LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Missional Leadership:

An Instructional Program to Cultivate Leaders of a Missional Church

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to

the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

in Candidacy for the Degree of

Doctor of Ministry

by

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Thesis Project Approval Sheet

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT
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The purpose of this action research project is to design, execute, and evaluate a small group instructional framework that cultivates a missional culture focused on communal discipleship at MVMNT Church, a local church in the Association of Related Churches network, while also addressing a gap in scholarship surrounding the interrelation of discipleship and the missional church. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study leveraged inductive thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with survey data to validate the lack of discipleship activity at MVMNT Church and moderate-to-low comprehension of topics related to mission, discipleship, and leadership in the church. This project recommended and directed an intervention consisting of an instructional program that targeted seven members of MVMNT Church in formal and informal church leadership to cultivate an environment for learning, knowledge-sharing, and mutual edification in discipleship to address the problem. Longitudinal analysis of survey data collected post-intervention demonstrates the success of the instructional framework in improving comprehension of these topics and the effective catalysis of discipleship. This project proposes an instructional framework bridging the gap between mission and discipleship scholarship, with the potential to improve missional discipleship cultures in many other similar church environments. The project processed the generalizability and transferability of this research and areas warranting more in-depth study.

Keywords: Discipleship, Mission, Missional Church, Attractional Church, Leadership, Culture

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Abbreviations

ARC *Association of Related Churches*

NIV *New International Version*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This action research project contributes to an understanding of practical missional cultures within the non-denominational church, particularly within the author's ministry context as a leader of adult discipleship at Movement Church, officially named MVMNT Church.[1] The church is a historically attractional church, focused strongly on the priority of the Sunday morning experience and the attraction of visitors and members to that service. As the church's leaders pursue a shift toward a missional culture dedicated to the pursuit and service of God's redemptive mission, this project serves as a foundation of understanding for biblical mission and the role of the church and its leaders within the context of that mission.

This thesis has multiple aims, the foremost being to dissect the discipleship culture within the author's ministry context as a leader of adult discipleship at Movement Church, officially named MVMNT Church. Following this dissection, the thesis project reviews a comprehensive assessment of literature on mission, leadership, and discipleship, then executes action research to develop, implement, and evaluate an instructional curriculum for mission and discipleship in the church. The instructional curriculum will equip MVMNT church members for effective mission, provide an example to other non-denominational churches, and provide findings and conclusions available for incorporation into future bodies of research. This chapter will introduce the ministry context of MVMNT Church, followed by a thorough exposition of the problem and purpose this

[1] MVMNT, pronounced "Movement," is the legal and advertised name of the church. The church's name conveys necessary action beyond an admission of faith, implying the criticality of perpetual forward movement along one's faith journey.

research addresses. The following sections will delineate basic assumptions upon which the research rests, as well as delimitations, limitations, and the thesis for this research project.

This project's mission-focused approach will challenge the church's longstanding practices and encourage it to foster a culture that prepares its disciples to participate in God's redemptive mission actively. The aim ultimately is to equip the members for growth as disciples who disciple others, thereby fueling the service of God's kingdom in MVMNT Church and beyond. Through that biblically founded church transformation, this study will establish a pathway for future exploration and action at MVMNT Church and similar congregations worldwide. By addressing this significant issue in the context of theological research, this study underscores the need for church transformation in alignment with God's expansive redemption plan.

Ministry Context

MVMNT Church is a non-denominational church in Charlottesville, Virginia, where the author works as a small groups and adult discipleship leader. The church, while not formally affiliated with any denomination and not in formal recognition of any confession or creed beyond the Nicene Creed, teaches theological concepts roughly in alignment with the 1689 Confession of Faith. Although the church does not possess any denominational affiliation, it is a member of the Association of Related Churches (ARC), a non-denominational church-planting organization with an attractional or seeker-sensitive culture. The church is modest in size, averaging between 150–210 attendees per week between two services. MVMNT's body is remarkably diverse, particularly in comparison to other non-denominational churches in the Charlottesville region; there is no clear demographic majority concerning race, age, or economic

status, and the church's volunteer staff also enjoys a remarkably diverse membership over its children's ministry, hospitality ministry, groups, and discipleship ministries.

Leadership

The church has two ordained pastors: the lead pastor who oversees all financial, operational, and administrative decision-making for the church; and the executive pastor, who functions primarily as a delegate of the lead pastor's authority, facilitating staff meetings, managing volunteer staff, and occasionally delivering the Sunday morning liturgy. The lead pastor balances his authority via accountability to two councils: an elders' council, composed of other pastors from the ARC network as well as his own lifelong pastor; and a treasurers' council, the members of which are unknown to the church body. The elders' council provides spiritual oversight and accountability, while the treasurers' council provides approval for the church's annual budget and extraordinary expenses outside the approved budget such as capital expenditures.

Alongside the lead and executive pastors, volunteer staff members work part-time to manage the church's myriad ministries: community outreach, children's ministry, small groups, teen ministry, worship, and a mobile food pantry ministry. The church assesses the qualifications and capability of these leaders via an informal interview process with the lead pastor. These volunteer staff members provide an administrative supervisory capacity, arranging volunteers, rosters, and other strategic logistic operations necessary to conduct ministry. At a more granular level, these staff members support church operations through a loosely organized cadre of informal leaders who lead small groups and manage service teams such as hospitality and outreach.

Though numerous, informal leaders are the unsung heroes of the church's operations. They are not recognized on any form of roster for their leadership role, but the church's members recognize their well-understood positions of authority and influence. Crucial to the church's operation, these leaders supervise logistics, administration, and task management associated with the church's variety of ministries, including hospitality functions and children's ministry. These informal leaders exercise authority through an abstract structure, and the church's volunteer staff typically direct new volunteers and new church members to these informal leaders for direction or questions about the church.

The People

The body of MVMNT Church is remarkably diverse, possessing no significant race or age minority. The church's leaders are also a diverse grouping, led by a husband-wife pair overseeing male and female ministry leaders across verticals of youth ministry, children's ministry, small groups, and community outreach. Many members have come to MVMNT after leaving other area churches, searching both for a welcoming and hospitable environment as well as a smaller church community than Charlottesville's many other attractional non-denominational churches. Because Charlottesville itself has a history of race-related tension,[2] many of MVMNT's congregants possess a passion for reconciliation and spiritual-emotional healing. The church's worship leader displays a sticker on her guitar case that reads, "It's okay to have Jesus and a therapist, too," showcasing the church's perspective of holistic spiritual health, which is informed by the individual's mental and emotional health.

[2] Debbie Elliot, "Five Years After the Charlottesville Rally: 'It's What You're Still Trying to Forget'," (NPR), August 12, 2022.

The Culture

To assess the context of MVMNT church beyond the demography, this thesis will seek to gain a deeper understanding of MVMNT's organizational culture through the evaluation of its symbols, rituals, narratives, and values. To do this, the thesis will lean on a paradigm of cultural analysis pioneered by scholar Edgar Schein: to assess the church at three distinct levels, ranging from the most superficial to the most revealing. Schein writes, "Any group's culture can be studied at these three levels–the level of its artifacts, the level of its espoused beliefs and values, and the level of its basic underlying assumptions."[3] By assessing the church's artifacts, values, and assumptions, the thesis will arrive at a comprehensive understanding of MVMNT's ministry context, shaping the problem and purpose of this research project.

Artifacts

Artifacts are those items that are visibly apparent in the life of an organization. They include symbols like a logo, wall decorations, or other visual icons; narratives, the widespread and well-known stories that the organization's members propagate; and rituals, which are the common events that organization members value and participate in. At MVMNT, churchgoers will notice key artifacts immediately: As one enters, they are greeted with a large sign that reads, "Welcome Home!" The merchandise stand, not far from the entrance, is adorned with sweaters, shirts, and notebooks bearing the church's 2023 slogan: "Kingdom of Outsiders."

Individuals and families mill about within a lobby space intentionally designed to push people toward one another. Sanctuary doors do not open until worship begins, encouraging church members and visitors alike to listen to the upbeat worship music that fills the lobby and

[3] Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3rd Ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass, 2004), 58.

mingle with the numerous volunteers bearing name tags saying, “We’ve got you!” Photos adorn the walls, picturing church members amidst worship, participating in community service projects, and simply smiling in the lobby. The exterior of the church and the lobby are conspicuously absent of traditional Christian imagery, such as crosses or other clear religious symbols. As the individual enters the sanctuary, the music has already begun. The lights are dim, and the focus is drawn to colorful spotlights on the stage. If one were to turn backward to the wall behind them, they would see large crosses carrying luggage tags, upon which are written the prayers of church and local community members.

Among the many rituals common to MVMNT Church, the Sunday morning experience concludes by encouraging the congregation to participate in prayer. Visitors and members alike may either walk to the front of the sanctuary for prayer with the church’s pastoral team or head back to the large hanging crosses to fill out a prayer tag. After the church service, there is often a follow-up event in which individuals and families can participate. Most prominently, these events include the church’s monthly “MVMNT 101” experience, where guests will learn more about the church’s operations and can join the church’s volunteer team.

If they join the volunteer team, they will experience another of MVMNT’s most cherished rituals: the Sunday morning pep rally, which occurs at 9:10 a.m. before the first Sunday service. At the rally, one of the church’s pastors presents announcements and selects a volunteer to receive a “shout-out,” which is praise for some above-and-beyond duty they have performed. At the end of the rally, the group circles for prayer, placing their hands in the center and shouting, “One, Two, Three, Movement!” reminiscent of a sports team taking the field. These artifacts are the surface of MVMNT’s culture; they hint at the core assumptions and values beneath them, alluding to a culture oriented around celebration, joy, and hospitality.

Espoused Values

Beneath the church's artifacts, symbols, and rituals, MVMNT espouses its values in the form of common quotes often repeated weekly before, during, and after Sunday services. Espoused values, which may be distinct from actual values, are the common expressions and terms that convey the organization's values to outsiders and those new to the organization. These may be formally expressed as values or members may convey these values more informally via common phrases or idioms. In the case of MVMNT Church, the Sunday morning pep rally always concludes with the lead pastor's reminder, "Two things are always true: Today will be someone's first day at MVMNT, and someone is going to take a next step today." This emphasis on the newcomer and their experience shapes the Sunday service and, indeed, the entire church's operational cycle throughout the week.

At the end of each service, when the speaker solicits the weekly tithe and offerings, another common quote appears with regularity: "If this is your first Sunday with us, then we're not asking you to give us anything. In fact, we hope that this experience has been a gift to you." On the wall of the church that leads into the children's spaces, a large sign reads: "Kids leave here knowing that Jesus loves them, and church is fun."

In its monthly new members class, called MVMNT 101, the church reviews its core activities: the weekly worship experience, small groups, community service projects, and the church volunteer team, called the "Dream Team." In each of these offerings, the church emphasizes the centrality of physical gathering at the church; the lead pastor typically explains that "going to church should feel more like a party and less like a funeral." Members share anecdotes about the friends they have made through church, experiences they remember fondly, and other narratives connected to the institutional worship experience at MVMNT Church. These narratives, stories, and phrases articulate a fundamental value placed on the centrality of the

Sunday morning worship experience and the criticality of institutional worship as a core component of the Christian faith.

Core Assumptions

As one explores and analyzes the artifacts and espoused values of an organization, it becomes clear that these cultural attributes are reflections of basic shared assumptions held by all group members. Like an iceberg, most of the organization's culture is hidden beneath the surface. It becomes revealed only by the symbols on the wall, widespread narratives, rituals practiced by the group, and the espoused values that the organization's leaders and members propagate. At MVMNT Church, the artifacts and espoused values of the church reveal a handful of core assumptions that, when assessed, reveal everything about the church's culture.

The emphasis on language and values around celebration, both in artifacts and espoused values, points to a shared assumption that the gathering of believers within the institutional church is primarily meant to be a celebratory experience dedicated to praise. Abundant language encouraging church visitors to "get connected" and "take a next step" places the onus of connection onto the individual, revealing a shared assumption that it is primarily the responsibility of the individual believer to pursue discipleship and growth. The Sunday morning experience emphasizes the importance of new believers from all walks of life.

The lobby, intentionally devoid of religious symbols, is designed to make non-Christians feel comfortable. The Sunday morning pep rally, encouraging volunteers to note newcomers, further emphasizes these new individuals and families. This emphasis cultivates a shared assumption that these visitors are akin to guests of honor and that the highest aim of the church is to welcome these new believers. Were one to peruse the personal library of the lead pastors, tucked away backstage, it would become apparent that these core assumptions are by design: The

books *Deep and Wide*, *Future Church*, and *The Purpose-Driven Church*, among others by seeker-focused and attractional-minded authors and pastors, shaped the education and the thinking of MVMNT's lead pastor.

Summary of Ministry Context

Based in a city-on-the-rise in Charlottesville, Virginia, experiencing some of the most significant population growth in the state,[4] MVMNT Church is a classically attractional non-denominational church. The church's leaders and members emphasize the importance of hospitality, particularly regarding newcomers, and focus most of the church's institutional energies on attracting and retaining new members. Following a member's commitment to MVMNT, subsequent next steps are available through small groups and sporadic community service opportunities, though at this stage, the responsibility of growth falls on the individual. There is no dedicated pathway or guidance to shepherd the individual from newcomer attendance to a mature disciple nor any formal structured discipleship program.

The church culturally prioritizes the gathering of believers for celebratory worship, leaving other aspects of the Christian faith to the informal and unstructured leadership of lay leaders and other interested parties. To put it succinctly: MVMNT views its institutional goal as gathering the saints in one place; from there, all reliance is on the Spirit as to what growth, if any, might propagate from that gathering. This attractional paradigm, while not biblically invalid or necessarily damaging to the church, focuses primarily on the new believer or attraction of new church members, thereby limiting existing church members' opportunities for growth and discipleship by reducing priority against numeric church growth and new member attraction.

[4] Bryan McKenzie, "Where is Virginia's Growth Occurring? You Might be Surprised," (UVA Today), February 3, 2023.

Alongside these gaps, leaders see an opportunity: The missional church culture, though relatively unknown to MVMNT's leaders subordinate to the lead pastor, appears as a new vision for the future of MVMNT Church.

Problem Presented

MVMNT Church is a member of the Association of Related Churches (ARC) and subscribes broadly to the attractional church paradigm. Pastor Bill Hornsby, the founder of ARC, champions this church model as a means by which the church might operate as a magnetic community, attracting the unchurched into its doors.[5] Missiologist Craig Van Gelder asserts that such a church model is not well-suited for full participation in the mission of God due to a conflict of priorities. As such, a church generally places more emphasis on drawing members into its services rather than sending its congregants as equipped witnesses into the world.[6] MVMNT Church, as a subscriber to the attractional paradigm, places most of the emphasis on drawing believers and unbelievers alike into Sunday morning worship experiences, wherein opportunities to cultivate growth and understanding of mission are the onus of the individual churchgoer.

As a result of placing the onus outside the church leadership, sporadic attempts to cultivate missional focus in the church are challenging. While Sunday attendance grows week after week, attempts falter to grow small group programs and community service programs. The church, therefore, seeks to pursue a more missional culture in alignment with the missional culture described in popular church leadership books such as Woodward's *Creating a Missional*

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[5] Billy Hornsby, *The Attractional Church: Growth Through a Refreshing, Relational, and Relevant Church Experience* (Brentwood, TN: FaithWords, 2011).

[6] Craig Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdman's, 2018), location 607, Kindle.

Culture[7] and Guder's *Missional Church*.[8] The goal of such cultural transformation is to foster an understanding of biblical mission and discipleship within the church. Such a mission-oriented culture, in turn, leads to action and cultivates a long-term self-sustaining reproductive strategy for church growth as individual church members become empowered to make disciples.

This missional culture, as Woodward espouses, possesses a focus on missional engagement with the world outside the church; primarily to call, develop, and reproductively send new disciples. Woodward refers to this quality of a missional church as "self-generative," meaning that a church possessing a missional culture is one that exponentially reproduces through discipleship.[9] Due to the lack of any structured or formal approach to discipleship, as well as to any clearly expressed philosophy of discipleship, MVMNT Church is unable to adopt a missional culture effectively, though the church's robust cadre of informal lay leaders across ministry teams presents a prime opportunity for the empowerment of discipleship among the church laity via the influence of the church's informal leaders.

Because Jesus called the church to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8), and scholarly literature generally agrees that the church is meant to operate in a unified community rather than as a collection of individuals,[10] such church culture must become endemic throughout the body. Therefore, the leadership of the church must work to become aligned with one another in a shared understanding of mission, discipleship, and the path forward for intervention toward a missional culture that prioritizes the practice of discipleship throughout the church. This

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[7] J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

[8] Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

[9] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, location 97.

[10] Phillipus J. Buys, "The Roots of Missio Dei in the Reformation, and Its Implications for Theological Education," *Luce Verbi* 54, no. 2 (2020): 6.

alignment will encourage a sense of biblical unity and peace within the body, critical for the endurance of its heavenly mission (Eph 4:3–4). Therefore, this thesis acknowledges the critical importance of leadership and the alignment therein in shaping discipleship culture. The problem is that MVMNT Church's discipleship culture is focused on individual disciplines rather than a missional culture emphasizing participation in communal mission.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a leadership curriculum to cultivate a culture focused on missional discipleship. This intervention would promote a culture pursuant to biblical mission as defined by missiologist Michael Barram, who notes that mission is "a purposiveness [of God] into which the interpreting community has been caught up and called,"[11] necessitating a growth of understanding and alignment with God's purposes in the form of *missio Dei*. Such a leadership curriculum emphasizes the importance of biblical instruction in the cultivation of leaders, as the psalmist notes: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you" (Ps 32:8, New International Version). Throughout Scripture, God reveals His plan for leaders to train leaders.[12] Therefore, the careful biblical instruction of such leaders is paramount, as biblical leaders raise yet more leaders via discipleship.

This thesis will analyze and synthesize the scholarly literature surrounding the topic of leadership in mission and discipleship, thereby seeking to distill an understanding of biblical

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[11] Michael Barram, *Missional Economics: Biblical Justice and Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2018), location 4561, Kindle.

[12] Matthew Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission: A Framework for Disciple-Making as a Communal Function of the Local Church," (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022), 55–56.

mission suitable for instruction in the curriculum to church leaders at MVMNT church. Church leaders will participate in a small group instruction of that curriculum, becoming exposed to mission as a lens for biblical, reproductive discipleship. This is following the example of Scripture, which makes plain the value of biblical instruction in the pursuit of spiritual formation (Eph 4:11–12; 1 Tim 4:6). Through the application of scholarly research in the fields of missiology, Christian education, and Christian leadership, this thesis proposes a missional leadership curriculum founded in biblical principles supported by the latest scholarly research.

Precedent literature in the field of mission and theology reveals that there are a variety of biblically valid understandings of discipleship as it relates to mission, as well as the role the church corporately plays in mission. Therefore, the curriculum will be ecumenical in its expression of biblical truths related to mission and discipleship, empowering participants to discover their personal contextual interpretations of these topics. The curriculum will define God's mission, *missio Dei*, and outline various roles the church plays to serve such mission. The curriculum will review various means and methods for cultivating discipleship within the church, assessing the scholarly views on spiritual disciplines versus missional vocation approaches to discipleship.

The training will encourage leaders to understand the urgency of the modern mission field as it pertains to the contemporary church, as well as the critical importance of their leadership role in transforming and evaluating their church on mission. Therefore, this thesis will review relevant literature to support strong theological and theoretical foundations resulting in leadership training that applies the latest biblical research to cultivate a powerful missional culture in the church.

This project is considered successful, and the thesis valid, if leaders focus on and practice disciple-making in their own lives, as such a leadership focus is reflective of the culture of a missional church.[13] As a result of participation in this action research project, the purpose is fulfilled if leaders pursue intentional discipleship relationships with others within the church with the intent to raise new disciple-making leaders, thereby cultivating a missional culture of discipleship throughout the body of the church via generational reproduction.

Basic Assumptions

In the conduct of its research, this project holds basic assumptions regarding the nature of its participants and the study itself. Regarding the project's purpose, the thesis assumes that there is a causal correlation between the culture of an organization and its behavior; that is, that manipulating the culture of an organization will also impact the behavior of that organization and vice versa, that the behaviors of church members reflect that church's culture. Similarly, the project assumes that an organization's leaders have some ability to manipulate culture through their beliefs and actions. The project also assumes that, while participants represent only a subset of leaders at MVMNT Church, the study results are generalizable to the entirety of MVMNT Church's leaders.

This project assumes a correlation between leadership development and organizational culture. In his book *ReVision*, pastor and ministry coach Aubry Malphurs astutely observes that "When pastors have been leading a church for five years or longer, the church assumes the character of their pastor. As goes the leadership, so goes the church!"[14] The purpose of this

[13] Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon E. Penfold, *ReVision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2014), location 497, Kindle.

[14] Malphurs and Penfold, *ReVision*, location 398.

project is to cultivate a culture of missional discipleship at MVMNT Church, and the project assumes that a church leadership focused on reproductive missional discipleship is a valid proxy for a church culture that, itself, is focused on missional discipleship.

Concerning the project's participants, the project assumes that they are generally truthful throughout the study. The project also assumes that all participants are practicing Christians who, despite potential theological and cultural differences, subscribe to core tenets of the Christian faith as outlined in the apostle's Creed: that God is the creator and sovereign of all things; Jesus Christ died, resurrected, and ascended; and belief in the Holy Spirit, the Christian church, communion, forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body, and everlasting life.

Definitions

This thesis deals with topics related to church organization and mission, particularly within the ministry context of MVMNT Church. To understand the concepts associated with these topics, an underlying foundation of common vocabulary will facilitate the interpretation of this research project. Such key vocabulary includes attractional and missional church models, church leaders, discipleship, and other significant terms for the understanding of this study. Many of these terms overlap in conceptual definition and the role they play in the context of ministry; each possesses a distinct meaning contributing to the project.

Attractional church. An attractional church is one whose operations and philosophies focus primarily on the attraction of potential church members to the Sunday morning church experience. Wilson writes, "An attractional church conducts worship and ministry according to

the desires and values of potential consumers. This typically leads to the dominant ethos of pragmatism throughout the church."[15]

Church leaders. Churches require a variety of pluralistic leaders to sustain operations. This thesis, when referencing leaders or leadership of the church, does so with the context of Eph 4:11–12, which includes apostles, prophets, evangelists, teachers, and pastors. All those within the church whose primary role is to equip the body of the Church for ministry. Christian education scholar Ed Stetzer recognizes a need for this wide definition: "There is a growing trend of diverse and non-traditional ministry employment."[16] This definition casts a wide umbrella for those whom this thesis considers to be church leaders, focused on the leader's spiritual role in the congregation rather than the particular job title.

Communal mission. Much Christian literature, whether scholarly or not, draws attention to the necessity of the Christian community and sharing life together toward collaborative spiritual growth. This project will use communal mission as a means of describing the state or act of collaborative unified participation in mission by the body of the church. Through the lens of communal mission, the purpose of the church is to be a "formation of a community of people, who are then built up and released into their gifting and ministries within the world."[17]

Culture. In his seminal work *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Edgar Schein defines culture as "both a dynamic phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others and shaped by leadership behavior, and a set

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[15] Jared C. Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church: Uniting Church-Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), location 340, Kindle.

[16] Ed Stetzer and Andrew McDonald, "How Can and Should We Reach and Train Our Future Pastors and Christian Leaders?" *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 1 (2020): 5.

[17] Andrew Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), location 2306, Kindle.

of structures, routines, rules, and norms that guide and constrain behavior."[18] In this way, an organization's culture has two elements: that which organically expresses the shared beliefs and assumptions of the group, and that which is captured in the manipulable rituals, artifacts, and structures of the group. Collectively, culture both guides and reflects the dominant beliefs and attitudes of the organization.

Discipleship. Discipleship, as a concept, is subject to many variant perspectives and practices, which this thesis will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2. Common to each of these variants, however, is a definition of discipleship as "relational learning of how to live life in a Christlike way."[19]

Discipleship framework. While discipleship is the process by which Christians learn Christlikeness or grow more spiritually mature, as exemplified in Pauline writings such as Rom 6:1, a discipleship framework is a particular structure through which the church guides the process of discipleship. This type of framework might take the form of curricula such as Greg Ogden's *Discipleship Essentials*,[20] a set of steps or stages such as the eight-step process of Robert Coleman's seminal *The Master Plan of Evangelism*,[21] or a broad perspective on the philosophy of discipleship such as the Navigators' *Walking With Christ*.[22] Regardless of the format, a discipleship framework is any expressly communicated distinct structure through which the church views and participates in the process of discipleship.

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[18] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 22.

[19] Malan Nel and W. J. Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciplemaking' and the Role of Faith-Sharing*," HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 5.

[20] Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials* (Westmont, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2019).

[21] Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1993).

[22] The Navigators, *Walking With Christ: Design for Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2022).

Evangelism. Including a variety of activities such as cross-cultural outreach, witnessing, and verbal proclamation of the gospel, evangelism is any activity by which Christians, engaged in a process of discipleship, participate in "calling people to decisions for Christ."[23]

Missio Dei. *Missio Dei*, a Latin phrase meaning *the mission of God*, references the collective plan and process by which God seeks to redeem all humankind. In particular, scholarly use of the phrase *missio Dei* generally emphasizes a perspective on Christian mission, which calls the church and individual disciples to participate in God's redemptive mission. Schoon describes *missio Dei* as "a lifelong calling to service, sacrifice, selflessness, and effort. It will be worked out in neighborhoods and people groups around the world, and fueled and led by the least likely saints."[24]

Mission. Mission, while it might commonly be associated exclusively with the domain of evangelism and outreach, has a broader definition related to God's timeless purpose for the redemption of humankind. In this way, mission is an all-encompassing term to capture that aspect of God's plan for mankind in which humans participate; this thesis relies on this understanding of mission derived from the gospel and the Culture Network's *Missional Economics*, which defines mission as "the purposiveness of God, a purposiveness into which the interpreting community has been caught up and called."[25]

Missional church. The Missional church is one that emphasizes the cultivation of discipleship through practice in association with mission. Schoon describes a missional approach to worship as one "in which Jesus' character is cultivated among God's people through worship

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[23] Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciplemaking' and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 2.

[24] Christopher Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character: Integrating Worship and Discipleship in the Missional Church Movement* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), location 397, Kindle.

[25] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 4561.

and leads into their communal embodiment of that character in the world."[26] A Missional church prioritizes this form of worship, aimed at the embodiment of Christ's character in action in the world.

Missional discipleship. Simply put, missional discipleship is a lens that views the process of discipleship as accomplished primarily through participation in mission, as understood via *missio Dei*. This is a philosophy of discipleship that emphasizes the cultivation of laity as missionaries, wherein all Christians have a mandate to engage in reproductive discipleship as a means of Christian identity formation.[27]

Limitations

Any study possesses limitations, over which the project has no control and that influence the research and its findings. One limitation pertinent to this study is the participants' engagement with the project; likely, all participants may not engage with the entirety of the curriculum. Additionally, although truthfulness is an assumption of this project, participants may likely omit, downplay, or exaggerate responses to the survey intentionally or unintentionally. The specificity of the ministry context associated with this study limits the project's generalizability and replicability related to other ministry contexts, even if such contexts appear similar in culture and problem. The project's focus on church leaders, which reduces the randomness of sampling as well as the sample size, further limits generalizability. Finally, this project places a high degree of emphasis on both formal and informal leaders, though the church only has one lead pastor who is ultimately responsible for decision-making and strategic ministry

[26] Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 123.

[27] Christopher Beard, "Missional Discipleship: Discerning Spiritual-Formation Practices and Goals Within the Missional Movement," *Missiology: An International Review* 43, no. 2 (2015): 175.

planning. Because of MVMNT Church's centralized formal authority in a single lead pastor, the cultivation of formal and informal leaders subordinate to the lead pastor may limit their ability to influence the culture of the church through formal mechanisms within their limited authority.

Delimitations

This project's author delimited the scope of its target population by focusing on formal and informal church leaders in the context of MVMNT Church. The study is also delimited by time; the curriculum for research will take place in the setting of MVMNT Church's physical facility for eight weeks. Because the target population is a subset of the church population itself, the study will seek a sample that does not include all church leaders. Instead, he will choose a sample to provide diverse perspectives and backgrounds across demographic lines and various ministry specializations such as youth ministry, worship ministry, and small groups ministry. While potentially reducing the project's generalizability and replicability, these delimitations will build a research project representative of current and future church leaders at MVMNT Church.

Thesis Statement

It is a biblical imperative for church leaders to equip and form the body of Christ for works of ministry (Eph 4:11–12). Individual believers cannot maximally contribute to the service of the kingdom; rather, through the combination of their gifts wielded in a unified community, they amplify one another and bring forth powerful witness to the world (1 Cor 12:15–20).[28] Just as Paul raised leaders up behind him as he planted churches throughout the early Christian community, today's church leaders are also obligated to cultivate cultures of leadership,

[28] Mary T. Lederleitner, "Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World," *Transformation* 38, no. 3 (2021): 247.

discipleship, and mission within their church community.[29] Church leaders set the example and, in doing so, lead the church toward their biblical vision.

The early church rallied around Peter and John not because they were highly educated but because they experienced the discipleship of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:13). The curriculum this thesis proposes will provide a framework emphasizing spiritual growth and Spirit-led discipleship that empowers church leaders to transform others. This study's objective is not just to cultivate strong church leaders for their own sake. Instead, the aim of this study is that this training might serve as a springboard from which leaders can cultivate other leaders in reproductive discipleship and guide the church on a holistic journey toward a unified communal mission.

By raising leaders in alignment with one another who possess a strong grasp of Scripture's vision for biblical mission and discipleship, church leaders will gain the gifts needed to impart such vision onto their church and lead it purposefully for works of ministry as God designed it (Eph 2:10). Therefore, the curriculum this thesis proposes will aid church leaders at MVMNT Church in the undertaking of missional transformation within the church, leading to the cultivation of a measurable culture of missional discipleship, the success of which is measured by participants' engagement with and practice of reproductive discipleship in their own lives. If MVMNT Church's leadership team completes a curriculum focused on missional discipleship, then the church's culture will prioritize participation in communal mission.

[29] Herschel R. Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities: A Seminar for Vineyard Church Planters and Leaders," (DMin thesis, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2020), 95.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To craft a training curriculum for MVMNT Church leaders to pursue missional transformation, this thesis will review relevant literature and establish the theological and theoretical foundations for such work. In addition to uncovering the biblical structures upon which such training must rest, this thesis seeks to determine theoretical best practices for leadership, education, and evaluation of the church and its leaders in order to conduct quality, rigorous research. This chapter will explore the relevant literature to synthesize a common understanding of themes in missiology, which will be the cornerstone of the leadership curriculum.

Additionally, this chapter will assess the theological and theoretical foundations of such training to ensure that training is biblical and is in accordance with academic best practice and meets the standards of appropriate scholarly rigor. By reviewing precedent literature alongside theological foundations and theoretical best practices, this thesis will synthesize a biblically valid and academically supported curriculum that will contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding the preparation of missional leaders throughout the church.

Literature Review

Before defining this study's theological and theoretical foundations, it is essential to explore the themes in the literature surrounding the subjects of mission, discipleship, the church, its leaders, and the gaps therein. Missiologist Rich Starcher notes that literature review is a core component of rigorous theological scholarship and is "used as a way of framing the study and

establishing a researcher's expertise."[1] This review uncovered many themes, at first seemingly divergent, ultimately united in pursuit of uncovering the nature and purpose of the church and individual disciples in pursuit of God's mission, *missio Dei*.

This literature review consists of three major sections: Theory and Theology of Mission, Missional Discipleship, and The Church on Mission. The goal of this review is to synthesize the substantial body of scholarly literature regarding these three broad categories. The review first appraises a general survey of missiology before subsequently engaging with the applications of missiological scholarship on the Christian life individually via discipleship and communally via the church. In synthesizing the literature on these topics, the review will also identify areas of contention and gaps in existing research and highlight areas of universal alignment across various camps of scholarship. In so doing, the review provides a strong foundation for the construction of an educational program that approaches the culture of the missional church from an ecumenical perspective.

Theory and Theology of Mission

To begin this literature review, this thesis will begin with a survey of the theory of biblical mission. The narrative of scripture clearly demonstrates a mission of reconciliation for all creation, calling the church to participate in this mission. This mission has never been more urgent than today, as the decline of Christendom necessitates a refocusing of understanding across the ecumenical church on discipleship and mission rooted in biblical truth. This section will review the theological topic of *missio Dei*, the mission of God, the value of a missional

[1] Richard L. Starcher, Leanne M. Dzubinski and Jamie N. Sanchez, "Rigorous Missiological Research Using Qualitative Inquiry," *Missiology: An International Review* 46, no. 1 (2018): 54.

hermeneutic, and a survey of observations on the modern church and its contemporary mission field.

Missio Dei

Contemporary scholarly work generally assumes and agrees to an understanding of *missio Dei* as a reflection of the missional nature of God: a God who sends Himself and who sent Christ, sacrificially, for the purpose of reconciliation.[2] This view is heavily influenced by seminal scholarship such as *Transforming Mission*[3] and *Missional Church,*[4] which have shaped much of the work in missiology and missional ecclesiology over the past several years. Whereas many scholars look to the Great Commission of Matthew 28 as a grounding focus for *missio Dei*,[5] thereby focusing the mission of God on disciple-making, some scholars disagree with this approach. Missiologists Van Gelder and Payne, argue that undue focus on the Great Commission dilutes the nature and purpose of *missio Dei*. They assert that the entire biblical narrative, revealing God's mission of reconciliation for humankind, is the cumulative meaning of *missio Dei*.[6] This meaning is inclusive of, but not limited to, disciple-making.

Conflict also arises in attempts by scholars to define the church's role in *missio Dei*. Much scholarship is relatively vague in this regard, simply acknowledging that *missio Dei* defines the purpose of the church while leaving out explicit definitions or guidance for the

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[2] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 548, 555.

[3] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

[4] Guder, *Missional Church*.

[5] Lederleitner, "Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World," 242; Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 2–12; Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciplemaking' and the Role of Faith-Sharing, 3.

[6] J. D. Payne, *Theology of Mission: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Bellingham, WA: Lexingham Press, 2022) location 394, Kindle; Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, location 942, 5454.

church.[7] However, a growing body of scholarship emphasizes the inability of humans to participate in *missio Dei* through human action; rather, the role of humans is simply to identify the workings of the Holy Spirit and witness.[8] Schoon and Fitch, in particular, indicate that this witness is primarily achieved through worship as a form of mission for the purpose of selflessly reflecting the glory of God.[9]

Buys adds clarity to this view, specifying that the mission of reconciliation carried out through the covenant of grace, brought about by the sacrifice of Christ, is the fundamental cornerstone of *missio Dei*. The purpose of the church is to witness, glorify, and proclaim the gospel through the lens of this grace.[10] In contrast, Moore asserts the critical role that the church plays in *missio Dei* as an instrument of the renewal and reconciliation of God, which occurs fundamentally through disciple-making.[11] Some scholars, such as Woodward, adopt a more abstract view of *missio Dei*'s relation to discipleship and the church.[12] This abstract view of *missio Dei* is a lens through which the church and individual Christians view their growth as a public glorification of God focused on Christ's lordship and His mission. In this paradigm, the specific tangible functions of discipleship or church operation are localized and contextual, informed only in a broad sense by their relation to *missio Dei*.

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[7] Gregory Reader, "Evaluating Transformational Development as Christian Mission," *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy* 2, no. 2 (2021): 69.

[8] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 4564.

[9] David E. Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission: Proposing an Alternative to the Standard Account." *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 2 (2021): 179; Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 373, 391–97.

[10] Buys, "The Roots of Missio Dei in the Reformation, and its Implications for Theological Education," 1–2.

[11] Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 12.

[12] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, location 281.

The foundation of *missio Dei*, on which scholars are united, is the primacy of God's mission and purposes above the mission and purposes of the church. Theologian Jurgen Moltmann synthesizes this idea well in his ecclesial manifesto *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*: "It is not the church that has a mission of salvation to fulfill in the world; it is the mission of the Son and the Spirit through the Father that includes the church."[13] *Missio Dei*, while well-understood as a concept, finds tenuous ground when meeting practical application in the church, particularly as it pertains to the church's function of disciple-making. Despite these tensions, it is clear that disciple-making and the church's association to disciple-making is, to various contested degrees, a key component of *missio Dei*.

Missional Hermeneutics

While most scholars agree that knowledge of Scripture and application of valid hermeneutics are critical for discipleship and church leadership,[14] much biblical scholarship makes scarce mention of specifically missional foci. Of the scholars that do assert the importance of missional hermeneutics, much of that emphasis is directed toward the New Testament. Gospel scholar Michael McDowell, for example, advocates for a missional reading of the synoptic gospels and asserts that the Gospel of John has strong missional implications regarding the imperative of the Christian community to welcome outsiders into a restorative community.[15]

As a standout from this crowd, Missiologists Barram and Payne argue that all of Scripture is designed to reveal God's mission. Therefore, the entire Bible is best approached with

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13 Jurgen Moltmann, The Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993).

14 Abrahams-Appiah, "Rethinking Urban Mission," 306; Pettigrew, "Christian Leadership and the Great Commission," 119.

15 Michael T. McDowell, "An Insider's Church for Outsiders: The Johannine 'Come and See' Passages and Christian Engagement with the World." Religions 13, no. 9 (2022): 866–69.

a missional hermeneutic, sharing the view of missions scholar Christopher Wright in his work *The Mission of God*.[16] They both agree that such an approach is the best harmonization of the Old and New Testaments, which work together to reveal God's will to bless His people and the nations on a mission of renewal and reconciliation. This represents a scholarly view in which the applied hermeneutic largely reflects the scholar's research focus: missiologists tend to apply a missional hermeneutic, whereas most other biblical scholars do not.

Biblical Examples of Mission

In view of a missional hermeneutic, there are strong examples of mission throughout Scripture. Scholars agree about the instructive value of the totality of Scripture concerning mission, though various scholars focus on missional themes in different text segments. Aside from the textual content of Scripture itself, Wright asserts the inherent missional hermeneutic of Scripture based on the historical context of the writing of both the OT and NT; because the authors of the text were engaged in mission, their writing inherently reflects examples of mission.[17] Barram, in keeping with his views of a missional bridge between the OT and NT, emphasizes the mission of God as revealed through the Mosaic texts, histories, and works of the prophets. He notes the revelation of God's identity as a liberator of slaves and an advocate for justice, which persisted throughout Christ's incarnation and the early church's development.[18] Theologian Amy Sherman, in her book *Agents of Flourishing*, does not explicitly use language associated with missions or a missional hermeneutic, but argues for a hermeneutic, emphasizing

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[16] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 2342; Payne, *Theology of Mission*, location 362, 2472; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2006), 39.

[17] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 58.

[18] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 1194, 1771.

the functional missional mandate of humanity as demonstrated throughout the Old Testament via the motif of the "royal priesthood." She notes that this missional mandate began as early as Genesis 1 and persists throughout Scripture.[19] Despite scholarship such as that represented by Barram or Sherman, the bulk of biblical work on instructive scriptural mission focuses on the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ as well as the activities of Paul and other leaders after Christ's death.

A large body of research discusses the ministry of Christ as a template for the modern church and discipleship. In relation to mission, various themes emerge: Jesus's emphasis on training a new generation of disciples who could lead by His example,[20] His willingness to engage with those outside the Jewish community while simultaneously challenging the conventions of Jewish society,[21] and a sincere focus on empathetic relationships with His followers and friends. McDowell notes: "If the church is called to imitate Jesus, it is also called to dwell on earth and dwell so much so that it deeply understands, sympathizes with, and goes out to the surrounding world."[22] In sum, scholarship on the ministry of Christ points to a manifestation of mission which, through the church, reflects the love of Christ through evangelism and empathetic relationship with the community both inside and outside the church.

Scholarship agrees that the early church continued the mission of Christ, carried out predominantly through fellowship and edifying community with one another, in order to foster

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[19] Amy Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing: Pursuing Shalom in Every Corner of Society* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 22.

[20] Keith Nehrbass, "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy: Implications for Ministry Practicums." Christian Education Journal 18, no. 1 (2021): 76–77; Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 14, 81.

[21] McDowell, "An Insider's Church for Outsiders," 866; John S. Shorack. "Jesus, Friend of Sinners: A Three-Party Kerygmatic Model of Mission," Missiology: An International Review 49, no. 3 (2021): 241–43.

[22] McDowell, "An Insider's Church for Outsiders," 875.

Christlikeness throughout the body.[23] Scholars debate, however, on the extent to which that community should be associated strictly with the institutional church. Olivier asserts that, although Christian fellowship need not occur in a specific church building, it should be in a space dedicated intentionally and exclusively to worship.[24] Moore goes a step further to assert that discipleship, in its most biblical form, is the sole province of the local church. He asserts that biblical descriptions of early church discipleship occur exclusively in a local community as a clearly identifiable local gathering to support his argument.[25]

Other scholars assert that the church as it existed in the New Testament lacked the organizational hierarchy that is found today in the institutional church, and the particular organization of the church has little bearing on the church's mission. These scholars emphasize frequent gatherings of believers, commitment to each other in all areas of their lives, visible display of their faith through action, and preaching of the gospel.[26] Though these functions may benefit from clear organizational structure, such scholarship argues that it is not strictly defined by Scripture's example of the early church and is, therefore, contextually adaptable to the needs of the congregation.[27]

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[23] Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, location 815; Peter Botross. "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers? A Case Study of Four Baptist Churches in Victoria, Australia," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Education Ministry* 19, no. 2 (2022): 301.

[24] Isak Jacobus Olivier, "The Strategic Task of the Church in Creating Spaces for Spirituality," *Transformation* 40, no 1 (2023): 5–8.

[25] Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 5.

[26] Alawode, "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church Planting," 2; Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 2641.

[27] Christoph W. Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last: Paul as a Sustainable Leader According to the Book of Acts," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023): 9–10.

Mission in the Modern Church

As an impetus for further research on the role of the church in God's mission, the literature reveals contrasting ideas about the degree of urgency with which the church should reform its understanding of mission. Discipleship scholars, as well as those missiologists who view discipleship as a fundamental cornerstone of mission, lament a clear and present danger in the modern church as it fails in pursuit of mission primarily due to a lack of capacity, knowledge, and willingness to cultivate disciple-making cultures.[28] In their view, the current state is at peak urgency: The church must regain a proper biblical understanding of discipleship or perish. In contrast, some ecclesiological scholars point to a proliferation of church-planting organizations and the continual growth of healthy churches as evidence of health. They argue that while some elements of the church community may need revitalization, the church at large is persistently expanding the kingdom through successful church-planting efforts.[29]

Moderate views on the health of the modern church exist as well. In his analysis of the state of the contemporary Australian church, Botross notes that church decline is due to a lack of empowerment among the laity, a problem rectifiable through effective reproductive leadership.[30] Similarly, scholars in Christian leadership and Christian Education generally agree that the contemporary Western church is not beyond saving. While it may need revitalization, the appropriate identification, education, and calling of strong church leaders presents an opportunity to refocus those wandering elements of the church to a renewed emphasis on discipleship and

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[28] Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana," 85; Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 2; Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 4; Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, location 1432.

[29] Alawode, "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church Planting," 1–3; Warrick Farrah. "The Genesis and Evolution of Church-Planting Movements Missiology," *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 4 (2022): 358.

[30] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 298.

biblical mission.[31] Such leaders, in the view of these scholars, must be biblically qualified and comfortable with pluralistic modern society in order to lead mission in a modern Western context.

Some missiological scholars are of a similar mind that the contemporary church possesses clear and abundant opportunity to orient itself toward biblical mission. In contrast to Stetzer and Lederleiter, who place focus on leaders as a focus of revitalization, these missiological scholars point to new modes of organization and interaction with the community. Abrahams-Appiah advocates for the organic church model, arguing that informal networks of Christian fellowship are more suited for contemporary urban ministry.[32] Others point to the rise of parachurch ministries and extra-church discipleship organizations, which have risen to fill the gap opened by an overly commercialized church culture; Van Gelder notes and appreciates the contribution of such organizations to the mission,[33] while scholars such as Moore assert that such extra-ecclesial organizations depart from biblical norms.[34]

According to missiologists like Guder,[35] the church has become distant from mission as a result of reductionism: the viewing of Jesus strictly through a soteriological lens and thereby diluting the authority of Jesus as sovereign Lord. As a consequence, such reductionist churches possess a view of mission as a subordinate element of Christian life. In the view of these missiological scholars, reductionism is the root issue resulting in a reduced practice of evangelism, a diluted philosophy of discipleship, and an absence of missional theology as an

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[31] Lederleiter, "Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World," 243–45; Stetzer and McDonald, "How Can and Should We Reach and Train Our Future Pastors and Christian Leaders?" 174.

[32] Abrahams-Appiah, "Rethinking Urban Mission," 309.

[33] Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, location 825, 4364.

[34] Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 27, 41.

[35] Darrell L. Guder, *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016).

aspect of the kingdom of Heaven.[36] All of these scholars point to a renewal of discipleship, particularly oriented toward reproductive discipleship via a healthy practice of evangelism, as the most potent solution to the problem of reductionism. The state of the modern church, with respect to mission, is poised throughout the missiological literature as in need of revival, with the means of that revival being a restoration of the primacy of leadership development, discipleship, and missional culture in the church.

Modern Mission Field

Along with general agreement on the failure of the contemporary Western church to pursue a biblical mission, most scholars also agree that the modern mission field has changed dramatically from historically conceived notions of global mission. Rather than a clear sending-receiving relationship between the West and the Global South, a dilution of Christian identity in Western society has given rise to a new modern mission field that surrounds the entire global church,[37] thus elevating the West and Global South to a new relationship as peers and partners.[38] Many American scholars point out a growing urgency throughout the Christian West due to a loss of Christian identity. These scholars assert that the rise of individualism and commercialization, values in direct opposition to biblical themes of justice and economy for the poor and marginalized, are to blame.[39]

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[36] Frederick R. Coetzee, Malan Nel, and Johannes J. Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 44, no. 1 (2023): 4; Andrew Hardy and Dan Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), location 219, Kindle; Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, location 318.

[37] Stetzer and McDonald, "How Can and Should We Reach and Train Our Future Pastors and Christian Leaders?" 170.

[38] Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, location 726, 4357.

[39] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 837, 1330; Schoon, Cultivating an Evangelistic Character, 417.

Some missiologists, such as Abrahams-Appiah, highlight the need for the church to adopt more informal networked operations that are in greater alignment with the needs of modern society. He points to the success of the cell-church model in sub-Saharan Africa as evidence that the church must step away from bloated institutional models.[40] In contrast, scholars such as Olivier appeal for the exact opposite: a clearer distinction between the church and society, wherein physical spaces replace informal networks to emphasize intentionality and distinctiveness in the practice of worship.[41] Though nearly all scholars agree that the modern mission field has changed dramatically, there are different perspectives on how to engage with this mission field. Scholarship is divided on greater formality or less, though all agree that such churches must abide by the guidance of the Holy Spirit in such pursuit.

Discipleship and Mission

Given a robust understanding of God's mission of reconciliation for His creation, it must follow that individual Christians have some means of applying that theological knowledge to their practical Christian life. Discipleship is the process by which Christians grow in spiritual maturity toward Christlikeness, including the imitation and service of Christ via mission. This section will examine the relationship between mission and discipleship as well as expound upon relevant scholarly topics related to discipleship, such as evangelism, discipleship methods and frameworks, and spiritual vocation.

[40] Abrahams-Appiah, "Rethinking Urban Mission," 302–04.

[41] Olivier, "The Strategic Task of the Church in Creating Spaces for Spirituality," 5.

Evangelism and Discipleship

Scholars generally agree that the concepts of mission, evangelism, and discipleship are in some way linked, though there is some disagreement as to the extent and nature of such connective relationships. For many missiological scholars, discipleship is related to mission insofar as such discipleship is related to the pursuit of witness in accordance with *missio Dei*; therefore, evangelism is a tool of spiritual formation, which, in turn, is a tool of holistic mission that transforms the character of God's people.[42] In a further abstraction of the relationship between evangelism, discipleship, and mission, some scholars argue that evangelism is but one facet of the mission of God; a mission which, in its entirety, is far more vast than could be associated with human activity.[43]

In contrast, more practically-minded scholars view mission through the lens of disciple-making and multiplication, generally through the foci of the local church and evangelism through the church.[44] Alawode, in particular, stresses the importance of evangelistic church planting as the instrument of God's kingdom expansion.[45] This sentiment is popular among discipleship scholars such as Boa and Tracy, who assert that mission critically depends on the multiplication of God's people, which occurs primarily through discipleship. In their view, the reproduction of disciples is the highest aim of spiritual formation, thereby leading to the expansion of God's

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[42] Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 1–5; Reader, "Evaluating Transformational Development as Christian Mission," 66–68; Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 174.

[43] Barram, Missional Economics, location 4565–67; Andrew Michael Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana," (DMin thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023), 47.

[44] Eric Jean-Ive Abrahams-Appiah, "Rethinking Urban Mission: Reconsidering Strategic Cell Fellowships as Tools to Reach and Disciple the Unreached Sub-Saharan Urban Dwellers," E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies 8, no. 10 (2022): 309; Andy Pettigrew. "Christian Leadership and the Great Commission: Foundations for Building Christian Leaders," Journal of Applied Christian Leadership 15, no. 1 (2021): 116.

[45] Akinyemi O. Alawode, "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church Planting: An Effective Method to Achieve the Great Commission," HTS Theological Studies 76, no. 1 (2020): 1.

kingdom and the advancement of His mission.[46] Therefore, the literature reveals two poles: one end in which evangelism fuels a practical execution of multiplicative discipleship, which is itself the foundation of mission, and the other in which evangelism and discipleship are mere tools in God's arsenal for conducting His mission. Most scholars are somewhere in the gray area between these poles.

Missional Discipleship

There are a variety of lenses through which scholars associate mission and discipleship, often colored by the scholars' theological foci. Missiological scholars tend to view discipleship as subordinate to mission, while discipleship scholars tend to view mission as subordinate to discipleship. Many missiologists view discipleship as a subset of mission, wherein discipleship and disciple-making are but one facet of God's plan for human participation in His redemptive mission for the Earth. This is the view of Guder and others of the gospel and the Culture Network, such as Barram and Van Gelder.[47] Conversely, some scholars view discipleship as the ultimate umbrella for the Christian way of life under which mission is subordinate.[48] In some instances, this is likely because mission is taken for granted. Pauline scholar Robert Plummer notes that, for Paul, the missionary nature of the early church was an assumption of the everyday Christian life.[49]

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[46] Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical, Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation, Revised Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020) locations 7993, 8253, Kindle; Brian G. Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," (DMin thesis, Regent University, 2023), 15.

[47] Barram, *Missional Economics*; Guder, *Called to Witness*; Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*.

[48] Breen, Mike, *Multiplying Missional Leaders: From Half-Hearted Volunteers to a Mobilized Kingdom Force* (Edmond, OK: Crowdscribed, 2014).

[49] Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry*, Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), location 806, Kindle.

A growing camp of scholars places mission and discipleship as distinct ideas that are equal and irrevocably intertwined. This view is missional discipleship and asserts that disciples of Christ are fundamentally missionaries and vice versa.[50] The Great Commission is a common theological foundation for this view, asserting that true evangelism results in disciple-making and that this evangelistic disciple-making, as commanded by the Great Commission, is the primary means by which disciples recognize the lordship of God and participate in His mission.[51] Along these lines, scholars such as Christopher Wright assert that participation in mission is a form of obedience; a critical prerequisite to the pursuit of holiness.[52] This lens of discipleship balances the everyday timeliness of the Christian life in the context of the timelessness of God's mission; that is, Christians were called to a specific place and time to participate in God's redemptive mission, which transcends time.[53] That timeless context of *missio Dei* informs the everyday lives of the Christian, necessarily resulting in a missional discipleship paradigm.

The Process of Discipleship

Before exploring the role of discipleship in mission further, it is important to analyze the conceptual understanding of discipleship as a whole in the view of missiological scholars. All scholars agree that the end goal of discipleship is maturity and Christlikeness, but differences emerge in the functional prioritization of spiritual vocation, the transformative power of the spirit, and the role of church community. On one end of this spectrum, some scholars cite the

[50] Guichun Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere: With Special Reference to Lordship, Followership and Christlikeness in the Concept of Public Discipleship" *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 39, no. 2 (2022): 111.

[51] Coetzee, Nel, and Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," 3.

[52] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 61.

[53] Ian Jones, "Five Time Perspectives on Christian Discipleship" *Practical Theology* 16, no. 1 (2023): 60.

importance of support from a Christian community but emphasize the individual nature of discipleship. In this paradigm, growth in spiritual formation is primarily an individual experience led by the Spirit and supported by community.[54] Many of these views highlight reproduction and multiplication as a high aim of discipleship (i.e., that discipleship is incomplete without some function of disciple-making).[55]

Other scholars minimize the role of individual activity in spiritual formation, emphasizing instead the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of life in community.[56] Tracy, in particular, calls attention to the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit, without Whom discipleship is impossible.[57] McDowell and Barram note that discipleship for individuals is linked inextricably with the formation of their community; that individual spiritual growth occurs in the context of and also informs the growth of those around them, for better or worse.[58] Though there is some disagreement between scholars, most of the missiological literature points toward this perspective of discipleship: Christlikeness is informed by and informs the community of the believer, and that such formation occurs exclusively through the transformative work of the Holy Spirit.

Whether scholars align with a Spirit-led or individually active approach to discipleship processes, scholars are virtually unanimous in the requirement of discipleship to be a radical new approach to life. Whether led entirely by the Holy Spirit, through personal discipline, or some

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[54] Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 18; Pettigrew, "Christian Leadership and the Great Commission," 117; Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 62.

[55] Botross, "How do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 301; Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 77.

[56] Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, location 542; Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 3; Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 170.

[57] Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 89.

[58] McDowell, "An Insider's Church for Outsiders," 4; Barram, *Missional Economics*, 444.

combination therein, discipleship as a process demands complete commitment from the Christian and total pursuit of a Christlike way of life.[59] In this way, despite scholarly disagreement surrounding the means by which Christians pursue Christlikeness, it is clear that discipleship is the reproduction of Jesus's life within their own life, building to epitomize the moral quality of a life of grace.[60]

Methods of Discipleship

Scholars agree that discipleship is some balance of the organic working of the Spirit in the Christian life versus the human pursuit of holiness, typically embodied by the concept of spiritual disciplines. However, various camps lean toward one end or the other, often driven by their hermeneutic and theological foci. Scholars with a strong missional hermeneutic frequently emphasize the importance of spiritual vocation and experiential learning, asserting that discipleship is more about the abstract journey of being rather than doing.[61] Though spiritual disciplines have their place in the Christian life, these scholars assert that such disciplines only impact discipleship insofar as they materially impact their relationships and interactions with the surrounding community. This perspective, according to Nel and Schoeman, is a powerful safeguard against biblical legalism.[62]

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[59] Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere," 114.

[60] Stuart Patrick Chalmers, "Fritz Tillmann, Discipleship and the Renewal of Moral Theology," *The Irish Theological Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (2021): 357.

[61] Shorack, "Jesus, Friend of Sinners," 241; Yau Man Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship: Stories of Apprenticeship to Jesus at an Urban Anglican (Episcopal) Church," *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 18, no. 2 (2021): 191.

[62] Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 3.

Heavily influenced by seminal work such as Willard's *Spirit of the Disciplines,*[63] which is abundantly cited in contemporary discipleship literature, the other end of the spectrum emphasizes the necessity of human will in participating in the Holy Spirit's work of transformation. In this view, while the Holy Spirit's work is primary, this work is enabled by human action, typically through the form of spiritual disciplines such as participation in institutional liturgical worship, Bible reading, prayer, and tangible church membership.[64] These views also generally emphasize the importance of the institutional church as a venue for the teaching and support of these disciplines in the Christian life.

For a moderate approach, most scholarship operates at a halfway point on this spectrum. Boa asserts, "The biblical balance is that the spiritual life is both human and divine … on the human side, we are responsible to work out, not work for our salvation. On the divine side, God gives us the desire and empowerment to accomplish His purpose."[65] This view is supported by Schoon and Rosser, who articulate the importance of spiritual practices such as worship, fellowship, prayer, and Scripture reading but also emphasize that such spiritual practice should be seen as a way of life rather than a collection of activities carried out in pursuit of sanctification.[66]

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[63] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (Sacramento, CA: HarperOne, 1999).

[64] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 169; Leslie J. Francis, Bruce G. Fawcett, Tracy Freeze, Renee Embree, and David W. Lankshear. "What Helps Young Christians Grow in Discipleship? Exploring Connections Between Discipleship Pathways and Psychological Type," *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture* 24, no. 6 (2021): 566; Andrew Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana," 42.

[65] Boa, *Conformed to His Image,* location 1383.

[66] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 92; Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 3960.

This median view of discipleship situates the Christian life between God's timelessness and own human timeliness: The disciple's daily practices, situated particularly in time, are informed by the timeless spirituality of God and His mission.[67] Blending the everyday practice of Christian life and the sovereignty of God, in the view of some scholars, is the most faithful embodiment of the gospel. This blending enables Christians to embody the character of Christ more fully by acknowledging the timelessness of God as a context for their physical presence.[68] In this way, the literature offers a blend of discipline-driven and organic discipleship in which the Christian life pursues Christlikeness by conforming to a way of life led by the Spirit that is inclusive of, but not inherently limited to, the practices and activities performed by Christ.

Frameworks for Discipleship

Discipleship, as a process, is the means by which Christians become more Christlike or adopt a more Christlike life in apprenticeship to Him. In practice, individuals and communities in the church may adopt various structured approaches to refine and replicate this process via a discipleship framework. Though many such frameworks exist, they are united in their ability to aid the Christian in cultivating a sense of Christ-centered identity, through the lens of the gospel, informed by a particular theological, cultural, and sociological paradigm.[69] These frameworks may be loosely structured by a series of stages such as the eight-stage model proposed by Robert E. Coleman in his seminal work *The Master Plan of Evangelism*,[70] or they may be more

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[67] Jones, "Five Time Perspectives on Christian Discipleship," 58–60.

[68] Nel Coetzee and Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," 5.

[69] Hardy and Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom*, location 562.

[70] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.

comprehensively organized around a particular curriculum as in Ogden's 29-session *Discipleship Essentials*.[71]

Regardless of the degree of structure, discipleship frameworks generally assume some initial state of immaturity on the participant's part. The framework then takes that participant through a sequence of stages to engage with Christian spiritual disciplines to a greater stage of maturity. This aligns with the human development approach to discipleship as championed by Estep and Kim, which evaluates Christian spiritual formation through various lenses of intellectual, moral, personality, and other human developmental paradigms.[72] Boa and Chalmers approach discipleship from a similar angle, identifying modular attributes of the human condition developed through the lens of Christian spirituality, and spiritual and moral development is particularly chief among those attributes.[73] In alignment with the missiological literature, most discipleship scholars agree that the fruits of discipleship are the sending out of a disciple to make new disciples reproductively.[74] Therefore, regardless of the degree of structure or developmental paradigm, discipleship frameworks are united in their pursuit of a reproductive mandate as commanded by the Great Commission: empowering followers of Christ to go and make disciples.

Spiritual Vocation and Mission

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[71] Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*.

[72] James R. Estep and Jonathan H. Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2010).

[73] Chalmers, "Fritz Tillman, Discipleship, and the Renewal of Moral Theology," 364; Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, location 245–93.

[74] Greg Ogden, *Unfinished Business: Returning the Ministry to the People of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003); Hardy and Yarnell, *Missional Discipleship After Christendom*, location 434.

Individual participation in mission is impossible without the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit drives the missionary growth of the early church throughout the book of Acts and propels Christ's ministry onward after His death and resurrection, enabling the apostles to engage in Christlike evangelism.[75] Scholars agree that spiritual gifts, bestowed via the Holy Spirit upon Christians, are the fundamental enablers of mission. Stedman, in his profound study of the church *Body Life*, notes the importance of the proper allocation of spiritual gifts for missional enablement: "The church is primarily and fundamentally a body designed to express through each unique, individual member the life of the indwelling Lord."[76]

This philosophy is universal among missiological scholars, who view spiritual gifts as indispensable to biblical mission.[77] It is also a common idea in prominent secular leadership literature, wherein businesses and organizations employ the technique of "strengths-based leadership" to ensure their employees' gifts are identified and enabled in the workplace.[78] Through the application of these spiritual gifts, Christians participate in public life as a reflection of God's love.

The engagement of the Christian in public life, in service of and surrounded by non-believers, is a cornerstone of missiological thought.[79] Indeed, missiological scholars assert that it is only through engagement with non-believers that Christians can fully reflect Christlikeness.[80]

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[75] Plummer and Terry, *Paul's Missionary Methods,* 763–99.

[76] Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life: The Book That Inspired a Return to the Church's Real Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House, 1972), location 975, Kindle.

[77] Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere," 114; Woodward, *Cultivating a Missional Culture*, location 2255.

[78] Jim Clifton and Jim Harter, *Culture Shock: An Unstoppable Force Has Changed How We Work and Live. Gallup's Solution to the Biggest Leadership Issue of Our Time* (Washington, DC: Gallup Press, 2022), location 1021, Kindle.

[79] Jones, "Five Time Perspectives on Christian Discipleship," 58; Abraham Cho, "Public Discipleship: Forming Disciples for the Sphere of Neighborhood and Justice," DMin thesis, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2017.

[80] Jun, "Missional Discipleship in the Public Sphere," 117.

Scholars base this view on a theological foundation of love for one's neighbor, indicating that the humility and servanthood of Christ are embodied in the Christian's missionary service to non-believers leveraging the gifts of the Spirit, that very gift-aligned missionary service being the definition of missional vocation.[81]

The Church on Mission

While individuals have a key role in the mission of God, they cannot do so alone. Biblical authors emphatically encourage God's people to gather in community for uplifting, mutual development, and collaborative engagement in mission. The church fellowship, through which individual Christians gather in communal pursuit of holiness, is a key component of mission and discipleship. This section will review various scholarly perspectives on the particular role and function of the church on mission, as well as the roles and functions of leaders within the church. Taken together with a robust understanding of biblical mission and discipleship, this review will provide a thorough overview of mission practically understood and undertaken by the church throughout the nations.

Missional Purposes of Community

Scholars agree that the fellowship of Christian community is an essential element of both discipleship and mission. This life-in-community possesses both centripetal and centrifugal attributes. It is centripetal in its ability to draw believers inward toward one another for mutual sharpening and centrifugal in the Christian community's role as a light for the nations, radiating outward for the purpose of mission. Various scholars emphasize either the centripetal or centrifugal attributes of community, owing to disagreement regarding the primary purpose of

[81] Chalmers, "Fritz Tillman, Discipleship and the Renewal of Moral Theology," 353.

Christian fellowship and the church in general. For Moore, Siew, and Fitch, the institutional church gathering and community therein presents the fullest expression of Christian fellowship. This gathering primarily serves the purpose of building up believers and instilling them with disciplines of worship and sociality that will empower them to live faithfully from day to day in other domains of their life outside the institutional church.[82]

Other scholars, while continuing to emphasize the centripetal purpose of Christian community, do not stringently associate such community with the institutional church. Alawode notes that Christian community throughout the church, but not limited to the institutional church, is defined by a life of brotherliness between believers.[83] This emphasis on communal discipleship as a focus of Christian community is echoed by Nel and Schoeman, Stenschke, Nehrbass, Barram, and Boa, who agree that discipleship is not made complete outside the context of relationship with others.[84] The Christian life, they propose, is only lived fully when it is done so in Christian community, regardless of that community's formal association with an institutional church organization. Olivier, though in agreement with this broad concept, adds an addendum that such Christian community should be carried out with space intentionally dedicated to such spiritual practice rather than exclusively carried out organically in other life settings.[85]

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[82] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 172; Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 194; Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 10.

[83] Alawode, "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church Planting," 3.

[84] Barram, *Missional Economics*, location 291; Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, location 755; Nehrbass, "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy," 85; Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 6; Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last," 3.

[85] Olivier, "The Strategic Task of the Church in Creating Spaces for Spirituality," 4.

In contrast to the centripetal focus, other missiological scholars emphasize the centrifugal nature of Christian community as the chief instrument of God's mission.[86] In this way, the purpose of gathering together with one another in fellowship is to radiate and reflect God's holiness outward, worshiping in such a way that it provides a model in which the world might find a glimpse of God's plan for reconciliation.[87] Lederleitner points out the importance of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and Scripture's explicit call for the body of Christ to work together with one another for the purpose of witness and ministry, indicating that the church exists primarily for the purpose of reaching outward.[88] This view finds affirmation amongst missiologists Van Gelder and Abrahams-Appiah. Van Gelder writes, "The church is sent to witness in word and deed to God's renewal of creation in Jesus."[89] Abrahams-Appiah takes this to an extreme, suggesting that Christian community need not rely on institutional organization at all, but rather should adopt informal networked approaches that maximize its ability to witness in the social context of its mission field.[90]

When analyzing these various points of view regarding the purpose and nature of Christian community, a commonality emerges: The church is divinely created and ordained by God for a specific purpose according to His plan. Whether that purpose is primarily centripetal or centrifugal is largely immaterial, as the community possesses both attributes, as agreed upon throughout the scholarly literature. Therefore, the literature reveals that different Christian

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[86] Buys, "The Roots of Missio Dei in the Reformation, and its Implications for Theological Education," 6.

[87] Danny Hunter, "Radical Ecclesiology: The Church as an Arena for Reconciliation Through Cultivating Alternative Community," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 1 (2020): 76–78; Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 417.

[88] Lederleitner, "Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World," 247.

[89] Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, location 951.

[90] Abrahams-Appiah, "Rethinking Urban Mission," 304.

communities may indeed possess different natures, including different balances of centripetal and centrifugal energy, divinely attributed to the specific purpose to which God has called that Christian community for the mission context in which it is established.

The Missional Church

The missional church is a lens for understanding the missionary role of the church that emerged in the late 1990s, resulting from seminal missiological works such as Newbigin's *The Open Secret*.[91] In some views, the missional church model emerged as a direct response to and transformation of the seeker-sensitive church paradigm inspired by works such as Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church*,[92] wherein the church was designed to evangelize as a means of growth, targeting and attracting segments of the church's surrounding community.[93] While the missional church movement does align with the seeker-sensitive prioritization of evangelism and outreach, the two paradigms diverge with respect to the purpose of and means of executing such evangelistic activity.

Missional churches generally perform evangelistic ministry purely out of devotion to *missio Dei*, wherein the church may grow or may not, and the act of evangelism and disciple-making itself is the objective.[94] To accomplish this, churches emphasize discipleship within the congregation to empower the laity to become a body that effectively communicates the gospel in their everyday lives. Conversely, *The Purpose-Driven Church* and similar seeker-sensitive or attractional models place a primacy on church growth as a metric of effective evangelism,

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91 Leslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to Missional Theology* (New York, NY: Eerdman's Publishing, 1995).

92 Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, location 4385.

93 Richard Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 207–08.

94 Wilson, *The Gospel-Driven Church*.

resulting in an emphasis on church-focused events and primacy of the Sunday morning service as a means for drawing in church attendees wherein their primary exposure to the gospel is via clergy-led church activity.[95]

In both the missional and seeker-sensitive or attractional models, the church is predominantly viewed by scholars as a unified faith community that plays a critical role in the spiritual formation of its congregants. Ecclesial thought in both camps is shaped greatly by the work of Bonhoeffer, such as his *The Cost of Discipleship*, in which he challenges the practice of personal and individualistic piety. Bonhoeffer espouses the Christian life in the form of sacrificial Christian communities, which are vulnerable, sacrificial, and loving toward one another, thereby stirring one another toward spiritual formation.[96] This sense of the church as a unified people rather than a geographic place is commonplace in scholarly thought across nearly all ecclesial camps.[97]

A primacy on evangelism, which is viewed both as an invitation to that particular local church community itself as well as an invitation into the redeemed Christian life,[98] is also common among missional and attractional paradigmatic camps. In this way, the church is self-generative, whether it grows through the addition of new seekers to the church community, as in the clergy-driven attractional model, or whether it grows through multiplicative reproductive discipleship, as in the laity-driven missional model.[99]

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[95] Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentle Manifesto Against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

[96] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. Eric Mataxas (New York, NY: Touchstone Press, 2012), 57.

[97] Woodward, *Cultivating a Missional Culture*, location 429.

[98] Coetzee, Nel, and Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," 2–3.

[99] Woodward, *Cultivating a Missional Culture*, location 97.

Not all scholars view evangelism as the primary calling of the church. Contrasting views, such as Plummer's, categorize evangelism as one subset of the church's vocation, in which the church also conducts equally important functions of fellowship, worship, service, and discipleship.[100] Despite this contrasting view, missiological scholars would contend that such an argument is incompatible with a truly missional approach to discipleship in which functions such as discipleship, service, worship, and fellowship exist as means or facets of mission, which itself is an umbrella concept capturing all of those means by which Christians grow in Christlikeness through pursuit of *missio Dei*.

Church Leaders and Mission

The importance of leadership within the church is generally assumed by missiologists. Foundational works such as *Master Plan of Evangelism*[101] and *The Training of the Twelve*[102] established a common understanding that Jesus's missional intent, exemplified by His earthly ministry, was to lead and train leaders who could carry on His mission as communicated in John 20:21 and Acts 1:8. In particular, some scholars hone in on Jesus's relationship with Peter, as the progenitor of the church, as a fundamental example for pastors and church-planters to consider for the sustainability of mission.[103] Similarly, Stenchke and Moore point to Paul's efforts to train leaders and sustain strong relationships with them as the key to the church's early success.[104] Paul's missionary methods, as founded on the identification, cultivation, and delegation to a new

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[100] Plummer, *Paul's Missionary Methods*, location 909–11.

[101] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*.

[102] A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve: How Jesus Christ Found and Taught the 12 Apostles: A Book of New Testament Biography* (Edinburgh, UK: Crossreach Publications, 2022).

[103] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 18, 28.

[104] Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 55–56; Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last," 2.

generation of leaders, is a core theme of Pauline scholarship, particularly in missiological literature.[105] This literature indicates a strong desire for the contemporary church to look back to these early models of leadership incubation as a core strategy for mission.

In addition to biblical examples and leadership qualifications in the early church, some scholars in the fields of Christian leadership and Christian education identify core attributes that are particularly valuable for leaders' success in evangelistic missions. Pettigrew notes the foundation of the Great Commission and urges leaders to adopt a purpose-driven mindset rooted in the cultivation of biblical discipleship relationships.[106] Tracy, in his quantitative study of disciple-makers and church members, notes that self-confidence with regard to knowledge of Scripture and practice of spiritual disciplines is key for leaders to engage in successful disciple-making and multiplication efforts.[107] Lederleiter emphasizes an importance for strong leaders to adopt a polycentric mindset, overcoming cross-cultural barriers and striving for collaborative leadership in pluralistic mission contexts.[108]

As leaders develop other leaders within their church, the church itself begins to adopt a culture: the collection of artifacts, narratives, and rituals designed and propagated by organizational leaders that collectively reflect the communal identity of the organization.[109] In this way, scholars agree that leaders have a critical role to play in cultivating organizational culture. Woodward describes this as the responsibility for church leaders to be "culture

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[105] Plummer, *Paul's Missionary Methods*, location 1010.

[106] Pettigrew, "Christian Leadership and the Great Commission," 112.

[107] Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 4.

[108] Lederleiter, "Navigating Leadership Challenges in a Polycentric World," 245.

[109] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*.

makers".[110] These attributes, variously emphasized, coupled with healthy biblical qualification and alignment with biblical examples of leadership, form a common theme emerging from the literature indicating the importance of strong, biblical, collaborative leaders for the purpose of mission in the church.

Gaps in Theological Education

Most scholars agree that the current state of seminary education, particularly focused on lead pastors and other senior church leaders, does not adequately prepare leaders for leadership in accordance with mission.[111] Stetzer argues this is due to a seminary philosophy focused on outdated church models and calls for a greater focus on contextualization and translation of the gospel for a pluralistic society.[112] Pettigrew and Stenschke agree that to rectify the current state of theological education in pursuit of biblical mission, an emphasis must be placed on the transformation of character within the leaders. This approach highlights relationship-building and emotional intelligence in the leader, calling back to Paul's focus on the cultivation of character development rather than explicit activity modification.[113] In contrast, Tracy and Moore assert that the end aim of Christian leadership education must be effective disciple-making; thereby promoting a model of education emphasizing tangible skills needed for teaching, training, and coaching others.[114]

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[110] Woodward, *Cultivating a Missional Culture*, location 406.

[111] Buys, "The Roots of Missio Dei in the Reformation, and its Implications for Theological Education," 6; Van Gelder, Participation in God's Mission, location 6380.

[112] Stetzer, "How Can and Should We Reach and Train Our Future Pastors and Christian Leaders?" 2, 13.

[113] Pettigrew, "Christian Leadership and the Great Commission," 124; Stenschke, "A Mission Made to Last," 2.

[114] Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana," 16; Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 5.

In recommendations for methods to improve theological education, scholars propose various paradigms. Nehrbass, using Jesus's model of instruction to the disciples, identifies four stages for theological education: framing, experiential action, peer support, and feedback.[115] Botross, in a study of four churches' leadership training pipelines, noted that although the four churches in his study applied the same theological principles relating to mission and discipleship, each used a distinct approach to pedagogy with various approaches to lecture, participant involvement, and experiential practical application.[116] Multiple scholars identify the importance of group-learning models, drawing from Paul's education of churches in community as well as Jesus's own education of His disciples in group settings.[117] Therefore, the aggregate of scholarship indicates that theological education should seek to reform according to biblical examples, using paradigms adaptable for the individual contexts of various individuals and congregations.

Evaluating Ministry Goals

To aid a church in embarking on a transformative journey toward biblical discipleship and mission, church leaders must be able to evaluate the church. It must be clear where the church currently stands in relation to biblical goals, and it must be clear where the church has room to grow. Rosser notes that it is tempting in the modern American church to rely solely on visible metrics related to the church's popularity, such as weekly attendance or raw count of participants in various programs.[118] Although these measurements have some logistical value,

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[115] Nehrbass, "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy," 76.

[116] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 301.

[117] Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 21; Moore, "New Testament Norms for the Great Commission," 46–53.

[118] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 94.

they are superficial; they cannot measure the spiritual health of the church nor the health of its congregants.

Instead, churches must seek to uncover the deeper spiritual well-being of their church. The literature identifies a variety of quantitative and qualitative means for accomplishing such measurement and evaluation. Both Nel and Pliezier rely on the "National Church Life Survey," a popular quantitative survey that congregants in Australia can use to evaluate the state of their church.[119] This makes the "Church Life Survey" a valuable tool for church leaders to understand the well-being of their church as a collective from the perspective of the layperson. Pliezier, in particular, amplifies the survey to target specific issues of concern within his congregation; in the case of his ministry context, to amplify the focus on pastoral care.[120]

Similar quantitative surveys appear in the literature to target individual discipleship metrics, such as discipleship surveys used by Francis and Moore to measure both individual spiritual health and individuals' aptitude for missional vocation and disciple-making.[121] Byerly notes that it is imperative that church leaders recognize the appropriate scenarios for individual or collective surveys. He asserts that a collection of surveys about individuals' well-being does not necessarily reflect the state of the group as a whole.[122] To that end, he encourages using a survey specifically designed to ascertain the congregation's health.[123]

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[119] Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 6; Theo Pleizier. "Who Cares? Exploring Pastoral Care in Dutch Protestant Parishes Using the Church Life Survey (CLS)," *Pastoral Psychology* 71, no 3 (2022): 346.

[120] Pliezier, "Who Cares? Exploring Pastoral Care in Dutch Protestant Parishes Using the Church Life Survey (CLS)," 347.

[121] Francis, "What Helps Young Christians Grow in Discipleship?" 564; Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana," 17.

[122] Ryan T. Byerly, Keith J. Edwards, and Peter C. Hill, "The Congregational Character Questionnaire: An Initial Empirical Examination of the Significance of Collective Church Character Traits," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 50, no. 3 (2022): 342.

[123] Byerly, Edwards, and Hill, "The Congregational Character Questionnaire," 349.

Scholars agree that quantitative surveys are not always appropriate for deeply understanding the spiritual health of a church, especially when health factors are unknown or difficult to define, such as in the case of the church wherein terms like "mission" or "discipleship" may be subject to broad interpretation.[124] In such instances, scholars rely on semi-structured interviews or analysis of church documents and other cultural artifacts.[125] Siew and Botross used semi-structured interviews conducted with leaders within the church to uncover themes related to the church's strengths and weaknesses.[126]

Through the conduct of qualitative semi-structured interviews in combination with a thorough analysis of church documents, sermons, and other cultural artifacts, it becomes possible for the church leader to uncover themes that might not be captured in quantitative survey studies. Therefore, the literature reveals that church leaders must carefully think about specific problems they seek to solve and the degree to which those problem's categorical features are known, thereby appropriately applying quantitative or qualitative evaluation techniques as necessary.

Summary of Precedent Literature

The literature reveals common agreement on the nature of *missio Dei* and God's redemptive mission as a foundation for the purpose of the church. Additionally, scholars agree on the theological primacy of Christian community, the importance of the application of appropriate hermeneutics and biblical knowledge to mission, and the existence of gaps in current theological education for mission in pluralistic contexts. Related to the church, literature is

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[124] Starcher, Dzubinski, and Sanchez, "Rigorous Missiological Research Using Qualitative Inquiry," 52.

[125] Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 42.

[126] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 298; Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 195.

aligned on the key role of mission leaders, the adaptable nature of ministry evaluation, and the contemporary church's crisis. Across denominational and scholarly camps, scholars recognize and agree that the Western church finds itself in an increasingly secular society shaped by informal social networks and the advance of digital technology. Scholars disagree on the role of the church and individual disciples in mission, the role that mission plays in spiritual formation, and the primary purpose of Christian community as it pertains to the pursuit of God's mission.

This review uncovered a variety of paradigms to move forward through these disagreements, which, when taken in aggregate, result in a highly contextual framework for the church as well as individual disciples. This indicates that different churches simply have different roles to play in God's mission, determined by their unique mission context as well as the distinct gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows upon their congregation. Likewise, members of these churches may experience varying degrees of success in perceiving spiritual formation through organic or discipline-driven means, dependent on the particular path God has laid out for them. Therefore, attempts to frame a missional curriculum and evaluation criteria for the cultivation of missional discipleship cultures in the church must be flexible and adaptable for use in a pluralistic church environment.

Acknowledging the primacy of *missio Dei*, a clear biblical hermeneutic, biblical example for mission and church leadership, and the general importance of leadership in discipleship and disciple-making for the purpose of mission, this thesis will propose such a missional curriculum. In keeping with the findings of this literature review, such a curriculum will be ecumenical in nature and emphasize participation and introspection so that churches and church leaders in a novel modern mission field might uncover the particular missional context and purpose for

which they and their church have been called, and therefore disciple their congregations appropriately.

A review of the scholarly literature also uncovered gaps which this research will, in part, seek to address. Much literature exists surrounding the theory and theology of mission, its role in individual Christian discipleship, and its impact on the role of the biblical church. Scholars also have delved deeply in the subject of Christian leadership within the church, the urgency of renewed leadership, and various methods for improving the education of such leaders. However, the literature does not feature specific case studies on the education of Christian leaders for biblical mission, specifically by and through the local church. In addition to cultivating a missional culture at MVMNT Church, this project seeks to contribute to this body of knowledge by emphasizing the role of church leaders in the local church's participation in local mission.

Theological Foundations

God's mission, which began at the start of creation and follows the narrative of Scripture until the end of days, seeks to bring about redemption and reconciliation of all people to Him. The biblical narrative not only provides a command to God's people to serve this mission but also many examples of how God sent and empowered His people to serve His mission via discipleship and witness. God Himself works actively toward His mission, and He also sent many throughout history to lead His people toward effective holy service. Beginning with Abraham and leading ultimately to Christ, the Holy Spirit now empowers the church today to function as witnesses to Christ's gospel in service to the redeeming mission of God. Through imitation of Christ, disciples pursue holiness via missional witness and discipleship across the nations. This is the mission for which the church exists and the objective toward which its people must serve.

Theological Principles

To capture the role of the Christian and the church in the mission of God adequately, this thesis addresses core theological principles related to the mission of God, *missio Dei*, and the image of God, *Imago Dei*. Disciples of Christ possess a mandate to pursue mission based on the commands of Jesus Christ, following the parameters of *missio Dei* and as a biblical reflection of God's holiness as *imago Dei*. These theological principles and the command of Christ to pursue mission are the foundations for understanding discipleship and mission through a scriptural lens.

Theological Foundations of *Missio Dei*

God's ultimate mission is to redeem all humankind so that all tongues and nations might come to worship Him (Rev 7:9). The entire narrative of Scripture and, indeed, all the movement of God drives toward fulfilling this objective. This is the saving purpose for which God sent Jesus Christ to humankind (John 12:47). Likewise, God intends for His to participate in His mission. He gave Adam and Eve, and humanity at large, dominion over the Earth (Gen 1:28). The purpose of this dominion was not to rule in tyranny or with blunt authority but rather to sustain order and the peace of God amidst great diversity and pluralism, as was found in the garden of Eden.[127]

After the Fall, God works both directly and through His people to pursue the mission of redemption. He sent Moses to deliver the Israelites, generating a pattern of apostolicism: Throughout the narrative of Scripture, God empowers and sends chosen representatives for the purpose of salvation and redemption, culminating in the apostolic sending of Jesus Christ (John

[127] Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, "A Perspective on God's View of Human Diversity: A Missiological Application of Joy in Diversity," *Missiology: An International Review* 48, no. 3 (2020): 253.

3:17).[128] After the death of Christ, God continues to empower His people. He sent the Holy Spirit to further His aims of redemption for all people (Acts 2:17), bestowing blessings and gifts to enable His chosen people's participation in the mission of God, *missio Dei*. Not only did the Lord see fit to bestow the Holy Spirit upon His people in that time and place, but to all of His people across all time.[129] In this way, *missio Dei* guides the entire narrative of Scripture while simultaneously defining the highest aims of humanity's service to God throughout all history.

Imago Dei as Foundation for Mission

In Gen 1:26–27, Scripture makes clear that God made mankind in His image. This idea of the image of God, *imago Dei*, has significant implications for Christian mission. There are multiple scholarly perspectives on the meaning of the image of God as it pertains to humanity: the substantive, relational, and functional views are among the most dominant categories of thought. Ancient scholars like Irenaeus and Aquinas made distinctions between the image and the likeness of God, with Aquinas viewing the image of God as a physical representation of God and the likeness of God as being representative of God's moral or ethical being; the ability to pursue God's righteousness.[130] Aquinas views this likeness became tarnished in the Fall of Genesis 3, redeemed by the grace and sacrifice of Christ and the sending of the Holy Spirit.[131]

Other scholars, such as Karl Barth, view the image of God in a relational sense: mankind was created by God for the purpose of fellowship with Him and with one another, and this

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[128] Marvin Richardson Vincent, Word Studies in the New Testament, 1887 reprint, (Ithaca: Cornell University Publishing, 2009), 100.

[129] Craig S. Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1–2," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 62, no. 1 (2019): 25.

[130] J. Richard Middleton, The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1 (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 13.

[131] Daniel Simango, "The Imago Dei (Gen 1:26–27): A History of Interpretation From Philo to the Present," Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae 42, no. 1 (2016): 175.

purpose is a representation of the relational nature of the Trinity.[132] The functional view is based on a critical analysis of Genesis 1 in the context of Gen 1:28 and the prevailing theme of sovereignty and dominion throughout Genesis 1. This view receives support from the context of the term image in ancient Near Eastern culture, which would associate such contextual image with the representation of a king, such as on local currency or stamps.[133]

The substantive, relational, and functional views are not mutually exclusive. Some scholars, such as Meredith G. Kline, view them as interrelated perspectives of the same fundamental truth. Simango writes, "The functional aspect of the image of God consists of man's likeness to God in having authority and exercising dominion. The substantive aspect of the image of God consists of ethical characteristics or attributes of God, thus holiness, righteousness, and truth."[134] The incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, His teachings, and His subsequent death on the cross and sending of the Holy Spirit restored those ethical characteristics of God, thereby empowering humanity's effective dominion through relational fellowship with God and with man via the fruit of the Spirit. Simango asserts Col 3:10 and Eph 4:24 as basis for this perspective.[135]

This thesis adopts the perspective of Kline and Simango: The image of God is indicative of man's representative dominion. Though all humans were made in God's image, Christ's sacrifice enables His followers to restore the moral-substantive representation of God, enabling them to subdue through relational love, compassion, and service in imitation of Christ. Only through acceptance of Christ and restoration and renewal of the disciple, as Paul describes in his

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[132] Simango, "The Imago Dei (Gen 1:26–27): 179–80.

[133] Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable - Reconsidering Imago Dei," *Neue Zeitschrift fur Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 62, no. 3 (2020): 271.

[134] Simango, "The Imago Dei (Gen 1:26–27)," 185.

[135] Ibid., 177.

letters (Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23), can the disciple adopt a redeemed posture to fulfill the functional and relational aspects of bearing God's image.[136] In this way, *imago Dei* is the necessary foundation from which *missio Dei* becomes imperative for the Christian life.

The Command for Mission

Scripture reveals a clear command to followers of Christ to participate in God's mission. Christ's commission to His followers, given in Matt 28:18–20, is explicit: to make disciples. This command was not solely for His disciples in the place and time at which the command was given, but a timeless command for Jesus's followers across time and space.[137] To accomplish this, Christ tells His followers that they will receive and should take guidance from the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8), indicating that they cannot effectively conduct their assigned task without the power of the Spirit. Wright emphasizes that this command was present from the earliest texts of the Old Testament, citing examples such as Isaiah 40:5 to highlight the missional trust of Israel's very existence.[138]

The people of God possess a singular responsibility to function and behave as a priesthood. Theologian Marvin Vincent calls attention to the use of the Greek *anaphero*, meaning to raise or take up in the context of a sacrificial offering, in 1 Pet 2:5 as well as 1 Pet 2:24. In verse 24, the word *anaphero* is the active verb, describing Christ's bearing of humanity's sins. Peter's understanding of the term, therefore, informs the sacrificial devotion implied by his assertion that the people of the church "to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual

[136] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 178.

[137] Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciplemaking' and the Role of Faith-Sharing," 1.

[138] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 68.

sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5 NIV). His usage of the word *anaphero*, translated as "offering," describes the spiritual sacrifices of God's people.[139]

In this way, Scripture's persistent description of God's people as a holy priesthood (1 Pet 2:5, 9; Exod 19:6; Rev 1:6) is not merely a blessing but a command to pursue His mission with a sacrificial devotion akin to Christ's own. Through this service, God's people serve God and find their place in the kingdom that they have inherited. Brown writes, regarding the inherited kingdom, "They are kings because they are priests: the priesthood is the continuous ground and legitimization of their kingship; they are kings in relation to man, priests in relation to God, serving Him day and night"[140] (Rev 1:6 NIV).

Discipleship

The command for mission, and subsequent pursuit of it, provide a pathway for spiritual growth. Individuals' growth in Christlikeness, as a process of spiritual formation, is discipleship. This thesis will review biblical standards of discipleship and holiness, which define a Christlike posture of self-sacrifice empowering human participation in God's redemptive mission. This section will discuss the biblical standards for discipleship through the lens of holiness, then examine the symbiosis between discipleship and mission.

Biblical Standards for Discipleship

Although biblical scholars argue multiple perspectives on the tasks and process associated with discipleship, as expounded in the literature review section of this dissertation, Christ Himself views the criteria for discipleship through a clear lens of formation via the cross

[139] Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 643.

[140] Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible, vol. 2* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 552.

(Luke 9:23). To pursue Christ, His followers must necessarily deny themselves and sacrifice their personal goals, desires, and ambitions and replace them only with the pursuit of Christ.[141] In his commentary on the Gospel of John, Edwin Blum notes that it is an easy trap for self-professing Christians to don the Christian name absent the sacrificial pursuit of Christ. These identifying Christians, who refrain from sacrificial denial of the self, are the "burned" branches of which Christ speaks in John's recounting of the Last Supper (John 15:5–8 NIV).[142]

When the follower of Christ has truly denied the self in pursuit of Christ, they also then inevitably pursue holiness. This is the way of life praised by the psalmist: to meditate on the Word of God and walk not in the ways of the wicked (Ps 1:1–3); the delight of the Holy Spirit fuels this meditation and the strength to pursue holiness.[143] Through the Spirit, disciples of Christ become holy as God is, Himself, holy. This reflection and representation of God's holiness, through the sanctified life of the believer, is a command repeated throughout Scripture (1 Pet 1:15–16; Lev 19:2; 20:7; 21:8; 1 Thess 4:7) and, for the biblical authors, is a fundamental and irreducible attribute of a true disciple of Christ.[144] Adopting this posture is not merely self-deprivation for its own sake but rather a deprivation of the self so that one might live more fully in service of others, fulfilling a biblical expression of mission.[145]

Because all humans fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:22–23), it is impossible for humans to successfully pursue holiness by their own means alone, though that holiness is God's

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[141] John A. Martin, "Luke," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 229.

[142] Edwin A. Blum, "John," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 325–26.

[143] Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 790.

[144] Roger M. Raymer, "1 Peter," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 842–43.

[145] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 170.

desire for His people.[146] To reconcile this, Jesus blessed His disciples with the sending of the Holy Spirit: a comforter, a Spirit of truth, and a counselor (John 14:15–18). The Gospel of John refers to this comforter as *parakletos*, the one "called alongside to assist," that disciples of Christ may be empowered through the Spirit's work to grow in holiness.[147] Reliance on God via the power of His Holy Spirit makes the path of the disciple straight (Prov 3:5–6); it is via this reliance upon and trust in God alone that disciples achieve growth.[148] Such reliance, true faith, is a common theme of Paul's writings to the early church (Heb 11:1–12; Rom 8:24; 2 Cor 4:18; 5:7), revealing its importance to the life of Christ's disciples.

Discipleship as Mission

God created mankind in His own image (Gen 1:26–27). Although scholars debate as to the ultimate significance of this image, *imago Dei*, missiologist Jan-Olav Henriksen asserts that this image is a foundational requirement for mission due to God's transcendence. He writes, "Because God cannot be experienced as an empirical element among others, the experience of God is always mediated … for human beings, God is primarily in the form of representation."[149] Therefore, *imago Dei* is itself a call to witness, which is a call to reflect God's holiness to the world. This is the calling of Paul in his encouragement of imitation (1 Cor 11:1–2); that the imitation of Christ by His disciples should be a dim reflection of Christ's perfection.[150] Indeed,

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[146] John A. Witmer, "Romans," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 451.

[147] Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 352.

[148] Sid S. Buzzell, "Proverbs," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 911.

[149] Jan-Olav Henriksen, "Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable – Reconsidering Imago Dei.," 268.

[150] Matthew Henry and Thomas Scott, *Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 1997), 1 Co 11:1.

this was Jesus's commission to His followers: to love one another and to be known for such love, just as He had loved them (John 13:34–35), thereby witnessing through imitation.[151]

In pursuit of the imitation of Christ and growth in Christlikeness, Jesus means for His disciples to conduct such mission in the world. Just as He empowered and sent the Twelve into the world (Luke 9:16), His followers today are empowered via the Holy Spirit and meant to participate in His mission in the world.[152] This is why, upon first calling Simon, He describes Simon's new vocation to "fish for people" (Luke 5:10, NIV). In order to achieve this, Simon leaves his entire world behind and joins Jesus's call to pursue mission requires complete obedience and deep personal sacrifice. Through the lens of mission, self-denial is not a checkbox of obedient faith, but a necessity borne by the demands of a true missionary life.

The missionary life, one guided by pursuit of the good works of witness that God has outlined for His people (Eph 2:8–10), is the purpose for His peoples' creation. Hoehner writes, "The purpose of this creation is that believers will do good works … this does not mean doing a work for God; instead, it is God's performing His work in and through believers."[153] These are the works of ministry for which the body of Christ has been built (Eph 4:12–13), wherein Paul uses the word *diakonia*, alternatively translated as "ministry" (ESV, KJV, NRSV) or "service" (NIV, NASB) to describe the functional purpose of disciples in pursuit of good works for the building up of the body of Christ, which is the responsibility of all disciples, not professional clergy alone.[154] This is also the ministry of reconciliation for which God has called His people

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[151] Paul Anthony Hartog, "Johannine Ethics: An Exegetical-Theological Summary and a 'Desiderative' Extension of Mimesis," *Religions* 13, no. 6 (2022): 503.

[152] Ian Howard Marshall, "Luke," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 995.

[153] Harold W. Hoehner, "Ephesians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, 624.

[154] Max Turner, "Ephesians," *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1238.

and the command to be "ambassadors for Christ" (2 Cor 15:20, NIV). To fulfill the calling of discipleship, disciples must be committed to ambassadorship through service and witness; genuine discipleship cannot be fruitful without mission.

Biblical Examples of Mission

Throughout Scripture, the biblical authors provide clear examples of mission to ensure that followers of Christ possess ample evidence of spiritual growth through participation in God's mission. The narrative of Scripture, when viewed through a missional hermeneutic, reveals God's inherent missionary nature through the sending of Himself and His followers throughout the nations to glorify Him. These examples of mission provide disciples with a coherent framework for their individual practice of mission via witness, disciple-making, and sacrificial service to others.

Missional Leadership in the Old Testament

Throughout the biblical narrative, Scripture reveals the participation of humanity in the mission of God. Beginning as early as the creation of man in Genesis, the missional mandate is apparent via God's command to "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:28).[155] After the fall, humanity's participation in mission emerges again through God's covenant with Abraham, wherein God makes clear that His blessing of Abraham and his lineage serves the purpose of leading toward the blessing of all humanity (Gen 12:1–3). Abraham's leadership of his lineage, leading to the nation of Israel and eventually the grace of

[155] Sherman, *Agents of Flourishing*, 17.

Christ, is the vehicle for God's blessing to all the nations (Gal 3:8–9).[156] Beyond this, God sent out many representatives as leaders to guide His people on *mission*. Moses delivered the law, which included robust provisions for representing the goodness and holiness of God to outsiders (Lev 19:34; Num 15:14–16).

These provisions in the law enabled and encouraged foreigners to settle in Israel so that they might come to know and worship the Lord.[157] Biblical scholar Adam Clarke notes that the worship of the one true God, as the sole worship in the land of Israel, was enticing to the outsider. The law allowed the Israelites not to spurn those who came to worship the Lord, but rather provided them the tools and guidance to cultivate such a propagation of God's worship.[158] God would continue to send Himself, directly or via the Holy Spirit, to His chosen representatives. Through the prophets, the judges, and the kings of Israel, God used His people as vehicles to cultivate the service of *missio Dei* throughout the narrative of the Old Testament.

Jesus's Example of Missional Leadership

The coming of Christ marks a shift in the narrative of *mission*. Rather than anointing and sending chosen representatives to lead His people, God anoints and sends Himself in the form of His son Jesus Christ. In the same way God sent Moses to lead the Israelites to Canaan, God sent Christ, evidenced by the key use of the word *apostello* (Heb 3:1).[159] Specifically in the context of empowering God's people to serve His mission, Christ's earthly ministry served a distinct purpose: to provide clear instructions and examples for how to serve His mission effectively.

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[156] Matthew Poole, *Annotations upon the Holy Bible, vol. 1* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1853), 31.

[157] Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, 88.

[158] Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes, New Edition., vol. 1* (Bellingham, WA: Faithlife Corporation, 2014), 665.

[159] Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 410.

Christ makes clear that God's people are sent for the same ends as Christ Himself was sent (John 20:21), and Scripture clarifies that Christ was sent for specific purposes instructive to His followers.

Christ leads a ministry of "healing, deliverance, and illumination," according to scholar Adam Clarke.[160] He leads His ministry explicitly "to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18 NIV). This is the example He set for His followers, upon which he continues to elaborate and instruct throughout His earthly ministry. This instruction culminates in His sending of the apostles; He provides them with authority and commands them to be with Him and learn His message, proclaim the gospel, and drive out demons (Mark 3:14–15).

As His final earthly act, even after the saving grace of His death and resurrection, He sends the Holy Spirit to empower His people to witness (Acts 1:5). His people receive witness from the Spirit and, in turn, must provide witness to the world (John 15:26–27). This is the ultimate example and purpose for which the Spirit moves to dwell within Christ's followers.[161] God blessed Abraham so that Abraham's line would bless the nations, the followers of Christ became blessed by the presence of the Holy Spirit so that they could in turn serve God's mission through witness.

Missional Leadership in the Early Church

The early church provides today's Christians with many examples of its service to God's mission, empowered by the Spirit. Throughout the book of Acts, in keeping with Christ's

[160] Clarke, The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes, 396.

[161] Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary," Trinity Journal 19, no. 1 (1998): 122.

command to be witnesses throughout the whole world. Scripture records the early church's witnessing to Samaritans, foreigners and gentiles, and citizens of many nations (Acts 8:5, 27; 11:20; 15:8–9). Additionally, this witnessing occurs through multiple means: through the verbal proclamation of the gospel, teaching and instruction, and the performance of healing and other miraculous activities, which demonstrate Christ's supreme dominion over the natural and the supernatural.[162]

The apostle Paul recognizes and exemplifies active participation in service to God's mission, identifying himself as having necessarily been called to proclaim the gospel as a direct result of the revelation of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:15–16). As he travels the ancient world in pursuit of missional witness, he often does so in the company or in participation with other followers of Christ, including Cephas, Barnabas, Priscilla, Aquila, and others (Rom 16:3; Gal 1:18; Acts 13:2). Following Christ's example in that witness is a collaborative and communal affair. While dedicated to the gentiles, He also recognized the importance of saving the Jews (Rom 10:1), He demonstrated sacrificial devotion to the gospel, which included a passion for the salvation of Jew and gentile alike.[163]

Summary of Theological Foundations

The narrative of Scripture overwhelmingly points to a fundamental responsibility of God's people to pursue service to His mission to redeem all humanity. The Bible provides examples of chosen people throughout history whom God sent on mission to witness His glory. Throughout the biblical narrative, Scripture emphatically calls God's people to pursue holiness and to do so requires sacrificial participation in the mission of God via discipleship. Beginning

[162] Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1–2," 28.

[163] Clarke, *The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Critical Notes*, 121.

with God's self-sent mission, Scripture reveals a plan for missional leadership that began with Abraham, leading ultimately to the example set by Christ. Following Christ's sending of the Holy Spirit, the early church sets an example of a relational mission empowered by the Holy Spirit. This example is a strong theological reference for the effective pursuit of mission in today's church via robust and sacrificial discipleship.

Theoretical Foundations

Planning for effective intervention, this thesis begins by evaluating underpinning theories relevant to the research project. Firstly, the project must review the attributes of organizational culture, theoretical best practices for leaders' influence of culture, and the role of church leaders in the church's mission. Subsequently, this chapter will review historic formats and attempts at discipleship-focused instruction in the church and various means of evaluating the efficacy of these attempts. In doing so, the project conducts an intervention founded in strong theoretical precedent. This research revealed that an effective intervention will involve formal and informal church leaders in a small-group instructional format delivering group discussion content, practical exercise, and take-home material for individual review. Theoretical consensus also indicates that best practices for evaluation leverage mixed methods, so this project will evaluate its intervention's success using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Organizational Leadership in the Church

Because the purpose of this action research project is to improve the organizational culture of MVMNT Church, it is imperative first to evaluate the theoretical foundations of understanding, evaluating, and transforming organizational culture. There is abundant literature from both Christian and secular scholars on the topic of organizational culture. This thesis will

engage exclusively with secular scholarship that is validated by biblical foundations and aligned with Christian scholarship on the subject of culture and leadership. By leveraging a synthesis of scholarly resources, this thesis will establish a directive definition of organizational culture and provide a foundation of leadership and change scholarship that underpins the instructional curriculum for the project's intervention.

Defining Organizational Culture

For a church to be missional, mission must be embedded in its cultural identity. Guder summarizes this distinction in his book *Called to Witness*, "Our challenge today is to move from a church with mission to a missional church."[164] In order to accomplish this, leaders of the church must transform the organizational culture of their church. Although a nebulous concept in theological circles, organization culture is well-defined in secular literature. Organizational culture is a catch-all that broadly encompasses the concept of capturing and expressing the organization's shared assumptions and beliefs, exposed through norms of behavior.[165] This secular definition is supported by church practitioners like Malphurs, who adds that "A church's organizational culture is its unique outward expression of its shared beliefs and values."[166] Importantly, culture is not owned by a leader or subset of leaders; instead, it is the property of the organization of the collective.[167] Leaders play a critical role in establishing and propagating artifacts, rituals, and narratives that communicate the organization's culture. However, these

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[164] Guder, *Called to Witness*, location 79.

[165] Janet L. Szumal and Robert A. Cooke, *Creating Constructive Cultures: Leading People and Organizations to Effectively Solve Problems and Achieve Goals* (Plymouth, MI: Human Synergistics International, 2019), location 205. Kindle.

[166] Malphurs and Penfold, *ReVision*, location 172.

[167] Barbara Mutonyi, Terje Slatten, Gudbrand Lien, and Manel Gonzalez-Pinero, "The Impact of Organizational Culture and Leadership Climate on Organizational Attractiveness and Innovative Behavior: A Study of Norwegian Hospital Employees" *BMC Health Services Research* 22, no. 1 (2022): 2.

elements only diffuse across the culture when they reflect the organization's practices, behaviors, and attitudes.[168]

Leaders have the opportunity to direct a positive culture that lends itself toward the adoption of mission. To do so, they must be willing to adopt a posture of humility. Christian and secular scholars alike agree that, for culture to diffuse successfully, it adopts a posture of emphasis on the growth and well-being of the organization as a whole, possibly to the detriment of individual members of leadership.[169] This form of culture emphasizes teamwork, participation, cooperation, and transparency while de-emphasizing hierarchy and authority.[170] For the church, this act of humble culture-forming reduces the formal authority of the professional clergy while empowering the laity and honoring the sovereign authority of Christ. By adopting this humble posture of empowerment rather than hierarchical authoritative leadership, leaders begin to shape the thinking and behavior within their organization, which, in turn, diffuses into the organization's culture and identity.[171]

Leaders' Impact on Culture

Leaders must take tangible steps to affect the church's culture to achieve effective growth within the church toward a spiritual ideal. Missiologist J. R. Woodward identifies six specific areas where church leaders can tangibly focus their attention: language, artifacts, narratives,

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[168] Kaitlyn Tate, Tatiana Penconek, Bruna Moreno Dias, Greta G. Cummings, and Andrea Bernardes. "Authentic Leadership, Organizational Culture, and the Effects of Hospital Quality Management Practices on Quality of Care and Patient Satisfaction," *Journal of Advanced Nursing* (2023): 2.

[169] Szumal and Cooke, *Creating Constructive Cultures*, location 215.

[170] Tate et al., "Authentic Leadership, Organizational Culture, and the Effects of Hospital Quality Management Practices on Quality of Care and Patient Satisfaction," 2.

[171] Szumal and Cooke, *Creating Constructive Cultures*, location 302.

rituals, institutions, and ethics.[172] Leaders begin by first assessing the state of their church by asking key questions: what common language does the body use to describe the gospel and their Christian life, and how is that language represented throughout the church via artifacts, rituals, and narratives?[173] Once leaders have evaluated the state of the church, they then begin to take steps toward transforming individual elements of the church's culture. In doing so, leaders must take particular care in positive relational interactions with members of the church; then, the culture will begin to change.

This dynamic process of leaders' transformation of culture is impossible to avoid. If leaders are not involved in this process intentionally, they certainly are unintentionally impacting the culture in ways of which they are unaware.[174] By taking intentional steps toward evaluating the church's culture, their place in it, and making explicit decisions to focus their attention on positive transformation, leaders seize the opportunity to empower their congregation for missional purposes. This act of specifically prioritizing energy toward culture generation creates a powerful culture of supportive autonomy,[175] enabling members of the organization to participate in mission as effective disciples. As leaders build more intentional relationships with more disciples the leadership group grows, thus more effectively diffusing cultural principles throughout the body. This establishes a growing coalition, ensuring that the organization pursues sustainable positive transformation rather than dying out.[176]

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[172] Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture*, location 424.

[173] Malphurs and Penfold, *ReVision*, location 168.

[174] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 22.

[175] Mutonyi et al., "The Impact of Organizational Culture and Leadership Climate on Organizational Attractiveness and Innovative Behavior," 7.

[176] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Brighton, MA: Harvard Business Press, 1996), location 129. Kindle.

Successful Organizational Change

Organizational leadership scholar Edgar Schein asserts that all organizations, churches included, face two fundamental categories of challenges. The first is internal challenge related to continuous integration, daily functioning, and the ability to adapt and learn. The second is the contextual challenge related to survival and growth in their environment.[177] Because these challenges are ongoing and persistent, organizations must constantly transform and adapt to survive. The church must constantly re-evaluate itself in pursuit of holy growth, as it must persistently fend off the trappings of the world and re-align itself to the authority of Christ and His vision for the church. As theologian Hendrik Kraemer famously quipped, "The church is always in a state of crisis; its greatest shortcoming is that it is only occasionally aware of it."[178] In order to begin this change process, organizations must first begin by evaluating and decomposing the status quo.[179]

To pursue organizational change successfully, there are a variety of frameworks. Aubrey Malphurs recommends a threefold approach: understanding God's design of the church's leaders and body, the divine direction for the church's unique local mission, and crafting a strategic plan for development leveraging the church's design toward its divine direction.[180] Harvard Business professor John Kotter's seminal eight-stage process for leading successful change begins with the alignment of a pluralistic coalition of leaders who craft and communicate a compelling vision, then taking intentional steps to diffuse that vision throughout the body of the organization

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[177] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 39.

[178] Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1947).

[179] Kotter, *Leading Change*, location 323–47.

[180] Malphurs and Penfold, *ReVision*, location 55–69.

through the removal of obstacles and achievement of small, stackable wins.[181] Regardless of the approach, both Christian and secular scholarship is unified in the criticality of empowering the organization's laity through tangible goals backed by a clear and communicable vision.

In this vision of successful change, the church embodies the spiritual fellowship, *koinonia*, that is the purpose of its organizational design.[182] No individual leader can achieve meaningful change or growth alone.[183] God created the church to be a confluence of varied gifts and skill sets, each coming together to form a cohesive body far stronger as a collective than the sum of its parts; this is the definition of *koinonia*.[184] By identifying and leveraging the spiritual gifts throughout the body, and empowering the application of those gifts through effective discipleship, the church adopts an organic structure far more powerful than a traditional hierarchical institution.[185] The church's leaders achieve missional transformation within their church by rallying the church around God's missional vision for the church, subsequently empowering the congregation as a collective of laity via intentional discipleship. This crafts a sustainable organizational culture focused on mission.

Practical Application of Mission

Having ascertained the criticality of leaders to the transformation of culture and established a synthesis of scholarly best practices for facilitating organizational culture in the church, this section will evaluate theoretical foundations for mission and witness. A biblical understanding of mission and witness, founded upon effective theoretical best practice, is the

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[181] Kotter, *Leading Change*.

[182] Stedman, *Body Life*, location 206.

[183] Kotter, *Leading Change*, location 175.

[184] Stedman, *Body Life*, location 562.

[185] Ogden, *Unfinished Business*, location 338–431.

basis for a clear and communicable vision that leaders can wield to cultivate a missional culture within the church. Leaders play an instrumental role in guiding the body of the church toward biblical mission, as well as a robust understanding and practice of public witness. This project's intervention will effectively empower church leaders to craft and communicate a vision rooted in missional witness by establishing a comprehensive theoretical foundation for these subjects.

Church Leaders on Mission

Because this action research project is centered on church leaders and their impact on their congregation's culture, it is prudent to evaluate the true importance of leaders and the roles they play in mission. In a 2022 research study conducted to evaluate four Australian churches' success in conducting discipleship initiatives, researchers evaluated several different pedagogical techniques as well as the extent to which leaders participated in their execution. The study identified four categories of church leadership participation: pastor-led, pastoral-team-led, pastor-facilitated, and pastoral-team-facilitated. Of these, the pastor-led discipleship initiative failed within twelve months, while the pastoral-team-facilitated initiative resulted in lasting institutional change over a period of nine years.[186] This indicates the criticality of leaders' involvement not directly in mission, but in cultivating informal leaders within the body of their church for participation in mission.

This emphasis on informal leadership, cultivated and facilitated by church leaders, introduces more diverse cultural backgrounds and perspectives that strengthen the conduct of mission. It empowers the church on mission to witness for the gospel in varied ways, impacting audiences both outside the church and audiences within the church in their discipleship

[186] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers? A Case Study of Four Baptist Churches in Victoria, Australia," 309–10.

journey.[187] These factors make it clear that further attempts to cultivate mission within a church body must not be solely dedicated to building up church leaders or church members. Rather, successful cultivation entails a specific focus on encouraging church leaders to facilitate a diverse group of informal leaders from within the laity who can work together as a team for the proliferation of mission.

Church Witnessing Methods

Across varying theological and denominational perspectives, a constant attribute of the biblical church is its distinctiveness from worldly society.[188] By existing in a way that is congruent with biblical values, often in contrast to societal values, the church establishes itself as a representational witness of the kingdom of Heaven. In pursuit of such heavenly values, it is critical that the church understand and adopt the views of God toward the world, emphasizing the primacy of justice, love, and reconciliation.[189] Witnessing can be done through a variety of specific tasks, including verbal evangelism, acts of service, and proclamation of messianic reign.[190] This witness is contributory to the mission of God when the church works to discern the movement of the Holy Spirit in their community and witnesses in that local missional context.[191] By aligning itself to God's work in suffering and injustice, the church positions itself to reflect and act as a witness for God's love.[192]

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[187] Shorack, "Jesus, Friend of Sinners," 239.

[188] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 173.

[189] Guder, *Called to Witness*, location 859.

[190] Nestor Miguez, "Missional Formation for Transforming Discipleship," *International Review of Mission* 106, no. 1 (2017): 12.

[191] Guder, *Called to Witness*, location 978.

[192] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 178.

In pursuit of witness, scholars are divided on the particular role that traditional church liturgy plays in the body's conduct of mission. Fitch proposes a three-layered concentric circle vision, in which worship within the physical church is a central grounding point enabling the congregation to participate missionally in the outer two layers: friends and familial relations, and vocation in the world.[193] By contrast, scholars assert that such a central emphasis on church-based worship is destructive to the efficacy of regular worship as a way of life outside the institutional church, instead calling for a focus on the Holy Spirit and emphasis of regular worship in all life activities regardless of domain.[194] In either case, the importance of public witness, prayer, worship, praise, proclamation, reconciliation, acts of justice and mercy, and endurance under persecution, which, when observed by the outside world, are reflections of the glory of God universally accepted.[195] While the particular importance or emphasis of church-led communal worship may vary depending on denominational or theological background, scholars agree that the intended result in the life of Christians is always public missional witness in the Christian's everyday life and local context.

Instruction and Evaluation

There are many ways for leaders to participate in and implement training within the church. This section will analyze theoretical methods of instruction applied in various ministry contexts, arriving at a common base to develop a small group instructional curriculum for intervention rooted in theoretical best practices. In addition to the appropriate instructional format, this project will synthesize methods for qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the

[193] Fitch, "The Way Worship Works in Mission," 177.

[194] Schoon, *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, location 3960.

[195] Guder, *Called to Witness*, location 2207.

intervention's instructional program to determine its efficacy in empowering MVMNT Church's leaders to cultivate missional culture.

Format of Instruction

As leaders both receive training and conduct training for others, the small group environment stands out as a model for pedagogical instruction, inspired by Jesus's own teaching of His apostles in a small group environment.[196] Botross, in his study of discipleship instruction programs at four Australian churches, reviewed group sizes, including one-to-one, small groups of five to six, and larger seminar-style training with many dozens of participants. He found that the size of the group was not necessarily a direct contributor to the success or failure of the instruction. Rather, he noted that instruction was most effective and successful when it incorporated direct participation and relational interaction between those receiving the instruction.[197]

In a review of factors contributing to healthy discipleship development, researchers in the United Kingdom found that participation in small group discussion was the number one contributor to perceived discipleship progress, followed closely by individual practice of prayer and Scripture-reading.[198] Multiple scholars highlighted the importance of biblical teaching as an aspect of small group study, providing instruction to group participants on the example of Jesus as well as fundamental theology.[199] Rosser and Tracy, in each of their doctoral research projects, found a one-weekend small group seminar format to provide ample time for instruction while

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[196] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 104.

[197] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 305.

[198] Francis et al. "What Helps Young Christians Grow in Discipleship?" 565.

[199] Botross, "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?" 304; Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 197–99; Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 134–35.

providing that instruction in a condensed time frame, reducing risk of dropout.[200] Despite successfully validating his hypothesis, Rosser noted in the analysis of his results that the program would have been strengthened by adding another day, granting time for additional practical implementation opportunities.[201]

Evaluative Foundations

In evaluating the efficacy of instructional programs in the church, many researchers employ a mixed-methods approach, combining semi-structured qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys.[202] Siew analyzes transcripts from interviews with church leaders to better understand the church's approach and relationship with discipleship ideas, indicating that such a qualitative approach lent itself to better understanding the motivations and methods behind discipleship initiatives in a more effective manner than a quantitative survey alone.[203] Rosser found that conducting a follow-up survey two months after his instructional intervention was effective in learning the extent to which his instructional seminar actually impacted church operations, given that enough time had passed since the intervention to allow for change to occur.[204] He used qualitative interviews to capture broader codes and themes, then compared those results to a Likert scale survey that his participants completed online.[205]

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[200] Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 125–26.

[201] Ibid., 127.

[202] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 114; Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples," 154; Pleizer, "Who Cares? Exploring Pastoral Care in Dutch Protestant Parishes Using the Church Life Survey (CLS)," 346.

[203] Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 194.

[204] Rosser, "Prioritizing Spiritual Formation to Grow Disciple-Making Communities," 132.

[205] Ibid., 114.

Notably, scholarship agrees that the surveys employed must be designed to measure the actual desired outcome. Byerly et al. explain that an aggregation of surveys about individual discipleship may not necessarily reflect the discipleship culture of the church as a whole; instead, a survey should be designed to inquire about the church as an organization specifically.[206] Plezier found success in leveraging the existing "Church Life Survey," routinely completed by churches throughout Australia, to understand congregation-level attributes related to pastoral care.[207] Therefore, a similar organizational survey is optimal for evaluating progress or change at the organizational level, while surveys targeting individual characteristics suffice only to evaluate change at the individual level.

Summary of Theoretical Foundations

Precedent literature validates that church leaders play an important role in the church's conduct of mission through the crafting of sustainable organizational culture rooted in laity empowerment and clear vision. Literature shows that relational small group environments provide an effective pedagogical setting, and that previous studies have successfully leveraged mixed-method approaches involving semi-structured interviews and organizationally focused quantitative surveys. Because of the importance of formal and informal church leaders to the conduct of church missions, the project will involve participants in both formal and informal positions of leadership influence. Xx To conduct education surrounding mission successfully, past attempts to demonstrate that effective growth can occur over the course of a minimum of two days, and that the educational content should include biblical teaching, participatory group

[206] Byerly et al. "The Congregational Character Questionnaire," 340.

[207] Pleizer, "Who Cares? Exploring Pastoral Care in Dutch Protestant Parishes Using the Church Life Survey (CLS)," 346–49.

discussion, practical implementation exercises, and resources for individual follow-up study. These theoretical practices provide a strong foundation for intervention.

Conclusion

MVMNT Church, a young and thriving attractional church based in a booming central Virginia city, is experiencing a problem. Years of operation in an attractional model have cultivated a discipleship culture that eschews communal mission in favor of individually focused discipline. The purpose of this action research project is to develop and execute an instructional program targeting MVMNT Church leaders to cultivate a missional culture. If such an instructional program teaches MVMNT Church leaders how to lead missionally and cultivate mission within the church, then the congregational body will follow, resulting in a transformed church with renewed missional purpose.

To accomplish this purpose, this thesis reviewed precedent literature related to the theology of mission, leadership in the church, and concepts related to evangelism, discipleship, and church education. The synthesis of such themes in the literature revealed a highly varied spectrum of belief surrounding the concept of mission and discipleship, as well as conflicting ideas about the role of the church and the individual Christian on mission. A successful instructional program, therefore, must adopt an ecumenical approach that reviews these ideas in a personal and contextual way, encouraging church leaders to develop their own understanding.

Theologically, Scripture reveals a biblical narrative that demonstrates God's will to empower His people for His mission, which, in turn, will culminate in the reconciliation of all His people to Him. This thesis reviewed the prevalence of this theme, supporting God's mission, from the Old Testament through to the examples set by Christ and the early church. Past attempts to cultivate discipleship and instruction in the church have demonstrated that small group

formats, encouraging relational interaction and participation, succeed in imparting biblical wisdom.

A successful instructional program will teach the theologically founded principles of mission, using the example of Christ and other biblical figures, conveyed through teaching, practical exercises, group discussion, and individual study. The literature has demonstrated value in targeting formal and informal leaders for this program and evaluating the efficacy of the program through mixed methods. These theoretical principles, accompanied by a robust analysis and synthesis of precedent literature and a comprehensive theological foundation of mission, form a strong basis for intervention.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project is to design, implement, and evaluate an instructional program to develop leaders capable of cultivating a missional church culture at MVMNT Church. To do so, participants will undergo an eight-week instructional program designed to train them on the theological foundations of mission and to develop leadership skills necessary to generate and sustain a missional church culture. The research project will follow research best practices of data triangulation, reflexivity to expose potential bias, and human-centered research ethics, including formal recruitment, consent, and permission. This chapter will review the methodology of the project including a review of the intervention design, including an explanation of how the author developed the instructional curriculum for intervention, followed by an examination of the actual implementation of the intervention.

To mitigate the risk of bias caused by the researcher's background and experiences, this chapter includes a reflexivity statement to maximize transparency: The author of this thesis is a military veteran, data scientist, and ministry professional in Charlottesville, Virginia. The author is an Asian-American, grew up in an upper-middle-class, predominantly white community, and lives today in an ethnically diverse upper-middle-class community. This project deals with mission, leadership, and service; the author's perspectives have been shaped by his culture, professional background, and upbringing. Though this project has made every attempt to identify and mitigate bias in this research, the author's social and professional background may introduce subconscious biases, which may impact perspectives and approaches to research.

Intervention Design

This action research study aims to develop, implement, and evaluate a missional leadership curriculum intended to empower church leaders to cultivate a missional culture at MVMNT Church. Because the intervention targets church leaders, participants for the study must be at least eighteen years or older and hold a formal or informal leadership role in MVMNT Church. Formal leaders include paid and volunteer staff members with titles like director, coordinator, manager, or pastor. Informal leaders include volunteers who serve as team captains for the church's volunteer ministries, leading other volunteers in areas such as Sunday school, hospitality, and small groups. At the discretion of MVMNT Church's lead pastor, other individuals who do not hold explicit roles of leadership may be identified as informal leaders due to influence within the congregation or potential candidacy for future explicit leadership roles.

The intervention will occur in four phases: recruitment, instruction, follow-up, and results analysis. Each phase will take place in a different location pertinent to that phase's goals, such as the church facility or a private one-on-one interview space. The entire intervention will take place over sixteen weeks: two weeks for recruitment, eight weeks for instruction, four weeks for follow-up, and two weeks for analysis and synthesis of results. This project will leverage multiple methods of data collection to triangulate the results: focus groups, individual Likert surveys, and semi-structured interviews will provide a range of data sources to reduce bias and ensure the validity of research findings. Figure 1 displays the sequential nature of this project's intervention design.

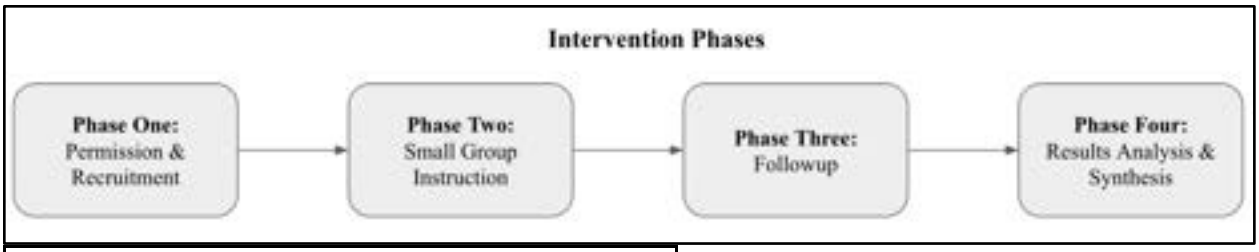

Figure 1. Sequential structure of intervention phases

Systems and Software

This project extensively uses Google Workspace, a cloud-based software for audio recording, note-taking, and data analysis. The researcher chose Google Workspace services (e.g., Meet, Docs, and Sheets) because they have complex privacy and security options to ensure participants' data remains private and secure. Google Meet, which the researcher will use for audio recording purposes, leverages end-to-end encryption to ensure that data is secure in transit.[1]

Similarly, data in Docs, Sheets, and Drive are protected by encryption at rest.[2] All Google Workspace services enable the sharing of data through password protection, allowing the researcher to share progress with the thesis mentor securely, which does not compromise participants' privacy. Additionally, Google Workspace synchronizes content and data across devices, providing ease of access for the researcher between notes taken via mobile device or laptop.

[1] Google, "Google Meet Security & Privacy for Users," 2023, https://support.google.com/meet/answer/9852160?hl=en

[2] Google, "Understand the Basics of Privacy in Google Docs, Sheets, & Slides," 2023. https://support.google.com/docs/answer/10381817?hl=en

Design of Instructional Content

This section will review the inputs that influenced the develop of this project's instructional content, as well as highlight gaps in existing instructional content necessitating the development of new content. This section will review the application of moral development theory as well as strengths and weakness of precedent discipleship curricula as they informed the development of this intervention's instructional content.

The purpose of the instructional content is to educate church leaders on the theological principles of mission and discipleship, while also empowering them to take practical steps toward the practice of mission and discipleship in the ministry context of MVMNT Church. Although there are a variety of curricula available focused on discipleship, such as *Discipleship Essentials* and *The Ways of the Alongsider,* as well as frameworks for the cultivation of discipleship in the church, such as *The Purpose-Driven Church* and *The Prodigal Church*, no existing instructional curriculum reviewed concisely covers the expanse of both mission and discipleship in both the context of individual spiritual growth and operations of the church.

Because this project aims to cultivate both an individual practice of mission and discipleship in MVMNT Church's leaders as well as cultivate a culture of church operations focused on mission and discipleship, this project will research and validate a new curriculum entitled "Missional Leadership." Appendix F contains an outline of the eight-week instructional content at a weekly level and Appendix G has the instructional materials that participants will study and discuss in Phase Two of this research project.

The curriculum is designed to provide an abbreviated and ecumenical perspective on current scholarly research and theological reflections on mission, discipleship, and the church. Participants will engage with a sample of the scholarly material contributing to this project's conceptual framework. The purpose of such engagement is to empower participants to develop a

personal biblical perspective on mission and discipleship in the context of their own Christian lives, as well as their leadership of the church.

Application of Christian Formation

In their book *Christian Development*, authors James Estep and Jonathan Kim review several philosophical, anthropological, and educational theories of human development as they relate to Christian spiritual formation. Among these is a theory of moral development, which relates to the process by which believers grow in their moral maturity over a phased journey; beginning with self-centric criteria and culminating in a spiritual stance derived from in-dwelling moral principles. This theory of moral development is closely related to missional views of discipleship which, as the focus of this action research project, asserts that disciples can pursue spiritual development through the lens of participation and trust in the redemptive mission of God.

This section will review the theory of moral development posited in *Christian Development*, clarifying the stages of maturity from self-centric reasoning to indwelling moral principle, identify how the action research project will support the moral development of research participants to cultivate a theocentric worldview and improved understanding of mission, and specify methods of evaluating this moral development in participants. As participants engage with the research project intervention, they will learn the ways in which Christ and other biblical figures expose the divine moral principles associated with the Christian mission and develop in their own ability to recognize and abide by these moral principles indwelling within them via the Holy Spirit.

Overview of Moral Development

There are many philosophical and educational approaches to understanding moral development in humans. These frameworks range from the significance of external stimuli to innate human character, each presenting alternative variations by which internal and external forces drive individuals to adopt and abide by concepts of morality which may or may not be universal to human society. The philosophical theory of cognitive-moral reasoning, in which morality is revealed through cognitive decision-making, is the most prevalently associated with Christian education scholarship and well reflects scripture's revelations of moral development.[3]

Philosopher Lawrence Kohlberg popularized a seminal model for moral development in alignment with the cognitive-moral reasoning framework which consists of three broad stages: moral reasoning, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality.[4] In stage one, moral reasoning, humans' sense of morality is associated solely with selfish stimuli: decisions are made based on the cost or gain that will impact the individual in the form of punishment or reward. As the individual matures, their moral decision-making will transition to stage two in which their decisions are guided by an external arbiter of morality such as law. Finally, the individual internalizes the underlying moral principles to an extent to which the individual no longer makes decisions for selfish reasons or because of external authority, but rather based on the decision's alignment to a set of internal moral principles such as justice or fairness.

Kohlberg's theory of moral development, while flawed, does align to some degree with the revelation of scripture. As Kohlberg posits, scripture indicates that human beings are inherently selfish creatures who are prone to make decisions based on the needs of the flesh and,

[3] Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation*.

[4] Ibid., 127.

through the grace of Christ and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, become creatures whose decisions can be based on the principles of the Spirit (Rom. 8:5–25).[5] This moral transcendence results not only from cognitive growth, as Kohlberg asserts, but through the power of the Holy Spirit.[6] As the individual places more trust in God, their decision-making reliance shifts from a focus on the flesh to a focus on the Spirit, thereby aligning themselves to the third stage of moral development, guided by indwelling moral principle.

Moral Development Through Intervention

From a pedagogical perspective, there is a universal theme for all theories of moral development: Through moral teaching, the individual shifts from an egocentric decision-making paradigm to a "principle-centered and ultimately toward a God-centered view of life".[7] Education for such moral development cannot occur through lectures alone, but rather through practical application of discussion and learning into real-life situations and experiences. Estep and Kim suggest that educators in pursuit of moral development expose their students to conceptual ethical norms, followed by clarification of the underlying values, along with opportunities to apply those values to real-world situations.[8]

This action research project aims to convert believers from passive observers of God's mission to active participants, making this intervention ripe for the application of moral development theory. True engagement in God's mission involves a mindset shift: Mission is not something that a disciple does, but rather a fundamental attribute of what a disciple is.[9] This

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[5] Estep and Kim, *Christian Formation*, 139.

[6] Ibid, 142.

[7] Ibid., 146.

[8] Ibid, 150.

[9] Schoon, *Cultivating and Evangelistic Character*, location 2668.

intervention, in the form of weekly small group sessions, will engage participants in a study of the ethical norms and behaviors of the Christian mission revealed by scripture. Following exposure to these norms, participants will, through Socratic discussion and practical thought exercises, explore the underlying principled values that guide those ethical norms.

Finally, the active cultivation of missional service in the lives of research participants will provide the opportunity for these moral values to become endemic to their lives and, through the power of the Spirit, form a logocentric and mature sense of morality. This logocentric view of morality coincides with the theocentric worldview described by missions scholar Christopher Wright, who asserts that such a theocentric worldview is key to the development of a missional hermeneutic and corresponding mission ethic.[10] The coincidence of Kohlberg's stages of moral development and Wright's promoted theocentric worldview development, as depicted in figure 2, will develop research participants toward a mature theocentric spiritual-moral maturity primed for mission.

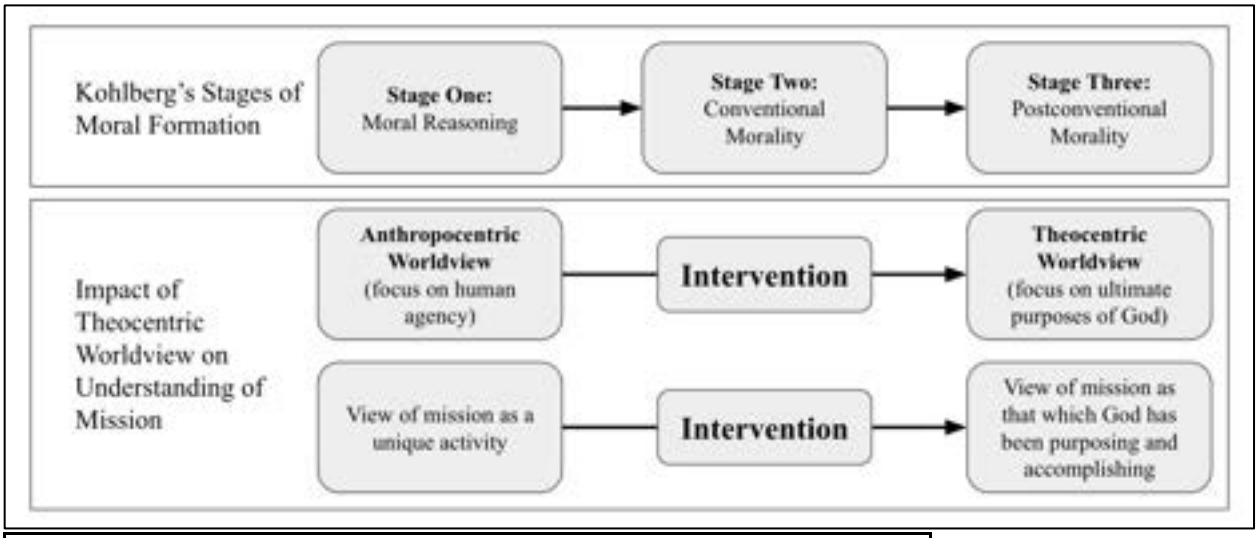

Figure 2. Coincidence of moral development and theocentric worldview

[10] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 75.

The intervention assumes that, as committed believers and church leaders, participants have already transcended stage one of moral development, entirely egocentric morality, and, at a minimum, are engaged with stage two of moral development–performing moral behavior because of the authority of scripture. Therefore, the intervention will emphasize the transition of participants from authority orientation to universal principles; leveraging the models provided by Christ, the Holy Spirit, and asserting the mission of God as an indwelling compass for the internalization of moral principles.

Measuring Moral Development

Measuring moral development presents unique challenges because, like many facets of Christian development, morality is a complex construct that cannot neatly be composed into neat quantifiable metrics. In such instances, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews provides an opportunity to evaluate the factors and attributes of such a complex construct, in which underlying attributes may be unknown or ill-defined.[11] Therefore, the project will seek to evaluate participants' moral development through the lens of Christian mission and through the execution of semi-structured interviews before and after intervention.

To provide a perspective for validation and triangulation of the results of the qualitative study, participants will also engage in a quantitative Likert-scale survey, the questions for which will reflect themes in the associated qualitative interview. Such surveys provide a valuable means for statistical analysis of change over time, including spiritual formation and discipleship.[12] These surveys, while of limited value alone, serve to amplify and validate the findings of semi-structured interviews to paint a holistic picture of participants' moral

[11] Starcher, Dzubinski, and Sanchez, "Rigorous Missiological Research Using Qualitative Inquiry", 56.

[12] Francis et al. "What Helps Young Christians Grow in Discipleship?", 564.

development because of the intervention. From a perspective of participants' moral development, the study will have succeeded if those participants, after the intervention, participate more actively in mission via active discipleship and possess an innate understanding of biblical moral principles related to Christian mission.

Review of Discipleship Curricula

Precedent literature revealed a need for a discipleship and training program that provides an ecumenical perspective. In keeping with this intervention's focus on individuals in the second stage of Kohlberg's moral development model, the curriculum also should be directed not to those who are new to faith but have achieved a moderate level of moral and spiritual development. To accomplish this, the researcher reviewed several popular discipleship frameworks popular in the non-denominational church: *Discipleship Essentials*, *The Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*, *The Third Option*, *The Purpose-Driven Life*, and *The Ways of the Alongsider*. Although this list is far from comprehensive, it does provide an overview of common trends in discipleship pedagogy as well as identify likely opportunities wherein this intervention's curriculum can fill gaps regarding instruction of discipleship and mission.

Discipleship Essentials

Written by discipleship scholar Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials* provides a workbook curriculum for the development of disciples over six months to a year. In alignment with the discipleship approach Ogden promotes in his book *Transforming Discipleship*, *Discipleship Essentials* recommends a discipleship cohort of three individuals meeting weekly for intentional mutual formation. Ogden asserts that there are three core functions of the group

facilitator: to equip, encourage, and empower the group members to eventually develop disciples of their own.[13]

The content of the workbook is divided into four parts: growing up in Christ, understanding the message of Christ, becoming like Christ, and serving Christ. The weekly content facilitates three main activities, each designed to promote active discussion among the group members around a specific "core truth" such as "making disciples," "quiet time," redemption," or other practical theological topics. These activities are a memory verse, Bible study of a related passage, and a reading from a theological essay. Each of these activities leads to written discussion questions optimized for critical discussion.

Real-Life Ministries

The *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*, developed by the pastoral leadership team of Real-Life Ministries under the guidance of lead pastor Jim Putnam, is a twelve-week discipleship curriculum oriented around a focus on the Great Commission as presented in Matt 28:18–20.[14] Real Life Ministries promotes a multi-tiered view of the disciple with perspectives on the head, heart, and hands. Through this lens, the disciple is defined as one who is "committed to following Christ … committed to being changed by Christ … committed to the mission of Christ".[15] In addition to this view, the discipleship training program also emphasizes stages of discipleship growth ranging from a spiritual infant to a spiritual parent. Over time, the

[13] Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 11.

[14] William S. Krause, William James Putnam, Avery T. Willis Jr., and Brandon Guindon, *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual: Equipping Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 7.

[15] Real Life Ministries, "Real Life Ministries Leader Resource Guide," Real Life Ministries, 2018, 4.

disciple grows in their knowledge of and relationship with Christ, culminating the training and release of new generations of disciples.

According to the *Real-Life Ministries Leader Resource Guide*, each week of the curriculum begins with a welcome and prayer, church announcements, and engagement with the curriculum of the *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*. The curriculum emphasizes the role of mentorship between spiritual parents and children or young adults, meaning that more spiritually mature members and leaders of the group should intentionally provide guidance, encouragement, and equipment to the less spiritually mature members of the group. The weekly session also highlights the role of discussion questions oriented around the discipleship foci of head, heart, and hands to guide Socratic discussion among the group toward a greater understanding of discipleship and mission.

The Third Option

The Third Option is the name of both a book and a training curriculum by pastor Miles McPherson, who designed the curriculum as a means for promoting church and secular leaders' ability to cross ethnic, racial, and demographic boundaries for improved relationships based on biblical principles of mission and unity. Although *The Third Option* does not explicitly promote discipleship or mission by name, it centers around the biblical mandate for a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18–19). This focus on reconciliation, along with the curriculum's slogan of "The Third Option: A Strategy to Unite the Country," does promote a missional mandate through its emphasis of spreading reconciliatory spiritual maturity through development of relationships.[16]

[16] Miles McPherson, *The Third Option: Hope for a Racially Divided Nation* (Washington, DC: Howard Books, 2018).

The church curriculum itself consists of six sessions. Each session consists of a prayer, reading and discussion of Bible verses, an instructional video sermon delivered by Miles McPherson, and an interactive worksheet designed to encourage participants to explore the boundaries of their comfort zones while also improving comprehension and retention of the week's study material. Though the curriculum does not explicitly identify discipleship by name, it encourages participants to form an intentional relationship with another participant designated as a "brother's or sister's keeper." This relationship is meant to be an intentional relationship of mutual upbuilding, encouragement, and accountability mirroring traditional views of a discipleship relationship.

The Purpose-Driven Life

Pastor Rick Warren's classic book, *The Purpose-Driven Church*, published in 1995, provided a framework that shared the views and models of Saddleback Church, the multi-campus church for which he is the lead pastor. Following up on that seminal book, Warren developed a discipleship curriculum published under the name *The Purpose-Driven Life*. As with *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Warren's discipleship curriculum promotes a spiritual life defined by five purposes: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry, and mission. These elements derive from the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:37–40) and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

The Purpose-Driven Life, though it encourages a small group format, is not explicitly designed as a small group curriculum. The book is formatted for individual use, with group discussion questions located in an appendix rather than within the body of the content. The content itself consists of forty days, split into five parts each focused on a different purpose. These five parts take the reader on a journey to introduce the reader to their role in spiritual community with respect to the five purposes, culminating in mission. Each week's content

consists of written devotional content, a theological focus in "point to ponder," a memory verse, an introspective question for consideration, and an audio sermon.

The Ways of the Alongsider

Published by The Navigators, an international ministry dedicated to the promotion of discipleship practices, Bill Mowry's *The Ways of the Alongsider* promotes The Navigators' philosophy of "life-on-life" discipleship, encouraging individuals engaged in discipleship to promote intentional spiritual growth in the lens of everyday activities rather than exclusively in a small group or classroom setting. The book consists of ten chapters, corresponding to ten weeks of meetings. Mowry emphasizes the importance of the workbook as a tool for either small group or one-on-one discipleship rather than reading alone.

The content of the book is structured in two parts. Part one, "Foundations and Skills," introduces participants to the biblical foundations of discipleship. The second part of the book develops "Practical Skill-Building" for biblical life and relationships, culminating in an introduction to biblical mission in Chapter 10. Each week consists of devotional content, questions to stimulate Bible study, and a practical activity or worksheet in the "Alongsider Toolbox." Each chapter is designed to emphasize or build upon one of the four core components of a discipleship relationship, according to Mowry: relationship with God and others; three A's of application, accountability, and affirmation; two D's of discovery and discussion around the Bible; or the central target of Christ's example.

Final Curriculum Design

Upon reviewing various discipleship curricula, some common elements stood out. All reviewed curricula included, at a minimum: discussion questions, study of curated Bible verses

or passages, and written devotional or sermon delivered via audio/video. Alongside these commonalities, some curricula introduced additional elements to aid pedagogy, including practical worksheets and excerpted readings from outside theological authors. Some curricula such as *Discipleship Essentials* and *Ways of the Alongsider* explicitly describe mission but acknowledge it as one component of discipleship, treated with a single chapter. Others, such as the *Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual* and *The Purpose-Driven Life*, acknowledge mission as fundamentally interrelated with discipleship.

Some curricula target believers of all maturity levels, including newcomers, while others do specifically target engagement with more mature believers such as those aligned with the second stage of Kohlberg's model of spiritual and moral development. No single curriculum provides access to all the identified pedagogical elements, treats mission as a concept fundamentally interrelated with discipleship, and targets believers aligned to the second stage of spiritual-moral development.

Table 1 depicts the researcher's analysis of treatment and pedagogical elements in each reviewed curriculum. This highlights the need for a new instructional curriculum for the intervention which will include discussion questions, Bible study, written devotional content, practical activities, outside theological perspectives, a treatment of mission as fundamentally interrelated to discipleship, and a target audience of believers in the second stage of spiritual-moral development.

Table 1. Matrix of discipleship curriculum attributes

	Discipleship Essentials	*Real-Life Ministries*	*The Third Option*	*The Purpose-Driven Life*	*The Ways of the Alongsider*
Discussion Questions	X	X	X	X	X
Bible Study	X	X	X	X	X
Mission as a Component of Discipleship	X				X
Mission Fundamentally Related to Discipleship		X		X	
Devotional or Sermon	X	X	X	X	X
Practical Activity or Worksheet		X	X		X
Targets Second Stage of Moral/Spiritual Maturity	X	X			X
Includes Outside Theological Perspectives	X			X	

After reviewing the gaps and opportunities in existing discipleship curricula and synthesizing that information alongside the coincidence of moral development and formation of a theocentric worldview, the researcher developed an eight-week small group curriculum. Borrowing from the sequential structure of precedent curricula, the intervention's structure consists of two parts: Theological Foundations and Practical Skills. Gleaning from the

pedagogical methods in *The Third Option*, *Discipleship Essentials*, and *The Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*, each weekly session will include written devotional content, guided discussion questions, prayer, Scripture reading, excerpts from other theological perspectives, and an interactive practical activity or worksheet.

Each of the eight weeks is accompanied by a learning objective, which defines the eight constructs for quantitative survey evaluation. The complete list of these learning objectives is expounded in Table 4, in the Phase Two: Instruction section of this thesis. The researcher packaged the instructional content in a personal workbook similar in style to Ogden's *Discipleship Essentials*, the totality of which is in Appendix G. Based on evaluation of precedent literature surrounding the pedagogy of discipleship and the theoretical foundations of this study, participants complete reading and worksheets asynchronously ahead of group, allowing for deep personal introspection and prayer, while synchronous sessions are devoted to group discussion and fellowship.

Intervention Phases

The intervention will seek to mitigate the potential of reduced participation or dropouts by over-recruiting participants. Recruitment will target at least five participants based on samples from similar recent research projects in the ministry leadership domain. Participants will verbally receive the recruitment request detailed in Appendix A. The thesis plans to mitigate risks to the sample by seeking to recruit at least ten participants and by acknowledging these risks in the limitations section of the thesis. Additionally, while discussing the project in preliminary interviews, the recruitment phase will explain the importance of sustained participation for the quality of the research. By explaining and informing the participants, in combination with explicitly obtaining their consent for participation through the physical in-person signing of the

consent form documented in Appendix B, the project aims to encourage a sense of urgency and priority on participation throughout the project.

Table 2. Goals and timeline of intervention phases

Intervention Design Phases and Goals			
Phase	Timeline	Goals	Location & Format
Phase One: Permission and Recruitment	Weeks 1 - 2	Recruit at least 10 participants for the project.	One-on-one interviews at MVMNT Church
Phase Two: Instruction	Weeks 3 - 10	Conduct the 8-week Instructional Program	Small group discussions at MVMNT Church
Phase Three: Follow-up	Weeks 11 - 14	Conduct online surveys and follow up interviews with participants	One-on-one interviews at MVMNT Church
Phase Four: Results Analysis & Synthesis	Weeks 15 - 16	Analyze and synthesis data to report research findings	No participant involvement

Phase One: Permission and Recruitment

The first step in the project will be acknowledgment of IRB approval for the action research, documented in Appendix H, and receipt of permission for implementation from the thesis mentor to conduct research. Following that approval, the researcher will meet with MVMNT Church's lead pastor to review the permission request (see Appendix C), which describes the project and the intervention plan. With the aid of the lead pastor, the researcher will develop a roster of formal and informal leaders within the church, aiming for at least twenty contacts with email addresses and phone numbers. The project will aim to recruit at least ten participants from twenty contacts. Once these participants have been identified and agreed to

participate, the researcher will meet with each participant individually to explain the project, its purpose, and what they should expect from the intervention. Informed consent and a preliminary interview will occur at this time.

The preliminary interview will be semi-structured, using questions from a prepared interview guide documented in Appendix E. It will be conducted in person, with audio recording using Google Meet software and transcripts subsequently documented in Google Docs. The interview will uncover themes related to their leadership philosophy, confidence in leadership, and understanding of biblical concepts related to mission and discipleship, leadership, and culture.

Over a two-week recruitment period, these preliminary interviews will be conducted, and transcripts will be analyzed to identify codes and themes using QDA Miner Lite. During the preliminary interviews, participants will be notified to expect receipt of a quantitative survey to their email before the instructional period begins. They will also be given a workbook with reading material for the first week of the instructional group, consisting of fundamental Bible verses related to mission and a definition of terms that will provide a common vocabulary for the group. A sample of the first two weeks of this workbook is documented in Appendix G.

Following the two-week recruitment period, participants will receive a Likert survey to validate the themes exposed in the preliminary interviews and to form a basis for later comparison (questions are documented in Appendix D). Individuals will have one week to respond to the initial survey, which will be sent to their email via Google Forms. The data will be stored in Google Sheets as participants complete the forms online. For participants who do not complete the quantitative survey online, time will be set aside on the first day of the instructional intervention before instruction begins so that they can complete it.

Phase Two: Instruction

The instructional intervention itself will be an eight-week small group-style intervention. Each week will cover a high-level topic related to missional leadership and outlines of each week's materials (see Appendix F). Each week, the group will meet for approximately ninety minutes. The weekly agenda will follow a predictable pattern. Each week, the group will review the week's reading material, conduct group discussion of the week's Bible verses, and participate in a worksheet to critically apply the week's lesson content. After engaging with the week's workbook content, the group will discuss the worksheet in pairs or small groups, discuss the week's lesson in a full group, and check on participants' pursuit of a practice of disciple-making.

Table 3. Group meeting agenda

Small Group Weekly Agenda	
Agenda Item	**Time Allotment**
Review Workbook Material	20 minutes
Discuss Bible Verses	20 minutes
Practical Application Worksheet	20 minutes
Paired Discussion	10 minutes
Full Group Discussion	15 minutes
Disciple-Making Check-in	5 minutes

As the instructional program continues, the content will gradually shift from exposing and explaining the theological principles of a missional culture to more practical instruction about how to go about leading culture and organizations. The researcher will encourage the cultivation of disciple-making as a personal practice for each participant, beginning on week one of instruction and re-emphasized in each subsequent week, due to disciple-making as a

fundamental practice of mission as evident from this project's review of precedent literature and theological foundations. Immediately following the completion of the eighth week of instruction, participants will provide feedback on the intervention in a focus group. This focus group will be recorded using Google Meet, with transcripts in Google Docs to be reviewed in QDA Miner Lite for code and theme extraction.

Table 4. Weekly topics and learning objectives of the instructional curriculum

Small Group Curriculum Design			
Instructional Phase	Week	Title	Learning Objective
Theological Foundations	Week 1	Overview of *missio Dei*	Participants can express the theological concepts and practical applications of *missio Dei*.
	Week 2	Mission and Discipleship	Participants can express the relationship between theological concepts of mission and discipleship.
	Week 3	The Role of the Church in Mission	Participants can express the role and activities of the church as related to *missio Dei*.
	Week 4	The Role of the Christian on Mission	Participants can express the role and activities of individual Christians as related to *missio Dei*.
Practical Leadership Applications	Week 5	Cultivating Spiritual Gifts for Mission	Participants can express the role of Spiritual Gifts in both individual and communal participation in mission.
	Week 6	Fundamentals of a Missional Culture	Participants can express the process by which they can evaluate and transform organizational culture in the

			context of the church.
	Week 7	Raising up Missional Leaders	Participants can express the importance and process of leaders raising up other leaders to participate in *missio Dei*.
	Week 8	Growing and Evaluating Mission in the Church	Participants can express the means by which they evaluate the church's state of mission participation and generate growth goals based on evaluations.

Phase Three: Follow-up

A week after the final week of instruction, participants will receive a quantitative Likert survey in their email (see Appendix D). This survey will be identical to the first quantitative survey they completed, though the questions will be randomized in order. This survey will, again, be conducted via Google Forms and stored in Google Sheets. The data will be analyzed in RStudio: Cronbach's alpha will ensure that redundant questions are valid constructs of the themes they seek to measure, and a *t-Test* will determine the statistical significance of the change in the survey. If participants do not complete the survey online, the researcher will meet them in person to ensure the completion of the quantitative survey.

One month after the end of the instructional period, participants will engage in follow-up semi-structured interviews with the participants to learn how they have begun to apply the learnings from the intervention, if at all, in their ministry domain. These interviews will again be conducted in-person with audio recording in Google Meet, transcribed in Google Docs, and analyzed with QDA Miner Lite. The objective of these follow-up interviews will be to qualitatively evaluate the efficacy of the intervention in improving leaders' ability to cultivate a

missional church culture, to determine the extent to which disciple-making has become a personal practice of the participant, and to validate the results of quantitative analysis.

Phase Four: Results Analysis & Synthesis

Following the final interviews, the project will execute a longitudinal study between the pre-survey taken before instruction and the post-survey taken after instruction. This longitudinal study will use a *t*-test to measure for statistically significant change and will validate the constructs of the survey questions using Cronbach's Alpha. In addition to the quantitative survey, the project will conduct extraction and analysis of themes from both the preliminary interviews and the follow-up interviews to better understand how the participants apply the instructional content to their lives and ministries. The researcher will also analyze themes from the focus group, conducted on the final day of the small group instruction phase, to identify areas for improvement in the intervention design. In this way, the results will inform both the thesis of this project and provide informative directions for future research.

The primary hypothesis of this project is: If MVMNT Church's leadership team completes a curriculum focused on missional discipleship, then the culture of the church will prioritize participation in communal mission. Although a single iteration of this instructional curriculum alone is almost certainly insufficient, the theoretical foundations of this study indicate that successful development of the church's leaders will trigger catalysis of cultural change throughout the church. This inherent limitation in the study presents compelling avenues for further research through additional iterations of the instructional curriculum as well as sustained evaluation of research participants to determine long-term impacts of the intervention. The conceptual framework of this project has validated through theological foundations and review of precedent literature that a culture of mission necessitates the cultivation of discipleship

relationships within the church. This project will use two primary methods to verify the success of the instructional curriculum: the pursuit of disciple-making as a personal practice for participants in the project as revealed through qualitative survey, and numeric improvement on the quantitative survey validated through Cronbach's alpha and *t*-test.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

The intervention design, when executed, experienced revision in action. Although Phase One went smoothly as planned, recruiting ten individuals for participation, Phase Two exposed weaknesses in the original plan for delivery of instruction. Logistics considerations added new items to the agenda for weekly instruction agenda, and real-time facilitation led the research participants to spend time in group discussion differently than planned. However, the overall structure and timeline of the intervention remained intact and proceeded as planned. Similarly, the follow-up and data analysis Phases Three and Four proceeded as planned, with some considerations raised through the exploration of construct validity during data analysis.

Phase One: Permission and Recruitment

The Lead Pastor of MVMNT Church provided permission to begin recruitment of participants on January 1, 2024, via the permission request letter featured in Appendix C. Upon review of the proposed course material, the literature review and purpose of the study, and the conceptual framework of the study, the Lead Pastor contacted multiple identified formal and informal leaders within MVMNT Church to begin soliciting participants. The target for participant recruitment was at least ten individuals. Ten individuals met with the researcher individually in person and provided permission per the permission request discussion outlined in Appendix A and signed the participant consent form documented in Appendix B.

Immediately following the receipt of consent, participants conducted the semi-structured pre-interview following the conversation guide documented in Appendix E. The researcher recorded the audio from the in-person interviews using Google Meet software. Participants then reviewed a survey, containing the randomized questions documented in Appendix D, via a Google Forms email wherein the survey stored results in a Google Sheets spreadsheet. All ten participants completed consent documentation, pre-interviews, and surveys between January 8-19, 2024, thereby completing Phase One of the intervention.

Phase Two: Instruction

The small group instruction period began on January 28, 2024, with agreement among participants regarding schedule and cadence. Between Phases One and Two, three participants dropped out of participation due to scheduling conflicts. The remaining seven participants agreed upon a weekly meeting cadence from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. Because of the afternoon meeting time, participants agreed to extend the meeting time from the planned ninety minutes to two hours, adding thirty minutes for lunch and fellowship prior to engagement with the instructional content. Participants took turns providing lunch for the rest of the group on a rotational basis. Alongside the addition of a lunch period before the instructional content, actual engagement with the instructional material differed in time allotment from the planned intervention design. Participants spent an average of forty minutes engaged in discussion regarding the reading material in the workbook, discussing points in which they both agreed and disagreed with sentiments expressed by the various reading excerpts.

Often, this period of the meeting strayed away from the core topic of the weekly discussion toward other theological domains such as miraculous gifts, the covenants of the law and grace, and the distinctions between the local church body and the global church body. The

researcher acted in the role of facilitator, encouraging the group to remain focused on the core topic and asking guided questions to orient the group toward ecumenical discussion of mission and discipleship. The average meeting structure also differed from the planned intervention with shorter time engaged with the week's curated Bible verses, less time completing the weekly worksheet, and less time in paired discussion, as reflected in Table 5.

Table 5. Actual meeting structures

Small Group Weekly Agenda	
Agenda Item	**Time Allotment**
Lunch Fellowship	30 minutes
Review Workbook Material	40 minutes
Discuss Bible Verses	20 minutes
Practical Application Worksheet	5 minutes
Paired Discussion	10 minutes
Full Group Discussion	10 minutes
Disciple-Making Check in	5 minutes

The target number of participants to complete the entirety of the instructional curriculum was five; all seven participants who began the curriculum completed the curriculum. Four of the seven participants attended all eight meetings; the other three participants missed two sessions each, non-consecutively. Each meeting occurred in person in the fellowship hall of MVMNT Church. Following the eight weeks of instruction, participants engaged in an in-person focus group to provide feedback on the intervention and instructional content. The researcher recorded focus group feedback using Google Meet software for reference and analysis. Feedback included positive feedback about the structure of content and general focus on mission and discipleship, as well as constructive feedback to improve the wording of some discussion questions and

worksheet instructions which participants perceived as unclear or ambiguous. The focus group concluded Phase Two of the intervention.

Phase Three: Follow-up

Immediately following the conclusion of Phase Two, participants engaged in a focus group to provide feedback on the content, format, and structure of the instructional material and small group conducted over the previous eight weeks. Participants met in person the researcher leveraged Google Meet software to conduct an audio recording of the focus group session. The focus group lasted ninety minutes, with ten minutes dedicated to discussion of the intervention as a whole and ten minutes apiece for each of the eight weeks of instruction. The researcher transcribed the focus group recording using Google Docs software and synthesized lessons learned and areas for improvement of the instructional material, which are detailed in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Within one week of the completion of Phase Two, all participants completed a post-intervention Likert survey sent via Google Forms. The content and structure of the survey were identical to the pre-intervention survey, though questions were randomized by the Google Forms application. Four weeks after the conclusion of Phase Two, participants completed a post-intervention semi-structured interview. The format and structure of the interview were identical to the pre-intervention interview conducted in Phase One, covering themes related to mission, discipleship, leadership, and organizational culture. As with the Phase One series of interviews, all interviews were conducted in person. The researcher leveraged Google Meet recording software for the audio recording of the interviews.

Phase Four: Data Analysis

This section reviews the process by which the researcher received and analyzed data from Phases One and Three of the intervention. The section will first review the methodology for the analysis of pre-intervention data, collected during phase one, followed by a description of the methodology for post-intervention data collected during Phase Three. Considerable attention to this data, and the results of said analysis, is in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. Rather than discuss the results of the analysis, this section will summarize the data analysis process at a high level.

Pre-Intervention Data

Upon receipt of the 24-question survey from research participants, the researcher analyzed the validity of survey constructs using the standard measurement of Cronbach's Alpha; the results of which are presented in more detail in Chapter 4 of this dissertation. This validity analysis tested eight constructs; each construct aligned with learning objectives for a corresponding week of instruction. Evaluation of Cronbach's Alpha revealed five valid constructs that passed the test: discipleship, the church's mission, individual mission, spiritual gifts, and raising leaders. The invalid constructs, which the researcher did not consider for results synthesis, were: *Missio Dei*, a missional culture, and evaluating mission. Given five valid constructs, the researcher assessed the following metrics for later comparison against post-survey data: mean overall score aggregated by participant, mean topic scores aggregated by participant, and mean overall scores aggregated by topic.

In addition to quantitative analysis, the researcher analyzed transcripts of semi-structured interviews. The researcher transcribed interviews using Google Meet and Google Docs software. Once transcripts were complete, the researcher leveraged QDAMiner Lite to conduct inductive thematic analysis to analyze themes in the interview data. The output of said analysis focused on

inductively identifying themes emergent from the interview data and documenting areas in which intervention participants overlapped and diverged in their perspectives on said themes. The researcher reviews the list and analysis of said themes in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

Post-Intervention Data

Based on the validity assessment of survey data in the pre-intervention stage, only the five valid constructs were subject to analysis in the post-intervention stage. These constructs were discipleship, church mission, individual mission, spiritual gifts, and raising leaders. Of the seven participants, all participants showed numeric increases in their mean survey scores. Upon receipt of post-survey data, a two-sample T-test was performed to assess the statistical significance of change.

In addition to quantitative data analysis, the researcher leveraged QDAMiner Lite to analyze transcripts of follow-up semi-structured interviews. Given themes identified in the pre-intervention stage, the researcher applied a deductive thematic analysis technique to evaluate changes in the participants' understanding and application of themes revealed before intervention. The purpose of this analysis was to identify areas of significant change or growth that occurred during the intervention period and to serve as a method of triangulation for quantitative survey data. Given significant numeric growth in survey scores, the qualitative data aided the researcher in validating the impact of the intervention on the survey results.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Phase Four of the intervention consists of the analysis of data collected during Phases One and Three of the intervention. According to the thesis of this dissertation and the planned intervention, a successful intervention would lead to improved comprehension of mission, discipleship, and leadership among research participants as well as increased reports of active participation in discipleship. To measure the results of intervention, this research leverages quantitative data collected via online Likert surveys triangulated by qualitative data collected through semi-structured interviews. This data was collected pre-intervention during Phase One and post-intervention during Phase Three, culminating in longitudinal analysis following intervention in Phase Four. This chapter will first review the collective results of the research, followed by a thorough breakdown of data analysis results and a high-level summary of the results overall.

Collective Results

The collective results of data collected throughout the intervention reveal a multifaceted, evolving understanding of discipleship, mission, and leadership among MVMNT Church's team of formal and informal leaders. Employing quantitative and qualitative data collection methods, the research process offered valuable insights into the nature of the problem presented by this dissertation while validating the thesis of this dissertation, indicating a successful intervention in promoting a missional culture at MVMNT Church.

Data collection in Phase One demonstrated a variance in knowledge and understanding among the participants pre-intervention. Quantitative data showed that the participants' mean survey scores varied, particularly related to constructs of discipleship, the church's mission, and spiritual gifts. There was divergence in comprehension and application of these constructs pointing towards the need for intervention. Findings from the qualitative data underscored this need, revealing gaps and slippage on the nature of mission, the role of leaders, and understanding of discipleship as well as a lack of active participation in discipleship among research participants. Tellingly, multiple participants explicitly reported in interviews that they lacked confidence in their understanding of biblical mission and could not recall having received teaching or training on the subject. This Phase One analysis validated the existence of the problem presented by this dissertation and established a baseline for intervention.

Upon analysis of data collected in Phase Three after intervention, there was significant quantitative improvement across participants' understanding of constructs post-intervention. Participants converged on a more solid understanding of topics related to mission and discipleship, reflected in a 190 percent improvement in mean survey scores. Qualitative data corroborated quantitative findings, indicating a reduced slippage in comprehension of mission, discipleship, and leadership in the church. This change was also apparent in the participants' engagement with discipleship relationships. Pre-intervention, most participants were not actively engaged in any discipleship relationship. Post-intervention, the figure changed markedly with most participants reporting active engagement in a discipleship relationship.

Despite participants' lack of total post-intervention convergence on the directional dependency and nature of the relationship between mission and discipleship, all agreed on their interconnectedness, indicating an improved understanding of the influence each has on the other.

These collective results affirm the success of the intervention in peeling away misconceptions and encouraging clarity of vision for leaders at MVMNT Church. Ultimately, the collective results highlight the success of the intervention in fostering a shared level of understanding among the MVMNT Church's leadership team.

Data Analysis

Data for this intervention consisted of quantitative data measuring five constructs: discipleship, the church's mission, individual mission, spiritual gifts, and raising leaders. The researcher collected quantitative data using Likert surveys delivered via Google forms and analyzed the data via basic statistical analysis including T-testing, validation through Cronbach's alpha calculation, and calculation of the mean. Qualitative data, collected through semi-structured interviews, served as a means of triangulation in conjunction with a semi-structured focus group to evaluate the efficacy of intervention on the promotion of a missional culture among MVMNT Church's leadership team.

Phase One Data Analysis

During Phase One of the intervention, before the delivery of instructional content, the participants completed a Likert survey and engaged in semi-structured interviews to determine a baseline. This baseline would later be compared with data collected in Phase Three for longitudinal analysis to determine the impact of intervention on the baseline. Phase One of data analysis included basic statistical analysis of quantitative data, identification of valid constructs using Cronbach's Alpha, and the identification of themes, slippage, and silence in the qualitative interview transcripts via inductive thematic analysis.

Quantitative Data

After receipt of survey results from the pre-survey, the researcher measured the validity of constructs using Cronbach's alpha to verify internal consistency. Consistent with quantitative research best practices, any latent constructs with a Cronbach's alpha value below 0.7 are invalid and the researcher did not consider these constructs for synthesizing intervention results. The quantitative survey aimed to capture eight constructs: one for each week of the instructional content. The constructs and associated Cronbach's alpha values revealed three invalid constructs and five valid constructs.

The researcher chose Cronbach's Alpha as a standard metric for measurement of the reliability of component items, as it is a commonly used measure of internal consistency wherein the internal consistency of questions is determined by a Cronbach's Alpha measurement above 0.7.[1] To take the measurement, the researcher identified the responses to each of the three questions for a given construct across the entire sample and then applied the Cronbach's Alpha formula to derive the result. Although the researcher reviewed other methods such as split-half reliability, parallel-forms reliability, and inter-rater reliability, Cronbach's Alpha requires only one iteration of the test for a given sample. This ease of use, in addition to its widespread adoption, made Cronbach's Alpha the optional choice for validating the reliability of survey data for this intervention.

Table 6. Survey constructs and Cronbach's Alpha Values

Measuring Construct Validity		
Corresponding Week of Content	Construct	Cronbach's Alpha Value
1	*Missio Dei*	0.589

[1] Jeremy Dawson, *Analysing Quantitative Survey Data for Business and Management Studies* (London, UK: SAGE Publishers, 2017), 17.

2	Discipleship	0.854
3	The Church's Mission	0.884
4	Individual Mission	0.959
5	Spiritual Gifts	0.971
6	A Missional Culture	0.518
7	Raising Leaders	0.755
8	Evaluating Mission	0.481

Because of the findings of validity analysis, this chapter will only discuss the five constructs scoring a Cronbach's Alpha measurement above 0.7: discipleship, the church's mission, individual mission, spiritual gifts, and raising leaders. A complete list of the questions and associated topics are listed in Appendix D. Overall, participants' mean scores across the survey varied. The highest-scoring participant had a mean score of 4.9, indicating a high degree of familiarity with the instructional content. The lowest score was 2.0, indicating low familiarity with the instructional content. A bar chart indicating the mean scores for each participant is displayed in figure 3.

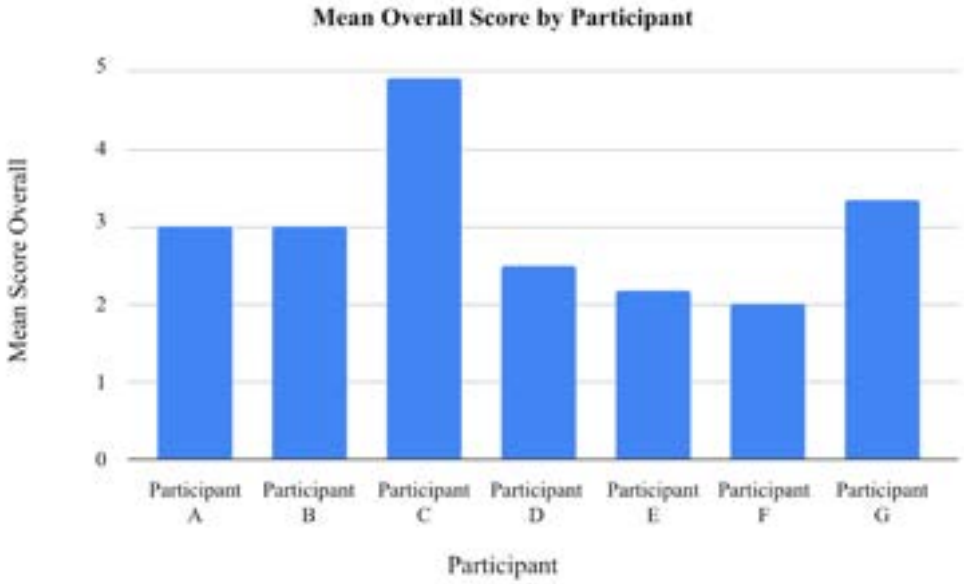

Figure 3. Mean overall score by participant

As a deeper look into those participants' scores, participants generally scored higher on the discipleship construct while scores were more variant in other constructs, with the lowest performance on the church's mission and spiritual gifts constructs. This may indicate that participants have a better understanding of individual spiritual practices and a lower familiarity with the purpose of communal discipleship via the church and its role in mission. Scores, broken down by construct and participant, are displayed in figure 4.

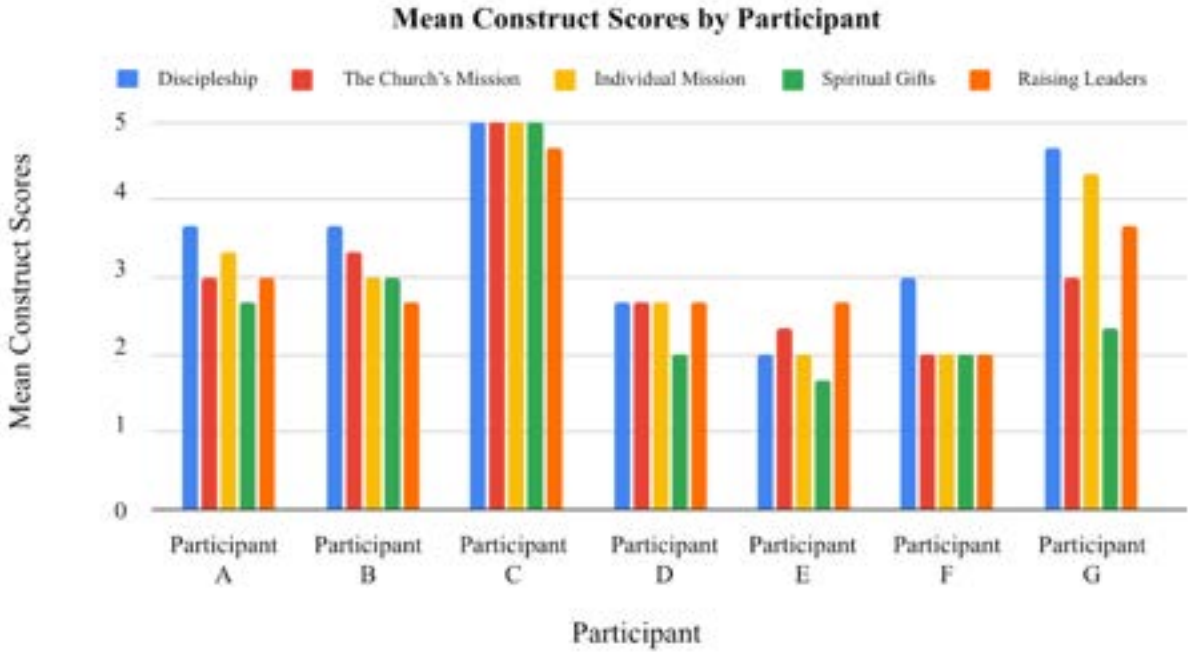

Figure 4. Mean construct scores by participant

Across all participants, mean scores aggregated by construct indicated that the group did not possess a strong understanding of any single construct. No construct had a mean score over four. Although individual participants did score highly, there were differences between high individual scores and the mean across the group; indicating that the body of participants did not share a common level of understanding. Rather, there is a difference in knowledge and understanding throughout the group that surfaces in the mean scores aggregated by construct, which are all between two and four. These scores are displayed in figure 5.

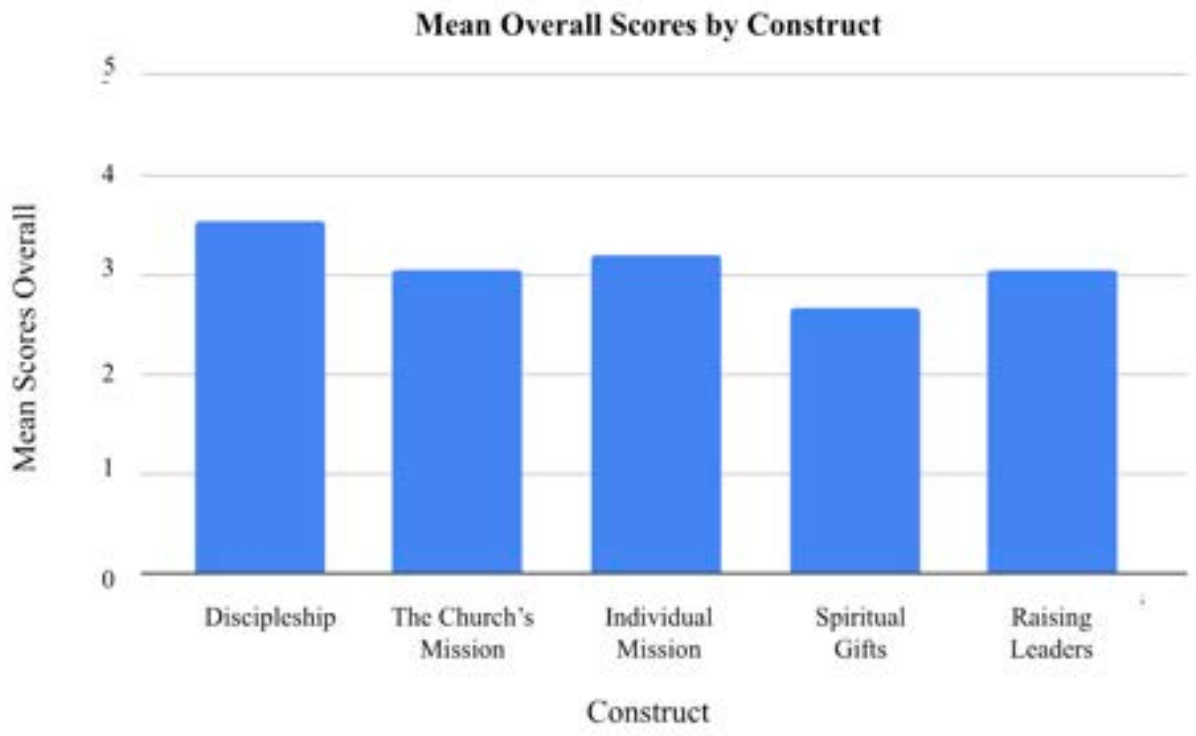

Figure 5. Mean scores by construct

Qualitative Data

After a review of seven interview transcripts using an inductive thematic analysis method, key themes emerged: activities of mission, spiritual growth, understanding of mission, role of leaders, and understanding of discipleship. These themes, having emerged through interviews with the research participants, paint a holistic picture of the participants' understanding of mission, discipleship, leadership, and culture within the church before intervention. This understanding was instrumental not only as a mechanism for triangulation against the quantitative survey data but also as a tool for facilitating the instructional content of Phase Two in a personal way, ensuring appropriate delivery of the material in a context relevant to each participant.

Activities of Mission

All seven participants discussed themes of service regarding mission and discipleship, although they had varying views on the nature and extent of this service. Participants A, B, C, E, and F all highlighted the concept of 'service' as the heart of a Christian lifestyle, with this concept of service being synonymous with mission. Participants E, D, G, and F associated mission specifically with acts of service in their daily lives. These activities primarily consisted of service activities. Participants listed specific examples including volunteering at a food pantry, serving on volunteer teams during the Sunday morning worship experience, and other acts of volunteerism. Only Participant A expressed the primacy of evangelism, or the spreading of God's word, as a key component of mission; other participants perceived service as related more tangibly to physical volunteerism. No participants surfaced a relationship between mission and discipleship, exposing a silence in the data.

Spiritual Growth

All participants appeared to see discipleship as a path toward spiritual growth, though the data exposed slippage related to the details of that path and how Christians actively engage in discipleship. In general, participants disagreed on the role of spiritual disciplines versus the guidance of the Holy Spirit, surfacing the tension described in precedent literature between the role of the individual and the role of the Spirit. Participant A understood discipleship as a fluid process guided by the Holy Spirit, whereas Participant G viewed discipleship as an intentional series of activities, related to spiritual disciplines, undertaken by the Christian in pursuit of spiritual growth. Participants B, C, and F expressed a belief that discipleship referred to a collection of spiritual disciplines, but expressed uncertainty about what activities specifically might be considered discipleship.

Understanding of Mission

Participants displayed signs of slippage regarding the nature of mission. While Participant E saw mission as being related to "participating in a larger purpose orchestrated by God," Participant A described mission as aligning personal spiritual purpose with the wider goal of spreading God's word. In contrast, Participant F understands mission as a service-oriented lifestyle, related in part to their vocation or employment within the world. Participants B, C, D, and G expressed explicitly that they were not confident in their understanding of mission and that, though they perceived mission as being relevant to their lives as Christians, they had not received teaching or training regarding mission nor its application to their lives.

Role of Leaders

The participants diverge in their understanding of leadership. Leadership, in its various forms, is seen by all participants as pivotal in promoting spiritual growth and culture-building within the church community. Participants A and C highlighted the importance of leaders exhibiting desirable qualities that inspire the congregation, while Participants C, E, F, and G emphasized the role of leaders as mentors. Unanimously among participants, culture-building and enforcing an atmosphere of inclusion appeared in interviews as key responsibilities of leaders. Another common theme was the importance of behavior and character modeling, particularly in the church, as participants expect leaders within the church to provide examples of biblical lifestyles and to provide a model for the church to follow.

Engagement with Discipleship

Participants showed diverging views about discipleship. Participants C and G view discipleship as a lifelong journey of spiritual growth through intimate engagement with God's

Word. Participant E, however, identified discipleship as a journey where mentorship plays an essential role. Participants D and F perceive discipleship as an application of Christian principles in daily activities and interactions, signaling the everyday nature of spiritual commitment. Most participants reported themselves as not engaged in any active discipleship relationship, defined as an intentional personal relationship with another Christian to encourage, equip, and teach for growth in spiritual maturity. Only Participants A and C reported themselves to be actively engaged in such a discipleship relationship at the time of the pre-intervention interview.

Baseline Overview

Analysis of pre-intervention data revealed a strong divergence between participants who reported the highest levels of understanding in the survey data and participants who reported low levels of understanding. This variance in the survey results emphasizes a need for greater knowledge-sharing between participants and validates the presence of the problem addressed by the intervention. The variance and moderate mean scores of participants, slippage in the interview data missing connections between mission and discipleship, and low reporting of active engagement in discipleship highlight a need for the intervention to focus on collaborative discussion and a challenging of existing paradigms of mission and discipleship that were poorly understood by the participants during Phase Two of the intervention.

Phase Three: Data Analysis

Phase Three of the intervention plan, follow-up, involved the collection of new quantitative and qualitative data from research participants. Immediately following the completion of Phase Two, participants completed a Likert survey and participated in a focus group to provide feedback on the content, format, and structure of Phase Two instructional

content. Four weeks following the completion of instructional content, participants engaged in a semi-structured interview for the analysis of themes identified in Phase One.

Quantitative Data

This study leveraged a T-Test to measure the difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention data. The T-Test is a common statistical measure evaluating the difference between two samples to determine whether the populations represented by those samples are meaningfully different from one another. In the case of this study, the T-Test determined whether differences between pre-intervention and post-intervention data were the result of random chance, or whether the data genuinely presents meaningful difference. The standard threshold for significance, widely applied in social sciences, is 0.05.[2]

Upon receipt of the survey data, a T-Test measured the statistical significance of the difference between pre-intervention and post-intervention data for all participants. Two participants, Participants C and G, returned a T-test greater than 0.05, indicating that their results were not statistically significant. Therefore, their results were not used to contribute to any analysis leading to conclusions related to this research. The list of participants, their mean scores, and the results of T-testing are detailed in Table 7.

Table 7. Post-Intervention survey analysis

Measuring Statistical Significance of Change				
	Mean Score Pre-Intervention	Mean Score Post-Intervention	Improvement	T-Test Results
Participant A	3	4.667	1.667	0.000152
Participant B	3	4.867	1.867	0.000119
Participant C	4.917	5	0.083	0.3739

[2] Thomas R. Black, *Understanding Social Science Research* (London, UK: SAGE Publications, 2001), 174.

Participant D	2.5	4.867	2.367	0.000001
Participant E	2.167	4.733	2.566	0.000023
Participant F	2	5	3	0.000151
Participant G	3.333	4.667	1.334	0.06598

Because two participants' results failed the T-test, results only consider data related to participants A, B, D, E, and F. Across these five participants, the Likert survey measured a mean overall score improvement of 2.3 or a mean improvement of 190 percent across participants. figure 6 displays the mean overall survey scores for the five valid participants, comparing their pre-intervention scores to their post-intervention scores.

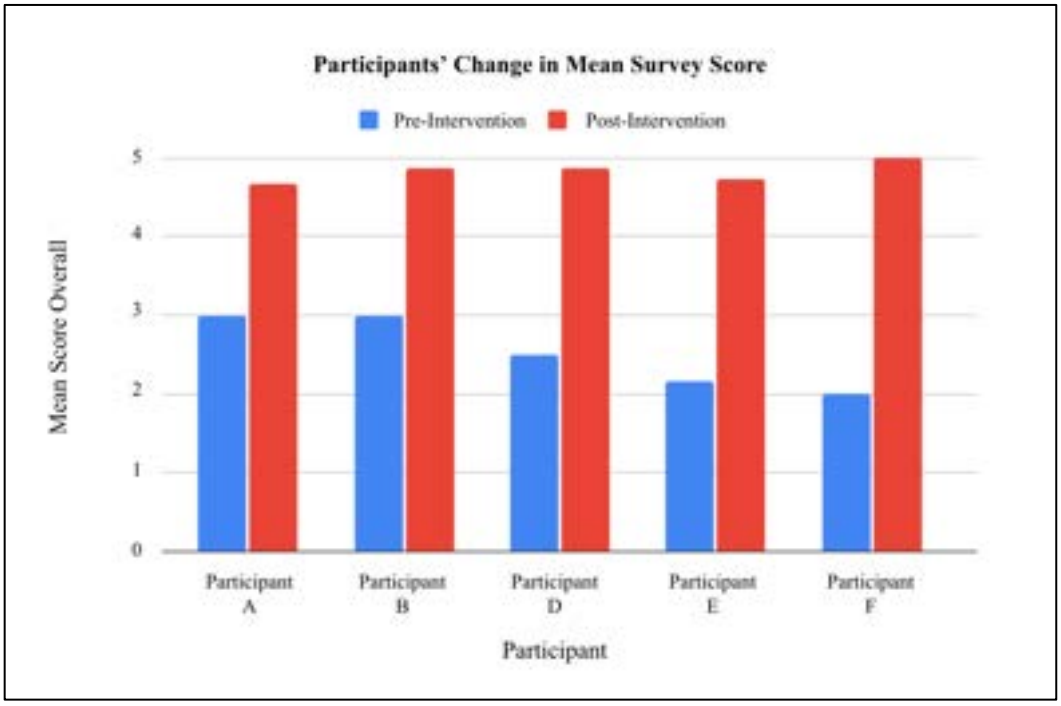

Figure 6. Participants' change in mean survey score

The data shows that participants experienced significant improvement through intervention. Although pre-intervention survey results showed a high variance in self-reported understanding of concepts related to mission and discipleship, post-intervention data shows that

participants arrived at a common level of understanding that was an improvement on their pre-intervention state.

Qualitative Data

In addition to survey performance, the intervention plan aimed to improve the count of participants actively engaged in a discipleship relationship, defined as a personal relationship in which the participant is regularly and intentionally encouraging, equipping, and teaching another Christian in the way of Christlikeness. Of the five participants, four reported themselves to be actively engaged in a discipleship relationship upon conduct of the post-intervention interview. The change in discipleship engagement, from pre-intervention to post-intervention, is displayed in figure 7.

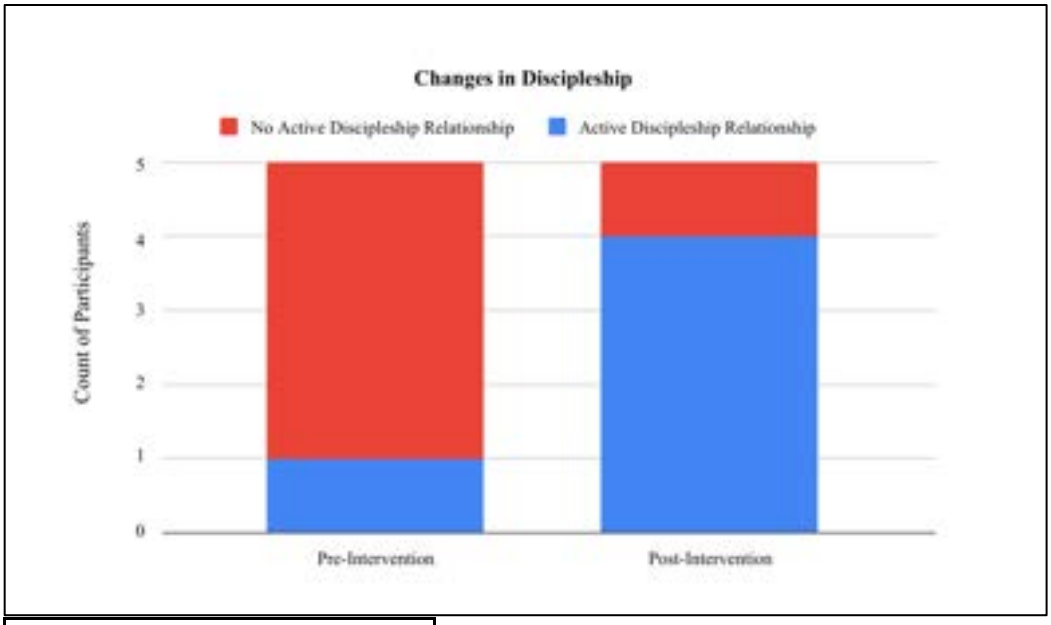

Figure 7. Changes in discipleship

Semi-structured interviews, leveraging a deductive thematic analysis method, validated the improvements discovered in quantitative data. Having identified relevant themes in the pre-intervention phase, the post-intervention phase of data analysis sought to identify changes or

growth in the participants' understanding and application of those themes in their Christian lives. These themes were: activities of mission, spiritual growth, understanding of mission, role of leaders, and understanding of discipleship. In the post-intervention stage, there was very little slippage among participants. However, the participants' engagement with these themes changed after the intervention; particularly concerning activities of mission, spiritual growth, and understanding of discipleship.

Following the intervention, participants identified explicit connections between discipleship and mission, resolving the silences uncovered in the pre-intervention analysis. Slippage did occur between the relationship of mission and discipleship concerning the direction of dependency between the two topics. Participants B, F, and G converged on an understanding of discipleship as being focused on individual spiritual growth through relationship, which is critically dependent on mission as a means of participating in God's plan for the world. In contrast, Participants A and C viewed discipleship as the primary means by which humans participate in mission, thereby making mission dependent on discipleship. Participants D and E, though explicitly affirming a relationship between mission and discipleship, viewed the pair as interdependent on one another with neither topic in a position of hierarchical superiority.

Regarding discipleship, all participants reported their understanding of discipleship to have changed throughout the intervention. Participants A, B, D, and F reported that they previously viewed discipleship as being a highly formal mentor-mentee relationship purely dedicated to teachings surrounding spiritual disciplines, but that their view on discipleship post-intervention is of a more informal mentorship relationship dedicated to mutual upbuilding with a broader, less specifically focused intent. All participants identified evangelism, teaching of scripture, and mutual encouragement as core components of a discipleship relationship.

Participants all agreed on the role of leaders as being to shape culture within a local body as well as to effectively communicate the mission of God to the congregation. However, participants disagreed on the level of formality with which the term *leader* is used. Participants B and G place a high degree of importance on formal education and authority through explicit leadership positions within the church, whereas Participants A, C, and F view all members of the church as leaders with some capacity of authority within the body of the church.

Post-Intervention Overview

Analysis of post-intervention data reveals significant quantitative improvement across participants, validated by a reduction in slippage and silence concerning mission and discipleship in qualitative interviews. Most participants, after intervention, reported themselves to be actively engaged in a discipleship relationship. Although participants disagreed on the directional dependency and nature of the relationship between mission and discipleship as discrete topics, all participants viewed mission and discipleship as interrelated topics of critical importance to the Christian life. Improvement of the participants' mean overall survey score indicates success of the intervention.

Focus Group Data

Following intervention, participants contributed to a focus group to relay their experience and feedback concerning the instructional content delivered in Phase Two. Participants unanimously reported having a positive experience engaging with the instructional content, agreeing that both the group discussion in synchronous small group sessions as well as the asynchronous workbook content led to positive spiritual growth. In addition to the content and

format of instruction itself, participants identified logistical elements that contributed to their positive feelings; these elements are listed in Table 8.

Table 8. Positive feedback on phase two of intervention

List of Elements Contributing to Positive Feedback	
Element Description	Impact Description
Hosting small group sessions in the church facility	Participants reported easier participation due to convenience of a known location
Timing small group sessions to occur immediately following Sunday church experience	Participants reported convenience because they were already at church. Additionally, the worship experience preceding small group enabled them to prepare their hearts and minds for engagement with Scripture.
Group members ate lunch together in intentional fellowship prior to group discussion	The combination of discussion and fellowship supported participants' ability to disagree in love and more easily understand one anothers' perspectives.
Inclusion of verses from Scripture in combination with excerpted readings of theological sources	Participants appreciated the ability to review diverse perspectives through theological reading, balanced by a biblical perspective through direct study of Scripture.
Workbook itself and facilitation format was professional and efficient	Participants reported that the workbook and structure of facilitation itself promoted precise and efficient discussion of the specific topics, and made it easy to avoid distraction or disruption by veering into unrelated topics.

In addition to positive feedback regarding the content, structure, and format of instruction, participants identified areas for improvement and further development of the

instructional material. Much of the growth feedback related to specific phrases or wording contained in worksheet instructions or discussion questions, generally surrounding unfamiliar words and phrases that participants perceived to be theological or scholarly jargon. Such words and phrases include the use of words *ecumenical* and *ecclesial*, and the use of Latin phrases such as *missio Dei* and *imago Dei*.

In addition to scholarly jargon, participants reported unclarity around the use of phrases common to church life but not explicitly defined in the workbook or elsewhere in MVMNT Church literature: terms such as evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, and body or church body. Though they reported possessing an intuitive understanding of these phrases, group discussion revealed that participants did not share a universal definition or common understanding of these phrases. Participants also reported other elements that provide an opportunity for growth and improvement, listed in Table 9.

Table 9. Growth feedback on phase two of intervention

List of Elements Contributing to Growth Feedback		
Element Description	Impact Description	Recommendation
Reading excerpts from resources targeting academic or scholarly audiences	Participants reported confusion regarding some readings in the workbook due to lack of understanding scholarly jargon or lack of experience reading scholarly articles.	Include a glossary of terms and replace scholarly readings with excerpts from works targeting laymen
Structure of session reviewing theological reading first, followed by direct discussion of Scripture	Participants expressed a desire for more direct engagement with raw scripture in addition to, or instead of, exposure to theological perspectives	Move Scripture study ahead of theological readings in agenda, and reduce ratio theological readings relative to Scripture

Lack of clearly explicated learning objectives for each week of content	Participants discussed weekly learning objectives in-person informally during group discussion, and expressed a desire for greater precision of focus during the asynchronous study	Document clear learning objectives in workbook related to asynchronous content

Despite opportunities for growth and improvement of the instructional content, all participants expressed a belief that the instructional content improved their understanding of mission, discipleship, leadership, and culture in addition to cultivating spiritual growth throughout the intervention. Additionally, participants reported in the focus group higher levels of engagement with spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, prayer, and community participation in the church, though the researcher did not collect data related to spiritual disciplines for verification and validation of these reports.

Summary of Results

Data from the pre-intervention period revealed a moderate understanding of mission and discipleship, low reports of active discipleship relationships, and silence regarding the interrelation of mission and discipleship. Following the intervention, survey data indicated significant improvement in participants' understanding and application of topics related to mission, discipleship, and leadership, validated by an increase in participants' reports of active discipleship in their lives. Interview data revealed convergence on themes related to mission and discipleship following intervention, indicating that participants grew both in their individual understanding of these topics as well as in alignment with other group members toward a unified understanding.

This unified understanding, as well as quantitative improvements on survey performance and reports of active discipleship, prove this dissertation's thesis that if MVMNT Church's leadership team completed a curriculum focused on missional discipleship, then the church's culture would prioritize participation in communal mission. Based on responses in the focus group data, participants found the greatest value from the professionalism and intentionality of the small group instruction itself, fellowship with other participants, and exposure to a variety of theological perspectives. These factors, and the successful outcomes of the study, are depicted in figure 8.

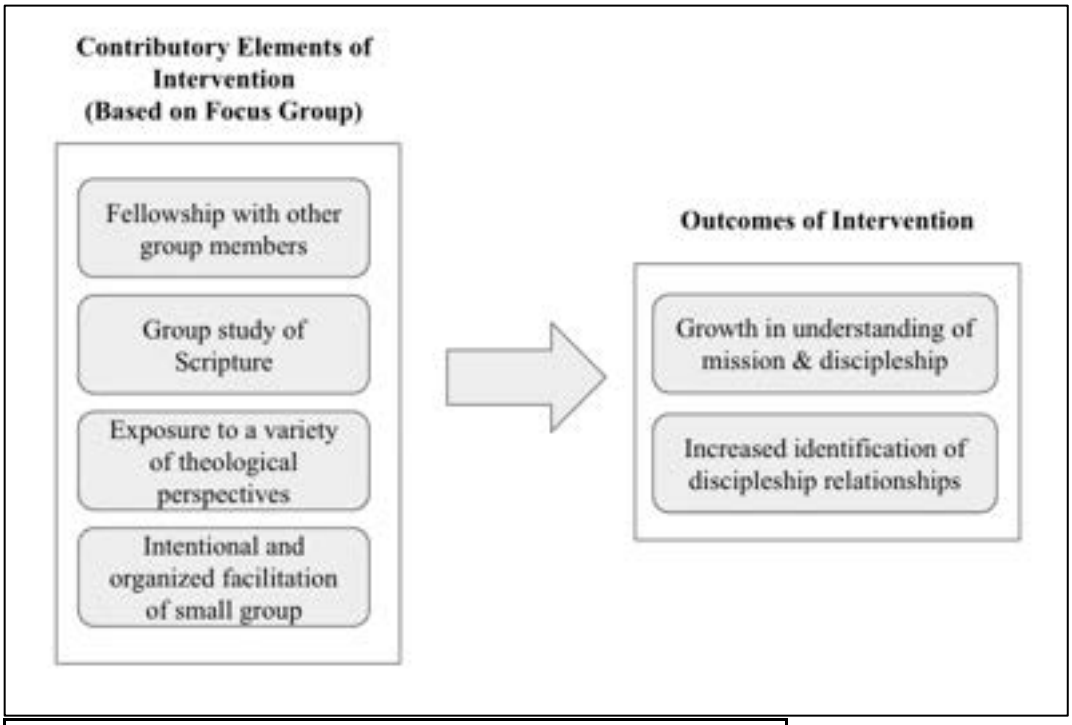

Figure 8. Intervention factors leading to successful outcomes

Success is realized in the form of newly reported active engagement with discipleship relationships which, intertwined with the participants' understanding and application of a theology of mission, cultivate a church body dedicated to spiritual maturity and proliferation of the gospel.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter will review the study presented in this dissertation. The chapter is organized into five parts: conclusion, research implications, research applications, research limitations, and further research. The conclusion section will revisit and summarize the original problem this intervention sought to address, the theological and theoretical topics supporting the proposed solution oriented around ecumenical missional discipleship, and review the methodology and findings of the research project. The chapter will then discuss the implications of this research on the fields of missions and discipleship scholarship, the application potential of this research for similar ministry contexts, the limitations of this research project, and areas for further research based both on research limitations as well as opportunities identified in the results of this research.

Conclusion

This action research project set out to cultivate a missional culture, focused on communal discipleship, at MVMNT Church while also addressing gaps in precedent literature related to the interrelationship between mission and discipleship in the non-denominational church context. The study designed and executed an eight-week instructional framework, delivered through the medium of small group instruction, designed to improve understanding of theological topics related to mission, discipleship, and leadership in the church. Longitudinal analysis, evaluating Likert survey data collected before and after the intervention, indicated that the intervention was successful in improving participants' understanding of these topics. Additionally, semi-

structured interviews revealed higher engagement in active discipleship as well as a strongly unified common understanding of mission and discipleship among research participants.

Problems Addressed by This Study

Previous attempts to develop cultures of disciple-making have successfully demonstrated the effectiveness of formal instructional curricula and small group instruction methods for the cultivation of discipleship programs, though none of these projects had a distinctly missional focus nor emphasis upon mission as a primary partner of discipleship.[1] However, a gap remained in that these programs did not possess a distinctly missional lens nor express an explicit partnership between topics of mission and discipleship as critical interrelated elements of the Christian life.

In addition to these gaps in scholarship, this action research project sought to address ministry challenges at MVMNT Church. MVMNT Church, a member of ARC, was born with a generally attractional model of ministry in keeping with the writing of authors such as Andy Stanley's *Deep and Wide* and Bill Hornsby's *The Attractional Church*. In keeping with this attractional model, the church emphasized the role of church leadership as central authority figures responsible for the magnetic attraction of new church congregants as well as the primary resource for upbuilding of those congregants' spiritual maturity.

As a result of this reliance on formal church leadership and a prioritization of new member attraction, the church has historically struggled to provide sustainable opportunities for discipleship and intentional spiritual growth, evident through inconsistent participation in small groups and community service projects as well as high turnover on the church's volunteer teams.

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[1] Moore, "Developing a Disciple-Making Program for Ross Baptist Church in Gary, Indiana"; Tracy, "Training Confident Disciple-Makers at Evangel Assembly to Facilitate the Multiplication of Disciples."

The church, therefore, looked to a missional church culture as an objective to cultivate a missional culture focused on self-sustaining reproductive discipleship. The goal of such transformation was to foster an understanding of biblical mission and discipleship within the church, fermenting growth in spiritual maturity and cultivating a self-generating strategy for church growth as individual church members became empowered to make disciples.

Overview of Missional Discipleship

To improve the discipleship culture at MVMNT Church, leaders turned to a study of the missional church movement. Derived from seminal works as Newbigin's *The Open Secret* and Guder's *Missional Church*, the missional church movement promotes a church philosophy in which the primary calling, purpose, and pathway for the church lies in the mission of God, *missio Dei*. J. R. Woodward notes that "we find *missio Dei* in Scripture: God the Father sends the Son and the Spirit into the world, and the Father, Son and Spirit send the church into the world for the sake of the world. In other words, mission does not originate with the church but is derived from the very nature of God." Springing from the missional church movement, the individual pursues a mandate of fellowship and partnership with God's mission; this fellowship and partnership being the primary lens through which spiritual formation occurs. This perspective of the individual's relationship with God's mission, resulting in spiritual formation, is missional discipleship.

Missional discipleship emphasizes the role of the disciple in participation with God's mission. Though the literature provides a variety of perspectives on how individual believers go about this participation, scholars universally agree that such participation occurs primarily in the context of the believers' relationships with others: through mentorship and discipleship, sharing the gospel with others, fellowship and communion with fellow believers, and service to others.

To aid the formation of the body of MVMNT Church, missional discipleship provides a foundation from which the church can draw in its community members while simultaneously propelling the gospel outward into its surrounding community.

Moral Development and Mission

Theories of moral development proposed by the philosopher Lawrence Kohlberg, as in the advocation of James Estep and Jonathan Kim in their book *Christian Formation*, align well with the pursuit of missional discipleship. Much as scholars agree that discipleship occurs across multiple stages of spiritual formation and multiple levels of spiritual maturity, Kohlberg proposed a model for moral development that occurs over three stages of growth.

In the first stage, humans make moral decisions based purely on consequences: they are limited to pursuing rewards and avoiding punishment. As the individual matures, they arrive at stage two: conventional morality. At this stage, the individual recognizes the authority and values of rules and authorities, now making moral decisions based on pre-defined concepts of right and wrong as defined by an external authority such as secular laws or, in the case of spiritual formation, the guidance of prescriptive elements Scripture. Finally, the individual may grow to reaching a postconventional state of morality in which their worldview has matured to such an extent that the individual can make moral decisions based on an inherent sense of absolute morality derived from core values such as justice, fairness, or generosity.

This final stage aligns with what Christopher Wright describes as a “theocentric” worldview in which the individual has traded a drive for pursuit of agency and reward for pursuit of the purpose and mission of God. In the highest state of moral development according to Kohlberg’s framework when aligned with biblical values, the individual makes decisions based on an intrinsic understanding and desire for the advancement of the mission of God. In this way,

the cultivation of moral formation is a lens for discipleship with, coupled with a missional hermeneutic, leads to the establishment of a theocentric worldview and eager participation in *missio Dei*.[2] Figure 9 displays the parallels between Kohlberg's moral development framework and the cultivation of a theocentric missional worldview, demonstrating the placement of intervention during Stage Two of participants' moral development to catalyze the transition to a theocentric worldview.

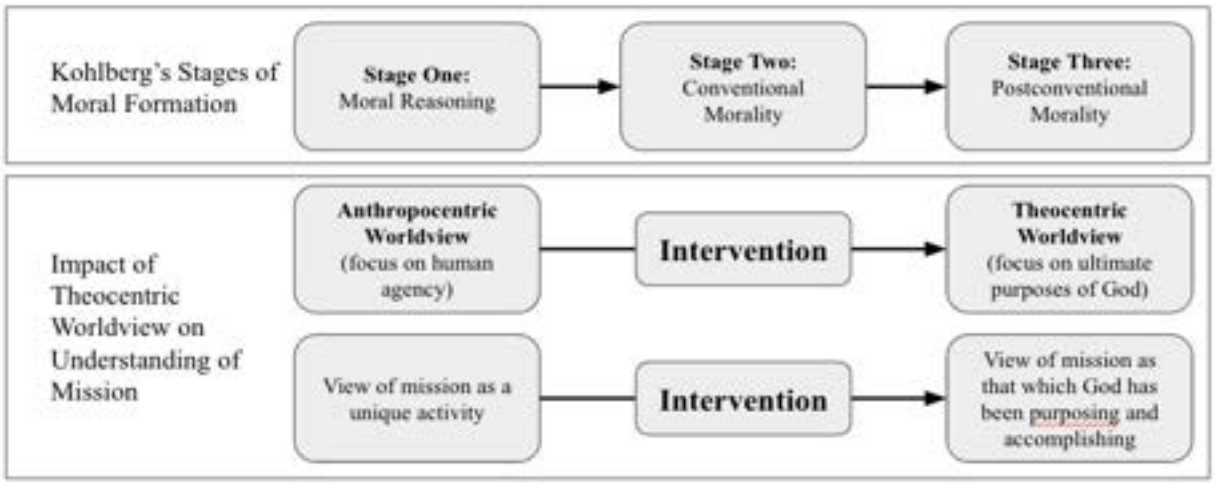

Figure 9. Role of intervention on moral development

Importance of an Ecumenical Perspective

Precedent literature revealed a wide range of perspectives around discipleship and mission within the church. Scholars disagree on the activities and role of the individual believer in participation with mission as well as the activities and role of the church itself. Rather than reconcile these disparate views into a single forced perspective, this intervention recognized the value of an ecumenical perspective emphasizing the plurality of interpretation resulting from the interaction of participants, their historical and cultural context, and the insight of the Holy Spirit.

[2] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 75.

Wright validates the value of such a pluralistic approach in his work *The Mission of God*, in which he writes the following:

> The plurality of perspectives from which readers read [biblical texts] is … a vital factor in the hermeneutical richness of the global church. What persons of one culture bring from that culture to their reading of a text may illuminate dimensions or implications of the text itself that persons of another culture may not have seen so clearly.[3]

The diverse perspective of research participants, reflecting the diverse nature of the body of Christ in the church, cultivates an environment for spiritual formation in which participants can lean on one another's gifts and come together as one team in alignment with Scripture's mandate to strive for unity and, in so doing, to achieve fullness of their purpose (Eph. 4:11–13). Together, the church elevates itself through its diversity greater than the sum of its parts, capable through the Spirit to pursue Christ's command to make disciples and be His witnesses (Matt. 28:18–10; Acts 1:8). This ecumenical perspective, therefore, does not dilute biblical truth but rather emphasizes truth through unity and love. This intervention strived for an ecumenical perspective by emphasizing interactive Socratic discussion from all group members, integrating outside readings from theologians from a variety of denominational perspectives, and seeking to provide well-rounded and unbiased presentations of theological topics.

Review of Methodology

By conducting a comprehensive literature review, robust theological and theoretical foundations were established which provided a strong basis for the execution of an intervention aimed at nurturing a missional culture within MVMNT Church. This intervention consisted primarily of an eight-week instructional program delivered in an in-person small group format.

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[3] Wright, *The Mission of God*, 46.

The study evaluated the success of the instructional framework through analysis of quantitative data as well as thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews.

To develop the instructional curriculum, the researcher applied the research project's conceptual framework, derived from precedent literature, in addition to a review of popular discipleship curricula. Having reviewed such instructional curricula like *The Real-Life Discipleship Training Manual*, *Discipleship Essentials*, and others, the researcher identified a series of pedagogical activities. These pedagogical activities, when combined with theories of moral development and theocentric worldviews promoting a lifestyle of mission and discipleship, led to the development of an eight-week curriculum designed for implementation in a small group setting. The learning objectives of this curriculum covered topics such as theological foundations of *missio Dei*, review of the role of the church and the individual on mission, and a litany of practical skills for leadership and participation in mission.

The instructional curriculum consisted of prayer, Bible study, practical activities and worksheets, group discussion, and readings from essays and books. The intervention targeted leaders in the second stage of moral development, having developed a relationship with Christ and already in a position of formal or informal leadership. The intervention sought to increase their understanding and application of mission and discipleship, evidenced by positive growth in survey data as well as the growth of identified discipleship relationships among research participants.

The research occurred over four phases: recruitment of participants, pre-intervention data collection, instructional intervention, and post-intervention follow-up, as depicted in figure 10. Seven individuals participated in the study; each of them possessing formal or informal leadership roles at MVMNT Church through participation in the church's volunteer 'Dream

Team', leadership of small groups, or membership on the church's official volunteer staff team. All seven participants remained in the group throughout all four phases of the intervention.

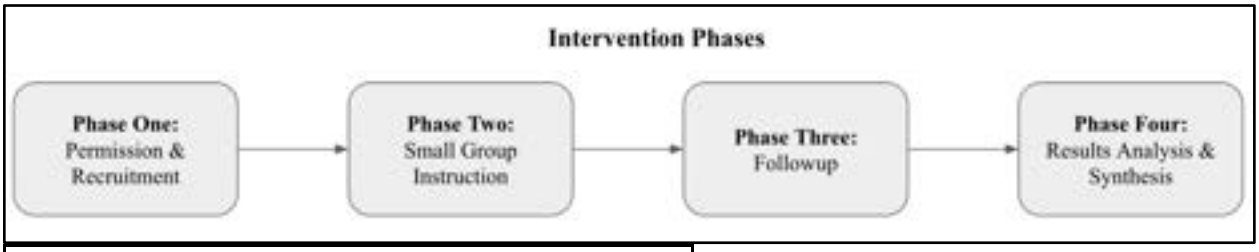

Figure 10. Sequential structure of intervention phases

Summary of Findings

Data collected before the intervention validated the researcher's understanding of the problem at MVMNT Church, as survey data and interview data cooperatively revealed low-to-moderate understanding of topics related to mission, discipleship, and leadership. Most tellingly, only two out of seven participants reported an active discipleship relationship. Pre-intervention data collection validated the researcher's understanding of the problem at MVMNT Church related to its discipleship culture and established a baseline for measuring the impact of intervention.

Following the intervention, survey data revealed significant improvements for all research participants in their understanding of relevant topics, and thematic analysis of interview data indicated a reduction in slippages surrounding mission and discipleship. These findings indicate that research participants, through the intervention, arrived at a communal understanding of mission contributing to shared assumptions and a unified culture. Additionally, nearly all participants reported engagement with an active discipleship relationship following the intervention. Focus group data revealed that fellowship, study of Scripture, intentional and organized group facilitation, and exposure to theological perspectives were instrumental elements contributing to successful outcomes of the intervention, as depicted in figure 11.

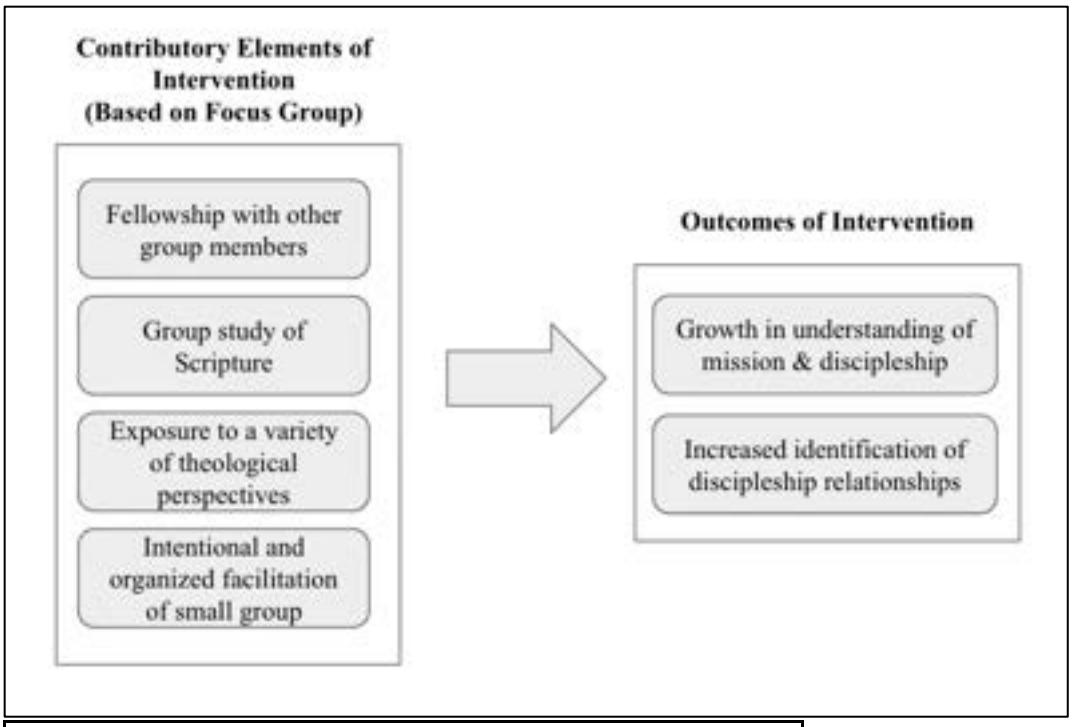

Figure 11. Intervention factors leading to successful outcomes

Research Implications

This research project uncovered insights into the state of mission and discipleship at MVMNT Church and executed a successful intervention cultivating seven leaders, improving their understanding of mission, discipleship, leadership, and culture, and empowering them to transform the culture of the church body. In addition to the successful intervention experienced by research participants, this research project has implications for MVMNT Church beyond the action research project. These implications, for the future of missional culture and discipleship overall, provide an opportunity for biblical growth toward a stronger practice of mission and discipleship throughout the church body.

Implications for Missional Culture of MVMNT Church

Based on the theoretical foundations for this research, the project places MVMNT Church in a strong position to develop a missional culture. Precedent literature on the topic of

organizational culture emphasizes the importance of formal and informal leaders in the cultivation of culture through the propagation of shared assumptions and espoused values. With seven leaders having participated in the intervention, resulting in alignment on shared assumptions related to mission and discipleship, these leaders are now well-suited to propagate these shared assumptions to other members of the church body.

MVMNT's pastoral team can leverage the experience of research participants, as well as the reusable instructional framework developed in this research project, to document and propagate espoused values prioritizing mission and communal discipleship, ultimately leading to the cultivation of a powerful missional culture throughout the church. This research project, having succeeded in its aims of generating a missional culture among its participant group, sets the church up for focused and intentional participation in God's mission for Charlottesville and its people.

Implications for Discipleship at MVMNT Church

Pre-intervention data collection, targeting individuals in formal and informal leadership roles, revealed a low-to-moderate understanding of discipleship and low engagement in discipleship prior to participation in the research project. Although the research participants demonstrated significant growth in these areas through the intervention, these findings are likely indicative of a low understanding of and engagement in discipleship throughout the MVMNT Church body. MVMNT Church now has a foundation from which leaders can begin to cultivate a greater emphasis on discipleship throughout the church, leveraging the shared culture and leadership influence of research participants as well as instructional materials from the intervention to continue propagating discipleship practices throughout the church.

Research Applications

The instructional content developed and implemented in this study provides a practical resource for other churches seeking to nurture missional discipleship within their contexts. The flexibility and adaptability of the curriculum, as informed by the literature review, enables its application across diverse denominational and cultural settings. Other churches, with minimal effort, can easily adapt the content of this project's instructional material for distribution and facilitation within their church settings in the form of a class or small group. Additionally, this research project sheds light on the value of an ecumenical approach to mission and discipleship based on its review of precedent literature as well as the successful execution of its ecumenical instructional content. Finally, this study validates the application of mixed-methods evaluation techniques by its use of Likert survey data, semi-structured interviews, and focus group data to triangulate the results of data analysis.

Re-Usability of Instructional Framework

One key application of the study's findings is the potential to inform the development of missional leadership training programs within theological education. By highlighting the gaps in current training models, this study suggests the need for a greater emphasis on equipping church leaders with the theological, practical, and relational skills necessary to cultivate missional cultures in their respective contexts. The curriculum developed in this study could serve as a foundation for such missional leadership training programs. By providing a framework that emphasizes biblical instruction, participatory group discussion, practical implementation exercises, and resources for individual follow-up study, the curriculum offers a holistic approach to equipping church leaders for the task of nurturing missional cultures.

Furthermore, the insights gleaned from this research could be leveraged to inform the refinement and adaptation of the instructional content for use in diverse church settings. As the literature review noted, different churches may have different roles to play in God's mission, determined by their unique mission context and the distinct gifts of their congregation. By understanding these contextual factors, the instructional content can be tailored to meet the specific needs of various church communities.

An Ecumenical Approach to Mission and Discipleship

Review of precedent literature revealed a wide spectrum of perspectives regarding mission and discipleship. This wide spectrum of perspectives manifested itself in the form of slippage in post-intervention interview data: though participants all agreed upon a relationship between mission and discipleship, participants disagreed on the directional dependency between the two topics. The precedent literature and theological foundations of this study affirm the biblical validity of both perspectives: mission as a priority focus, dependent on a lifestyle of discipleship, or discipleship as a priority focus dependent on a lifestyle of mission.

Therefore, future approaches to missional development and the cultivation of discipleship programs in the non-denominational church should seek to pursue ecumenical approaches that recognize the validity of a range of practical application perspectives regarding discipleship. Individual members within a unified church body may prioritize mission as a priority of the Christian life, carried out through the vehicle of discipleship, or vice versa. Similarly, these approaches may manifest practically with a range of views on topics such as spiritual disciplines, service, vocation, and other topics subordinate to mission and discipleship. The church must seek to expose its body ecumenically to all these topics, recognizing that everyone’s application of discipleship and mission is likely to be unique, personal, and intimate.

Mixed-Methods Approach to Mission Evaluation

This research project leveraged a mixed-methods approach to evaluating the state of mission and discipleship among research participants. Quantitative survey data, executed in the form of online Likert surveys, qualitative thematic analysis via semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and a focus group involving all participants functioned collaboratively to paint a holistic picture of the problem space. Quantitative data enabled longitudinal analysis, making comparisons across time simple and efficient to measure growth in the participants' understanding. The one-on-one semi-structured interviews, however, were invaluable in crafting a comprehensive understanding of each participant's perspective individually as well as developing a picture of the participants' relationship with discipleship.

As emphasized by precedent literature and the theoretical foundations of this study, effective evaluation is instrumental to any change effort within the church. Therefore, non-denominational churches of similar contexts can apply similar mixed-methods research approaches to assess the state of their congregation concerning mission and discipleship. The data collection instruments for this study, documented in appendices D and E, are available for re-use and applicable to a range of ministry contexts.

Research Limitations

While this study has yielded valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. As an action research project focused on a single ministry context, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all non-denominational church settings. The relatively short duration of the intervention, while sufficient to demonstrate initial impact, limits the ability to assess the long-term sustainability of the missional culture developed within MVMNT Church. In addition to its relatively short duration, another limitation of the study is its focus on a subset of the

church's leadership team, rather than the entire leadership body. The specificity of the ministry context associated with this study further limits the project's generalizability and replicability related to other ministry contexts, even if such contexts appear similar in culture and problem.

Another limitation lies in the self-reported nature of the qualitative data collected. While the triangulation of multiple data sources, including focus groups, individual Likert surveys, and semi-structured interviews, enhances the validity of the findings, the possibility of participant bias or selective recall cannot be eliminated. Participants may have intentionally or unintentionally omitted, downplayed, or exaggerated their responses, which could skew the study's results.

Finally, the study's delimitation of the target population to formal and informal church leaders, while necessary to address the specific problem at hand, further limits the generalizability of the findings. While this approach provided a diverse range of perspectives and backgrounds, it excluded the broader church membership, whose experiences and insights could have enriched the study's understanding of the missional culture within MVMNT Church.

Further Research

Building upon the foundations laid by this study, several avenues for further research emerge. One particularly promising area for further research would be to explore the long-term effects of the missional leadership curriculum implemented in this study. By tracking the continued engagement of participants in missional discipleship relationships and the subsequent impact on the broader church culture, researchers could gain a deeper understanding of the sustainability and transformative potential of such an approach.

To engage with the applications of this research for discipleship ministry at MVMNT Church and in acknowledgement of the limitations of this study, a compelling avenue for further

research would be to conduct additional iterations of this intervention with similar samples. Additional samples would strengthen the validity of quantitative analysis while also improving the generalizability of the study across the population represented by the sample. This avenue of research would improve understanding of the long-term sustainable impact of the intervention on MVMNT Church culture or on the culture of similar attractional non-denominational churches host to similar representative participant samples.

New research should also take into consideration the findings of data analysis and focus group research from this study. Multiple constructs in the Likert survey were invalid according to the measurement of Cronbach's alpha. Additional qualitative research can identify gaps in the structure and wording of the survey to improve future iterations of the collection instrument, improving its ability to effectively measure mission and discipleship in a variety of ministry contexts. Similarly, growth feedback regarding the instructional framework itself presented in the focus group data offers an opportunity for iterative improvement and further research.

Additionally, comparative studies examining the effectiveness of missional leadership development initiatives across diverse denominational and cultural contexts could yield insights into the contextual factors that influence the cultivation of missional discipleship. Such research could inform the refinement of the instructional framework developed in this study, enhancing its applicability and effectiveness for a wide range of church settings.

Finally, expanding the scope of the research to include the broader church membership, rather than just the leadership team, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to the development of a missional culture. By incorporating the perspectives and experiences of the entire congregation, future studies could offer additional insights into the dynamics of missional transformation within the church.

By addressing these avenues for further research, the insights gained from this study can continue to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding the church's participation in God's redemptive mission. Through collaborative and contextual exploration, the church can deepen its understanding of how to cultivate missional cultures that empower disciples to engage actively in the work of God's kingdom.

APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT VERBAL

Hello,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Ministry degree. The purpose of my project is to determine the efficacy of a mission-focused leadership instructional program on leaders' ability to cultivate a missional culture, and if you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be 18 years of age or older and hold a formal or informal leadership role at MVMNT Church. A formal leadership role includes members of the paid or volunteer staff. An informal leadership role includes Sunday School teachers, Small Group leaders, and Volunteer Team leaders. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an eight-week small group, focused on leadership and theology of mission.

Each small group session will include approximately an hour of independent reading and study and 1.5 hours of synchronous small group discussion, for a total of 2.5 hours weekly. Before and after the eight-week small group, I will ask you to complete a 24-question online survey, which should take approximately a half hour. One month after the small group concludes, I will conduct a follow-up interview with you that will last approximately one hour. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

Would you like to participate? Great, could I get your email address so I can send you the link to the survey and instructions to attend the small group study?

I understand. Thank you for your time.

Here is a consent document. The consent document contains additional information about my project. After you have read the consent form, please complete, sign, and return the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

APPENDIX B

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title of the Project: Missional Leadership: An Instructional Program to Cultivate Leaders of a Missional Church
Principal Investigator: Conner Brew, Doctoral Candidate, Rawlings School of Divinity, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a quality improvement project

You are invited to participate in a Quality Improvement study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and hold a formal or informal leadership role at MVMNT Church. Taking part in this project is voluntary.

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

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

The purpose of the study is to develop, implement, and evaluate a leadership curriculum to cultivate a culture focused on missional discipleship.

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, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.
2. Complete an online 24-questions survey, which should take no more than 30 minutes.
3. Participate in an eight-week small group study located at MVMNT Church, consisting of 1 hour weekly of independent study and 1.5 hours weekly of collaborative group discussion.
4. Participate in an evaluative, audio-recorded focus group on the day of the final small group session, lasting no more than 1 hour.
5. Complete an online 24-question survey which should take no more than 30 minutes.
6. Participate in an in-person, audio-recorded interview that will take no more than 1 hour.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits participants should expect to receive from taking part in this study include an increased understanding of theology related to mission and improved leadership skills.

Benefits to society include the cultivation of a capable leadership team at MVMNT Church dedicated to mission, thereby increasing the capacity of MVMNT Church as an organization to participate in biblical mission.

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. Project records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses to online surveys and interviews will be anonymous.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.
- Data will be stored on a password-protected 256-bit encrypted Google Drive storage folder. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Recordings will be stored on a password-protected 256-bit encrypted Google Drive storage folder for three years and then erased. The researcher will have access to these recordings.

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

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

The researcher serves as a small group leader and adult discipleship leader at MVMNT Church. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, survey data collection will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

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

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

included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

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

The researcher conducting this study is Conner Brew. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at [redacted] or [redacted]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor.

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

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

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

Your Consent

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

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

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

APPENDIX C

PERMISSION REQUEST LETTER

24 September 2023

Jeffrey Nicolette
Lead Pastor
MVMNT Church
309 Hillsdale Drive

Dear Ps. Nicolette,

As a doctoral candidate in the Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting a project as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Ministry degree. The title of my project is "Missional Leadership: An Instructional Program to Cultivate Leaders of a Missional Church," and the purpose of my project is to develop, implement, and evaluate a leadership curriculum to cultivate a church culture focused on missional discipleship.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my project at MVMNT Church and contact members of your church to invite them to participate in my quality improvement study.

Participants will be asked to participate in in-person interviews, complete two online surveys, and participate in an eight-week in-person small group curriculum. 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.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, respond by email to [redacted].

Sincerely,

Conner Brew

APPENDIX D

PRE AND POST SURVEY QUESTIONS

The following table lists the questions that will be in both the pre and post survey. The questions are divided into eight sections, and each section is designed to elicit participant understanding of a single week's topic in the instructional material. The survey format will be a five-point Likert scale response. Each section has three questions to reduce bias and ensure the validity of the results. When participants access the questions in the online survey, questions will appear in a randomized order to further reduce likelihood of bias.

Table 3. Questions and sections of the online survey

Online Survey Questions	
Section 1: *Missio Dei*	I know what God's mission is for the world.
	I am aware of God's plan for humanity.
	I know what the scriptural definition of mission is.
Section 2: Missional Discipleship	I know how God's mission impacts my discipleship.
	I know biblical ways that I can live my life on God's mission.
	I know how I can participate in God's mission by Jesus's example.
Section 3: The Role of the Church in Mission	I can express the role the Church plays in God's mission.
	I know what activities the Church can do on God's mission.
	I understand how the Church fits into God's mission.
Section 4:	I understand how individual Christians participate in God's mission.

The Role of the Christian on Mission	I can express the role of individual Christians in God's mission.
	I know activities that Christians can perform on God's mission.
Section 5: Cultivating Spiritual Gifts for Mission	I understand the role that spiritual gifts play in Christian participation in mission.
	I can identify ways that leaders can encourage spiritual gifts for the purpose of God's mission.
	I can express the means by which spiritual gifts aid the Church in God's mission.
Section 6: Fundamentals of a Missional Culture	I understand how to evaluate organizational culture.
	I understand what activities can help change an organizational culture.
	I understand the role a leader plays in organizational culture.
Section 7: Raising up Missional Leaders	I can express Scriptural examples of leaders raising up other leaders.
	I know biblical activities by which leaders can raise up other leaders.
	I understand the purpose of leaders raising up new leaders.
Section 8: Growing and Evaluating Mission in the Church	I can express the importance of evaluating the church's state of participation in mission.
	I know methods by which I can evaluate the church's state of participation in mission.
	I understand how to create growth goals based on evaluations of the church.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Semi-structured interviews will focus on high-level topics related to mission, discipleship, leadership, and organizational culture. This interview guide will provide examples for inquiring about these high-level topics, as well as example questions to elicit more information about each topic. Interviews will aim to spend approximately fifteen minutes discussing each topic.

1. Mission
    a. What does the topic of "mission" mean to you in the context of God's plan for the world?
    b. Are there particular activities you associate with the concept of mission?
2. Discipleship
    a. What does the topic of "discipleship" mean to you?
    b. Are there particular activities you associate with the concept of mission?
3. Leadership
    a. What does leadership mean to you?
    b. Do you think that leaders have a unique role regarding biblical mission?
4. Culture
    a. In the context of a church or organization, what does culture mean to you?
    b. What do you think the relationship is between culture and mission?

APPENDIX F

OUTLINE OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Small Group Curriculum Outline		
Week	Title	Outline
Week 1	Overview of *Missio Dei*	Reading: Excerpts from *Theology of Mission* and *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*
		Verses: Rev 7:9; John 12:47; Acts 2:17
		Worksheet: The Trinity on Mission
Week 2	Mission and Discipleship	Reading: Excerpts from "An Insider's Church for Outsiders" and *Christian Mission in the Modern World*
		Verses: Matt. 28:12–20; Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 2:4–5
		Worksheet: How Do We Do Mission?
Week 3	The Role of the Church in Mission	Reading: Excerpts from "The Way Worship Works in Mission" and *Missional Church*
		Verses: Rev. 5:10; Eph. 1:22–23
		Worksheet: What Should the Church Do?
Week 4	The Role of the Christian on Mission	Reading: Excerpts from "Rediscovering Disciplemaking and the Role of Faith-Sharing" and "Jesus, Friend of Sinners"
		Verses: Rom 1:16; Luke 4:18; John 20:21
		Worksheet: The Image of God
Week 5	Cultivating Spiritual Gifts for Mission	Reading: Excerpts from *Body Life* and "How Do Churches Equip Their Disciple-Makers?"

		Verses: Eph. 4:10–12; 1 Cor. 12:4–6; Rom. 12:4–8
		Worksheet: The Five Roles of Equipping the Saints
Week 6	Fundamentals of a Missional Culture	Reading: Excerpts from "Paul's Biblical Patterns of Church-Planting" and "Rethinking Urban Mission"
		Verses: Gal. 3:28; Luke 9:23; Gen. 12:1–3
		Worksheet: What Are the Aspects of Culture?
Week 7	Raising up Missional Leaders	Reading: Excerpts from *The Master Plan of Evangelism* and "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy"
		Verses: 2 Tim 2:2; Gal 2:20; Heb 3:1
		Worksheet: How Do I Lead?
Week 8	Growing and Evaluating Mission in the Church	Reading: Excerpts from *The Gospel-Driven Church* and "A Mission Made to Last"
		Verses: Matt. 25:23; Prov. 16:9; Luke 14:28
		Worksheet: Specific, Measurable Goals for Church Transformation

APPENDIX G

INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIAL

Phase Two of the intervention leverages a small group workbook of the thesis author's design. The workbook leverages article and book excerpts from this thesis's bibliography as well as Scripture review building upon the theological foundations in this thesis.

Missional Leadership

How to Use This Book

This book is for leaders or aspiring leaders, whether formal or informal, who seek to grow in their knowledge of God and His redemptive mission. God's mission is personal: you can participate in it! This book consists of two sections:

- Section 1: Theological Foundations
- Section 2: Practical Applications

In the first four weeks we will learn about the theological foundations of God's mission, *missioDei*, and how Jesus set an example for how we can live and lead in the church today. In weeks five through eight, we will learn to apply those theological foundations to our Christian life, our relationship with the church, and our relationships with others.

The curriculum is designed to be conducted over eight weeks with a small group of 3 or more. You will embark on a journey to review scholarly perspectives on theological topics, study scripture related to those topics, and perform a practical exercise to apply your understanding.

Each week consists of three core activities:

Reading:

Read two short excerpts from books or theological essays, revealing perspectives and ideas about the week's topic.

Scripture Study:

Read and discuss three sets of verses from Scripture to learn more about the biblical foundations of the topic.

Worksheet:

Complete a short practical worksheet to apply the lessons from the week's reading, study, and discussion.

Between each activity, there will be a discussion prompt. Discussion does not need to answer the question specifically or directly; the prompt is meant to stir thought and serve as a jumping-off-point for fruitful discussion of the topic.

Find discussion prompts in boxes that look like this!

Missional Leadership

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Week 8: Growing Mission 52

Section 1

Theological Foundations for Mission

Week 1

The Mission of God

This week will introduce and refine your understanding of the mission of God, also known as "*missio Dei*". This theological concept will be the foundation of the entire eight-week study! *missio Dei*, a latin phrase meaning “The Mission of God”, references the collective plan and process by which God seeks to redeem all of humankind.

Scholarly use of the phrase *missio Dei* emphasizes a perspective on Christian mission that calls the church and individual disciples to participate in God’s redemptive mission. By understanding God's mission of redemption for His creation, we can more fully embrace the calling and purpose of our Christian life.

Reading:

- "In the Beginning ... God Sent Himself," an excerpt from *Theology of Mission* by J. D. Payne
- "Missional," an excerpt from *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character* by Christopher Schoon

Scripture Study:

- Revelation 7:9
- John 12:47
- Acts 2:17

Worksheet

- The Trinity on Mission

"In the Beginning ... God Sent Himself," an excerpt from *Theology of Mission* by J. D. Payne

The biblical storyline reveals a God who remains faithful to his promises which require the ongoing sending of Himself and his servants into a tragically suffering and deeply needy world to accomplish his mission of redemption and restoration. Mission begins in the heart of God and flows from his nature. He is glorified through relationship with the nations and extending his blessing to them.

He reveals Himself as deeply concerned with a divine plan, his plan, a plan that existed in eternity past. Mission began with God, is sustained by God, and will culminate with God. Mission is not an activity developed by the church; rather, the church participates in God's mission. Mission belongs to Him.

God's strategic plan for executing his mission begins with the concept of sent. For example, the New Testament's use of the verb *apostello* ("send") from which the noun *apostolos* ("apostle") is derived reveals the connection between God's work in the world and his messengers. Sending is necessary for mission. Jesus is called an apostle (Heb 3:1) and sent to do the work of the Lord (Luk 4:18). God sends Himself into time and space and communes with his creation.

Notes

Payne, J. D. *Theology of Mission: A Concise Biblical Theology*.Bellingham, WA: Lexingham Press, 2022.

From the beginning, Adam and Eve and their descendants, divine image-bearers, were to walk in fellowship with God throughout the earth and enjoy his blessings (Gen 1:28). Here is an important point to grasp: God's mission has always been to have the earth filled with his people (Isa 45:18). Genesis 1:28 was not only a pre-fall expectation. Following Noah's departure from the ark, Moses records (twice) the command to multiply and fill the earth (9:1, 7).

The grace of the apostolic God is clearly revealed after the fall. While He was under no obligation to engage the couple, He does just that. True to his word, He arrives and states the consequences of the trespasses. Within this dark moment in history, God announces the good news of hope through judgment that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This early account shows God's mission already, as He comes to Adam and Eve to address sin, a reflection of the gospel.

Though sent from the garden, as God's image-bearers, they were to continue to bring glory to Him (Gen 3:23–24). This model of sending → message → relationship → blessing will become a pattern throughout the Bible. People (Jew and gentile) will rebel against God. They will suffer for their sins, but He will move to them and bring a means of redemption and restoration.

Notes

"Missional," an excerpt from *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character* by Christopher Schoon

The word missional began to appear in Christian missiological literature in the early 1980s, particularly among those following theologian Leslie Newbigin's cultural assessment of the Christian West as a contemporary mission field. Newbigin's reclamation of the *missio Dei* construct served as the orienting theological basis for understanding the church as a people who are sent.

For the early proponents, this missional ecclesiology is rooted in perceiving God as the God who sends. In *Missional Church*, Darrell Guder explained the ecclesiological implications: "With the term 'missional' we emphasize the essential nature and vocation of the church as God's called and sent people."

The church's core identity is that they have been formed by God in order to be sent by God. At its best, 'missional' describes not a specific activity of the church but the very essence and identity of the church as it takes up its role in God's story in the context of its culture and participation in God's mission to the world.

Reflecting on how this identity is not simply a specific set of activities, missional carries a life-encompassing response: The missio*Dei* is a lifelong calling to service, sacrifice, selflessness, and effort. It will be worked out in neighborhoods and people groups around the world, and fueled and led by the least likely saints.

Notes

Schoon, Christopher. *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character: Integrating Worship and Discipleship in the Missional Church Movement.* Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018.

Pastor Al Tizon says that 'missional' means "to join God's mission to transform the world, as the church strives in the Spirit to be authentically relational, intellectually and theologically grounded, culturally and socio-economically diverse, and radically committed to both God and neighbor, especially the poor." Within this project, missional will operate either as a shorthand way of speaking about the missional church movement or as an adjective conveying the missionary character of God, the church, or another aspect of the church's tangible participation in the *missio Dei*.

What is God's mission? What does it mean to be missional?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Revelation 7:9

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.

John 12:47

If anyone hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge that person. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

Acts 2:17-21

In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

How does Scripture reveal God's Mission? Does God's Mission change over time?

Notes

Worksheet: The Trinity on Mission

The reading this week from *Theology of Mission* revealed a biblical pattern of sending → message → relationship → blessing to show how God embarks on mission throughout Scripture. Choose and read one of the three chapters below, then use the worksheet to explain what "sending," "message," "relationship," and "blessing" appear in the story.

Old Testament Mission Examples

Genesis 12 | **Exodus 3** | **1 Samuel 3**

How Does This Story Fit the Pattern?

Sending	
Message	
Relationship	
Blessing	

What does it mean for us that God is a missionary God?

Week 2

Mission and Discipleship

Mission and discipleship are irrevocably intertwined. To pursue discipleship, one must align themselves to the mission of God. To align oneself to the mission of God, one must pursue discipleship.

Although scholars have many different definitions of 'discipleship', discipleship is commonly understood for all Christians to be the process by which they grow in spiritual maturity with the goal of becoming more like Jesus Christ. How does the Christian simultaneously pursue discipleship and mission? This week will invite discussion into that very question.

Reading:

- Excerpt from "An Insider's Church for Outsiders," by Michael McDowell
- "The Priority of Mission," an excerpt from *Christian Mission in the Modern World* by John Stott

Scripture Study:

- Matthew 28:18–20
- Acts 1:8
- 1 Peter 2:4–5

Worksheet

- How Do We Do Mission?

Excerpt from "An Insider's Church for Outsiders" by Michael McDowell

The progression of the “come and see” passages (John 1:39; 1:46; 4:29; 11:34) — Jesus calls his disciples, his disciples call other disciples, and Jesus draws near to the suffering of others—displays conspicuous resonance with the prologue, where Jesus “comes to his own”, and “gives to those who receive Him the right to become children of God”, and “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. He drew others to Himself, but He also went out to others.

To what end does the church welcome people? The church is more than an open door—that door must lead somewhere, and John shows where it might lead. In John 1:46, Philip tries to recruit Nathaniel, using similar messianic language as had brought the first disciples to Jesus: “we have found He about whom Moses wrote in the law and the prophets: Jesus of Nazareth, from Galilee”. But Nathaniel remains unimpressed, retorting, “Is it possible for anything good to come from Nazareth?”

There may have been an understanding in first century Palestine that the Messiah—or any prophet, for that matter—could not come from Galilee. The Pharisees make the same point later in the book, in 7:52. However, rather than argue the intricacies of messianic theory with Nathaniel, Philip simply says the same words as Jesus to Philip: come and see. Nathaniel does, and just one dialogue later, He has fallen to his knees and declared Jesus “the Son of God, the King of Israel”.

Notes

McDowell, Michael T. “An Insider’s Church for Outsiders: The Johannine “Come and See” Passages and Christian Engagement with the World.” Religions 13, no. 9 (2022): 865-879.

Similarly, in 4:29, the Samaritan woman understands that Jesus is more than a Jew (4:9) and more than a prophet (4:19). Her conversation with Him has so radically changed her outlook that she leaves her water bucket behind, and, where she had earlier hidden from the other inhabitants of her town by drawing water at noon, she now rushes into town with an invitation and question: "come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could He be the Messiah?" The townspeople heed her invitation, and, when they meet Jesus, they remain with Him, like the disciples in 1:39, and they subsequently believe his testimony.

What has happened here? To use a modern term: multiplication has occurred. Jesus invited in several disciples, and those disciples learned to act like Jesus, inviting others in like He did. As they spent time with Jesus, his disciples began to do the things that He did and say the same things that He said. They changed. They became like Him.

This is the other side of the dialectic and the second lesson for reading John as a 21st century Christian. The open doors of the church do not lead back to the self: they lead to Jesus. No matter how open the church is to its surrounding communities, no matter the creativity it employs to open its doors and make its space a welcoming place for outsiders, it, nonetheless, must maintain a distinctive character from the rest of the world because its aims are ultimately different from those of the world: to lead, train, and teach people to know, love, and become like Christ.

Notes

"The Priority of Evangelism," an excerpt from *Christian Mission in the Modern World* by John Stott.

I think we should agree with the statement that "in the church's mission of sacrificial service, evangelism is primary." Christians should feel an acute pain of conscience and compassion when human beings are oppressed or neglected in any way, whether what is being denied them is civil liberty, racial respect, education, medicine, employment, or adequate food, clothing and shelter. Anything that undermines human dignity should be an offense to us.

But is anything so destructive of human dignity as alienation from God through ignorance or rejection of the gospel? And how can we seriously maintain that political and economic liberation is just as important as eternal salvation?

Both are certainly challenges to Christian love. But listen to the apostle Paul when He writes with solemn emphasis about his concern for his fellow Jews: "I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race" (Rom 9:1−3).

Notes

Stott, John. *Christian Mission in the Modern World.* London, UK: Intervarsity Press, 2015.

What was the cause of his anguish? That they had lost their national Jewish independence and were under the colonial heel of Rome? That they were often despised and hated by Gentiles, socially boycotted and deprived of equal opportunities? No.

"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved" (Rom 10:1), and the context makes it plain beyond doubt that the "salvation" Paul desired for them was their acceptance with God (Rom 10:2-4). That few if any of us feel this inward agony is a mark of our spiritual immaturity.

Evangelism must not be defined in terms of methods. To evangelize is to announce the good news, however the announcement is made. It is to bring the good news, by whatever means it is brought. In different degrees we can evangelize by word of mouth (whether to individuals, groups or crowds); by print, picture or screen; by drama (whether what is dramatized is fact or fiction); by good works of love (Matt 5:16); by a Christ-centered home; by a transformed life; and even by an almost speechless excitement about Jesus. Nevertheless, because evangelism is fundamentally an announcement, some verbalization is necessary if the content of the good news is to be communicated with any precision.

Notes

How are mission and discipleship related to each other?

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Acts 1:8

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

1 Peter 2:4-5

As you come to Him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to Him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

What does it mean to be part of a holy priesthood?

Notes

Worksheet: How do We Do Mission?

Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus showed us by example how we should live our life on mission. Think of at least four ways that Jesus revealed the Gospel, and think of how we can practice that example today.

Ways That Jesus Lived on Mission

Ways That I Can Live on Mission

How can we follow Jesus' example to grow in discipleship and pursue mission?

Week 3

The Church and Mission

Theologian Christopher Schoon, in his book *Cultivating an Evangelistic Character*, describes the Missional Church as one "in which Jesus' character is cultivated among God's people through worship and leads into their communal embodiment of that character in the world."

Jesus' ministry on Earth was a mission trip, and He sent His church to carry on His witness for the Kingdom of God. By cultivating a missionary attitude within the body of the church community, we can work together to serve God's work in our world and participate in His redemptive mission for humanity.

Reading:

- "Missio Dei: A Mission Theology," an excerpt from *Called to Witness* by Darrell L. Guder
- Excerpt from "The Way Worship Works in Mission" by David Fitch

Scripture Study:

- Acts 2:46–47
- Ephesians 1:22–23
- Matthew 10:5–8

Worksheet

- Should the Church Do Mission?

"Missio Dei: A Mission Theology," an excerpt from *Called to Witness* by Darrell L. Guder

If the Christian mission is God's mission, rooted in the very character and purposes of God, and if God's mission is directed towards the entire world ("God was in Christ reconciling the world . . ."), then a Euro-centered theology and practice of mission, as developed in Western Christendom, must necessarily be reductionistic. In its tendency to reduce the gospel to individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the message of the inbreaking reign of God in Jesus Christ.

In its tendency to make the church into the institution that administers that individual salvation, it fails to confess the fullness of the church's vocation to be, do, and say the witness to that reign of God breaking in now in Jesus Christ. In its bondage to Western cultural expressions coupled with the unquestioned assumption that these traditions represent "normative Christianity," this approach effectively reduces the essentially multicultural and multi-organizational character of the church catholic that was intended by Jesus and so founded by the apostolic mission.

For Christianity, the incarnation of Jesus the Christ means that the mystery has become a person, has differentiated itself, in that God has sent the Son (John's Gospel). "This sending allows us to look into the mystery of God and allows God to be understood as the triune one who is defined solely by love".

Notes

Guder, Darrell L.. *Called to Witness: Doing Missional Theology* (The Gospel and Our Culture Series (GOCS)) (pp. 23–40). Eerdmans.

This results in the entry of the mystery into history, the possibility of telling the story and joining the history — “As my Father has sent me, so I send you” . The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ make the story totally open, totally universal, and totally accessible, because through this event God has made Himself totally accessible to all humanity.

The revelation of the mystery, which creates the church as its witness, does not imply that the human community that knows and confesses this distinctive history can also control it. “Mission means that dynamic that propels us towards the unknown person, to the religiously alienated person whom God wants to welcome back again”. The changes that occur in this interaction affect all that are engaged, but certainly they affect the missionary, the witness.

The final dimension of Christian mission, as unpacked by the theology of the *missio Dei*, has to do with the role and reality of time for witness. The central theme of the kingdom of God presents itself here — 'The future is coming in such a fashion that it explodes upon us as totally present! It comes in such a fashion that it interrupts time and disaster, and salvation becomes present.

Humans, even the most faithful disciples, neither build nor bring about this kingdom. That is what God is already doing; into this inbreaking reign He invites his witnesses as the firstfruits of this certain future. The anticipation of God’s completion of what God has begun transforms the present in such a way that obedience, endurance, and joy are possible.

Notes

Excerpt from "The Way Worship Works in Mission" by David Fitch

Following Acts 4:26–27, Christians live as a people in three circles: a close circle of worship in Christ's risen presence ("the Temple"), most often on Sunday; a dotted circle of presence in our neighborhoods ("house to house"); and a half circle of presence among people who are not Christians ("favor with all people").

Worship, then, is one circle within a rhythm that encompasses all the circles of our lives inhabited during the week. And what we practice in worship on Sunday we practice in all three circles of our lives for the rest of the week. The practices we learn in liturgy at Sunday worship open space for God in Christ to do His work in all three circles of life in the redeeming of all things. These practices include eating around tables, proclaiming the gospel, reconciliation, being with the least of these, being with children, the giftings, and prayer.

We are never isolated individuals to be absorbed into the world. We are together salt and light, disrupting and bringing the transformative power of God into all the circles of life we inhabit in society ... Likewise, in our half circles in the world, where Jesus's presence is not yet recognized, we go to the places of brokenness, as well as the places of daily life—work, schools, local government, neighborhoods, the arts.

Notes

Fitch, David E. "The Way Worship Works in Mission: Proposing an Alternative to the Standard Account." *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 2 (2021): 168-183.

We go in "twos," extending the practices of Sunday worship into the world via invitation and the work of the Spirit in the world—never via power over people. We are a leavening force because we extend the practices of the Kingdom into these places in groups of two or more.

We do not simply blend in—nor do we assimilate and assume a logic already at work here must be from God's good creation. Like common grace, we look for places where God is already at work in His good creation, but there is no discerning this apart from Jesus and his practices of discipleship that make space for His presence to become known.

Our first call as Christians is to cooperate with God and His presence, always submitting humbly and recognizing God's work via the presence of Christ in the world. This we learn and live in via worship on Sunday, and we continue to live it in all the circles of our lives. In this way, we are to be salt and light in the world for what Christ as Lord is doing to reconcile the whole world to Himself.

How does the Church participate in mission?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Acts 2:46-47

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Ephesians 1:22-23

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of Him who fills everything in every way.

Matthew 10:5-8

These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. As you go, proclaim this message: ‘The kingdom of heaven has come near. ’Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

Notes

How does the Church honor the sovereignty of God while on mission?

Worksheet: How Should The Church Do Mission?

Jesus' disciples and the early church give us an example of what biblical mission could look like. Below are a handful of activities listed in this week's Scripture Study. **Choose one of the activities**, and list a few ways that we might learn from that activity to do mission in modern worship.

Early Church Examples of Mission

- Heal the Sick
- Cleanse Lepers
- Drive Out Demons
- Break Bread
- Praise God
- Devoted to Teaching
- Devoted to Prayer
- Give to Anyone in Need

How Can We Learn From <u>One</u> Example?

_____

_____

_____

_____

In what ways is the modern church's mission the same as the early church? In what ways is it different?

Week 4

The Christian and Mission

Bearing the Image of God means that we reflect the glory and reign of God on earth. Although the image in humanity was tarnished by the fall, Jesus restored that image and made it possible for human beings to reflect the goodness, love, and servant-leadership of God.

By following Jesus' example, we can grow as image-bearers to more fully participate in God's redemptive mission for His creation. We do this by loving others, serving others, and proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of Heaven and Jesus' salvation!

Reading:

- Excerpt from "Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable - Reconsidering Imago Dei," by Jan-Olav Henriksen
- Excerpt from "Jesus, Friend of Sinners" by John S. Shorack

Scripture Study:

- Romans 1:5–6
- John 20:21
- Luke 14:18–19

Worksheet

- The Image of God on Mission

Excerpt from "Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable," by Jan-Olav Henriksen

Human beings can experience themselves and others to be more than things, and also realize that if we conceive of ourselves or others as things, we are degraded as humans – and that there is something lacking in such an approach to humans. Because being created as a person by God implies that we are called to goodness, to witness, and to realize the good of the loving God who created us, goodness is internal to human life.

God made us capable of doing good, leading good lives – and of desiring goodness. Created life is good and God-willed, and our destiny as humans is, from the point of view of the doctrine of creation, that we live according to the desire for the goodness that emerges out of the fact that we are created in the image of God. Hence, our love and our hope and desire for goodness are related intrinsically to being created in the image of God.

Simultaneously, this hope for goodness is not secured once and for all: it does not eliminate the vulnerable situation in which we can still be disappointed, hurt, or injured. In this way, the Christian doctrine of human beings as created in the image of God relates God and humans to each other and allows us to develop practices in which the goodness of God and the desire for love and for goodness in human life are closely related. Simultaneously, the destiny of the human being as created in the image of God not only lends the human his or her dignity, but it also offers us the task set for our lives: to be mirrors of the God who created us.

Notes

Henriksen, Jan-Olav. "Embodied, Relational, Desiring, Vulnerable – Reconsidering Imago Dei." *Neue Zeitschrift Für Systematische Theologie Und Religionsphilosophie* 62, no. 3 (2020): 267–94.

The desire that comes from goodness, and which expresses itself in every part of human activity and desire, emerges from our relationship with God. It is an expression of how we, from the outset, are determined by God's love in the innermost core of our being. It is when we separate ourselves from the love of God and stop loving God that our desire goes astray. Then we no longer express to a full extent our calling to be the image of God and to bear witness to God's love and God's desire for goodness and justice.

However, when we relate to our future and see ourselves in a not yet fulfilled destiny, and realize that it cannot be wholly appropriated or fulfilled at present, this attitude safeguards the possibility of living here and now in a way that may recognize the vulnerability of both others and oneself ... This is one of the reasons why love and the safeguarding function that love has are so important in human life. Love provides us with the opportunity to see ourselves as human beings in our distinct otherness – from different centers and perspectives – and in a way that still recognizes how we are related to other living beings, dependent on them, and partake with them in history.

It is only against this background that we can interpret our experience of what it means to be human, harboring love, desire, and the struggle to become a self and find our own identity by means of faith, hope, and love. Desire and the vulnerability that is open to transformation by faith, hope, and love are thus the very embodied manifestations of God's future in us. It is by manifesting and realizing this fact that humans represent God as *imago Dei*.

Notes

Excerpt from "Jesus, Friend of Sinners" by John S. Shorack

Clearly, Jesus and the Pharisees and scribes did not fraternize as a social unit, akin to a family or tied group of associates. So, in what regard could we consider them as belonging to a common in-group? First of all, in the broadest sense, both Jesus and these leaders would fit within the same realm of "full-blooded Israelites." Second, they belonged to the category of non-elite persons, meaning they were not representative of the Jerusalem-based authorities (the elite class) or the small, marginalized unclean class.

More pointedly, they shared a certain identity within Israel as respected, Torah-abiding holy men with spiritual authority … With loyalty being the hallmark of in-group expectations, the Pharisees and their scribes expected Jesus to mirror their loyalty to Moses and the traditions of the elders. Even the way that Jesus's loyalty was publicly challenged (Matt 22:24; Mark 7:5; John 8:3) further supports the argument that He belonged to the same social strata as the Pharisees and their scribes.

Jesus's discourse consistently engages an out-group in relation to one of his in-groups (i.e. Roman centurion and Jews; sinful woman and Simon the Pharisee; blind man and authorities). In the parables, note the presence of a neighbor in each kingdom lesson. The outsider gets honored, while the insider leaves dumbfounded, if not offended.

Notes

Fitch, David E. "The Way Worship Works in Mission: Proposing an Alternative to the Standard Account." *Missiology: An International Review* 50, no. 2 (2021): 168–183.

Jesus picks the wrong kinds of persons to associate with: women of dubious moral character, foreigners, the unclean, and the ignorant commoners to boot. Jesus engages the outsider, often breaking with behavioral norms to do so. This leads to the second offense that is repeated throughout his public ministry: his declarations of welcome.

His encounters with outsiders, and the parables regarding the same, are broadcast with little inhibition. He extends a shocking welcome to the outsider as if they were an insider, under conditions which are condemnable to Jesus's in-groups. Only in-group trust and belonging would beget such friendship with sinners … Jesus appeals to fellow insiders to see as He sees (see Matt 8:10–12; Luke 10:36; Mark 2:8–11).

Jesus brings the message of his kingdom, and the urgency of turning to become a part of it, to both groupings—those who assume they know God and his ways, and those who assume they are unworthy of such belonging. Jesus's message cuts both ways, honoring the outsider with inclusion and offending the insider with potential exclusion.

"Jesus, friend of sinners" embodies an evangelizing approach that honors outsiders in ways that may offend insiders, since the message urges both to turn (repent) in light of God's salvific intentions for one people, called out from many, in continual conversion and unity with Jesus, Savior and friend of all.

How does Jesus' example inform the way we represent the Image of God?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Romans 1:5-6

Through Him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

John 20:21

Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."

Luke 14:18-19

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because He has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Notes

***Apostleship* means "being sent," in a missionary sense. What did Jesus mean when He *sent* the early church "As the Father has sent me"?**

Worksheet: The Image of God on Mission

When Jesus came to Earth, He showed us what it truly means to be made in the Image of God and to reflect God's glory and reign. Scholars study **three perspectives of the Image**: the moral, the relational, and the functional. We reflect the **moral goodness of God**, the **relational love of God**, and the **functional service-dominion** over the Earth. Think of some ways that you can reflect God's image in each of those three ways.

Moral Goodness	Relational Love	Functional Dominion

Jesus' example of *Dominion* or *Kingship* is very different from the world's. How does Jesus change your idea of what it means to have "dominion"?

Section 2

Practical Applications of Mission

Week 5

Cultivating Gifts for Mission

Every Christian is blessed, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, to possess Spiritual Gifts that empower them to work together with other living stones of the Church to participate in God's redemptive mission.

These gifts have names that are familiar to us: service, leadership, prophecy, generosity. However, the biblical meaning and applications of these words are not always aligned with the world's definition of these words. To learn to cultivate these gifts in yourself and others, we must first evaluate the biblical foundations and purposes for these gifts.

Reading:

- "How the Body Works," an excerpt from *Body Life* by Ray C. Stedman
- An excerpt from "Spirit, Community, and Mission" by Richard E. Averbeck

Scripture Study:

- Ephesians 4:11−13
- 1 Corinthians 12:4−6
- Romans 12:4−6

Worksheet

- Understand Your Gifts

"How the Body Works," an excerpt from *Body Life* by Ray C. Stedman

When Paul speaks of the church as a body, He makes it clear that no one joins that body except by a new birth, through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no other way into this body. Once a person becomes a part of that body, every member has a contribution to make. As each member works at the task God has given Him to do, the whole body functions as intended.

When Paul describes the church as a building, He makes it clear that it is a living, growing building. Every Christian is a stone added to that building—a "living stone," as Peter says in his first letter (1 Pet 2:5). Each is a vital part of the great temple the Holy Spirit is building as a habitation for God. We can never understand the church until we grasp that picture.

When we compare present-day churches to the original blueprint, it is strikingly apparent that many deviations have been permitted that have been detrimental to the life of the church. Through the centuries, the church gradually turned from the simple provisions that made it such a powerful and compelling force in its early years, and terrible distortions entered into the church that continue to weaken the church today. Popular thinking fastened onto the church building—the physical stone-and-glass edifice—as the identifying symbol of the church. Emphasis was placed upon great imposing structures, massive ornate cathedrals with stained glass windows and flying buttresses.

Notes

Stedman, Ray C.. *Body Life: The Book That Inspired a Return to the Church's Real Meaning and Mission* (p. 86–103. Discovery House.

The scriptural concept that every believer is a priest before God was gradually lost, and a special class of super-Christians emerged who were looked to for practically everything, and who came to be called the "ministry." Somehow, the church lost sight of the concept, so clearly stated in Ephesians 4, that all Christians are "in the ministry." When the ministry was left to the "professionals," there was nothing left for the people to do other than come to church and listen.

They were told that it was their responsibility to bring the world into the church building to hear the pastor preach the gospel. Soon Christianity became little more than a Sunday-morning spectator sport, much like the definition of football: twenty-two men down on the field, desperately in need of rest, and twenty thousand in the grandstands, desperately in need of exercise.

The work of the ministry belongs to the entire body of believers, who should be equipped, guided, and encouraged by those who are gifted by God to expound and apply His Word with wisdom and power. The entire body has received gifts from the Spirit, and it is the task of those in the pastoral ministry to encourage the entire body to discover and exercise those gifts.

If we can recapture God's original strategy for the church, then we will again see churches that are modern extensions of the church of Acts. The trademarks of the true, living church of Jesus Christ are boldness, power, transformation, and love, lived out in act after act of Christian service. There is no place in this world more exciting to be than a church that operates as God designed it to!

Notes

An excerpt from "Spirit, Community, and Mission" by Richard E. Averbeck

The distribution of spiritual gifts is one way in which the Holy Spirit "tailor makes" spirituality for each of us as individuals. Much of what the Holy Spirit does in us we all hold in common, but the very nature of these gifts is that they make us different spiritually.

Of course, even the human spirit in each of us is unique and different, so the Spirit of God shapes each of us differently as He transforms our human spirit. We all retain our individuality in terms of personality and so on, even though we are all baptized into one Spirit and are called to manifest the same fruits of the Spirit, etc. Nevertheless, we each also have a personal mission for the Lord, which is tied to, among other things, the special giftedness which the Holy Spirit has granted each of us.

As the Apostle Paul argues, this is important to how we view ourselves and others in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12−26). We are each essential to each other in the body. We all need each other in order to grow well spiritually and function properly in our mission in the church and in the world. It is important to emphasize this bondedness here even as we focus on our uniqueness in the body of Christ. Paul thought it so necessary to keep this in mind that in the midst of what is arguably the most important passage on spiritual gifts in the Bible (1 Cor 12−14), He inserted one of the most magnificent digressions in the Bible. 1 Corinthians 13 is virtually a hymn about "love."

Notes

Stedman, Ray C.. *Body Life: The Book That Inspired a Return to the Church's Real Meaning and Mission* (p. 86–103. Discovery House.

Love is superior to all the spiritual gifts because without love we violate the bondedness that makes the gifts work together in a unified body of Christ. Because we are gifted differently, there are times when we express our love for God and people differently. We cannot be all things to all people.

Instead, we should be who we are designed to be, and offer that to God for Him to use as He sees fit ... the real focus must be upon presenting ourselves to the Holy Spirit for his transforming work to be carried out in our lives. We become truly "spiritual" only through the work of the Holy Spirit Himself, who orchestrates our lives, our relationships, and our circumstances to accomplish this in, among, and through us.

According to Scripture, there are three primary dimensions of the Holy Spirit's work in us, among us, and through us, respectively. First, the Holy Spirit works in our human spirit to transform us individually and personally into the image of Jesus Christ, from the inside out. Second, the Holy Spirit works among us to build us into a community that functions as a temple for the very presence of God that makes Him and His glory manifest in the church and in the world. Third, the Holy Spirit works through us as prophetic persons and communities through whom the world hears the gospel and sees its transforming effects in the lives of people and communities.

How do individuals' spiritual gifts contribute to God's mission?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Ephesians 4:11-13

So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

Romans 12:6-8

We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Scripture reveals several different gifts which might exist within the body. How do these gifts work together toward mission?

Notes

Worksheet: Understand Your Gifts

Look at the below list of gifts which, although not comprehensive, summarizes the gifts listed in this week's Scripture Study. Although all disciples grow by participating in each of the below activities, individuals are naturally gifted toward only one or two. Often, we expect our church's leaders to excel at all of them! **Circle one or two gifts that you are naturally drawn to.** Consider the gifts that are not your natural strength. How can you protect your weaknesses?

Planting	Apostles, or planters, are high on initiative; though sometimes low on execution. They get the ball rolling on big ideas.
Teaching	Teachers excel at simplifying complex topics. They're great at explaining and breaking things down.
Giving	Givers epitomize the "abundance" mindset. They're not worried about running out - they give freely of time and resources.
Evangelism	For evangelists, witnessing comes easily. They understand their own testimony and share the Gospel naturally.
Compassion	Compassionate people always default to mercy, forgiveness, and empathy. They can often see other perspectives.
Prophecy	Prophets can see the gaps between heaven and earth - injustice, evil, inequity. They call these things out and push for change.
Shepherding	Shepherds take care of the flock. They prioritize others' wellbeing and steer them in the right direction.
Service	The gift of service, sometimes translated as "ministry" in Scripture, pushes believers out of their in-group to seek and serve those outside of the church.
Leadership	The word used in Rom 12:8 also translates to "manage". Biblical leaders are capable organizers, administrators, and managers.

Jesus was the only man who could ever excel at *all* these gifts. How can we pursue mission with only our individual gifts?

Week 6

A Missional Culture

Pastor and theologian J.R. Woodward wrote that, "more than a strategy, vision, or plan, the unseen culture of a church powerfully shapes her ability to grow ... culture is like gravity. We never talk about it, except in physical classes. We don't include gravity in our weekly planning processes. No one gets up thinking about how gravity will affect their day. However, gravity impacts in everything we do, every day. Like gravity, the culture of a congregation can either pull people down to their base instincts or lift people up to their sacred potential."

This week will review theological foundations of culture-building in the church, and explore practical ideas for enhancing and transforming the culture of our ministry contexts.

Reading:

- "Paul's Mission As the Mission of the Church," an excerpt from *Paul's Missionary Methods* by Robert Plummer
- "How Culture Works," an excerpt from *Creating a Missional Culture* by J.R. Woodward

Scripture Study:

- 1 John 3:16–18
- 2 Corinthians 5:18–20
- Luke 4:43

Worksheet

- Challenge the Culture

"Paul's Mission As the Mission of the Church," an excerpt from *Paul's Missionary Methods* by Robert Plummer

Paul not only says the gospel has been received by the Corinthians but that it is something "in which" they now "stand" (1 Cor 15:1). This is an unusual way of speaking of a message. After watching the U.S. president's State of the Union address on TV, would you turn to the person next to you and say, "I stand in that message"? Would you walk out of church Sunday morning and comment to your spouse, "Let's stand in that sermon"?

Paul's description of the gospel as a realm in which the Corinthian Christians now stand reveals that the gospel is more than simply a set of true propositions (though certainly not less). Elsewhere in Paul's letters He speaks of the gospel as growing and bearing fruit (Col 1:6). Paul describes the gospel as making a triumphant march, in whose way He does not want to stand (1 Cor 9:12). The gospel arrives (like a traveler) to a congregation (1 Cor 14:36; 1 Thess 1:5).

Perhaps surprisingly, Paul usually seems to assume the missionary presence of his congregations rather than command it. Indeed, in many of Paul's letters, the addressed congregations or individuals are suffering for their faith (Gal 6:12; Phil 1:29−30; 1 Thess 2:14−16; 3:3−4; 2 Tim 1:8; 2:3; 3:12). Christians who are suffering because of their faith are clearly in no need of being told to make that faith known! It is as if Paul's congregations have fallen into the river of the gospel's flooding advance. The idea of not being carried downstream is unthinkable.

Notes

Plummer, Robert L.; Terry, John Mark. *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours* (pp. 48-94). InterVarsity Press.

20th Century theologian Roland Allen noted that Paul "intended his congregation to become at once a centre of light. . . . There is no particular virtue in . . . establishing a church in an important place unless the church established in the important place is a church possessed of sufficient life to be a source of light to the whole country round" or, in similar words, "St Paul did not go about as a missionary preacher merely to convert individuals: He went to establish churches from which the light might radiate throughout the whole country round."

Elsewhere Allen observed, "One other effect of St Paul's training is very clear. His converts became missionaries. . . . The Christians of the Four Provinces were certainly zealous in propagating the faith, and apparently needed no exhortation on the subject. . . . this was not really surprising. Christians receive the Spirit of Jesus, and the Spirit of Jesus is a missionary spirit, the Spirit of Him who came into the world to bring back lost souls to the Father." For Allen, part of the true character of the church is that the church is self-propagating.

Paul did envision his churches as having an active mission to those outside. . . . Paul did not understand his apostolic mission as fulfilled in the establishment of firmly founded communities, but in the independent spread of the Gospel from the communities He founded." If mission is to be understood and practiced as the mission of the church, each congregation has the opportunity to not only address its own needs and matters, but also to partake in God's vision and mission for this world until the day comes when Christ triumphantly gathers his saints "from east and west, and from north and south, and [they] recline at [his] table in the kingdom of God" (Luke 13:29).

Notes

"How Culture Works," an excerpt from *Creating a Missional Culture* by J.R. Woodward

Culture has particular narratives, institutions, rituals and ethics that shape us as people. The dominant culture seeks to squeeze us (the church) into its mold of market-style exchanges, manufactured desire, self-sufficiency and addiction. Paul tells us that the dominant culture shapes who we become. According to cultural theory, culture is largely made up of artifacts, language, rituals, ethics, institutions and narratives.

In other words, the language we live in, the artifacts that we use, the rituals we engage in, our approach to ethics, the institutions we are a part of and the narratives that we listen to have the power to shape our lives profoundly. If we hope to experience transformation, we need to develop a culture in the congregation that encourages people to live in the world for the sake of the world, without being of the world. When we grasp the power of culture, it gives both perspective and fresh hope for transformation.

Leaders of God's people uniquely contribute to the cultivation of a culture distinct and different from the dominant culture. For it is the role of Spirit-filled leaders to create a missional culture within the congregation. If we hope to create a missional culture, we must understand the power of culture in shaping the life of the congregation, and learn the basic elements of culture.

Notes

Woodward, JR. *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Forge Partnership Books) (p. 32–64). InterVarsity Press.

In addition, we must examine our very approach to leadership. For an individualistic approach to leadership often leads to an individualistic approach to discipleship, while a shared approach to leadership often leads to a communal approach to discipleship with an appreciation of the life-shaping power of culture. To change the ethos of the church we also need to change our approach to leadership.

Since we need to cultivate a learning, healing, welcoming, liberating and thriving environment to create a missional culture, we need to think about the kinds of leaders needed to cultivate these environments. No one leader can do this, hence the reason we need polycentric leadership … In Paul's letters, including the letter to the Ephesians, we learn how our environment powerfully shapes who we become. We also see how our approach to leadership is vital if we are to help the church grow to the maturity of Christ.

The beauty of the vision that Paul is laying out for us is that as we learn to develop a diverse team of leaders who together can cultivate communities to be more like Christ. As Markus Barth points out in his commentary on Ephesians, "The whole church is the clergy appointed by God for a ministry to and for the world." Paul tells us that when each of the equippers are equipping well, the whole body will grow up to the full stature of Christ.

What role do formal and informal leaders play in the missional church?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

1 John 3:16-18

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

2 Corinthians 5:18-20

All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

Luke 4:43

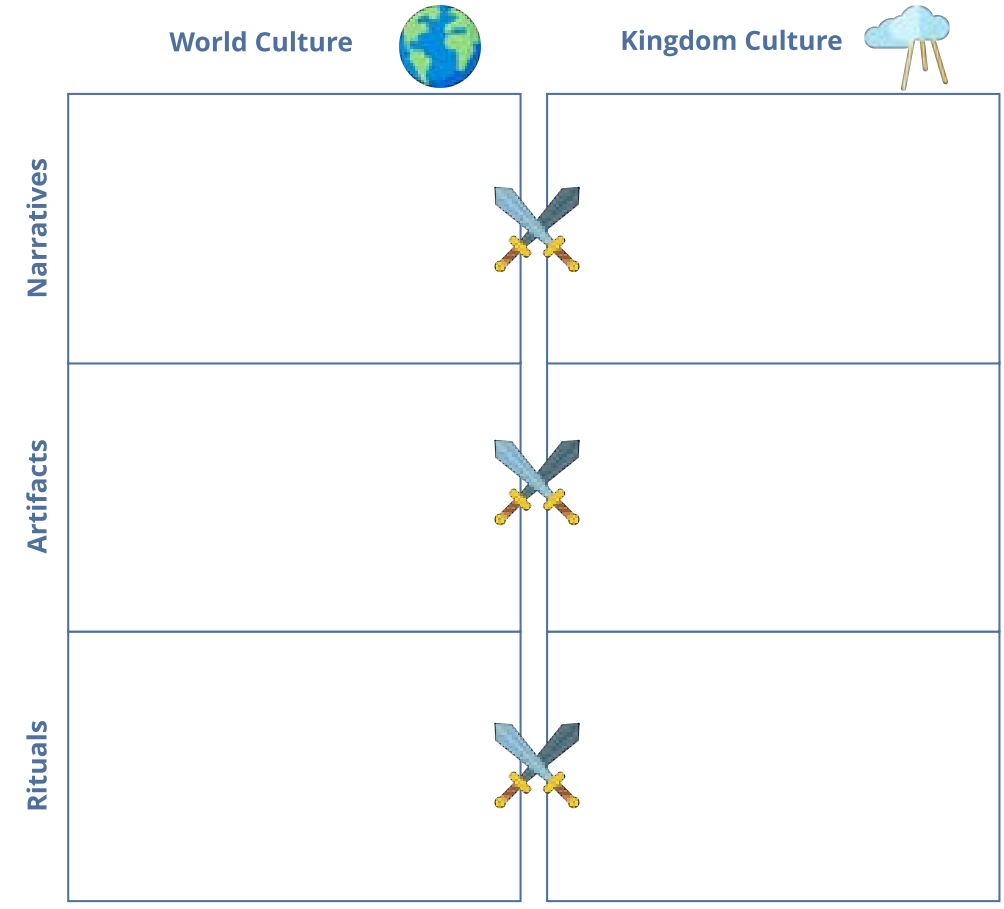
But He said, "I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent."

Notes

What does it mean that God "gave us the ministry of reconciliation"?

Worksheet: Challenge the Culture

Culture is shaped by narratives (stories we tell), artifacts (symbols), and rituals (things we do as a matter of tradition or habit). For each of those three, thing of an example that exists in the world: e.g. what narratives are prominent in the world's culture? Then, think about a corresponding narrative, artifact, or ritual related to the Kingdom's culture that challenges the world's culture.



What narratives, artifacts, or rituals in your life and environment (e.g. work, home, school) can you challenge?

Week 7

Raising Missional Leaders

Leaders cultivating more leaders is a cornerstone of both biblical growth as well as a well-understood best practice for sustainable leadership. Harvard Business professor John Kotter wrote in his seminal book *Leading Change* that, "A guiding coalition made up only of managers - even superb managers who are wonderful people - will cause major change efforts to fail."

Transformation can only occur through the cooperative efforts of many. In order for leaders to cultivate missional culture in their environments, they must learn to develop those around them into missional leaders as well.

Reading:

- "Reproduction," an excerpt from *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert E. Coleman
- An excerpt from "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the 70" by Kenneth Nehrbass and Jane Rhoades

Scripture Study:

- 2 Timothy 2:1−3
- Colossians 1:25−28
- Exodus 18:21−22

Worksheet

- Developing Disciples Practically

"Reproduction," an excerpt from *The Master Plan of Evangelism* by Robert E. Coleman

Jesus intended for the disciples to produce his likeness in and through the church being gathered out of the world. Thus his ministry in the Spirit would be duplicated manyfold by his ministry in the lives of his disciples. Through them and others like them it would continue to expand in an ever-enlarging circumference until the multitudes might know in a similar way the opportunity that they had known with the Master. By this strategy, the conquest of the world was only a matter of time and their faithfulness to his plan.

It all comes back to his disciples. They were the vanguard of his enveloping movement. “Through their word” He expected others to believe in Him (John 17:20), and these in turn to pass the word along to others, until in time the world might know who He was and what He came to do (John 17:21, 23). His whole evangelistic strategy—indeed, the fulfillment of his very purpose in coming into the world, dying on the cross, and rising from the grave—depended on the faithfulness of his chosen disciples to this task. It did not matter how small the group was to start with so long as they reproduced and taught their disciples to reproduce.

This was the way his church was to win—through the dedicated lives of those who knew the Savior so well that his Spirit and method constrained them to tell others. As simple as it may seem, this was the way the gospel would conquer. He had no other plan. Leadership was the emphasis. Jesus had already demonstrated by his own ministry that the deluded masses were ripe for the harvest, but without spiritual shepherds to lead them, how could they ever be won?

Notes

Coleman, Robert E.. *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (p. 99–105). Baker Publishing Group.

Here finally is where we must all evaluate the contribution that our life and witness is making to the supreme purpose of Him who is the Savior of the world. Are those who have followed us to Christ now leading others to Him and teaching them to make disciples like ourselves?

Note, it is not enough to rescue the perishing, though this is imperative; nor is it sufficient to build up newborn babes in the faith of Christ, although this, too, is necessary if the firstfruit is to endure; in fact, it is not sufficient just to get them out winning souls, as commendable as this work may be. What really counts in the ultimate perpetuation of our work is the faithfulness with which our converts go and make leaders out of their converts, not simply more followers.

Surely we want to win our generation for Christ, and to do it now, but this is not enough. Our work is never finished until it has assured its continuation in the lives of those redeemed by the Evangel. The test of any work of evangelism thus is not what is seen at the moment, or in the conference report, but in the effectiveness with which the work continues in the next generation.

Similarly, the criteria on which a church should measure its success is not how many new names are added to the role nor how much the budget is increased, but rather how many Christians are actively winning souls and training them to win the multitudes.

Notes

An excerpt from "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the 70" by Kenneth Nehrbass and Jane Rhoades

The sending of the seventy may initially seem like the disciples were tossed into the deep-end without a significant amount of prior training. Their learning task, after all, was quite ambiguous. What did Jesus expect them to do? But those who had spent a year or two with Jesus had experienced first-hand Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of God and had observed the Lord in action in a variety of settings.

Jesus described images the disciples could relate to from their lived experience, such as harvests and sheep and even the cross; and He drew on their own religious heritage experiences and knowledge when He gave instructions about austerity and self-sacrifice. He effectively used their previous experiences and knowledge. Further, the tasks He gave them for the internship (healing and exorcisms) fit within their expectations of the impending kingdom of God.

Ordinary people—common folks—and not just the twelve, were transformed into ministers. The point is, people were sent out regardless of ability or education. Jesus did not give them a spiritual gift inventory before sending them out.

There was no alternative assignment—they did not have the choice to say, "Jesus. Let me sit this out. I prefer to do a term paper instead." This act of appointing seventy was, in fact, a means of reframing their concept of identity and role. Who were the seventy? They fulfilled many roles, from emissary to healer to prophet to priest. But they also remained disciples—learners.

Notes

Nehrbass, Keith and Jane Rhoades. "Jesus' Use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy: Implications for Ministry Practicums." *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 1 (2021): 74–88.

Jesus confidently sent the seventy out on their experiential learning activity into a demanding location with expectations for a challenging model of ministry. Jesus' use of experiential learning provided unique components of experiential learning for our consideration. Although Jesus was a master teacher, He did not depend solely on His powerful rhetoric.

Jesus' use of experience demonstrates the power of experiential service for learning. Combined with preparatory modeling and teaching, support and feedback for action and reflection, and planned debriefing and evaluation of learning, a ministry internship can extend learning beyond the Sunday school or sanctuary and into the realm of the real world.

Luke records Jesus' joy when the disciples returned full of enthusiasm and insight into how God used them in their outreach (Luke 10:21). Jesus expressed his own enthusiasm and joy for what his disciples learned out in the field and the part the Father played in their learning process (Luke 10:21−22).

How can we learn from Jesus' example to raise up more disciples?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

2 Timothy 2:1–3

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. Join with me in suffering, like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

Colossians 1:25–28

I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness— the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the Lord's people. To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

Exodus 18:21-22

But select capable men from all the people—men who fear God, trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain—and appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you; the simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter, because they will share it with you.

Why is it important for the mission of God that we raise up other leaders?

Notes

Worksheet: Developing Disciples Practically

In their article "Jesus' use of Experiential Learning in the Sending of the Seventy," theologians Kenneth Nehrbass and Jane Rhoades propose that the "Joplin-Linhart" model of learning development is an effective tool to conduct practical discipleship. **Imagine that you are mentoring or discipling a new believer** and want them to learn about service. **Using the four step process below, explain how you would help them learn about biblical service.**

Stage	Description	Your Example
Framing	What information or knowledge do they need to begin the learning experience ?	
Support	How will they be supported? E.g. group learning, prayer, side-saddling	
Experience	What activity will they execute or engage with to learn the lesson?	
Reflection	How do you evaluate success? What did they do well, and where do they have room to grow?	

How have you done mentoring or discipleship in the past? What experiences have been especially useful in your own growth?

Week 8

Growing Mission

How do we measure mission? If mission is the purpose of the church, how should we measure the church? Scholars and practitioners alike have wrestled with this question for centuries. This section will challenge you to explore new perspectives for understanding ministry success as the cultivation of spiritual maturity in the people around you.

The content in this section will push you. It will make you think. On the other side of that challenge, you will be equipped to apply everything you've learned throughout this book to pursue a ministry of mission that is biblical and successful.

Reading:

- "The Metrics...," an excerpt from *The Gospel-Driven Church* by Jared C. Wilson
- "The Perfect Measurement," an excerpt from *The Measure of a Healthy Church* by Gene Getz

Scripture Study:

- Philippians 1:9–11
- Matthew 25:20–21
- Ephesians 4:14–16

Worksheet

- Food for Thought

"The Metrics...," an excerpt from *The Gospel-Driven Church* by Jared C. Wilson

What are the signs of actual fruitfulness? And how do we know our church is a growing part of something God is blessing? Let's look at some things that may or may not accompany a genuine move of God, what we can call marks of neutrality.

The first mark of neutrality is a steady accumulation of decisions or responses during Sunday invitations. People coming to know Christ is always a good thing, no matter what kind of church they're in and no matter how they hear the gospel. But the "effectiveness" of the gospel message does not sanctify any and every evangelistic method. A simple counting of "decisions" does not prove genuine fruitfulness. A genuine decision is itself the first tiny bud of life that will one day ripen into fruit.

Second, don't put your faith in large attendance numbers. It wearies me to repeat this, but because American evangelicals love bigness, we must keep saying it: having a lot of people coming to your church is not a sign of faithfulness. It is a neutral sign. A lot of people coming to a church can be a good thing, of course. There is nothing inherently wrong with a big church! But there is nothing inherently right about it either.

My point is that Jesus repelled just as many as He attracted. And He did not base his ministry efforts on drawing the big crowds. When we come to the end of his earthly ministry, his closest disciples were one fewer than when they started—a net loss.

Notes

Wilson, Jared C.. *The Gospel-Driven Church: Uniting Church Growth Dreams with the Metrics of Grace* (p. 44–67). Zondervan.

The Bible does not measure spiritual health in terms of size. It's not about bigness. It's largely about transformed character. Do shepherds count sheep? Of course they do. Counting is not unimportant. It's one sign to help a shepherd note problems with his flock. But it's a blunt measurement. More important still is feeding the sheep, protecting the sheep, and making sure the sheep are healthy.

The biblical marker of success is never high attendance or a focus on decision-producing. That doesn't exist in the pages of the New Testament. What we see is faithfulness. And out of that faithfulness we sometimes see fruit, arriving "in season," and other times we do not, when fruit is "out of season" (2 Tim 4:2).

The church is not called to be successful by attaining certain numbers or meeting a preset standard of growth, but we are called to be faithful. And that faithfulness will lead to fruitful growth. There may be seasons—hopefully many!—when your fruit leads to numeric growth.

But the fruit of faithfulness, according to the Bible, is deeper discipleship, maturing in Christ, and a more loving reach outward in service to our neighbors. There may be times when this fruit and numeric success go hand in hand, but that is no ready guarantee for faithfulness. What we need is a new scorecard.

Notes

"The Perfect Measurement," an excerpt from *The Measure of a Healthy Church* by Gene Getz

The term "measure" is translated from the Greek word *metron* and refers to God's standard for evaluating and measuring the maturity level of both the universal church and local assemblies. Local churches are, of course, to be the visible expressions of the universal church and are the only way we can measure corporate maturity.

It's also very clear that the ultimate standard is Jesus Christ Himself, particularly the way He lived during the days He walked on earth as the incarnate Son of God. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul defined maturity in a corporate or collective sense. God's plan is that "we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

I believe Paul used this phrase "perfect man" as a metaphor to illustrate that all members of Christ's body are to reflect the perfect Son of God, the "man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5) who "became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14).

As men and women who are followers of Christ, we are to be mature reflections of God's perfect son, Jesus. Although this is a personal exhortation, Paul made it clear in his Ephesian letter that purity is to be a hallmark of the Christian community. As we have seen, we are to become "a radiant church" that is "holy and blameless" (Eph 5:27). The apostle Paul probably had in mind both eternal and earthly perspectives for the church when He penned the words "attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Notes

Getz, Gene A.. *The Measure of a Healthy Church: How God Defines Greatness in a Church*. Moody Publishers.

But as He continued to describe God's plan for the church, He focused more specifically on local expressions of the universal body of Christ. Consequently, Paul stated that churches in the here and now will mature and become doctrinally stable.

Its committed members won't be "infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching" (Eph 4:14). Mature believers know what they believe as well as how to live. They speak "the truth in love" to one another—and as they do, they "grow up into Him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Eph 4:15). In other words, as a local church grows and matures, its committed core and those who are newcomers to the faith and immature will become more and more like the perfect man, Jesus Christ. Together, they will reflect His image.

It's God's will that when mature believers live as they should, Christians at various levels of growth, from "infants" to "adolescents," will become a part of the committed and unified core, and together they will more and more reflect the "perfect man," as they grow into the "fullness of Christ." How are Christ's attitudes of servanthood, humility, and sacrifice reflected in the church?

As a leader engaged in ministry, how do you define successful growth?

Notes

Take time to study the following verses in context. What do they tell us about *missio Dei*? Can you think of other instances in which Scripture reveals God's mission to us?

Philippians 1:9–11

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

Matthew 25:20–21

"The man who had received five bags of gold brought the other five. 'Master,' He said, 'you entrusted me with five bags of gold. See, I have gained five more.' His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'"

Ephesians 4:14-16

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ. From Him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

What is spiritual maturity, and how do we recognize it in a church body?

Notes

Worksheet: Food for Thought

This worksheet will present a sampling of questions from Pastor Gene Getz's book *The Measure of a Healthy Church*. Consider these questions in the context of your ministry domain: your small group, your service team, or your church itself. **Write a number 1 through 5 to answer the question.**

Question	1 - 5
To what extent do the people in our church realize how important they are as a functioning group—not just as functioning individuals?	
what extent do the people in our church understand that true disciples of Jesus are committed to obeying everything He has taught us?	
To what extent are people in our church reflecting the fruit of the Spirit in their relationships with one another—"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23)?	
To what extent do the people in our church understand and believe that salvation is an absolutely free gift and cannot be earned by good works?	
To what extent do the people in our church avoid judgmental attitudes and accept one another just as Christ has accepted them?	
To what extent are the people in our church committed to doing good works *because* of their salvation?	
To what extent do the people in our church pray for one another—and themselves—when facing difficult circumstances?	
To what extent are the people in our church being exposed to the total message of the Bible?	
To what extent are all members of our church committed to developing the same qualities in their lives that are outlined for spiritual leaders?	

If you understand missional leadership as the cultivation of maturity in those around you, does that change the way you lead today?

APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

December 4, 2023

Conner Brew and Thomas Cook

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-890 DMIN Missional Leadership Instruction & Evaluation

Dear Conner Brew and Thomas Cook,

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 that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because

(3) evidence-based practice projects are considered quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

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

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

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

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

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IRB APPROVAL LETTER

December 4, 2023

Conner Brew and Thomas Cook

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY23-24-890 DMIN Missional Leadership Instruction & Evaluation

Dear Conner Brew and Thomas Cook,

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 that your study does not meet the definition of human subjects research. This means you may begin your project with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study/project is not considered human subjects research because

(3) evidence-based practice projects are considered quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46.102(l).

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

For a PDF of your IRB letter, click on your study number in the My Studies card on your Cayuse dashboard. Next, click the Submissions bar beside the Study Details bar on the Study Details page. Finally, click Initial under Submission Type and choose the Letters tab toward the bottom of the Submission Details page.

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

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

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office