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ABSTRACT

INCREASING DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT: BUILDING A FIRMER SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION FOR LEADING TO MORE ACTIVE MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT

by

Anthony L. Bell

The purpose of this study was to evaluate perceived discipleship commitment expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions that occurred in participants in the twelve-week Firm Foundation study. The research measured the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation handbook published by Injoy. Changes of self-perception in individuals' discipleship commitment were evaluated using a researcher-designed survey. The method utilized was a preexperimental one-shot case study with control group. Significant positive change occurred as a result of the treatment. Findings reveal the Firm Foundation material as an effective tool in transforming participants' discipleship commitment perception, and anecdotal evidence points to promising increased ministry involvement.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
INCREASING DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT: BUILDING A FIRMER SPIRITUAL
FOUNDATION FOR LEADING TO MORE ACTIVE MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT

presented by

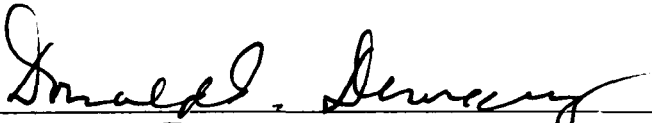
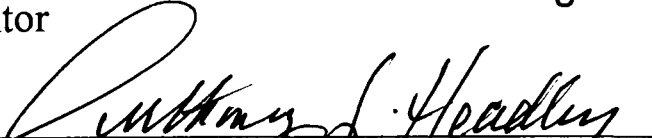

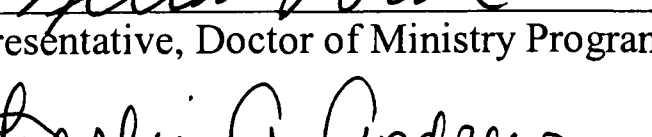
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TO MORE ACTIVE MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Anthony L. Bell

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CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Context

Central United Methodist Church (UMC) is a downtown church located in the heart of Asheville, North Carolina. Asheville is an eclectic city with a population of over seventy thousand people; however, several bedroom communities seamlessly merge together generating a size and feel of a community of 150,000. Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, Asheville is a charming area drawing people from all over the world. In the spring of 2007, publications recognized Asheville as the number one city in which to live out of a list of the top one hundred places in the United States. Some publications refer to Asheville as the “Paris of the South.” The allure and cultural appeal result in sizeable numbers of retirees, professionals, and young families choosing to settle in the area.

Central traces its historical roots to Francis Asbury as the church’s location was one of Asbury’s circuit stops. The church continues ministry from the same location since its origin. While many downtown churches have struggled to stay open or have relocated to different areas of their respective communities, Central UMC has experienced resurgence over the last ten to fifteen years. Central is a regional church, strong and vibrant, known for having a heart for missions. Until fifteen years ago, Central had been dealing with issues common to downtown churches, but with the leadership of a strong senior pastor and leadership team, the church began to turn around and started growing. At the same time, the city of Asheville was revitalizing the downtown area. The transformation of both the downtown businesses and community, along with Central’s renewed ministry approaches resulted in the beginning of a growth phase for the church.

An outward missional focus continues to propel the movement.

The current senior pastor of Central UMC, who arrived in July 1998, has continued the legacy of quality leadership that casts a compelling vision, motivates people to be a part of something significant, and carries on the strong missional emphasis. The slogan of the church is, “A Community for Christ in the Center of the City.”

When I began my doctoral studies, I was the senior pastor of a United Methodist Church in central Illinois. Positive ministry experiences enlivened St. Timothy UMC. Equipping ministries undergirded significant change. However, as my studies progressed at Asbury Theological Seminary, I began experiencing a strong call toward staff ministry in a large church that would utilize my spiritual gifts and passion more effectively. My call into pastoral ministry never wavered during this time; rather, further clarity of vision unfolded and directed me more specifically in living out my life for Christ. The learning from class experiences and reading numerous books impacted me greatly. The biblical aspects of equipping people for ministry based on their gifts rang out loud and clear. I knew I had to obey God’s leading.

As time came for reappointment, two factors contributed to my arrival at Central Church. The first and most significant event occurred when I got married in 2001. Conversations with my wife revealed a desire to return to her home state of North Carolina with the next pastoral appointment. The second factor involved the strong calling toward staff ministry in a large church. I took the appropriate steps in seeking transfer to a different United Methodist conference, and in so doing, I specifically requested to be an associate pastor. The process of appointing associates in the Western North Carolina Conference of the UMC allowed for interviews between churches and

potential staff. What drew me to Central as my top choice initially was the senior pastor, also the overall ministry of the church. I received the appointment to Central UMC, as one of the associate pastors, in July 2003.

The pastoral staff at Central has a vision of making disciples and helping people grow in their discipleship commitment. Such a vision constitutes the essence of my call to ministry. Central Church is an exciting place to serve as many people seek authentic and significant ministry. Further, Central's heart for missions provides a contagious atmosphere as it reaches out to people in ministry on a variety of levels.

In my four years on staff at Central UMC, God has been growing and stretching me. Clarity of call continues to take shape and added responsibilities emerge. In January 2007 I became the executive pastor at Central. The new role utilizes my strengths and understanding of leadership where I do leadership development and supervision with the ministry staff. Seeing the various facets of my doctoral studies come into play as the future unfolds is both exciting and rewarding. Still, at the very core of my call to ministry is a heart for discipleship. People growing in their relationship with Christ and in their personal discipleship commitment stirs my heart more than anything else.

As stated earlier, Central resonates with ministry possibilities and energy. Such factors contribute to momentum over the years and have led to significant growth. Nevertheless, with many areas of strength, Central UMC remains very much a "traditional" United Methodist church. Membership is slightly more than three thousand, yet attendance at the three regular weekly worship services is around one thousand. Individuals actively participating in ministry is no higher, percentage wise, than in most other congregations. In spite of positive ministry experiences and multiple ministry

“programs” the maintenance and spectator mind-sets are alive and well among many in the church.

The Problem

A church the size of Central could not function without the leadership and involvement of both laity and staff; nevertheless, like most churches a small percentage of people represent those actively involved in ministry. Observation reveals a disproportionate amount of ministry responsibilities among active leaders while a large segment of the congregation participates rather minimally. Calvin Miller describes the condition in this manner: “Often a company or a church consists of a few hassled, harried leaders and a great many take-it-easy followers” (158). Central Church is very much staff led, and the viewpoint among some people reveals an attitude that the laity simply comes alongside the staff to accomplish certain tasks. Further, the mind-set among some of the administration and leadership bodies embraces the notion that lay ministry consists of joining the church membership and giving financially to support the budget.

The lack of participation in ministry by church members and attendees is not a new phenomenon. Seeing the same few people carrying out most of the work of the ministry unfortunately pervades churches. The “traditional” attitude of the “people being the recipients of ministry” while the pastors are primarily hired to care for their spiritual needs exists here (McManus 30). Central’s image of being a large, growing church, does not lessen the challenges of this ministry mind-set as most of its growth comes from transfers from other traditional mainline churches.

Increasing discipleship commitment and assimilating people into the life and ministry of the church are some of the most significant areas in need of improvement. In

order to grow people in their discipleship commitment and assimilate and empower them more effectively, the church needs to get to the heart of people's understanding of what the church is about and how each of them plays a role (Phillips 95).

From the beginning of the New Testament Church, ministry was about people using what they had to offer in service for God rather than it being a "spectator sport," where laity are the recipients of ministry benefits while the clergy do all the work. The images in Scripture reveal that each believer plays an important role in the ministry needs of their community. The early Church, when at its best, functioned based on the gifts of each believer. Every follower of Christ received a call to ministry and spiritual gifts to enable them to fulfill their calling (Robinson 19). Paul certainly affirmed in 1 Corinthians that the church is much healthier and stronger when all the members of the body of Christ are working together in ministry according to their gifts and strengths.

Central UMC is a church where preaching and the Sunday morning worship are strongly emphasized. Quality worship services along with numerous available ministries and programs draw from many miles away people desiring such a community of faith. A wide demographic age range exemplifies the congregational makeup as young and old alike are well represented. While the old ministry mind-set is clearly evident, the church is at an opportune time to assess and develop its ability to increase discipleship commitment and to equip and release the laity for ministry.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate perceived discipleship commitment expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions that occurred in participants in the twelve-week Firm Foundation study. I implemented the twelve-week discipleship course,

Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ (Firm Foundation), at Central United Methodist Church. The project targeted new and/or potential members as well as existing members in order that they might grow in their understanding, experience, and attitude towards discipleship commitment. The hope was that as participants developed a firmer spiritual foundation and discovered the important role each layperson plays in the body of Christ they would be compelled to act upon their perception of their own discipleship commitment and take steps toward more active involvement in the ministry of Central Church. The survey data aided the evaluation of the effectiveness of the twelve-week Firm Foundation course.

Description of the Project

The project was a twelve-week group experience implementing the Firm Foundation material published by Injoy. The project goal sought to increase participants' perception of their discipleship commitment in hopes that individuals' transformation would lead towards more active involvement in the ministry of the church. While the Firm Foundation material indicates it may be most suitable for one-on-one discipling applications of persons, I desired to evaluate the effectiveness of the course material based upon utilizing a group application process.

Central's need to offer a next-level course for people in the life of the church propelled this project; however, the vision for utilizing this course was born out of God's mandate that every believer should take part in fulfilling the mission to make disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). Being a disciple of Jesus Christ epitomizes a lifelong journey in which people become more Christlike and live out their purpose and calling. The Firm Foundation material provides an avenue for individuals' personal and faith growth while

encouraging further discipleship commitment. Participants see their theological foundations strengthened, begin thinking about ministry from a different perspective, grow in their relationship with God through Jesus Christ more fully, realize the importance of their connectedness to the life of the church, discover their spiritual gifts, and, finally, are challenged to put their learning into action within the body of Christ.

John R. Mott, who was never ordained, addresses this topic:

Lay initiative, sense of responsibility, and full-hearted participation are necessary to ensure the proper religious development of the layperson themselves; that is to say, to ensure growth in Christian knowledge, in faith, in Christ like character, in genuine serviceableness to others, and, as a result, in contagious influence and propagating power. (44)

Further, Richard J. Foster says, “Conversion without discipleship provides no rationale or motive for moving forward in Christ-likeness” (21). People come to church for a reason, and if the church does not help them take steps to grow in their discipleship so they can go out into the world to offer the hope of Christ, then the body of Christ shrinks from its responsibility.

Attending a service with a large gathering of believers two to three times a month does not ensure the kind of spiritual growth necessary to equip people for ministry. No matter how inspirational these services may be, people still need to be connected with brothers and sisters in Christ in a smaller way, looking at the deeper issues of faith in order for them to begin to see the importance of being involved in ministry. This Firm Foundation course provides such an opportunity, where for many it will be a beginning point for them to think about ministry from a different perspective. One additional advantage of participating in this study will be the experience of gathering with other believers in a nonthreatening environment, whereby individuals will share from their own

life experience in a small group setting. People will learn from the course material, the facilitator, each other, and they will encounter the powerful nature of being connected to the community of Christ. Participants will be encouraged to get connected with other groups after the completion of this course in order that further progress in discipleship commitment could be realized.

Evaluation of this study will determine if this material will be used on an ongoing basis for new members or anyone interested in further discipleship and lay ministry involvement. This study was not intended to be all inclusive but a beginning point for being more intentional in increasing discipleship commitment at Central UMC.

Research Questions

The following questions aided and guided the direction and evaluation of this project.

Research Question 1

How do participants perceive their level of discipleship commitment as expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions?

Research Question 2

What was the change of self-perception of the discipleship commitment expressed in the spiritual and behavioral dimensions subsequent to the study?

Research Question 3

What aspects of the Firm Foundation course were associated with the perceived changes?

Definition of Terms

The definitions that follow seek to clarify the focus of this research project.

Discipleship Commitment

Discipleship commitment is pledging and surrendering one's life to be a follower of Christ. An initial decision is made to live day by day under the influence of Jesus Christ in all aspects of one's life. Such a resolution results in a life-changing and lifelong process whereby an individual chooses to be a lifelong learner of the ways of Christ. More than just a determination to learn, discipleship commitment involves both spiritual and behavioral dimensions as people put their faith into action and live a lifestyle compatible with that of Jesus Christ. A disciple of Christ invests oneself in being both a hearer and doer of God's Word. Using one's spiritual gifts, natural talents, and resources for the purposes of God and for the building up of the body of Christ not only represents being a good steward but also epitomizes discipleship commitment.

Firm Foundation

Firm Foundation is a twelve-week study published by Injoy. The title of the handbook describes the material, Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ. The curriculum covers both the spiritual and behavioral dimensions of the Christian life. The basics of the Christian faith, the importance of being connected to the body of Christ, and the encouragement to discover one's spiritual gifts in order to put them into action emerge as the key elements of this work (see Appendix A).

Ministry

For the purposes of this study, the terms "ministry" and "ministry involvement" are rooted in the biblical concepts of "preparing God's people for works of service" (Eph. 4:12, NIV) and the "priesthood of all believers" (1 Pet. 2:9). Ministry is the responsibility of all the people of God, not merely the "hired professionals." Every believer in Jesus and

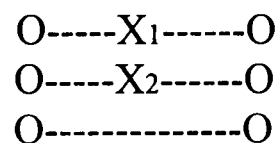
member of the body of Christ has been gifted and called into service for the kingdom of God. Areas of ministry involvement include all acts of service accomplished for Christ's sake, whether inside or outside the church walls. When people use their spiritual gifts for building up the body of Christ and glorifying God, they are participating in ministry. Generally, people sense more fruitfulness and fulfillment when they work in the areas of their giftedness. Occasionally, however, people will reach out to others to accomplish the mission and purpose of God even in areas not associated with their strengths.

Transformation

Transformation can easily be defined as the process of being changed. For this study, a spiritual dimension adds clarity to the term. Robert M. Mulholland lends further insight to the definition: “[t]he intentional process of being conformed to the image of Christ as the result of the power of God’s grace” (27). As participants grow in their understanding, experience, and attitude towards discipleship commitment, they will encounter a different way of looking at their lives, their relationship with God, and their own desire to be involved in ministry. This change is indeed transformational as they are in process of becoming more Christlike.

Methodology

The methodology of the project was a preexperimental one-shot case study with a control group, diagrammed as follows:



The “Os” represent pre- and posttest surveys completed by respondents. The “Xs” represent the implementation of the twelve-week study Firm Foundation. The project

utilized a researcher-designed instrument that measured the participants' perceived level of discipleship commitment before and after taking the twelve-week course (see Appendix A). Two treatment groups were established to gather a larger sampling. One group met on Wednesday evenings and the second group met on Saturday evenings (see Appendix G). A control group added further evaluation of the effectiveness of the treatment.

Population and Sample

The population of this project included adults, age 21 and over, who voluntarily committed to taking the Firm Foundation study at Central United Methodist Church. The sample for the Wednesday treatment group consisted of thirty people, while the Saturday treatment group involved twenty-seven individuals. Participants ranged from church members who had recently joined Central to long-time members. In addition, new attendees of Central comprised the treatment groups, as did people who had been coming for a few years but had not yet joined. The voluntary process for gathering treatment participants resulted in a collection of people representing a significant cross section of the congregation. For the control group, twenty persons were selected at random and asked to complete surveys to aid in the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation study.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the Firm Foundation twelve-week study (see Appendix A). The course was implemented sequentially in the spring of 2007, with two classes per week covering the same lesson material (see Appendix G). The Firm Foundation curriculum covered key theological basics of the

Christian faith, discipleship, and lay ministry involvement. Throughout the course, the foundational understanding of the importance of followers of God being actively involved in the body of Christ became clearly evident.

The dependent variables of this study included the spiritual and behavioral changes experienced by the participants in relation to perceived discipleship commitment. The hope was that those who participated in the twelve-week course would experience transformation in their understanding, experience, and attitude because of the implementation of the Firm Foundation material. As a result, individuals would act upon this change of perception and become more actively involved in the ministries of the church based on their spiritual gifts, natural talents, and resources.

The intervening variables that might have influenced outcomes include age, number of years attending Central UMC, and the level of ministry involvement at the beginning of the study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

A researcher-designed survey was the primary instrument used to measure the effects of the twelve-week Firm Foundation study. The survey included thirty statements where participants rated their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale. Results from each of the twelve lessons were calculated based on the two to three questions established per lesson (see Appendix H). In addition, two larger categories established further evaluation data: The spiritual dimension included analyzing lessons one through seven of the Firm Foundation material collectively. The same method allowed for lessons eight through twelve to establish a behavioral dimension. Both the spiritual and behavioral dimensions contributed analysis for any change in perceived

discipleship commitment. Finally, an overall test score revealed results from the entire survey.

The pre- and posttest surveys were identical with the exception of one addition to the posttest, which invited participants to share any insights or learning they would take from the course and how that would impact their lives. This question provided additional anecdotal information for further reflection and evaluation.

The first survey (pretest) was given at the beginning of the study to serve as a baseline on the participants' perceived level of discipleship commitment. After finishing the twelve-week course, respondents completed the posttest survey. Administration of both surveys for the treatment groups took place within the class setting. The pretests were completed prior to distributing the Firm Foundation handbooks at an introductory session the week before the study began (see Appendix G). The posttests were completed at the end of the final session of both Wednesday and Saturday groups. For anyone unable to attend the final session, the posttest was e-mailed to individuals, requesting they complete and return it to the church office. The results were tabulated at a later time.

The control group pre- and posttests were completed by volunteers at the church. People, randomly recruited and individually asked, filled out the survey while on campus. The process of recruiting and collecting twenty control group surveys encompassed a two-week period. Establishing a list of control group names enabled the same process for completion of the posttest twelve weeks later. The results were tabulated at a later time.

Delimitations

Central United Methodist Church's need for a next-level course offering initiated this project. Central had a four-week class for newcomers that offered basic information

about the church and Methodist history and doctrines; however, it lacked a follow-up course that connected people to the life and ministry of the church and that would ground them theologically. This study focused on Central's congregational participants' perceived level of discipleship commitment. The research project involving the implementation of the Firm Foundation twelve-week course began on 31 January 2007 and concluded on 28 April 2007. The study measured the discipleship commitment perception of respondents at the outset as well as the change of perception that occurred as a result of the treatment. Fifty-seven adults in two different groups made up the population of the Firm Foundation study. Twenty people comprised the control group.

The twelve-lesson handbook, Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ, was the selected curriculum for this study. An analysis of quantitative measures was completed through the researcher-designed survey (see Appendixes B, C, and D). Anecdotal comments added additional insights regarding the course.

Generalizability

Direct implications of this study are for purposes of Central United Methodist Church. Generalizations about other churches could be possible yet must be done with caution, for each congregation has its own unique characteristics and qualities.

Overview of the Study

This study attempted to show a positive correlation between the Firm Foundation study and increased discipleship commitment. Chapter 2 lays the biblical and theological groundwork for understanding the ministry of the laity as it pertains to discipleship and ministry involvement. The research design is presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 reports the research findings, while Chapter 5 summarizes and interprets the research findings.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Discipleship commitment and ministry involvement are inseparable. Followers of Christ are called for a purpose to use what they have been given for the glory of God and for the building up of God's kingdom. God desires every believer to be a minister for Jesus Christ and to be equipped to minister (Snyder, Liberating the Church 17).

In this chapter, my biblical foundations for theology of ministry are presented. An overview begins with a brief look at the Old Testament, followed by further examination in the New Testament as I consider several concepts, especially Ephesians 4. Next, a brief overview of church history lends perspective to this topic. Finally, the condition and implications for today's church concludes this section of the study.

Biblical Overview

The following section provides a biblical framework for this research project.

Old Testament

From the beginning God desired relationship with his people. Humans are created in the image of God and made to be relational people, yet with Adam and Eve's sin came separation. The story of the Old Testament reveals God reaching out to creation. The people of God are constantly wrestling with issues of obedience and remaining faithful to the Creator. When they are in right relationship with God, things go well, but as time passes, the people lose their focus and rely on themselves more than on God. Eventually, the people find they are far from God, and often only a tragic event or crisis turns them to see their need for depending on the One who made them. These difficult moments lead to

brokenness. Repentance often follows. Reconciliation emerges. Finally, the people are seeking God and growing again. All is well until the cycle repeats itself.

God's concern with the entire world reveals his redemptive purpose. The Lord approached Abraham and offered a covenant relationship whereby "all peoples on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). Through Abraham and his descendants, God's character and offer for redemption were revealed. Time passes and the children of God were enslaved in Egypt. God's power and deliverance were once again made known as Israel celebrated salvation from bondage (Exod. 4-14). Moses emerged as one of the great leaders during this historic period. "God spoke the words that defined them over against their four centuries of slavery in the highly hierarchical kingdom of Egypt" (Peterson 13).

Covenant renewal provides a fresh start for the people of God, "If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6). Here, in this holy moment, God commissions all his people to be his representatives in the world. "The entire people were called to belong to God, to be God's people and to serve God's purposes" (Stevens 38). In essence, every one of them was called to be a priest.

The mountain top experience between God and Moses ushered in a new era for Israel. The law was established, along with a priestly group of individuals. Aaron and his sons were called to serve as priests (Exod. 28:1). While these persons were called and set apart for sacred duty, part of their leadership role was to enable the ministry of all the people of God to the world.

In time, however, a shift in mentality occurred among the people of God. The priests became recognized as the “religious professionals” with specific responsibilities for ministry. The larger body of people began functioning as “recipients of ministry” rather than ministry servants (Yoder 5). This line of demarcation exists throughout the remainder of the Old Testament.

New Testament

God’s continued redemptive work unfolds in the New Testament as Jesus comes onto the scene. He revealed a different ministry approach and shattered the Old Testament concept of the priest. Scripture unveils Jesus Christ, the Messiah, as the great high priest (Heb. 3-8). Christ’s new role makes the old version of the priesthood obsolete (Heb. 8:13). His ultimate sacrifice allows people to enter directly into a relationship with God where the old priestly sacrifice of animals is no longer needed for the atonement of sin (Heb. 10:18).

The “new priesthood” expanded to include all the followers of Christ. In the epistle of 1 Peter, the author “wrote to his congregation of beleaguered first-century Christians in the process of helping them understand and live out their baptismal identity in Jesus” (Peterson 14). He exhorts, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (2:9).

Priest

The word *priest* is found in 1 Peter 2:4-5, 9-10. Often in theological circles, much lip service is given to the “priesthood of all believers.” After all, this phrase, “priesthood of all believers,” was Luther’s platform for the Reformation. Usually when people think

of priest, however, they associate the term with the Roman Catholic designation for clergy qualified to represent people before God. In the Protestant faith, clergy are usually not referred to as priests, although all pastors have experienced a sense of being treated differently because of their “position.”

Biblically, a shift occurs in the idea of the priesthood between the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the priests and Levites were descendants of Aaron. Their roles generally included representing God to the people and then representing the people before God. In essence, they were mediators.

In the New Testament, however, this office of priest is eliminated as it pertained to a select group of people. Jesus became the high priest and completed the role of mediator, as he sacrifices himself (Heb. 7:27). Because of Jesus’ work, the entire body of believers is described as a priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5). Jesus ushered in a new kingdom. The apostle Peter defines the new priesthood as the church: “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (1 Pet. 2:9).

The implication for believers today is the same as in Peter’s day: Followers of Christ are priests to each other—God’s representatives to one another (John-Charles 12). Eugene H. Peterson makes the point this way:

We are all priests, not for ourselves, but for one another. The priesthood of all believers is not an arrogant individualism that, at least in matters dealing with God, doesn’t need anyone. It is a confession of mutuality, a willingness to guide one another in following in the way of Jesus, to assist and encourage, to speak and act in Jesus’ name and to be guided by another to speak and act in Jesus’ name. (14)

The new covenant laid out by Christ calls all people to take up the cross and follow him. Such followership implies that people will emulate the life of Christ and actively participate in ministry service. David B. Eller denotes this distinction:

Ministry is based on priesthood, gifts, and servanthood [original emphasis]. The New Testament teaches that all believers are priests (1 Pet 2:4-9), all have received spiritual gifts (Rom 12:4-8, 1 Cor 12:4-8, 1 Pet 4:10-11), and all are called to serve others as Jesus did (Mat 20:25-27, Phil 2:1-16). All three of these teachings are radical because they apply to all believers, not just the leaders, and do not admit of any fundamental distinction between “ministers and laymen.” As all believers are the *laos* of God, so all are called to *diakonia*, ministry of service. (105)

Examination of these New Testament developments leads to consideration of several themes, including a look at Ephesians 4.

Laos and Kleros

The Greek language has two words that constitute the term “laity.” One is *laikos*, and the other is *laos*. *Laikos* really refers to the layperson in the sense of the uneducated masses. This person is someone who knows very little about the subject matter (Kraemer 49). In the New Testament, *laos* generally means “the people of God.” Interestingly enough, the word *laikos* (“uneducated masses”) never appears in the New Testament (Garlow 41). On the other hand, the word *laos* is used repeatedly throughout the New Testament.

The Greek word *kleros* might, at first glance, appear to mean “clergy.” While the term clergy has its root in this word, in actuality, *kleros* means “lot,” “portion,” or “a selected part.” In fact, in the New Testament, “the two words, *kleros* and *laos* denote the same people, not different peoples” (Robinson 17). Traditionally, people have assumed that the clergy is a group set apart, or selected; however, James L. Garlow further points out, “Every time these two words, *kleros* and *laos*, appear they apply to the same people—to that portion of all humanity that walks with God” (51).

As followers of Christ, every person is a part of the *laos* (the people of God) as well as a part of the *kleros* (those especially set aside for service for God). The distinction

between these two groups was unknown in biblical times (Garlow 52). Instead, as time passed, more and more people in power began to write and talk about these two groups, and a gradual change in meaning formed. Clergy were accorded increasingly privileged positions, and as the hierarchical institutionalized structures continued to persist, so did the division. Now, centuries later, this division is still present in the minds of the majority of people (Kraemer 49). Greg Ogden writes of the matter in his book:

In the institutional church there is a clear line of demarcation between spiritual and non-spiritual matters. The clergy are qualified to handle the spiritual (e.g., preaching, teaching) and people (e.g., pastoral care, counseling) ministries. The laity is left with odd jobs as stage hands, lighting technicians, and custodians. They carry out support or temporal functions. Laity too often perform tasks for the church, but are frequently not allowed to exercise ministry gifts to build up the body of Christ. (20)

The division described by Ogden did not exist in the New Testament church. Every follower of Christ was called to put their faith and gifts into active ministry service.

Biblically speaking, to say that each believer is a part of the people of God is accurate—they are *laos*. By definition then, both laity and clergy are of the same body. One is not better than another, nor is one more important than the other. Rather, each is a vital part of the body with its own unique function. I like how Garlow writes of this matter: “When you find yourself admitting, ‘I’m just a layperson,’ you might as well say, ‘I’m just one of the people of God’” (41).

If Jesus is the high priest and the notion of priesthood is applied to the entire people of God, then the division between clergy and laity should not exist; however, this reality does not eliminate the need for leadership among God’s people. R. Paul Stevens affirms this point:

While the New Testament has no place for clergy as a separate category of

believer, the Scripture has many references to leaders within God's laos. Conspicuously missing from the list of leadership words is "priest" (hiereus), a word which until the end of the second century was reserved for Christ and the whole believing community. (145-46)

Under the new covenant found in the second testament, leaders do not minister as "priests." Rather, their ministry is to facilitate that of the priesthood of all believers (McNeal 36).

Ephesians 4

Ephesians chapter four is one of the key scriptural passages relating to the issue of equipping laity for ministry. The theme of believers being called together in unity in order to build up God's kingdom emerges. The writer exhorts people to live out their lives according to their calling by Christ (Eph. 4:1). Readers are reminded of important characteristics that should be evident in a believer's life so that people are brought together in love.

An examination of a portion of this chapter proves beneficial in the overall landscape of discipleship commitment and ministry involvement. Verses 11 through 13 especially deal with leaders in the body of Christ and believer's responsibilities. The context of the passage is the author's affirmation of the importance of unity within the body of Christ even as a diversity of gifts exists.

The people of God share a common unity that comes through Jesus Christ, yet each member of the body has been given unique or different gifts to use in ministry to contribute to the oneness of the body. F. F. Bruce writes, "Within the unity of the body each member has a distinctive part to play, a distinctive service to perform, for the effective functioning of the whole" (339-40). In Romans, Paul says, "[H]aving gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them" (12:5-6). Earlier in Ephesians,

(3:7-8), Paul refers to a special “grace” granted him to carry out his call. This same grace of God empowers each member of the body to contribute his or her own specific role.

In the letter to the Corinthians, Paul indicates that through the Spirit the various “manifestations” are given “for the common good,” together with the power to exercise them (1 Cor. 12:7-11). Here in Ephesians, these manifestations are given “according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (4:7). Bruce describes the difference in this manner:

Since Christ is the one who baptizes his people with the Spirit, it is not inconsistent to credit him with bestowing the gifts of the Spirit also: this is one of the differences in emphasis and wording between the treatment of this subject elsewhere in the Pauline writings and its treatment in Ephesians. The proportionate allocation of the gifts is consistently stressed, but while in 1 Cor. 12:11 it is the Spirit who “apportions to each one individually as he wills,” here the apportioning, like the general giving is the work of the ascended Christ. (340)

Almost all commentators agree that the word for “grace” (*charis*) here does not mean what it does in 2:6, 8, but it is the author’s equivalent of Paul’s word *charisma* in Romans 12:3-12 and 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (Martin 49). In so doing, the author faithfully reminds the reader of the teaching on needed spiritual gifts to ensure that each person plays his or her part in the life the body of Christ. Paul returns to this conviction again in Ephesians 4:16, “[T]he whole body ... grows effectively according to the due measure of each separate part” (RSV).

Ephesians 4:11 says, “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers” (NIV). This listing of gifts has often been associated with specific clerical offices of the Church; “professionals” set apart to carry out the work of the ministry. However, Paul is not suggesting that such “gifts” are restricted to those specifically named; rather, those named exercise their ministries in such a way as to help other members of the body of

Christ “to exercise their own respective ministries (no member is left without some kind of service to perform)” (Bruce 345-46). In fact, verse 12 makes the case for the ministry gifts mentioned in verse 11 to be a means for preparing believers for ministry involvement: “to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up” (4:12). Elton Trueblood adds to the discussion:

The significant factor is the understanding of the function of the leader. His function is to help equip the members for the work of ministry. The good pastor or teacher is one who cultivates the ministerial possibilities of his fellow members. (46)

The leaders mentioned in verse 11 are not intended to do all the work of ministry. Instead, their role is to equip and enable all God’s people to carry out the ministry according to their own giftedness.

The role of pastoral leadership in a congregation is to equip others for ministry (Eph. 4:12) with the goal being that these leaders would, in turn, equip others. The pastor’s main task is “not to minister for the congregation but to give away the ministry to the people of God” (Throop 97). Ephesians 4:11-12 recognizes a “division of labor without any denial of the universality of responsibility” (Trueblood 45).

The pastor is not paid to do the work of the church so that the congregation can attend on a Sunday morning, receive a word, and then go home and feel good about themselves, only to do it all over again the next week. Instead, the pastor is to equip people so they may become the ministers God has called them to be in order to do the work of the ministry. Furthermore, the idea of equipping people for ministry is not about getting others to help the pastor do his or her tasks. John Throop addresses this point as well when he says, “Equipping the saints does not mean harnessing the laity for the

institutional tasks of the church nor ... to assist the pastor with certain delegated ministries. The saints are to be equipped for their own ministry” (97).

To reach a new understanding of this equipping ministry, one must have a strong foundational understanding that all believers are ministers of God. “There is but one people and one ministry” (Haugk 5). In the institutional mind-set, the distinction of “clergy” and “laity” often sets up two levels of people, whereas in the general public some think that the clergy is “above” the laity or knows more (Peterson 11). Certainly the ordained pastor has a particular function within the body, but it is no better or worse than any other functioning part. Every single believer is called to be a part of the body so that it will function properly and be effective.

Equip

The word “equip” (Eph. 4:12) plays a pivotal role in this passage. The Greek word for equip appears earlier in connection with Peter, Andrew, James, and John as they were out fishing. Jesus walked by and said, “Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19-21; Mark 1:17-19). In the context of the story, the Bible says these men were mending their nets. This word “mending” in the Greek is the same word used here in Ephesians 4:12 when the author says, “We are to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry.” In other words, to equip and to mend can be seen as the same thing (Cordeiro 54).

In thinking of this scene of fishermen mending their nets, three pictures come to mind. First, this equipping/mending of the nets is a continual process. Their work is never done. Every day after fishing, the fishermen would bring in their nets and examine them, and wherever the nets were torn they would begin to mend them, so they could return to

fishing. Nets are always under construction. In the same way, equipping people is a process (Pobee 24). People are always under construction.

A second picture with equipping and mending is that they are for the purpose of work. Fishermen mend their nets to catch fish. The mended nets are not for display. They assist in the work of the fishermen. Equipping people is for the purpose of work to use one's gifts for the glory of God, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Bugbee, Cousins, and Hybels 44).

The third image of equipping/mending portrays nets as extensions of the equipper's work. The fishermen mended their nets knowing that in doing so, their reach would be extended, allowing for a larger catch of fish.

Equipping people is essential in the life and health of the church because no one person can do the entire ministry by him or herself. Christ calls all believers for a Great Commission: to go out and reach others in the name of Jesus Christ. In order for people to feel confident to accomplish the task of the Great Commission, people must be equipped to be an extension of Christ's work (Mallory 139).

Saints

Another word that benefits from examination is *saints*. Usually when people think of the word saints, they think of the spiritually "elite" who are now deceased (Gordon 72). In referencing people in the Roman Catholic tradition, the term is often heard as a title, as in St. Mary or St. Mark, people canonized by church authorities. In a less formal way, others think of people as "saints" who have demonstrated their commitment by giving their lives to God in Christian service and ministry.

In the biblical sense, the term “saints” always refers to the whole body of Christ, not to some select individuals who have achieved “spiritual stardom” (Ogden 58). In the Greek, saints (*hagios*) refers to the “ordinary, garden-variety Christians in a particular time and place whose only distinction is that they are chosen by God, claimed by Jesus Christ, and convened by the Holy Spirit as the church” (57).

Even though “saints” implies personal holiness, Paul’s focus is not on personal purity but on God’s holiness. In fact, the term saint never appears in the singular in the New Testament; it always takes place in the context of community. To be saints means to be set apart and called out. People are not holy because of their “purity” but because of their relationship with God who has redeemed them through the work of Christ and made them right with God (Ogden 57-58). The word “saints” should not, therefore, be foreign to people in the Protestant church; rather, believers should understand that as a body of believers people are saints because of God.

Minister

Finally, another concept worthy of review is “minister.” The term “minister” is so frequently used but seldom understood. Most often the word is thought of in terms of the ordained person serving a church. People hear others say, “Here comes our minister.” When asked what a person does, a pastor may even say, “I’m a minister.” Indeed, this person is a minister, but so is every other believer in Christ.

Nowhere in the Bible does the term “ministry” or “minister” refer to a particular class of people set apart from the rest of the church. The Greek word *diakonia* is usually translated “ministry,” “service,” or “mission” (Greek New Testament and Dictionary 42).

The personal form of the noun *diakonos* is translated either “ministers,” “servants,” or “deacons” (42).

As one looks to Scripture, these terms are used in three ways. First, “ministry” or “service” encompasses the spirit by which ministry is to be done on behalf of the whole body (Ogden 61). Jesus said, “For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). When Paul talks about the ministry, he talks about the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to those in the body (1 Cor. 12:5). First Corinthians 12 further expresses the importance of each part doing its job and how this concept is essential for a properly functioning body.

Second, another way the term is used can be seen in the particular task or call of which people have been set apart to perform. Ministry took place in Scripture as the disciples were empowered to cast out demons, feed others physically and spiritually, and pray. Therefore, service captures the manner in which ministry is done, while ministry is performed for the common good of others (1 Cor. 12:7).

The third usage of the term can be found in Ephesians 4:11-12, where the ministry is the province of the entire body of believers (John-Charles 11). It says, “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers to equip the saints, for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ.” Almost all scholars agree that the comma after the word “saints” should not be present; that it was an insertion by the translators and is not accurate. With the comma inserted, the passage almost takes on another flavor (Garlow 24).

From this passage Paul says that the saints (Paul's designation for all God's people) are to do the work of ministry under the tutelage of the particularly gifted people mentioned. Yes, pastors have a place in ministry, but so does every single believer.

The listing of the various gifts in verse 11 can be thought of as particular kinds of leadership within the body. Such leadership gifts are intended to be used for the purpose of equipping the people of God. Verse 13 shares the goal of building up of the body, "until we all reach unity in the faith in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. 4:13). The goal is a mature body of Christ as a result of discipleship commitment. Verse 16 finishes the thought, "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."

Howard A. Snyder makes the point this way:

No Christian can grow into the fullness of Christ except as he or she is part of a growing, maturing body. It is the whole believing community, not the individual believer, who reaches Christ's fullness, and the individual believer reaches that fullness only in the environment of a maturing community of believers. (Liberating the Church 173)

The responsibility of ministry is that of all God's people. Ephesians 4 clearly reveals this reality. The body functions best as leaders equip the people of God for works of ministry according to their gifts. This equipping leads to increased discipleship commitment, more maturity, and Christlikeness among the body.

In addition to Ephesians 4, another great example in Scripture can be found in Acts 6. The passage reports that the church was growing (v. 1) and that some of the widows were being overlooked in the food distribution. Therefore, the twelve got together all the disciples, and they chose seven other people who were full of faith and of

the Holy Spirit and who had spiritual integrity to be in charge of this ministry. The apostles turned the responsibility over to these seven so they themselves could devote more time to prayer and preaching. As a result, the widows were fed and the gospel continued to spread.

The passage in Acts reveals another instance of how the Bible speaks to the importance of lay ministry. Jesus was not physically present in that scene as he once had been before he died, but the disciples, through the Holy Spirit of God and through this ministry, made Jesus present. Christ was represented in their ministry. In his work, Garlow shares this thought:

If we want to see the living Christ today, we need to look to our brothers and sisters. They are representatives. They are, in fact, those who continue that which Jesus began. If we want to see the ministry of Jesus, we must look around. In fact, we can look into the mirror! (36)

Christ is present today as others are empowered to do ministry on his behalf. As people reach out in ministry, recipients of that ministry experience the very hand of Christ touching them through the hands of others.

Historical Overview

The concept of laity actively involved in ministry is not new, contrary to what many people might think. Christ taught and provided the perfect example of calling and making disciples, enabling and equipping them for works of ministry, yet, over time, a distinct separation between the laity and clergy came to exist. Understanding this development lends insight and perspective on the Church's condition today.

Looking to the gospels, one observes Jesus and the disciples meeting the needs of people. Jesus was constantly training followers to care for and minister to others. Even after Jesus died and was resurrected, his disciples continued to minister to one another.

The Book of Acts reports that because of the Holy Spirit and the work of these disciples, the church was exploding in growth (Acts 2-6). Paul's writing highlights the importance of the people of God using their gifts for ministry in order that the body of Christ might be edified and God be glorified. Some among the *laos* had gifts of leadership such as pastors and teachers, apostles and prophets, and evangelists (Eph. 4:11-12). "Early Christianity was a *lay movement*. *No one* [original emphasis] was 'ordained' in the sense that any Christian tradition means it today" (Hunter 120).

Nevertheless, as time passed, things changed. The Church became more organized and the hierarchical structures of government began to creep in by the latter part of the first century. The usage of the word *laos* shifted. Ministry was gradually stripped from the hands of the laity as a new class of "ordained clergy" emerged among the ranks of the church (Kraemer 50). Eventually the term for laity began representing a seemingly second-class, untrained, and unequipped people. Peterson refers to this reality when he writes these "so-called laity" would become thought of as "nonprofessionals, the amateurs, the 'mere' Christians" (10).

The Church continued to foster the demarcation of ministry roles between clergy and laity during the second century. Christianity was changing and a new understanding for "priesthood" was solidified by the third century (Yoder 17-18). No longer was it marked by servanthood, where all the people of God participated, based on their gifts. Now the clergy were "doing" ministry and the people became "recipients."

By the fourth century, the edict of the Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. This governmental influence further propelled a distinct division of classes (clergy and laity), and the Church moved far from the New

Testament “body” model (Steinbron 49). This era, from the time of Constantine to the mid-twentieth century, became known as “Christendom.” Church became the center of society, politics, and culture. With such power often came corruption. During this time, the people witnessed that “clerical embodiment of the means of grace and office defined the church” (Guder et al. 191).

The Reformation

The Protestant Reformation in the sixteenth century attempted to bring the Church back into line with the New Testament understanding of ministry. Martin Luther preached the “priesthood of all believers” in an attempt to return ministry involvement into the hands of the laity. The Church, however, did not tolerate such a paradigm shift and became divided. Two distinct lines of the Christian faith emerged—the Roman Catholic and the Protestant.

The Protestant reformers dreamed of liberating the Church from the hierarchical priesthood as they reminded people of the direct access everyone has to God because of Jesus, the high priest. Further, they asserted that everyone was a priest, a minister for God (Snyder, Liberating the Church 169). Most scholars today recognize that great strides were made during the Reformation, but success was not totally complete (e.g., Guder et al.; Kraemer; Ogden; Snyder; Yoder). The Protestant Church, even with its newfound freedom, would organize itself after the example of the Catholic Church and history would eventually repeat itself.

The Methodist Movement

Two hundred years after Martin Luther and the other reformers’ contributions, John Wesley came on the scene. Wesley, an Anglican priest, desired reform within his

own movement. Like Luther, he was burdened by what the Church had become. People were being left out: the poor, the downcast, the “least,” and Wesley’s appeal was one compatible with Jesus. Determined to bring about change, Wesley set out to empower people to be unleashed for ministry, meeting the needs of those around them.

Following Wesley’s “heart-warming” experience in May 1738, an explosion of growth occurred under his leadership. He developed a system for soul-winning and discipleship modeled after the New Testament example. These class meetings, bands, and societies called and allowed for lay leadership, which, in turn, transformed lives and led to significant renewal and growth in the Church in England. Like the Protestant Reformation, Wesley’s leadership and reform could not be contained within the Anglican Church, and the Methodist movement was born.

Lay ministry was an essential part of Wesley’s reform efforts. As people responded to the gospel preached, they were then disciplined for living a new life for Christ. The class meetings provided a place where converts might grow in their discipleship commitment, be encouraged, and held accountable. This process was significant, for it produced a multitude of leaders, preachers, and equippers. Indeed, “Methodism was largely a lay moment, involving thousands of unordained folks in a wide range of leadership and ministry functions” (Snyder, Radical Wesley 119).

Wesley put the “priesthood of all believers” into action. He recognized gifts in both men and women and encouraged them to use their gifts for God and for the building up of God’s kingdom. Wesley clearly understood the connection between ministry involvement and discipleship (Henderson 46). The example of Wesley’s reform is

encouraging to the church today and is a reminder of the powerful possibilities the church has in its grasp when the laity are unleashed and equipped for ministry involvement.

The Church Today

A multitude of books and articles have been written within the last decade and a half on the topics of leadership and lay ministry. They have thoughtfully explained contributing factors leading to the condition of the present church. The realities of individualism, secularism, and pluralism have taken their toll on society and the church, and, in many cases, the churches have remained silent as these elements have eroded at the very fiber of its foundation (Easum 15).

Many experts trace the contributing factors back to the Enlightenment period, when a key change in human thought occurred and people began searching for more individual freedom (Guder et al. 21-22). Resistance grew toward the institutional church. The Reformation was supposed to generate newfound freedom for believers. Unfortunately, the Reformation did not go far enough in its reform. Instead of recapturing the essence of the New Testament Church, the Protestant churches tried to make their various changes amid the institutional frameworks currently in place.

Furthermore, from generation to generation, numerous theories about how the church should live out its mission have surfaced. More recently, churches and their leaders have tried a multitude of approaches in an attempt to bring about growth in their congregations. Some churches utilize marketing techniques borrowed from the corporate world. Others try all the latest and greatest program ideas. Still others simply attempt to hang onto what membership they have. These approaches most often have led to frustration rather than real significant change and growth.

The ineffectiveness of quick-fix approaches leads one to believe a better way must exist. Fortunately for the church, a better approach does exist. Even now, when so many churches are struggling just to survive, a number of thriving congregations around the world are seeing positive results. These churches are growing because they are doing the right things. They are following a biblical model of discipleship where lay ministry is one of the key ingredients of a vibrant church in becoming what God calls it to be today and for the future (Barna 98).

Congregations that focus on themselves and try to do ministry on their own power and strength soon forget to rely on God's guidance and the power that comes through the Holy Spirit (Smith 39). These churches are in decline, frustrated, and longing for more significance. On the other hand, some congregations have kept their focus on Jesus and know their power comes from God. They are grounded in the basics and are equipping faithful disciples for Jesus Christ (Reed and Westfall 51).

Rick Warren includes discipleship as one the five main purposes of the church (105). At the very heart of discipleship is Christ's mandate to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). Scripture reveals the Church exists to spread the good news to others, which is the responsibility of every believer. The Great Commission stands before every follower of Christ as the ultimate calling.

God's desire is that all might come to know him personally and live their lives in a relationship with God. Here, one finds another element essential in discipleship, that of fellowship or belonging (Warren 105). Human beings, created as relational people, want to feel they belong to something bigger than themselves. To be a part of God's work is more significant than anything else a person could experience. For this reason

discipleship is key. Growing and maturing in Christ aids in building up one another in the faith. The very essence of discipleship is the process by which people are able to become more Christlike in their daily lives.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate perceived discipleship commitment expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions that occurred in participants in the twelve-week Firm Foundation study. The hope was that an intentional discipleship course could help influence people's mind-sets about their ministry involvement and move them towards becoming more active participants in the ministry of the church. To understand this concept more fully, in light of the church today, requires a look at the important topic of leadership.

Leadership

Bill Hybels, of Willow Creek Community Church, says, "The church is the most leadership-intensive enterprise in society" (qtd. in Maxwell 18). This statement may very well be true considering all of the aspects of leading a congregation in a variety of ministries, while at the same time relying on mostly volunteer workers.

The natural inclination for the church yields as many opinions as people; therefore, having someone who can cast vision and keep the congregation on track with their purpose and direction is essential. Michael Slaughter, the directing pastor at Ginghamburg UMC in Tipp City, Ohio, describes his role as one of "vision caster": "People need a challenging dream and a clearly defined purpose. The leader is the one who is able to cast the dream. The leader must be able to answer the question about why we are here" (114). The role of leader is key to the life of the Church as it seeks to grow, increase discipleship commitment, and equip people for ministry involvement.

This leader must be able to help the congregation align their ministries accordingly. A good leader works with the core group of influencers within the congregation, equipping and encouraging them to become spiritual leaders themselves. Leadership development is essential because no leader can do everything by him or herself. Paul says as much when he talks about the body in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31: God has given people different gifts, and each of these gifts is to be used to glorify God and edify others.

Whether one is clergy or laity, each person is an equal part of the body of Christ. Both are needed in the overall picture of ministry, each with different functions. Some strong proponents of lay ministry might want to lessen or do away with the role of clergy, but such an approach would not be the answer. Overreacting to centuries of putting clergy on a pedestal will not solve the problem. Instead, a vision of both laity and clergy working together in the larger context of ministry, side by side, accomplishing great things as God works through them is the better way. For this reason, I want to speak briefly of the role of pastoral leadership.

Pastoral Leadership

The role of pastoral leadership in a congregation is to equip others for ministry. The goal should be that as people are equipped and become leaders, they would, in turn, equip others (Dale 79). Leadership development is a never-ending process. Leadership requires courage to stay the course and spiritual integrity to ensure credibility in order to lead effectively (Hybels, Courageous Leadership 81). Still, the church leader needs to balance the various responsibilities that come with the calling, while at the same time find ways to equip people.

The call to leadership seems a daunting task, but people are not alone. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, David, Peter, James, John, and so many other leaders in the Bible were all called by God and were given the reassurance that God would be with them every step of the way. God is always faithful, and in every generation God still provides. God provides wisdom and guidance, along with strength and courage, by placing other people in one's path that come alongside the leader. One of the reasons a leader must have others to turn to is because the calling is bigger than any one person. Experts say that one person can only effectively minister to six to ten people (George 29). Believing this statement to be true, churches will not grow if a pastor or a congregation has the mentality that "ministry is the pastor's job."

Raising up other spiritual leaders and not just obtaining more followers is essential. Tommy Barnett talks about the difference when he writes about multiplication and addition. When a church is simply concerned with getting more people in the pews, in essence they want more followers. Followers equate to addition. A church may eventually add a few people here and there, but the growth will not be as significant as it should be. On the other hand, if the church is truly concerned about making disciples and equipping leaders, then it is talking about multiplication, and multiplication is God's way of producing exponential growth (20).

For example, in the beginning, as strong foundations are being laid to increase discipleship commitment, equip, and raise up leaders, one notices little difference between multiplication and addition. Simple arithmetic will clarify the point: $3+2 = 5$, whereas $3 \times 2 = 6$. The difference is minimal. As time goes by, however, and more leaders are developed, here is what happens: $100+4 = 104$, whereas $100 \times 4 = 400$. Here, one can

see a dramatic difference. The desire is not growth for growth's sake; rather, the call of the Great Commission is for every believer to live out their life for Christ and to share the good news of the gospel. The goal is seeing people come to have a personal relationship with Christ and grow in their discipleship commitment and thus become leaders for God who would then lead others to Christ.

Lay Ministry

God calls each and every person to be a minister for Jesus Christ. God did not call people to sit around and be spectators. God created everyone with certain uniqueness. Each believer is given spiritual gifts to use for the building up of God's kingdom and for glorifying God. The Bible is very clear that followers of Christ have a role to play here on earth—that of partnering with others so as to strengthen and disciple each other. Churches grow by the power of God through the skilled effort of people. Throughout history God has used people to accomplish God's purposes.

In 1 Corinthians 3:6, 9, Paul talks about this partnership: "I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God made it grow.... For we are God's fellow workers." In the Old Testament book of Joshua, God tells the Israelites to go and possess the land. God did not do it for them. A partnership was offered, and the Israelites had a part to play, but because they were afraid of taking a risk, they died in the wilderness. The point is made so well by Warren: "While we wait for God to work *for* [original emphasis] us, God is waiting to work *through* [original emphasis] us" (60).

Sometimes in today's churches, people want things done for them. They want to know all the answers to all the questions and know the outcome before they step forward. God wants believers who will step out in faith, and when they do, God provides for them

every step of the way (Ortberg 175-76). God provided the quail and the manna when the Israelites were faithful (Exod. 16). God blessed Abraham when he and Sarah left their homeland, even though they did not know where they were going (Heb. 11:8). God continues to provide for those who are faithful today.

In examining the theology of the laity, one cannot ignore the many examples of people who have stepped out in faith. Such a faith response is required of the churches today if one is to experience a different understanding of the role of laity. Changing the mind-set that has been developed for more than seventeen centuries is an enormous task.

Implications for Today

When people think of ministry today, unfortunately, too many persons think of it as something clergy do. They say things such as, “That’s the pastor’s job,” or “That’s what we pay him or her for.” This mentality basically leads to the self-deprecating inflection of “I’m just a layperson.” (Peterson 10). Thus, people become passive spectators who want to receive the ministry. Such a viewpoint is not surprising given the history and emphasis placed upon authority and institutionalism; however, this mind-set is far from the biblical understanding of ministry. As a result, of course, the church has been robbed of significant growth and the people of God have been left feeling unfulfilled and unfruitful.

If this condition represents the current state of a church, each congregation faces important decisions. Faithful and courageous people will need to lead the way by stepping out in faith, thus, leading churches in a different direction. John Ortberg speaks of this concept in the title of his book, “If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat” (10). Granted, structure is needed; otherwise, chaos would abound. At the

same time, structures that inhibit the people of God from ministering in the ways God has called them is not the answer.

In looking to Jesus' example, Jesus was not satisfied in having a succession of audiences to which he would share his gospel. He was interested in having disciples in whom and through whom his ministry would be multiplied many times over. For the church to become the kind of place God desires it to be, each person in the congregation must believe and claim for him or herself that he or she is a minister for Jesus Christ. Everyone who has accepted Christ is filled with the Holy Spirit and has been given gifts to use for the building up of God's kingdom so that God may be glorified (Bugbee, Cousins, and Hybels 78). For this reason increasing discipleship commitment and equipping people for ministry is essential. Nevertheless, claiming an equipping ministry is going to shake the very foundation of the majority of church people. Such a ministry approach is going to mean a paradigm shift—where people will see ministry in a different way than they have before. Thus, increasing discipleship commitment, helping teach and affect how people see themselves as a vital and active part in the body of Christ, is a necessary ingredient in making strides toward equipping laity.

For such transformation to occur, strong leadership is required. Those in leadership need to have the courage to point others to what God is calling them to become. Next, key leaders in the church need to be equipped for spiritual leadership, who, in turn, equip others to grow in their faith and use their gifts for God's ministry. Finally, this group of people then needs to continue to grow spiritually and numerically, so more and more people catch the vision of how every believer is a minister with gifts for ministry involvement and called to extend the love of Christ to those around them.

Revolutionary changes exist in the world today. Change is constant, yet people resist change. Such resistance is part of human nature. The church is no exception. Many congregations long for the “good old days.” The “insiders” seem content and work diligently to maintain the status quo, yet this reluctance to change by the mainline churches has actually led to decline. Declining churches have forgotten what God called the church to be—a missional church (Kraemer 131).

Fortunately, however, this scenario is not the end of the story, for the living God leads courageous people in a different direction. Surprisingly enough, this new path is, in fact, an old one. Jesus calls people to live out their lives in an exciting way as they discover and use their gifts in ministry for God. It is a way to thrive and see the abundant life Jesus desires for his followers. Growing in one’s discipleship commitment empowers the people of God, transforms lives, increases the kingdom of God, and propels the Great Commission.

Conclusion

In today’s church, the needs of people are not always met because of an insufficient number of believers involved in ministry. No one individual can reach out and minister to every single person in a congregation. The challenge of a small percentage of church people meeting all the needs of those in their community is insurmountable without the entire body of Christ. For many congregants, however, this expectation continues to be firmly held in their mind.

The good news is that Jesus never intended ministry to be this way. In fact, every single believer was and is called to be in ministry where they are, using their gifts to edify

others and to glorify God. Unfortunately, somewhere along the way people confused Jesus' message and began teaching something else.

Each generation of followers has the daunting task of looking to Scripture and seeking out God's guidance for ministry. The responsibility of teaching his truths and helping others understand discipleship should be taken seriously. The twelve-week course, Firm Foundation, was evaluated to see if, in fact, it can help people grow in their discipleship commitment, begin to see their role more clearly and, thus, become more actively involved in ministry.

Scripture reveals God's call on every believer to reach out to others, on behalf of Christ, and to share the good news, to offer unconditional love, and to meet their needs in ministry service. Returning to the biblical understanding of an equipping ministry where leaders are developed and the people are then unleashed to do the work of the ministry is exciting. When this ministry approach exists, incredible power, renewal, and growth occur. Individuals realize their own call and giftedness. They are energized and empowered upon discovery that they are worthy servants and ministers for God. Enabling such an experience is part of the goal at Central Church and at the very heart of my personal call to ministry. I long for nothing more than to see every single person come to know Christ and experience God's call on their lives and to be transformed into active ministers for Christ. This longing is quite a dream, and it involves an uphill battle because of the centuries of tradition and practice and teaching. The current mind-set is so deeply embedded that only by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit can people's minds be reshaped.

My calling as a believer is not just to bring about change for change's sake. Instead, my call is to be about following God's direction and helping equip and empower others to see what God is calling them to be and do for Christ. It is about increasing discipleship commitment in people and helping them take steps toward more ministry involvement.

Often human nature reveals people who want things to remain the same. Certainly this observation can be seen in a traditional church setting. One wonders if people do not want to be touched by God; rather, they are content with just showing up at church every now and then, just so long as they are left alone and can continue to live their lives as they see fit. On the other hand, many people long for more. They are in search of significance. Some have a personal and powerful relationship with the Lord and have a deep sense they have been called to service. They have discovered their gifts and they want to use them for God.

At the same time, other people are ready to respond to their faith but do not know where to go or what to do. They need direction; thus, spiritual leadership is essential. Leaders (both lay and clergy) within the church need to come alongside such individuals and help them see the purpose for which they are called. This process is nothing less than the discipleship journey. Probably one of the most helpful ways to aid someone in this process is through understanding spiritual gifts. God has designed each person with certain gifts and passions. When people serve in the areas of their passions and gifts, they contribute to the body and have a sense of fulfillment. On the other hand, the opposite is true as well. When people do something they do not like and for which they do not have

gifts, they become frustrated and feel they are not contributing. Too often in the “traditional” church, one finds more of the latter than the former.

At Central Church, attempts are underway for helping people discover their gifts and put them into action. Spiritual gift inventories have been utilized several times. Network, designed by Bruce Bugbee, Don Cousins, and Bill Hybels, seems to be the one of choice. This inventory helps congregants discover and understand their God-given passions, spiritual gifts, and personal styles. People completing Network classes indicate their discoveries have brought fruitfulness and fulfillment in their lives. However, only a relatively small number of people have been interested enough in “discovering their gifts” to take the class. Many wonder why spiritual gift inventories are necessary. Taking a broader discipleship approach that encompasses foundational theological material creates a context allowing individuals to see why discovering one’s gifts is important. The Firm Foundation study provides such an opportunity. The Network inventory can still be utilized; however, in the context of Central UMC, a broader approach seems more inviting.

The Firm Foundation material promises to be an effective way of increasing discipleship commitment and leading to more active ministry involvement. The hope is that through the implementation of this material people within the congregation of Central Church will be better equipped and grow up into Christlikeness as they become more actively involved in ministry.

Jesus set a great example of how to develop leaders. He had twelve disciples with whom he spent three years shaping their lives. He spent even more time with Peter,

James, and John, who were closest to him. These three men would be the leaders of the early Church and would equip others to carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.

Discipleship commitment and equipping people for ministry within a congregation are vital if one longs to have a more active and mature church. Increasing discipleship commitment requires people (leaders and followers) who are willing to learn and grow while acting on their beliefs. Developing spiritual leaders who share their faith and lead others to Christ is essential. Raising up congregants who are willing to be used by God in different kinds of ministry to reach different kinds of people is energizing and rewarding.

The Great Commission stands before the Church as its ultimate purpose. Much has been accomplished over the years, but God continues to call every believer to step forward, take up the cross, and follow. When people faithfully respond in this manner, discipleship commitment increases, people put their God-given gifts to use for ministry service, and the body of Christ is edified while God is glorified.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem

Central UMC, a downtown church, has had a resurgence of growth over the last fifteen years. It enjoys a large membership of three thousand people; however, worship attendance is closer to one thousand. While many laity participate in Central's ministries, the percentage is still rather small when compared to worship attendance and membership. Like many similar sized churches, Central has a large "back door" where people who are not connected soon depart. So, while the church may take in a large number of members each year, it also loses members or sees people not actively involved in ministry.

Central Church is very much staff led, and the viewpoint among many laypersons reveals the perception that laity simply comes alongside the staff to accomplish tasks. Further, among some of the administration and leadership bodies themselves reveals a mind-set that lay ministry simply involves joining the church and giving financially to support the budget.

The lack of participation in ministry by many who attend church is nothing new. Seeing the same few people carrying out most of the work of the ministry is unfortunately a common reality. One of the challenges Central faces revolves around assimilating people into the life and ministry of the church. The biblical mandate of "making disciples" stands above "meeting the needs" of followers who attend church for what they can receive. At the core of discipleship is the very essence of teaching followers of Jesus to obey and serve him in ministry. Spiritual growth of Christians

requires they not only learn the truths of God's Word but they also act upon and live out what they learn. Such obedience involves responding to God's call to ministry by utilizing the spiritual gifts, natural talents, and resources God has given for the purpose of service. To experience such transformation requires a change in peoples' perception of their discipleship commitment.

Central currently offers a four-week introductory course to people new to the congregation. This Newcomers' Class includes an introduction and overview of the various ministries and programs of the church, a brief history of Methodism, doctrines, and polity, along with a campus tour. The course has been offered for many years, long before I came to the church; nevertheless, Central is missing a key component for helping people connect more effectively in the life of the church. The need for a next-level type of course is abundantly clear. Such curriculum would target not only newcomers to the church but also anyone seeking to belong more to the life of the congregation who are not actively involved.

A more effective approach for discipling people provides the opportunity for followers of Christ to begin thinking differently about the church and their own discipleship commitment. Instead of the pastors, staff, and a relatively small percentage of active laypeople feeling overburdened by a disproportionate number of ministry responsibilities, more and more members of the congregation would experience the joy of serving in areas that match their spiritual gifts. Such a reality could alleviate both overwhelmed leaders and uninvolved followers. Each could then experience more fulfillment and fruitfulness as they grow in their personal discipleship commitment. A culture could be created where people would ask, "What can I do that would glorify God

and edify the body of Christ?” This transformational change would greatly impact the life and ministry of Central Church.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate perceived discipleship commitment expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions that occurred in participants in the twelve-week Firm Foundation study. A model for leading two separate groups through the Firm Foundation material was implemented at Central United Methodist Church. The study’s effectiveness for transforming participants’ perception of discipleship commitment in the church is evaluated.

Research Questions

Three primary research questions guided this study. The first question identified the participants’ understanding, experience, and attitude towards discipleship commitment within the church prior to the study. The second question focused on the changes that occurred in the respondents’ perception of their discipleship commitment as a result of the implementation of the Firm Foundation course. This question addressed whether positive outcomes were achieved as a result of the treatment. The third question attempted to identify which components of the Firm Foundation material were most significant in shaping the participants’ perception of their discipleship commitment.

Research Question 1

How do participants perceive their level of discipleship commitment as expressed in spiritual and behavioral dimensions?

The answer to this research question provides a baseline of the participants’ understanding, experience, and attitude of discipleship commitment prior to the

introduction of the independent variable, the Firm Foundation study. Without such a measurement, determining how much, if any, change occurred in the participants' perception would not have been possible. The question enabled evaluation of whether the goal of transformational change in one's discipleship commitment perception resulted from the Firm Foundation study.

Research Question 2

What was the change of self-perception of the discipleship commitment expressed in the spiritual and behavioral dimensions subsequent to the study?

This research project was designed on the premise that implementing the Firm Foundation study among participants would result in a change of understanding, experience, and attitude in regard to one's discipleship commitment. Such change in mind-set would theoretically then lead towards acting upon this perceived discipleship commitment, whereby participants would become more actively involved in the ministries of Central UMC. The posttest survey measured how the Firm Foundation material impacted the participants' self-perception of discipleship commitment.

Research Question 3

What aspects of the Firm Foundation course were associated with the perceived changes?

The research project tested the effects of each Firm Foundation course lesson as well as two larger categories, that of a spiritual dimension and a behavioral dimension. The survey evaluated the participants' progress in each category on the basis of their responses to thirty statements on a Likert scale (see Appendixes C and D). This research question evaluated which areas of the Firm Foundation study were most helpful in the

perceived changes. In addition, further evaluation of the various aspects of Firm Foundation's effectiveness was generated by observation, class notes, recurring themes, and participants' comments.

Description of the Project

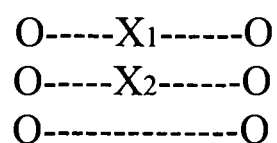
The Church is continuously addressing issues concerning the lack of laity involvement. Central UMC is no different than other mainline churches in this regard. My desire, in considering the needs of Central's congregation, was to provide an opportunity for people to grow in their discipleship commitment and be equipped to act upon their beliefs. Such discovery would empower followers of Christ to connect their spiritual gifts with much-needed ministries and encourage them to assume new levels of responsibility that fill their hearts in ways they never before could have imagined (Hybels, Volunteer Revolution 12).

People come to church for different reasons. Some attend because they need support and encouragement. Others participate because they want to have a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves. Others have experienced such a relationship with God that they are compelled to attend worship to show their dedication and appreciation to God. Still others may not know how to verbalize why they attend, but they know they have a longing for something and are searching for spiritual meaning. The goal of this writer and of Central Church is to help move people beyond simply attending worship with a large gathering of believers two to three times a month towards being actively involved in the various ministries of the church and growing in their spiritual lives.

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ epitomizes a lifelong journey in which people become more Christlike and live out their purpose and calling. The Firm Foundation material provides an avenue for individuals' personal and faith growth while encouraging further discipleship commitment. Participants see their theological foundations strengthened, begin thinking about ministry from a different perspective, grow in their relationship with God through Jesus Christ more fully, realize the importance of their connectedness to the life of the church, discover their spiritual gifts, and, finally, are challenged to put their learning into action within the body of Christ.

Methodology

The methodology of this project is a preexperimental one-shot case study with control group diagrammed as follows:



The "Os" represent pre- and posttesting of people's perception of discipleship commitment while the "Xs" represent the implementation of the Firm Foundation twelve-week course. Two separate treatment groups assembled. One group met on Wednesday evenings, while the other group met on Saturday evenings (see Appendix G). A control group completed both the pre- and posttests but did not go through the twelve-week study. This group provided further comparison in regards to the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation course material.

Population and Sample

The population for this project consisted of adults (21 years and older) who attend Central United Methodist Church. The Wednesday evening class consisted of thirty

participants and the Saturday evening class began with twenty-seven participants (see Table 4.1, p. 64). Of the fifty-seven people who began the treatment groups, 82 percent were church members and 18 percent were attendees. A control group of twenty individuals completed both the pre- and posttests but did not go through the twelve-week study. Out of this group of twenty individuals, 95 percent of the persons were church members and 5 percent were attendees.

The sampling generated a cross section of attendees ranging from those who were newer to the congregation (less than one year) to those who had been attending for a few years. For the church members, membership ranged from having just joined within the last year to those who had been members for ten years or more. The treatment group revealed 67 percent of the participants had been attending Central Church for less than five years.

The population for the pretest of both treatment groups was fifty-seven. At the completion of the study, the population was fifty-three. The completion rate was 93 percent. The population for the control group pretest was twenty with the same twenty completing the posttest twelve weeks later.

Participants in the treatment groups voluntarily responded to open invitations given by way of two newsletter articles and an announcement made in the three worship services from the pulpit one weekend. People signed up based on interest. For the control group, I approached twenty individuals at random to complete the surveys.

Variables

The independent variable of this research project was the curriculum of the twelve-week study, Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ

(see Appendix A). The implementation of the course occurred sequentially beginning in the spring of 2007 with two courses per week (see Appendix G). The well-rounded material covered the theological basics of the Christian faith and moved toward key aspects of discipleship commitment. Throughout the entire course, the foundational understanding of the importance of believers being actively involved in the body of Christ was clearly evident.

The dependent variables of this study were the spiritual and behavioral changes experienced by the participants in relation to perceived discipleship commitment. The desire was that those who participated in the twelve-week course would be transformed in their understanding, experience, and attitude by the implementation of the Firm Foundation material. As a result, the hope was that individuals would act upon this change of perception and become more involved in the ministries of the church based on their spiritual gifts, natural talents, and resources. The results of the study determined whether Central Church would begin using Firm Foundation as a way for providing a “next-level” course opportunity to enhance assimilation into the life of the congregation, with the hope that it brings about a degree of transformation among congregants and ultimately would impact the body of Christ in a positive manner.

Intervening variables that might influence or help explain outcomes included age, number of years attending Central UMC, and the level of involvement in ministry at the outset of the study.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

The researcher-designed instrument, Firm Foundation pretest and posttest (see Appendixes C and D), evaluated the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation course offered

at Central Church among two treatment groups. The design gauged people's perception (understanding, experience, and attitudes) of discipleship commitment. A control group completed the exact same survey providing a comparison.

The survey design was organized around the twelve lessons of the Firm Foundation material. Two to three statements per lesson established a basis for analysis and were included in the pre- and posttest surveys (see Appendix H). Both pretest and posttest included thirty identical statements, with the exception of one additional question on the posttest asking for respondents' comments about their course experience.

Participants identified their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) as indicated in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1. Level of Agreement/Disagreement

___ 1	___ 2	___ 3	___ 4	___ 5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral/Unsure	Agree	Strongly Agree

The pretest survey established a reading of the respondents' perception of discipleship commitment at the outset of the study. The two treatment groups gathered for an introductory session (see Appendix G) where I thanked them for their interest and willingness to go through the Firm Foundation study. I explained the process and logistical details, and I distributed the pretest surveys. Respondents completed and turned in the pretests. Following the completion of the survey, I handed out the Firm Foundation handbooks and participants were free to adjourn. That same week, I mailed the survey to

the four to five people who were unable to attend the introductory session. They completed the survey and submitted it prior to beginning session one.

The posttest survey was administered upon completion of the twelve-week course. Like the pretest, the surveys took place in a group setting. Ample time was given to complete each survey. I e-mailed the posttest survey to the two to three people who were unable to attend the final session. They had the option of either completing and e-mailing it back to me, mailing it to the church via standard postal service, or personally dropping it by the office. The posttest surveys measured changes in the respondents' perception of discipleship commitment at Central UMC.

The results were tabulated at a later time. A respondent-created code utilizing the first initial of their mothers' maiden names and the last four digits of their social security numbers assured confidentiality. Some people seemed uneasy using digits from their social security numbers. As an alternative, I suggested they use other numbers to ease their conscience. To ensure accuracy when repeating individuals' codes for the posttest, an index of personal codes was distributed to serve as a reference. Some individuals had written their code in their Firm Foundation handbooks, which proved helpful. If repeating this process, I would instruct the people at the time of completing the pretest to write their code in their books for easy recall. As a result of people writing their code in their book, the reference sheet supplied at the posttest, and people actually using the last four digits of their social security number, all pre- and posttest codes matched up. The use of personal codes allowed for tracking changes in the individual respondents from the beginning of the project to the end.

Firm Foundation Lesson by Lesson Description

The Firm Foundation study consists of twelve lessons (see Appendix A), that fall into two categories, which I labeled the spiritual dimension (lessons 1-7), and the behavioral dimension (lessons 8-12). The outcomes of this research project reflect the twelve individual lessons, the two larger categorical dimensions, and an overall result. Evaluation of this study determined if the Firm Foundation curriculum would prove beneficial on an ongoing basis at Central Church.

Lesson one is entitled, “Who is God?: Recognizing God’s Character.” Here, the foundational theme of knowing God emerges. Participants notice, in dynamic fashion, the importance of discovering God’s character, having a personal relationship with the Lord, and trusting in him. Through the lesson material and Scripture readings, people catch a glimpse of how getting to know God is life changing as one’s thoughts, actions, opportunities, and identity are all affected, and the abundance of benefits are beyond human comprehension.

Lesson two, “Where Do I Stand with God?: Knowing God Personally,” gets at the heart of justifying grace as participants learn the meaning of being a Christian, based on what the Bible says. People are challenged to reflect on their standing with the Almighty as they are reminded that only by the grace of God are people reconciled back into a relationship with the Heavenly Father.

In lesson three, “Who Am I Now?: Understanding My Identity in Christ,” is presented. Many people who make a decision to live for God have a challenging time understanding their new identity in Christ (Firm Foundation 19). If individuals do not fully comprehend their new role, they can never grow effectively in the deeper areas of

that relationship. This session seeks to solidify persons in their understanding of seeing themselves as new creations in Christ.

Lesson four covers the topic of prayer. The title for the session is, “How Can God and I Communicate?: Establishing a Life of Prayer.” Many Christians misunderstand prayer and the necessity of it in relationship with God (Firm Foundation 25). Session four paints an accurate picture of what prayer really is, dialogue with God, as well as helps participants understand the necessity of this spiritual discipline if they are to grow in relationship with God.

Lesson five, “Why is the Bible Important?: Discovering the Truth of Scripture,” lays out the need to fill one’s heart and mind with the truths of God’s Word. It speaks to the importance of understanding both the validity of the Bible and the necessity of it in a Christian’s relationship with God. Regular reading and study of Scripture is an essential part of furthering discipleship commitment and growing in understanding of God and becoming more Christlike in one’s daily living.

“What Does It Mean to Praise God?: Worshipping a Holy God” is the topic for lesson six. Here, participants learn that worship takes place whenever a child of God enters the Lord’s presence to attribute praise to him (Firm Foundation 33). This session expands the participants’ view of worship from being more than something reserved for Sunday mornings to praising God in everyday life.

For lesson seven, the topic of obedience is covered, “How Do I Show God My Love?: Demonstrating Obedience.” People often think being a “good Christian” means following a set of rules. One of the paradoxes of the Christian life is that only by living within God’s guidelines are people free (Firm Foundation 37). Session seven reveals a

deeper understanding of obedience and strives to reveal that obeying God is another way people can show their love for God. The main premise of the lesson exhorts obedience as directly related to spiritual growth.

In lesson eight, “How Should I Manage My Time and Money?: Becoming a Good Steward,” participants learn how stewardship exemplifies a disciple of Christ. People often do not have an appropriate understanding of the topic. On the one hand, stewardship is important because it is a testimony of one’s love for and trust in God. On the other hand, it also reveals one’s priorities (Firm Foundation 43). This session provides a clear explanation of being a good steward for God and suggests practical ways for growing in a person’s stewardship.

“Why Should I Be with Other Believers?: Take Your Place in God’s Community” is the topic material for lesson nine. Many people who claim to be Christian fail to see the importance of being connected with other believers in the body of Christ. Perhaps people believe they do not “fit in” or have anything “to offer,” but what typically results is a spectator mentality, people showing up for what they can “get out of it.” God designed Christian community to be the source of encouragement, edification, and equipping. Community is meant to be a place where believers come together under mutual submission to God and, through relationships, meets the needs of the body of Christ, and carries out God’s purposes of making disciples (Firm Foundation 47-48). Session nine dispels misconceptions about community and provides an image of the significance and value of being with other believers. The goal of this session is for participants to see why being an active part of the body of Christ is essential for growing in one’s discipleship commitment. A spiritual gift inventory, Network, was handed out at the end of the

previous lesson, so participants had time to complete the survey in preparation for this lesson. The topic of spiritual gifts played a large part in this session.

Building on the previous session, lesson ten is entitled, “How Do I Share What I’ve Learned?: Being a Disciple of Christ.” The argument presented clearly states that “making disciples” is not something reserved for people who are in a position of authority or those who have a “knack for it” (Firm Foundation 51). Discipleship and evangelism are part of a lifestyle whereby people emulate the very life of Christ. Living in such a manner is a continual process throughout life.

Lesson eleven, “Am I Called to Lead?: Discovering Your Leadership Potential,” challenges each participant to rethink the definition of leadership. “Too many Christians have not taken the time to understand what it means to be a leader” (Firm Foundation 55). The concept that leadership is influence is promoted throughout the lesson. Every believer is called to be an influencer for the sake of the kingdom of God. Session eleven provides an understanding of leadership, an assessment of current ability, and a determination of leadership potential in a pursuit to enable participants to maximize their gifts. The goal of the lesson is helping people see the importance of being leaders for Christ by becoming positive influencers in the lives of those around them and in the church.

The final session twelve, “Where Do I Go from Here?: Taking the Next Step in Your Journey,” summarizes the foundational work that has been laid in each participant’s life through the course of the study. The session stresses that the end of the course is not the end of their growth process but rather the beginning point for them to take what they have learned and put it into action. People come to trust that God has gifted them and

called them to ministry, teaching the biblical imperatives and spiritual growth outcomes of being connected in the body of Christ in community and using their gifts in service inside and outside the walls of the church (Mallory and Smith 67). Participants, during this lesson, were asked to reflect on their spiritual gifts, their natural talents, the resources they had at their disposal, and the ministry needs of the church in order to come up with a plan for putting their faith into action.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data was analyzed using t-tests and analysis of variance to determine effectiveness of the Firm Foundation course on respondents' change of perception of their discipleship commitment. The first research question and pretest survey provided a baseline of the participants' perception of discipleship commitment prior to the introduction of the independent variable, the Firm Foundation study. The second research question and posttest survey focused on the changes that occurred in the respondents' perception of their discipleship commitment as a result of the implementation of the Firm Foundation course. Analysis of the pre- and posttest surveys determined if any change in perception took place as a result of the twelve-week treatment.

For each Firm Foundation chapter, the two or three questions based on that lesson (see Appendix H) were averaged on both the pretest and the posttest to come up with a lesson mean score for the tests. In addition, all the questions relating to chapters 1-7 of the Firm Foundation material (see Appendixes A and H) were averaged to come up with a score labeled "spiritual," and the questions dealing with chapters 8-12 (see Appendixes A and H) of the course were averaged to come up with a score labeled "behavioral."

Finally, all of the questions were averaged to come up with an overall score (see Table 4.3, p. 69).

To test for differences between the control group and the treatment group on categorical demographic variables, the Pearson Chi-Square test was used. Categorical variables with more than two categories were collapsed to two categories to increase the possibility that all expected counts were greater than 5, which is a standard assumption of such a test. When two of the four cells in the 2 x 2 table had expected counts less than 5, no test was performed. When one of the four cells had an expected count less than 5, the test was performed with a warning that the assumptions were not met exactly (see Appendix E). The same approach was used to examine differences between the Wednesday treatment class and the Saturday treatment class. To test for differences between the control group and the treatment group on numeric demographic variables, the 2-sample t-test assuming unequal variances was employed. This test uses the Satterthwaite approximation to the degrees of freedom. The same test was performed to test for differences between the Wednesday treatment class and the Saturday treatment class.

For each lesson and dimension, a 2-sample t-test assuming unequal variances tested for differences between the mean treatment group pretest score and the mean control group pretest score. To test for changes in score between the posttest and the pretest for both the treatment and the control groups, a paired t-test was used. The test was performed by taking the difference, posttest minus pretest, for each individual and testing the null hypothesis that the mean of those differences is 0. To test for differences between the treatment group and the control group in the mean change, posttest minus

pretest, a 2-sample t-test assuming unequal variances on the change scores for the control group and the treatment group was implemented.

The third research question attempted to identify which components of the Firm Foundation material were most significant in shaping the participants' perception of their discipleship commitment. Comparison of the responses of the pre- and posttest surveys, along with observation, class notes, recurring themes, and participants' comments accomplished this analysis.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

A positive relationship exists between the Firm Foundation course and increasing discipleship commitment among participants at Central UMC. The findings presented include a profile of the subjects, followed by the reliability of the instrument used. Finally, the results of the study are presented in relationship to the research questions.

Profile of Subjects

The treatment sample at the outset was fifty-seven adults in two different groups. Thirty people began in the Wednesday night class and twenty-seven participants were in the Saturday evening session. All fifty-seven people completed the pretest. The sample at the conclusion of the twelve-week course was fifty-three persons, or 93 percent, who completed both the class and the posttest. A sample of twenty adults comprised the control group; all twenty completed both the pretest and posttest.

Table 4.1 depicts basic demographic information for the treatment and control groups who completed both the pretest and posttest. The treatment group is presented as one large group due, in part, to the reality that participants attended the weekly sessions either on Wednesday or Saturday based on their schedules. Observation revealed participants' attendance was much higher than if only one course offering was provided. Thus, occasionally a regular Wednesday night attendee came to the Saturday group, and vice versa, so they would not miss that week's lesson.

Table 4.1. Demographics

Group	<i>n</i>	Gender			
		M	%	F	%
Treatment	53	25	44	32	56
Control	20	7	35	13	65

Instrument Reliability

The researcher-designed survey was comprised of two sections. Part I asked for basic information on a demographic survey (see Appendix B). Part II included the pretest and posttest surveys consisting of thirty statements measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1, “strongly disagree,” to 5, “strongly agree” (see Appendixes C and D). Both the pretest and posttest were identical with the exception of one additional question, number thirty-one, on the posttest, which allowed participants to provide additional comments.

The pretest and posttest consisted of two to three statements corresponding to each lesson of the Firm Foundation material (see Appendix H). The first survey, pretest, established a baseline of the respondents’ perception of their discipleship commitment at Central Church. The posttest provided a way of measuring progress and the change in perception of their discipleship commitment. Statements worded negatively in the survey were reverse coded in order to align their score properly with the positively worded items. All statistical computations were performed using Statistical Analysis Software (SAS). The reliability of the questionnaire as measured by the Chronbach’s alpha applied to the standardized pretest results was 0.888.

Subject scores in the treatment group increased significantly between the pre- and posttests. On the other hand, no significant change occurred in the scores for individuals in the control group (see Table 4.3).

Perceived Level of Discipleship Commitment

The first research question of this study was, “How do participants perceive their level of discipleship commitment as expressed in their spiritual and behavioral dimensions?” At the introductory sessions on Wednesday, 31 January and Saturday, 3 February 2007, the participants gathered for basic information about the course, to take the pretest, and to receive the Firm Foundation handbook (see Appendix G). The pretest survey revealed that the strongest areas of discipleship understanding among the group were that of a belief in God on some level (L1, God’s Character=4.34) and (L2, Relationship with God=4.43), as well as the concept of worship (L6, Worship=4.33). The weakest areas were that of understanding the importance of reading the Bible (L5, Scripture=3.76), discipleship (L10, Discipleship=3.60), and putting belief into action specifically at Central (L12, Discipleship Commitment=3.72).

Comparing the two larger categories of the surveys, the spiritual dimension (lessons 1-7) and the behavioral dimension (lessons 8-12), one can observe the spiritual and theological aspects of the group’s understanding was stronger (4.15) than the behavioral aspects of living out one’s understanding and beliefs (3.93; see Table 4.2).

Table 4.2. Comparison of Spiritual and Behavioral Dimensions

Lesson	Experimental Group	<i>n</i>	Pretest Mean (SD) ¹	Posttest Mean (SD)	Difference (Post-Pre) Mean (SD) p-val ²	p-value Treat=Cont ³
Spiritual	Treatment	52	4.15 (0.56)	4.41 (0.36)	0.27 (0.35) 0.000	0.000
	Control	20	4.08 (0.52)	4.05 (0.52)	-0.02 (0.16) 0.551	
Behav.	Treatment	51	3.93 (0.49)	4.28 (0.43)	0.34 (0.43) 0.000	0.000
	Control	20	3.86 (0.41)	3.85 (0.43)	-0.02 (0.12) 0.541	

¹ The two-sample t-test (unequal variance) indicates no significant differences in treatment pretest and control pretest for any of the lessons, dimensions, or overall.

² This represents paired t-test p-value associated with the null hypothesis that the mean change between pretest and posttest is 0.

³ This represents the two-sample t-test (unequal variance) p-value associated with the null hypothesis that the treatment group mean change equals the control group mean change.

The treatment group assembled on a volunteer basis. By the very fact that they agreed to participate indicated some level of interest in the study material. Church members comprised 82 percent of the group. One might assume, at the very least, participants had some level of understanding and desire to know God and to worship at Central. Therefore, the discovery that pretest mean scores would be higher in the two areas of God and worship is not surprising.

Observing the landscape of Central Church reveals a traditional congregation. The large size contributes to a significant amount of ministries and programs. The eclectic community assures diversity, and that element is certainly evident among the congregation. Church members vary greatly in their theological and social ideologies; however, most of the congregants would indicate some belief in God and spiritual matters.

The group that went through the Firm Foundation course is a very small segment of Central's congregation; however, the results were telling of people's perception of their discipleship commitment. Their starting point, pretest mean scores were higher in two categories (L1, God's Character, and L2, Relationship with God) than I would have assumed.

Interestingly, the treatment group scored higher in the pretest mean scores than did the control group in all but three areas: Treatment L4=4.21 compared to Control L4=4.30 (Prayer); Treatment L5=3.76 compared to Control L5=4.13 (Scripture); and, Treatment L12=3.72 compared to Control L12=3.78 (Discipleship Commitment; see Table 4.3). While not statistically significant, demographic analysis shows a difference in two areas that may have affected the mean scores. The average age of the treatment group (51.1) is lower than that of the control group (66.1; see Appendix E). Further, Sunday school involvement is higher among the control group (55 percent) than with the treatment group (18 percent; see Appendix E). These differences might explain why the control group would score higher in the areas of prayer (L4), Scripture reading (L5), and involvement in the church (L12).

When comparing both the treatment and control groups' pretest mean scores in the spiritual dimension (lessons 1-7), all of the treatment group scores were in the "4-and-above" range. All but two of the control group's scores were also above four. Analysis of the behavioral dimensions of the material (lessons 8-12) reveals the majority of the lessons scored in the "3-range." According to the Likert scale, the "4" is an "Agree" response, while the "3" is a "Neutral" or "Unsure" response. The scores would indicate a strong leaning towards my assumption that people generally believe and conceptually

understand discipleship issues more than they live out or act on those same beliefs. The categorical demographic information would strongly affirm this assumption as both treatment and control group numbers reveal a much higher percentage in the “not involved” responses of the specific survey questions pertaining to church involvement (see Appendix E).

Changes in Discipleship Commitment Perception

The second research question was, “What was the change of self-perception of the discipleship commitment expressed in the spiritual and behavioral dimensions subsequent to the study?” Significant change occurred in the treatment group’s discipleship commitment perception. Anecdotal comments from the posttest, provided later in this chapter, will reveal intentionality in regard to how they plan to act on their changed views of discipleship commitment.

Whereas no significant change occurred in the control group, every outcome of the treatment group, except the first category (L1, God’s Character) increased significantly between the pretest and posttest surveys (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Comparison of Treatment and Control Subject Test Scores

Lesson	Experimental Group	<i>n</i>	Pretest Mean (SD) ¹	Posttest Mean (SD)	Difference (Post-Pre) Mean (SD)	<i>p</i> -val ²	<i>p</i> -value Treat=Cont ³
1	Treatment	53	4.34 (0.55)	4.50 (0.56)	0.15 (0.62)	0.084	0.112
	Control	20	4.18 (0.75)	4.15 (0.76)	-0.03 (0.30)	0.716	
2	Treatment	53	4.43 (0.52)	4.63 (0.48)	0.20 (0.60)	0.020	0.109
	Control	20	4.30 (0.70)	4.32 (0.71)	0.03 (0.30)	0.716	
3	Treatment	53	4.03 (0.62)	4.28 (0.49)	0.25 (0.51)	0.001	0.001
	Control	20	3.98 (0.67)	3.85 (0.79)	-0.13 (0.40)	0.148	
4	Treatment	52	4.21 (0.80)	4.52 (0.62)	0.31 (0.54)	0.000	0.001
	Control	20	4.30 (0.80)	4.30 (0.75)	0.00 (0.16)	1.000	
5	Treatment	52	3.76 (0.85)	4.16 (0.69)	0.41 (0.62)	0.000	0.002
	Control	20	4.13 (0.81)	4.05 (0.71)	-0.08 (0.37)	0.379	
6	Treatment	52	4.33 (0.66)	4.60 (0.48)	0.27 (0.63)	0.003	0.382
	Control	20	4.05 (0.58)	4.20 (0.47)	0.15 (0.46)	0.163	
7	Treatment	52	4.06 (0.53)	4.34 (0.48)	0.28 (0.54)	0.001	0.003
	Control	20	3.78 (0.53)	3.75 (0.49)	-0.03 (0.28)	0.606	
8	Treatment	51	4.31 (0.54)	4.68 (0.42)	0.36 (0.55)	0.000	0.014
	Control	20	4.30 (0.41)	4.38 (0.32)	0.08 (0.37)	0.379	
9	Treatment	52	4.00 (0.63)	4.30 (0.55)	0.30 (0.56)	0.000	0.000
	Control	20	3.97 (0.55)	3.90 (0.50)	-0.07 (0.23)	0.214	
10	Treatment	52	3.60 (0.83)	4.02 (0.73)	0.42 (0.78)	0.000	0.011
	Control	20	3.45 (0.58)	3.48 (0.73)	-0.03 (0.47)	0.815	
11	Treatment	52	3.86 (0.66)	4.19 (0.69)	0.34 (0.78)	0.003	0.001
	Control	20	3.65 (0.63)	3.53 (0.57)	-0.13 (0.32)	0.096	
12	Treatment	52	3.72 (0.50)	4.07 (0.56)	0.35 (0.53)	0.000	0.000
	Control	20	3.78 (0.62)	3.75 (0.55)	-0.03 (0.03)	0.716	
Spirit.	Treatment	52	4.15 (0.56)	4.41 (0.36)	0.27 (0.35)	0.000	0.000
	Control	20	4.08 (0.52)	4.05 (0.52)	-0.02 (0.16)	0.551	

Table 4.3. Comparison of Treatment and Control Subject Test Scores, continued

Lesson	Experimental Group	<i>n</i>	Pretest Mean (SD) ¹	Posttest Mean (SD)	Difference (Post-Pre) Mean (SD) p-val ²	p-value Treat=Cont ³
Behav.	Treatment	51	3.93 (0.49)	4.28 (0.43)	0.34 (0.43) 0.000	0.000
	Control	20	3.86 (0.41)	3.85 (0.43)	-0.02 (0.12) 0.541	
Overall	Treatment	51	4.06 (0.43)	4.36 (0.46)	0.30 (0.35) 0.000	0.000
	Control	20	3.98 (0.47)	3.96 (0.47)	-0.02 (0.11) 0.414	

¹ The two-sample t-test (unequal variance) indicates no significant differences in treatment pretest and control pretest for any of the lessons, dimensions, or overall.

² This represents paired t-test p-value associated with the null hypothesis that the mean change between pretest and posttest is 0.

³ This represents the two-sample t-test (unequal variance) p-value associated with the null hypothesis that the treatment group mean change equals the control group mean change.

I chose a standard p-value less than or equal to .05 ($p\text{-val} \leq .05$) to indicate significant change. Observing the mean difference (post-pre) p-value for the treatment group clearly reveals all categories had significant change except for L1, (God's Character), as they were all well below .05. The main reason for such little change in L1 is due to the fact that the majority of the participants marked "5" in the pretest, and with such a high initial score no significant increase is possible using the Likert scale. As stated in the previous section, the first two lessons were the two highest scores on the pretest. The p-value (L1=.084) does not, however, mean that the lesson was not helpful to the group members; rather, statistically it was not as significant of a change as all the other categories.

The increases demonstrated in the treatment groups mean scores ranged from +.15 to +.42 in all categories, with the largest increase in categories L5 (Scripture) and L10 (Discipleship). In the spiritual dimension (lessons 1-7 combined), the mean

improvement was +.27, whereas the improvement for the behavioral dimension (lessons 8-12) was +.34. The overall means increase for the treatment group was +.30.

In addition to the significant positive change that took place among the treatment group, another encouraging element was that out of the fifty-seven people who began the class only four did not complete it to the end. The success rate of 93 percent speaks of the favorable impact the course had on participants. Leading both groups and seeing their eyes opening to new insights and observing the growth occurring in them was a true joy. Numerous and consistent comments were made throughout the course regarding the quality of the content and what impact it was having on individuals. The statistical analysis confirms the comments shared in class.

For the most part, as stated earlier, the Wednesday class and the Saturday class were similar in results, thus providing the opportunity to combine both treatment groups in order to compare them with the control group. However, four categories emerged where a comparison between the Wednesday and Saturday classes is worth noting (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.4. Comparison of Wednesday and Saturday Lessons with Significant Differences

Lesson	Wednesday		Saturday		Two-Sample t p-value
	<i>n</i>	Mean Diff. (SD) ¹	<i>n</i>	Mean Diff. (SD) ¹	
4	30	0.47 (0.59)	22	0.09 (0.40)	0.008
8	29	0.52 (0.60)	22	0.16 (0.39)	0.014
Behavioral	29	0.46 (0.44)	22	0.19 (0.38)	0.020
Overall	29	0.38 (0.38)	22	0.19 (0.28)	0.045

¹ Posttest minus pretest scores.

Analysis shows a difference between the means in the two treatment groups in L4 (Prayer) and L8 (Stewardship), as well as in the behavioral dimension and even in the overall category. Difficulty arises in an attempt to ascertain the reason for such differences. For example, group members occasionally switched meeting nights depending on their schedules. Perhaps group dynamics played a role. One noteworthy demographic observation that may lend insight to the differences can be seen in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5. Comparison of Wednesday and Saturday Variables with Significant Differences

Variable	Level	Wednesday		Saturday		Chi-Square p-value
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Involved in a Journey Group	No	27	93	20	71	0.032 ¹
	Yes	2	7	8	29	

¹ One of the four cells of the table has an expected cell count less than 5, so the assumptions of Pearson Chi-square test are not exactly met.

Table 4.5 reveals more people from the Saturday class are involved in Central's small group ministry known as Journey Groups. Two people from the Wednesday night class (7 percent) engage in group life, whereas eight people from the Saturday class (29 percent) are in a group. This difference may be significant as prayer is one core element of Journey Groups. I am also the point person for Journey Groups and, therefore, aware of what is being taught in the groups. Further insight into the Journey Group ministry provides awareness that the concept of stewardship and the living out of one's faith is encouraged regularly in the groups. Perhaps such an influence may reveal why less mean

difference resulted in the Saturday group in the listed areas as compared to the Wednesday class (see Table 4.4). Because the pretest mean score is higher in the Saturday class, one might assume less room for improvement on the posttest.

Contributing Factors

The third research question was, “What aspects of the Firm Foundation course were associated with the perceived changes?” Findings in each area of the treatment group increased between the pretest and the posttest. All but one of the categories (L1, God’s Character) had significant change (see Table 4.3). The difference in test results between both surveys revealed consistent growth throughout the entire twelve-week study. Several key factors contributed to participants’ positive growth and increased perception of discipleship commitment. Observation, class notes, recurring themes, and participants’ comments lent insight for these elements.

The first key factor was the Firm Foundation material. Injoy’s twelve-week study, Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ, states in the opening line of the introduction, “You’re about to embark on a life-changing journey. Glean every bit you can from the material, from your interaction with your discipler, and from God” (Firm Foundation 1).

Participants encountered quality, thorough, and engaging curriculum. Class members expressed the Firm Foundation handbook was the best material they had used. The lessons were well organized and contained great substance presented in easily understandable and relevant ways. The format consisting of having a combination of topical commentary, scriptural references mixed with reflective questions allowed participants to respond in their handbooks, which then prepared them to offer beneficial

discussion during the class meetings. I observed group members came to the sessions prepared and eager to grow and learn from each other. The volume of preparatory work was not so large as to discourage participants from completing it. Rather, the work load seemed appropriate and manageable.

The Firm Foundation introduction indicated that while a person may find themselves “on the right track in an area covered by one lesson,” they may discover they are in a different place of their spiritual lives in another area. “The point is to be teachable and be authentic before God and with your discipler” (Firm Foundation 1). I reiterated this concept throughout the twelve-weeks, which provided a level of comfort when people were wrestling with various topics. The course material challenged people. A straightforward approach involving theological basics of discipleship presented in a relevant manner was well received. While not condescending nor judgmental, the material did not apologize for the sake of the gospel, either.

A second key factor, the class sessions themselves, emerged as a significant part of the experience. While the Firm Foundation introduction indicates the material is suitable for a one-on-one discipleship application, I chose to implement the study in a group setting. Part of the goal in choosing this approach flowed from a desire to help people experience a smaller group setting. The hope was that such an experience might lead participants wanting to join a Journey Group after the twelve weeks, enabling further discipleship growth.

The leader facilitated the groups and invited much discussion during each lesson. People openly shared their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs. Much learning was gleaned from one another in class. Different viewpoints were encountered and considered. Still,

Scripture and the lesson material served as reference points and anchored the discussions. Again, comments by group members throughout the twelve weeks revealed how helpful the dialogue had been for them personally. They gained deeper understanding from other group members as well as the leader. They came to realize in a powerful way how God uses other people in the body of Christ to speak to each other. Conversations challenged them toward further introspection. For me, observing the transformation taking place in the participants' lives throughout the entire study was exciting. They were thinking and talking differently. They were more excited about their faith and more interested in getting connected in the life and ministries of the church.

This previous point flows into the third contributing factor, which was the discovery of the importance of being connected to the body of Christ. Lesson nine of the Firm Foundation study, "Why Should I Be with Other Believers: Take Your Place in God's Community," significantly impacted the participants, according to verbal feedback. This lesson was a key component in the overall behavioral dimension (lessons 8-12) of the material. Test results confirm a greater mean score improvement among the treatment group in the behavioral dimension than even in the spiritual dimension (see Table 4.2, p. 66).

Class comments from participants indicated the importance of this lesson, especially in the context of the theological foundations that had been laid in the previous weeks. Lesson nine is where the leader observed the numerous eye-opening experiences in participants as they related to being connected to the body of Christ and putting one's faith into action. Anecdotal comments, shared later in this chapter, also reveal the

importance of this lesson for their overall discovery and discipleship commitment growth.

Included in this lesson was the discovery and discussion of spiritual gifts. I introduced a spiritual gift inventory, Network, which supplemented this lesson. I handed out the inventory at the end of the previous lesson as additional preparation work for lesson nine. During lesson nine the class went through the definitions of the spiritual gifts, and many of the participants shared their own spiritual gifts. I demonstrated the importance of understanding one's gifts and passion and seeing how and when they connect to ministries in the church people are more apt to feel fruitful and fulfilled.

Group members responded positively in class as to the helpfulness of such a discovery. Only two individuals had taken a spiritual gift inventory prior to this class. To many participants this exercise was an eye-opening experience.

A fourth key factor contributed to increased discipleship commitment perception as well. Lesson twelve pulled the entire study together and challenged participants to develop a plan for implementing what they had learned in the Firm Foundation course. The lesson encouraged individuals to review their spiritual gifts, natural talents, key life experiences, resources, and opportunities God had put at their disposal, along with considering ministry needs at Central Church. Putting a plan together appeared to be significant for people as the experience concretized their learning and painted a picture for how they could act upon their perceived discipleship commitment and grow in their faith journey.

One final contributing factor surprisingly involved offering the course at two different times. Two course options dramatically increased overall attendance.

Unanimously, class members expressed the helpfulness of being able to switch meeting nights. Many indicated they would have been absent several times during the course of the twelve weeks had it not been for the two different meeting nights. Instead, because of the two classes, they were able to make adjustments and attend the other night's sessions. Some expressed without this option they would have missed a few classes and then would not have felt like continuing on in the study. Throughout the twelve weeks, attendance was high. While the numbers fluctuated in the Wednesday and Saturday classes, depending on people's schedules, the overall attendance remained constant. With increased attendance comes the possibility of greater impact on one's development and growth.

An additional item to note references that fifty-three people completed the study out of the fifty-seven who began (93 percent). This completion rate speaks favorably about the impact of the Firm Foundation course. The combination of solid, quality material, positive group interaction, realization of the importance of being connected to the body of Christ, and acknowledgment of the necessity of putting one's faith into action, as well as higher attendance as a result of two class options not only led to a substantial completion rate but also contributed to significant positive change in participants' perception of discipleship commitment.

Anecdotal Comments

At the end of the final class session, I distributed the posttest for completion. The survey was exactly the same as the pretest, with one exception, item number thirty-one, "What significant insight or learning will you take from this class and how will it impact your life?" All but two people responded to this question.

The information gleaned from item thirty-one was both interesting and helpful. The responses confirmed the statistical data as each one was positive in nature and indicated the respondents had grown in some way. Several responses revealed how individuals had come to understand the importance of prayer and study of God's word for daily living. Many more expressed how they had grown in their understanding of God and relationship with Christ. One individual shared that he had accepted Christ into his life as a result of the course experience. Many more generally referred to how they had grown in their faith and were encouraged to continue seeking ways to grow in their faith journeys.

Multiple responses acknowledged people's discovery of the importance of being connected and actively involved in ministry and church life. Several of these respondents shared specific ways they plan to use their gifts in ministries both inside and outside the church walls.

One additional exciting development came by way of participant responses as well as verbal commitments in the final class session. Ten to twelve people have committed to getting connected to a Journey Group at Central, and three of these people are willing to lead a group. As the point person for the Journey Group ministry, I was especially pleased to hear this feedback and commitment.

To lend further reflection to the findings of this research project, the following comments were extrapolated from item thirty-one of the posttest:

The specifics of the study were very helpful to me as well as broader viewpoints from the class members. An example was the ACTS [Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, Supplication] approach to prayer. This has touched me by showing me a way to feel comfortable with the content instead of the length of the prayer. Another example was the specifics of the spiritual gifts—how wonderful was the revelation that we

all have spiritual gifts to offer that otherwise would be overlooked or not understood as a gift.

I think in the broader spectrum, I better understand that God sent Jesus to us not to show us a more complicated way to be better followers but to simplify our understanding of what He wants for us and from us. I tend to complicate and bog down what God wants for me with details and static that isn't there or is created in my head. That is why my commitment to prayer is so vital for me. I need to prepare my heart to hear his word clearly and to act on this. God sure does know what He is doing—it's really that simple!

Such a comment speaks to the powerful experience this individual had throughout the twelve weeks.

Another person expressed these thoughts in response to the Firm Foundation course:

What I take away from this class is how much more I need to be doing to be a true disciple of Christ. I have always considered myself to be a Christian, but after this class I am almost disappointed in my actions (or lack of) as a Christian and I know that I am going to change and become more active from here on out.

This participant's transformation in perceived discipleship commitment promises to lead toward putting his or her faith into action.

One participant wrote, "You need to be engaged with all aspects of your relationship with God and the church to grow closer to God." Another commented, "I will use the knowledge of my spiritual gifts to find the ways that I can serve God and his people more effectively." Along the same lines, someone else wrote, "I plan to assist and give of my time and talents in the areas of my spiritual gifts of administration, craftsmanship and helps. I now see them as very valid and worthy to be used in the life of the church." Still one respondent spoke of the experience this way, "I want to use my spiritual gifts that I am now aware of for spiritual endeavors and for any services I am

called to do.” Another person wrote, “I learned about spiritual gifts and their definitions. The definitions gave me realistic expectations about how I can grow in discipleship.”

Another class member had these words to say in response to their experience:

The spiritual gift lesson was really eye-opening. I plan to talk with Tony about where best my spiritual gifts and talents can be used at the church. I want to join a Journey Group as well. I also take a lot away from the study of God and his role and the Holy Spirit—who, what, how they work in and through us. I think it has made me more aware of God’s presence in my life and more aware of how the Holy Spirit can work in and around me.

I would say this individual experienced the presence of God in an eye-opening way during the twelve weeks.

Other comments get to the heart of discipleship commitment as well: “It’s not the showing up that makes the difference, it’s the living and applying that makes the real difference. Folks see through words, but actions speak volumes.” Another put, “God is calling me to become more active in Christ. I have learned many things from this course about being a Christian, it is not just having morals and believing. It takes action, commitment and much more.” Someone else shared these words:

I plan to earnestly seek out opportunities to serve Him with the spiritual gifts and natural talents He has given me. Being a Christian is a call to action and each of us are called to contribute to the body of Christ in a different way and at different times. Bible study is essential to effectively grow and reach others. Being connected to the church through a small group is an important part of spiritual growth and in preparation of being able to reach others.

Here is an individual who better understands the importance of being connected to the body of Christ.

Another respondent shared these thoughts as a part of the posttest survey:

I have a firmer grasp of what it means to be a disciple of Christ and to live out my life for God. It is not as mystical as it once was. This course was down to earth and a great approach in helping us all grow in our

understanding about God and our relationship with God. I've realized I can't just be content with learning every now and then, but that God is calling me to do something with what I've learned. My husband and I both plan to get more involved in areas that we have interest in and that match up with our gifts and talents.

This comment speaks of the down-to-earth approach of the material, as well as the impact the course had on the individual.

Someone else commented on their experience when writing these words:

Religious Legalism makes one a good citizen while embracing the Spirit makes one a good Christian. I have the feeling that I have been very happy with being a good citizen while missing the boat. This course has helped me get in the boat.

I could not have made the point any better myself.

Summary of Findings

This research project provided the opportunity to implement the Firm Foundation study for the first time at Central UMC. The need at Central for a next-level course offering that would stimulate discipleship commitment and growth propelled me to lead the class and to test the findings as to whether or not this course material should be offered on a consistent basis. The statistical analysis revealed significant improvements across the categories tested. A positive relationship exists between the Firm Foundation study and increasing one's perception of discipleship commitment. In addition, the anecdotal comments are significant in their own right and show a desire to act upon their discipleship growth. The following points summarize the key findings:

1. Participants desired to know and understand God at the outset;
2. People tend to have a higher level of belief than of acting on their belief; and,
3. The Firm Foundation treatment was effective.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The initial concept of this research project began with a desire to fulfill my call to equip disciples for ministry. A substantial hurdle in discipleship commitment for any believer is one's mind-set or perception of being a Christian. Part of my passion has been to help instill a love and desire in following Christ among laity that would lead to deeper discipleship commitment. Central UMC is a great church of which I am blessed to serve, yet even as large as Central is, the traditional attitude of laity being recipients of ministry benefits while the pastors are primarily hired to care for their spiritual needs continues to pervade the congregation. Pastors cannot do ministry alone, nor should they. The biblical approach to ministry is that every believer is called and equipped to serve Christ. My personal call to ministry will not allow me to be satisfied with the status quo.

For years, a Newcomers Class, offered on a volunteer basis, provided four weeks of basic information about Central Church but did not effectively assimilate people into active participation. Not having any follow-up course or "next-level" study only perpetuated the traditional mind-set of simply having one's name on the membership role and coming as a spectator to worship. Continued numerical growth in the congregation and the lack of assimilating laity led to the sense of urgency of the church's ability to meet the demands of ministry.

Injoy's twelve-week study, Firm Foundation: Building Solid Disciples for the Body of Christ, was implemented in order to evaluate whether or not it might provide positive transformational change in people's mind-set and discipleship commitment perception. The results of the study would determine if Firm Foundation might become

the next-level course offering in order to increase the assimilation of people into active ministry involvement at Central Church. The Firm Foundation material effectiveness was evaluated by using a pretest-posttest survey for both participants of the study and a control group. The instrument measured how well the material's outcomes were achieved at Central United Methodist Church.

Evaluation and Interpretation

The data shows significant growth and improvement throughout all categories except one among the treatment group when comparing the treatment groups and the control group at Central Church. The data reveals several key findings.

A Desire to Know and Understand God at the Outset

Results from the pretest surveys showed similar mean scores for both treatment groups and the control group. The highest scores, or strongest outcomes, at the outset involved lessons one and two of the study. These chapters dealt with the topic of God. The fact that questions involving the concept of one's desire to know and understand God scored higher at the outset is not surprising considering the respondents were part of the church already. Most were members of the congregation and some were attendees, but one might assume each of the persons were predisposed toward desiring more knowledge about various aspects of God.

Central is a large, downtown church in a beautiful city nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains. The very culture of the community exhibits a strong eclectic element. The congregation experiences a demographic makeup of largely business professionals and well-educated people. Theological and social diversity is common place. Therefore, while some people in the congregation may not be quite sure what to do about the person

of Christ, most of them are very comfortable with the concept of God and searching for spiritual significance. Such a context explains a higher score in this area of the survey.

The demographic survey questions and spaces for open comments revealed respondents were attracted to Central Church because of its friendliness and multiple programs and ministries. One of the most common responses heard from visitors and individuals who eventually join the church references the hospitable nature of Central. In addition, energy and vibrancy exude from the life of the church. Perhaps this sense comes from the very size of the congregation. Perhaps the missional culture contributes to this observation. Maybe the down-to-earth quality worship, ministries, and leadership make the church attractive. More likely a combination of many factors draws people to Central. Building on such positive elements of congregational life should assist in reaching people for God and helping them grow in discipleship commitment.

People desire to belong to something bigger than themselves. God created humanity in God's image, and inherent in that nature is a relational element. Individuals search for connectedness with both God and other people (John-Charles 12).

Being in relationship with others is a powerful, motivating factor. People learn from the life experiences and testimonies of others. Listening and watching the example of those around them contribute to how they then live out their own lives. In matters of the faith, nothing is more moving than a personal experience or testimony. Coming together in a group setting lends support, encouragement, and accountability for being on the way of following Christ and growing in one's faith journey and discipleship commitment. For this reason, the body of Christ becomes essential for enabling people to meet God and grow in their relationship with the Lord and other believers. The apostle

Paul knew this reality as he wrote, “We will in all things grow up into 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” (Eph. 4:15-16).

Higher Level of Belief versus Acting on Belief

Another observation at the outset revealed respondents scored higher in the spiritual dimension than in the behavioral area. That people would score higher in what they believe versus how they live out their beliefs is not surprising. The data only strengthened the researcher’s assumptions held prior to the study. For instance, the behavioral dimension of the study (lessons 8-12) overall scored a 3.93 for the participants of the study, as compared to 4.15 in the spiritual dimension (lessons 1-7). Three of the five lessons in the behavioral category scored 3.60, 3.86, and 3.72 respectively (see Table 4.3, p. 69). These scores revealed that participants were largely unsure or neutral about the various matters. The topics for these lessons revolved around the importance of being connected to the body of Christ, using one’s gifts for ministry, reaching out to others, and doing something with their beliefs in active ministry participation—in short, discipleship commitment.

The discrepancy between belief and acting upon one’s belief is not a new human development. History reveals this phenomenon has been a reality for centuries. In fact, the Church even perpetuated the condition by encouraging the two-level hierarchy, “clergy” and “laity,” which stripped ministry out of the hands of laypeople (e.g., Guder et al.; Kraemer; Ogden; Snyder; Yoder). While reformers such as Luther and Wesley attempted to counteract such tradition by returning to a New Testament model of being

the Church, congregations continue to see its effects (Snyder, Radical Wesley 119).

Perhaps one can write this situation off as being “human nature,” but God’s design for God’s people is that action would follow and match belief.

Firm Foundation Effective

The Firm Foundation course was effective in increasing self-perception of discipleship commitment. The treatment groups’ scores increased significantly between the pretest and posttest surveys, while the scores of the control group did not. Participants of the study realized significant change in scores between the pretest and posttest in all categories except for the first lesson (God, L1). The reason for a p-value change of only .084 is due largely to the fact that the majority of the scores in the pretest were fives “5” on the Likert scale (see Table 4.3, p. 69) lowering the possibility for improvement on the posttest. Lesson one dealt with the concept of God and was the highest pretest score at the outset (4.34).

All other lessons (L2-12), as well as the larger categories of the spiritual dimension and the behavioral dimension realized significant improvement (see Table 4.3, p. 69). Voluntary comments contributed throughout the progression of the class as well as anecdotal comments recorded on the posttest provided further confirmation of the significant change that occurred in the lives of the participants. Energy and excitement escalated as new discoveries impacted their experience. Throughout the twelve weeks it seemed as if the majority of both treatment groups were having moments where the “lights were turned on” in their minds and hearts in relationship to their perception of their own discipleship commitment.

By the end of the study, most of the people were talking of how they were going to live out their lives differently, put their faith into action, and get involved in ministries that matched their spiritual gifts, talents, and interests. They voiced their acknowledgment of the importance of being connected to the body of Christ.

Class participants discovered for the first time the depth of understanding “*laos*” and “priest.” Seeing themselves not as “second-class” Christians but as significant “people of God” gave them a newfound sense of freedom that opened their world for new possibilities of how God longs to use them in ministry (e.g., Garlow; Kraemer; McNeal; Robinson). They were reminded that Jesus called laity to come and follow and then to go and serve. This invitation is for every believer, not just for those who are ordained.

The discovery of individuals’ spiritual gifts greatly impacted class members. Participants encountered concepts taught in Scriptures such as Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 Peter 4:10, Romans 12:4-8, and 1 Corinthians 12. These passages provide the biblical foundation for every person in the body of Christ being equipped for ministry and using what gift(s) they have been given for the glory of God and for the building up of the body of Christ.

Further, participants wrestled with the concept of leadership. Many of the class members had trouble thinking of themselves as leaders. However, the Firm Foundation material defined leadership as influence. Discussion of the close connection between leadership and being a disciple of Christ proved beneficial. Jesus calls each follower to be salt and light in the world. All believers are the people of God and called to influence others in making disciples for Christ no matter whether one is a clergy or laity. This Firm

Foundation lesson helped reshape people's view of leadership and their role as leaders for God.

The Firm Foundation study proved to be an effective and useful equipping tool for participants at Central Church. The data reveals significant improvement. Both written and verbal anecdotal comments offered throughout the twelve-week course further supports the findings. Participants shared their plans to continue to grow in their relationship with God. Most admitted they had not read the Bible or prayed as much as they had during this study and they experienced the benefit in doing so. Almost all of them expressed a genuine desire to continue building upon their discipleship commitment, indicating that the Firm Foundation class would not be the end but the start of a renewed and, in some cases, new desire for growth in their faith journeys. Others realized and commented on the importance of being connected with others relationally. Insights and growth occurred as a result of discussions, sharing, and hearing participants' stories and testimonies.

Among the congregation, conversations were being shared about the impact of the Firm Foundation course on the lives of those participating. I heard numerous comments by a wide variety of people who were not in the course about the positive feedback from class members. The excitement generated from these comments and conversations led to a number of people asking if I would be leading the class again. They expressed their desire to attend the next course offering. Multiple staff members also shared similar comments they heard from congregants. While this feedback is exciting, caution is encouraged so that the Firm Foundation study does not become just another "program" or the "latest, greatest offering."

Relation to Previous Studies

No known prior studies exist that measures the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation material. Injoy does not provide data for the effectiveness of its curriculum, nor does it reveal any testing that led to revisions and the final development of its work. Nevertheless, the introduction of the Firm Foundation study makes this claim as it addresses the leader/discipler:

You are embarking on an incredible journey, one in which God is allowing you to share your life with another person in order to help them become more Christ-like. It's an opportunity to help your brother or sister become more intimate with your Heavenly Father, and in the process, discover his or her place in God's plan. (Firm Foundation 1)

Injoy further addresses the leader of the class:

Although the process of discipleship involves teaching, your mission is a greater one: to partner with God in transforming a life. The truths that you pass to your disciplee are not just informational, they're meant to be transformational. It's the essence of Paul's words to the Corinthians when he said, "Follow my example, as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). (Firm Foundation 1)

Injoy's claim of the transformational purpose of the Firm Foundation material proves to be accurate in light of the statistical data of this research project evaluated at Central United Methodist Church.

The Firm Foundation handbook indicates it could be used in one-on-one discipleship efforts; however, the need of Central Church compelled me to implement the study in a group context. The course material provides a theological and relevant framework for helping people see the importance of their involvement in the body of Christ, thus increasing their discipleship commitment. The research's relation to the Firm Foundation material is to quantify the effectiveness of the twelve-week study among participants.

Implications

The implementation of the Firm Foundation study dramatically increased the perception of discipleship commitment among participants. The potential for significant impact upon the life of Central Church is exciting to anticipate. Subsequent studies to gauge participants' actual follow-through was not within the scope of this research project; rather, the intent of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation material on individuals' perceived discipleship commitment within the life of Central United Methodist Church.

The results of the study clearly show respondents grew in both spiritual and behavioral dimensions of their understanding of Christian discipleship. Based on the results of this study, Central will continue to offer the Firm Foundation course as a means of increasing discipleship commitment and assimilation into the life of the church. The response of the group participants confirmed it to be a suitable match for the personality and style of congregational representatives.

Discipleship commitment and equipping of laity are key elements in any body of Christ. They are not to be taken lightly. Generally speaking, the concepts of equipping and discipleship commitment are verbally received and acknowledged in the life of Central; however, careful attention will need to be given to these topics if continued improvement is desired. Further, follow-up strategies will need to be established to ensure realized progress. Such strategies include connecting people with Journey Groups upon completion of the Firm Foundation course, allowing participants to share their testimonies in class, as well as in worship, so that others might be motivated to seek avenues of growing in their faith and discipleship commitment, counseling others in how

they can put their spiritual gifts into action at Central, and occasionally having celebration dinners and events to promote opportunities and bring others together for mutual encouragement. Finally, staff and leaders among the laity must model and elevate their own discipleship commitment and equipping as a priority in the life of the church.

Pastors and other church leaders who desire to implement a similar approach to increasing discipleship commitment and or assimilating believers should give considerable prayer, time, and attention to understanding the needs and makeup of their own congregation.

As participants of the Firm Foundation study take steps toward increasing their discipleship commitment, they will likely experience the joy of service and the support and encouragement of being more relationally connected with the body of Christ. Greater involvement in ministry by highly motivated laypeople serving in areas that better match their gifts will benefit the kingdom of God in extraordinary ways. Pastors and lay leaders will find more satisfaction in equipping others to fulfill their own ministry commitments rather than doing the majority of the ministry themselves. More will be accomplished for Christ. The body will be strengthened and God will be glorified.

Theological Reflection

Scripture points out that every believer is important to God and called to be a part of God's purpose and ministry. Passages such as Ephesians 4:11-13, 1 Peter 4:10, Romans 12:4-8, and 1 Corinthians 12 provide the biblical foundation for every person in the body of Christ being equipped for ministry and using what gift(s) they have been given for the glory of God and for the building up of the body. Ministry, as described in the New Testament, was not intended for the "professional Christian" alone but for laity

and clergy working together, side by side (Garlow 41). Both clergy and laity make up the entire body of Christ. Neither is more important than the other; each plays a role.

Ephesians 4 indicates that some people among the body have been called to different forms of leadership, but this calling does not negate every believer's need to serve in ministry. Instead, such forms of leadership are intended to encourage, enable, and equip people for ministry based on their particular gifts (Throop 97).

History has shown a divergence from the New Testament model for ministry as the lines of demarcation were drawn between "laity" and "clergy" (Kraemer 50). However, numerous attempts have been made to return ministry into the hands of the laity. The Reformation and the Methodist movement are two excellent examples. Nevertheless, the Church today wrestles with the same issues. God's call remains the same. Transformation among churches requires courageous leadership. It requires a change of mind-set among all the members of the family of God. If progress is to be realized, believers must see their value as an important part of the body of Christ, they must heed the call to grow in their discipleship commitment, and they must utilize their gifts in active ministry involvement. If this transformation occurs, people very well may experience what Paul described in Ephesians 4:12-13, that the whole body "will 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."

Contributions to Research Methodology

The main contribution of this research is that it utilizes quantitative methods to evaluate material that has not been previously analyzed. Researchers approach studies with various assumptions and bias. My initial review of the Firm Foundation material

indicated a solid, well-rounded curriculum. I anticipated favorable reaction to the material as well as positive results. Being objective was impossible for me, as a pastor and leader of the class; however, by utilizing an instrument that quantified results, I was able to view the outcome from a more objective perspective. The results verified my assumptions about the possibility of transformation of discipleship commitment perception among participants of the Firm Foundation study.

Another contribution of the research suggests further longitudinal design studies might prove beneficial. This project took place over a thirteen-week period (including the initial meeting when the pretest was distributed, completed, and collected followed by twelve weeks of the treatment course). Further follow-up studies would lend insight as to the effectiveness between perceived and realized discipleship commitment.

Limitations

One limitation is the time frame of the study. The Firm Foundation introduction indicates the course's hope for increased discipleship commitment:

The goal of being disciplined is to become more Christ-like. But that process doesn't end when you complete the last lesson. Your growing process continues as you take steps to apply what you've learned and serve in a specific ministry or take another person through the discipleship process yourself. (Firm Foundation 1)

While significant change occurred in individuals' perceptions of their discipleship commitment, the scope of this project did not include a longitudinal study to evaluate if people actually followed through with their discipleship intentions. This implementation of the Firm Foundation material was the first experience with the study for both Central and me. The long-term effects of the treatment are yet to be known; however, due to the positive test results this Firm Foundation study will continue to be offered in order to

achieve a higher level of discipleship commitment among the congregation. Success will require continued evaluation and adjustment.

Implementing and evaluating this course material at only one location was another limitation of this study. The completion rate (93 percent) seemed successfully high for this project. Having more churches involved in the study may have proven beneficial.

One other possible limitation could also be seen as a benefit. The two treatment groups (Wednesday class and Saturday class) were given the possibility of switching meeting nights based on their schedule. A number of participants took advantage of this opportunity and instead of missing a lesson they simply attended the other class offering. On the one hand, this approach may be seen as corrupting the test results. On the other hand, attendance was much greater from lesson to lesson because people had two opportunities to attend each week.

Unexpected Conclusions

The significant positive change that took place in almost every area was pleasantly surprising. My assumption was that people's perceptions would be impacted more by the behavioral dimension of the material. Seeing the straight-across-the-board dramatic improvements only heightened the potential future for positive impact on Central Church by this material.

Another encouraging discovery was how serious people were about searching for genuine growth and opportunities. The people responded extremely well to the material which exhibited openness to God's working in their lives. The very fact that fifty-three people completed the course out of the starting number of fifty-seven truly is amazing.

Yet another unexpected discovery was the advantage of offering two different course times, which allowed for a higher attendance rate. The positive response to the two time slots is already having an impact on our staff planning for future ministry endeavors.

Practical Applications

One application of this study is that Central Church will be offering this course on an ongoing basis as a way of positively developing disciples for Jesus Christ and connecting people relationally. Believing in the gospel is the foundation for both perception of Christ and the way we live out our lives for Jesus. Continued monitoring and evaluation will aid in any adjustments needed for future effectiveness.

Another application of this study can be the initiation of further studies that might expand evaluation of the effectiveness of the Firm Foundation material. People may adapt the survey to meet their needs. Developing more instruments for testing other effects of the study would be helpful, as well as performing tests across a broader context.

Certainly the Firm Foundation material is rooted in the core beliefs of the Christian faith. For this reason, it would be suitable for use in a variety of churches and denominations as long as careful review and consideration is given by each location so as to make sure it aligns with their mission and objective.

Conclusion

The application of the Firm Foundation study material to Central United Methodist Church yields significant results. An overwhelmingly positive experience was had by both myself as the leader and the participants of the course. As the facilitator of

the study, as well as one of the pastors in the congregation, I am very encouraged and even more resolute to my call to raise up disciples for Christ and equip the saints for the work of the ministry. To see the excitement in the lives of individuals who for the very first time realize they have gifts that can contribute to the ministry of Christ and the life of the church in a way that leaves them feeling fruitful and fulfilled is a true joy. Nothing seems more rewarding. Though Central Church enjoys many positive attributes, continued growth is possible. Increased discipleship commitment can be realized. More lives impacted for Christ is part of the goal. I have been blessed to have been a part of this experience.

APPENDIX A

Firm Foundation Material Outline

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APPENDIX B

Demographic Survey

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following spaces to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your Mother's Maiden Name _____

The last four digits of your Social Security Number _____

Used for privacy purposes: (Please complete each of the following categories.)

Age: _____

Gender: ___ Male ___ Female

Current Marital Status:

___ Single (Never Married) ___ Married ___ Divorced ___ Widowed

Your children: ___ Number ___ Number living at home

How long have you been attending Central United Methodist Church?

___ 0-1 year ___ 2-3 years ___ 4-5 years ___ 6-10 years ___ 10+ years

How often do you attend the weekly worship services?

___ Once a month ___ 2 times a month ___ 3 times a month ___ 4 times a month
 _____ other

What is your relationship to the church? ___ Member ___ Attendee

What attracted you to Central Church?

Are you involved in either Sunday school and/or a Journey Group on a regular basis (twice a month or more)? ___ Sunday school ___ Journey Group

What ministries do you serve in?

___ Worship ___ Sunday school ___ Journey Group ___ Missions Council
 ___ Education ___ Evangelism ___ Youth Group ___ Prayer Group
 ___ Children's Ministries ___ Music ___ Congregational Care
 ___ Other _____

How many people do you associate with on a regular basis here at Central? (As in significant relationships?) ___ 0-1 ___ 2-3 ___ 4-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 10+

How many people do you associate with on a regular basis who are not part of the church? (Significant relationship with those who do not participate in any church?)

___ 0-1 ___ 2-3 ___ 4-5 ___ 6-10 ___ 10+

APPENDIX C

Firm Foundation Pretest

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following spaces to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your Mother's Maiden Name ____
 The last four digits of your Social Security Number ____ _

Part II:

Please respond to each statement on a scale of 1 to 5.

- 1 - Strongly Disagree with the statement
- 2 - Disagree
- 3 - Neutral or Unsure
- 4 - Agree
- 5 - Strongly Agree

Please mark the exact number and not any where between the numbers.

1. I desire to know God.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

2. I am unsure what I think of God.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

3. Having a personal relationship with God is necessary to me.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

4. I understand the difference between knowing about God and knowing God personally.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

5. Understanding my identity in Christ is important for me to become all I can for God.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

6. I am growing in my understanding of my identity in Christ.

____1 ____2 ____3 ____4 ____5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

7. I am unsure of my identity in Christ.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

8. Prayer is an important part of my daily life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

9. Prayer is essential for me to grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

10. I regularly read Scripture.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

11. Reading Scripture is important for me to grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

12. Worshiping God can take place outside of a church service.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

13. I praise God every day in some way.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

14. Obedience is more than following rules.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

15. Obedience to God restricts me.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

16. Obedience has direct implications for how I grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

17. Managing my resources are important to God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

18. Stewardship is about more than money.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

19. Stewardship is important to God; therefore, it is important to me.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

20. Being connected in a community of Christ is essential for growing in one's faith and living out God's purpose for his/her life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

21. A person can be a Christian and live out their life for God without being involved in a church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

22. It is important for me and my walk with God to be involved in a church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

23. God calls me personally to go and help make disciples.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

24. Making disciples is the responsibility of every believer.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

25. God calls each believer to take a leadership role in some degree.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

26. I would like to become more of a leader for Christ.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

27. I have a clear understanding of how God is calling me to live out my life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

28. God is calling me to _____ through this study.

29. I desire to grow in my discipleship commitment to God and to the church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

30. In order to live out my commitment to God and to the church I plan to _____
_____.

APPENDIX D

Firm Foundation Posttest

In order to assure complete anonymity, please fill in the following spaces to create your own personal code:

The first initial of your Mother's Maiden Name _____

The last four digits of your Social Security Number _____

Part II:

Please respond to each statement on a scale of 1 to 5.

1 - Strongly Disagree with the statement

2 - Disagree

3 - Neutral or Unsure

4 - Agree

5 - Strongly Agree

Please mark the exact number and not any where between the numbers.

1. I desire to know God.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

2. I am unsure what I think of God.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

3. Having a personal relationship with God is necessary to me.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

4. I understand the difference between knowing about God and knowing God personally.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

5. Understanding my identity in Christ is important for me to become all I can for God.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

6. I am growing in my understanding of my identity in Christ.

_____1 _____2 _____3 _____4 _____5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

7. I am unsure of my identity in Christ.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

8. Prayer is an important part of my daily life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

9. Prayer is essential for me to grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

10. I regularly read Scripture.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

11. Reading Scripture is important for me to grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

12. Worshiping God can take place outside of a church service.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

13. I praise God every day in some way.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

14. Obedience is more than following rules.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

15. Obedience to God restricts me.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
 Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

16. Obedience has direct implications for how I grow in my relationship with God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

17. Managing my resources are important to God.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

18. Stewardship is about more than money.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

19. Stewardship is important to God; therefore, it is important to me.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

20. Being connected in a community of Christ is essential for growing in one's faith and living out God's purpose for his/her life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

21. A person can be a Christian and live out their life for God without being involved in a church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

22. It is important for me and my walk with God to be involved in a church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

23. God calls me personally to go and help make disciples.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

24. Making disciples is the responsibility of every believer.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

25. God calls each believer to take a leadership role in some degree.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

26. I would like to become more of a leader for Christ.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

27. I have a clear understanding of how God is calling me to live out my life.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

28. God is calling me to _____ through this study.

29. I desire to grow in my discipleship commitment to God and to the church.

____ 1 ____ 2 ____ 3 ____ 4 ____ 5
Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral/Unsure Agree Strongly Agree

30. In order to live out my commitment to God and to the church I plan to _____
_____.

31. What significant insight or learning will you take from this class and how will it impact your life?

APPENDIX E

Comparison of Demographic Variables

Variable	Level	Treatment		Control		Chi-Square p-value
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Gender	Male	25	44	7	35	0.489
	Female	32	56	13	65	
Marital status	Married	39	68	12	60	0.493
	Unmarried	18	32	8	40	
Number of years attending Central United Methodist Church	0-5	38	67	6	30	0.004
	6 or more	19	33	14	70	
How often do you attend weekly worship?	0-3 per month	20	36	7	37	0.970
	4 per month	35	64	12	63	
What is your relationship to the church?	Member	47	82	19	95	0.168 ²
	Attendee	10	18	1	5	
Involved in Sunday school twice a month or more?	No	46	81	9	45	0.002
	Yes	11	19	11	55	
Involved in a Journey Group twice a month or more?	No	43	75	18	90	0.167 ²
	Yes	14	25	2	10	
Serve in worship	No	36	63	11	55	0.520
	Yes	21	37	9	45	
Serve in Sunday school	No	49	86	12	60	0.014 ²
	Yes	8	14	8	40	
Serve in Journey Group	No	47	82	18	90	0.425 ²
	Yes	10	18	2	10	
Serve in missions	No	55	96	20	100	
	Yes	2	4	0	0	
Serve in education	No	56	98	20	100	
	Yes	1	2	0	0	

Variable	Level	Treatment		Control		Chi-Square p-value	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Serve in evangelism	No	56	98	18	90	0.319	
	Yes	1	2	2	10		
Serve in prayer group	No	54	95	18	90		
	Yes	3	5	2	10		
Serve in children's ministry	No	54	95	20	100		
	Yes	3	5	0	0		
Serve in music	No	53	93	18	90		
	Yes	4	7	2	10		
Serve in congregational care	No	56	98	17	85		
	Yes	1	2	3	15		
Serve in other areas	No	39	68	14	70		
	Yes	18	32	6	30		
Number of people associate with on a regular basis at Central	0-5	33	58	9	45		0.277
	6 or more	24	42	11	55		
Number of people associate with on a regular basis who are not part of any church	0-5	32	56	14	70	0.277	
	6 or more	25	44	6	30		

¹ P-values are not reported for tables with 2 or more cells having expected counts less than 5.

² One of the four cells of the table has an expected cell count less than 5 so the assumptions of the Pearson chi-square test are not exactly met.

APPENDIX F

Comparison of Numeric Demographic Variables

Variable	Treatment		Control		Two-Sample t-test p-value
	<i>n</i>	Mean (SD)	<i>n</i>	Mean (SD)	
Age	57	51.1 (13.2)	19	66.1 (17.0)	0.002
Number of children	57	1.37 (1.16)	20	2.00 (1.34)	0.070
Number of children at home	57	0.35 (0.59)	20	0.25 (0.72)	0.589

APPENDIX G

Firm Foundation Meeting Schedule

Firm Foundation Study Schedule—2007		
Wednesday 6:00-7:30 p.m.	Room 206	Saturday 7:30-8:50 p.m.
31 January 2007	Introductory Session	3 February 2007
7 February	Session 1	10 February
14 February	Session 2	17 February
21 February (Ash Wed. 7:00-8:15)	Session 3	24 February
28 February	Session 4	3 March
7 March	Session 5	10 March
14 March	Session 6	17 March
21 March	Session 7	24 March
28 March	Session 8	31 March
4 April	Session 9	7 April
11 April	Session 10	14 April
18 April	Session 11	21 April
25 April	Session 12	28 April

APPENDIX H

Survey Questions to Firm Foundation Lesson Key

Pre- and Posttest Survey Questions Corresponding with Firm Foundation Lessons

Lesson	Topic	Survey Questions Relating to Lesson
1	God's character	1, 2
2	Relationship with God	3, 4
3	Identity in Christ	5, 6, 7
4	Prayer	8, 9
5	Scripture	10, 11
6	Worship	12, 13
7	Obedience	14, 15, 16
8	Stewardship	17, 18, 19
9	Belonging/Community	20, 21, 22
10	Discipleship	23, 24
11	Leadership	25, 26
12	Commitment/Plan	27, 28, 29, 30

Lessons 1-7 created the Spiritual Dimension; Lessons 8-12 created the Behavioral Dimension.

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