ABSTRACT

DISCOVERING THE CATALYSTS FOR GROWING TRUE DISCIPLES

IN AN EMERGING POSTMODERN CULTURE

Wayne D. Spears, II

This project sought to identify men and women who were already vibrant, zealous disciples in order to discover what catalyzed their growth into spiritual maturity.

The review of literature analyzed the shift from modernity to postmodernity and how each worldview affected the American church's views of discipleship, especially the classic spiritual disciplines.

Disciples who exhibited lifestyles consistent with passionate discipleship were identified and then their spiritual behavior was quantified. Candidates were subsequently interviewed in order to ascertain the most formative and influential events and avenues in their progress toward fullness in Christ.

The catalysts revealed in the interviews can be arranged in six major categories: influential relationships, supernatural experiences, leaps of faith, finances, Bible reading, and forgiveness. These six catalysts provided the context, activity, and points of obedience that propelled these fifteen candidates to true discipleship.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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IN AN EMERGING POSTMODERN CULTURE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Acknowledgement seems ironic understatement for the following people.

Mom and Dad. Thank you for always believing in me and setting an incredible example in the home and out of it.

Aubrey. Thank you for your intelligence and gift of encouragement.

Julie. In calm moments of certain days I am disquieted by the unexpected thought of how deep has been your influence in my life. I thank God often for the gift of you. I love you.

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Understanding the Problem

> Today's church is in serious trouble…. I am suggesting that the 21st century
> Church looks little like—and has far less power than—the church as it formed
> in Jerusalem in the book of Acts.
> Tim Clinton, qtd. in Len Hjalmarson

Context of the Study

Mrs. H. made a profession of faith as a child. She is now eighty-five years old

and recently informed her pastor that not once in her lifetime has she verbally shared her

faith. Mrs. B. is the church secretary and is active in the life of the church. In a discussion

about abortion, she stated that although she believed that abortion was a form of murder,

if her teenage daughter confided a pregnancy to her, she would be the first to drive her

daughter to the abortion clinic. Mrs. C. has worshipped in her neighborhood church for

several decades while battling an addiction to gambling. Mr. D. asks the pastor why God

will not answer his prayers to heal his marriage. Later in the conversation, he admits that

he has recently been drinking heavily and smoking some marijuana. One Saturday night

he met a woman in a bar and drove with her to find a hotel although he fortunately had a

change of heart and did ask her to leave before actually following through with his

intentions. Dan C. left his wife and two preschool children for a woman with whom he

was engaged in an affair. He claimed that God advocated his decision. Each of these

people claims to be a disciple of Christ.

American Christianity

An argument could persuasively be made that these people are representative of

the norm of American Christianity rather than the exception. Almost nine out of ten

Americans describe themselves as "Christian" (Barna 11). In a separate survey by the

same author, under the more stringent label of "born-again Christians," less than 10 percent of self-proclaimed Christians said that they had intentionally built a relationship with someone for the purpose of sharing the gospel message (35). One executive of the North American Mission Board argues, "[N]inety-two percent of Southern Baptists will die without ever witnessing to another person about Jesus" (Sweet, Postmodern Pilgrims 162). Pastors know that their pews are full of people who profess to be followers of Christ but in values, beliefs, and actions are substantively identical to those who do not claim to follow Christ. George Barna claims that according to a gauge of forty-two indicators, only five indicators evidence a statistical difference between Christians and non-Christians (64). "Churches are full of individuals who have spent years as Christians yet live lives that reflect little of the fruit of the Holy Spirit" (White 59).

Jesus promised that his followers would be a part of a Church so powerful that not even death could dissuade it from fulfilling its purpose (Matt. 16:18). Almost two thousand years later, the Church appears to be impotent to affect a nation that leads the industrialized world in teen pregnancy, violent deaths, murder, rape, robbery, and other measures of sin ("It's Time"; Prescott; "Teen Pregnancy"; Weiner). "Believers are largely indistinguishable from non-believers in how they think and live. The Church has lost its place at the table of cultural influence" (Barna 14). American culture, in fact, seems to be a major influencer of American Christianity:

> Amid a flood of techniques for self-fulfillment there is an epidemic of depression, suicide, personal emptiness, and escapism through drugs and alcohol, cultic obsession, consumerism, and sex and violence—all combined with an inability to sustain deep and enduring personal relationship. Christians are among those caught up in the sorrowful epidemic just referred to.… [M]odern thinking has come to view the Christian faith as powerless, even somehow archaic, at the very least irrelevant. (Willard, Spirit viii)

America is populated by people who consider themselves Christian simply

because they intellectually assent to the God of Christianity. Intellectual assent does not

translate well, nor often, into supernatural transformation, either of individuals or of

cultures. In reality, "each of us is called to become a true image of Christ, to become a

Jesus face" (Sweet, Jesus Drives Me Crazy! 52). Discipleship is about zeal for Christ and

reproducing that zeal in others (Barna 20). Much of America claims to believe in Christ,

but few actually measure up to Christ's own definition of being his disciple (John 8:31).

   The irony is that most Christian churches spend much energy, time, and resources

on discipleship. "Almost every church in our country has some type of discipleship

program or set of activities. Stunningly few churches have a church of disciples" (Barna

21). The main event of the Sunday worship hour is often a sermon about how to live

more exactly a life of obedience to Christ. In many churches, this worship hour is

immediately preceded by a Bible study hour that focuses on conveying biblical

knowledge so that parishioners may more closely follow the commands of the Bible.

Even those churches that have a Sunday evening meeting generally consider it some sort

of "discipleship training" time. Unfortunately for many sincere Christians, "Bible study,

prayer and church attendance, among the most commonly prescribed activities in

Christian circles, generally have little effect for soul transformation, as is obvious to any

observer" (Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines"). The very thing that the institutionalized

church purportedly wants most is what seems to be most lacking.

   Church leaders have historically relied upon dispensation of knowledge with a

view toward practicing the spiritual disciplines as the pathway to discipleship (Wesley;

Kempis; Foster). Through many centuries this method has been adequate, but now brews

a cultural revolution, termed postmodernity, that has already begun to de-systematize the

pathways of spiritual journey. "Education is about conveying information.… Information

alone isn't enough to transform" (Ortberg). Classic spiritual disciplines are still relevant,

but this cultural revolution might render them ineffective if received, internalized, and

practiced in ways historically accepted, especially those disciplines imbued with a

primary emphasis placed upon a transfer of knowledge. Centuries-old methods of

teaching spiritual disciplines are insufficient for the spiritual seekers of a postmodern

culture:

> What Christians were normally told to do, the standard advice to
> churchgoers, was not advancing them spiritually: attend the services of the
> church, give of time and money, pray, read the Bible, do good to others,
> and witness to their faith, Christians were not able to do even these few
> necessary things in a way that was really good for them, as things that
> would be an avenue to life filled and possessed of God. (Willard, Spirit
> 18)

Somewhere in the ebb and flow of the modernistic worldview, an inherent human

tendency toward self-orientedness and ease pressed modernity to subsume and modify

spiritual disciplines. Eventually, Christians in modernity too often put on the mantle of

the disciplines, disciplines bent toward reason, individualism, and dualism, only to live

lives bereft of godliness and power.

  Churches might be full of bodies yet evidence a serious paucity of disciples. "The

natural tendency, of course, is to believe that we are doing okay, that we just need to

tweak a few things and everything will be great" (Barna 13). One might wonder if the

generic local congregation is really a church. If the church has no, or few, disciples, then

that church would prove impotent in assisting God in his redemptive plan for the world.

Biblical/Theological Foundations

  Simply stated, God's plan for the redemption of the world relies heavily on his

followers' ability to enact the last command of Jesus. The well-known Great Commission

articulates the unmistakable imperative to "make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). A study of the

verse in its original language reveals that the crux of the commission can be misplaced to the word "go" when read in English translations. The only imperative in Matthew 28:19-20 is the word *matheteusete*. Grammatically speaking, this command to "make disciples" contains the thrust of the sentence. As a consequence of the grammatical structure, Jesus' marching orders to his followers immediately preceding his ascension could be summarized in that command. Since Jesus has not yet reappeared to supercede his last directions, those who are called by God to be ambassadors of his name two thousand years later have the same dictum—make disciples.

The nature of Jesus' idea of what constitutes a disciple bears "*Mathetes* always implies the existence of a personal attachment which shapes the whole life of the one described as *mathetes*, and which in its particularity leaves no doubt as to who is deploying the formative power" (Kittel 441). The command to "make disciples" necessitates the cultivation of relationship with a person rather than focusing on the tenets of a belief system. While the belief system is vital and necessary, it is not primary nor solitary.

In opposition to the rabbinical system of disciple making, Jesus himself chose his followers. In the Rabbinate, initiates would pick the teacher to whom they wished to attach themselves (Kittel 444). In Jesus' paradigm, he calls followers to discipleship (444). The distinction may seem subtle, but a correlation exists between Jesus initiating the call to discipleship and the way the Spirit calls sinners to repentance and salvation. More pertinent to the subject of true discipleship is the idea that Jesus stands at the core, from the invitation to the interaction:

> The factor on which the whole emphasis lies is exclusively the person of Jesus. As it is He who finally decides whether a man enters into discipleship, so it is He who gives form and content to the relationship of His disciples. (445)

True disciples are birthed, grown, and sustained by the person of Jesus. "Going," "baptizing," and "teaching" are indicators and symptoms of discipleship, not discipleship itself. True discipleship is the emptying of self so that the Godhead may make himself at home in the body of the disciple.

True discipleship is both an end in itself and a means to an end. Discipleship in all other vocations is the avenue by which one becomes the teacher or practitioner. "For the disciple of Jesus, however, discipleship is not a first step with the promise of greater things to come. It is the fulfillment of his destiny" (Kittel 448). Discipleship is the goal and the process. If disciples could remember to define discipleship as a relationship rather than the learning of a set of beliefs, the Church would be a more presentable bride. The Gospel of John lends weight to this thought. John 15:5 refers to "abiding" in Jesus as the essence of productive discipleship.

For too long churches have prescribed behavior and set forth intellectual assent as the path to and indicator of discipleship without realizing that they were undermining their own efforts:

> The realities of Christian spiritual formation are that we will not be transformed into Christlikeness by more information, or by infusions, inspirations, or ministrations alone. Though these have an important place, they never suffice, and reliance upon them alone explains the now common failure of committed Christians to rise much above a certain level of decency. (Willard, "Spiritual Formation in Christ")

Right behavior spawned from the wrong motivation lends itself to powerless living and subsequent frustration. Intellectual assent without relationship results in spiritual snobbery and Pharisee-like convictions. Churches are full of these people, and the kingdom of God duly suffers.

Salvation never appropriates itself by right doctrine alone. James claims, "[F]aith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (Jas. 2:17). Correct doctrine is a step

towards salvation but is powerless in itself unless it is manifest in a faith that motivates a lifestyle. The nature of Jesus' life implies correct doctrine with the accompanying lifestyle. Spiritual power does not emanate from culturally relevant holiness. Salvation and spiritual power, redemption and sanctification, originate and persevere in the Godhead. One way to describe what God is looking for is to borrow a phrase from Orthodox Christianity. "Ingodded" describes those who are so yielded to God that they have become "by grace everything that God is by nature" (Sweet, Jesus Drives Me Crazy! 142).

Local churches need a new paradigm to grow true disciples in a new worldview. Rather than harvesting decisions and spoonfeeding perpetually baby Christians, a local church should cultivate an environment inherently conducive to growing true disciples. Churches should exercise introspection to determine which activities are profitable for producing true disciples and which are counterproductive. Local congregations should determine if a process exists that makes probable, rather than accidental, a true disciple. Many long for the day when local churches produce enough true disciples that they can get busy with the business of "turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). To allow this introspection accurately, one must take into account the environment that shapes and molds the people who exist therein.

The modern era produced numerous paragons of godliness. Every era of history has its benefits, but also its excesses. The contention here is that modernity as a worldview is being replaced with postmodernity. Proportional to the degree of the influence of postmodernism, modernistic pathways of discipleship avail to a constantly lessening degree—thus the paradox of widespread discipleship within churches proportional to a preponderance of nominal disciples—in a society that increasingly

internalizes knowledge and truth in ways foreign to spiritual disciplines refined in the agar of modernism. Also, postmodernity is not inherently "good," nor is modernity inherently "bad." "It is naïveté at best and hubris at worst for us to think that a school of thought not yet three decades old would actually render all previous theological cogitation null and void" (Shields, "Delight and Dangers" Part 4). Both modernism and postmodernism have beneficial aspects as well as anti-Christian aspects. The Western world now finds itself in the midst of a transition of worldviews. Modernity is not totally banished, nor is postmodernity completely adopted. In fact, vestiges of several worldviews are present. "The premodern way of thinking has not been totally abandoned. It is still with us and continues to exist side by side with the modern recent innovations" (Inbody 538). Most importantly, this worldview shift changes the ways that people receive, interpret, and internalize knowledge. Ultimately, true disciples must be produced within the context of their present environment. Disciple makers must learn to mobilize the influence of culture, rather than wage a quixotic war, tilting at windmills that are no longer relevant or, worse, no longer there.

Many theologians agree that American citizens now live in a postmodern culture (e.g., Grenz; Sweet; Veith). Any attempt to persuade Christians towards discipleship must take into account the influences of the dominating culture. Although specifically referencing scriptural study, Pope John Paul II acknowledges this sort of influence of worldview upon discipleship: "Those who devote themselves to the study of Sacred Scripture should always remember that the various hermeneutical approaches have their own philosophical underpinnings, which need to be carefully evaluated before they are applied to the sacred texts" (85). An interesting note to this hermeneutic is that several authors (e.g., Grenz; Hunter; Sweet) believe that the present postmodern culture has

many of the characteristics of the first century culture that produced so many paragons of

godliness. Even after one factors in the issue that the first century culture was pre-

Christian, as opposed to the current post-Christian culture, the similar openness to new

pathways of knowledge and truth bode well for a beleaguered Christianity.

True Disciples

Jesus is the standard of true discipleship. The Scriptures are clear that those who

would follow Christ have as a goal subsumation into him (e.g., Eph. 4:13; Gal. 2:20). A

comprehensive description, with a view toward an accurate gauge of discipleship, of an

infinite, eternal, although human, Christ is futile. A description of a "true disciple" could

never be, in one sense, accurate because the model is infinitely indescribable.

Additionally, discipleship is a process, so progress is often a suitable measure, although

very difficult to quantify or even qualify. On the other hand, Jesus was a tangible,

concrete reality, and, as such, something in his realness makes comparison possible. An

attempt was made to outline the measurable qualities of a "true disciple" of Christ.

The following attempt to define true discipleship suffered under the

presuppositions of the researcher and his denominational background. While any

definition of a true disciple will be molded by the subjectivity of its creator, such

subjectivity does not necessarily disqualify its validity.

All Christian discipleship is empowered by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Rom. 8:9; Gal.

5:22; Eph. 3:16). A measurement of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 6) would reasonably

correlate to a gauge of the Spirit that concurrently empowers, equips, and motivates a

believer toward true discipleship. In other words, the degree to which love, joy, peace,

patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, and self-control are evident in a

disciple's life is a relatively correlative predictor of the maturity of a disciple.

Jesus' life and the teachings of Scripture make clear the expectation that discipleship to Christ informs and demands a certain lifestyle. "There is a tendency to distinguish active 'disciples' from ordinary Christians. Such distinctions cannot be supported from the biblical concept of discipleship" (Kvalbein 33). Certain activities are indivisible from Christian discipleship. With the understanding that discipling activities can be undertaken without the proper motivation or guidance of the Spirit, circumstances that render the spiritual benefit of such activities dubious, a list will be proffered. No such list is comprehensive, and all elements of any list receive different prioritization depending upon its author. At the present stage of life, I consider prayer (1 Thess. 5:17; Matt. 6:9), Bible study (2 Tim. 2:15; Ps. 119:11), financial stewardship (Matt. 6:21, 24), verbal Christian witness (Acts 1:8; Matt. 28:19-20), service (Matt. 20:28; 1 Cor. 12:5), disciple making (Matt. 28:19), and involvement in Christian community (Heb. 10:2; 1 Cor. 15:33) to be both biblically defensible and pragmatically indispensable characteristics of true discipleship.

<div align="center">**Purpose and Research Questions**</div>

This project sought to describe those things that catalyzed zealous spiritual discipleship in followers of Christ. With the understanding that present-day disciples are influenced both by modernity and postmodernity, no attempt was made to assign spiritual catalysts into either category. Moreover, no prognostication was made as to what events, avenues, or methods might produce true disciples in the future, except to assert that such catalysts as have worked in the recent past, and are common to the sample, might prove to be effective in the near future.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to discover the catalysts that grow believers into

true disciples of Christ in an emerging postmodern culture. The goal was to find men and women who were already passionate disciples of Christ and then uncover the avenues of spiritual formation that accelerated, sustained, and cultivated that passion. Scores, perhaps hundreds, of effective (and not so effective) discipleship programs have been promulgated in the two millennia since Jesus iterated the Great Commission. In the midst of a massive worldview shift, customization of any future discipleship process to its cultural context and to what has already proven efficacious in cultivating disciples in the emerging postmodern culture seemed wise.

Research Question 1

What significant avenues of spiritual formation catalyzed the subjects toward true discipleship?

Research Question 2

How do the answers to the activities questionnaire correspond to the catalysts identified in the interviews?

Methodology

The nature of the emerging culture is so nebulous and less than generalizable that a prescriptive study seemed naïve and presumptuous. If the process of discipleship must honor the philosophical underpinnings of the prevalent worldview, when the present worldview is emerging at a velocity heretofore unknown and not yet in its final shape, then no prescriptive plan can realistically prove generalizable. Several published dissertations support the claim that creating another discipleship program rarely proves efficacious to empower or motivate Christians to an expression of discipleship vibrant with passion and fervency. Although several of these dissertations measured increases in knowledge of Jesus and desire to obey him more dutifully, little evidence of lifestyle

transformation concordant with Christ's call to disciple making resulted after prescribed discipleship courses (Heckaman; M. Powell; Taylor; Willis). Due to the speed of change and the lack of a coherent cultural, paradigmatic worldview, any plan for discipleship should be based on what has most recently proven effective and then applied with modifications that honor the trajectory of the emerging culture.

This research project followed the criteria for qualitative design. The purpose of the study necessitated a design concerned with process rather than outcomes or products. The primary research interest was meaning and interpretation—how people made sense out of their experiences.

I favored the idea that the fruit of the Spirit was a nonnegotiable manifestation of a true disciple. Ministers and/or friends recommended thirty candidates who exhibited a clear tendency to be characterized by the fruit of the Spirit. These thirty candidates were invited to take part in the interview section of the study. Interviews were analyzed to ascertain what catalysts of spiritual growth were apparent in the spiritual journeys of the disciples. These catalysts of spiritual growth were then studied and collated to uncover discernible patterns and commonalities. Each interviewee then answered an activities questionnaire that sought to quantify some specific spiritual practices. The interview answers were then cross-referenced with the respective activities questionnaire to see how and when answers corresponded.

Subjects

Ministers and friends were asked to identify thirty candidates who exhibited fruit of the Spirit in conjunction with my definition of a true disciple of Christ. I contacted these candidates to see if they were available for an hour-long interview.

Instrumentation

The subjects were interviewed using a semi-structured interview that sought to discover the avenues that catalyzed true discipleship. The same subjects were asked to answer an activities questionnaire.

I used primary instruments for data collection and interpretation. The design has two sources of comparative data for analysis. This study is representative of the qualitative research guidelines found in R. C. Bogdan and S. K. Biklin's Qualitative Research for Educators: An Introduction to Theory and Methods.

A letter was sent to friends and pastors asking for recommendations of candidates for the study. Candidates were recommended based on the appearance of life transformation as evidenced by exhibition of the fruit of the Spirit. Candidates then were asked to take part in semi-structured interviews that I developed. The basic form of the interview included having the candidates create a spiritual timeline. Subsequent questions then probed significant events on the timeline and strategic pre-determined areas. The activities questionnaire provided data revealing frequency and consistency of specific spiritual activities. Information about these activities provided insight into the passion and fervency of each candidate's discipleship and was compared to the answers given in the interview.

Data Collection

The interviews were recorded and transcribed. I also took notes during the interviews to specifically record any physical movements or emotional inflections that were not registered by an audio recorder.

The activities questionnaires were hand-delivered and completed in my presence. The questionnaire took seven to ten minutes to complete.

Delimitations and Generalizability

Born out of frustration with disproportionately few zealous disciples of Christ in a self-identified Christian culture, this study sought to describe the positive spiritual growth of Christians considered to be true disciples. The findings were delimited by the transience of the shaping culture. As the overarching cultural influences change, so will the application of the findings. The study was also delimited by the relatively uniform denominational representation and by geography. Lack of diversity in these two areas tended to shade the application of the findings toward evangelical Christians in the southern United States.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 of this study presents the previous literary contributions that address the core issues under consideration. Modernity, postmodernity, and the classic spiritual disciplines were the general areas of study. The specific details of the design of the research project are presented in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 delineates the findings of the project, and Chapter 5 collates the findings and offers an interpretation of the information collected. Chapter 5 also suggests areas of further inquiry and interest.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF SELECTED LITERATURE

Postmodernity

Postmodernism is a response to the hubris and inadequacies of modernity. "To

understand postmodern thinking, we must view it in the context of the modern world that

gave it birth and against which it is reacting" (Grenz 2).

Plato's memorable explanation to the question, "What is real?" paints the picture

of people in a cave frightened by the shadows that danced on the wall, convinced that

these shadows were the deepest reality. One cave dweller escaped to the mouth of the

cave and viewed the sunlight and other people that were the cause of the shadows. When

he returned to tell his clan of the discovery, they killed him because they were unable to

imagine a reality more real than what they could see (205-08).

Plato's explanation of the world of reality ruled for nearly two thousand years

until René Descartes reappropriated Augustine's writing with the statement, "Cogito ergo

sum." Descartes responded to the philosophy of the day that asserted that some beliefs

are more foundational than others and, therefore, provide the foundation on which all

other beliefs stand (Grenz and Franke 29). In his search for the most foundational of

truth, Descartes reasoned that the existence of the thinking self is the first truth that doubt

cannot deny (Grenz 3). Coupled with Isaac Newton's scientific discoveries that appeared

to reveal a mechanized universe, Cartesian philosophy helped birth modernity.

Whereas the Enlightenment elevated the self to the center of the world (Grenz 2),

modernity extrapolated that everything is knowable by the all-powerful mind (Jones,

Postmodern Youth Ministry 19) so that God was on the verge of becoming irrelevant.

Those who believed that only what can be quantified, measured, and experienced is real

found the concept of a God independent of creation simply inconceivable.

Modernity held several basic assumptions about knowledge: it was objective, inherently good, and totally rational. The assumption of objectivity led the modernist to claim access to dispassionate knowledge (Grenz 4). Modern scientists believed that they were capable of standing outside of the sphere of what was being measured. As a result, any measurement, correctly performed, would be absolutely accurate, without corruption by the measurer and the instrument. Such beliefs moved the modernists to claim that all measurable things could be handled, understood, and subsequently controlled for the good of humankind. In addition the idea prevailed that "knowledge is good and will free us from our vulnerability to nature and social bondage" (6). Modernity, based on the assumption of the inherent goodness of knowledge, an assumption which eventually allowed human reason to supplant God in many opinions, attempted to manipulate knowledge to solve all human problems and remake society along the lines of scientific, rational truth (Veith 27). The rationality of knowledge led to a dichotomy of the body and mind. Emotions and intuition were deemed inconsequential to the conquest of knowledge. Individuals were resultantly given the option to ignore the body as inferior to the mind or to sate the desires of the flesh since the body and mind were inconsequential to each other. All beliefs that curtailed the autonomy of the self or elevated external authority were suspect (Grenz 4).

Such philosophy eventually led to the allegation by Frederick Nietzsche's "madman" that "God is dead" (sec. 125). As horrifying as such a statement may sound, it may have precipitated the resurrection of Christianity as a viable religion. Nietzsche was right in that Western culture had rid itself of the belief that it had a need for God, yet the shock of his statement jolted Christians out of their modern stupor, forcing them to

reengage the battle for influence in the world where it needed to be waged by recognizing the underlying weaknesses of foundationalism. For far too long, Christians had been toiling under the rules of modernity and losing ground. Nietzsche's ideas provoked what has eventually been recognized as the beginnings of literary deconstructionism. Deconstructionism questions traditional assumptions about certainty, identity, and truth (Jones, Postmodern Youth Ministry 20). This theory gained momentum in the first half of the twentieth century as science clearly showed that it could not answer all questions— Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, Quantum Theory—and that the human mind could not solve every problem—Nazi Germany, WWI, Stalin's Russia, WWII, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki.

Postmodernity may have been birthed with Nietzsche, but it remained confined to the philosophical world and visionary underground until apparently exploding in the counterculture of the 1960s. Although the postmodern worldview is still in its embryonic form, the fact that it is a response to the weaknesses of modernism can shed light on its trajectory.

Postmodernity eschews the belief that knowledge is objective. Objectivity means that one can stand outside of something, look in, and judge without affecting or being affected by whatever is held up to observation. Postmodernists believe that all humanity is immersed in the flow of history. To rid oneself of the influence of time, geography, culture, and environment is impossible; therefore, "reality will be 'read' differently by each knowing self that encounters it. This means that there is no one meaning of the world, no transcendent center to reality as a whole" (Grenz 6). Albert Einstein could not find a Unifying Field Theory (a magical formula that accurately explained and predicted the natural universe) because none existed. Furthermore, the world is not an object

waiting to be known and described. The world is a reality that is relative and participatory (7).

A corollary to this subjectivity of reality is that one perception of truth is just as valid as the next, so in some convoluted way the postmodern worldview operates "with a community-based understanding of truth. Truth is relative to the community in which we participate" (Grenz 8). One facet of this belief has to do with the fact that an individual's view of reality has been shaped and is being shaped by the community in which he or she exists. Truth, then, is a product of environment, history, culture, and relationships, but not everyone's environment, history, culture, and relationships are identical, not even in the same community. Resultantly, views of reality and truth are as numerous and varied as humanity. To tolerate a variant view of reality, people must adopt the other view and adapt their own so that the two are not mutually exclusive. In such cases, reality becomes a composite of the various perceptions in the community so that the overall, general good of the community can be achieved.

Gone also is the idea that truth can be limited to its rational dimension. The denigration of reason automatically elevates the emotions and intuition for the postmodern. The dichotomy of the body and mind is consequently replaced by a belief in the holistic human life. The tendency of modernity to compartmentalize the spiritual life away from the behavioral life has been rejected by postmodernity. Postmodern holism involves a unified relationship between belief and action. Hypocrisy (separation of belief and lifestyle) is eschewed, and authenticity is highly valued.

Postmoderns value a holism not only with respect to the human self but also with regard to the world as a whole. This connectedness extends to what lies outside of each self, namely, community and nature. The global-mindedness and environmental fervor

that can be incomprehensible to some moderns is a result of the holism of the postmodern worldview (Jones, <u>Postmodern Youth Ministry</u> 37).

This postmodern worldview has changed the rules whereby Christians engage in battle with those who would deny the existence and the need for God. Theologians and practitioners of the faith had fallen into the trap of engaging the modernists within the confines of the rules of modernity. For example, Christians, specifically in the evangelically conservative camp, under the rules of modernity, often declared that Scripture was a foundational belief of faith. The subsequent attack then focused on that foundation and forced the question, "How do we know that the Bible is true?" Forgetting that Christianity is an issue of faith and that God cannot be proven by empirical means, Christians too often used the circular logic of proving the validity of the Bible by quoting the Bible itself. Such logic was ineffective and unconvincing enough that Christianity, per Nietzche, was on the verge of rendering itself obsolete. The normal course of battle for Christianity was to be forced to distill its faith down to propositional truth and then stand back powerless as modernity atomized each proposition, disparaged each minute part, and then ruled the whole to be fallacious. Christianity had allowed itself to be seduced by modernity into an ambush. Although postmodernity does not hold any more affection for Christianity than did its predecessor, the rules have at least changed and Christianity should be ready to engage the culture on different epistemological grounds.

Whereas moderns elevated the rational, postmoderns value the experiential. "They [postmoderns] are more concerned with whether a religion can bring them into contact with God" (Jones, <u>Postmodern Youth Ministry</u> 63). This transition of worldviews might actually be appropriate for a God who declared that the Law was inadequate to save (Heb. 10:4) and so came himself in the form of humanity to live among his creation.

God never intended himself to be distilled to a set of propositional truths. He always intended that he be experienced, felt, and sensed. The most postmodern of generations are more interested in encountering the supernatural (Anderson 20). Postmodern Christianity should adjust itself to "welcome people into a journey instead of getting them to assent to an oversimplified version of the gospel and recite a three-sentence prayer" (Jones, Postmodern Youth Ministry 39). If the essence of Christianity was a set of propositions, then intellectual assent would suffice.

The danger of the pendulum swing toward experience is that many people are unwilling to believe what they do not enjoy (Veith 194). Although God promises love, joy, and peace, he also affirms that suffering for his sake and chastisement for those whom he loves will occur. Christianity cannot afford, as it did during modernity, to fall into the trap of letting the prevailing worldview write all the rules. Christians cannot afford to neglect the acknowledgement of the importance of discourse and definitive statements, but neither can they remain fixated on the approach that renders Christian truth as nothing more than correct doctrine (Grenz 170). Truly knowing God occurs at the intersection of knowledge and experience. An experience of God without a biblically interpretive framework leaves open the possibility that reason will be divorced from experience. "Experience and interpretive concepts are reciprocally related. Our concepts facilitate our understanding of the experiences we have in life, and our experiences shape the interpretive concepts we employ to speak about our lives" (170). Scripture may not be unassailable by its opponents, but that does not relegate God's word to the trash bin.

Perhaps as exciting as a return to the validity of the experiential is the rediscovery of mystery. Modernity elevated reason to such a height that it deduced that anything unexplainable must not be real. Postmodernity embraces the inexplicable mysteries

encountered in life. This post-rationalistic gospel (Grenz 169) is certainly a victory for God and his followers who would too readily play the game according to someone else's rules.

While modernity, beginning with Descartes' dictum, elevated the self to the center of the universe, postmodernity purportedly shuns individualism. Because of its rejection of the objectivity of truth, the postmodern worldview operates with a community-based understanding of truth (Grenz 8). In fact, postmodern philosophy promotes the idea that community is gained by understanding truth, or knowledge, together. "Sharing knowledge is the first step toward community" (Linux). One reason for this belief in communal truth is the understanding that every discerner of truth stands on a customized foundation. "We must affirm with postmodern thinkers that knowledge—including knowledge of God—is not merely objective, not simply discovered by the neutral knowing self" (Grenz 168). Since one cannot stand outside of history and environment, perception of truth is shaped in part by the platform upon which one stands. Since each platform is built differently by the history, society, culture, and environment that shaped each person, everyone's perception of truth will be different. Postmoderns, moreover, believe that every perception of truth, while different, is equally valid. In an attempt to preserve the validity of all versions of truth, an effort is made to assimilate the various versions so that they fit together and can exist peacefully in the community. The downside to this approach is that the truth may be compromised for the sake of preference. Just as in Plato's cave, the cave dwellers' preference for the reality of the shadows and, therefore, their rejection of the information of the source of the shadows did not mean that no people existed outside of the cave. The upside to this seemingly disastrous approach is that those outside of Christianity are forced by their worldview to

listen to, if not accommodate, the story of Christianity. At the same time, the exclusive

claims of modern Christianity tend to infuriate postmoderns. From a postmodern view,

Christianity leaves no room for other perceptions of truth. Modernism forced Christianity

to so condense its propositions that any variant perspective was seen as opposition to the

truth promoted by Scripture. Unfortunately Christians were so caught up in defining what

they were, and, thereby, defining what they were not, that they forgot to promote the

inclusive side of Christianity, that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be

saved" (Rom. 10:13).

Additionally postmoderns do not trust the biased opinions of the self to arrive

constantly and consistently at the truth in solitude. In fact, postmodern people are group

oriented (Veith 227). They are willing to be influenced by others. Christians should take

the influence and opportunity given them, in this egalitarian dispersal of influence, to

engage in dialogue that encourages postmoderns to experience God and then come to the

faith community for help in interpreting that experience. The post-individualist gospel

will certainly have a much better chance of prevailing in postmodernity than during the

era of the elevation of self.

The modern paradigm, with its elevation of reason, forced a dichotomy of the soul

(mind) and body (matter). With the belief that the reasonable mind could know and

understand and, therefore, control matter, Christianity focused on the salvation of souls

and eventually offered indifference to the human body. "Their primary if not sole concern

is that of saving 'souls.' They may entertain a secondary concern for 'bodies,' but they

are convinced that the physical dimension of the human person has no eternal

importance" (Grenz 171). Postmoderns attend to a more holistic view of the person and

desire a worldview that encompasses the body as well as the mind. Rather than project a

Christianity that demands only assent to doctrines, postmoderns issue a call for a lifestyle that is not compartmentalized so neatly. Postmoderns, according to Brian McLaren, would say, "[I]t's more attractive to 'behave myself into believing' than to 'reason myself into believing'" (qtd. in Jones, <u>Postmodern Youth Ministry</u> 94). This type of thinking surely bodes well for a God who did not send a syllabus into the world but a son. One facet of this issue is that postmoderns are highly attuned to and put off by hypocrisy. They are looking for a teacher who lives the message. Just as Jesus was the message as well as the messenger, postmoderns will only listen to someone who lives Christianity in the drudgery and suffering of life to the same extent that it is lived in the victories and excitement. Holistic postmoderns believe that they "can no longer bypass authentic, pervasive, thorough transformation of the inner life of the human being" (Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines"). The end of modern dualism is an exciting time for Christianity.

Some influential Christian thinkers would reject postmodernism as hyper-modernism (e.g., Oden), a transient fad (e.g., Morgenthaler), or something abhorrent to be battled and banished at any cost (e.g., Colson). Postmodern philosophy, however, is not a product to be accepted or rejected but rather an attempt to describe what is already happening. Postmodernism is no more theo-friendly than modernism. Each worldview is anthro-originated and resultantly anthro-oriented. The point to be noted is that the rules of engagement in every discipline have changed. This shift in worldview presently taking place in America begs Christian leaders to endeavor to understand it so as to be able to answers its questions and present Christianity in a language that may be understood. Some feel excitement that the winds are changing and life is in the air. Christians must be a people with a God big enough to overcome any opposition and wise enough to provide viable answers in any atmosphere. If Jesus is truth, then a mere philosophy or worldview

could never overthrow him. Followers of Jesus Christ must believe that postmodernity

will either acquiesce to Jesus or be broken by him.

The Spiritual Disciplines

Dietrich Bonhoeffer poses the question, "How can we live the Christian life in the

modern world?" (60). Numerous voices have cried throughout Christian history that

godliness is gained by the exercise of the spiritual disciplines (e.g., Augustine; Edman;

Kempis; Whitney). Dallas Willard summarizes the thoughts of many:

> What, then, are the indirect means that allow us to cooperate in reshaping the personality… so that our whole being is poised to go with the movements of the regenerate heart that is in us by the impact of the Gospel Word under the direction and energizing of the Holy Spirit?
> These means are, primarily, the disciplines for life in the Spirit. These disciplines are not, in themselves, meritorious or even required except as specifically needed. They do, however, allow the spirit or will—an infinitesimally tiny power in itself that we cannot count on to carry our intention into settled, effectual righteousness—to direct the body into contexts of experience which the whole self is inwardly restructured to follow the eager spirit into ever fuller obedience. ("Spiritual Formation")

Even though proponents can find neither a comprehensive list of disciplines nor a

consensus as to what should comprise that list, the cry echoes all the same. J. I. Packer

links contemporary disciplines to the "classical Protestant teaching on the means of

grace" (9). John Wesley's "works of piety" include prayer, Scripture, the Lord's Supper,

fasting, and Christian community (Yrigoyen 33). The "spiritual disciplines" of the

apostles in Acts 6:4 included only prayer and "serving the word." 1 Timothy 4:7 exhorts

all followers of Christ to "[t]rain yourself in godliness" as if godliness does not come

naturally and effortlessly but, rather, requires intentionality and discipline. Passionate

believers claim, "The only road to Christian maturity and Godliness passes through the

practice of the Spiritual Disciplines" (Whitney 16-17). A warning label should remind

disciples that practicing the spiritual disciplines does not encapsulate the whole of the

responsibility. "Disciples are disciplined, but discipleship is more than disciplines" (Sweet, "DMIN Project"). Without revealing the hubris that would avow it is the only way, practicing the spiritual disciplines might be the oldest, most sure way of gaining godliness.

Survey of the History of Spiritual Disciplines

The conversion of Constantine in the fourth century caused not a little reaction within Christianity. Although the respite from persecution was welcome, the marriage of Church and state softened the disparity between the two. As some began to grow comfortable with both the world and discipleship to Christ, "a select group within the Christian fellowship found this situation unbearable, and individuals and small groups began to set themselves apart to engage in what they felt to be a more intensely spiritual mode of existence" (Willard, Spirit 140). The concurrent blending of Greek, Hebrew, and Christian thought, especially through Origen, provided an atmosphere within Christianity that sought an orderly, rational pattern of maturity (Royall 1). Origen saw humans as cooperating in the process of their own sanctification and doing so by steps or degrees (Willard, Spirit 140).

The monastic movement was subsequently born, and Christians flocked to the Egyptian desert to work out their salvation through solitude, rigors, and hardships described by radical asceticism. Eremitical monastics sought to achieve doctrinal purity, spiritual vitality, and a hastening of the *parousia* by living completely alone in the wilderness (Royall 1). Harsh conditions, predators, and illness diminished their numbers and coenobitic monasticism was born wherein dwelling places were protected by walls although each ascetic did not participate in communal life. This brand of monasticism could be described as a sort of public solitude.

While searching for ways to ensure the purity of doctrine and getting rid of Platonic contamination, ascetics seemed to vie for God's favor by engaging in wild competition to bring unnecessary hardship and travail upon themselves. Fantastic reports circulated of eating no cooked food for seven years, exposing the naked body to poisonous flies while sleeping in a marsh for six months, not lying down to sleep for forty or fifty years, not speaking a word for many years, or living in iron bracelets and chains (Willard, Spirit 142). Perhaps the most famous ascetic was Simeon Stylites who perched himself on a sixty-foot high column for thirty years. Exposed to rain, sun, cold, and every other element, he bound himself to the pillar by a rope. The rope reportedly became "embedded in his flesh, which putrefied, and stank, and teemed with worms. Simeon picked up the worms that fell from his sores and replaced them there, saying to them, 'Eat what God has given you'" (142).

The essential misunderstanding of this era of asceticism tied discipleship to "forgiveness, punishment, and merit rather than to 'exercise unto godliness'" (Willard, Spirit 144). Several attempts at reformation failed as flagellation (whipping oneself or being whipped), wearing hair shirts (an undershirt made of coarse animal hair to induce discomfort), and *inclusio* (confining oneself to a very small room, cave, or box) came into vogue. The Protestant Reformation of course registered its disagreement, but ascetics felt all the more justified in their attempts to gain God's pleasure because of the attacks from those who were diametrically opposed to the entire Catholic church. Categorical attacks do more to rally a defeated cause than all else.

Ignatius of Loyola, during the sixteenth century, developed the earliest form of systematic disciplines. Ignatius promoted a four-week regimen of spiritual exercises that included individual and group retreats. He encouraged people to consider personal sin

and its consequences, and reflect on Christ's life on earth, his passion, and his resurrection (Royall 2). This prescribed formula systematized the disciplines. Although it has taken on many shapes since, the template remains largely the same.

The Protestant rejection of asceticism was founded on its preclusion of works-based salvation, but it "continued to lack any adequate account of what human beings do to become, by the grace of God, the kind of people Jesus obviously calls them to be" (Willard, Spirit 145). A diluted understanding of Luther's triad of *sola fidelis, sola gratis*, and *sola scriptura* could lead a disciple to believe that salvation is only an event. John Ortberg rues this misunderstanding of discipleship. "'Disciple'… has come to mean a time-limited process that you can finish. To be a disciple of Jesus was something all followers did … their whole lives long" (3). An event-defined salvation would negate the need for process and growth; consequently, no further action is required to make any endeavor for God's grace as it has been wholly given in the salvific act. "Protestantism made the mistake of simply rejecting the disciplines as essential to the new life in Christ" (Willard, Spirit 147). Rather than proposing an alternate scheme, Protestantism piously pointed out the incompatibility of extreme asceticism and justification by faith, a move that virtually anathematized the disciplines.

"Earning" grace and "receiving" grace are two vastly different concepts. "We must stop using the fact that we cannot earn grace as an excuse for not energetically seeking to receive grace" (Willard, "Spiritual Formation"). Spiritual disciplines place the disciple in the path of God's grace. Paul urged Timothy and fellow believers to "train [themselves] in godliness" (1 Tim. 4:7). This statement explicitly acknowledges the human role in receiving grace by conceding that believers must actively work for godliness. The question then is, "'How, precisely, am I to go about doing my part in the

process of transformation? What is my plan?' The answer to the question is, in general

formulation: By practice of spiritual disciplines, or disciplines for the spiritual life"

(Willard, "Spiritual Disciplines").

History validates the belief that in most ages groups of people who longed for

more of God have existed in various expressions. Invariably these groups have turned to

some form of spiritual disciplines as pathways to communion with God. John Wycliffe,

the Anabaptists, John Wesley, various groups during the Great Awakenings, revival

groups such as the Jesus Movement and Asbury, and various charismatic and worship

movements, among others, have historically been attracted to the spiritual disciplines

(Royall 3). Modern-day advocates include Richard J. Foster, Dallas Willard, and Donald

S. Whitney. Predominantly drawing from the Puritan heritage, these men have celebrated

the efficacy of the spiritual disciplines as pathways to grace. "Becoming Christ-like never

occurs without intense and well-informed action on our part" (Willard, "Human Body").

Foster goes so far as to claim "Frankly, no spiritual disciplines, no spiritual formation".

Survey of the Contemporary Spiritual Disciplines

Willard is a professor at the University of Southern California's School of

Philosophy and a Southern Baptist minister. In <u>The Spirit of the Disciplines</u>, Willard

divides the spiritual disciplines into two categories: disciplines of abstinence and

disciplines of engagement.

The idea of abstinence is rooted in the admonition in 1 Peter 2:11 to "[a]bstain

from fleshly lusts which war against the soul." Abstinence addresses areas that in

moderation are not harmful but in excess are debilitating to various degrees. Such

debilitation can be addressed "by the carefully adapted arrangement of our circumstances

and behavior, the spiritual disciplines will bring these basic desires into their proper

coordination and subordination within the economy of life in his Kingdom" (Willard, Spirit 160).

Engagement tends to counteract the tendency to commit sins of omission. By intentionally planning to perform various acts that Jesus commanded, the Christian will be in less danger of forgetting them altogether. Disciplines of abstinence and engagement work together toward obedience to God. Willard's disciplines of abstinence include solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. The disciplines of engagement include study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission.

Whitney teaches spiritual formation at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Kansas City. He is a student of the Puritan ideology and a fervent practitioner of the spiritual disciplines. Whitney's lists differ somewhat from Willard's. While not making the distinction between abstinence and engagement, the lists are similar. Whitney's list includes Scripture reading, prayer, worship, evangelism, serving, stewardship, fasting, silence and solitude, journaling, and learning.

A brief explanation of each discipline follows below. Those disciplines that are included in both lists will have one description that includes notes from both authors.

Solitude entails the purposeful abstention from interaction with others. Daily human interactions can seduce Christians into feelings, thoughts, and actions that are antithetical to God. Humankind is easily caressed into comparisons with one another that inevitably distract a right focus toward God. In solitude, the Christian confronts his "own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts" (Willard, Spirit 161). Regress from other people and the cares of daily life provide sharper contrast with God's kingdom.

Silence is the removal of sounds such as noise, music, or words. Silence allows a

Christ follower to attune to God's voice. God occasionally speaks in a "still, small voice" (1 Kings 19:12), and only silence makes that transforming message audible. The danger of this discipline is that in quiet one can discover that there exists very little between "just me and God" (163). Whitney couples silence with solitude and defines silence as "not speaking." He recommends various degrees and tenures of silence including minute retreats, daily quiet times, multi-day retreats, or special places like parks, hiking trails, rooms, and observation spots that afford a private moment.

Fasting involves the abstention in some significant way from food and possibly drink. Richard J. Foster and Martyn-Loyd Jones, as well as others, broaden the definition of fasting to encompass abstaining from other normal functions that can be given up for a spiritual purpose (Whitney 160). Willard differentiates between a normal fast in which food, but not liquid, is sacrificed, a partial fast in which a specific limitation is placed on type of food and drink, an absolute fast whereby one intakes neither food nor drink, and a supernatural fast where no food or water is taken for forty days. In any form, fasting reveals how much peace and pleasure is derived from eating. "Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a sustenance beyond food" (Spirit, 166).

In **frugality** one abstains from spending money merely to sate desires for status and luxury. This discipline involves a conscious delineation between what is necessary and what is not. Frugality teaches contentment with simplicity; it is a safeguard against materialism.

In **chastity** one purposefully abstains from sexual activity for a time. Paul referred to this potentiality in 1 Corinthians 7:5. By avoiding sex one ensures that the physical dimensions of life are kept in their proper place. While not denying the inherent sexuality of humans, chastity provides an analysis of its role in life.

Willard mentions **secrecy** as a means of experiencing a continuing relationship with God independent of the opinion of others (Spirit, 172). At its best secrecy teaches love and humility before God above all others. By keeping good deeds and qualities from public display, some actions are thereby performed only for the pleasure of God.

Sacrifice entails abstaining from possessing or enjoying what is necessary for living. Different from frugality in that it does not deal with the superfluous, sacrifice means giving away what is needful for the security of meeting needs.

Study involves engaging with the written and spoken Word of God. Whitney suggests that God's word be heard, read, studied, memorized, meditated upon, and applied. Countless biblical references to the absorption of God's word demand obedience.

In **worship** one engages with, dwells upon, and expresses the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God through thought and the use of words, rituals, and symbols (Willard, Spirit 177). Whitney suggests that both public and private worship are aspects of the same discipline. Divine encounter happens commonly during worship, but not exclusively. Ascribing to God his worth should be an outflow of the disciple's life rather than a discipline, but by prioritizing worship, one guards against neglect.

Celebration completes worship when Christians meet together to eat and drink, to sing and dance, and to relate stories of God's action in their lives (Willard, Spirit 179). Israel's history is replete with public ceremonies ordered by God to celebrate and thus remember his works. Willard's description is virtually a mandate for a party in God's honor.

Service means utilizing resources and abilities to promote the welfare of others and the causes of God. Willard focuses on service as the means by which the poor are

able to honor God, and the rich are able to practice humility and thankfulness (Spirit 182). Whitney addresses the spiritual gifts as God's means of empowering and equipping his children for service (123).

Prayer shows up on most lists of spiritual disciplines and generally refers to conversing, or communicating, with God. The act includes listening to God as well as speaking. Willard contends that prayer has its greatest force when Christians participate in it unceasingly (Spirit 185).

In **fellowship** one engages in spiritual activities with other disciples. More than simple geographical sameness, fellowship, if referring to *koinonia*, entails living life together. The "one another" commands that pervade the New Testament are references to fellowship. Without the affirmation, encouragement, accountability, and strength of others who are moving in the same direction, life could easily overwhelm.

Confession evolves out of fellowship when one confides deepest weakness and failure to other Christians. Although remission of sin can be asked directly of the Father, the emotional and psychological benefits of confession can be quite cathartic.

Submission to earthly authority ensures that submission to God is healthy. It provides a way to invoke order in the Church. Willard refers to the admonition to look to those who are "elder" as ones who have wisdom and maturity (Spirit 189).

These are the disciplines as listed by Willard. In addition, Whitney adds several disciplines to Willard's list.

Evangelism is as commanded by Jesus in Mark 16:15 and Acts 1:8. By practicing evangelism as a discipline, one alleviates the risk of ignoring those commands that tend to be obeyed only with difficulty. Whitney reminds Christians that success is in the obedience, not the outcome of the evangelistic invitation (100).

Stewardship of time and money is advised both as a way to honor God with what he has given and a tool to further God's kingdom in this world. Disciplined use of time is a prominent thought of many who are compelled to measure what they accomplish. Accomplishment is obviously important to those who accumulate wealth, power, and material possessions. Surely the things that Christ has commanded his followers to accomplish are exponentially more important.

The act of **journaling** is a way to record the works and acts of God in daily life. Journaling could reveal a lack of God's work or perhaps one's own insensitivity to such acts. When the works of God are written down, they seem to achieve a permanence not capable with a mere memory.

Whitney includes **intentional learning** in his list. Although he advocates both biblical knowledge and other intellectual acquisition, he focuses on the correlation between knowledge and wisdom. So much information is already available in this world that one person could not possibly learn the whole. Whitney, however, suggests that in order to quell the stagnation that sometimes accompanies learning one should ingest information through a variety of measures (231).

Modernity and the Spiritual Disciplines

The spiritual disciplines were eventually neutered by some of the philosophical tenets of modernity and subsequently reoriented in such a way as to rob them of their purpose. As modernity neared the apex of its sway, some specific areas of application suffered emendation in the extreme.

Reason and the Spiritual Disciplines

Modernity tended to intellectualize the action out of the disciplines so that Christians fooled themselves into thinking that knowing that for which they were striving

was equal to its practice. Discipleship was never about reading books and storing up

knowledge (Barna 16). Mastery of the material was not equivalent to godliness. In

objectifying knowledge modernity placed the *logos* in formaldehyde so he could be

dissected and studied. Wordsworth's observation that "we murder to dissect"

complements nicely Nietzsche's assertion that "God is dead" (sec. 125). The

objectification of truth ultimately served to mutate it into an object that could be

dispassionately manipulated, studied, and understood while preserving a distance

between the object and the studier. Disciples lost the gratification and fulfillment of

experiencing what was being studied. The essence of Christianity is not gained by

knowing more about Jesus as if he were the subject of analysis in the cold laboratory of

modernity but, rather, by internalizing, being indwelt by, and embracing God through

experience. Christians fell into the trap of believing the modern tenet that if an object

could be understood it could be controlled. Doctrinal accuracy was valued more than

relationship with God. What Christians now know is that "'pure doctrine' alone, as

countless examples illustrate, does not induce growth" (Schwarz 27). The spirit of the age

forced Christians to systematize theology so as to better understand God. "A

reformational paradigm is fixed on the message: getting right what we think about

God.… Purity is the goal if you're in the reformational paradigm" (Sweet, Jesus Drives

Me Crazy 99). Christians mistakenly defined discipleship as head knowledge rather than

complete transformation (Barna 78). As a result, God's American church can tell much

about God but corporately voices a telling silence when asked to evidence a life indwelt

by God.

Individualism and the Spiritual Disciplines

The elevation of self above all through Descartes' monumental assertion, "Cogito

ergo sum," undermined the potency of practicing the spiritual disciplines in the context of community. Disciples assumed that their "'habits of the heart' were chosen and formed in isolation from other human beings and social realities" (Guder et al. 150). The self became the highest arbiter of truth and so the individual and individual desires were placed in higher regard than the community. This "exaggerated individualism" denies the triune nature of God (Shaw). Modernity's elevation of self was antipodal to the subjugation of self in the incarnation. Jesus sacrificed his well-being and comfort for the good of the Godhead. Modernity convinced Christians that the doctrine of individualism was compatible with Scripture.

Christianity also lost a sense of global perspective through the elevation of the self. According to modernity, nature was a realm to be analyzed, understood, and, finally, manipulated for the good of humanity. The creation account in Genesis stresses that humankind is to cultivate and protect the earth. Rather than exploit it for the good of humanity, humanity should preserve nature and protect it from the excesses of sin. This lack of global outlook also served to undermine the biblical mandate to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 19:19). The glory of the American church during the 1940s was mitigated by an isolationist policy that let the rest of the world slaughter itself while America tried to stay out of the brouhaha. Modernity elevated the idea of the self to such an extent that it necessitated the denigration of others, on both an individual and communal level. The spirit of the disciplines that assumed exercise within the community of God was defeated by the triumph of the will.

Dualism and the Spiritual Disciplines

The dualism of modernity that severed the link between body and mind ultimately led to the promulgation of "cheap grace" by advocates of the spiritual disciplines

(Bonhoeffer 45). Author Allan Coppedge claims that "Jesus calls first for repentance and faith; then, second, as a separate event He calls believers to follow Him as disciples" (41). The influence of modernity shows itself in the assertion that salvation is an intellectual allegiance to the doctrines of Christianity while discipleship can be compartmentalized to the further step of Christianity that corresponds to the separate and distinct portion of the human that is the body. The logic of the statement being that spiritual disciplines require the action of the body and so must be inferior to the rational acquiescence that true salvation requires. "Salvation by grace is the beginning and may be described as entering the kingdom of heaven or starting to follow Jesus,… [b]ut those who want to follow on as Jesus' disciples will go further and commit themselves to God's basic life objectives" (48). Many American Christians have embraced this idea as a theological justification of what the human heart inherently wants to believe. Many believers who find the holy life a difficult one happily accepted a draw in the Pauline battle between the flesh and the spirit. "The center of much of Protestant life today is a bifurcated version of the gospel message, one that reduces the call to Kingdom life to simple belief about Jesus while leaving the exemplary Christian life to the 'very' devoted" (Pagitt 31).

By splintering salvation and discipleship, even the champions of spiritual disciplines showed themselves to be products of the age of modernity. John F. MacArthur, Jr. similarly shows himself to be a child of the Enlightenment:

> I can promise you as a testimony of Scripture that if you stand with your face in the Word of God—learning and beholding the glory of God—the Spirit of God will transform you into the image of Jesus Christ. That is the epitome of spiritual growth. (18)

This cognitive-osmotic discipleship sounds high and lofty. Rather than elevating the word of God, MacArthur raises reason to the highest heavens. The very word MacArthur

relishes urges its readers to be "doers and not hearers only" (Jas. 1:22). MacArthur, knowingly or not, suggests that godliness conform to the modern definition of objectifiable knowledge.

MacArthur's writing reveals that he has internalized and appropriated modernity's autonomy of the self. "The epitome of spiritual growth" could never be a product of singular study, albeit of Holy Scripture, when the entirety of the Bible was written to and for God's people in community. Individual study can, of course, be valuable, but certainly the triune author would inhere the necessity for community somewhere within the process of absorption, interpretation, or application.

Postmodernity and the Spiritual Disciplines

While the logical outcome of modernity emasculated the spiritual disciplines as pathways to godliness, postmodernity offers the opportunity to regain the power of the disciplines in the midst of a worldview that appears antithetical to God. Postmodernity looks askew at the modern elevation of reason, self, and dualism to offer the good fortune of a renewed valuation on experience, community, and holism. Those shifts look amazingly like a work of providence that meshes seamlessly with biblical teaching. God can overcome, even manipulate and use, worldviews, but he has chosen not to overcome the hearts of his creatures by force. In the end, the "real obstacles to becoming a fully devoted, zealous disciple of Christ are not money, time, methods or knowledge. The major obstacle is the human heart" (Barna 130). Many people never become true disciples because they consider the price too great or they ignorantly believe that intention is not necessary. To the contrary, "the final step in becoming a disciple is decision. We become a life student of Jesus by deciding. We do not drift into discipleship" (Willard, "How to Be a Disciple").

Experience and the Spiritual Disciplines

The elevation of the self in collusion with the objectification of truth gave modern

disciples the impression that the rational component of the human was superior to all

intuition, emotion, and affection. With regard to the spiritual disciplines, this aspect of

the modern program "influenced evangelicalism to believe that mere information is

transformational" (Shields, "Christian Discipleship"). In a nutshell, the information

proffered by the disciplines gave knowledge about, and thus power over, God himself.

For example, prayer and/or fasting tended to become a formula whereby God was forced

to answer because he said he would. These disciplines were avenues to power rather than

to God. The great systematic theologies of Protestant scholars, especially in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were demanded by the modern paradigm as a way to

describe and codify God. Some allowed themselves to think that God and the godly life

could be comprehensively studied, understood, and articulated with words and

propositions. "Postmodern critics of Christianity claim that the severe limits of language

and paradigm make nonsense any propositional statements about God or eternality.

Language and the human mind are simply inadequate to the task in the face of the

Infinite" ("Delights and Dangers Part 2"). By relegating the disciplines to the arena of

reason, Christianity denied parts of God-created humanity. The disciplines were always

meant to be tools used to meet God. Since God created humanity with the ability to sense

and emote, part of God's communication should indubitably incorporate those arenas.

Postmoderns in general, and especially those who do not yet follow Christ, cater

to their experiential selves. The "mere transfer of naked information divorced from its

relational context" (Shields, "Delights and Dangers Part 1") elicits frustration and

acknowledgement of inadequacy. In fact, for many postmoderns, "truth needs to be

experienced before it is believed" ("Axis Avalanche" 10). This mind-set, however, bodes well for a Savior who invited men to "[c]ome, follow me" (Matt. 4:19; 9:9) before he asked them for a confession of faith. One blatant modern branding of the gospel is the insistence that salvation and discipleship are separate and distinct decisions and that salvation always comes first (e.g., Coppedge; MacArthur; P. Powell). Bonhoeffer insists that Jesus' call to salvation was a call to discipleship, one distinct call in which the two cannot be separated.

The great news is that postmoderns have not rejected God; they have expressed their dissatisfaction with a purely propositional God. One postmodern writes, "[L]imiting our relationship with God to mere information denies us the greater understanding that comes from experiencing God" (Shields, "Delights and Dangers Part 3"). Most postmoderns believe the myth that truth is purely relative, but, on the other hand, once they experience God, they willingly adopt his truth as their own.

By designating propositional truth as of second order importance, postmoderns run the risk of allowing misinterpreted experiences to muddle their idea of God. The Church must come alongside postmoderns and teach the spiritual disciplines as a framework by which to interpret experience. Christians must not allow the context of the world to seduce them into believing that no truth claims or propositional statements about God are totally inaccurate. Just because the ways to discover truth are subjective does not necessarily mean that the truth discovered cannot be objective. Christendom cannot repeat the mistake of focusing entirely upon the rational side of humankind. The teaching of the spiritual disciplines imparts knowledge that, although not entirely sufficient in itself, helps interpret the experiences of life. Experience then helps place knowledge in context so that the knowledge will not be anachronistic within a historical religion.

By embracing the bent toward experience, postmoderns have regained the Christian jewel of mystery. Modernity eschewed ideas of the supernatural, which, by definition, could not be objectified. As a result, mystery was banned from some areas of Christianity (e.g., deism) and even, to some extent, filtered out of the spiritual disciplines. Postmoderns love mystery because it points to something beyond what can be understood. In its barest essence, Christianity is an intersection with the supernatural, and the spiritual disciplines are pathways to that intersection.

Postmodern Christians will find a way to make the spiritual disciplines experiential:

> The only way that pomos are going to grow closer to God is through following Jesus. This means that the church must seek ways to let people follow Jesus and not just sit around and talk about him.… [E]xperience is the means of making proposed truth turn into personal truth. (Hall 5)

Postmodern evangelists must, moreover, find a way to make the invitation to come to Christ experiential. Jesus' invitation was experiential by virtue of the fact that he had a human body and was the one extending the invitation. Modernity made salvation and discipleship seem easy by presenting each in rational, logical steps. Postmodernity is scary to some because of a blurring of faith, lifestyle, experience, and knowledge. For example, Chad Hall claims, "You didn't believe him until you believed him, and he wasn't the truth for you until you believed him" (2). Salvation and discipleship have been coalesced back into one, inseparable entity by postmodernity making discipleship the *sine qua non* of salvation. This reunion of salvation and discipleship can become a point of leverage for Christians in a postmodern world to make disciples.

Community and the Spiritual Disciplines

Descartes did not say, "We think; therefore, we are." "I think; therefore, I am" solidified in human hearts what each already wants to believe is true: "I'm number one."

The atmosphere of twentieth century America catalyzed the obsession with self because "American individualism, reflected and encouraged by democracy, tends to emphasize the ability of the individual to discern truth" (Shields, "Delights and Dangers Part 3"). Postmoderns have rejected the "exaggerated individualism" of modernity and have reclaimed the value of community. One danger to the postmodern reaction is the possibility of the rejection of the biblical mandate for an individual's responsibility toward salvation. A person's failure to surrender to, or rejection of, the offer of salvation cannot be blamed on others; it is, after all, an individual choice.

Postmoderns understand that the modern claim that an individual might stand outside of tradition, community, and history is simply not true. Individuals are shaped within a framework mediated by their community. The stories, values, morals, and language of a community are part of the makeup of every individual. The greatest derivative of such thought is that those individuals who are born into and shaped by Christian communities will have a predisposition toward Christianity. "The church's practices are communal. We are not born knowing how to live the Christian life. We need mentors, teachers, and partners who will provide the advice, challenge, and support to enable us to extend and deepen our participation" (Guder et al. 155). The bad news is that examples of Christian community are by no means common enough.

By embracing the relational aspect of the spiritual disciplines, postmoderns allow themselves to be exposed to the propositions that point to the person of God as Christ-communities undertake obedience to the commission to be "disciple-makers" (McLaren 61). Those who teach the spiritual disciplines cannot present themselves divorced from their message. "Just as there is no distinction between the teacher's content and character; there is similarly no arelational transfer of knowledge" (Shields," Delights and Dangers

Part 3"). In the postmodern spiritual disciplines, the teacher is both the messenger and the message. Postmoderns need to see the message lived out, especially in their own set of relationships within which they can explore the truths of the gospel (Hall 5), rather than only hear it explained. If God meets humans in the intersection of knowledge and experience, and experience trumps knowledge in the postmodern paradigm, then Christians must be wise enough to be on hand, in a credible, authoritative relationship, when the experience happens. "Biblical authors similarly contend that it is in community that individuals best come to apprehend truth" (Shields, "Christian Discipleship"). Contemporary advocates of discipleship are rediscovering the advantages of teaching spiritual disciplines within the boundaries of community (e.g., Bailey; Brockman; Ridings).

A fundamental difference exists between a postmodern community and a modern small group. Whereas spiritual disciplines may be taught to a small group of people at once, that does not mean that those people are a community. Community happens when people live life together. Postmoderns have a way of sharing life to its fullest with their friends in a mode that necessitates trust, love, acceptance, tolerance, and mutual authority. Christians should optimize this tendency toward meaningful community in an authentic, relationship-building strategy to infiltrate postmodern communities with the gospel of Christ and, subsequently, the spiritual disciplines. "Becoming Christ-like never occurs without intense and well-informed action on our part. This in turn cannot be reliably sustained outside of a like-minded fellowship" (Willard, "The Human Body").

Postmoderns tend to identify themselves by the communities in which they live. They are willing to subjugate the self, at least for a time, in order to enjoy the benefits of community. Those who develop zealous followers of Christ will have to learn to build

community in order to teach the spiritual disciplines effectively. God never intended

"Lone Ranger" Christians, and postmodernity looks askew at such renegades.

Holism and the Spiritual Disciplines

With modernity's differentiation of mind and matter, a logical next step was the

separation of body (physical substance) and soul (thinking substance) (Grenz 171).

Christianity devolved this rationale into an overwhelming concern to save souls

accompanied by a trifling concern for bodies (Now I lay me down to sleep; I pray the

Lord my soul to keep) since present, physical bodies had no eternal importance anyway (I

believe in the resurrection of the body).

Postmoderns have regained an appreciation for the unity of the person. Although

the real and present danger of physical permissiveness, to sate the body for the sake of

happiness, abounds, Christians should welcome this reclamation of biblical theology.

"Jesus presents the understanding of their minds as being inextricably tied up with the

commitments and decisions of their hearts" (Shields, "Delights and Dangers Part 3").

Jesus' teaching erased the dichotomy of body and soul. Using adultery as an example,

Jesus exposed the link between the actual performance of the act and the desire. He

claimed that thinking about it (soul) and engaging in it (body) were equivalent.

In such an atmosphere, Christians have the opportunity to challenge the hypocrisy

of a church that assents to God but exhibits lifestyles that are far from him. The spiritual

disciplines should especially rejoice at this renewal. Disciplines are by nature performed

in the body rather than existing entirely in the intellect:

> What then is the specific role of the spiritual disciplines? Their role rests
> upon the nature of the embodied human self—they are to mold and shape
> it. And our part in our redemption is … to "yield" the plastic substance of
> which we are made. (Willard, Spirit 92)

 Spiritual disciplines are not singularly spiritual. Physical participation has proven

efficacious in furthering the teaching of the disciplines.

Postmoderns would have nothing of spiritual disciplines bereft of physical action. The concept of holism is important and urges them to embrace an idea with the totality of the body. "Churches can connect with postmoderns by offering them an outlet for their passion to serve. Genuine faith always expresses itself in ministry" (Moon). The discipline of service presents few problems for a holistic praxis, but Christians need to ascertain how to involve the other disciplines in such activity. Somehow the spiritual disciplines should provide action and experience to balance the rational. Fortunately God's wisdom presciently built into salvation an internal motivation toward action on his behalf. "It is out of being Christ's disciple that I am compelled to act in love and grace in every area of my life. It is real and active and flows out of an intimate relationship with the Savior" (Seidel).

Postmodern holism involves an integration of the emotional, sensual, and rational sides of humanity. The spiritual disciplines rightly practiced address all of these arenas:

> So the disciplines cannot be carried out except as our body and its parts
> are surrendered in precise ways and definite actions to God. Salvation is
> something we live, and we live only in the actions and dispositions of our
> body. (Willard, Spirit 40-41)

Whereas modernity would strip the disciplines of the need to address anything other than the rational soul, postmodernity strives to find ways to incorporate the holistic human body into the practice of the disciplines.

A Glimpse of the Future

A smattering of church leaders throughout the States have already begun to experiment with "postmodern discipleship." Most of these pioneers understand the elusive and liquid nature of evolving culture and have chosen to avoid the use of "postmodern" as a descriptor. They most often refer to themselves as experimenters in

the "emerging church." Tony Jones, a youth minister in Edina, Minnesota, sees in the

culture a yearning for the ancient, especially with regard to spirituality: "People are

harking back to the spiritual disciplines" (Soul Shaper 15). Jones advocates the

reincorporation into the local church's educational model some of the spiritual disciplines

taught throughout the centuries by the Roman Catholic Church. In his ministry he uses

and promotes such tools as *Lectio Divina*, Ignatian Examen, Praying with Icons, Daily

Office, Labyrinth, Stations of the Cross, Pilgrimage, Signs of the Cross, and Sabbath.

Jones links Christian discipleship with the spiritual disciplines in this manner: "The

ultimate goal in life for a Christian is that we become conformed to the image of Christ.

Spiritual discipline is the time-tested arena for that change" (232). Most of the ancient

disciplines Jones has introduced into his Protestant ministry include experiential,

communal, and holistic facets. An intersection with twenty-first century culture (video

projection, Internet, coffee-house gatherings, etc.) is also obvious.

       Doug Pagitt, pastor of Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis, has tried to format the

structure of his church so as to attract and be compatible with postmoderns. Community

is at the center of Solomon's Porch's philosophy of spiritual formation:

> I truly believe that community is where real spiritual formation happens.
> Most people come to faith not by an isolated effort but through living day
> by day with people of faith such as their families or friends.… [T]hey
> learn what the Christian life looks like as they see people to whom they
> are deeply connected living out the disciplines of prayer, worship, and
> service. (27)

Pagitt's idea of ministry is thoroughly experiential and submerges followers of Christ

deeply into a holistic life of discipleship. "When we move beyond belief-based faith to

life-lived, holistic faith, the only true test is lives lived over time" (25). He consistently

promotes the necessity of holistic, experiential faith without denigrating the fundamental

necessity of doctrine, propositional truth, and faith. This church moves rather

unselfconsciously from experiential worship to neighborhood hospitality to service to physicality (like yoga classes, massage, etc.), all the while conscientiously studying the Scriptures. While traditionally "churched" people stay away in droves, the vast majority of Solomon's Porch attenders are baggaged with little or no previous contact with institutionalized religion.

Dan Kimball left a thriving church ministry to start an "emerging" church nearby. Kimball subscribes to Willard's description of a disciple as "one who practices His presence and arranges his or her life in such a way as to live as Christ would live if He were them" (214). He believes that discipleship in the "emerging" church is holistic and communal, based on ancient disciplines, holistic in faith and action, and occurring primarily through experience and participation. He has structured his church so that people heavily influenced by postmodern culture will be attracted to a gospel message and discipleship that resonates with what Blaise Pascal terms "the infinite abyss" (sec. 425).

These men are concurrently students of postmodernity and products of the culture. They have all chosen to prescribe a process for discipleship (and, in some cases, all aspects of church life) deeply informed by their reading of the culture and then move disciples into contact with the process, constantly evaluating and tweaking. By the grace of God, coupled with genuine humility and sincere concern, these "experiments" will hopefully work more often than not, producing "true disciples" at a high rate of regularity and efficiency.

The difference between those three projects and this project is that I entertain no illusion that I can accurately read the culture or prescribe a program capable of producing "true disciples" with any regularity. This project attempted to ascertain what was most

recently effective in producing disciples with the hope that God chooses to work in a redundant, although creative, manner in the lives of his people.

Conclusion

Postmodernity has its dangers to be sure. The modern worldview also presents dangers. In fact, any worldview will run the risk, if not the desire, of taking humanity beyond its God-ordained boundaries. Worldviews are born of and enacted in the hearts of depraved humanity. This earth will see no redeemed worldview until Jesus returns. The rub for Christians is not to figure out a way to defeat the philosophy of the day but to plot a wise strategy that would leverage the courses of culture to point people to God. The philosophical tenets of modernity in many ways answered the inadequacies of Christianity during the Dark Ages and allowed spiritual development to be reclaimed by the layperson. Modernism seems also to have perverted the spiritual disciplines to such an extent that they have largely lost their effectiveness to train men and women unto godliness. What appears to have happened in twentieth century America is that at the apex of modernity (also the inflection point of its demise), the Church manifested its unconscious adoption of modern epistemology. Christendom appeared, in sway and numbers, to be positioned to make converts and reproduce disciples indefinitely. Then the epistemological shift from modernism to postmodernism exposed the large numbers of people who carried the correct label and ingested the correct doctrine but had appropriated an unbalanced relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

Postmodernism thankfully changed the rules by which the spiritual disciplines can be applied. Postmodernism is not the Christian answer to modernism. In fact, much of incipient postmodernism intelligently questions the very postulation of God and Christianity. Fortunately, as postmodernism works out its kinks, especially those that are

internally mutually exclusive, greater questions remain unanswered that deal with immortality, infinity, and spirituality. The disciplines worked in antiquity, the middle ages, during the Enlightenment, and they will make zealous disciples out of men and women in postmodernity inasmuch as the Church is wise enough to teach the disciplines within the cultural context.

CHAPTER 3

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

American Christianity is currently subject to the cataclysmic cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity. Although the Great Commission of Christ remains the clarion call to all believers, the manner and method by which this commission is effectively accomplished must deal with the emergence of one worldview during the demise of another. The influence of postmodernity on individual followers of Christ is so varied and evasive of categorization that to formulate another discipleship program to be tested on a group would be akin to a stab in the dark. The purpose of this project was to discover the catalysts that grow believers into true disciples of Christ in an emerging postmodern culture. One assumption of this project was that the existence of zealous disciples necessarily meant that adequate catalysts toward true discipleship were already in place. Rather than trying to predict what will work, this project tried to discover and describe what was working.

Research Questions

These research questions were formulated to gain information relating to the discipleship activities of the subjects. The questions took on a more probative nature as they sought to determine the sources of motivation and catalysts that were effective in spurring these subjects toward deeper discipleship.

Research Question 1

What significant avenues of spiritual formation catalyzed the subjects toward true discipleship?

Zealous disciples are not born. Disciples evolve at various speeds toward maturity in Christ. In addition, different methods and disciplines appeal to and promote growth in

different people depending on any combination of personality, temperament, history, environment, and/or theology. This question simply investigates the avenues of spiritual formation of those who exhibited true discipleship.

Research Question 2

How do the answers to the activities questionnaire correspond to the catalysts identified in the interviews?

Although God chooses to shower his grace in diverse ways, seven modes of discipline and obedience were chosen for further quantifiable investigation: prayer, Bible study, finances, verbal witness, service, disciple making, and Christian community. These specific arenas of activity introduced quantifiable data to be compared to the more exploratory research accumulated in the interviews. The intent was to notice any connection between present practice of these modes and disciplines and whether or not they were catalysts toward Christ likeness.

Sample

Subjects were chosen for participation in the study because of the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit. Pastors recommended thirty people. Fifteen of those were interviewed.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Candidates were known by and/or recommended to me based on their perceived exhibition of the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit were given operational definitions by me based on Webster's New Encyclopedic Dictionary and The New Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Strong; see Appendix D). Providing definitions of the fruit of the Spirit was an attempt to operationalize what was meant by "true disciple." I met with fifteen candidates to administer a semi-structured interview.

I designed the interview to induce the candidate to articulate his or her spiritual journey. Before the interview commenced, the candidate was asked to provide a spiritual timeline that delineated major spiritual events and stages. This timeline enabled the candidate to give forethought to his or her responses during the interview and stimulated thinking in the areas probed by me. Details that related to the broad categories of reason/experience, individuality/community, and dualism/holism were explored further.

I refined the activities questionnaire with help from the RRT in such a manner as to attempt to delve beyond surface-level response. Dichotomous questions required an answer of "Yes" or "No." Open-ended questions required the precise date of a described activity or a number that divulged the frequency per week or month of a spiritual activity. At times the candidates were asked to list names or spiritual truths. Although such an instrument does not offer the quantitative consistency of a Likert scale, true/false schema, or other instruments, I believed that in a descriptive project such variety of questions injected more introspection, insight, and depth into the responses.

Validity and Reliability

The subjective nature of the recommendations was ameliorated by the operational definitions of the fruit of the Spirit. The activities questionnaire lent a more objective view to the process by allowing a single researcher to compare answers to like questions. Comparison of candidates became plausible after the activities questionnaires were completed. The interviews injected a descriptive aspect to the project that contributed yet another layer to the discovery process. The validity of the findings of the interview was largely dependent upon the skill of the researcher to identify and link commonalities.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed to search for catalysts in each

candidate's spiritual journey. Particular attention was paid to those catalysts that by their nature were more susceptible to change during the shift from modernity to postmodernity. Much scrutiny was also applied to the transcripts to see if there were frequent references to leaps of faith, suffering, and classic spiritual disciplines (per Bonhoeffer). These catalysts were described and categorized. Those descriptions and categorizations were compared to see if any similarities existed and were readily apparent. The answers to the activities questionnaire were also compared to the corresponding interviews to see if there were any relation between heightened activity and specific spiritual catalysts.

Mention should be made of the tendency toward researcher bias in any exploratory research. The categories delineated in the activities questionnaire were presupposed to an unknown degree to be present in the subjects. Therefore, the danger is that the categories identified as catalysts through the interviews would correspond to the categories probed by the questionnaire.

Delimitations and Generalizability

This study was limited to a variety of evangelical churches in the southern section of the United States. The nature of the convenience sample depending on pastors and individuals known to me rendered the selection of candidates somewhat homogenous. Although human nature tends to have foundational constants, lack of regional diversity, and denominational theological issues may have affected the generalizability of this project. The additional subjectivity of a researcher-defined "true disciple" additionally lent a unique perspective to the study. Anyone who significantly differs in defining true discipleship would find the study limited and ungeneralizable.

Without appearing wishful, in the end, one would hope that the nature of

Christianity and the sovereignty of God would more often than not overrule the relatively minor considerations of region, denomination, and theology and make the findings of this study applicable to all believers in an emerging postmodern culture.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Catalysts speed up chemical reactions. They are superfluous additives that are not mandatory to the reaction but affect the reaction nonetheless. A catalyst can be inserted at any point during the reaction. The reaction from beginning to end is not comprised solely of the catalyst. The catalyst simply speeds up the reaction at the point it is inserted. Spiritual catalysts are those events, avenues, and experiences that speed up spiritual growth. Spiritual catalysts are not usually involved during the whole growth period but intensify the growth period when they are involved. Catalysts are not necessarily the growth engines themselves but additives that intensify or propel growth. On a spiritual journey, catalysts propel spiritual growth even if the subject is not aware of it at the time. On the other side of the catalyst there is a realization that growth took place.

Discipleship manifests itself in obedience. Jesus' Great Commission articulates its own litmus test, "teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 20:18). Obedience proves to be the means and the end of discipleship by being both the goal itself and the thing that helps achieve the goal. Through obedience disciples become more like Christ. Catalysts for growing true disciples provide opportunity for and encouragement toward obedience.

True disciples of Christ live and breathe and move among the American church. Amazing acts of forgiveness, gigantic steps of faith, and radical transformations might not be commonplace, but they are possible and exist in the present expression of the Bride of Christ. This project sought to identify followers of Christ who had achieved a noticeable level of spiritual maturity. Once those Christians were identified, I attempted

to find out what catalyzed their growth in godliness. These Christ followers were then

questioned about their habitual spiritual activities.

Two research questions guided this study. The first question was exploratory in

nature: What significant avenues of spiritual formation catalyzed the subjects toward true

discipleship? The interviewees were asked to describe their spiritual journey. Further

questions were asked in order to clarify or probe relevant topics. The second research

question utilized information gathered from the activities questionnaire to address the

issue of how the answers to the activities questionnaire correspond to the catalysts

identified in the interviews.

Profile of the Subjects

All of the fifteen subjects in the study exhibited evidence of the fruit of the Spirit.

These subjects evidenced outward behavior as proof of inner transformation to the extent

that their pastors recommended them to this study. The subjects ranged in age from

twenty-three to sixty-two years old. Five of the subjects were female and ten were male.

With regard to denominational background, seven grew up as Baptists, two practiced

Catholicism, one belonged to a strict branch of the Mennonite church, one was

independent and four were totally unchurched. Five left the church of their childhood as

soon as they were allowed to make that decision. Eleven subjects were attending Baptist

churches during the time of the interview while four worshiped at a Church of God

(Anderson). As a side note, no one stressed, or even mentioned, their denominational

affiliation during the interviews.

Subjects used the term "profession of faith" to describe a public event like

walking down the aisle to meet with the preacher at the close of a church service. The

profession of faith was almost always the recitation of a prayer that indicated an

acknowledgement of sin and a desire for salvation. Subjects used the term "salvation" to connote a true transformation of the soul in which Christ's life, death, and resurrection were appropriated in the forgiveness of sin and right standing with God. Many of these subjects described an experience of salvation distinct from a prior profession of faith.

Three of the four who did not grow up in church accepted salvation as adults. The other person came to Christ at age fifteen. Interestingly, none of these four experienced a dichotomy between their spiritual life and their social, or public, life. From the time of their salvation, each began a spiritual journey that progressed in a generally positive direction. Five subjects recounted a prolonged period between their public profession of faith and a whole-hearted surrender to Christ wherein their religious lives were compartmentalized away from the rest of their lives. Of the subjects that experienced lengthy dichotomies, four grew up in families that were active in the church (two were Catholic; two were Baptist). Each made a public confession of faith or was confirmed into the church as a child. All vigorously claimed that true salvation did not come until they were adults. A female subject reported "walking the aisle" at the age of nine so her cousins would quit "telling me I was going to hell." Her true salvation did not take place until she was twenty-six years old. A male subject, aged seven, met the pastor at the altar after one church service. The pastor prayed for him and he was baptized. His salvation experience did not truly occur until he was thirty-one years old. These subjects raised the question of whether or not the churches they attended valued conversions rather than disciples, even at the cost of producing false conversions.

Six subjects reported that substantive spiritual growth did not begin until some time after their salvation. Although each claimed a genuine salvific experience, they continued to relegate their spiritual activity and pursuit to the specific sphere of church-

related times while living in an unspiritual manner during the majority of any given

week. One male served as minister of music in a church when his girlfriend conceived his

child. Another subject attended church services on Sundays but relished a hedonistic

lifestyle during the rest of the week. One woman sincerely confessed Christ at the age of

fifteen only to spend the next fifteen years of life rarely in church and consistently

unconcerned with spiritual matters.

Table 4.1. Profile of Subjects

Subject	Age	Gender	C/U*	POF**	Salvation	Growth
1	60	M	U	28	28	28
2	50	M	U	15	15	15
3	55	M	C/U	17	44	44
4	62	M	C	9	9	23
5	31	M	C	4	17	23
6	42	M	U	26	26	26
7	23	M	C	8	8	16
8	41	F	C/U	9	26	26
9	43	M	C	10	13	17
10	45	M	C/U	7	31	31
11	32	F	U	27	27	27
12	49	M	C/U	36	36	36
13	35	F	C	15	15	30
14	37	F	C/U	8	8	24
15	62	F	C	5	5	5

*Churched/Churched as a child and then Unchurched **Profession of Faith

Informational redundancy began after twelve of the fifteen interviews. The subsequent subjects gave no new pertinent information but corroborated the previous data by repeating the major themes. Although the major themes presented theoretical saturation, the combination of those themes offered great diversity. None of the subjects reported the same combination of themes as another subject. While the discovery of new categories ended relatively quickly, the combinations of those categories in each subject's life proved to be quite varied. Three subjects identified with all six categories but even so, much diversity appeared within those six parameters.

Research Question 1

Designed to be exploratory, the first research question presupposed no specific answers. The interviews were structured with the hope in mind that an open invitation to discuss the subject's spiritual journey would reveal those catalysts that were formative. The first interview question was usually phrased as a statement: "Tell me about your spiritual journey beginning with your earliest remembrances of God or the church." After fifteen interviews, six very prominent themes began to recur.

Influential Relationships

Every subject spoke strongly, without prompting or guidance, of the influence of an individual, or in some cases several individuals, who were catalytic in spiritual development. Many times these influencers were involved in the evangelistic web that framed the subject's decision for salvation, but just as many were not. Eight of the influencing friends were clergy; the others were simply friends who had forged ahead on their own spiritual journey and demonstrated a vibrancy that was attractive and meaningful. Several of the subjects remained in contact with these influential friends even though in some cases the geographical proximity became prohibitive years before.

When questioned as to why relationships were so important to his spiritual growth, Clay replied, "[G]rowth times weren't done in an auditorium full of people or even in a Sunday School class, they were done because of people who just ministered to me and prayed for me and were hands on with me."

Pat claimed that "relationships brought discipleship away from church." She later stated that discipleship happened best in a relationship in which you "pour your life into them."

When Neal spoke of Bill and Mary Fleetwood, his Sunday school teachers in a class for young married couples almost forty years ago, he became so emotional that I had to turn off the tape recorder so that he could compose himself. His fond memories and gratitude toward his friends was moving.

Discipleship is neither learned nor lived in isolation. The fruit of the spirit is most evident and powerful when manifested in the company of others. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, meekness, faithfulness, and self-control are most evident in the presence of their opposites and alternatives. For these subjects, spiritual maturity was modeled and encouraged by their friends and given room to express itself in their own lives. One man described his closest spiritual friend as his "mentor." Two men described their pastor with the same phrase, "my spiritual hero."

Serial influential relationships were common. Most subjects revealed the fact that even deep, solid relationships ended for a variety of reasons. Those disciples that were able to form new friendships in spite of a new job, home, or context showed evidence of continued, consistent growth. Two subjects neglected to cultivate new influential relationships when their important friends moved out of their life. Both of these disciples often experienced lapses in their spiritual growth.

Supernatural Experiences

Nine of the subjects spoke of some type of contact with God that did not neatly fit into what would be considered normal modes of communication. All of these stories were unsolicited and were readily discussed by the subjects. In fact, each seemed anxious to tell this part of his or her story. Two ladies told of unusual dreams while one man recalled what could only be described as an out of body experience. Two young men spoke of instances in which a particular attribute of God so overwhelmed them that they were overcome with uncontrollable emotions—a mixture of joy, gratitude, and awe. Others told of instances of a glimpse into the glory of God. Each spoke of the encounters with unusual clarity and surety. Most of these experiences were subsequently internalized as evidence that God was real, active, and personal. For all of the subjects these experiences solidified personal faith and compelled future growth. These experiences usually preceded a markedly important step or decision that each was facing.

A sixty-two year old lady who had whole-heartedly followed Christ since the age of five told the story most illustrative of this category. By the age of fifty-seven, Laurie had already lost her mother, her husband to cancer, and her oldest daughter to diabetes. Her pastor had invited her to join his staff as a full-time minister. While trying to discern God's will in the matter, she attended a Walk to Emmaus retreat. One evening after a plenary worship service, the main speaker and three other male pastors approached her with a request to speak to her in private. The main speaker introduced himself and cautioned her that he had no previous prophetic ministry. In fact, he had only once before done what he was about to do. He then related to her that all four of them were in agreement that God had urged him to tell her that she was to be involved in full-time ministry at a church. She had shared with no one the offer from her pastor to serve and

the decision she was trying to make. She had in fact never spoken to any of these four men before. God used circumstances and events that are best described as supernatural to reveal himself and his will.

Clay intensely experienced God during worship times at a summer camp when he was a teenager. In response to a question about how these experiences furthered his godliness, he explained, "Christianity became more personal."

Robert shared a similar story. While driving along a major interstate alone at night, he lost track of time and place as he saw a realistic vision of the passion of Christ. A few weeks later he sensed God's call to become a full-time minister sometime in the future.

Monica and Dale, a wife and husband, presented an interesting scenario. While working in her home kitchen, Monica audibly heard God say to her, "[Y]our life's about to change." Within the next couple of days Dale informed her that they needed to talk about resigning his job to move to seminary to acquire the education to be a full-time minister.

These supernatural experiences almost always preceded a call to obedience. This type of encounter with God served to provide a boost that made the request of God seem doable and exciting. Perhaps these subjects would describe such supernatural experiences as shots of faith adrenaline.

Leaps of Faith

Twelve of the fifteen subjects admitted that God had invited them to take a step of obedience that required a seemingly inordinate amount of faith. Five subjects surrendered to full-time Christian ministry while they were in the middle of careers and families. Of these five, two men retired early to work full-time in ministry positions at a church. Three

others, two women and one man, quit their jobs well before retirement in order to

relocate their families to seminary or work in a church. Kari remembered sitting in a

leadership conference and hearing the speaker ask if anyone was contemplating full-time

ministry. Through tears she heard the speaker validate what she had sensed for a while

that God was saying to her. After making her decision to take that leap of faith, she

described it as her chance to "leave it all and follow Jesus." In response to the question of

what that decision did for her spiritual growth, she referred to herself and her husband

and replied, it "increased our faith in God."

Two men classified marriage as their leap of faith. One of these married for the

first time at forty-three, the other at age forty. Both have experienced deep pain and

suffering on account of the blending of family.

Dale was a forty-two year old husband and father of three when he quit his job at

NASA to move his family to seminary. The move has given Dale the peace and sense of

purpose that he miserably missed for almost twenty-five years. The ensuing several

months were exciting and fulfilling for Dale and his family.

Robert's leap of faith centered on finances. With trepidation he tithed for the first

time in his life and found God to be more than faithful. The growth point was that, "he

showed me for the first time that faith was real." This realization helped Robert

internalize the faithfulness of God that in turn became a model and standard for Robert's

own life.

Pat's leap of faith was in not leaving a church that had become less than desirable.

As she continued to minister to and with fellow believers who tended toward

judgmentalism and standoffishness, she never felt God release her from that situation.

Her response to the question of how she grew during this time was, "It made me desire to

be compassionate."

These people learned through obedience that when they have the faith to obey,

God often translates that action and resulting momentum into growth.

Finances

One surprise was the number of subjects that offered the area of finances as a

catalyst for growth. Eleven subjects referred to the issue of money as a testing ground

initiated by God. Of those eleven, only two were called to tithe to the local church. The

two men who struggled with tithing came to Christ as adults and did not have a firmly

established concept of tithing from a church background. They both tell great stories

about conscious conversations with God regarding the idea of tithing. Both men received

timely gifts in the mail, through a scholarship for a child or by way of an unexpected

raise. All of these gifts came within hours of the decision to tithe or the act itself.

Two subjects recounted a compulsion from God to live a life free of debt. Both of

them claimed that the act of ordering their lives to live debt-free enabled them to join

God on very specific, otherwise impossible, chapters of their lives.

Four subjects drastically reduced their family income in order to obey God's call

into the ministry. They made financial sacrifices for the sake of their spiritual health. One

woman reported that God used her situation to teach her that "security is not in your

resources."

One lady recently relinquished compulsive control of the household finances in

order to "be more concerned about my husband's soul than our stuff." She mentioned that

patience then became much more possible for her.

Robert argued with God during a Sunday sermon about God's command to tithe. After reluctantly agreeing, Robert slipped a check into the offering box. Later that day his daughter called from college to tell him of the full scholarship she had surprisingly received. Soon after, Robert begrudgingly tithed again with the awareness that his son's $800 college tuition payment was due. The Monday morning mail delivered an unexpected $800 check from his escrow account. He described this incident as "The first time I ever had a conscious conversation with God."

Bible Reading

Eleven subjects recalled that an insatiable desire to read God's word accompanied their salvation or their movement toward total surrender to Christ. These eleven told stories of the pervasive influence of the Bible during times of pain, suffering, disappointment, and calm. For those who were previously unchurched and came to Christ as adults, hunger for the Bible seemed especially strong. Ben described his morning time in the Bible as "armor to face the day."

Dan rode a train everyday for forty-five minutes one way on his commute from the suburbs of Chicago to downtown. He chose to use this time reading his Bible. Years after he had moved away from Chicago, he remembered these daily trains ride as "a great time of growth."

Forgiveness

Although only seven subjects referred to the issue of forgiveness, I think that because it awoke such intensity in the subjects, and because the events were so transformational in their lives, the idea of forgiveness needs to be mentioned. Three subjects suffered through the trials associated with alcoholic or emotionally abusive parents. Each of these three people experienced seasons in life in which God led them to

confront the issues and reconcile with their fathers. One lady experienced the joy of leading her father to Christ two years before his death. Her father's death was both "hard and sweet." She described that time as sweet because she came to a place where she could "trust God to just handle it." This woman remembered with joy her father's life leading up to his demise.

One man lost his godly mother in childbirth when he was only ten years old. The shock and grief of losing his mother, causing the dissolution of his family to various orphanages and foster homes, greatly influenced his view of God. Only after salvation at the age of thirty-six did he find the strength to forgive God.

Another man found forgiveness for himself over the guilt of an illegitimate pregnancy and subsequent miscarriage. He and his wife together went through the process of confession and cleansing.

A sixty-two year old subject found herself facing the uncomfortable realization that she had never forgiven her adult daughter for wanting to die while battling the final stages of the diabetes that would take her life. During her period of care giving, she felt the need to project hope and a positive attitude. Although she felt betrayed by her daughter's willingness to discontinue the medical treatment and to concede defeat to the disease, she never allowed herself to admit her anger at her daughter's attitude. Forgiveness came during a Bible study when she was given permission to express her anger to her deceased daughter.

Perhaps one of my favorite stories is that of a woman who initiated and exercised forgiveness to a former friend who had an illicit relationship with her husband. This subject not only offered forgiveness but consequently experienced the presence of God in a way that gave direction and deeper meaning to her life. She described this account of

forgiveness as "a life-changing experience." This episode was one of the major factors that convinced her to quit her job and become a full-time minister.

These episodes of uncommon forgiveness introduced pervasive peace to the lives of the subjects. The subjects each indicated that the choice to offer forgiveness empowered them to go forward in their growth in godliness. After the act of forgiveness, each subject began radical Christian growth. Shannon grew "more in the last two years than ever" in his spiritual life after his act of forgiveness. The issue of unforgiveness presents a barrier to spiritual growth that can be broken down only by the unselfish act of forgiveness.

Table 4.2. Subjects and Catalytic Categories

	Catalytic Categories					
Subject	Supernatural Experiences	Influential Relationships	Leaps of Faith	Finances	Bible Reading	Forgiveness
1	Yes	Yes				
2		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
4		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes
6		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
9		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
10		Yes			Yes	
11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
12		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes
13	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Other Areas of Interest

One trait that proved common to all of these stories was the milieu in which growth took place. All of these subjects were products of vibrant churches or sub-groups

within a church. Whether it was a Sunday school class, a youth ministry, an individual, or an entire church community, transformative Christianity was modeled. This concept of vibrant scenes differed from the theme of influential relationships in its scope. All of the influential relationships existed in the larger context of a vibrant church, or youth minister, or Sunday school class. Specific influential relationships were the personalized expression of a culture-wide vivacity.

Three subjects mentioned the influence of Bill Gothard's seminars that were popular approximately thirty-five years ago. One man was influenced to live radically different in his finances while another man acted on the seminar leader's urge to restore a relationship.

Six men and women participated in a formalized mentoring program at their church. These six also happened to all score in the top eight on the activities questionnaire. All of these subjects went to the same church and only these six subjects were active in this type of program. These six represented the entire spectrum of the demographic data. They were both churched and unchurched as young men and women. Some confessed Christ as children, some as teens, and some as adults. Two experienced lengthy dichotomies and four did not. Just as much variety showed up with regard to the catalytic themes. The only pattern that proved consistent was their participation in this formalized mentoring program.

Reaction to pain and disappointment appeared to be a hidden underlying current in many of these interviews. When asked direct questions, most of the subjects did not acknowledge pain as a catalytic influence in their spiritual lives; however, during the telling of their stories, many told stories of pain and disappointment that turned their attention Godward and made them receptive to obvious maneuverings that ended in

deeper relationship with God. Pain and disappointment related to both spiritual issues and non-spiritual issues. While some of these things could be considered persecution because of faith, most of them had to do with the natural consequences of living in an imperfect world.

Each subject reported a unique combination of catalysts. Although these catalytic themes were pronounced and definable, no two subjects displayed the same mixture of themes. Even when they did overlap, some themes such as finances, supernatural experiences, and forgiveness varied greatly from story to story. The catalysts were common enough to be generalizable but each subject bore a unique catalytic fingerprint.

Research Question 2

Each subject completed a researcher-designed activities questionnaire. The answers to the questions were assigned a numerical value ranging from three, the highest score based on an answer of "Yes" or the provision of a complete list, to zero for an answer of "No" or for no answers on a list. Question 8 asked for a specific date regarding the last time a specific event occurred. Each answer received three points if the answer fell within the last four months, two points if five to eight months ago, one point if nine to twelve months ago, and zero points if more than a year had passed. The value of the answer was heightened in proportion to how recently the action occurred. Question 12 required a list of three names and was given three points for a complete answer, two points for two names, one point for one name, and zero points for no name. Questions 1 and 17, regarding frequency of Bible study and prayer, received three points for an answer of five to seven days, two points for an answer of three to four days, one points for an answer of one to two days, and zero points for an answer of zero days. Questions 10, 15, and 21 received three points if a specific answer was given and one point if the

answer was vague or general. For question 11, referring to whether or not one's primary circle of friends was made up of growing believers, one point was given for a "yes" answer and three points were given for a "no" answer. Since the question fell into the category of evangelism rather than Christian community, more value was given to those answers that indicated proactive pursuit of non-Christians. The highest possible score was sixty-three while the lowest possible score was zero.

The importance of the scoring system related to its uniformity. Since each subject was being gauged in comparison only to other subjects in this sample, it was not necessary to have a universally recognized scoring system. These subjects were not being compared to subjects in other studies. The goal of the project required that there be a way to compare the praxis of the subjects to each other. This scoring system enabled the subjects to be compared one to the other with adequate consistency.

One lady answered the questions in such a way that she scored a perfect 63. The other scores were as follows: 61, 60, 59, 55, 53, 53, 51, 50, 49, 47, 46, 45, 43, and 27.

The man who scored twenty-seven admitted several times during his interview that he was a "lazy Christian." His story entailed involvement in two successive dysfunctional churches that ended in a split in one church and a mass exodus in the other. His spiritual growth seemed to have occurred immediately after his salvation, at the age of thirty-one but had stalled when he became involved in these church catastrophes.

The lady who scored sixty-three was very obviously the most vibrant and faith-filled subject in the sample. Her spiritual journey was lengthy enough to have developed and ingrained some important habits, but her zeal seemed to have grown with the passage of time.

Table 4.3. Activities Questionnaire Results

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
								Subjects							
Q1	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	3
Q2	3	3	0	3	0	0	3	3	3	0	0	3	0	3	3
Q3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3
Q4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Q5	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3	0	0	3	3	3	3	3
Q6	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	0	3
Q7	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	0	0	3	0	3	0	3
Q8	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	0	0	3	3
Q9	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Q10	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	0	1	3
Q11	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Q12	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	2	0	1	2	3	0	3
Q13	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3
Q14	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Q15	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3
Q16	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Q17	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	3
Q18	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3
Q19	2	1	3	0	2	1	1	3	3	0	3	3	0	3	3
Q20	3	3	3	3	3	3	0	3	0	3	3	3	3	3	3
Q21	3	3	1	3	3	1	1	3	1	1	3	3	3	3	3
Total	60	59	53	55	51	43	45	63	49	27	53	47	46	50	61

Several patterns emerged when looking at the cumulative scores of the questions rather than the scores of the subjects. Question 19 received the lowest aggregate score. Three subjects had not led someone to confess Christ as their Savior in the previous twelve months. Five additional subjects had not done so within the last six months. Only five of fifteen subjects had shared this experience in the last four months. But those five subjects reported praying with fifty-seven people in this manner in the last twelve months. As a corollary, question 12 revealed that six subjects prayed weekly for fewer than three non-Christians to confess Christ. The two subjects who reported praying for zero non-Christians incidentally prayed with zero people to receive Christ in the preceding calendar year.

Seven subjects did not study the Bible both privately and in a group setting. Five of those could not articulate a specific concept that they had learned through Bible study in the last thirty days.

With regard to indebtedness, six subjects reported that they made monthly payments to an interest bearing account other than a car or a house. Three of those have been unable to give to a ministry need because of this debt. Although all six practiced tithing, three subjects had been unwise with their finances and were still trying to escape those decisions.

The activities questionnaire revealed that only subject ten answered more than half of the questions poorly. Subjects six and seven scored less than three on eight of the twenty-one questions. Ironically, they each attend the same church as the woman that scored a perfect sixty-three. One man needed work on seven questions while one woman needed work on six questions. Ten of the fifteen subjects scored a three on at least sixteen questions. According to the activities questionnaire, these fifteen subjects habitually practice those seven activities commanded by the Bible and addressed by this study. Their actions validated recommendations from their pastors as zealous disciples. Subject ten's score separates him from the rest of the group. His inclusion in the study is most probably due to the subjective nature of the recommendation procedure.

Direct Correlations

Eleven of the subjects had spouses traveling in the same spiritual direction at the same general speed. For example, three couples confessed Christ at the same time and enjoyed the same influential relationships. Three subjects confessed Christ due to the influence of their spouse but quickly adopted their spouse's influential relationships. Nine of the eleven subjects adjusted their finances as two people in agreement. One female

subject spoke of God's call on her life to full-time ministry. Such a move required that she quit her full-time job, a sizeable step of faith. At the same time, her husband was sensing the direction from God to start his own business. Together they prayerfully considered the weight of those two actions in combination and arrived at the same conclusion.

No relationship was able to match the synergistic power of the marriage partnership. Even though the spouse was usually not the catalytic relationship, the marital relationship proved to be a multiplying factor when partnered with an outside influential relationship. As further evidence, the three subjects that scored the lowest on the questionnaire each partnered with spouses that were ambivalent at best and antagonistic toward spirituality at worst.

Six of the top eight subjects, according to the questionnaire, were involved in a formal mentoring program. Five men and one woman were meeting weekly with a spiritual director. All six had been participating in this program for three years. The mentor required daily Bible reading, daily prayer, weekly exercise, and book reading in the context of regular meetings. Each of these subjects mentioned during their interview the efficacy of this program.

A relationship also existed between perseverance on the spiritual journey and a high score on the activities questionnaire. Four of the top five scorers on the questionnaire suggested that their discipleship had been maturing for at least thirty years. One woman had been maturing for fifty-seven years. The only other subject who had been journeying for more than twenty-five years had just realized that he engaged in a willful disobedience twenty-six years ago. At the age of seventeen, he awoke spiritually due to the influence of a personable youth minister. While at camp that summer he felt

God's call to the ministry but turned down the offer. Through a series of recent events, he

remembered the call and the disobedience. After prayerful consideration, he resigned his

job and moved his family of five to New Orleans, Louisiana, to go to seminary full-time.

Perhaps his longevity in the journey was undermined by his singular act of disobedience

twenty-six years ago. Even so, he scored ninth on the activities questionnaire.

Table 4.4. Subjects in Order of Rank with Catalytic Categories

Subject	AQ Score	Catalytic Categories
8	63	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, Bible reading, forgiveness
15	61	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading, forgiveness
1	60	Supernatural experience, influential relationships
2	59	Influential relationships, leap of faith, Bible reading, forgiveness
4	55	Influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading
11	53	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading, forgiveness
3	53	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances
5	51	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, forgiveness
14	50	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading
9	49	Influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading
12	47	Influential relationships, leap of faith, Bible reading, forgiveness
13	46	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, finances, Bible reading, forgiveness
7	45	Supernatural experience, influential relationships, leap of faith, finances
6	43	Influential relationships, leap of faith, finances, Bible reading
10	27	Influential relationships, Bible reading

The other four subjects in the top eight had been maturing for as little as five

years to as many as fifteen, but they all had in common extraordinary acts of forgiveness

and one of miraculous healing. In fact, all but two of the seven of those who named

forgiveness as a catalyst scored in the top eight. One of the two subjects not in the top

eight had a spiritually ambivalent spouse and the other had a spouse that was not a follower of Christ.

Of the top seven questionnaire scores, six of the subjects began their positive spiritual growth at the same time as their salvation. These six men and women never experienced a prolonged or serious dichotomy of their spiritual lives and their physical, or social, lives. Conversely, of the next six subjects, according to the scores of the activities questionnaire, five lived dualistic lives for at least four and sometimes sixteen years. This dualism always consisted of believing the orthodox teachings regarding salvation but refusing to "work out" (Phil. 2:12) their salvation. In four of the five lives it involved experimentation with various forms of overt rebellion and sin. One female confessed Christ at the age of eight due in large part to the influence of a Christian home. She reported that her spiritual growth truly began about age twenty-four. She attributed this delay to the fact that growing up in a Christian home meant she and her brothers "never got a chance to use our faith." The only subject in this group that did not suffer through a period of spiritual compartmentalization experienced salvation as an adult at the age of thirty-six. The other five subjects confessed Christ as children or teenagers.

A general trend appeared with regard to suffering through a period of backsliddenness. Except for one woman (salvation at aged five) and one man (salvation aged fifteen), the six subjects that confessed Christ as a child spent several years living away from godliness. The seven subjects that received Christ as adults did not recount such a dichotomy.

<div style="text-align:center">Summary of Significant Findings</div>

These particular themes emerged during the semi-structured interviews: influential relationships, leaps of faith, Bible reading, supernatural experiences, finances,

and forgiveness. The first three were no surprise and were mentioned previously as catalysts to spiritual growth recognized throughout history. The final three were serendipitous discoveries. More will be written about all six categories in the final chapter.

The activities questionnaire illuminated certain nuances of how these subjects expressed their spiritual praxis so that several important comments could be offered.

1. Active influential relationships were virtually requisite for catalytic growth.

2. Spouses often served as influential relationships, both positively and negatively.

3. Subjects involved in a formal mentoring process all scored in the upper tier on the activities questionnaire.

4. Perseverance in spiritual growth over time proved to be an important factor in correlation to scores on the questionnaire. Spiritual growth of over ten years proved to be decisively beneficial except in three instances wherein the spouse of the subject provided no spiritual support.

5. A dichotomy in the spiritual life served to delay spiritual growth. This sort of dichotomy appeared most often in those subjects who grew up in church and confessed Christ as a child. The subjects who first confessed Jesus as Christ as adults did not lapse into prolonged and profound backsliding.

6. Vibrancy in a church or group provided a context conducive to catalytic spiritual growth.

7. While the catalysts can be broadly described by six themes, the combinations of those themes proved to be unpredictable. When added to the diverse demographic information, the possibilities prove too numerous to count.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This project was birthed out of my own concern for the efficacy and lasting value of my ministry as shepherd of a group of believers as well as the effectiveness and legacy of the local church. Overwhelming evidence shows that many in America adhere to the major tenets of Christianity but live lives powerless to appropriate "life abundant" (John 10:10) much less powerful enough to "turn the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Working under the knowledge that God has consistently produced true disciples throughout history, but that culture morphs, occasionally in ways that shift the paradigms for how people internalize truth and knowledge, I began to wonder if the present cultural shift from modernity to postmodernity had affected the catalysts of discipleship. My underlying assumption was that the predominant culture was neither godly nor conducive to effortlessly producing disciples of Christ. So rather than declare the historical catalysts of growth categorically defunct, I chose to investigate the spiritual journeys of true disciples in order to find out what was currently effective. I had hoped that some common categories of catalysts would become apparent in the exploration. I also intended to gauge the spiritual activities of these true disciples in order to find out if there was an obvious connection between catalysts and actions.

Major Findings

The major findings of the exploration can be divided into two sections. The first section entails highly common catalysts that should not produce much surprise. These three engines of spiritual growth are neither new nor innovative. Much solace should be found in the fact that some catalysts for spiritual growth seem to escape the influence of the shifts in worldview and culture.

Tried and True

Relationships are the *sine qua non* of spiritual development. Since humanity was created in the image of and are called to serve a Trinitarian, incarnational God then people are virtually forced to consider that godliness involves relation to other people in a very meaningful way. The stories of these spiritual journeys shout the inherent benefit of partnership for spiritual growth. The overwhelming majority of these relationships formed in one of two contexts. A follower of Christ purposefully initiated contact with one of these fifteen subjects; sometimes the subject was already a believer, sometimes not. The important point was that in all cases, the subject became a growing, zealous disciple largely due to the fact that someone who followed Christ purposefully imitated Christ and poured life into them. Many of the influential relationships grew within the context of a vibrant church or sub-group within a church. Youth groups and Sunday school classes for young couples seemed to be mediums in which reciprocal relationships teemed with life.

Alongside the primacy of relationships in the discipleship process stands the emerging culture that appreciates the value of interpersonal interactions. Since postmoderns tend to look askance at modernity's elevation of self and instead value the exchange of viewpoint and opinion, an automatic leverage point exists in God's use of influential relationships in catalyzing discipleship.

Although the right relationship proved to be of primary importance, several subjects moved from one influential relationship to another without adverse effects. Sometimes the subject grew beyond the usefulness of the initial positive relationship and formed another that proved beneficial in other areas. The critical point of this matter appeared to be that catalytic growth took place concurrent with vital relationships.

The issue of mentoring deserves special mention. Six of the subjects were under the tutelage of a mentor for the specific purpose of discipleship. These six subjects excelled in their answers on the activities questionnaire, each scoring in the top eight. All six subjects attended the same church and were mentored by the same person in identical mentoring programs. Whether or not the program or the mentor was more influential is unknown. If the program offered value in and of itself, the program would be invaluable in many churches. If the mentor were the key to the spiritual development of the disciples, then one would wonder if his success as a disciple maker was transferable to others or exclusive to his combination of personality and abilities. Mentoring as a catalyst would be even more generalizable and thus beneficial to the church at large if the key component were its intentionality.

In the emerging culture, disciple makers would do well to acknowledge that potential disciples eschew insincerity and perceived hypocrisy. The literature review mentioned that Jesus was both message and messenger. Disciples influenced by postmodernity look for mentors who embody the message they deliver. Mentoring works best in close, sincere relationships in which the mentor owns enough humility to communicate that the mentoring relationship proves beneficial to both parties. Mentors are not necessarily teachers as much as fellow travelers. The modern classroom with its didactic lecturer might still work in some contexts, but more effective is an attitude that uses life as the classroom and sees mentor and disciple as fellow travelers.

A relevant tangent to the category of influential relationships is the importance of the marital relationship. Very simply put, those subjects that enjoyed the support and concurrent growth of a spouse scored higher on the activities questionnaire and identified with more catalytic categories. Those subjects who were married to spiritually apathetic

or disinterested spouses scored lower on the activities questionnaire and identified with fewer catalytic categories.

Those few subjects who spent a long time without growth coincidentally spent long periods of time without formative relationships. This absence of growth in the absence of formative relationships provides evidence that spiritual growth hinges to a great degree on positive personal influence. If spiritually mature people naturally seek out influential relationships, then the two men who scored lowest on the activities questionnaire would have maintained their spiritual maturity while cultivating another positive relationship. As that did not happen, one can deduce that, for these two men, spiritual maturity did not sustain itself apart from positive influential relationships.

Leaps of faith offered definite opportunities for growth through obedience. In the end, Christ-likeness boiled down to obedience. The leaps of faith offered definitive opportunities for growth through obedience. God brought the subjects to a place in life where they could either go on with him or stunt their spiritual growth. The primary concern was not necessarily the issue at hand (finances, career, marriage, etc.) but the response to God. Spiritual growth occurred because each leap of faith was a step toward God. Through these interviews I learned that each leap of faith was a step out of a comfort zone and into the invisible arms of Jesus. These leaps are situations wherein disciples learn to trust God more fully. Passing the first test does not mean that test will be the last. For those who leapt by faith, new steps of godliness awaited on the other side. Not all leaps of faith were met with immediate reward. Some subjects are currently in the midst of living out those leaps. Without exception, all of the subjects who readily identified these leaps in their lives eagerly anticipated the next word from God. They

spoke as if they were living a great adventure and their capacity for God in their lives was growing in proportion to their obedience.

A close relationship exists between leaps of faith and finances. Many of the leaps of faith dealt with finances at least indirectly. Those subjects who were called by God to move or surrender to the ministry had to consider the effect of obedience to their financial situation. God's challenge, however, to trust him usually involved more than merely finances. Money entailed only part of the consideration. I will not pretend that these leaps of faith often involve changes in income. On a most fundamental level, the leaps dealt with levels of faith while the financial issues dealt with pure obedience.

Bible reading often appeared to be a by-product of genuine salvation. Several of the subjects grew up in evangelistic churches that placed a premium on a public profession of faith and then baptism by immersion. These churches sometimes ran the risk of bifurcating evangelism and discipleship. Conversion often became the primary issue while discipleship was relegated to secondary or lower importance. Those subjects who did not grow up in church, and several who did grow up in church and made a premature profession of faith and experienced baptism very early in their lives, found that an insatiable desire to read a Bible followed their authentic salvation experience. For these believers, the Bible sated not only their thirst for knowledge of God but provided an avenue to God himself. Often this Bible reading happened when alone, but just as often this desire to read and study Scripture prompted the disciple to seek out friends and small groups with whom to discuss what they had discovered.

The three findings mentioned above were relatively unsurprising. The nature of God and the model of Jesus' ministry assume the necessity of relationships. Leaps of faith have long been characteristic of God's call to obedience since Jesus' invitation to

"[c]ome, follow me" invited the disciples out of relative security and into absolute

insecurity. Bible reading is attested to by the Scriptures themselves as beneficial, perhaps

even mandatory, for spiritual growth. These three catalysts have historically been

recognized as such and appear to supercede any cultural constraints or shifts.

Surprises

The final three catalysts proved to be somewhat of a departure from the

previously recognized catalysts of spiritual growth. While supernatural experiences,

finances, and forgiveness certainly can be found in the Scripture, the historical church has

not really viewed them as primary means of spiritual formation. I make a claim that these

final three issues are formational catalysts accentuated by God in reaction to important

streams of the present emerging culture.

The number of supernatural experiences that molded the spirituality of these

subjects was tantalizing. Dreams, Spirit-filling, coincidences, overpowering sensations,

and prophetic words do not adequately connote the meaning of the corresponding events.

Each of these events appears to be an avenue of communication from God. Although

Scripture is rife with such stories, the theologies and philosophies promoted by modernity

overly-focus on nonrational experiences. These types of experiences do not neatly fit into

the paradigm defined by the rational realm and might be a manifestation of the cultural

shift from faith in the rational to longing for the experiential. Whether or not this catalyst

can be described as modern or postmodern is ultimately immaterial. Supernatural

experiences such as the ones described by the sample are tools apparently used by God to

draw believers to him and propel them toward obedience.

The same spirit that conveys these supernatural experiences is the dispenser of

fruit. One subject was overwhelmed by God's mercy and subsequently lived life with

more kindness. Another subject received a prophetic word and changed career paths based on God's faithfulness. A female subject experienced the peace of uncommon forgiveness. Anne learned patience for her husband through a dream. Pat internalized God's love because of a traumatic interlude with God during a low point. Supernatural experiences with God produced spiritual fruit in the lives of the subjects.

I was taken aback at the number of references to finances. This was not a category in which I initiated discussion. All of the subjects who mentioned finances brought it up themselves. Some subjects felt invited to purposefully lessen income in order to concentrate on professional ministry. Others were compelled to get out and stay out of debt. Only two men mentioned tithing as a point of contention with God. Most of the others had no trouble with the practice of tithing. God apparently considers tithing to be a jumping off point for those who would forge ahead in their spiritual journey. Andy Crouch describes postmodernity as a culture of consumerism (Sweet, <u>Church</u> 71). Perhaps God addresses finances in direct opposition to the cultural bent toward materialism. Each subject that offered the arena of finances as a point of discussion recognized God's call to surrender their money to him as part of a holistic discipleship.

Forgiveness seemed to be God's answer to the modern and postmodern emphasis on the self. Modernity elevated the self to primary status. Postmodernity claims that community is an asset more valuable than the individual. In reality, postmodernity affords everyone the opportunity to voluntarily subject the self to a community that does not hamper individualism. In other words, postmodernity allows people to retain their individualism in the comfortable presence of others who have no leverage to deny anyone their individualism. People in general—and disciples of God are no different—find self-sacrifice a difficult virtue to embrace. On one level, forgiveness demands that one

sacrifice the self for the sake of the relationship and often for the sake of the community. In a world in which dysfunctional relationships tend to be normal, forgiveness might be the tool of God to reflect heaven-birthed, Jesus-modeled interactions between fellow members of humanity, if not the kingdom of God itself. These subjects experienced forgiveness as an extreme act of self-denial. In doing so, each one gained or regained a friend. In some instances, a new believer was won.

As much as anything else, forgiveness brought the fruit of peace. The issues of unforgiveness lead four of the seven subjects away from God and toward destructive habits. For all seven who mentioned forgiveness, God delivered his calming peace in every facet of life when the single issue of forgiveness was addressed.

Forgiveness and finances both appeal to postmodernity's attraction with holism. Genuine forgiveness demands an inner life transformed by the Spirit. The fruit delivered by extending forgiveness does not come by mere words of apology. The outward action of speaking words of contrition must be paralleled by an inward activity. The power to perform such an unselfish holistic act is valued by those who have seen too much hypocrisy in religious circles and have themselves known the emptiness of similar duplicity. Godly finances help consolidate areas of internal and external life into one whole. Materialism tends to be a chief distraction for spiritual travelers. The present beneficiaries of one of the most financially healthy civilizations in world history know the inadequacy of material goods to satisfy the deepest needs of life. When God challenges disciples to surrender to him their finances, he gives them a chance to align a major spiritual distraction with him. When God addresses finances and forgiveness, he encourages a holism that is so attractive in the present culture.

A couple of surprises presented themselves by their noticeable absence. The spiritual disciplines were never mentioned as catalytic growth agents. Vic, a man who tends to "logically process things" and a consistent practitioner for thirty-five years of Bible study and prayer admitted no "radical growth periods" due to spiritual disciplines. Dan described the effects of prayer and Bible intake as more "stabilizing" than "growth spurts." All of the subjects were intentionally probed about the disciplines of prayer and Bible reading. Responses ranged from "never lasted" to "kept me on the path" and "I don't think there would have been spiritual growth without it." Although Bible study was often mentioned, it was always as a foundational tool rather than a catalyst. Several people expressed the opinion that spiritual growth was unimaginable without Bible study and prayer, but they would not offer that either of those propelled them toward growth. Other classical disciplines, including those defined in the literature review, were never even mentioned. I am not sure if the absence of effective classical disciplines is an issue of language or if the churches, or denominations, represented generally do not teach such things.

Noticeably absent was mention of traditional evangelical church emphases like Sunday school teaching, formal training in discipleship, church organizations like Royal Ambassadors, Girls in Action, Women's Missionary Union (to name a few Baptist jewels), or catechism class and confirmation. I cannot remember even one person who mentioned a preaching event as transformational or catalytic.

The sacraments were not mentioned as catalysts. Even those who grew up in the Roman Catholic Church did not mention Eucharist or baptism as significant. The number of subjects influenced by the Southern Baptist and Church of God denominations might shed light on this conspicuous absence. These are two of the denominations that have

reacted in the extreme to the sacramental theology of Roman Catholicism. Most of the Southern Baptist churches with which I am familiar relegate baptism and communion to acts of mere symbolism. To speak of them as means of grace would be akin to heresy in most settings within these two denominations.

Implications and Practical Applications

The most prevalent and the most effective catalyst toward spiritual growth is deep, reciprocal relationships. The implications are both encouraging and daunting. Ministers of Jesus Christ should be encouraged that everyone can develop a relationship. The daunting isue is that Christians involved in making disciples must make sure theirs is a life worth sharing. Disciples must purposefully order their lives in such a way as to make room to befriend and invest in other believers for the purpose of training in godliness. In each such relationship both the more mature and the less mature disciple journey onward.

A difference exists between being friendly and being a friend. Jesus modeled for his followers the value of time with friends through compassion, honesty, love, confrontation, and a myriad of other attitudes and characteristics that show and grow friendship. Disciples that took the initiative to build influential relationships reaped the reward of growing true disciples. These disciples were taught to purposefully invest their lives in people who are journeying toward God. Every one of the subjects interviewed for this project named one or more people for whom they were grateful for spurring them on toward Christlikeness. Even more, the majority of subjects who graded out the highest on the activities questionnaire had in turn initiated relationships for the purpose of reproducing disciples. Disciples who are also disciple makers reflect Jesus' incarnational

ministry by initiating and proactively cultivating purposeful relationships. Within the

context of these relationships is where the catalysts for spiritual growth are bred.

Churches are well positioned to provide opportunities for Bible study in groups

that intentionally value obedience. Most people could probably safely assume that a

majority of Christian churches already provide this type of opportunity on some level.

According to the interviewed subjects, in order for a relationship to be influential, it must

be deep and intimate. For Bible study to provoke someone towards leaps of faith, it must

be supported by a deep and intimate relationship. Churches might want to consider the

value of formal mentoring programs and opportunities that celebrate and promote the

value of the marriage partnership as a ready-made spiritual partnership. One huge

ramification for churches is that if relationships are spiritual catalysts on a nearly one-to-

one basis, the number of professional clergy will never be enough to make a sizeable

impact in society. In order for such catalysts to become widespread enough for major

influence, laypeople must take on the mantle of disciple makers.

Supernatural experiences as a catalyst toward true discipleship presents an

interesting dilemma. By nature, supernatural experiences cannot be programmed or

predicted. At first glance, this category would appear to be beneficial only as a

serendipitous event in the life of a disciple. On the other hand, perhaps the nature of God

as supernatural can shape the prevalent view on the issue. The subjects of this study

alluded to the idea of interpreting experiences more than internalizing information. This

allusion does not mean that information, or proposition, is denigrated or cast aside. In

isolation, the acquisition of knowledge proves inadequate. Information often provides the

framework for which experiences are rightly interpreted. Modernity tended to focus

followers of Christ on the acquisition of knowledge to the virtual exclusion of the

awareness that God still speaks and reveals himself. Theologies inform disciples that God is continually at work in the lives of everyone, lost or saved. Believers can become adept at interpreting the work of God in each other's lives. Although supernatural events cannot be instigated, disciple makers can train their eyes to discern the movement of God so that they can then interpret those movements to convince each other that supernatural experiences abound and those experiences move help disciples travel onward with God.

On Sunday, 20 February 2005, I baptized a seventy-three year old man who had been an atheist for all of his post-adolescent life. In early February doctors administered a bone scan and a CAT scan to check the progress of his two year old cancer. He mentioned to his wife that he had challenged God to give a sign as proof of his existence. When they saw the doctor for the results of the scan, the doctor let them know that both scans showed no cancer. The doctor proclaimed it "kind of a miracle." Becky, the man's wife, replied, "It *is* a miracle." Bob recognized his sign from God and surrendered his life to Christ later that day. More disciples need to be like Becky. Disciple makers need to declare that miracles are miracles and call a supernatural experience exactly what it is. Disciple makers learn the value of interpretation not just the value of information.

God challenges disciples to face their too seductive spiritual lethargy. In the context of relationships, true disciples can lovingly "provoke one another to love and good works" (Heb. 10:25). The context of deep relationship offers the forum to challenge other believers to move forward in their faith. This study revealed the challenge of finances to be prevalent and powerful. If those critical of postmodernity because of its too ready acceptance of a consumeristic, or materialistic, lifestyle are indeed correct, then perhaps it can be agreed that God is presently at work addressing that very issue by confronting his disciples' attitudes toward money. Moreover, the surrender of finances to

the lordship of God accentuates his faithfulness and encourages his disciples toward the same faithfulness.

Much value can be found in the disciplines of prayer and Bible study. Many disciples have never found that value because they have never found the discipline to exercise spiritual muscles in this way over the long haul. The vast majority of interviews revealed that prayer and Bible reading laid the foundation upon which spiritual growth gathered traction to speed off in the direction of Christ. These disciplines are neither sexy nor always exhilarating, but they are apparently necessary. In fact, the refusal to develop the habit of practicing these disciplines can cause a passionate spirituality to flicker and extinguish.

Jesus encouraged his disciples to choose humility and death to self. Forgiveness was the frequent expression of these ideas in many interviews. Forgiveness is the relinquishment of an individual's right to retaliation and satisfaction. God is the author of forgiveness, and Jesus on the cross is the perfect example. Every follower has occasion to forgive. I would submit that no disciple is a true disciple unless he or she has chosen to do the hard work of forgiveness. Many aspects of life alter the disciple's growth toward self-denial. The subjects interviewed in this exploration consistently referred to the importance of forgiveness in their lives. I propose a relationship between the several struggles with forgiveness and the pervasiveness of selfishness in American culture.

These conclusions scream that much of what is effective in discipleship takes place on a level not available inside the church building. The depth of trust and friendship demanded for provocation in the areas of finances and forgiveness, to name two, can probably only be developed in a friendship that spills over from the church house into the family home. Even the subjects that spoke of their ministers as influential spoke of them

more as friends than professional clergy. Formative relationships are built on the foundation of love, not authority. This claim does not mean that the authority of the minister is obsolete but that catalytic discipleship is not based on such authority alone. True disciples are grown in the context of shared life. In other words, discipleship takes place in church only insofar as church refers to the community of God.

Although six themes can describe the spiritual catalysts for these fifteen subjects, the individual stories reveal great variety with regard to the combination and manifestation of these themes. Such diversity does not mean that no one can be effective in disciple making because he or she could not possible predict what would be efficacious in the life of any individual. This diversity might mean that myriad possibilities present themselves for catalytic discipleship in each and every case.

The findings of this study indicate that when followers of Christ live life together good things happen. Through formal or informal discipling, God addresses the culturally designed distractions (e.g., materialism and individualism). God also inserts himself into the lives of his children and prods them toward radical obedience. Sometimes disciples need a friend with a different point of view to interpret the experience.

Comment about Modernity, Postmodernity, and the Findings

No one should be surprised that the findings and implications are not wholly new. Jesus' ministry was marked by relationships with his disciples, supernatural experiences, invitations to leaps of faith ("[c]ome, follow me"), acts of forgiveness, reprioritization of money, and with regard to Bible reading, he was the "Word" (John 1:1). I relish the challenge presented by the present cultural shift. The label of modernity or postmodernity is relatively insignificant. No matter what its name, this is the culture in which Christians are called to become and make disciples for Christ.

The themes reported by the subjects of the study as salient to their spiritual growth are reminiscent of Jesus' ministry. Jesus modeled discipleship in the context of relationship; he encouraged leaps of faith and spoke often and passionately about forgiveness and finances. Several of the categories seem to be more efficacious in a culture that elevates experience over rationale (supernatural experiences and leaps of faith), community over self (relationships and forgiveness), and holism over dualism (finances). Whether or not such a cultural shift is in progress does not mean that one culture has prevailed over the other. Americans continue to live under the influence of both modernity and postmodernity. One concern for Christians is that of how to more often produce true disciples in the midst of whatever culture dominates at the time.

Limitations of the Study

This project is limited by the nature of its methods. Any exploratory project will succumb to researcher bias. Qualitative data must be discovered, categorized, and prioritized. Both obvious and subconscious presuppositions will manifest at some point in the process.

Another weakness is the researcher's lack of interviewing experience and skill. A more prescient interviewer would without doubt have produced more nuanced responses and probed more deftly to elicit better information. The analysis of the data would then have delivered more valuable findings and implications.

The sample represented four churches and two denominations. The general autonomy of the four churches undermined the generalizability of the study within even those two denominations.

The subjective nature of the sample selection also renders the study somewhat limited.

Further Study

Due to the frequency with which they were mentioned as catalytic, supernatural experiences, finances, and forgiveness are rubrics that should be further investigated. A people who serve a mysterious and spiritual God might find leverage in a cultural preoccupation with the mysterious and spiritual. If the contextual conditions that produce supernatural experiences with God can be replicated in a church setting—at least in an informal church setting, if not the Sunday morning worship hour—then there would be more opportunity for that catalyst to work itself into people's lives. The dynamics of disciples' readiness to obey God in the area of finances could also be further explored. This subject seems to be pretty touchy for most people. Pastors would be well served to know whether or not the preaching event is more influential than one-on-one discussions, what role the preaching event plays in spiritual formation, whether or not specific requests are more persuasive than calls to give to the general budget, and whether or not people need courses on budget planning, etc. The category dealing with forgiveness presents promising possibilities for further study. The prevalence of dysfunctional families and relationships would lend considerable weight to the belief that this area could be a major tool of God to convince people of the importance of life together in the family of God. More information surrounding these exceptional acts of forgiveness would prove beneficial.

Summary

The categories that summarize the experiences of the subjects do not mesh seamlessly with what has been historically accepted as pathways to God. While the classical spiritual disciplines have not been abandoned, their practice has apparently diminished. None of the fifteen subjects interviewed regularly participate in any

disciplines other than prayer and Bible reading, however, most of the subjects acknowledged that those two disciplines were invaluable to their growth as the vessel in which their godliness was catalyzed. One should question why the other long-held spiritual disciplines were so rarely mentioned.

The end of the matter is that God uses relationships as the context to compel his disciples to grow through obedience. In direct response to the current culture's acceptance of the supernatural, God seems to have chosen to respond in kind. God also appears to have addressed the tendency toward materialism and selfishness with a consistent reference to finances and forgiveness.

For followers of Christ intent on becoming disciple makers, whether professional minister or not, one proven, effective method is to pour themselves into another person. The ability to interpret life experiences as continual brushes with God will be a primary tool. Bible study and prayer build the lenses through which such experiences are viewed and the framework through which they are interpreted. Disciple makers will also need to learn how to wisely, yet purposefully, direct a friend to address the culturally imprinted tendency toward materialism and selfishness.

APPENDIX A

LETTER TO PASTORS SOLICITING RECOMMENDATIONS

Dear Pastor,

Thank you for agreeing to help with this project. I have a burning passion to find the best way to grow true disciples of Christ in my ministry. Your help with this project will greatly help me find out how great disciples of Christ are developed. The bottom line is that I am looking for passionate, zealous disciples of Jesus Christ. These should be Christians who actively participate and invest in the kingdom of God—obedient followers who exhibit power in their spiritual lives, not characterized by hypocrisy.

You can help me by **providing the names and phone numbers of six men or women** who have experienced such an internal transformation that their lifestyle is very obviously oriented toward Christ.

For the sake of the project, I would ask you to recommend people who exhibit the *fruit of the Spirit*. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control should characterize those who are true disciples. I have included a page that lists definitions for each of the fruit so that we can have a common understanding of what type of person I am looking for. Rather than searching for those who exhibit perfectly each of the fruit, your recommendations should include those who are growing toward Christlikeness in each area. Growth (movement) is indicative of the workings of the Holy Spirit.

You should know that I will contact each of your recommended candidates to gain further information in the second step of the project. If they are willing, I will ask them to sit with me for an interview. The goal of this interview will be to discuss their journey toward Christ and discover those catalysts that most effectively furthered their spiritual life. After the interview, they will answer an activities questionnaire that contains questions about their lifestyle and activities in the following areas: prayer, Bible study, finances, witness, Christian community, disciple making, and service.

I would prefer that no one still in high school or younger be recommended. Although their passion and zeal can often be more intense than at a more mature age, the issue of finances is often untested on those not yet supporting themselves. Of course, if you personally know of a youngster who has a story that is an exception to this generalization, please include him or her.

If you are unable to recommend six people, then send as many names as possible. Do not dilute the definitions of the fruit of the Spirit to reach the quota of six. The foundation of the project rests upon the quality of disciple you recommend, not the quantity.

Simply write the names and phone numbers down on the enclosed form and return the form in the enclosed, addressed envelope or you may fax the list of recommendations (337-482-3066).

For questions, please contact me at home (337-582-6336) or at the church (337-582-3606).

In Christ,

Dee Spears

APPENDIX B

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PASTORS

_____   _____

Name   Phone

_____   _____

Name   Phone

_____   _____

Name   Phone

_____   _____

Name   Phone

_____   _____

Name   Phone

_____   _____

Name   Phone

APPENDIX C

ACTIVITIES QUESTIONNAIRE

ID Number: 015   Date: _____

1.   On average, how many days a week do you set aside time specifically to pray?
        _____

2.   Are you in debt that requires the payment of monthly interest (other than a
        house or car)?

        Circle one: Yes   No
        Explanation (if necessary): _____

3.   Are you presently involved in a relationship with the primary intention of
        witnessing to that person?

        Circle one: Yes   No

4.   Have you been baptized after choosing to follow Christ?

        Circle one: Yes   No

5.   Are you presently participating in a group that studies the Bible together?

        Circle one: Yes   No

6.   Do you serve in a ministry either monthly or weekly?

        Circle one: Yes   No

7.   Are you currently participating in a regular, formal meeting with someone
        who considers you a spiritual director (mentor)?

        Circle one: Yes   No

8.   When was the last time you asked someone if they would like to receive
        salvation?

        Date:_____ (Guess the month/year if you do not
        remember the exact date.)

9.   Do you pray aloud regularly in a group setting?

        Circle one: Yes   No

10.   In what particular expression of service do you find joy?

        _____

        Do you practice this service regularly?

Circle one: Yes   No

11.   Is your primary circle of friends made up of growing believers?

Circle one: Yes   No

12.   List three people for whose salvation you pray at least weekly.

Person one: _____

Person two: _____

Person three: _____

13.   In the last six months, have you adjusted your lifestyle because of a truth learned in Bible study?

Circle one: Yes   No

14.   Do you tithe to the local church?

Circle one: Yes   No

15.   In what ways have you served during your spiritual journey?

_____

16.   In the last three years, have you invested yourself in a relationship with a consistency that produced obvious growth toward spiritual maturity in that friend?

Circle one: Yes   No

17.   On average, how many days a week do you set aside time specifically for Bible study?

_____

18.   Have you found yourself unable to give financially to a ministry need recently (in the last six months) due to unwise spending or debt?

Circle one: Yes   No

19.   In the previous year, how many people have you influenced to give their life to Christ?

_____

20.   Do you regularly meet (at least two times per month) to pray or worship or study the Bible with a small group of believers?

Circle one: Yes   No

21.   What is the most meaningful thing you learned in the last thirty days due to Bible study?

_____
_____

APPENDIX D

DEFINITION OF THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Love: Affection without limitation.

Joy: Delight, gladness, cheerfulness.

Peace: Mental and physical tranquility, calm, serenity.

Patience: Long temper, forbearance, long-suffering.

Kindness: Gentleness, virtue, usefulness.

Gentleness: Goodness; not harsh, severe, or rough.

Faithfulness: Reliance upon Christ and constancy in such profession.

Meekness: Holding affections and passions in even balance; humility.

Self-control: Temperance; having control of life.

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

Age, gender, length of involvement in current church setting, at what age did spiritual

formation take on a higher level of intention and intensity, denomination

Initial Activity:

1. Using a time line, indicate the memorable events in your spiritual development.

Categories for further probing:

Individualistic/Communal

1. Describe the individuals and groups who have had the most spiritual influence in
   your life.

2. Do you have a spiritual hero? Who is it?

3. Do you get more out of private Bible study, prayer, worship, etc., or by doing
   those things with others?

Rational/Experiential

1. Have you ever had an instance where you felt compelled to make such a drastic
   lifestyle change that you actually paused to count the cost before proceeding?
   Describe.

2. Have you ever felt compelled by God to discontinue contact with certain people
   in order to progress spiritually?

3. Describe the decision or action that required the most amount of faith.

4. Do you now, or have you ever, practiced spiritual disciplines (fasting, silence and
   solitude, etc.)?

Dualistic/Holistic

1. Were you ever relatively strict about Bible study, prayer, worship, etc.?

2. Do you ever find that your physical needs and desires are at odds with your spiritual life? How do you address those issues?

3. What has been the most painful experience of your Christian life? How did you respond to God?

4. How does your spiritual maturity affect those around you?

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