rather than examining spiritual maturity on an individual the level, he focuses on church-wide health as the precursor to church revitalization.²³² He addresses the problem of apathy as it

²³⁰ Greg Ogden, *Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple: Eight Sessions for Mentoring and Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2016), 25.

²³¹ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 20-23.

²³² *Ibid.*, 18.

relates to the spiritual issues that causes spiritual deficiency,²³³ and agrees with Cheyney that “the church will never grow beyond a pastor’s personal, spiritual growth.”²³⁴ Spiritual development, whether on an individual level or as viewed as the collective efforts within a congregation, is “non-negotiable in church revitalization.”²³⁵ Keep in mind also that the focus of this DRP as a means to strengthen spiritual maturity and thus evangelism and church revitalization focuses on the Philippians 1:9-11. Henard refers to this pursuit of maturity as a journey toward excellence, and this researcher agrees.²³⁶

In summary, it is both surprising and alarming that only a handful of the myriads of works that were reviewed contained anything that specifically tied both spiritual maturity and church revitalization together. Cheyney, Fink, and Henard came the closest, proving that the examination of these two as partners is sorely lacking in theological academia. Several did well to cover one topic or another, and some explored multiple topics such as discipleship and spiritual maturity, but the gap in seeing spiritual maturity as a precursor to or even as a partner of church revitalization is quite evident, and unfortunately large.²³⁷ This is the gap that is being addressed within this DRP, and this is just what today’s church needs to be effectively revitalized from the inside out.

The above theoretical review, along with the theological review and the examination of literature, proves that the gap between spiritual maturity and church revitalization exists. Although five dissertations were identified to come close to addressing the topic of apathy and

²³³ Henard, *Can These Bones Live*, 71-73.

²³⁴ Ibid., 151.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid., 254.

²³⁷ The two works that promoted both discipleship and spiritual maturity are Putman, Harrington, and Coleman, *DiscipleShift*, and Fink, *Biblical Discipleship*.

spiritual maturity (sometimes called spiritual formation or spiritual growth), the partnership between these two fields requires further investigation to provide a more comprehensive approach to overcoming spiritual apathy and growing in spiritual maturity. Again, the epitome of spiritual maturity is to find individuals engaging in evangelistic activities that lead to church revitalization, and subsequently to church growth. Spiritual apathy is often tied to a lack of participation in the disciple-making process, if indeed one even exists. Seldom is it identified as the nemesis to spiritual maturity that is required for church revitalization to be a sustainable force in the life of an otherwise dying church.

Conclusion

The sole focus of this research was to discover if anyone else has matched spiritual maturity as a precursor to and as a partner of church revitalization. Surprisingly, this was not the case. Although a grand collection of works is available within the different topics of church life, which include evangelism, discipleship, church growth, church revitalization, and spiritual maturity, very few, if any, have spotlighted the requirement for growing in spiritual maturity on an individual basis as a mandatory prerequisite to the church revitalization endeavor. This is not to say that both have not been mentioned in the same breath, or minimally alluded to frequently, but the two of these have not been a primary focus or thesis within theological academia. Instead, one will find that evangelism and discipleship go well together (an obvious result of Matt 28:19-20), as do discipleship and spiritual maturity, and unhindered progress toward church growth can be the expectation of church revitalization. However, there remains a huge gap in the joining of spiritual maturity and church revitalization, whereas the former is a prerequisite to the latter. The following graphic reveals how these categories either amalgamate or are, at best, only contiguous.

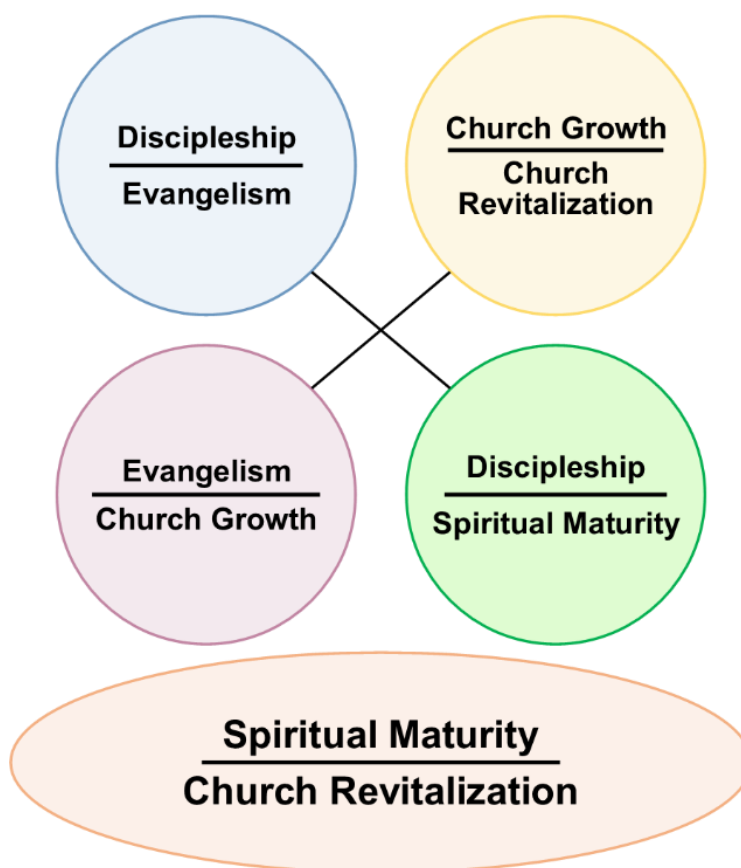


Figure 1. The five circles of Christianity as a visualization of overlapping categories.

Too many churches are closing their doors, and several others are maintaining an existence that does nothing to advance the kingdom of God. Filling the gap between spiritual maturity and church revitalization will prayerfully help FBC overcome the problem of apathy toward fulfilling the Great Commission and thus living out the Great Commandment. To accomplish this undertaking will require adapting the insights gleaned from others who have forged the path in discipleship training, evangelism, church revitalization and church growth techniques, but done in such a way that will fill the gap of promoting growth in spiritual maturity as a precursor and partner to the church revitalization process. The following chapter discusses revitalization at FBC.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The dilemma addressed at FBC is noted within the thesis of this work. That is, if FBC embraces this DTC, individuals will overcome apathy, grow in spiritual maturity, and church revitalization will result. It is being argued here that Philippians 1:9-11 provides an outline for measuring one's spiritual maturity. Because spiritual apathy is in direct conflict with spiritual maturity, it is also being argued that one would want to be pursuing spiritual maturity on an individual level to coincide with the church's pursuit of church revitalization and thus church growth. It is with this in mind that the following process will be followed to determine the level of spiritual maturity at the beginning of this project and then compare that to the level of spiritual maturity at the end of this project.

First, the pastor and the revitalizer will introduce expectations to the congregation. Second, participants will be recruited to become involved in the initial interview process. The initial interview process will be conducted with confidentiality in a one-on-one, audio recorded interview. Third, the entire congregation (eighteen years of age and older) will be asked to complete a Likert survey which contains questions evaluating one's level of spiritual maturity, their understanding of the disciple making process, and questions relating to their evangelistic prowess. Finally, once the surveys are collected, they will be tallied and divided by subcategories based on the length of time the individual has reported that they have been a believer. Those who were interviewed will then be asked to participate in the fine-tuning of the DTC so that it will be written specifically to their needs for discipleship training.

The DTC will then be conducted over a ten-week period. At the end there will be a second survey being distributed to the participants once again. The DTC will be followed by opportunities to engage in disciple making and evangelistic opportunities. While individuals who have not volunteered for the initial confidential interview will be allowed to participate in the

DTC training sessions, it will be required that all DTC participants will have completed their spiritual assessment surveys. Handouts and a review quiz will be given to those who missed a weekly session so they can gain credit for attendance. Additionally, all DTC sessions will be recorded audibly. The following explains this in more detail.

Intervention Design

Introduction

Beginning in February 2022, the details and direction of this research project were discussed at length with the pastor of FBC during weekly meetings. This project is aligned with the church's desire for growth as outlined in the posting for the job vacancy for a Senior Pastor dated May 8, 2014. Numerical growth has not been the result of the current pastor's time at FBC, and there has been no means by which spiritual growth could be measured. A letter of request to conduct this DRP was presented to the board of elders prior to this researcher being added as an elder (Appendix M), and the approval was granted as signed by the pastor in a letter from FBC that was received after IRB approval was granted (Appendix N).

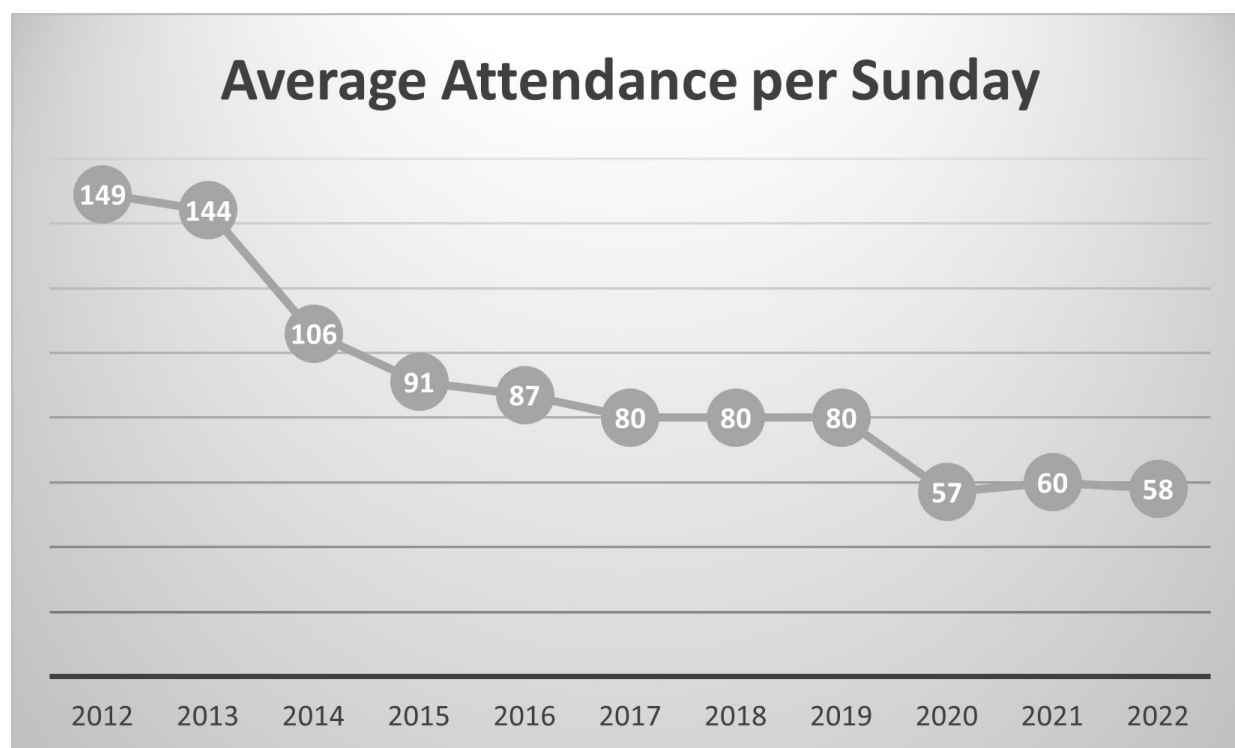


Figure 2. Average attendance per Sunday, 2012-2022.

The initial drop in 2014 was due to a church split. The drop in 2020 is at least in part because of Covid. Average attendance is down by ninety-one, which equates to a sixty-one percent decrease. See also figure 9.

The first task is for an announcement to be made from the pulpit on a Sunday morning.²³⁸

It was shared that the (then) elder board has endorsed this project and that the pastor has been meeting with the DMIN researcher weekly to go over the details of this project. The researcher will then share an overview of the program according to the narrative found in Appendix A. Starting with the following Sunday that the announcement was made from the pulpit, bulletin inserts will be included for a three-week duration. A sample of this insert can be found in

²³⁸ The announcement was made to the congregation on Sunday, June 25, 2022. Recruitment for volunteers for the confidential interviews will begin on Sunday, July 3, 2022, by way of the bulletin inserts, PowerPoint slide, and signup sheet.

Appendix B. Posters may also be placed in the foyer and by each exit (Appendix C), and a PowerPoint slide is also available to be added to the pre-service slideshow (Appendix D).

There will be a place in the foyer for individuals to sign up individually and confidentially for a one-on-one interview by placing their name, phone number, and email address on a three-by-five card into a locked box. A recruitment flyer (Appendix E) will be mailed to the individual, followed by a phone call to set an appointment for the initial interview. These interviews will be conducted during the latter part of July 2022 through the first week of September 2022. Prior to the interview taking place the IRB consent authorization form will be covered and signed (Appendix F). It is the goal to have a minimum of twenty individuals signed up for the initial interview process.

There are twelve questions designed to engage the individual to share about their subjective experiences at FBC, their salvation experience, and their desires for how they would like to see the church's growth progress in the future (i.e., "What do you like about FBC and what is one thing you would change?"). Appendix G contains the questions to be asked during this interview. The answers will be recorded and documented by categories of how long the individual has been a member of FBC (zero to five years, six to ten years, and eleven years or more). Audio recordings will be accomplished using a recording device, much like the Garmay Digital Voice Recorder with forty-eight gigabytes of space. It has a battery that allows for thirty-two hours of continuous recording time. As of April 22, 2022, this can be purchased from Amazon for \$41.99.²³⁹ There will be no documentation at this point as to their sex, age, or name due to the need to eliminate personally identifiable information.

²³⁹ Accessed April 23, 2022. https://www.amazon.com/GARMAY-3343Hours-Recording-Activated-Reduction/dp/B091911MF1/ref=sr_1_5?crid=2FUBXBIW3PQT8&keywords=personal+voice+recorder+with+play+back&qid=1650657415&srefix=personal+voice+recorder%2Caps%2C247&sr=8-5.

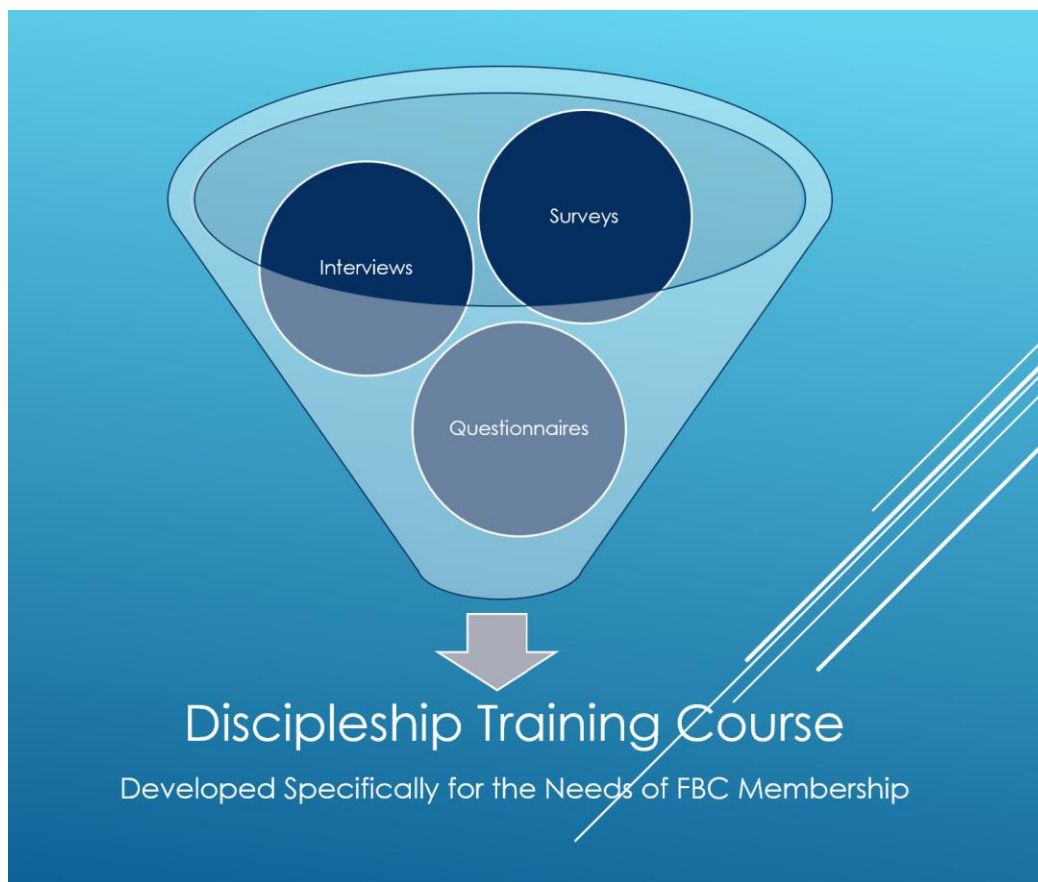


Figure 3. Discipleship Training Course.

The Interviews, surveys, and questionnaires will be analyzed to determine a specific course of action for the direction the DTC needs to take to provide the greatest effectiveness for the outcome of spiritual maturity and church revitalization.

Soon thereafter, or during the month of August, individual surveys will be mailed to everyone in the church who is at least eighteen years or older (Appendix H). A self-addressed stamped envelope will be provided for them to mail the survey back to the researcher. These surveys are designed to evaluate how the individual thinks of themselves in their spiritual maturity growth and to determine if they completely understand what it means to be spiritually mature. The goal is to have as close to 100% participation as possible. At the end of the DTC, an additional survey will be conducted, and the answers will be compared to their original score. These surveys will be analyzed based on two categories—those who have attended the DTC and

those who have not. It is assumed that grades will be higher for those who attended the DTC, and that those who have participated from start to finish will be more likely to engage in fulfilling the Great Commission.

Once these interviews are completed, the data shall be compiled for the purpose of trend analysis and to help the DTC to become more refined based on the audience at hand. After recording the above discussions, and compiling the surveys, the DRP will be explained to the participants in more detail. The problem that has been identified at FBC is that there is a spirit of apathy in the church. This is not to label every individual as being apathetic toward living out the Great Commission, but on a church-wide level, the problem is still quite clear. This might be because of a lack of trust, or a lack of training, or a lack of vision/leadership, or it could even be the result of Covid or even due to unconfessed sin.

Apathy, nonetheless, has been a problem within the church for years. Spiritual apathy is a deterrent to spiritual maturity. It is this researcher's position that if a proper definition of spiritual maturity is explained and ways in which an individual can pursue growing in spiritual maturity are taught then the natural result will be that FBC will grow as a family of believers who have gained a new or renewed excitement to reach the Norway and surrounding communities for Christ. If the next generation is not reached, the doors of FBC will inevitably close. The information and answers to the interviews, surveys, and questionnaires will be kept in high confidence. The data will help develop and customize the DTC that will be offered at FBC, of which the initial outline is provided in figure four below.

Discipleship Training Classes

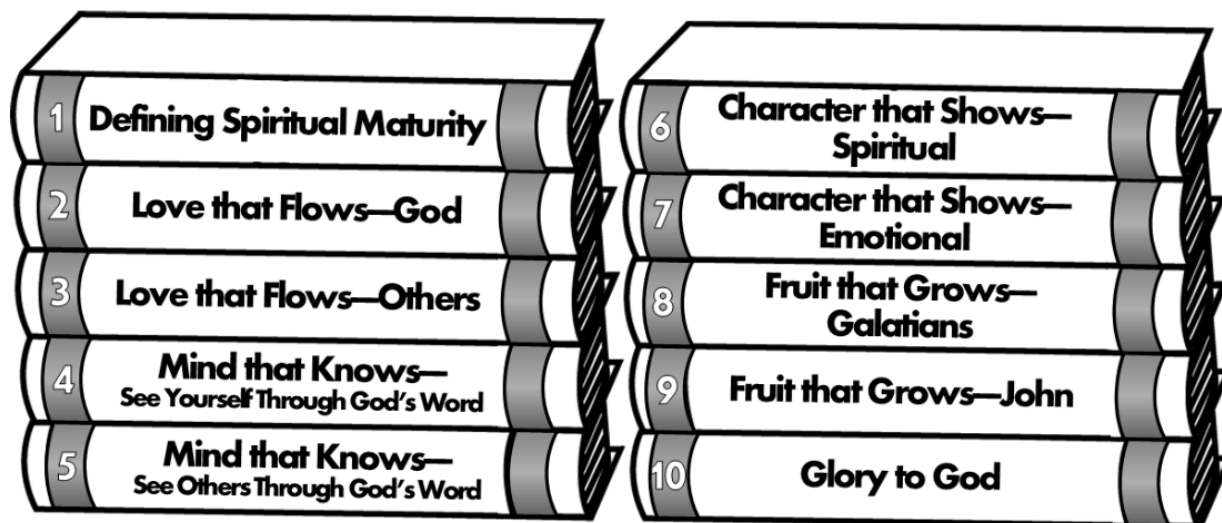


Figure 4. Discipleship Training Course 10-week outline.

Finally, spiritual maturity awareness will be established, and individuals will hopefully grow in their walk with the Lord. The following graphic (Figure 5) highlights the necessity to “deny himself and take up his cross” (Matt 16:24, ESV), removing focus from self and placing it on giving God the glory for His wonderful blessings. This is seen in the baseline narrative, in that early on a believer has a man-first-earthly-focus whereas a spiritually mature individual has grown to adapt a God-first-heavenly-focus. Note also that the number of years a person has been a Christian does not always correlate to their level of spiritual maturity.

One can be years into their relationship with Christ yet still have not advanced beyond spiritual milk (1 Pet 2:2, Heb 4:12, 5:12-13). Spiritual maturity should also not be reduced to a list of disciplines (e.g., pray, read, tithe, attend, journal, serve) or a list of restricted behaviors (Gal 5—do not be like your old self, but live by the Spirit). Although these are often identified as markers for spiritual maturity, they are only a means to an end. The focus of this DTC is to bring glory to God as the epitome of spiritual maturity, through focusing on love, mind, character, and

fruit (evangelism/discipleship), all with eternity as the focus, as humility (Phil 2) is replacing apathy.

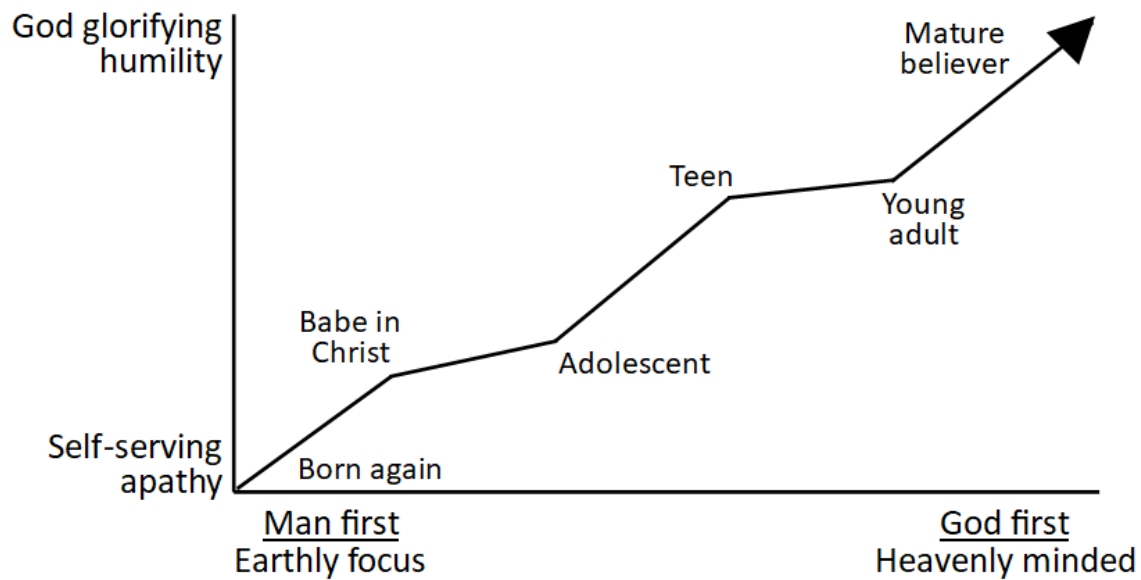


Figure 5. Growing in spiritual maturity means to die to self and to focus on glorifying God.

Once these surveys have been collected, the answers will be tallied to provide an average score for each question for the entire congregation. Secondly, the surveys will also be separated based on the length of time individuals have been a Christian, and those subsets will be tallied to determine an average score based on the length of time individuals have been a born-again believer (Figure 5 above). These averages will be compared to the second set of surveys to determine if any progress has been made because of this church revitalization program. Based on these surveys as well as the initial interviews, a questionnaire will be made available for those who are willing to participate. Whereas the surveys are quantitative, the questionnaire is designed qualitatively, thus providing the third leg of the triangulation process to which the data can be cross-referenced.

As Tim Sensing advises that there is a need “to produce as full and balanced a study as possible,”²⁴⁰ for this DRP data triangulation is being used,²⁴¹ realizing that answers derived during interviews may be tainted by personality traits, a potential uneasiness for the interviewee to open to the interviewer, and potential biases within the researcher when filtering and evaluating the data. Although the surveys carry with them a numerical score, the quantitative aspect of these surveys will be translated into a qualitative summary. Initially, it was determined that this summary would be discussed with the pastor to detect which areas of discipleship training were most needed, however, the dynamics of FBC have become quite fluid as the research has gotten underway.

The answers from all three categories, the interviews, the surveys, and the questionnaires, will be used to provide a specific approach to the DTC weekly lesson plans (Appendix I). While the interviews focus on random sampling based on who will volunteer their participation, the surveys are blanketed covering the entire congregation but are limited to only those who are eighteen years of age and older, a born-again believer, and preferably a member of FBC. It has since been identified that there are more than a few who have been dedicated attendees yet who have opted not to join the church officially.

As part of the research process these individuals may be included on a case-by-case basis. The top of the survey will ask for the individual to qualify that they meet these requirements prior to submitting their answers. The questionnaires form a convenience sampling as they are targeted only for those who have completed the first two and are thus purposive in nature. The DTC will be conducted in a 10-week Sunday school setting, beginning the first Sunday after

²⁴⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 72.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 73.

Labor Day weekend in September, and ending just before Thanksgiving in November (see Appendix J for an outline). The last survey will be conducted the week following the 10-week DTC class and a comparison will be made between the first survey to the last, again, based on averages across the congregation. Through data analysis the researcher will look for trends, correlations, patterns, and disparities.

To evaluate the effectiveness of church revitalization because of growing in spiritual maturity, initially a program called a new mover mailer will be used to provide an opportunity for individuals to engage in outreach and evangelism to the Norway community. This program has already been initiated at FBC, but nobody is visiting the new families who have moved into the area (see Appendix K for more details on the new mover outreach program). The previous website for the church was not sufficient, therefore it was agreed upon that the pastor would publish a new website with the assistance of a couple of church members.

The church's Facebook page has not been updated since April 2020 (and only has fourteen posts from its inception on June 19, 2015). It is because of these factors that the new mover postcard program has been placed on hold until these marketing aspects have been corrected. Once the DTC has been completed, the new mover program will be reinstated as an entry point to outreach and evangelism.

Efficacy will be evaluated based on two initial factors. First, efficacy will be measured by the number of folks who have participated in this journey from start to finish. This measurement is not to be made solely on attendance, but on a visible change in attitude toward reaching the lost. But numbers alone are not enough, as an enthusiasm for the movement of the Holy Spirit, and an attitude of excitement for what God might want to do amid FBC once again are also good indicators of some level of success because of this DRP. Furthermore, the level of ongoing

participation in a biweekly visitation to new movers will be an initial sign of progress, especially in one's willingness to share their faith during an encounter. Finally, although this is beyond the confines of this DRP, it is this researcher's hope that an ongoing discipleship training which emphasizes servant evangelism will be established.²⁴² At the completion of the DRP those who have participated from start to finish will be provided a Certificate of Completion (Appendix L) and invited to a catered dinner as a way of saying thank you.



Figure 6. Philippians 1:9-11 four-point sermon.

Each category is for the purpose of giving God the glory. Spiritual maturity is epitomized in evangelistic activities.

The above research is based on a sermon (and mini-sermon series) from Philippians 1:9-11, which posits that spiritual maturity is achieved, if at all possible this side of heaven, when the individual displays not only a love that flows, a mind that knows, and a character that shows, but in that they are seeking to reproduce fruit (Matt 28:19-20, John 15) by sharing their faith, being

²⁴² This is an example of an effective ongoing discipleship training program that correlates to Figure 3. Jim Putnam, Avery T. Willis, Jr., Brandon Guindon, and Bill Krause, *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual: Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 131.

engaged in evangelistic activities, and displaying their righteousness by not only obeying but actively pursuing the Great Commission (a fruit that grows). The DTC weekly sessions are framed by this sermon.

Finally, it is important to note that in evaluating and comparing the surveys, it is not enough for the church members to just change their opinion toward spiritual maturity or toward living out the Great Commission. It is much more than that, for head knowledge alone will not keep a believer engaged in the growth process, whereas heart knowledge, or a change of emotion toward reaching the lost, is crucial for the bigger picture of church revitalization. As noted by Wesley Ryan Steenburg, a change of opinion is far less critical than for the individual to progress in their way of thinking.²⁴³ Change the way you think, and you may respond with different words. Change the way you feel, and you will respond with different actions (Phil 4:8, Rom 12:2). Create a pattern of new actions, and you have changed the way you live, and to live for Christ is gain! The pattern highlights the key ideas of the love that flows, the mind that knows, the character that shows, and the fruit that grows which all work together for God's the glory and praise.

Physical Setting

The DTC will be conducted in the sanctuary of the church, since that is where the adult Bible study has traditionally been held. Children and youth classes are held in the basement of the church. Next door to the church is the parsonage turned office space, and due to budgetary issues and a lack of upkeep, the space available in the office area cannot be used, especially as

²⁴³ Dr. W. Ryan Steenburg, Professor at Liberty University in Lynchburg, VA, made this comment on or about April 18, 2022. He noted that Bloom's taxonomy of hierarchal learning and Piaget's stages of development should be in play during the evaluation stage of this church revitalization project.

the months turn colder. Available to the facilitator of the DTC is a large screen for PowerPoint display, a lecturn, and a microphone. What is not ideal for participation and involvement is that the sanctuary's seating uses pews instead of chairs, making it extremely inconvenient to turn the seating inward so as to have folks seeing eye-to-eye (literally). And because the time period allotted for the DTC is during the Sunday school hour (9:00 a.m.–9:45 a.m.), there have been interruptions with people coming to church for the service, whereas they mill about in the foyer with no real separation of space from the sanctuary.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Anyone who has been in pastoral ministry knows that church life can either grow stagnant or can be quite fluid, and sometimes both can run parallel, depending on the dynamics of the church. This is especially true within the scope of church revitalization. While approval to conduct this research was requested from and approved by the elder board and pastor of FBC, prior to commencing the DTC this researcher was voted by the church body to become an elder and then was quickly named as the Chairman of the Elder Board. Within two months he began filling the pulpit and managing the affairs of the church due to the pastor's illness.²⁴⁴

It is for this reason that some of the initial plans for implementation have been changed because of these unforeseen circumstances. Having explained the fluidity of these church dynamics, the reader will now be introduced to the dynamics of and parameters for how the DTC will be administered, including how and where the initial interviews will be conducted, the way

²⁴⁴ The pastor of FBC has been placed on medical leave starting the beginning of July 2022. At the time of this writing, his leave of absence has been extended through the end of October, which correlates to eight weeks into the ten-week DTC.

the surveys will be distributed and collected, and the limitations placed on the DTC environment due to the old and compartmentalized layout of FBC's building and facilities.

One-on-One Confidential Interviews

It is the goal that each of the one-on-one confidential interviews be conducted in such a way as to provide anonymity and seclusion during the interview event. This, however, was not always to be the case. For example, where there was more than one individual in a household, both parties were present during the other individual's interview. This was due to the proper etiquette and mandate that a man should not be alone with a woman who is not his wife.

Additionally, due to Covid or other factors of illness, and in one situation simply as a matter of convenience, some interviews were conducted over the phone rather than in person (which would have been the preferred method). Using such things as Zoom, FaceTime, or Teams Meetings would have been better, but when dealing with some individuals the technological prowess was not present.

Spiritual Maturity Assessments

The availability of the surveys was initially announced during a Sunday morning church service on July 24, 2022, and again on August 14, 2022. As of September 5 (Labor Day), only eight have been received. The church secretary has also announced the availability of these surveys and the request to complete them in the church's weekly announcement email. Without these surveys, it will be difficult to write the meat of the DTC while desiring to remain focused on this particular congregation. It was hoped that the confidential interviews and surveys would have been completed with ample time to complete the ten weeks of DTC classes, whereas

pertinent and targeted questions could have been asked to promote involvement and especially buy-in toward the end goal of spiritual maturity resulting in discipleship and evangelism.

Change in Triangulation Plans

One major adaptation to the initial plans for triangulation was to include the pastor as a silent observer during the DTC classes, and this is no longer the case. Due to unforeseen circumstances, the pastor may not be the best choice for this task. It is, therefore, desirable to recruit a different observer and train that individual on what information to observe and gather during the DTC. At this point the best-suited individual would be the researcher's wife, who will be coached on what type of information to observe, such as the attitude in which something is stated (or even in what is not stated), including hesitations and tones of speech.

These observations would then be discussed weekly after each DTC session. Her observations, coupled with the information derived from the confidential interviews and the surveys, as well as contributions made to the DTC throughout the ten-week period, will promote the triangulation of data to ensure its accuracy. Due to circumstances beyond the control of the researcher, adding an additional observer did not occur. Instead, the original thought of having a formal triangulation questionnaire interview post-DTC would take precedence.

The post-DTC Triangulation questionnaire was originally set to conduct confidential one-on-one interviews with those who volunteered for the original interview. These interviews were going to be scheduled, and either conducted face-to-face or within a Zoom meeting. Because of the observation that folks were getting tired of the longevity of this research project, the formal questionnaire was conducted during one-on-one chats before or after church or during a quick, pastoral phone call. Rather than asking such questions directly as, "How have you grown in your spiritual maturity as a result of this project?", "Are you motivated to share your faith now?", and

“Can I count on you to volunteer for an outreach ministry in the near future?”, the interview became an open-ended discussion as to how they perceive the life of the church now as compared to before the DRP started.

Post-DTC New Mover Ministry

The original plan in implementing this research project was to formulate three to four small groups made up of volunteers from the study group. These groups would be engaged in the evangelistic ministry of meeting new families who have moved into the area, the list from which would be obtained via the new mover postcard mailing program. Due to the burnout mentioned above, implementing the new mover program has been delayed. This researcher has observed that opportunities for more fellowship needed to be established prior to embarking on an outreach program. In fact, a new sermon series is following this step-by-step approach to completing the DRP. These sermons are being conducted to introduce the new vision/mission of FBC (see page 51) and the four pillars for church revitalization. Birthed from Acts 2:42-47, these include growing warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through ministry, and larger through evangelism.²⁴⁵ The method for evaluating data is covered next.

Methods for Evaluating Data

Given that the initial survey questions follow a 1-10 Likert Scale, with one being an absolute “No” and a ten being an absolute “Yes,” trying to evaluate the scores for each question cannot be simply based on a numbering system due to the questions being asked. For example,

²⁴⁵ The idea for this came from an old SBC Sunday school lesson. The original source, although produced through Lifeway.com, is no longer available based on internet research. These four points were within a Bible study curriculum that was purchased while teaching an adult Sunday school class at Spring Valley Baptist Church, Raytown, MO, sometime around 2010-2012.

question one asks for a self-evaluation of one's ability to live by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5). One participant was not sure what that question meant. This individual did not realize that the evaluation was a judgment call on how well the individual has grown in their walk with the Lord in relation to their spiritual maturity. It was explained that having love and patience can be lived out in how well one shows kindness to someone who is not of the faith, and that joy is not being happy all the time but should be evaluated based on how they see eternity even during the earthly storms that all of humanity must endure.

Another individual stated they had a different answer based on distinct groups of people they encountered and did not know by which group they should use for their answer (i.e., is it easier to show patience for an unruly and defiant teenager or toward an adult who is an infant in their faith?). Additionally, grading oneself as a ten is not always the best score, for question sixteen would have a one as their answer if spiritual maturity were the case ("do you struggle with yielding to sexual temptations?" Ten would be "Yes," and one would be "No"). In more than a few instances it is believed that the individual used a score of ten to depict that they are doing well against such a struggle, whereas others rightly documented a one. The following is an example of how the information from the surveys is being compiled for future analysis.

Table 1.1. Compiling the surveys.

The description of “A-1-Green-Female-10+” is a discreet way to assign the survey anonymously to an individual for future reference.

✓	Question #	Q1- Fruit of the Spirit								
		Love	Joy	Peace	Patie	Kind	Good	Gentl	Faith	Self
17-Aug	A-1-Green-Female-10+	8	8	6	6	8	8	8	7	8
18-Aug	A-1-Light Blue-Male-10+	6	7	8	6	6	7	6	8	6
18-Aug	M-5-Blue-Female-10+	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
26-Aug	C-5-Green-Male-10+	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
30-Aug	A-5-Red-Female-10+	6	7	9	8	7	6	7	9	8
31-Aug	A-5-Green-Female- 10+	9	5	6	8	9	9	9	7	6
1-Sep	K-6-Blue-Female-2	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
2-Sep	N-3-Blue-Female-10+	7	8	8	8	7	7	7	7	9

These surveys are initially being tallied to produce an average number for each of the questions, and special attention is being given to the final two questions, which are of special interest to writing the DTC. These last two questions are “What does it mean to be spiritually mature?” and “What does ‘Church Revitalization’ mean to you?” Questions reflecting spiritual maturity were included in both the Likert survey and in the one-on-one confidential interview.

The process of analysis in evaluating the qualitative data of the spiritual inventory assessment will be coupled with the narrative found in the confidential interviews, as the questions, “What is one thing you would change about FBC” and “What do you like about FBC?” have been most telling. Key issues are emerging, and subtle nuances are also heard in the individual recordings based on the moments of silence prior to these answers being provided. The issues themselves are not to be disclosed within the confines of this paper, especially when they do not coincide with the end goal of spiritual maturity being pursued on an individual level as a precursor to and partner of church revitalization being pursued on a church level.

The issues uncovered fit well with realizing what foundation can and should be established when choosing the types of discipleship and evangelism/outreach focuses. The primary desire among those interviewed was to have more opportunities for fellowship (the church only meets once per week). A close second was to reestablish a solid children/youth ministry, both of which waned after the church split in or about 2014. While pursuing a solid children/youth ministry is only one ingredient that can be introduced to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of this DRP, it is nonetheless beyond the initial scope of this project. The focus needs to remain with the implementation of the DTC to help overcome a spirit of apathy and to engage in the pursuit of spiritual maturity. The direction of this DTC points toward effective evangelism and outreach to the community, and it also addresses the overwhelming need for solid biblical leadership and eager followership. And when it comes to casting a God-centered vision for the future of FBC's ministries, knowing the community's demographics is only one aspect of this leadership requirement.

During the first week of the DTC, a folder will be given to each attendee. This folder will include the initial outline for the ten weeks, and a pen and paper for taking notes. These folders will have a place for a three-hole punched handout to be securely included within the folder, with tabs that separate each week. The weekly sessions will be recorded audibly and will be held in the sanctuary where the Sunday school class normally meets. Because folks sit where they like to sit during the worship service, and because FBC does not own a wireless handheld microphone, it may be necessary to bring in a portable PA system.²⁴⁶ This will not only allow for the ability for everyone to hear what is being shared, but because they are not likely to sit closer together,

²⁴⁶ The sanctuary contains pews rather than chairs. There is an annex to one side where some who have volunteered to participate in this DRP normally sit. The PA system that this researcher owns is called a *Happie Amp*, found here: <https://www.boardwalkmagic.com/products/happie-amp-with-microphone-trick>, accessed December 19, 2022. This set up contains two lapel microphones and a wireless handheld microphone.

the PA system will help to promote participation, enthusiasm, and fellowship. While this logistical scenario has a workaround, it is not the only obstacle to the DRP. There were unforeseen obstacles that slightly altered the effectiveness of the overall project.

Unforeseen Obstacles

Unforeseen obstacles quickly presented themselves when launching the DRP. These include the set-up options for the facility being used for the DTC, inconsistent attendance and limited participation, complications in trying to keep the entire church body abreast as to the DRP progress, and a lack of trust for current leadership.

Facility Constraints

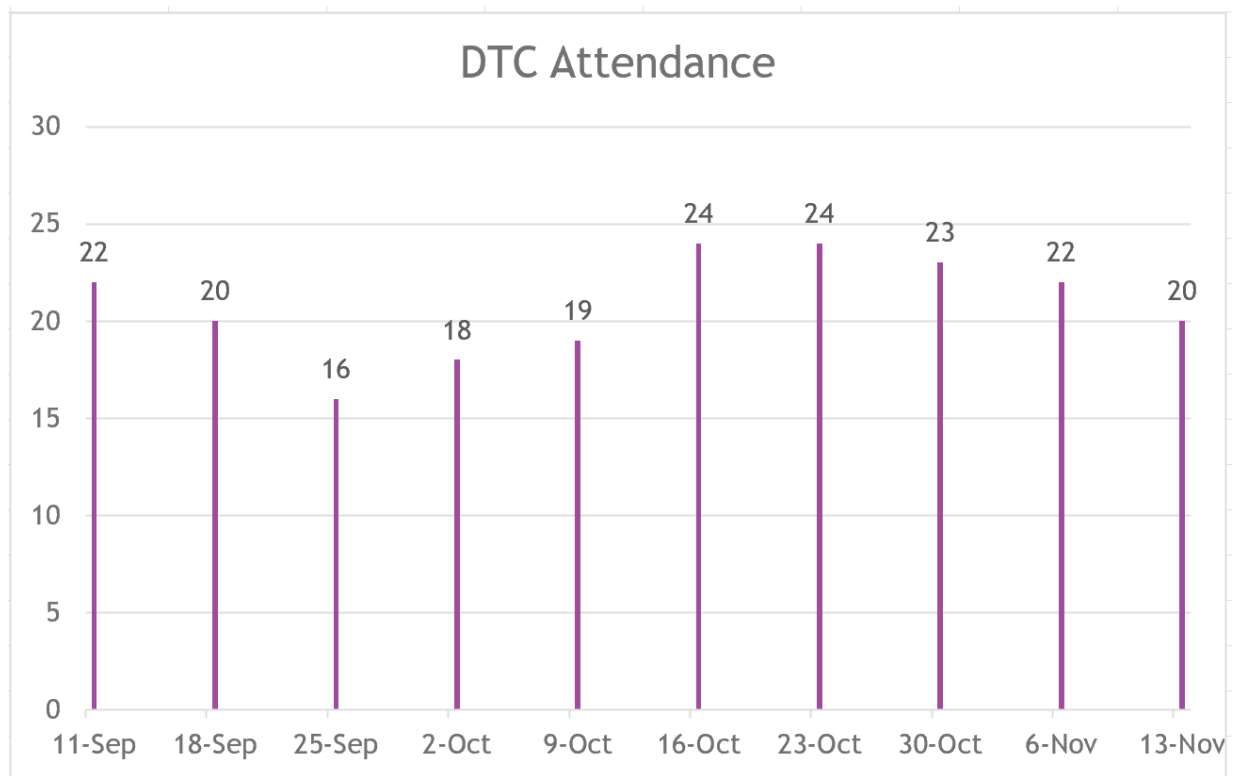
Unfortunately, the sanctuary is set up in a typical lecture-style layout and cannot be shuffled around to have folks sit in a u-shaped set of tables with chairs, which would be more conducive to promoting participation. The church also has a small foyer in the front of the building with nothing to block it from the sanctuary, therefore, when folks came in for church, they interrupted the end of the DTC session.

Attendance and Participation

Unforeseen obstacles also include not having consistent attendance during the DTC sessions due to travel, sickness, Covid, and even deaths, as well as not being able to include the entire church during the DTC sessions. The DRP would have been more successful had everyone attended every session, as they would have had a better grasp of the overall purpose. Other than a dip in late September and early October, one will notice that the attendance numbers were consistent; however, what the following table does not reveal is that only eight of the participants maintained perfect attendance, and only five additional participants only missed one week.

Table 1.2. DTC attendance.

Individual roll-call records were not kept, but individual attendance was determined by listening to the recordings of voices, as well as by keeping track of who asked for a handout from a week that was missed.



Communication with the Church Body

Another unforeseen obstacle was time constraints. Trying to summarize the findings and discussions from week-to-week and then having this information available to present to the entire church for buy-in will prove to be difficult. The researcher is working a full-time job during a hectic time of the year while also needing to prepare sermons and DTC lessons. Unless a Sunday morning sermon or sermon series is preached with the findings of the DRP, it will be impossible to revisit these sessions to present en masse.

The researcher eventually made-up flash drives that contained the recordings of the weekly sessions, each week's handout, and a summary from listening to the weekly sessions was

also typed up for anyone who wanted it, but this did not happen until a few weeks after the DTC sessions were over. When offered to the entire church, and especially to those who had previously stated they wanted this information, only three individuals came forward to request a flash drive.

Lack of Trust for Current Leadership

Finally, a pre-existing lack of trust for church leadership seeped into the equation as an unforeseen obstacle. The introduction to this doctoral project was made from the position of being a fellow church member, even though it was well known that the researcher also had pastoral experience. The perception of the church toward the researcher may have been altered by a series of events that took place during the research process. The researcher was voted in as an elder by the church in June 2022. The pastor took ill and the researcher-now-elder was then asked to fill the pulpit for the months to come. Pulpit supply began the last week of June and continued almost non-stop throughout the DRP.

Because there was an underlying lack of trust in previous leadership, becoming an elder and then stepping into the assumed role of pastor made it almost impossible to maintain the one-of-us perspective. Respect and trust needed to be earned quickly, not only as a church member introducing a major directional change, such as what church revitalization requires, but also to be an elder. As noted earlier in this work (page 3), the researcher was later asked and then voted in to serve as an interim pastor, which began midway through the DTC sessions.

Unfortunately, the dynamics of how the congregation viewed the elder board's position (as led by the pastor) on certain topics of church life seemingly placed this researcher into a position where obstinance might abound. Therefore, with an even greater sense of urgency, the trust needed to be earned, and an open-door policy for communication needed to be established.

That said, having the opportunity to preach Christ from the pulpit allowed for the congregation to see, and soon share in, a contagious excitement and hope for FBC's future. The plan remains for the imminent need for church revitalization to be promoted in such a way as to allow the entire church to have a glimpse into the discussions that transpired during the DTC sessions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

It is being postulated that without pursuing spiritual maturity individually, there can be no true and sustainable revitalization accomplished at the church level. This assertion led to conducting a research project using six stages, all of which were with a group of volunteer adults at FBC Norway. Using qualitative and quantitative methods for research,²⁴⁷ these stages for gathering data included one-on-one confidential interviews, an initial individual spiritual maturity assessment using a Likert grading system, a DTC comprising ten weekly sessions, a second spiritual maturity assessment which was used to measure growth on both the individual level as well as for the group, a focus group session to discuss upcoming outreach opportunities and unfinished business from the DTC sessions, and finally, follow-up discussions were conducted with the participants to uncover hidden issues not disclosed while in the group setting. The discussions also provided for the data needed to triangulate the findings.

The purpose of the focus group was to evaluate the effectiveness of this research project toward a renewed hope and excitement as FBC embarks on its journey toward revitalization. The focus group was interviewed to evaluate how they felt this project might have changed not only their understanding of what it means to overcome apathy and complacency by pursuing spiritual maturity, but also how that pursuit relates to their active involvement in church life. Beyond the predetermined stages listed above, unsolicited comments have been received by several church members stating that they are once again excited for the future of FBC. These conversations have

²⁴⁷ Josh Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 2nd ed. (London, UK, 2016), 71.

been compiled to countercheck and appraise FBC's readiness toward the next steps of church revitalization. Several of these comments are included later in this chapter.

Stage One: One-on-One Confidential Interviews

The first stage of this research project was to conduct confidential one-on-one interviews. There were twenty-one adults who volunteered, but only eighteen made themselves available for the interview.²⁴⁸ These eighteen adults equated to forty-five percent of those eligible to be interviewed based on the pre-established IRB guidelines.²⁴⁹ It was not foreseen that in many cases, family members would be present during the confidential interviews. Husbands and wives sat side-by-side, as did others who are related to one another (mother/daughter, sisters). The bystander needed to be reminded to remain quiet during the other's interview, and it might have formed an unfair advantage for the second person to hear the questions before it was their chance to be interviewed, for the second person gained more time to formulate their answers. Part of evaluating the answers included the observation of any hesitations prior to answering questions of a more delicate topic.

The main question that was strategically placed toward the end of the interview, "If you could change one thing about FBC, what would that be?" was intended to not only acquire data from the answers themselves, but from the hesitation and dead time that often occurred prior to the answer being given. Everyone paused for a significant amount of time before answering this question. Did they hesitate because of having too many answers, and they had to narrow it down

²⁴⁸ Of the three individuals who did not participate, one passed away and the other two had contracted Covid. Later it was determined that a proper sampling size was achieved, therefore, they were not officially interviewed.

²⁴⁹ At the time of this research project, an average of fifty-eight attend on a Sunday morning. Of those in attendance, thirteen are below the age of eighteen, and five are not members of the church. Fifty-eight minus eighteen offers a pool of forty adults, and the eighteen therefore equate to forty-five percent.

to only one? Was their hesitation due to not wanting to speak aloud how they truly felt about either the current life of the church or its leadership?

Through follow-up questioning, it was determined that the former was more often the case. Under the pastor, fellowship had waned, an atmosphere for exuberant worship was thwarted, and although Christ was absolutely the focus during his preaching (1 Cor 2:2), the feedback was that his sermons often lacked application and his delivery lacked enthusiasm. It was this researcher's observation that the above was not so much the result of the pastor's care and concern for the flock or pulpit prowess as much as it was because of his style and hyper-eagerness to see a congregation do nothing but worship the Lord in spirit and in truth.

The gap was stylistic, and the result became diminishing returns and a decreasing congregation. This researcher also came to realize that the disconnect in preaching style was because of the pastor's poor health. This was not a scenario of personality or of performance, but one of relatability and results. He was well-liked and appreciated as a friend, but the church members also looked around, wondering where all their friends had gone.

Leadership issues were also identified as a problem, whereas a lack of trust and hope for ways of old were identified by almost everyone interviewed. Feeling beat up and talked down to were two other common denominators. Of the various answers, a few commented that they desired for a new pastor to be called. For example, regarding a desire for new leadership, one church member stated that "We feel beat up after a sermon, that the pastor is talking down to us and always pointing out what we are doing wrong. There is no joy in coming to church anymore. We are long overdue for a change, but we are waiting for God to intervene."²⁵⁰

²⁵⁰ Due to anonymity, individual identifying information is in coded form. The individual who stated this is labeled as A-2-Blue-10.

Another, when asked during the one-on-one confidential interview what the number one thing they would like to see change at FBC, answered, “We need a new pastor.”²⁵¹ And as to the desire for new leadership is concerned, yet another piped in, “The damage is done, and it is irreversible. There is no going back, and I fear there is no going on, either; that is, unless we make a change soon, and I fear it may be already too late to reverse this trend.”²⁵² Yet another added, “I am not sure that apathy and complacency are the problems in our church. It is more a lack of trust toward the pastor. When he tried to change our Constitution and Bylaws to be elder-led, or it is better to describe it as ‘elder-ruled,’ that was it for me. I just shut down. But this is my church. I am not going anywhere.”²⁵³

These comments, while harsh, point to a situational reality much more than they do to a personality conflict. The pastor was liked, even loved, but the concerns for the future of the church took priority. Regarding a lack of fellowship opportunities, the consensus was overwhelming.

We used to do potlucks, and small groups, and people liked to hang out together after church. I do not think we can blame Covid any longer. People just do not want to stay. Church used to be fun. We used to have banners on the walls, and we sang with joy. Now we cannot even clap for the kids if they were even still allowed to do a special song or something. I wish it were like it used to be, when we had a lot more people and we got together. Small groups were the place where real ministry happened, and too many of my friends have left the church. I wonder why I am still here, to be honest.²⁵⁴

All said, the desire for (internal) fellowship was overwhelmingly the top desire for change. The information derived from the one-on-one confidential interviews, while descriptive, was not altered to soften the reporting of opinions regarding the life of the church prior to the DRP being

²⁵¹ C-1-Green-10.

²⁵² D-4-Violet-10.

²⁵³ P-7-Indigo-10.

²⁵⁴ Q-5-None-5-10.

launched. As Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod explain, “By and large, descriptive research does *not* involve changing or modifying a situation under investigation, nor is it intended to determine cause-and-effect relationships.”²⁵⁵

Stage Two: Initial Spiritual Maturity Likert Assessments

An initial spiritual maturity assessment was done by anonymous participants with the goal of forming a baseline from which growth could be measured. It was never intended for the evaluation of this growth to be limited to the self-assessment and numerical grades (on a scale of one to ten) as compared to the final assessment. Unbeknownst to the participants, several of the questions within the Likert questionnaire were strategically used to uncover both a willingness to change and a willingness to participate in future church revitalization activities. These would concurrently address the issues of apathy and complacency by engaging in new activities that reach beyond the four walls of the church (Luke 14:23).

One purpose for these strategic questions was to gauge the focus group’s attitude and willingness toward a future church revitalization process. For example, one question that asked, “Do you show enthusiasm toward the work of revitalization?” showed an overall score of 7.2/10 during the initial assessment. There were seven participants who graded themselves at six or below during the initial survey, but during the final assessment, only four graded themselves in the lower category, yet those same participants also had better narrative answers than they did during the first assessment. During the first assessment, only five scored a nine or better, while that number doubled to ten during the final assessment. The answers would uncover both an

²⁵⁵ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (Uttar Pradesh, India: Pearson India Education Services, 2020), 146.

understanding of what taking part in church revitalization might look like (before and after the DTC), and the individual's desire to become engaged in the process.

Although not specifically worded to be so blunt, two other questions addressed a desire to pray for FBC and its leadership as well as a desire for involvement in future outreach activities. These questions were written with a direct subtlety based on feedback given during the one-on-one confidential interviews. In summary, these questions gauged one's desire for prayer and willingness to submit to a renewed (or new) vision. As to praying for and submitting to the vision of church leadership, questions twenty-four through twenty-six on the spiritual maturity assessment provided data for this analysis.

Question twenty-four asked about seeking the Holy Spirit's guidance before deciding on a course of action. During the discussions this was explained to include a willingness to realize that leadership would have pursued this prior to announcing an aspect of church revitalization. During the first assessment there were three who scored at a nine (with zero scoring a ten), whereas during the final assessment the results revealed seven who scored at a nine or better, with three scoring a ten.

Question twenty-five was specific to prayer as a key element to the revitalization process. The scores of nine or better grew from five to eight between the two assessments, and one additional score of ten was seen in the latter. Finally, question twenty-six touched on teamwork and using one's spiritual gifts for the work of ministry at FBC. Again, these questions were strategic toward revitalization. Although this question showed a limited increase (from six to seven high scores and the number of ten scores moved slightly from two to three), the upward trend was still showed evidence of progress. Figure 7 and Table 1.3 display the increase in scores between the first and second assessments. The data was not analyzed by weighting male/female

differentiators, but allowances were made for participation levels within the DTC sessions as well as the one-on-one interviews.²⁵⁶

It is difficult to measure an individual's true growth in spiritual maturity in any other way than to compare their personal survey scores from the start of the project to the end. It was forecasted that because of the specialized DTC and because of individual buy-in to being involved in this DRP that an atmosphere of hunger and excitement toward the things of God would have been created. This goal was accomplished. When contemplating and praying about a quantitative goal, it was hoped that a twenty percent increase in survey scores would be achieved over the course of this project. But even this measurement is subjective, as it is the individual who is grading themselves in each scenario. What is even more exciting to quantify is the increased levels of activity and excitement that springs from a renewed commitment to the Christian walk. Becoming a viable contributor to fulfilling the Great Commission is the ultimate benchmark of this DRP.

Therefore, the quantitative goal of a twenty percent increase in scores needs to be weighed by the activities that take place after this project has been put to rest. Qualitatively speaking, one might observe such changes as restored relationships, smiling faces, and a new or renewed commitment to attending Sunday school or to become engaged in outreach activities, but is that a realistic goal? Change for the sake of change is not recommended but to become the church that God desires is a worthy goal. If a twenty percent increase in survey scores is observed, and a ten percent increase in volunteerism in outreach activities can be measured, especially according to Luke 14:23, then success can be claimed.

²⁵⁶ Floyd J. Fowler, Jr., *Survey Research Methods*, 5th ed., (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 134-137.

A 19% increase was seen in key questions evaluating spiritual maturity and church revitalization

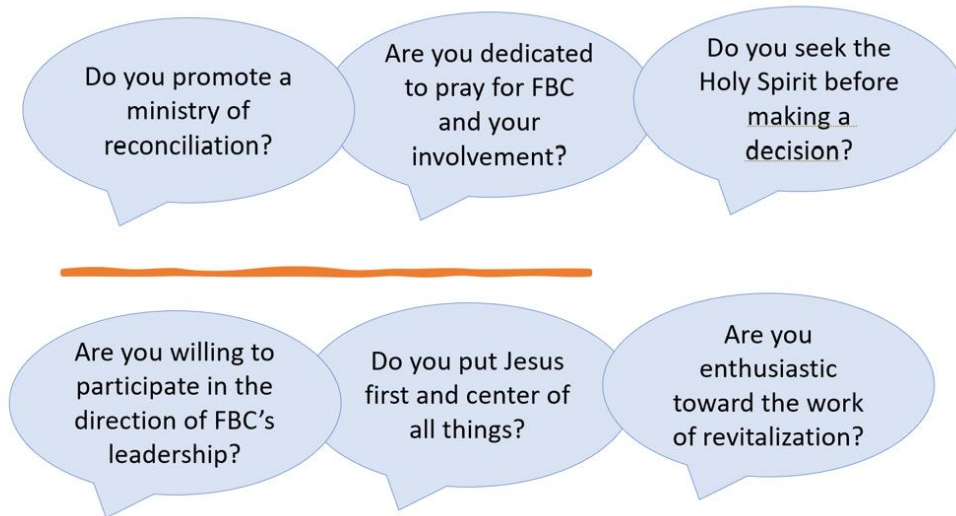


Figure 7. Nineteen percent growth in key areas.

The above highlights six of the thirteen questions that were strategically used to evaluate any predisposition toward future changes that are necessary for church revitalization. A nineteen percent increase was realized between the two spiritual maturity assessment surveys. This percentage was determined by isolating thirteen strategic questions and comparing the scores from the group of the initial assessment to those of the second assessment. These questions can be adapted to the specific needs and concerns of a local church as deemed necessary by the researcher and are included here to highlight the value of this approach. As to volunteerism, if the new mover program can move from its infancy to childhood by seeing ten folks engage in one of its outreach ministry teams, then that can be a measure of success.

Table 1.3. Key question comparison.

This shows the raw data used from the thirteen questions proving the nineteen percent increase.

Key Question Comparison		
Question #	First Score	Second Score
5	6.6	7.4
8	6.5	7.3
9	6.7	7.1
10	7.2	8.1
22	6.6	7.5
23	6.9	6.8
24	5.8	7
25	5.6	6.8
26	6	6.9
27	5.7	7.2
28	5.8	6.9
30	6.1	7.7
32	6.4	7.8
Totals for the Group	81.9	94.5
Actual % Increase Raw Data	15.38%	= 19.13% increase
Essay Questions received a non-statistical rate increase of	3.75%	

Although it was not realized when the spiritual maturity inventory assessment questions were originally selected, a pattern has emerged after a quick analysis of the answers. Recalling that a score of one is an absolute “No” and a ten is an absolute “Yes” for the first eight participants who turned in the assessment, a pattern became apparent from the average scores that were 7.5 or lower. Questions three, seven, twelve, thirteen, fifteen, twenty-nine, and thirty-one all had to do with being easily angered, impatient, confrontational, selfish, frustrated, not thick-skinned, and not remaining calm during trials or otherwise heated discussions. Gossiping was also a problem based on the collective scores. Four questions resulted in an average score of 8.5 or higher (five, ten, twenty-one, twenty-two, and thirty), which had to do with having a heart

for worship, being respectful of those in the church who are in leadership positions, speaking the truth in love, eagerly pursuing a relationship with Jesus, and having a desire to promote a ministry of reconciliation within the body of Christ. Being easily frustrated presented the lowest score (6.38) while eagerly pursuing a relationship with Jesus Christ through the practice of spiritual disciplines scored the highest (9.13).

Stage Three: Ten-Week Discipleship Training Course (DTC)

The purpose of the DTC was to engage the core group of FBC and lead them on a journey toward growth in spiritual maturity. These weekly discussions focused on the immediate needs of FBC to overcome apathy and to initiate a church revitalization effort. The DTC was created to be an entry point for all new believers/members of the church, with an emphasis on fulfilling the Great Commission. These sessions came from Philippians 1:9-11, which emphasizes four markers upon which one can measure their spiritual maturity. These points include having a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows, all to the glory and praise of God. The following highlights the weekly discussions which were conducted from September 11, 2022, through November 13, 2022. For a comprehensive description of these DTC sessions, please see Appendix Q.

DTC Session One: Spiritual Maturity and Spiritual Disciplines Defined

The first session discussed the definition of spiritual maturity and how to become (re)engaged in the spiritual disciplines.²⁵⁷ The group voted on its top three by way of importance. The first was Bible intake, which includes hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and

²⁵⁷ The spiritual disciplines focused upon were Bible intake, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fellowship, and discipleship.

meditating, followed by prayer and worship. The need to discern against false teachers, especially those on television and even with some prominent Christian authors came in a close fourth. These disciplines need to result in a changed heart, and a revived life, and if they do not, there are deeper issues that need to be addressed. Additionally, the three phases/tenses of salvation were discussed (once saved, are being saved, and will be saved—justification, sanctification, glorification). The focus was to acquire a deeper understanding of what it means to participate with God in the sanctification process (Phil 1:6, 2:12-13). For FBC to undergo the church revitalization process successfully, it will require the pursuit of a spiritual maturity that is eager to fulfill the Great Commission.

DTC Session Two: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Loving God

Session two focused on having a love that flows (love God), whereas week three dealt with loving others (Great Commandment). The disciple displays their love for God through acts of obedience and worship and through praising, praying, pursuing, preventing, and presenting Christ our Lord to others. This love should abound more and more (μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύη) with an ongoing pursuit of spiritual maturity. The prayer of a matured believer should no longer approach God with a list of personal requests, but instead should focus on an exchange of wills, ours for His (Luke 22:42, προσεύχομαι). The acronym L-O-V-E was used to frame the discussion on loving God. First, a believer (L) learns by studying God's Word and putting it into practice, they (L) lean not on his or her own understanding, but instead (L) learns to trust God. Second, a believer loves by (O) observing the needs of others and (O) obeying God's truth. Third, believers walk in (V) victory in Jesus, realizes they have (V) value. Finally, one loves God by (E) enjoying his/her relationship with Him, by (E) enduring the things of this world, and by being (E) enthusiastic toward serving Him within the church.

DTC Session Three: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Loving Others

Session three dealt with the disciple's attitude toward loving others. The attitude of one's heart (1 John 3:13, 15) should have a love that is proclaimed (1 John 4:7-8), proved (1 John 4:9, 14), and perfected (1 John 4:18-21). First, the believer loves others by (L) listening to them, (L) learning about them, and growing in their ability to be (L) long-suffering. Second, the believer (O) observes the details of other people's lives and pursues the discipleship process with them. Third, the believer finds (V) value in others by also (V) validating their worth in Christ. Finally, the believer (E) encourages others and is (E) enduring their faults while becoming (E) engaged in their life. "A true disciple of Christ is to sacrificially reflect an agape love while serving the other person. Do not be self-serving, but self-sacrificing."²⁵⁸ The various types of love in the Bible were then discussed (ἀγαπάω, ἀδελφός, φιλέω - φιλαδελφία, ἔρως, στοργή),²⁵⁹ and how they may be misapplied.

DTC Session Four: Measuring Spiritual Maturity Through a Mind That Knows God

This kind of knowledge is a firsthand experience that results in a discerning mind and an engaged heart. Discernment is the ability to sense truth from half-truth, and it is growing in a knowledge of God and in one's progress toward spiritual maturity (Eph 4:11-16). Defining knowledge, an elder offered that, "This knowledge to which we are speaking comes from the Greek *gnosis* (that you may know), and *epignosis* (knowledge from above). It is how you live out

²⁵⁸ K-3-Brown-10.

²⁵⁹ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, "Love" by R.E.O. White, 1357. Greek words taken from the Bible Word Study feature of Logos Bible Software. The point of listing these words for love is not to be emphatic in properly parsing each, but to highlight that the otherwise learned lay person can take them out of context. Too often a word such as love is studied only in the English language whereas the Greek contains different emphases.

that information that makes a difference. Knowledge also carries with it the danger of becoming puffed up, therefore, as we grow in knowledge we also need to grow in humility.”²⁶⁰ Growing in wisdom, discernment, and knowledge occurs when we see this world through the eyes of God.

DTC Session Five: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Being Mindful of Others

Spiritual maturity also requires a focus on the needs of others. Being adopted into the family of God is likened to when a child is adopted into a new family. They need to learn a new set of rules, expectations, and behaviors. Evangelism was discussed next, with the question, “Which is easier, to go down the street and knock on the doors of strangers to tell them about Jesus, or to engage someone you know (friend, neighbor, coworker) and to share your faith with them?” Some agreed that it would be easier to engage a stranger, while others stated they would be more apprehensive to share Christ with a friend, a coworker, or a family member. Our willingness to engage in evangelism is a sure mark of progression toward growing in spiritual maturity.

DTC Session Six: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by a Character That Shows

This week’s topic focused on what it means to be pure and blameless in character (Phil 1:10). The mature believer needs to learn how to battle against a sin nature (Ps 51:5) while growing in their understanding of being both gradually and positionally made pure and blameless. Being pure is a positional truth, being in Christ. Being blameless does not mean being without fault or charge, it is “a position we are given, not a position we can earn.”²⁶¹ Being blameless does not mean that man is without guilt, but that the

²⁶⁰ J-1-Green-5-10.

²⁶¹ K-5-Gold-3-7.

punishment/penalty has been paid in full in God's righteous courtroom. Christ is the Mediator and the Intercessor, for He is both the wall of separation for unbelievers and the bridge of connection for believers.

DTC Session Seven: A Character that Shows Others a Closer Walk with God

This week's topic emphasized bringing glory to God with a character that shows. How one acts and reacts in every situation shows what Christ has done and is doing in the life of the believer. The believer's character puts Jesus Christ on display. A believer's character is the result of a lifelong journey with Christ, having walked in His dust and having grown in wisdom, discernment, and the continual process of yielding ones' will to His truth. This led to discussing how FBC might reach its community for Christ. See Appendix Q for this discussion. The bottom line is that success for any of these programs will require people who are willing and excited to follow up with visitors. Without engaging the lost with an emphasis on showing them a better way (John 14:6), all these ministry events will prove to be for naught.

DTC Session Eight: Filled with the Fruit of Righteousness

The eighth session dug deep into the Word. When we read of the fruit of righteousness (Phil 1:9-11), it is easy for the mind to go immediately to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23, or to Jesus being the Vine and we the branches in John 15. But Paul's use of the word for fruit (καρπός) is much more than that, for it suggests a meaning of producing offspring or a desired result. As Paul focuses on the bigger picture of evangelism and making disciples elsewhere, the fruit of righteousness that brings the most glory to God is that which yields a harvest for the King. To think this fruit is solely focused

on the believer's personality and not at least in part on evangelistic endeavors misses the mark. This fruit is not for us, but for God's glory.

DTC Session Nine: The Final Analysis. Where Do We Go from Here?

A new direction and a collective vision²⁶² were introduced to the volunteer group with a warning that it is now time to hold the group's feet to the fire. Because the vision will also be introduced to the congregation, it is imperative that this inner group become the catalyst through which FBC would unite toward revitalization. The agenda was to produce a program and/or purpose to which this DTC was designed to accomplish, and the discussion focused on the question, "What can, or should we do as a church to pursue revitalization?" The foremost desire of this group is to promote opportunities for fellowship, and fellowship and outreach are to be joined at the hip. A wake-up call was made with the question, "If FBC closed its doors, would the community around us even know? Would they miss us? What impact are we making?"

DTC Session Ten: Second Spiritual Maturity Likert Assessments and Focus Group Interview

Session ten was designated as the time when the second spiritual maturity inventory assessment would be completed individually within a group setting. Details are in Appendix Q.

Stage Four: Final Spiritual Maturity Likert Assessment

Not everyone who submitted the initial assessment was present at this week's DTC session, and an announcement was made on the two Sunday mornings following (November 27, 2022, and December 4, 2022) to request that if someone submitted the first assessment and had yet to submit the second assessment, to please take one home and mail it in ASAP. There were a

²⁶² It is believed by this DMIN student that God gives the vision to the pastor, however, given the dynamics at FBC it is important to gain buy-in at as many steps along the way toward church revitalization as possible.

few narrative updates made to questions sixteen, twenty-nine, and thirty-three, as they were being scored with some ambiguity during the first assessment. These updates did not change the content of the questions, but instead clarified them. The two essay questions at the end of the assessment were rewritten altogether to reflect a post-DTC analysis. Question thirty-four asked, “As a result of the Discipleship Training Course sessions, do you feel that you have grown in your understanding of spiritual maturity (and how to pursue it)? Please explain,” and question thirty-five asked, “Have you grown in your understanding of the need for FBC to undergo a season of revitalization (a reboot), to establish itself once again as a vital influence in the Norway community while advancing the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God? Please explain.”

There were nineteen who took the initial spiritual maturity assessment and seventeen who completed the final assessment. In the following graphic (Figure 8), purple represents the first assessment, and orange represents the second assessment. The numbers on the left side (1-10) depict the Likert scores, and the numbers on the bottom depict the question numbers. The two low scores are questions where a low score was desired. In all but three of the questions, a better score was achieved after attending the DTC sessions.

This increase should not assume that spiritual maturity has increased in the individuals or in the group; however, it does reveal that the need for growth in spiritual maturity as a precursor to and partner of FBC’s ensuing church revitalization efforts has been heightened. The primary focus of this DRP was to do just that: uncover the disease of apathy and complacency, heighten the need to grow in spiritual maturity, and introduce an upcoming church revitalization emphasis. It was never the intention of this research project to engage in an actual discipleship-making process.

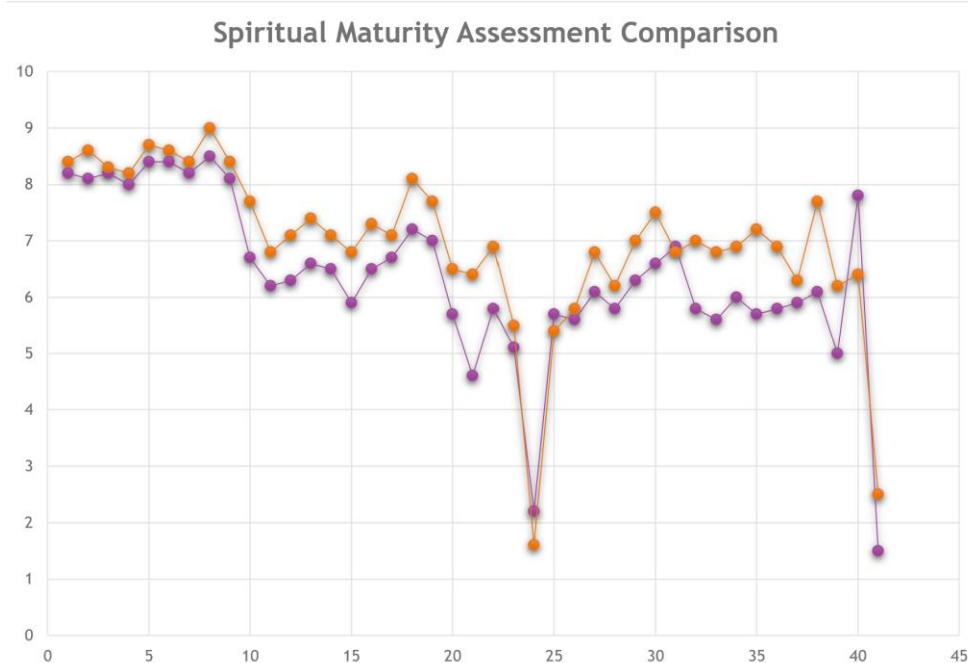


Figure 8. Spiritual maturity assessment comparison.

This presents a summary of the scores posted between the initial and final spiritual maturity assessments.

Although the improvements appear to be nominal on the above graphic, they were still improvements. What was interesting to note is how the scores for the fruit of the Spirit do not seem to coincide with the self-assessed scores for questions in the spiritual maturity assessment that had to do with conflict management, patience during confrontation, and the battle with personal desires when it comes to yielding to the future vision for FBC. Although these scores cannot be classified as scientific, they are what was available for analysis. For example, question three asked, “Would others say of you that you show a godly character when confronted?” The answers were almost identical, in that the overall score for the group averaged the same in both assessments (6.2) and both contained no perfect scores (10) and only six scores of nine.

Running parallel to question number three were two other questions. Question seven asked, “Are you unselfish in all aspects of your life, and do you look out for the needs of others

first?” while question eight asked, “Do you promote a spirit of unity within the body of Christ?” Question seven showed a slight increase from a score of 6.3 to 6.8, while question eight moved in the same direction from 6.9 to 7.3. Finally, question ten sought to ascertain how well the congregation would interact with and support a new pastor’s desire to move toward church revitalization. The overall score from both assessments only differed by one point, whereas the initial assessment’s tally of answers came to 146 points, and the final assessment equaled 145 points.

Table 1.4 below displays a t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means which displays the difference in scores, both individually and as a group. After further analysis it was determined that there were two questions that the participants misread during the first assessment, as both questions were ambiguous. They thought that a high score would depict that they do not struggle with sexual sin during the first assessment, whereas it was later explained to the group that a lower score would be better, meaning that they would be answering “No” with a one or two as compared to a “Yes” with a nine or ten. This scenario also applied to a different question that dealt with showing patience amid conflict.

Table 1.4. t-Test: paired two sample for means, spiritual maturity overall grade.

Data analysis reveals a slight increase in scores with only one participant scoring lower on the final spiritual maturity assessment as compared to the initial spiritual maturity assessment.

Raw Data from Spiritual Maturity Assessments:			t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
Participant	Initial Assessment	Final Assessment		Variable 1	Variable 2
Participant #1	7.2	7.4			
Participant #2	7.3	7.6	Mean	7.457894737	7.67368421
Participant #3	8.8	9	Variance	0.620350877	0.86982456
Participant #4	8.6	8.7	Observations	19	19
Participant #5	7.7	7.8	Pearson Correlation	0.953612188	
Participant #6	6.4	6.4	Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Participant #7	7.8	8.2	df	18	
Participant #8	7.6	7.7	t Stat	-3.14970725	
Participant #9	7.4	8.1	P(T<=t) one-tail	0.002770946	
Participant #10	7.8	8.4	t Critical one-tail	1.734063607	
Participant #11	6.7	7.2	P(T<=t) two-tail	0.005541892	
Participant #12	6	5.5	t Critical two-tail	2.10092204	
Participant #13	8.4	8.5			
Participant #14	7.1	7.1	Increase for all scores:	0.215789	
Participant #15	7.6	7.8	Only one participant (#12) decreased in their score.		
Participant #16	5.9	5.9			
Participant #17	7.9	7.9			
Participant #18	7.8	8.6			
Participant #19	7.7	8			

During the spiritual maturity assessments, the questions regarding the nine elements of the fruit of the Spirit were asked primarily to determine the group's collective attitude toward any future changes to the ministry focus of FBC. They were never intended to become a benchmark for spiritual maturity. That said, the nine percent increase in scores can be viewed under both scenarios. Participants three and four graded themselves with tens across the board during both assessments. Knowing who these two individuals are, it is understood that their theology is one where the believer has already been made complete in Christ because of His godliness bestowed upon the believer. Their perfect scores do not reflect a prideful self-analysis, but rather relate more to a theology derived from such texts as Ephesians 1:3-14 and 2 Corinthians 5:17. Nonetheless, every participant showed an increase in their scores, and the

group increased by nine percent.²⁶³ The following two tables highlight this portion of the spiritual maturity assessments.

Table 1.5. t-Test: paired two sample for means, fruit of the Spirit growth.

The scores reveal there was an overall increase of nine percent within the group when calculating raw data between the first spiritual maturity assessment as compared to the final assessment.

Analysis of the Fruit of the Spirit Questions using a t-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means					
	First Score	Last Score			
Participant #1	77	81			
Participant #2	75	78			
Participant #3	90	90		77	81
Participant #4	90	90	Mean	72	78.6875
Participant #5	58	66	Variance	88.8	52.8958333
Participant #6	67	72	Observations	16	16
Participant #7	65	76	Pearson Correlation	0.93090093	
Participant #8	79	83	Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
Participant #9	62	72	df	15	
Participant #10	66	73	t Stat	-7.12489401	
Participant #11	77	83	P(T<=t) one-tail	1.73914E-06	
Participant #12	68	72	t Critical one-tail	1.753050356	
Participant #13	63	75	P(T<=t) two-tail	3.47828E-06	
Participant #14	72	81	t Critical two-tail	2.131449546	
Participant #15	68	76			
Participant #16	71	82			
Participant #17	81	90			
Group Totals:	1229	1340			

While the above table shows an analysis of the data for the group who took part in the DTC, table 1.6 below shows the scores of each participant's analysis of the fruit of the Spirit. The reader will observe that in all but four grades the scores increased between the two assessments. Of the nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, self-control and peace showed the lowest scores during the first assessment, and joy and patience scored the lowest during the second assessment. This is interesting because many of the comments made towards the end of

²⁶³ Math used: $(1229 / \% =) \dots (1340 =) 109.03$, or 9%.

the DTC as well as the unsolicited comments after the research had to do with an increase in joy during the Sunday morning worship experience.

Table 1.6. Before and after scores: fruit of the Spirit.

The first number represents the score from the initial spiritual maturity assessment, and the second number is from the final assessment. The highlighted areas represent areas where the individual scored lower on the second evaluation.

Sampling of Spiritual Maturity Assessment Scores

Question #	Q1- Fruit of the Spirit								
	Love	Joy	Peace	Patie	Kind	Good	Gentl	Faith	Self
A-7-Teal Blue-Female-10+	9/9	9/9	9/9	9/9	9/9	9/9	9/9	8/9	6/9
L-6-Green-Female-6-10	8/8	8/8	8/9	8/8	9/9	9/9	8/9	9/9	8/9
M-5-Blue-Female-6-10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10
C-5-Green-Male-6-10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10	10/10
A-1-(Light) Blue-Male-10+	6/7	6/7	8/8	6/6	6/7	6/8	6/7	8/9	6/7
A-1-Green-Female-10+	8/8	8/8	6/8	6/8	8/8	8/8	8/8	7/8	8/8
A-5-Red-Female-10+	6/8	7/7	7/9	8/10	7/8	6/7	7/8	9/9	8/10
A-5-Green-Female-10+	8/9	9/9	8/9	9/9	9/10	9/9	9/9	10/10	8/9
K-8-Pink-Female-10+	8/8	6/8	6/8	7/8	8/8	8/8	7/8	5/8	7/8
A-7-Green-Male-6-10	7/8	8/7	7/8	8/9	7/9	7/7	7/8	7/9	8/8
F-9-Blue-Female-0-5	9/10	9/10	7/9	9/9	9/9	9/9	7/9	9/9	9/9
J-9-Blue-M/F?-10+	9/9	8/9	6/9	5/4	8/8	9/8	7/8	10/10	6/7
A-5-Green-Female-10+	7/9	5/6	6/7	8/8	9/9	8/9	7/9	7/9	6/9
K-5-Blue-Female-0-5	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9	8/9
L-3-Indigo-Female-10+	7/8	8/9	8/9	8/7	7/7	7/9	7/9	7/9	9/9
M-9-Green-Female-0-5	7/9	7/9	8/9	7/9	8/9	7/9	9/9	10/10	8/9
M-3-None-Male-10+	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10	9/10

Stage Five: Focus Group

A focus group was formed by those who were in attendance to evaluate the effectiveness of the DTC and the introduction to the church revitalization process. This was done by asking the group present at the last week's DTC session to provide feedback how the training has helped them (a) understand what it means to pursue spiritual maturity, (b) how these sessions may have

motivated them to share their faith with others, and what that might look like, and (c) if they are excited for not only the future of FBC but for their personal involvement in future ministries of the church. The consensus was positive, if only because the emphasis on discipleship training had been lacking at FBC for years. The following is a summary of the discussions that have taken place, both within this focus group and of individual conversations that took place within the following two weeks.

Pursuing Spiritual Maturity

Based on answers provided in the initial spiritual maturity assessment survey, the thought of pursuing spiritual maturity was a foreign concept for over half of those who participated in the research process. Some definitions of spiritual maturity did not even come close. For example, one lady said to be spiritually mature means to keep in fellowship with others,²⁶⁴ while another added that those who are mature will “stay close to the Lord no matter what—sickness, rejection, family, or money problems.”²⁶⁵ Two other answers remained on the peripheral at best. “Spiritual maturity is when you can disagree with someone and still love them, like when you disagree on the Rapture,”²⁶⁶ and another asserted that someone has grown in maturity when “they recognize they are God’s property to do with as He chooses.”²⁶⁷

Although spiritual disciplines were only briefly discussed during the first session, the thread throughout these ten weeks, or the premise that man has a role in his maturation process, has already proven to be a catalyst that has prompted the realization that apathy and

²⁶⁴ A-1-Green-10.

²⁶⁵ A-5-Green-10.

²⁶⁶ K-6-Gold-3.

²⁶⁷ M-3-None-None.

complacency were becoming silent killers. A hesitancy to engage in ministry had settled into FBC and atrophy was on the horizon. The answers in the second survey relating to the need for growth in spiritual maturity and a readiness to engage in the church revitalization process were encouraging.

Have You Grown in Your Understanding of Spiritual Maturity?

The focus of this DRP was to introduce the need for spiritual maturity by addressing the problem of spiritual complacency and apathy, and in doing so, to bring FBC to a point where the steps toward church revitalization could be established. Therefore, through open discussion, it needed to be determined if this core group was ready to move forward in the process. Not only was the following question asked during the final spiritual maturity assessment, but it was discussed at great length during the focus group meeting. The question posed was, “As a result of this DTC, have you grown in your understanding of spiritual maturity?” While everyone responded with a resounding “Yes,” it was the qualification of their yes answers that highlighted the success of this endeavor. The following five quotes were taken from the assessments.

“Yes, I have learned of the importance of talking to others about Jesus Christ and how much God loves us. I need to present the gospel even if I make mistakes and cannot think of an answer, which makes me uncomfortable.”²⁶⁸ Another wrote, “Yes, it reinforced my belief in that spiritual maturity is growing in Christlike character and [that I should] continue to pursue that through fellowship with other believers and through daily prayer and Bible study.”²⁶⁹ The following comment was made in reference to a comprehensive review of the Philippians 1:9-11 text. This person stated, “Yes, it was an extremely helpful class. It reviewed many things that I

²⁶⁸ W-5-Blue-8.

²⁶⁹ L-1-None-5.

thought I already knew, and it made me realize that I have become lazy, especially in volunteering for jobs and hospitality. Defining fruit and righteousness has helped me understand both better. I never thought of telling others about Jesus as the best way to glorify my Lord.”²⁷⁰ This was pertaining to a session discussion where being filled with the fruit of righteousness applied to evangelism and disciple-making more than it should lead ones’ mind to the fruit of the Spirit.

Finally, a long-time member stated, “Yes. I have a new desire to strengthen my walk with the Lord and to spend more time with Him. This is a discipline I let slide and am now excited about being in the Word and studying it.”²⁷¹ Two weeks after the focus group the researcher received a text from a man who had previously voiced concerns that God may not want to do anything with our church. He said, “Fantastic service this morning. I feel alive again at our church.”²⁷²

Spiritual Maturity Leads to Evangelistic Encounters

These sessions were not designed to motivate individuals to share their faith, but it has opened the eyes of FBC that it is our God-given privilege to tell others about Him. The have-to is slowly becoming a get-to. This research project has led the Great Commission and the Great Commandment to become top-of-mind awareness. Even recently the motivation for sharing ones’ faith has popped up now and again in the past month, with reports of inviting folks to church, for rekindling previous conversations, and even for a few to become bolder in talking about their relationship with Jesus. With an abundance of prayer these sparks will quickly set

²⁷⁰ S-5-Light Blue-6.

²⁷¹ K-1-Green-10.

²⁷² P-7-Indigo-10.

FBC ablaze for the Lord. To help facilitate this growth the leadership of FBC needs to create opportunities for fellowship and special events upon which others can be invited. More on this is covered in chapter five.

The above summarizes the discussions that took place during the final group session. Individuals were not recruited to participate, but instead, the group was a random sampling of those who were in attendance for the final session. What was still needed was an opportunity to invite folks into a one-on-one discussion so they could freely offer their input as to the progress and direction of FBC. This triangulation questionnaire needed to be approached with caution due to some obstacles that were identified early in the research process. Because there appears to be some burnout from the ongoing participation in this DRP, instead of asking the triangulation questions in a formal, one-on-one scheduled interview, they were asked nonchalantly and in passing. Indeed, the triangulation questionnaire morphed into informal follow-up discussions.

Stage Six: Follow-up Discussions

The original plan for a generalized questionnaire to be conducted as a part of the triangulation process needed to be replaced with an informal yet confidential one-on-one phone interview, or it was disguised as an informal chat, depending on the temperature of the individual. In some ways it became a blind study with Fowler's warning being taken into consideration. "To behave as a professional, not a friend, helps to standardize the relationship across the interviewers and respondents. There is no evidence that having a friendly interpersonal style per se improves the accuracy of reporting."²⁷³ Realizing that Fowler was not writing with the pastor-church member relationship in mind did not negate the advice in which he provides.

²⁷³ Fowler, *Survey Research Methods*, 112-13.

The takeaway from his comment was that caution should be maintained as to not direct the conversation in any way other than to probe for a deeper understanding of what feedback the participant was willing to provide. In all fairness, “the issues to be included, information to be obtained, and the respondents to be included in the survey sample”²⁷⁴ were selected based on three factors: the individual’s influence within the congregation, their participation in discussions during the DTC sessions, and the connections that have been made between the individual and this researcher, who has progressed from being a layman, to an elder, and now as the pastor of FBC. The choice to be selective as to the participants is solely for the purpose of maintaining momentum toward church revitalization.

Three Obstacles to Future Ministry

Prior to the launching of the actual research for this project, a general questionnaire was going to be conducted to uncover needs and perceptions toward the life of the church at the end of the DRP. This second interview comprised three topics for discussion. The first topic related to an obstacle where many still thought that revitalization meant for the group who split from the church to return. The second topic had to do with revitalization equating to having more opportunities for internally focused fellowship rather than providing for events that reach into the Norway community with a goal of inviting others to join the ministry of FBC either through salvations or by returning to the family they once knew and loved. The third topic asked for the individual to summarize their take on the DTC and to gauge their level of buy-in for future ministry involvement.

²⁷⁴ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed., (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2014), 118.

On one hand, the thought that church revitalization meant for the return of those who had left FBC during the split was disappointing, however, on the other hand the assumed motivation behind this thought has value in that a restoration of old friendships and a healing of past wounds would be the result. Additionally, if these were the so-called worker bees of FBC, then the church would benefit from having additional soldiers in the battle. The second topic was clarified as a desire for things to return to how they were prior to the pastor coming to FBC, in that with more people there would be more who could do the work that fellowship events would require. The third topic was answered with a collective hope for the future and an apprehension to have to get out of their comfort zone. These three topics are classified as obstacles that have been present throughout the DTC process, obstacles that differ from those listed in chapter three's unforeseen obstacles.

Obstacle #1: Revitalization Means Reuniting

The first obstacle is the desire for the group who left the church during the split, which happened shortly after the previous pastor's arrival in 2014. The premise for church revitalization was clouded by the hope of returning the church to as it was in its heyday. Although there are many within FBC who still maintain a friendship with those who left our fold, it has been discovered that their desire to return is far from reality. They have planted a new church, and even after the researcher reached out to their pastor with an offer for some of the FBC members to partner with them in ministry by volunteering to help them with their AWANA club, a gentle, yet firm "no thank you" was extended. While reconciliation is always a good thing (2 Cor 5:11-21), the lingering hope for the old group of so-labeled doers to return is causing an

obstacle, if ever so subtle, to moving forward. Complacency and apathy are the direct result, at least in part, of the fleeting hope of a merger. “Sour grapes make for bitter juice.”²⁷⁵

Obstacle #2: Revitalization Means Internal Fellowship

The second obstacle is that to become a revitalized church means to have returned to conducting internally focused opportunities for fellowship rather than to pursue ministry projects that allow for the sharing of Christ. There are too many at FBC who still desire numerical growth to result from former members coming back, or even as the result of proselyting, as if that was the only measure of a church’s success. In this area of the UP five or six churches make up a cyclical stomping ground for those who leave one church and go to another. The majority of FBC members have at one point or another been a member of another local church, and more than a few will return to those churches for special events.

The fellowship events that have initially been instituted at FBC are internally focused (potluck, sweetheart dinner, small groups), but they are also great opportunities to invite others, either to target the *nones*²⁷⁶ or to invite those outside of the faith to an event that is not churchy. “Of all unchurched people, 82 percent would come to church this weekend if they were invited by a friend.”²⁷⁷

Obstacle #3: A Change in Leadership and Future Ministry

The third obstacle was unexpected. At the initial announcement that this DRP would be pursued at FBC under the authority and leadership of the pastor, this researcher was operating as

²⁷⁵ D-6-Blue-3.

²⁷⁶ White, *The Rise of the Nones*.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 153.

a former pastor, now serving as a lay member, pursuing a personal goal of seeing God's hand at work in the church revitalization process. All research was to be conducted under the pastor's authority. Midway through the initial one-on-one confidential interviews had begun, the church voted for the researcher to become an elder. The pastor became ill and starting the last week in June 2022, the need for pulpit supply fell in the researcher's lap. With the passing of the pastor, the researcher is now serving as the interim pastor, and it has become more difficult to maintain the I-am-one-of-us position that was desired from the beginning. It is because of this that conducting the triangulation questionnaire has become more difficult, if even only in presumption. It was too late to vet and train a third-party researcher, so it needed to be preempted that the interviews were being conducted under the guidelines of research rather than to be viewed as a line of questioning from the new pastor.

With new leadership in play, the answers to the question of hope and intention to get involved in future ministry opportunities were undoubtedly filtered. And although hope abounds for the future of FBC with excitement and joy in worship, there remains the question as to whether this DRP will have been enough of an encouragement for the majority to engage in the Great Commission. When it was shared that it was a potential obstacle for this researcher to ask these questions as the pastor, ten out of ten voiced that this was not an obstacle, but a benefit. They had been with the researcher throughout the process. Trust has been earned. Enthusiasm has grown, and people are excited for the future of FBC. Hope has been restored, and it is all because of Christ. People are not only once again willing to contribute, but ministry is beginning to take place organically.

Post DTC Understanding of Church Revitalization

When asked of their understanding of church revitalization and what that should look like for FBC, the following is a summary analysis of the answers. One person is still stuck on the idea that revitalization means reconciliation. She said, “I have been praying for reconciliation since the church split. It is in my heart every single day. He is the God of reconciliation, and He can bring it about!”²⁷⁸ Other people struggle with how they can become involved, not believing they are worthy to contribute or have anything of value to contribute. Their assertion is that we need to find younger people to do all the work and that they have already paid their dues. Yet another has realized that the future of FBC will not look like what it did fifteen to twenty years ago, and that they need to be like Paul and forget what is behind, but instead to look forward (Phil 3:13-14).

Post DTC Opportunities for Fellowship and Outreach

Many of the ideas for events that were shared in the brainstorming session for the first ministry project in which FBC would undertake had to do with opportunities for fellowship, or in other ways had little to do with pursuing church revitalization. One longtime member said we needed to “Advertise in the paper. People don’t know we even exist.”²⁷⁹ Another said, “For us to pursue revitalization we need to reconcile with the group that left the church six to seven years ago.”²⁸⁰ Other comments included a desire to hold block parties once again, to send volunteers from our church to the group that split to help them reach kids through their AWANA program, and another said, “We need to bring prayer back like how we used to do it. We used to pass a

²⁷⁸ C-3-Green-10.

²⁷⁹ H-2-White-10.

²⁸⁰ C-9-Blue-10.

microphone around to share prayer requests. We used to know what was going on with each other when we did it that way.”²⁸¹ Finally, as the researcher sought to bring the topic back to what FBC can do to pursue revitalization, one person said, “We need a leader who is called by God to take the ball and run. There must be someone that steps up.”²⁸²

It took more than just a little coaxing to get folks to realize that opportunities for fellowship and returning to past ministry events may not be what is needed for church revitalization. The events of old were such that did not promote local outreach, such as doing a can drive to give to a local food bank, participating in the Samaritan’s Purse shoebox campaign, or picking a name of a needy family off the giving tree. These are all viable ministries, but they do not promote one-on-one encounters that might lead to a gospel presentation. In contrast, during the DTC sessions as well as from the pulpit on Sunday mornings, a desire for the baptismal waters to once again splash²⁸³ and for church growth to result from pursuing the Great Commission were proclaimed.

Post DTC Momentum

The final analysis of this research was focused upon evaluating if people were getting excited about the future of FBC. The comments from the crowd at the beginning of this journey were filled with despair, doubt, and even hopelessness. For example, after the idea of revitalization was first introduced, one lady stated, “I feel a great need to revitalize this church. I felt it was close to a dying church.”²⁸⁴ Other comments included, “We need major change to stop

²⁸¹ C-1-Brown-10.

²⁸² S-7-Orange-3.

²⁸³ It is exciting to report that as of the writing of this paper (December 2022) a twelve-year old young lady has recently accepted Christ and was baptized, and two teenage boys have come forward for baptism. Three were voted into membership on Christmas.

²⁸⁴ C-2-Blue-10.

the death spiral we are in. We must reach out and include more,”²⁸⁵ and “The church has lost its impact in the community and needs to become a bright light in the darkness once again.”²⁸⁶

During this stage of research, one could hear the excitement and renewed commitment build. “I have known that we as a church need to do this and am now excited about the possibility of it actually happening,”²⁸⁷ and another agreed in saying, “I am excited to return to my first love and to share the gospel to win others to Christ. My desire for our church is to grow and reach out to others.”²⁸⁸

Summary of Findings

The original three questions, which addressed the fallacy of church growth via a return of those who left the church in the split of 2015, the errant concept of fellowship being only internally focused rather than to provide opportunities to draw others in (Luke 14:23, John 13:34-35, Acts 2:42-48, 1 Pet 2:12) and to obtain their temperature for future volunteerism and contribution to the cause of Christ at FBC, had to be altered slightly. The triangulation stage of this research project became a focus on attitudes, excitement, enthusiasm, and a desire to discover what everyone hopes for in this church. Misconceptions and motivations that were not aligned to the vision for the church needed to be uncovered, discussed, and prayerfully overcome.

The six stages of research conducted with the volunteer team at FBC has revealed that past hurts have created current problems that only church revitalization (God!) can overcome.

²⁸⁵ K-7-Brown-10.

²⁸⁶ H-8-Red-10.

²⁸⁷ B-5-Pink-8.

²⁸⁸ S-1-White-10.

The information uncovered during the one-on-one confidential interviews, the training and discussions that took place during the DTC, the analysis of data retrieved from the two spiritual maturity assessments, the post-DTC comments, and the ensuing changes that were introduced to the Sunday morning worship service have already made a huge impact on the vitality and future hope for FBC.

The introduction to this DRP initiated a sense of apprehensive hope that someone was going to do something about the problems in this dying church. Leadership was lacking, the morning worship service lacked vitality and enthusiasm, and people were leaving. The confidential one-on-one interviews allowed for the researcher to hear the heart of those who were sticking it out through thick and thin. Somebody showed that they cared about their concerns. The initial spiritual maturity assessment launched the journey through introducing the need for FBC to be revitalized, and the DTC sessions followed a structure that pointed to God's mandate for a church to be more than a local place to fellowship and sing songs. Spiritual apathy and complacency were introduced as the nemesis to becoming what God desires for the believer to be (Phil 1:6, 1 Pet 2:9-12).

The second spiritual maturity assessment allowed for individuals to identify where they need to focus on their discipleship journey and revealed that progress was being made in key areas (re: nineteen percent increase, see Figure 7 and Tables 1.3 and 1.4). Coupled with the final triangulation interviews and the church revitalization focus being made from the pulpit, this DRP has already proven to at least turn the masses into a renewed direction to bring God all the glory. Only time will tell if this momentum continues toward becoming a revitalized congregation who is excited to make Christ known by evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved. If momentum

wanes, the volunteerism, participation, and yielding to a higher calling might make future ministry and evangelistic efforts at FBC difficult.

Conclusion

The six stages of this DRP were strategically chosen to introduce the topic, provide a baseline of data, discover individual prowess and understanding, correct fallacies, and create an atmosphere of hope and vision for the future of FBC. Discussions regarding spiritual maturity were the mainstay of the initial weeks of the DTC, which then progressed to the need for church revitalization and what that might look like. Participation grew as the research project progressed, and one could feel the excitement level growing as hope for a bright future became the motivation for many.

But there remains an underlying reluctance by some in the congregation whether God will truly bless the efforts of FBC to reach its community, and there remains a question in the minds of the new leadership whether folks who have been otherwise complacent, or even apathetic, will become willing to step up to the plate to fill the gaps in ministry. Will FBC become a vibrant contributor to the kingdom of God? Will God choose to show up and show off in her midst?

The intervention plan has yielded results, at least within the core group who attended most of the DTC sessions. The expectation for this DRP was that folks would realize that apathy and complacency existed, that the Great Commission and the Great Commandment needed to become the focus once again, and that hope would be restored for a dying congregation. To accomplish this, an in-depth treatise needed to be introduced and taught about growing in spiritual maturity. This is a precursor to and a partner of the church revitalization process. What

is yet to become clear is will the excitement level wear off or will it permeate to the others, if even only because of inspirational dissatisfaction.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Introduction

Church revitalization begins with the realization that there is a problem. For FBC, this problem was that apathy and complacency had become the norm, whereas Scripture mandates that a church should be actively involved in fulfilling the Great Commission. A church's revitalization process must begin with individuals being trained and encouraged to pursue spiritual maturity. According to Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11, this maturity actively engages in evangelism to bring glory to God. Revitalization must start with the pastor, who then promulgates this need via church leadership (elders, deacons, teachers, ministry leaders) and then into the flock. When a church finally focuses its ministry efforts on fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20), reestablishes itself as a New Testament church (Acts 2:42-47), and facilitates growth in spiritual maturity through fellowship (κοινωνία), discipleship (μαθητής, disciple, pupil, learner), and ministry (ἀγαθοὺς ἔργους, good works), only then will apathy and complacency be conquered. An atmosphere of excitement should then be created with a restored hope and vision according to God's will, His plan, and His Word. This will create an environment where enthusiasm (ἐν θεός, in God) will grow, folks are renewing their commitment to become more involved, and the process toward church revitalization will then take root. Overcoming spiritual apathy and complacency by pursuing growth in spiritual maturity is the precursor to and partner of church revitalization.

Research Implications

Beginning

Now that the problems of spiritual apathy and complacency have been uncovered and the need to pursue spiritual maturity on an individual basis has gained buy-in, the next phase of the

church revitalization process is to cast a motto/vision, pick a project, and get people excited and unified toward a common goal. The motto/vision for FBC is to make Christ known. This is accomplished through evangelizing the lost and discipling the saved. It is founded on four pillars for church revitalization: grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through ministry, and larger through evangelism, with Jesus Christ as the Chief Cornerstone (Eph 2:19-22). The four pillars form the strategic plan by which the mission/vision is being pursued.

To move directly into evangelistic endeavors is not realistic. On the contrary, to do so would scare people off from getting involved. For FBC, the next step requires the establishment of one major event, such as the *National Back to Church Sunday* campaign,²⁸⁹ which is held annually on the second Sunday in September. Preliminary to this is to conduct two or three outreach-related opportunities that focus on non-churchy events to which the church family can invite their family, friends, and neighbors. This could be a block party, a recreational event (fishing contest?), or even a gospel illusion show. The missions and outreach committee at FBC is currently planning an outdoor church service at a local lake during the second week in July and will be investigating the feasibility of conducting a Vacation Bible School in June.²⁹⁰

FBC has reinstated small groups, changed some aspects of the Sunday morning church service, and refocused the prayer life of FBC toward revitalization and reaching the lost for Christ. Nothing changes unless we do. Nothing changes without prayer. Nothing changes without God. Nothing of any significance will happen if the family at FBC does not come together in unity. The success of this DRP is therefore measured not only on the immediate

²⁸⁹ <https://www.backtochurch.com/>, accessed November 22, 2022.

²⁹⁰ VBS has not taken place at FBC since 2016.

evidence of life being restored to the church body but also in the future vitality of outreach events based on an increase in volunteerism and on their effectiveness toward church growth.

This research project has been designed to promote a growth in spiritual maturity that would overcome spiritual apathy, especially toward living out the Great Commission in an otherwise dormant society, and this growth on an individual level would be a catalyst toward those activities of church revitalization that would save an otherwise dying church from closing its doors. In fact, no mention of prayer has been made up until this point for a purpose. The behind-the-scenes observation of spiritual growth is to witness a people who crave a focus on praying for the lost and for the workers of the harvest to show up at FBC (Matt 9:38, Luke 10:2). The danger, on the other hand, is to consider this project a failure if people do not change, if ministry programs are not instituted, if volunteers are not excited to join in, if outreach programs are not planned, or if the church does not grow numerically. God must be the focus today and the director of FBC's future.

Success is according to God's will and His good timing. Current works in church revitalization, growth in spiritual maturity, disciple-making, and the like are filled with great ideas and valuable insights, but one must remember that man cannot manipulate God. Pastors are called to follow Ephesians 4 to equip the saints for works of service. Church members are told to pray for their pastor (Heb 13:7). We are all called to live in unity (Eph 1, 4) and we are to be in the right activities and leave the results up to God (Matt 16:18, 1 Cor 3:6). And most of all, no matter how success is measured, God is to get all the glory, period (Phil 1:11, Jude 24-25).

The Gap in Theological Academia

While investigating the potential benefits of this DRP, it was uncovered that of the five areas of church life (evangelism, discipleship, spiritual maturity, church revitalization, and

church growth), spiritual maturity and church revitalization seldom crossed paths in the existing theological academia. Evangelism and church growth fit well together, and these topics have been investigated, researched, and discussed individually and in collection ad nauseam. The same goes for the research on discipleship and evangelism. These two categories are joined at the hip due to Matthew 28:19-20, whereas one first needs to evangelize to make disciples.

Discipleship and spiritual maturity are partners as well, given that one will seldom find a discipleship training curriculum that does not focus on the result of spiritual maturity, and in reverse, spiritual maturity equates to becoming involved in mentoring and discipling others (i.e., 2 Tim 2:2).

Research Applications

The question, “How do the results of the research compare to the information gleaned from previous studies or the published work analyzed in the literature review” will be explored next. Because there were few previous books, journal articles, dissertations, or research projects that met the criteria set herein for spiritual maturity being a precursor of and a partner to the journey toward church revitalization, the comparable information is in many ways lacking on this subject.

Previous Studies Fall Short

The dissertations, journal articles, primary books, supplemental findings, and other theological works consulted provide great value to Christianity, but they fail to bridge the gap discovered in academia, whereas church revitalization and spiritual maturity should be pursued in tandem to ensure a church’s future. At best, these two might be mentioned in the same breath, but they are not emphasized together. Medina came close when he identified that spiritual

maturity is essential to church revitalization, but then his research ventures into the area of church growth rather than a journey toward church revitalization that results in organic growth, which is found post-obedience to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.²⁹¹

Wootton's focus on Hebrews 5-10²⁹² as a call to spiritual maturity for the purpose of church revitalization runs parallel to this DRP; however, his does not address the how, but only the what. In short, his work does not unpack how to measure spiritual maturity, nor does it hit the bullseye as to the need for this pursuit as an ongoing necessity toward a successful church revitalization endeavor. Rolsing,²⁹³ on the other hand, posits that Ephesians 4:11-16 offers seven traits upon which the believer can measure their journey toward Philippians 1:6's grand finale, but even his does not fit the same category as this DRP because he ventures into the scope of spiritual maturity and discipleship, rather than spiritual maturity and church revitalization.

Brooks²⁹⁴ partners the apathetic demise within the church and relates the problem of apathy to a lack of evangelism. Again, this is close, but the partnership is different. There is one book that is the most comprehensive treatise on the field of church revitalization, and that is Henard's *Can These Bones Live?*²⁹⁵ His work, labeled as a practical guide to church revitalization, almost flew under the radar when it came to researching current works that dealt with both spiritual maturity and church revitalization. Although he does not focus on spiritual maturity as a precursor to the revitalization process, he does indeed speak of the need for "spiritual development,"²⁹⁶ but he is referencing the need for strong leadership to grow rather

²⁹¹ Medina, "Spiritual Maturity of the Individual Believer..."

²⁹² Wootton, "New Life, Better Life..."

²⁹³ Rolsing, "Local Church Revitalization Through Christological Discipleship."

²⁹⁴ Brooks, "Addressing Apathy in the Church..."

²⁹⁵ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*

than for the individuals of the congregation to be disciplined toward growth. Every facet of the revitalization journey, post pursuant to the quest for spiritual maturity in the face of apathy and complacency, is dealt with in one way or another in his work, and because of the comprehensive approach to everything church revitalization, even his does not mirror what was hoped to be accomplished within this DRP.

Key Take-Aways and Observations

Several observations, or key takeaways, were realized throughout the implementation process. These observations were initially intended to be grouped into three categories: preparation phase (PRE), presentation phase (MID), and application phase (POST), but truly these observations transcend across the entire DRP timetable. The observations will still be grouped as best as possible to promote a logical flow of thought.

Do Not Assume Theological Prowess

During the preparation phase (PRE) of this research project, while the preliminary planning was conducted, it was assumed that the seasoned saints of FBC would have had a better handle on what spiritual maturity entails and what the church revitalization process might look like. Even after the DTC stage was completed, there were more than a few who could not articulate with biblical accuracy what it should look like for FBC to undergo a church revitalization campaign. For example, one individual still maintained that church revitalization meant for a restoration to take place with the group that had split from the church some seven to eight years ago. A couple of others still thought that man was not to pursue spiritual maturity (Phil 1:6), negating the idea that we are to participate with God as an outward flow resulting

²⁹⁶ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 151.

from an inward change (Phil 2:12-13, Eph 2:10). The answers provided by these same individuals asserted that man's attempt to reach outside of the four walls would only get in God's way of His sovereign activities.

Given that many of the other participants answered otherwise, this is more of a theological stance than it is a lack of training during the DTC. But either way, it would have been helpful to flush this out when these topics were presented. Overall, the takeaway is that even after decades of being in the church, do not assume that years within equates to wisdom and theological prowess, as many are without.

Interview Questions Fall Short

Finally, during the one-on-one interviews, there should have been better questions chosen that would have fed into the data analysis stage of this DRP. Many of the initial questions were icebreakers designed to make a connection and to promote an atmosphere of trust and cooperation. Only the last two or three questions were of extreme value as to the initial steps needed to start the revitalization phase. The earlier questions were designed to uncover whether the individual might have been on the fence about leaving FBC like so many others had already done. The one-on-one confidential interview, therefore, contained triage questions to determine if a tourniquet was required to stop the bleeding.

Communicating the Big Picture

During the presentation phase (MID), it was learned that if there had been a manner established by which the rest of the church could have been kept abreast as to what was being discussed, then the application phase might have gone smoother. Whereas those who have volunteered their time and energy to participate in this DRP have formed a sort of revitalization

committee through which future changes to the church's ministry would flow, those who did nothing with the DRP should not have a say, or at least not as strong of a vote. With that in mind, it was observed that inconsistent attendance during the DTC sessions may have resulted in a lack of buy-in from those who were not fully involved in the research process throughout its entirety.

It would also have been beneficial to remain in communication with those who would otherwise have been a part of the research if they did not have responsibilities elsewhere (i.e., teaching another Sunday school class). Perhaps if a second day and time were offered for those who could not attend on Sunday mornings, then there may have been more participation. As things progressed, at least the spouse or a close relative of most of these individuals was able to make it to the DTC sessions (wife, husband, sister-in-law).

Data Analysis – Know What to Look for Beforehand

During the application phase (POST), it was observed that there should have been a game plan for deciphering the data before each phase of the research was initiated. It would have been much better to evaluate data along the way rather than trying to summarize things toward the end. Not knowing exactly what to look for caused this delay, although observing personalities, responses, and the differences during participation and feedback dictated that some of the analysis could not take place until afterward. Also, it would have been more beneficial to have established a method by which the recordings of the DTC sessions could have been distributed along the way.

The recordings were not available in a timely manner due to the file size of the audio recording. If the church had a Vimeo or YouTube account set up, or a way to add these classes on the church's website, then folks could have listened along the way. Providing all the recordings at once might prove to be overwhelming. It was not until December 11, 2022, that

flash drives were made available to hand out to those who wanted to review the material. Included in these flash drives were the ten recorded sessions (audible), each of the week's handouts, and a summary of findings in .pdf format.

Research Holds Value for Other Ministry Settings

How might the results apply in other settings? While serving as a Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant, it quickly came to the forefront that thousands of churches across America are struggling to grow. Numerical growth is often measured with an emphasis on trying to draw other believers into their local fold. The sad truth is that churches have become too focused on trying to get people inside the four walls rather than training the flock how and why to get outside of those walls (Luke 14:23). The results of this DRP absolutely are applicable to such churches, as these six stages of research can be used to redirect the vision of an otherwise dying congregation.

Denominational structures and how one views such topics as Calvinism or Arminianism could alter the direction a church might take when seeking to apply the results within their ministry context. If the reader is of a denomination that sees catechism as the benchmark of a believer, then the practice of catechism may lead the findings herein in a different direction. Additionally, the theological understanding of how one grows toward spiritual maturity could determine how this research might come into play. Charismatic friends might bypass the findings of this project and jump ahead to the act of speaking in tongues as proof of salvation and then focus on the usage of spiritual gifts as a measure of holiness and spiritual maturity.

Parachurch ministries could also benefit from this research, such as Christian counselors who offer marriage or premarital counseling. Could the four measures of spiritual maturity from Philippians 1:9-11 be used to structure the message of a gospel illusion show or be used in a

series of acts within a puppet ministry? The results of this research are already being drafted into a book that seeks to lead the reader to understand how we get to partner with God as we are blessed by His work in our lives toward maturity (Phil 1:6). This book will be available as a small group Bible study. All said, the foundational premise to conducting this DMIN research, especially the DTC, was to formulate a different approach to a new-member class at FBC.

Finally, someone who is pursuing a DMIN in church revitalization, who is focusing on prayer, the book of Philippians, or even on a different DMIN category altogether might benefit from this work. Any pastor can adapt this research to their congregational setting. It does not need to be restricted to only an older Baptist church in a neighborhood or rural setting.

Research Limitations

What was not taken into consideration, however, was the setting and atmosphere for these interviews. Although most of these interviews took place in the comfort of their home, some were conducted via a phone call or after church, or while other distractions could have influenced a decision to answer more delicate questions with more freedom. It was not until more than a month after these interviews were conducted that such variables as the setting, activities and interactions, conversations that chased rabbit trails, and the behavior of the interviewer²⁹⁷ were considered when conducting a summary analysis of findings.

When seeking out works on church revitalization, it was discovered that there were none that specifically spoke of the partnership with spiritual maturity but instead focused on revitalization as a requirement for church growth. The opposite was also untrue, in that few works that focus on church growth have established the need for a revitalization process that

²⁹⁷ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 183-84.

entails a pursuit toward spiritual maturity on an individual basis. The partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization simply has yet to hold hands. It has also been discovered that of the works whose labels might lead the reader to believe that spiritual maturity and church revitalization are discussed together with any depth of focus, the reader may uncover but a hat tip between the two but will instead find a focus on other areas such as discipleship training, evangelism, or church growth. At best, of the dozens of works that were written specifically on church revitalization, no more than a handful even mentioned spiritual maturity, and that was only in passing. As the research in literature expanded, so did the size of the chasm that exists between these two imperative categories. Where should research regarding this problem go from here?

Further Research

Research regarding the problem of spiritual maturity not being a partner to church revitalization needs to be investigated further within three areas of concern. These concerns include a lack of focus on growing in spiritual maturity, which is either due to a lack of leadership's focus or due to a misinterpretation of Scripture (or even denominational focuses); the causes of spiritual apathy and complacency, and whether these causes should be framed and thus investigated by the separation of different age bands (i.e., younger Christians do not know, while seasoned saints might sit dormant thinking that they have already paid their dues); and finally, why does this gap in theological academia exist in the first place?

Structure Ministry for Growth in Spiritual Maturity

First, because there lacks a focus on the individual pursuit of spiritual maturity, the reasons why a church is not structured to focus on this needs to be identified. Is it because the

leadership of the church does not realize there is a need, or they have chosen not to rock the boat when it comes to such delicate topics that can coincide with growth, such as church discipline (Matt 18)? Does the pastor not focus on making disciples due to the belief that all he is required to do is preach on Sundays, and that it is solely at the whim and discretion of the Holy Spirit to do such work? There is much to be uncovered as to why the church does not provide a solid discipleship training course to coincide with the various ministries that might be in place.

For example, a focus on making and growing disciples could be instituted to a greater degree through small group ministries. Rather than for these meetings to just be get-togethers for fellowship and a shortened Bible study, the leadership of the church should promote growth through these small groups in two ways. That the leaders of the small group recruit someone who they can mentor to take on a small group themselves, and second, that each group focuses on an outreach ministry. This is certainly an area where someone can take on additional research to expand the findings herein.

Causes of Apathy and Complacency

Second, what are the causes of spiritual apathy and complacency? Should the causes of these nemeses to maturity and revitalization be researched by age groups due to the potential reasons for apathy and complacency? As noted within this DRP, a lack of trust in existing church leadership could be the underlying problem that is potentially mislabeled as apathy or complacency. When there is a lack of motivation to serve, or a lack of volunteerism within the church (the Pareto principle), can these be the result of an unconfessed sin on the part of the individual or even due to a previous hurt that had been experienced that causes these obstacles? Although the causes of apathy were explored in chapter two, the causes can be explored further

to diagnose the problem and find better solutions as to how to overcome apathy and perhaps even how to curtail its existence in the first place.

Why Does this Gap Exist?

Third, why does this gap in theological academia exist in the first place? Is there a reason others have not identified this gap in research? Have the collective masses not focused on the partnership between spiritual maturity and church revitalization because they have assumed these topics have been covered at length within other areas of focus? After an extensive and intensely focused research process, did this researcher simply fail to uncover this partnership being present in several other works that were not identified within the Bibliography? The above three areas for potential expansion upon this research could very well be the additional layers needed to help pastors unlock the potential of their congregations to overcome the problem of dying churches.

Research Will Continue

It is this researcher's plan to continue the research of spiritual maturity and church revitalization into phase two after this DMIN project has been completed. The focus will be on measuring the level of participation, commitment, and absolute buy-in of an aging congregation trying to reach a younger demographic. The measurement of participation will also include evaluating the consistency of attendance, which would measure commitment, as well as pushing to comprehend why some only commit to a sporadic attendance. Could their sporadic participation be the result of a lack of spiritual maturity, or is it due to work requirements, or traveling, or could they be attending another church on a fifty-fifty split?

Rather than trying to twist the arms of an older group to become children's workers, it will be the direction of this church to try to reach others who are in the next decade younger than

the average age of FBC. Once the seventy-something crowd reaches the sixty-somethings, or better yet, to focus on the forty or fifty-year-old demographic, it might be easier to tap into even younger families to call FBC their home for worship. But even that has its drawbacks, for it focuses on bringing in more believers rather than focusing on the lost and dying world of those around us. To help bypass this course of action or to have a ministry focus that runs parallel with it, if FBC could recruit four or five younger families around which we would plant a new church within the existing church, then that might be an end around toward reaching the lost. Younger families tend to attract younger families, and those who are within this church's neighborhood are attracted to event and purpose-driven ministries.

One might choose to do research as to the causes of spiritual apathy and complacency. Partway through this research project, it was discovered that the problem of apathy or complacency may not have been the root cause for idleness, but instead, it was a disregard or mistrust for existing leadership. Many were still reeling from the great divide when the so-called doers in the church left due to a conflict with the pastor. Others have trickled away from FBC over recent years, if even for trivial reasons, and the ones who remained were wondering if the doors would stay open much longer.

Comparatively speaking, to be in a church that has two services, appears vibrant, fun, enthusiastic, and filled with ministry opportunities that reach into the community, to then later look around and see the results of a sixty-one percent decrease in attendance, well, this is a scenario through which far too many churches have had to suffer. This progression toward death has caused a collective level of doubt, dismay, and a loss of hope, which this DRP has overturned. Therefore, the continuation of research might focus on the positive effects of pursuing spiritual maturity and how that process can thwart such a dilemma.

What I Wish I Knew Ahead of Time

There are three items of merit that have emerged during the study that a future researcher might keep in mind. First, plot out a way to run a parallel campaign from the pulpit that will include the rest of the church, as the volunteers were only a sampling of the population. As this researcher has pondered and prayed over this thought, a future sermon series might be developed to encompass and present to the rest of the congregation the findings from discussions, interviews, classes, and the like. These sermons should of course be birthed in God's Word. The precaution to introducing this too quickly is that there is a sense that some folks might be growing weary of the continued focus on spiritual maturity and church revitalization.

Second, because the ten-week DTC focused more on the framework of Philippians 1:9-11 as a means by which to grow toward spiritual maturity, as the research unfolded, it became difficult to classify the findings under that same structure. Given that the DTC was also purposed to one day become the discipleship training framework for this church, it might be difficult to include the findings in such a way as to produce, for example, a new member's class. The desire to have the DTC be from the congregation to any future members that may come was noteworthy, but at the very least, an excursus needs to be written in such a way that the existing congregation might say to a future member, "This is who we are, what we believe in, and what we stand for. This is also who we desire to become in Christ. These are the areas we have chosen to focus on as we minister to the Norway community, and these are why we have made these choices. If you want to join us on this journey, please do!"

Third, being forced to write an extremely specific thesis statement has rightfully narrowed this research project to only focusing on one facet of church revitalization. It would have been impossible to try to introduce other elements of church life during this process. Both the limitations and delimitations have emerged throughout the research phase, and because of

this narrowed and deepened focus, not having the leeway to take rabbit trails has been difficult, especially as the personality and immediate needs of the congregation of FBC have crystallized.

Summary of Progress Made Since DRP

This DRP has been successful for several reasons, as progress has been made toward revitalizing this church already. To start, potluck fellowships are now on the calendar for every other month, two small group ministries have been launched with another one on the horizon. From December 2022 to the middle of March 2023 FBC has already had twenty-two visitors, three baptisms, and ten new members. Three of the visitors have been consistently attending and are showing eagerness to get involved. Fellowship opportunities have doubled, and summer outreach events are already on the calendar.

The children have started a separate tithe bringing their change to a birdhouse that looks like a church, the funds of which will go to purchase a goat for a needy family through World Vision. FBC's puppet ministry, *Hallelujah Hands*, is again in full force. A new adult Sunday school teacher has been recruited with two others volunteering to step in when and where needed. As noted earlier, there was one salvation/baptism, three new members joined the church, and another long-time visitor stated her intentions to join at the next business meeting. The advertising budget was approved to increase from \$250 (2022) to \$6,000 (2023), and a mentorship program is soon to be underway (Titus 2:2-8). The church body has also voted to relocate and build a new church building on the sixteen-acre plot located just east of Norway proper.

The worship team has expanded with a brass ensemble, and children are once again singing specials to the appreciation of many and to the glory of God. The new mission/vision statement has been well-received, with excitement mounting toward reaching Norway for Christ.

FBC also started a new website and is ramping up its presence on Facebook. There have been over two dozen visitors since the end of November, and administratively FBC is better structured to follow up with these folks. Attendance has increased from an average of fifty-three in October 2022 to seventy in January 2023 (Figure 9). The leadership structure has expanded with a new deacon and a new elder, and there is talk about looking into building a new ministry facility on the acreage FBC owns, should the Lord lead in that direction. But most importantly, the excitement for the future of this church is growing each week, and folks are looking forward to additional opportunities to serve and grow through a discipleship training program.

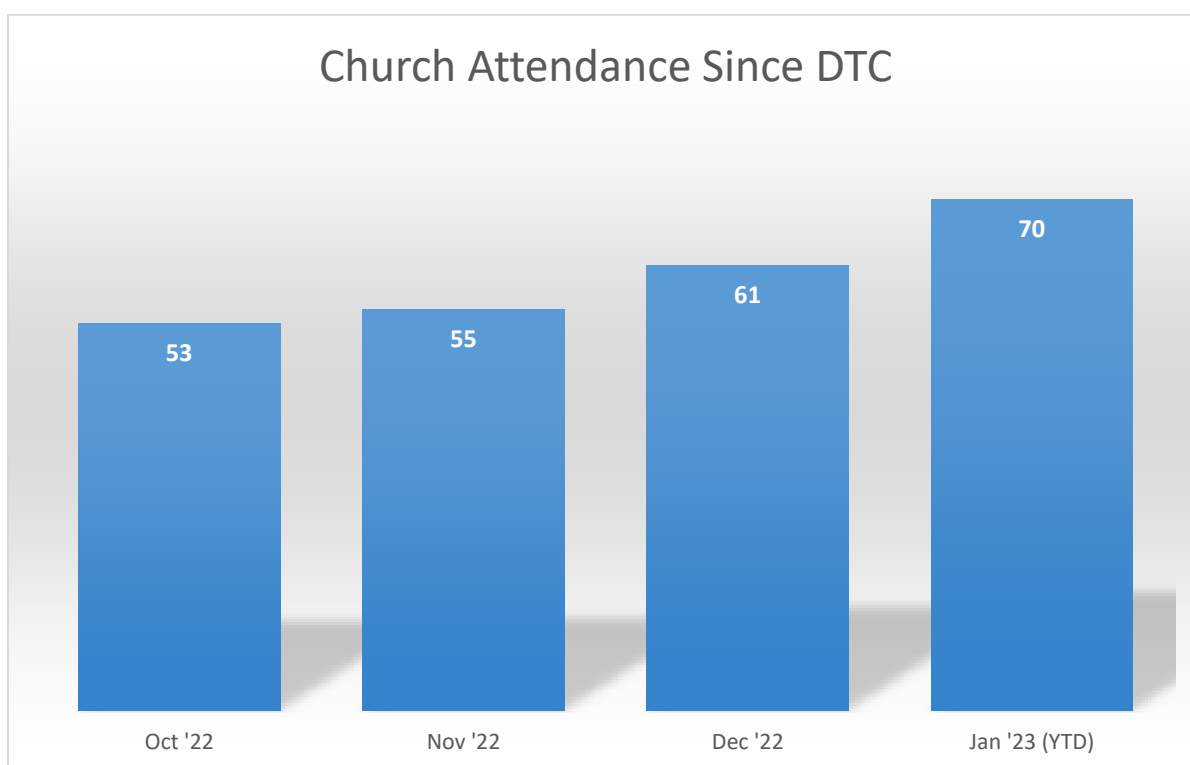


Figure 9. Church attendance October 2022–January 2023.

This chart shows that weekly attendance on Sunday mornings has increased because of the DTC focus.

Conclusion

A church that has been revitalized has not only overcome apathy and complacency but is now on fire for the Lord. It is marked by an unyielding pursuit of fulfilling the Great

Commission while living out the Great Commandment. A revitalized church is one where unity is experienced, love is shared, disciples are made, God is worshiped, and ministry is eagerly pursued by everyone. There is no longer the Pareto principle within which to be restricted. A revitalized church loves God so much that lines are formed toward volunteering to serve, and spiritual gifts are utilized according to the leadership of the Holy Spirit.

The point of the final application is for the leaders in a church to promote an atmosphere where believers can grow, participate, build each other up in the faith, and realize that going to church is not just a thing to do on a Sunday, but a week-long event to be lived out daily. Going to church is a time to gather with fellow believers, whereas the other 165 hours in a week are to be lived with Matthew 28:19-20 in mind. The next step after completing this DRP is to kick people out of the church and into the highways and byways of life (Luke 14:23). Rinse, lather, repeat. Just because this project has taken place once at FBC does not mean that it cannot take place again to be fine-tuned and refined. It is this researcher's hope that what we have seen at FBC, both good and bad, can be used by others in the cause of Christ and for the kingdom of God. Until the nets are full...

Appendix A

INTRODUCTION OF THE DMIN RESEARCH PROJECT TO THE CONGREGATION

Pastor's Announcement: The elder board met with David, and we enthusiastically support him and his ministry project as he pursues his DMIN in Church Revitalization. David and I have been meeting every week to go over the details along the way, and he is acting under my supervision and direction. I am excited to see what God will do through this project. Here is David to explain in more detail.

Explanation of the DRP to the church: The following is the narrative that will be read from the pulpit to the congregation explaining what to expect during this DRP. This is easily adaptable to the context of other churches for church re-vitalizers and pastors who desire to make use of the enclosed content. The purpose of this announcement is to present an overview of the project and to appeal to the congregation for recruitment and participation.

Thank you, Pastor. Many of you already know that I am pursuing my Doctor of Ministry in Church Revitalization, not so much as a career move as much as it is as a personal goal. Although I am no longer serving in pastoral ministry, it is my desire to serve in the local church to help advance the cause of Christ. Throughout this journey, I have studied in great depth the areas of evangelism, discipleship, spiritual maturity, church growth, and church revitalization. What I have come to realize is that there is a huge gap in theological academia. Too often, biblical scholars have only focused on the individual categories of evangelism, discipleship, church growth, church revitalization, and spiritual maturity. Beyond these individual categories, one will find some overlapping. For example, evangelism and discipleship go hand in hand, as do discipleship and spiritual maturity, church growth and church revitalization, and even evangelism and church growth. But seldom, if ever, has anyone focused on spiritual maturity as a

precursor to and a partner of church revitalization. It is my thesis that the individual must be on a purposeful journey to grow in spiritual maturity if the church is going to be successful in sustaining its presence in the community through the church revitalization process. Today, churches across America suffer from a spirit of complacency and even worse, a spirit of apathy. Thousands of churches close their doors every year, and honestly, some of them need to be closed. Having gone through a deep and intensified study of the characteristics of churches that are either dead or dying, as well as becoming a doctor, if you will, that can identify the subtle ailments that will lead to sudden death, and by all professional estimations, FBC faces closure in ten years if nothing changes. This does not need to happen. There is hope in Christ, but there is also work to be done. Our faith, without works, is dead. As a quick point of reference, I served as a Church Marketing and Outreach Consultant with Outreach, Inc. in Colorado Springs. While there, I also attended Church Marketing University. It was my job to call on the pastors of churches across the United States, of all denominations, ethnicities, and demographics, to offer encouragement, feedback, and input as to how they can better reach their communities for Christ. Before this, I served as a pastor of three churches, much like ours. One is still alive, one was hanging on by a thread and last I heard has almost tripled in size, and the last one, which was on a steep downhill trend before I got there, has since closed its doors for good. They would not put forth the effort to change and become the church that God had called them to be. It is my thesis, therefore, that if the church is to survive, individuals must pursue spiritual maturity on a personal level, with that being a precursor to and a partner of the church revitalization process. It is important that we, as a body of believers in Christ, become engaged in and actively pursue not only the Great Commandment, to love God and to love others, but also the Great Commission, which is to reach the lost and make disciples. I am inviting each of you to go on this journey with

me. I will be conducting one-on-one confidential interviews in July with those who volunteer to participate, and then in August I will be conducting a survey which hopefully 100% of you will take part in, and then starting the Sunday after Labor Day weekend in September I will be leading a ten-week discipleship training course that I wholeheartedly believe every one of us will benefit from. I look forward to being on this journey with you by my side.

Appendix B

BULLETIN INSERT



**YOU ARE
NEEDED!**

If you are 18 years old or older, you are invited and encouraged to take part in a ministry project being directed by David Williamson over the next several months for the benefit of FBC and for the glory of God.

In July, David will be conducting confidential one-on-one interviews with church members to determine who may be an eligible candidate to join in this ministry project. These interviews will be strictly confidential per the Institutional Review Board.

In August, surveys will be distributed to the entire church family. The goal is 100% participation by everyone!

Beginning in September, David will conduct a 10-week Discipleship Training Course during the Sunday school hour (from September 11 through November 13).

Your participation and input is vital to the success of this project. Seriously – this is all about you and the desired growth of our church!

Additional information will be forthcoming. If you have any questions in the meantime, please contact David at [REDACTED].

THANK YOU!



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THANK YOU!

Appendix C

ADVERTISING POSTER



If you are 18 years old or older, you are invited and encouraged to take part in a ministry project being directed by David Williamson over the next several months for the benefit of FBC and for the glory of God.

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THANK YOU!

Appendix D
POWERPOINT SLIDE



Please see this morning's bulletin for some important information regarding an upcoming ministry project.



Appendix E

RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Doctor of Ministry in Church Revitalization Research by Rev. David T. Williamson, FBC

Norway, MI.

- Are you at least 18 years of age or older?
- Are you a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone for your salvation?
- Are you willing to contribute confidentially as a volunteer by undergoing a one-on-one interview, completing a survey and a questionnaire, followed by a 10-week Discipleship Training Course made available through FBC Norway on Sunday mornings during the Sunday school hour?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to encourage individuals to overcome apathy by pursuing growth in spiritual maturity. Your participation and involvement will help to develop a Discipleship Training Course to be used by churches across America.

Participants will be asked to be interviewed on a one-on-one basis sometime during the month of July 2022. This will be followed by a church-wide survey of questions that pertain to spiritual maturity and fulfilling the Great Commandment. Based on an analysis of those findings a questionnaire will be offered to help fine tune the analysis, and a 10-week Discipleship Training Course will be offered from September to November 2022.

Participants who complete each stage of the interview process, as well as the Discipleship Training Course, will receive a Completion Certificate and an invitation to attend a catered dinner as a way of saying thank you for your contribution.

If you would like to participate, please either call David Williamson at (blank) or email him at (blank).

A consent document authorized by the Institutional Review Board will be provided prior to the interview. David T. Williamson, a Doctoral Candidate in Church Revitalization, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Appendix F
IRB CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: DMIN in Church Revitalization Research Project

Principal Investigator: Rev. David T. Williamson, DMIN candidate, Liberty University

Co-investigator: Dr. Jacob Dunlow, Assistant Professor, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

Invitation to be Part of a Project Study

You are invited to participate in a project study. To participate, you must be a born-again believer in Jesus Christ, at least eighteen years old, and a member of First Baptist Church.

Taking part in this project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is conducting research that supports the idea that spiritual maturity should be pursued on an individual level prior to and parallel to a church initiating a church revitalization program. Overcoming apathy is necessary before a church can effectively reach its community for Christ.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Be interviewed one-on-one, with the interview being recorded (audio only). These interviews will be conducted at your earliest convenience during the month of July 2022 (pending IRB approval). All discussions during this interview will be kept to the highest of confidential standards. Plan for thirty to forty-five minutes for the interview.
2. Participate in a church-wide survey that contains self-evaluation questions pertaining to spiritual maturity and the Great Commandment. Each survey will be assigned a number in lieu of individuals placing their name on the survey. This will take place no later than

the month following the confidential interview stage of this project (potentially in August 2022). Close to 100% participation is requested from the FBC church family.

3. Through a questionnaire, offer suggestions and feedback to help develop a Discipleship Training Course specifically designed for FBC Norway, and attend the ten-week course during the Sunday school hour from just after Labor Day weekend until just before Thanksgiving week.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study are to gain a deeper understanding of how one participates with Christ in the spiritual growth process and how to better evaluate ones' walk with the Lord using Scripture.

Participants will not be paid financially for participating in this study. However, for those who are involved from start to finish, a catered dinner will be offered as a way of saying thank you for your invaluable contribution to this project.

As a result of this DMIN project, the family of FBC Norway will be better equipped to share their faith with a lost and dying world. The benefit to our community is secured in eternity!

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal. Information obtained from the one-on-one interviews will be kept in extreme confidence and will be used to help develop a viable Discipleship Training Course specific to the needs of FBC Norway. Recordings will be promptly destroyed once the retention requirements of this DMIN project have been met. Individual names or personal identifiers will not be used within the dissertation, however, generalized situations may be alluded to in such a way as to explain findings while at the same time protecting those who have offered information. The researcher is required to report any child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others that may come up during the interview, however unlikely this may be.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject outside of generalities common to any church environment. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to these records. Any files that are saved temporarily will be placed in a confidential computer file that is protected by malware and security software, to include additional access steps that coincide to the level of security mandated for insurance and financial institutions to maintain (Bitlocker and encryption software will be used where applicable). Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses, although in many ways personal, will be kept anonymous to the extent that the data can be treated as such. The voice recorder will always be kept on the researcher's person and locked in a safe when not in use. Any surveys, questionnaires, and notes taken will be kept locked up until such a time as they can be scanned and filed electronically in a data-secured location. Protection of your privacy is my number one concern. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Any printed data, once scanned and filed electronically, will be immediately shredded using a crosscut shredder. The shredding will then be burned. The data will be kept in a double-password locked computer and deleted once it is no longer required for this project. However, the compiled findings of this project must be retained for three years upon completion of this study.
- There are limits to confidentiality in that during group discussions within the Discipleship Training Course setting, individuals may share information. The instructor will make every effort to introduce necessary topics in a generalized manner and will not use names. While names will remain confidential, topics will be treated with anonymity.

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

There will be no costs to the participant in this project other than your time and travel to and from otherwise normal church activities.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

For the anonymous survey offered to all attendees of FBC who are eighteen-years old or older: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

All Other Research: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is David Williamson of FBC Norway. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at (blank) and/or email at (blank). You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Jacob Dunlow, at (blank).

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

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

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations.

The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers

are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix G

CONFIDENTIAL ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Number	Question	Excursus
1	How long have you lived in the area?	Outsiders coming into a small community often find it difficult to have a sense of belonging, whereas those who are born and raised in an area might be slighted toward not welcoming an outsider.
2	How long have you been attending FBC?	The answer is important, as these interviews will be grouped into three categories to help identify what problems might be present within the church that are not always discussed in the hallowed hallways. Group one will consist of those who have attended FBC for zero to five years, group two from six to ten years, and group three for more than ten years.
3	Where did you attend church before FBC? What denomination was it? Please describe the church's dynamics (size, demographics, geography, their level of involvement and any ministry role or responsibility you held).	If they have attended churches of a different denomination, this is an opportunity to explore further their understanding of denominational doctrine. It is important to realize if members of FBC differ vastly in their personal beliefs (i.e., Paedobaptism, their view on the Lords Supper, salvation and works, and the like), as more than a few have left the church recently due to eschatological differences with the pastor.
4	What did you like most about that church?	This will give the interviewer insights into what makes the interviewee tick, what their spiritual gifting might be, and in what areas of ministry they might be best suited in which to serve.
5	Why did you leave your last church?	Depending on how the interview is going, there might be an opportunity to discover if they left the church appropriately or if they

		have been hurt by previous events or personalities. The information shared from this question could provide insights as to ways to promote unity within the body of Christ at FBC.
6	What drew you to FBC? Did you move to this area? Were you invited by someone? How did you discover the church's existence—was it from a website or online search?	Once the data is collected, it will be easy to see if this church has been evangelistic in the past. Has anyone gotten saved in this church? Baptized? Or are they all transplants from other congregations?
7	Explain your salvation experience.	The way they explain their salvation experience will help determine (a) if they are truly saved in the first place, (b) if they have had any training on how to share their salvation experience, and (c) will help to identify those who might be better equipped to join in leadership roles when it comes time to introduce evangelistic activities after the Discipleship Training Course has been completed.
8	If you could change one thing about FBC, what would that be?	Although not every nuance can be addressed, and it is important not to provide a soap box for gossip or for bad-mouthing others, this is an opportunity to gain trust and buy-in for the direction of upcoming church revitalization events.
9	What do you like most about this church?	Be sure to explore their answer more completely.
10	How would you define or measure spiritual maturity?	There is no wrong answer here, at least for the initial interview questions. How they answer this question will also provide input as to how to streamline the survey questions.
11	What are you doing personally to obey and actively pursue the calling to make disciples?	Jesus gave the church a commandment just before He left the earth. We call it the Great Commandment (Matt 28:19-20).

12	Have you ever been formally taught how to share your faith?	While this is a closed-ended question (yes/no), it will solicit further discussion as to how their participation in the doctoral project will be valuable.
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Appendix H

SPIRITUAL MATURITY INVENTORY ASSESSMENT

Doctor of Ministry–Church Revitalization

Your answers are confidential! I do not need your name, but I do need a way to track the data.

Since this assessment will be taken again at the end of the research project, I will need a way to compare the first set of answers to the second set of answers. Therefore, please answer the following questions so I can coordinate the scores:

What is your middle initial? _____ What is the last digit in your phone number? _____

Are you a **male** or **female**? (circle one) What is your favorite color? _____

How long have you attended FBC? (0-5 years) _____ (6-10 years) _____ (10+ years) _____

With one (1) being a definite “NO!” and ten (10) being a definite “ABSOLUTELY YES!”, grade yourself based on relationships with others in the church as well as those whom you know who are not of the faith. Be sure to read the Bible verses and pray over your self-assessment before answering. Thank you in advance for taking this inventory assessment!

1. Do you actively pursue growth in the fruit of the Spirit? (Gal 5:22-23)

Love	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Joy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Peace	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Patience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Kindness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Goodness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Gentleness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Faithfulness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Self-control	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

2. Are you a man/woman of integrity, even when you may not benefit from the outcome?

(Prov 10:9, 28:6)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

3. Would others say of you that you show a godly character when confronted? (1 Sam 16:7,

Rom 5:3-5, 1 Tim 4:8)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Morality—are you obedient to the laws of the land and the laws of God, and not

influenced by the ways of the world? (1 Cor 15:33)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

5. Do you have a heart for worship? (1 Sam 13:14, Acts 13:22)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. Do you show humility in your life, desiring to give all praise to God? (Phil 2:3-4, 1 Pet

1:3-12)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Are you unselfish in all aspects of your life, and do you look out for the needs of others

first? (Phil 2:4)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Do you promote a spirit of unity within the body of Christ? (Eph 1, 4, Phil 2:1-4)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Do you pursue righteousness? (1 Tim 6:11)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Are you respectful of others within the church, especially those in pastoral/elder positions? (1 Thess 5:12-13, Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 2:17)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. Do you have a good name in the community; a good reputation with those outside the church? (1 Tim 3:7)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Are you able to remain patient during trials or during tumultuous times, even when someone in the church is attacking your character? (Rom 5:3)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

13. Do you become easily frustrated? (1 Pet 1:6-9)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14. Knowing that the body is the temple of God, and good health is required for physical endurance, do you reveal a healthy lifestyle? (Prov 23:2, 25:28, 1 Cor 6:19-20)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

15. Are you thick-skinned during times of confrontation (endurance)? (Jas 1:3-4)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

16. Is there any hint of sexual immorality in your life, even in your private life? (Rom 13:13-14)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

17. Do you practice hospitality? (Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2, 1 Pet 4:9)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

18. Are you able to teach; do you rightly divide the Word of truth? (Mal 2:6-7, 1 Tim 3:2, 2 Tim 2:15)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

19. Do you show that you are not a lover of money, and do you put God first with your finances? (Prov 3:9-10, 1 Cor 13:3, 1 Tim 3:3, 6:10, Heb 13:5)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

20. Are you willing to administer God's Word rightly in love when discipline is needed? (Matt 18, 2 Tim 3:16)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

21. Do you show a genuine character with no false pretenses, and are you committed to speaking the truth in love? (Eph 4:15, 25)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

22. Do you eagerly pursue a relationship with his Lord Jesus Christ? (e.g., spiritual disciplines, and Jer 29:13, John 14:21)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

23. Do you know what the spiritual disciplines are?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

24. Do you seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit before making a decision? (Ps 143:10, Rom 8:14)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

25. Are you a man/woman of prayer? (1 Thess 5:17, Jas 5:13-16)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

26. Do you build and promote an atmosphere of teamwork, whereas everyone is to use their spiritual gifts for the glory of God and the advancement of His kingdom? Put another way, do you know what your spiritual gifts are, and do you seek opportunities to use them in the church? (Prov 27:17, Eph 4:11-16, Jas 1:22)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

27. Do you show enthusiasm for the work of church revitalization? (Rom 12:11, 2 Cor 9:7, Col 3:23)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

28. Do you put Jesus Christ first in all things, and do you keep Jesus Christ at the center of all things? (1 Cor 10:31, Col 3:17)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

29. Are you prone to gossiping, do you remain calm during the storms of confrontation, and do you refrain from the desire to retaliate when falsely accused? (2 Cor 12:20, Eph 4:29, Jas 1:26, Isa 7:4, Rom 12:19)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

30. Do you desire to promote a ministry of reconciliation within the body of Christ? (2 Cor 5:18)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

31. Are you “not easily angered,” and do you not take things personally? (Lev 19:18, Prov 14:29, 16:32, 29:11, Eccl 7:9, Jas 1:19-20)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

32. Do you engage in spiritual warfare? (Eph 6)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

33. Do you battle for a position of power over others, or do you promote and praise yourself in competition with others (or with God)? (Jer 9:23-24, Deut 10:21, Prov 11:2, 27:2, 1 Pet 5:5)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

34. In your own words, define what it means to be spiritually mature and if possible, provide some biblical references to back up your answer.

35. What does it mean to you when you hear the phrase, “Church Revitalization”?

When finished, please return the assessment to David in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. DO NOT include your return address, and DO NOT give this assessment back to David at church. Married couples—return only one survey per envelope, please.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate!

- David Williamson

NOTE: The Second Spiritual Maturity Inventory Assessment had the following changes:

Spiritual Maturity Inventory SECOND Assessment

With one (1) being a definite “NO!” and ten (10) being a definite “ABSOLUTELY YES!” grade yourself based on relationships with others in the church as well as those whom you know who are not of the faith. NOTE: PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS AFTER HAVING ATTENDED AT LEAST ONE OF THE DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING COURSE SESSIONS.

16. Is there any hint of sexual immorality in your life, even in your private life? (Rom 13:13-14)

NOTE: The lower the number, the better.

29. **INSTEAD OF BEING** prone to gossiping, do you remain calm during the storms of confrontation, and do you refrain from the desire to retaliate when falsely accused? (2 Cor 12:20, Eph 4:29, Jas 1:26, Isa 7:4, Rom 12:19)

33. When there are different choices for the direction of the church (changes), do you get upset or fight hard if you do not get your own way? (Jer 9:23-24, Deut 10:21, Prov 11:2, 27:2, 1 Pet 5:5).

34. As a result of the Discipleship Training Course sessions, do you feel that you have grown in your understanding of spiritual maturity (and how to pursue it)? Please explain.

35. Have you grown in your understanding of the need for FBC to undergo a season of revitalization (a reboot, if you will), to establish itself once again as a vital influence in the Norway community while advancing the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God? Please explain.

Appendix I

DTC WEEKLY HANDOUTS FOR ATTENDEES

Session One: Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life²⁹⁸

The Spiritual Disciplines are for the purpose of (or means to) GODLINESS.

Bible Intake:

- Hearing God's Word
- Reading God's Word
- Studying God's Word
- Memorizing God's Word
- Meditating on God's Word
- The Promises in God's Word
- The Central Figure of God's Word
- Applying God's Word
- Pouring God's Word into Others

Prayer:

- Prayer is Expected of the Believer
- Prayer is to be Learned by the Believer
- Prayer God's Word
- Elephant-sized Prayer
- Prayer Formulas/Outlines
- Public Prayer

²⁹⁸ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, Revised and Updated* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014). ISBN: 9781615216178.

- Private Prayer
- Fasting
- Prayer Chain is not for Gossip (town dry cleaners–Andy Griffith)

Worship:

- Focusing on God
- Responding to God
- In Spirit and in Truth
- Worship through Song, Dance, Joy
- Giving God the Glory through Worship
- Done Daily (privately) and Weekly (corporately)
- In Good Times and Bad (James 1)

Evangelism

- It is Expected that the Believer Evangelizes.
- God Empowers Evangelism.
- Evangelism as a Discipline (habitual vs. occasional)
- Evangelism is to be Pursued like Treasure.
- Spiritual Gift of Evangelism

Serving

- Serving Motivated by Obedience
- Serving Motivated by Gratitude
- Serving as the Result of Forgiveness (no guilt)
- Motivated by Humility, Love
- Spiritual Gift of Service

Stewardship

- Time, Talent, Treasure—has no age limits or boundaries.
- Use Time Wisely “because the days are evil.”
- With Eternity in Mind—tomorrow is never guaranteed!
- You are Held Accountable for the TTT Given to you by God.
- Money and “Stuff”—God Owns it all (10/10/80)
- Giving as an act of Worship—reflects love, not legalism and trust, rather selfishness.

Silence & Solitude (tame the tongue... do not get ahead of God)

Journaling—helps with other disciplines.

Learning—growing in wisdom and discernment.

Lists help, but do not be reduced to following them (do this, do not do that... equals legalism)

Perseverance and Consistency—require the Holy Spirit

Fellowship—Mentoring—Discipleship

“I was saved.”

“I am being saved.”

“I will be saved.”

	<u>JUSTIFICATION</u>	<u>SANCTIFICATION</u>	<u>GLORIFICATION</u>
PHASE	(No longer guilty of sin and made right w/God)	(Process of becoming progressively holier)	(A state of complete sanctification)
TENSE	PAST (a one-time event)	PRESENT	FUTURE

		(a lifelong spiritual growth journey)	(after death or rapture)
SAVED FROM SIN'S	PENALTY (Positionally made righteous) “Ticket to heaven”	POWER (Victorious living via the Holy Spirit) “Not sinless, but sinning less”	PRESENCE (New glorified body)
SCRIPTURE	Ephesians 2:8-9 Romans 4:25 Romans 5:1, 9, 18-19 Titus 3:5 John 3:1-7	Philippians 1:6 Philippians 2:12 1 Corinthians 1:2 Romans 6:13 Ps. 119:9-16 Romans 12:1-2 2 Thess 2:13 Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29	1 John 3:2-3 Romans 5:10 Romans 8:16-18 Romans 8:23 Romans 8:28-30 Ephesians 5:26-27 Philippians 3:21 ²⁹⁹

²⁹⁹ A variation of this chart was found on a Facebook post during the summer of 2022. Original author unknown. Updated for use.

JUSTIFICATION: Comes from a Greek concept meaning “to declare righteous.” It is a legal act wherein God pronounces that the believing sinner has been credited with all the virtues of Jesus Christ. Whereas forgiveness is the negative aspect of salvation, meaning the subtraction of human sin, justification is the positive aspect, meaning the addition of divine righteousness.

SANCTIFICATION: Comes from a Greek verb meaning “to set apart.” This is an already/not yet parallel, or simultaneous truth.

GLORIFICATION: This is when the salvific process, if you will, has been made complete. The believer enters Heaven, and thus “physically” into God’s presence/glory.³⁰⁰

Session Two: OH GOD, HOW DO I LOVE THEE?

Obeying ... worshiping ... restraining ... sharing

...Praising/Praying/Pursuing/Preventing/Presenting

L—

O—

V—

E—

The Greatest Commandment (Deuteronomy 6:1-9)

“Now this is the commandment—the statutes and the rules—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it,² that you may fear the LORD your God, you and your son and your son’s son, by keeping all his statutes and his commandments, which I command you, all the days of your life, and that your days may be long.³ Hear therefore, O Israel, and be careful to do them, that it may

³⁰⁰ Definitions of justification and sanctification were derived from the glossary of Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, Revised and Expanded (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2008).

go well with you, and that you may multiply greatly, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey.

⁴“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ⁶ And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. ⁷ You shall teach them diligently to your children and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. ⁸ You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. ⁹ You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:34-40)

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” ³⁷ And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments depend on all the Law and the Prophets.”

Session Three: OH GOD, HOW CAN I LOVE OTHERS?

Listening, Observing, Valuing, Encouraging

L–

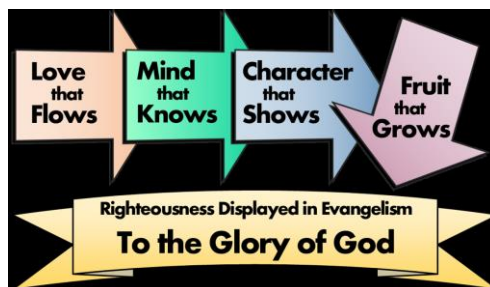
O–

V–

E–

Session Four: Discipleship Training Course - Week 4 Handout

HAVING THE MIND OF CHRIST—A MIND THAT KNOWS GOD



Philippians 1:9-10 ... And this is my prayer: That your love may abound more and more IN KNOWLEDGE and DEPTH OF INSIGHT, so that you may be able to DISCERN what is best...

- ἐπίγνωσις -εως, ἡ; (*epignōsis*), *knowledge; recognition*.
- αἴσθησις -εως, ἡ; (*aisthēsis*), *discernment*.

Ephesians 1:17-18a ...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the KNOWLEDGE of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know...

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. **27** But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. **28** God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, **29** so that no one may boast before him. **30** It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. **31** Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. **12** We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Romans 12:2

Do not be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...

Philippians 4:8

If anything be true...noble...right...pure...lovely...admirable...excellent...praiseworthy, think on these things.

1 Corinthians 2:16

“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

SEE Philippians 2:5-11, Romans 8:5

Session Five: Discipleship Training Course – Week 5 Handout

BEING MINDFUL OF OTHERS

We are framing Philippians 1:9-11 (love that flows, mind that knows, character that shows, fruit that grows) as the FOUNDATION by which we are to measure our spiritual maturity.

- We put God first
 - Love God ...greatest commandment ... and the second one is like it (Deut 6:1-9, Matt 22:34-40)

- Love others (becomes a natural outflow from having loved God)
- Having the mind of Christ (humble, serving, giving, yielding)
 - A firsthand knowledge of God, from a life lived with and for Him.
 - Jesus had his thoughts on blessing others as He pointed to His Father in heaven.
 - A call to repentance (through encounter, encouragement, and influence)
 - A call to reproduction (a better way, a blessed way, the only way!)
 - A call to a relationship (come follow me, do what I do, go where I go, rinse/repeat)

MINDFUL OF OTHERS DISCUSSION: How should our growing in spiritual maturity change the way we engage others (family of God – iron sharpening iron) and the world around us (make disciples).

HOW DOES THIS CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK, FEEL, BEHAVE?

Session Six: Discipleship Training Class–Week 6

Character that shows...”What does it mean to be **PURE** (εἰλικρινής) and **BLAMELESS** (ἀπρόσκοπος)?”

The Nature of Complete Character (Philippians 1:10b)

These words convey two slightly different ideas.

- **“Pure”** (sincere, genuine, righteous, just, without hypocrisy) occurs only a few times in the New Testament (Heb 7:26; 2 Pet 3:1), although other words with the same root occur (1 Cor 5:8). It comes from two words, “sun” and “to judge” and the word meant *to hold up to sunlight for inspection*.
 - Matthew 5:8 ... “Blessed are the **pure** in heart, for they shall see God.”

Practical Application - In this Scripture it means to have a heart that has been cleansed, purged, forgiven. It means to be holy; to have a single purpose, that of God's glory. See Phil 1:11 (glory to God is the goal).

- **“Blameless”** also occurs rarely in the New Testament (Phil 1:10, Acts 24:16, 1 Cor 10:32). The root term may have an active meaning (*to cause blame*) or a passive one (*to be free from blame*).
 - “In this context, any reference to conduct toward others is out of place. Paul spoke only of their relationship to God here.”
 - QUESTION: Does being blameless mean to be without fault or charge?

DAY OF CHRIST 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 ... see also Phil 1:6, 2:1, 2 Pet 3:14

QUOTE: “Holiness is not something we are called upon to do in order that we may become something; it is something we are to do because of what we already are.” - David Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Session Seven: Discipleship Training Course—Week 7

“The Journey of Becoming Like Christ”
Character that Shows (2nd session)

So far, we have spoken more about the theory of spiritual maturity and discipleship than about the practicality of living it out. It has thus far been a “we should” and “what does the Bible say?” approach on how to grow in spiritual maturity. The spiritual maturity that we are exploring is defined, at least within the context of this 10-week DTC, from Paul's prayer in Philippians 1:9-11 (love that flows, mind that knows, character that shows, and a fruit that grows). Now it is time to approach the nitty gritty, where the rubber meets the road, the brass tacks, the end-all-be-all, of the discipleship training course:

A.) We should be disciples and make disciples (theory and command).

B.) How to evaluate spiritual maturity as a disciple who is called to make disciples (the focus has been on us - internal)

C.) This week, we turn our focus to the actual act of disciple-making with a focus on others (externalizing the command).

Love that flows for God ... loving others ... Having a mind for God ... Being mindful of others ... A character that shows (wisdom, discernment, internalized, based on a walk with God) ...

THIS WEEK—A *Character that shows others a closer walk with God.*

Some FOUNDATIONAL Scriptures:

- Ephesians 4:11-16, 20-24
- 2 Timothy 2:2, 15 (see also 1 Cor 11:1)

A few “BE LIKE CHRIST” Scriptures:

- Matthew 6:33
- John 3:30
- Romans 8:29
- Galatians 2:20, 3:27
- Ephesians 5:1-2
- Philippians 2:5
- 1 John 2:6

Various MAKE DISCIPLES Scriptures:

- Matthew 4:19, 28:19-20, Acts 1:8
- Luke 9:23, 10:1-3
- John 13:34-35, 15:8, 16
- Romans 6:3-4, 10:14-15

- Hebrews 10:25

Session Eight: Discipleship Training Course—Week 8 Handout

FILLED WITH THE FRUIT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A Simple Outline for a Complex Equation

Discussion Topic #1—What is righteousness? How do we get it? Maintain it? Show it?

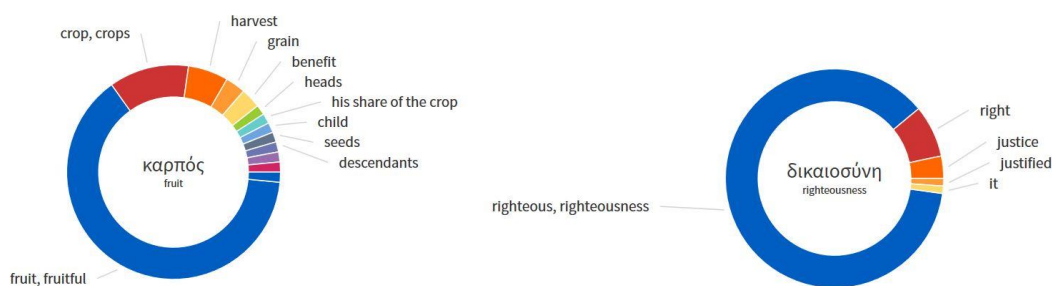
Discussion Topic #2 - What does “fruit” mean in the Bible? What does “fruit” mean in this text? (Phil 1:11)

Discussion Topic #3 - How are we filled with “IT”? (What is “it” talking about?)

- Righteousness?
- Fruit?

NOTICE: How the first point (love that flows) and the last point (fruit that grows) parallel the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

- John (kingdom of heaven is near) / Jesus (at hand)
- Come follow me and I will make you fishers of men.
- All authority in heaven/earth, therefore go; make disciples.



Fruit—“offspring, producing an outcome or result.”

Rom 6:21-22, Eph 5:9, Heb 12:11, 13:5, Jas 3:17-18.

NOTE: Galatians 5 is not mentioned in parallel passages.

Righteousness—”adherence to what is required according to a standard (could be morality or character, but tied to *fruit* it is that which is brought out).

Session Nine: Discipleship Training Course–Week 9 Handout

This page intentionally left blank so that you, as a viable member of FBC, can help write the future narrative of how we are going to once again be the Church that God has called us to be. The goal is for everyone to pursue spiritual maturity on an individual basis as a precursor to and a partner of the revitalization process—as FBC reestablishes its footprint in the Norway community as a people of God who adhere to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Session Ten: No handout

Appendix J

DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING COURSE OUTLINE

Discipleship Training Course Outline

The following is a skeleton of the ten-week course based on the sermon outline for Phil 1:9-11.

Week #1—Overview of spiritual maturity based on Phil 1:9-11, 1 Tim 3, Gal 5:19-25, and Rom 12:2.

Week #2—Love that flows and the Great Commandment—how to love God through obedience.

Week #3—Love that flows and the Great Commission—how to love others by sharing your faith.

Week #4—Mind that knows—seeing yourself through God’s eyes and the Word of God.

Week #5—Mind that knows—seeing others through God’s eyes and the Word of God.

Week #6—Character that shows—displaying spiritual maturity to God.

Week #7—Character that shows—displaying emotional maturity to others.

Week #8—Fruit that grows—the fruit of righteousness, how to exchange one’s filthy rags for a brand-new coat.

Week #9 - Fruit that grows—the fruit of righteousness in discipleship, evangelism, and having a kingdom mindset.


Week #10 – Tying it all together – living with heaven in mind and to give God all the glory.

Appendix K

NEW MOVER INFORMATION

Although there are more than a few companies that provide the service, a FBC Norway uses Outreach.com's new mover program.³⁰¹ This is a program that will mail a pre-designed and customized postcard to individuals and or families who have moved into the community within a certain area around the church. The postcard welcomes the family to the community and invites them to visit the church. The geography to be targeted can be chosen by the church based on the number of miles around the church that they want to target. FBC has chosen to use a 1-mile radius. Every month a list of names and addresses are provided to the church to where those postcards have been mailed, and the church also receives the postcard in the mail monthly so they will be alerted as to when the postcards are arriving in the homes. This is a terrific opportunity for individuals from the church to follow up with a gift basket and a personal invitation to church after welcoming the family to the neighborhood. This is also a non-threatening way to engage those within the church in evangelistic opportunities without them feeling like they must first earn their doctorate in evangelism. The program is flexible in that a church can increase or decrease their geographics, pause the program when needed, and they can choose a new postcard design for a nominal fee. The premise behind the new mover campaign is to get folks outside of the church walls and into the community (Luke 14:26).

³⁰¹ Accessed April 23, 2022. <https://outreach.com/new-mover-program>. If the reader would like additional insights as to how to effectively utilize a new mover outreach program, feel free to contact david@fbcnorway.com.

Appendix L**CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION, DTC PARTICIPANTS****(POWERPOINT SLIDE)**

Certificate of completion

This is to certify that

Insert Name

Has successfully completed the 10-week Discipleship Training Course provided at First Baptist Church, Norway, MI.

You are now charged to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission and to bring glory to God through your pursuit of spiritual maturity.

Rev. David T. Williamson
Church Revitalization Consultant
and Interim Pastor

Appendix M

LETTER REQUESTING APPROVAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT FBC

Rev. Warren N. Geldmeier and the Elder Board of FBC

First Baptist Church

421 Iron St.

Norway, MI 49870

June 12, 2022

Dear Pastor Warren and the Elders of FBC,

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Church Revitalization. The title of my research project is “One Church’s Apathy Toward Fulfilling the Great Commission: and the purpose of my research is to establish a Discipleship Training Course (DTC) that will promote spiritual maturity on an individual level as a precursor to and a partner with church revitalization. It is my thesis that individuals who understand and pursue spiritual maturity are more likely to participate in church revitalization by fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20).

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research at First Baptist Church, Norway, MI, and to contact church members (18+ years old) to participate in my research study. I am also requesting permission to create and facilitate a Discipleship Training Course during the Sunday school hour spanning a ten-week period (i.e., September–November).

Participants will be asked to (a) be interviewed on a one-on-one basis (recorded audibly and kept confidential, (b) complete two Likert surveys, one at the beginning of the study and one at the end, containing questions on spiritual maturity and church revitalization, (c) complete a

questionnaire based on their desires for participation in the church revitalization process, and (d) attend the ten-week Discipleship Training Course. I will present the participants with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official church letterhead indicating your approval. I have attached a permission letter draft as provided by the Institutional Review Board for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Rev. David T. Williamson

Church Revitalization, Marketing, and Outreach Consultant

Appendix N

LETTER OF AUTHORIZATION FROM FBC



Without Jesus, Nothing Else Matters

June 19, 2022

Rev. David T. Williamson
Church Revitalization, Marketing, and Outreach Consultant

Dear Rev. David T. Williamson,

After careful review of your research proposal titled, "One Church's Apathy Toward Fulfilling the Great Commission" we have decided to grant you permission to conduct your study at FBC Norway and access our membership to invite them to participate in your study.

We will provide our membership list to Rev. David T. Williamson, and he may use the list to contact our members to invite them to participate in his research study. We understand that only those who are 18 years of age and older will be eligible to participate and that the Institutional Review Board's consent form will be acquired prior to entrance into this study.

We grant permission for Rev. Williamson to make announcements to the congregation as appropriate to promote his research project, initiate one-on-one confidential interviews, solicit the church membership to participate in surveys, to conduct research through questionnaires, and to create and facilitate a 10-week Discipleship Training Course to be taught during the Sunday school hour in the fall of 2022.

We are also requesting a copy of the results upon study completion and publication. Although this letter is affixed only with my signature, the above has been discussed with and approved by the Elder Board of FBC.

Sincerely,

Signature on file

On Behalf of the Elder Board

425 Iron St, Norway, MI 49870
fbc.norway.mi@gmail.com

office: (906) 563-5500
www.firstbaptistnorway.com

Appendix O

VERBAL-PHONE RECRUITMENT SCRIPT (IF NEEDED)

Hello [Potential Participant],

As a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Church Revitalization. The purpose of my research is to determine if the pursuit of growing in spiritual maturity on an individual level can help to overcome a spirit of apathy that exists in so many churches today, and if that in turn can help create an atmosphere that promotes church revitalization. If you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be a born-again believer in Jesus Christ and 18 years of age or older. Participants, if willing, will be asked to undergo a confidential one-on-one interview that consists of twelve questions. It should take thirty to forty-five minutes to complete the interview. Although these interviews will be audibly recorded, names and other personally identifying information will remain confidential. Additionally, everyone at FBC, for those who are 18 years of age and older and who profess Christ as their Lord and personal Savior, will then be asked to complete an anonymous survey that contains questions pertaining to spiritual maturity and church revitalization. The surveys will be completely anonymous, and no personal identifying information will be collected. Following the confidential interviews and anonymous surveys, there will be a ten-week Discipleship Training Course offered during the Sunday school hour at FBC. At the end of this course, a second survey will be conducted to determine the potential success of this research project. Those who have participated will contribute to the direction which FBC will take toward the church revitalization process.

Would you like to participate? **[Yes]** Great. Let us set a time to meet for the confidential interview. **[No]** I understand. Thank you for your time.

[If yes, continue...] A consent document will be provided prior to starting the confidential interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document prior to the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Participants who complete the one-on-one interview, the surveys, and who attend at least eight of the ten Discipleship Training Course sessions will be invited to a catered dinner banquet as a way of saying thank you for your contribution to this research project.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

Appendix P

RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP LETTER (IF NEEDED)

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

[Mailing Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree in Church Revitalization. Recently, a letter was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up letter is being sent to remind you to respond if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is [Date].

Participants, if willing, will be asked to answer twelve questions during a confidential interview which will be audibly recorded. It should take thirty to forty-five minutes to complete the interview, and your identity will remain confidential and will not be exposed during the summary analysis of these interviews. The information obtained in the interviews will aid in determining the initial steps toward church revitalization. Additionally, every born-again church member of FBC Norway, who is eighteen years of age and older, will be asked to complete a survey containing questions related to spiritual maturity and church revitalization. Participants in the surveys will be completely anonymous, with no personal, identifying information being collected other than the length of time the individual has been attending church at FBC. The answers provided in the surveys will help to create a Discipleship Training Course specific to the needs of FBC.

For more information, or to participate in the confidential one-on-one interview, please either email David Williamson at (blank) or call (blank) to schedule a time to meet.

A consent document will be provided prior to the scheduled interview which contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate in the confidential interview, you will need to sign the consent document prior to the start of the interview. A signed consent form is not required for the surveys due to anonymity.

Participants who volunteer for the confidential interview, complete the surveys, and attend at least eight of the ten sessions in the Discipleship Training Course will be compensated with a catered banquet dinner at the end of the research period.

Sincerely,

Rev. David T. Williamson

Church Revitalization Consultant

Appendix Q

Stage Three: Ten-Week Discipleship Training Course (DTC)

The focus of this DTC is that the family of believers at FBC, develop this course together, based on FBC's needs and situation, with a focus on how future members can be brought through the discipleship training so that they, too, can understand the mission and methods for ministry according to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Research and training were conducted through a ten-week DTC. These sessions were framed by the four sermon points from Philippians 1:9-11, whereas one is to measure their spiritual maturity based on having a love that flows, a mind that knows, a character that shows, and a fruit that grows, all to the glory and praise of God.

The participants formed a focus group and became a loose sampling³⁰² of the rest of the body of believers at FBC. It would have been far better if everyone had attended these sessions during the Sunday school hour, and not having the overall population of the church involved will cause logistical problems soon, due to communication and overall participation. The following is a summary of each session, conducted weekly on Sunday mornings during the Sunday school hour, from September 11, 2022, through November 13, 2022.

DTC Session One: Spiritual Maturity and Spiritual Disciplines Defined

The focus of this first session was to define spiritual maturity as a group and to discuss which spiritual disciplines are most beneficial. The group offered that Bible intake, which includes hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating, along with prayer and worship, were the top three disciplines upon which FBC needs to become more focused. If these are not

³⁰² The reason for identifying this as a loose sampling because it was those who would normally attend Sunday school, a group who might be classified as those who are more mature, as compared to others who are not motivated to attend additional Bible studies.

put into practice and taught/demonstrated from the leadership, then spiritual apathy and complacency would still abound. The focus group agreed that believers should not be hearers only, but doers of these disciplines when it comes to discerning against the false teachers of today. This assertion was made during a discussion that brought up the various false teachers that ride the airwaves, to which so many undiscerning Christians fall prey.

Being a doer not only means putting God's Word to the test and to believe God for His promises, but it means to be willing to do the hard work of checking the Scriptures for oneself just as the Bereans were applauded for doing (Acts 17:11). One lady added that such works as *The Shack*,³⁰³ *Heaven is for Real*, and the *Jesus Calling*³⁰⁴ books "should be highly scrutinized as they do not align well with the truths of Scripture. Christians are being misled thinking that these works depict the biblical Jesus. They do not!"³⁰⁵

Additionally, the three phases/tenses of salvation were discussed (once saved, are being saved, and will be saved—justification, sanctification, glorification). The emphasis of this discussion was to gain a deeper understanding of what it means to participate with God in the sanctification process (Phil 1:6, 2:12-13). If the believer would focus more on one's position of being in Christ, then this should help in understanding how the believer is to partner with God in the maturation process. In defining spiritual maturity, and the sanctification partnership, learning how to interact with fellow believers, how to behave like one believes by working in a church

³⁰³ Diana Chandler, Baptist Press News, "'The Shack' film stirs debate as did preceding book." February 27, 2017. <https://www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/the-shack-film-stirs-debate-as-did-preceding-book/>, accessed December 12, 2022.

³⁰⁴ <https://www.jesuscalling.com/>, accessed December 12, 2022. This website now lists eighty-seven different Jesus Calling styled books, including those for children and for the Spanish speaking population.

³⁰⁵ K-1-Blue-0-5.

setting, and by pursuing an ongoing growth toward perfection a state that is unachievable this side of heaven, should focus upon bringing glory to God.

This led to a follow up question for discussion. “Is spiritual maturity defined by what we do or by who we are?” The summary became a dualistic emphasis, in that our spiritual maturity is defined by what one does because of who the believer is in Christ, and it is defined by Whose we are because of being adopted into the family of God. Someone added that “We need to be careful that what we do does not result in legalism.”³⁰⁶ A final approach was then made before defining spiritual maturity. Being a disciple of Christ is to be a learner, a pupil, a follower, and a doer.

Spiritual maturity, while defined by God’s Word, unfortunately can take on an erroneous focus. For FBC to undergo the church revitalization process successfully, it will require an all-hands effort to be involved in the pursuit of spiritual maturity. This maturity will produce an eagerness to get involved in the ministry that FBC was called to do, which is to fulfill the Great Commission while living out the Great Commandment.

DTC Session Two: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Loving God

The focus of session two was “Loving God” (a love that flows). Using the acronym “L-O-V-E” one spoke of ways in which believers can live our life as a disciple of Christ by measuring everything one thinks, says, and to grow in our love for God. The discussion continued with speaking of showing ones’ love for God through acts of obedience, worship, and in ones’ restraint, as well as in how one shares with one another, and in praising, praying, pursuing, preventing, and presenting Christ our Lord. Having a love that abounds more and more

³⁰⁶ Individual names throughout the DTC discussions as to who made these comments are not being disclosed because of the promise of anonymity and confidentiality, therefore, quotes are not being used. This individual is being labeled as J2-5-Red-8.

for God carries with it the idea of loving God differently, better, with greater intent, with renewed purpose, and with a joyous desire to pursue spiritual maturity through the sanctification process.

The focus of this DTC is that this course is being developed as a family of believers here at FBC, based on the specific needs and situation, with a focus on how future members can be brought through the discipleship training so that they, too, can understand the mission and methods for ministry according to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. Having a love that abounds more and more (μᾶλλον καὶ μᾶλλον περισσεύη) is an ongoing process, and it is a never-ending journey. To abound means to burst forth, like a sneeze that cannot be held back. The purpose and excitement, therefore, should never be birthed and bathed in our own desires, but in the calling and commands seen in God's Word.

The believer loves God through worship and prayer, with all our hearts and minds, and by following Scripture's teaching. The believer shows his or her love for God on an individual, intimate basis in those moments where accountability by the Holy Spirit takes place in our thoughts, in what is being looked at, and in the desires of our heart. In other words, the believer loves God by seeking to have the mind of Christ. And in keeping with the prayer as seen in the Philippian 1:9-11's text, one can learn to love God more in ones' prayer life while reflecting on how one is growing in his or her understanding of prayer. When the believer no longer approaches God with a shopping list of requests, but instead has developed a yearning to exchange his or her will for His (Luke 22:42, προσεύχομαι), then that is another way to identify loving God through prayer (Ps 37:1-2).

The idea of loving God through prayer is to come to the confident realization that anything God has in mind for us is far better than anything one could ever think or imagine, that

His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. Spiritual maturity, as gained through learning to love God more and more, comes with a cost. That cost is to surrender our will in exchange for His. How is this accomplished?

First, a believer (L) learns by studying God's Word and putting it into practice, to be a Berean and study to show thyself approved, rightly dividing the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Proverbs 3:5-6 was shared in that the Christian is to (L) lean not on his or her own understanding, but instead to (L) learn to trust God. Second, a believer loves by (O) observing the needs of others and (O) obeying God's truth. Third, life is lived with the realization that believers can walk in (V) victory in Jesus, and that because of Jesus the believer has (V) value. Finally, one loves God by (E) enjoying our relationship with Him, by (E) enduring the things of this world, and by being (E) enthusiastic toward serving Him within the church.

DTC Session Three: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Loving Others

Week three's session started with a discussion on 1 John 2:15ff, which is the antithesis of how one should behave and believe. The attitude of our heart (1 John 3:13, 15) should be to have a love that is proclaimed (1 John 4:7-8), proved (1 John 4:9, 14), and eventually perfected (1 John 4:18-21). The focus for this week was on 1 John 4:7ff, having a love that comes from God, which is then lived out through us to others (1 John 4:11). Like last week, the acronym "L-O-V-E" was used, this time in how believers can have a love for others.

First, the believer loves others by being in the moment and (L) listening to them, (L) learning about them, and growing in our ability to be (L) longsuffering in their dealings with them. Second, the believer (O) observes the details of other people's lives so that he or she can get to know them and love them as they are, and to walk beside them in discipleship process. Third, the believer finds (V) value in others by (V) validating their worth in Christ. Finally, the

believer (E) encourages others and (E) endures their faults while one becomes (E) engaged in their life. Interestingly, in the initial spiritual maturity assessment there were higher scores for love in the fruit of the Spirit category, yet there was a thread of lower scores in the categories of dealing with others, such as putting up with their faults and getting upset because of their idiosyncrasies.

The question was asked, “How does a believer do a better job of loving others?” One person offered that “a true disciple of Christ is to reflect an agape love while serving the other person sacrificially. Do not be self-serving, but self-sacrificing.”³⁰⁷ Another added that “love involves the willingness to communicate even when what needs to be said is difficult. Never keep score or try to get even and work together to produce a viable solution. Growing in our relationships with one another takes work and has risk associated with in the process.”³⁰⁸ A discussion ensued about the different words for love (ἀγαπάω, ἀδελφός, φιλέω - φιλαδελφία, ἔρω, στοργή),³⁰⁹ and how they have been misapplied. The discussion of love ended by refocusing on Paul’s prayer in Philippians 1:9-11. When Paul stated that our love should abound more and more, and as we have discussed this to be in loving God and now loving others, we need to be reminded of Paul’s assertion, in that this love abounds due to knowledge and depth of insight, and these are the result of having walked through trials and tribulations having gained a firsthand understanding of God’s love through the journey upon which we trek.

³⁰⁷ K-3-Brown-10.

³⁰⁸ C-5-Green-10.

³⁰⁹ Elwell and Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, “Love” by R.E.O. White, 1357. These Greek words were copied from the Bible Word Study feature of Logos Bible Software. The point of listing these words for love is not to be emphatic in properly parsing each, but to highlight that the otherwise learned lay person can take them out of context. Too often a word such as love is studied only in the English language whereas the Greek contains different emphases.

DTC Session Four: Measuring Spiritual Maturity Through a Mind That Knows God

The fourth DTC session saw group participation increase. The format for this DTC is to follow Paul's prayer for the believers at Philippi in Philippians 1:9-11. It is the four parts of his prayer that are being used by which to measure our progress toward becoming complete and spiritually mature in Christ. Without Christ, nothing else matters. The knowledge to which Paul is writing is based on a firsthand experience, rather than on a secondhand account. Gaining a firsthand knowledge of God is to experience growth in ones' ability to live with a discerning mind and an engaging heart.

Asking for a definition of discernment brought forth much discussion. One man contended that "discernment is a studying of a particular topic and digging deep into it to conclude what your thoughts are." Others added that discernment is knowing right from wrong and that it is the ability to see when something is only partially true when it is being presented as the whole truth. Discernment is when one's antennae goes up and one's spiritual senses are heightened to not only recognize a falsehood but to be able to quote, and stand firmly on, the absolute truth. Discernment not only contains the desire to find the truth according to God's Word, but it also contains within it an element of wisdom.

A definition of knowledge was then discussed. There were several who contributed to this topic, and the mainstay was that knowledge is the accumulation of facts that are both genuine and true. One of the elders offered that, "This knowledge to which we are speaking comes from the Greek *gnosis* (that you may know). The variations of this word might emphasize that we can never know or that the knowledge we seek should be that which is a greater understanding of our Heavenly Father above. It is how you live out that information that makes a

difference. Knowledge also carries with it the danger of becoming puffed up, therefore, as we grow in knowledge we also need to grow in humility.”³¹⁰

The discussion then turned to making disciples, whereas the discipleship process includes sharing knowledge (2 Tim 2:2) as well as sharing good things back to your teacher (Gal 6:6). Given that iron sharpening iron (Prov 27:17) entails learning, sharing, and teaching not only of the truths from God’s Word, but also from life’s lessons, one lady reminded us of the lesson learned from Apollos, Priscilla, and Aquilla (Acts 18:18-28). Apollos preached what he knew, but he did not have the full understanding until Priscilla and Aquilla came alongside him and disciplined him in the entire truth. If there was any falsehood in his earlier teaching, it was only because of a lack of knowledge. The process of discipleship benefited not only him but also those with whom he ministered to thereafter.

Growing in wisdom, discernment, and knowledge occurs when we look at the things of this world through the eyes of God, realizing we are joint heirs with Christ and now to be used for His glory. Having a mind that knows not only comes from life’s adventures, but from a life lived with a focus on bringing all the glory to God. As a result of these first four sessions, the realization that growing in spiritual maturity on an individual basis is a requirement before a church can successfully engage in the revitalization process has increased within this group.

DTC Session Five: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by Being Mindful of Others

The fifth session unexpectedly started out dry as it was difficult to get people engaged in the discussion of being mindful of others. It either seemed that people were growing tired of the DTC topic, or they were not comprehending the topic for discussion. The latter became evident,

³¹⁰ J1-2-Green-5-10.

for by the time this session was ending the discussion was so lively and invigorating that we could have continued our discussion in lieu of having a normal church service. This was very encouraging. In being mindful of others the focus of our discussion was on how our growing in spiritual maturity should change the way we engage others (family of God) and the world around us (making disciples).

We are to interact with others not only in the physical world but also with spiritual sensitivity. The verse, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, King James Version) became the focus. The discussion circled around the question as to whether the verse is a descriptive text describing Jesus or a prescriptive verse for Christians. The common answer was both. It describes Jesus Christ and what He did for us, but it is also an illustration within the life of Christ that we are to follow. In our carnal DNA, we are not wired that way. It is in our fallen nature to look out for ourselves first. A baby’s first words include, “no” and “mine.”

We are disciples and are adopted into the family of God. When a child is adopted into a new household, they need to learn a different set of rules and a new set of expectations that both defines and confines a new expected behavior. The greatest love we can show to a nonbeliever is to share with them the gospel of Jesus Christ. The love that comes from the Father who compels us to do so.

The discussion then naturally progressed to evangelism. The question was presented, “Which is easier, to go down the street and knock on the doors of strangers to tell them about Jesus, or to engage someone you know (friend, neighbor, coworker) and to share your faith with them?” A longtime member offered that it is easier to share Christ with someone you know because you have a relationship with them. Another longstanding member offered

that for him, it is easier to engage a stranger because he is less concerned about whether they like him after presenting Jesus to them. He advised he is more likely to be apprehensive with a friend, a coworker, or a family member. He cited an excitement he once experienced for sharing his faith while on a church-sponsored mission trip. It was easier to tell others about Jesus knowing that he would be gone from that area in a week (Luke 4:24).

If we really cared about our friend, then we should be even more willing to ruin our friendship by sharing Christ with them. To be apprehensive is okay, but to have a list of restricted people from our evangelistic radar is not. To not want to share Christ with someone we know because we fear how they might react puts the focus on us (our horizontal relationship with them). To share Christ with someone is to focus on our vertical relationship with God, which is by far more important. It takes a long time to come to this mindset, and it takes even longer to put it into practice. Our willingness to engage in evangelism is a sure mark of our growth toward spiritual maturity.

How should our growing in spiritual maturity change the way we engage with others, as well as the way we think, feel, and behave toward such difficult topics? One answered that it should generate a love for lost souls that compels us into individual activities. Another added their thoughts regarding lifestyle evangelism. “I would like to be more aware of people’s needs, rather than to just think of them as being okay. That way we can engage them by providing for a physical need and take that opportunity to encourage them with a spiritual presentation.”³¹¹

³¹¹ Q-6-9-Lime-3-10.

DTC Session Six: Measuring Spiritual Maturity by a Character That Shows

Leaving the mind that knows segment of Paul's prayer, session six embarked on a different topic, which is the call to become both pure and blameless in our character (Phil 1:10). Growing in spiritual maturity is the result of our participation with God as He manifests it within our lives (Phil 1:6, 2:12-13). In and of ourselves we can never earn the status of being pure and blameless, for we are born into a sinful nature (Ps 51:5), and even though we are not sinless, we do sin less as we grow. Our purity is found solely in the life of Christ and His imputed righteousness. Being pure is a position as well as a journey, whereas we grow by getting our mind right and our heart right with God (e.g., Phil 2:12, 4:8, Rom 12:2).

Purity has to do with our thoughts, our motives, and our desires. Purity hits the heart of the matter, whereas the measure is Christ, and we can never obtain that measure outside of being in Christ, or as Paul notes, until the Day of Christ Jesus. Our purity is an already, not yet scenario. According to 1 John, anyone who has this hope purifies himself. We are looking forward to that time when we get to meet Him face-to-face. Seeking purity contains within it a realization of our hope which is in Christ. "The Word of God is our measure as well as the light that shines on our porcelain, revealing any cracks and deficiencies in our character."³¹²

It was asserted that we are made pure when we think of such verses as 1 John 1:9, and another then added Psalm 103:12 as a promise given to us by God. While we will always be dealing with our sin nature (present tense, ongoing), it was Christ who dealt (past tense, ongoing) with our sins. The only way we can be pure is to realize we are not pure in

³¹² J-1-2-Green-5-10.

and of ourselves, but positionally as we are in Christ. We have an imputed righteousness because of Christ. When Jesus died on the cross, we were made whole in Him, sinless in the eyes of God, and our redemption was made complete. We still need to pursue purity though.

The discussion about purity moved to what it means to be blameless. Does being blameless mean to be without fault or charge? An otherwise quiet participant was quick to answer this question. She inserted, “No. Being blameless is a position we are given, not a position we can earn. Christ removes the guilt.”³¹³ It all circles back to one place (the cross) and to one person (Jesus Christ). Another supplemented the conversation with a wonderful truth. When we look at it from a legal standpoint, the person stands guilty and a fine or punishment is required of them. They are to blame, they are not pure, they are with fault (sin). Jesus expunges the record (their record) while also meeting the holy requirement of paying the debt on their behalf.

Our records in eternity are wiped clean having been washed by the blood of Christ. Blameless does not mean that one is without guilt, but that the punishment/penalty has been paid on our behalf – for the Christian (from a legal standpoint). Spiritually, we are made pure and blameless by being in Christ. He is the wall of separation (for unbelievers) and the bridge of connection (for believers). Another reminded us that we cannot live the pure and blameless life without the Holy Spirit.

DTC Session Seven: A Character that Shows Others a Closer Walk with God

The entire premise, the main idea, the key focus for this week’s seventh session is to come to the realization that your character matters. How one interacts with others falls

³¹³ K-5-Gold-3-7.

under the umbrella of discipleship. Everything one thinks, says, and does, the good, the bad, and the ugly, all apply to the process of pouring Christ into others. How one acts and reacts in every situation is an opportunity to show what Christ has done and is doing in your life. Character counts. The believer's character, like it or not, puts Jesus Christ on display. A believer's character is the result of a life-long journey with Christ, having walked in His dust and having grown in wisdom, discernment, and the continual process of yielding ones' will to His truth. Character counts, and it matters. You behave the way you believe.

The topic of living a life of character quickly changed to ways in which we can reach the next generation for Christ. Evangelism was not the focus for this session but was originally planned to fit into the final session on evangelism. We discussed several opportunities in which we can reach our community for the Lord. These ideas included a Halloween outreach which includes handing out tracts; branding with yard signs, Facebook ads, a new website, invite tools to special events, and outdoor banners and signage; and when the reminder that we do an annual food drive and Samaritan's Purse shoe box campaign was offered, the question needed to be reiterated, in that we are discussing ways we can reach our community for Christ. Ideas on how to reach the kids at the local school were discussed, including backpacks, fifth quarter celebrations, supporting the teachers with school supplies, after school programs, and getting involved with youth sports.

The emphasis quickly turned to the need to reach kids, youth, and younger families. Concerns for the church building's lack of structure was discussed, which then changed the topic back to a lingering debate that resulted in the church split some years ago, and that is whether we should build a new facility on the acreage that the church already owns. Although volunteerism has been lacking in recent years, excitement continued to build.

Enthusiasm and hope were rising within this focus group. Other ideas were shared, such as reinstating the puppet ministry, offering a gospel illusion show as an outreach event, returning to movie nights where kids could make a car out of cardboard to reenact a drive-in setting, and youth-focused outings.

Success for any of these programs will require people who are willing (and excited) to follow up with visitors. Right now, FBC does not have a way to capture the information of folks who visit. We have no record, no address to which we can mail a thank you letter, no way to reengage them into the life of the church. So far, we have been talking about theory, and this week the focus was changed to practical ways to be the hands and feet of Jesus. The budget needs to be realigned to point toward the mission of the church (Great Commandment, Great Commission).

DTC Session Eight: Filled with the Fruit of Righteousness

The eighth session was delivered as an in-depth Bible study by design. Being filled with the fruit of righteousness is a statement that automatically leads our thoughts to the Fruit of the Spirit as recorded in Galatians 5:22-23. It might even cause us to think of being grafted into the Vine, to bear much fruit, according to the Gospel of John (John 15). Paul uses the word for fruit (καρπός, also offspring, descendant) that is translated in context to mean offspring or producing an outcome or result. Within the bigger scope of Paul's writings and the overall attention given to evangelism and disciple making, we will do well to keep our understanding of his writing in the context for which it was intended.

The fruit that grows is not righteousness itself (i.e., Gal 5, one fruit listed with nine descriptors), but what righteousness produces, or in how spiritual maturity purposes to bring in a harvest for the King. The fruit of righteousness is not for us, but for God's glory. And

how can we best bring glory to God? It is not to sin less, or to quote Bible verses, or to pursue a gold star by our name because of consistent church attendance, but to bring others into the fold.

The best way to share God's love with others is to tell others about Him, and while fruit is the focus, righteousness is the foundation. What does it mean to be filled with the fruit of righteousness? The first point of Paul's prayer (having a love that flows) parallels to the Great Commandment, which is to love God/love others. The last point of Paul's prayer (be filled with the fruit of righteousness) parallels the Great Commission. The beginning and ending of his prayer form an *inclusio* for the entire reason for the Church, which is to make disciples by fulfilling the above two bookends. If a church is not functioning within this structure, if it is not focused on making disciples, the Great Commission, the Great Commandment, and if it is solely (even emphatically) focused on programs and pleasures for the internal body of friends, then the church by its purist definition, is already dead. It is just a matter of time before the doors close.

DTC Session Nine: The Final Analysis. Where Do We Go from Here?

The ninth session was the final session which contained deep discussion, as week ten was reserved to complete the second spiritual maturity assessment and to bring the ten weeks to a close. The handout provided was intentionally left blank, for this week's agenda was to produce a program and/or purpose to which this DTC was designed to accomplish. The goal of this week's discussion was to produce a direction and/or collective vision.³¹⁴ This session was purposed to hold the focus group's feet to the fire. It was intended to echo the brainstorming

³¹⁴ It is believed by this DMIN student that the vision is given by God to the pastor, however, given the dynamics at FBC it is important to gain buy-in at as many steps along the way toward church revitalization as possible.

session of week seven in such a way that specific plans would be instituted. This goal was not achieved, at least not during today's session.

We are held accountable for being obedient in fulfilling the Great Commission. We are not held accountable for the results or for people's response. Not included in last week's summary were these two comments, purposefully placed in this week's analysis. One lady described a moderate level of discouragement in that she was not seeing the fruit of her efforts. Another disclosed a difficulty in seeing Philippians 1:9-11 as a text he could apply to himself, as it was written to a church body, not specifically as a prescriptive text to be applied at the individual level.³¹⁵ The struggles toward growing in spiritual maturity are surfacing, and that is good!

This week's discussion focused on the question, "What can, or should we do as a church to pursue revitalization?" The answers were across the board. One said we can pursue revitalization by putting an ad in the local paper. People do not even know that we exist. Another said we can revitalize by reconciling with the group that left six to seven years ago. Another said we can revitalize by advertising within the body of Christ itself. Did he mean to proselyte? After further inquiry, the intention of advertising within the body of Christ is for individuals to share with the congregation the opportunities being provided them by the Holy Spirit as they pursue engaging the lost in discussions about their eternal status. Yet another added that we should be using our spiritual gifts within the body of Christ here at FBC.

Other answers and discussions ensued, however, the flow of thought always led to the number one item uncovered within the confidential one-on-one interviews, that people wanted

³¹⁵ The researcher provided insight that even though Paul wrote this letter to the plural church (to you, ὑμῖν), the application is singular (you, σὺ, or to you, σοι).

more opportunities for fellowship (internally focused rather than reaching Norway for Christ). The focus group of FBC wished for the way things used to be that were in place under the pastor who was here some eight years ago. There is nothing wrong with this, and it will be the first step of action as the result of this DMIN project, but it will need to come about with an emphasis of having events that follow the Luke 14:23 mandate. Fellowship and outreach need to be joined at the hip. One gentleman then added that rather than having programs that focus on the event itself, we need to facilitate opportunities to meet and serve the community in a way that we can build relationships with those outside of the faith.

Unfortunately, other than the final statement, the above answers still do not show that a solid understanding of the church revitalization process has been gained. But that is okay, at least for now. To understand the steps of the revitalization process was not the goal of this research project, especially the DTC, but it is meant to become the focus step afterwards. There was a change in attitude when the following questions were presented to the focal group. “If FBC closed its doors, would the community around us even know? Would they miss us? What impact are we making? Do we focus on building a new building, or do we focus on rebuilding in this old building?”

The focus quickly changed to new ideas for outreach, ideas that also promoted excitement and a hope for a new future. One idea presented was to develop the property we own to reach the community, to not focus on a new church building, but to focus on a place where ministry can take place, such as youth group meetings, room for AWANA, build a pavilion for church picnics, and what not. Another lady revisited the idea that block parties used to be a good and inexpensive way to invite our neighbors to something that was not churchy but would give us a chance to get to know them and their needs.

DTC Session Ten: Second Spiritual Maturity Likert Assessments and Focus Group Interview

Session ten was not recorded as it was designated as the time when the second spiritual maturity inventory assessment would be completed on an individual basis within a group setting. A recap was provided of the previous nine weeks, and a focus group interview was conducted, the findings of which are covered in the summary paragraph below. It should be noted that the structure for this focus group was a hybrid between being structured with preplanned questions, as well as being somewhat informal with the understanding that it would be best for the group's input to dictate the direction with little intervention from the researcher.³¹⁶ Using this format caused the discussion to remain on a surface level, for to go too deep at this point would prove to be counterproductive.

When comparing the data from the first spiritual maturity assessment to the second, all but three of the assessments were coded in such a way as to match the same individual, confirming that the raw data was available from both occurrences. Although the length of time as a member at FBC was documented and it was predetermined in chapter three that this information would be reviewed, this data was not used as there was not a standard deviation or a notable variance in the data. The focus of data analysis was on the correlations and commonalities that were targeted from which the raw data was extracted.³¹⁷

³¹⁶ Judith Bell and Stephen Waters, *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First-Time Researchers*, 7th ed. (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education, 2018), 213-214.

³¹⁷ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister and Terry Dwain Robertson, *Your Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 197-202.

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IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

June 10, 2022

David Williamson
Jacob Dunlow

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-1165 DMIN IRB Application Church Revitalization David Williamson

Dear David Williamson and Jacob Dunlow,

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 project 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:

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(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current 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