

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCES
IN HARTSVILLE, SC, BAPTIST CHURCHES

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

Robert W. Stuckey

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

March 5, 2024

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF DISCIPLESHIP EXPERIENCES IN HARTSVILLE,
SC BAPTIST CHURCHES
by Robert Wayne Stuckey

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

Matthew A. Vander Wiele Ed.D., Dissertation Supervisor

Rich J. Sironen, Ed.D., Second Reader

ABSTRACT

Catchy quotes could describe an identified problem, but none were used here. Eternity is what is at stake. The American church is in trouble. Discipleship has been ineffective inside and outside the church for growth in the kingdom of God. This phenomenological qualitative study was performed to understand the discipleship experiences of pastors and mature Christians. The setting of this study was Hartsville, South Carolina, area Baptist churches. This study utilized semi-structured interviews to obtain data. The population was twelve mature Christians, comprised of a lead pastor and two mature Christians from four selected churches. The instrument utilized was two sets of semi-structured interview questions. One was designed for the pastoral participants, while the other was for mature Christian participants. Data from the interviews was analyzed utilizing Moustakas' modified Van Kamm method of analysis, allowing the identification of composite descriptions or themes. Results showed two significant implications. First, a clear definition of discipleship with missional purposes should be established by pastors for organizational alignment. Second, a gap exists in discipleship in the home for mature Christians.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. At this stage in the research, discipleship was defined as the personal growth of a follower of Christ to be obedient to Christ's teachings and then make disciples. The theory guiding this study is Chris Shirley's (2008) position on the local church's biblical mandate given by Jesus to share the gospel, teach obedience, and make disciples.

Keywords: discipleship, spiritual maturity, spiritual formation, spiritual growth, obedience, Christ

Copyright © 2024. Robert Wayne Stuckey. All rights reserved.

Liberty University has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the University, including, without limitation, preservation, or instruction.

Dedication

When I read these dedication pages, I often wonder how those people listed really helped in this process. Then I realized it was not just about writing this dissertation but all the events that led to this and during the writing. I would like to dedicate this dissertation chronologically, never to forget how I arrived here. This dissertation is dedicated to the following:

- My mother, who put me on a bus every Sunday when I was a child to go to church.
- First Baptist Church of Goose Creek, whose bus ministry allowed me to begin a journey so many years ago.
- The Zauhler family, my childhood neighbors, poured into me as child and took me to church and VBS when they could.
- The youth workers at Northwoods Assembly, which had the courage to share the Roman Road with a 12-year-old boy.
- My grandparents, Nana & Pop, loved me and took me everywhere.
- Bob and Nancy Johnson loved my wife and me and discipled us as a young couple and as parents for many years.
- Dr. Bob Cline, a pastor after God's own heart.
- Dr. Ryan Goodroe, a dear friend, a wonderful preacher, and a source of great encouragement to me.
- My Children, thank you for the privilege of being your dad.
- My wife Candace, whom I love dearly and who pushes me to be better.

And most of all, to the God of all creation that is patient with me and clearly pursued me... in spite of me.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following for their prayers, wealth of experience and knowledge, and genuine care to help me finish this project.

- Dr. Chris Shirley for his help and expertise on discipleship.
- Dr. Eugene Butler for his critical eye that was much appreciated.
- Dr. Matthew Vander Wiele, for his time and concern.
- Dr. Rich Sironen for his excellent guidance and template knowledge.
- Dr. Ryan Goodroe for being an encouragement even when he didn't know it.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT.....	3
Copyright	4
Dedication.....	5
Acknowledgments.....	6
Table of Contents.....	7
List of Tables	14
List of Figures.....	15
List of Abbreviations	16
CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN.....	17
Introduction.....	17
Background to the Problem	19
Deuteronomy 6:4-9.....	20
Matthew 28:19-20.....	21
Statement of the Problem.....	29
Purpose Statement.....	29
Research Questions.....	30
Assumptions and Delimitations	30
Research Assumptions.....	30
Delimitations of the Research Design.....	31
Definition of Terms.....	31
Significance of the Study.....	32
Summary of the Design	32

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	33
Overview.....	33
Theological Framework for the Study	33
Discipleship Defined.....	34
Biblical Progression of Discipleship.....	36
Trinity	37
Humanity.....	40
Sin	50
Jesus	52
The Need for Discipleship	55
Theoretical Framework for the Study	57
The Role of the Church.....	57
Discipleship Approaches and Gaps	59
Discipleship in the Home.....	60
Theological Training.....	60
Evangelism for Reproduction	63
Related Literature and Rationale	64
The Five Stages of Discipleship	64
Spiritually Dead	65
Infant Disciple Stage.....	66
Children Disciple Stage	67
Young Adult Stage.....	67
Parent Stage	67

Four Spheres of Life	68
History of Discipleship	70
Jesus: The Beginning of Discipleship.....	73
Acts 2 Church, The Disciples, and Paul	74
Bishops and Monks.....	75
Discipleship Models.....	76
Relational Discipleship-The Model of Jesus	76
Small-Group Discipleship.....	77
Church Models.....	78
Leadership in Discipleship.....	80
Everyone Has a Job.....	82
Bad Leadership	83
Personal Theology and Philosophy Description of Leadership	84
The Best Leadership	85
Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature	86
Profile of the Current Study	87
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	88
Research Design Synopsis	88
The Problem.....	88
Purpose Statement.....	89
Research Questions.....	90
Research Design and Methodology	90
Setting	92

	10
Participants.....	93
Role of the Researcher	94
Ethical Considerations	96
Data Collection Methods and Instruments.....	97
Collection methods	98
Instruments and Protocols.....	99
Interviews.....	99
Procedures.....	101
Data Analysis	102
Analysis Methods.....	102
Trustworthiness.....	103
Credibility	104
Dependability	104
Confirmability.....	104
Transferability.....	105
Chapter Summary	105
CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	106
Overview.....	106
Compilation Protocol and Measures.....	107
Demographic and Sample Data	108
Data Analysis and Findings	110
Research Question 1	113
Interview Findings	113

Research Question 1 Summary	114
Research Question 2	115
Interview Findings	116
Research Question 2 Summary	117
Research Question 3	118
Interview Findings: Mature Christian's Role	119
Interview Findings for Mature Christian's View of the Pastor's Role	122
Research Question 3 Summary	123
Research Question 4	124
Interview Findings for Pastor's View of Pastor's Role	125
Interview Findings for Pastor's View of the Church's Role.....	126
Research Question 4 Summary	127
Research Question 5	129
Interview Findings	129
Research Question 5 Summary	134
Research Question 6	134
Interview Findings	135
Research Question 6 Summary	138
Evaluation of the Research Design	139
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS	142
Overview	142
Research Purpose	142
Research Questions	142

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications	143
Research Conclusions	143
Conclusions for Research Questions:	144
Conclusion to RQ1 and RQ2: Definition of Discipleship	144
Implication One:	146
Conclusion to RQ3/RQ4: Pastor’s & Christian’s Role in Discipleship...146	
Conclusion to RQ5: Mature Christian’s Discipleship Experience	149
Conclusion to RQ6: Pastor’s Discipleship Experience.....	150
Implication Two:	152
Applications	153
Research Limitations	154
Further Research.....	155
Summary	156
References.....	159
APPENDIX A: IRB Approval.....	166
APPENDIX B: Mature Christian Interview Questions	167
APPENDIX C: Pastoral Interview Questions.....	168
APPENDIX D: Alternate Church List.....	169
APPENDIX E: Church Permission Request.....	170
APPENDIX F: PASTOR CONSENT FORM	171
APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM.....	174
APPENDIX H: PASTOR RECRUITMENT EMAIL	177
APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL	178

APPENDIX J: PASTOR RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL.....	179
APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL.....	180

List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Church Models</i>	79
Table 2. <i>Correlation between Interview/Research Questions for Mature Christians</i>	100
Table 3. <i>Correlation between Interview/Research Questions for Pastors</i>	100
Table 4. <i>Pastoral Participant Demographics</i>	109
Table 5. <i>Mature Christian Participant Demographics</i>	110
Table 6. <i>RQ1-Mature Christian Definition to Theme Correlation Review</i>	115
Table 7. <i>RQ2-Pastor’s Definition of Discipleship Theme Correlation Review</i>	118
Table 8. <i>RQ3-Mature Christian’s View of Their Role/Correlation Review</i>	124
Table 9. <i>RQ3-Mature Christian’s View of Pastor’s Role/Correlation Review</i>	124
Table 10. <i>RQ4-Pastors to Pastor’s Role/Theme Correlation Review</i>	128
Table 11. <i>RQ4-Pastor’s to Church’s Role/Theme Correlation Review</i>	128
Table 12. <i>RQ5- Mature Chrisitan Salvation Story Age/Event</i>	131
Table 13. <i>Gaps Experienced by Mature Christians</i>	133
Table 14. <i>RQ5-Mature Christian’s Discipleship/Theme Correlation Review</i>	134
Table 15. <i>Pastoral Salvation Story Age/Event</i>	136
Table 16. <i>RQ6-Pastor’s Discipleship/Theme Correlation Review</i>	139
Table 17. <i>Mature Christian’s Role</i>	148
Table 18. <i>Pastor’s Role</i>	148

List of Figures

Figure 1 <i>Stages of Development</i>	59
Figure 2 <i>The Five Stages of Discipleship</i>	65
Figure 3 <i>The Four Spheres of Life</i>	69
Figure 4 <i>Church History 0-500 AD</i>	71
Figure 5 <i>Church History 600-1000 AD</i>	72
Figure 6 <i>Church History 1500-2000 AD</i>	73

List of Abbreviations

Liberty University (LU)

CHAPTER ONE: RESEARCH CONCERN

Introduction

Why are there so many baby Christians in churches today? These are Christians who know Jesus by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8) but have not matured through the discipleship process. The Apostle Paul referred to the Corinthians this way, saying:

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready (*English Standard Version*, 2016, 1 Corinthians 3:1-2).

The problem is that these Christians are challenging to identify. Baby Christians come to church, serve, and can even quote scripture, but they are not maturing. Their identity in Christ lacks the depth necessary to explain who they are in Christ. Christians lacking spiritual maturity do not share their faith to make disciples in obedience to Jesus' command in Matthew 28. This researcher experienced this phenomenon firsthand. A decision of faith in Jesus as Savior was made at the age of twelve, but there was an absence of true discipleship in the home or from the church. The result was many years of spiritual infancy for the researcher. The researcher did not experience any discipleship in the home and believes this is the major contributor to the years of spiritual infancy. However, that spiritual outlook changed when the body of Christ acted and invested in this researcher's spiritual health. There are gaps in discipleship in the American church, and people can go without being discipled to spiritual maturity. During this study, gaps were defined as an absence of a particular aspect/discipline of discipleship or discipleship during a specific time during the discipleship process. This study examined the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians to understand how those experiences led to their spiritual maturity. This was accomplished by interviewing pastors and mature Christians gaining insights

by inquiring about how they define discipleship, their role in discipleship, and how they were disciplined.

The understanding of spiritual maturity originates in Ephesians 4, where the Apostle Paul said that church leaders should equip the saints “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (Ephesians 4:13-14). Hull (2016) said spiritual maturity “is transformation into people who live to love others” (Hull, 2016, p. 174). However, he referenced Willard’s definition, which discusses an apprentice who can do and often does what is Godly. This maturity extends from the transformation that occurred in the apprentice’s life. Hull also listed three practical benchmarks for spiritual maturity:

1. Mature Christians do not defend themselves when found to be wrong.
2. Mature Christians do not feel they are missing something by not sinning.
3. Mature Christians find it easier and more natural to do God’s will than to not do it. (Hull, 2016, p. 194-195).

Considering the above, spiritual maturity is defined as a person’s transformation resulting in living to love others, obeying, and teaching the commands of Jesus while making disciples of others.

The lack of spiritual maturity in the Body of Christ has led to a slow downward trend in the American church over the past several years. Data shows lower attendance numbers and fewer baptisms. A Pew Research Center’s (2015) study on the changing religious landscape in the United States indicated a drop in Christians in the total population from 78.4% to 70.6% during the seven-year period from 2007 to 2014. Another study from Pew Research Center (2015) on generations indicates that approximately 35% of Millennials are unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist. Why is the American church in a slow, downward spiral?

Discipleship is a biblical mandate given by Jesus before his ascension in Matthew 28. With this mandate, Christians everywhere should be obediently serving in local churches to help make and grow disciples that can make disciples, but the studies mentioned indicate just the opposite. One contributor may be an unclear definition of discipleship. A Barna Group study identified "...an underlying reason why there is little progress in helping people develop spiritually: many churchgoers and clergy struggle to articulate a basic understanding of spiritual maturity." (Barna Group, 2009). Christians professing faith in Jesus are not maturing in their spiritual walk to the point of being able to make disciples. This study examined the lived discipleship experiences of Christians in Hartsville, SC area Baptist churches.

Background to the Problem

The United States of America is no longer a Christian nation. In his 1967 inauguration speech after winning the gubernatorial race for California, Reagan (1967) spoke of the fragility of freedom. He said, "Freedom is a fragile thing and it's never more than one generation away from extinction. It is not ours by way of inheritance; it must be fought for and defended constantly by each generation..." (Reagan, 1967). In a sense, Christianity is much like freedom and requires each generation to do its part in discipling the younger generations, teaching their faith in Jesus and obedience to Him. The American church has lost the art of discipleship. It is essential to understand the basis of such a statement. The researcher reviewed relevant literature to establish a theological and theoretical framework and literature related to discipleship in Chapter Two.

The Bible was the logical place to start for any theological background to be recognized by the academic community. The Bible is the ultimate resource and authority on discipleship and discipleship is foundationally established in two key sections, one from the Old Testament and

one from the New Testament. The Old Testament passage is Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and the New Testament passage comes from Matthew 28:19-20. Discipleship originated with the command in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 6) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28). Cox and Peck in the *Christian Education Journal* fully capture the heart of Christian discipleship:

Christian discipleship is a major, all-encompassing theme of the Bible – Old and New Testaments alike. Pivotaly articulated in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20), it addresses all dimensions of life, is deeply grounded in teaching and mentoring and applies to practically all age levels. (Cox & Peck, 2018, p. 1).

Deuteronomy 6:4-9

The focus of Old Testament discipleship required Israel's parents to teach how to love God generationally and to love others (Leviticus 19:18). The directive given in Deuteronomy 6 was for parents in Israel to love God and provide instruction to teach their children, but this directive was specific. Parents received this command to teach children to love God:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

God commands parents to teach their children to love the Lord in all facets of their lives. This imperative is ongoing, permeating every aspect of Hebrew life and culture. Discipleship in Hebrew the culture was not just a command but a way of life. Moses closed out the Deuteronomic instructions this way, "For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess" (Deuteronomy 32:47). He emphasized that these commands are integral to their way of life. Grisanti (2012) explained that for Israel's tenure to be long in the land God promised, they must

teach the next generation not only to love God and others but to have “passion for genuine conformity of heart to his law” (Grisanti, 2012, p. 796).

Matthew 28:19-20

New Testament discipleship, also an integral part of a Christian’s life, is more specific than Old Testament discipleship. New Testament discipleship centers around Jesus as Savior and Lord. Jesus was the living God on earth, and, as Kilner (2015) discussed, Jesus is the standard that God used to create man. For the New Testament church, the goal of discipleship is becoming like Christ and obediently making disciples in others. Jesus said:

And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:18)

Also, the New Testament command extends beyond the family. New Testament Discipleship was intended to be a community. That example is at the end of Acts 2 but is summarized in verse 44, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Hull described this community, “A covenantal community is a group of like-minded people who want to learn from Jesus and one another how to live as if Jesus were living their life. (Hull, 2016, p.58). Both the Old and New Testament discipleship hold a command to teach others but also intend to bring rest and peace in the context of a community of believers. Discipleship is a process, but some miss the mark. Brandewie said, “Discipleship is the process of following Jesus in obedience and investing in others following Jesus in obedience” (Brandewie, 2020, p. 163). The researcher considered Brandewie’s definition incomplete as it fails to include the aspect of multiplication. Hull described a problem with discipleship, building on the covenantal community concept. He said, “The missing element in our discipleship is not a lack of teaching

on missions, obedience, evangelism, or any other topic. The omission is a lack of intentional apprenticeship rooted in a covenantal community” (Hull, 2016, p.58). A more comprehensive definition of discipleship is found in Chapter Two.

This study focuses on discipleship in Hartsville, South Carolina (SC), area churches. First, however, why is there a need for discipleship? Faber (2008) examined the image of God as it relates to the Christian life. The creation story in Genesis 1 informs readers that God created man in his image. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Genesis 1:27). Readers also understand from the story of the fall of man in Genesis 3 that man became separated from God, and the image was damaged.

Faber said:

The creation account of Genesis 1 and 2 gives a very clear account of why man exists. Chapter 3 of Genesis explains what has gone wrong with humanity; and the rest of Scripture relates the struggle of regaining the original intended condition and purpose of man. (Faber, 2008, p. 2).

The struggle that Faber (2008) references is discipleship. The human condition, sinful and damaged, does not resemble the original design and is only restored through Christ. The church’s mission now begins to come into focus.

The church’s mission is to share the gospel (evangelize) and teach obedience to all Jesus’ commands (maturity). Both are elements of discipleship. Discipleship is the primary function of the church. English (2020) pointed out the two purposes of the church as mission and Christlikeness but saw a gap between experts (pastors) and amateurs (saints). English highlighted, “The second purpose outlined for the church is that all members are being called to maturity—growing in Christlikeness” and said, “This may be one of the biggest gaps I currently see in ministry philosophies” (English, 2020, p. 43). The journey that man begins in Christ to become more like Christ is discipleship, allowing God's view of sinners through the lens of the

cross. Jesus said, "...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6).

Shirley (2008) argued that "the local church is a biblically-ordained and relevant vehicle for transformational discipleship." (Shirley, 2008, p. 208). The argument that accompanies this statement is that the church needs to reform the discipleship process due to results linked to the decline of the American church. Shirley explained that the word disciple occurs no less than 230 times in the four Gospels and 28 in Acts. If discipleship is biblically ordained, why is the American church in decline?

Shirley (2008) explained that a change occurred in the meaning of disciple after it occurred in Matthew. Before Jesus, a disciple was understood as a learner but took on a first-century cultural understanding of more than a learner. In the gospels, a disciple was more than a learner and a follower. The concept of knowledge resulting in action is not new in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 6, Moses did not expect Israel to only know about loving God; the expectation was to teach generations how to love God. Malone (2021) explained this pedagogy:

Israel offers love to God by keeping the commandments, and she offers love to children by teaching the commandments. Because the commands are so intricately wed to the call for total love, when Israel teaches the commands and helps cultivate the disciplines needed to follow them, she trains her children how to love. (Malone, 2021, p. 51).

Contemporary thinking of disciples is the twelve men selected by Jesus, now called apostles. Shirley said disciples are more than just followers and learners. Jesus added a new command for New Testament believers so disciples would know what they do:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:34-35).

Jesus also called his followers to be more than learners. Shirley listed the qualifications of a disciple, "The qualifications for true disciples were: (1) Belief in Jesus as messiah (John 2:11,

6:68-69); (2) Commitment to identify with Him through baptism; (3) Obedience to his teaching and submission to his Lordship (Matt 19:23-30, Luke 14:25-33).” (Shirley, p. 209).

Shirley (2008) explained that a crisis of identity exists in contemporary Christianity, causing a hindrance in spiritual growth, which can also be linked to the decline of the American church, as the PEW report identified. Shirley quoted Hull from his book *The Complete Book of Discipleship* concerning this topic. Hull said:

The common teaching is that a Christian is someone who by faith accepts Jesus as Savior, receives eternal life, and is safe and secure in the family of God; a disciple is a more serious Christian active in the practice of the spiritual disciplines and engaged in evangelizing and training others. But I must be blunt: I find no biblical evidence for the separation of Christian from disciple. (Shirley, 2008, p. 210).

This researcher is familiar with this identity crisis and finds evidence of this in Hartsville, SC, area churches and refers to these people as “baby” Christians. Unfortunately, it is a common problem in Southern churches where many identify as Christians but are either not a follower of Christ or have only accepted Jesus as Savior and are not being discipled to spiritual maturity.

Colebank’s (2017) mixed-methods model dissertation examined the effectiveness of discipleship approaches in Northeastern Southern Baptist Convention churches by utilizing Lifeway’s “Transformational Discipleship Assessment.” The discipleship approaches Colebank identified in this study are:

- Spiritual disciplines
- Relational accountability small groups
- Ministry teams
- Missional training

Colebank’s dissertation stated, “The goal of the research was to identify obedience-oriented discipleship best practices to better equip churches to transform Christians from self-oriented lives to Spirit-directed lives of serving and being on mission.” (Colebank, 2017, xiv). Colebank’s literature review reported recent books by Rainer, Stetzer, and Waggoner, well-known Southern

Baptist leaders, that all spoke of gaps or missing conceptual discipleship practices in the American church. These crucial missing concepts in contemporary discipleship have led to the previously identified decline in the American church. This study examined the lived experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist Churches. The discovery of gaps may result from this study; however, the intent is not to focus on specific gaps or missing practices. The researcher believes discipleship in the home may exist as a gap, and, as Hull (2016) noted above those gaps may include teaching on missions, obedience, and evangelism.

This study intended to understand the discipleship experience of mature Christians.

Through Colebank's (2017) literature review, he derived the definition of a disciple as:

A disciple is a child of God the loving Father, a learner taught by the Holy Spirit to obey God's commands to love the believers as family, and an ambassador who has Jesus living in them to love lost people in the world. (Colebank, 2017, p. 23).

Putman and Harrington (2013) shed light on the issue of discipleship in contemporary churches. Many churches measure success with attendance, programs, and even faith decisions. The measure of the church must be on whether the lives of Christians are transformed to Christ's image. The transformative power of the gospel must lead to more than conversion, but also obedience to all that God commands, including the multiplication of new disciples. New methods must be employed to help equip believers with the skills and knowledge to make disciples.

Putman and Harrington (2013) explained the "Five Stages of Discipleship" used at Real Life Ministries. The stages are:

- Spiritually Dead
- Infant
- Child
- Young Adult
- Parent

Like Hull's assessment of many Christians, the infant stage is those craving the spiritual milk (1 Peter 2:2-3) and not solid food (Hebrews 5:14) as a mature Christian or parent would need. These two authors described four categories that the American church typically fit. These categories are educational, attractional, missional, and organic or home, with each having a biblical foundation but also its implementation challenges. The duo wrote that churches should shift to a biblical discipleship focus with a methodology that creates relational environments, regardless of category.

Johnston's (2009) dissertational problem identified the lack of discipleship in evangelical churches. The church's mission is the Matthew 28 command given by Jesus. However, Johnston reported, "the evangelical church in America has been satisfied with a person accepting Christ but not concerned with them growing in that newfound relationship." (Johnston, 2009, p. 3.) Johnston's purpose, although limited in scope to First Baptist Church of Covington, was to help create a biblically-based strategy for discipleship that helps a "disciple's heart retain the fire of inspiration" (Johnston, 2009, p. 2).

Shirley (2018) also identified a problem in the American Church. He opened his book *Family Ministry and the Church* by discussing Faith Community Church and their new young Pastor Andrew. The church saw attendance swell over 1,000 then drop to less than 100. With the change in the landscape of the 21st century leading to families opting out of church for other activities, church leaders faced a new challenge. Although new programs were launched with a pastor for every stage of life, from children to adults, Faith Community Church suffered the decline that many churches are experiencing. A gap in discipleship in the home still existed, but as Shirly pointed out, all the programs and pastors cannot replace what God meant to occur in the home. Discipleship in the home was left out of all the new and improved programs.

Shirley (2018) attested that the family and the church are connected. That is seen in the Deuteronomy 6 text previously discussed. However, Shirley explained:

Many churches like Faith Community have lost the ability—and for some, the desire—to be a place where families are won to Christ, parents are equipped to be spiritual leaders, marriages and family relationships are strengthened with godly wisdom, and all members share the responsibility to raise up the next generation of disciples for the glory of God. (Shirley, 2018, p. 6)

To that end, Shirley suggested that churches of all sizes will need a “family focused framework.” (Shirley, 2018, p.8). Shirley wrote the lion’s share of his book to discuss and strengthen the many facets of family-based discipleship.

Taylor (2021) compared sermon-based small groups of eight to sixteen to discipleship groups of three to four. Jesus was the father of discipleship, and he laid the foundation for relational-based disciple-making. This is a critical difference between the two methods compared, and Taylor noted, “Being Jesus’s disciple meant becoming part of his new community of disciples” (Taylor, 2021, p. 6). Taylor, along with others, utilized Bonhoeffer’s definition of discipleship, which focuses on adhering to Christ. Bonhoeffer (1995) asserted that Christians must adhere to Christ, and discipleship goes hand in hand with that adherence. Bonhoeffer said it best:

Discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. An abstract Christology, a doctrinal system, a general religious knowledge on the subject of grace or on the forgiveness of sins, render discipleship superfluous, and in fact they positively exclude any idea of discipleship whatever, and are essentially inimical to the whole conception of following Christ. With an abstract idea it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even to put it into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience. Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ. It remains an abstract idea, a myth which has a place for the Fatherhood of God, but omits Christ as the living Son. And a Christianity of that kind is nothing more than the end of discipleship. (Bonhoeffer, 1995, p. 49).

Taylor's (2021) literature review brought him to a similar conclusion as others in this study's literature review concerning the American church, "...the Western church is lacking in the mission of making disciples." (Taylor, 2021, p. 62). The reality of the situation Taylor pointed out is that professing Christians cannot be identified in a lineup, and their lives do not look different than non-Christians. Taylor's superficial discipleship, further exasperated by discipleship through programs versus the relational biblical model Jesus provided, is a distraction to pastors. Taylor endeavored that discipleship groups are more effective than sermon-based small groups at Cypress Community Church. At the project conclusion, Taylor's hypothesis confirmed that a Jesus-based relational discipleship group is more effective at discipleship.

Davis (2002) wrote to determine pastoral perceptions of discipleship in the local church. Davis separated the Great Commission in Matthew 28 into the categories of evangelism and nurturing. Davis asserted this about nurturing in discipleship, "Nurturing is a term that points to the responsibility Jesus Christ has given the church in helping all converts to grow to be more and more like Him." (Davis, 2002, p. 1).

Bible colleges, seminaries, Bible studies, campus ministries, missions organizations, and other nonprofits have stepped in to fill the gap local churches have left. Praise God for these organizations, but they will never be able, nor do they want, to replace the local church. (Hull, 2016, p. 33).

Hull believed that the church should be the primary training ground for deeper discipleship and love for God, not outside organizations.

This study explored the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, South Carolina Baptist churches. This study can benefit pastors, lay leaders, and parents to understand gaps or perceived gaps in discipleship models in the churches they pastor or attend. The importance of this study related to the researcher's personal discipleship experience. A lack of discipleship in the home after a faith decision in Christ at age twelve resulted in no significant

spiritual maturity for fourteen years. This gap in time without discipleship for the researcher caused a passion for the discipleship process and nurturing new Christians to spiritual maturity. The gap the researcher experienced in discipleship so many years ago is the genesis of this project.

Statement of the Problem

Many studies and books exist on the topic of discipleship. Pastors and authors have developed and written countless models and strategies to make disciples. A digital search of the Jerry Falwell Library on discipleship returns resulted in 2,548 books, and 20,377 articles and ten databases full of material. Students have labored over doctoral dissertations explaining the phenomenon, but a gap in the literature still exists for Hartsville, South Carolina area Baptist churches. This study utilized elements from Colebank's 2017 dissertation titled *Obedience Oriented Discipleship: A Mixed Methods Study of Effective Discipleship Models in Select Southern Baptist Churches*. While Colebank used the "Transformational Discipleship Assessment" to determine spiritual maturity, this study utilized the lead pastor of the selected churches to determine spiritual maturity and recommend participants. Christians in Hartsville, South Carolina, have experienced maturity through a discipleship process. This study focused on understanding the experiences of Christians during their discipleship process. A gap exists in the literature concerning the lived discipleship experiences in Hartsville, South Carolina Baptist churches.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. At this stage in the research, discipleship is defined as the personal growth of a follower of Christ to be

obedient to Christ's teachings and then make disciples. The theory guiding this study was Shirley's (2008) position on the local church's biblical mandate given by Jesus to share the gospel, teach obedience, and make disciples.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do mature Christians, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ2. How do pastors, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ3. What do mature Christians believe, if at all, is their role and the role of pastors in discipleship?

RQ4. What do pastors believe, if at all, is their role and the role of the church in discipleship?

RQ5. How were mature Christians disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

RQ6. How were pastors disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

Assumptions and Delimitations

It would be conservative to limit the application of this study to Baptist churches, but a study could extend to different geographical regions. Due to the theological similarities amongst protestant evangelicals, this study may apply across protestant evangelical denominations. This study would not apply to non-evangelical and non-protestant religions like Catholicism and Islam.

Research Assumptions

The research assumptions that guide this study are as follows:

1. Discipleship is understood and defined similarly among pastors and mature Christians in Hartsville, South Carolina Baptist churches.

2. Mature Christians and pastors understand how to describe their lived experiences of discipleship.
3. Pastors can recommend a spiritually mature Christian to participate in the study from their congregation.
4. This study does not assume that specific discipleship gaps exist in Hartsville, South Carolina Baptist churches.

Delimitations of the Research Design

The boundaries of this study were delimited to evangelical adults attending Baptist churches in the Hartsville, SC. The sample was gathered from a snowball sample which used the lead pastor to refer other participants that were adults older than twenty-one who have reached spiritual maturity. Spiritual maturity was based on their church leader's assessment of their spiritual maturity. This study was not intended to determine and evaluate discipleship models in Hartsville area churches but to understand lived experience of pastors and Mature Christians in Hartsville, SC area Baptist Churches.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are pertinent to the research:

1. *Disciple*: Follower of Christ (Wilkins, 1996, p. 175).
2. *Discipleship*: Transformational process that is the personal growth of a follower of Christ to be obedient to Christ's teachings and then make disciples.
3. *Spiritual Maturity*: a person's transformation resulting in living to love others, obeying, and teaching the commands of Jesus while making disciples of others.
4. *Mature Christian*: participants that have reached spiritual maturity (see above) and recommended for the study by the lead pastor.
5. *Gap*: an absence of a particular aspect/discipline of discipleship, or discipleship during a specific time during the discipleship process.

Significance of the Study

This study provided insights into the discipleship process of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC. This study may inform pastors, parents, and lay leaders about methods utilized during the discipleship process. It is also possible to discern the efficacy of specific discipleship methods. Additionally, this study has the potential inform pastors, parents, and lay leaders of gaps that may exist in the churches chosen, informing additional gap studies. Finally, this study could inform research utilizing the same methodology in other locations.

Summary of the Design

The study is a qualitative phenomenological case study that allows the researcher to understand, “the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon.” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13). The lived discipleship experiences of pastors and spiritually mature Christians were examined in Hartsville, SC, area churches. The lived experiences of pastors and spiritually mature Christians was examined with semi-structured interviews. The selected participants described experiences based on interview questions that allowed the researcher to obtain data concerning the lived experience of discipleship of the participants. This data may allow the researcher to understand and gain insights into the discipleship experiences of pastors and mature Christians in Hartsville, South Carolina, Baptist churches.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Like many others, this study is built from prior researchers' work. Chapter two establishes the theological foundation on which this study is based. The literature review also creates the theoretical framework for the study by reviewing the relevant literature that currently exists. The literature review then provides a context for this research by exploring relevant literature. Finally, the necessity of the study due to a gap in the literature is established. The decline in the church, indicated by Pew Research Center (2015), revealed a more than double increase from 17% to 35% in the number of unaffiliated from Baby Boomers to the Millennial generation period. Cooperman's (2022) report, *Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, concluded this:

The bottom line is that although Christianity is by far the majority faith in the U.S., religious switching – beginning in the late teen years – has resulted in a net flow of millions of Americans from Christianity to unaffiliated. (Cooperman, 2022).

This decline may be linked to the discipleship within the church. Exploring literature concerning discipleship informs the study's look at the lived experience of mature Christians and has revealed a gap in the literature.

Theological Framework for the Study

Christians who undertake a technical writing project should begin writing with a theological framework for their topic. It must be undergirded with scripture. Christians encounter many subjects, questions, or situations that Scripture does not directly address or is silent about altogether. Discipleship is not one of those topics. As previously stated, the foundation for discipleship is established in two key sections of the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The Old Testament passage is Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and the New Testament passage is Matthew 28:19-20. The subsections below review the relevant literature,

establish a robust theological framework for discipleship, and potentially reveal discipleship gaps like those experienced by the researcher in Hartsville, South Carolina, Baptist churches.

Discipleship Defined

The term discipleship has varying meanings across many settings and typically depends on who defines the term and to which program they are referring. Discipleship is also used synonymously with other terms, the most common being spiritual development, spiritual formation, or spiritual growth. An exact, agreed-upon definition becomes troublesome when considering the above. Petitt helped with this by explaining:

Spiritual formation is the holistic work of God in a believer's life whereby systematic change renders the individual continually closer to the image and actions of Jesus Christ. And second, the change or transformation that occurs in the believer's life happens best in the context of authentic, Christian community and is oriented as service toward God and others. (Petitt, 2009, p. 19).

Earley and Dempsey (2013), in their book *Disciple Making Is...*, labored to define a disciple in a multi-page affair referencing ten passages. The synthesized version of a disciple is someone who follows Christ wholly, is willing to sacrifice for Christ's cause, gives up earthly possessions while continuing in scripture loves others, is full of the holy spirit, obediently does Christ's work, and is on a mission to make disciples. Although the definition of discipleship varies among theologians, there is some alignment on its ultimate purpose, the glory of God. The Anchor Yale Dictionary states, "Discipleship is characterized by establishing a fundamental life relationship to the person of Jesus (and not merely to his teaching)" (Weder, 1992, p. 208). Earley and Dempsey did not propose an exact definition but do explain its motivation, "We have considered the motivation for disciple-making—the glory of God—suggesting that the way to bring God glory is by helping others grow and develop to the point where they bring forth 'fruit'" (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 239). While the researcher agrees with Earley and

Dempsey on the motivation for disciple-making, this contributed to the problem of an exact definition of a disciple. Being in Christ is the mark of a disciple; disciple-making may not be present in every disciple. Therefore, a distinction between a disciple and a disciple-maker exists; consistent intentional disciple-making is most often present in spiritually mature disciples of Christ. Colebank's (2017) definition of discipleship was derived from theology literature and biblical text:

A disciple is a child of God the loving Father, a learner taught by the Holy Spirit to obey God's commands to love the believers as family, and an ambassador who has Jesus living in them to love lost people in the world. (Colebank, 2017, p. 22).

Scripture does not provide readers with an exact definition of a disciple; instead, Scripture provides characteristics and what a disciple does. Earley and Dempsey supported this by discussing that a clear definition of a disciple must be established. They explained, "From the Scriptures, we can extract guiding principles that will help us create a definition of a modern-day disciple." The duo discussed that a challenge exists keeping a tight focus on disciple-making and this requires clarity for a church including the vision and core values. To accomplish this, a clear, biblical definition of discipleship is needed. The definition must come from the principles to capture the image that God has in mind for a Christ follower" (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. xxix). The Bible does not establish an exact definition, one can be formed through this literature review. First, however, some background on the term is needed. The Scripture references in this study are from the English Standard Version (ESV). In the ESV, the word disciple is found 269 times. All occurrences except Isaiah 8:16 are found in the New Testament in the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, as well as Acts (Logos, 2021). Disciple comes from the Greek word *mathētēs* or someone who learns (Logos). The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary defines the word as "The people in the New Testament who stood in a special and intensive relationship

with the earthly Jesus” (Weder, 1992, p. 207). This researcher defined the discipleship process as follows:

The ongoing formation and development of a believer’s heart and mind following the justification that comes by faith through grace (Ephesians 2:8) due to the completed work of Jesus as seen in His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15 3-4). The ongoing formation and development transpires only because of the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18) working in each believer and intended to occur within the constructs of the body of Christ, the Church. This is to restore humanity to the originally intended relationship with God and maturity that allows a believer’s life and body of work to be an example used in concert with the Gospel for the glory of God and go and make disciples.

While the term disciple is not defined but assumed to be a learner in the culture, Jesus does define the term by a new action contradictory to the general meaning of learner Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). In conclusion, the researcher found that since every disciple may not be obediently following Matthew 28 to make disciples, this presents a potential cause for church decline. It may also present a causality in parents charged with discipling the next generation that is in the category of a disciple without disciple-making, specifically, discipleship in the home.

Biblical Progression of Discipleship

At the core of Scripture is Jesus. Discipleship is humanity’s response to Him. The entirety of the Bible points toward Jesus, who is the fulfillment of God’s plan to restore humanity to the originally intended relationship. Piper (1976) stated, “The Scriptures teach throughout that all the works of God have as their ultimate goal the display of God's glory.” Discipleship has looked different throughout biblical history. Specifically, the concept of discipleship or spiritual development differs between the Old and New Testaments. The following sections shed light on the biblical foundations for discipleship as directed in the Old and New Testaments.

The best method to demonstrate the revelation of discipleship throughout the Bible is to create a biblical progression of discipleship. The biblical progression of discipleship begins with the Trinity, the triune relationship of God, and in relationship with humanity. This progression discusses humanity's responsibility in discipleship as well as sin and the implications this has on man's image, which was like a reflection—the image of God in man. Because of sin, man's image became distorted. The Apostle Paul wrote, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Finally, the culmination of discipleship in the Bible moves to the completed work of Jesus, followed by the work of the Holy Spirit in each believer. The biblical progress starts with the Trinity, God in relationship with himself, then humanity, sin, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit.

Trinity

Discipleship begins with the Trinity and finds its roots in a biblical community. The Trinity is God in relationship with himself, God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the first evidence of biblical discipleship. Vander Wiele (2014) explained that God is relationship expressed in the Trinity, and now man knows God and experiences this community, walking with and listening to Him. The Bible explains:

Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ (Genesis 1:26).

Discipleship begins with the Trinity and finds its roots in a biblical community. This relationship often develops within the context of the church. The church is the body of Christ or a biblical community. Vander Wiele offered that biblical community “might be people with Christ in common that are participating in Spirit filled ceremonies, rituals, and dialogue between God and man, and man and man” (p. 26). God is community, as observed in the Trinity. Matthew

describes this in the account of Jesus' transfiguration in front of Peter, James, and John (Matthew 17:1). Carson (2010) explained that this event differed from Moses, who only reflected God's Glory, but Jesus was transformed and not a reflection. Carson described the use of *metamorphoō*, a verb that "suggests a change of inmost nature that may be outwardly visible" (Carson, 2010, p. 437). The change was for the disciples' sake, suggests Carson, but went on to say, "As they would come to realize, they were being privileged to glimpse something of his preincarnate glory..." (Carson, 2010, p. 437). The Trinity functions for him in relationship. Another example of this is Jesus' baptism in Matthew 3. Readers observe the Trinity in relationship and the hierarchy within the Trinity itself.

The researcher's derived definition of discipleship included the idea of discipleship occurring within the body of Christ or a biblical community. A critical foundational element of discipleship includes not just listening to God but being obedient to His commands. The commands God gave and continues to give are received by different mechanisms throughout the Bible. No matter the mechanism, whether the audible voice of God, orally passed down generationally, prophetic speech, or the Apostle Paul, what must be understood is that God speaks to His people. Goodroe (2015), focused primarily on expository preaching, quoted John Stott, who said, "One of the distinctive truths about the God of the biblical revelation is that he is a speaking God." (Stott as cited in Goodroe, 2015, p. 24). Discipleship begins with the Trinity and extends to man as God begins to be in a community with humanity.

God Speaks. From the beginning, the Bible established God as a speaking God. The Trinity is first in relationship with itself and then with mankind. God speaks to mankind through various means in biblical history. Understanding that God speaks, it is prudent to discuss God's primary means of communicating with humanity. The methods God utilized to speak are

essential because God speaking, and man hearing are synonymous with discipleship. Post-creation, God spoke audibly to Adam and Eve in the Garden with no contra-indications that this was His initial primary method, with other methods discussed later. Willard (2014) wrote, “In the most primary of senses, the word of God is simply God’s speaking” (p. 19). The Genesis 1 account of creation describes how God spoke creation into existence. The following truncated passages drive this point home:

- And God said, “Let there be light” (v. 3)
- And God said, “Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water. (v. 7)
- And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” (v. 9)
- And God said, “Let the water teem with living creatures and let birds fly above the earth across the vault of the sky.” (v. 20)
- And God said, “Let the land produce living creatures according to their kinds... (v. 24).
- Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... (v. 26).
- God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number... (v. 28).
- Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. (v. 29). (Genesis 1:3-29)

God’s speaking creation into existence is the beginning, but a subtle transition occurs with God providing Adam with commands in Genesis 2:

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.’ (Genesis 2:15-17).

Vander Wiele (2014) spoke to a dynamic relationship (biblical community) in the Trinity that has a hierarchy. He stated, “There is a submission to authority that can be observed in God and then modeled among believers in any environment” (p. 32). Vander Wiele also pointed out that this hierarchy was established by the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 and Romans 5. Jesus acknowledges God the Father’s authority in John 12 as Jesus proclaimed He came to save the world. Jesus said:

For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me. (John 12:49-50).

The Apostle Paul said, “through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,” (Romans 1:5). God speaks, and man must hear and then obey, becoming a doer of the Word of God.

Humanity

Discipleship was different in the Old Testament. Discipleship began and centered around the family unit. The Trinity, the Father, Son, and Spirit, are in a relationship and then make mankind, male and female, who then can have a child. This established the relationship of God to man and now man to man. This transition is the beginning of Old Testament discipleship, where God directed man in the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6. Anthony and Benson (2011) explained that because of Mosaic Law, parental involvement was an absolute requirement. The active engagement of parents afforded the principle means for discipleship, the family. The family God established reflects the Trinity with man in a relationship with man. Collectively, Israel was set apart from other nations by the law established throughout Leviticus. God gave the purpose to Moses, saying, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). Three verses were highlighted to discuss Old Testament discipleship: Deuteronomy 6, Proverbs 22:6, and Psalms 78:5-7.

Hearing God. A significant transition occurs in the Old Testament in how man first hears God, then hears God through man (oration), and then hears or reads God’s Word. Before the fall, man heard God’s audible voice. Sin changed how God communicated and began to utilize Moses, the prophets, and eventually the written Word. Whether passed down by generation, heard, or read, God’s Word elicits a response from His people. An example of this is

Ezra's reading of the Book of the Law of Moses in Nehemiah 8. All the people gathered as one and attentively listened as Ezra read God's Laws. Israel, gathered and humbled, understood what Ezra was reading. The response by Israel was recognition of their sin against God. Ezra stated, "...This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep." For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law" (Nehemiah 8:9). Israel cried at the recognition of their sin, but Ezra urged them that the day was holy. It was holy because Israel's repentance allowed God's restoration of the people. Yamauchi said it this way, "The powerful exposition of the Word of God can bring deep conviction of sin. Repentance, however, must not degenerate into a self-centered remorse but instead must elicit joy in God's forgiving goodness" (Yamauchi, 2010, p. 519). Goodroe (2015) pointed out that God has been speaking, "God spoke creation into being and he continued to speak through the prophets." (Goodroe, 2015, p. 27). Where Goodroe added the Apostle Peter's position, where Peter said:

knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:20-21).

God speaks to man in the context of relationships. Willard said, "Being close to God means communicating with him, which is almost always a two-way street." (Willard, 2012, p. 11).

God's method of communication eventually added another method of communication, the expository preacher. Goodroe explained expository preaching this way:

Expository preaching can be defined formally as the oral communication of God's revealed truth driven by the careful exegesis of a biblical text, delivered by the Holy Spirit through the personality and style of a preacher to a specific group of listeners, with the intention of producing a specific response. (Goodroe, 2015, p. 19).

Hearing God is an ongoing dialogue and has primarily moved to expository preaching and the written Word. Vander Wiele concluded, "Family and church must connect *hearing* the Word and

then progressing to obeying the Word.” (Vander Wiele, 2014, p. 111). James cements this by stating this about hearing and doing:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. (James 1:22-25).

There is an outcome that God intends for man as he listens to God and obeys. God intends a life in a relationship that is blessed and in peace. Man hears God today primarily through the written word. The best examples of this are in Deuteronomy 6 and Matthew 28. The Shema’s command in Deuteronomy 6 for generational teaching of the older generation to the younger generation. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 is for followers of Christ to go and make disciples, teaching them to obey Jesus. These two commands expect that man will hear God and then expect followers to respond in obedience.

Along with the Great Commission in Matthew 28, there is an expectation throughout the Bible, as seen in the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. God expects mankind to hear and then do what was commanded. God intends for man to hear and obey, but a problem was created by the fall of man in Genesis 3. From this point forward, God’s plan and Scripture point to Jesus as Savior, and discipleship becomes necessary. This begs a discussion on Scripture’s authority and how mankind should treat God’s written word.

The Authority of Scripture. The Triune God desires man to know Him, and through the revealing of His Word, mankind hears and obeys. Through this hearing and obeying, God desires humanity to live His truth out and teach His words of life to others. God gave this task to Israel; He revealed generational teaching or discipleship in the Shema in Deuteronomy 6. Israel was

called to be an example by showing the world YHWH; Israel could disciple the world. This task was given to the disciples in the New Testament so that the church could disciple the world.

Since the written Word is one of God's primary methods of communicating with man, a case should be made for Scripture's authority and how mankind should treat God's written word. The Bible is the Word of God, divinely inspired, inerrant, and the final authority, and as believers, it is crucial to understand this theology. In his Systematic Theology text, Geisler (2002) explained the intricacies of the multi-faceted claims of Scripture. Geisler explained, "the prophetic Scriptures (of the Old Testament) did not originate with man but with God moving on men called prophets of God." (Geisler, 2002, p. 230). The most well-known claim of the Bible is the Apostle Paul writing to Timothy saying, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." (2 Timothy 3:16-17) This is an affirmation of Scripture's authoritative use by Christians. Since the Bible is the final authority, Christians should understand what dogmas this doctrine is founded on...God. This is declared as the psalmist says, "Forever, O Lord, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens." (Psalm 119:89). Jesus upholds the psalmist's claims when he says, "For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished." (Matthew 5:18)

When one studies the theology of Scripture and its authority. Eventually, an encounter with the term Sola Scriptura is likely to occur. God's Work Alone or Sola Scriptura means "only Scripture, because it is God's inspired Word, is our inerrant, sufficient, and final authority for the church" (Barrett, 2016, p. 26). This understanding of Scripture informs believers of several things. First, Sola Scriptura helps to understand that the Bible is the only authority. The Bible is

also our final authority. Second, because God intended it to be the only and final authority, the Bible also becomes our sufficient authority. Third, as Barrett explained, “Not only is the Bible our supreme authority, but it is the authority that provides believers with all the truth they need for salvation and for following after Christ.” (Barrett, 2016, p. 26). Finally, the Bible describes how believers should treat Scripture and what authority it possesses. Since the Bible claims to be the final authority, “The burden of proof rests on those critical of Scripture, for they must answer the question, ‘Why shouldn’t Scripture’s voice be the first one we listen to?’” (Barrett, 2016, p. 240).

Van den Belt (2016) discusses Martin Luther’s response to his ex-communication in 1520 by the Pope. Van den Belt quotes Luther’s response:

I want, that Scripture alone reign (*sola scripturam regnare*) and that it not be interpreted according to my spirit or that of other human beings, but I want it to be understood by itself and according to its own spirit. (Van den Belt, 2016, p. 209).

This statement is considered the origin of the phrase *Sola Scriptura*. This is strategic by Luther, as Van den Belt reported, “Luther’s appeal to Scripture is a means to protect the doctrine of grace, received through faith without works, from the power of the church.” (Van den Belt, 2016, p. 209). The previous evidence points back to the Trinity as the Father provides the written Word that presents the Son as the Savior for mankind to accept through grace from the penalty of death. The Spirit works for the Glory of God, revealing “these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Corinthians 2:10).

God has extended revelation of himself to humanity. Erickson (2013) in *Christian Theology* helps readers to gain an understanding of this revelation. Readers understand that this revelation has two classifications: general and special. Special revelation is specific and is

concerned with writings about topics such as the life of Christ. General revelation happens, and God reveals himself to us in areas like history and nature. These general revelations, while grand, are not always directly credited to God. For example, it is possible to see a rainbow following a thunderstorm, but without the general revelation of Scripture, the context of its meaning would not be known. However, mankind cannot claim ignorance of God's revelation. Scripture corroborates this as the psalmist said, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." (Psalm 19:1). The Apostle Paul addressed this in his letter to the Roman Church:

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20).

Erickson added that "Scripture itself proposes that there is a knowledge of God available through the created physical order." (Erickson, 1998, p. 123). Therefore, whether dealing with general or special revelation from the Bible, it is imperative to understand the Bible as the single final authority. It is God's primary communication method in His relationship with His people. This points back to God speaking (through Scripture) and mankind hearing (reading Scripture) with the expectation of doing what is in the Scripture.

The Inerrancy of Scripture. It was previously established that the Triune God desires man to know Him through the revealing of His Word. Discipleship happens in the biblical community, and God's Word is a critical part of the process. The revealed Word must be trusted and stand up to any scrutiny. In this critical era of biblical scholars, many debates have sparked concerning the history of Scripture and its inerrancy. While these debates remain contentious, as Christians, there is a burden for the Bible to be inerrant. Scholars write much worldwide on inerrancy, including the synoptic problem of the Gospels. What does Jesus say concerning

Scripture? How does He treat these ancient texts? Wenham was quoted by Geisler in *Inerrancy*, exhorting, “There is happily, abundant evidence on which to determine our Lord’s own view of the historicity of Old Testament persons and events.” (Geisler, 1980, pp. 4-5). Wenham went on to say, “Christ held the Old Testament to be historically true, completely authoritative, and divinely inspired.” (Geisler, 1980, p. 6) The primary issue presented by proponents of Bible errancy is human authorship. Inerrancy is a doctrine that is foundational to the Bible and its authority. Ryrie stated it clearly:

Most disastrous consequences must follow our believing that anything false is found in the sacred books...if you once admit into such a high sanctuary of authority once false statement, there will not be left a single sentence of those books, which, if appearing to anyone difficult in practice or hard to believe, may not by the same fatal rule be explained away as a statement, in which intentionally, the author declared what was not true. (Ryrie, 1981, p. 25)

The key is to define what is meant by inerrancy. An unknown author said, “If the only tool you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail” (Unknown). This analogy warns readers that if searching for “problems” with the Bible, an article has been written supporting the thought. Paul warned Timothy concerning this, “For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions” (2 Timothy 4:3). A simple definition is attainable by merely looking at any quality dictionary, but a simple definition will not suffice. Geisler defined inerrancy this way:

Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the social, physical, or life sciences. (Geisler, 2002, p. 294)

Inerrancy is a doctrine that is foundational to the Bible and its authority. There was an assumption that the Word of the Lord was the authority and truth Israel lived. This is

demonstrated in their mission statement, which is directly tied to God and his Word and how that Word is to be lived out in front of God and man.

Deuteronomy 6. The directive in Deuteronomy 6 was for parents in Israel to provide instruction and teach their children, but this directive was very specific. They were to teach them to love God and be a living example. Deuteronomy 6 is the foundational passage for parental discipleship:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

This imperative provided the below list of daily life actions (italics added by the researcher for emphasis) where the Word of God is assumed to be practiced; it was intended to become a way of life for Israel:

1. when you sit in your house
2. when you walk by the way
3. when you lie down
4. when you rise
5. bind them as a sign on your hand
6. frontlets between your eyes
7. write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates

Grisanti (2012), in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, explained that Moses used the opposite terms, such as sit/walk and lie/rise purposefully, to signify not just these specific actions but to include “everything between them” (Grisanti, 2012, P. 557). There was no beginning and an end. God intends for parents to teach their children to love the Lord in and during every aspect of their lives; this is discipleship. This imperative was unending, permeating every aspect of Hebrew life and culture. Old Testament discipleship centers around the family unit. It is

rooted in hearing, doing, and then being – living it out and teaching it to others, who then will teach it to others.

Proverbs 22:6 and Psalm 78:5-7. Proverbs author, in typical style for this genre in the Bible, does not mince words. If parents do this, “Train up a child in the way he should go;” then the result will be, “even when he is old he will not depart from it.” (Proverbs 22:6). This describes a lasting faith in God that is directed to the parents. Psalm 78 offers a slightly lengthier reminder of what was previously commanded. Psalm 78:5-7 says:

He established a testimony in Jacob
and appointed a law in Israel,
which he commanded our fathers
to teach to their children,
that the next generation might know them,
the children yet unborn,
and arise and tell them to their children,
so that they should set their hope in God
and not forget the works of God,
but keep his commandments (Ps 78:5-7).

This reminder explains that this is a command, and it ensures the sustained faith of future generations not to forget the works God already performed but also to keep his commandments by listening and obeying. In Deuteronomy 32, after reading God’s law and Joshua being commissioned to lead Israel, Moses spoke to all the people about being in a relationship with a Holy God. Moses succinctly described Old Testament discipleship, saying:

He said to them, “Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess (Deuteronomy 32:46-47).

When humanity does not obey God’s law, a barrier is created between God and Man. As a result, man’s image is no longer a reflection of God’s image. The image of God is discussed in further detail in the next section.

Image of God. The Persons of God desire humanity to know Him and to live out His truth. This was the task originally given to Israel. God established this covenant, “I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Genesis 6:7). Israel was called to show the world YHWH and live as an example. The image of God is a biblical truth that can be traced throughout Scripture. The earliest entry in the creation story of Genesis, “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). A Logos Bible Software (2021) word search reveals the word “image” is found 123 times in 107 verses. The term appears 102 times in the Old Testament and 21 times in the New Testament. Only the three occurrences of Genesis chapter 1 are in reference to God’s likeness. The remainder of the Old Testament application is about something other than God, typically idols. The New Testament occurrences, except for Acts and Revelations (9), refer to God’s image in the instances but with the distinction of Christ at its core. With this simple analysis of the usage of imagery, the reader can see that man’s beginning was in God’s likeness, and then, after the fall, the intended image of man became tarnished. This is found in the nine occurrences in the New Testament between Acts and Revelation. Sin does not affect God’s image; the impact is that humanity’s image is damaged.

The above biblical information allows readers to see humanity's original design in the Genesis creation account. Readers then also begin to see the impact of sin on man’s image as it can no longer reflect God’s image. Kilner (2015) explained that although sin has entered the world, it has not affected God’s image, but people are damaged. Faber, in *A Critical Examination of the Biblical Teaching on the Image of God, and its Implications for Christian Living*, said:

All deficiencies in the human creature are the result of original sin, and its impact of marring the image of God, it must also be made clear that such deficiencies are not

necessarily the result of sin in that particular individual (Faber, 2008, p. 7).

The impact of the original sin has fundamentally rocked the foundations upon which God intended. The remainder of The Old Testament depicts a challenging life with a sacrificially based restorative system for Israel. God still pursues the restoration of humanity, as demonstrated in the cyclical nature of Israel's story of God's saving provision. Only after man understands who Jesus is, does the whole story begin to come into focus—looking at Faber again as he quoted Hodge concerning the revelation from the Gospel of John:

‘The question of why the Son is called ‘The Word’ may be answered by saying that the term expresses both his nature and his office. The word is that which reveals. The Son is the εἰκὼν and ἀπαύγασμα of God, and therefore his word. It is his office to make God known to his creatures.’ (Faber, 2008, p. 68).

The turning point of God's image in man comes to believers in Jesus. Kilner (2015) explained the affirmation in which the New Testament provided Christ as God's image. Jesus embodies the image of God. That understanding helps biblical readers to process why New Testament writers continually emphasize our faith in Christ and the transformative power that comes from Him. This leads to “the idea that people are being liberated from sin to fulfill all that God intends them to be as human beings created in the image of God” (Kilner, 2015, p. 233). God intended the restoration of mankind to the original image through the completed work of Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection. This is affirmed in Scripture, “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 8:5).

Sin

Old Testament discipleship centered around the familial teaching of the next generation to love and obey God and to love others, while New Testament discipleship centers around Jesus through the body of Christ or previously established biblical community. Sin enters the world in Genesis 3 as Adam and Eve sin against God by eating fruit they were instructed not to eat.

Vander Wiele (2014) spoke to the disruption sin has on the biblical community creating a barrier between man and God and man's ability to practice discipleship. The barrier separating man from God, caused by man's disobedience to God's command, seen in Genesis 3:8, where man is hiding from God. There is an impact on the individual sinner and the biblical community.

Additionally, man's image, although created in God's likeness, is now distorted by sin. This distortion is the catalyst for Jesus and man's spiritual formation and biblical community. Vander Wiele said, "Biblical community, as part of one's Christian formation, can only exist when believers utilize each other to become more conformed to the image of Christ" (Vander Wiele, 2014, p. 39).

Consequences of Sin. The consequence of sin is severe and understood by humanity after the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden. The Apostle Paul directly stated the cost of sin, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). Moses instructed the generations to teach future generations; an example of the consequences of not obeying the command in Deuteronomy 6 can be seen in the sons of Eli, the priest.

Vander Wiele (2022) discussed Eli's worthless sons as an example of what happens when family discipleship does not occur. In 1 Samuel 2, the sons of Eli find trouble, "Thus the sin of the young men was very great in the sight of the Lord..." (1 Samuel 2:17). Eli did rebuke his sons, "...But they would not listen to the voice of their father, for it was the will of the Lord to put them to death" (1 Samuel 2:25). This disregard by Eli's sons led to their death. Eli's sons died in a battle between Israel and the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:17). The ark of the covenant was captured in that battle.

Also, in 1 Samuel and tied to Eli's story, Vander Wiele (2022) discussed the benefit of hearing and listening to God. After receiving Eli's blessing (1 Samuel 1:17), Hannah had her

first-born son whom she lent to God. (vs. 28). Eli helped Samuel understand that he must listen and respond to God. (1 Samuel 3:8-9). Samuel grew up listening and obeying God, “And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground” (1 Samuel 3:19).

Vander Wiele’s conclusions of the benefits of listening to God are below:

- Salvation
- Eternal Security in God
- Identity in God
- Ability to Understand God’s Word and others recognize that you know God
- Experiencing God’s will for your life

Because sin entered the world in the Genesis 3 account of the fall of man, God requires a penalty to overcome the barrier sin created. The penalty is death for all sinners. Paul exclaimed, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). The result is that God and man became separated, and a sacrifice was necessary. God’s righteousness was displayed as he sent Jesus, “whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness because, in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins” (Romans 3:25).

Jesus

The New Testament established Jesus as Savior and is the focal point of New Testament discipleship. Old Testament discipleship centered around the familial teaching of the next generation to love and obey God and to love others, while New Testament discipleship centers around Jesus. Discipleship is found in mankind’s identity in Christ (Romans 12) and obedience to all He commanded (John 14:15). This happens now through the body of Christ or the previously established biblical community. Jesus alluded to the hierarchy established within the Trinity in John 5. Jesus said, “...Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does

likewise” (John 5:19). Jesus obeyed the Father, and the Body of Christ must then hear and obey Jesus. Bonhoeffer (1995) discussed that the Church is Jesus’ image and wrote, “In the Body of Christ we are become ‘like Christ’” (Bonhoeffer, 1995, p. 257). The obvious New Testament reference to highlight discipleship comes from Jesus himself:

And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matthew 28:19-20)

This command from Jesus is clear; however, the second directive concerning teaching all the commands has gotten lost. That is the discipleship aspect of the Great Commission. Shirley (2018) explained that Jesus came to earth fully man but had to leave a perfectly designed fellowship with God and the Holy Spirit. Initially, Jesus’ primary focus was on the relationship between Father and the Son; he spent three years with his disciples preparing for the ministry ahead. Shirley said, “Their preparation was an interplay between developing an intimate relationship with Jesus, forming a community of love among the disciples, and ministering to those inside and outside the fellowship” (Shirley, 2018, p. 376).

In understanding who the disciples were in Jesus’ ministry and considering the applicability of the call, this researcher contends that a follower of Jesus is first a disciple, then a disciple maker. This leads to a disciple being known for their identity in Jesus; then, the Holy Spirit carries out the biblical call to discipleship through the body of Christ. Shirley said it this way:

Jesus’ model for discipleship (John 15:1-16) is grounded within a context of human and divine relationships: abiding in Christ, fellowshiping with other disciples, and ministering to needs of others in the world and in the church (Shirley, 2018, p. 376).

The New Testament has an abundance of Scripture referencing discipleship. Mbennah (2016)

discussed discipleship regarding Ephesians 4:13-16. He pointed out that Ephesians 4:1-16 is not simply a call to unity but a call to grow in spiritual maturity. Verse 13 specifies that the goal of spiritual maturity ultimately allows the church to be “in full conformity with Christ, is an accurate full physical manifestation of Christ in the world” (Mbennah, 2016, p. 127). In John 14, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the Trinitarian hierarchy previously discussed when Philip asks Jesus, “Lord, show us the father...” (v. 8). Jesus disappointedly explained to Philip that God sent Him saying, “...I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.” (v. 10). Jesus then extended this to mankind saying, “...whoever believes in me will also do the works I do” (v. 12) and finally extending the Trinitarian chain of command to the Holy Spirit. Jesus explained, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever” (John 14:15-16).

Love is central to Old and New Testament discipleship but always includes obedience and identity. The Gospel is the good news of Jesus shared in love by followers of Jesus. One of Jesus’ first acts in his three-year ministry was to begin calling his twelve disciples (Mark 1:16-20). Vander Wiele (2022) discussed three major aspects of being a disciple.

- Hearing/learning—The term disciple is not found in the Old Testament but translates as a learner. Discipleship characteristics are observed, and Israel was to teach the next generations to hear/learn and obey God.
- Doer—A disciple is a doer of God’s commands. For the Old Testament, this included teaching future generations to be doers (Deuteronomy 6) and cemented in New Testament discipleship in James 1.
- Communally Relational—This aspect focuses on truth and love with the central focus on God’s love. Jesus gave this in a new commandment in John 13.

This was in response to Jesus’ final command in Matthew 28, but He gave a new command also. Jesus said, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:34). Mounce (2007) referred to this by stating

that Jesus' life "defines the meaning of love" and, "Love is the evidence of discipleship." (Mounce, 2007, p. 557). The Apostle Paul explained, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). Vander Wiele said, "The Practice of Discipleship is Assumed in the Family and Community of God" (Vander Wiele, 2022).

The Need for Discipleship

A theological basis for discipleship has been established that lies in commands from the Old and New Testaments. Discipleship restores humanity's image to God's likeness.

Discipleship is a biblical process that results in loving God and others and leads to making disciples of others. It is accomplished through spiritual development and calls for the obedience of the believer to go and make disciples once a believer is justified by the free gift of grace that cost Jesus his life. Due to sin, man is separated from God and needs a savior, which comes by grace from God. Because Scripture explains that the cost of sin is death (Romans 3:23), God responds in love to the needs of his people. The Apostle John wrote:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (John 3:16-17).

Submission to Christ is to deny self; Matthew wrote, "Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24). Jesus is not talking only about salvation, but that discipleship as a way of life. Carson said it this way, "Death to self is not so much a prerequisite of discipleship to Jesus as a continuing characteristic of it" (Carson, 2010, p. 43). The disciples and other Christians were moving away from what was established by the world as good and right. Christ wanted more for his disciples, a relationship with the Father that comes only through Him. What does submission

to Christ look like in our lives, how is it applied, and what does Scripture reveal? Two sections of Scripture bring this to a point:

“And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:37-39)

A second passage from the Apostle Paul highlights others before self, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4).

Submission to Christ is following him, even if the cost is grave. This is easy to say but much more challenging to live.

“You will never fully experience Jesus while staying in your comfort zone. You will only experience Him when you go where He goes. Following Jesus means following Him wherever He leads, even if it is uncomfortable. Would you be willing to die for Jesus Christ? Obviously you would never really die for Jesus unless you were fully following Him right now.” (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 90).

Love, above all else, stands at the center of salvation and discipleship. Old Testament discipleship was like New Testament discipleship on the topic of love. Love was still central. Brandewie (2020) stated that family discipleship in the *Shema* in Deuteronomy 6 “represented the confessional apex of the Israelite people and operated both theologically and practically as a continual reminder of Israel's sole devotion to their one and only God, who also committed and devoted himself to his people” (Brandewie, 2020, p. 27). Grace, however, is the initiating event for discipleship and Bonhoeffer said about this grace:

Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift which as to be asked for, the door at which one has to knock. It is costly, because it calls to discipleship; it is grace, because it calls us to follow *Jesus Christ*. It is costly, because it costs people their lives; it is grace, because it thereby makes them live. It is costly because it condemns sin; it is grace, because it justifies the sinner. (Bonhoeffer, 2003, p. 45).

Theoretical Framework for the Study

The previous section established a theological framework for discipleship. It was necessary to establish the theoretical framework of discipleship as well. Christians must do more than understand the command for discipleship; Christians and Christian leaders must also act. This section laid out a theoretical framework forming a basis for the study based on existing literature. This study intended to examine the lived experiences of mature Christians; in doing so, a literature review reveals what and how discipleship is performed today and in recent history. The researcher examined the literature on the church's role in discipleship along with discipleship approaches and potential gaps. This may point to a gap in discipleship in the home which the researcher experienced as an adolescent. Also, in this section the researcher highlighted the stages of discipleship and the spheres of relationships in a disciple's life.

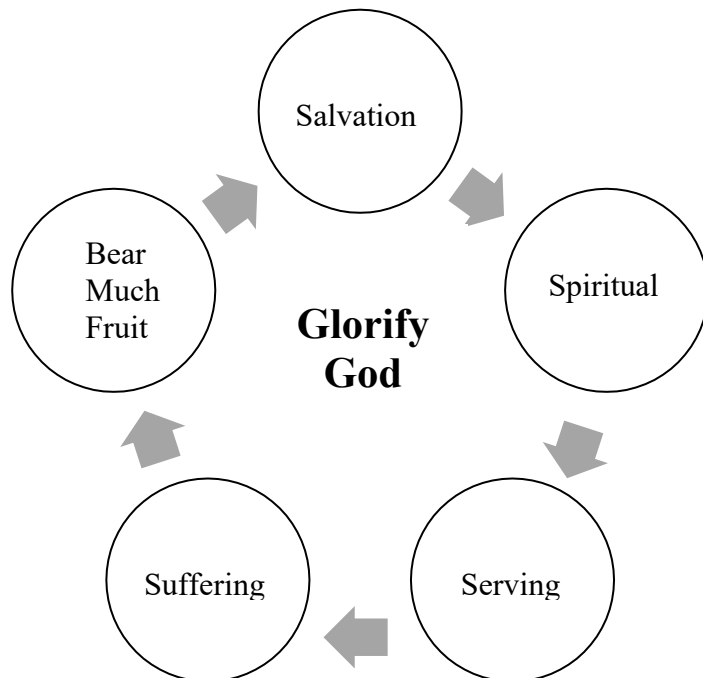
The Role of the Church

The church has evolved over the years with the early beginnings of the church in the home. The church began in Israelite homes when God gave His command in Deuteronomy 6. The Acts 2 believers gathered as a single body separate from the home and was the first church. The church eventually morphed into what is seen today with buildings, pastoral staff, programs, and ministries. Shirley said about this model, "The assumption of this model was that staff members at every level of life, along with a corps of trained volunteers, could provide comprehensive spiritual development for every family member at any life stage" (Shirley, 2018, p. 1).

It is not a secret that the American Church is in decline. This phenomenon is seen in several studies, including Pew Research Center (2015) on Religious Landscape in America, that indicate 35% of Millennials are unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist. A more recent Pew

Research Center (2021) study indicated that U.S. self-identified Christians make up 63% of the population. This is down from 75% in 2011. Conversely, the same study indicated that three-in-ten (29%) of all U.S. adults are ‘nones’ or unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist. The predictions do not get better for the future. A Pew Research Center study in September 2022, *Modeling the Future of Religion in America*, indicates a trend in all scenarios modeled that U.S. Christians will fall below 50% of the population by the year 2070. That same 2022 study also indicated that the most likely scenario modeled would show the religiously unaffiliated rise to 48% in that same time frame.

Willard (2014) discussed that the church is distracted. The model mentioned above has caused the church to lose its primary focus. Willard stated that the church needs to change direction under God’s direction in a direction “that makes spiritual formation in Christlikeness *the exclusive primary goal of the local congregation*” (Willard, 2014, p. 252). Consider then Earley and Dempsey’s (2013) point that “THE organizing principle, then, is the glory of God.” (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 15). The duo provided this visual for the stages of development in a person with God’s glory at the center.

Figure 1*Stages of Development**Earley and Dempsey, 2013, p. 16*

The goal then for everyone is Christlikeness for the glory of God. The tool God chose was the church. The Apostle Paul expounded on this:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (English Standard Version, 2016, Ephesians 4:11-13).

The explanation provided by Paul gives everyone a job, but that job is very specific as Paul points out and is kingdom driven. It is towards the fullness of Christ and the Glory of God.

Discipleship Approaches and Gaps

The sheer volume of books on discipleship and church models and approaches can leave a Christian wondering what or how to disciple others. This section will highlight some church models and approaches to discipleship but will focus on three elements of discipleship that

should be present in every model. Earley and Dempsey (2013) in their book *Disciple Making is...* laid out four major church models of traditional, attractional, organic and hybrid with their views on 25 church attributes. Each of these models has positive and negative attributes, but all of them are part of the current condition of the declining American Church.

Discipleship in the Home

Discipleship in the home originates with obedience to the previous biblical text in Deuteronomy 6, but other passages of family struggle reinforce the need for discipleship in the home. Shirley (2013) wrote about the first family fracture between Adam and Eve. He said, “Their sinful choice infected their own children and was woven into the fabric of future families and nations” (Shirley, 2013, p. 7-8). Then, David’s family conflict initiated by adultery with Bathsheba. David, even though he was a Godly man, began a conflict that divided the nation of Israel. Israel desired a king to rule them instead of God because they did not want to follow Samuel’s sons. The leaders of Israel gathered and said to Samuel, “...Behold, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Samuel 8:5). The Apostle Paul rebuked the church at Corinth for tolerating sexual immorality by accepting a son sleeping with his father’s wife. Paul said, “Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?” (1 Corinthians 5:6). Discipleship in the home is where the command in Deuteronomy 6 begins, with parents. Shirley (2013) pointed out, however, that “Leaders had not been trained or encouraged to engage and equip parents in their most important role as spiritual leaders and disciple-makers” (Shirley, 2013, p. 7). Additionally, the faith of youth was not surviving for those who were not disciplined in the home.

Theological Training

The title may overstate the term theological training, but the intent is for God’s people to

know God's word. A major element of this is understanding the authority of Scripture. Discipleship is without meaning if the Bible is not a trusted source of authority for believers. The authority of Scripture is a fundamental necessity of spiritual growth. The Bible, in contemporary Christian circles, is not always viewed as authoritative. This can be especially true today when relationships can be impacted. Often the Bible is used "like a self-help book. We scour it for verses that will bolster our sagging spirits or help us to love our spouse better" (Galli, 2015, p. 2). Galli emphasized the need for Christian leaders to begin a "new battle for the Bible" (Galli, 2015, p. 2).

The battle for the Bible goes back to Nicaea in A.D. 325. These historical events revealed an understanding that the larger community can be wrong and for an extended period. The Arian party caused the Nicene controversy even though they lost the vote at Nicaea. The Arians were in power with an impressive political influence. This is a key learning that "Consensus, as important as it is at time, cannot be the final rule of faith and practice... The Bible is." (Galli, 2015, p. 2) The importance of holding the line on these biblical teachings does not just impact those teachings but *all* biblical teachings. This includes "The Bible's unique message, its special revelation, is the revelation of the God who has brought us salvation in Jesus Christ." (Galli, 2015, p. 3).

The Bible is the Word of God, divinely inspired, inerrant, and the final authority, and as leaders, it is crucial to understand this theology. As previously discussed, Geisler (2002) explained that Scripture is prophetic and originates from God using prophets. The Apostle Paul's assertion in 2 Timothy 3:16 text that reads, "All Scripture is breathed out by God..." affirms for Christians the authority of Scripture. (2 Timothy 3:16). Since the Bible is the final authority, Christians and Christian leaders need to understand the doctrine. Jesus himself said when

speaking of his fulfillment of the law:

Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:19)

This is affirmed as the psalmist says, “Forever, O LORD, your word is firmly fixed in the heavens.” (Psalms 119:89) Jesus upholds the psalmist’s claim when he says, “For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18)

Knowing the history of the Bible and the canon may be beneficial for Christians to have, but it is more important for Christians to know what is in the Bible. Austin (2019) notes that biblical literacy had degraded recently that church goers have very little Bible knowledge. Auston goes on to say, “Biblical illiteracy contributes to the failure of churches to present Christ to the world in a lifechanging manner.” (Austin, 2019, p. 2). Coleman (2020) summarized Grudem et al. when he wrote, “...that followers of Christ essentially allow the Holy Spirit to rewrite their lives through continual teaching about God that leads to an application of Scripture” (Coleman, 2020, p. 18). Coleman listed several themes during his literature review concerning biblical literacy. These themes were:

- Application in response to Reading the Bible
- Connecting with God through Reading
- Effectiveness in the World through Reading the Bible
- Hindrances to Reading the Bible
- Knowing God by Reading the Bible
- Spiritual Growth and Maturity from Reading the Bible (Coleman, 2020, p. 37)

These six themes are important to address, however, the theme that stood out to the researcher was spiritual growth and maturity from reading the Bible. It is this researcher’s belief that this point is the outcome from the other themes. God intends for believers to know him and become

more like Jesus. God's character, love, and commands are in the Bible. Discipleship must include the theological training to read and understand God's word.

Looking again at what Jesus commanded in Matthew 28, Steven Davis (2002) points out that "teaching" disciples to obey all of Jesus' commands is nurturing and stated, "Nurturing is a term that points to the responsibility Jesus Christ has given the church in helping all converts to grow to be more and more like Him" and "...the local church can legitimately be referred to as a school of Christian discipleship" (Davis, 2002, p. 21).

Evangelism for Reproduction

This section will discuss the element of evangelism for reproduction which results in the intentional sharing of the gospel to others. A Christian matures to the point that reproduction of a person with faith in Jesus as savior and a life that results in more disciples, in other words, disciple-making. Evangelism for reproduction is Christians making disciples who make disciples. This starts with the Gospel being shared by people. The church must wrap its head around this concept. Earley and Wheeler (2010) emphatically suggested the only difference between Christians and the rest of the world is Jesus, and God's plan to share Him with is people. The duo stated, "God's method is mankind. His plan is people. His strategy is you and I." (Earley & Wheeler, 2010, p. 45). So, then if a new believer is to become mature enough in his faith to produce new believers, discipleship must occur. This only comes from the Holy Spirit. Bill Hull said concerning this, "The Holy Spirit is in the business of making us new people by transforming our mind and changing our character" (Hull, 2014, p. 101). To further strengthen the thought, the Apostle Paul said: "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Jesus led a life of making disciples. According to Ferguson (2013) in *Church History* His three- year ministry gathered a following that raised hopes and led to the eventual confession of Jesus as Messiah by his Disciples. Jesus transformed the lives of these men and molded them into disciples who would start the church and change the world. These twelve men handed the baton to the contemporary church to continue the work conversion and transformation. It is a process and Bonhoeffer said:

The transformation into the divine image will become ever more profound, and the image of Christ in us will continue to increase in clarity. This is a progression in us from on level of understanding to another and from on degree of clarity to another, toward an ever-increasing perfection in the form of the likeness to the image of the Son of God. (Bonhoeffer, 2003, p. 286).

Related Literature

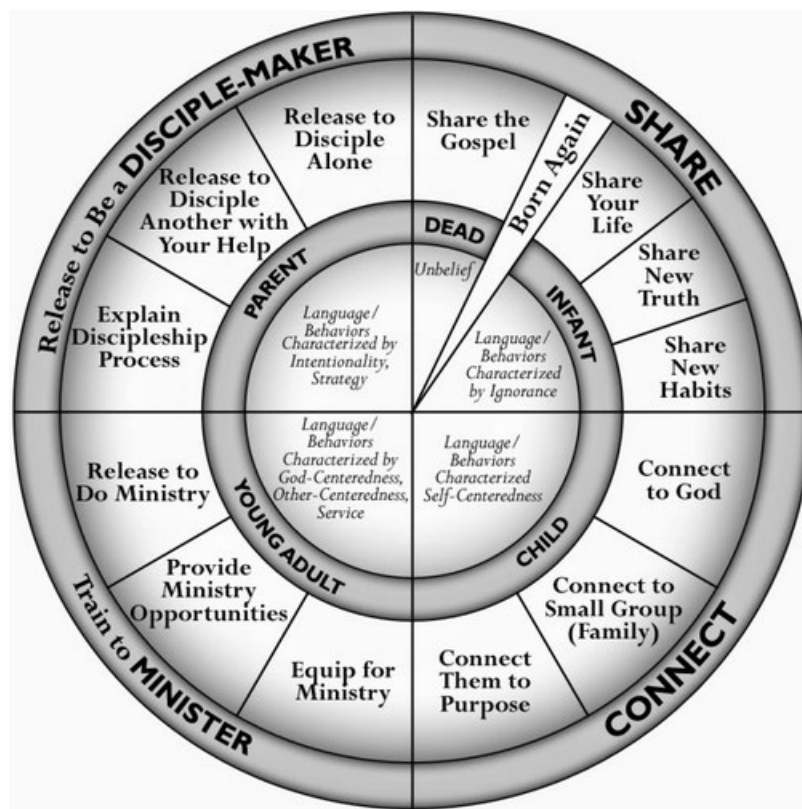
A review of related literature was performed to gain a more robust understanding of discipleship and the variety of related topics. However, due to the volume of available material, this is not an exhaustive review of discipleship models and material; it provides the reader with a firm understanding of the subtopics relevant to the study.

The Five Stages of Discipleship

While establishing the need for discipleship and many references to a discipleship process, the researcher concluded some insight is needed. Putman and Harrington (2013) described that five stages exist within the discipleship process. The five stages of discipleship are 1) spiritually dead, 2) infant, 3) children, 4) young adult, and 5) parent. The five stages of discipleship are a process. Putman compares the maturation of a disciple to the development of a human. Figure 2 below from Real Life Ministries provides a visual of the stages of discipleship and some characteristics associated with each of the five stages.

Figure 2

The Five Stages of Discipleship



(Real Life Ministries, 2016)

This diagram is a tool that pictorially shows the stages of discipleship. Putman said it is “helpful to have a tool, and the skill to use it, that allows us to quickly and accurately assess where we are during any given time, as well as where the one we are discipling is” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 57).

Spiritually Dead

This stage, on the surface, is the simplest to understand. “People in this stage have not yet accepted Christ as Lord and Savior” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 61). On the surface, it is simple.

However, many who claim to be Christians do not have Jesus as their savior and no evidence of

fruit in their lives, nor do they have the Holy Spirit within them. This passage from Matthew is alarming for those in the church who have no relationship with Christ. Matthew wrote:

‘Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ (Matt 7:21-23).

The researcher has experienced these self-proclaiming Christians, and they are difficult to identify, especially within the body of Christ. Because of the difficulty identifying people in this stage, disciple-makers must understand the stages and accurately identify people within their respective stages.

Infant Disciple Stage

Disciples in this stage are primarily new Christians but sometimes are “longtime ‘Christians’ who have remained stagnant in their faith.” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 63). This is the first stage of being spiritually dead. The infant stage is not where disciples are intended to stay for a significant amount of time. This stage is a steppingstone to the next, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.” (1 Peter 2:2). People in this stage should be eager to learn and grow, if not, a thorough assessment should be made of this disciple. These disciples’ behavior and language are signified by ignorance. (Putnam et al., 2013, p. 60). The Hebrews addressed the infant and children stage that some disciples stay saying:

For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. (Hebrews 5:12-13).

Children Disciple Stage

Putman et al. (2013) explains disciples in the children stage have self-centered behavior and language. These disciples are more self-sufficient than infant disciples but still lack significant maturity. Looking at typical characteristics of children can help determine if a disciple is in this stage. These disciples can do many things for themselves and often serve in the church. However, at this stage, “their primary need is a strong relational connection to a mature believer so they can make the transition to a more God- and kingdom-focused life.” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 67).

Young Adult Stage

The young adult stage is the transitional stage between the child stage and being a spiritual parent. These disciples are often God-centered and are eager to serve God. Young adult disciples are very self-sufficient and are at a point where they understand more what God’s desire is for their lives. “The key concept with spiritual adults is they are orienting their lives around God and his perspective” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 68). However, these young adults still have needs. They still need mentorship and deeper relationships with spiritually mature Christians. Mentorship provides the necessary coaching and encouragement to push them to be spiritually mature disciples.

Parent Stage

Putman et al. (2013) explains the parent stage as the final or most mature stage in the discipleship process. A distinction is made here between adult and parent for the understanding that spiritual parents make disciples. These disciples continue to grow and learn; they are capable and trusted to teach others. These disciples have an in-depth knowledge of God’s word; they are kingdom centered and focused on the needs of less mature Christians. The parent stage is the

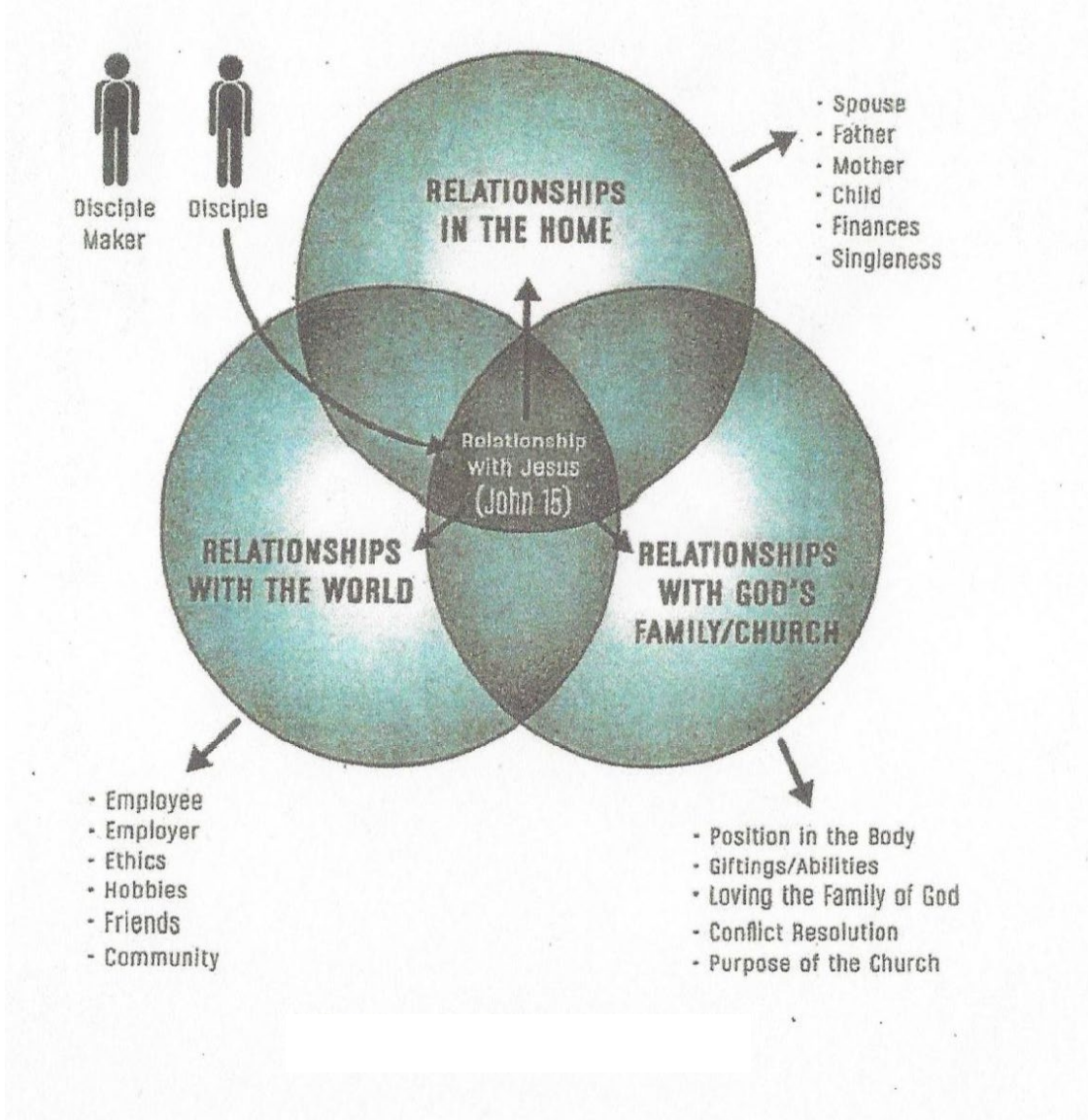
place that God intends for us to reach and maintain as Christians. The Apostle Paul explains in 2 Timothy:

“You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. (2 Tim 2:1-7).

Four Spheres of Life

The researcher previously established the relational aspect of discipleship. Putman et al. (2013) describes four spheres as a model for the disciple’s relationships. These spheres are the relationship with God, the relationship with God’s family or the church, the relationships in the home, and the relationship with the outside world. The Four Spheres model hinges on the centrality of Christ to the disciple. This relationship then impacts the other three. This model has three concentric circles overlapping, with the overlapping section being the center, the disciple’s relationship with God. “This sphere is the core, the hub that unites the other spheres together.” (Putman et al., 2013, p. 85). What is the significance of this model? It can be used to illustrate to disciples of any stage what the discipleship process is centered on. It also serves as a reminder of the spiritually mature dependence of our relationships on Christ. When Christ is not the center of a disciple, the other spheres are not correctly balanced in a person’s life.

Figure 3
The Four Spheres of Life



The stages of discipleship and spheres of life are merely tools to aid discussion and awareness. It is healthy for the body of Christ to self-examine and determine areas that need improvement. The key to examining oneself is to use the correct comparison, Christ. This type of exercise aims for a disciple to analyze their life, compare it against the model or standard and identify any areas or relationships that need improvement. Discipleship is a process where

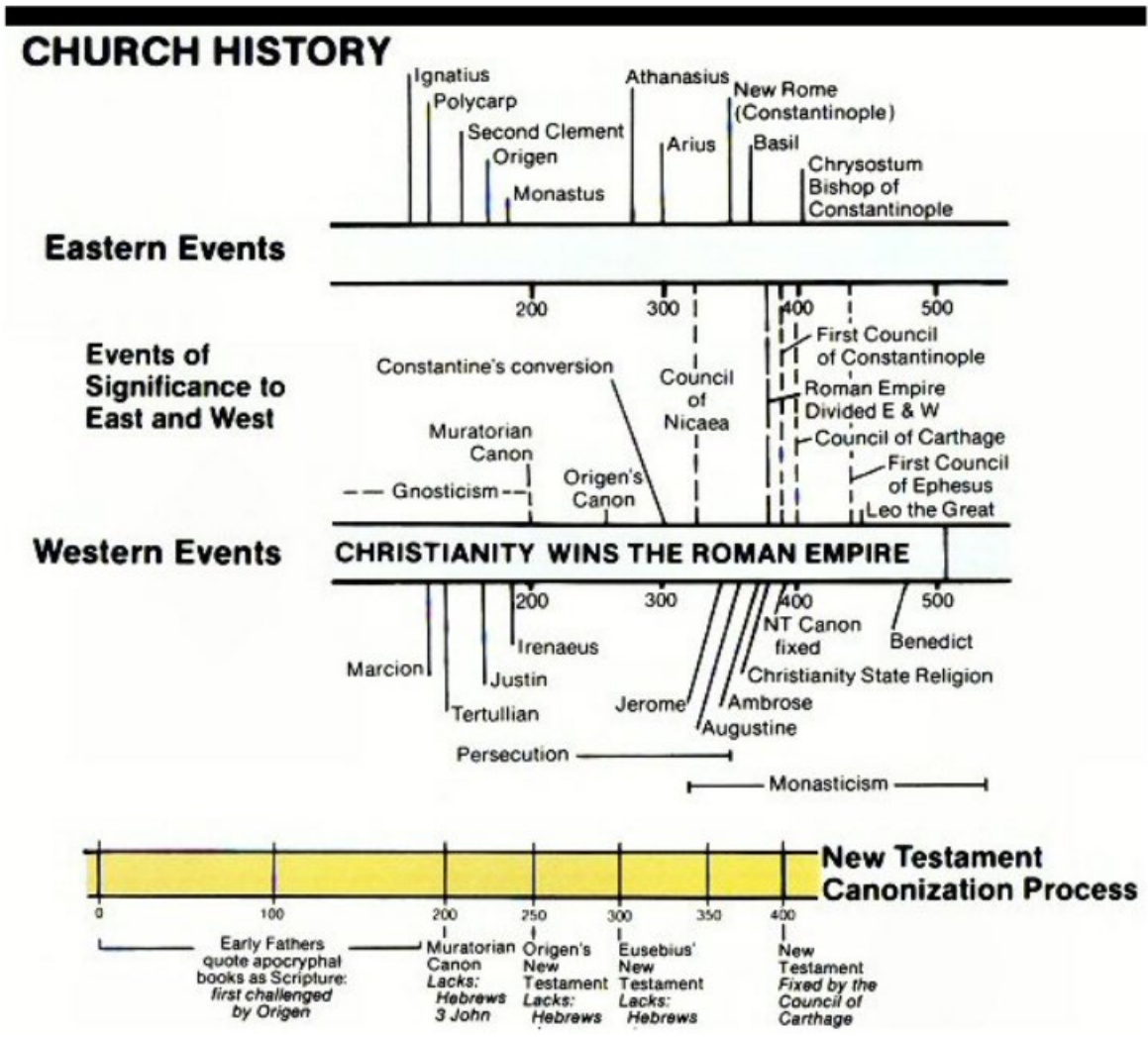
believers continually grow and mature into fully equipped disciples who obediently follow all the commands that Jesus taught, especially loving others and making them disciples.

History of Discipleship

This study examines the *current* state of discipleship in Hartsville, South Carolina, area Baptist Churches, but it is vital to understand the origins and progress of discipleship over the years. A sentiment exists that history can inform the future. Winston Churchill, although not the originator of the thought, wrote, “Those that fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” (Virginia Tech, 2021). Concerning the history of discipleship, Christians, certainly not doomed, might be informed to repeat the past. This may be an appropriate inverse of the history-repeating aphorism since discipleship originated with Jesus. Dayton Hartman (2016), in his book *Church History for Modern Ministry*, warns pastors that it is foolish to ignore the past. Hartman wrote, “The past was once the present, and the present is what dictates the future. For Christian theology, this is an invaluable reminder” (Hartman, 2016, p. 3). This overview is not intended to be an overview of the church or an exhaustive look at its history. This brief history overview is intended to help the reader understand the origins and history of the church and discipleship influences over the years. Hull’s (2014) history review in *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, which was admittedly shortened, was composed of a look at bishops, three “maverick” monks, the Middle Ages and then highlights seven people whose efforts during the Protestant Reformation helped shape discipleship into what it is today. The three subsequent (Figures 4-6) are a simple visual of the Church's history to aid in understanding the path of discipleship over time.

Figure 4

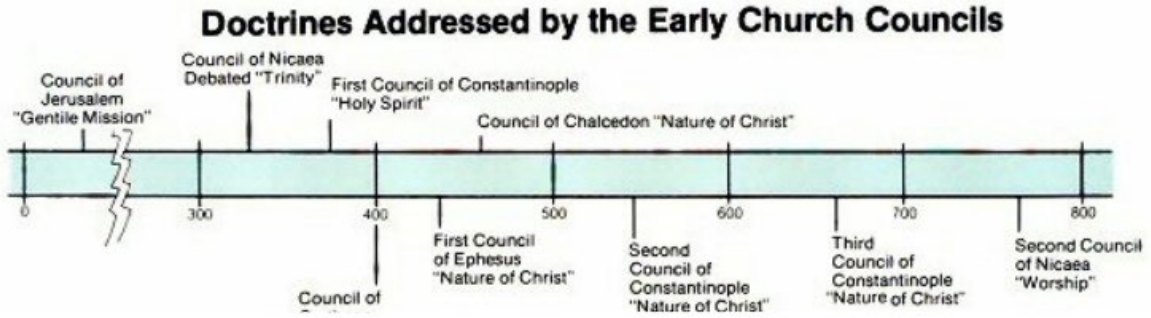
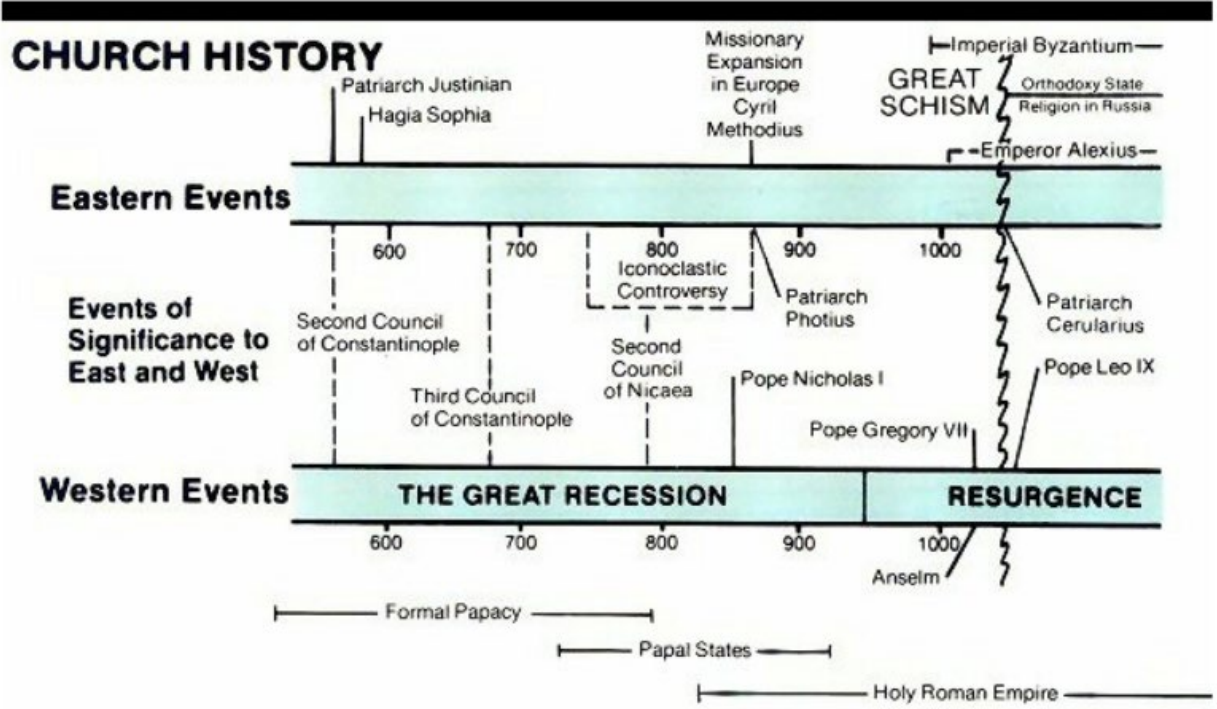
Church History 0-500 AD



(Smith et al., 1993, p. 33)

Figure 5

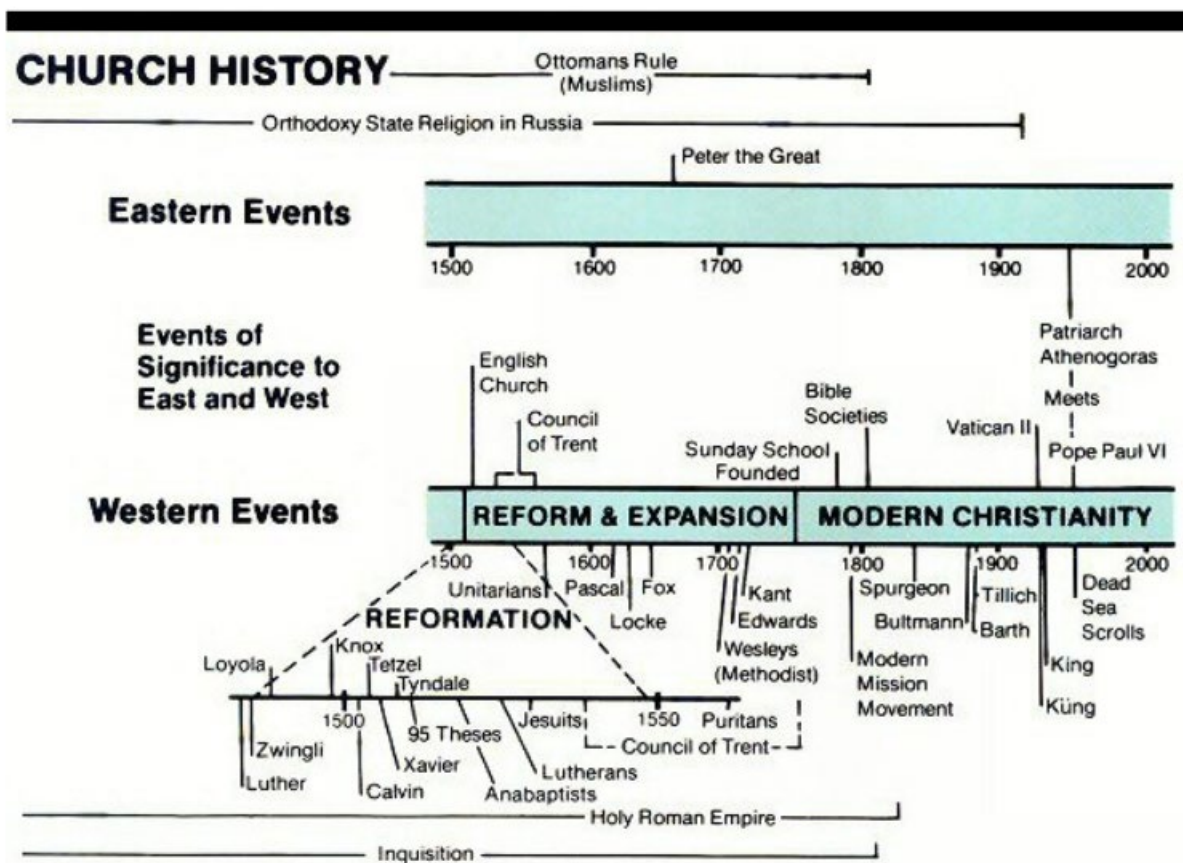
Church History 600-1000 AD



(Smith et al., 1993, p. 35)

Figure 6

Church History 1500-2000 AD



Jesus: The Beginning of Discipleship

The beginning of man began with God in the Genesis creation account (Genesis 1), and it is fitting that the beginning of discipleship starts with the Son of Man, Jesus. Jesus began his ministry by calling the 12 disciples, and this can be read in the Gospels. Taylor's dissertational work in Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Matthew highlights this aspect. Taylor said, "His discipling ministry was highly relational. Being Jesus's disciple meant becoming part of his new community of disciples, primarily the twelve, but also included a larger group of disciples and ultimately becoming the church." (Taylor, 2021, p. 6). Putman and Harrington (2013) used Jesus' invitation in Matthew 4:19, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew

4:19), not only as an invitation but as the definition of disciple with three key elements from the passage. The first was to follow Jesus. A disciple recognizes Jesus not only as a savior but as Lord. The next element is Jesus “making” our hearts to be more like His. This is a response to the Holy Spirit in a disciple. The third element is to become a “fisher of men.” This response is joining Jesus in reaching the lost. Jesus’ ministry was for everyone, and he said, “...Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” (Mark 2:17). Jesus’ ministry on earth ended with his command in Matthew 28 just prior to his ascension. This began the start of the early church and discipleship.

Acts 2 Church, The Disciples, and Paul

As the burden of work was transferred from Jesus to His followers, so began the work of the early church and the missional movement of early believers. Luke writes the best account for this early work in the Book of Acts. This effort did not come without the promise of help that Jesus made at ascension to be with the apostles always (Matthew 28:19). The biblical account of the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), where the apostles received the Holy Spirit allows the men to speak in tongues and be heard by people in their language. Following this, Peter’s sermon was led to the salvation of “about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The Acts 2 church emerged out of this event where Luke explains the phenomenon:

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

Two other events that this researcher will discuss are the selection of Stephen to serve (Acts 6:5) and his subsequent speech and stoning (Acts 7). Ferguson (2013) explained that the stoning of Stephen scattered the believers from Jerusalem from the persecution and led to the start of the Antioch Church. The early church leaders sent Barnabas to Antioch to teach the new believers (Acts 11:22), "...And in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians." (Acts 11:26). The next event is the conversion of the Apostle Paul found in Acts 9. The Apostle Paul's zeal for the law and the persecution of the church (Philippians 3:6) was now aimed at the gospel of Jesus. Paul's three missionary trips established several churches in Asia, and letters to those churches are a sizable percentage of the New Testament. Paul did not only preach of the salvation from Christ through faith (Ephesians 2:8) but also to begin a process of achieving maturity in Christ that allows the Body of Christ to grow due to the gospel (Ephesians 4:13-16).

Bishops and Monks

Hull (2014) wrote, "Clement and Constantine serve as bookends of early church history." (Hull, 2014, p. 53). Clement of Rome, Ignatius of Antioch, and Polycarp of Smyrna are the three bishops that Hull (2014) pointed out as influential early disciple makers. Clement of Rome, as Hull explained, was best known for his letter to the Corinthian church and likely interacted with several of the 12 apostles. Hull referred to Ignatius of Antioch as the Bishop of Bishops and said he "wrote the book on bishops and their work. Fortunately, that means he wrote the book on how to disciple a congregation." (Hull, 2014, p. 54). Ferguson (2013) explained that Ignatius of Rome wrote seven letters, six to the churches in Asia and one to Polycarp of Smyrna. Polycarp was martyred in 156 and is known for his letter to the Philippian church. Glimm et al. (1947) wrote that Polycarp was appointed by the Apostle John, whom he encountered in Ephesus.

The legalization of Christianity in 325 by the emperor Constantine allowed the church to morph into Christendom, Hull (2014) explained. More and more bishops were appointed eventually calling out the bishop of Rome as the leader of the bishops and now known as the Pope. There is a stark contrast between the early bishops of Clement, Ignatius, and Polycarp and later bishops under Papal control that is known for “using evil means to maintain control of power and wealth.” (Hull, 2014, p. 58). This abuse of power pushed people to isolation and the emergence of a monastic period and then, eventually, the Protestant Reformation. Hull (2014) explained that this reformation was ignited by an Augustinian monk who had never read the New Testament until he arrived in Rome at the age of twenty-seven years. After reading the New Testament, Luther’s dissatisfaction with the church emerged. Parks (2017) indicated that this led to Luther’s 95 Theses that he nailed to the church door at Wittenberg Castle. Luther’s theses pointed to the corruption of the church and the use of indulgences as a penance for sin, but most importantly, expressed a key biblical theology “of justification by faith alone, in the work of Christ alone.” (Hull, 2014, p. 69).

Discipleship Models

This section of the review will highlight and discuss popular models that have been established to share the gospel and teach people to obey all that Jesus commanded as he instructed in Matthew 28. It is also important to note that the varied models of the church that have been developed over the years have differing methodologies for discipleship and evangelism.

Relational Discipleship-The Model of Jesus

As previously discussed, the relational model established by Jesus is what kicked off the Christian faith a little over 2,000 years ago. This is the obvious starting point when discussing

discipleship models. The researcher previously discussed the decline that is being experienced in American churches, and a lack of discipleship is at the center of the issue. The correct discipleship model is not the real issue, Malone exhorted, "...we have a discipleship issue because we have a love issue. And that is why intimate discipleship matters." (Malone, 2021, p. 4). Jesus' method of discipleship was to have a relationship with his followers; He cared for them, taught them, and He loved them.

Small-Group Discipleship

Another method of discipleship that has been developed utilizes small groups, usually in the home, as a method of discipling others. Earley and Dempsey (2013) explained small groups and the three types of small group categories. Churches are "with" small groups, or the church is comprised "of" small groups, or a church that "is" small groups. The church model section specifies which church model typically emulates which category. Shirley (2013) wrote that commitment to the church is demonstrated one way by being committed to other believers through small groups. He said, "Small groups are where the church becomes the church." (Shirley, 2013, p. 49).

Within the small group model, there are specialized groups that can vary in size and structure. Taylor's (2021) study was on sermon-based small groups versus discipleship groups. He explained the two this way, "sermon-based small groups are eight to sixteen individuals of mixed gender that commit to one another over years of time (long term) with the goal of growing in love for one another," whereas "Discipleship groups are specialized, gender-specific groups of three to four individuals that meet for six to nine months (short term)." (Taylor, 2021, p. 5). The result of Taylor's study was that discipleship groups are more effective than sermon-based groups. For members of a discipleship group, the results demonstrated "that they pursued Christ

more consistently, became more Christ-like, and were more likely to make disciples of others” (Taylor, 2021, p. 128).

Church Models

There is no golden standard that exists in church models except for the characteristics that were established by the fellowship of believers in Acts 2. Those believers did several acts that have been incorporated into the 21st-century church. Those were:

- Devoted themselves to teaching and fellowship with the apostles
- Prayed together
- Ate together
- Spent time together
- Sold their possessions to give to the poor
- Attended the temple together
- Gathered together for meals in their homes

Earley and Dempsey (2013) in *Disciple Making is...* list the major church models and their views and practices. The table below shows those models and practices.

Table 1

Church Models

VIEW/PRACTICE	1. TRADITIONAL	2. ATTRACTIVE	3. ORGANIC	4. HYBRID
CHURCH STRUCTURE	Single pastor/deacon-led or congregation led	Single elder	Multiple elders	Single elders with deacons or elder board
CHURCH LOCATION	Building	Building	Incarnational—lived out in the community	1, 2, and 3 building focused
COMPLEXITY	Simple	Complex	Simple	Extremely Complex
EVANGELISM	If at all — “soul winning”	“Come and see” or “invest and invite”	“Relational missional groups	Mainly “come and see.”
DISCIPLINE	From the pulpit— hearing	Classes— curriculum-driven learning	Mainly small groups— learning & mentoring	1 and 2
SMALL GROUPS	No small groups	“Of” small groups	“Is” small groups	“With” and “of” small groups
CHANGE ATTITUDE	Change is not needed; resistant	Change is accepted b/c of evangelism	Change is constant due to missional living	Change is tolerated but not well received
SPIRITUAL FORMATION	If it happens...it happens at church	Attender is encouraged to become a self-feeder	Intentional mentoring in community	Both personal and community
GIFTS	Not needed	Outward gifts needed	All gifts needed	Needed for the programs
PREACHING	For the Congregation	Toward the seeker	For the believer	1, 2, and 3 but light
GROWTH ENGINE- What drives the church? Or <u>How</u> is success measured?	Maintenance/Survival	Evangelism	Missional/Discipleship	Activity
BUDGET	Limited for the preacher	Support the staff, property, and buildings	Aimed toward the mission	2 and 3 and complex
WORSHIP	On Sunday morning	On Sunday morning	Through the people in the community	2 and 3, but mainly Sunday focused
PRAYER	At the church	Personal	Body life	Personal
LEADERSHIP PHILOSOPHY	Codependent leader—the people need me to minister to and for them	Hierarchical—the people are there to accomplish the leader’s goals	Equipping leadership to develop the people to reach their full potential	Understands equipping leadership but manages a complex organization
LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	No leaders developed	Leaders developed the programs	Disciples developed; leaders emerge for the mission	2 and 3, but limited
SENIOR PASTOR	“Preacher”	Charismatic CEO	Equipper/Teacher	Multitalented
STAFF	Limited staff	Paid staff to run the Sunday programs	It can be paid, but also bi-vocational	Extensive paid staff
SAINT’S ROLE	Watch and pay	Watch and cheer	Involved and active	Watch, pay, cheer, and limited involvement
SAINT’S ATTITUDE	“Watcher”	“Consumer”	“Kingdom Citizen”	1, 2, and 3, but limited
TRAINING	No training	To run the programs	To lead the missional groups	2 and 3 but divided
PERSONAL GOAL	Be faithful	Meet my needs	Fulfill my role in the mission	Both emphasized, but the default is to meet my needs
MISSIONS	Foreign missions board	Local (satellites) and international	Local, national, and international, through church planting	Local (satellites) and international
MULTIPLICATION	Not Applicable	Addition b/c of leadership philosophy	Multiplication oriented	Addition b/c of leadership philosophy
CHURCH PLANTING	Not Applicable	Add satellites/campuses	Multiply churches	2 and 3, but limited

The four church models all have elements of discipleship, and it is accomplished in different ways. The decline of the American Church and the claims of 35% of Millennials as unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist lend themselves towards a change.

Leadership in Discipleship

Leadership in discipleship is no different than leadership in other areas of life. The difference is that leaders in discipleship are leading and shaping people to a more Christ-like version than their previous selves. Leaders in discipleship are not necessarily church leaders, deacons, or pastors. They are simply engaged in the process of discipling others. What does a leader in discipleship look like then? Reggie McNeal, in *Practicing Greatness*, said this, “Practicing greatness requires that the spiritual leader develop some key “disciplines.” These are self-awareness, self-management, self-development, mission, decision making, belonging, and aloneness.” (McNeal, 2006, p. 6). Leadership in discipleship is the ability to translate a vision in a Christ-like, Spirit-led way that maximizes individual efforts toward achieving a common goal while assisting in the spiritual development of individuals to restore humanity to God’s intended relationship.

Christian leaders are typically “called” to their position and sometimes placed by circumstances. Nonetheless, they are leaders. What should a leader strive for? McNeal’s opening quote in his book *Practicing Greatness* reveals this quite bluntly as he quotes Elton Trueblood. “Deliberate mediocrity is a sin.” (McNeal, 2006, p. 1) Greatness exhorts McNeal (2006), in God’s kingdom begins a journey on the road to humility, which does not correlate with a low spotlight. Jesus’ idea of greatness was one involving humility and service. Jesus said, “Even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28). McNeal (2006) provides insight that Christian leaders often possess the same

ambitions that non-Christians possess, the difference is Character. The church, households, government, and the list goes on of places in need of great Christian leaders. Since character and trust are at the top of the list of needed qualities, this further emphasizes the importance of Scripture and its final authority to today's leaders. Christian leadership must trust in the Authority of Scripture. Since Scripture is now established as final and authoritative, it is best to seek examples *from* Scripture. During Jesus' ministry, while traveling through many towns and cities, Jesus saw a teaching moment for his newly selected leaders that He was about to send out. They were to be leaders where they were needed:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. (English Standard Version, 2016, Matt 9:36-38).

Well-known is Paul's second letter, where Paul reveals "the supreme value of Scripture." (Köstenberger, 2006, p. 591) Paul is certainly leaving no room for interpretation as he claims that *God inspires ALL Scripture*. Because God inspires the Bible, the Bible has value. It is useful or profitable for teaching, rebuking, correction, and training in righteousness because God is righteous. Köstenberger explains in verse 17, "The end result of such thorough biblical training will be that the "man of God"—Christians in general and specifically church leaders—will be...complete." (Köstenberger, 2006, p. 591).

A Christian leader is a leader regardless of the context. Christian leadership differs from non-Christian leadership, but how? This instruction comes from Paul to the Ephesian church, "I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (Ephesians 4:1). Worthiness is uniquely consigned in the leader's identity in Christ. Christian leaders must emphasize Godly Character. "Character is the sum total of a

person's distinct qualities, both good and bad, that reflects who he or she is." (Malphurs, 2003, p. 18).

This distinction is where the authority of Scripture becomes a factor. There is much said about character in the Bible. 1 Timothy 3:1- 10 and Titus 1:5-9 provide Paul's character qualifications to the first-century church leaders and elders. Malphurs quotes James Kouzes and Barry Posner, who articulated their "first law of leadership: 'If you don't believe in the messenger, you won't believe the message.'" (Malphurs, 2003, p. 49) This emphasizes the importance of trust in leaders and "at the core of the leaders' credibility and essential to effective leadership..." (Malphurs, 2003, p. 50). Christian leaders are held to a higher standard. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15). It is for these reasons that Christian leaders need to rely on the Authority of Scripture as a foundation for their leadership.

Biblical instruction to the Hebrews from Paul exemplifies the importance of leadership and reliance on sound doctrine, Authority of Scripture, as a foundation. Paul writes to the Hebrews, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever." (Hebrews 13:7-8). Understanding that the people being led will rely on this leadership and Scripture to understand this ministry philosophy:

Leaders must develop a ministry philosophy that simultaneously honors biblical leadership values, embraces the challenges of the times in which they live, and fits their unique gifts and personal development if they expect to be productive over a whole lifetime. (Clinton, 1988, p. 184).

Lastly Clinton (1988) explains that this philosophy is implemented with, "The central task of leadership is *influencing God's people toward God's purposes.*" (Clinton, 1988, P. 184).

Everyone Has a Job

Every believer has a job in discipleship and, by default, has some leadership

responsibility. Paul guided Timothy, a younger pastor he was discipling, on who should be pastors or overseers and deacons. These qualifications are spelled out in 1 Timothy 3: 1-13 and speak to a character that will glorify God and allow believers to follow. The pastor has specific responsibilities as a leader in discipleship. The Apostle Paul said:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (*English Standard Version*, 2016, Ephesians 4:11-13).

The rest of the body of Christ is not off the hook in discipleship (which is a type of leadership) as Paul went on to state later in that same chapter, “from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (*English Standard Version*, 2016, Ephesians 4:16).

Bad Leadership

Leadership does not come without its difficulties. Fowler et al. (2020), in their recent study on the decline in membership of a traditional protestant church, stated, “secularization, diversity, pluralism, and ineffective leadership have been suggested as contributing to the decline in Church membership.” (Fowler et al., 2020, p. 210). Under their explanation of ineffective leadership, they list several factors that could contribute to the issue. The authors admitted that the literature review of ineffective leadership linked to declining membership was a challenge. They utilized existing literature on corporate leadership to form the qualities of ineffective leadership that can lead to church decline. Those qualities are:

- Inconsistent behavior
- Lack of leadership courage
- Resistance to change
- Lack of stability

- Autocratic leadership style
- Hypocrite
- Unethical leader
- Ethically neutral

Following up after ineffective leadership it felt appropriate to reemphasize what a leader should be. It can be a challenging undertaking to define a disciple leader due to the vast and varying models of leadership in publication today. This can leave discipleship leaders with their heads spinning like Woodstock from the old Charles Shultz Peanuts cartoon. Therefore, it becomes necessary to rely on the best example of leadership that Christians and the world have seen, Jesus. There are many examples of leadership in the Bible that have been adapted to leadership theory, but the servant leadership that Jesus displayed during his ministry sets the proverbial bar extremely high.

Personal Theology and Philosophy Description of Leadership

Leadership has always just been a part of this researcher's life. Keep in mind, nowhere was effective leadership mentioned, that has been the cause and goal of a great amount of personal work, Seminary credits, prayer and, pleas to the Holy Spirit. Some key influences have shaped how this researcher's leadership and theology have changed over the years. Most fitting is the continued seeking of God's will to be done on a personal level. Examining Wright's book *Relational Leadership*, which focuses on servant leadership, some key truths strike the heart of the researcher's personal theology. According to Wright (2009), leadership is a gift from God and at his pleasure. Paul provided this instruction to the Roman church, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." (*English Standard Version*, 2016, Romans 12:1).

Servant leadership that models and continues to evolve to emulate Jesus is the personal theology of this researcher. That sounds nice and well thought out, but there is a problem. As Sundheim pointed out in his article *The Trouble with Leadership Theories*:

The trouble with leadership theories is they're easy to hide behind (often inaccurately). They become proxies for *actual* leadership. When something important is on the line, people don't follow five-tiered triangles, four-box matrices, or three concentric circles. They follow real people." (Sundheim, 2014, p. 1)

So, this personal theology cannot be nice words that find no actions or evidence in the way others are led. It must involve a real change in the heart of this researcher and the people encountered. Ledbetter and crew point out that Spears identified some characteristics that are critical to this type of leadership. Those characteristics are:

- Listen to others and discern the will of a group,
- Have empathy with one's fellow workers,
- Help make both others and oneself whole,
- Rely on persuasion rather than coercion and positional authority,
- Think and act beyond day-to-day realities,
- Hold in trust and be a good steward of an institution,
- Build community among one's colleagues and fellow workers. (Ledbetter, 2016, p. 107).

To have any real meaning leading in discipleship must result in lives being changed for Christ. That will always be in the context of the body of Christ and the process of discipleship.

The Best Leadership

There are many great theories and concepts that leaders can pull from to shape their leadership style; the Bible has several key figures whose examples could be used as a leadership model. These are the examples that, without even thinking, could be explored for their qualities and characteristics:

- Abraham
- Noah
- Moses
- David
- Job

- Samuel
- Paul

These are just a few of the top candidates where examples can be made. Noah and his humble blind faith built an arc with no evidence of what was to come. Moses took on an empire where he was exiled and hunted for murder. David with a heart that is after God's own heart. Samuel helped lead Israel into a new time with a traditional king and then removed that king with the confidence that God was working through him. Then, finally, Paul, arguably the greatest missionary the world has ever seen, encountered countless sacrifices, imprisonment, physical harm, and danger. This author continues to believe that if Christians are intended to model their lives after Christ, so should the leadership. Why would there ever be a need for a new concept? Jesus is the most influential man that has ever walked on the earth. Jesus did not coin the phrase servant leadership, but he was the greatest leader who came to serve the world has ever seen. This was evident throughout Jesus' ministry but was specifically told to the disciples to be prepared to serve those that they encounter in Mark 10, Jesus said:

And Jesus called them to him and said to them, 'You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.' (Mark 10:42-45).

Rationale for Study and Gap in the Literature

A good literature review must also offer a clear rationale for the study and offer a gap in the existing literature. Based on the researcher's experience and discipleship experience, a desire to understand the experiences of other mature Christians. Specifically, the researcher desired to understand the impact of discipleship in the home. The researcher has been involved in youth ministry for over twenty years and the difference between teens that have parents that actively disciple at home and teens that do not have parents active in discipleship is not difficult to

observe. Other studies have explored discipleship methods and efficacy, but this researcher believes there is a gap in the literature examining the lived experiences of mature Christians and pastors to understand those experiences. By applying meaning to these lived discipleship experiences may reveal gaps that may need to be addressed. Additionally, no research to date has examined lived experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC Baptist churches.

Profile of the Current Study

This phenomenological study was conducted by interviewing pastors and mature Christians from four Hartsville, SC Baptist churches that have been in operation for greater than 20 years. A gap exists in the current literature on discipleship in this area. No study to date has examined, measured, or studied the lived discipleship experiences of Christians in Hartsville, SC. The participants were volunteers selected with a snowball sample referral originating from the lead pastor of the selected churches. Interviews were semi-structured with a pre-determined set of questions. This study explored the lived discipleship experiences of participants and understand those experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist (Southern Baptist/Independent) churches. Rathers (2021) wrote, “Only the person who has experienced a situation or event in their life knows the deep and sometimes intimate details of their experience” (Rathers, 2021, p. 62). This study intended to understand the lived experiences of participants discipleship and provide meaning to the phenomenon. Understanding the lived experiences of mature Christians can allow an understanding of potential hole in their discipleship. One area that impacted the researcher that may be revealed was the absence of discipleship in the home. Understanding the participant’s experiences could point to this missing area or others in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches.

This chapter outlines the research design for the study. The design synopsis includes the research problem, research questions, and research design and methodology. Also included in this chapter are the research setting, participants, role of the researcher, necessary ethical considerations, and data collection methods. Finally, the process of data analysis used in this research study is outlined.

Research Design Synopsis

The Problem

Many studies and books exist on the topic of discipleship. Pastors and authors have developed and written countless models and strategies to make disciples. A digital search of the Jerry Falwell Library on discipleship returns results for 2,548 books, 20,377 articles, and ten databases full of material. In addition, students have labored over doctoral dissertations explaining the phenomenon. Despite the numerous experts and overwhelming information, the

American church is in a state of decline. According to the Pew Research Center (2015) on Religious Landscape in America that indicates 35% of Millennials are unaffiliated, agnostic, or atheist. In his 2017 study, Colebank said, “Discipleship is the church’s training ministry of reviving and training people to live a Spirit directed life” (Colebank, 2017, p. 1). This decline is partly due to the lack of spiritual formation in churches. Willard wrote, “Spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (Willard, 2012, p. 24). This study focused on lived discipleship experiences as part of the spiritual formation process for mature Christians. This study did not focus on specific discipleship areas or the absence of any identified in the precedent literature review but on understanding the lived discipleship experiences. The precedent literature review revealed discipleship in the home as a leading gap in discipleship for the church, but the church must be a driver for discipleship. Putman et al. (2013) shed light on the issue of discipleship in contemporary churches explaining that churches often measure success by measuring metrics such as attendance, number of programs, and even faith decisions. However, the church's measure must be on transforming lives into Christ’s image. Although this study did not attempt to draw any correlation between any gaps discovered during the study, future research may build on this study to explore identified findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. At this stage in the research, discipleship is succinctly defined as the personal growth of a follower of Christ to be obedient to Christ’s teachings and then make disciples. The theory guiding this study is Shirley’s

(2008) position on the local church's biblical mandate given by Jesus to share the gospel, teach obedience, and make disciples.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do mature Christians, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ2. How do pastors, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ3. What do mature Christians believe, if at all, is their role and the role of pastors in discipleship?

RQ4. What do pastors believe, if at all, is their role and the role of the church in discipleship?

RQ5. How were mature Christians disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

RQ6. How were pastors disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

Research Design and Methodology

This study was a phenomenological study to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative studies bear a distinction because they use open-ended words instead of numbers to frame the research. Merriam (2015) stated, "Qualitative research is based on the belief that knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon" (p. 23). She also explained that this type of inquiry must use an instrument that is sensitive to the meaning of the study. This is a contributor to why face-to-face interviews with participants were utilized. Creswell and Creswell (2018) added phenomenological research:

Is a design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology in which the researcher describes the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by

participants. This description culminates in the essence of the experiences for several individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon. This design has strong philosophical underpinnings and typically involves conducting interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 13).

Rathers' (2021) phenomenological study used similar methodologies in his study of the experiences of high school graduates and their instructional leaders. Rather's purpose was "to investigate the lived experiences of instructional leaders and high school graduates in relation to behavioral transformation and the development of a biblical worldview within a released time (RT) learning center" (Rathers, 2021, p. 25). Rathers' study utilized interviews and observations as key data collection methods.

This researcher's approach was chosen, as Given (2008) alluded, to allow the researcher to interpret the data and recommend the findings to churches, pastors, and parents. The intended population was twelve, including four lead pastors and additional participants determined by a snowball sampling method of pastoral recommendation. The selected instrument for data collection was a semi-structured interview. Interview questions are in Appendix B and C. The protocol selected best supports the study but also protects and helps participants feel at ease. Moustakas said, "The interviewer is responsible for creating a climate in which the research participant will feel comfortable and will respond honestly and comprehensively" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). The researcher intends to utilize Moustakas' modified Van Kamm method of analysis. This method allows "the Individual Textural-Structural Descriptions, develop a Composite Description of the meanings and essence of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The final steps include codifying the data to allow the researcher to understand, interpret, and describe the meaning of the participants' spiritual journey experiences. The nature of the questions may lead to future studies that can draw correlations between these experiences and the state of the church.

Setting

The setting of a study was an essential element of study, and careful consideration was given to the selection. This study examined the lived experiences of mature Christians; therefore, much of the experience had occurred in the past. The setting for the study varied amongst the participants, as discipleship from childhood to adulthood is not likely the same as the selected churches. It is noteworthy that key insights are potentially available if participants have been members of the selected church, and their personal discipleship experience was at the selected church. McGregor et al. (2018) explained that “qualitative studies are concerned with understanding and interpreting participants’ lived experiences with a particular phenomenon and the meanings people attach to these experiences” (McGregor et al., 2018, p. 227). The individual settings of the experience were documented in the interview process to draw any commonalities among the participant’s experiences. An expanded interview was not necessary.

Interviews were primarily conducted on the selected church campus; however, this location may not be suitable or available depending on the participants’ needs. Three interviews were conducted at alternate locations based on the participant’s preferences. A simple internet search for “Baptist Churches Hartsville SC” and a search of the Welsh Neck Baptist Association (Southern Baptist Chapter) revealed the following 25 churches:

First Baptist Church	Fourth Street Baptist Church
Lakeview Baptist Church	Jerusalem Baptist Church
Second Baptist Church	West Hartsville Baptist Church
Cornerstone Baptist Church	Hartsville Bible Baptist Church
Forest Hills Baptist Church	Kelleytown Baptist Church
Kay Branch Missionary Baptist Church	North Hartsville Baptist Church
South Hartsville Baptist Church	Whispering Pines Baptist Church
Emmanuel Baptist Church	Chapel Hill Baptist Church
Mt Tema Baptist Church	Mt Calvary Baptist Church
Mt. Elon Baptist Church	Greater Heights Baptist Church
Antioch Baptist Church	Faith Baptist Church
Gum Branch Baptist Church	Liberty Hill Baptist Church
Pine Ridge Baptist Church	

Barring any issues with permissions, the researcher selected four churches on the larger side where no personal connection existed between the lead pastor and the researcher. The four churches selected were Kelleytown Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, West Hartsville Baptist Church, and Kay Branch Missionary Baptist Church. Although the participant's experiences likely occurred at other locations, the researcher emphasized participant and church anonymity.

Participants

The participants were from the selected churches in Hartsville, SC. The selected churches have been in operation for over 20 years; however, no specific criteria were selected as the participant experiences occurred in the past. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that the research size for a phenomenology study can range from three to ten participants, but there is no one correct answer; Creswell and Creswell alluded to saturation that originates from grounded theory. The idea is to stop collecting data when data "...no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. This is when you have an adequate sample" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 185). Rathert's (2021) sample size was twelve based on standard phenomenological guidelines. It is noteworthy that Rathert achieved saturation despite losing three participants and a final sample size of nine. Based on this and recommendations from Liberty University staff, the population size was twelve participants. The lead pastor for the selected churches was the first requested participant. The lead pastor's consent was not obtained for all the initial selected churches. This required the researcher to select an alternate church. The list of alternate churches is found in Appendix D.

Following the lead pastor, participants were obtained using snowball sampling. Merriam (2015) referred to this as network sampling. This method utilized key participants (pastors) to refer other participants (mature Christians) for the study. Each lead pastor recommended four or

five participants considered spiritually mature Christians. The researcher selected two church members from the recommendations where no personal connection with the researcher exists. This sampling method allows the population to get bigger or snowball as the interviews with the pastors take place. With this methodology, the number of participants was twelve, comprising the lead pastor and two spiritually mature church members based on pastoral recommendation.

Role of the Researcher

Due to the nature of qualitative research, it was vital to identify the role of the researcher. Creswell and Creswell (2018) wrote about the impact a researcher can have on a study due to the interaction with participants that can be extensive. He stated, “This introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research process” and went on to say, “With these concerns in mind, inquirers explicitly identify reflexively their biases, values, and personal backgrounds, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status that shape their interpretations formed during a study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 183).

This study interacted with mature Christians and attempted to understand the experiences in the discipleship journey. This study was of personal interest to the researcher due to the gaps in discipleship experienced in the researcher’s spiritual journey. There was an absence of discipleship inside the home for the researcher, with nothing formative during the early years. The influence of that experience could adversely impact the study; therefore, the researcher utilized bracketing to eliminate or suspend any impact from personal experiences. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) explained that researchers must “suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what they ‘hear’ participants saying” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 233).

Understanding the lived experiences of mature Christians can allow an understanding of potential gaps in discipleship that may be present in Hartsville, SC area Baptist churches. So, the researcher did not influence the study with assumptions that discipleship in the home is a gap participants experienced or that any gap exists. Chan et al. (2013) wrote that researcher's presuppositions that can cause leading questions should be acknowledged. To curtail this, the researcher chose semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. Chan et al. said, "A semi-structured interview is a technique for generating qualitative data and is characterized by open-ended questions that are developed in advance and by prepared probes" (Chan et al., 2013, p. 4).

The researcher made a faith decision for Christ at the age of 12 at a youth event that the researcher attended. Unfortunately, the researcher did not live in a Christian home, neither parent was a follower of Christ, and there was no discipleship in the home. A lack of spiritual maturity for 14 years was the result. When the researcher moved to Hartsville, SC, it started a journey of spiritual maturity. This large gap in years has impacted the researcher and was the genesis of this study. Another consideration for the researcher's role was the potential connections between the researcher and the participants.

The Hartsville, SC area is a small town which allows the possibility to have previous connections with participants. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that this can influence the researcher's interpretation of data. The researcher needed to demonstrate how the data was not compromised and implemented validation strategies. The validation strategy of member checking was the choice for this study. The researcher "takes back parts of the polished or semi-polished product, such as the major findings, the themes, the case analysis, the grounded theory, the cultural description, and so forth." (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). This was performed

via emails and texting with participants for follow-up. This allowed the participants to comment on or correct the findings. The researcher did not encounter any comments that required further interaction with the participants. A mitigating strategy to minimize data compromise due to participant familiarity, the researcher selected churches in Hartsville, SC area, where a personal connection did not exist with the lead pastor. That same criterion was applied to non-pastoral participants as well.

Ethical Considerations

Participation in this study was voluntary; however, when dealing with this type of study, Moustakas (1994) said, “Human science researchers are guided by the ethical principles of research with human participants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). The beginning step of any study of this nature is to apply to the Independent Review Board for approval to ensure the study is within the institutional and ethical requirements of Liberty University. The consent of each lead pastor for the selected church and individual participants was obtained, with participants having a complete understanding of the study and the intended outcomes.

Due to the personal interaction with participants and the small town of Hartsville, SC, data compromise was possible due to personal connections. As described in the Role of the Researcher section, a mitigating strategy to select churches in Hartsville, SC area, where a personal connection did not exist with the lead pastor, or the non-pastoral participants was utilized. A final consideration was the privacy of the participants. Performing a study of lived experiences was personal. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that the information disclosed may be harmful and/or intimate, and the participants’ privacy should be protected. Creswell and Creswell stated, “...ethical code for researchers (which may be different for schools and prisons)

is to protect the privacy of the participants and to convey this protection to all individuals involved in a study” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 93).

Selected churches were renamed with generic nomenclatures, such as Church #1, to protect the participants and maintain their privacy. Renaming was also extended to the participants. Their names are not divulged in the written report, and the researcher assigned pseudonyms to protect each participant's identity. The identities of the participants and churches are located only in files that are password-protected on the researcher's computer. Desired participants were 21 years or older, as the research lent itself to the lived experience of looking at discipleship from childhood to adulthood. There are currently no plans to print hard copies. However, if the need arises, the researcher will shred those hard copies after the study, and custody will be maintained with the researcher. The lived experiences were recorded on a password-protected device for security purposes and deleted after the study.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

This phenomenological study was intended to explore the lived experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. Since the desired data has occurred in the past, the primary data collection method was through qualitative interviews. Merriam reinforced this by writing, “Interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the worlds around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate” (Merriam, 2015, p. 109).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) added that this can be performed via telephone or focus group but often is where “the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews with participants” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 186). Merriam (2015) also explained that person-to-person interviews are the most common but have the purpose of collecting unique information. Merriam quoted DeMarris

on this subject where DeMarris said a research interview is “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 229).

Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended that researchers “Triangulate different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification of themes” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). Considering this and Rathers’ 2021 study, the researcher used respondent validation to triangulate the data. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) explained that in qualitative research, this can be utilized to triangulate data. The researcher will, “take conclusions back to the participants in a study...” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 94). Taking conclusions back to participants and asking them if they agreed with the researcher’s conclusions contributes to the study's trustworthiness. The individual interviews were performed, with respondent validation following the interviews. Revisions to questions did occur following the individual interviews.

Collection Methods

This researcher determined that a semi-structured interview best fits the scope of this study. Participants were asked to recall historical interactions associated with their specific discipleship journey. According to Leedy and Ormond, it will require “...considerable preparation and planning.” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 229). Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that a semi-structured interview will have some questions developed before the interview based on information that this researcher desired to collect. These pre-determined questions are in Appendix C of this study. The semi-structured interviews were conducted in two phases for each church selected, with the first stage beginning with the pastoral interviews. Next, the participant interviews were based on the snowball selection from pastoral recommendation

and voluntary participation. These face-to-face interviews allowed personal interaction between the researcher and participants.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis in the current study and any future studies.

Instruments and Protocols

Qualitative interviews were utilized as the primary data collection method for this phenomenological study. The researcher used semi-structured interviews with spiritually mature Christians and pastors. This allowed two data streams and the ability to check and adjust between interviews. A pilot study was desired at the researcher's home church but was not to feasible due to a staffing vacancy for the lead pastor. The researcher elected to utilize a panel of selected pastors with doctoral credentials to review the interview questions. The panel determined the interview questions were acceptable for the instrumentation purpose.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were selected for this study. According to Merriam (2015), a semi-structured interview is necessary since the participants' discipleship to maturity had already occurred and could not be observed. Additionally, the interview aided the researcher in getting inside the participants' minds. The researcher was intentional during the interview process and bracketed his own experiences to eliminate any bias. This was possible when conducting phenomenological research. Leedy and Ormrod (2018) emphasized the importance of this to eliminate bias. The duo explained that researchers must "suspend any preconceived notions or personal experiences that may unduly influence what they 'hear' participants saying." (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 233). The interview questions are found in Appendices B and C. Below are the questions and their correlation to the research questions.

Table 2*Correlation between Interview and Research Questions for Mature Christians*

Mature Christian Interview Questions	Research Question Addressed
1. How do you define discipleship?	RQ1
2. How did you come to a spiritually mature relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?	RQ5
3. What do you believe is your role in discipleship?	RQ3
4. What do you believe is the role of pastors in discipleship?	RQ3
5. What gaps have you experienced in your discipleship journey?	RQ5
6. What gaps in discipleship exist in your church?	RQ3,4
7. Did you experience discipleship in the home?	RQ5
8. What impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation have on your spiritual maturity?	RQ5
9. What is the current condition of the church?	RQ1,3
10. Is the church in decline? If so, why?	RQ3,5
11. Why do you believe there are so many church members that lack spiritual maturity?	RQ3,5
12. What do spiritually mature Christians do?	RQ3

Table 3*Correlation between Interview Questions and Research Questions for Pastors*

Pastoral Interview Questions	Research Question Addressed
1. How do you define discipleship?	RQ2
2. How did you come to a spiritually mature relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?	RQ6
3. What do you believe is a pastor's role in discipleship?	RQ4
4. What is the church's role in discipleship?	RQ4
5. What gaps have you experienced in your discipleship journey?	RQ6
6. What gaps in discipleship exist in your church?	RQ3,4
7. Did you experience discipleship throughout childhood to present in the home?	RQ6
8. What impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation have on your spiritual maturity?	RQ6
9. What is the current condition or health of the church you pastor and the body of Christ as a whole?	RQ1,4
10. Is the church you pastor in decline? If so, why? Is the entire church (body of Christ) in decline? If so, why?	RQ2,4

11. Do you believe there are members of the church you pastor that lack spiritual maturity?	RQ2,4
12. What do spiritually mature Christians do in the church you pastor, and the church as a whole?	RQ4
13. What are the most effective discipleship practices or models?	RQ2,4
14. What prepared you for your role as a pastor in discipleship?	RQ6
15. What are the characteristics of a disciple?	RQ2,6

Procedures

Although qualitative studies are less prescriptive than quantitative studies, detailed procedures were utilized to conduct the study and interact with individuals. Once institutional approval was granted, the data collection phase began. Previously identified in the settings section, the researcher selected four churches on the larger side where no personal connection existed with the lead pastor. The four churches selected were Kelleytown Baptist Church, First Baptist Church, West Hartsville Baptist Church, and Kay Branch Missionary Baptist Church. The following is a general procedural order that was followed for data collection and analysis.

General Study Procedure:

1. Contacted the governing body of the churches, informed them of the desired study, and gained permission to conduct interviews with the lead pastor and four to five participants.
2. Conducted a face-to-face interview with the lead pastor.
3. Transcribed data from the interview.
4. Reviewed transcription for themes and ideas to inform the following interview.
5. Provided themes to lead pastor for agreement and validation (member checking) of a dataset.
6. Determined a list of candidates from church members based on pastoral recommendations.
7. Began contact with a list of recommended participants, gaining consent for an interview.
8. Reviewed previous interview data and adjusted interview questions if necessary.
9. Conducted a face-to-face interview with the participant.
10. Transcribed data from the interview.
11. Reviewed transcription for themes and ideas to inform the following interview.
12. Provided themes to participants for agreement and validation (member checking) of the dataset.

13. Repeated steps 8-11 until data is collected from two participants per church.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis are different in qualitative studies. Creswell and Creswell (2018) advised that the inductive nature of qualitative studies allows the researcher to build from specific to general themes representing the complexity of a lived experience. Leedy and Ormrod stated, “In qualitative research, we closely examine the data to find the meanings that lie within them. In most qualitative methodologies, data interpretation begins almost immediately, and initial interpretations are apt to drive subsequent data collection” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2018, p. 344).

Analysis Methods

No study is complete without adequate analysis of the data collected. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed using Otter.ai transcription software. After transcription, a method to formulate the transcribed interviews into a data set was required. To analyze the data, the researcher chose Moustakas’ (1994) modified Van Kamm method of analysis. Each interview was treated as its dataset. The steps for this method utilized a complete transcription for each participant and are as follows:

1. Listing and Preliminary grouping of every expression that is relevant to the experience in question. This is called Horizontalization.
2. Reduction and Elimination: This determined the invariant constituents by testing each expression against two requirements.
 - a. “Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?”
 - b. Can the expression be abstracted and labeled? This was a horizon of the experience, and other expressions not meeting the criteria were eliminated.
3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents: This group’s invariant constituents into a related theme which become the core themes of the experience.
4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes by Application: This was a validation to check the invariant constituents and the themes assigned against the complete record of each participant.

5. Construct a textural description of the experience for each participant, including verbatim examples.
6. Construct a textural-structural description for each participant's meaning of the experience.
7. Using the individual textural-structural descriptions, a composite description of the meanings that represent the group is developed. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121).

The data sets in step 5 above from Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method had textural descriptions for each participant (data set) that were put into tabular format using Microsoft Excel. This allowed the researcher to create the textural-structural description for each dataset and then synthesize and merge the data to form a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Since data analysis of phenomenological studies was ongoing from the beginning of data collection to the final interview, a procedure is in the following section of this study. Merriam (2015) guided researchers to review data as it is collected. Therefore, after each survey and interview, the interview data was transcribed and reviewed for any reflections, emerging themes, or ideas from the initial interview to inform the next.

Trustworthiness

Merriam (2015) discussed the trustworthiness of research in the traditional terms of validity and reliability. Merriam also said this on the subject, "Whether one is conducting a study or wants to make use of someone else's research in their practice, the trustworthiness of the research is paramount" (Merriam, 2015, p. 192). The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews at the selected churches to understand the discipleship experiences of the participants. The data was analyzed after each interview and church prior to subsequent interviews to validate the data's contribution to the study. Adjustments to survey questions and participant criteria were not required during this study. However, following the first interview the setting criteria was

adjusted by the researcher. The settings were limited to settings that were not public and low background noise to eliminate distractions and recording interference.

Credibility

To maintain a study's credibility, the researcher remained unbiased; however, researchers naturally bring personal bias into a study. As previously noted, this researcher experienced gaps in discipleship from the initial faith decision to spiritual maturity. Stating this upfront clarified the bias the researcher brought to the study. The researcher focused on procedural rigor, and as Rathens (2021) explained, adhering to the interview protocols limits bias, ensuring a systematic approach to data collection. Also, member checking was utilized. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that member checking involves bringing theme descriptions or the final report back to participants. Member checking was performed for each dataset by presenting the themes from the interview to each participant. This added credibility by allowing participants to validate the accuracy of the study.

Dependability

The dependability of a study hinged on the procedures and protocols established. Merriam (2015) explained that this is tied to the results being consistent with the data. Triangulation is the method that has been selected to ensure consistent results. A detailed procedure was established and was followed for each interview. This allowed consistency across the data collection process, strengthening the dependability of this study.

Confirmability

As previously mentioned, a detailed procedure has been established. The researcher documented the steps of the study to ensure that the study was auditable, which means that the steps of the study can be tracked along the process. The detailed protocols and procedure of this

study demonstrated the confirmability of the study, allowing this phenomenological study to be reproduced.

Transferability

Many factors impact a study's applicability in other settings. This researcher believes this study would effectively transfer to other settings. Although this study focused on Baptist churches in Hartsville, SC area, the procedures would apply to other denominations and/or locations. A critical factor would be selecting mature Christians who can articulate their personal discipleship experience.

Chapter Summary

Chapter three was the research design and rationale of this study. The population and the setting of the research have been identified. The research methods with ethical considerations for interviewing participants, as well as the role of the researcher, have been discussed. Discipleship is a personal journey, and understanding the lived experiences of the participants can only be determined with a phenomenological study utilizing an interview method of data gathering. A detailed procedure was identified to conduct the interviews and perform data analysis as the study progresses to inform the next steps of the study. A leading concern of this researcher was the researcher's influence on the study, which was related to the researcher's personal experience. A key mitigation strategy was to select churches where the researcher had no personal relationship with the lead pastor. This prevented the pastor and participants from considering the researcher's experience when providing interview responses. A phenomenological study was utilized to understand the lived experiences of Christians and their discipleship.

CHAPTER FOUR: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. The interest in this phenomenon stemmed from the researcher's discipleship experience, where the researcher experienced significant gaps in discipleship, including discipleship in the home and one-on-one mentoring over many years. The theological framework primarily focused on two key sections of the Bible, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. The Old Testament passage was Deuteronomy 6:4-9, and the New Testament passage was Matthew 28:19-20. The additional guiding theoretical framework was from Shirley's (2008) position on the local church's biblical mandate given by Jesus to share the gospel, teach obedience, and make disciples.

Chapter four presents the results of the data analysis, which was the modified van Kaam method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994) and was used to interpret the lived experiences of participants. This study utilized semi-structured interviews with twelve participants from four churches to gather the data. The interviews included the lead pastor from each church and two mature Christians based on pastoral recommendation. Chapter Three and the interview questions are listed in Appendices B and C. This chapter covers data compilation protocols and measures utilized in this study, demographic information, and sample data obtained from the participants. Next, in the data analysis and findings section, the themes that emerge from the analysis of interview data were presented by the study's research questions. Lastly, this chapter also evaluated the research design utilized. The following section will present the research compilation and analysis process.

Compilation Protocol and Measures

The selection of participants was comprised of four lead pastors and two mature Christians from the lead pastor's congregation. The spiritual maturity of the lay participants was at the lead pastor's discretion. In Hartsville, South Carolina, there were over 25 churches available for selection. The researcher utilized the Welsh Neck Baptist Association (Southern Baptist Chapter) to formulate the church pool. The churches selected were larger, with no personal connection between the lead pastor and the researcher. The researcher used the "General Study Procedure" in Chapter Three to contact the church's lead pastors/participants and perform interviews. Transcription software Otter.ai was utilized for recording and creating a transcription of the interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted for mature Christians (see Appendix B) and for pastors (see Appendix C). The recording process, overall, was free of problems. However, there were times when a poor internet connection caused inaccurate participant responses in the software—this required researcher intervention to solicit participants to repeat their answers.

The first interview was with a pastor in a public restaurant setting during the breakfast service. The busy setting proved distracting and noisy, and the software did not record and transcribe accurately, causing a lengthy interview to be edited. During the interview, the researcher had to expound on the interview questions associated with gaps in discipleship that participants may have experienced. Interview question #6 for participants and question #5 for pastors required this additional explanation. The term gap was previously defined "as an absence of a particular aspect/discipline of discipleship, or during a specific time during the discipleship process." This information was not available to pastors/participants and was necessary for clarification. The researcher reviewed transcripts using Otter.ai software services, and each

speaker was assigned a label on the transcripts. The researcher assigned each transcript two labels. The researcher used a label specific to the researcher and a label for participant pseudonyms.

Following the collection of audio data, the researcher saved the data on a password-protected computer that only the researcher could access. Accuracy in the data was essential to the researcher and helped ensure the trustworthiness of the study. To ensure accuracy, the researcher listed each audio file in the Otter.ai software and edited the transcription at the beginning of the analysis portion of the study. After editing each transcription, the researcher exported the transcript from the Otter.ai software into Word documents to begin Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm analysis method.

Demographic and Sample Data

When performing a phenomenology study, the researcher determined the sample size and demographics needed to complete the study. Creswell and Creswell (2018) explained that the research size for a phenomenology study could range from three to ten participants, but there was no one correct answer; Creswell and Creswell alluded to saturation that originates from grounded theory. The idea was to stop collecting data when data "...no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. This is when you have an adequate sample" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 185).

The population size was twelve participants based on Liberty University staff recommendation. The participant breakdown was split into two categories: four pastors and two mature Christians from each church selected. The four churches selected were Baptist churches in the Hartsville, South Carolina area, have been in operation for over 20 years, and no personal connection existed between the lead pastor and the researcher. The researcher contacted churches

to gain permission to perform the study from the lead pastor. Only one church contacted would not consent to participate in the study. Several churches either did not answer after several attempts to reach a staff member or did not respond to the recorded message left by the researcher.

Pastoral participants were contacted directly via phone to gain permission to perform interviews and consent from the lead pastor to meet. The researcher met with each lead pastor and obtained written consent to perform the pastoral interview and obtain recommendations for mature Christians to participate in the study. Appendix F contains a copy of the pastoral consent form. The preferred method of communication was via phone, so the researcher contacted the recommended participants from all four churches in the same manner as the pastor. The researcher made an initial phone call to arrange a meeting at the participant's convenience. The researcher obtained written consent from all participants (see Appendix G). The only criteria for pastoral selection were that no personal connection with the researcher existed. Criteria for mature Christian participants' selection originated from the pastor's recommendation, and they also must have had no personal connection with the researcher.

Table 4

Pastoral Participant Demographics

Pastors	Age	Race	Gender
James	64	Caucasian	Male
Gerald	50	Caucasian	Male
Mark	79	Caucasian	Male
Don	60	Caucasian	Male

Table 5*Mature Christian Participant Demographics*

Mature Christian Participants	Age	Race	Gender
Dan	41	Caucasian	Male
Mike	76	Caucasian	Male
Sean	64	Caucasian	Male
Reid	60	Caucasian	Male
Terry	51	Caucasian	Male
Darrin	76	Caucasian	Male
Steve	36	Caucasian	Male
Susan	45	Caucasian	Female

The research population was 12 participants. Four pastors and two mature Christians from each church were selected. All participants were Caucasian males except one female participant from one of the selected churches. The researcher attempted several times to contact two predominately African-American churches that fit the criteria to introduce diverse participants. However, neither church would answer the phone. The researcher directly contacted one African-American pastor and could not elicit a response after several attempts, including a voicemail on the pastor's cell phone.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data consisted of twelve interviews in total. Four interviews were conducted with lead pastors of selected churches, and the remaining eight were conducted with mature Christian volunteers recommended by lead pastors. This study consists of six research questions, with Research Questions 1, 3, and 5 geared towards the mature Christian's discipleship experience. Research Questions 2, 4, and 6 were designed to understand the pastoral experience of discipleship. The semi-structured interview questions allowed the researcher to gain insight into

each group's experience. The researcher took the following steps for each interview and research question. The transcribed interviews were edited for accuracy by the researcher while listening to the interviews. These edited transcriptions were converted to Word documents, and the researcher read the transcripts a minimum of three times to understand the responses and understand each discipleship experience. The researcher then grouped the responses from each participant according to the correlating research question (see Tables 2 and 3).

In the initial step, the researcher identified and bracketed his assumptions during the analysis process to ensure accurate analysis. Roberts explained this necessity by saying, "As an ethical researcher, it is your responsibility to be nonbiased, accurate, and honest throughout all phases of your dissertation" (Roberts, 2010, p. 36). The researcher began the analysis using Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method. The following steps were utilized:

1. Listening and Preliminary Grouping.

The researcher performed the initial listing and preliminary grouping by highlighting each relevant expression. Moustakas (1994) identified this step as horizontalization. Then, each relevant expression was listed in an Excel spreadsheet table. Listing these relevant expressions allowed the researcher to visualize these statements and move to the next step of reduction and elimination.

2. Reduction and Elimination.

This step tested each expression by comparing it against two criteria. Moustakas directs researchers to ask if the expression contains a moment of the experience that is "necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it?" and if the expression can be "abstracted and labeled" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Moustakas determined this is the horizon, and the researcher

eliminated expressions that do not meet the above criteria. These are the “invariant constituents” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

3. Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents.

This step involved grouping the invariant constituents. Some of the expressions were unique to a participant. However, they could still be grouped with other related expressions. Performing this, the researcher began to identify core themes for a particular element or the overall discipleship experience.

4. Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents. and Themes by Application.

The researcher checked the invariant constituents and the themes assigned against the complete record of each participant to perform a validation check. The researcher reviewed each invariant constituent and then re-read the transcripts to ensure that he accurately captured the experiences the participants were able to describe.

5. The researcher constructed a textural description of the experience for each participant from the synthesized data in the form of major themes. The researcher then included verbatim examples from appropriate participants corresponding to the constructed textural description or theme.

6. Using the developed themes or constructed textural description, the researcher developed a meaning for each participant group. Textural description construction enabled the researcher to understand the groups' experiences and any commonalities. The lack of discipleship in the home was the leading common theme in the semi-structured interview responses.

7. Using the individual textural-structural descriptions allowed the researcher to develop a composite description of the meanings that represent the group. (Moustakas, 1994, p.

120-121). The researcher utilized this data and developed four themes and two key takeaways discussed in Chapter Five.

Research Question 1

How do mature Christians, if at all, define discipleship?

Research Question 1 (RQ1) aimed to understand how mature Christians define discipleship. This step in the analysis laid a foundation for the researcher to understand the mature Christian's discipleship experience. The lead pastor selected potential volunteers that the pastors consider mature Christians. There is a natural presupposition that mature Christians will have a working knowledge and definition of discipleship. This research question was analyzed as a stand-alone data point and included in each participant's experience.

Interview Findings

The researcher believed it was necessary to understand how each participant defined discipleship to understand their discipleship experience fully. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, there were 46 relevant expressions listed in the horizontalization step, and three major themes emerged from participant responses. The three major themes were teaching, living life together, and personal growth. The first theme, teaching, meant that an element of discipleship is engaging with others to pass on knowledge. The second theme, living life together, was understood to be spending time with new or less mature believers. The third theme personal growth, explained the tangible changes in character, speech, and knowledge of God, becoming more like Christ.

Dan, Sean, and Terry's responses centered on teaching and living life together. Mike was a career missionary but added that his missional contribution centered on civil engineering. His response was an outlier compared to the other participants, as his definition was limited to

“Telling what you know about Christ.” Mike stated later in the interview that he was with the mission board in a different context than most people, focusing on construction and management. The researcher believes this is a contributor to Mike’s response. Reid understood that discipleship was an intentional, ongoing process of “helping others grow as you grow yourself.” Darrin and Steve’s definitions both focused on Scripture and living a life that resulted in transformation and evidence of fruits in the life of a Christian. Susan’s response was limited to training and obediently behaving or acting in a particular way. Susan’s definition was constrained to an inward focus, lacking key elements of biblical discipleship defined in Chapter Two.

Research Question 1 Summary

Participants did not struggle with their responses during the interview, but some needed significantly more depth and completeness to define discipleship. Although three major themes of Teaching, Living Life Together, and Growth emerged, the element of multiplication in Jesus’ command in Matthew 28 was missing from participant responses. Lacking multiplication in the definition of discipleship is problematic for the church and signifies Christians are not maturing to spiritual adulthood and sharing their Jesus. In Chapter Two, the researcher discussed Putman and Harrington’s (2013) *Five Stages of Discipleship*. The “Parent” stage is the final stage in the duo’s model where Christians are released to become disciple-makers. A visual aid for this idea is in Table 2. Jesus’ command in Matthew 28 was the command to make disciples. The multiplication element missing in mature Christian responses contrasts with the command in Matthew 28. The researcher established a full definition of discipleship in Chapter Two that included a maturing process stemming from the power of the Holy Spirit that resulted in the multiplication of disciples in others. The researcher believes that, individually and collectively,

mature Christian's definition of discipleship lacked the completeness that the Chapter Two definition contained. This adds credence to the 2009 Barna Group study that identified the inability of Christians and leaders to define discipleship as the underlying reason for the slow progress of spiritual maturity in American churches discussed in Chapter One. The results of each mature Christian's discussion of the major themes of teaching, teaching God's Word, and Living Life Together are below.

Table 6

RQ1-Mature Christian Definition to Theme Correlation Review

Participants	Dan	Mike	Sean	Reid	Terry	Darrin	Steve	Susan
Themes								
Teaching	X		X			X		X
Teaching God's Word					X	X	X	X
Living Life Together	X		X	X	X			

Research Question 2

How do mature pastors, if at all, define discipleship?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) also aimed to understand participants' defined discipleship, but this question focused on pastors. The researcher designed a research question (RQ2) to understand how pastors define discipleship. This research question stems from Appendix C's (Pastoral Interview Questions) Interview Question 1 (IV1). This step in the analysis, like RQ1 for mature Christians, was not part of the pastor's discipleship experience. However, this question continued to build a foundation for the researcher to understand the pastoral discipleship experience.

These pastors would also be considered mature Christians but have a different biblical role in discipleship. There was also a natural presupposition that pastors have a working

knowledge and definition of discipleship. This research question was analyzed as a stand-alone data point and included in each pastor's experience.

Interview Findings

The researcher believed it was necessary to understand how each pastor defined discipleship to understand their discipleship experience fully. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, there were 32 relevant expressions listed in the horizontalization step. Three major themes emerged from participant responses. The major that themes emerged following the reduction phase from RQ2 responses were following Christ, relational teaching, and learning or learner. The first theme, following Christ, meant that each person has accepted Christ, has a personal relationship, and has begun following Jesus to be more like Him. The second theme, relational teaching, was understood to be a pastor spending time, individually and in groups, with those following Christ. The pastors believed this was to teach about Christ while equipping them to make new disciples and invest in other less mature believers. The third theme, learning or learner, explained the pastor's understanding of their own need to increase in the knowledge of God, becoming more like Christ.

James. James' responses focused on salvation and evangelism, partially contributing to a full definition of discipleship. A person can only be a disciple of Jesus after a decision to accept Jesus as a Savior by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8). The Matthew 28 directive given by Jesus begins with making disciples by sharing the good news of Jesus. However, a disciple involves inward growth and outward teaching.

Don. Don's responses focused only on the student/learning and life application element of discipleship, needing more depth for a full definition. The researcher found it noteworthy that

Susan, a member of Don's church, also limited her definition to an inward focus. Steve, who was the pastor's son, discussed being a doer and teacher of the Word of God.

Gerald. Gerald's response contained more depth than any other pastor. Gerald is 50 years old, a seasoned pastor of over 20 years, and has a Doctor of Ministry degree. Gerald's definition incorporated learning, teaching, and the need to be relational, utilizing the examples of Paul and Timothy. Gerald referenced the role Paul took on with Timothy. He discussed how each relationship should be relevant in a disciple's life to be challenged and to grow personally, but also the need to be that (Paul) for others. A key incite Gerald spoke of was the importance of discipleship being generational, saying:

In life, you should always be in that place where you are learning and growing and being stretched by someone who was further down the road spiritually than you are. The second part of that would be that as you grow as a student, that you begin to pass on to others what you have received. (Interview Response, 2023).

Disciples are to teach the future generations how to live and follow Christ and make new disciples.

Mark. Mark is a seasoned pastor of over 30 years, also with a Doctor of Ministry degree. Mark's response described the personal aspect of growth and following Christ in-depth but failed to mention any outward element. "So basically, discipleship is the process of learning about Christ and following after Christ." (Interview Response, 2023). Notably, during the entirety of Mark's interview, a clear, well-rounded understanding of discipleship emerged, including outward teaching and generational growth.

Research Question 2 Summary

Pastoral definitions, except for Gerald, were more inward thinking. James also discussed being on mission to reach the lost adding an evangelism element to his definition. Being a learner and follower of Christ were the primary components of the definition that includes an

outward focus that leads to maturity and multiplication. As previously stated, the researcher established a robust definition of discipleship. Based on the results and analysis of RQ2, the researcher believes that individually (except for Gerald) and collectively, the pastor's definition of discipleship lacked the completeness that the Chapter Two definition contained.

Table 7

RQ2- Pastor's Definition of Discipleship Theme Correlation Review

Participants	James	Gerald	Mark	Don
Themes				
Following Christ	X	X	X	
Relational Teaching		X		
Learner/Student		X	X	X

Research Question 3

What do mature Christians believe, if at all, is their role and the role of pastors in discipleship?

Research Question 3 (RQ3) is a two-part question designed to understand what mature Christians believe is their role and the pastor's role in discipleship. This research question stems from Interview Question 3 (IV3) and Interview Question 4 (IV4) in Appendix B (Mature Christian Interview Questions). These two interview questions did not inform the researcher of direct insights into the participant's discipleship experience but rather informed a partial result of that experience. Understanding what mature Christians believe is their role and the role of the pastor in the discipleship process aids the researcher in accomplishing this goal. RQ3 deals with Mature Christian and pastoral roles in discipleship and is the next step in leading the research to the practical application of discipleship. In the following sections, the researcher detailed interview findings for RQ3. First, the researcher dealt with data concerning what mature Christians believe is their role in discipleship. The following section deals with findings concerning what mature Christians believe is the pastor's role in discipleship. The researcher

rolled both sections of findings into a succinct summary for RQ3.

Interview Findings: Mature Christian's Role

The researcher detailed the findings for RQ3, which dealt with the role or practical application of discipleship for mature Christians and pastors from the viewpoint of Christians in the church. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, thirty-three relevant expressions were listed in the horizontalization step, and four major themes emerged from participant responses. The four major themes were to teach/teach God's word, share the gospel/evangelize, build relationships, and personal growth. The researcher found that mature Christians reported broader expectations for themselves in their role than in their definition of discipleship. The themes mature Christians identified as their roles in discipleship are defined in each theme subsection that follows.

Teach/Teach God's Word. This theme emerged from the mature Christian's role in discipleship, with 88% or seven out of eight participants listing Teaching/teaching God's Word as a role for Christians. The theme, teach/teach God's Word, meant that mature Christians fill roles inside and outside the church teaching less mature Christians. This theme includes teaching the Bible to these individuals and life application in less formal settings. This role aligns with Jesus' direction in Matthew 28 to teach others in obedience to the commands from Jesus. Dan detailed a life application related to fair treatment and helping as many people as possible in his business accomplishments. However, Dan's self-stated role in discipleship to primarily benefit his employees as much as possible, did not align with his definition of discipleship which included teaching, building relationships, and personal growth. Mike, the career missionary, was again an outlier but did align his role with one of the themes of sharing the Gospel and evangelizing.

Share Gospel/Evangelize. Sharing the Gospel was understood to be mature Christians actively sharing their faith and the Gospel to lost people of this world. Hearing and receiving the Gospel is the initiating event in the discipleship process. Jesus directed followers to go and make disciples. The theme of sharing the gospel/evangelizing was identified by 37.5% or three of the eight participants. Mike was a career missionary (retired) in the group, again an outlier, only speaking to the evangelistic element of discipleship. Reid and Steve are the other two participants who identified sharing the Gospel as part of their role in discipleship. Being the exception, Reid was the only participant identifying all five themes in his description. The low percentage of mature Christians identifying this theme further strengthens the findings in RQ1 where mature Christians failed to include multiplication in their definition of discipleship.

Build Relationships. This theme understandably emerged as the researcher believes most Christians understand this as a function of the church. The theme of building relationships was explained as getting to know people, having social interactions with one another, and being part of each other's lives. The researcher believes many Christians think building relationships is their primary role in discipleship with 75%, or six out of eight participants listing the theme of building relationships one of their roles in discipleship. Many American churches today are set up to have a place for everyone. Shirley (2018) believes that this church model intends to have every stage of life covered for spiritual development. However, this contradicts the model Jesus' provided to His disciples. Jesus' relationship with his disciples was personal. Having personal relationships with people to pour into their lives is how Jesus intended discipleship. Terry specifically spoke about his desire to teach others about the journey while "Teaching them biblical truth, being real, honest, and open because life is hard." (Interview Response, 2023).

Sean, Reid, Darrin, Steve, and Susan all described a responsibility to engage with younger people and couples to help them with their spiritual growth. Susan's explanation of her intentional relationship building with young girls in the church has contributed to the salvation of some. Susan also spoke of deeper relationships where the girls know that she is not perfect creating a comfortable situation for the girls to depend on Susan for guidance.

Shetter (2021) discussed this from the mentor/apprentice vantage point where "Mentorship is building a relationship that develops spiritual maturity and the use of spiritual gifts and talents. A mentor is to make a space for an apprentice to learn and grow." (Shetter, 2021, p. 21). Shetter goes on to discuss how the apprentice is willing to take the challenge to learn from others that are more mature. It is not necessary when building personal relationships to be as formal as mentor/apprentice-defined roles. However, Jesus demonstrated that spending time with others is the primary method of discipleship. Linhart (2016) spoke to Jesus' ministry did contain teaching, but Jesus' relationship with his disciples was the central element giving Jesus' life as the model. Linhart said, "Formal moments of teaching, combined with informal life together, produced a group of disciples who were 'Fully Trained' (Luke 6:40-41) to carry on Christ's commission." (Linhart, 2016, p. 5). Jesus' actions solidify Linhart's sentiment in John 13 when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples. Jesus follows up the action saying:

You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 13:13-15)

Personal Growth. The theme of personal growth emerged but was the smallest percentage at only 25% or two of eight participants discussing this as a role for mature Christians. The theme of Personal Growth was understood to be the ongoing spiritual growth experienced resulting in Christians becoming more like Christ. This theme is critical in the life

of a Christian. Steve and Reid both recognize personal growth as a role for Mature Christians, Steve directly spoke to this theme saying, “So I have a role as a disciple to learn still, follow, and grow. Then I have a responsibility to try to help my young people to try to help create in them a desire to know more.” (Interview Response, 2023). The Apostle Paul spoke to this saying, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” (Colossians 1:28). Personal growth was established in the definition of discipleship in Chapter One and explained to be a key element of the transformational process of discipleship. Paul explained this as a duty of church leadership providing church leaders for this journey (Ephesians 4:1-16). He began this section of Scripture saying this, “...urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” (Ephesians 4:1). Paul’s prayer just prior to this is asking for strength from the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 3:14-21) so they may be filled with the “fullness of God”. Paul’s letters establish an expectation for believers to mature (personal growth) in their faith. The researcher established in Chapter One English’s (2020) claim that the call of church members to spiritual maturity is a large gap in church ministry philosophies. The researcher believes this corroborates this gap with only 25% of mature Christians in this study stating personal growth as part of their role in discipleship.

Interview Findings for Mature Christian’s View of the Pastor’s Role

The second element of this two-fold research question involves what mature Christians believe is the pastor’s role in the discipleship process. The researcher believes there should be a clear link between the definition of discipleship identified in Chapter Two and the practical application (role) for pastors. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, seventeen relevant expressions were listed in the horizontalization step, and two major themes emerged from participant responses. The two major themes were to equip the saints and teach the

church. The first major theme to emerge was that “Mature Christians Believe the pastor is to equip the saints (for discipleship)”, with 50% of respondents including this in the role of pastors. Equipping the saints is the most straightforward biblical assignment for pastors given by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 4. Paul explained that church leadership was to equip the saints for the ministry work of the church. This concept was established by the researcher in Chapter Two. The second major theme, Teach the Church, provided by mature Christians meant pastors are to teach the church aligning with the second half of the directive Jesus gave in the Great Commission in Matthew 28, "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you..." (Matthew 28:20).

Research Question 3 Summary

This research question's design intends to draw out the practical application of discipleship for mature Christians and pastors in the church from the mature Christian perspective. The researcher asked mature Christians about their role and the role of pastors in discipleship. The synthesized data revealed five themes for Christians and two themes for pastors. The results of each mature Christian's discussion of major themes for their role and the role of the pastor in discipleship are below. This data set informs the researcher concerning what mature Christians believe is their role and the pastor's role in the discipleship process.

Table 8*RQ3-Mature Christians View of Their Role/Correlation Review*

Participants	Dan	Mike	Sean	Reid	Terry	Darrin	Steve	Susan
Themes								
Teach/Teach God's Word	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Share Gospel/Evangelize		X		X			X	
Build Relationships	X		X	X	X	X		X
Personal Growth	X			X		X	X	X

Table 9*RQ3-Mature Christian's View of Pastor's Role/Theme Correlation*

Participants	Dan	Mike	Sean	Reid	Terry	Darrin	Steve	Susan
Themes								
Equip Church		X		X		X		
Teach	X		X	X	X		X	X

Research Question 4

What do pastors believe, if at all, is their role and the role of the church in discipleship?

Research Question 4 (RQ4) is another two-fold question designed to understand what pastors believe is their role and the role of the church in discipleship. This research question stems from Interview Question 3 (IV3), Interview Question 4 (IV4), and Interview Question 12 (IV12) on Appendix C (Pastoral Interview Questions). These two questions do not inform the researcher of direct insights into the pastor's discipleship experience, but rather informs a partial result of that experience. This is accomplished by helping the researcher understand what pastors have come to believe concerning their role and the role of the church in the discipleship process.

Interview Findings for Pastor's View of Pastor's Role

This section details findings from RQ4 which deal with the role or practical application of discipleship for pastors and the church from the viewpoint of pastors. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, the researcher identified thirty-one relevant expressions. Three major themes emerged after the remaining steps in this analysis: teaching biblical discipleship, model discipleship, and equipping for biblical discipleship. Teaching biblical discipleship was understood to include preaching God's word and increasing the biblical knowledge of church members. The second theme was to model discipleship by being an example, first as a follower of Christ continuing to learn and mature spiritually and second, obediently follow Jesus' command to go and make disciples in Matthew 28. The third theme meant that pastors were to demonstrate biblical discipleship like Jesus by pouring into the lives of a few selected members to help lead the church.

All four pastors discussed these three elements as a function of the pastor in discipleship, except for Don, who believes his primary focus should be preaching the King James Bible. The researcher garnered from Don's statements that he was firm in his belief in his role in discipleship. Don said, "Well, the main thing is teaching the Word of God, not getting sidetracked on other stuff, but people have got to know the Word of God. And around here, we think the Word of God is vitally important" (Interview Response, 2023). Don did allude to this as the 'main thing,' which allows room for elements in his role in discipleship, but he did not speak to this after a prompting question from the researcher concerning the strict usage of the King James version of the Bible. The researcher determined it was necessary to follow up with Don following data analysis. The researcher spoke with Don on the phone and asked about his role described above in contrast to Paul's guidance in Ephesians 4 to equip the saints for ministry.

Don stated, “discipleship is never done, it is learning and passing it on. The pastor’s job is to ensure the flock is prepared” (Interview Response, 2023). Don also spoke about specific events or practices that help accomplish this such as an eight-week new believers class and one-on-one soul winning with the pastor. Gerald's response was the most well-rounded concerning the pastor's role in discipleship. He spoke to the multiplication and generational aspect of biblical discipleship. Gerald said this about his role as a pastor:

...it's to present the biblical ideas of discipleship and disciple making and then to model it on a personal level, as well and, to begin to take people through that men with men and women with women, helping them to grow, inviting them into life, so that they are exposed to biblical discipleship and how that progresses on generationally and how, you know, if that's what's done, what happened numerically in the book of Acts can happen again, today because Acts starts out with God was adding to the church on the day of Pentecost, and then it moves to he was adding daily to the church... (Interview Response, 2023).

Gerald believes that Christians have not been taught biblical discipleship. Mark alluded to this point, saying, "The first responsibility of the pastor is to help people understand that the conversion, when you come to know Christ, that's the beginning" (Interview Response, 2023). Thus, affirming the researcher's assertion that the church contains many Christians who remain in spiritual infancy over an extended period.

Interview Findings for Pastor’s View of the Church’s Role

This section details findings from RQ4 which deal with the role or practical application of discipleship for the church from the viewpoint of pastors. The researcher identified twenty-three relevant expressions Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method. Four major themes emerged after the remaining steps in this analysis process. The four themes were obey, mutual discipleship, sharing or passing on what you learn, and praying for each other. The first theme to obey was understood to meant that the church learns and obeys biblical teachings. The theme of mutual discipleship was meant to explain that each Christian should serving and an

active member of the Body of Christ. The third theme to share or pass on what is learned was described as generational teaching and the sharing of one's faith. The fourth theme was straightforward, to pray for each other continually.

Each pastor provided a thorough list of the church's responsibilities in discipleship, except for James, who abruptly discussed that if churches are not actively participating in discipleship, there is no discipleship. Gerald did not explicitly discuss mutual discipleship but referred to *The Navigator*, about Dawson Trotman by Robert Foster. Gerald spoke of the discipleship tool developed by Trotman called *The Wheel*. Gerald's description of the wheel and its spokes allows the researcher to infer his belief that mutual discipleship is a role of the church. Gerald and Mark spoke on all three themes in their descriptions of the church's role in discipleship. However, it was Mark's summarizing statement towards the end of this question that the researcher found to be especially inciteful. Mark said this about the process of discipleship, "The church's role is to support and aid each other and serve each other to facilitate that process" (Interview Response, 2023). Mark believed this was accomplished in several ways including actively being part of the Body of Christ, sharing burdens, using spiritual gifts in service together, praying together and for one another, but overall creating a place for what Mark described as "mutual discipleship"

Research Question 4 Summary

The researcher asked pastors about their role in discipleship and the church's role. The summary for RQ4 is unique in that Don was an outlier for his view of the pastor's role speaking only to preaching the Word of God specific to only the King James Bible. James was an outlier concerning the church's role; he did not elaborate except to say that the church needs to participate in discipleship. The researcher determined it was necessary to follow up based on this

limited response. The researcher asked James what was meant by this response in considering Ephesians 4:11-12. James expanded his response to include more formal training in a classroom -setting and a focused setting limited to one to three persons. James stated the focused setting was for the purpose of reproduction saying, “Intentional as you go in life. Living life, doing things, spending time is not always a classroom. Going with others to do what we discuss. Go pray, or witness at the farmer’s market” (Interview Response, 2023). The synthesized data revealed three themes for pastors and three for the church. The results of each pastor's discussion of major themes for their role and the church's role in discipleship are below. The tables below illustrate each pastor's response to the two-fold question. This data set informs the researcher concerning what pastors believe is their role and the church's role in the discipleship process.

Table 10

RQ4-Pastors to Pastor’s Role/Theme Correlation Review

Pastor	James	Gerald	Mark	Don
Themes				
Teach Biblical Discipleship	X	X	X	X
Model Discipleship	X	X	X	
Equip for Biblical Discipleship	X	X	X	

Table 11

RQ4-Pastor’s to Church’s Role/Theme Correlation Review

Pastor	James	Gerald	Mark	Don
Themes				
Obey		X	X	X
Mutual Discipleship	X	X	X	X
Share/Pass On		X	X	X
Prayer for Each Other		X	X	

Research Question 5

How were mature Christians disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

The researcher wrote Research Question 5 (RQ5) to understand how mature Christians were disciplined. Did they experience any gaps in their discipleship or during their childhood, specifically, if they were disciplined in the home? This research question stems from Interview Question 2 (IV2), Interview Question 5 (IV5), Question 7 (IV7), and Question 8 (IV8) in Appendix B (Mature Christian Interview Questions).

Interview Findings

This section details findings from RQ5, which deal with the discipleship experience of the mature Christian participants. The researcher divided these findings into two steps: the salvation story or experience and the discipleship experience leading up to spiritual maturity. The researcher developed interview questions from Appendix B (Mature Christian Interview Questions) to gain insights into the mature Christian participants' discipleship experience. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, the researcher identified sixteen relevant expressions for each salvation experience and forty-three for each discipleship experience after salvation. After the remaining steps in this analysis process, a major theme that emerged in the salvation story was that 62.5% or five of eight Christians were involved in church. Church involvement from the five was similar but not consistent. Church involvement in this context is understood to be two times per week, typically Sunday and Wednesday attendance. Like the pastoral participants, the remaining 37.5%, or three out of eight, were influenced by an external group or event leading to their salvation. The researcher identified four major themes for the discipleship experience after salvation: absence of discipleship in the home,

church involvement, Preaching of the Bible, and 62.5% or five of eight believed they experienced significant gaps in their discipleship experience. The three themes identified are defined and explained in greater detail below. After analyzing the interview data, the researcher considered discussing the discipleship experience in two phases prudent. The first was the salvation story preceding this section, and then the discipleship experience following salvation.

Salvation Story. The salvation experiences of mature Christians placed some strain on some participants to explain. The researcher understood this to be due to some non-traditional occurrences of coming to faith in Jesus and a lack of skill sharing the story. Each mature Christian could point to a time and/or event when they decided to follow Christ. The age varied from 5-19 years old. As stated above, five of the eight mature Christian participants experienced significant involvement in the church leading up to and after the point of salvation. Steve and Susan attended the same church and placed their faith in Jesus as savior at the early ages of five and six. Their church places a heavy value on preaching from the King James Version of the Bible. In her responses, Susan discussed the importance of this and understanding how to differentiate which Bible versions are accurate. Don is the pastor of this church and spoke very pointedly that the KJV was the only source utilized at his church. The researcher did not find it surprising that the mature Christians who attend this church also place a high value on the KJV Bible. During the interview with Steve, the researcher prompted a discussion asking why only the KJV Bible. Steve's response indicates that the King James Bible was the only version his church trusted to be accurate and the true Word of God.

Dan, Mike, and Reid were the three participants involved in a church up to salvation. Dan accepted Christ at seventeen; although Dan said he was in church, he admitted that his parents were "going through the motions like everybody else" and were not "super religious" Mike was

not exposed to church his entire childhood, as his father was saved at a Billy Graham Crusade when Mike was ten, and from that point on, Mike's family was in church. Mike started following Jesus at the age of eleven. Reid was in church growing up to the point of salvation. His father did not attend church often, but his stepmother ensured that Mike was in church when the doors were open.

The remaining three participants, Sean, Terry, and Darrin were not involved in the church. Terry and Darrin both grew up in a Roman Catholic background and did not participate actively in any church, nor were they exposed to biblical preaching or reading. Terry and Darrin were in college and exposed to the parachurch organization, The Navigators. In college, Darrin was also exposed to Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU). Sean came from a non-Christian home that he explained was very violent. Sean was exposed to the Gospel at a Christian Concert that he was attending due to dating a young lady that was a Christian. Sean related to the band's testimonies during the concert and decided to follow Jesus. Table 10 below illustrates the age and event or organization that impacted each salvation.

Table 12

RQ5-Mature Christian Salvation Story Age/Event

Participants	Dan	Mike	Sean	Reid	Terry	Darrin	Steve	Susan
Salvation Story Details								
Age of Salvation	17	11	16	9	18	19	5	6
Event or Organization of Salvation	Church	Church	Christian Concert	Church	Navigators	Campus Crusade for Christ & Navigators	Church	Church

Discipleship Experience. This section details the four major themes identified for the discipleship experience after salvation. Those four themes were: absence of discipleship in the

home, church involvement, and Preaching of the Bible; 62.5% or five out of eight believed they experienced significant gaps in their discipleship experience.

Absence of Discipleship in the Home. All eight of the mature Christian participants explained that they did not experience discipleship in the home despite five of the eight being involved in church, at least in part up to salvation. Discipleship in the home was established in Chapter Two previously, but originates with the Shema in Deuteronomy 6, where the home is the center for discipling the young. For the two participants with Roman Catholic backgrounds (Terry and Darrin) and the one non-Christian home (Sean), the researcher was not surprised to discover those participants did not experience biblical discipleship established in this study. The researcher was surprised that the three participants, Reid, Steve, and Susan, who had significant church involvement, did not believe they experienced discipleship in the home.

Preaching of the Bible. Preaching of the Bible was experienced again by 62.5%, or five of the eight participants in this study. This theme is understood to mean a consistent exposure to the Bible by preaching and teaching within the church. The two participants with Roman Catholic backgrounds (Terry and Darrin) and the one non-Christian home (Sean) were not exposed to the Word of God as they did not attend church with any regularity. Steve was a preacher's kid. He was in church, at revivals, or programs on many days of the week during his childhood and did not believe he experienced discipleship in the home. Steve exhorted, "My life has been centered around the church and the preaching of the Word of God" (Interview Response, 2023).

Significant Gaps Experienced. This theme, along with discipleship in the home, was hypothesized to be of impact due to the researcher's own experience, and 62.5% or five of eight participants claimed they experienced some gap in their discipleship experience. In Table 11 below, the researcher details the perceived gap in discipleship by mature Christian participants.

Table 13*Gaps Experienced by Mature Christian*

Participants	Gaps
Dan	No Gaps Perceived
Mike	1-10 years old and from eleven to college age
Sean	Gap until approximately 23 years old
Reid	Gap following marriage and beginning of career
Terry	Gap until approximately 18 years old
Darrin	Gap until approximately 19 years old
Steve	No Gaps Perceived
Susan	No Gaps Perceived

Dan, Steve, and Susan explained that they did not experience gaps in their discipleship experience. A gap was defined in Chapter One as an absence of a particular aspect/discipline of discipleship or discipleship during a specific time during the discipleship process. In contrast, Reid, an active churchgoer, and participant, claimed several gaps, with the most notable listed above following marriage. Reid explained that after he and his wife purchased a new house, they began attending a church close to their new residence. It was apparent to the researcher that the Holy Spirit was moving Reid to get involved with this new church. Reid has been an active Sunday School teacher for over 50 years following that move.

Church Involvement. For 62.5% or five of eight participants, church involvement was a factor. For this study, the researcher determined it was necessary to establish church involvement as attendance at least two times per week. Typical involvement is on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening. Reid spoke of training that would occur on Sunday evening during the interviews. This training was discipleship training for the church. Steve, a preacher's kid, experienced significantly more church involvement as his family would attend several church services or revivals at other locations during the week.

Research Question 5 Summary

The findings from the RQ5 data indicated five themes in total. One theme from the initial salvation story of mature Christians is that they were all at a meeting or event when they realized their need for a savior and decided to follow Jesus. The four additional themes that emerged from the discipleship experiences following salvation for pastors are: the absence of discipleship in the home, reading the Bible, discipleship training, and personal discipleship/mentor. Table 12 below illustrates the results of each mature Christian's discussion of their discipleship experience.

Table 14

RQ5-Mature Christian's Discipleship/Theme Correlation Review

Participants	Dan	Mike	Sean	Reid	Terry	Darrin	Steve	Susan
Themes								
Discipled in the Home	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Preaching of the Bible	X	X				X	X	X
Experienced Significant Gap		X	X	X	X	X		
Involved in Church	X	X		X			X	X

Research Question 6

How were pastors discipled throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

The researcher designed Research Question 6 (RQ6) to understand how pastors were discipled. Did they experience any gaps in their discipleship or childhood, specifically, were discipled in the home? This research question stems from Interview Question 2 (IV2), Interview Question 5 (IV5), Question 7 (IV7), Question 8 (IV8), and Question 15 (IV14) in Appendix C (Pastoral Interview Questions). These interview questions give the researcher direct insights into the participant's discipleship experience. Including the influence of any discipleship that occurred, including discipleship in the home and any gaps the pastoral participants may have

experienced. The researcher accomplished this by evaluating the responses to interview questions that target the specific experiences of pastors in their discipleship process.

Interview Findings

This section details findings from RQ6, which deal with the discipleship experience of the pastoral participants. The researcher divided these findings into two steps: the salvation story or experience and the discipleship experience leading up to spiritual maturity. The researcher developed the interview questions in Appendix C (Pastoral Interview Questions) to gain insights into the pastoral participants' discipleship experience. Following Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method, the researcher identified eleven relevant expressions for each salvation experience and twenty-five relevant expressions identified for each discipleship experience after salvation. After the remaining steps in this analysis, a major theme emerged in the salvation story experience; an external group or event enabled each pastoral participant's salvation. Major themes identified for discipleship after salvation were the absence of discipleship in the home, reading the Bible, discipleship training, and personal discipleship/mentor. After analyzing the interview data, the researcher again believed discussing the discipleship experience in two phases was prudent. First was the salvation story preceding this section and the discipleship experience following the salvation story.

Salvation Story. Each pastor reported their experience with ease, allowing the researcher to understand how they came to believe in Jesus as their personal savior. Each story was different, and the researcher provided the relevant details below. James elaborated on his experience, explaining that experience with the Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) during his high school experience. This FCA group was a small group led by a coach who read Bible studies and he asked questions. James recalls this group growing to 120 students each Thursday

night but stated that "It wasn't formal discipleship" Gerald grew up as a preacher's kid and experienced much exposure to church life and Christian education. He recalls being saved at an early age but identified a Bible conference his family attended when he was 17 years old as a launch pad for his discipleship experience.

Mark accepted Christ at twenty at a revival at a small country church. Mark found humor in the events leading up to his attendance at that revival, explaining he was not interested in attending church but was there because he wanted to date a girl. This girl, eventually becoming his wife, could not go out on Sunday nights unless she went to church. Mark realized "something happened in the course of my going to church with her on Sunday night. Something happened and actually, for the first time in my life, I felt conviction about my sins about my life."

(Interview Response, 2023). Don's salvation experience occurred at the Bill Rice Ranch in Tennessee at the age of thirteen. Don said that at the end of a week of preaching, he understood his sin and decided to follow Jesus. Table 13 below illustrates the age of salvation and the event or group where a decision to follow Jesus occurred.

Table 15

Pastoral Salvation Story Age/Event

Pastor	James	Gerald	Mark	Don
Salvation Story Details				
Age of Salvation	15	8	20	13
Event or Organization at Salvation	Fellowship of Christian Athletes	Bible Conference	Revival	Ranch Camp

Discipleship Experience. Each pastor described their personal salvation story, and the researcher established the events after salvation to present to be the discipleship experience. The four themes are: the absence of discipleship in the home, reading the Bible, discipleship training, and personal discipleship/mentor, and explained in greater detail below.

Discipleship in the Home. Discipleship in the home was a specific inquiry by the researcher utilizing a specific interview question. Discipleship in the home was established in Chapter Two previously, but originates with the Shema in Deuteronomy 6, where the home is the center for discipling the young. All four pastors stated that they were not discipled in the home. Gerald's story was of interest because he was a preacher's kid. His father left the pastorate when he was 17, but he grew up in the church. Gerald explained, "...formal discipleship wasn't a part of what my parents were doing" (Interview Response, 2023). Despite Gerald's father being a preacher, he spoke to the lack of discipleship in the home.

Reading the Bible. Three of the four pastors attributed the reading of the Bible as a contributor to their discipleship experience. James, Mark, and Don discussed the desire that God planted in their hearts to read the Bible following their salvation. The pastoral participants began a personal daily reading of the Bible following the decision of faith. Mark's explanation was detailed, and he began reading the Bible the day after he was saved and "developed a love for the Bible and knowledge". Mark completed this thought saying, "I believe the Bible, more than more than anything else, is essential for discipleship, because that's how we learn about God, it's how we learn about what it means to Christian" (Interview Response 2023). Gerald did not specifically mention this as a factor; however, years of exposure to church, revivals, Awana, and Training Union (discipleship training) likely included reading the Bible.

Discipleship Training. Three out of four pastors discussed discipleship training, with only Don not mentioning this as a factor. The researcher was not surprised as, during Don's interview, he specifically mentioned that his church uses only KJV translation and does not utilize any extra-biblical publications to aid their ministries. James, Gerald, and Mark all mentioned Training Union or discipleship training that occurred on Sunday nights as a contributor to their

discipleship. This Lifeway training program is no longer used, and according to Mark, it was a factor in his calling to full-time ministry.

Personal Discipleship/Mentor. Three of the four pastors identified this theme, with James being the exception. He did not speak of any individual who invested in him personally in his discipleship. Being exposed to organizations such as FCA and Campus Crusade for Christ (CRU), he encountered at least intermittent personal discipleship. Mark and Don spoke of individuals at various stages in their lives who invested personally in their spiritual development. Mark mentioned a man that partnered with him in the Royal Ambassador ministry for school-age boys following his salvation. He attributes getting plugged into the church for service with someone to walk alongside as a crucial factor in his discipleship. Don's father-in-law was the previous pastor of the church he now leads, and he explains that his mentorship and influence greatly impacted his spiritual development. Gerald's story interested the researcher as his experience closely resembled Jesus' example of biblical discipleship. Gerald recalled meeting a man at a Bible conference that he said was the most influential and was an intentional discipler. Gerald exhorted, "I would have no problem estimating him to be a modern-day Paul." Gerald's had daily access to this mentor for almost thirty years until his passing. Gerald explains that he still has access to him through books that he wrote, and the late discipler's wife still sends out pre-recorded sermons to those whom he disciplined.

Research Question 6 Summary

The findings from the RQ6 data indicate five themes in total from this data. One theme from the initial salvation story of pastors is that they were all at a meeting or event when they realized their need for a savior and decided to follow Jesus. The four additional themes that emerged from the discipleship experiences following salvation for pastors are: the absence of

discipleship in the home, reading the Bible, discipleship training, and personal discipleship/mentor. Table 14 below illustrates the results of each pastor's discussion of their discipleship experience.

Table 16

RQ6-Pastor's Discipleship/Theme Correlation Review

Pastor	James	Gerald	Mark	Don
Themes				
Discipled in the Home	No	No	No	No
Reading the Bible	X		X	X
Discipleship Training	X	X	X	
Personal Discipleship/Mentor		X	X	X

The researcher did find it noteworthy to discuss IV5, which inquired about gaps in the pastor's discipleship experience. All four initially stated that no gaps occurred in their discipleship experience. However, following prompting from the researcher with a follow-up question, each pastor did identify that the lack of discipleship in the home created a gap in their discipleship. Mark astutely identified two potential gaps that can exist in churches. The first relates to the early days for new believers as the church does not come alongside and meet the needs to nurture and grow the new Christian. He also identified a potential gap in church discipleship when Christians are "...no longer in that local church that they've grown up in and been involved in." The specific examples included high school graduates leaving home for college or Christians beginning a new career or business that heavily taxes their time. After synthesizing the data and reducing the data into themes for each research question, the following section discusses the research design considering the study's data, analysis, and results.

Evaluation of the Research Design

This research design utilized semi-structured interviews to understand the phenomena of the discipleship experience for pastors and mature Christians. This study's design gave the researcher

valuable insights into the participant's discipleship experience. Most participants were comfortable with the research, and the questions afforded some lengthy responses from many participants.

The length of the interviews ranged from fifteen minutes to forty-five minutes. During the interview, a frequent researcher interjection occurred for questions associated with gaps participants may have experienced in their discipleship journey. The researcher explained what was meant by the term *gap* and utilized the definition provided in the introduction section of Chapter One. The researcher previously defined a *gap* as an absence of a particular aspect/discipline of discipleship or during a specific time in the discipleship process.

The researcher believes that using a panel of ministry professionals to review or strengthen semi-structured interview questions may have provided more insights into the lived discipleship phenomenon experienced by the participants. Research Questions 1 and 2 linked the definition of discipleship according to participants to the remaining research questions. The researcher felt this was necessary to set the stage for understanding the lived experience that each mature Christian and pastor. The researcher designed Research Questions 3 and 4 to understand what mature Christians and pastors believe is their role in discipleship. The researcher believes follow-up questions with a list of provided roles and definitions from the literature review may have provided participants feedback on their responses. After data analysis and considering the twelve participant's responses, the researcher believes an additional data stream from a panel may add validity to the study and findings. It was obvious that some participants were reluctant to speak about a specific gap they may have experienced, possibly from a fear of someone discovering this perceived experience. This fear may have been present despite the assurance of anonymity for each participant.

The final considerations of this research design are the criteria for the mature Christian selection and discipleship in the home. The researcher discovered that two or three of the selected mature Christians may not be as spiritually mature as the pastor may believe. The evidence was in mature Christian responses about the definition of discipleship and their role. Based on this, the researcher believes increased rigor, or criteria is needed for future research to validate the participant's ability to respond appropriately to the interview questions. Lastly, the interview findings show that all twelve participants believe they were not disciplined in the home. It is recommended that future research establish a definition of and criteria for discipleship in the home. This will allow a better understanding of the experience specific to discipleship inside the home.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of pastors and mature Christians from Hartsville, SC area churches. Chapter Five concludes the data presented in the previous chapter and interacts with the precedent literature from Chapter Two. This chapter includes the purpose of the project and a list of the research questions. Additionally, this chapter contains research conclusions, implications, and applications. Finally, Chapter Five contains the limitations of this study, suggestions for further research, and a final summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC area, area Baptist churches. At this stage in the research, discipleship is defined as the personal growth of a follower of Christ to be obedient to Christ's teachings and then make disciples. The theory guiding this study is Chris Shirley's (2008) position on the local church's biblical mandate given by Jesus to share the gospel, teach obedience, and make disciples.

Research Questions

RQ1. How do mature Christians, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ2. How do pastors, if at all, define discipleship?

RQ3. What do mature Christians believe, if at all, is their role and the role of pastors in discipleship?

RQ4. What do pastors believe, if at all, is their role and the role of the church in discipleship?

RQ5. How were mature Christians disciplined throughout childhood to the present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

RQ6. How were pastors disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

Research Conclusions, Implications, and Applications

This section provides a concise summary of the study findings and conclusions to each research question. This section also discusses interactions and relationships between this study's findings and the theological and theoretical literature reviewed in Chapter Two. Finally, this section summarizes the findings, research limitations, and areas for further research.

Research Conclusions

This research study examined the lived discipleship experience of pastors and mature Christians. This concluding chapter discusses the six research questions, and the researcher will discuss the research implications. This study explored the lived experiences of four lead pastors and eight mature Christians (pastoral recommendation), revealing conclusions from the synthesized data collected from semi-structured interview questions. The genesis of this research stems from the researcher's own discipleship experience, where he experienced no discipleship in the home, gaps in time following salvation, and did not experience significant personal discipleship/mentorship. The goal was to explore the lived experience of pastors and mature Christians to understand how they perceive their discipleship experience. Did they experience discipleship in the home? Do other mature Christians experience gaps in discipleship? How effective is personal discipleship or mentorship in the overall discipleship process? The researcher desired to answer these questions following the data from this study.

The researcher utilized semi-structured interviews and Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm analysis method. The researcher treated each interview as its own dataset, allowing the researcher to create textural-structural descriptions or themes for each research question. The

researcher used synthesized data to form a perceived understanding of the phenomenon. The researcher then discussed a conclusion for each research question.

Conclusions for Research Questions:

The section utilized the synthesized data from each research question to reveal conclusions based on participant responses. The researcher treated each RQ as a separate data set and the themes that emerged from the analysis. The researcher then grouped the themed conclusions in the subsequent sections by their intention. The researcher grouped RQ1 and RQ2 together to form a more cohesive conclusion to the research question about the definition of discipleship. Similarly, RQ3 and RQ4 are grouped together for a more cohesive conclusion about the role of pastors and mature Christians in the discipleship process.

Conclusion to RQ1 and RQ2: Definition of Discipleship

The researcher wrote these two research questions to understand how pastors and mature Christians define discipleship. During the literature review phase of this study, the researcher discovered that there is not one agreed-upon definition for discipleship. The Bible does not explicitly define discipleship. The researcher determined that this data was necessary to fully understand the phenomenon as these definitions certainly result from each participant's discipleship experience. Each research question resulted in themes that emerged from the data analysis. The major themes that emerged from mature Christians were:

- Teaching
- Teaching God's Word
- Living life together.

The major themes that emerged from the pastoral data from RQ2 are:

- Following Christ
- Learner/Student

Theme One: Pastors and mature Christians must understand the definition of biblical discipleship. This theme corresponds to RQ1 and RQ2.

- *How do mature Christians, if at all, define discipleship*
- *How do mature pastors, if at all, define discipleship?*

These data themes for RQ1 and RQ2 are problematic as they are missing critical elements for the definition of discipleship, specifically, the element of multiplication. The researcher believes this gives credence to the Barna Group's 2009 study linking the inability of Christians and church leaders to articulate even a basic definition of discipleship. However, it does provide the example of Jesus as he progresses his followers to spiritual maturity.

The mature Christian's themes indicate an outward focus as the themes are about teaching others and living life together. The pastor's themes focus more on following Christ and being a learner/student (of Christ). A fundamental element of discipleship is multiplication from Jesus' final command before ascension in Matthew 28. The researcher believes that a comprehensive definition is necessary to fully capture what Cox and Peck (2018) claim mean by their assessment, "Christian discipleship is a major, all-encompassing theme of the Bible...addresses all dimensions of life, is deeply grounded in teaching and mentoring and applies to practically all age levels" (Cox & Peck, 2018, p. 1). A key takeaway from this data is that church leaders and pastors must define discipleship as an organization to align congregations on what defines discipleship. If pastors define discipleship as a function of being a student or learner of Jesus, but the congregation defines it as teaching and spending time with others; the church and its leadership may not have the same focus. Discipleship cannot only be evangelism, small groups, or biblical preaching, to name a few. Biblical discipleship must take on the actions of Jesus, and therefore the definition must match those actions.

Implication One: A clear definition of discipleship with missional purposes should be established by pastors for organizational alignment.

Pastors and Mature Christians must focus on the church's purpose. There is no shortage of opportunities for pastors and mature Christians to focus their resources. Earley and Dempsey (2013) speak to this, "To make disciples, you must maintain a tight focus on the Great Commission." (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 224). The duo discusses that maintaining this focus on developing the saints may require some re-evaluation of programs or ministries within the church. The authors reference 1 Peter 4:10-11 to ensure that the gifts received are used to serve others. A clear focus is needed, which may require reducing or eliminating programs, and "it may redefine how we spend the 168 hours that we have in a given week" (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 225).

Conclusion to RQ3 and RQ4: Pastors and Christians Role in Discipleship

The researcher wrote these two research questions to understand what pastors and mature Christians believe are the various roles in discipleship. Grouping RQ3 and RQ4 together allowed the researcher to understand the preconception of the roles of all participants. This grouping also allowed the researcher to determine and understand any overlap between the two RQ's and participant responses. The themes from RQ3 and RQ4 data for roles in discipleship do not create the same problems as the themes for the definition of discipleship from RQ1 and RQ2. During the literature review phase of this study, the researcher discovered that there is not one agreed-upon definition for discipleship. A logical next step was to determine if this same condition exists for the roles of pastors and mature Christians in the discipleship process. The researcher determined that this data was necessary to fully understand the phenomenon as the perceived roles certainly result from each participant's discipleship experience. Each research question

resulted in themes that emerged from the data analysis. The major two-part themes that emerged from mature Christian's data from RQ3 were:

Mature Christians Role:

- Teach
- Teaching God's Word
- Share Gospel/Evangelize
- Build Relationships
- Personal Growth

Pastor's Role:

- Equip the Church
- Teach

The major two-part themes that emerged from the pastoral data from RQ4 are:

Pastor's Role:

- Teach biblical discipleship
- Model discipleship
- Equip for biblical discipleship

Church's Role:

- Obey
- Mutual Discipleship
- Share/Pass on
- Pray for Each Other

Theme Two: Pastors and mature Christians must know their role in biblical discipleship. This theme corresponds to RQ3 and RQ4.

- *What do mature Christians believe, if at all, is their role and the role of pastors in discipleship?*
- *What do pastors believe, if at all, is their role and the role of the church in discipleship?*

Below is a side-by-side comparison of discipleship roles from each data set. On the left are themes (RQ3) that emerged concerning the roles mature Christians believe they have in the discipleship process. The right side shows the themes (RQ4) that emerged concerning roles that Pastors believe mature Christians (the Church) have in the discipleship process.

Table 17*Mature Christian's Role*

Mature Christian's View (RQ3)	Pastor's View (RQ4)
Teach	Obey
Teach God's Word	Mutual Discipleship
Share Gospel/Evangelize	Share/Pass on
Build Relationships	Pray for Each Other
Personal Growth	

The researcher noted that mature Christians' definition of discipleship generally aligns with what they believe is their role in discipleship. Mature Christians did add sharing the Gospels and personal growth to the list of their roles. The researcher believes that if the participants shape their definition around what they believe are their roles, they will have a working biblical definition of discipleship.

Below is a side-by-side comparison of discipleship roles for pastors from each data set. On the left are themes (RQ3) that emerged concerning the roles mature Christians believe pastors have in the discipleship process. The right side shows the themes (RQ4) that emerged concerning roles that pastors believe pastors have in the discipleship process.

Table 18*Pastor's Role*

Mature Christian's View (RQ3)	Pastor's View (RQ4)
Equip the Church	Teach Biblical Discipleship
Teach	Model Discipleship
	Equip for Biblical Discipleship
	Pray for Each Other

Mature Christians took a very simplistic view of the role of pastors. The researcher understood this view as scripture points to this role as Paul instructed the Church in Ephesus saying:

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all

attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, (*English Standard Version*, 2016, Ephesians 4:11-13).

The academic world also supports this view. Davis (2002) speaks of the pastor as the chief discipler. He specifically places the responsibility on pastors to disciple the members by “teaching and equipping them” (Davis, 2002, p. 23). Pastors must accept this responsibility to obediently carry out their biblical responsibility as a shepherd to the body of Christ. Bill Hull (2016) challenges the notion that Christians must leave the church to receive the necessary training. Hull challenges the dichotomous notion that outside organizations such as Bible colleges and seminaries are what Christians need for a deeper level of discipleship and ministry training. Hull explains, “Praise God for these organizations, but they will never be able, nor do they want, to replace the local church” (Hull, 2016, p. 33). The themes from these RQ’s associated with the role of pastors and Christians reassure the researcher.

Conclusion to RQ5: Mature Christian’s Discipleship Experience

How were mature Christians disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

RQ5 provided the researcher with direct insights into the discipleship experience for mature Christians. The researcher now begins to understand what kind of discipleship was in the participants’ lives growing up. The Bible commands every Christian to mature in their faith after salvation. Peter clarifies, “Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). This study revealed gaps in discipleship for 62.5% or five out of eight discipleship experiences for mature Christians. This research question resulted in four major themes from the data analysis. The major themes that emerged from the mature Christian's discipleship experience were:

Mature Christian Discipleship Experience:

- Not disciplined in the home
- Preaching of the Bible
- Significant gaps experienced in 62.5%
- Involved in the church were 62.5%

Theme Three: Significant gaps exist in the discipleship experience of mature Christians.

The researcher observed a gap in five of the eight mature Christians, and 100% of these participants perceived that they were not disciplined inside the home. Sean decided to follow Christ during a Christian concert; then, Sean classified what he experienced following his salvation as a "huge gap." Sean explained that he was welcomed and baptized but felt as if the church said, "You're a Christian. Here's your King James Version of the Bible. Good luck. So, I did not get that one-on-one, or nobody took me under their wing to disciple me and teach me right" (Interview Response, 2023). Sean went back to his old life of sin for seven years but was eventually invited into a men's group that began his discipleship process in his late twenties. Evans (2013) identified this gap in the U.K., specifically with new Christians with an "aggressively secular background." Evans identified four reasons that worked to solve this problem by developing a program to help "...well-equipped mature Christians who are prepared and enabled to disciple them in the early stages of their new spiritual life" (Evans, 2013, p. 1). The four reasons Evans identified are not pertinent to this study; however, the issue identifying the vulnerability of new believers to resort back to their pre-salvation life is a danger that this study has identified for Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches.

Conclusion to RQ6: Pastor's Discipleship Experience

How were pastors disciplined throughout childhood to present, if at all, and what impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation process?

RQ6 provided the researcher with direct insights into the discipleship experience for pastoral participants. This research question resulted in one theme from the salvation story and five major emerging from the data analysis. The major themes that emerged from pastoral discipleship stories are below.

Pastoral Salvation Story Theme:

- All four pastors were saved at an event or through an organization outside of regular church services. Examples are FCA meetings, Revival, and the Bill Rice Ranch.

Post Salvation Themes:

- Not disciplined in the home
- Reading the Bible
- Discipleship training
- Personal discipleship/mentor
- Plugged into church

These themes indicate a need for churches to continue focusing on the gospel when the doors open. The results again indicate that 100% of pastors perceived a gap and did not experience discipleship in the home. Regardless of background where participants were exposed to church or the Bible, the beginning point of discipleship is salvation and may occur outside of the church. Despite Gerald being a preacher's kid growing up in the church, his salvation was at a Bible conference, not his home church. Don is now the pastor of the church he grew up hearing the Word of God preached, and yet his salvation came at the Bill Rice Ranch in Tennessee.

Earley and Wheeler (2010), in their book *Evangelism is...*, discuss the importance that God places on lost people. The duo used the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7). The duo said, "We need to be consumed with going after the lost" (Earley & Wheeler, 2010, p. 39). In the book *Discipleship is...*, Earley and Dempsey explained the purpose of the church this way, "The church exists to win people to Christ, help them grow in their walk, and then send them out to participate in the mission of winning the entire world" the church's purpose becomes quite

apparent. (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 43). Pairing this thought with previous thoughts about lost people, the church has a duty to disciple its families inside the church, equipping parents to disciple their children.

Theme Four: Churches/Pastors must maintain a focus on equipping parents to disciple in the home.

This study indicated that pastors experienced a disciples gap in the home. All four pastors perceived no discipleship taking place in their homes. The researcher speculates that many parents and churches considered parental discipleship as ensuring that children were in church. This study corroborates Chris Shirley's (2018) position that church programs cannot replace what God intended to occur inside the home—recalling that Shirley used the example of Faith Community Church, where there was a program for every age, but the church still experienced a decline. Considering the above the researcher was able to draw a second implication.

Implication Two: A gap exists in biblical discipleship in the home

The data revealed that mature Christians and pastors believe they did not experience discipleship in the home. The research established an explicit biblical command for family, home-based discipleship in Deuteronomy 6. The data also revealed that churches have not clearly defined discipleship or established how the church will accomplish spiritual maturity for its members. All twelve participants stated they experienced a gap in home-based discipleship, possibly contributing to decisions to follow Christ to occur with organizations or events outside the church. The researcher noted throughout the interview process that these organizations have been highly influential in the lives of this study's participants. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Campus Crusade for Christ, The Navigators as well as concert events were integral to some participant's discipleship experience.

Shirley (2013) points out, however, "Leaders had not been trained or encouraged to engage and equip parents in their most important role as spiritual leaders and disciple makers." (Shirley, 2013, p. 7).

Applications

The impetus for this research originated from the researcher's discipleship story, which drove a concern for discipleship and, specifically, discipleship in the home. The researcher reviewed the implications of the research established in Chapter Five to determine applications that may be drawn. The literature provides inferences that discipleship is a biblical mandate that should occur in the body of Christ through the local church.

Implication one relates to the need for the local church to align a clear definition of discipleship with organizational direction. The research points to the need for pastors and church members to understand and agree on how the church defines discipleship and what the church's primary mission will be within the Great Commission in Matthew 28. Earley & Dempsey (2013) wrote concerning a need for a narrow focus on disciple-making that provides clarity to the church, including the vision and core values. This allows the church's time and resources to be utilized for an agreed-upon purpose. This application provides top-to-bottom church alignment on specific ministries the church will undertake to share the gospel and "help believers grow and develop into maturity" (Earley & Dempsey, 2013, p. 42).

The second implication related to discipleship in the home was informed by the data relating to research questions that allowed participants to explain their personal discipleship experience. Each discipleship story was unique to the participant, but each story had one common element related to discipleship in the home. All twelve participants, pastors, and mature Christians believed an absence of discipleship in the home existed. The Deuteronomy 6 directive

to Israel has a direct application to contemporary churches that is not being fulfilled as the research indicates. This leads to a practical need for churches to focus on family-based discipleship. Shirley's (2018) recommended that churches establish a family-focused framework. Applying this framework to a church model may allow for the equipping and support of parents to fulfill their role in discipleship. Churches supporting parents in their role contributes to the church's mission of making disciples.

Research Limitations

This study included participant selections from four Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. There are three potential weaknesses associated with the demographics and sample population. Based on pastoral recommendations, the four lead pastors selected at least two mature Christian participants from the congregation. The mature Christian selection process created a potential weakness of this study, which is no specific criteria for pastoral participants other than holding the lead pastor position. It is prudent to establish criteria for pastoral participants with a minimum number of years of experience. Secondary to this weakness was no specific or quantitative criteria for mature Christian participants, only pastoral recommendations. The researcher determined with no criteria other than pastoral recommendation, the spiritual maturity is limited to the opinion of the lead pastor. The third potential weakness was in church selection. The only two criteria were: the church must be a Baptist church in the area and has been in operation for over 20 years. It is recommended to determine to some measure the health of the church. Comparing the results from participants with varying health can create a vulnerability in the data collected.

The research design was sound, and the researcher took measures to eliminate bias. However, this researcher believes Moustakas' (1994) modified Van Kamm method of analysis

still allows researcher bias in the analysis phase of the study. Another potential weakness involves the diversity of participants, pastors, and mature Christians. This weakness became evident in church selection as churches that would have provided diverse participants would not respond to the researcher's attempts to contact the lead pastors. This potential weakness also lies in selecting mature Christians, as seven out of eight were Caucasian males over 40 years old. These selections do not afford the study the potential gains from a diverse population.

Further Research

Considering the study findings, limitations, and delimitations placed on the study, the researcher provided multiple recommendations and directions for future research. These recommendations are not exhaustive but provide the recommended topics and population. Also included is the recommended type of design for future research.

1. A doctoral project like Brandewie's (2020) ministry project to develop a family-based discipleship project to cultivate missional families. This project is recommended for a single Baptist church in Hartsville, SC, to follow up on this study's implication of a gap or missing discipleship in the home.
2. To better understand the gap in discipleship in the home, this study identified a study focusing on discipleship in the home is recommended. A correlational mixed-method study exploring the relationship, if any, between discipleship in the home and spiritual maturity of Christians. A correlational study would utilize survey instrumentation to identify Christians who did not experience discipleship in the home. This quantitative information would then be utilized to extract the impacts of this gap on the spiritual maturity process.

3. To improve generalizability, the study should be repeated with a more diverse sample in Hartsville, SC, Baptist churches. A representative sample that more accurately reflects the demographics of the areas should make up the population. Hartsville, SC, is not home to multicultural churches, which would require the sample from specific churches that would aid population diversity.
4. Additional research is needed that focuses on the gap in churches for young adult or college-age Christians. The researcher noted that some participants believe there is a gap in church discipleship programs for young adult Christians or college-age Christians. This population often experiences a gap in their discipleship, with one contributor potentially the transient life of college students.
5. Additional research is needed to determine the effective equipping of parents to disciple children within the home. The study revealed that 100% of participants, including those involved in church, were not effectively disciplined in the home. The gap exists in the homes of Christians but also in the churches they attend. A ministry project for church and pastoral training on equipping parents to disciple in the home is prudent.
6. Additional research is needed study to understand the environments of pastoral salvation. All four pastors decided to follow Christ at events or organizations outside the church. Discipleship is intended through the local church, potentially allowing a gap to develop in sharing the gospel within the church body.

Summary

This final section provides an overall summary of the study. This study produced four themes in the conclusion that answer the research questions. The four themes were:

- Pastors and mature Christians must understand the definition of biblical discipleship.

- Pastors and mature Christians must know their role in biblical discipleship.
- Significant gaps exist in the discipleship experience of mature Christians.
- Churches/Pastors must maintain a focus on equipping parents with discipleship in the home

The researcher believes there are two key takeaways resulting from this study. The first is that churches must establish a clear definition of discipleship. The church's role and ministries must focus on winning souls to Christ and growing them to spiritual maturity. The second takeaway is that pastors and churches are equipping parents to disciple their children in the home as God intended. Considering Chris Shirley's (2018) recommendation, churches should establish a family-focused framework.

The study brings the gap the researcher experienced to the forefront. This project's genesis started with a twelve-year-old who became the researcher of this project. For the researcher, this study began many years ago when a decision for Christ was made at the age of twelve. That experience of no discipleship in the home and no discipleship from the church for fourteen years created a desire to understand and educate the church and parents. This researcher sincerely believes that church decline can be stopped if parents obediently follow the command in Deuteronomy 6 to love the Lord and diligently teach this to children. The researcher felt it necessary to point to a participant's response to the negative outlook of the church. Mark referenced Jesus' interaction with His disciples in Matthew 16 where Jesus asked the disciples who they say that He is:

And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 16:15-19)

Mark's reference was to point out this about the church. He said, "So the church is a church triumphant. And I think we need to keep that in mind. Because whatever the deficiencies are, whatever's going on in the church, then it's not going to be defeated..."

References

- Anthony, M. J., & Benson, W. S. (2011). *Exploring The History and Philosophy of Christian Education: Principles for the 21st Century*. Wipf & Stock.
- Austin, J. G. (2019). *The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church*. Liberty University.
- Barna, G. (2009). Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity. *The Barna Group* <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/12-faithspirituality/264-manychurchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity> (accessed May 25 2009).
- Barrett. (2016). *God's word alone-- the authority of scripture what the reformers taught ... and why it still matters*. Zondervan.
- Bonhoeffer, D. (1995). *The cost of discipleship*. Touchstone.
- Bonhoeffer, D. (2003). *Resistência e submissão: cartas e anotações escritas na prisão*. Editora Sinodal.
- Brandewie, B. A. (2020). *Developing a plan to cultivate missional families in the next-generation ministries at Ingleside Baptist church: a ministry to families and through families to make disciples* (Order No. 28257522). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2468393131).
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fdeveloping-plan-cultivate-missional-families-next%2Fdocview%2F2468393131%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Carson, D. A. (2010). Matthew. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Matthew–Mark (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 9). Zondervan.
- Chan, Z. C. Y., Fung, Y., & Chien, W. (2013). Bracketing in Phenomenology: Only Undertaken in the Data Collection and Analysis Process? *The Qualitative Report*, 18(30), 1-9.
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholarly-journals%2Fbracketing-phenomenology-only-undertaken-data%2Fdocview%2F1505321230%2Fse-2>
- Clinton, J. (1988). *The making of a leader*. NavPress.
- Colebank, M. (2017). *Obedience oriented discipleship: A mixed methods study of effective discipleship models in select Southern Baptist churches* (Order No. 10680672). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1972559435).
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fobedience-oriented-discipleship-a-mixed-methods-study-of-effective-discipleship-models-in-select-southern-baptist-churches>

[ions-theses%2Fobedience-oriented-discipleship-mixed-methods%2Fdocview%2F1972559435%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085](https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/biblical-literacy-developing-habit-personal-bible/docview/2479810960/se-2)

- Coleman, C. L. (2020). *Biblical Literacy: Developing a Habit of Personal Bible Reading Among the Members of Contending for the Faith Christian Fellowship* (Order No. 28263016). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University. (2479810960). <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/biblical-literacy-developing-habit-personal-bible/docview/2479810960/se-2>
- Cooperman, A. (2022). Religious ‘switching’ patterns will help determine Christianity’s course in US.
- Cox, W. F., Jr., & Peck, R. A. (2018). Christian education as discipleship formation. *Christian Education Journal*, 15(2), 243-261.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (5th Edition). Sage Press.
- Davis, S. B. (2002). *Pastoral perceptions of critical thinking in the process of discipleship in the local church* (Order No. 3048646). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305508253). <http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fpastoral-perceptions-critical-thinking-process%2Fdocview%2F305508253%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Earley, D., & Dempsey, R. (2013). *Disciple Making Is...: How to Live the Great Commission with Passion and Confidence*. B&H Publishing Group.
- Earley, D., & Wheeler, D. (2010). *Evangelism is: How to share Jesus with passion and confidence*. B & H Academic.
- English, J. T. (2020). *Deep discipleship: How the church can make whole disciples of Jesus*. ProQuest eBook Central <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu>
- English Standard Version. (2016). Crossway Bibles.
- Erickson, M. (2013). Christian theology, 3rd. *Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic*.
- Evans, J. (2013). *Equipping disciples of new Christians from a post Christian culture* (Order No. 3622933). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1549975843). <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/equipping-disciplers-new-christians-post/docview/1549975843/se-2>
- Faber, T. T. (2008). *A critical examination of the biblical teaching on the image of God, and its implications for Christian living* (Order No. 3331213). Available From Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University. (304801839). Retrieved from

<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdocview%2F304801839%3Faccountid%3D12085>

- Ferguson, E. (2013). *Church history: The rise and growth of the church in its cultural, intellectual, and political context* (Second ed.). Zondervan.
- Fowler, D., Musgrave, J., & Musgrave, J. (2020). A traditional protestant church experiencing substantial membership decline: an organizational strength analysis and observations to attend or leave the institution. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior*, 23(3), 207-223. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/IJOTB-02-2019-0012>
- Galli, M. (2015). The New Battle for The Bible: It's time to return to Scripture as our final authority. *Christianity Today*, 59(8), 31–33. Retrieved from <https://search-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI8W160502001159&site=ehost-live&scope=site>
- Geisler, N. L. (1980). *Inerrancy*. Zondervan Pub. House.
- Geisler, N. L. (2002). *Systematic theology*. Bethany House.
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The SAGE encyclopedia of qualitative research methods* (Vols. 1-0). SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412963909
- Glimm, F. X., Marique, J. M.-F., & Walsh, G. G. (1947). *The Apostolic Fathers* (Vol. 1). Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Goodroe, R. S. (2015). *Developing the listening habits of a select group of members of Utica Baptist Church (Seneca, South Carolina) to increase the benefits of hearing expository preaching* (Order No. 10024433). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1771299195).
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/developing-listening-habits-select-group-members/docview/1771299195/se-2>
- Grisanti, M. A. (2012). Deuteronomy. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The expositor's bible commentary: numbers–ruth (revised edition)* (Vol. 2). Zondervan.
- Hartman, D. (2016). *Church history for modern ministry: why our past matters for everything we do*. Lexham Press.
- Hull, B. (2014). *The complete book of discipleship: on being and making followers of Christ*. NavPress.
- Hull, B. (2016). *Conversion & discipleship: you can't have one without the other*. Zondervan.
- Johnston, J. G. (2009). *Discipleship: stepping stones to developing your church's strategy*.

- Kilner, J. F. (2015). *Dignity and destiny: humanity in the image of god*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Köstenberger, A. (2006). 2 Timothy. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians–Philemon (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 12). Zondervan.
- Ledbetter, J. P. (2016). *Beyond "Supervising" Paraeducators: A Community of Practice about Team Leadership in Special Education*. Arizona State University.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2018). *Practical Research (12th Edition)*. Pearson Education (US). <https://libertyonline.vitalsource.com/books/9780134776248>
- Linhart, T. (2016). *Teaching the next generations. A comprehensive guide for teaching Christian formation*. Baker Academic.
- Logos. (2021). *Logos Bible Software (Version 9.9)*. Faithlife Corporation.
- Malone, L. (2021). *Love at First Step: A Study on Intimate Discipleship Informed by the Shema and Song of Songs* (Order No. 28317127). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2490938221).
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Flove-at-first-step-study-on-intimate-discipleship%2Fdocview%2F2490938221%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Malphurs, A. (2003). *Being leaders: the nature of authentic Christian leadership*. Baker Books.
- Mbennah, E. D. (2016). The Goal of Maturity in Ephesians 4:13-16. *Acta Theologica*, 36(1), 110-132. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.4314/actat.v36i1.7>
- McGregor, D., Restoule, J. P., & Johnston, R. (2018). *Indigenous research: Theories, practices, and relationships*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
- McNeal, R. (2006). *Practicing Greatness: 7 disciplines of extraordinary spiritual leaders*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2015). *Qualitative research a guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Mounce, R. H. (2007). John. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Luke–Acts (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 10). Zondervan.
- Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Sage Publications.
<https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412995658>

- Parks, J. (Ed.). (2017). *Martin Luther: a guide to his life and writings*. Faithlife.
- Petitt, P. (2009). *Foundations of spiritual formation: a community approach to becoming like Christ*. Kregel Publications.
- Pew Research Center. (2015). *America's changing religious landscape*.
<https://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/>
- Pew Research Center. (2021). *About three-in-ten U.S. adults are now religiously unaffiliated*.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2021/12/14/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-are-now-religiously-unaffiliated/>
- Pew Research Center. (2022). *Modeling the future of religion in America*.
<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/09/13/modeling-the-future-of-religion-in-america/>
- Piper, J. (1976, October 12). *The Glory of God as the Goal of History*.
<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-glory-of-god-as-the-goal-of-history>.
- Putman, J., Coleman, R., Harrington, B. W., & Harrington, B. (2013). *Discipleshift: Five steps that help your church to make disciples who make disciples*. Zondervan
- Putman, J., & Harrington, B. (2013). *DiscipleShift: Five steps that help your church to make disciples who make disciples*. Zondervan.
- Rathers, S. L., Jr. (2021). A Phenomenological Study of Leader-Observed and Student Experienced Behavioral Transformations Associated with Christian Released Time Programs.
- Reagan, R. (1967). Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum.
<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/january-5-1967-inaugural-address-public-ceremony>
- Real Life Ministries. (2016). *The reproducible discipleship process*.
<http://www.reallifeministries.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/HGL-Handbook-Fall-Final-copy-2.pdf>
- Roberts, C. M. (2010). *The dissertation journey: a practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation*. Sage Books.
- Ryrie, C. C. (1981). *What you should know about inerrancy*. The Moody Bible Institute.
- Shetter, S. (2021). *Using Mentor/Apprentice Relationships in Discipleship Groups to Develop Missional Leaders in the Church of the Covenant* (Order No. 28772803). Available from Dissertations & Theses @ Liberty University. (2599915201).
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/using-mentor-apprentice-relationships/docview/2599915201/se-2>

- Shirley, C. (2008). "It takes a church to make a disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship for the Local Church." *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 50, no. 2: 207-224. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost . Accessed September 24, 2017.
- Shirley, C. (2013). *December 1941: 31 days that changed America and saved the world*. Thomas Nelson.
- Shirley, C. (2018). *Family ministry and the church: a leader's guide for ministry through families*. Randall House.
- Smith, M. A. E., Swann, J., Butler, T. C., Church, C. L., & Dockery, D. S. (1993). *Holman book of biblical charts, maps, and reconstructions*. Broadman & Holman Publishers.
- Sundheim, D. (2014). The trouble with leadership theories. *Harvard Business Review*.
- Taylor, D. P. (2021). *Making disciples at Christian community church according to Jesus's method in Matthew's gospel* (Order No. 28416957). Available from ProQuest
- Van den Belt, H. (2016). Sola scriptura: an inadequate slogan for the authority of scripture. *Calvin Theological Journal*, 51(2), 204–226.
- Vander Wiele, M. A. (2014). *An analysis of students' perception of biblical community within the environment of digital media: A mixed methods study* (Order No. 3668224). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (1647767750).
<http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fdissertations-theses%2Fanalysis-students-perception-biblical-community%2Fdocview%2F1647767750%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085>
- Vander Wiele, M. A. (2022, September 9-11). *Practicing Biblical Discipleship in The Family*. [PowerPoint Slides].
- Virginia Tech. (2021). *History Repeating*. <https://liberalarts.vt.edu/magazine/2017/history-repeating.html>
- Weder, H. (1992). "Disciple, Discipleship". In D. N. Freedman (Ed.), & D. Martin (Trans.), *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*. Doubleday.
- Wilkins, M. J. (1996). "Disciple, Discipleship." In *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. Baker Book House.
- Willard, D. (2012). *Hearing god: Developing a conversational relationship with God*. InterVarsity Press.
- Willard, D. (2014). *Renovation of the heart: putting on the character of Christ*. NavPress.

Wright, D. P. (2009). *Inventing God's law: how the covenant code of the Bible used and revised the laws of Hammurabi*. OUP USA.

Yamauchi, E. M. (2010). Ezra and Nehemiah. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Chronicles–Job (Revised Edition)* (Vol. 4). Zondervan.

APPENDIX A: IRB Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 10, 2023

Robert Stuckey
Matthew Vander Wiele

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-677 A Phenomenological Study of Discipleship Experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist Churches

Dear Robert Stuckey, Matthew Vander Wiele,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:104(d):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

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

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

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

APPENDIX B: Mature Christian Interview Questions

1. How do you define discipleship?
2. How did you come to a spiritually mature relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?
3. What do you believe is your role in discipleship?
4. What do you believe is the role of pastors in discipleship?
5. What gaps have you experienced in your discipleship journey?
6. What gaps in discipleship exist in churches you have attended?
7. Did you experience discipleship throughout childhood to present in the home?
8. What impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation have on your spiritual maturity?
9. What is the current condition or health of your church?
10. Is the church in decline? If so, why?
11. Why do you believe there are so many church members that lack spiritual maturity?
12. What do spiritually mature Christians do?

APPENDIX C: Pastoral Interview Questions

1. How do you define discipleship?
2. How did you come to a spiritually mature relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior?
3. What do you believe is a pastor's role in discipleship?
4. What is the church's role in discipleship?
5. What gaps have you experienced in your discipleship journey?
6. What gaps in discipleship exist in your church?
7. Did you experience discipleship throughout childhood to present in the home?
8. What impact did discipleship in the home and other environments have on their spiritual formation have on your spiritual maturity?
9. What is the current condition or health of the church you pastor and the body of Christ as a whole?
10. Is the church you pastor in decline? If so, why? Is the entire church (body of Christ) in decline? If so, why?
11. Do you believe there are members of the church you pastor that lack spiritual maturity?
12. What do spiritually mature Christians do in the church you pastor, and the church as a whole?
13. What are the most effective discipleship practices or models?
14. What prepared you for your role as a pastor in discipleship?
15. What are the characteristics of a disciple?

APPENDIX D: Alternate Church List

1. Fourth Street Baptist Church
2. Jerusalem Baptist Church
3. Second Baptist Church
4. Cornerstone Baptist Church
5. Hartsville Bible Baptist Church
6. Forest Hills Baptist Church
7. North Hartsville Baptist Church
8. South Hartsville Baptist Church
9. Whispering Pines Baptist Church
10. Chapel Hill Baptist Church
11. Mt. Tema Baptist Church
12. Mt Calvary Baptist Church
13. Mt. Elon Baptist Church
14. Greater Heights Baptist Church
15. Antioch Baptist Church
16. Faith Baptist Church
17. Gum Branch Baptist Church
18. Liberty Hill Baptist Church
19. Pine Ridge Baptist Church

APPENDIX E: Church Permission Request

[Insert Date]

[Recipient]

[Title]

[Church Name]

[Church Address]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my project is a phenomenological study of discipleship experiences in Hartsville, SC area Baptist churches. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived discipleship experiences.

I am writing to request permission to conduct my research at [CHURCH NAME]. This study is for participants who must be 21 years of age or older, mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in a virtual or face-to-face interview. It should take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete the interview. Following (one to two weeks), the interview participants will be asked to review and approve the transcribed interview. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Thank you for considering my request. If possible, please respond within ten days of receiving this request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval or respond to my email, [REDACTED] granting permission to conduct this study.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stuckey
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX F: PASTOR CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Discipleship Experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist Churches

Principal Investigator: Robert W. Stuckey, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 21 years of age or older, a mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. This study will focus on understanding the experiences of Christians during their discipleship process.

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. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Recommend four or five participants considered spiritually mature Christians in the church.
3. One to two weeks following the interview, participants will be asked to review the interview transcriptions and any developed themes and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
4. At the conclusion of the study, the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Indirect benefits to pastors, lay leaders, and parents to understand gaps or perceived gaps in discipleship models in the churches they pastor or attend.

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. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.]
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and/or any hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Robert Stuckey. 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. Matthew Vander Wiele, 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 of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: A Phenomenological Study of Discipleship Experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist Churches

Principal Investigator: Robert W. Stuckey, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 21 years of age or older, a mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived discipleship experiences of mature Christians in Hartsville, SC, area Baptist churches. This study will focus on understanding the experiences of Christians during their discipleship process.

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. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. One to two weeks following the interview participants will be asked to review the interview transcripts, any developed themes, and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
3. At the conclusion of the study the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Indirect benefits to pastors, lay leaders, and parents to understand gaps or perceived gaps in discipleship models in the churches they pastor or attend.

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. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.]
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and/or any hardcopy records will be shredded.
- Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then deleted. The researcher and members of his doctoral committee will have access to these recordings.

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 will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

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

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

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

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

Printed Subject Name

Signature & Date

APPENDIX H: PASTOR RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Insert Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my project is a phenomenological study of discipleship experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist churches. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived discipleship experiences.

Participants must be 21 years of age or older, mature Christian, and the lead pastor. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Recommend four or five participants considered spiritually mature Christians in the church.
3. One to two weeks following the interview participants will be asked to review the interview transcripts, any developed themes, and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
4. At the conclusion of the study the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information/to schedule an interview/etc. Sign and bring/email the attached consent document to the researcher at the email above or agreed upon location. Please respond within five days of receiving this request to allow the study to continue.

A consent document is attached to this email or can be provided at the time of the interview. 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 [REDACTED] to arrange consent at the time of the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stuckey
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX I: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL

[Insert Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my project is a phenomenological study of discipleship experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist churches. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived discipleship experiences.

Participants must be 21 years of age or older, mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. One to two weeks following the interview participants will be asked to review the interview transcripts, any developed themes, and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
3. At the conclusion of the study the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at (843) 858-6767 or rstuckey@liberty.edu for more information/to schedule an interview/etc. Sign and bring/email the attached consent document to the researcher at the email above or agreed upon location. Please respond within five days of receiving this request to allow the study to continue.

A consent document is attached to this email or can be provided at the time of the interview. 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 rstuckey@liberty.edu or call (843) 858-6767 to arrange consent at the time of the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stuckey
(843) 858-6767/rstuckey@liberty.edu

APPENDIX J: PASTOR RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

[Insert Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

This is a follow-up to my previous email requesting your participation in my study as a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my project is a phenomenological study of discipleship experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist churches. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived discipleship experiences.

Participants must be 21 years of age or older, mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. One to two weeks following the interview participants will be asked to review the interview transcripts, any developed themes, and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
3. At the conclusion of the study the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information/to schedule an interview/etc. Sign and bring/email the attached consent document to the researcher at the email above or agreed upon location. Please respond within five days of receiving this request to allow the study to continue.

A consent document attached to this email or can be provided at the time of the interview. 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 [REDACTED] to arrange consent at the time of the interview.

Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stuckey
[REDACTED]

APPENDIX K: PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT FOLLOW-UP EMAIL

[Insert Date]

Dear [Recipient]:

This is a follow-up to my previous email requesting your participation in my study as a graduate student in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The title of my project is a phenomenological study of discipleship experiences in Hartsville, SC Baptist churches. The purpose of my research is to explore the lived discipleship experiences.

Participants must be 21 years of age or older, mature Christian, and recommended by the lead pastor. Participants, if willing, will be asked to:

1. Participate in an in-person or virtual, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. One to two weeks following the interview participants will be asked to review the interview transcripts, any developed themes, and check for accuracy or confirm agreement.
3. At the conclusion of the study the participants will be asked to review the conclusions the researcher made from the results of the study. This is a final step to allow participants to validate the findings.

Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please contact me at [REDACTED] for more information/to schedule an interview/etc. Sign and bring/email the attached consent document to the researcher at the email above or agreed upon location. Please respond within five days of receiving this request to allow the study to continue.

A consent document attached to this email or can be provided at the time of the interview. 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 [REDACTED] to arrange consent at the time of the interview.

Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the interview.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Stuckey
[REDACTED]