

Liberty University

Exploring the Impact of Spiritual Disciplines Among Disciples of Christ

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

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Spiritual disciplines have long been recognized as a means to foster more significant spiritual growth and maturity in the life of disciples of Christ. However, in today's culture, there is a perceived lack of commitment to spiritual growth with new and established disciples of Christ of the twenty-first century vs. those of the twentieth century at Perfecting Church in Detroit, Michigan. Therefore, this study will look at the impact of introducing spiritual disciplines to new disciples of Christ to foster more significant spiritual growth and a commitment to a life of faith in Christ. Although faith community members embrace a wide array of disciplines, this study will specifically highlight the role of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting in promoting a lifestyle of discipline and spiritual pursuit. In this project, pre-and post-test surveys assess the participants' perception of and commitment to spiritual growth and spiritual disciplines as discipleship activities. The post-test reveals positive changes in the knowledge and practice of Spiritual disciplines among the target audience. Spiritual disciplines are for the journey toward holiness, the pursuit of becoming more like Christ.

Keywords: Disciples, Holy Spirit, Spiritual Disciplines, Holiness, Spiritual Formation

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Abbreviations

CCOGIC	<i>Congregational Church of God in Christ</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
GSS	<i>General Social Survey</i>
KJV	King James Version
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
PC	<i>Perfecting Church</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This DMIN thesis research project is about the development and progression of the spiritual disciplines in the life of a disciple of Christ. Spiritual disciplines are the habits and practices that promote a godly relationship and holiness for becoming more like Christ. Jesus practiced spiritual disciplines as an excellent example of aiding and teaching Christians to make disciples of Christ within the twenty-first-century church congregation.

Disciple-making is a vital component of a healthy church. Therefore, the three spiritual disciplines to be studied are Bible intake, prayer, and fasting. In addition, there is a need for the local congregations to equip members strategically and develop the members and disciples in their midst. Jesus commanded His initial twelve disciples, saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:18–20, English Standard Version). This passage of Scripture is known as the Great Commission to most Christian Church organizations and ministries worldwide. This DMIN thesis project will be about the development and progression that spiritual disciplines have on the spiritual growth of Christian believers. Small group ministries are the focus group to facilitate the project study and data collection.

While this work will not focus on the Great Commission, it will take up the New Commandment from Jesus. The New Commandment from Jesus is “love one another” (John 13:14). Though given to the disciples over two thousand years ago, it is a command for today’s

disciples. The love of God for His people becomes reciprocated as one learns more about who God is. The spiritual disciplines are a means for learning who, how, and why Christians are to love others as God has shown His love for them. The Scriptures speak to how God loves man so much that He has saved many from various forms of hurt, harm, and danger.

Discipleship is how Jesus demonstrated His love toward his disciples, teaching them to love and care for one another through demonstration. Authors Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey said, “The modern-day disciple must be committed to love: loving God, loving our neighbor, and loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. When we love like this, no argument can stand against this force.”¹ Christians are to love as God loves them. The *agape* love is unlike a man who quickly falls out of love or loves with conditions. In the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (ISBE), the definition of *agape* is,

While the Hebrew and Greek words for “love” have various shades and intensities of meaning, they sum up in some such definition as this: Love, whether used of God or man, is an earnest and anxious desire for and an active and beneficent interest in the well-being of the one loved. Different degrees and manifestations of this affection are recognized in the Scriptures according to the circumstances and relations of life. An example of this is the expression of love between husband and wife, parent and child, brethren according to the flesh and according to grace, between friend and enemy, and, finally, between God and man. However, it must not be overlooked that the fundamental idea of love, as expressed in its definition, is never absent in any of these relations of life. However, the manifestation thereof may differ according to the circumstances and relations. The ISBE says: The Greek verb *an apa, agapa's*, denotes the highest, most perfect kind of love (Latin, *diligere*), implying a precise determination of will and judgment and belonging mainly to the sphere of Divine revelation. In his answer, Peter substitutes the word *philo*, which means the natural human affection, with its strong feeling or sentiment, and is never used in Scripture language to designate man’s love to God.²

¹ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishers, 2013), 24.

² The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. E-Sword.

Michael E. Green puts it this way, the ancient world knew about *philia*, friendship; about *erōs*, sexual love; about *storgē*, the love that binds families together; but *agapē* is very different. That is why the word was practically unknown before Christ.³ When Green discusses “this type of love, one learns it was in short supply and then adds that “*agapē* means a love that gives itself for the recipient’s good. It means love that springs from the nature of the donor and not the real or fancied worthiness of the recipient.”⁴ Just as Christ has expressed the love of God to the Twelve, the followers of Christ today should learn to love the same way.

Spiritual disciplines are an essential component of disciple-making for disciples of Christ. Spiritual disciplines are needed to guide the disciples of Christ toward Christlikeness, or the description known as godliness. Therefore, one of the instructions for discipleship is that a disciple develops habits of spiritual discipline. Donald Whitney writes,

The original language of the words’ discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness is the means of holiness. That is, spiritual disciplines are not an option. NASB makes it plain that this is a command of God, not merely a suggestion. Holiness is not an option for those who claim to be children of the Holy One (1 Peter 1:15–16), so neither are the means of holiness; spiritual disciplines are not an option.⁵

Spending time doing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, and reading the Bible is viewed as spending time with God.

³ Michael E. Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*. The Bible Speaks Today, ed. John R. W. Stott (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 86.

⁴ Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2014), 20.

⁵ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 20.

Ministry Context

According to Pew Research data, “The share of Americans who say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month dropped by seven percentage points. While the share who say they attend religious services less often (if at all) has risen by the same degree.”⁶ This decline has been occurring over the past two decades. According to Jeffery Jones, the declining rate in the Protestant church membership, according to the data collected in his study, is due to an increased number of Americans who only identify themselves as Christian instead of a denominational name such as those of the mainstream faith denominations like Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutherans, or Baptist.⁷ In the report, Jones added that those who classified themselves as Protestants decreased from 73% to 67% during 1998-2000.⁸ Healthy Christian disciple groups are known to multiply in numbers, which is how Christianity has spread globally over the past two thousand years. However, the poll data suggest Christians are not multiplying, developing, and growing as Christ instructed. This study’s discussion is not about church membership numbers but more about the proclivity of active Christians in fellowship with other believers who share their faith and practice the spiritual disciplines as members of small groups of believers of Christ.

⁶ In U. S. “Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America’s Changing Religious Landscape,” Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project, October 17, 2019, accessed June 9, 2020, <https://www.pewforum.org/2-29/2017/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

⁷ Jeffery Jones, “U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades,” Gallup.com, April 18, 2019. Accessed August 29 Accessed August 29, 2020. <https://new.gallup.com/poll248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx>.

⁸ Jones, U.S. Church Membership.

The context for this project is Perfecting Church (PC), a non-denominational church in Detroit, Michigan. The founding pastor is from the Congregational Churches of God in Christ (CCOGIC), a denomination of churches started by his great-grandfather, the late Isaiah Winans. The church held its first service with eight people on May 27, 1989. With continued growth and the multiplication of disciples, the congregation soon grew, and in sixteen months, PC purchased and moved into a church building. This growth and multiplying of disciples continued. In less than seven months, the building became too small for one Sunday worship service, leading to the addition of a second service, which soon became standing room only. Therefore, another morning service became necessary to accommodate the multiplication and growth of the church. The increased growth led to three Sunday morning worship services.

By March 1996, the church moved into its present location in the Northeast area of Detroit, serving a diverse multicultural and socioeconomic group of believers. PC has a saying: “Ministry means People.” The congregation has thirty small group ministries to help fulfill the commands of Jesus to “go into all the world and proclaim the gospel” and “that you love one another” (Mark 16:15; John 13:34). The departments, or small groups, are most involved with the spiritual growth of disciples in five areas: the Ministerial Alliance (prayer and discipleship training sessions), Follow-up department (telephone calls to new disciples), Academy to Perfection (Christian education), Perfecting Care (social needs and references), and the Women’s and Men’s departments. The Women’s and Men’s department leaders oversee the gender-specific small groups divided into groups according to the metro area and state locations to facilitate

abilities and opportunities of fellowship at times other than worship services and church meetings.

The structure developed by the pastor under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was a traditional template of known denominations but not traditional in many aspects. Thus, the church lists it as non-denominational. According to Dempsey and Earley, there are four models of church types: traditional, attractional, organic, and hybrid. At PC, the traditional church model is like the description in Earley and Dempsey.

A traditional model has specific characteristics: the senior pastor oversees the programs and ministries of the church, most of the church activities occur in and around the physical building, the organizational structure is not complex, the senior pastor assumes most of the church's leadership, evangelism is not central, but members are concerned with soul winning. Discipleship is taught and practiced from the pulpit, during Sunday school hours, or in small group meetings.⁹ The traditional model, though somewhat different at PC because of ministry-specific name differences such as Academy to Perfection instead of Sunday School, still has "the pastor viewed as the professional, and the saints are the laypeople or disciples of Christ. The leadership philosophy is that the people need the pastor to minister to them. Consequently, the pastor or staff do most of the ministry while the members support and fund the ministries and programs of the church."¹⁰ Though not elevated to a prominent place in the church's life, some spiritual gifts, such as teaching and prophecy, flourish.

⁹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 231.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Along with Sunday worship, the pastor preaches three or four times per week on Tuesdays at noon, during evening Bible study, and at the 6:00 a.m. prayer services on Sundays and Tuesdays. The offerings and tithes are used primarily for staff salaries and to maintain the facilities. The church leans towards addition and not multiplication to assist church planting ideology.

During the first three to twelve years, PC became an Attractional Church. The church grew by addition, quickly growing to a congregation greater than four thousand members by the time it was ten years old. The PC began to have and display many characteristics of an attractional church listed by Earley and Dempsey.¹¹ In addition, there was an increased emphasis on evangelism, discipleship/membership classes, marketing, and the worship experience.

As the years went by, PC became more of a hybrid church. Earley and Dempsey write, “As the name implies, the hybrid model seeks to blend traditional, attractional, and organic elements.”¹² The Organic model is a church made up of groups. Earley and Dempsey note that “this model of a hybrid church usually overlays a new small group ministry model on top of an existing traditional, or even attractional, church model. One of the main challenges in the hybrid model is that the church leadership often does not reduce existing ministries and programs. As a result, there is considerable complexity with the model.”¹³ The hybrid model best resembles PC. Dave Browning discusses and defines a hybrid church as “not combining just smallness with

¹¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 231

¹² Ibid..

¹³ Ibid.

largeness but two things that are much more significant. It fuses intimacy (a personal, relational, transparent church) and impact (a powerful, relevant, and trans-formative church) to create a third form.”¹⁴ This definition seems to work for local hybrid churches noted in the surrounding community and works at PC. Browning gives examples and comparisons between large corporate companies of the past that have been adjusting and downsizing in various ways yet still maintaining a global organization for this generation. He shares his thoughts “relative to the contributions of megachurches and microchurches, adding a story about a man looking at a river and asking a local man standing nearby, ‘Is this the Mississippi?’ ‘It is part of it,’ the local replied. The story is relevant to Christ’s church. One wants to imagine what they are looking at, and this is it. However, it is not all of it. Christ’s church is more extensive and broader.”¹⁵ This grand church of the Lord Jesus Christ is more significant than one man can see with natural vision.

This thesis project focuses on the small group ministry of the women’s department of PC. Four years ago, the church’s women were divided into smaller groups to promote increased relationships among them. The groups are called Power Teams, which resemble what many know as cell groups. Small groups have been proven effective in multiplying and enhancing the spiritual growth of Christ’s disciples, as noted in the Scriptures.

If one is to follow the teaching of Jesus, then the example He left regarding how to make more disciples for Him is in the first small group of His twelve disciples. Fulfilling the command

¹⁴ Dave Browning, *Hybrid Church: The Fusion of Intimacy and Impact*, Leadership Network (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 3.

¹⁵ Browning, *Hybrid Church Fusion*, 6.

Jesus gave the disciples is a great motivation. The development of disciples in small groups is how Jesus taught, and since then, this model has continued because of His example of discipling the twelve apostles. Because of the witness of Christ, the first disciples of Christ went on to disciple others, growing into a church of believers who have begotten thousands of disciples in these past two thousand years. Making disciples for Christ is vital to the fulfillment of working for the glory of the Lord. Furthermore, the spiritual growth of believers enhances when they connect in relationship with God through the practice of spiritual disciplines.

Perfecting Church is a church that believes in and teaches holiness (Hebrews 12:14). According to the Word in Hebrews, God requires holiness for man to see the Lord. PC teaches that the Word of God found in 1 Timothy 4:12–16 helps teach new disciples and those who are yet striving to be followers of Christ to grow progressively toward godliness (1 Timothy 4:7). According to Whitney, when one comes “to God trusting in the person and work of Jesus to make them right with God, one receives the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13–14). The presence of the Holy Spirit causes all those in whom He resides to have a new holy hunger.”¹⁶ Whitney adds, “The Holy Spirit indwells in a new believer, and the person begins to prize and pursue holiness.”¹⁷ The pursuit of holiness is the same as the pursuit of godliness.

The Word of the Lord states, “Holiness, becometh Thine House, O Lord, forever” (Psalm 93:5, King James Version). This verse hangs on a poster in the center front of Zion Congregational Church of God in Christ (Zion CCOGIC), 2135 Mack Avenue, Detroit, MI. This

¹⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

church is considered foundational in the history of holiness and disciples of Christ in the metro Detroit area. The late great-grandfather of Pastor Winans of PC founded the denomination after splitting away from the main body of the Church of God in Christ. Not only did the pastor of PC start there, but many members of the PC congregation also began the journey and pursuit of holiness there, including the author of this project thesis. During the discipleship at Zion CCOGIC, the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, fasting two times a week, corporate prayer, and personal prayer time emphasis among the fellow disciples of Christ. Many of these disciples are part of PC now.

The tenets of faith at PC include belief in the Scriptures as the inspired and inerrant Word of God and the Word being complete in revelation through the Holy Spirit. Water baptism, holy communion, and foot-washing services are the rites. One of the tenets of faith taught at PC is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. This tenet is part of the lesson plan for the new members' discipleship course. Faith is introduced and encouraged as a necessity for the believer after accepting Christ as Savior. The Trinity, the importance of church fellowship, and the Great Commission are part of the curriculum instructed to and by Christ's followers. The church has many opportunities for the saints to gather.

The Sunday worship services are in the morning and afternoon. There are regularly scheduled corporate prayer services on Sundays and Tuesdays at six in the morning. Wednesday evening service is a prayer service, too. Bible study sessions are held every Tuesday at 11:15 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Small and ministry group meetings have various scheduled times during the week. PC has many opportunities for corporate gatherings of disciples to edify and promote

spiritual growth. However, personal time in the spiritual disciplines is a must in the life of believers. Changes in twenty-first-century lifestyles, be it due to the social distancing mitigation process caused by COVID-19 or general logistical needs, cause many to decrease traveling distances in daily schedules.

Problem Presented

The problem is a perceived lack of commitment to spiritual growth with new members and disciples of Christ at PC in Detroit, MI. One of the reasons for this perception is that many congregants accept the call to follow Christ at the end of various church services. However, it seems that not as many become active in the small group ministries of the congregation. Sometimes, scheduling new disciples to the body of believers into PC discipleship classes is not conducive to those who would and should like to attend. There may be anywhere from two months to one year before a person seeking membership or fellowship with PC as a disciple of Christ can connect their life schedule to attend sessions that facilitate placement into small groups. However, it may be that some church members are dogmatic and believe that disciples of Christ should grasp the same hunger for the Word of God and the fellowship of the believers that the group of believers first received at Zion CCOGIC.

The writer confesses that she has had conversations with disciples of Christ, saying, “The new and or current day disciples of Christ do not seem to want to give up secular and worldly pleasures as done and expected in the days at Zion CCOGIC. One tends to forget that it is okay to be different. The Twelve were a diverse group of individuals who grew toward understanding

holiness at various stages of life. All twelve spent time with the Lord and had a different yet loving relationship with Christ (Matthew 10; John 21:22).

Of course, the smaller congregation of believers at Zion CCOGIC was staunchly traditional in structure. There were official church services four times a week with relational and spiritual growth opportunities available. In addition, the disciples would have brunch and dinner between Sunday school and morning and evening worship service. Therefore, many friends and family relationships remain forty years later.

When the disciples of Christ are not in fellowship with other believers, how can one determine if the babe in Christ or established disciple of Christ is growing spiritually? Ministry group meetings, such as ushers, greeters, and choirs, have various scheduled meeting times during the month at the church. However, disciples of Christ do not serve in ministry or come together in other small groups until after completing the new member or discipleship sessions. PC has been an organized body of believers for more than thirty years. Of the greater than four thousand registered members and disciples of Christ, many are not actively fellowshiping in ministry or gender-specific small groups.

There appears to be a transient climate in Christian culture today where many disciples of Christ move from church to church, not participating in small groups. Because of the temporary nature, members are not always getting the training and equipping they need to grow spiritually, which seems to contribute to a decrease and, in some cases, a lack of spiritual growth. Therefore, being aware of the need for practicing spiritual disciplines for disciples, not in constant fellowship with other disciples, will benefit the disciples' spiritual growth and development.

According to Philip Nation, the way to determine spiritual growth and the relationship one has with God is through spiritual disciplines. He writes, “As the central discipline of the Christian life, love propels habitual holiness and the desire to follow God into the world for His redeeming mission. Internal transformation (founded in our love for Christ) manifests in eternal action (Bible reading, fellowship, prayer, serving, giving).”¹⁸ Spiritual disciplines are an outward expression of a disciples’ loving relationship with Christ as they grow spiritually through practicing spiritual disciplines.

Purpose Statement

The DMIN thesis project aims to increase the commitment level associated with spiritual disciplines in disciples of Christ at PC in Detroit, Michigan, encouraging and teaching them about the practice of spiritual disciplines as a necessity in their lives. Acts 2:42–47 shows the early church’s example and how it fulfilled the Great Commission. Making disciples for Christ, who are to be the body of Christ, requires that the body of Christ be healthy. When local churches and small groups are not multiplying and growing spiritually, the body of Christ goes lacking. There may be no evidence that the Holy Spirit’s gifts are being used within the groups when there is no growth toward godliness or holiness. When disciples are not moving toward holiness, the body’s health suffers. When there is no growth, there may be no evidence that the Holy Spirit’s gifts are being developed and used within the groups, and thus, the disciples’ spiritual growth and small group health will suffer also. The project also includes a focus on the

¹⁸ Philip Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness: How the Spiritual Disciplines Grow Us Up, Draw Us Together, and Send Us Out* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2016), 20.

small groups led by ministry team leaders to facilitate the groups toward making disciples for Christ.

Basic Assumptions

According to the plan and the example left by Christ, when making disciples for Christ, one should see spiritual growth and healthy multiplication of PC members. The apostle Paul discusses the healthy development of the body of Christ in Ephesians. According to Ephesians 4:11–23, members in the body of Christ, each having a different function, work together for optimum service. Therefore, when disciples of Christ are growing and healthy, one expects fellow believers to be able to serve within the body or ministry according to a need.

Another assumption is that the techniques and biblical principles regarding discipleship and training for spiritual growth, when done intentionally, will lead to enhanced growth and maturation of those who follow Christ. One can also assume that the church will multiply and grow for the glory of God as believers develop and grow spiritually. According to the model that Jesus left, one can expect that discipleship will promote the practice of spiritual disciplines in new believers and babes in Christ who have not yet had significant guidance. Other assumptions are that the participants will give honest responses, anonymity allows the participants to be open in responding to the study questions, and the sample is valid.¹⁹

¹⁹ Pew Research, in “U. S. Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace.”

Definitions

This section provides descriptions of key terms utilized in this research thesis project. The descriptive list is not overwhelming because many terms are not new within the Christian faith.

Age Categories. The Pew Research and Gallop polls cite the definitions of names given to generations. The current categorical generational ages covered in this study are in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1. Current Categorical Generations.

Categorical Generational Era	Years Covered	Ages
Baby Boomers	1946–1964	54–72
Generation X	1965–1980	39–53
Millennials	1981–1996	24–38
Generation Z	1997–2002	18–23

Bible Intake. Whitney describes Bible intake as “the purpose of all intake methods is to keep it, that is, to do what God says and thereby develop in Christlikeness.”²⁰ Bible intake can be reading oneself or listening to someone else reading. Bible intake occurs during the church service, but one can hear the Word from various audio-visual tools. Luke 11:28 gives instruction from Jesus that hearing the Word is vital in the life of the believer: “But he said, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it’ (ESV)! Jesus then asked the people who

²⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 20–23.

claimed to be the people of God, “Have you not read” (Matthew 19:4; Mark 12:0). Millard Erickson says that as someone reads the Bible or hears it proclaimed, the God who manifested himself to a person in the biblical incident while reading may renew his revelation and repeat what he did in the biblical situation. He may present himself in an encounter with the person reading or hearing the Bible.”²¹ With the technology, there are many translations, along with

COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic started in early 2020. The Center for Disease Control recounts its events when it records:

During the late winter and spring of 2020, the United States and the rest of the world-initiated mitigation and restricted the movement of man due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Covid-19 or coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is not the same as the [coronaviruses commonly circulating among humans](#) and causes mild illnesses, like the common cold. The name of this disease is coronavirus disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19. In COVID-19, ‘CO’ stands for ‘corona,’ ‘VI’ for ‘virus,’ and ‘D’ for disease...The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads mainly from person to person, primarily through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes into the air and onto surfaces. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people nearby, or one can inhale virus droplets into the lungs. Spread is more likely when people are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).²²

During this period, many state governors ordered that only essential workers such as hospital workers, first responders, grocery store employees, take-out or food deliverers, and others considered necessary to support people’s lives should gather in large groups.

²¹ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, (Grand, MI: Baker Academic, 2013). 152.

²² “Coronavirus Disease Basics” Center for Disease Control (CDC), accessed April 21, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/faq.html>.

Disciple. Earley and Dempsey say, “Being a disciple generally means abandoning the things of the world and following Jesus.”²³ They also write, “A disciple has trusted Christ for salvation and surrendered completely to Him. A disciple is committed to practicing the Spiritual disciplines in the community and developing their full potential for Christ and His mission.”²⁴ The transformed life of a disciple will draw others to see what the love of God can do for them. Noted by Alice Wood, “Spiritual discipline is from the same root as the word disciple, which means instruction or training. Spiritual disciplines are usually a learning experience within a community of committed disciples journeying together.”²⁵

Discipleship. True discipleship occurs when individuals move beyond information download and behavior change to true transformation of who they are in Christ. A person’s identity is changed as God recreates them in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians. 4:23). The apostle Paul writes, “Also, do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:2, ESV). Noted in Winfield Bevins, Jesus expected His followers to obey Him. He sought to create in His disciples a lifestyle of consecrated obedience. Discipleship is about a total consecration to the Lord. As disciples, we must submit and obey God’s word and plan for our lives. However, many people have trouble submitting to the will of

²³ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 22.

²⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 28.

²⁵ Wood, Alice L. “The Spiritual Disciplines Project: Fostering Spiritual Development of Undergraduates at a Historically Black University,” *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 10, no. 4 (2020): 70.

God. Americans live in an individualistic culture where it is not acceptable for people to tell others how to live one's life. That is why submission and obedience to God are hard but necessary. When they become obedient to God in every area of their lives, they will experience victorious Christian living. God can only use men and women willing to obey Him.²⁶ Becoming more like Christ will also lead to increased obedience to the Word of God.

Fasting. For this study, the definition of Christian fasting will be, as Whitney describes it as: "a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes."²⁷ It is not a time for quick weight loss; instead, "it is for believers in Christ, for the Discipline must be rooted in a relationship with Christ and practiced with the desire to become more like Christ."²⁸ This time with God has a biblical foundation and directions to be God-centered.

Spiritual Disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are the terms for application to one's personal and the believer's interpersonal life. One primarily practices spiritual disciplines alone, but some are shared in the community or congregation, for example, in the gathering of the saints in worship. Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as "those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ."²⁹ The personal disciplines that are the spiritual disciplines for the focus in studying are prayer, fasting, and Bible reading. According to Josh Branum, "Practicing spiritual disciplines to seek communion with Christ, one

²⁶ Winfield Bevins, "How Jesus Made Disciples" *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*. Accessed June 4, 2012. <https://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2012/06/04/how-jesus-made-disciples?rq=How%20Jesus%20Made%20Disc>.

²⁷ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Christian Life*, 192.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 4.

develops a deeper walk with Christ along with the understanding and application of the gospel.”³⁰

Spiritual Formation. Kenneth Boa gives a brief and succinct definition as a practical handbook to the spiritual formation of disciples of Christ through spiritual disciplines. According to Boa, spiritual formation is “the grace-driven developmental process in which the soul grows in conformity to the image of Christ.”³¹ This process does not happen overnight. Nor does it happen just because one accepts Christ as a Savior, according to Romans 10:9–10. Another way to view spiritual formation is as “a broader concept. It is a composite term not found explicitly in the Bible. It refers to all God undertakes and undergoes for His people to bring us to Holiness. Therefore, pointing to resources God brings, forming us to His likeness and what we do to pursue this goal.”³² One might say that one is growing in the Spirit toward holiness when spiritually forming with the help of spiritual disciplines.

Limitations

As in Whitney, one notes that the spiritual disciplines discussed in this study are specific as noted in Whitney “the spiritual disciplines taught and practiced in the Bible. Being specific about the Bible disciplines prevented others’ promotion of fanciful ideas and plans. Such as one

³⁰ Josh Branum, “Personal Holiness, and Evangelistic Leadership: Understanding the Relationship Between Practicing Spiritual Disciplines and Effective Student Evangelism,” *The Journal of Youth Ministry* 15, no. 1 (Fall 2016): 11, 30.

³¹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed in His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 21.

³² Darrell L. Bock, “New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” in *Foundation of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*, ed. Paul Pettit (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2008), 105.

might say, gardening is a spiritual discipline, bodily exercise is a spiritual discipline, or claim that some other hobby or pleasurable habit is a valid spiritual discipline.”³³ Other limitations could be the flaws that may have occurred in data collection and reporting of the Gallup poll or the Pew Research studies.

Due to the participants experiencing the challenging COVID–19 pandemic crisis, the study may reflect unexpected life stressors. Many of the participants solicited have likely not been part of a research study before. The time frame and mode of the project will require that the participants are timely with their responses. The number of participants from the small groups that participate may not reflect the disciples’ diverse lifestyles for Christ.

Delimitations

Although there are seventy small groups of women ages twenty-one to eighty-four, the study will only utilize four groups. The small groups usually receive new members based on geographic locations after the member has gone through a member orientation and discipleship program. There will be some changes due to the changes in the community due to COVID–19. Indeed, the whole world practiced social distancing to prevent and decrease the spread of a highly contagious new virus of pandemic proportions. The researcher continued with plans for the research thesis study dates, as planned, before the COVID–19 pandemic in the winter and spring of 2020. Social distancing caused the PC community to change and not meet as face-to-

³³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for Life*. 12.

face groups but to communicate via telephone or video calls, text messaging, email, and other social media.

Thesis Statement

When the disciples of Christ are not in fellowship with other believers, how can one determine if the babe in Christ or established disciple of Christ is becoming more like Christ while utilizing the spiritual disciplines? Many who believe in Christ have no relationship with God by spending time in spiritual disciplines. Many may not understand what the term spiritual disciplines refer to when asked. Various faith traditions have ideologies of spiritual disciplines, but it is best to stay with the spiritual disciplines listed in the Bible for the disciples of Christ. Spiritual disciplines help develop healthy disciples of Christ. When a believer expresses spiritual disciplines in one's life, then the Holy Spirit's gifts can be developed and used with the small groups, promoting a healthy body of Christ growing and multiplying, making more disciples for Christ. If the disciples of Christ at PC receive additional education regarding spiritual disciplines to enhance spiritual growth, they will become more committed disciples of Christ.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter Two includes a literature review that expands on the information discussed in the thesis project proposal. The theological and theoretical foundations, the biblical foundations for the research thesis project, are discussed in this chapter to round out the conceptual framework. Many books and articles about spiritual disciplines aim to help develop disciples of Christ. For this thesis project, the author builds on small group models proven to help disciples of Christ develop as healthy disciples emphasizing spiritual disciplines.

Literature Review

This literature review looks at the spiritual disciplines of disciples of Christ. There is a wide array of written literature on disciples becoming more like Christ. The utilization of spiritual disciplines in the life of God's people in the Bible can lead Christians toward godliness. Resources regarding the Reformation and the Spiritual Awakening in Europe and the United States include spiritual disciplines. Bible scholars share how the disciples followed the teachings of the first-century disciple-makers. The church's early culture developed according to the instructions left by Jesus during his ascension to make disciples. Early and Dempsey write, "Disciples obeyed the Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37), the New Commandment (John 13:34), and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19). In so doing, they become the hands, feet, and voice for Jesus in their world."¹ As a result, the church was healthy, and their spiritual growth was healthy, thus promoting solid Christian communities. As the Christian communities grew and spread, so did the Word. When disciples are not spending time together and sharing the

¹ Early and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 22.

Word and the love of Christ, growth may develop slower than necessary. This literature review examines what others have studied and written regarding spiritual disciplines needed for a healthy church or congregation of disciples for Christ.

A Healthy Church

The key to a healthy church is to follow the command of Christ to His disciples and to make disciples for Christ. According to Earley and Dempsey, Christ left commandments to the disciples to continue into future generations. The term or phrase known as the Great Commission is imperative to the church's founding and mission. The disciples' instructions were to go, baptize, and teach what Jesus taught them in this significant command (Matthew. 28:19–20). The way to make disciples of Jesus Christ is to proclaim the good news.² When Michael G. Mawson discusses discipleship, he writes that the cross to bear when one hears the “call to follow Christ is to obey as a form of simple obedience.”³ He adds that “Bonhoeffer affirmed and gave a deeper understanding of the calling of Christ to the disciples. Christ called the disciples to follow Him, and they immediately dropped what they were doing because of his authority and obeyed [by following Him].”⁴ It is important to note that one does not call oneself. Discipleship can only occur when one continues to look to Christ, for without the awareness of who Christ is; there is

² Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Leading Healthy Growing Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty Press, 2018), 8.

³ Michael G. Mawson, “Suffering Christ’s Call: Discipleship and the Cross,” *The Bonhoeffer Legacy* 3, no. 2 (2015): 8.

⁴ Ibid.

no discipleship.⁵ After His ascension, the disciples followed the teachings that Christ taught the twelve apostles.

According to Christopher Beard, obeying God's Word contributes to discipleship's "experience" aspect. So, as a disciple hears the good news and "obeys God's word, the Holy Spirit continues to shape and conform the new believer into the image of Christ. The more the disciple practices and engages in obedience, the more growth and a closer relationship with God can occur."⁶ Beard noted that true discipleship relates to the disciple's changes and the transformation required for spiritual growth. Beard shares that transformation occurs when one moves beyond just downloading an information exchange and some behavior changes. The "true transformation of who we are in Christ is true discipleship. We take on a new identity, and our lives change as God recreates us in Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:17) and as the Holy Spirit continually transforms us by the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:2)."⁷ To be born again is to become new in Christ. To practice spiritual disciplines as Christ took time to pray, fast, and spend time in Scripture are acts of obedience to the Word of God. In *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*, N. T. Wright writes,

The whole fantastic story of Jesus shares multiple layers for man to follow Him. In John, the ultimate vision of the nature of true Christian discipleship comes to fruition. At the end of John 21, after Jesus' strange and beautiful conversation with Peter, he issues that haunting summons: do not think about what I may or may not require of the person

⁵ Mawson, "Suffering Christ's Call Discipleship," 8.

⁶ Christopher Beard. "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals within the Missional Movement," *Missiology* 43, no. 2 (April 2015): 179.

⁷ Ibid.

standing next to you. Your call is simply to follow me. “If it is my will that he should remain until I come, what is that to you? You are to follow me.”⁸

Wright also explains the relationship that one can have firsthand with Jesus. He writes that, because of the Cross, Jesus offers us, here and now, his sonship, his Spirit, and his mission to the world. Because of His love, God desires to reaffirm all that is genuinely human within us, including our bodies, relationships, work, and creativity. Nevertheless, the message in Jesus is that this reaffirmation of humanness follows crucifixion, that wholeness comes down the road of holiness.⁹

The thought of crucifixion in the manner that Jesus was is horrific. However, a disciple hears from the Word of God to “take up your cross, Jesus said; he invites us to a great act of faith and trust, to look with a clear eye at the moral choices we face and to prepare to say ‘no,’ even if it hurts when faced with subtle and powerful temptations. In the sight of the foolish, such behavior seems to be death. Still, we will be at peace.”¹⁰ The disciples of today “are to live in the present as resurrection people: ‘if you have been raised with Christ,’ says Paul, ‘seek the things that are above...[and] put to death...whatever in you is earthly’ (Colossians 3:1–15). That is never easy.”¹¹ Not many want to take up the cross that is associated with Jesus.

No, most are not willing to suffer for the cross that causes the disciples of Christ to be different in the 21st-century technologically and seductively-driven society. Nevertheless, the

⁸ N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 21–22.

⁹ Wright, *Following Jesus*, 85.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

disciple of Christ must take up the cross that Jesus offered himself for that man may become like his Sovereign, Christ having a mission to the world, according to Wright. Again, noted in John, Wright adds, “The Word may become flesh once more and dwell among humanity. When one has once beheld His glory, the enlightened individual should have the desire to reveal the glory of the Lord to others.”¹² The apostle, Paul, spent much time discipling others and making disciples for Christ. The epistles of Paul teach much about making disciples for Christ in society today.

Holy Spirit in the Beginning and Now

Donal Door wrote that it is evident that the first-century Christians believed themselves to be moved by the same Holy Spirit as the prophets professed in the Old Testament. The Holy Spirit of the early church revealed to the disciples that “their spiritual anointing was different, seeing as they were sharing in the life and work of Jesus Christ. So, they experienced God’s Spirit as the Spirit of Jesus Christ.”¹³ Door further examines other passages of Scripture, adding “In essence, the life-breath of God is the inspiration received from God through the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴ The Holy Spirit is the gift from God given to Christians freely and in unmerited favor.

¹² Wright, *Following Jesus*, 85.

¹³ Donal Door, “The Holy Spirit as Source, Power, and Inspiration for Spiritual Practice,” *Practical Theology* 10, no.1 (2017): 8–9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

Coleman Ford adds that the scriptures contain truths that are “taught with sweetness.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, not everyone will necessarily find them sweet. Scriptures can correct evil, feed the simple, and delight great ones. However, the minds of men are in danger of not receiving Scripture’s humble yet life-giving consolation. Ford also shares that the Word of God must be read in its totality and not softened so that those who hear will gain a complete picture of God’s nature.¹⁶ The Scripture gives life as the Holy Spirit that gives one clarity and illumination concerning the Word of God.

Jesus instructed the disciples to wait on the Holy Spirit to receive power to share the gospel (Acts 2:4–6). According to Adam Kotsko, Augustine reasoned that “one must understand the procession of the Holy Spirit, [because it] must be understood differently from the generation or birth of Jesus, the Son of God.”¹⁷ Augustine goes further, as noted by Kotsko, “He comes forth, you see, not as being born but as being given, and so he is not called son, because he was not born like the only begotten Son. Neither was He made and born adoptively by grace like us.”¹⁸ The gift of the Holy Spirit joins man into a relationship with God. Kotsko further writes, “This is how the two are joined to the other, by which the begotten, loved by the one who begets him. And, in turn, loves the begetter. The Spirit takes his place in the unity of the Trinity as that

¹⁵ Coleman M. Ford. “He Who Consoles Us Should Console You: The Spirituality of the Word in Select Letters of Augustine of Hippo,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (2018): 251–55.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Adam Kotsko, “Gift and Communion: The Holy Spirit in Augustine’s *De Trinitate*,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 64, no. 1 (2011): 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

unity, and perhaps one might even say that the Spirit is their unity because it is charity.”¹⁹ The Holy Spirit’s presence after one accepts and believes that Jesus came for their reconciliation with God tends to fill the disciple with the ability to love as God so loves them. The practice of spiritual disciplines allows one to grow closer to godliness while being indwelt with the presence of the Holy Spirit. The communication of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting help guide one to be more like Christ, revealing who Christ truly is.

The Scriptures contain stories and verses about God’s love for his people. The approach of Augustine Aurelius is that “the Holy Spirit is decisive in giving his Trinitarianism its distinctive shape, insofar as it determines his conception of the unity of God, the relationship of God to the creation and, most importantly, what it means for God to be love.”²⁰ The journey of a disciple progresses through life with him learning to follow the commands given by Jesus. If believers say they love God and are born of God, then the Holy Spirit facilitates the commandment to love one another. According to Daniel M. Doriani, “Without minimizing the complexities of interpretation, we must confess that if the Spirit removes the veil that covers unregenerate eyes, Scripture is clear enough that readers grasp its fundamental truth and believe.”²¹ To believe in the Lord, having faith and trust will easily facilitate.

¹⁹ Kotsko, “Gift and Communio”, 7.

²⁰ Aurelius Augustine, *The Fifteen Books of Aurelius Augustinus, Bishop of Hippo*, “On The Trinity” Book I, accessed 10/15/2020, http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103/Page_17.htm.

²¹ Daniel M. Doriani, “Take, Read Daniel,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016, 1030. ProQuest.

When one loves someone, intimacy strengthens by spending time alone with the one you love. Steven Porter shares that “praying and fasting draw disciples closer to God. The closer one becomes to God through spiritual disciplines, the more the intimacy of the presence of God. Jesus taught that getting away quietly and secretly is better than boasting in a crowd. The Father can see the true intention of the heart.”²² Porter adds, “God is at work in man, enabling him to have a will and to work for his good pleasure”²³ Philippians. 2:12–13 Spiritual disciplines effectively promote the demonstration of and encouraging the walk of others with Christ.

According to Guthrie Ziegler, the journey toward godliness is a meaningful lifestyle because “in Christ, is godly living, godly worship, and godly thinking when one practices the spiritual disciplines. The Son through the Spirit offers his life of prayer and faithfulness to the Father in perfect communion.”²⁴ This communion with God is so crucial to leading to the transformation of the disciple. Diane Chandler puts it this way “transformation of a disciple requires reception of the Holy Spirits inner working and self-agency for personal transformation and obedient response in loving and serving God and others, all for the Glory of God.”²⁵ So much more the disciple spending time reading the Bible, fasting, and praying. Loving God and loving the people of God is so much easier when one takes up the spiritual disciplines and allows

²² Porter, Steven L. “Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship that Forms the Christian Character,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 2 (2019): 88.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Geordie W, Ziegler, “Is It Time for a Reformation of Spiritual Formation?: Recovering Ontology,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 11, no. 1 (Spr 2018): 85.

²⁵ Diane J Chandler, “Whole-Person Formation: An Integrative Approach to Christian Education,” *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 329.

the Holy Spirit to mold us into Christlikeness. Practicing the spiritual disciplines daily, be it one, two, or more, only develops a greater awareness and closeness to God the Father. Peter White puts it like this: praying continuously in daily communion with God is referred to as spirituality, the core of the Christian experience. “It is how churches and individual believers participate in the mission of God, through the way they live in and by the Holy Spirit, to know the will of God.”²⁶

Discipleship and the Great Command

According to Dempsey and Earley, three stages of discipleship help with viewing the development of a relationship with God: stage one: Declaration (Investigation Leading to Repentance and Faith in Jesus); stage two: Development (Immersion, Abandonment, and Apprenticeship into Ministry); stage three: Deployment (Intentional Global Commissioning).²⁷

In another description of discipleship, Jim Putnam, Bobby Harrington, and Robert Coleman present their attempt to help determine disciples’ spiritual growth with different explanations and names for five stages and then add four spheres. The five stages are (1) those who are spiritually dead (unbelief); (2) the spiritual infant (excited and eager to learn); (3) the spiritual child, who is rebellious and self-centered; (4) the spiritual young adult, who has become God-focused and other-centered; and (5) the spiritual parent because the disciple is of God and

²⁶ Peter White, “Pentecostal Mission Spirituality: A Study of the Classical Pentecostal Churches in Ghana,” *Missionalia* 44, no.3 (2017): 251–62.

²⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 58–59.

the other focused.²⁸ Some may find the three stages from Earley and Dempsey simple and more comfortable to measure. Still, others may prefer the more descriptive terminology of the stages and spheres.

The four spheres of a disciple's relationship life help determine how they grow. The first is in his relationship with God; the second is in his relationship with God's family and the church; the third is in his home life, and the fourth is in his relationship with the world. The five stages and four spheres need consideration when intentionally planning the disciples' growth and development, from one beginning as spiritually dead to becoming a parent stage.²⁹ Knowing the stages and levels of growth can aid small group leaders and disciple-makers.

In comparison, Michael Henderson's study of the Mologist Society and the Evangelical Awakening in England during the eighteenth century found that John Wesley had determined a way to develop small groups of people into a company of men and women who had the form of godliness and sought the power of godliness. These groups were united, coming together to pray, receive a word of exhortation, and then watch over one another in love, helping one another work out their soul's salvation."³⁰ Thus, even though making disciples today seems to be headed back to small groups as part of larger congregations, there is a difference because people tend to move around more to see what is going on across town or the next county.

²⁸ Jim Putman, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help our Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 25.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki, 2016), 82.

Andy Stanley addressed the issue of the “attractional church of the late twentieth century,”³¹ adding that many pastors and leaders of these churches say it does not help grow the kingdom of God. Stanley also noted that “the Great Command and the Great Commission should focus on church leadership and disciple-makers.”³² All church leaders and disciple-makers will be encouraged to go forward in this day with a different understanding of what has happened to discipleship under the attractional church banner.

According to Jared Wilson, the attractional church’s intentions and the movement’s leaders were noble. Wilson makes what has been discovered clear. The beginning of the seeker/attractional movement addressed genuine problems, especially when church members did not reach their unsaved neighbors. The unsaved neighbors could not see how Christianity was relevant to modern life.³³ The challenge from this attractional model is that many did not take up the cross and follow Jesus around as His disciples did. According to Wilson, one also learns that discipleship is supernatural, not taught. Prayers of disciples toward God for guidance to live and be an example in one’s community are known to make a difference in communities.

Holiness and Sanctification

Many times, a disciple or born-again believer may not have a clear understanding of the defining characteristics of a lifestyle of holiness, but one can put into practice the words of Paul:

³¹ Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 12–13.

³² Ibid.

³³ Jared Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 53.

“I appeal to you; therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern what the will of God is, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (Romans 12:1–3, ESV). A different perspective on a new believer’s life occurs upon having a changed and renewed mind. The mind changed because of the renewing by Christ through the Holy Spirit makes the difference. Also, one notes here that Christ says, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matthew 11:29, ESV). This verse of Scripture helps support why disciples should practice spiritual disciplines just as Christ Himself took the time to do the same. According to Vanhoozer’s *Putting on Christ*, “The role Christians play in the theodrama is that of disciples of Jesus Christ: persons who have the mind of Christ and know how to embody it at all times and places. This is the drama of discipleship: discerning and doing the way of Jesus Christ in particular situations.”³⁴ A follower of Jesus, when putting on the Christ, “begins a life-changing process that has no ceiling to our growth potential in this life. Our graduation is incomplete until there is a flat line on the monitor.”³⁵ When this happens, the goal is to see and be with the Lord.

According to Wright, followers of Jesus have a compelling reason to choose holiness. He adds that there is much talk about wholeness and one’s fulfillment. However, Wright adds, many

³⁴ Kevin Vanhoozer, “Putting on Christ: Spiritual Formation and the Drama of Discipleship,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 2, no. 2 (2015): 147–71.

³⁵ Neil Cole, *Church 3.0: Upgrades for the Future of the Church*, Leadership Network (Jossey-Bass, 2010), 41, Logos.

Christians consider this utterly self-justifying, as though self-fulfillment is above all that matters. The Word, ‘Take up your cross, and follow me per Jesus; invites disciples to grab hold of a great act of faith and trust, to look with a clear eye at the moral choices we face, and to be prepared to say ‘no, even if it hurts, when faced with not only subtle but powerful temptations.³⁶ Often, one’s faith may be considered foolish by those unregenerated, but the peace of God associated with faith in God will comfort the disciples of Christ.

The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto against the Status Quo by Jared Wilson does not have a theme against the Traditional Church or the Word of God. Instead, the focus is that the era of pastors and church leaders designing programs to be marketed to the community to help increase and encourage the move from community attendance to church service does not help develop and promote congregational membership’s spiritual growth. The intentions of many pastors who began to listen to the cries of church members rather than the Word of God were not to turn away from God but to make God more people-friendly. Wilson writes that believers “once emphasized God’s perfect holiness, now they emphasized his abundant love. Where once the church emphasized obedience, now they emphasized success. Where once the church emphasized sin, now they emphasized happiness.”³⁷ Wilson shares that spiritual growth has declined in many large churches, even with increased attendance. Spiritual disciplines draw the disciple with the indwelled Spirit, which serves to help change the hearts and minds “since only

³⁶ Wright, *Following Jesus*, 85.

³⁷ Wilson, *Prodigal Church*, 83.

the Spirit of God can transform the heart of the disciple.”³⁸ The body of Christ needs believers to know who Christ is and who want to follow Christ, not onlookers on the sideline.

A few of the topics covered by Wilson are 1) What Works, 2) The Bible is Not an Instruction Manual, 3) What if the System is Broken, 4) Watching is Beholding, 5) Pastoring Hearts, and 6) A Way Forward. In an honest discourse, Wilson argues that the way to holiness is to teach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He shares that the church became the Prodigal Church in many communities because it left the good news’s foundational teachings.³⁹ This project is about increasing the practice of spiritual disciplines among Christ’s disciples who are new to the church’s faith and established members. The intent is to make disciples for Christ, willing to take up their cross and follow Him. Disciples of Christ strive to be like Christ; they hope to see him face to face. As Paul describes it, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed in the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18, ESV).

In the *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Richard J. Forster shares that “prayer catapults one onto the frontier of spiritual life. Prayer is the most central of all the spiritual disciplines because it ushers one into perpetual communion with the Father.”⁴⁰ Many children raised in homes of disciples of Christ will learn to pray as the first spiritual discipline

³⁸ Rick Yount, “The Mind: Discipleship that Forms the Thoughts of Christians-Reflections on Dallas Willard’s Thinking on the Mind (Thoughts),” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 58.

³⁹ Wilson, *Prodigal Church*, 53.

⁴⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2018), 33.

taught by one's parents. The importance may or may not have emphasis, and the children will not necessarily grow in prayer unless the teacher understands how God relates to His people through this specific discipline. The Twelve saw a need to learn to pray. Foster writes, "The bold and truthful statement is, to pray is to change. Prayer is the central avenue God uses to transform us. If one is unwilling to change, then prayer is abandoned as a noticeable characteristic in the life of a disciple of Christ."⁴¹ When becoming Christlike "in prayer, real prayer, we begin to think of God's thought after him: to desire the things he desires, to love the things he loves, to will the things he wills. Progressively we are taught to see things from God's point of view."⁴² Many men, known to walk with God, past and present, emphatically proclaim that prayer is the key to one's closeness to God.

Learning to pray is and should be ongoing in the lives of disciples. As babes learn from others, so will disciples of Christ learn from the experience gained as one continues to practice the disciplines while at the same time observing this among fellow believers in the community. Even so, the disciples saw a need due to the realization that Jesus, the master, practiced the spiritual disciplines in a way they had not done until the times spent observing him. Luke writes, "Now Jesus was praying in a certain place, and when he finished, one of his disciples told him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, when you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come'" (Luke 11:1–2, ESV). This favored passage of many is from the beginning of what is now called the Lord's Prayer.

⁴¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 33.

⁴² Ibid.

The main argument in *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation* is that one can become more effective with a consistent prayer life.⁴³ There is an admonishment for one to pray several of Paul's prayers in such a way that they will be able to hear God speak clearer in their lives today. According to D. A. Carson, disciples of Christ "find strength and direction toward godliness when praying for God's glory and the self-edification of the disciple."⁴⁴ Carson teaches through a Framework of prayer, Worthy petitions, Praying for others, and having a Passion for people, as noted in 1 Thessalonians 3:9–13.⁴⁵ The Sovereign is yet relational. In His Word, God gives man examples of helping believers overcome hurdles and excuses for not praying in Philippians 1:9–11. Spiritual reform and growth among the people of God should be encouraged in believers' lives, as one is never too old to learn more about the way of holiness. The way to grow in prayer is to pray more often. With the knowledge of developing a relationship with God, the believer should also understand that it is essential to "discipline themselves, which requires a context of intimacy and accountability."⁴⁶

Michael Barrett writes in *How Can I Grow in Holiness Through Reading the Old Testament* that one can grow by reading the Bible. There is a discussion regarding the frequency and descriptions of Holiness appearing throughout the Old Testament."⁴⁷ He follows with, "The

⁴³ Donald A. Carson, *Praying with Paul: A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), x.

⁴⁴ Carson, *Praying with Paul*, x.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 10.

⁴⁶ Greg Ogden. *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God*. Revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 143.

⁴⁷ Barrett, Michael P. V. *How Can I Grow in Holiness Through Reading the Old Testament?* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2016), 2.

main point is that every time one opens the Scriptures, it should be done with awe and reverence. Adding for the readers, the Bible is not an ordinary book. It is the Word of the eternal God,”⁴⁸ This belief is in most Evangelical and Pentecostal churches’ Tenets of Faith. Barrett shares that the Bible “whose veracity is beyond question or doubt. The premise is that the Bible is God’s inspired, authoritative, infallible, sufficient, and effective Word.”⁴⁹ With this belief, Kevin Vanhoozer adds, “It thus appears that Scripture, minimally, provides everything maturing saints need to know. The gospel of Jesus Christ is necessary—‘need to know’ information—because saving faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Romans 10:17), and the canonical Scriptures are sufficient because saving faith needs to know nothing else.”⁵⁰

Loving One Another is A Command Also

The Formation of Christian Character: Living into the Life of Jesus by Klaus Issler is a refreshing guide to what it means to walk and live the life that Jesus came to show. According to Issler, the life of Christ via the Scriptures emphasizes how Christ lived as both human and divine.⁵¹ There is a discussion around the heart of man. One point is that the teachings and examples of Jesus’s life exemplify developing a relationship with the Master. According to Issler, the heart is central to the lifestyle of believers.⁵² A believer must have the heart to do what is

⁴⁸ Barrett, *How Can I Grow*, 2.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer, “The Sufficiency of Scripture: A Critical and Constructive Account,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 49, no. 3 (2021): 218–34.

⁵¹ Klaus Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character: Living into the Life of Jesus* (Downer Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 17.

⁵² Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character*, 35.

right, not just the desire for willpower. Issler puts it this way, “We need to abandon an externally focused, rule-keeping emphasis on Christian living, and instead embrace Jesus’ teaching and example of inner heart formation.”⁵³ There is an emphasis placed on Scripture itself. Jesus taught the Word of God while he was on the earth and extolled the need for the Holy Spirit relationship for one to receive the power to grow. Noted in Issler, he teaches that reading and learning the Scriptures is what pricks the heart and causes the change required for a closer walk with God.⁵⁴ The heart, once changed, will manifest the love of Christ to others that the believer encounters.

One can see that “throughout the Old Testament, the term ‘heart’ represents the self, including thoughts, feeling, and the will (e.g., Psalm 22:26; 1 Kings 3:12; Exodus 36:2); the word can even be interchangeable with ‘soul’ (Hebrew *nephesh*, e.g., Joshua 22:5; 1 Samuel 2:35).”⁵⁵ When it comes to the New Testament there is a difference in the term for “the ‘heart’ (Greek *kardia*, e.g., Luke 21:34; Acts 14:17; 2 Corinthians 5:12), and the name is also occasionally used in parallel with ‘mind’ (Greek *nous*, e.g., 2 Corinthians 3:14–15). Thus, the heart will signify the changeable aspects of our inner life, mainly the source of our character.”⁵⁶ A Christian’s character and integrity should demonstrate that they have a heart for God; they love God with their hearts. According to John Calvin, “The Christian life like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul; and finds its seat and habitation

⁵³ Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character*, 35

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–28.

in the inmost recesses of the heart.”⁵⁷ The time one spends disciplining oneself through Bible intake, fasting, and praying is a good way of softening and moving one to holiness.

One can get the sense and believe that if one can get man’s heart to change, believers can learn to truly love God in a way that showcases the command to love one another. Issler shares that forgiveness is the first exemplary practice that Jesus practiced.⁵⁸ Many times, one must learn to forgive to learn how to love. Forgiveness will require continually looking to the Holy Spirit to help the disciple of Christ grow spiritually. The five formation gaps give one principle to deal with hurtful situations that can quickly slow one’s spiritual growth journey. Issler then provides a process, the four steps from Jesus’ example: awake, admit, ask, and act. These are a foundation that one can fall back upon to help both themselves and others.⁵⁹

Growing towards being like Christ and having holiness, one must become aware that no matter how much maturation occurs in the relationship with the Lord, one can still look to him as *Abba*. It is essential to think of this term and use it when situations require forgiveness toward others. Issler writes that Christ’s disciples should substitute *Abba* instead of Father when talking to God in prayer. No matter how many years have passed in traveling and learning to lean on Jesus, one can still consider themselves a beloved child of *Abba*.⁶⁰ The Scripture that resonates is that a disciple should love the Lord with all his heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37–40), and

⁵⁷ John Calvin. *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, Book 6. Chap 3. E-Sword.

⁵⁸ Issler, *Formation of Christian Character*, 168.

⁵⁹ Issler, *Formation of Christian Character*, 156.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 94–95.

this Scripture, “hopefully, is exemplified so that others may come to love *Abba* in the same way.”⁶¹ Going forth in life daily to share the love of God through daily lifestyle actions.

Theological Foundations

The small groups ministry has biblical principles that serve as strong biblical foundations for small groups. There are four major and significant biblical passages that support and provide small-group instruction. In addition, three components or topics can describe each of the passages’ meanings: The Great Commandment, the Great Commission, the Great Example, the Great Illustration, and the Great Plan. This section will include the biblical passages that serve as foundational building instructions for discipleship using strong small groups to promote God’s kingdom’s healthy growth.⁶² There will also be a discussion of biblical examples of small group discipleship. Categorizing the passages with topics helps form a structure for believers regarding the foundational scriptures.

The primary New Testament passages for discipleship are Matthew 22:36–40; John 13:34, and Matthew 28:19–20. These Scripture passages provide the “biblical foundations for the Great Commandment, which is to love God and to love the people of God.”⁶³ Also, Jesus describes the New Commandment as “A new commandment I give to you that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have a love for one another” (John 13:34–35, ESV). The

⁶¹ Issler, *The Formation of Christian Character*, 168.

⁶² Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 22–23.

⁶³ Ibid.

“Scripture that gives Christians the Great Commission is Matthew. 28:19–20 tells them to baptize new converts, to teach them to observe and obey the way of the Lord, and to exhibit behavior that provides an example of what one’s life looks like when following Christ.”⁶⁴

Following the Apostles’ teaching and leadership, the church began to multiply and began the life of the church of Jesus Christ. A good example of the church in the beginning is found in Acts,

And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. So, the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2: 42–47).

In this passage, one finds a clear expression of what discipleship is. This passage, known as the Great Example, shares the love among the brethren and describes how the Christians began to fulfill the great commission to reach the nations from Jerusalem.

While there are Scripture references for discipleship instruction, one can go further to connect biblical references beginning in the Old Testament, through the Intertestamental, then the New Testament, which gives more explicit Scripture examples of connection to small groups discipleship. These Scripture references support and foster growing more toward holiness through small group discipleship. Joe Easterling writes, "Perhaps the family unit is the most consistent form of small group discipleship seen in the Hebrew scriptures. One need only read

⁶⁴ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 22–23.

the first eleven chapters of Genesis to find small groups in the form of family, such as Adam and Eve in Eden and Noah's family in the ark. However, such evidence extends beyond the opening pages of the Old Testament."⁶⁵ When God used Moses to lead the enslaved descendants of Abraham from Egypt, the large group eventually became smaller groups known as the twelve tribes. Easterling said, "During the dark years of exile, God used a small group of faithful followers to infiltrate and influence the pagan king for his divine will (Daniel 1:3–7). Moreover, Nehemiah 3 documents how the post-exilic Jews were organized in groups to rebuild the ruined wall of Jerusalem."⁶⁶ Many of these leaders and organizers of the small groups were people who prayed and called out to God and were many times anointed by the Holy Spirit to fulfill the will of God.

Biblical Principles for Discipleship and the Early New Testament Church

There are three guiding principles of philosophical implications for the disciple-making process. These directives are as follows: Sacrifice, Relationship, and Transformation for discipleship. Supporting verses of Scripture include Luke 14:27 and John 8:31–32.⁶⁷ The sacrifice one makes to take time for Bible intake, fasting, and prayer leads to relationship and transformation. Carson writes, "Scriptures teach that the Word 'is living and active (Hebrews 4:12). It can transform one through the renewing of the mind (Romans 12:2).'"⁶⁸ The renewed

⁶⁵ Joe M. Easterling, "Big Things Start Small: A Survey of the Role of Small Groups in Christianity's Major Spiritual Awakenings." Ph.D. diss., Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity, 2020, 29.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 30.

⁶⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 25–27.

⁶⁸ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 348.

mind of those growing towards godliness or Christlikeness is what the believer who has been born again develops Holy hunger for more of the presence and understanding of who God is in one's life. According to Augustine,

He found valuable his reflections on these themes. One such locus classicus is the collection of sayings involving the self-found in Matthew 16:24–28, Mark 8:34–39, and Luke 9:23–27. In the version in Mark, Jesus addresses his disciples (and others present) with these words: ‘Anyone who wishes to be a follower of mine must leave self behind; he must take up his cross and come with me.’⁶⁹

These Scriptures that were written and passed down to scholars and disciples of Christ had a profound transforming effect on Augustine.

Brian Brock says Augustine textually marks his growing certainty about his place in God through Spiritual disciplines.⁷⁰ Brock shares with his readers that Augustine declares in *Confessions* that to have come to an understanding and achieved this has meant uncovering the proximity of Jesus Christ to Scripture. Reading and listening to Scripture made one become confident in praying, knowing that God was listening to him.⁷¹ Bob Johnson and Rickie D. Moore have presented work saying, “Spiritual disciplines for spiritual formation is thus intensely personal and communal. In that it focuses on the development of the heart and mind of the individual, it is intensely personal. It is intensely communal in that formation concerns the bride’s growth, edification, and preparation for Christ.”⁷² Matthew Levering shares an awareness

⁶⁹ Brian Brock, “Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and some Later Authors,” *The Journal of Religion* 91, no. 1 (January 2011): 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 49–51.

⁷¹ Brock, “Self, Soliloquy, and Spiritual Exercises in Augustine and some Later Authors,” 9.

⁷² Bob L. Johnson and Rickie D. Moore, “Soul Care for One and All: Pentecostal Theology and the Search for a More Expansive View of Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 26, no. 1 (March 2017): 125.

that he discovered “God intends to teach about himself in Scripture.”⁷³ The one finds in the same just written another way in A. W. Tozer, “Only the Spirit of the Holy One can impart to the human spirit the knowledge of the Holy.”⁷⁴ God always has a plan for the disciple. Many have learned through the years that prayer or Bible reading will provide an answer or balm for life’s challenges.

Becoming more Christlike happens, starting with practicing two or three disciplines: Bible intake, prayer, and fasting. When one learns to listen and read the Word, God, through the spiritual disciplines, will guide his disciples toward Godliness, Christlikeness, or holiness. All three are the same. Jan Johnson presents great work with practicing exercises regarding what and how of spiritual disciplines for those who would like to gain more insight into practical prayers and what it means to listen for the voice of God during one’s prayer time. One of the ways Johnson says spiritual disciplines help disciples connect with God is that trust in God develops over time. She reminds the disciples that “one’s spirituality is not about the individual or prayer group; it is the work of God in us. The disciple gets to cooperate in God’s ‘family business’ of transforming the world. One reminds that all that is needed is to trust that God will do the work in the inner being through the power of the Spirit (cf. Ephesians 3:16).”⁷⁵ Becoming like God, like Jesus of whom man is made in the image of.

⁷³ Matthew Levering, *Engaging the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit: Love and Gift in the Trinity and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 73.

⁷⁴ A. W. Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2009), Chapter: The Holiness of God, Paragraph 3. E-Sword.

⁷⁵ Jan Johnson, *Prayer and Listening* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020) 5–6. ProQuest.

Richard N. Longenecker shares that Paul sets out in Romans 12:1–2 “vitally important factors that are involved in the formation of a Christian ethical consciousness.”⁷⁶ He goes on to give themes to share with the believer that the message serves to help one to develop a lifestyle of Holiness. The themes are as follows: “(1) ‘God’s mercies,’ (2) the message of ‘the Christian gospel,’ and (3) the ‘transformation’ of a person. The fourth is God’s continual “renewing of the mind” of a believing person by the ministry of his spirit.”⁷⁷ Longenecker also states that “the Christian ethic (1) has to do with a believer’s new moral discernments and moral commitments more than just external guidance and practices, and (2) is generated and expressed in response to what God has done and is doing redemptively through the work of Jesus Christ the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”⁷⁸ Again, there is testimony that the renewing of the mind toward godliness is by the Holy Spirit. Travis Pickell puts the discipline of prayer like this “in the practice of silent prayer, the one who prays relates to God as man, who is the image of God, with an awareness and acknowledgment of dependence on God for every breath.”⁷⁹ In practicing the spiritual disciplines, the disciple experiences an indwelling with the Holy Spirit for transforming effectiveness. It is safe to express that spiritual disciplines and spiritual growth are only progressively and significantly transforming with the presence of the Holy Spirit in the disciple.

⁷⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I Howard Marshall and Donald A. Hagner (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 855.

⁷⁷ Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 850–55.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Travis Ryan Pickell, “Gentle Space-Making: Christian Silent Prayer, Mindfulness, and Kenotic Identity Formation,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 32, no. 1 (February 2019): 72.

According to Dave Early and Rod Dempsey, “The spiritual disciplines are merely a means of helping us gaze into the face of Jesus so we may transform to think, act, feel, and love more like him.”⁸⁰ Therefore, one must remember that becoming more Christlike will require humility. One must always allow the Holy Spirit to impress upon us the need that the natural mind requires the Holy Spirit to understand the divine things of God. John Goldingay reminds his readers that “because of the prophet Isaiah teaching in Chapter 58, the improper motives Jesus condemned were not new or exclusive to the Pharisees. One of the clearest and most convicting Old Testament passages calls for a need for the Israelites to fast and focus their lives and attitudes on God’s will.”⁸¹ God’s chosen fast in Matthew does not focus on food; instead, it expands to include the same triad that requires prayer and almsgiving, here understood as a type of social justice in action.”⁸² To spend time reflecting on the Word of God, praying and at times sacrificing some of the tasty pleasure that a good meal can provide, one can become more like the Christ who went away to pray on many occasions noted in the Gospels (Matthew 6: 5–6; Luke 5:16).

According to Beverly Vos, prayer and Scripture study disciplines are often considered indispensable to the faith journey.⁸³ The spiritual disciplines are a means toward God and Christ’s likeness. Godliness is the goal of the disciples of Christ. One wants to model the pattern

⁸⁰ Early and Dempsey, *Spiritual Formation Is*, 272.

⁸¹ John Goldingay, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 56–66, 173.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Beverly Vos, “The Spiritual Disciplines and Christian Ministry,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 36, no. 2 (April 2102): 100–14.

set and left via the Bible for those who love the Lord and seek to be what He calls for the disciples of Christ to grow into as one journeys through this life with the Holy Spirit indwelling. The author of Hebrews penned and “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14, ESV). When reading the Bible, Augustine put it this way,

In order therefore that the human mind might be purged from falsities and myths learned earlier in life, the Holy Scripture, which suits itself to babes, has not avoided words drawn from any class of things really existing, through which, as by nourishment, our understanding might rise gradually to things divine and transcendent.”⁸⁴

Todd Wilson in *Real Christian: Bearing the Marks of Authentic Faith*, writes,

The Spirit turns you into what he likes, not by removing your personality, but renews your character. The Spirit makes his character, the disciples’ character; his holiness, the disciples.’ Until one day, the change is complete, and the character perfectly matches his. One’s desires, drives, and thoughts begin to resemble the Son, who is the perfect image of the Father.⁸⁵

Therefore, even today, 2000 years later, this revelation from the Twelve Apostles and early church fathers is just as true now as it was those years ago.

In work among scholars regarding discipleship and spiritual growth, one notes, “practicing the spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, Bible study, verse memory, and meditation on the Bible daily and consistently promotes a change in the life and way of thinking promotes spiritual growth.”⁸⁶ The culture of families and body of Christ’s lifestyle in the first few

⁸⁴ Augustine, Aurelius. *The Fifteen Books of Aurelius Augustinus, Bishop of Hippo*, “On the Trinity,” http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf103/Page_18.htm.

⁸⁵ Todd A. Wilson, *Real Christian: Bearing the Marks of Authentic Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 24.

⁸⁶ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 27.

centuries of the New Testament church saints practiced different lifestyles, but many modern technology and travel advance can assist those who would be followers of Christ to make the time for prayer, fasting, and Bible reading. Elmer Towns writes, “The purpose of all spiritual disciplines, including fasting, is to change the disciple in ways that have a social and interpersonal impact.”⁸⁷ Towns also made known to the readers that:

One of the most significant spiritual benefits of fasting is becoming more attentive to God. Therefore, becoming more aware of one’s inadequacies, God has adequacy, our contingencies, and His self-sufficiency. Take the time to “listen to what He wants us to be and do. Christian fasting, therefore, is antithetical to, say, Hindu fasting. Both seek results; however, Hindu fasting focuses on the self and tries to get something for a perceived sacrifice. Christian fasting focuses on God. The results are spiritual results that glorify God, both in the person who fasts and in others for whom we fast and pray.”⁸⁸

Many people fast for various reasons, but Towns makes clear the essential facts regarding the need to be practical and safe.

According to Carson, “Perseverance is a mark of true faith, of real disciples. A genuine believer remains in Jesus’ word (*logos*), his teaching: such a person obeys it, seeks to understand it better, and finds it more precious, more controlling, precisely when other forces flatly oppose it. It is the one who continues in the teaching, which has both the father and the Son.”⁸⁹ Carson further discusses more regarding John 8:32, “holding to Jesus’ teaching” (8:31) not only established the genuineness of faith, it also has authenticating power. We come to know the truth,

⁸⁷ Elmer L. Towns, *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Practical Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House of Baker Publishing Group, 2017, 14. Proquest.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 13.

⁸⁹ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 348.

not simply by intellectual assessment, but by moral commitment.”⁹⁰ Because Jesus has revealed it, the truth means the gospel, the reality of who Jesus is.

Discipleship and the Cross

The first principle, sacrifice, is based on certain teachings of Jesus that he modeled for His disciples. According to Scripture, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. So likewise, whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple”⁹¹ (Luke 14:26–27, ESV). Jesus reiterated this fundamental principle more than once during His ministry on earth. Once heard, the Word should, if reflected upon, can be brought to remembrance, and nurtured like in any other relationship. Just as Jesus mentions more than once to His disciples, disciples, and disciple-makers should include Bible intake as frequent nourishment today.

According to James Edwards, the full significance of coming to Jesus is clear for new believers in Luke 14: 25–35.⁹² The character of discipleship is described by Luke,

In terms of coming to Jesus, a theme introduced earlier in 6:47, when Jesus called disciples, ‘Come to me and hear my words and put them into practice.’ The call was left open, and a disciple might assume that coming to Jesus is one of several relationships he or she might enjoy. Nevertheless, hearing the Word of Jesus is one of several Words that he or she might hear.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 348.

⁹¹ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 26.

⁹² James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2015), 354.

⁹³ Ibid.

This passage is a call from the Lord for the sacrifice of those who hear the call and practice what one learns upon hearing the Word of the Lord.

Two premises found in Luke 26–27 define what a believer must be willing to sacrifice to follow Christ. First, Edwards writes, “The call of Jesus takes precedence even over primary familial and marital life relationships.”⁹⁴ Also, accepting the call to follow Jesus and be his disciple is to “hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even self in v. 26.”⁹⁵ Going on to v.27, accepting the call from Jesus to come to Him “is defined in terms of bearing one’s cross, and the image of discipleship introduced earlier. The cross (see at 9:23), an instrument of suffering and shame, epitomizes the sacrifices required of a disciple in following Jesus.”⁹⁶ One notes in Luke that the very fabric that binds humanity together, to love mothers and fathers, is taught against by Jesus. The disciple becoming more like Christ will love God more than secular habits or material belongings.

The phrase “salvation is free” is common and frequently used among the disciples of Christ. Though one does not, nor can one purchase salvation for oneself, it will cost something. Jesus teaches a metaphor about the cost of discipleship. In Edwards, Luke 27 is what Paul teaches in the same metaphor, “I am crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Galatians. 2:20, ESV). The threefold call of Jesus to forsake family and self, bear the Cross of discipleship, and renounce possessions is nothing less than the summons to a new

⁹⁴ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 354.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

identity, not based on genetics, race, or social factors, but based on costly discipleship with Jesus.⁹⁷ When one begins to practice spiritual disciplines, the disciple begins to learn and obey the Words of the Scripture and begin the journey toward godliness.

In explaining discipleship and the cross, it is necessary to return to the definition of discipleship. Greg Ligon states, “discipleship means adherence to the person of Jesus, and attachment to Jesus means submission to the law of Christ, which is the law of the cross. The law of the cross calls for the denial of self and the choice to take up the cross given by God. Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds disciples that enduring the cross is not a tragedy but the suffering that is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Christ.”⁹⁸ A born-again disciple is given a new life in Christ. Bonhoeffer also writes, “Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. Additionally noted, “the cross is not suffering that stems from natural existence; it is suffering that comes from being Christian. The essence of the cross is not suffering alone but being rejected. Strictly speaking, it is being rejected for the sake of Jesus Christ, not for any other attitude or confession.”⁹⁹ The suffering can be great, and one may not live up to the cross. A. W. Tozer wrote a question and answer: “What happens to the Christian who breaks down, who sins? The answer is the difference between coming into discipline, the spiritual disciplines, and coming into condemnation.”¹⁰⁰ One need not worry when

⁹⁷ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 354.

⁹⁸ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 44–45.

⁹⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, vol 4. (Minneapolis: First Fortress Press, 2003), 80.

¹⁰⁰ A. W. Tozer, *And He Dwelt Among Us: Teachings from The Gospel of John*, ed. James L. Snyder. (Grand Rapids, MI: Bethany House of Baker, 2011), 81. ProQuest.

a fall or mistake occurs, God is forgiving, and the Cross has already gone before those who want to be redeemed.

In Martin Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," which is referenced by Edwards, are the words, "Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also."¹⁰¹ Scripture tells believers that Jesus gave His all and died for all. Therefore, He reigns over them all, calling all to give their all to Christ in return. Because the Word is inerrant in content, absolute in authority, and complete in its revelation, this teaching is not pushed and advanced as a myth or fairy tale but is instead the truth. According to Edwards, obeying the call to give oneself "is not an unachievable ideal but a natural characteristic of knowing and loving Jesus. In some instances, one must forsake the family (v. 26), and in others, bring the family into the fellowship (Acts 16:33; 1 Corinthians 7:12; Colossians 3:18–21); in some instances, bear one's Cross (v. 27)."¹⁰² Following the call to pick up one's cross and follow Christ though it may be costly, it is also rewarding. The Word says in the Gospel of Mark, "And calling the crowd to him with his disciples; he said to them, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake, and the Gospels will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?'" (Mark 8:34–35, ESV). Grant Osborne writes, "Jesus uses his messianic suffering as the model for discipleship. When one reads Mark 8:34–9:1, the implications for true followers are defined. Two clarifications are telling why one should follow Jesus (v. 35–37, 38) and an eschatological

¹⁰¹ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 357.

¹⁰² Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 357.

promise linking discipleship with the Parousia (9:1).”¹⁰³ The disciples of today, just as “Jesus’ disciples, must walk one’s path of suffering and retribution.

The disciples were typical Jews who expected the Messiah to bring victory and vindication to the nation.”¹⁰⁴ A Holy Spirit-filled believer will have their lives enriched with increased Bible intake. It can be exhilarating for a new believer when the Holy Spirit’s presence quickens the mortal body while reading the Bible. Rebecca Carhart reminds disciple leaders and members of the body as a whole “To promote proper interpretation, laypeople could focus on those passages of Scripture that were ‘more easily understood’ and consult resources such as commentaries, sermons, or a local minister for correct interpretation.”¹⁰⁵ It is not always prudent for disciples to get so caught up in the Word and never check with others with a more knowledgeable understanding of the Scripture.

Whitney describes Bible intake, writing that “the purpose of all intake methods is to keep it, that is, to do what God says and thereby develop in Christlikeness.”¹⁰⁶ Bible intake can be reading oneself or listening to someone else reading it. Bible intake occurs during church service, but one can hear the Word from various audio-visual tools of the twenty-first century. Luke 11:28 gives instruction from Jesus that hearing the Word is vital in the life of the believer: “But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it! Jesus then went on to ask the

¹⁰³ Grant R. Osborne, *Mark*, in Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 46.

¹⁰⁴ Osborne, *Mark*, 46.

¹⁰⁵ Rebecca Carhart, Rebecca F. “A Forgotten Spiritual Practice: Puritan Conference and Implications for the Church Today,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 12, no. 1 (2019): 34–49.

¹⁰⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 23–25.

people who claimed to be the people of God have you not read,” (Mark 12:10, ESV, cf. Matthew 19:4). A disciple, young or inexperienced in faith, may come to expect a carefree life. However, Grant Osborne shares that the Bible teaches, “Jesus’s atoning sacrifice for us provides the only means of salvation (Romans 3:24–26).”¹⁰⁷ Then he adds more, saying getting to know Jesus is choosing to “participate in his sufferings and to become like him in his death (Philippians 3:10).”¹⁰⁸ That is what it means to “take up his cross” in Mark 8:34. One becomes a Christian not to gain more of this world but rather to find eternal life in the heavenly realm.¹⁰⁹ A life of sacrifice that one makes and the denial of self in obedience to the Lord’s will facilitates a lifestyle of holiness. Disciples of Christ live this life to live eternally with Christ.

Relationship of Disciples

To be in a relationship with other like-minded believers helps ease the sting of persecution upon the community of disciples of Christ. The relationship between believers leads to shared camaraderie due to like-minded thinking. The disciples are in a relationship, like the example of the relationship shared amongst Christ’s disciples. The lifestyle of the early New Testament believers, as noted by Darrell Bock,

The gathered community is of “one mind” (ὁμοθυμαδόν, homothymadon) as it prays. Ten of the eleven NT occurrences of this term appear in Acts. The word refers to a group acting as one (“with one accord” in KJV, ESV, RSV; “with one mind” in NASB, NET; “met together continually” in NLT; “continually united” in HCSB).¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ Osborne, *Mark*, 146.

¹⁰⁸ Osborne, *Mark*, 146.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Bock, *Acts*, 146.

Those who grow toward being like Christ begin to love one another and share the love of Christ not only with each other but the love that flows over to one's neighbors. In other cases of using the Word, one notes that it describes the disciples who are in accord (Acts 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25). Also, "As the examples concerning disciples show, it is a term that points to the church's fundamental unity. Here, the group is operating in obedience, waiting for the Spirit, and praying in preparation as they wait as instructed by Jesus."¹¹¹ Praying and waiting on the Lord as disciples are also good examples of the obedience demonstrated by the followers of Christ as they waited and prayed for the power from on high. The instructions that Jesus left as He ascended and then was taken seriously by the disciples were instrumental in the beginning stages of the Holy Spirit growing more disciples.

The results one receives from obedience, found in Acts 2:2–6, is the occurrence of a theophany, described as "the image of fire pointing to the association of heavenly glory in the presence of the Spirit. The divine presence and heaven come powerfully to the earth to indwell God's people."¹¹² According to John Starke, the resurrected and ascended Christ lets us pray "as his contemporary."¹¹³ He becomes our neighbor and friend, our companion and our intimate. The mystery of our faith is that God is simultaneously beyond us, with us, and in us.

Thus, the New Testament followers develop a relationship, allowing a commune between God and His creation. All those present are filled with the Spirit and speak in tongues as the

¹¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, 146.

¹¹² Bock, *Acts*, 146.

¹¹³ John Starke, *The Possibility of Prayer: Finding Stillness with God in a Restless World* (Minneapolis: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 18.

Spirit gives them utterance. In Bock, the definitive of “the genitive πνεύματος (*pneumatos*) is a genitive of content (“filled with the Holy Spirit,” Wallace (2000: 52) Williams (1990: 44– 45) explains that tongues are connected with praise, as these verses note.”¹¹⁴ The connection or relationship between the Spirit and prophesying is in Acts 2:17–18 and Luke 1:67.

According to Bock, the description of being filled with the Spirit began in Luke and Acts with John the Baptist’s story (Luke 1:15). Then again, Elizabeth and Zechariah were able to sing a hymn of praise to God (1:41, 67).¹¹⁵ From the initial experience of spiritual baptism that occurred among the disciples as they waited and prayed as Jesus had instructed, the disciples grew in relationships with God and each other. For the disciples today, Greg Ogden says, “Life is not the offspring of a program or paper. Life is the offspring of life.”¹¹⁶ The truth of Scripture comes alive when we see it lived out through others.” When one is active in prayer, Bible reading, and fasting, the activities are good ways of living an active relationship with Jesus.

Bock shares that Luke wants to leave no doubt that there is an essential connection between community life and the ‘favor’ the community experiences with outsiders. This kind of engagement has a positive effect on the mission. Everything about the Gospels and Acts tells us that God’s people are to take the initiative to show the community and serve those around them.¹¹⁷ Noted in Allison Collier, Jesus taught His disciples; the Gospels testify to the life He

¹¹⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 100.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ogden, Greg. *Essential Guide to Becoming a Disciple: Eight Sessions for Mentoring and Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 78.

¹¹⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 146.

lived and shared with the Twelve for our edification. The passages in Matthew 6 offer disciples reflection about disciplining oneself for “self-sacrifice to seek and serve God in fasting, alone in prayer or even publicly by the teaching the disciples the Lord’s Prayer.”¹¹⁸ The chapter also “provides much about the ideas of piety and righteousness weaved throughout the discourse, all while showing that the disciplines of prayer and fasting are linked together.”¹¹⁹ Even though the disciplines are linked, sometimes a disciple or two may differ in needs. Being different or ill is not to say that prayer, fasting, and Bible reading will not produce the desired results of closeness with God. It is just that some disciples do and will need more than independent time with God.

Jeremy Rios argues from a different reference point. He writes that this article is a biological insight (Bowen Theory) and a theological insight (Bonhoeffer). Consequently, formation is always a project undertaken for the sake of the system, to bring change, healing, wholeness, and Christlikeness to a network of relationships.¹²⁰ He further discusses what one should consider when working with disciples who may have problems with mental health or even the approach that can facilitate developing the relationships of small groups with very diverse disciples.¹²¹ Rios proposes that “if you are to grow in differentiation, it is not for your specific personal spiritual benefit, but solely so that you can re-enter your community better equipped to bring life and clarity to it. Spiritual change, then, in this model, is measured by

¹¹⁸ Allison Collier, “Fasting: A Congregational Call for Baptists to Reclaim a Neglected Discipline,” *Review & Expositor* 117, no. 4 (Spring 2020): 465.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Jeremy M. Rios “Bonhoeffer and Bowen Theory: A Theological Anthropology of the Collective-Person and its Implications for Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 13, no. 2 (2020): 192.

¹²¹ Rios, “Bonhoeffer and Bowen Theory”, 192.

groups, never by individuals.”¹²² This proposed model would require professionals with Christian counseling consultation to prevent harm to the relational group’s disciples.

Unfortunately, many in Western culture drive toward individualism, which undercuts community development. Today’s social norms of measuring a community’s success are that it is necessary to have things for oneself and accommodate one’s needs. In Western culture, individual needs and rights come before any needs of the group. The biblical picture is not what “someone receives from the church. Although one does receive a great deal, it is what one gives and how one contributes to it. The early church portrait in Acts shows that the community and the group’s welfare were a priority. This attitude reflected spiritual maturity that allowed the church to grow.”¹²³ Herein is where the community demonstrates the act of sanctification. While sanctifying themselves apart from nonbelievers, disciples of Christ practicing spiritual disciplines exhibit a life of Christlikeness and loving one another in one’s community.

Disciples and Holiness

According to John Stott,

The exposure of human depravity is made plain by Apostle Paul in Romans 3:13: “Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.” “The venom of asps is under their lips.” “Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.” “Their feet are swift to shed blood; in their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known.”¹²⁴

¹²² Rios, “Bonhoeffer and Bowen Theory”, 192

¹²³ John Stott, “The Message of Romans: God’s Good News for the World,” in *The Bible Speaks Today Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 221.

¹²⁴ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 357.

Stott adds, “Christian sanctity shows itself in the deeds of the body. So, growing to the likeness of Christ, we are to offer the different parts of our bodies not to sin as ‘instruments of wickedness’ but unto God as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:13, 16, 19).”¹²⁵ This righteousness will lead to one’s feet walking in the right paths; the lips will speak the truth and share the gospel.

Disciples will talk about healing and helping those who have fallen. No task is too small. The disciples of Christ will be willing to embrace the sick and broken-hearted. Stott wrote, “If the first part of Paul’s appeal relates to the presentation of our bodies to God, the second relates to our transformation according to his will. Do no longer conform to this world’s pattern but be transformed by renewing one’s mind. Then one can test and approve God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will.”¹²⁶

New believers and all disciples of Christ should aim to become like Christ. There is a saying that the old mind is transformed into a new mind, fresh with a unique view of life. In Romans, Paul calls for nonconformity and holiness from the disciples of Christ. The call to holiness speaks to the people of God throughout Scripture.

With a thought for clarity regarding discipleship, Earley and Dempsey share that “Before a church embarks on the process of making disciples, there must be absolute clarity on what a disciple of Jesus looks like.”¹²⁷ As mentioned above, the guiding principles are Sacrificial,

¹²⁵ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 357.

¹²⁶ Stott, *The Message of Romans*, 221.

¹²⁷ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 26.

Relational, and Transformational. The sacrificial life means that a convert “has decided to submit to Christ and surrender their will, to follow Christ no matter the cost. Therefore, the starting point of this commitment is Christ as Savior.”¹²⁸ Christ, the Savior of humanity, came as the ultimate sacrifice to save the people of God from the sins with which man comes into the world at birth.

The “love of the brethren is one of Jesus’ commandments. Therefore, this is an integral part of the value system of a disciple.”¹²⁹ Finally, when a transformational process occurs, this is a characteristic and the purpose of spiritual growth. When transformed, one will see the first purpose of the church. According to Ray Stedman, “The first purpose is that the church is to reflect God’s holiness.”¹³⁰ God commands that man is to “be holy,” as noted in Ephesians 1:4. God’s plans for the church, the bride of Christ, includes the expectation that the disciples of Christ have a moral character. The goal “is for the church to have a character of ‘doing,’ for what we are determines what we do. As Christians, we are to be a moral example to the world, reflecting the pure character and holiness of Jesus Christ.”¹³¹ Jesus left an example of how to act, and the Scripture gives Christians examples of how to walk through this earthly life.

Believers follow Christ, and God sent him to be a living example they should never forget. In *Body Life*, “our goal as Christians is to be a people of unbending, uncompromising

¹²⁸ Earley and Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is*, 27.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹³⁰ Ray Stedman, *Body Life: The Book that Inspired a Return to the Church’s Real Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1995), 27.

¹³¹ Stedman, *Body Life*, 27.

character and integrity. If we refuse to compromise our integrity and morality in the smallest details, we will be faithful to bigger things.”¹³² Stedman adds, “God calls Christians to be more specific and to the point, to ‘be holy and blameless before God, both inside and out. We are to reflect His holiness.’”¹³³ Being set apart to God is an extraordinary calling, but God, who is faithful, reminds believers that “no temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and will not let you suffer temptation beyond your ability. However, with the temptation, he will also provide the way of escape, that one may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13, ESV). When one spends time cultivating a relationship with the Father through Bible intake, prayer, and fasting, the relationship grows as the disciple learns who Abba is. Boa puts it this way, “The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1, ESV) requires the painful choice of renunciation. Without renunciation, the gifts of God will take the place of God, and our relationship with him will consist more of wanting things from Him rather than Him alone.”¹³⁴ It should be enough to love God just for who He is. Tom Schwanda put it this way, “The more a person walked in holiness with God the greater that harmony and intimacy would be.”¹³⁵ To those who have developed a relationship with God and enjoy being in his presence, it is one of the greatest pleasures in the mortal world.

¹³² Stedman, *Body Life*, 28.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹³⁴ Boa, *Conformed in His Image*, 188.

¹³⁵ Schwanda, Tom. “Evangelical Spiritual Disciplines: Practices for Knowing God,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (2017): 6.

Theoretical Foundations

A healthy small group provides a sense of belonging or group care that “allows people to stimulate each other and, as a result, to put their God-given gifts to use for building the church.”¹³⁶ The group must be careful not only to focus inward but also outward. There is a tendency to focus inward among any small group. Inward focusing of a group can be tempting to focus on the group’s care and not reach outward. Continuing to focus on self is as old as the beginning of sin in the Garden of Eden. The healthy characteristic of groups reaching outward is to provide service to others and evangelism.

Prayer has made a difference in believers’ lives throughout the ages. Jesus prayed and left an example for them to follow as His disciples. In response to the command of the Great Commission, Bevins adds, “Jesus expected His disciples to reproduce His likeness in others.”¹³⁷ According to Bevins, the imparted message and mission to the disciples was that Christ promoted the knowledge that they should and would reproduce themselves in others and make disciples of all nations. Again, another declaration is that “The Great Commission implies that the followers of Jesus will reproduce themselves and make disciples. Reproduction is how the Christian movement was born.”¹³⁸ The reproduction of disciples filled with the Spirit and in relationship with God is how the Christian movement will continue to grow worldwide. John Ortberg puts it this way, “When one works toward becoming more like Christ, to be Holy, one

¹³⁶ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples”,

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples”,

must have the Holy Spirit acting as an engine to start up, get going, and keep going. Acts 1:8; 8:14; Galatians. 5:18. Adding that “obeying God faithfully, and successfully is impossible without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.”¹³⁹ The practice of spiritual disciplines guides and helps one to stay plugged into the source of life, the Holy Spirit, just as a tree branch is an offshoot of a specific type of tree.

When a disciple of Christ is endowed with the Holy Spirit, practicing the spiritual disciplines helps produce the good fruit or evidence that a disciple is walking with God.¹⁴⁰ When Jesus is praying during his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon him (Luke 3:21), implying that prayer serves Jesus as a means of accessing the Spirit’s power or inspiration. Accordingly, Luke repeatedly, and more so than the other evangelists, shows Jesus in prayer (Luke 5:16; 9:28–29; 10:21–22; 11:1), including at pivotal moments in his ministry when he is facing some trial or choice (6:12; 9:28–36; 22:41–44).

One can learn and develop great life lessons about how to live as a disciple of Christ through the practice of the disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting. When the Spirit impresses the words of Scripture on our hearts, we have a better grasp of who we are in Christ. Hence, one of the essential habits for disciples to cultivate is reading and studying the Bible.

One cannot overdo or have too many Bible passages to reference regarding discipleship. The biblical references about individual life issues or sins help believers understand when reconciling their new lives as God touches their hearts. Depending on an individual’s background

¹³⁹ John Ortberg, *The Me I Want to Be: Becoming God’s Best Version of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishers, 2010), 14.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

and the disciples' deliverance and lifestyle, some Scripture examples and passages will impact various individuals differently. Depending on what stage of life the disciples are in will sometimes make a Word at a specific time more meaningful to the person listening. A favorite Scripture is Matthew 6:33, "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (ESV). This passage will help with guidance and structure for planning and organization in the lives of new disciples.

Bill Hull wrote, "The principle behind discipleship does involve one person influencing another, which does result in a change in heart and mind. The success of discipleship does not depend on soldiering forward in a mechanical strategy of reproduction and multiplication."¹⁴¹ He added that discipleship does not involve a trained group of people with a good sales pitch. A disciple's life is by the occurrence of a transformed person with the light of the Holy Spirit radiating Christ to those they may encounter. Hull puts it this way, "it happens when people so deeply experience God's love that they can do nothing other than produce an effect upon those around them."¹⁴² For example, there is a gospel song with a portion of the chorus saying that Jesus' love just bubbles over in one's soul.¹⁴³ Various Gospel singers have recorded it over the past 70 to 80 years.

¹⁴¹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 23.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ John Avery Lomax, Ruby T. Lomax, Beatrice Ellis, and Herman Ellis, "Jesus Love Just Bubbles Over in My Heart," recorded 1940 Natchez, Mississippi.

The churches in the first few centuries operated under strong group beliefs. The Mediterranean lifestyles and cultural practices noted in Hellerman's writing regarding family in the Mediterranean region explain how much a daughter always remains close to the family she was born into, her blood relatives. A wife is not part of the patriarchal bloodline (consanguine). The family relationships were stronger between the brothers and sisters of a married couple because of their blood from their fathers.¹⁴⁴ The historical Mediterranean family relationship status significantly changes relationship lines among the early church. Because there are many cultural and familial traditions among the people today, one should best remember, per the writings of Brad House, "discipleship is a lifelong pursuit."¹⁴⁵ A lifelong factor is true even though some disciples move at different paces during the lifelong journey.

Paul structured the language of his communication in his letters to disciple churches he had planted so that those with a strong group family belief would understand. He taught that God's family, converted from paganism, was more critical than their natural families. In the early Christian church, the bonding and love that the new disciples displayed towards one another not only fulfilled the great commandment of Jesus, but this philosophy also helped grow and multiply the followers of Christ. According to Hellerman, "For Paul, God's group takes priority over all other claims of loyalty, even family."¹⁴⁶ This practice of the early church helped multiply disciples.

¹⁴⁴ Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family*, xxxvii.

¹⁴⁵ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49, Logos.

¹⁴⁶ House, *Community: Taking Your Small*. 12.

Following Jesus' Example and Model for Discipleship

Many passages in the gospels tell of situations, methods, and gatherings used by Jesus while He discipled the Twelve. The last instruction the Lord gave His twelve disciples was that they should teach others as He had taught them. This passage is where Christendom gets its Great Commission (Matthew. 28:18–20). In *True Discipleship*, John Koessler writes that Christian tradition says Jesus' disciples eventually gathered their disciples and trained them to be the church's next generation of leaders. The New Testament epistles also clearly indicate that the Apostle Paul followed Jesus' pattern. He urged others to “*follow my example*, as I follow the example of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:1).¹⁴⁷ “The Gospels also state an excellent example of fasting. The spiritual discipline fasting is expressed and occurs after Jesus' baptism by John and begins a public journey among men teaching by example the lifestyle His disciples follow.

The disciples that follow Christ can learn and grasp the “understanding that the motive behind a fast is crucial to fasting for the right purpose. Scot McKnight states, “Fasting is a response to something instead of a means to something else.”¹⁴⁸ Sometimes, one might fast because of a desire for self-needs instead of the need to be with Jesus just because of who He is. Allison Collier notes, “the Gospels are a testimony to Jesus' teaching; and lives lived, shared among them for the edification of the believers.”¹⁴⁹ In Matthew's sixth chapter, Collier adds much

¹⁴⁷ John M. Koessler, *True Discipleship: The Art of Following Jesus* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), 116, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁸ Scot McKnight, “Lent as a Season of Responsive Fasting,” *Issue of Christian Reflection: A Series in Faith and Ethics* 46 (2017): 27, <https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/193171.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Allison Collier, “Fasting: A Congregational Call for Baptists to Reclaim a Neglected Discipline,” *Review and Expositor* 117, no. 4 (2020): 465.

discussion for reflection about disciplining oneself for self-sacrifice and seeking and serving God while fasting. This teaching occurred whether alone in prayer or publicly by teaching the disciples the Lord's Prayer."¹⁵⁰ During the times of a follower's life needs, taking time to get aside and talk or commune with the Savior in prayer is what the Lord desires.

According to Lemke, being in a community with other disciples "helps develop mentoring relationships and professional development opportunities. Disciples in prayer relationships hopefully shall have times that include ongoing discussion of listening to God for guidance regarding personal, life, and team decision-making."¹⁵¹ Small group meetings or just a few getting together for coffee and sharing how good God has been in one's life can be quite a testament to the Christian lifestyle. Easterling shares how "The Gospels also record that Jesus' public ministry was primarily found in the small group setting of an individual's house. Nearly a dozen examples can be cited of Jesus ministering in people's homes."¹⁵² Many small groups meet in the homes of fellow believers, even though most have a relationship with a larger established church congregation.

The spiritual disciplines were instrumental in helping establish the church by preaching the Gospel of Jesus. Jesus always shared and practiced spiritual disciplines, and the Gospels record the stories of the intimate time that Jesus spent with His disciples. They ate with Him. They lived together, whether they were sheltered or sleeping in the open. They served in ministry

¹⁵⁰ Collier, "Fasting: A Congregational Call", 465.

¹⁵¹ Dale L. Lemke, "Vocation and Lifelong Spiritual Formation: A Christian Integrative Perspective on Calling in Mid-Career," *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 2 (2020): 316.

¹⁵² Easterling, *Big Things Start Small*, 32–33.

to the multitudes with Him. Koessler writes, “The discipleship experience is training in Christlikeness. Going on to say this is not merely a matter of asking ourselves, what would Jesus do? Our imitation of Christ begins with the mind and heart.”¹⁵³ Therefore, one can safely say that without a doubt, the Lord fasted, prayed, and read and quoted Scripture, which means that the book referred to when speaking to the Pharisees is the text now known as the Old Testament.

In the New Testament, Luke’s Gospel thus uniquely emphasizes prayer. The Gospel does not say Luke presents a different Jesus from those portrayed in the other Synoptic Gospels. It is just that, according to Craig Bartholomew, “Luke deliberately opens the window for us to the place of prayer in Jesus’ life and public ministry. Matthew, Mark, and Luke note Jesus’ pattern of withdrawing to pray amid his public ministry (5:16; Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35).”¹⁵⁴ Throughout Luke, “time and again, Luke positions prayer in the foreground like the other Gospels do not. Indeed, prayer is pervasive in Luke’s Gospel.”¹⁵⁵ According to Craig S. Keener, when the Spirit inspires prayer, the prayer may be in tongues as an affective prayer from one’s spirit; interpreting such affective prayer in the vernacular language communicates cognitive content and is a gift from the Spirit.¹⁵⁶ Romans 12:9–11 This is the witness of a relationship with the Father, usually between the spirit of the disciple and the Holy Spirit as the intercessor. One should never forget

¹⁵³ Koessler, *True Discipleship*, 31.

¹⁵⁴ Craig G. Bartholomew, *Revealing the Heart of Prayer: The Gospel of Luke* (Oak Harbor: Lexham Press, 2016), 10.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ Craig S. Keener, *The Mind of the Spirit: Paul’s Approach to Transformed Thinking* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 274.

that no matter the situation, prayer is always appropriate. Be it a quick moment silently or withdrawing to be alone as did Jesus.

David Mathis shares, “The New Testament includes no mandate that Christians fast on certain days or with a specific frequency. Jesus’ words assume we will fast. It is a tool too powerful to leave endlessly on the shelf collecting dust. While many biblical texts mention fasting, the two most important chapters are Matthew 6: 16–18 and Matthew 9:14–15.”¹⁵⁷ According to Mathis, “Fasting is as basic to Christianity as asking from God and giving to others. The key here is that Jesus does not say ‘if you fast,’ but ‘when you fast’ in Matthew 9:14–15. This passage speaks clearly and answers the question, should Christians today still fast? Jesus’s answer is a resounding yes.”¹⁵⁸ Yes, the Gospel shares what, how, and why Jesus disciplined His twelve chosen disciples.

An example of Paul praying as Jesus, noted by Grant Osborne, is “that Paul had the same priorities in prayer found in Jesus and the early church. Prayer is primarily communion with God, consisting of worship and sharing oneself with our heavenly Father and simply basking in his presence.”¹⁵⁹ When Jesus is praying during his baptism, the Holy Spirit descends upon him (Luke 3:21), implying that prayer serves Jesus as a means of accessing the Spirit’s power or inspiration. Accordingly, Luke repeatedly, and more so than the other evangelists, shows Jesus in

¹⁵⁷ David C. Mathis, *Habits of Grace: Enjoying Jesus through the Spiritual Disciplines* (Wheaton Illinois: Crossway, 2016), 119.

¹⁵⁸ Mathis, *Habits of Grace*, 120.

¹⁵⁹ Grant R. Osborne, “Moving Forward on Our Knees: Corporate Prayer in The New Testament,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 2 (June 2010): 259.

prayer (5:16; 9:28–29; 10:2122; 11:1), including at pivotal moments in his ministry when he is facing some trial or choice (6:12; 9:28–36; 22:41–44).¹⁶⁰ Prayer is usually one of the first spiritual disciplines a child from a Christian home learns.

Prayer is for all generations of disciples. Christina Embree says it is important to note that these instructions to share about the commandments of the Lord go to the whole assembly of Israel. Deuteronomy 4:9 reads, “Make them known to your children and your children’s children,” (ESV) indicating multiple familial generations were present (cf. Deuteronomy 1:1–13).¹⁶¹ In Hebrews, the author teaches that through prayer, according to Gareth L. Cockerill, “drawing near” is an expression that happens through prayer. Thus, the life characterized by “fullness of faith,” to which the pastor is about to turn, is a life of drawing near to God through the appropriation of Christ’s high-priestly work.” Therefore, Peter Nelson adds that “our longing and aim is to be like Christ, to be holy.”¹⁶² Growing to be like Christ is the goal of the disciple. It is a goal that one constantly strives for, knowing that we are ever moving toward Christlikeness because of the holiness of the Lord and Savior.

¹⁶⁰ Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom According to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 145.

¹⁶¹ Christina Embree, “Intercessory Prayer Across Generations: A Case Study,” *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 1 (Spring 2017): 129.

¹⁶² Peter K. Nelson, “Discipleship Dissonance: Toward A Theology of Imperfection Amidst the Pursuit of Holiness,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 4, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 86.

History of Small Groups

For this thesis project, small group members for the project participated voluntarily. Joel Comiskey states,

Small groups have played an important role in biblical history.¹⁶³ He also discusses small groups in the Old Testament and New Testament, adding, “Although God chose Moses to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt, he lacked the delegation skill. This organizational structure extends down from leaders over thousands to those over tens. . . Christ Himself gathered a small group of disciples, and the early church primarily met in homes.”¹⁶⁴

The small group history from the Old Testament to the present is what this project considers regarding the thoughts behind the study and the development of disciples for Christ. The biblical perspective, small groups in early Christian history, including the period of monasticism, and small groups during and after the Reformation are areas of Christian thought that are part of this study.¹⁶⁵ This historical view makes sense when considering God’s plans for the bride of Christ.

Small Groups in Biblical Perspective

According to Comiskey, “The organizational principle that Jethro first introduced to Moses in Exodus 18 when he gave timely counsel to Moses”¹⁶⁶ is an Old Testament story that resembles a system for developing small groups. He further discusses choosing leaders and how

¹⁶³ Joel Comiskey, “Chapter 2: History of the Cell Movement.” Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), 1. https://joelcomiskeygroup.com/en/resources/phd_dissertation/en_ch2/.html.

¹⁶⁴ Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement,” 2.

¹⁶⁵ Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement,” 2.

¹⁶⁶ Joel Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-Based Church: New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: CCS Publishing, 2012), 56–57.

Moses should set up groups' purposes. Even though Moses was the chosen leader by God, Moses needed help delegating the work required to move God's people to the Promised Land. The New Testament shows Christ's example and His interaction with the small group, the Twelve. His modeling of the spiritual disciplines was duplicated and led to the successful multiplication of like groups so effectively that they could carry out the Great Commission Christ gave them, which led to the transformation of others into Christ's disciples.

The early church of small groups met in homes and sometimes in the temple before increased persecution for their beliefs. The reference to the "structure of cell and celebration is seen first, in the Jerusalem Church after Pentecost" (Acts 2:46).¹⁶⁷ And then again by Paul when he says, "And how I kept back nothing profitable unto you, but have shown you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house" (Acts 20:20, KJV).¹⁶⁸ The early church held daily celebration meetings in their home until persecution made it dangerous. After that, the churches continued to meet but not as frequently. Some communities had more than one small group home church that would gather as a large group to celebrate, for example, the Love Feast of 1 Corinthians 11. When gathering in a small group in prayer, repeating the words of Jesus from memory in storytelling as a form of spiritual discipline, disciples of Christ promote the attributes of the command, loving one another.

¹⁶⁷ Comiskey, "History of Cell Movement," 2.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

Small Groups in Early Church

The small groups in early Christian history took a different path. Two historical events led to the change in home churches. The first was a “growing distinction between clergy and laity, and the second was the legalization of Christianity.”¹⁶⁹ As Christianity flourished, other religions rose to challenge authority. The chosen and elected Bishops’ church authorities became more watchful and stressed Apostolic Succession. Church gatherings needed this because they did not yet have the compiled Bible. By the 3rd century, the distinction between clergy and laity began, and bishops became “less servant-shepherd and more official, priesthood, and administrative ruler.”¹⁷⁰ The laity became those who listened and followed the rules and authority handed down to them instead of participating in the ministry of making disciples.

After the legalization of Christianity, a division occurred as “believers felt the church had lost vision and succumbed to the worldliness of the age.”¹⁷¹ The divide led many lay members to separate themselves from the organized church to seek their sense of holiness unto the Lord. These lay monks soon began to organize their small groups around communities. They incorporated many of the Christian community’s “features in Acts 2.”¹⁷² These small groups of monks soon began to evangelize. Through evangelism, the groups multiplied throughout the continent and beyond.

¹⁶⁹ Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement”, 2.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 2.

¹⁷² Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement”, 5.

Small Groups After the Reformation

The Reformation shattered the medieval church with the authority of the scriptures' recognition that Luther promoted. Again, in Comiskey, "The Anabaptist movement, which came out of the reformation, significantly shaped Luther's ideas about small groups."¹⁷³ The Anabaptist teaching believed in small groups for baptized, new-birth believers. There was much persecution against the Anabaptists, to the point of it becoming an illegal faith. Luther, who initially believed that small home groups were okay, changed his mind and disavowed them. However, Luther's disciple Martin Bucer saw the small home groups' needs and promoted small groups' development among Christ's serious and committed followers. This era is when Pietism developed out of the Lutheran church.

The Pietists formed small groups for holiness and making disciples. Phillip Jacob Spener led this movement. The groups were to have leadership, participation, and the goal of "making the state church more holy and Christlike through the ministry of small groups."¹⁷⁴ Comiskey writes, "Philip Jacob Spener is instrumental in spreading Pietism. He taught reform of the churches' practical life, including small groups designated for spiritual growth."¹⁷⁵ Meeting together for mutual correction and benefit started momentum upon the priesthood's reformed doctrine of all believers. Spener's genius, a former Lutheran, was his view that the Reformation was incomplete without an inner character transformation. The theme of the Pietistic renewal

¹⁷³ Comiskey, "History of Cell Movement", 9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 13.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

movement: Change the Church by changing the individual.”¹⁷⁶ Spener spent much time teaching the doctrine of regeneration and encouraging the children of God to continue to grow, as growing is a process. The Moravians were also formed and sent small missionary groups worldwide during this time frame in history.

Another small group ministry was that of John Wesley. Pietism’s effects also influenced Wesley when he began his small group ministry, calling them bands. These groups developed over time and took years to grow into a large group, becoming a significant denomination in society today. In his writing of John Wesley, Gilchrist Lawson shares “that at about the age of twenty-two Wesley, read the words of Thomas Kempis and began to see that religion had to do with the heart and not with outward actions.”¹⁷⁷ The small groups of Wesley began the multiplying movement of the Methodist Church. The discipline and accountability of leadership were vital to the small groups that successfully developed, leading to spiritual growth and the multiplication of Christ’s disciples after the reformation. Comiskey presents a view of the history of how Christianity multiplied. He starts with the early Church and proceeds to the Reformers, discussing the Pietists, the Puritans, and the Methodists. As the early Church did, all the small groups began to make disciples like Christ.¹⁷⁸ Even today, many current small groups in the Christian Church have some form of Wesley meeting groups.

¹⁷⁶ Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement”, 13.

¹⁷⁷ Gilchrist J. Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2018), 58, Logos.

¹⁷⁸ Comiskey, “History of Cell Movement”, 20.

Robert Walson states, “The nature of the Trinity is important to this discussion also. Just as the Trinity has a traditional portrait as the mutual indwelling of the persons of the Trinity, so koinonia is an experience in the church of the divine community.” Therefore, “as the body of disciples has received the gift of God, the experience and expression of its diversity as a rich unity of interdependent persons, it is touching and echoing the life of God. When this is manifest in the Church, it is to a sign or reflection of the Triune God.”¹⁷⁹ He also adds to the discussion that “the core of the small group’s life is mutual help without deep challenge, and the God at the heart of the small Christian groups is a God of comfort, support, love, and security.”¹⁸⁰ The early church’s method going through the reformation and Wesley up to now shows a significant relationship between these groups that indicates what has proven to be what it takes to make disciples for Christ.

According to Michael Haykin, “Baptist piety and spirituality have never doubted the centrality of prayer in the Christian life. Prayer is a constant duty; never out of season, never to be neglected, till faith turns into vision, and prayer into praise.”¹⁸¹ 76 Haykin goes further and adds, “There is no duty we are more apt to omit, no duty which it is more our interest to perform, no duty which Satan more opposes, or with which God is pleased. As a man cannot live without

¹⁷⁹ Walton Roger, *Disciples Together: Discipleship, Formation, and Small Groups* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2015) 146.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹⁸¹ Michael A. G. Haykin, “Draw Nigh unto My Soul: English Baptist Piety and the Means of Grace in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2006), 66.

breathing, so it is certain that the Christian cannot thrive without praying.”¹⁸² Talking and praying with and to God is quite fulfilling and helps build a closer relationship with God.

¹⁸² Haykin, “Draw Nigh unto My Soul:,” 66.

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The Rationale for this Project

This project assesses and reports on disciples' understanding and use of spiritual disciplines for spiritual growth in an established congregation at Perfecting Church (PC) in Detroit, Michigan. Spiritual disciplines are a required part of the life of one who would be like Jesus. Making disciples for Christ requires the disciples to be healthy believers in Christ. The lack of spiritual growth becomes evident when the congregation is not reproducing spiritually. For a church to grow, it must produce more disciples for Christ. The individual or small groups are led by multiplying leaders to facilitate the groups toward making disciples for Christ. When the new disciples at PC receive additional education regarding spiritual disciplines that enhance spiritual growth and a lifestyle of holiness, they will become fully committed to reproducing disciples.

Initially, the plan for this project was to involve more time and gatherings in classroom sessions for the surveys. With the change in state and national group gatherings, the decision came to utilize today's social media and technology. According to Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, "The biblical basis for offering a formative spiritual education from a distance is the same basis for offering this education in person."¹ The Scripture reference for this statement is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the

¹ Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, "Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul's Formation Transaction," *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (Spring, 2013): 115.

measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,”² (Ephesians 4:12–13, ESV). Paul’s encouragement to the disciples in Ephesians does not distinguish the locations of the believers’ relation to the teacher. While Paul wrote many letters to disciples and established church groups, his teaching included directions for practicing spiritual disciplines. The Bible gives one the understanding that one does not have to be in person to communicate that the journey of salvation requires some behaviors that are now different. James Flynn says, “digital education presents the opportunity of a lifetime to shape the future.”³ Of course, Paul was unaware of the vast communication available today via modern technology that has changed methods of communication and travel.

However, Cris Shirley shares that “Jesus within His relational framework of Jesus’ disciple-making tools included the Scripture (Matthew 13:13–15; 24:37–40), his authoritative teaching (Matthew 5:21–48), his miracles (Luke 6:30–44), the community of disciples (Luke 22:7–22), and hands-on ministry experiences (Luke 10:1–15).”⁴ In the social-relational realm today, Shirley adds “disciple-making is increasingly mediated through a digital process, outside the realm of direct human-to-human interaction. The Internet and other electronic media now play a significant role in making and equipping disciples and developing relationships inside and

² Benjamin K. Forrest and Mark A. Lamport, “Modeling Spiritual Formation from a Distance: Paul’s Formation Transaction,” *Christian Education Journal* 10 no. 1 (Spring, 2013):

³ James T. Flynn, “Digital Discipleship: Christian Education in a Digital World,” *Christian Education Journal* 10, no. 1 (05, 2013): 89.

⁴ Cris Shirley, “Overcoming Digital Distance: The Challenge of Developing Relational Disciples in the Internet Age,” *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (2017): 376.

outside the church.”⁵ The technology and social media tools served to facilitate this project very well. The participants were encouraged to contact the researcher with any questions.

Intervention Design

The design of the project takes into consideration the participants and the milieu. According to Ernest Stringer, the criteria for evaluating one’s intervention for the thesis project are that the investigation’s effects should consider the project’s impact on the participants.⁶ The requirements should consider and include the project’s effects on the participants’ pride, dignity, identity, sense of control, responsibility, group unity, place, and location of importance. The researcher should always take into consideration the perspective of the participants.

The intervention design considers that participants have some input into the planning process for a successful outcome of the intervention proposed. Therefore, the senior pastor and the women’s department directors are engaged in information to receive any suggestions into the process that might improve potential participants’ reception of the intervention process. Success will probably result when plans have the buy-in with the participants’ inclusive processes. In addition, this process should help develop the goals and establish outcomes. Therefore, completing goals and results will determine the project’s success.

The interventions that will occur are three brief exhortation lessons regarding the importance of spiritual disciplines in the believer’s life. The spiritual disciplines discussed are

⁵ Shirley, “Overcoming Digital Distance”, 377.

⁶ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th. ed. Rev. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2024), 135.

prayer, fasting, and Bible intake. Next, the author sent the pre-test and post-test questions in an email via Survey Monkey to the participants. Baseline levels determining spiritual knowledge before interventions are from the administered pre-test. The post-test survey was taken through Survey Monkey after the intervention of three exhortation lessons was also utilized. After data collection, the author analyzed the themes and issues shared among those interviewed.

According to Stringer, once data is collected, the researcher is to “sift through the accumulating body of information that emerges from the Look phase of action projects. The look phase is the time to identify features and elements that influence events significantly. Next, these ideas and concepts of the project’s responses are organized into a framework”⁷ that will clarify understanding of the featured answers and problems. Finally, a systematic process analyzes the qualitative analysis of data collected.

According to Nation, the way to determine spiritual growth and the relationship one has with God is through spiritual disciplines. Nation writes, “As the major discipline of the Christian life, love propels habitual holiness and the desire to follow God into the world for His redeeming mission. Internal transformation (founded in our love for Christ) manifests itself in eternal action (Bible reading, fellowship, prayer, serving, giving).”⁸ Spiritual disciplines are an outward expression of a loving relationship between the disciple and the Father. James Lang puts it this way, “Experiencing the unconditional love of God the Father has resulted in transformative

⁷ Ernest T. Stringer. *Action Research*, 135.

⁸ Nation, *Habits for Our Holiness*, 20.

learning and change.”⁹ As the disciples of Christ grow through practicing spiritual disciplines, one hopes and expects that a transformation toward a life of holiness becomes more and more evident in the life of the disciple.

The purpose and objectives of the project’s intervention align with the thesis, problem statement, and research question. The intervention design assesses and reports the use of spiritual disciplines among disciples of Christ who receive instructions and lessons to enhance and encourage the use of the spiritual disciplines to help them draw closer to God. Drawing closer to God fosters becoming more like Christ, growing spiritually, and developing holy habits.

Whitney describes what happens to one who attends to the spiritual disciplines, writing, “Consequently, when the Holy Spirit indwells someone, that person begins to prize and pursue holiness. Thus, as we have seen in Hebrews 12:14, anyone who is not striving for holiness will not see the Lord.”¹⁰ Furthermore, Whitney continues the discussion by adding, “The reason he or she will not see the Lord in eternity is that he or she does not know the Lord now, for those who know Him receive the gift of His Holy Spirit and all those indwelled by the Holy Spirit desire to pursue holiness.”¹¹ Again, Bible intake is a way to hear and learn the Word of God. Jerry Ireland adds that disciples are to seek the Holy Spirit and submit to the Holy Spirit . . . and that the early church devoted themselves to “Here the early church is said to have devoted itself to ‘the

⁹ James A. Lang, “An Evaluation of a Discipleship Process Addressing Christians’ Inner Life Issues,” *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (September 2015): 259–81.

¹⁰ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 10.

¹¹ Ibid.

apostles' teaching (*kerygma*) proclamation).”¹² The thesis has included many times that the Apostles taught the teaching of Jesus, both instructed and experienced.

One finds the educational and pre-test plus post-test method chosen for this project is to recreate the style of Jesus, written in many interactions between Jesus and His disciples. For example, “One day Jesus told the crowds a parable about a farmer who scattered seed widely. Only a small proportion of the seed took root and yielded harvest, but that harvest far outweighed the seed initially sown.”¹³ This passage is often referred to among discipleship leaders to teach multiplication to believers.

The design of the project takes into consideration the participants and the milieu. According to Stringer, the criteria for evaluating one's intervention for the thesis project are that the investigation's effects should consider the project's impact on the participants. Therefore, the researcher is careful regarding criteria to consider, including the project's effects on the pride, dignity, identity, sense of control, responsibility, unity of the group, place, and location of importance to the participants.¹⁴ Therefore, the researcher considers the participants' perspectives while determining the interventions and designing this project.

The intervention design considers that participants have some input into the planning process for a successful outcome of the intervention proposed. Therefore, the senior pastor and

¹² Jerry M. Ireland, “A Classical Pentecostal Approach to Discipleship in Missions,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2019, no. 2 (2019): 255, 257.

¹³ Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2016), 184.

¹⁴ Stringer, *Action Research*, 135.

the women's department directors met and provided information and suggestions that might improve the intervention process. Success results are likely achievable by plans that have the buy-in with the participants' inclusive processes. This process should help with developing the goals and establishing outcomes. Therefore, obtaining the goals and outcomes set for the project will determine whether the project is successful.

During implementation, the step-by-step design process interventions are three brief exhortation lessons regarding the importance of spiritual disciplines in the believer's life. The spiritual disciplines discussed are prayer, fasting, and Bible intake. Next, the author wrote the study survey questions, which the mentor approved and submitted to the Survey Monkey online program. There were ten questions developed with the use of the software program.

Next, the author emailed the participants the pre-test questions via Survey Monkey. Baseline levels determining spiritual knowledge before interventions are from the administered pre-test. Next, the presentation of intervention educational lessons is split into three exhortation lessons and sent to the participants via email. The written lesson in an email will occur for one week. A post-test survey via Survey Monkey's email follows. After data collection, the author will analyze the data, considering the themes and issues shared among those receiving surveys. Finally, the design of the project data collection tool is for the participants to complete a questionnaire in the form of a pre-test. It should take approximately three to ten minutes to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix B). Participation will be completely confidential as their email addresses and names for contact are part of this project, but the information will remain confidential. The online survey program, Survey Monkey, helps with confidentiality.

On the first Monday, after everyone has completed the pre-test, the first intervention, in the form of an exhortation lesson regarding the definition of the term spiritual disciplines, will take place as the author will share the benefits of reading the Bible daily via email (see Appendix D). Social media interventions should only take five minutes or less. The Intervention Design will be the same for all three interventions.

The second exhortation regarding individual fasting benefits as a spiritual discipline will occur on Wednesday of the same week. The third and last intervention of the exhortation lesson regarding prayer's benefits as a spiritual discipline will be on Friday of the same week. Another email delivers the link for the survey monkey post-test on the Monday after the third lesson and should take about three to ten minutes to complete (see Appendix C).

Implementation of the Intervention Design

On July 7, 2020, before implementation, all plans and rationale for the Intervention Design had to be submitted, reviewed, and approved by the IRB (see IRB Approval Letter). The submissions to IRB included information about the setting, participant demographics, sample size, study location, and time frame of educational outlines and study resources. In addition, according to IRB protocol, any ethical issues regarding the need to provide anonymity and confidentiality for participating in this study project were included.

Recruitment of Participants

To participate, one must be a Christian woman of a small group's ministry or an established member of a Christian ministry, eighteen years of age or older. Taking part in this

study was voluntary. Participants for the study were called and notified via social media avenues of text messaging and email. The author chose this notification process because of Detroit's status related to the mitigation and restrictions of contact in large gatherings for social distancing between individuals. In Michigan, Governor Gretchen Whitmer signed into law that no one could hold large meetings of more than ten people when the project occurred. The restrictions began to decrease in the first week of June 2020.

Perfecting Church administration offices were open, and staff provided services such as funerals for families, distributing community food bank provisions, prayer services via conference telephone calls for members, and social media globally. In addition, the church administration continued the PC member critical relationships by setting up Zoom meetings for leadership and small groups to meet. Unfortunately, there were fatalities and severe illnesses of the church family members and respective family members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The author considered the loss of family and friends during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the author slightly altered the recruitment process because the author chose to recruit among the known participants who met the criteria. Once identified, the author contacted participants via telephone calls or text messages. In addition, the author emailed candidates explaining details, including requirements of the project's three-week length and project instructions. The intervention took place over five weeks. The first two weeks of the plan were for sending and receiving the permission letters to church leaders of the women's department Leadership for official sign-off from the church board of directors to move forward with recruiting participants for the project thesis study.

The number of participants initially selected for invitations to participate in the study via email became much less than the initial plan and expectation of the groups available in the large community of small groups and discipleship sessions planned for in-person and face-to-face sessions available to the author prior to the mitigation changes in the study community. The data collection process started with fifteen email notifications sent out to women over eighteen years of age. The participants received access to the Survey Monkey link for the pre-test survey in this first email. The response goes back into the Survey Monkey program. A decision made as part of the implementation plan is that the researcher does not view data collection up to the responses until the end of the process. The end of the intervention process leads to analyzing the responses in the Survey Monkey program. The following Monday, after the first email and request for participation in the study, the written exhortation lesson was emailed (see Appendix D) to all those who had not replied via email to say they would not participate. On Wednesday, the lesson on fasting was sent out to participants (see Appendix E). Friday's last interventional lesson was on prayer (see Appendix F).

Data Triangulation

Data triangulation is when a researcher views and uses various data collection methods to provide and “enhance the validity and reliability of the student’s research and is accessible to DMIN students.”¹⁵ Confirming validation and reliability methods is crucial in any research or study project. Tim Sensing says, “Triangulation derives from an analogy with navigation and

¹⁵ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 74.

surveying. A person or researcher can fix her location or gain her bearings by knowing two other landmarks or signposts.”¹⁶ Sensing gives more description about the definitions; the term and method used in applied research is “data triangulation, the use of various data sources in a study. For example, comparing and contrasting data from observation, documents of official records, and interviews will give one a more detailed description than one could otherwise know.”¹⁷ In this study, the pre-test and post-test documents aid the researcher in comparing the data collected.

The reason the surveys are the data collection tool for this study goes with “the definition of a survey because it is a lengthy questionnaire that employs fixed choice responses. The purpose of a survey is to describe the characteristics or understandings of a large group of people.”¹⁸ In this study, the desired sample size was not overly large, but the survey use is most pragmatic because face-to-face questionnaires and interviews were impossible during the study.

According to Sensing, one learns about “four identified basic types of triangulations that augment our ability to see varying perspectives on complex issues and events: data triangulation, investigational triangulation, methodological triangulation, and theory triangulation.”¹⁹

Any single approach will have limitations. Subsequently, triangulation (multiple data-collection technologies designed to measure a single concept or construct) provides a complex view of the intervention, enabling a “thicker” interpretation. It is a way to cross-check one’s data

¹⁶ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 74.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 115.

¹⁹ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 115.

that provides breadth and depth to the analysis and increases the trustworthiness of the research. It is a means of refining, broadening, and strengthening conceptual linkages and perceptions. Triangulation is “cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from some informants and sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another to produce as full and balanced a study as possible.”²⁰ Sensing also discusses that “triangulation is cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from some informants and various sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another to produce as full and balanced a study as possible.”²¹

The researcher is known to all who received invitations to participate in this project thesis study as a member of the Ministerial Alliance team at PC, a coordinator for the discipleship ministry, a Bible teacher (Academy to Perfection, Christian Education Department), and a team leader in the women’s department small group (Power Teams leaders).

Noted in Sensing, “The DMIN context, the process is cyclic. First, the pastor-student or ministry leader lives and works within their context. Second, various ministries and practices are occurring on an ongoing basis. Third, within the context, the pastor-student identifies a problem that needs addressing.”²² Finally, the practices and study results will hopefully benefit others throughout the body of Christ. The implementation of this Intervention Design “is taken to

²⁰ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 115.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 64.

address the problem noted in the problem statement. Data is collected and analyzed to discern whether the intervention accomplished its purpose. Finally, the end of the project conclusions include the intervention's feasibility and sustainability in the context's future life."²³ A meeting scheduled at the conclusion of the results in a presentation with the board of directors and Pastor Winans.

After the project, the minister will continue working in the context of the ministerial team, small group (Power Team) leader, and a Bible teacher. The DMIN project thesis focuses on an ongoing process in the life of congregations and other para-church organizations. By examining the cycle through the lens of an intentional project thesis, expectantly, the pastor will develop habits of thinking and acting that will enhance the development of a novice into an expert. After completing this project, the researcher continues the path of lifelong learning.

The methodology for this project thesis study has a specific sequence of tasks and assignments to move the process toward the desired goals. There were challenges regarding creating a worthwhile project for furthering the project study and continuance in the future work of ministry in the body of Christ. The researcher has an interest in discipleship and making disciples for Christ. The love of Christ is essential to one becoming more like Christ. Trying to understand the road toward holiness happens quickly for some and at a slower pace for others. Some believers and disciples come to know whom God is because of the education and knowledge received since birth. Figure 3.1. shows information bullets shared with participants in

the email. The design of this thesis project takes its design from work by Sensing, as shown in figure 4.1.

- Complete a questionnaire in the form of a pre-test. It should take approximately 3 to 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire (see Appendix B).
- Participation will be confidential as their email addresses and names for contact are part of this project, but the information will remain confidential. The online survey program, Survey Monkey helps with confidentiality.
- The first Monday after everyone has completed the pre-test, the first intervention, in the form of an exhortation lesson regarding the definition of the term spiritual disciplines, and the author will share the benefits of reading the Bible daily via email. Social Media interventions should only take 5 minutes or less. Special Note: The Intervention Design will be the same for all three interventions.
- The second exhortation regarding individual fasting benefits as a spiritual discipline will occur on Wednesday of the same week.
- The third and last intervention of the exhortation lesson regarding prayer's benefits as a spiritual discipline will be Friday of the same week.
- The post-test will be distributed the Monday after the third lesson and should take about 3 to 10 minutes to complete (see Appendix C).

Figure 3.1. Information for participant's email

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter outlines the results of the data collected during the project. The project involved a survey building upon the small group ministry activities and outreach of PC's Women's Department. These groups are called Power Teams. This model for the project has been used successfully by other researchers to help analyze the ministry's effects and suggest ways for improvement. The first part of the project analysis presented in this chapter is the online survey questions analysis. The questionnaire areas where participants wrote their answers in the sections designated as other, or there was freedom to answer in their own words, are also included. The online survey tool provides accurate measurements of the collected data.

Data Analysis

The data was collected, organized categorically, reviewed repeatedly, and continually monitored via Survey Monkey tools. The analysis performed by the web tool helped develop qualitative themes, categories, and codes to identify emerging themes among the data. In addition, the service provided allowed for data classification into pieces to find meanings in the data. When thinking and analyzing data, Stringer explains that the central task of this procedure is to identify the significant features and elements that make up the experience and perception of the people involved in the study (stakeholders).

All analysis is an act of interpretation, but the primary aim of the study is to identify information representing the perspective and experience of the stake-holding participants.¹ These female participants were of various adult ages, with diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, and in

¹ Stringer, *Action Research*, 138.

different stages of life. Some were single, some married, some divorced, some with children, and some without children.

There is anonymity regarding the participants of both the pre-test and post-test surveys. The survey title is “Christian Sisters and Spiritual Disciplines: Individual Practices.” A total of fifteen Christian sisters were recruited, with nine participants responding. Ten of the women agreed, and nine responded to the online surveys. The typical time spent on the pre-test was four minutes and eighteen seconds. The average time for the post-test completion was two minutes and thirty-three seconds.

Pre-test Results and Analysis

Question 1

How many minutes do you spend reading your Bible each day? Not surprisingly, this generated a myriad of responses. For example, 55% of the participants wrote in thirty to sixty minutes per day, 22% reported in one to two hours, 11% in twenty minutes, and only 11% said they do not read their Bible every day.

Question 2

Why do you read the Bible (see table 4.1.)?

Table 4.1. Responses to Question 2 of the Pre-test.

Answers	Percentages of Answers
Renewal	11.11%

Spiritual Growth	33.33%
Strength	11.11%
Encouragement	44.44%

The data in figure 4.1. provides a different perspective on the group's response. Again, the number of those who view Bible intake as a means of encouragement is the highest, scoring 44.44% of the reactions. This percentage was a surprise. One cannot help but reflect on how lay members, through the years, have viewed themselves as congregants believing that the ordained minister or pastor can only teach the Word of God.

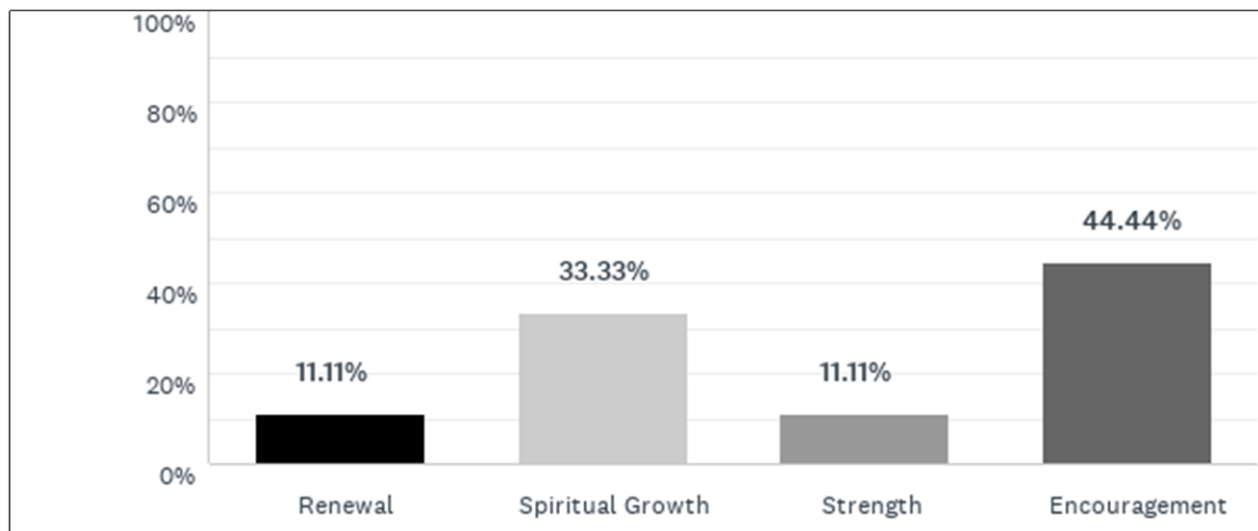


Figure 4.1. Responses to question 2 of the pre-test as a bar graph

Question 3

How long have you been reading the Bible for your spiritual growth and development?

Nine responses to this question ranged from ten to over thirty years. The number of years was a surprise; fewer years were expected.

Question 4

How long do you read your Bible for spiritual comfort?

The responses to this question are what the author hoped for. The range of five to sixty minutes was most prevalent. In terms of percentages, 44% read for comfort thirty minutes per day, 33% read five minutes or less, and 23% who read sixty minutes or more. One participant responded with a written response of wording that bible reading for comfort is done by them to answer questions that may arise from any lecture, preaching or life situation. According to Bock, “God is in the business of forming us into his likeness so that we can have deeper fellowship with Him and reflect the virtues of righteousness in our lives.”² He then goes further with a discussion of the community of believers. Spiritual growth “possesses (1) an agent, the Spirit; (2) a dynamic growth in the context of community identification; and (3) a goal; holiness in the context of mission. It also requires (4) an open and responsive heart that pursues formation as a key purpose in life.”³ According to the model promoted by John Wesley, the formation of believers and the promotion of spiritual disciplines do not require a grand plan.

² Bock, *New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation*, 103.

³ Ibid.

According to Henderson, “John Wesley had great confidence in those activities of the Church to promote personal spiritual growth: communion, baptism, Bible reading, prayer, preaching, and confession.”⁴ Therefore, the participants are on the right path, allowing the spiritual disciplines to guide them toward disciples of Christ. The path of allowing the same disciplines Christ incorporated in His life (Bible reading, fasting, and prayer) leads Christ’s disciples toward holiness. This Scripture passage comes to remembrance as a guiding reference for disciples of Christ: “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105, ESV). The Word of God is always right.

The following questions assess and analyze problems and understanding some may have regarding fasting as a spiritual discipline.

Question 5

How do you feel about our church’s corporate fasting day every Tuesday with no food from morning to 5 p.m. (see fig. 4.2.)

The responses in the pre-test were not so surprising because the pastor of PC teaches and regularly encourages fasting for congregants. In addition, another space designation allows participants to write in a personal response instead of a checkbox to the question. Figure 4.2 shows that 66.71% either agree or strongly agree that the regular fasting schedule currently in place for our church membership is agreeable to them, and the other 33.3% neither agree nor

⁴ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 132.

disagree. This question leads to the following question regarding the various types of fasting the group member's practice.

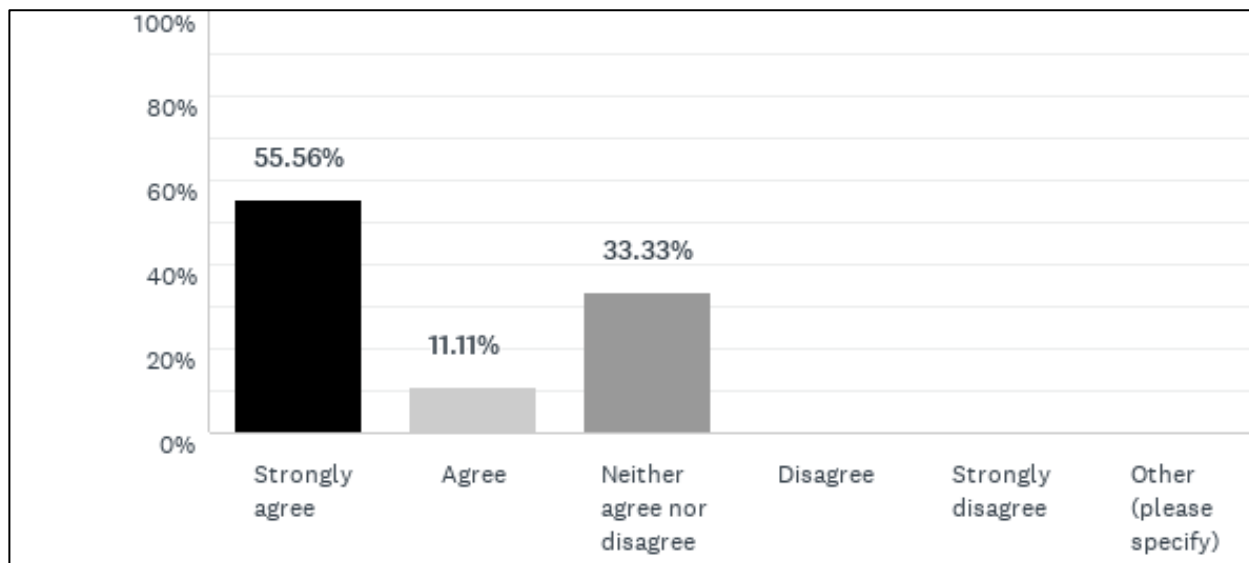


Figure 4.2. Responses to question 5 of the pre-test

The author wanted to know this practice because the regular traditional Tuesday fast is considered a textbook partial fast. PC's membership fasts every Tuesday unless the church administration calls another church or small group fast. Therefore, the traditional fast at PC is to fast from early morning upon waking until 5:00 p.m. The fast ends with the first meal of the day. Members drink fluids daily while fasting from food to prevent dehydration and problems during regular work and daily activities.

Question 6

Have you ever fasted for your own spiritual reason? If so, what type of fast and why (see fig. 4.3.)?

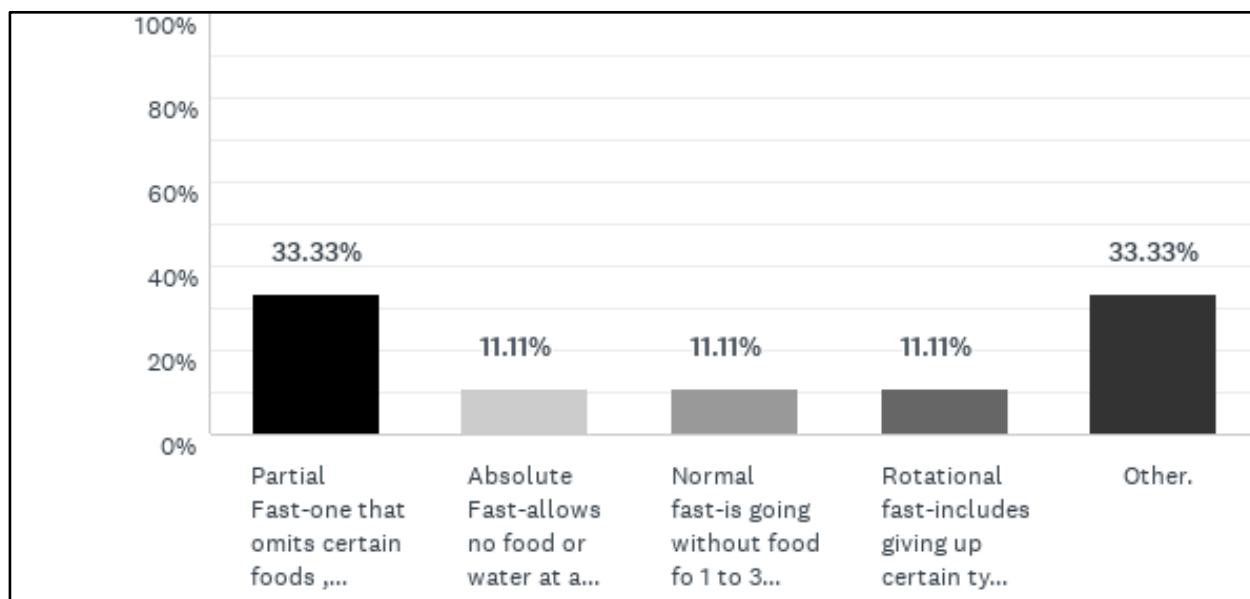


Figure 4.3. Responses to question 6 of the pre-test

Table 4.2. Unique Reactions to Question 6 of the Pre-test.

- I fast from social and mass media. I have not watched TV in ten years; I also fast from social and mass media. It is counterproductive to faith-based living.
- I went on a 30-day fast at the age of 19, going on 20. I wanted to break down my fast and get closer to God.
- All of the above. I have done several types of fasts at different times as the Lord has led me.

There were 66.66% responses to the four types of fast presented. The other 33.33% chose to write specific answers themselves. Those reactions are recorded in table:

Question 7

We have three different days for one to attend a prayer service at Perfecting Church; how do you feel about attending one or more of these services (see fig. 4.4.)?

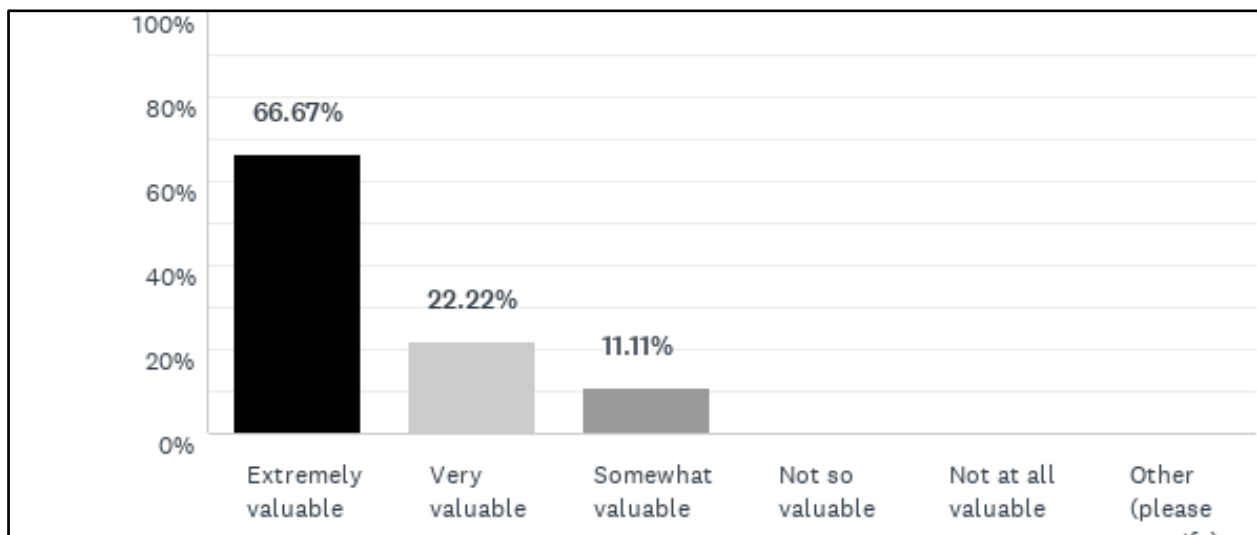


Figure 4.4. Responses to question 7 of the pre-test

Question 8

What is a favorite time to pray on your own when alone with just you and God (see fig. 4.5.)?

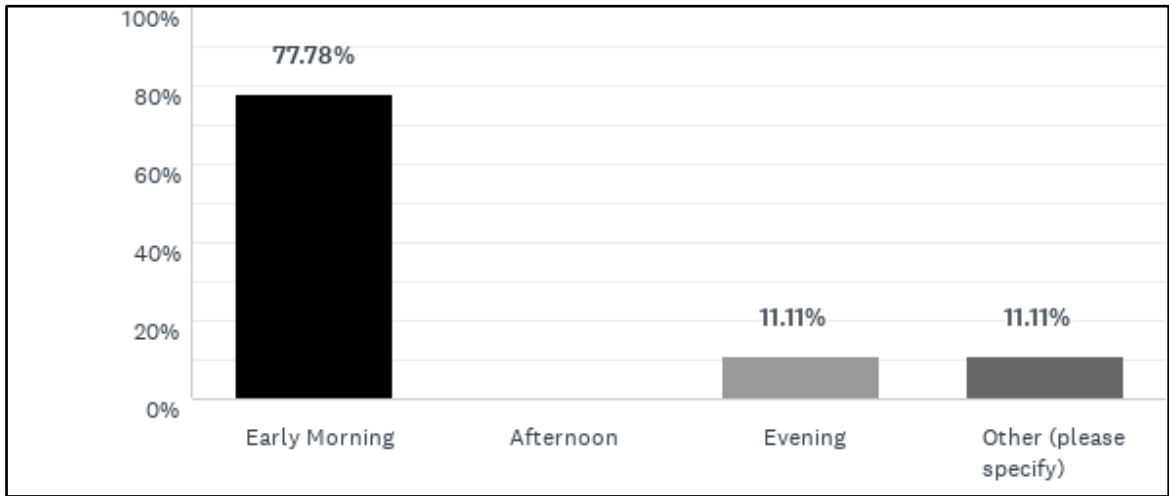


Figure 4.5. Responses to question 8 of the pre-test

Question 9

Do you have a favorite way of spending time with God? If so, what (see table 4.3.)?

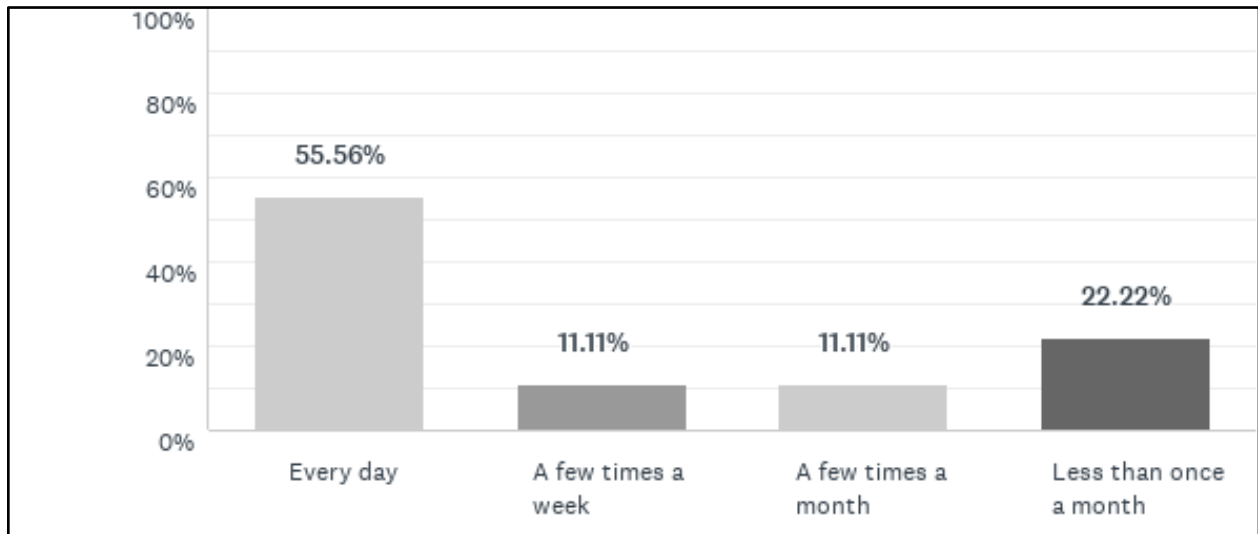
Table 4.3. Responses to Question 9 of the Pre-test.

<u>Responses</u>	
Movement	I like to watch him in nature activities. It is so beautiful to capture everything in a large view.
I like to share my life with Him. So, my prayer sometimes is more like a conversation with a friend.	Meditation

No	Reading the Bible.
Alone, sitting by the water.	I love dancing; it makes me feel free and closer to him, so I dance.
Listening to worship songs and praying	

Question 10

Do you apply any spiritual discipline, either Bible intake, fasting, or prayer to your daily lifestyle (see fig. 4.6.)? The data results in figure 4.6. include that one participant skipped over this question. After completing this first part of the project, the participants received the definition of spiritual disciplines and exhortations via email. Therefore, the outline in table 4.4. is for the written exhortation and description the participants received on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday after nine of the ten participants responded to the online survey. In addition, to table 5, please also turn to the specific practices of spiritual disciplines in their lifestyles for references



(see Appendix C, D, and E).

Figure 4.6. Responses to question 10 of the pre-test

Table 4.4. Outline of Spiritual Discipline Email Lessons.

Spiritual Discipline Lessons for Email	
Outline	
<p>I. Spiritual Disciplines and Bible Intake Exhortation</p> <p>A. Definition of Spiritual Disciplines</p> <p>B. Benefits and Methods of Bible Intake</p> <p>C. Scriptural Foundation II Timothy 2:15; 3:16</p> <p>II. Fasting Exhortation</p> <p>A. Scriptural Foundation Isaiah 58</p>	

B. Benefits for life

III. Prayer Exhortation

A. Scriptural Foundation: Hebrews 4:16; Matthew 6:5–6; 21–22

B. Benefits in one's life

Post-test Results and Analysis

Question 1

How many minutes do you spend reading the Bible each day? Not surprisingly, this generated a myriad of responses. For example, data noted that 55% of the participants wrote in thirty to sixty minutes per day, 22% wrote in one to two hours, 11% in twenty minutes, and only 11% said they do not read their Bible every day.

Question 2

Why do you read the Bible (see table 4.5.)? The post-test collects how the participants read their Bible to improve a Christian disciples' spiritual growth.

Table 4.5. Responses to Question 2 of the Post-test.

Answers	Percentages of Answers
Renewal	11.66%
Spiritual Growth	66.67%

Strength	0.00%
Encouragement	22.22%

Question 3

How long have you been reading the Bible for your spiritual growth and development (see table 4.6.)?

Table 4.6. Responses to Question 3 of the Post-test.

Answers	Percentages of Answers
Ten years or more	11.11%
Spiritual Growth	66.67%
Strength	0.00%
Encouragement	22.22%
Other (please specify)	0.00%

Question 4

How long do you read your Bible for spiritual comfort (see fig. 4.7.)? The responses to this question are what the researcher hoped for, except for two possible outliers, which means this group is in tune with the lessons they received in the Bible study sessions. According to Bock, “God is in the business of forming us into his likeness so that we can have deeper fellowship with Him and reflect the virtues of righteousness in our lives.”⁵ A few months after the survey, participants’ verbal feedback was that one or two had begun to be frustrated. One participant said she was irritated during the survey, and her answers may have reflected her frustration due to changes in lifestyle because of the COVID–19 pandemic restrictions. The unexpected outlier responses received are the same amount of time and fifteen years. Needless to say, these were not expected and gave rise to thoughts that this author will be more specific when writing survey questions in the future.

⁵ Bock, “*New Testament Community and Spiritual Formation*,” 103.



Figure 4.7. Responses to question 4 of the post-test

For figure 4.7., the responses were 11% for three minutes, 22% for five minutes, 22% for fifteen minutes, 33% for thirty minutes, and 22% for any outliers.

Question 5

How do you feel about our church's corporate fasting day every Tuesday with no food from morning to 5 p.m. (see fig. 4.9.)?

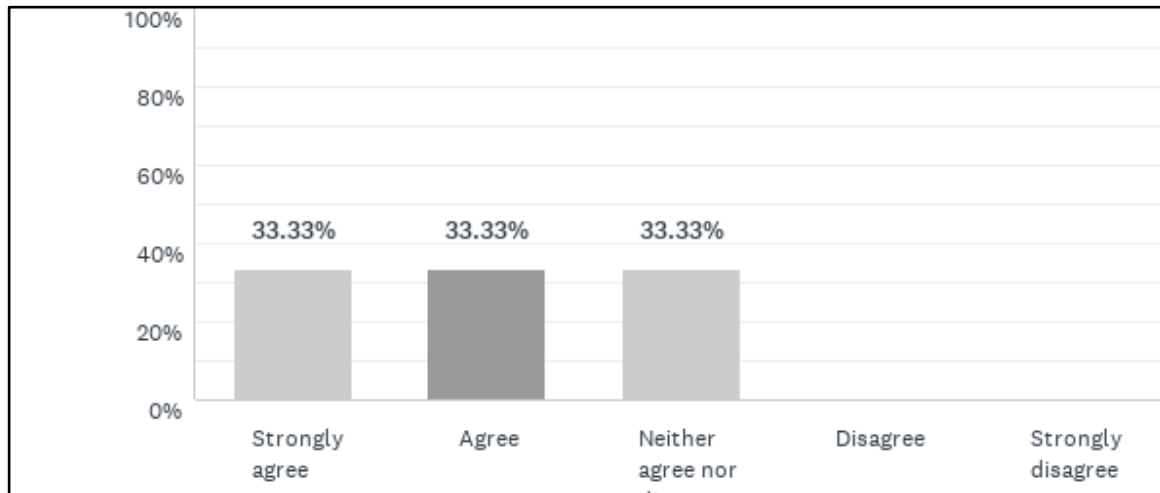


Figure 4.8. Responses to question 5 of the post-test

Question 6

Have you ever fasted for your own spiritual reason? If so, what type of fast and why (see fig. 4.9. and table 4.7.)?

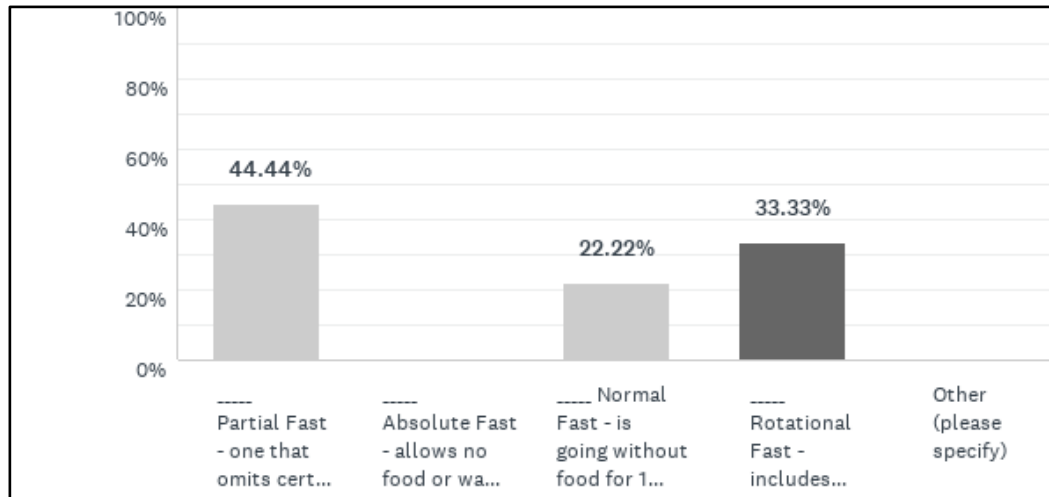


Figure 4.9. Responses to question 6 of the post-test as bar graph

Table 4.7. Responses to Question 6 of the Post-test.

Answer Choices	Responses
<u>Partial Fast</u> – one that omits certain foods, limited eating, and may consist of 1 meal per day	44.44%
<u>Absolute Fast</u> – does not allow food or water at all. This fast should be done for a short time or a very few days.	0.00%

<u>Normal Fast</u> – is going without food for 1 to 3 days, one week, one month, or 40 days. This fast includes water and juice	22.22%
<u>Rotational Fast</u> – includes giving up certain types of foods for a period.	33.33%

Question 7

We have four different days for one to attend a prayer service at Perfecting Church. It is via a telephone call-in number on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at noon and Saturday at 5:10 p.m. How do you feel about attending one or more of these services?

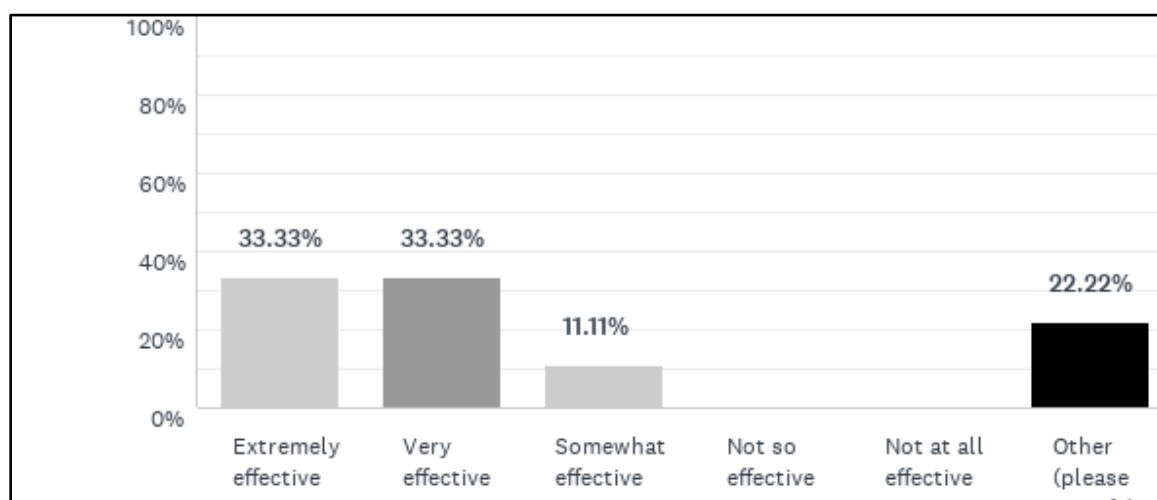


Figure 4.10. Responses to question 7 of the post-test

See figure 4.10. for the responses and table 4.8. for additional responses and information.

Table 4.8. Additional Responses to Question 7 of the Post-test.

Answer Choices	Responses
Other (please specify)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skipped/not answered • No • Maybe effective

Question 8

What is a favorite time to pray on your own when alone with just you and God?

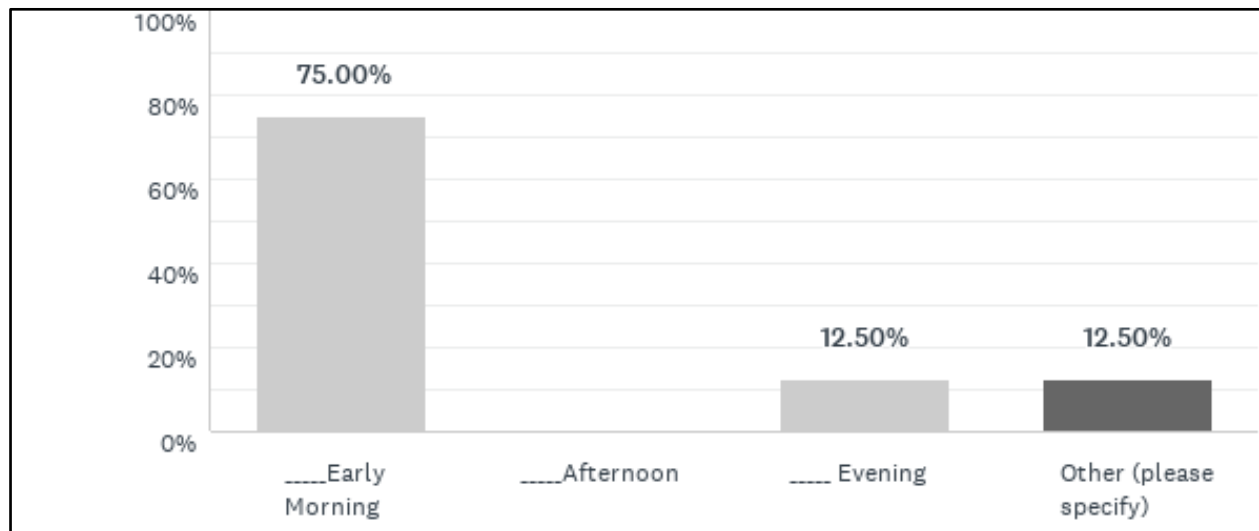


Figure 4.11. Responses to question 8 of the post-test

One participant skipped this question (see fig. 4.11.).

Question 9

Do you have a favorite way of spending time with God? If so, what is it (see table 4.9.).

Table 4.9. Responses to Question 9 of the Post-test.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Other, please specify	No specific time	Movement
	1 participant skipped	
	Praying and reading my Bible with candles and soft music. It varies depending on my schedule, but it is usually afternoon.	Meditation
		Quiet Time
	Journaling I keep notes and refer to them	Singing Worship
		Praying and Singing

Question 10

Do you apply any spiritual disciplines, either Bible Intake, Fasting, or Prayer, to your daily lifestyle (see fig. 4.12.)?

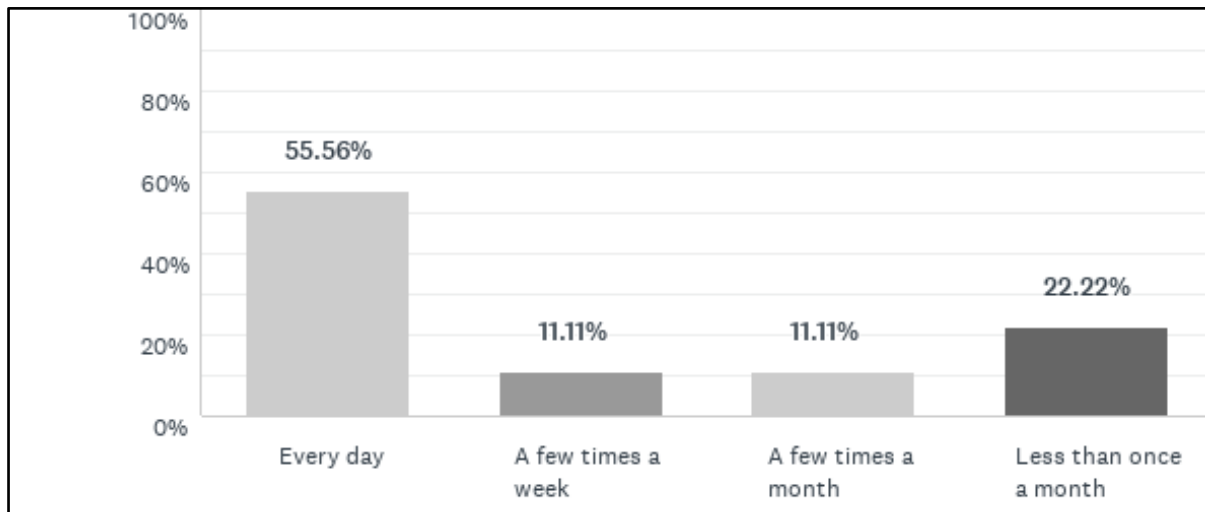


Figure 4.12. Responses to question 10 of the post-test

The participants' responses were interesting under the less than once-a-month heading. This study looks at Christian women, and the author prejudices thinking that all Christians read their Bible at least once a month, whether new or established disciples of Christ. This response is a lesson not to assume or prejudge what others may do as a spiritual discipline. The reactions to the question might be less than once a month because of these women's busy lifestyles. Whitney describes this as "a godly person is a busy person."⁶ This reasoning would also give credence to the believer's need to be in community with others of like faith.

⁶ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines Christian Life*, 288.

The three-week-long time frame for this project, plus the week before obtaining official church authorization, was mainly successful. In addition, the survey results indicate that this approach to presenting spiritual formation resulted in increased commitment to the participants spending time with Christ and practicing spiritual disciplines.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Research Implications

This project gave insight into how the spiritual disciplines, as written in the Word of God, help inspire and promote the spiritual development and growth of followers of Christ. The project proposal presented a problem noted in Perfecting Church's area in Detroit, Michigan. Therefore, the proposal, submission, and approval occurred, assuming the project could occur in a small group meeting format.

The problem is a perceived lack of commitment to spiritual growth with new members at PC. PC has just celebrated thirty years as an established church. Church attendance by the membership has declined over the past six years. Compared to the members who have attended PC for twenty-five to thirty years, there does not seem to be a devotion to attending worship services regularly. There appears to be a transient climate in the Christian culture today. Members do not seem anchored to the Scripture or Christ the Solid Rock, which appears to contribute to decreased and, in some cases, no spiritual growth.

The question addressed in this project was: Is there a relationship between spiritual disciplines and commitment to the body of Christ and the fulfillment of becoming more like a disciple of Christ whose relationship is progressing toward holiness? As a result, the project proposal's thesis statement had to be adjusted somewhat. Still, it worked regarding the author's questions regarding spiritual disciplines determining Christ's disciples' spiritual growth and development. Therefore, the original thesis reads: If the new members at Perfecting Church receive additional education regarding spiritual disciplines to enhance spiritual growth, they will become more committed to the ministry.

Research Application

At the start of the project, the church's culture was still practicing church services traditionally. Many congregations moved into the twenty-first century utilizing some modern technological resources. However, few were using all that was available. Many quickly changed how social media can facilitate church services and programs. The data results also show that social media can positively affect disciples' spiritual growth through short but specific educational and exhortation pieces. The changing work schedules and actual places of work now have everyone's lifestyles in the congregation changing.

The early church did not have today's technology. They practiced the disciplines of fellowship with the words of Christ that His disciples taught to groups or discussed one-on-one. The fasting and praying spiritual disciplines were encouraged by one another. The fellowship of being together during social distancing, though not taking the place of being present with each other, is facilitated through social media. The use of cell phones, computers, and the internet allows disciples to see one another's faces during conversations.

Compared to Henderson's work regarding the Methodist Church's growth, the project results support exhortation to small groups. Henderson adds, "The messages delivered within the Methodist system were exhortations to do something rather than make speeches about something."¹ The project provided three short exhortations for the group members to practice Bible intake, prayer, and fasting. The encouragement and exhortation do not lead to awe and praise for the leader because of the elaborate speech. Instead, it is one of eight strategies for

¹ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 151.

leadership principles of Wesley's "practice in appealing to action."² The teachers, preachers, and leaders of the small groups that made up the Methodist Church were consistent with this method during the small group meetings. Leaders always receive "instruction that presentations to the society must call for a decision to act. The call for action is to follow with a clear explanation on how to do it."³ The method has been instrumental in leaders "developing the ability to gain commitment"⁴ from group members. The project's results, relevance, and efficacy can encourage any Christian pastor and leadership team to lead a community of believers more effectively. Eloquence and length do not promote Christlikeness and life transformation. This past year, many groups of believers and organizations have been in active change modes, along with how societies worldwide relate. Christian ministries must think more creatively when doing discipleship to promote a healthy church. Email and text messages, Zoom technology, and regular telephone calls served the discipleship educational and relationship process. In her work on Luther, Elaine Graham shares that "while people still record high levels of belief in some supernatural or divine being, while they may pray regularly, research suggests that much of the rest of their religious lives are far more heterodox than orthodox, such that belief in angels, and the resurrection of Christ," goes by the wayside.⁵ She adds that Christian educators must find

² Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meeting*, 151.

³ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Elaine Graham, "Luther's Legacy: Rethinking the Theology of Lay Discipleship 500 Years After the Reformation," *Ecclesiology* 13, no. 3 (September 2017): 342.

ways to instill ways that liturgical life can more effectively nurture and support the practice of spiritual disciplines.⁶

The traditional church has made many changes regarding finding alternatives to congregational members gathering as believers of faith in the community. Many discipleship programs and small group ministries relate to each other via seeing and talking to each other over the internet, such as through YouTube and Zoom apps.

Research Limitations

This project was satisfactory, given the time allowed during a social challenge of the small group's ministry chosen for the project thesis. The results were positive for the participants' improved growth and understanding of spiritual disciplines. This study has shown that even during times of challenge and change in how man communicates and relates to one another, discipleship can still happen successfully. The spiritual disciplines educational plan incorporating spiritual disciplines into disciples of Christ's lives based on biblical teaching effectively increases understanding and promotes spiritual transformation among God's people. Small groups effectively relate to people without feeling like they are just a number in the large congregations prolific in our large society.

The discipleship of small groups includes encouraging spiritual disciplines, which is vital for healthy spiritual growth and development of the church, the bride of Christ. In today's busy and easily distracted society, there is a need to stop and focus on building a

⁶ Elaine Graham, "Luther's Legacy: Rethinking Theology", 348.

relationship with God. It is easy during these modern times to make excuses, but Jesus encourages in this way: “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21; Luke 12:34, ESV). The writer hypothesized that the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, and fasting would help promote the women in the study to think and meditate on the Word of God and His caring plans for His people. In the work of Dale Lemke, one discovers that “prayer and praying with others is useful when one needs to hear from God or clarification regarding specific ways in which God is asking them to live into that calling. In short, one’s vocation is also a matter of growing and developing through spiritual disciplines.”⁷ Many of the women in the study were facing changes in lifestyles during the time of the study.

The *Confessions*, written by Augustine, one of the early church theologians, describes the joy and significance of reading Scripture. Augustine states, “I would also say, O Lord my God, what the following Scriptures remind me of you, I will say, and not fear. For I will say the truth, Thyself inspiring me with what Thou wilt me to deliver out of those words. But by no other inspiration than Thine, do I believe myself to speak the truth, seeing Thou art the Truth.”⁸ Even as the centuries have passed, the reading of Scripture is still an essential spiritual discipline.

According to Whitney, developing an appreciation for spiritual disciplines catalyzes change from the inside out. He adds, “Disciples are to discipline themselves for the purpose of godliness, practicing the God-given spiritual disciplines to receive His grace and grow in

⁷ Dale Lemke. “Vocation and Lifelong Spiritual Formation: A Christian Mid-Career,” *Christian Education Journal*. 17, no. 2 (2020): 316.

⁸ Augustine, *Confessions*.

Christlikeness.”⁹ This is where many unchurched and new disciples get confused, thinking they can rely on themselves and not the power of the Holy Spirit. Many have heard that one should have self-discipline when living right or a godly lifestyle. Unfortunately, this saying is not helpful to one following Christ and becoming His disciple. One needs the added strength and relationship that drawing close to God through spiritual disciplines provides to the Disciples of Christ.

The writer proposed that practicing the spiritual disciplines of Bible intake, prayer, and fasting would promote and enhance the small group ministry’s spiritual growth. One should also note that during social distancing in 2020, many congregations maintained fellowshiping communities via social media for various church activities. Using social media is new to the local community, and there is room for growth and expansion when working with disciples.

Perfecting Church’s fellowship occurs through corporate Sunday worship service via YouTube and Facebook Live and weekly prayer services via telephone conference call on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. In addition, weekly Bible study and a youth service were held at 7:00 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays. At 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays, another prayer conference call is held with national participation and fellowship.

When this project thesis is published, many in-person services will have resumed at PC and church congregations worldwide. However, some members will continue to practice social distancing and wearing masks as needs arise in various lifestyle situations. The increase in social media use has begun at PC, and the researcher looks forward to implementing lessons learned

⁹ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for Life*, 15.

from this study. In addition, the teaching and exhortation lessons will enhance disciples of Christ worldwide. The researcher also plans to utilize the Survey Monkey program for further studies with participants generated through the online data participation resources.

Further Research

This study can be replicated on a larger scale using Survey Monkey for specific faith communities or participants randomly chosen in the Survey Monkey database. The survey is a valuable and quick tool that can determine where a disciple is in one's walk in life. Expanding the study to a larger community in various parts of the country or internationally would be a good future project. Hopefully, expanding the project will give more data to help develop spiritual growth education. Checking and assessing other areas of the United States seems like an exciting challenge. A more extensive demographic will further the knowledge base on spiritual formation, growth, and development as Christians advance in the ever-changing society.

Another question for improving the study is whether the groups should have definite distinctions between believers. The data collected from new babes who come to Christ with little knowledge will provide new Church leadership awareness. Christianity's cultural norms will cause a need for greater creativity of the servants of God to introduce the Gospel to those that need a Savior. In saying this, one must not forget, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful, and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near," (Hebrews 11:23–25, ESV). Nothing can replace meeting together in the flesh, yet believers are to obey the laws of the land,

knowing that eventually, God will get the glory. All the Bible's scriptures remind God's people how to behave and live no matter the obstacles. According to Mark Dever, "Augustine, the fifth-century African pastor, described the spiritual conflict as a clash between the city of Man and the City of God. And both cities want to recruit men for their work. The underlying reality here is humans can be changed positively and negatively."¹⁰ If one does not receive Christian spiritual education and encouragement toward Godliness, then the journey toward the newness in life and resurrection that Christ taught will lack the hope of salvation.

N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird share that "learning to live as a Christian is learning to live as a renewed human being, anticipating the eventual new creation, with a world which is still longing and groaning for that final redemption."¹¹ They add that the gospel and the renewed mind in Christ offer hope to those who believe in the Resurrected Christ.¹²

¹⁰ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2026), Chap. 1, Kindle.

¹¹ N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird. *The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians* (HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2019) 887.

¹² *Ibid.*, 119.

Appendix A

April 2, 2020

Sister Myra Coleman Williams, Women's Department Co-Lead
Perfecting Church
7616 E. Nevada
Detroit, MI 234

Dear Sister Myra:

As a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Ministry department, Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a study as part of the Doctor of Ministry degree requirements. The title of my study is "Spiritual Growth of Disciples and Members of an Established Congregation." The purpose of my study is to increase the level of spiritual growth in new and or established members at Perfecting Church. I request your permission to conduct my study utilizing the women's department's small group ministry at Perfecting Church.

Participants will go to a webpage (i.e., Survey Monkey), click the link, and complete the attached survey. Participants will be given informed consent information before their participation. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. The procedures are as follows: Complete a questionnaire in the form of a Pre-test. It should take approximately 3 to 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. Participation will be completely confidential as email addresses and names may be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential. I plan to use Survey Monkey.

After everyone has completed the pre-test, the first intervention, lesson 1, in the form of an exhortation regarding the definition of the term spiritual disciplines and the benefits of daily Bible Intake sharing is via email; social media should only take 5 minutes or less. Special note: The Interventions Design will be the same for all three interventions. The second exhortation regarding the benefits of individual fasting as a spiritual discipline will occur next.

The third and last intervention of the exhortation will regard prayer's benefits as a spiritual discipline. The post-test will be distributed the Monday after the third exhortation and should take about 3 to 10 minutes to complete.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to syhunter11@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Minister Sharon Hunter, Power Team #35

Appendix B

Pre-test

Hello, Sisters and members of the body of Jesus Christ. I appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts.

1. How many minutes do you spend reading your Bible each day?

2. Why do you read the Bible?

☐ Renewal

☐ Spiritual Growth

☐ Strength

☐ Encouragement

3. How long have you been reading the Bible for your spiritual growth and development?

4. How long do you read the Bible for spiritual comfort?

5. How do you feel about our church's corporate fasting day every Tuesday with no food from morning to 5:00 p.m.?

Strongly Agree ☐, Agree, ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree ☐, Disagree, ☐

Strongly Disagree ☐ Other ☐ (please specify)

Comments

6. Have you ever fasted for your own spiritual reason? If so, what type of fast and why?

☐ Partial_Fast_omits certain foods, limited eating, and may consist of 1 meal per day.

☐ Absolute_Fast_restricts all food and water at all and should be short.

☐ Normal_Fast_restricts food for 1 to 3 days, 1 week, 1 month, or 40 days. This fast includes water and or juice.

☐ Rotational_Fast_includes giving up certain types of foods for a period.

☐ Other

7. We have four different days for one to attend a prayer service at Perfecting Church via a telephone call-in number on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at noon. Then on Saturday at 5:10 p.m. How do you feel about attending one or more of these services?

- ☐ Extremely Effective
- ☐ Very Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Not So Effective
- ☐ Not at All Effective

8. What is a favorite time to pray on your own when alone with just you and God?

- ☐ Early Morning
- ☐ Afternoon
- ☐ Evening
- ☐ Other _____ (please specify)

9. Do you have a favorite way of spending time with God? If so, what is it?

10. Do you apply any of the Spiritual Disciplines, either Bible Intake, Fasting, or Prayer, to your daily lifestyle?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ A few times a week.
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Less than once a month

Appendix C

Post-test

Hello, Sisters and members of the body of Jesus Christ. This survey is the last part of our project. Thank you for participating.

1. How many minutes do you spend reading the Bible each day?

2. Why do you read the Bible?

☐ Renewal

☐ Spiritual Growth

☐ Strength

☐ Encouragement

3. How long have you been reading the Bible for your spiritual growth and development?

4. How long do you read your Bible for spiritual comfort?

5. How do you feel about our Church's corporate fasting day every Tuesday with no food from morning to 5:00 p.m.?

Strongly Agree ☐, Agree, ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree ☐, Disagree, ☐

Strongly Disagree ☐ Other ☐ (please specify)

Comments

6. Have you ever fasted for your own spiritual reason? If so, what type of fast and why?

☐ Partial_Fast_omits certain foods, limited eating, and may consist of 1 meal per day.

☐ Absolute_Fast_restricts all food and water at all and should be short.

☐ Normal_Fast_restricts food for 1 to 3 days, 1 week, 1 month, or 40 days. This fast includes water and or juice.

☐ Rotational_Fast_includes giving up certain types of foods for a period.

☐ Other

7. We have four different days for one to attend a prayer service at Perfecting Church via a telephone call-in number on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at noon. Then on Saturday at 5:10 p.m. How do you feel about attending one or more of these services?

- ☐ Extremely Effective
- ☐ Very Effective
- ☐ Somewhat Effective
- ☐ Not So Effective
- ☐ Not at All Effective

8. What is a favorite time to pray on your own when alone with just you and God?

- ☐ Early Morning
- ☐ Afternoon
- ☐ Evening
- ☐ Other _____ (please specify)

9. Do you have a favorite way of spending time with God? If so, what is it?

10. Do you apply any of the spiritual disciplines, either Bible intake, fasting, or prayer, to your daily lifestyle?

- ☐ Every day
- ☐ A few times a week
- ☐ About once a week
- ☐ A few times a month
- ☐ Once a month
- ☐ Less than once a month

Appendix D

Letter

Hi ladies, here is today's exhortation.

Spiritual Disciplines: Spiritual Discipline is a term for applying to one's personal and the believer's interpersonal life. One can practice spiritual disciplines alone or in a community. An example of spiritual discipline in a shared community is the gathering of the saints in worship. Donald Whitney defines spiritual disciplines as "those practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus Christ." Personal disciplines are considered prayer, fasting, journaling, and Bible reading. These *disciplines* will not earn us favor with God or measure *spiritual* success. Instead, they are exercises that equip us to live fully and freely in the present reality of God.

As disciples of Christ, we must grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Spiritual disciplines are the exercises or practices that tie our hearts to the triune God. Learning the Word of God helps disciples be obedient to His commands. Bible intake is like regularly taking in food to nurture healthy growth.

Bible Intake (Bible reading) The purpose of all intake methods is to keep it, that is, to do what God says and thereby develop in Christlikeness. Bible intake can be reading oneself or listening to someone else reading it. Bible intake is not only to occur during church service; one can hear the Word from various audio-visual tools of the 21st century during personal time. Luke 11:28 Jesus instructs that hearing the Word is vital in the believer's life; "But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" Jesus then asked the people who claimed to be the people of God, "Have you not read. . ." (Mark 12:10).

Appendix E

Fasting

Matthew 6:18, ESV

That your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father, who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Ezra 8:23, ESV

So, we fasted and implored our God for this, and he listened to our entreaty (request).

For this study, the definition of Christian fasting is a believer's voluntary abstinence from food for spiritual purposes for a specific amount of time. It is not a time of quick weight loss but for believers in Christ to turn to God. This discipline must be rooted in a relationship with Christ and practiced with the desire to become more like Christ. This time with God has a biblical foundation and directions for fasting in a God-centered way.

1. The normal fast is going without food for a definite period when you ingest only liquids (water and or juice). The duration can be one day, three days, one week, one month, or 40 days. With longer fasts, one should take extreme care and only attempt after medical advice from your physician.

2. The absolute fast allows no food or water and should be short. This fast requires supernatural intervention. One should never go without food or water for an extended period.

3. The partial fast omits certain foods or is on a schedule with limited eating. It may consist of eliminating one meal a day. An example is eating only fresh vegetables for several days or one meal daily. Elijah practiced partial fasts at least twice. John, the Baptist, and Daniel, with his three friends, are other examples of participating in partial fasts. People who have hypoglycemia or other diseases might consider this fast.

4. A Rotational fast consists of eating or omitting individual groups of foods for designated periods. For example, eating grains only every fourth day. The various food groups rotated so that some food was available each day.

Appendix F

Exhortation of Prayer

Bonding with God is not an all-or-nothing endeavor. It takes time and persistence.

Intentional time set aside for bonding is one of the best gifts we give anyone, even if it is only fifteen minutes.

Begin where you are. If fifteen minutes is what you have, give yourself to God as sincerely as you know how during this time. Trust God to receive and work with what we give him.

In Luke 18:1, Jesus teaches and instructs us to pray and not lose heart. Prayer does change things. Praying cultivates and promotes godliness in the lives of the people of God.

Be blessed, my sisters.

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Liberty IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

July 7, 2020

Sharon Hunter

Gary Moritz

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY19–20–285 Understanding the Spiritual Growth of New Disciples
in an Established Congregation

Dear Sharon Hunter, Gary Moritz:

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study does not classify as human subjects research because:

(2) Quality improvement activities are not considered "research" according to 45 CFR 46.102(d).

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

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