

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Ripe For the Harvest:
Developing Servants Through Spiritual Formation at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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This action research project addresses the need to develop committed Christian servants within a church ministry context by utilizing a spiritual formation initiative focused on service as a means towards and evidence of spiritual formation and development. Fairhaven Church of Rootstown had not been instructed on the fundamental need for members to serve together. Consequently, service within the church was not a necessary part of discipleship or its spiritual growth plan. The purpose of this intervention was to create and implement a three-fold spiritual development initiative focused on Christian service that includes a sermon series, a midweek study, and a hands-on, Service-Learning component through which participants will implement and practice a Christian service plan. If Fairhaven Church of Rootstown continues to implement this project's spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood, then members will be empowered and motivated to serve, which will strengthen the church by addressing the needs of the church community through service.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FCR	<i>Fairhaven Church of Rootstown</i>
IFB	<i>Independent Fundamental Baptist</i>
NT	<i>New Testament</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
OT	<i>Old Testament</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

The local church needs its members to embrace Christian service as an integral part of discipleship and spiritual formation so that it can properly function, grow, and thrive. Since the earliest days of Jesus's ministry, the need for servants to help advance the ministry has been clear. Jesus tells His disciples in the Gospel of John that there is more work than laborers in the kingdom (John 4:27–42). Consequently, Jesus spends much of His ministry exemplifying service and servanthood to the kingdom as a mark of spiritual growth and discipleship, culminating in His instructions in John 13 to serve one another. Scripture teaches that through acts of service a believer grows spiritually and conforms to the image and likeness of Christ through imitating Jesus Christ's behavior. Service to the kingdom of God is consistently presented in Scripture as a means of spiritual formation, as are prayer, worship, fasting, and study of the Word. However, in today's ministry context, a Christian's service within the local church is often undervalued as a spiritual discipline and a means of spiritual formation and growth, to the detriment of both the individual and the church.

This DMIN action research project is focused on the ministry found at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown (FCR). FCR is a young, vibrant, and growing congregation that has struggled to develop a culture of servanthood within the church. Due to a variety of reasons that will be detailed, this congregation lacks instruction regarding the importance of Christian service within the life of a believer. Therefore, they do not fully value the spiritual discipline of service as a fundamental mark of discipleship and a means of spiritual growth.

This Chapter will cover the ministry context, problem, purpose statement, and thesis statement for the project. The ministry context section will provide detailed information on FCR and its congregational and geographic history, demographics, activities, and the relationship between the researcher and the church. The problem statement will focus on the connection between the ministry context and the existing issue regarding the lack of committed, long-term servants. The purpose statement will lay out the framework of the solution that was prescribed: A focused spiritual formation initiative that includes preaching, in-depth teaching, and a Service-Learning framework focused on Christian service and servanthood within the church. The definitions section will clarify any essential terms and concepts that are utilized. Last, project limitations and delimitations, as well as the thesis statement, will be presented.

Ministry Context

The local ministry context for this DMIN action research project is Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. FCR has a unique and interesting history, having been founded and reestablished several times over its nearly eighty years of existence. What is known today as FCR was originally founded in 1946 as Country Road Baptist Church in Springfield Township, a suburb of Akron, OH. It was founded in a one-room school building that was built in the mid-1800s. This church community grew and existed as a viable congregation from 1946 to 1981. At some point during those thirty-five years, it would undergo a name change to Tisen Road Baptist Church, likely to reflect the paving, expansion, and renaming of the road where it was located. Tisen Road Baptist Church filled the role of a small, rural community church that served its neighborhood in Springfield Township.

In 1982, a new pastor arrived and reestablished the church as an Independent Fundamental Baptist (IFB) church, and with this re-establishment of the community, the church

was also renamed Fairhaven Baptist Church. Over the next thirty years, the church grew and remained a healthy community with a congregation of approximately twenty families and a weekly attendance of approximately sixty people. As the church grew, the building expanded to include an attached apartment used primarily for visiting missionaries and a small fellowship hall. However, the growth of the community did not last. Culturally, the church became isolated and did not engage the community effectively, and as a result, attendance dropped precipitously.

In 2018 the second pastor of Fairhaven Baptist Church retired after twenty-five years of service. The congregation initiated a pastoral search, and in their search, the writer of this action research project was interviewed and installed as Senior Pastor. In September 2018, Fairhaven Baptist Church had a congregation of fewer than five families (twelve individuals) and few material resources. The church had a debt-free building that desperately needed maintenance and little else. The church as a viable community was in crisis and likely weeks or months away from closing its doors.

Church Growth

Immediately upon the installation of the new pastor, the church began to experience remarkable growth. The congregation quickly grew from twelve to sixty and then to eighty within three months. This growth in new members fundamentally altered the demographics of the church in multiple ways. Many of FCR's new members were part of growing families with young children, so much so that seemingly overnight, the church became awash with children of all ages, from newborns to teenagers. Conversely, few senior citizens or retirees remained within FCR as most of these new church members were between the ages of twenty-five and fifty.

The influx of new members created opportunities for the church beyond the attendance increases as a number of these new members were not raised with committed, regular church

attendance as a part of their personal or family experience. Some of these new church members had nominal or casual church experience within their family groups, while some never attended church regularly. Hardly any of the new members joining the church had any denominational connection to, or affinity for the IFB status of the church. Many of the new members expressed concern that the IFB identification was more of a perceived hindrance to their inviting people to church than a benefit. For these new church members, the Baptist designation was viewed as an obstacle to evangelism and to inviting people to church due to a sensed social stigma with being Baptist. Within six months the congregation voted on a name change and removed the Baptist affiliation from the church, choosing to rename the community as “Fairhaven Church.”

Fairhaven Church’s statement of faith is based on the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith, and that has been the church’s position since its inception in 1946.¹ This statement of faith was not modified or updated with the changes in name and remains the church’s statement on faith.

Church Demographics

Fairhaven Church’s new church members could be broadly categorized into three main groups: 1) Friends and family of the pastor and the pastor’s family that followed the pastor to this current ministry, 2) Friends and family of the new members that attended because of a personal invitation, 3) Local individuals intrigued at the new activity that was happening in the church.

The surge in new church members also radically altered the geographic demographic of the church. Nearly all the new members at Fairhaven Church were from the community of

¹ John Newton Brown, “The New Hampshire Confession 1833,” 1833, accessed October 27, 2022, baptistdocuments.tripod.com/nhampshire.html.

Rootstown Township and the surrounding area. Rootstown Township is a small community that is fifteen miles northeast of Springfield Township, where Fairhaven Church was located. During this period of growth, no new members came from Springfield Township. Essentially, the growth in church membership occurred with no involvement from the community in which the church building was physically located. This presented a unique situation. Every Sunday morning, anywhere between sixty and eighty church members would get in their cars and drive fifteen miles to a building to worship God in a community that they had no other interaction or connection with while passing by multiple other churches both in Rootstown Township and along the way. This led to a problem of community convenience. Due to the travel time between church and home, it was difficult for many of these new church members to attend or participate in weeknight ministries or perform maintenance and custodial activities at the church. Additionally, the many youth-group age students that now were a part of Fairhaven Church did not have their church facility nearby for easy access during or after extracurricular activities. These youth also found it difficult to consistently secure transportation to the church for weeknight events.

Geographic Location

In order to better serve its community and address the needs of the congregation, an opportunity presented itself for Fairhaven Church to sell its property in Springfield Township and move to Rootstown Township. This opportunity was unanimously accepted by the congregation, and in October 2021, Fairhaven Church moved to Rootstown Township and was officially renamed Fairhaven Church of Rootstown.

The move to Rootstown Township has been successful for FCR. The congregation continued growing, and as of January 2023, FCR is comprised of sixty-five families, a sizeable

and energetic youth group, and regular weekly visitors. FCR offers two services every Sunday morning. Early Sunday service at 8:30 a.m. is a Spoken Word Service, which is comprised of prayer, responsive Psalm reading, Scripture reading, and a sermon. The later service at 11:00 a.m. is a traditional Worship Service, which is comprised of prayer, worship music, Scripture reading, and a sermon. Communion is celebrated monthly, and the sacrament of Baptism is administered as needed. Bible studies for adults and children are also offered.

In many respects, FCR is a new church community that is carrying on an eighty-year-old legacy. There are only two active FCR members that were attending prior to 2018. While several members within FCR have grown up with church as a part of their experience, for many members at FCR, however, the life of a committed and regularly attending church member is a relatively new experience.

Problem Presented

The congregation of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown presents unique challenges and opportunities based on their current demographic composition and spiritual experience. Founded in 1982 as a small IFB church, it had fallen on challenging times, going from a congregation of nearly one hundred in the 1990s to a group of no more than twelve by 2018.

In 2018 the pastor retired having served more than twenty-five years and a new pastor was installed. Within weeks of the new pastor's installation the attendance surged with approximately sixty new members joining the church within weeks. That growth has continued and maintained through to the current day.

Presently, more than sixty families are a part of FCR, with visitors and new members attending regularly. However, this growth and steady attendance for worship service has not been matched in the areas of committed, long-term serving within the church. While Sunday

service is well attended and financial areas of the church are secure, many administrative functions and specific ministries within the church struggle to remain viable due to a lack of committed volunteers. The congregation did not fully realize the need for committed Christian service primarily because the congregation had not been instructed on the value of servanthood as a necessary and fundamental aspect of the Christian life.

Many of the new members are young families (the median age of the church is thirty-eight years old) with little-to-no background or any dedicated family history within any church, and a portion of these same members have only a surface-level understanding of Scripture. These believers are young seekers who come to church seeking to know more of Jesus but do not yet comprehend the value or the necessity of servanthood as fundamental to spiritual growth and development. These believers are young chronologically and spiritually, still needing to discern between the biblical understanding of the Christian life and the distractions that exist within the world.² Their love and desire for Jesus has not yet translated into the personal spiritual transformation that leads to the ministry of servanthood that the Scriptures prescribe. The problem at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown is that the congregation has not been taught that servanthood is a fundamental part of spiritual formation. Consequently, servanthood within the church is not appreciated as a means of spiritual growth, or as a necessary aspect of a life of discipleship.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project was to create an instructional framework on servanthood that would spiritually and practically equip the congregation for

² R. W. L. Moberly, *The Bible in A Disenchanted Age* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2018), 136.

service within the church. This was accomplished through a three-part program. First, through employing a focused sermon series on biblical servanthood. Second, through creating a supplemental in-depth weekly study that will reinforce the themes and points of the sermon lessons. Finally, the instruction provided through the sermon and teaching series was combined with a Service-Learning model that provided service opportunities within the church, leading to an increased understanding of the role of Christian service in the spiritual formation of a believer.

Scripture affirms the need for teaching and instruction for the development of faith and spiritual formation. Acts 8:26–40 presents the well-known pericope of the apostle Philip interacting with the Ethiopian eunuch. This text presented the story of Philip, attuned to the calling of the Holy Spirit, receiving a command to go and meet with this Ethiopian eunuch, a member of the court of the queen of the Ethiopians. As the story develops, the reader finds that the eunuch is reading from the prophet Isaiah, and when asked by Philip if he understands the words of the prophet, the eunuch simply replies, “How can I unless someone guides me?” This open question provides Philip with the opportunity to instruct the eunuch and explain the Scriptures to him, leading ultimately to the salvation and baptism of this individual. In this instance, the act of instruction, or stated differently, Philip’s service in the kingdom, was of paramount importance to the salvation and spiritual formation of the individual.

Philip, in his role as apostle, served the kingdom by 1) being obedient to his calling and acting upon the call of the Holy Spirit to go to where he was called, 2) by serving through the teaching of the Scriptures to the eunuch, and 3) by ultimately leading the eunuch to salvation and baptizing him. This eunuch was now able to return to his community empowered and enabled to share and serve as had been modeled to him.

Over the last four years at FCR, the pastoral focus has been on addressing the explosion of growth, or the immense challenges that faced the church during the Covid pandemic of 2019–2020. Due to these competing priorities, any intentional or focused teaching or instruction on the need for Christian service as a part of spiritual formation was not prioritized or provided. For the congregation to understand the necessity of service within the life of the individual and within the life of the church, the congregation required biblical education, direction, and guidance to realize the need. The aim of this action research project was to provide biblical education, direction, and guidance through a Service-Learning framework that allowed for spiritual formation that leads to an increase in personal spiritual formation and ultimately, dedicated and committed servants.

The project launched with a sermon series focused on Jesus's teaching on repentance—that turning away from the former way of life, discipleship, spiritual growth and transformation, and the need and necessity of Christian service, which leads towards developing a servant's heart within the believer. The sermon series was supplemented by a multi-week study that deep dives into the sermon topics. This study reinforced the concepts presented in the sermons and allowed for interaction and discussion between the pastor and the members, and amongst the members peer-to-peer. The instruction provided through the sermons and lessons was then reinforced by utilizing a Service-Learning model that put into practice what was taught.

As the Scriptures were expounded upon and the Holy Spirit had an opportunity to work on and renew the heart of the believer, this intervention led to an improved understanding of what Christian service within the church and the kingdom are and led to a fuller and more robust Christian life for the believer and the community of FCR.³

Basic Assumptions

The thesis for this action research project was predicated on the full assumption that regenerate believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit are both motivated and desirous to follow the example of servanthood modeled by Jesus Christ, and to live lives that are obedient to His teachings. Jesus is clear that servanthood within the kingdom would be both required and countercultural, as noted in the story found in Matthew 20:20–28, where the mother of James and John came to Jesus requesting that her sons be given places of honor in the kingdom. Jesus seized the opportunity to impart an important lesson: Jesus instructed them that places and titles of honor are not what is important in the kingdom, rather being a servant is the mark to be desired. Jesus clearly states, “just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.” (Matt 20:28, New Revised Standard Version). Jesus was a servant. Jesus came to serve, not to be served, and as a result, His disciples are to follow His example. Jesus served and was a servant to all, and as a believer comes to understand this foundational characteristic of Jesus, they will be empowered and encouraged to serve as well.

To imitate Jesus, a Christ-follower must understand that Jesus lived a life of service and that His entire ministry was a ministry of service demonstrated through availability, dependability, and commitment. Both the Old and New Testaments, illustrate the kind of servanthood both present in Jesus and prefigured in the prophets and patriarchs.

Throughout the OT the service that would be required of Jesus’s followers was prefigured through the likes of Moses, Joshua, and many others. For example:

- *Availability.* Exodus 3 describes the calling of Moses. Here is an individual who is called of God and commanded to go to Pharaoh and lead the Israelites out of slavery

³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *Why We Need the Church to Become More Like Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 152, Kindle.

and bondage and take them to the promised land. Moses made himself available and was obedient to God's leadership.

- *Dependability and Commitment.* Joshua 24 presents the story of Joshua assembling all the tribes of Israel at Shechem to renew the covenant with Israel prior to his death. Joshua served God and Israel as a dependable and committed leader throughout his life, ultimately calling for Israel to commit to God and serve him exclusively as he had done.

These OT examples point forward to and prefigure the arrival of the Messiah. As the NT unfolds, Jesus is a better example of service than was found in the OT. Jesus's life and teaching impacted and dramatically altered the course of the lives of everyone He ministered to. Jesus's example of service was and is the model which true disciples are to emulate.

The NT is replete with examples of those who truly followed and consequently modeled His example. Jesus in His servanthood, was an example of:

- *Availability.* In Matthew 8:5–13, one reads of the interaction between the Roman centurion and Jesus. The Roman centurion came to Jesus, in faith, requesting the healing of his servant. In this pericope, we see a gentile Roman approaching a Jewish rabbi, seeking healing and assistance. Notwithstanding cultural or religious boundaries, Jesus makes Himself available and rewards the faith of the centurion. Jesus faithfully demonstrates the need for the Christian to be available in service to the kingdom.
- *Dependability.* Mark 5 describes several miracles of Jesus: the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, the healing of the woman who suffered from hemorrhage, and the story of the death and resurrection of Jairus' daughter. In these accounts, Jesus is presented as the high example of dependability in all He does. The story of Jairus' daughter is of note. In this story, Jairus comes to Jesus asking for healing for his daughter. Jesus, as a result of the crowds and other healing opportunities that occur along the way is delayed and the young girl seemingly dies. However, dependable as always, Jesus continued, and though she had passed, Jesus proceeded to the house of Jairus and brought her back from the dead. There was no letdown for Jairus or his family. Jesus was dependable to provide the healing that was needed.
- *Commitment.* Ultimately, Jesus was committed and was a model of commitment for His followers. Shown clearly in His prayer to the Father in Luke 22:42 as He was on the Mount of Olives on the eve of His crucifixion, Jesus not only prays for His followers, but in His prayer confirms and affirms His commitment to God the Father that His mission to save humanity would be carried out. Jesus was a servant, and as a servant, He was committed to service.

Within the framework of Fairhaven Church, and the context of the action research project presented, Christian service had not yet been understood as a mark or as a means of spiritual formation due primarily to the fact that it had not been taught within the church, nor were the aspects of availability, dependability, and commitment prioritized. This action research project addresses that need by creating a robust spiritual formation initiative that provided instruction on this foundational truth and allowing for the Holy Spirit to work within the heart of the believer to respond to the scriptural command to serve faithfully.

From a practical standpoint, there was the assumption of the full support of FCR. This action research project utilized a Service-Learning model that involved both instruction and service.⁴ This required participant church members to attend weekly services regularly and faithfully, as well as the instructional study that was a part of this intervention. Additionally, there was the assumption that participants would be available to fulfill specific service opportunities within the church as a part of the project for the duration of the intervention.

Definitions

This action research project focused on the issue of service within the church community of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. Throughout this research, specific terms and words such as spiritual formation, discipleship, spiritual disciplines, Christian service, Virtue Theory, and Service-Learning are key to the research and are referenced frequently. What follows is a definition of these terms.

⁴ Roxanne Helm-Stevens, Dan Kipley, and Todd Pheifer, "The Impact of a Service-Learning Project on Undergraduate Students' Faith Development and Spiritual Formation: Outcomes of an Organization and Administrative Behavior Course," *International Journal of Educational Methodology* 4, no. 3 (2018): 187.

Christian Service. Christian service as a term will be central to this action research project and can be interchangeably used with the words *servanthood* and *service* for the purposes of this project. The objective of Christian service is centered squarely on service performed within the church ministry context and accomplished for the benefit of the church and the kingdom. As noted earlier, in both OT and NT examples, service within the life of the believer and the community is of paramount importance. In the OT, Joshua strongly warns the Israelite community to serve the Lord in Joshua 22:5. He admonishes the Israelites to serve wholeheartedly, and to remain steadfast in their service to the Lord as an indication of their faithfulness.

In the NT, Jesus calls His followers in John 12:24–26 not only to serve, but He insists that whoever follows Him must also serve Him. Jesus indicates that discipleship and Christian service cannot be separated. Again, in Mark 9:35, Jesus instructs His disciples that those who expect to be served must be servants to all. This call to service by Jesus is regularly made throughout all the Gospels, and continually reinforced in the NT Epistles.

Godard-Peele asserts that Christian service, or servanthood, is a mindset or a worldview whereby an individual places value in serving others as a part of their spiritual walk and formation.⁵ Essentially, Christian service once rightly understood as a spiritual discipline, and as a means of spiritual formation should pervade the entirety of an individual's life.

Wilhoit builds upon this idea of Christian service as a mindset and provides additional enrichment by proposing that Christian service promotes the nurturing of faith and the advancement of the humble virtue of continually seeking to serve.⁶ What can be said then is that

⁵ Shirley Godard-Peele, "The Effectiveness of Servanthood Training" (DMIN Thesis, Liberty University, 2021), 14.

Christian service seeks to minister to others, promotes an increase in faith for the giver and the receiver of the service, and encourages spiritual growth and formation.

Deacon. The term deacon, from the Greek word *diakonia*, means servant, or one who serves. It is found over thirty times in the NT and is always in reference to serving or ministering in a practical sense: serving the community through meals, assistance, etc.⁷ In Luke 10, the author describes the scene as Jesus visits the home of Mary and Martha, and it is described in verse 40 that as Mary was sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to His teaching, Martha was busy serving (*diakonia*) the guests. Acts 6 and 1 Tim 3 establish the structure of the role or office of deacon. In Acts, the role of the deacon manifests itself in feeding the congregation and tending to the non-teaching and preaching needs of the community. In 1 Timothy, Paul details the requirements for deacons and to an extent, their roles: a servant to the congregation, of deep faith, sober, wise, not malicious, etc. Whether viewed through the lens of Acts or 1 Timothy, ultimately a deacon is for service and is meant to serve.

To shed even more light on the biblical understanding of the term, a deacon would have been a member of the community who may have run errands and tended to the poor and needy.⁸ Fundamentally, to serve the community for Christ and kingdom regardless of the job needed. This concept is summarized by Dominic Cerrato as such,

This is what it means to be a minister of service: not simply a doer of good things, but an envoy of God's love in the service of which good things are done. The deacon's service is not first and foremost to the people, but to God, and only in God, and with His grace, can he truly serve the people.⁹

⁶ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community*, 2nd ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 48, Kindle.

⁷ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

⁸ Dominic Cerrato, *Discovering Christ The Servant: A Spirituality Of Service* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Publishing, 2022), 40, Kindle.

⁹ Ibid., 41.

What is evident in Cerrato's definition is the idea that service should be seen through the lens of an activity that glorifies God, an activity that also achieves the edification of the community, and ultimately service is done as a part and parcel of the relationship with God. The result of that relationship, necessarily then, manifests itself in the common good accomplished for the body of Christ.

Discipleship. Discipleship is closely related to spiritual formation, and in some senses can be used interchangeably with spiritual formation, however discipleship is narrower in scope than spiritual formation, focusing on following and imitating the life of Jesus. Discipleship captures the idea of following Jesus completely. In its simplest understanding, a disciple is an apprentice who learns in a master-disciple relationship and then puts into practice what has been taught.¹⁰ This understanding of discipleship is shared across current literature. Discipleship is a process through which an individual spends time with Jesus through prayer and study, learning His ways, and living like Him.¹¹ This learning goes beyond learning and apprenticeship as it would be considered in modern society. The disciple/rabbi relationship was extremely close and committed. Earley and Gutierrez describe it as “an intensely personal relationship,” which included sharing all phases of life together.¹² It is through this intertwining of life and instruction through which a disciple is taught, and through which a disciple comes to understand the service which is expected of their role.

¹⁰ Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), 160, Kindle.

¹¹ Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 256, Kindle.

¹² Dave Earley and Ben Gutierrez, *Ministry Is: How To Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010).

There is an aspect of discipleship that also calls for public and open engagement with society. Disciples are to follow, learn, and imitate Jesus with their actions and with their lives. As a part of this calling, there is a command for collaboration with one's community. Paul Hanson opines that Jesus did not call disciples for the preservation and maintenance of their teaching, but rather to engage society for the kingdom of God.¹³ This aspect of engagement is shared across all current literature. Ultimately, a disciple imitates Christ in every way of life, which includes imitating Christ's interactions with others within their communities to further the kingdom.

Service-Learning. Service-Learning, as its name implies, is a teaching and training method that combines classroom or traditional material with volunteer service in such a way where there is a direct connection between what is taught theoretically within the classroom, and how it is then implemented practically in real life settings.¹⁴ For the purposes of this action research project, the volunteer service will focus on service within the church.

Spiritual Disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are practices that allow a believer to grow closer to God and deepen their faith. Spiritual disciplines are habits that believers develop that allow them to live in God's presence.¹⁵ These spiritual disciplines include prayer, Bible study, meditation, partaking of the sacraments, worship, and service. These activities, when employed regularly, provide a means of grace that allows for the forming and shaping of the individual and the community of faith.¹⁶ In addition to being habitual and intentional practices, Evan Howard

¹³ Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1986), 431.

¹⁴ Roxanne Helm-Stevens, Dan Kipley, and Todd Pfeifer, "The Impact of a Service-Learning Project on Undergraduate Students' Faith Development and Spiritual Formation: Outcomes of an Organization and Administrative Behavior Course," *International Journal of Educational Methodology* 4, no. 3 (2018): 187.

¹⁵ Jody Dean and Hal Stewart, *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2018), 9, Kindle.

¹⁶ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, 71.

also adds that spiritual disciplines are to be utilized for the sake of Christian objectives.¹⁷ They are a means to an end, with the end being a transformed and fuller Christian life.

In combining all of these together then, (spiritual formation, discipleship, and spiritual disciplines), one can see that as spiritual formation conforms the believer into becoming more like Christ, and through discipleship, a believer demonstrates in action the transformation that is occurring within them through the Holy Spirit, then ultimately the spiritual disciplines are those habits and actions that demonstrate both the inner and outer transformation that is occurring within the life of the believer and aids in maintaining and growing them. The combination of spiritual formation, discipleship, and the spiritual disciplines impacts both the individual and the community for the advancement of the kingdom.

Spiritual Formation. Spiritual formation in its most basic sense is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit transforming the life of a believer over time to become more Christlike. This process initiates as an inward change in the life of the believer, which then leads to outward focused public action. Spiritual formation is broader in scope than discipleship as it is an act of the Holy Spirit working through the life of the believer as they seek to grow in their devotion to and relationship with Christ.¹⁸ Through the process of spiritual formation, a believer understands their role in the kingdom not only as a disciple of Christ but also as a servant and an ambassador of Christ's kingdom on earth (John 13:1–17; 2 Cor 5:20).

A synergistic interworking exists within spiritual formation between an individual and the Holy Spirit. James Wilhoit proposes that spiritual formation is, “The intentional communal

¹⁷ Evan B. Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 108.

¹⁸ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls*, 108.

process of growing in our relationship with God and becoming conformed to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁹ This definition illustrates that interworking, in that as the Holy Spirit is living with (communing with) the individual, and an individual’s heart and mind are set towards the Spirit, the gradual process of conformity to Christ happens. Whereas discipleship focuses on the master-disciple relationship in how a believer acts, spiritual formation focuses on the inner development and renewal of the believer through the working of the Holy Spirit. This is the essence of spiritual formation.

Virtue Theory. Virtue theory is a training philosophy and learning method that is comprised of three steps: 1) Setting focus on a goal, 2) Practice that leads towards the goal, and 3) Testing that determines whether the goal has been proven in the individual.²⁰ Virtue theory originated with Aristotle and Greek thought, but from a Christian perspective, is to be goal-oriented with regards to biblical and theological questions and arguments.²¹

Limitations

The researcher conducting this intervention identified three limitations in this action research project. First, the intervention was limited to service opportunities that are already present within the ministry context of FCR. The ministry context is a small church with limited active ministries and limited opportunities to serve.

¹⁹ Mark A. Maddix, “Spiritual Formation and Christian Formation,” in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 238–72.

²⁰ Jonathan D. Worthington and Everett L. Worthington Jr., “Spiritual Formation by Training Leaders in Their Indigenous Cultures: The Importance of Cultural Humility and Virtue Theory,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 12, no. 1 (2019): 114.

²¹ William Rocky Wright, “The Telos of the Spiritual Disciples,” (D.Ed Dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2019), 70.

Second, the intervention had the limitation of participation and commitment of the members of FCR. Historically, sustained participation and commitment to service have been low in this ministry context, and any lack of commitment or participation may limit the effectiveness and outcomes of the intervention.

Last, the relationship between the researcher leading the intervention and the participants was an identified limitation. The researcher is the congregation's senior pastor and has long-standing relationships with the members of this community. Those relationships may impact participation, feedback, or neutrality amongst the participants.

Delimitations

The researcher leading this project identified three delimitations for this intervention. First, this intervention was focused exclusively on service and servanthood within FCR. While spiritual formation and discipleship are marked by multiple behaviors and activities, only the aspect of service and servanthood within the local church was examined for this intervention.

Second, the sample size and participants were constrained in several ways. This intervention was restricted to regularly attending, adult members of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. Furthermore, participation in the intervention was reserved for those who could commit to attending the weekly study sessions and participate in the offered service opportunities. This action research utilized a Service-Learning framework for the intervention in which participants received both traditional instruction and service opportunities that married traditional instruction with practical application. The traditional instruction was delivered through a focused sermon and instructional study series devoted to the theme of Christian service as a part of spiritual formation and discipleship. Service opportunities were then provided to reinforce practically what had been taught through the sermon series and classroom study.

Last, the service opportunities that were offered were only in currently existing ministries within the church. Service opportunities were offered in the following areas: ushers, greeters, worship set-up and tear-down, Sunday school teachers, youth leaders, member care, and prayer team. Service opportunities that involved the church but were not part of the church's existing ministries were not in scope for this intervention. This was done in order to focus the intervention on addressing object problem of the intervention.

Thesis Statement

As a believer turns away from their sin and towards a life in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is awakened in the heart of the believer to move the believer towards conforming their life to the image of Christ. Xx Through spiritual formation, an individual not only becomes like Jesus, but abides in Jesus, bears fruit, and will have a renewed desire to want to live like and imitate their Savior.²² It is not simply through listening to Jesus's words that a believer is transformed, it is in putting what the Scriptures teach into action for the betterment of the kingdom.²³ It is in that imitation of Jesus that the understanding of what service is, and of how servanthood in one's personal Christian life and within the corporate life of the church community comes together to further the spiritual formation of a believer. If Fairhaven Church of Rootstown implements this project's spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood, then members will be empowered and motivated to serve, which will strengthen the church by addressing the needs of the church community through service.

²² Godard-Peele, "The Effectiveness of Servanthood Training," 19.

²³ James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community*, 2nd Edition, Kindle. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2022), 48.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Literature Review

A Christian's call to service within the church begins with a transformed life, and a transformed life in Christ that includes spiritual growth and formation is a consistent theme throughout Scripture. The concept of transformed life is presented repeatedly in the OT. In Isa 6 one can clearly see in the call of Isaiah the prophet's need to be transformed and cleansed to be properly prepared for his work in the kingdom. Isaiah's initial response was dread, "There is no hope for me! I am doomed because every word that passes my lips is sinful, and I live among people whose every word is sinful" (Isa 6:5, Good News Today). Yet Isaiah, through his obedience and willingness was able to be transformed through his relationship with God, and therefore served as a faithful prophet of the Lord.

As Jesus came on to the scene, His first command was a call for action. Jesus entered the public ministry with a call to faith in Him, and command to repent (Mark 1:15). Jesus calls His followers to a new and better way of living throughout His ministry. His teachings are systematically detailed throughout the Gospels. In Rom 12:1–2, the apostle Paul calls followers of Christ to not conform to this world, but rather to be transformed in their minds and in their lives as an indication of their whole-hearted commitment to Jesus and His way of life. This call to spiritual renewal is not made simply as a theoretical request, but also as a call to action in the life of a Christian. Scripture makes it clear that fealty to Jesus is best demonstrated through a follower's imitation of Him both in word and action, as to be a disciple is not only a matter of

head knowledge or heart knowledge, but also a matter of action and living.¹ A disciple was not only to learn the teachings of their rabbi, but to in essence become like their rabbi.² As the apostles followed, learned from, and imitated their rabbi, they were transformed radically, and it is through that same imitation and conformity to Christ and His life that a believer in any age experiences spiritual formation. Spiritual formation and spiritual growth are authenticated through those markers that indicate such a reality in the life of a believer and works of service within the body of Christ and within the church are the fruit of an authentic faith.³

There are several marks of ongoing spiritual formation that manifest in the life of a believer such as prayer, worship, servanthood, and Bible study. While not an expert, the experience of the researcher over the last twenty years, across multiple churches and denominations is that Christian service (servanthood) is too often overlooked, underappreciated, or misunderstood as a means of spiritual formation. As a person develops spiritually and becomes familiarized with the Scriptures, they will experience a divine motivation through the Holy Spirit to act and to serve the kingdom. A part of service in the kingdom is the recognition that servanthood within the Christian life is a means of the grace of God present in their lives for their own personal growth, and for the growth of both community and kingdom.

Current scholarship indicates that servanthood is an integral part of spiritual formation as it intersects multiple characteristics present in the Christian life. According to Cerrato, as one serves, they become sensitive to the presence of God in those that are served, and in doing so extend the hand of Christ to those in need.⁴ This pertains to and develops not only an individual's

¹ N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), Kindle.

² Earley and Guitierrez, *Ministry Is: How to Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence*. 44.

³ Brad Harper and Paul Louis Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009).

⁴ Cerrato, *Discovering Christ The Servant: A Spirituality Of Service*. 87.

spiritual formation, but also the spiritual formation of the broader community. There is a distinct relationship between personal and corporate spiritual formation. Individual spiritual formation when experienced within the larger community of faith and in obedience to Scripture forms a path towards committed servanthood within the kingdom. A necessary and comprehensive understanding of spiritual formation is necessary for an individual to appropriately understand not only the need for service within the community, but also the necessity of service for their own personal spiritual growth. Once the believer has developed an authentic relationship with Jesus, it is through service and Christian action for God and neighbor that belief is outwardly confirmed.⁵

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

Spiritual formation occurs in several ways as the Holy Spirit works within the heart of the believer. As the believer can “glimpse the magnificence” of God through the Holy Spirit,⁶ the process of transformation from within the believer outwards begins. Once spiritual formation has begun, the process of discipleship brings about that desire within a believer to follow Jesus whole-heartedly.⁷ In a sense, spiritual formation and discipleship function together as a hand-in-glove in the life of the believer: Spiritual formation working to change the believer mind and heart into the likeness of Christ, and discipleship empowering the believer to live out a life for Christ. Both utilize the spiritual disciplines of prayer, corporate worship, Scripture reading, meditation, receiving the sacraments as a means of the grace through the Holy Spirit to transform

⁵ Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 155, Kindle.

⁶ Nate Palmer, *Servanthood As Worship: The Privilege Of Life in A Local Church* (Minneapolis, MN: Cruciform Press, 2010), Kindle.

⁷ Vincent Dodge Frampton, “Follow Me: Follow Jesus with Our Head, Heart, Hands, & Feet,” (MA Thesis, Liberty University, 2020), 2.

a believer's life, and within those disciplines there is the discipline of service. Through Christian service both within the life of the believer and the life of the church community, an individual not only transforms themselves, but also by extension transforms their community. The community is a sum whole of its parts. As its individual members transform into the likeness of Christ, so too will the larger community as both individual and community grow in conformity to Christ. This is supported by Palmer's position that biblical Christian service is the authentic and tangible expression of biblical love within the community.⁸

The connection between spiritual formation and discipleship is regularly noted within current scholarship. Diane Chandler argues that discipleship is simply the act of imitating Christ.⁹ In this regard, one can understand the spiritual formation implications: By imitating Christ a believer is conforming to the image of Christ, and if one is conforming to the image of Christ then certainly the discipline of servanthood is also being manifest within the life of the believer. This is a biblically affirmed position as the apostles, Mary Magdalene, and multiple others who were impacted by and followed Jesus became servants within their lives and their communities. Whether speaking of Gideon in Judges 6, who went from a hiding coward to mighty warrior through his faith, or Jesus, the rabbi and Lord who was humble enough to take on the role of lowly servant and stoop to wash the disciples' feet in John 13:1–17, the connection between spiritual formation and servanthood in and through the life of a disciple is clear: being a servant is a necessary indication of both an internal change within the life of a believer and an external confirmation and action impacting the betterment of both the individual and their community.

⁸ Palmer, *Servanthood as Worship: The Privilege of Life in a Local Church.*, 65.

⁹ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, 256.

As spiritual formation conforms the individual to the image of Christ, discipleship manifests itself in living for Christ. Paul Hanson argues that a disciple is not merely called to follow Jesus in learning lessons as students in a classroom, but rather disciples are called to enter the world, make additional disciples, and persevere in the life of the community.¹⁰ Dominic Cerrato argues that Jesus as a servant is most clearly revealed in His role as a servant (Gk. *diakonos*) through which He carried out His ministry serving others. By extension, and through dedicated imitation and appreciation, authentic disciples today are called to the same.¹¹ In church communities, and in their individual spheres of influence, true disciples of Jesus are called to serve as a mark of the faith. Across the current literature there is broad based consensus that spiritual formation and discipleship both within and without the life of the believer leads to a desire for servanthood that impacts both the individual and the community that the individual finds themselves in, and that same call to service is in and of itself an indication of spiritual growth and authentic faith.

Spiritual Formation: Individual and Community

As one reads Scripture, the consistent message is that spiritual formation occurs personally within an individual, and then by extension the spiritual formation of the community occurs through the transformed life of the individual believer.¹² The community, as a functioning body (1 Cor 12:12) grows through the individual members of which it is composed. This is where spiritual formation and servanthood intersect.

¹⁰ Paul D. Hanson, *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, Inc., 1986), 432.

¹¹ Cerrato, *Discovering Christ The Servant: A Spirituality Of Service*. 20.

¹² Stephen D. Lowe and Mary E. Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in A Digital Age* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 208, Kindle.

Joseph Hellerman argues that the spiritual formation emphasis within the modern-day church is far too individualistic, leading to a preoccupation with self. This is inherently detrimental to the community and the larger kingdom which is comprised of believers and demands a level of selflessness within it.¹³ An unbalanced focus on the individual and on utilizing God's grace and talents for personal reasons robs the community of its potential. This position is commonly shared across current literature. Boya builds on this concept of individual versus community spiritual formation by clarifying that an individualistic view of spiritual formation will manifest ultimately in a culture of selfishness within the church community,¹⁴ which inevitably will lead to an under-appreciation and an under-utilization of Christian service. Where servanthood is under-appreciated it is also under-utilized, and as a result spiritual growth becomes stunted since service and growth are connected relationally. Harmon opines that rather than existing as a collection of individuals, believers are called to mutually bear one another's burdens and serve each other just as Christ served others and bore the burdens of all who call on Him.¹⁵

Hellerman maintains that a healthy community is grounded in the gospel, and service to the community is foundational to the gospel message.¹⁶ Harper agrees with Hellerman and adds that the gospel message itself creates a new community in what it proclaims.¹⁷ Without an intentional focus on Christian service that is the result of a life that is undergoing spiritual

¹³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *Why We Need The Church To Become More Like Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2017), 95, Kindle.

¹⁴ Kgaugelo S. Boya, "The Ambivalence Regarding Volunteering and Reward Systems in Church Settings," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 1 (June 15, 2022): 3.

¹⁵ Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of The Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme Through the Cannon*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), Kindle.

¹⁶ Hellerman, *Why We Need the Church to Become More Like Jesus*, 95.

¹⁷ Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 74.

formation, the community of believers will suffer: a robust spirit of servanthood within the life of the church is necessary for a church to thrive and grow. Evan Howard builds on Hellerman's argument by bringing in the communal reality of the Lord. In summary of his position, Howard contends that the Christian God is a God that exists in community, the Holy Spirit works to transform the individual through community, therefore what exists is a relationship through which the believer is transformed through the Holy Spirit individually and the community is transformed through the individual and the Holy Spirit collectively.¹⁸

Diane Chandler takes this a step further, arguing that God is expressed humanly through community. Her argument is that the true image of God is best articulated within a human community. The idea being that since God has hardwired human beings to be relational, and since these relationships exist within community and are therefore a part of the body of Christ within the church, the relational formation within the church is what truly manifests the image of God in the world.¹⁹ So if the image of God is to be reflected within the community, then service within the community will be present.

Kimlyn Bender identifies six practices of the church, more precisely a collection of believers identified as a church community, that when displayed point towards and exemplify corporate spiritual formation. Those six practices are: 1) prayer, 2) pastoral care, 3) production of exemplars of Christian life, 4) service through diaconal ministries, 5) prophetic action, and 6) fellowship.²⁰ Clearly service within the life of the church is identified as one of the practices that

¹⁸ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls*, 154.

¹⁹ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, 122.

²⁰ Kimlyn Bender, *Confessing Christ for Church and World: Studies in Modern Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

marks a church community, and therefore the lack of the presence of Christian service or servanthood is of detrimental consequence to the local church.

As identified by Bender, the practice of fellowship as an adjunct mark and part of service is worth special attention. Where community exists, and where relationships exist, fellowship naturally exists as well. Within a community as people meet to worship, study, and serve, there are multiple opportunities to interact with fellow believers and this is vital not only to the spiritual health of the community and the individual, but it also creates a favorable environment for service. In Hjort and Skraeddergaard's study, they find that fellowship is ranked as the highest indicator of volunteer service within the church.²¹ It stands to reason then that the Christian God who is relational, and exists within community in His very being, and who has created all people with the desire for relationship with Him and with each other, that when those believers gather together in a church community to serve the kingdom would also desire fellowship with their brothers and sisters in the faith.

In summary then, Christian service is selfless and self-giving. Christian service is done for the benefit of the community and the transformation of the individual believer. Christian service within the body of Christ also produces opportunities for fellowship which is necessary within a communal setting. So then one can say that within the relationship between spiritual formation and discipleship, for both the individual and the community, is found the intersection of spiritual formation, servanthood, and obedience as indicators of discipleship, whereby spiritual formation accomplished through servanthood is evidence of a believer's obedience to

²¹ Birgette Graakjaer Hjort and Kristine Bjerg Skraeddergaard, "Fellowship as Driving Force-Volunteering in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark," *Studia Theologica- Nordic Journal of Theology* 76, no. 1 (2021): 12.

the Scriptures in which the believer's life modeled by Jesus is a life of service both personally and communally.

Spiritual Formation and Obedience

A Christian's life is a life lived in obedience to Christ, and obedience to Christ is an indication of the sincerity of faith and the spiritual formation and maturity of the believer (John 14:15). A believer's obedience to Christ comes in response to an effect initiated through the Holy Spirit as a part of spiritual formation, and naturally leads to acts of discipleship. Chandler posits that the leading indicator of a Christian's spiritual formation and growth is a life in which God is followed passionately and obediently.²² Wright adds that through acts of service, a believer improves their following of Jesus.²³ In this regard, service is not performed begrudgingly or perfunctorily, but with joy in accordance with God's will, in full understanding that servanthood is a part of the Christian life.

Building upon Chandler's position that obedience is a leading indicator of spiritual growth, Lowe correctly adds that obedience to the Scriptures in the life of a believer is a visible expression of grace demonstrating the sincerity of the believer's faith.²⁴ The implication of that argument is that a believer does not obey as a prerequisite of faith, or as a prerequisite for service, but rather a believer is obedient to Scripture as a result or a product of faith. Obedience does not create a servant's heart, rather obedience demonstrates that a believer's heart has been renewed (Eph 4:22–24) and is ready and prepared for service. Therefore, an obedient Christ-

²² Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, 78.

²³ Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship*. 98.

²⁴ Lowe and Lowe, *Ecologies of Faith in a Digital Age*, 221.

follower is by definition a servant since Christ modeled a life of servanthood and Christ is the standard to be followed.

Bill Hull builds on both Chandler's and Lowe's foundation by not only stating that obedience is an indicator of spiritual formation, but also argues that a lack of obedience to Christ's commands shows a lack of understanding of the gospel message, and possibly that a salvific faith in Jesus is not present.²⁵ This supports Lowe's argument in particular, since obedience is the evidence of, and not the reason for spiritual formation and sincere faith. As the Holy Spirit works in the life of the believer, spiritual formation gradually occurs as the believer is transformed progressively into the image of Christ. As a result, the believer becomes more like Christ, and Christ is the exemplary model of servanthood. Additionally, Evan Howard also strongly affirms that obedience to Christ and to His Word leads to increasing conformity to Christ Himself.²⁶ Jesus lived a life of total obedience to the Father, up to and including His death on the cross. As Christ-followers then, a believer ought to follow Christ's example of obedience. There is consistent agreement across current scholarship that obedience to Christ and to the Scripture is visible evidence of spiritual formation within the life of a believer.

In summary, if one considers Wright and Chandler's argument that obedience is the measure of a believer's spiritual life, and Hull's and Lowe's argument that a lack of obedience demonstrates a lack of understanding of the gospel message, and Howard's contention that obedience leads to an increase in conformity to Christ, the picture being painted is clear: as a part

²⁵ Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2018), loc 2636, Kindle.

²⁶ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls*, 57.

of spiritual formation, obedience to Christ through the study of His word necessarily leads to action and service in the Christian life.

Servanthood

In Acts 3:26, the apostle Peter boldly declares that Jesus is a servant raised by God. Servanthood is a spiritual discipline and transformative characteristic that epitomizes Jesus's life, ministry, and teachings. The clear biblical expectation is that believers will be imitators of Christ and as a result will serve the church and the kingdom of God through service. This requires spiritual formation within the believer, and it also requires a believer to maintain a particular mindset. Godard-Peele argues that believers who are servants not only value service in the kingdom, but also value serving all their fellow humans and develop a love and desire to embody the Christian discipline of service in all areas of life.²⁷ Christian service is for the community, and it is edifying in the life of the believer. This has broad implications for the church community.

For the church, which is the visible body of Christ on earth to function as intended, every part of the body must be active individually in their specific role for the benefit of the collective community. As du Plessis contends, God through the Holy Spirit calls His people and prepares them for the work of His kingdom, for their growth and development, and to experience the joy of selflessly giving of themselves for others.²⁸ Inherent in this position is the idea of Christian service as a personal and individual form of spiritual formation. Therefore, through their service

²⁷ Godard-Peele, "The Effectiveness of Servanthood Training," 14–16.

²⁸ Amanda L. du Plessis and Carol M. Nkambule, "Servant Leadership as a Part of Spiritual Formation of Theological Students in Contextualisation of 21st Century Theological Training," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 76, no. 2 (August 11, 2020): 3.

to the church and the kingdom, a believer not only uplifts the community, but they simultaneously grow spiritually as they obediently follow the commands of Scripture.

While this concept of personal spiritual formation and growth through servanthood is regularly found in current literature, there appears to be a gap between current research and the local church implementation on this matter. Unlike prayer, worship, or Bible study and meditation which is widely accepted within the local church as a means of spiritual formation, the concept of servanthood as a channel towards personal spiritual formation is not as common. Current scholarship is clear that it is in and through Christian service that significant spiritual growth and formation occurs, this is not found extensively in the local church based on this author's experience. Debra White-Smith discusses this at length with regards to modern day culture that focuses inwards on the individual and makes consumers of believers. Christian service requires an outward focus. White-Smith maintains that in many modern church communities a consumer culture has become prevalent which in many instances is detrimental toward developing a culture of serving and volunteering.²⁹

Jody Dean argues strongly that there is a symbiotic relationship that occurs between Christian service and spiritual growth, whereby as a believer grows spiritually, so too will their desire to serve grow. Conversely as a believer serves more, so too will they grow spiritually.³⁰ When taken collectively then, service within the community that is inspired through the Holy Spirit transforms and edifies the believer and transforms and edifies the church, and simultaneously stands as a safeguard against inward-focused spirituality.

²⁹ Debra White-Smith, "Ministerial Training on Consumer Culture and Volunteer Management May Prevent Burnout for Small-Church Clergy," *Pastoral Psychology* 69, no. 3 (July 17, 2020): 239.

³⁰ Jody Dean and Hal Stewart, *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation* (Bloomington, IN: Westbow Press, 2018), 60, Kindle.

There is an element of discipline that should not be overlooked with regards to servanthood as well. The foundational requirements of a spiritual discipline are that they are habitual, they are intentional, and they are performed in service to the kingdom of God.³¹ Having established that servanthood is a spiritual discipline, that it is a part of spiritual formation in terms of evidence of growth and a means of growth, and that it is performed in obedience to the scriptures, one cannot overlook the fact that servanthood requires a level of discipline. Scholarship agrees that servanthood within the church community and for the kingdom of God fulfills all these requirements.

Theological Foundations

A consistent theme throughout Scripture is the concept of service and servanthood within the life of a believer, and within the community of believers, as a sign of spiritual formation and spiritual growth. Found in the Old Testament accounts is much of individual and corporate service within the believer's life, presented within the framework of a covenant community, and obedience and faithfulness within that community. The covenant relationship with God contains both promises and obligations between God and His chosen people, exemplified in one instance through the understanding found in Deut. 30: 6–8, in which God promised to circumcise the hearts of His people, so that His people may keep the obligations needed to follow Him.³² Through the keeping of God's commandments and laws, the community of Israel worships God, serves Him, and in doing so serve one another. These laws and covenants in the OT point forward then to something greater, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

³¹ Howard, *A Guide to Christian Spiritual Formation: How Scripture, Spirit, Community, and Mission Shape Our Souls*, 108.

³² Dominik Markl, "God's Covenants with Humanity and Israel," in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*, ed. John Barton, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 312–37.

Once Jesus arrives on the scene, it is clear that His earthly ministry would be to spread the gospel and advance the kingdom primarily through service. Jesus clearly states in Matt 20:28; Mark 10:45; and John 13:1–17, that He, “the Son of Man” came to serve, rather than to be served. This identifies without question the nature of His ministry and the expectation of His followers, as Jesus through His earthly ministry presents life in the kingdom as a pattern of self-sacrifice and service to be followed by His disciples indicated in His admonition for His followers to take up their cross and follow Him.³³

Service and servanthood for both the individual and the community are inextricably intertwined in the life and ministry of Jesus. Jesus serves those whom He came to save, and He expects His followers to continue His example of service. As a result, the church of Jesus Christ must be a serving community. Stanley Grenz notes that the mission and ministry of the church is summed up in witness (evangelizing), fellowship, service, and worship.³⁴ For the purposes of this action research project and within the ministry context provided, the theological foundations of service will be established through two lenses: First, a brief overview of service in the OT through the framework of the covenant community relationship between God and His people, and second through the lens of Jesus’s mission to serve, His humility in service, and the impact of service in the life of believers and for the church.

Service and Hospitality in the OT

To understand service within an OT framework and with regards to the covenants of the OT, one needs to appreciate the role of hospitality in the OT culture as a part and parcel of

³³ Harmon, *The Servant of The Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme Through the Cannon*, 238.

³⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 490.

service. Although the word hospitality does not appear in the OT, the social and communal importance of hospitality within the community is difficult to miss.³⁵ There are many examples found in the scriptures to illustrate hospitality as service, for example:

- Abraham and Sarah preparing a lavish feast for the three travelers in Gen 18:1–15
- Rahab welcoming the spies in Josh 2
- Elisha receiving food from the Shunammite woman in 2 Kgs 4:8–37

Hospitality, as opposed to how it is viewed in modern culture as something optional, was an obligation. Not only was it an obligation, but often these acts of hospitality were done at a significant personal sacrifice. In the examples provided, both Rahab and the Shunammite woman were not people of great wealth, and yet their duty to serve their guests and provide the hospitality that the culture expected was not hindered. As Jacobson and Chan express the influence of hospitality in OT culture, “It was a society-wide obligation that every household was duty bound to extend to strangers, foreigners, travelers, and sojourners. Because the societal weave was based on familial relationships, the societal welfare depended on it”³⁶ Goldingay builds on Jacobson and Chan by adding that hospitality is what people were to do, and places hospitality in the same camp as keeping the Sabbath, being a good and faithful neighbor, and engaging with others in the community.³⁷ Theologians agree, and Scripture demonstrates that hospitality was an essential part of the culture and played a significant role in serving the community, and therefore serving God.

³⁵ Kathrine Southwood, “The Social And Cultural History Of Ancient Israel,” in *The Hebrew Bible: A Critical Companion*, ed. John Barton (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 54–85.

³⁶ Rolf A. Jacobson and Michael J. Chan, *Introducing The Old Testament: A Historical, Literary, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2023), Kindle.

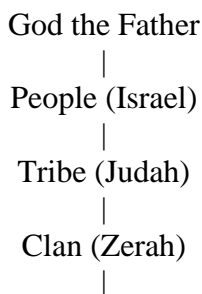
³⁷ John Goldingay, *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019).

This concept of Hospitality was the ideal for the Hebrew community and a part of the servant life.³⁸

Service and Covenant-Community in the OT

Apart from a new and transformed life in the Lord, humankind repeats various and numerous kinds of evil and sin, as demonstrated in Isa 1:21. However, the overriding message of the OT is that God's chosen people, who follow and love the Lord demonstrate a different existence, an existence that is filled with acts of communal service, justice, and righteousness as is seen in Amos 5:24.³⁹ The Hebrew people in the OT lived under the covenant relationship extended to them from God the Father through the patriarchs and kings of Israel. In the various covenants, from Abraham to Noah, and Moses to David, the Israelite people existed in this relationship with the Lord as they looked forward in anticipation of the coming Messiah. The structure within this societal relationship was well defined and covered most all aspects of the group.

The covenantal relationship in the OT was a kinship-based relationship that extended from God the Father to the community, to the individual. Jacobson and Chan illustrate the relationship as follows⁴⁰:



³⁸ David M. Carr, "Genesis," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2018), 7–80.

³⁹ Jacobson and Chan, *Introducing The Old Testament*, 421.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

Household (Zabdi)
|
Individual (Achan)

In this framework, one can see that the impact of relationships and interactions have an effect that applies corporately to the community, and privately to the individual. At each level, there are expectations and obligations of hospitality and service that are performed within and through the covenant community of God. During this time in Israel's history, most Israelites lived in small villages composed of a few hundred people and a few extended family units.⁴¹ It is worth noting that at each level, the sphere of influence grows but grows through a familiarity of relationship so that each level stacks upon and builds out the community. From individual to household, and escalating through the relationship to God the Father, at each level and within each relationship cluster, there is a community within which an individual is a central figure. There is a close-knit relationship between individual and community through out, up to an including God the Father, who is both individual and community within the Godhead.

Considering again each level of community relationship, Goldingay states, "The practicalities of life in the village would depend on people working together and getting on with each other when they need to dig a well or terrace some hill for growing grapes or olives."⁴² Without service one to another, the community as a whole would suffer, and at the same time, a lack of service would also be detrimental to the individual. God provides the Israelites with the Ten Commandments in Exod 20, and it is no accident that interactions and service between and amongst community members account for six of the Ten Commandments. Community life and

⁴¹ Goldingay, *Old Testament Ethics: A Guided Tour*, 118.

⁴² Ibid., 118

the service that goes hand-in-hand within the community are of central importance to the covenant community of God.

The introduction of the Ten Commandments to the Israelite community also brings with it the need for obedience, and for the people to embrace and to live out the obligations and requirements of God. Although the Pentecost experience is still a future event for the OT community, and while spiritual formation in the NT sense is still a future event for the community of God, the OT community manifested their understanding of and growth in their faith through their obedience to the law. Novick states that, “obedience does not come naturally to us [human beings].”⁴³ Given that obedience is not natural to humankind then, one can understand that obedience to the laws, service within the community that is a part of the obligations of the covenant community necessarily demonstrates a growth of faith and spiritual formation within the life of the individual since obedience is not a natural state for mankind. In summary, service within the community of Israel is clearly demonstrated through the OT Scripture, and is evidence of the relationship, faith, and spiritual transformation of the community of God, and forms a continuous arc with the NT as it looks forward to the birth of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

⁴³ Tzvi Novick, *An Introduction to the Scriptures of Israel: History and Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), Kindle.

Jesus's Mission

Jesus was born, lived, and modeled a life of service. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, helped the helpless all for love, compassion, grace, and to reconcile them to the Father. Jesus called His followers to share about the kingdom of heaven, share salvation, and call all that would respond to a life of discipleship.⁴⁴ Jesus served selflessly and called His followers to the same standard. In Mark 10:43–45, as the apostles were arguing amongst themselves as to which would be the greatest in the kingdom, Jesus stepped in and admonished them to refocus their priorities. He instructed them that not only their thinking was off, but that if they truly wanted to be great in the kingdom, they needed to be servants one to another. Jesus went so far as to say that anyone who wished to be first must be a slave to all. This is the high call to service that Jesus expects of those who follow Him. Suzanne Henderson explains that in this passage of the Bible, Jesus not only imparts the posture of service that a disciple is to exhibit, but that it is this model of servanthood that leaders must follow to continue to advance the kingdom.⁴⁵

This call to be a servant regardless of situation or station in life is far more profound upon understanding the practical implications of such a call. In assessing the verses of Mark 10:35–45 where James and John request to sit at Jesus's right hand in glory, Morna Hooker states that Jesus is rather calling his disciples to model His behavior of service: A model that includes denying oneself, of accepting one's cross, and of refusing status or rank.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Constatine R. Campbell and Jonathan T. Pennington, *Reading the New Testament as Christian Scripture: a Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), Kindle.

⁴⁵ Suzanne Henderson, "The Gospel According to Mark," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, with the Apocrypha*, 5th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2018), 1850.

⁴⁶ Morna D. Hooker, "Mark's Vision for the Church," in *A Vision for the Church*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael Thompson (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd., 1997), 35.

Building this concept of modeling behavior with regards to the ministry of Jesus, one must take into consideration then the relational aspect of Jesus's ministry and service. Cerrato rightly asserts that service within the life of a Christian is more than merely work in the kingdom, it is also for the establishing and building of relationships amongst followers.⁴⁷ Jesus's service within the kingdom as a part of His ministry through His signs and wonders generated that love and inspiration for others to follow Him (e.g., John 6:2; Matt 4:27; Matt 5–7). So then, a disciple is to follow and imitate Jesus, and Jesus came to serve. As Christ-followers today therefore, the call and command to serve is part and parcel for the church community and for the development of relationships within the church community as well.

Humility in Service

Jesus is a humble servant to all. In His call and command to serve, Jesus also models service that is foundationally connected to humility. Jesus's expectation of service cannot be separated from His call to humility. As Richard Bauckham opines, the entire lordship of Jesus is one of service and self-humiliation.⁴⁸ Nowhere in the Scripture is this better illustrated than in Jesus's washing of the apostles' feet, and of Paul's description of Jesus's disregarding His position in heaven and emptying Himself out for the world.

In John 13 Jesus takes the lowliest servant roles and washes the disciples' feet prior to the Passover meal. Not only does He wash their feet, He goes on to instruct them as follows, "So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14). Jesus

⁴⁷ Cerrato, *Discovering Christ The Servant: A Spirituality Of Service*. 42.

⁴⁸ Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), Kindle, loc 2446.

could not be clearer: His disciples are to follow His example of humble servanthood.

Furthermore, the service Jesus is referencing here is in the ordinary activities of daily life, akin to daily chores. It is in this ordinariness of life, as Bauckham explains, that the service of a disciple is expressed amongst the community of believers.⁴⁹ Keener builds on this particular illustration from John 13 expounding that the model of Jesus is one of self-sacrifice, taking on of the lowliest of roles, to serve one another, and to do so out of recognition that Jesus first took on the same sacrificial role for them.⁵⁰ Clearly Jesus both modeled and commanded humble servanthood for Himself and from His followers.

In Phil 2:1–18, Paul provides the theological understanding of the full extent of Jesus’s self-denial to serve. Paul describes how Jesus, as He did not consider equality with God but rather emptied Himself to become a servant to all (cf. Phil 2:7), which Carolyn Osiek refers to as, “the extreme limit of self-denial.”⁵¹ Jesus therefore expects that amongst His followers the same desire for service should exist. In his Letter to the Philippians, Paul provides a tangible description of how Christ-followers are to serve and interact one to another. Gordon Fee asserts that it is through such common experiences as service, one to another, that Christ-followers can express their commitment to Jesus through their acts of self-sacrifice.⁵² Barclay goes on to note that self-sacrifice in the sense of service and servanthood is an essential attribute within the ministry of Jesus,⁵³ essential to His ministry and inextricably linked to His humility. Through the

⁴⁹ Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John*, loc 2464.

⁵⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003), 911.

⁵¹ Carolyn Osiek, “The Letter Of Paul To The Philippians,” in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 5th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2018), 2099–2105.

⁵² Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 217.

example of washing feet, and through the example of emptying Himself to save humanity, one can begin to understand that Jesus both modeled and embodied humility in service, and consequently expects humility in service from His followers.

Service in the Life of a Believer

Jesus lived and modeled a life of service as a revelation of who He was, and as a directive to be followed by His disciples. Service within the community of the church is a further indication of the transformation of a believer and the commitment to the Savior.⁵⁴ Paul reinforces the importance of service in the life of believers in several of his letters, including the Letter to the Ephesians. In chapter four of his letter to the Ephesians, Paul describes that grace and spiritual gifts were provided to the believers for the betterment of the community and the body of Christ, “The gifts He gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11--13).

These gifts were also given for the betterment and growth of the individual believers within the body, and in turn for the betterment and growth of the community.⁵⁵ That final exhortation, that the gifts are given for the work of the ministry, is a straightforward call for service within the life of the community, through the life of the believer. F. F. Bruce clarifies further that these gifts are provided to build up the life of the individual, which will then lead to the building up of the community as a collective.⁵⁶ Cerrato builds on this, making the point that

⁵³ John M. G. Barclay, “Does the Gospel Require Self-Sacrifice? Paul and the Reconfiguration of the Self,” *Studies in Christian Ethics* 36, no. 1 (2023): 3–19.

⁵⁴ Harper and Metzger, *Exploring Ecclesiology*, 162

⁵⁵ Campbell and Pennington, *Reading The New Testament as Christian Scripture: A Literary, Canonical, and Theological Survey*. 258.

⁵⁶ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids,

to serve, and to be in the ministry of service to the body, one must be a doer. A doer who serves the community and in doing so, serves Jesus.⁵⁷ Understood correctly then, as the body of Christ is made up of many individual components, naturally as the components develop in service, so too will the larger body grow in service. Andrew Chester agrees with Bruce and adds to it by stating that the benefit of service builds up the individual, which in turn builds up the community, which ultimately leads to the community serving for the benefit of those outside the community as well.⁵⁸

The concept of service within the community is further illustrated in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. In Acts 4:32–37, there is presented an image of the church community being of one accord and sharing communally amongst each other. There is a unity of heart and mind, and there is a commitment one to another. As a result of this community mindedness and service within the group, all the community needs are met, and therefore demonstrating a well-functioning body of believers.⁵⁹ This is further evidence of the spiritual transformation occurring within the life of the believer, as the love for neighbor grows, while the focus on self dwindles.

Building the concept of NT service in the life of the believer out further, one sees in the Scripture that as believers serve and grow spiritually, several are addressed as “coworkers,” a title used by Paul to address Prisca and Aquila in Romans 16 and used by Paul frequently of other believers as well (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 1:24; Phil 2:25; Col 4:11; 1 Thess 3:2). The understanding here is that these were individuals within the community that served and worked

MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 390.

⁵⁷ Cerrato, *Discovering Christ the Servant: A Spirituality of Service*. 41.

⁵⁸ Andrew Chester, “The Pauline Communities,” in *A Vision for The Church*, ed. Markus Bockmuehl and Michael Thompson (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd., 1997), 112.

⁵⁹ Bock, *Acts*. 213.

alongside Paul in the ministry.⁶⁰ These coworkers are evidence and example of service within the church. These individuals are undoubtedly those that demonstrated a spiritual growth through spiritual formation and were able to be utilized by Paul as fellow laborers and coworkers serving the kingdom of God.

Within a contemporary context, this understanding of the relationship between individual and community, and the gifting supernaturally provided from and through the Holy Spirit should be a significant and transformational concept. The persistent cultural message of the day is a selfish one, with a tremendous focus on the individual as opposed to the selfless call to serve others that is presented throughout Scripture. Perhaps through the focused intervention presented in this thesis, there is an opportunity to refocus attention away from serving self and towards serving one another within community.

In summary of the theological foundations that have been presented, several points are worth noting. Scripture is consistent from OT to NT that service is a distinguishing mark of both an individual follower of Christ and the community in which the believer lives. In the OT, the focus of service was the community through the covenant relationships that pointed forward to Jesus. In the NT, the focus of service is through the new covenant found in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to Earth and lived a life of a servant, and to that end He was faithful to God the Father and to His followers. Jesus served all and was a servant to all. Through His life as a servant, Jesus established a servant people to be the church.⁶¹ It is also clear through His ministry that Jesus instructs His followers to serve and has an expectation that His followers will learn from and imitate His actions. Scripture affirms that service and servanthood in the life of a believer is an

⁶⁰ Frank J. Matera, *Romans*, Paideia (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 340.

⁶¹ Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme Through the Cannon*. 208.

indication of the faithfulness of a believer. To this end, Jesus provides His believers the grace and spiritual gifts necessary to serve within the kingdom.

Theoretical Foundations

The Scripture is clear in its commands and directives to preach and to teach God's Word and to make disciples of all people. In the OT, teaching and instruction took place utilizing a couple of different models: familial teaching models between parents and children as evidenced in Deut 11:19, and rabbinical type schools of instruction where rabbis had a limited number of students, as is demonstrated in 1 Sam 10:5 and 2 Kgs 6:1. These examples appear to be the primary means of instruction evidenced in the OT. Consider also that within this OT setting, many of these familial and rabbinical schools were in small villages and rural locations, away from large and cosmopolitan cities located in Egypt and Greece.⁶² Academic instruction in these predominately rural settings consisted of basic reading, with requirements to learn and memorize the Torah, which was accomplished orally in the tradition of Moses.⁶³ Vocational training and education was also provided, as is evidenced throughout Scripture. In the Bible, one can find fishermen, tent makers, farmers, tax collectors, and winemakers, among others. Those were likely taught through apprenticeships and/or within family units. As Perkins notes, "Such practical skills must have been taught, but little evidence of the process survives."⁶⁴

In the NT, rabbinical schools still exist, as exemplified by Jesus who called his disciples to follow and learn from Him throughout the gospel witness. Additionally, in Paul's writings, one can find instruction passed down through letters to the various churches that provide

⁶² Pheme Perkins, "The Roman Period," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha*, 5th ed., ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York, NY: Oxford University Press USA, 2018), 2301, Kindle.

⁶³ Ibid., 2303.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2306.

direction from everything including behavior, worship, and spiritual disciplines. However, while such examples of teaching are present within the scriptures, there is no detailed information regarding a specific method to be used in teaching or training.⁶⁵

In modern society, the teaching methods discussed in the Bible are best compared to Sunday sermons or small group Bible studies, but not the method or framework for large-scale institutional education. Institutions such as public schools, universities, vocational schools and community colleges, online schools and programs as modern society knows them are all historically recent developments, and not something applicable to what was found in the days of the early church. Nevertheless, while foundational and essential, preaching and small group teaching are a necessary part of Christian instruction, but do not constitute the entirety of what can or should be done for thorough instruction. Many contemporary theories exist regarding various methodologies for teaching. This action research project will focus primarily on Service-Learning as a method and framework for instruction and discipleship. Additionally, as a part of the broader Service-Learning framework, some concepts of Virtue Theory will also be utilized for specific applications.

Service-Learning

While secular in nature, Service-Learning has several natural adjacencies to ministry that make it a suitable teaching framework within a church ministry context as much of Service-Learning is relatable to and compatible with discipleship and spiritual formation. Within Service-Learning, a student is taught, and then provided with an opportunity to both implement the teaching, while at the same time continue and advance the learning process. As Gomez-Estern et

⁶⁵ Scott K. Leafe, "Maintaining A Biblical Worldview: Mitigating Emerging Syncretism with World Philosophies Through Focused Instruction" (DMIN Thesis, Liberty University, 2021), 53.

al., surmise, “In Service-Learning, learning takes a two-way track that goes from the classroom to the field, and vice-versa. This promotes student reflections on the issues examined”⁶⁶

Within the context of a church ministry, this two-way learning of instruction and action, which also includes student experience and reflection, is an organic fit with the message and mission of the church in which Jesus as the head of the church calls His followers to come to Him, and to follow Him.

Service-Learning in the United States was conceptually founded and developed in the mid-to-late 1800s in the establishment of rural extension education, and other programs that were born out of the land grant movement.⁶⁷ Service-Learning is an educational training framework in which teaching is combined with relevant and practical service opportunities for the learner to implement in practice what has been taught in the classroom. Greg Toppo in his 2020 study asserts that Service-Learning bridges the contextual gap by providing actual application of classroom instruction in real-world service scenarios.⁶⁸ Through Service-Learning, the student can directly experience the application of their studies and appreciate the reason that the instruction is necessary. Service-Learning removes the gap that exists between the study that occurs in the classroom and the work necessary to implement the teaching.

In his research, Craig Dwyer’s understanding of Service-Learning agrees with Toppo. Dwyer adds that by supplementing traditional classroom education with practical hands-on experience, students have opportunities not only to ask questions that may not otherwise come

⁶⁶ Beatriz Macias Gomez-Estern et al., “Does Service Learning Make A Difference? Comparing Students’ Valuations in Service Learning and Non-Service Learning Teaching of Psychology,” *Studies In Higher Education* 46, no. 7 (2021): 1395–1405.

⁶⁷ Timothy K. Stanton and Dwight E. Giles, Jr., “Founders, Framers, and Futures,” in *The Cambridge Handbook Of Service Learning And Community Engagement*, ed. Corey Dolgon, Tania D. Mitchell, and Timothy K. Eatman (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

⁶⁸ Greg Toppo, “Service Learning in America,” *Education Next* 20, no. 3 (2020): 4.

up in a classroom setting, but also experience the ability to creatively develop solutions in real-time, and simultaneously deepen relationships with their fellow students.⁶⁹ In both studies, the students were advantaged in their learning as a result of the Service-Learning model.

While both Toppo and Dwyer focus their studies on high school students, Richenel Martin's research is focused on adults, and the results and implications are similar. According to Martin, in the process of Service-Learning, there exists opportunity for reflection in service encounters that would otherwise not happen in a classroom setting.⁷⁰

Additionally, in Lo et al.'s 2022 study, they hypothesize that motivation and learning experience are impacted through Service-Learning, through which a student's learning experience and motivation can positively impact a student's performance outcome. According to the study, Service-Learning increases the perceived task-value of the lesson and instruction. Therefore, if the class or classroom is purposefully constructed in such a way as to highlight the task-value of the instruction, then, "These can increase student's efforts, attention, and persistence in Service-Learning tasks, which eventually improves motivation, which can bring positive effects to the learning outcome."⁷¹ Within the ministry context of this action research project, this is precisely the desired objective effect: that an instructional environment is created that highlights the task-value of learning and applying the concept of Christian service in such a way that it both benefits the individual through spiritual growth and improved discipleship, and

⁶⁹ Craig William Dwyer, "'Our Way of Proceeding': A Case Study of Service-Learning in Two Jesuit High Schools" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Fordham University, 2018), 5.

⁷⁰ Richenel M. Martin Jr., "Leadership Development: The Effects of Service-Learning Programs on Adult Learners' Success" (D.EL. diss., University of Charleston, 2019), 13.

⁷¹ Kenneth W. K. Lo et al., "How Students' Motivation And Learning Experience Affect Their Service-Learning Outcomes: A Structural Equation Modeling Analysis," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (April 2022): 1–12.

simultaneously benefits the church community as the recipient of the newfound spirit of service and servanthood that exists amongst its membership.

These studies agree and are indicative of the results that can be expected from a Service-Learning framework and is the goal of this action research project. Through this intervention there will exist the opportunity to learn academically what Christian service is, to implement what has been taught, and through hands-on experience there is opportunity for additional learning, refinement, and reflection on both what is taught and experienced.

Service-Learning and Virtue Theory

Virtue Theory is a broad topic, that while different than Service-Learning, has organic continuity to Service-Learning as a methodology that will be utilized within this action research project. Virtue theory, as its objective, has the development of habits and practices amongst its participants. The pursuit of a virtue is the pursuit of a habit or a practice as something fundamental within an individual.⁷² The Virtue Theory concept that will be utilized in this intervention was defined in an earlier section. It involves the setting of a goal, the development of practice or testing in the pursuit of the goal, and ultimately finds its fruition in establishing a habit. Wright applies the framework of Virtue Theory to the observation of the spiritual disciplines that is commonly found in protestant, evangelical churches. Wright proposes that when Virtue Theory is utilized within a Christian context, it nurtures a vigorous biblical life application, and moves believers towards glorifying God through the establishment of spiritual disciplines and habits.⁷³

⁷² Worthington and Worthington Jr., "Spiritual Formation by Training Leaders in Their Indigenous Cultures: The Importance of Cultural Humility and Virtue Theory," 114.

⁷³ Wright, "The Telos of the Spiritual Disciples," 70.

Leveraging this aspect of habit formation or routine development, Virtue Theory combines rather well with Service-Learning for purposes of this action research project. The teaching and hands-on application regarding Christian service is done both to educate and inspire within the mind and heart of the participant a desire for Christian service that is born out of an understanding of the relationship between service and spiritual formation and development within the life of a disciple. Carlson calls for a three-pronged approach to that includes instruction, fellowship, and service.⁷⁴ In this model, instruction provides the necessary information, fellowship develops the bonds of community, and through service, which is the application of the instruction, the disciple can put into practice and develop what has been taught. This instructional methodology appears to share much in common with the rabbinical manner of instruction that Jesus utilized. The apostles were taught by Jesus, the instruction. The apostles and Jesus lived life together, the fellowship. The apostles were then expected to go and do as Jesus provided them opportunity, the service. Ultimately, the goal is for the apostles 2,000 years ago, and for the believer today, is to realize that Christian service is a part and parcel of spiritual formation and a life of committed discipleship.

Conclusion

The following can be surmised. Through the literature review, it is evident that spiritual formation, discipleship, and the virtue of obedience are inextricably connected within the life of a believer. Servanthood is a product of these aspects of the Christian life. Current scholarship

⁷⁴ Gregory Carlson, "Adult Development And Christian Formation," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 209–36.

agrees that servanthood and Christian service are foundational and visible marks of spiritual formation within an individual, and subsequently within the community.

The theological foundations present evidence from both the OT and NT of the importance of Christian service within the life of the believer. In the OT, this emphasis on servanthood is exemplified through the covenant relationship between God and His people, and between the people relationally within their communities. What is presented in the OT then finds its ultimate fulfillment in the life of Jesus Christ. The NT witness is clear that Jesus came to Earth exemplifying and living a humble life of service. Jesus served in all areas of His ministry and was a servant to all in need. It is also clear through His ministry that Jesus instructs His followers to serve and has an expectation that His followers will imitate His actions. Ultimately, Scripture declares that service and servanthood in the life of a believer is an indication of the faithfulness and spiritual maturity of the believer. To this end, Jesus provides His followers the grace and spiritual gifts necessary to serve within the kingdom.

Through the lens of the theoretical foundation presented, one finds that spiritual transformation that leads to service can be leveraged using a Service-Learning model, and certain specific aspects of Virtue Theory. Through Virtue Theory, the reflexive spiritual muscle-memory needed to grasp the theological objective of Christian service as a part of spiritual formation and discipleship through practicing and testing is developed. Through the Service-Learning model what is imparted in the classroom is then reinforced practically through hands-on service opportunities, demonstrating the task-value of Christian service within the life of the believer, as well as within the life of the corporate church community. In the end, what results is a developed habit that demonstrates full integration and understanding of service as a means towards and evidence of spiritual formation.

As stated previously, the problem at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown is that servanthood within the church is not appreciated as a means of spiritual growth or as a mark of discipleship because it has not been prioritized as a need within the church, nor has it been thoroughly taught. This intervention is a synergistic marrying of biblical instruction, Service-Learning methodology, and concepts of Virtue Theory within the specific ministry context of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. Service-Learning, which has predominantly been applied in school settings, will be applied in a church setting for this intervention, in many ways resembling the aspects of discipleship within the scriptures. Through taking the classroom instruction provided, and the instruction that will be provided through the weekly sermon and establishing the goal of service as evidence of spiritual formation, service opportunities will then be established and provided that put into practice the lessons taught.

Additionally, by combining certain attributes of Virtue Theory within a Service-Learning framework, the goal of service within the church will be established and the desired development of service as a spiritual routine or habit will be formed. This will create a multi-faceted spiritual formation initiative that focuses on service within the church that combines teaching, preaching, and hands-on service.

If Fairhaven Church of Rootstown implements this action research project's spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood, then members will be empowered and motivated to serve which will strengthen the church by addressing the needs of the community through service.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A vibrant and growing church community lacking in committed servants has been an issue at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown over the last five years. As stated earlier in this thesis, the problem at FCR is that servanthood as a fundamental part of spiritual formation and development has not been thoroughly explained or instilled within the community. This lack of instruction has led to an under-appreciation of service as a means of spiritual growth or as a necessary component of a life of discipleship. In the past, multiple attempts to attract committed servants within the church failed. Calls for volunteers were historically performed through church announcements and sign-up sheets, but there was no follow-up or foundational instruction to the congregation that provided the basis for the expectation that believers in Christ should serve within the church. The understanding that service is a vital part of the Christian's life was lacking.

The intervention that follows will directly address this lack of instruction through a three-part spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood; more precisely, the intervention will be focused on servanthood within the life of a member of the church community as evidence of spiritual formation. This intervention will provide its participants with the necessary instructional and practical knowledge to empower and motivate them to serve within the church as dependable, passionate, and committed servants out of an inward desire that is initiated through the Holy Spirit.

Intervention Design

The intervention will be structured as a three-part initiative that involves a focused sermon series, a weekly study, and a hands-on Service-Learning experience that allows participants to actively serve within the church as a part of the project. The goal of the intervention is to provide the biblical basis and understanding as to why a follower of Christ should live a life that includes active service to the church, combined with practical ways to apply what is taught. The intervention obtained the approval of the IRB (see the Approval Letter at the end of this thesis), meeting all the necessary requirements for the project.

The author of this thesis will lead the intervention, serving as the project leader and the pastor of FCR. While the question of bias is always a pertinent one, safeguards have been implemented to mitigate bias. The initial assessment questionnaire and subsequent information requested and provided will all be anonymous in an effort to encourage open and honest communication. Additionally, all information will be available and presented to again ensure an open, honest, and collaborative environment. Lastly, by limiting the participants to adults only and members only, participants should be more comfortable in providing honest feedback.

The intervention will follow an eight-week schedule and will begin with a broad, church-wide announcement detailing the high-level goals of the project. Table 1.1 provides the intervention design that will be further discussed in this section.

Table 1. The action research project overview and design

Week	Milestone	Step	Details
One-Acclimation	Pre-Announcement	1	Prior to the formal congregational announcement, generate interest and excitement in the intervention through 1) Creation of social media event, and 2) Distribution of informational flyers.
Two-Acclimation	Announcement	2	Introduce the intervention to the congregation. Utilize an announcement from the pulpit before worship service. Highlight the goal, testing, and habit to be developed as a part of the intervention.

	Sermon Series	3	Introduce the sermon series focused on service and spiritual formation. Week one sermon will be on Luke 9:1–23 and will focus on the duties and responsibilities of a disciple, particularly servanthood as illustrated in the commissioning of the apostles and the feeding of the 5,000.
	Recruitment	4	Recruit participants and distribute consent forms to potential participants. Review consent forms and discuss participant's responsibilities.
Three-Acclimation	Recruitment	5	Follow up with potential participants and collect consent forms. Answer any questions.
	Sermon Series	6	Week two sermon will focus on Luke 22:24–27 and the practical implications of Jesus declaring Himself as one who came to serve even as the apostles argued amongst themselves as to who was the greatest.
	Questionnaire	7	Identified participants will receive an initial questionnaire that explores their views on service as a part of spiritual formation.
Four-Acclimation	Sermon Series	8	Week three sermon will focus on John 12:25–26 and Jesus's clear command that whoever follows Him, serves Him. As a part of the body of Christ, this has direct implications for a believer.
	Service-Learning	9	Participants will have the option to either select an area of ministry to serve in for the duration of the intervention, or an area of service will be assigned to them by the project leader.
Five-Absorption and Action	Sermon Series	10	Week four sermon will focus on John 6 and Jesus's difficult teachings for His followers. This will focus Jesus's call for commitment from those who will follow Him, even when it seems difficult or illogical to the world.
	Service-Learning	11	Initiation of service learning. Participants will fulfill their area of ministry within the church.
	Midweek study	12	Initiation of midweek study. Study will consist of 1) Deep dive into the sermon and the text from the prior Sunday, 2) Questions and feedback from the participants, and 3) Peer discussion. The project leader will maintain notes throughout the study time. There will be an in-person and remote option for the meeting.
Six-Absorption and Action	Sermon Series	13	Week five sermon will focus on Mark 10:42–45 and the apostles call to view service from a kingdom perspective vs. a worldly perspective.
	Service-Learning	14	Participants will fulfill their area of ministry within the church.

	Midweek study	15	Study will consist of 1) Deep dive into the sermon and the text from the prior Sunday, 2) Questions and feedback from the participants, and 3) Peer discussion. The project leader will maintain notes throughout the study time. There will be an in-person and remote option for the meeting.
Seven-Absorption and Action	Sermon Series	16	Week six sermon will focus on Phil 2:5–8 and highlight Jesus’s humility and willingness to lower Himself, take on human form, and serve mankind as a model of behavior to be followed by His followers.
	Service-Learning	17	Participants will fulfill their area of ministry within the church.
	Midweek study	18	Study will consist of 1) Deep dive into the sermon and the text from the prior Sunday, 2) Questions and feedback from the participants, and 3) Peer discussion. The project leader will maintain notes throughout the study time. There will be an in-person and remote option for the meeting.
Eight-Absorption and Action	Sermon Series	19	Week seven sermon will focus on 1 Pet 2: 11–17 and the practical implications of serving in a Godly way to silence an unbelieving world.
	Service-Learning	20	Participants will fulfill their area of ministry within the church.
	Midweek study	21	Study will consist of 1) Deep dive into the sermon and the text from the prior Sunday, 2) Questions and feedback from the participants, and 3) Peer discussion. The project leader will maintain notes throughout the study time. There will be an in-person and remote option for the meeting.
Nine-Absorption and Action	Sermon Series	22	Week eight sermon will focus on Gal 5:13–14 and how believers are to serve each other out of love. This will be the final sermon of the intervention. Will announce to the congregations that this is the final week of the intervention.
	Service-Learning	23	Participants will fulfill their area of ministry within the church. This will be the final week of service learning for the intervention.
	Midweek study	24	This will be the final week of the study and will include a final debrief with the participants.
	Intervention close	25	Participants will receive an exit questionnaire for feedback.

The intervention seeks to both impart and extract significant learnings from, and to, the congregation at FCR. The varied nature of the intervention design will ensure the appropriate

triangulation of information that will result in a robust research project. Triangulation, within a research project is defined by Sensing as,

Cross-checking the existence of certain phenomena and the veracity of individual accounts by gathering data from a number of sources and subsequently comparing and contrasting one account with another in order to produce as full and balanced a study as possible.¹

The intervention is designed to give voice to multiple participants, with multiple options for both service and feedback. The intervention is also designed to ensure that broad-based community representation is included so that all community sub-groups will have their voices heard. The intervention is intentionally designed to attract a broad-based and representative group from the ministry context.

Acclimation: Project Initiation and Recruitment

The project will be initiated through a church-wide announcement during week one of the intervention. The announcement will utilize the principles of Virtue Theory² in which the project facilitator will clearly define the goal of the intervention at a high level. The layout the process through which practice (testing) in pursuit of the goal will occur, and ultimately how the intervention will lead to the establishment and development of a habit, and in the case of this intervention, the habit to be developed is service within the church. The announcement will be clear and direct and provide an enthusiastic and easy-to-grasp objective presented in an alliterative manner that will be simple to learn and remember throughout the project. The project will be presented through the lens of three overarching phases:

¹ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*, Logos Bible Software (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

² Worthington and Worthington Jr., “Spiritual Formation by Training Leaders in Their Indigenous Cultures: The Importance of Cultural Humility and Virtue Theory,” 114.

1. *Acclimation*. During this phase of the intervention, the intervention's problem, purpose, and thesis will be presented to the congregation. This will provide a succinct overview for the church community to grasp the issue at hand and the objective and potential resolution of the intervention.
2. *Absorption*. During this phase of the intervention, the requisite teaching and instruction will occur. Here will reside the sermon and classroom instruction that will impart biblical and practical applications of service as a spiritual discipline and a means of spiritual formation and development for a believer.
3. *Action*. This is the phase of the intervention deals with the Service-Learning component of the project. Each participant in the project will have an opportunity to serve weekly in some area of ministry within the church. The area of service will be within an existing ministry, and the individual participant is to fulfill the duties of that area of ministry for the duration of the intervention.

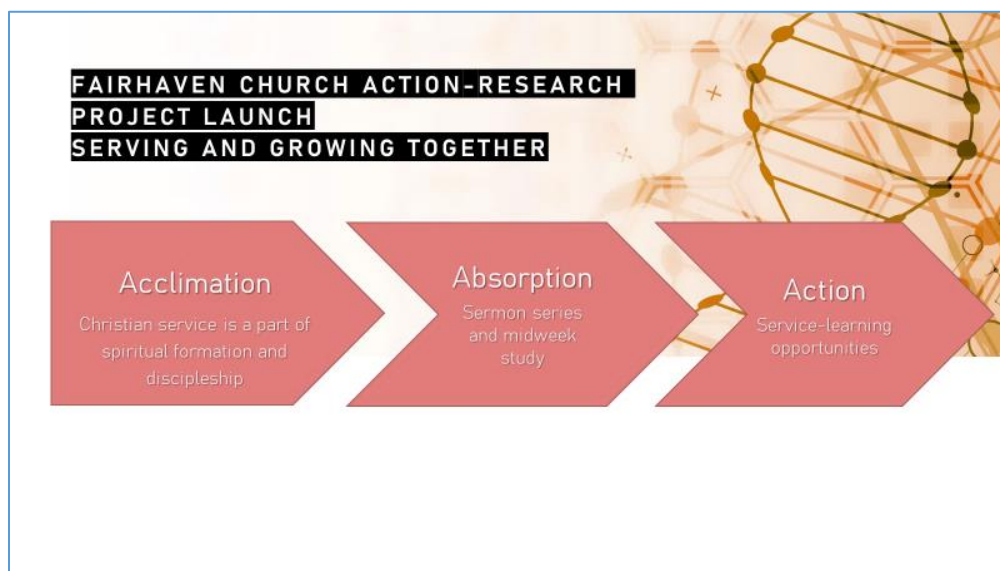


Figure 1. Intervention announcement plan

Upon announcing the project kick-off, the project leader will recruit participants for the intervention. Recruitment will be conducted through both an open invitation to the congregation of FCR, and through direct invitation by the project leader. Participants must be members of FCR and must be over the age of 18. Additionally, intentional efforts will be made to ensure that participants represent the congregation in terms of age, gender, and service attendance demographics (early service attendee or late service attendee). The intent here is to have a group

of adult members of FCR that represent the demographic make-up of the church community, including which worship service the members regularly attend, as there is a distinct culture that exists within each of the two Sunday morning worship times. This intervention is assessing the church holistically, therefore having a group of representative participants is vital to the project.

There are approximately eighty adult members of FCR, and that would be the total potential population of participants. Assuming the project leader can enlist 20–25% of the population, that would provide a participant total of 15–20 participants in the intervention. Participants will be required to complete and return a consent form to participate in the project. There is no concern about having more than twenty participants if enthusiasm to participate in the intervention presents itself. Both from a logistical and ministerial standpoint there will be no issue with accommodating more than twenty participants in the action research.

Absorption and Action-Instruction and Service-Learning

At the beginning of week three the intervention will move into the Absorption and Action phases of the project. These are the phases of the intervention where instruction and Service-Learning begin. Instruction will be conducted in two ways. First, there will be a focused sermon series that presents the biblical imperative for service and servanthood within a Christian's life. The sermon series, which is detailed in Appendix D, will focus on the following themes:

- Christian service is an essential part of the life of a disciple.
- Christian service is a spiritual discipline that leads to spiritual formation and growth.
- Service within the life of a believer is external evidence of spiritual maturity.
- A true follower of Christ will model service just as Christ modeled service.
- Through service, the church community will grow spiritually through the spiritual growth of its members.

FCR follows the practice of distributing a weekly outline for the sermon so that those attending worship service may follow along with the pastor and take notes. This practice will continue throughout the intervention and the taking of notes will be encouraged. All participants of the intervention will be together during the sermon series in their Sunday worship service of choice.

Second, there will be a midweek study that will be conducted. This midweek study will be a blended remote/in-person meeting. For those participants that cannot attend in person there will be an option to participate electronically via video conference call. Those who can attend in person will meet in person, with conferencing ability for those meeting remotely. This will be a combined study so that all participants will be attending the same study together. The midweek class will be structured as follows:

- The class will initiate with a spiritual gifts assessment review. The spiritual gifts assessment will be distributed to the participants upon completing the consent form. The results will be reviewed and discussed in week one.
- Review of the previous week's sermon topic, and deep dive further into the text and related texts to further develop themes.
- Open discussion to receive feedback on the intervention.
- Peer discussion time amongst the participants to discuss the theme of the sermon, their area of service, or the intervention.

The project leader will keep notes of each session and will encourage open and frank discussion.

The study will be scheduled for sixty minutes.

Additionally, during this phase of the intervention, the participants will be introduced to the Service-Learning component of the intervention. Each participant will commit to serving with the church in some existing ministry for the duration of the project. Service will be limited to areas of ministry that already exist. The following areas will be available for the intervention:

- Greeter

- Usher
- Set-up and tear-down team
- Worship- singing or audio-visual support
- Teaching children's Sunday school
- Youth group assistance
- Member care

Each participant will either select or be assigned one of these areas to serve so that the participants will be split up amongst the different ministry areas. The aim of this Service-Learning is to put into practice the lessons that are being taught and discussed in the sermon and during the midweek study to connect the concept that service is a vital part of spiritual formation and a vital need for the church community. FCR has been informed of and is in support of this forthcoming intervention. Use of the building and facilities, or the recruitment of members to participate that would be required for this phase of the intervention has been approved.

Evaluation of the Intervention

The intervention will conclude with an exit questionnaire and a final debrief discussion at the midweek study that occurs in week eight. At that point, all notes and responses will be collected for review and assessment. A successful intervention will produce the following results:

1. An increase in the total number of committed weekly servants within the church. This will be measured by assessing the number of servants within the church serving in ministry before and after the intervention.
2. An increase in the biblical understanding of service within the life of the believer and within the life of the church. This will be assessed through the questionnaire responses from before and after the intervention, and the captured direct feedback from the midweek study.

3. An increased understanding of the role of Christian service as a spiritual discipline that leads to spiritual transformation. This will also be assessed through the questionnaire responses from before and after the intervention, and the captured direct feedback from the midweek study.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Implementation of the intervention was both a considerable and well-planned step in this process. The researcher conducted exhaustive study and completed due diligence in developing a plan that was both novel in approach, and appropriately addressed the thesis of the project. The action research intervention was approved through IRB and implemented as designed and presented earlier in this Chapter. No deviations were necessary.

Acclimation: Gathering Participants

The inaugural step of the action research was to identify and amass participants for the study. This was achieved through three primary means. First, a social media event was created and shared through Fairhaven Church's social media accounts. This event was created through Facebook and shared with every member of the church. Additionally, the event was shared through FCR's Instagram page, and communicated through FCR's mass email service utilizing InstantChurchDirectory.com. The event titled, "Help Pastor Graduate" was a save the date type of event, indicating that on an upcoming Sunday the proposed research project and all relevant details would be shared with the congregation. This was intentionally created in a light-hearted theme in order to allow members to feel comfortable as they learned about the intervention in a non-threatening or intellectually intimidating way.

The creation of this social media event advertising the research project accomplished two objectives: it got the word out to the congregation of the upcoming action research project, and it created a level of excitement amongst the congregation to participate in the intervention. Many

people within the church expressed a sincere desire to know more about the project and help the church and the researcher with the intervention.

Second, upon the creation of the social media event, the action research project was announced weekly during the opening announcements at Sunday services. The weekly announcements presented the problem statement and thesis of the intervention: That FCR has struggled to develop committed servants within the church, therefore, if FCR were to implement the proposed spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood, then members will be empowered and motivated to serve which will strengthen the church by addressing the needs of the community through service. This was the consistent message and it allowed for anyone who might have missed the social media event to be informed of the upcoming intervention.

Last, after three weeks of announcements, the researcher directly approached all members of the church with a personal invitation to be a part of the project. This was done in-person at church services, in-person outside of church, and through phone calls, emails, and text. The information shared in these direct, personal invitations follows the content provided in Appendix B.

In utilizing these multiple methods of reaching church members (e.g., social media, church announcements, text, email, phone call, and direct conversation), all adult members of the church that met the recruitment requirements were contacted and had the opportunity to participate in the intervention.

The results utilizing these three methods exceeded expectations. The originally stated goal of this action research was to have 15–20 participants in the intervention. To the surprise of the researcher, 27 church members volunteered to be a part of the intervention, well beyond what was anticipated.

Each participant was provided with a consent form which was signed and returned to the researcher. The consent form utilized is found in Appendix A. Each participant was also provided with an initial questionnaire (see Appendix C), which anonymously provided the researcher with a pre-intervention baseline regarding the participants and their views and exposure to service as a part of spiritual formation. Lastly, each participant was provided with a spiritual gifts assessment test. The assessment test was taken individually by each participant at home, and the results were discussed during the initial midweek study. The spiritual gifts assessment utilized in this study is the adult spiritual gifts assessment found at www.spiritualgiftstest.com.³

The figures that follow indicate that there was a varied representation of the entire congregation in terms of age, gender, and attendance preference. This varied representation indicates that the researcher's design for a representative participant base was achieved. The focused attention and personal interaction in the gathering of participants were beneficial to the acquiring of intervention volunteers. There were multiple recurrent themes present when members were approached. Several members expressed thanks and were honored to be asked to participate. Several members volunteered upon learning of the action research project. There were multiple members who approached the intervention as an opportunity to push themselves outside of their "comfort zone." There developed a sense within the congregation that this intervention would be a value-add for the church, and that quickly led to a sizable participant group.

³ "Adult Spiritual Gifts Test," spiritualgiftstest.com, 2017, <https://spiritualgiftstest.com/translations/>.

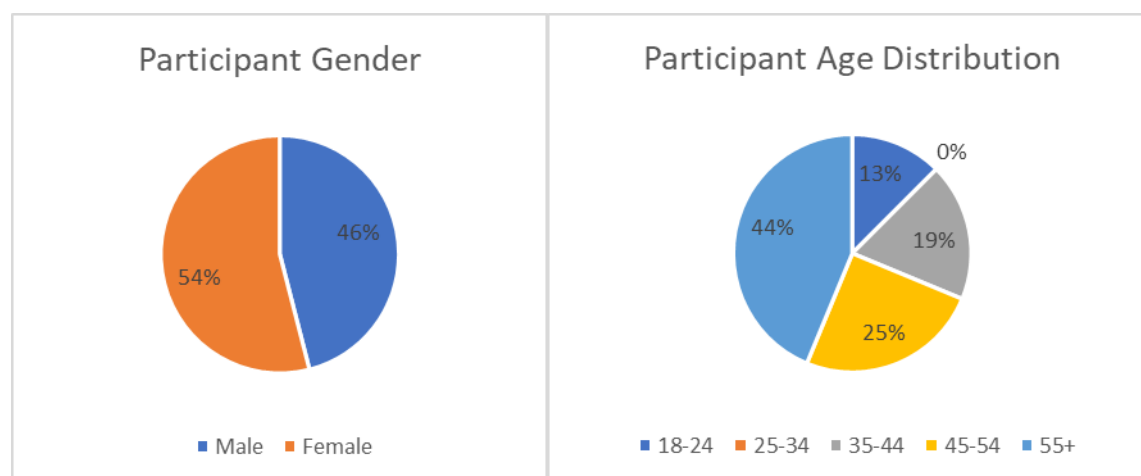


Figure 2. Participant demographics

A small number of members that when approached to participate in the project declined due to scheduling conflicts during the timeframe of the intervention. The intervention required attendance to church services and the midweek study throughout the project's timeline. As a result, if one could not attend for the duration of the intervention, they would not be able to participate in the study. Ultimately, there was a diverse and representative group that reflected the overall church community. The split between men and women was 54% men, 46% women, and the age demographic was also varied, as 56% of the participant group was below the age of 55. This accurately reflects the make-up of the church community.

Further establishing a baseline for the participants, the questionnaire established the starting point for the intervention and confirmed several underlying assumptions. The results of the questionnaire will be further discussed in the following Chapter. Figure 3 presents the questionnaire findings:

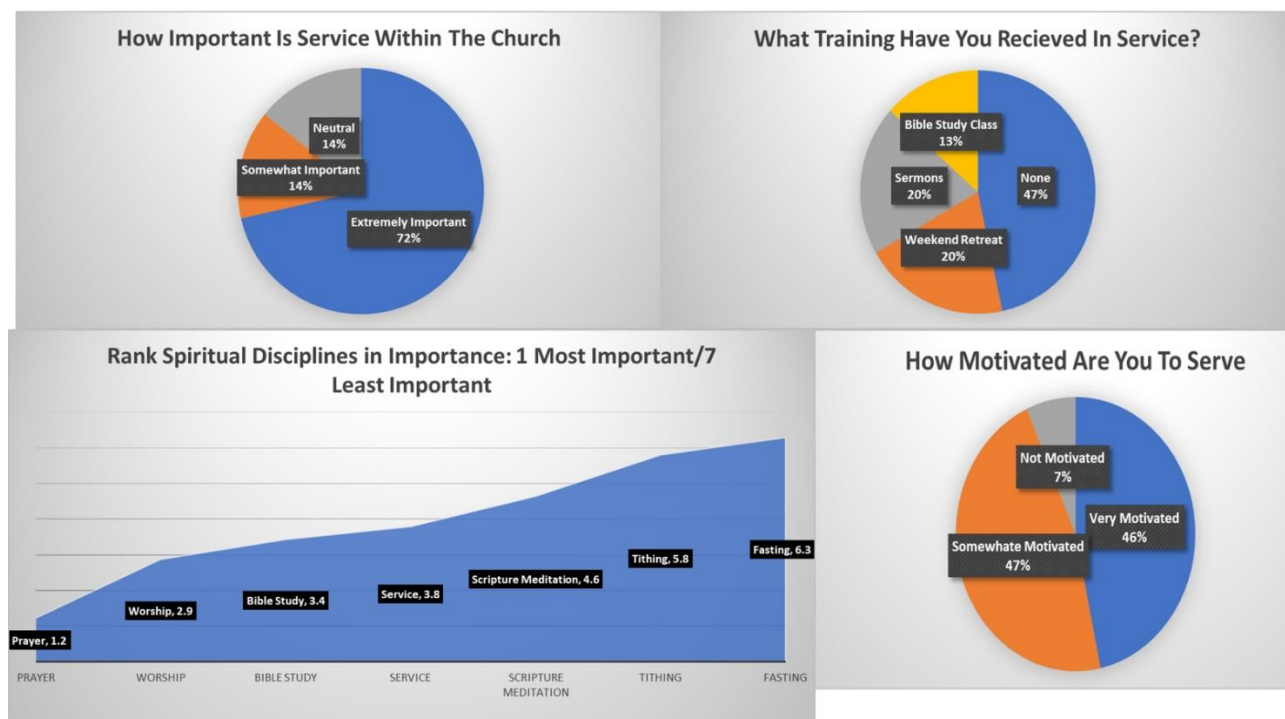


Figure 3. Participant overview

In understanding these results as a baseline, several results are worth noting. Of the current participant group, only 6% currently do not serve in any capacity within the church. This covers a wide range of service, both in terms of active service and/or ongoing service. This includes participants that are part of the prayer team which does not meet regularly, and special event projects which may occur monthly or quarterly.

72% of the participants responded that service was “very important” in the life of the church, the remaining 28% responded that service was either “somewhat important” or “neutral” within the life of the church. None of the respondents indicated that service was not important in the life of the church. Interestingly in light of the current intervention, while 94% of all participants currently serve, and 86% of respondents replied that service is important in the life of the church, nearly half of all respondents (47%) responded that they had never received any type of training, formally or informally with regards to service within the church. Of the

remaining 54%, 20% stated that the only training they received came from sermons that they had heard on the topic. The remaining 33% responded that what they know of service within the church came through either Bible studies they had participated in, or through weekend church retreats they had attended. In terms of Christian service as a spiritual discipline, prayer ranked fourth out of seven in terms of importance to the respondents. Service ranked behind prayer, worship, and Bible study in terms of perceived importance. Service ranked ahead of meditation, tithing, and fasting.

In summary, these results speak to and support the underlying thesis of the intervention. Through the responses provided, one can safely posit that these church members wanted to serve and were inclined to serve. However, Christian service as a part of spiritual formation, or as a fundamental part of discipleship had not been taught or prioritized. As a result, Christian service was not valued as much as worship services, prayer, and Bible study, which are routinely practiced and prioritized within the church. The opportunity that exists was that through the prescription provided in this intervention, the Holy Spirit could work within and without the heart of the participant to instill the desire to serve and grow as a disciple of Christ.

Acclimation: Sermon Series

The sermon series was a deliberate and methodical exposition on the function of service and servanthood within the life of a disciple and as a part of spiritual formation. The sermon series was eight weeks and followed the entirety of the intervention. The sermon series focused on the Gospels, Philippians, Galatians, and 1 Peter.

Weeks 1–5 focused exclusively on the Gospels and the example of service set by Jesus. The week one message was based on Luke 9:1–17, which covered the biblical accounts of Jesus sending the twelve out on their mission, and the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000. This sermon

message introduced and defined Christian service as a Christian discipline, as a foundational mark of a disciple, and as a core indicator of spiritual formation. The key theme of the message was that both the ministry of Jesus, and the ministry of the apostles is a ministry of serving the kingdom and those within the kingdom.

Week two of the sermon series was based on Luke 22:24–27, and Jesus’s perspective on greatness within the kingdom. Jesus clearly taught within this passage that those considered “great” within the kingdom were those who served and had a heart for service. The key theme of the message was in understanding that the values of the kingdom of God are different than the values of the world. While success in the world is measured by what a person acquires, success in the kingdom of God is measured by how a person serves.

Week three of the sermon series covered John 12:20–36, and the aspect of sacrifice as a part of service. The focus of the message was on Jesus predicting His death, and in doing so presenting to the disciples not only an account of what was to come, and why it was to come, but also presented to the disciples an example of the sacrifice required of a true servant. Service, for a Christian, is not merely a “nice to have,” it is the essence of what a Christian is to be, because it is part of the core of who the Savior is.

Week four of the sermon series discussed John 6:47–71, and the “hard teachings” of Jesus. Through the message, the challenge put forth for the congregation was in understanding that the teachings of Jesus were sometimes difficult to understand, and the life of a servant can be a difficult life; nevertheless, a true disciple remains in, abides in, and follows the words and teachings of Jesus. The Christian life is a sacrificial life, but it is worth it for the prize one finds in Jesus.

Week five concluded the Gospel portion of the sermon series with a message from Mark 10:42–45, and the interaction between Jesus and the rich, young ruler. In this message, the delineation was drawn for the congregation between the life of a disciple who affirms the teachings of Jesus and follows Him, and those who do not.

For the remainder of the sermon series, the focus moved to the letters of Paul and Peter. Week 6 focused on Philippians 2:5–8 and the humility of Jesus. The main theme in this lesson focused on Jesus's humility in taking on human form to serve and save. The lesson and implication were that as a disciple models the humility and service of Jesus, the same was to be expected in the life of any follower.

Week seven of the sermon series highlighted 1 Pet 2:11–17, and the call of Peter to Christians to live a life that is holy and different than the culture around them. The key theme was that followers of Jesus would necessarily feel different in this world, even uncomfortable in this world, like a foreigner or a sojourner. In following Jesus's humility, empathy, and service, the Christian will feel at odds with the world in which they live in, however the call of the disciple is to Jesus and not to the world.

Finally in week 8, the sermon series concluded with a message on Gal 5:13–14, and Paul's admonition to followers of Jesus to uphold the Great Commandment: to love your neighbor as yourself. The key theme in this message was that love is manifested in action toward your neighbor, and in the kingdom: to serve your neighbor for Christ is to love your neighbor.

This eight-week sermon series provided consistent teaching and developed a consistent cadence to the congregation on the message of service. Historically, Fairhaven Church had been an expository preaching church, therefore rarely preaching sermon series that were topical or focused on anything other than the straight teaching through complete books of the Bible. For

this community, to have a sermon series focused on a singular topic that spanned multiple books of the Bible was a new experience. Additionally, all participants of the intervention attended every week of the sermon series.

Absorption and Action: Midweek Study

The midweek study commenced during week four of the intervention. This study was held both through remote teleconference and in-person. The initial study had perfect attendance. Twenty-seven people were present, with three in-person and twenty-four online. The midweek study followed the agenda found in Appendix E.

The study met weekly on Thursday evenings, from 8:00–9:00. Remote attendees of the study met utilizing MS Teams. The researcher conducted the study from his home, and that was the location utilized by those meeting in-person. Both in-person and remote attendees were able to communicate via MS Teams. Supplemental microphones and speakers were utilized to improve communication. The in-person location was set up with a large, conference-style table for all attendees. All participants were encouraged to attend and participate in whatever manner they were most comfortable.

No audio or video recordings were made. Information was captured via notes by the researcher. Remote participants were able to send messages via the chat function in MS Teams. In-person participants were able to provide hand-written messages to the researcher if needed.

The initial night's meeting focused primarily on the spiritual gifts assessment that was distributed during the participant sign-up. The participants were required to take the assessment prior to the study so that the results could be discussed within the group. All participants came to the study with the assessment completed. Of the twenty-seven participants, seven participants stated that this was the first time they had ever taken such an assessment.

The newness of this experience for so many of the participants allowed for extensive discussion and instruction within the group. Each participant was encouraged to share their top three spiritual gifts to gauge an understanding of participant's giftedness. Significant themes and patterns quickly emerged:

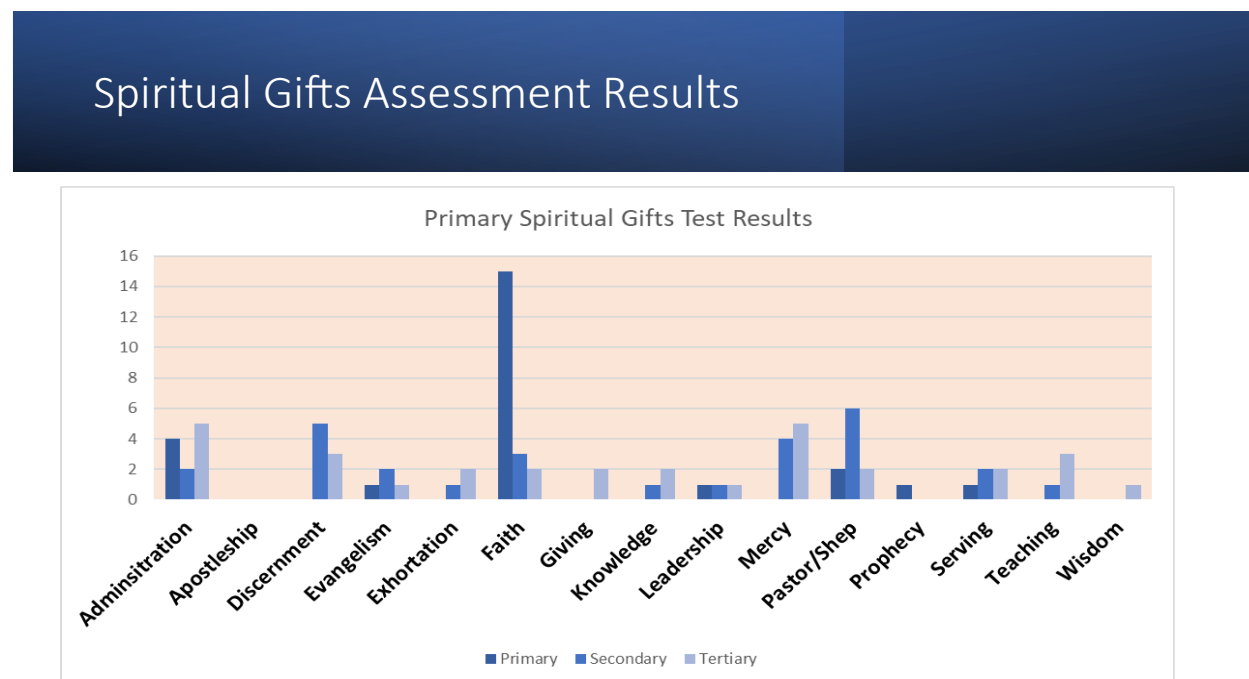


Figure 4. Spiritual gifts assessment results

All the participants in the intervention completed the spiritual gifts assessment. The spiritual gift of “faith” was far and away the most dominant of the spiritual gifts within the group. Faith was followed by the spiritual gift of “administration” as a distant second. The spiritual gift of “serving” ranked very low, with only five participants listing the gift of serving in their top three.

The midweek studies were well attended. All attendants participated each week. On average, each weekly meeting consisted of eight participants who met “in person” and 19 who met remotely via MS Teams. As per the agenda found in Appendix E, each meeting involved

deep-dive discussions into the previous week's sermon message, plus open time for the participants to discuss service as a part of Christian formation and discipleship. There was ample time for discussion and interaction.

Absorption and Action: Service-Learning

The Service-Learning component of the intervention was initiated on week five of the project. Each participant selected an area of the church to serve and served in that area weekly for the duration of the intervention. Areas of service selected by each participant as follows:

- Worship (singing/readers)- four participants
- Sunday morning greeters- six participants
- Ushers- four participants
- Prayer team- six participants
- Set up and tear down team- five participants
- Youth/Children ministry- two participants

Participants that volunteered in worship were able to either be a part of the worship team and assist in leading the congregation in singing both hymns and praise songs during Sunday service, or as Scripture readers, reading the assigned weekly text in preparation for the sermon message.

Greeters served during Sunday services by fulfilling multiple roles. Greeters met people as they entered church, distributed the bulletin and announcements to church attenders, and directed both adults and children to their respective areas for Sunday worship. Greeters also helped to guide first-time visitors to the worship facility.

The participants that served as ushers fulfilled the role of collecting the tithes and offerings and were also responsible to provide an account of the giving to the financial secretary.

The prayer team served through the ministry of praying for the church and covering in prayer the prayer requests of the church. The prayer team gathered early mornings prior to all Sunday services and prayed for the services, the church, and the pastor. Additionally, the prayer team prayed during the week for the prayer requests of the church community and utilized social media to share prayer requests with the prayer team.

Volunteers for the set up/tear down team were responsible for setting up all the chairs and sound equipment for Sunday services, and then for tear down and put away of all chairs and sound equipment once services are complete. Fairhaven Church does not have a dedicated sanctuary. The church meets within an existing elementary school. Set up and tear down are significant ministries within the life of FCR.

Last, those participants who served with youth and children ministries did so in two ways. Those assisting with children's ministry served through teaching either on Sunday mornings during junior church, or through leading the children during Wednesday night kid ministry programming. Those assisting with youth group served as youth leaders during weekly youth group gatherings.

In summary of the intervention plan, all participants served as required throughout the intervention period. All participants fulfilled their roles, attended all required parts of the intervention, and fully participated as needed. No elements of the intervention plan required change or alteration.

Christian Formation and Human Development

Beyond the development of servants within the ministry in question, there exists the larger objective of Christian formation, more precisely, Christian spiritual formation as it relates to human development. Intuitively one can understand that as a believer grows and is

transformed spiritually, the internal and external development of the individual naturally manifests itself. This section of the research will first explore the relationship between human development theory and Christian spiritual formation, and subsequently, the relationship and development theory, Christian spiritual formation, and the intervention conducted as a part of this action research.

As defined earlier in this research, spiritual formation is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit transforming the life of a believer over time to become more Christlike. This is an inward activity in which a believer grows in Christlikeness and becomes spiritually transformed over time into the likeness of Jesus. Conversely, Christian formation is more oriented towards human-action. It takes into understanding the fact that human beings are created in the image of God, acknowledges the relationship that exists between God and His creation, and seeks understanding through the intersection of theology (the study of God), and the social sciences (the study of people); as such, it is foundational in Christian education.⁴

As an outgrowth of the study of Christian formation within individual believers is the understanding that they grow and develop. This development, when viewed through a spiritual lens, can be measured and understood utilizing certain human development theories as a means of understanding. Timothy Jones identifies four such theories that will be briefly summarized here⁵:

- *Hard Development Theory*. In this theory, stages of development are represented through cognitive-neural operations that lead to qualitatively different approaches to similar projects. Stages are sequential and progress through hierarchy without regression or omission.

⁴ James R. Estep, "Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei," in *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development*, ed. James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 9–36.

⁵ Ibid., 40.

- *Soft Development Theory*. Like Hard Development Theory, this theory incorporates an individual's self-reflection and social/affective operations that impact responses and perceptions of similar realities. Also, like Hard Development Theory, these stages are sequential and progress through hierarchy without regression or omission.
- *Functional Model of Development*. In this theory, rather than progressing through neural-cognitive operations, each stage represents an individual's primary ego, and responses are born out of culturally rooted tasks that emerge out of an individual's life experience. The stages are psychosocial and phenomenological as a person's experience in life unfolds.
- *Cultural-Age Model of Development*. Unlike the previous theories, this theory proceeds through the stages of an individual's development through the perception of the individual's socio-cultural ecosystem and their role within that construct. Stages advance through social expectations and accepted rites of passage, religious or otherwise.

Essentially, these theories of development combine both the spiritual/theological view and expectation of an individual and the pedagogical/instructional methodologies of the social sciences. This allows for the integration of the social sciences and Scripture.⁶ From a Christian education perspective, therefore, this prepares a way for the sciences (which may exclude Scripture), and Scripture (which may exclude the sciences), to integrate, allowing for a more robust and thorough instruction for the individual. This does justice to both the social sciences and theology, or as James Estep surmises, "To neglect science is to neglect what God has revealed to us through His creation, and to neglect theology is to neglect what God has revealed to us through His Word."⁷

Christian Formation, Spiritual Formation, and Adult Development

It is commonly understood that children have an incredible ability to learn and to learn quickly. It is also understood that as children grow, so too does their discernment and

⁶ Estep, "Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei," 41.

⁷ Ibid., 47.

understanding. This is oft attested to in Scripture, most notably in 1 Cor 13:11, in which Paul admonishes the church in Corinth to put aside childish ways as they grow in Christ.

The study of adult development seeks to understand patterns of adult development and spiritual growth. The study of adult development is the “Study of the growth and maturing process of adults and can focus on such areas as moral, social, mental, physical, or faith development.”⁸ This adult development studies the phases and transitions in adult life from early adulthood to the senior years of life.

Adults learn differently than children, and as such different methodologies of adult instruction exist. Two such methodologies are andragogy and transformational learning. Beginning with andragogy as promoted by Malcom Knowles, supports that adults learn through five tenants of practice and development:⁹

1. Adult learners are self-directed.
2. Adult learners have significant experience.
3. Adult learners are ready to learn when they feel the need to learn.
4. Adult learners are oriented toward an experiential life-base.
5. Adult learners are motivated internally, rather than externally.

Fundamentally, andragogy draws deeply on the individual adult’s life experiences and internal, self-directed motivations to conduct learning. As an adult, having a depth of experiences is a deep well to instructionally draw upon.

⁸ Carlson, “Adult Development and Christian Formation,” 209.

⁹ Ibid., 212.

Transformational learning, promoted by Jack Mezirow, relies on an individual's internal trade-off discussions regarding values, meaning, and purpose. Transformational learning is founded on three themes:¹⁰

1. The critical reflection of assumptions
2. An awareness of frames of references
3. Participation in rational discourse

From these foundational themes in transformational learning, and individual moves from a disorienting dilemma (the start of the need for learning), through to a reintegration of understanding within the new learned perspective. While both methodologies have their particularities, ultimately, they agree on and arrive at the same objective: adult development and learning.

Spiritually, adult progression in understanding and growth must necessarily come through strong biblical understanding and church leaders within church communities that will assert an instructional model that imparts teaching understandable to adults. Within the context of a church community, adult development must come through a combination of instruction, fellowship, and service.¹¹ As has been presented previously in this research, the intervention in question embodies such a process.

Through this research's implementation plan of acclimation, absorption, and action, all the necessary foundational requirements for adult Christian development are met. Through the sermon and midweek study, the requirements for instruction through teaching and the reading of Scripture are met. Through the sermons, midweek study, and Service-Learning of the

¹⁰ Carlson, "Adult Development and Christian Formation," 213.

¹¹ Ibid., 228.

intervention plan, the need for fellowship is met. Lastly, through the Service-Learning component of the intervention, the need for service is satisfied. Ultimately, the intervention provides all of the necessary requirement for adults to learn and develop.

Drawing the connection then to spiritual formation becomes quite simple. Spiritual formation is that process in which a believer is shaped by the Holy Spirit into a definite character that more closely resembles the character of Jesus Christ.¹² Spiritual formation is a process that lasts a lifetime and is marked with action, experiences, starts and stops, but always progresses forward. It is an intentional and continual journey¹³

The spiritual formation initiative presented in this action research and implemented through the intervention fulfills this need within the life of the participants. The adults that were a part of this research received instruction, experienced fellowship, and participated in Service-Learning to a particular end objective: to grow in spiritual formation through service within the ministry context in question and therefore more committedly serve the church

¹² Maddix, "Spiritual Formation And Christian Formation," 240.

¹³ Ibid., 242.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The result and the outcome of the intervention will be clear and evident. The objective of this intervention is to create disciples that have a heart-felt desire and passion to serve out of devotion and dedication to the Jesus. This will be assessed in two primary ways. First, are there more willing and committed servants within the church community after the project than before? This will be assessed by comparing numbers: are there more committed, serving members within the community than there were prior to the intervention? The answer to that question will be indicative of the success of the intervention.

Second, is the question of spiritual formation within the life of the participants and their biblical understanding of service within their life as a believer. Has the heart and desire for service within the church community for these participants grown them closer in their faith-walk to the Lord? Has their view of service as a spiritual discipline been changed positively because of this intervention? This question will be assessed in two primary ways. First, by comparing the results of the questionnaire that was provided before the project with the answers to their project ending exit questions. Through those answers, the project leader will be able to assess the impact of the intervention and understand if attitudes or perceptions of service have changed. Second, through the discussions held at the weekly study, it will be possible to assess and track attitudes and inclinations towards service as a part of spiritual formation.

In answering these questions, over the course of the intervention, the researcher noted that four distinct themes became apparent within the participant group. In the sections that follow, these themes will be detailed and discussed.

Initial Participant Assessment Results: The Four Soils

In Matt 13:1–13, Jesus taught the crowd following Him the story that we know commonly as “The Parable of the Sower and the Seed.” Within this parable, Jesus teaches that a person went out to sow a field. As the sower went along scattering seeds, some of the seeds fell on the path and were quickly consumed by birds. Some of the seeds were sown on rocky ground that lacked soil, causing the seeds to sprout quickly, and subsequently to be quickly scorched by the heat of the sun due to their lack of depth of soil. Some seeds fell among the thorns and weeds, and as they grew were choked out. Finally, there were seeds that were sown on good and fertile soil, and those seeds brought forth abundant grain.

Jesus went on to explain the meaning of the parable: the seeds represented the Word of God spread forth throughout the world, and the types of soil represented different types of people. The hard soil of the path represented those that did not understand the Word of God, and therefore quickly lost it, as it was snatched away by the evil one. The rocky soil represents those people who enthusiastically received God’s Word, but due to a lack of depth, they quickly lose it as the world’s troubles present themselves. The thorny soil represents those that receive the Word of God, and accept it, but they remain focused on the cares of the world, and have the Word choked out by the weeds. Lastly, the fertile soil represents people who receive God’s Word, understand it, take it in, and allow it to transform them so that they can bear fruit.

Note in the parable that the Word of God is consistent, as is the manner for sowing the seed, however each soil has it’s unique and distinct qualities and results. The pattern in this parable will be used to detail the results of the action research as a similar pattern emerged among the participants.

The Soil on the Path: No Current Service, No Need to Serve

Within the participant group, a small percentage that currently did not serve in church. This group represented 6% of the group, as noted in figure 5. In discussion during the midweek studies, these individuals have never regularly served within church or felt the call or need to serve within church. Upon deeper discussions, these individuals had served on special occasions, for gatherings or special events, but always as a part of one-off participation events. They did not view service as a need for spiritual development or as necessary in the life of discipleship.

While these individuals were not serving prior to the intervention, they did serve for the entirety of the action research and did so willingly and gladly. In deeper discussion, much of the reason for not serving rested in a lack of knowledge, and a lack of direction within the church, both at FCR and at churches they had attended in the past. This lack of understanding emerged as a common theme throughout the group, even those that served. The participant group was unaware of service as a foundational means of spiritual formation or as a foundational part of a life of discipleship.

There was also a lack of understanding between spiritual gifts, as explained by the apostle Paul in 1 Cor 12, that are given freely to the church for the common good and edification of the church, versus spiritual disciplines which are acts of devotion that led to the development of spiritual formation.

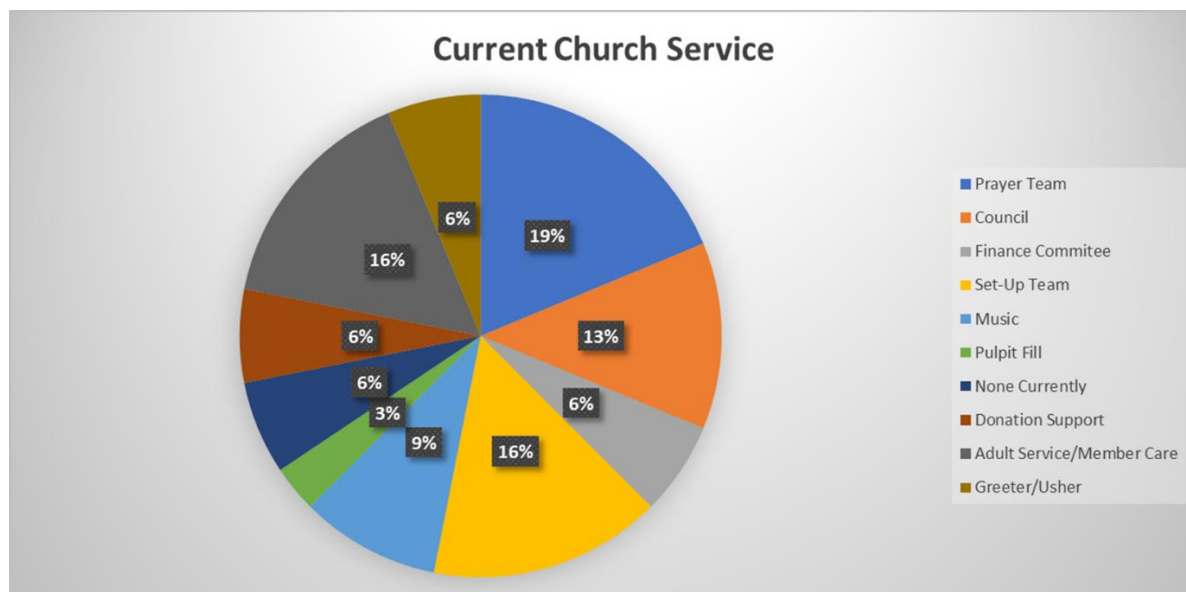


Figure 5. Current church service

In the discussion on the first night of the midweek study, many participants did not understand or had never heard of several of the spiritual gifts, specifically the spiritual gifts of Apostleship (Missions), Prophecy, and Wisdom. With these three spiritual gifts, there were some participants who had never known these to be spiritual gifts. Interestingly, these gifts that were less known and understood are gifts that address spiritual growth and development.

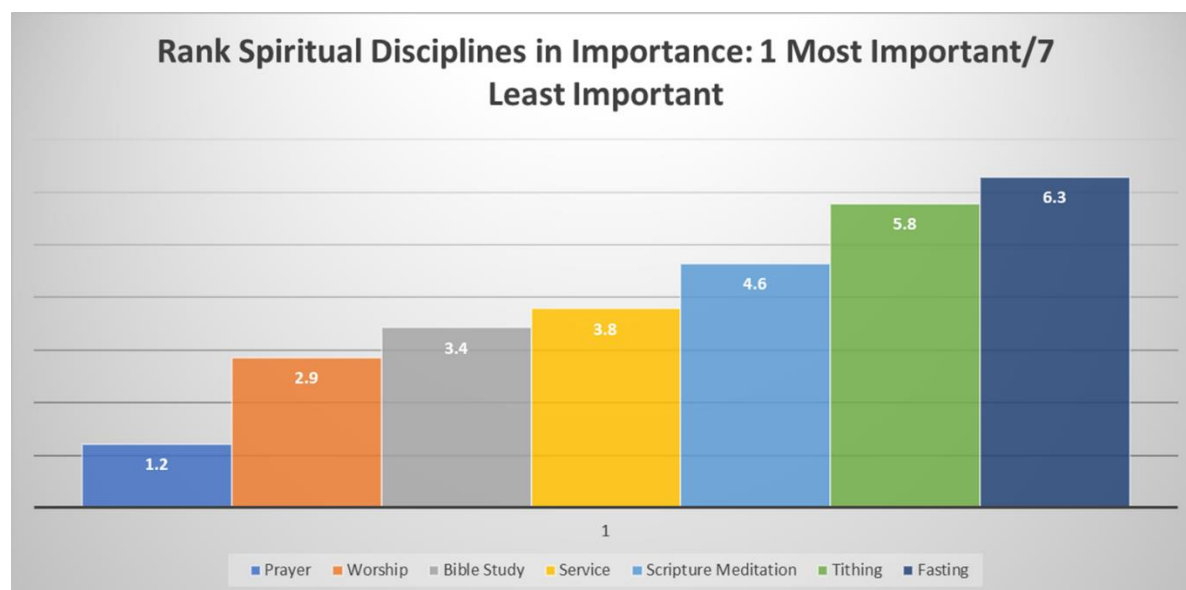


Figure 6. Ranked spiritual disciplines

The Rocky Soil: No Understanding for Serving

A second group that emerged follows the rocky soil. This is a group of individuals who understand that service within the church is an important part of discipleship and spiritual formation, but they do not serve regularly and cannot give an answer as to why they do not serve regularly. Frequently these individuals provided comments such as, “I know I should be serving, but I’m not sure why I’m not serving more.”¹ These individuals also stated that, “Every time I want to serve, something comes up.”² These church members enjoy service, enjoy the fellowship of serving, and appreciate the spiritual aspect of service, but somehow have not been able to consistently commit to serving. During the third week of Service-Learning, one of these individuals commented, “It has been a blessing getting to serve the last few weeks.”³

¹ Discussion at midweek study, September 21, 2023.

² Ibid.

³ Conversation with participant at church during sanctuary set-up, October, 7, 2023.

The Thorny Soil: Serving, but Unsure Why

This next group was rather interesting. Throughout the midweek study, a group of individuals served regularly. However, throughout the weekly discussions, they freely shared that they did not understand the depth or the benefits of their service from a spiritual perspective. Oftentimes, these individuals cited fellowship, a particularly conducive schedule, or a sense of duty as a reason for serving, but they did not make a connection between serving within the church, and discipleship or spiritual formation. Interestingly, these individuals were among those that had never taken a spiritual gifts assessment either.

Remarkably, the feedback from these individuals' experiences and comments supports the research of Hjort and Skraeddergaard which was presented earlier in this paper, that fellowship is a driving force in service.⁴ These individuals benefitted from serving yet did not understand the spiritual formation implications of service.

The Fertile Soil: Regularly Serve and Understand Why

There existed within the group a solid core of individuals that regularly serve the church, have grown up with church service as a part of their family tradition, and realize the spiritual formation implications of church service. Not surprisingly, this group was the largest of the participant groups. One would expect that the group that most willingly serves would also sign up for an opportunity to participate in an intervention project that focused on serving. As noted in figure 7, roughly half of the group of participants identified is very motivated to serve, and nearly three-quarters identified service as extremely important to the life of the church.

⁴ Hjort and Skraeddergaard, "Fellowship as Driving Force-Volunteering in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark."

Participant Overview

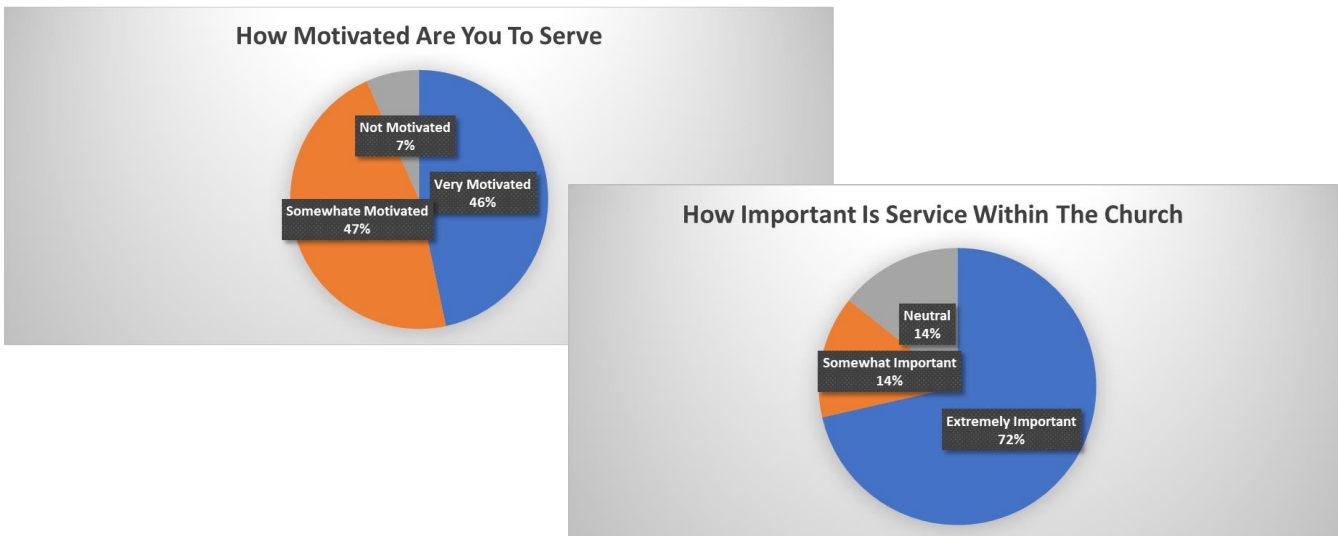


Figure 7. Importance and motivation of service

Nearly all these individuals were familiar with spiritual gifts and spiritual gifts tests and had taken them previously. This group also was a heavy participant in the midweek discussions and oftentimes assisted and encouraged other participants into the discussion.

These individuals were already leading areas of service within the church. For their Service-Learning, these individuals essentially served as *de facto* trainers for those who had not and were not serving. This resulted not only in service and spiritual development opportunities, but it also created a discipleship opportunity for those regularly serving, essentially role-modeling their ministry in the church.

Intervention Observations

The intervention produced several immediate, observable changes within the ministry context of FCR. All three components of the project had considerable impact, with the Service-

Learning component having the most dramatic and observable impact within the church. Three observations were evident: 1) throughout the course of the intervention, most all ministerial needs within the church were filled weekly, 2) the sheer number of weekly servants created a critical mass within the congregation that encouraged non-participants to want to get involved in serving, and 3) relationships within the community that were non-existent prior to the intervention started to form between members. These observations will be further discussed in the following pages.

Acclimation: Weeks 1–3

The intervention began with three weeks of sermon series focused on the topic of service, specifically the concept of Christian service within a church ministry as a means of, and evidence of, spiritual formation within the believer's life. The title for the entire sermon series was, "Service, Discipleship, and Spiritual Formation." Elements of service within the life of the believer as an expression of discipleship and as outward evidence of transformative spiritual formation were the focus of the series.

Homiletically, this was a new experience for the members of FCR, as topical sermon series have not been historically utilized. This church community is accustomed to exegetical preaching, in which a book from the Bible would be preached in its entirety as a series. This topical series used for the research project was well received. At this point in the intervention, no participants had been selected for the project, but the feedback from the congregation at-large was overwhelmingly positive. After the first sermon in the series, one member approached the researcher and without solicitation commented, "This should be interesting. I've never sat

through a whole series on spiritual formation before.”⁵ Another individual commented, “I’ve heard you talking about spiritual formation before, looking forward to learning more about it.”⁶

Attendance throughout the sermon series was higher than anticipated given that the intervention initiated in late August 2023. Locally, late August is the start of youth and high school football. Allowing for the young demographic of FCR, youth sports have historically had a detrimental impact on weekly attendance. However, that did not appear to be an issue for this project. Attendance maintained through the entire intervention.

Luke 9:1–17 was used for the initial sermon in the series. This set a baseline for the church and for participants in the intervention. While the focus was on service and spiritual formation, the foundational portion of the sermon was focused on equipping disciples for service. Jesus not only sent out the Twelve to go and do, but Jesus also equipped them for service. Jesus provided them with what they needed and instructed them on how to proceed. In that respect, this intervention served to highlight the fact that the role of equipping disciples, to go and do, and to serve the kingdom, is the purview of the church. The apostles were equipped, and so must the members of the church be equipped, to serve as Jesus requires. Once equipped, to go and do is the realization of the equipping that has taken place. This message was well received, leading one individual, who would end up becoming a participant in the research project, to approach the researcher unsolicited and say, “Okay, you got me. What can I do?”⁷

Week three, which was the final week of the Acclimation portion of the project focused on Luke 22: 24–27. This was the last week of the sermon as the only part of the research study. In this portion of Scripture, Jesus is admonishing His disciples after an argument broke out

⁵ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, August 20, 2023.

⁶ Comments from a non-project participant church member after worship service, August 20, 2023.

⁷ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, August 20, 2023.

amongst them as to which of them was the greatest. Jesus's answer was simple and profound, "... the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:26a–27, NRSV).

Jesus was a servant, and Jesus served His people. Jesus is calling on His followers to have the heart and mind of a servant, and to make it clear that the kingdom needs servants to advance and grow. This led to an interesting conversation with a church member who would go on to join the project as a participant. This individual asked the researcher to speak for a few moments after the sermon. In that conversation, this individual commented, "I always thought that as I got older, I would not have to do as much, but after reading this Scripture and listening to the message, I think there is a lot more I should be doing."⁸

Both comments noted in this section indicate support for one of the basic assumptions of the thesis for this intervention: as focus was placed on the preaching and teaching of service as a mark of, and an indicator of spiritual formation, the heart of the believer would be softened and made approachable by the Holy Spirit, allowing spiritual formation to occur within the life of the believer.

As the sermon series progressed, there was constant and consistent feedback that was both very positive and indicative that the underlying assumption of the intervention was correct: the congregation was not accustomed to being instructed on the spiritual discipline of Christian service and consequently did not value it as a means or as an indicator of spiritual formation.

Week seven of the sermon series was particularly impactful. The week seven sermon focused on Phil 2:5–8, and Jesus's humility and self-sacrificial willingness to serve. There was a

⁸ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, August, 27, 2023.

spirit of heaviness in church, as if this was the first time that the concept of Jesus's humanity in service had been taught. Several members of the congregation approached the researcher after this message to state, "I had never heard that message before."⁹ One member of the church, a part of the intervention participant group, shared after the service, "I just never considered serving within the church as something like Jesus would have done."¹⁰

The sermon series was a well-received and vital part of the overall intervention. As part of this spiritual formation initiative, it served the role of biblical instruction and exhortation. Through the words of the weekly sermon, the Scripture was opened, and the Holy Spirit was able to work on the hearts of participants and non-participants alike. This served a vital role in the spiritual formation of the participants.

Absorption and Action: Service-Learning Weeks 4–9

The Service-Learning component of the intervention was the most visible within the ministry context of FCR. This congregation was accustomed to weekly worship services during which only the pastor and a worship leader were actively involved in the ministry, however during the intervention the church found itself awash in volunteers. Throughout this Chapter, details of the Service-Learning component will be detailed through the lens of both worship services, and through the lens of the non-worship service areas of ministry.

The Service-Learning portion of the intervention was open to all areas of the current ministry within the church. Most of the participants served in ministry areas that were connected

⁹ Comments from a married couple, project participant church members after worship service, October, 1, 2023.

¹⁰ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, October, 1, 2023.

to either the 8:30 a.m. or the 11:00 a.m. service. A small number of participants served in the youth and children's ministry areas.

Early Morning Worship Service

The 8:30 a.m. worship service was the most impacted by the Service-Learning portion of the intervention. The early morning worship service does not have music and is strictly a spoken-word service that consists of prayer, responsive psalm readings, prayer, and the sermon. The only person actively serving during the early morning worship service is the pastor. Before the service begins, there is a prayer group of between two and three members who pray for the service.

As part of the intervention, four participants served as greeters for the early morning service, and two served as readers. The presence of these members serving in these roles was immediate and positively felt within the congregation of the church. The greeters at the door were enthusiastically welcoming people to serve, however they went above and beyond greeting. On most occasions the greeters were holding doors open as people arrived, helping elderly members or those with little children to get to their seats, ensuring that bulletins and other handouts were being distributed, and making sure that chairs were out and ready. There was a level of fellowship that had been missing within the church. Several members that were not a part of the project inquired as to how they could sign up to become greeters. All the early morning greeters expressed great pleasure in serving in this area.

The readers for the early morning service were employed in reading the responsive psalm, and in reading the Scripture passage for the sermon. While both participants expressed hesitation at reading Scripture publicly in front of their peers, they both accepted the ministry role. Both participants stated that reading the Scripture helped them to both prepare for Sunday worship, and that it also helped them to feel "more connected" to the congregation and to the

church. Both readers expressed a sincere desire to continue to serve in the ministry beyond the intervention.

Four intervention participants joined the prayer team for early morning worship. This essentially tripled the size of the existing prayer team and had an immediate impact. Prayer time was typically five to ten minutes before the service began. With the addition of the participants in the intervention, prayer time nearly doubled. Additionally, the prayer group expanded the focus of prayer to not only the immediate worship service, but also the needs of the church community. Prayer became something actively sought within the group. The prayer group also expanded outside of the worship service as well, to include seeking prayer needs outside of worship time. Overall, the prayerfulness of the early morning worship service significantly increased. One of the intervention participants commented to the researcher during week three of the Service-Learning, “Getting here early for prayer is my favorite part of Sunday morning.”¹¹

Throughout the entirety of the intervention, the early morning worship service experienced a positive impact. The number of greeters increased, the congregation was able to experience additional church members speaking during the worship service with the addition of the Scripture readers, and the early morning prayer team doubled in size and expanded in scope. Overall, the early morning worship became a much more interactive and connected group, and the participants of the intervention positively responded to their service within the church.

Late Morning Worship Service

The late morning Worship Service meets at 11:00 a.m. This worship service is different from the early morning worship service in two distinct ways: first, the 11:00 service is much

¹¹ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, September, 17, 2023.

better attended. Typically, the 11:00 service averages roughly one-hundred attendees, whereas the 8:00 a.m. service averages approximately thirty-five attendees. The 11:00 service features hymns and worship music. This makes the late morning service less intimate and more interactive by default.

The impact of the Service-Learning component of the project had an immediate effect on the 11:00 a.m. service in several areas. Some of the participants served as greeters throughout the intervention. This resulted in a consistency of weekly greeters. Prior to the intervention, the greeter role at the 11:00 a.m. service was inconsistent. Throughout the intervention, the consistency provided by the participants created a new familiarity with the members of the church. This was met positively by the members, several of which shared with the researcher that they enjoyed being met at the door, and having the door held open for them as they came to church. One of the participants in the study commented to the researcher, “I did not realize how much I would enjoy greeting people at the door.”¹²

Historically at the late morning worship service, the singing of hymns and praise music was led by a single worship leader, or occasionally with one additional singer. There is no band at FCR, so musical accompaniment is done through music tracks. Through this research project, several participants joined the worship leader to lead the congregation in singing. This led to worship services being led by five, and sometimes six singers weekly. This had a profound impact on the worship service in several ways. The new worship members that joined all had distinct voices and timbres. Instantly, the singers’ voices harmonized incredibly well and created more dynamic singing in church.

¹² Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, October, 8, 2023.

These additional singers also created new opportunities for the worship leader. The worship leader at FCR is a conservatory-trained choir director. She led large choirs in past churches and directed many cantatas and programs. During her five years at FCR she had never had an opportunity to lead worship with multiple individuals. As a result of these new volunteers, songs selection was able to expand, and she was now able to assign melody and harmony sections amongst the singers. This not only created a more vibrant musical worship for the singers, but it also increased engagement with the congregation. As the intervention progressed, more and more people within the congregation were actively singing during the worship time. All of the participants who served as singers expressed enjoyment in leading music worship. One of the participants commented to the researcher, “It feels good to be singing. I haven’t sung with other people in church in a long time, since I was a child. It just feels good to be singing upfront for worship.”¹³

The congregation expressed gratitude for the new additional singers. Weekly, the researcher fielded positive feedback from the church with regard to the new “worship team.” One church member commented, “I’m not sure what your project is doing, but based on the singing the last few weeks, I like it.”¹⁴ The new singers brought a welcomed freshness to the worship singing. The worship leader, who was also a participant in the intervention, several times expressed gratitude to the researcher for the new singers that were available to her.

The music ministry was positively impacted by the intervention, also impacting worship was the audio-visual component of worship. One of the intervention participants took on the creating and running of the slides and videos for the service as her service area. This participant

¹³ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, September, 27, 2023.

¹⁴ Comments from a non-project participant church member after worship service, September, 27, 2023.

took the role on and made it her own. FCR had only been utilizing projected slides for the last year, and the slides were minimal, consisting of projecting the lyrics to the worship singing only. During the intervention, the participant who took on this area of service completely overhauled the video presentation. What was formerly only music lyrics, the video presentation now includes animation (including a biblical trivia countdown clock to indicate the start of service), interactive videos, lyrics, and the Scripture passage for the sermon. This participant is a shy individual who does not enjoy the spotlight but has a heart for church and wanted to serve. This Service-Learning opportunity provided her with an ideal way to serve the church within her giftedness. Church members regularly commented how much they enjoyed the slides and how nice it was to read the Scripture on the screen.

Several participants in the research project served as readers, or liturgists during the late morning service. The liturgist served through the reading of announcements and in the leading of church prayer. The readers served through the reading of Scripture and through leading the congregation in prayer for the message. These areas of service were a powerful addition to the late morning service. In the last five years, the congregation of FCR has essentially heard the voice of the pastor exclusively on Sunday mornings. Through these participant volunteers, the congregation of FCR heard the voices of peers in the leading of worship. This had a tremendous impact on the congregation, and several members of the church that were not participants of the study came forward asking for areas in which they could serve the church. One church member commented to the researcher, “I’m seeing so many people serve the last few weeks, I’d like to serve too. Is there any area I can help?”¹⁵

¹⁵ Comments from a non-project participant church member after worship service, October, 8, 2023.

The impact was felt by the participants as well. Every reader and participant expressed to the researcher that this area of service had them feeling better prepared and open to Sunday worship. The assigned readings and the need to speak up front had them preparing for church during the week, and this weekly preparation was perceived as beneficial to the participants.

Three intervention participants served with the children's ministry during the late morning service. For this ministry service, the participants either taught or assisted teaching children during junior church, which occurred concurrently during the main worship service. These participants fully embraced these ministries, and the children responded well to them. One of the participants commented to the researcher, "I love those kids. You learn as much from them as they learn from you."¹⁶ This service was appreciated by both the existing children's volunteers who needed the assistance, and the children who enjoyed having new teachers for their class.

It should also be noted in this section the impact of church set-up and tear-down as a component of this intervention. FCR does not have a traditional church sanctuary. The church meets in the gymnasium of a daycare center. While the relationship between the church and the daycare is beneficial to the ministry of FCR, it does require that church is set-up and torn down weekly, before and after services. During the five-year history at FCR, often, the pastor and a few other volunteers served in this area, leading to church set-up and tear-down being a challenging task. As a result of the intervention, there were so many participants who set-up and tear-down were generally completed in under thirty minutes. Furthermore, those participants enjoyed the service and were able to begin, or in some cases further develop, relationships with other church members.

¹⁶ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, October, 8, 2023.

Overall, the Service-Learning component of the intervention was well received and well executed. Every participant enjoyed serving and were successful on their areas. For the duration of the research project, all areas of ministry within the church were filled. Furthermore, as each week went by, more and more individuals who were not participants in the research project were coming forward to inquire about serving and looking for opportunities to serve. At one point during an impromptu conversation with the long-time worship leader of FCR, the researcher was told without prompting, “I’m not sure what is going on, but have you noticed how many people want to volunteer lately? There’s a bunch.”¹⁷ Making the immediate connection between learning about service, and then participating in Service-Learning opportunity to implement and further learn service, provided a critical correlative relationship between word and action that proved successful within the ministry context of FCR.

Midweek Study

The initiation of the midweek study sought to accomplish many objectives. The idea being that this would be a time for participants to fellowship, deep dive on concepts taught in the preceding Sunday’s sermon, discuss their experience with the Service-Learning projects, and to share feedback and comments with the researcher and amongst each other. The midweek study started several weeks into the intervention and began with administering and reviewing a spiritual gifts test. The idea of the spiritual gifts test was conducted to establish a spiritual baseline within the group, given that service within the ministry context was lagging. Earlier in this research the overall results were provided, at this point a focused review of the participant’s primary spiritual gifts is appropriate, understanding as Sawyer and Wallace concur, that the role

¹⁷ Comments from a project participant church member after worship service, September, 24, 2023.

of spiritual gifts should not necessarily be overstated, nor are they necessarily the foundational framework of ministry within church.¹⁸ The call of Scripture repeatedly is that love, grace, and obedience can overcome many obstacles, including giftedness. This assessment is a guideline for the ministry.

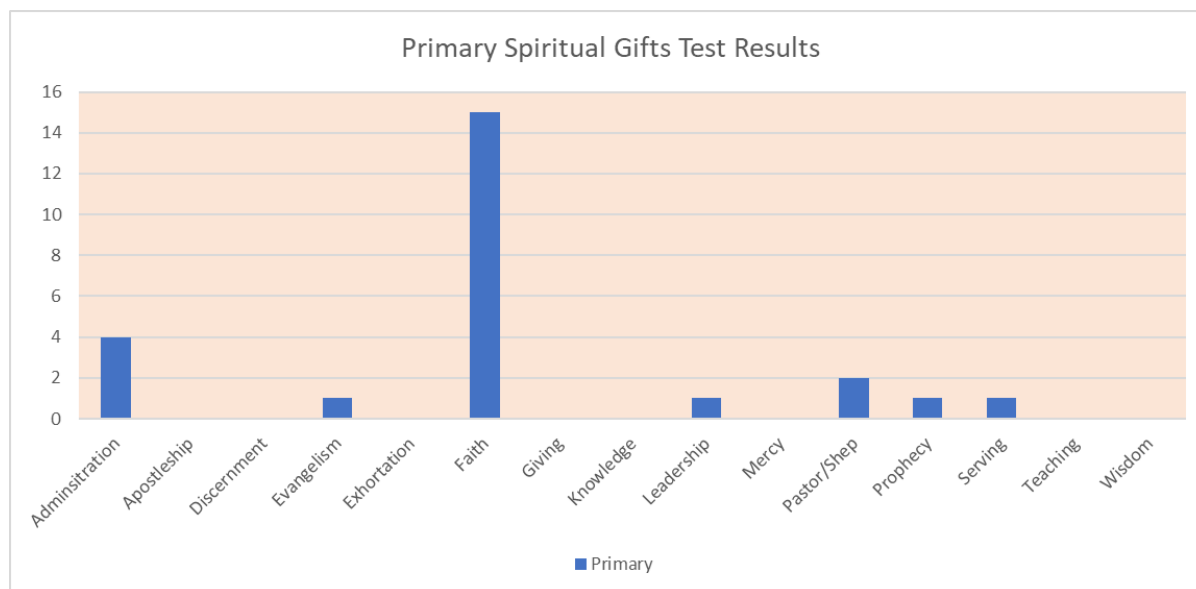


Figure 8. Primary spiritual gifts test results

Figure 8 presents the results of the participant's primary response to the spiritual gifts assessment. It presents a fascinating glimpse into the makeup of the ministry context. As one can note, the spiritual gift of "serving" ranks very low, whereas the spiritual gift of "faith" ranks very high. Additionally, the gifts that are related to teaching, wisdom, discernment, are non-existent. This led one participant to comment within the group, "Looks like we are a group that likes to pray and not much else."¹⁹ This result was the subject of much discussion during the week one meeting. Most participants were surprised, while many of the participants asked for definitions

¹⁸ M. James Sawyer and Daniel B. Wallace, ed., *Who's Afraid of the Holy Spirit? An Investigation into the Ministry of the Spirit of God Today* (Dallas, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005), 152, Kindle.

¹⁹ Participant comment at midweek study, September, 21, 2023.

of all the spiritual gifts. Many within the group saw the results as a challenge to learn more about spiritual gifts, even asking that an intervention be performed in the future, much like the current intervention on service but focusing on a different spiritual gift.

Week two of the midweek study brought an open group ready for discussion. All members checked in on their areas of service. All the comments presented were extremely positive, with many participants seemingly incredulous about why they had not served more regularly before this research project. One participant commented that he was intentionally assessing his personal life to understand how he could serve better and more often, commenting, “I need to identify the idols in my life that prevent me from prioritizing my time and service to God. The struggle is real.”²⁰

The sermon that proceeded week two of the study was Phil 2:1–11, and Paul’s description of Jesus, willingly and intentionally limiting His divinity, and taking on broken humanity, to come and serve and save His people. This message challenges the group in many respects. Much of the discussion within the group focused on the example of humble service set by Jesus, and how His followers are expected to follow. Much discussion was dedicated to realizing that the service that Jesus’s followers can accomplish in this life is a minuscule sacrifice compared to how Jesus served His people.

Week three of the midweek study provided a definite shift within the group. Sharing and fellowship flowed immediately, with the researcher requiring several attempts to get the focus and attention of the group. The participants were organically sharing and encouraging one another within their discussions. All participants shared experiences from their service areas, and all were positive.

²⁰ Participant comment at midweek study, September, 28, 2023.

The sermon topic for this study was 1 Pet 2, and the concept that followers of Jesus are called to serve and be a witness to an unbelieving world, and what that witness looks like from multiple perspectives. One could see in the discussion that spiritual formation was stirring within the hearts of the believers. One participant commented, “Serving the church is seeing what needs to be done, and then doing it. If we can change, and serve like Jesus serves, the church could make a huge difference in the world.”²¹

Another participant during the discussion started to make connections among all the spiritual gifts. This participant shared with the group that he believed there was a connection between serving and giving, both of which ranked extremely low within this group and had traditionally been lacking within the entire ministry context. In both areas at FCR, the serving and giving did not match the tremendous growth in membership the church had experienced. The group agreed, and one could see the understanding coming about of the interconnectedness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit within the community of the body of believers. One participant commented, “I have felt as blessed serving this week, as I feel when I give to charities.”²²

The following weeks during the intervention, in addition to the sermon message on Sunday mornings, the church unexpectedly had visits from missionaries that the church supports. Given the stage of the intervention, these visits and presentations were immensely powerful. While service within this ministry context of FCR consists of a small, independent church in northeastern Ohio, these missionaries shared radically different experiences. One missionary from Laos, shared the sacrifices his entire family has made to serve the kingdom of God, from having to meet in secret to avoid government detection, to forgoing meals to feed vulnerable

²¹ Participant comment at midweek study, October, 5, 2023.

²² Ibid.

individuals in their community, to changing their names in order to avoid detection. Several of the participants expressed tremendous humility and gratitude for their conditions after having heard these messages shared, with one participant commenting, “After that, I am never going to complain about helping at church again. Those missionaries do a lot, and they love it. You can tell they love Jesus because of what they do.”²³

The final study followed the teaching on Gal 5, and in understanding that the basis of service was love, devotion to Jesus, and following the example laid before church through Christ. This study had a celebratory feel to it, with many participants lamenting that this was the end of the intervention. Relationships were developing, and a change of heart towards serving within the church was occurring. Participants discussed the need to be in fellowship with the church community, and the responsibility one to another to serve. One participant explained that this research project, “is a reminder of what we are called to do and why we are supposed to do it. Jesus was in this world, and served this world, and so should we.”²⁴ There was a full consensus with this comment within the group.

This intervention started with a brief questionnaire to assess where the participants were with regards to service, and with regards to spiritual formation. During this final meeting, several exit questions were presented to the group for answers and discussion, and the responses were dramatic. All participants were in attendance. Presented here are the questions and responses:

- Do you understand the biblical concept of service better now than before you participated in this research project? All participants answered, “yes.”
- Do you feel more comfortable serving within the church now than before you participated in this research project? All participants answered, “yes.”

²³ Participant comment at midweek study, October, 12, 2023.

²⁴ Ibid.,

- How motivated do you feel to continue serving going forward? All participants answered, “very motivated” or “extremely motivated.”
- Are there other spiritual gifts that you would like to see more focus on? The consensus answer was “missions.”

Interesting note to make on the response to focus on missions next as a spiritual gift. Not only was this a consensus answer, but there also appeared to be significant energy around it. A husband-and-wife couple commented on behalf of the group, “We need to learn more about missions now because it seems like the logical next step of service.”²⁵

Summary

Overall, the intervention was executed as intended. All participants were engaged and attended the entirety of the research project. All participants were active learners with the study and the sermon series, and all participants fulfilled their service requirements throughout the project. As a result, relationships within the church community were developed, and ministry areas were all staffed for the duration of the project. Furthermore, because of the intervention, FCR members who were not a part of the intervention came forward to serve the church as well. As noted throughout the Chapter, attitudes were changed, hearts were softened, and spiritual formation was evident. The intervention provided the expected results and supported the underlying thesis of the research project.

²⁵ Participant comment at midweek study, October, 18, 2023.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This DMIN action research project sought as its objective the growth and spiritual development of the members of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown to ultimately grow in discipleship and service to the church community. Fairhaven Church of Rootstown has struggled in developing and maintaining long-term, committed servants to carry out the ministries of the church. While FCR has experienced tremendous numerical growth, it had not experienced the corresponding spiritual growth as reflected in the servant development of its members. The teachings of Scripture are a reminder that disciples of Jesus bear fruit, and service within the body of Christ is evidence of spiritual fruit.

The thesis of this project was simple and straightforward: If Fairhaven Church of Rootstown were to implement this action research's three-fold spiritual formation initiative focused on servanthood, then members will be empowered and motivated to serve which will strengthen the church by addressing the needs of the community through service. The results of this intervention as presented and implemented fully validated and supported this thesis within this local church community.

The overall results of the intervention far exceeded expectations. The initial recruitment was a success, as twenty-seven individuals committed to participate in the project, exceeding the fifteen-to-twenty that the researcher was expecting. All participants completed the entire intervention with perfect attendance.

Throughout the intervention, whether part of the midweek study, or the results of the initial questionnaire, the spiritual gifts assessment, the Service-Learning, or the sermon series, it

was evident that there initially was a lack of understanding of service as a part of, or as evidence of spiritual formation and spiritual growth, which was fully addressed. Ultimately, the results demonstrate that focus, dedication, and prioritization of service and servanthood as a part of spiritual formation deliver positive results.

While the results of this intervention are promising and certainly point directionally toward future growth and spiritual formation, ultimately, there is no way to ensure genuine spiritual formation through human means. Chandler correctly posits that, “The formation of our spirit is the ongoing, interactive, and grace-based process of being conformed to the image of Jesus through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, within the community of faith, in order to bear fruit that glorifies the Father.”¹ This intervention set the stage and provided the appropriate environment for that interaction between the Holy Spirit and the individual believer, but ultimately, long-term spiritual formation can only be produced through grace and the Holy Spirit.

Research Implications

Research implications will be assessed through the lens of the problem, the purpose, and a methodological assessment of the research project. Consideration will be given to understanding how the problem, purpose, and methodology related to, and impacted the results of the intervention.

Assessment of the Problem

Several unique characteristics presented themselves within the context of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. The church community was an old and established community that within

¹ Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness*, 69.

the last several years experienced incredible growth in numbers that essentially created a brand-new church community within an established church setting. This new community was incredibly young chronologically, with many young families. Additionally, a large portion of these new members were young Christians, with several having little-to-know Christian experience within their family histories. Lastly, the church moved locations within the last several years, causing a further shift in the demographic makeup. When all these factors are considered and navigating through the Covid-19 pandemic years of 2019–2020, the pastor of the congregation devoted much attention to daily management of the church, unable to focus on spiritual development and discipleship within the community intentionally. This was the identified problem, that without an intentional focus on servanthood as an aspect and foundational part of spiritual formation, the community did not have a vision to strive for. There was no focus and no prioritization with regard to developing servants.

The intervention addressed this problem through a concerted focus on service and a dedication to both teaching and exemplifying service. Disciples, as in genuine, Holy Spirit indwelt followers of Christ should intuitively desire to serve, but it is through the church community as that serve as a conduit for the Spirit. Nate Palmer states, “We cannot desire to serve God unless we have a glimpse of His magnificence, and only through the Spirit can we gain the right understanding of God.”² The results of this intervention support Palmer’s claim. As documented earlier, service within the church amongst the participants of the intervention, the growth and demonstrated change in understanding of, and posture towards service among the participants, was a result of believers catching a glimpse of the magnificence of God through the prayerful and deliberate components of the intervention.

² Palmer, *Servanthood as Worship: The Privilege of Life in a Local Church*, 56.

This deliberate focus on servanthood through a multi-component framework that spans preaching, teaching, and hands-on Service-Learnings opportunities may also be a template for additional spiritual formation opportunities.

Assessment of the Purpose

The purpose of the intervention was to create an instructional framework through a three-fold spiritual formation initiative that included teaching instruction (sermon series), group discussion and instruction (midweek study), and hands-on, Service-Learning opportunities (ministry service). The underlying objective through this purpose was to bring focus and prioritization to service as an aspect of discipleship and spiritual formation. In this regard, the research project was successful. As noted in the previous Chapter, through the intervention the church was awash in volunteers and the entire sentiment within the church body was positive.

Sue Mallory makes the profound assertion that the church community is the “greatest gathering of potential servants in the world, but she is also the most notorious vehicle for disappointing, discouraging, and even destroying them.”³ The research project presented here lends validity to this sentiment. Through both the willingness of members to participate in the intervention, and their dedication to continue throughout the project without falling away, the potential of service and servanthood was already present within the church community, however it had not been accessed in any concentrated way. The prayerful, deliberate, and methodical approach of this intervention tapped into the potential that was present within the church community and allowed for the Holy Spirit to impart His grace as the source of spiritual formation.

³ Sue Mallory, *The Equipping Church: Serving Together to Transform Lives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 36, Kindle.

Assessment of the Methodology

The methodology of the intervention was successful and accomplished the intended objective. Each component was executed as planned and functioned to achieve the desired objective. The sermon series served as a consistent and focused means of instruction through which there was a methodical teaching on biblical service. This acted as a cadence for both the participants and the church community in general. Weekly, all members were immersed in the Scriptures and in aspects of biblical service. This presentation and exposition of the Word assuredly provided the Holy Spirit with an opportunity to soften and illuminate the hearts of those listening.

The midweek study served as both instructional, in that the weekly sermon was discussed in deeper detail, and as an important fellowship occasion. During these weekly meetings, relationships were being formed, prayers were shared, and community was building. As has been previously noted, fellowship is an important aspect of volunteering, which was seen in the relationships being formed.

The Service-Learning component was not only well received but was incredibly impactful for the participants and the larger church community. Through the intervention, ministries that had been struggling within the church were suddenly thriving. Not only were the participants serving, thereby putting into action the lessons and instruction received through the sermon and with midweek study, but the service of these participants also became a witness to the entire church community. Through their example, church members and even visitors of the church that were not a part of the project began to enquire about and volunteer for service opportunities.

While the impact on the larger church community was more apparent through the Service-Learning component of the intervention, one can also safely assume that the weekly and

consistent messaging throughout the sermon series was impacting the church. Paul rightly states in 1 Cor 12:25–27, that when one part of the body suffers then all parts of the body suffer, and when one part of the body is honored then all parts of the body are honored. Prior to this intervention, the entirety of the body of FCR suffered because of the lack of committed servants, negatively impacting the church’s ministries. Throughout this intervention, as the individual participants and the larger body understood something of Christian service and responded through the leading of the Holy Spirit, then the body and the collective individuals that make it up were honored and enabled to develop spiritually. Sue Mallory’s assessment that the Bible’s imagery as the body of Christ, as a cohesive and defined group affirms the concept that “in Christ” the body forms, “an organism,” not just an organization.”⁴ An organism is alive, and needs care and attention in order to grow and to thrive, and within this particular body there had been no care and attention given to Christian service prior to this intervention. The evidence observed and documented throughout this project has demonstrated that the intervention as implemented was successful and achieved the objective it set out to accomplish

Research Limitations

Limitations were placed on the research as part of the DMIN project as established and implemented. The limitations were created to focus attention and efforts on the thesis of the project: implementing a spiritual formation initiative within the church that would both empower and motivate members to serve. Therefore, the limitations consisted of:

- Limiting participants to established members of the church that were above the age of 18
- Focusing service opportunities on existing ministries only

⁴ Mallory, *The Equipping Church*.

- The Service-Learning component of the intervention was five weeks per the established intervention schedule

In hindsight, these limitations could have been modified to achieve a larger, more broad-based result within the church community.

Given the sheer number of junior and senior high school students within the church community, there could have been an opportunity to include them in the study and help to establish an example or a pattern of service for the youth at a younger age. Several of the participants brought their children to their ministry service throughout the intervention. Their feedback and involvement could have provided unique results and insights. Estep calls for utilizing creativity in spiritual development, using the example of approaches to youth ministry.⁵ There may have been an opportunity to gain creative solutions and perspectives on service within the church by pulling in some of the younger students into the project.

Additionally, allowing the focus to expand beyond existing ministries could have also impacted the results of this intervention positively. Over the course of the intervention, several participants began to come up with ideas of service and new ministries, which were not acted upon for the purposes of the project, but perhaps if that availability was present, there could have been some additional empowerment or ownership of the ministry that would have become evident. Dean and Stewart in sharing their four organizational principles for leadership development, list “creative mental development and motivation” as a principle in which the organization encourages its leaders to think innovatively and creatively.⁶ Had the project allowed the participants to engage creatively on the ministerial needs of the church community, it might

⁵ Estep, “Christian Anthropology: Humanity as the Imago Dei,” 224.

⁶ Dean and Stewart, *Together We Equip: Integrating Discipleship and Ministry Leadership for Holistic Spiritual Formation*, 157.

have impacted the results of the project and the long-term engagement of the of participants.

There is an opportunity within this limitation to continue to listen to and observe the within the community with respect to continued service efforts. The initiative detailed in this intervention need not be a once-for-all event, but rather tool for consistent focus on service within the community.

Last is the limitation of time. The Service-Learning component of the intervention lasted five weeks. In hindsight, this time could have been longer. The participants were starting to truly develop relationships, there was a fellowship forming both within and without the project participants and the broader church community. Perhaps an additional three to six weeks, with eight to fourteen weeks of Service-Learning could have more deeply established patterns and allowed for a deeper and more robust spiritual development within the parameter of the research project. Another benefit to a longer intervention would have been to note the development of the participants and their “soil types”. All of the participants reported positive experience to the research project as noted, does this positive disposition to service maintain longer term, or like the seed that feel along the path, or the rocky soil, or the weeds, would they eventually fall away? A longer-term intervention might have shed more light on that possibility.

Further Research

This DMIN project achieved the objective it was designed for: to implement a spiritual formation framework that would focus on Christian service as a means of and evidence of spiritual formation, both empowering and motivating members of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown to serve and to become committed servants withing the church community. This framework can be applied within any church ministry context and deliver positive results.

Throughout the project, the researcher has identified several adjacent areas that are related to Christian service within the church that would be valuable for further research. The areas in question are, first, the need and the impact of prayer within the church community as it relates to spiritual formation and service. Second, the need for and attention given to missions, which are essentially acts of service that occur outside of the context of a church community.

Prayer as Spiritual Development

Throughout Scripture, there is example after example of prayer as a foundational aspect of spiritual formation, discipleship, and the beginning of true service within the community of believers. Jesus is oftentimes described as being in prayer both before and after His ministerial work. Paul in his letters is often sending prayers to his recipients. While prayer was not a focus of this DMIN project, as a spiritual discipline and a foundational part of spiritual formation, time spent in prayer as it relates to service within the church is an area of potential future research to be explored.

Speaking of serving God and the kingdom without prayer is a non-starter. Wilhoit rightly states that prayer is an unbreakable spiritual tool in which the believer communicates with God.⁷ It is through that prayerful communication with God that the believer and the broader church community can discern what is needed for the ministry.

Dean and Stewart opine that within the concept of servanthood amongst believers, teaching and prayer are necessary for creating an environment in which the Holy Spirit can work to add to the body of believers.⁸ Earley and Guitierrez add to this discussion by stating that prayer provides time for believers to accomplish what is needed, even when that may seem counterintuitive. Through prayer, the Holy Spirit can do more than is anticipated.⁹

Understanding prayer through this lens then, there is an opportunity for future research to understand the relationship between prayer and s

ervice within the life of the individual believer as a part of, and evidence of spiritual formation. Additionally, there is an opportunity to better understand the relationship between the

⁷ Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ Through Community*.

⁸ Dean and Stewart, 69.

⁹ Earley and Guitierrez, *Ministry Is: How to Serve Jesus with Passion and Confidence.*, 131.

corporate prayer life of a church community and the broader sense of servanthood within said church.

Missions as Spiritual Development

The action research presented in this thesis focused on service as a means of, and as evidence of spiritual formation focused particularly within a church setting, with the objective of developing committed and dedicated servants within the church community. It has been an intervention focused inwardly on the needs of the church. As a continued growth, and a logical outgrowth in the future, there could be opportunity for research in missions, specifically using the three-fold approach of this intervention to focus service outside of the of the church community, on to the larger community outside the church.

Jesus's final command to the apostles in Matt 28:19 is clear, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations." The directive is to go outside the existing community to the world, make disciples, share the faith, and baptize those as instructed. This command is not only reinforced throughout Scripture but also expanded:

- In Acts 1:8, followers of Jesus are called to go and be witnesses to the ends of the earth.
- In Acts 13:47, followers of Jesus are called to be a light for the Gentiles, to bring them salvation.

As Scripture continues, followers of Christ are not only called to go and share the gospel, but also to do acts, and to do good, as evidence of salvation, and as a means of spiritual formation:

- In Gal 6:9–10, Paul admonishes the church to not grow weary of doing good, for in time they will reap a harvest if they persevere.
- In Eph 2:10, Paul reminds the church that they were created for good works.
- In 1 Tim 6:17–18, Timothy was to instruct the church to be rich in good deeds.

- Ultimately, in Jas 2:14–17, followers of Christ are reminded that doing good works is evidence of a living and saving faith.

The command of Scripture is clear, a follower of Christ is a servant, regenerated and equipped by the Holy Spirit, to serve. A Christian's service then is both to one another in the church community, and to one another outside of the church community to the secular community at-large.

Just as followers of Christ serving within the church help one another, and assist the church in growing, it is imperative for a Christian to serve the larger world. John Stott rightly states that society at-large needs Christian servants as societal improvement can only come through regenerate hearts since an unregenerate individual is ill-prepared to help society.¹⁰ The constant example throughout Scripture is that of a God that sends, or as Stott says, "The living God of the Bible is a sending God."¹¹ Whether in the Old Testament with Abraham, Moses, Jacob, and Jonah, or in the New Testament with Jesus traveling village to village, sending out His disciples to share, and heal, and save, the Scriptures are replete with examples of disciples going forth and serving the kingdom of God by serving the world around them. It is within this relationship that the church and the world exist, and it is through the service of Christ's followers that society is improved. Understanding this through the lens of this thesis's intervention, just as the committed service of the church members within the church help to build up the church, so does the committed service of Jesus's followers help to build up society at large.

In the intervention presented in this thesis, it was shown that through service, in addition to building up the church and the individual and being a foundational part of discipleship and

¹⁰ John R. W. Stott and Christopher J. H. Wright, *Christian Mission in the Modern World, Expanded and Updated* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

spiritual formation, also allowed for and provided fellowship and relational development between church members. As that service is turned outward, to the larger community and society, there is an opportunity for fellowship and the opportunity for what James Menkhaus refers to as “solidarity as kinship.”¹² This solidarity with the larger community occurs as boundaries that divide are overcome, and relationships that bridge the us-versus-them divide begin to develop. This allows the church to serve a role in the community that is both faithful to Scripture and advantageous to society.

Christian service and mission are both foundational within the life of a committed Christ-follower, are both evidence of, and a means of spiritual formation, and are both key parts of the church's central mission. Understanding this at a deeper level is an opportunity for further research.

¹² James Menkhaus, *Immersion: A Pilgrimage Into Service* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2022), 139, Kindle.

Appendix A

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Ripe For the Harvest: Developing Servants Through Spiritual Formation at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown

Principal Investigator: Vincent A. Maltempi, Doctoral Candidate at the John C. Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a member of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown, and 18 years of age or older. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

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

The purpose of this study is to create a training model for volunteers that will prepare participants for service within the church.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Attend church service every week for 5 weeks.
2. Attend and participate in a one-hour, midweek study, either in person or remotely for 5 weeks.
3. Serve in some ministry area of the church for 5 weeks.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include a deeper understanding of the spiritual formation attainable through Christian service.

Benefits to society include adding to the body research of spiritual formation, the impact within a church of utilizing teaching, and hands-on instruction to develop the spiritual discipline of service.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

How will personal information be protected?

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

- Participant responses to the online survey will be anonymous
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data collected from you may be used in future research studies and/or shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a secure and password locked PC and will be destroyed after seven years.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is the researcher in a position of authority over participants, or does the researcher have a financial conflict of interest?

The researcher serves as Sr. Pastor at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. Data collection will be anonymous to limit potential or perceived conflicts, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Vince Maltempi. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Danny Allen, at [REDACTED].

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

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

Appendix B

Recruitment Template: Email or Letter

Dear Fairhaven Church member,

As a doctoral candidate in the John C. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry degree. The purpose of my research is to create a training model for volunteers that will prepare participants for service within the church, and I am writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older, and members of Fairhaven Church of Rootstown. Participants will be asked to attend church weekly, attend a midweek, one-hour study, and serve in some ministry area of the church for the 5 week duration of the project.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] to be screened.

A consent document will be given to you if you meet the study criteria. The consent document contains additional information about my research.

If you choose to participate, you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the first midweek study.

Sincerely,

Vince Maltempi
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

[REDACTED]

Appendix C

INTRODUCTORY AND EXIT QUESTIONNAIRE

<p>Fairhaven Church Action-Research Project Questionnaire</p> <p>Section 1</p> <p>1.How long have you been a member of the church? Enter your answer.</p> <p>2.How important is service within the church? Extremely important Somewhat important Neutral Somewhat not important Extremely not important</p> <p>3.In what area of the church do you serve? Enter your answer.</p> <p>4.Rank the following spiritual disciplines in importance from highest to lowest. Prayer Service Worship Bible Study Scripture meditation Fasting Tithing</p> <p>5.What training, if any, have you received regarding Christian service within the church? Enter your answer.</p> <p>6.How motivated are you to serve within church? Very motivated Somewhat motivated Not Motivated</p> <p>7.What is your gender? Female Male</p> <p>8.How old are you? 18-24</p>	<p>25-34 35-44 45-54 55+</p>
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Appendix D

ABSORPTION PHASE: SERMON SERIES OUTLINE

Weekly Sermon Series Outline		
Sermon Week	Scripture Passage	Key Points
One	Luke 9:1-23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service is embedded as a foundational part of a disciple's life, Jesus empowers disciples for the ministry and then sends them out to serve- application, we are empowered to serve During the feeding miracle, Jesus serves as provider, Apostles serve as helpers- application, that we should model that servant behavior. Jesus' call to discipleship is a call to serve
Two	Luke 22:24-27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service produces humility, and humility produces service. Is what you are vying for Kingdom worthy? Is your attitude that of the disciples or that of Christ? Jesus serves, so as we follow Jesus we should also serve
Three	John 12:25-26; John 13:1-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service for Christ happens in the ordinary and the lowly- washing of feet Servants will be where Christ is. Christ leads by example, and He sets an example of service.
Four	John 11:1-38	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service calls for sacrifice. Jesus changed plans in order to serve. Giving up of self for the good of others
Five	Mark 10:42-45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Service is community focused- Focus on me and not we is not Christlike. Humans look at the temporal, not the spiritual. True followers must be servants.
Six	Phil 2:5-8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-interest and service to the kingdom are mutually exclusive. To set an example, Jesus completely abased Himself to serve, that is the standard to follow.
Seven	1 Peter 2:11-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followers of Christ are to be different than the rest of the world, and selfless serving is Kingdom virtue, not a worldly virtue. We are to speak through our actions- our actions will show the world that we belong to Christ.
Eight	Gal 5:13-15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The freedom found in Christ for believers should manifest itself in serving one-another. Serving is a part of fulfilling the Greatest Commandment.

Appendix E

ABSORPTION PHASE: WEEKLY STUDY AGENDA

ABSORPTION WEEKLY STUDY AGENDA

Location: Fairhaven Church of Rootstown (remote optional)
Date: xx/xx/xxxx
Time: 12:00pm
Facilitator: Pastor Vince Maltempi

Agenda Items

5 Minutes	Opening prayer and check-in
15 Minutes	Review of Sunday's sermon: notes, questions, review of personal outlines
10 Minutes	Discussion: how do you view service in the life of a believer in light of sermon? How do you view service as a spiritual discipline?
5 Minutes	Service-learning update: how is serving proceeding? Any questions or learnings?
10 Minutes	Peer-to-peer discussion: pair off for discussion. 1) share your ministry experiences, 2) share your closest moment to Jesus in the past week, 3) share how you may serve the Kingdom this week,
10 Minutes	Report out, final thoughts, prayer

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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Date: 5-8-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1361
Title: Ripe For the Harvest: Developing Servants Through Spiritual Formation at Fairhaven Church of Rootstown
Creation Date: 4-7-2023
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Vincent Maltempo
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	No Human Subjects Research
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Key Study Contacts

Member	Danny Allen	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Vincent Maltempo	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Vincent Maltempo	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	