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ABSTRACT

**FROM DIASPORA TO DISCIPLE:
TRAINING MAINLAND CHINESE CHRISTIANS
TO LIVE A CHRISTLIKE LIFE**

by

Esther Law

Mainland Chinese scholars/students and immigrants are converting to Christianity with increasing numbers in the US and have become the majority of most immigrant Chinese church congregations in the US. However, concerns have risen over their spiritual health and faith development due to the lack of follow-up ministries after their conversion. This study addresses the discipleship ministry with mainland Chinese Christians in the US. Three key elements for effective discipleship were garnered from the literature review and subsequently implemented in an eight-week, relational-focused discipleship program among the Chinese congregation at the ABC church.

Employing pre- and postspiritual growth assessment surveys as well as three focus group interviews, the combined data evaluated the effectiveness of this integrated approach to disciple mainland Chinese Christians. The findings suggest that integrating biblical worldview learning, practicing spiritual disciplines, and small group support facilitates growth in participants' relationships with God and with people and also deepens their commitment to live Christlike lives.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

FROM DIASPORA TO DISCIPLE:

TRAINING MAINLAND CHINESE CHRISTIANS TO LIVE A CHRISTLIKE LIFE

presented by

Esther Law

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY degree at

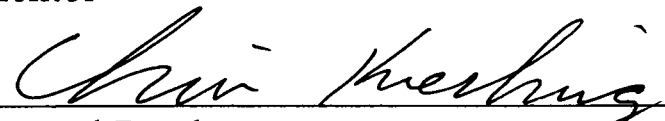
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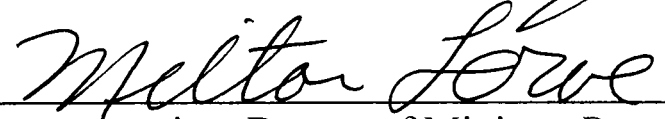
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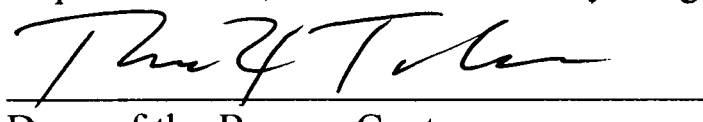
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March 9, 2015

Date



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FROM DIASPORA TO DISCIPLE:
TRAINING MAINLAND CHINESE CHRISTIANS TO LIVE A CHRISTLIKE LIFE

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

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

by

Esther Law

May 2015

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project along with the degree is a completely fitting testimony of the power of God's ongoing salvation in my life. Ever since I dedicated my life to God in my twenties, His unseen hand never stopped to transform me from the depth of my soul in order to shape me into the image of Christ and prepare me for his Kingdom work. The many experiences and opportunities God provided me in the past, including the most recent one, this Doctor of Ministry study at Asbury Theological Seminary, are all interwoven by the loving thoughts and plans of the Author and Perfecter of my faith. No words are adequate to express my profound gratitude for being saved and called into our heavenly Father's grand story.

I want to thank my dear husband, Sam, who is the second author and perfecter of this project and degree. His relentless support and encouragement served as an *Energizer Bunny battery* that kept me going in this adventure. My four children have, each in their own way, motivated and inspired me to continue to grow despite my many limitations. Their love and forbearance for my growing as their mother largely shapes me to be who I am today and, hence, contributed to the outcome of this endeavor.

Much appreciation goes to Dr. Ellen Marmon for being my mentor whom I can fully trust and with whom I can freely share. Without her patient and wise guidance, I would not be able to reach the finish line. Many thanks to the ABC church that allowed me to conduct this research and to all the participants whose hunger and thirst for righteousness have motivated me to continue to pursuit excellence in serving the body of Christ. Now that God has already blessed me with much, may he also make me a blessing to many others.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

When our family moved from Seattle to the Midwest in 2009, we joined a small Midwest Chinese Church (hereafter called ABC church) and witnessed their annual evangelistic meeting held in September. Over 250 people attended the meeting, and about seventy responded to the preacher's altar call. The following year the same preacher was again invited to lead a gospel meeting, and about fifty people raised their hands to accept Christ. During the four-year span of our attending this church, twenty people on average were baptized annually into God's family with 95 percent of them being from mainland China.

This phenomenon is far from the exception and a very encouraging movement that is happening throughout the overseas Chinese churches. Most missiologists believe that displaced people are often receptive to the gospel when in transition (Wan 36). Diaspora Chinese are no exception. Of the approximately two million Chinese immigrants to the US, about 10 percent have converted to the Christian faith (Su 17). In the meantime, new Chinese congregations are growing rapidly.

The unprecedented receptivity of the gospel by the mainland Chinese is exciting to all involved in this ministry. However, ministers also share an unfortunate, common concern over the apparent discrepancy between these new converts' claimed faith and the kind of life they actually live. After over ten years of ministering to a congregation of mainland Chinese Christians, one pastor portrays this people group as persons who have "super-sized brains with immature limbs or gigantic mouthpieces with tiny guts and

cowardly actions” (Gan 10). Spiritual immaturity among the many Chinese converts is indeed worrisome.

My personal experience in the ABC Chinese church confirms such immaturity among new converts from China. During my three years of attendance there, I have witnessed committed church board members whose marriages have broken down. Tensions and conflicts between family members are not uncommon among the congregation; worse yet, a cell group completely dissolved due to a feud between members’ business relationships. An outsider once bluntly criticized the church with his observation: “Simply looking at the behavior of your members makes me not want to join your congregation.” Such a comment sounds cruel but is, unfortunately, valid.

In the spring of 2011, I conducted three phone interviews with pastors whose congregations are comprised primarily of new believers from mainland China on the topic of spiritual growth. All of the pastors considered helping these new converts live in a godly manner in both home and work settings as their most important ministry. These veteran pastors identified certain causes that may contribute to the spiritual impediments among new Chinese converts. First, they usually began with a weak foundation. Most mainland Chinese became Christians through large gospel meetings that often only present a fragmented message. These new converts embrace God’s love and his forgiveness of sin while lacking the understanding of God’s continuing sanctifying work in his people. In other words, people know only from what they are saved (sin) but not why (for Christlike life).

Second, the Communist government in China has instilled a powerful materialistic worldview in its people’s minds. China’s recent economic boom further

caused many traditional values to dissolve rapidly. In addition, the Cultural Revolution of 1966-76 led China to become a morally confused and soulless society. As a result, “many who become Christians still retain their hope in these worldly systems and only add God as a patina to the surface of their lives” (Bieler 233). Missiologist Enoch Wan suggests, “[D]iscipleship of new Chinese converts is ... one of the most critical mission challenges to the Christian church globally” (37). His appeal should alert all who work among this people group.

Many Chinese churches have already recognized the need to provide discipleship training to the new Chinese converts. However, most new immigrant churches lack their own contextual theology. They have adopted a traditional discipleship approach that is often offered in a large group class format rather than in an individualized setting. This approach focuses more on imparting doctrinal or biblical knowledge. Greg Ogden suggests that such programs are seldom effective because they overlook individual differences in people’s spiritual pace and their real-life settings (42-45). When their real-life issues are addressed, they are usually treated with quick-fix workshops that provide only relational skills and technique training. These attempts at discipleship overlook the spiritual aspects of inward transformation that ought to be the product of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commandment of loving God and loving neighbors rather than serving the earthly pursuits for comfort and happiness.

New life in Christ as described in the Scripture involves the renewal of the whole person—mind, heart, and behavior. Discipleship with today’s new Chinese converts requires a more holistic approach that will produce spiritual fruit in disciples’ daily lives.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program, among adult mainland Chinese Christians who attend the ABC Chinese Christian Church to determine whether the program fostered growth in the participants' relationships with God and people in their current settings.

Research Questions

The following questions are designed to guide the research in discerning the effectiveness of the project.

Research Question #1

What are the participants' initial relational quality with God?

Research Question #2

What are the participants' initial understanding and practices of Christian relational principles and behavior in their communities?

Research Question #3

To what extent does the program facilitate growth of the participants' relationships with God and with people?

Research Question #4

What elements/components in this program are most beneficial or influential toward the growth of the participants' relationships with God and with people in their communities?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms require specific definition.

Relationship with God

Based on Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (1:15-23; 3:14-19), *growth in relationship with God* refers to believers' growth in grace and knowledge of God. Specifically, it measures believers' capacity to receive and experience God's love in their daily lives and their capacity to comprehend his will and his ways for the Church and the world.

Christian Relational Principles and Behavior

Christian relational principles and behavior pertains to what Paul details in Ephesians 4-6, such as putting off falsehood, speaking truthfully to one's neighbor, managing anger, speaking only what is helpful for the purpose of edification, being kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, and submitting to one another.

Ministry Project

The ministry project in this study was an intervention designed to improve participants' relationships with God and with others in their communities. I recruited, through announcements in Sunday bulletins, Christian adults from the ABC Chinese Christian Church to participate in an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program. The program was held in the fellowship hall of ABC every Saturday morning from 1 March to 19 April 2014. Childcare was provided to those who had young children.

The actual curriculum of the training was comprised of three major components based on the principles I drew from the book of Ephesians: foundational knowledge of God's salvation story that will deepen participants' understanding of God's will for the world and the Church (chs. 1-3), the importance of spiritual practices that keep believers

rooted in Christ's love and enrich their devotional lives (ch. 3), and the necessity of practicing Christian relational principles in God's new community (chs. 4-6).

During the first four sessions, I employed different teaching methods to present a grand overview of God's will and purpose as highlighted in the first three chapters of the book of Ephesians. I invited the participants to discover both their potential roles in that macronarrative, as well as the higher calling they receive from God when they become Christians.

The subsequent four sessions focused on practical Christian relational behaviors that participants could apply to their daily settings. Throughout the eight sessions, I always devoted a segment of time to introduce certain spiritual exercises that were related to the learning of the day. Participants not only practiced them in class, but they were also encouraged to incorporate the spiritual exercise in their daily lives to enrich their devotional times and to deepen their experience of God's daily presence. Suitable materials or homework were provided to facilitate their continued practice on their own throughout the week. At the end of each meeting, I divided the participants into smaller groups for the purpose of accountability in which group leaders emphasized and encouraged specific, personal application/action plan.

Context

At its birth, the ABC congregation was comprised only of those from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and southeast Asian countries. As a result of China's 1980 open-door policy and US immigration law changes, the landscape of Chinese population in the US has dramatically changed. Today, roughly 80 percent of the ABC's congregation is from mainland China while the remaining 20 percent belong to the older category. The

majority of the mainland Chinese who move to this city are employed by either a university, hospital, or a leading company in the field of technology. More than half of the ABC members hold doctoral degrees.

Located in the heart of the US Midwest, ABC church, like churches in other Midwest cities, has a small Chinese congregation that faces the challenge of a transient population and a shortage of mature Christian workers. Consequently, ABC is predominantly a lay-driven ministry. Since its inception, ABC has not had a pastor for more than half of its existence. The only two ministers who served here during the past decades only stayed for two and three years respectively. The pulpit ministry is a rotation of several local area speakers as well as different students who attend the local seminary. Without a fully devoted shepherd who can conduct a ministry plan with a long-term perspective, ABC church suffers from a weak faith foundation, especially in discipleship that leads new converts to grow in their relationships with God and with others.

Our family moved to this city in 2009 and began to attend ABC's Sunday service regularly. After two years of attendance as well as participating in one of their small groups, my husband and I were approached by the elder board for ministerial help. My husband agreed to serve as their pastor on a part-time basis for three years. Since then, we were able to be involved deeper in the various church ministries and developed more personal relationships with church members. As a result of the involvement, we also gained a fuller picture of the life of ABC church.

At first glance, people do not detect the consequences of such a weak faith foundation. ABC continues to reflect the national trend of increasing numbers of Chinese students and visiting scholars. In addition, it continues to welcome and baptize new

converts. A careful examination, however, reveals dangerous cracks in the church's faith foundation. During the past two years, ABC's membership continues to grow; unfortunately, life transformation among the members has not matched its numerical growth. Hidden or past conflicts among coworkers, among elders, and among its members began to surface more as our involvement became deeper in this church. The problematic relationships among its members reveal the inadequate rooting of their faith.

Methodology

This project is based on explanatory, mixed-method research. I collected data with a pre- and postintervention spiritual growth assessment survey. The pretest assessed participants' current relationship with God and with other people in their communities, while the posttest evaluated changes after they had participated in the eight-session discipleship training program.

After collecting the quantitative data, I then conducted a semi-structured interview with three smaller focus groups to gather overarching themes and observations that flow from their experiences of this training program. The qualitative data collected from the interviews, coupled with the quantitative data, served as the basis for analysis of the findings.

Participants

Participants were Christian adults attending ABC Chinese church who responded to a bulletin announcement for an eight-week, relationship-focused discipleship training. Their ages ranged from 25 to 65; most have children. Six small group leaders were recruited from the registered participants, and three focus groups were formed for the postsession focus group interviews.

Instrumentation

Three instruments were used in this research:

1. The researcher-designed, pretest spiritual growth assessment survey collected data on participants' understanding of, commitment to, and practices in their devotional lives with God and their relationships with other people prior to the program (see Appendix B).
2. The researcher-designed, posttest spiritual growth assessment survey collected data that allowed comparison to the participants' pretest scores (see Appendix B).
3. The researcher-conducted, semi-structured interview protocol with the focus group allowed me to discover themes and patterns from participants' experience of the program (see Appendix C).

Variables

The independent variable in this study is the eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program. The dependent variables in this study are any measurable changes in the participants' relationships with God and with others in their communities. The intervening variables include participants' gender, education background, existing Bible knowledge, length of attendance in the program, personal situations, and their faithfulness in doing the assigned homework.

Data Collection

I administered pre- and posttests using the researcher-designed, spiritual growth assessment survey to collect quantitative data. The pretests were completed and collected during the first session of the program. During the last session of the program, the posttest surveys were distributed and collected to track changes. I passed out a separate

form along with the posttest to allow participants to indicate their willingness to volunteer for interviews. After completion of the program, I conducted three focus group interviews, one with the small group leaders and two with the participant volunteers, to collect qualitative data. Three months later, I conducted another interview with six volunteers to evaluate the program's long-term effect on the participants.

Data Analysis

Comparative analysis using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics was performed to ascertain variances of the study population. T-test analysis measured the impact of the intervention on the dependent variables. Qualitative data collected through the interviews was processed first using explorative analysis to identify patterns, themes, and categories. I then followed the coded descriptions to perform content analysis.

Generalizability

This study focused mainly on mainland Chinese who were born after 1960 and came to the US after 1980 as a result of China's open-door policy and the expansion of US immigration quotas. The participants grew up in China during a unique historical and cultural context, as they were indoctrinated by the Communist government to reflect certain ideologies. The program was especially designed to address their particular worldview, as well as their moral conception in the area of interpersonal relationship.

As such, the result of the study may not apply to Chinese from other areas, such as Taiwan or southeast Asia, who carry different cultural and religious experiences. The result of the study should be helpful for ministers in the US whose congregations are comprised of new mainland Chinese converts.

Theological Foundation

Today's evangelistic efforts tend to approach people by asking questions such as, "Are you saved?" or, "Do you know where you will be going if you die today?" Such questions reveal a misconception that salvation is a one-time decision. Afterwards, all believers need to do is to wait until they die to experience the full benefit of the gospel. To the contrary, Scriptures paint a picture of salvation with a much more complex and comprehensive nature. Passages such as Romans 8:28-30 reveal a greater scheme of God's salvation plan: "[F]or those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.... And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" (NIV). Thomas C. Oden introduces the word *salvation*:

[It is] one of the most comprehensive terms of Christian teaching, gathering into a single word-picture a broad range of key points crucial to the Christian life: "redemption, reconciliation, atonement, propitiation, predestination, calling, covenant, grace, conviction, repentance, forgiveness, justification, adoption, faith, conversion, regeneration, sanctification, and perseverance." (563)

Indeed, salvation carries a much richer meaning than most Christians are accustomed to expect.

Scripture also points out the comprehensive past, present, and future aspect of God's salvation plan. For example, Titus 2:11-14 summarizes salvation as follows:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior.

With such a broad understanding of God's work, biblical conversion should no longer be presented as a one-time event but as an experience that will ultimately lead believers to

“the whole process of behavioral reversal in all its components ...” (Oden 562). In light of this process, the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to “continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling” in accordance to the one who “works in you” (Phil. 2:12-13). All believers need to participate in this *lifelong, ongoing* process of “growing up in our salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2), which is generally called sanctification.

The Holy Spirit is the main agent who applies God’s sanctifying grace to believers’ lives (2 Thess. 2:13; Tit. 3:5; 1 Pet. 1:2). However, the Scriptures also call for individuals’ *active and intentional* cooperation in this process on both a personal and church level. Romans 12:1 urges believers to “offer [their] bodies as living sacrifices” for godly services; believers are also exhorted to “live by the Spirit” (Gal. 5:16) or “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18) in order to produce the fruit of the Spirit. Sanctification by the Holy Spirit does not leave people in passive roles. Diligently and faithfully, believers are to practice the means of grace, such as Bible reading, prayer, or Christian fellowship, in order to stay on track of sanctification (e.g., Ps. 1:2; Phil. 4:6; Heb. 10:24-25).

Moreover, the Holy Spirit gives various gifts in order that “the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-13). Since the Church is the primary environment where a believer’s spiritual growth and renewal is to be emphasized and supported (Eph. 4:7-16), the Church should intentionally implement ministries to encourage its members to exercise their spiritual gifts in a responsible way as coworkers of the Spirit (1 Cor. 3:5-13) toward the goal of sanctification.

Holy Spirit-orchestrated sanctification seeks ultimately to restore believers to the image of God (2 Cor. 3:18; Col. 3:10; 2 Pet. 1:4). The doctrine of the Trinity teaches that God is not individual but, as a communion, a unity of persons in relation (Grudem 230). Since human beings are created in the image of God, this relational aspect in believers' lives becomes the key area for the Spirit's work of restoration and sanctification. Holy living through a relationship with God and with others is a prominent theme of both Old Testament Law and New Testament teaching. Both Testaments uphold loving God and loving neighbors as the greatest commandments. Both Testaments also give numerous instructions on how God's people ought to reflect the image of God through their relationships in communal settings. Sanctification does not occur in a vacuum; it has to be nurtured in *community*. The more than twenty *one another* statements in the Epistles that teach appropriate behaviors among believers prove the importance of relationship in the sanctification process. Therefore, the goal of this ministry project aims to assist new converts in the ABC church to walk intentionally in this lifelong journey by working with the Holy Spirit to transform their relationship pattern in communities.

Overview

Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and research on the areas of discipleship and Christian growth. The material considers the biblical and theological foundations on training Christians for continued growth. Subsequent research discusses key aspects that contribute to effective discipleship training. Lastly, the research examines the profile of the study population and seeks to understand the crisis as well as opportunities presented in the journey of their spiritual growth. Chapter 3 explains in detail the design of the study, its methodology, and data-collection process. Chapter 4 presents the analysis of the

research. Chapter 5 discusses the major findings and the implications derived from the study, offering suggestions for further study and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

Mainland Chinese in the US have shown openness and receptivity toward Christian faith. In the past few decades, increasing numbers of them have accepted Christ and have become the majority of many Chinese immigrant church congregations (Wan 40; F. Yang 6). However, many of them have only received the weak foundation of an incomplete and fragmented gospel message from the time of their conversion. The lack of follow-up discipleship training further impedes the necessary spiritual growth of Chinese converts. Teaching and training new converts to live Christlike lives are the most pressing issues facing the many Chinese churches in the US today. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program among adult mainland Chinese Christians who attend the ABC church and evaluate whether the program will foster growth in the participants' relationships with God and with others in their current settings.

Theological and Biblical Foundations

Scripture reveals at least three aspects about the sanctification that God promises and demands in Christians' lives. This section discusses these aspects and their implications to today's churches.

Sanctification as an Indispensable Process

Many Christians see salvation one dimensionally, yet its reality is far richer and deeper. Oden points out "The Hebrew and Greek words for salvation (*yeshuah*, *teshuah*, *soteria*) convey a complex matrix of meanings: deliverance, rescue, safety, preservation,

soundness, restoration, and healing” (562). Both the Old and New Testaments are consistent in their emphases on the earthly and spiritual dimensions of the nature of salvation (O’Collins 914). God reveals nothing thin or shallow about the gift he desires his people to enjoy.

Scripture reveals the nature of salvation in at least three ways. First, the New Testament authors use a variety of words to describe the crucial elements of salvation: redemption, reconciliation, atonement, forgiveness, justification, adoption, new birth, regeneration, and sanctification. Conventional systematic theology identifies these elements as the order of salvation, implying that there is a progression and duration in God’s saving work among his people. The apostle Paul prayed for believers to be sanctified “through and through,” that their “whole spirit, soul and body” be kept blameless at the coming of Jesus Christ. He assures Christians that “the one who calls you is faithful and *he will do it*” (emphasis mine; 1Thess. 5:23-24). Far from being only an one-time event or experience, salvation from God clearly is a comprehensive process that seeks to restore the whole of human life.

Second, biblical writers understand salvation as a reality that impacts the past, present, and future. Possessively, progressively, and prospectively, people are saved, are being saved, and will be saved. Various Scripture passages convey such a perspective, and, among them, Titus 3:5-7 declares it concisely: “He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit ... so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” John R. W. Stott further summarizes, “The past is justification and regeneration. The present is a new life of good works in the power of the Spirit. The future is the inheritance of eternal life which will one day be

ours” (*Message 1 Timothy* 207). Salvation is not a hope that is realized after death but is a very real power in every regenerate believer’s present life to overcome the bondage of sin (Rom. 8:1-11).

Third, the New Testament testifies to the multipurpose nature of salvation—that believers are saved *from* and saved *for*. Titus 2:11-14 clarifies that Jesus Christ gave himself for humanity not just to secure their forgiveness but also “to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Believers are saved from sin and saved for new life and union with Christ in both spirit and character (Rom. 5:9-10; Eph. 4:23-24; Col. 3:1-10; 2 Pet. 1:3-4) in order for them to live out the ultimate purpose for life: loving God and loving their neighbors (Deut. 10:12; Matt. 22:36).

This moral and spiritual transformation, known as sanctification, is an ongoing and lifelong process in the Christian life. The Epistles with their emphases, appeals, and exhortations for continual growth indicate that sanctification in believers’ lives is not instantaneous. Rather, Paul says, “[W]e are ... all being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor. 3:18). All the New Testament authors clearly expect that “our sanctification will increase throughout our Christian lives (Grudem 749). With the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying grace, believers progressively become more and more like Christ.

Biblical imagery used to describe believers’ new lives in Christ also affirms this ongoing and progressive nature of sanctification. The implications of the following imagery should spur Christians to strive for growth throughout their earthly journey.

Birth and crops. A Christian's initial conversion is likened to being "born again" by the Spirit or of imperishable seed (John. 3:3; 1 Pet. 1:23). A newborn baby must grow and develop in body, mind, and soul in order to become an adult and ultimately reach maturity. Likewise, the new birth that occurs in believers by the Spirit needs to go through stages of development. The seed that is planted by God into the soil of human hearts is not a static gift but is capable of change, growth, maturation, and progress (Ps. 1:1-3; Matt. 13:31; Mark 4:28; 1 Cor. 3:6). Psalm 92 projects the righteous to "flourish like a palm tree.... They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green" (vv. 12-14). Believers are challenged neither to quit nor retire. Consequently, Christians ought to be constantly "on the way to growing up to the stature of Christ" (Peterson 181). Peter urges believers to crave for "pure spiritual milk" (1 Pet. 2:2) in order that they may grow up in their salvation. The author of Hebrews rebukes against believers staying as infants and exhorts them to pursue maturity (5:12). Growing up in Christ to attain full maturity (Eph. 4:13) should be the lifelong goal for all Christians.

The Temple. Scripture often uses house or temple as analogies for the process of building up believers, both individually and corporately (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). At least two implications can be drawn from such an image. First, the New Testament authors' understanding of the building process is that it requires labor, careful work, and time. A duration is involved for all the materials to "be joined together" and "grow into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). Peter T. O'Brien suggests that both verbs Paul used in this passage "focus on the idea of continuous progress" (219). Christians' spiritual lives should always be considered *under* construction—an ongoing activity toward their ultimate goal of holiness. Second, Christ Jesus, the foundation of

God's household, is referred to as "living stone" by Peter (1 Pet. 2:4). Paul A. Cedar helpfully points out, "The word for living is *zao*. It is the same word used by Jesus when He told the Samaritan woman about living water ... and when he told the Jews, 'I am the living bread come down from heaven'" (138). By coming to him through faith, believers receive eternal life and are transformed into living stones (1 Pet. 2:5) suitable to be built into God's spiritual dwelling. Such an everlasting source of life prevents stagnation in believers' spiritual growth and promises life abundant (John. 10:10).

The race. Even the apostle Paul did not consider himself perfected in his spiritual growth. Rather, he states in Philippians 3:13 that his whole life is pressing on to a future goal. By alluding to the future, he clarifies that "the work of sanctifying grace is progressive, ... [and] that there will always be room for progress while the church is God's pilgrim people" (Martin 154-55). In view of this lifelong endeavor, Paul then exhorts his readers toward "forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead" (Phil. 3:13). Rather than being onlookers who simply wait to see how events unfold, the biblical picture of Christians is of runners who strain with every effort to press forward in the race. The book of Hebrews also compares the Christian life as engagement in an athletic contest (12:1). William L. Lane asserts that the metaphor of running a race is most likely taken from the recognized preeminence of the footrace in the Greek games (*Hebrews 9-13* 408), which is the only athletic contest at the Olympic Games that lasts an extended period of time. This allusion of a distance race calls for a believer not to consider himself or herself to be a sprinter but a "marathon runner" (409) in his or her ongoing pursuit of holiness.

In conclusion, the above biblical imagery of the Christian life presumes not only a starting point and a completion but, more importantly, the necessary process that all followers of Christ must undertake to grow into his likeness. As a corollary, the Church should take the responsibility to assist its members to press forward in this indispensable journey.

Sanctification as an Intentional Process

Just as God wills that believers should be sanctified throughout their lifetime, he also provides sanctifying grace through the Holy Spirit to assist them in this transforming process (1Thess. 4:3; 1Thess. 5: 23-24; Tit. 3:5). Believers must rely on the Holy Spirit as he applies this benefit of salvation into their lives. One must “walk by the Spirit” and to be “led by the Spirit” (Rom. 8:14; Gal. 5:16-18) in order for the Holy Spirit to produce in them Christlike character. However, the way that the Holy Spirit accomplishes the goal of sanctification is not by coercion but by enlivening and renewing human faculties to follow God’s way. The new covenant, prophesied through Jeremiah (31:33), told of God’s promise to transform the hearts and minds of his people so they would voluntarily love God and follow him. Today God continues to work in believers’ hearts that they “will and act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13). Reflecting on the work of the Holy Spirit, Oden contends, “The human will is not a machine mechanistically driven by the Spirit, but rather a renewed personal will that can receive a new spring of action” (616). Regenerated believers operate as free agents in this process and, thus, have the responsibility to play an active role in sanctification.

Partnership. The active and intentional roles believers should play are indicated in various places in Scripture. In Romans 8, Paul describes how regenerated believers can

continue to experience liberation from the “law of sin and death ... [by] the law of the Spirit of life” (v. 2). He tells readers, “if you live according to the sinful nature, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live” (v. 13). Paul acknowledges that only “by the Spirit” can believers overcome the plague of sin, but he also implies that they must carry out the action, for “we have an obligation to it [to live according to the law of the Spirit]” (v.12). Douglas J. Moo summarizes this balance well: “Holiness of life, then, is achieved neither by our own unaided effort ... nor by the Spirit apart from our participation.... Human activity in the process of sanctification is clearly necessary” (*Romans* 495-96). The Holy Spirit is not the sole actor in this process of sanctification.

In the same manner, when Paul appeals to the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (2:12), he assures them of God’s prior action in and among them: “[F]or it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (2:13). The Greek verb *energon* translated to *work*, explains Gordon D. Fee, “does not so much mean that God is doing it for them, but that God supplies the necessary empowering” (237). Their obedience in response to God’s work should then take “willing and doing” (237). Peter further explicitly asks Christians to “make every effort” in the task of developing a Christlike character (2 Pet. 1:5-7).

At the opening section of his second letter, Peter reminds his readers that they must take the initiative to pursue spiritual maturity actively if they expect to be welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom (2 Pet. 1:5-11). His exhortation is given in the context of God’s provision: for it is “his divine power” that has given all Christians all that they need for “life and godliness” (1:3). While insisting that Christians are charged to pursue

holiness diligently, Peter also insists that “our own effort to become godly is doomed to failure if God by his Spirit is not already working in us to produce just that godliness” (Moo, *2 Peter* 58). In summary, the New Testament clearly teaches a balance between God’s contribution and believers’ active efforts in this lifelong process of sanctification.

This balanced understanding of the cooperant nature of sanctification thus results in a more holistic view on both the value and role of spiritual disciplines in the Christian life: “God’s sanctifying grace utilizes the spiritual disciplines to facilitate the Spirit’s work in us” (Lightner 43). The Holy Spirit transforms Christians not by replacing their faculties but by enlivening them. By the intentional building up of habits and patterns by which Christians yield their whole being—mind, heart, will, and body—for renewal, Christians can then develop a more steady readiness to respond to God’s sanctifying grace. Hebrews 5:14 describes a qualification for the spiritually mature as one “who by constant use have trained their senses/faculties to distinguish good from evil” (RSV). Clearly, the kind of spiritual discernment lauded comes not as a result of casually surfing through Christian life, but through diligent “exercise, practice, long use” of one’s faculties (Lane, *Hebrews 1-8* 131).

Means of grace. Time-honored spiritual disciplines such as Bible reading, meditation, worship, and fellowship are just a few among the many practices that Scripture affirms to effect transformation of Christian life. Psalm 1 portrays a person whose delight is in “the Law of the Lord,” and on the Law “he meditates day and night” (v. 2). Such a practice results in a life that “yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither” (v. 3). God’s word is the “pure spiritual milk” that Peter encourages Christians to crave in order to “grow up in [their] salvation” (1 Pet. 2:2, NIV). Faithfully

coming to the Word of God opens the way for the Holy Spirit to impart to believers the kind of “knowledge of God” that can lead to increased godliness (2 Pet. 1:2-3, 8). Paul boldly claims that the word of God can “build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32). Indeed, Christians live not on food alone but “on every word that comes out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Jesus also said that by keeping his words, believers remain united with him and will enjoy effective prayer life (John. 15:7). Prayer is another spiritual discipline that is greatly emphasized throughout the New Testament (Luke 18:1; Eph. 6:18; Phil. 4:6; 1 Thess. 5:17). In discouraging the hypocritical motives of praying (Matt. 6:5-8), Jesus revealed the true meaning of this practice: “Prayer is opening one’s life to God. It is inviting Him to act in our lives. Prayer is not overcoming God’s reluctance, it is being willing to accept His will in our lives” (Augsburger 86). This understanding of prayer enables Christians to follow the command to “pray continually” (1Thess. 5:17), for prayer is practicing continued yielding to God for transformation.

Participating in Christian fellowship can keep believers on the track of spiritual growth as well. According to the Scripture, genuine fellowship provides Christians accountability, companionship, encouragement, correction, and opportunities for good deeds (Heb. 10:24-25; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 4:15-16). The sole purpose for these diverse spiritual gifts endowed upon the Church by God is that the body of Christ will grow up and become mature. The Holy Spirit works through God’s people to build up one another in faith and life.

The earliest church sets a great example for faithful and intentional living. According to Luke, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the apostles at Pentecost

and as a result of Peter's preaching, the number of believers increased by about three thousand in Jerusalem. Acts 2: 42-47 gives a snapshot on this newly born church:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

The young church's mature expression of faith is outstanding. While such maturity is undoubtedly the Holy Spirit's supernatural work, through the types of means of grace (e.g., learning the word of God, prayer, worship, fellowship) these new believers' devotion must not be overlooked. Ajith Fernando further directs attention to the word *devoting*, which is used often with the idea of "persisting obstinately in something" (119), meaning that those are the things they constantly do. No shortcut exists on the path toward sanctification. Christians need simultaneously to trust that "[t]he one who calls [them] is faithful and he will do it [sanctification]" (1 Thess. 5:24), while at the same time also devote themselves to the time-honored spiritual disciplines.

Sanctification is thus both a gift to receive and a project for believers to work out. Even the willingness and ability to work is solely by God's grace; believers simply respond according to their status of being awakened, renewed, and enabled by the Holy Spirit. John Wesley offers a succinct explanation on such a delicate conjunction of grace and participation:

[T]he Spirit's work of sanctification was not merely a forensic declaration of how God will treat regardless of what we are in reality. Neither was it a matter of directly infusing virtues in Christian lives. It was a process of

character-formation that is made possible by a restored participation of fallen humanity in the Divine life and power. (qtd. in Maddox 122)

Spiritual disciplines are those outward means by which believers participate in the “divine life and power” and should not be confused with sanctification by work when the means are understood in their proper context of prior free grace of God as previously explained. Moreover, spiritual disciplines, when rightly observed and practiced, never lead to individualized or private pietism. True spirituality of the Holy Spirit’s fruit always leads to communal expression.

Sanctification as a Communal Process

The portrait of the early Church in Acts 2 also reveals the important fact that salvation from God not only restores one’s relationship with God but must be embodied incarnationally in transformed relationships with others in community. All the exemplary marks of this Spirit-filled church concern their relationships: “[T]hey were related to the apostles in submission.... [T]hey were related to each other in love.... [T]hey were related to God in worship.... [T]hey were related to the world in outreach” (Stott, *Message of Acts* 87). In a word, they were transformed from fundamentally selfish persons to a community that was unified in oneness to love unselfishly. Sanctification carried out by the Spirit permeates every area of believers’ lives. The relational holiness stands especially at the heart of God’s transforming work because believers are to be restored to his likeness and image (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:10).

The Trinitarian image of God. Being made in God’s image attracts a wide variety of perspectives: (1) A substantive view refers to the capacities that human beings possess, such as reason/rationality, freewill, self-consciousness; (2) a functional view focuses on what humans do, such as exercising dominion over God’s creation; and, (3) a

relational view emphasizes the ability to relate to God, to each other, and to the world (Seamands, “Counseling”). While all of these interpretations are valid with respect to their exegetic basis, this paper focuses primarily on the relational aspect of the Trinity as it carries the most relevant implication to the project at hand.

The God Christians come to know and worship through the biblical revelation is a triune God—Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, existing as one in the communion of three persons: “The very names of the three persons imply existence in relationship,” suggests Stephen Seamands, for “[t]he Father is identified as Father only by virtue of his relationships to the Son, and vice versa. The Spirit is Spirit by virtue of his interaction with the other two” (*Ministry* 34). Several characteristics of the triune God’s relational existence deserve attention.

The first characteristic is their *diversity in unity*. The Bible shows that the triune Godhead moves and acts in overwhelming unity of which creation is a product (Gen. 1:2, 26; John 1:3). All three persons are involved in ushering in the birth of the Messiah (Luke 1:35), and all three were harmoniously seen at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16-17). Jesus was filled by the Spirit while fulfilling God’s will on earth (Luke 4:14; John 3:34); he claimed that he did nothing more than what the Father wanted him to do (John 3:34; 5:19; 8:28). Every aspect of salvation is purposed, accomplished, and appropriated from the unified counsel of the triune Godhead (Rom. 8:1-11; Eph. 1:1-14; Col. 3:1-17), yet room remains for particularity within the triune Godhead. The Scripture implicitly teaches about how such particularity manifests itself in Persons, in characteristics, and in their operations/functions toward the world (Grudem 210-13).

The second characteristic is their *loving intimacy*. Jesus is constantly in loving communion with the Father. The opening chapter of John depicts such intimacy: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God” (1:1). Seamands points out that the Greek word translated *with* suggests both *nearness* and *movement* toward God: “From all eternity, says John, the Son and the Father have existed not merely like side-by-side acquaintances ... but like face-to-face lovers, intently gazing into each other’s eyes, engaged in joyful communion and intimate dialogue with each other” (*Ministry* 59). On many occasions Jesus himself boldly claims intimacy with the Father: “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30), and “the Father is in me, and I in the Father” (10:38). Throughout his earthly ministry, Jesus never ceased to enjoy intimate fellowship with the Father (John 5:20; 8:29; 14:31; 15:9; 16:13-14; 17:23-24).

The third characteristic is their *mutual deference*. Although Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy full equality in deity, freedom exists for diversity. Each person’s distinctive characteristics and operations are honored by the other. Their mutual deference is clear in the Gospel of John. While claiming equality with God (5:18), Jesus sought to honor and exalt the Father by making him known. In reciprocity, “[t]he Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands” (3:35), and, “[t]he Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father” (5:22-23). By asking the Father to send another counselor to the disciples, Jesus revealed that the Holy Spirit is equal with him yet carries a ministry to “testify about Jesus” (16:26) and “bring glory” to the Son (16:14). In light of the book of John, Mark Shaw describes the Trinity as “a divine family at work to love, exalt, enjoy, and serve one another by

loving, exalting, enjoying, and serving redeemed sinners” (64). Their high respect for one another is evident throughout the Gospels.

The fourth characteristic is their *submission in self-giving service*. The strong bond that binds the Trinity is certainly not achieved through hierarchical power; rather, the three persons gladly yield to each other through selfless submission. The Son humbly came down from heaven to become flesh in order to make the Father known (John 1:18) and to fulfill the Father’s will. During his earthly ministry, the Son did not seek his own glory but subordinated himself to speak or do only what the Father was doing (3:34; 5:19; 8:28; 10:32; 14:10). Such other-centered agape love is reciprocal because the Father has placed everything in his hands (3:35) and “entrusted all judgment to the Son” (5:23). Just as the Son sought to glorify the Father, the Father glorified the Son as well (8:54). The third person in the Trinity also exhibits the same kind of submissive service to the other two persons as well, for “he [the Spirit] will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears” (16:13), and the goal of the Spirit’s ministry is to make Jesus known and to bring glory to the Son (16:14-15).

Hence, this dynamic interrelationship that exists eternally within the triune Godhead must shape the understanding of the image of God. Moreover, the Trinitarian understanding of the image of God carries significant implications for believers’ spiritual growth, for Christians “live and move and have [their] being” (Acts 17:28) in this God-in-Communion and are saved in order to participate in his divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4).

Relational holiness at the core of sanctification. Holy living in the area of relationships—with God and with others—henceforth becomes prominent teaching throughout the Scripture. In the Old Testament, the Law was given to Israel in order to

transform them from being slaves to become “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). People today, often like the Pharisees, tend to approach the Law of Moses as a list of dos and do nots or simply good rules by which to live. However, the context of Exodus shows that the commandments were given as an integral part of the Sinai narrative sequence and, therefore, should be seen as “an essential segment of the account of Yahweh’s presentation of *himself* to Israel” (emphasis mine; Durham 278). Later in Leviticus, God tirelessly reminds the Israelites of the ultimate reason for their distinct moral behaviors from their surrounding nations: “[B]e holy, because I am holy” (Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26). God’s law reveals his nature to allow his people to see what God is like and how they are to reflect his image.

With this understanding of the nature of the Law, one naturally discovers that the Ten Commandments, serving as the guiding principles of all Israel’s civil, ceremonial, and moral laws, essentially concerns relationships with God (the first four) and relationships with each other (the remaining six). Moreover, the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:19), which spells out the practical application of the Ten Commandments, comprehensively covers all kinds of relationships one would encounter in daily life: within one’s household, with neighbors, and even with animals and the land. The heavy emphasis on right relationship found in God’s commandments can be summed up by the following statement: “Love you neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18). As the Lord of Israel exists as three persons in community, being people of the Lord means transformation from being self-centered individuals to those who care for the interests of other members in the community. Vertical relationships with God should naturally and inevitably impact one’s horizontal relationships with each other.

Similarly in the New Testament, Jesus, the embodiment of the Law, also emphasizes relationships and the role they should play in disciples' spirituality. In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, relational holiness and righteousness dominate his teaching (Matt. 5-7). Jesus' message is clear: "God wants to see his characteristics embodied in his servants. Like father, like child. And nowhere is that more important and more noticeable than in our relationships" (Green 107). When challenged by the question about which is the greatest commandment in the Law (Matt. 22:36), Jesus, who "knew what was in a man" (John. 2:25), revealed to the Pharisees their deficiency: "Love the Lord your God ... and ... [l]ove your neighbor as yourself." Michael Green highlights the thrust of Jesus' answer: "For people who, like this expert in the Law, were strong on ethics and weak on relationships, this strongly relational teaching was a revealing mirror of the heart" (236). Sanctification must have its downward working through believers' relationship with one another.

The numerous teachings that appear in the Epistles affirm the critical connection between Christians' new identity in Christ and their relationships with others. The repeated *one another* commands, such as "carry one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2), "honor one another" (Rom. 12:10), "be kind and compassionate to one another" (Eph. 4:32), "live in harmony with one another" (Rom. 12:16), "accept one another" (Rom. 15:7), and "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11). demand that believers apply their proclaimed faith to their relationship with others in a practical and concrete manner.

When Paul asked the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil. 2:12), the book's context suggests that their corporal health and growth

was at stake. Fee argues that the passage is “an ethical text, dealing with how saved people live out their salvation in the context of the believing community and the world” (235). The apostle’s imperative for obedience is then for them to work on restoring the harmonious relationship within the church. Unity among God’s people is a necessary outworking of the ongoing sanctification by the Spirit.

The way that the Holy Spirit produces righteousness and holiness in believers’ lives is often through their closest relationships. One of the signs of being “filled with the Spirit” in Ephesians 5 is “submission to one another” (5:21) both at home and in the workplace. Usually in those daily encounters, believers face real-life situations where they most need to put into practice the already-mentioned *one another* commandments. Therefore, Eugene H. Peterson contends, “We do not become mature on our own. Maturity, especially if it is to be to the measure of the full stature of Christ, can be accomplished only in relationship with others” (232). The fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, cannot grow in a vacuum; it is best nurtured in communal relationship.

Sanctification, therefore, must happen in community, just as Wesley says: “The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness” (qtd. in Maddox 209). Only through life together can believers form a body (Eph. 4:16): Together, they are built into a house (Eph. 2:22); together, they become a holy nation (1 Pet. 1:9). Such a communal life fulfills the highest experience of divine-human relationship, for “if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us” (1 John 4:12). Authentic sanctification as a result of divine-human working together must always have communal expression.

Key Aspects of Discipleship

Christians today not only have serious spiritual health issues, but those issues have also impacted their public image. Several surveys by the Barna group in recent decades reveal a disheartening state of spiritual maturity among evangelical Christians (Barna 33-55). Biblical literacy is surprisingly low, and the values Christians hold differ little compared to nonbelievers. Even more troubling are the lifestyle witnesses of evangelical Christians in society. For example, one clear indication of spiritual immaturity is the divorce rate, which is almost identical within and outside the church (Barna Group, “New Marriage and Divorce Statistics”). As such, when asked about their impressions of Christians, most people outside the church have a very negative view. Descriptions such as “hypocritical” or “untrustworthy” are common (Kinnaman and Lyons 11). Additionally, church youth are increasingly being secularized and an alarming number are abandoning their faith in their twenties (Barna Group, “Millennials”). These symptoms found in today’s church reveal a faith community in peril.

Notable church leaders such as J. I. Packer, Stott, Dallas Willard, and Bill Hull unanimously agree that the major problem falls on the deficient and inadequate discipleship efforts among American evangelicals. Even Bill Hybels, the senior pastor of one of the largest churches in the US, confessed that over the years their much-imitated small group programs have failed to produce spiritually mature Christians (Wright 104). Ogden’s soul-searching cry, “[W]here have all the disciples gone?” (22), is a question posed by many church leaders.

A Definition

Finding common definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship* offers quite a challenge. Many have attempted to sketch the landscape of a disciple for the purpose of mapping out the road to the desired destination. Ogden, for example, defines disciples as people who are “self-initiating, reproducing, fully devoted follower of Christ” (53). Naturally, his discipleship approach focuses on training people to be able to multiply or reproduce the process of how they were trained to be disciples. In the newest attempt to rectify their discipleship program, the Willow Creek church seeks to produce disciples who are “self-feeders” (Wright 104). As such, training believers to know how to study the Bible has now become Willow Creek’s primary ministry emphasis.

While these traits of a disciple describe helpful facets, they alone do not determine the full nature of discipleship. One must be careful not to confuse discipleship with any human agenda or, worse yet, reduce it simply to becoming a means for church growth. Michael Green states, “Discipleship is not about a code of ethics detached from loyalty to Christ. It is all about commitment to the King ... [and] ... the lifestyle of the disciples of Christ” (89). Jesus’ only requirement for disciples are to “deny themselves,” “follow me” (Mark. 1:17; Luke 9:22), and “obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:20; John 8:31). Therefore, biblically speaking, a disciple is a “learner and follower” (Hull 32), committing oneself to conform to and obey Christ.

When Jesus walked on the earth among the first-century Jews and Gentiles, the common understanding of the meaning of being his disciple was clear. It primarily meant “to go with him, in an attitude of study, obedience, and imitation” (Willard 260). With such a commitment of transforming one’s whole life to imitate the Master, a disciple

strives to “live in intimate union and daily contact with Christ” (Hull 28). Transformation as a result of such an abiding relationship inevitably touches both one’s inward disposition as well outward conduct.

Disciple-making ministry must then be an organic and contextual process by which disciples are supported to grow in personal knowledge of, and loving loyalty to, their Master. Discipleship should never adopt “a cookie cutter approach to faith” (Richards and Martin 226) but allow freedom for a person to find fresh expressions of Christ’s life in both individuals and communities. With this understanding of the essence of discipleship, a biblically grounded discipleship ministry should first and foremost involve inculcating believers with a deeper knowledge of God, developing a more loving, intimate relationship with Christ and cultivating an obedient expectation for both inward and outward transformation.

The following sections review three movements of discipleship that I deem most relevant to the ministry project design. In addition to discussing their respective role in growing a disciple as depicted, this section also evaluates them in light of various adult learning theories. Although discipleship rarely identifies itself explicitly to any specific educational approach or learning theory, etymologically, rabbi means teacher, and disciple literally means “to learn” (Yount 229). Discipleship, in essence, is a teaching-learning process. The social sciences have valuable insights to offer to this process. Examining disciple-making ministries from the lens of adult learning theories can, in the end, inform and enhance discipleship.

The Roles of Scripture and Doctrine in Discipleship

The Bible is very clear about the importance of the Word of God in the life of disciples. Jesus prays for the sanctification of his disciples through the Word of God (John 17:17). The apostle Paul also stressed the indispensable role of Scripture in the ministry of “teaching, training, and equipping the person of God” for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16).

Current deficiency. Unfortunately, the Scriptures’ supposedly transformative and shaping power in the lives of believers have increasingly lost their grip. Both Packer and Robert E. Webber have attributed this unfortunate trend first to the modern spirit of rationalism and skepticism. In the past few decades, under attack by modern philosophy and science, the Bible has come under heavy fire. As a result, “the foundation facts of faith are called in question” (Packer, *Knowing God* 6). Falling prey to such a mentality of skepticism, Christianity increasingly has “become disconnected from its roots in Scripture” (Webber 16). The authority of the Bible as the divine revelation from God is further weakened by the pervading postmodern culture of pluralism and relativism where no objective and common guidelines exist for what is true and good. One chronicler of postmodernism, Walter T. Anderson, describes the characteristic of postmodern thinking:

Postmodernity challenges the view that the truth is ... one and undivided, the same for all men everywhere at all times. The newer view regards any truth as socially constructed, contingent, inseparable from the peculiar needs and preferences of certain people in a certain time and place. (27)

The very concept of truth that is absolute, objective, and universal is no longer acceptable, for “there are many ways of knowing and many perspectives to be embraced” (Groothuis 28). Under this prevalent notion, the Bible’s authority becomes relatively uncertain in many Christians’ lives.

The accommodation to such cultural pressures among American evangelicals is evident and the consequence costly, directly damaging the state of discipleship. First, by compromising with “a culture of disbelief regarding our Christian heritage” (Webber 17), the church has largely downplayed foundational biblical truths such as sin, salvation, redemption, sanctification, and the eschatological hope. Packer considers such compromise “suicidal” (*Knowing God* 6) as it accounts for the confusion of Christian mind as well as the widespread, shrinking of biblical literacy. Christine McSpadden aptly points out the resulting downward spiral: “We know less about Scripture, which therefore seems less relevant for our lives and therefore not authoritative for our lives, and which therefore ... we don’t really need to pay that much attention to anyway” (127). In many ways, Christians “have lost a sense of the Bible as the central text in the formation of Christian character and identity” (Jones 144). Consequently, they have allowed the postmodern mentality to creep into the life of the Church.

Second, a postmodern, self-centered narcissism has become prevalent in contemporary worship songs, prayers, and preaching and is another sign of the church’s capitulation to cultural influences (Webber 17). Even as the marketers have successfully turned the American culture into a consumerist society, the many so-called seeker-sensitive churches have also turned worship into entertainment for a human audience (Nekola 283). Studying contemporary Christian music, Risi Patrice comments that the lyrics of that music tend to “highlight the emotion and intuition of the worship experience rather than doctrinal depth” (53). Other researchers have found that the ever-popular, seeker-sensitive, and person-centered preaching style among some emerging churches has largely diminished the objective truths of Christian doctrine (Enoch; Gelger).

Preachers in this camp appeal to postmodern narcissistic attitudes and focus on audiences' own felt needs. Such accommodation not only "helps contribute to truth decay in the churches" (Groothuis 22) but also has little, if any, effect in bringing about genuine spiritual growth.

Third, a similar human-centered approach toward reading Scripture can be found in many small-group, Bible study settings. Robert Wuthnow's study on America's small group phenomenon concludes, "[M]any of the groups encourage faith to be subjective and pragmatic" (7). Subjective feeling rather than the objective truth takes the center seat. Biblical principles are meaningful so long as they calm anxiety and help people get through their challenges. Such an attitude has caused many Bible study groups become places for personal comfort, not where people become disciples through conformity to God's Word. For them, truth is simply "what we, as individuals and as communities, make it to be" (Groothuis 20). Since such human-made truths are not something over and above people, such groups have no power to transform its participants.

The moral implications of these cultural influences should not be surprising. As a result of such biblical illiteracy, a recent study reveals that "over half of all evangelicals surveyed agreed with the statement: 'The purpose of life is enjoyment and personal fulfillment'" (Groothuis 22). When the faith and hope that comes only from a firm foundation of biblical truth loses ground in the hearts of believers, the church can no longer challenge Christians to carry their crosses and live a selfless life of love as Christ did.

Direction to go. To counter this spiritual crisis, many evangelical leaders insist that Scripture needs to be first restored to the central role in the life of any genuine

follower of Christ. Leading advocates such as Stott pointedly declare, “A full, balanced and mature Christian discipleship is impossible whenever disciples do not submit to their Lord’s teaching authority as it is mediated through Scripture” (*Contemporary Christian* 173). In order to allow Scripture to form and transform effectively the lives of followers of Christ, several courses of action are suggested.

First, a return is necessary to a more comprehensive understanding of God’s single, universal, and unified metanarrative unfolding in Scripture. Secular postmodern thought has no requirement for an overall, rational metanarrative. Under such a cultural atmosphere, biblical narratives are understood to have only floating pieces of moral advices and the gospel story is often reduced to about Christ dying for individual reader in order to secure eternal life for him or her. Consequently, God’s overarching narratives is lost and, as well, a fuller interpretation of the narratives. Sean Gladding sees the danger of a reduced and privatized gospel story. The main problem is self-interest: “The Gospel message becomes all about *me*—the problem of *my* sin, the work of Christ is for *me*, I need to invite Jesus into *my* life and *my* journey so he would walk with *me* and bless *my* life” (Gladding, “Gospel”).

Another downside of a fragmented biblical presentation, according to Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, is that the “Bible is in danger of being absorbed into whatever other story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should” (12). All these authors insist on the need to teach the whole scope of Bible story so that people can see a more comprehensive understanding of the Bible as God’s story about the whole world from its creation to recreation. Such a perspective leads to a desire to hear “God, the divine narrator, saying, ‘I have a purpose for humanity and a

purpose for creation and history. I am not asking for permission to join your narrative.... I am asking you to join my narrative of the world, of human existence, and of all history” (Webber 25). Such a high calling usually corrects a nearsighted vision of life.

Robert W. Jenson adds to the significance of reading the Bible as a coherent dramatic narrative “not just as our story but fundamentally as God’s story” (33). He contends that reading the Bible as one single story is the means by which Scripture becomes authoritative for Christians: “Scripture constrains our lives and thinking the way a play or novel constrains the lives and thinking of the characters” (32). In other words, when Christians can see their lives located inside a larger metanarrative, the biblical author and his intention naturally become determinative for its characters as the story unfolds. Bartholomew and Goheen also agree on the compelling power of reading the Bible as one single unfolding story from God: “[T]hey provide us with an understanding of our whole world and of our own place within it” (18); moreover, “such a story invites us—compels us—to get involved” (22). In summary, discipling today first needs to familiarize followers of Christ with the comprehensive biblical story line as the foundation story for their faith and life, thought and action.

Second, a deeper immersion into the basic/core doctrine of Christian faith through catechism is another important foundation building in the task of discipleship. Unlike any other educational ministries (e.g., preaching or Sunday school teaching) commonly practiced by evangelicals, which often “hit the target yet miss the bull’s eye” (Packer and Parrett 9), *catechesis* seeks to ground and grow Christians through systematically teaching the “essential doctrines that constitute the Christian faith” (Parrett and Kang 91).

Such a doctrinal grounding is important for the following reasons. First, it provides clarity. Catechetical instructions teaches the essential, nonnegotiable truths of the Christian faith, allowing Christians to find a place to stand in a religiously plural world (Persaud 357). Clarity can replace blurry and smattering notions about God, his way and his purpose, and consequently give followers of Christ a stronger sense of identity (Persaud 359). Second, substantive Christian truth well taught through catechism is like laying a firm foundation for the house of God, which is characterized by “sound workmanship, thoroughness of construction, solidity, stability, and utility” (Packer and Parrett 16). Doctrinal teaching of this kind (Tit. 2:1) is what prevents Christians from being “tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming” (Eph. 4:14; Col. 1:23, 2:8). Third and last, learning the faith well leads to a distinctive lifestyle. Philip Harrold notes that “to catechize is more than just a matter of passing along essential information about the good news of Jesus Christ. It is instruction in the way of the Lord” (56). Winston D. Persaud as well insists that “living the faith, not just learning the faith” is at the heart of catechesis (362). The declaration and confession of the distinct belief of the Christian faith inevitably binds Christians to unique ways of “being, living, speaking and acting” (360) that sets them apart from people outside the faith. The ambiguous stand of today’s Christians on the many moral issues reflect the reality of lacking the kind of solid theological teaching that can distinguish Christians from their surroundings.

Third, in order for the Scripture to have authority in disciples’ lives, it needs to be rightly received and acted upon. Bible study that seeks to collect data or interesting facts

cannot transform one's heart and mind to be like Christ. In contrast, reading the Bible confessionally with openness for repentance is a necessary attitude to be restored in meaningful discipling (Davis 16-18). When the Scripture has no authority over its readers, Bible reading or Bible study naturally become subjected to cultural conditions or personal psychological need and carries no transformational power. Conversely, Bible teaching and learning, which sets "conforming to our Creator in belief and behavior, through trust and obedience" (Packer, *God Has Spoken* 9) as its goal, can be expected to bear fruitful discipleship.

Several ministries, such as the inductive Bible study movement, Bible Study Fellowship International, Precepts Ministries, and the Navigators' various devotional materials emphasize a serious and sincere attitude to studying the Scripture directly and inductively, allowing the Bible a canonical perspective to speak to human hearts in its own terms. These ministries call on participants to witness and experience the power of God to transform human character (D. Thompson 12). Studies have revealed that pulpit preaching or small group settings, which stress the responsibility of application through the expository presentation of the Word of God, have resulted in "life transformation" and "spiritual growth" (Olsen 122; Barr; Wilkerson). Hence, standing on the word of God and living out its implications must be the bedrock of today's discipleship.

The Role of Spiritual Disciplines in Discipleship

The spiritual formation movement, which promotes various historically rooted spiritual disciplines, has in recent decades gained momentum among evangelical churches as an effective means of growing disciples. This section discusses the nature of spiritual disciplines and the potential effect they usually produce in believers' lives.

The nature of the discipline. Spiritual disciplines train disciples to arrange their lives in a way that transformation becomes an integrated aspect of life rather than an unfulfilled dream. The proponents of spiritual disciplines often compare their practice as the path to actualize Christians' desire for Christlikeness. Many Christians sincerely want to have Christlike characters exhibited in their daily lives, but the more they try, the more they fall victim to their failures. The key, argues John Ortberg, lies in the difference between trying and training (46). Trying is like the New Year's resolution that people wishfully make but without specific plan; hence, it can only bring them to a certain point. Training, in contrast, includes those practices that serious athletes or musicians build into their daily routine that eventually bring them to the desired goal. According to Ortberg, "Spiritual transformation is not a matter of trying harder, but of training wisely" (47). This principle is the very counsel that Apostle Paul gave to his spiritual son, Timothy: "train yourself to be godly" (1Tim. 4:7).

Spiritual disciplines are not only wise practices; they actually fit into God's creative and redemptive action in human lives. Willard points out that human beings are created as embodied psycho-spiritual beings; therefore, any authentic spirituality must integrate the whole person—mind, soul, and body—in order for healthy growth (25, 31). Scripture confirms the critical role of a person's physical body in God's comprehensive redemptive work. Romans 7:22-23 explicitly uncovers the real battle that is taking place in every regenerated believer's life:

[I]n my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.

To overcome such struggles, the apostle Paul exhorts Christians to “offer the parts of your body to him [God] as instruments of righteousness” (Rom. 6:13) and, as well, “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom. 12:1). Spiritual disciplines, then, are specific activities Christians intentionally undertake to mold and shape the very substance of their bodies in order “to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help assist the ways of God’s Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies” (Willard 86). Transformation, thus, cannot ignore the bodily nature of human personalities.

Such a conscious human effort is not to be equated with self-reliance or merit earning before God. Advocates of spiritual disciplines understand them to be “means of receiving his [God’s] grace.... The disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (Foster 7). Marjorie J. Thompson compares spiritual disciplines to garden tools that “keep the soil of our love clear from obstruction and distraction, enabling us to remain more attuned to the mysterious work of God’s spirit” (16). In other words, if the Word of God is indeed seed that is being sown into the soil of human hearts (Mark 4:1-8), spiritual disciplines help create a more fertile condition for that seed to grow. As such, practicing spiritual disciplines is essentially a “labor of cooperation with God” (16). Jan Johnson echoes the cooperative nature of such a labor by saying that spiritual disciplines are “any activities that connect us to the God who wants to transform our souls” (8). Even as God has destined Christians to be like Christ (Rom. 8:29), they must first condition their whole person in a way that God can freely shape and mold them into Christlikeness. In summary, spiritual disciplines serve as the conditioning that prepares the way for such transformation to take place.

The most compelling reason for followers of Christ to adopt spiritual disciplines into their daily routines stems from Christ's personal example. The Gospels reveal that Jesus lived a disciplined life. One sees his relentless seeking to understand the word of God among the teachers in the temple court, "listening to them and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Later, when tempted by Satan, Jesus effectively drew from the Word of God as his sharp sword to defeat his enemy (Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12). Other disciplines, such as fasting, solitude, prayer, service, and simplicity, were all a regular part of Jesus' life throughout his public ministry. In effect, through such disciplined practice and learning (Heb. 5:7-9), Jesus engaged himself with the Father so intimately that he was able to fulfill the Father's will to the smallest detail while on the earth. Willard insists, "To live as Christ lived is to live as he did all his life.... [W]e cannot reasonably hope to do his deeds without adopting his form of life. And we cannot adopt his form of life without engaging in his disciplines" (29). Henri Nouwen also helpfully points out the same linguistic root between discipleship and discipline and concludes that these two cannot be separated (*Spiritual Formation* 18). Indeed, only disciplined disciples can possibly "do the right thing at the right time in the right way with the right spirit" (Ortberg 54), as Jesus did.

The effect of discipline. In his upper room discourse, Jesus taught clearly to his disciples that only an abiding, intimate relationship with him can sustain their mission in the world (John 14:21; 15:9). Later, in a dramatic encounter with Peter, the Lord once again insisted that love must be the ultimate driving force in the heart of anyone who desires to follow and serve him (John 21:15-19). Cultivating the sense of one's

“belovedness” in God’s eyes is the key that enables believers to listen to God’s voice and follow him (Nouwen, “Moving from Solitude” 82).

The new covenant, which Christ came to fulfill, promises to inscribe the law of God into the hearts of his people, resulting in their willing obedience (Jer. 31:31-34). In the Gospel of Matthew, looking at what Jesus taught about the kind of righteousness necessary for one to enter into the kingdom of God (chs. 5-7), one finds that all aspects deal essentially with the condition of the human heart. Renovation of the heart thus must sit at the core of discipleship, for believers need first to “learn and take on the characteristics of submission, humility, and vulnerability” (Hull 193) before they can expect spiritual transformation to happen.

The greatest benefit of spiritual discipline for followers of Christ, therefore, is a deeper Christian life characterized by a personal relationship with Christ and transformation from the inside out, a benefit that many evangelicals fail to experience as the focus of discipleship among evangelicals leans more toward the cognitive and the imparting of orthodox biblical knowledge. Spiritual practices, such as meditative reading of Scripture, practicing the presence of God in one’s daily life, or examen prayer, can train a person to develop the kind of attentiveness and inner fellowship that, according to Richard J. Foster, only exists “between the lover and the one beloved” (23). The heart, not just the head, is where the Lord desires to reside.

The various classical spiritual disciplines engage one’s heart, leading believers to pay attention to the state of their inner beings, enabling them to become more attuned to the Holy Spirit’s movement within. Such practices “create the emotional and spiritual space which allows Christ to construct an inner sanctuary in the heart” (Foster 20).

Constant communion with Christ in one's inner place cannot but produce Christlike fruit of the Spirit. Jesus taught that one can recognize whether or not a person is a true disciple by the fruit he or she bears (Matt. 7:20) and commanded his disciples to "love one another" in order to validate their witness for him (John. 13:34-35). The fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) in the lives of those who claim to belong to Christ Jesus is the kind of witness churches desperately need today.

In summary, biblically rooted and time-tested spiritual disciplines effectively deepen one's spirituality and enable the renovation of the heart that Christ commands. If growing toward Christlikeness is indeed the goal for discipleship, the diligent practice of spiritual disciplines must be the rule of life for all who seek to follow Christ faithfully.

The Role of Small Groups in Discipleship

Being involved in intentional community life such as a small group has a rich heritage in church history, but it has also received a renewed emphasis and welcome again in the late twentieth century. While many traps exist in the process of building a community for religious purposes (Wuthnow 6-7), the value of small groups in character forming and disciple making is still well recognized.

Small group specialist Gilbert Bilezikian has perhaps offered the most succinct rationale for this structure:

It is in small groups that people can get close enough to know each other, to care and share, to challenge and support, to confide and confess, to forgive and be forgiven, to laugh and weep together, to be accountable to each other, to watch over each other, and to grow together. Personal growth does not happen in isolation. It is the result of interactive relationships. Small groups are God's gift to foster change in character and spiritual growth. (54)

Bilezikian's statement helpfully pinpoints the key factors of small groups that enhance discipleship. Authentic Christian fellowship/small groups provide at least the following strengths.

Relational support. Community living in God's created order for humanity is evident in the Trinitarian image of God. Since human beings are created in the image of God, they are wired to connect and thirst for relationship. In the past few decades, neuroscientists such as Daniel Siegel and their research teams all confirm the need for human connectivity and show how humanity has been created as relational beings (276-300). Henry Cloud and John Townsend state a further discovery:

[P]eople's most basic need in life is relationship. People connected to other people thrive and grow, and those not connected wither and die.... At the emotional level, connection is the sustaining factor for the psyche, the heart, and the spirit. (122)

Unlike being in a Sunday congregation where people tend to address each other on a superficial level, small groups provide an ideal setting for believers to develop into a community of God. In a small group, individual needs are easier to be cared for as members carry out the more than twenty *one another* commands in the New Testament toward each other.

Research shows that among the top reasons people join small groups is for the purpose of participating in a community where people can relate to one another intimately and receive care and support (Wuthnow 3). By joining a small group, many experience blessings such as acceptance, warmth, encouragement, support, wisdom, insight, friendship, and love. Such loving and supportive relationships are crucial to the discipleship process. Lee Spitzer comments, "[D]iscipleship is a spiritual journey that requires trust, vulnerability, and willingness to share one's heart, mind and soul with

others” (80). Creating such optimal relationships through small groups is essential in developing disciples.

God-centered focus. The relational dimension of small groups in itself does not automatically translate into spiritual growth. Without putting God at the heart of small groups, members can become self-occupied, seeking only mutual help, empathy, and comfort to go through challenges in life. Several findings from Wuthnow’s research on American small groups affirm reasons for concern. In addition to the surprising fact that many small groups “do little to increase the biblical knowledge of their members” (7), Wuthnow’s research also reveals that many groups encourage the kind of subjective and pragmatic faith that views the divine being as “one who is there for our own gratification ... rather than one who demands obedience from us” (7). This secularization from within is what Wuthnow sees as the most worrisome danger.

For a community to be truly Christian, it must have a steadfast, God-centered focus. Transformation is only possible when God’s presence is at work. Julie Gorman declares that small groups with a God-centered focus redefine every aspect of the group times:

People don’t treat others with esteem and care just so they will feel at home in the group. Their at-homeness and experience of genuine love enhance openness to the formation of Christ within them and within relationships in the group. Members don’t share openly just because they want people to know them and like them. Honest communication can be a means of personal formation. One person’s disclosure may be used by the Spirit of God to help someone else gain perspective and encouragement. Refreshment times are more than icebreakers.... [T]hey become occasions for informal formation and enjoyment of God’s unique work in people made in his image. (95)

Every facet of a gathering thus becomes formational for its members.

More importantly, the place of and perspective on Scripture in a group are the determining factors that make the small group experience truly transformational. Gorman continues by asserting, “Spiritual formation in a believer’s life occurs when the Word of God is viewed as the only way of operating, the only way to live if fullness of life is desired” (98). Simply including Scripture in the discussion or even the study of Scripture in small group meetings is insufficient. Members’ viewpoints and experience need to be brought under the scrutiny of biblical truth. Through engaging observation and well-designed probes, Bible study should challenge participants to see the discrepancy between reality and their present lives. Lastly, application in response to this intersection needs to be emphasized. Almost all discipleship-focused small group leaders agree that “without active, practical responses to Jesus, all of our Scripture study is meaningless, theological babble that has an appearance of godliness but denies its power” (Harless 164). Obedience to his word and to live it out is exactly Jesus’ repeated command to those who want to be his disciples (Matt. 7:21; John 8:31).

Accountability. One of the best gifts small group members can give each other is an accountable relationship. Accountability may sound harsh and even betray the loving and accepting spirit that small groups try to promote. In actuality, accountability is a very biblical concept. The New Testament is filled with statements that remind believers of their interdependence. Hebrew 3:13 says, “[E]ncourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.” James also instructs believers to “confess [their] sins to each other and pray for each other” (5:16). These and many other passages imply that Christians are responsible for watching over each other’s spiritual progress.

Ogden defines Christian accountability in a small group setting as “a willing decision to abide by certain standards and a voluntary submission of oneself to a review by others in which one’s performance is evaluated in light of these standards” (168). For anyone who is serious about being a disciple, submitting to such an accountability relationship is crucial.

First, accountability helps disciples give full obedience to the Word of God. Even when people gain something from Bible study groups with pertinent application, they can still walk away and fail to act it out. This experience is how James describes a person looking steadily into God’s Word, spotting one’s problem, then turning around and forgetting his or her own reflection (1:23-25). In a committed relationship where life change is the focus, people hold each other accountable in following up their action plan. In other words, one is held to the standard of fully obeying God’s word by being a doer, not simply a hearer.

Second, accountability helps members establish good habits in the practice of the spiritual disciplines that are crucial for spiritual growth (Hull 231). In the previous section, spiritual disciplines are considered as training for one’s spiritual life. Training involves constant repetition, yet “constant self-discipline is rare, we need others to hold us accountable” (30). Supervision is what keeps habits flourishing. Without supervision, disciplines tend to be short-lived. Hull even argues that discipleship is all about “interference”—a willingness to allow another person to interfere in one’s life:

Most of us want to reap the harvest of a discipline while living a life of relative sloth. We want all the benefits of humility and growth without being humble or working to grow. Yet Scripture states clearly that we require a great deal of interference to stem the tide of our self-indulgence.
(25)

Accountability is that positive interference that can train disciples to obey everything Jesus commanded his followers.

One of the best examples of small group dynamics that have transformative effects are Methodist class meetings developed by Wesley, which “brought about a national spiritual revival in eighteenth-century England” (Henderson 11). The class meeting was a part of an interlocking educational system Wesley created to nurture spiritual growth. In his system, the Scripture—the Word of God—was the highest authority for its members. While classes and bands are composed of small groups of people, all the members belonged to the society where they receive biblical teaching as the foundation for small group sharing and behavioral changing. Wesley himself insisted, “The Bible was the starting point from which all experience was to originate and against which all experience was to be judged” (qtd. in Henderson 132). For Wesley, the focus of a meaningful small group meeting must be first and foremost God.

While the society carries out dialectic teaching, the class and band meetings provide personal supervision of serious discipleship: Each member is asked about “how their souls prosper” as well as “whether they are indeed working out their own salvation” (Henderson 96). Regular participating in the class meeting was a spiritual discipline required for the early Methodists, and the accountability each receives from the class leader serves as the means of grace for his or her sanctification.

However, this kind of giving personal account and soul-searching examination is meant to be done in a loving and accepting environment. The role of the class leader is to “establish a climate of acceptance and commitment.... [T]here was to be an atmosphere of trust and understanding generated by the others and stoked by the leader” (Henderson

101). When members feel safe to be real with one another, they can then practice “speaking the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15) and “carry[ing] each other’s burden” (Gal. 6:2) and, consequently, grow in love and grace.

Many revivals and evangelistic crusades have given birth to numerous converts; however, few of those movements have brought about long-lasting effects on either a personal or societal level similar to the ones that Wesley contributed. “The secret,” according to Gregory Clapper, lies at “the little churches [class meetings] within the church” (113)—the real power of true Christian community.

Building a small group of people within a trust relationship and mutual accountability is undoubtedly time-consuming. Jesus modeled it, his disciples adopted it, and the history also proves its effect. Today’s discipleship ministry should not underestimate the power of small group but seek to anchor the discipleship process around this important and meaningful structure.

Through the Lens of Educational Psychology and Adult Learning

From an educational point of view, teaching the Word of God in a comprehensive and systematic way is desirable for effective learning. According to Malcom S. Knowles’ andragogy model, one of the characteristics of adult learners is being increasingly self-directing. His assumption complements other humanistic theorists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers who identified another force in the learning process, that of self-actualization or self-fulfillment (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 282). They believe that every individual strives to achieve what he or she is capable of becoming and that human beings make conscious choices that move them in the direction of their goals. In light of such characteristics of learning, teaching Christians the whole story of God’s

metanarrative is no less important than supplying them with a glorious view of who they can become in God's coming kingdom. In contrast, the fragmented presentation and teaching of the gospel message deprives Christians of a fuller knowledge of their roles and destiny in God's story. Consequently, it hinders a disciple's ultimate self-actualization in Christ.

Moreover, with regard to one's cognitive development, a more objective and complete comprehension on a subject matter is often the starting point for any advancement in learning to take place (Patterson 129). Even a self-directing approach acknowledges the value of comprehensive teaching where "enough content has been acquired to enable self-directed inquiry to begin" (Knowles 98). In Christian education, both doctrinal teaching and a comprehensive presentation of God's story lay a foundation of knowledge that contributes to this important aspect of cognitive learning.

However, learning is not limited to the mental process of accumulating data and information. More knowledge, no matter how orthodox or biblical, rarely changes a person's belief system or behavior. Educational psychology and adult learning theory reveal that adults approach learning, knowing, and constructing their frame of reference in more than one way.

The Bible presents a holistic view of human nature: a unified body-soul-spirit or physical-psychosocial-spirit being (Packer and Parrett 12; Kirwan 33; Benner, *Care of Souls* 52). In similar fashion, science has long acknowledged the interplay/interdependency of the different dimensions of personhood (Benner 58-61). Increasingly, education and learning theorists are supporting a holistic approach toward adult education. For example, according to Illeris' learning model, three dimensions are

involved in learning—cognition, emotion, and society. These multiple forces “interact simultaneously in the acquisition of knowledge or skills” (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 97). Derise E. Tolliver and Elizabeth J. Tisdell emphasize a multidimensional approach in education:

Rational ideas are better understood and learned if they are anchored in one’s entire being rather than as facts stored in one’s short-term memory.... Engaging Learning in multiple dimensions, including the rational, affective, somatic, spiritual, and sociocultural, will increase the chances that new knowledge is actually constructed and embodied, thus having the potential to be transformative. (39)

Therefore, discipleship that seeks to transform people needs to be holistic, engaging disciples’ whole self—thinking, feeling, and doing.

Various spiritual disciplines, such as *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, meditation, silence, and practice of the presence of God, are all powerful exercises in shaping persons’ attitudes and values because they integrate multiple dimensions of a person’s being. Highly embodied, imaginative, and emotional, these practices invoke a person’s affective dimension and often lead to more experiential connections with the Transcendent One. Such an experiential knowing brings “greater understanding to our lives [and] ... enable[s] us to make meaning of our everyday experiences” (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 192) and, hence, is an integral part of learning.

The book of Genesis shows that, as a consequence of sin, people are forced to cover themselves with layers of self-protection—sinful tendencies and habits that prevent them from truthful self-knowledge. Subsequently, these layers inhibit meaningful fellowship with God and others. The aforementioned spiritual practices help a person break through the surface facade to cultivate an inner attitude of “openness, honesty,

trust” (Foster 40). Such a transparency is necessary for God to enter into the depths of a person’s being and renovate his or her emotional issues or self-deception.

Certain communal practices such as confession or spiritual direction hold particular effect in facilitating honest self-examine (Houston 135). This experience of self-discovery may be uncomfortable, but until Christians can be truthful to themselves, they are unlikely to develop an intimate relationship that results from opening up the depths of their beings to God and to others (Benner, *Gift* 26). Tolliver and Tisdell conclude, “[T]his openness to our deepest selves, other people, other perspectives, and possibilities ... deeply fuels the transformation process” (41). The value of practicing these biblically rooted and time-tested spiritual disciplines is evident in holistic discipling.

Practicing discipleship in a communal setting provides a social context from which believers can benefit for learning and transformation. The first benefit is the depth and breadth of experience each adult brings to the learning. Knowles’ andragogy model encourages treating adults as active learners rather than passive ones. He values adults’ prior knowledge and rich experience and contends that adults should be given opportunities to contribute to the learning process through sharing those resources with each other (97). The advantageous structure of small groups differs from other religious learning settings in that it offers more opportunities for sharing and interaction among members. It transforms traditional learning to one of collaboration and cooperation through which adults not only participate but are mutually motivated to learn on their own. Such a process has the potential to produce more mature disciples who grow up to

take *solid food* (highly motivated learners) rather than one who always lives on *milk* (passive and dependent learners).

Second, dialogue with others to assess one's beliefs and assumptions contributes to a person's ability for critical reflection and reflective discourse; these are the main components of the transformative learning process (Merriam, Carafella, and Baumgartner 134). Jack Mezirow suggests that these are "ideal conditions" for transformation to happen: "having complete information, being free from self-deception, being able to evaluate arguments objectively, having empathy, having an equal opportunity to participate in the various roles of discourse" (qtd. in Merriam, Carafella, and Baumgartner 134). These ideal conditions also imply that not all small group experiences are educational or transformational. In order to form a community that can truly edify God's people, leaders and participants alike must create an open, safe, and supportive environment where both truth and grace are extended. For as much as unconditional love and acceptance are desirable for a Christian community, grace alone is not enough to edify. Truth-telling seasoned with love (Eph. 4:15-16) is the key to challenge any form of self-deception and facilitate critical reexamination of one's long-held perceptions.

The third benefit of a positive learning community is the action component of transformative learning. Observing patterns of adult learning, Stephen D. Brookfield calls one phenomenon "incremental fluctuation" (43). This process is where learners move back and forth between initial enthusiasm to adopt new information and new behaviors and retreat to their comfortable territory of past experiences and the old way of life. Brookfield discovered that the solution comes when people are supported by a smaller learning community "upon whom they could depend for emotional support throughout

the course” (Patterson 131). Christian small groups parallel such learning communities when they carry out the critical function of relational accountability with one another for resolutions made through group activities. The many educational functions small groups are able to fulfill proves the even more worthy effort to establish intentional discipleship groups through this structure of grace.

A Profile Study of Mainland Chinese Christians in the US

According to the US Census 2010, the Chinese population in the US has grown an average of 10 percent each year since 1980 (Gibson and Jung). In particular, China’s push for modernization after 1979, and the resultant Open Door policy adopted by its Communist government, have allowed waves of students and scholars to come to study in the US. This “fever of studying overseas” continues to increase in lock step with China’s ever booming economy. Since 1990, the number of Chinese students often tops percentages of international students across college campuses in the US (Su 7). Many of them have chosen to stay in the US after graduation, especially after the US relaxed immigration policies for Chinese scholars in response to the 1989 Tiananmen incident. The door of immigration is further widened for Chinese educated and skilled workers to become permanent citizens through the H-1b visa program—a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations. As a consequence, while diversity exists in age and preimmigration background, many of the mainland Chinese immigrants to the US belong to China’s intellectual elite who are highly educated primarily in the fields of science, engineering, computing, or medicine (Wong 38). This paper focuses on this particular immigrant group as they represent both

the majority of the ABC congregation as well as the majority of Chinese immigrant churches (CIC) across the US (Wan 40; F. Yang 6).

Living in the West creates culture-shock experiences for mainland Chinese. Many are exposed for the very first time to religious American life with numerous churches and Christians around them. Despite having been indoctrinated from birth by the Communist government's propaganda of dialectical materialism, atheism, and evolution, surprisingly, these Chinese intellectuals exhibit an open attitude toward Christianity. In fact, the conversion rate since 1989 has been phenomenally high among Chinese intellectuals in the US (F. Yang 89). On any given Sunday and in any given CIC across the nation, the majority of the newcomers who show up at Sunday service are from mainland China. They comprise the majority of those baptized each year and now comprise the majority of most Chinese immigrant churches. The recent resurgence of the once stagnant CICs in the US can be largely attributed to these ever-increasing numbers of mainland Chinese who have converted to Christianity (Yu 1; Su 17; Wan 40).

Many factors contribute to mainland Chinese's openness to Christianity. Most agree that the past century's series of political, cultural, and moral upheavals in China have created an ideological vacuum among its people (Wong 36). The breakdown of trust in the Communist government's notion of a socialist utopia has created a hunger for an alternative meaning system among China's millions. Many are eager to explore Christianity once they come to the US and are even quicker to respond to the conversion call after just one experience of attending a gospel meeting.

However, not all the new faithful continue to grow and thrive in their spiritual venture. Many pastors and veteran workers among mainland Chinese believers in the US

have shared their concerns at the alarming percentage of backsliding (Su 41; Yu 2), as well as the discrepancies found between their life in the world and in the church. Such discouraging developments have led many concerned workers to examine factors that may have caused such stunted growth and the possible avenues that churches can provide to nurture growth. This section first looks into some background issues that may have hindered the growth of mainland Chinese Christians in faith and will follow by exploring opportunities that arise from those crises. Lastly, this section explains how this profile study informs the dissertation project with mainland Chinese Christians (MCC).

Factors That Hinder Growth

In Mark 4, Jesus used the parable of the sower to describe four types of soils and the respective results after seed was sown upon them. When looking deeply at the soil of the hearts of MCC, several conditions appear to be possible “rocks and thorns” (vv. 5-7) that prevent MCC from producing a good crop.

Their conversion. Understanding MCC’s general conversion patterns and the key factors that lead to their decision sheds light to the issues underlying the external fascinating statistics. First, most CIC still believe in large-scale evangelistic meetings to spread the gospel. In order to reach out to mainland Chinese who come from a predominantly atheistic background and scientific worldview, the typical strategy of CICs is to hold an evangelistic crusade by inviting famous speakers who can give eloquent speeches on opposing topics such as atheism versus theism, Creationism versus Evolution, and Bible versus science. This approach is generally effective in satisfying mainland Chinese intellectuals’ inquiries about the credibility of the Christian faith and,

as a consequence, fills their spiritual void. In fact, these large-scale meetings often result in many seekers converting on site.

However, many mainland Chinese evidently make the decision to accept Jesus without a clear understanding of the fuller gospel message (Su 32; Abel 164). One mainland Chinese pastor likens such conversion to “pre-mature birth” (Gan 11), for they only know about God’s love and forgiveness, embracing the benefit of a savior and the eternal life he gives but not necessarily his righteousness, lordship, and the need for ongoing sanctification. Starting with a weak foundation, their faith tends to remain superficial if CIC fail to provide follow-up effort to sustain the conversion process.

Veteran minister to mainland Chinese Stacey Bieler makes the following observation:

Many attend weekly church services and Bible studies.... A few look for ways to deepen their Christian walk. After a few years some soak up Christian values and are transformed. But other Chinese, who make professions of faith, do not grow and within five years are no longer active in any fellowship. This is often because a firm foundation has not been built in order that their hearts and minds become transformed to conformity with Christ. (228)

With an unprecedented opportunity to reach out to this growing harvest field, CICs have the duty to “preach the gospel faithfully, clearly, completely” (Ling 193) lest the seeds that are sown wither quickly.

Another pattern that clouds a pure conversion of mainland Chinese is their cultural response to CICs’ active helping behaviors. Many MCCs identify the love and kindness they experience from welcoming churches and Christian friends to be the most attractive factors that influence their decision to convert. The following testimony is typical:

Four semesters ago, I came to this country anxious to pursue a higher education degree and with extreme interest in the US cultural

environment. However, I did not have any relatives or friends in the US.... However, just several days before my arrival, I received an email from the Chinese Student Association asking me whether I wanted to arrange an airport pick up. I agreed and soon I received an email from a person who called himself Uncle John.... He double checked with me about my arrival time and gave me advice on packing. Once I arrived, I was picked up on time, and I was assigned a room to live temporarily with two other girls. They cooked me Chinese food, and they helped me find an apartment and roommates. I was so moved by their selfless behaviors. To show my gratitude, I went to their church a lot and started making friends there.

I soon realized this group continues to help a large number of new Chinese students and scholars every semester. There are usually almost one hundred people on their airport pickup schedule list. Their big houses are full of new students. By providing services to recently arrived Chinese students and scholars, they successfully receive the attentions of the newcomers to proselytizing activities. Many students and scholars attend church and some of them convert to Christianity soon.... (Fu 5-6)

Her experience is typical of testimonies shared by mainland Chinese converts who receive baptism.

Warm fellowship and unconditional kindness are indeed highly appealing to potential converts. Several researchers studying the relationship between the various forms of helping behaviors of CICs and the high conversion rate among mainland Chinese come to the similar conclusion that CICs' hospitality and timely assistance to new students and immigrants make significant impacts on the decision to convert (Abel 164; Wong 40; Yu 85).

However, highly effective evangelistic avenues, friendship and hospitality may also result in less than pure conversions. In his article, Andrew Abel notes that due to the Chinese cultural conception of reciprocal favors, many converts feel that, once helped, they are obligated to participate in church activities and even to accept the invitation to convert to Christianity (165-67). Many have begun to discredit such conversions as not being genuine (Chia 149-51), for Chinese students may very simply be repaying the

kindness they received from their Christian friends. Such a false conversion is usually reflected in their subsequent shallow faith and un-Christian-like behavior (Abel 164; Gan 11).

Additionally, while many converts hold strong emotional attachment to the fellowship or small group that brought them to conversion, they do not necessarily join the local church to be a member of the body of Christ (Gan 11). Through the fellowships and small groups, they continue to enjoy love, acceptance, and timely help for their practical needs. Nevertheless, the very unconditional kindness and love that attracted them to Christianity in the first place also does not require any commitment from them, nor is any accountability for membership required. A no-commitment conversion at the onset is difficult to lead these Chinese converts toward a deeper committed life of discipleship.

Religious plurality. The Communist government tried to destroy traditional Chinese religious culture during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), imposing in its place Marxist ideology. However, the long-held Chinese belief system and worldview have never truly disappeared from people's hearts; they have simply gone underground (Ling 151; Rawson 164). Traditionally, Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are the three most prevalent philosophical ideologies by which Chinese people anchor their souls and build their value systems. Under the influence of the country's rich cultural variety and religious traditions, for a Chinese person to develop a synthesized worldview is not unusual (Corduan 280).

Many mainland Chinese are drawn to Christianity because they find compatibility between their existing value system and that of Christianity. Many of the highly regarded

virtues in Confucianism match biblical teachings such as righteousness, integrity, and relational ethics. Some of the Christian views on humanity's relationship with God and its condition in the universe are also reflected in the philosophical lens of Daoism or Buddhism. Chinese churches in their teaching or preaching often creatively and flexibly interpret Christianity through well-accepted Chinese cultural perspectives. Fenggang Yang concludes that some of the reasons Chinese immigrants join churches are to receive help in preserving the Chinese culture and to pass on their distinctive value system to their children (116). Some of the converts may even selectively construct "adhesive identities" in which they attach certain forms of Christian identity to their existing ethnic identity (183).

Being able to hold multiple identities and a pluralistic worldview may well serve Chinese immigrants in their adjustment to the US. However, holding such a worldview can also hinder one's genuine growth in his or her faith. If the Christian faith is seen only as one aspect of viewing the world and if converting to Christianity simply adds one more layer of security for blessing in the world, many biblical truths will have no power in one's life. Christ will not receive his rightful place in the converts' hearts as Lord over all.

Cultural background. The cruelty of the Cultural Revolution and its resulting political and social upheaval have wounded many Chinese souls, especially among intellectuals who had high hopes for Communism. Their disillusionment and grief have caused many to be reluctant to trust people and authority. Suspicion and self-isolation describe general characteristics of the collective psyche of Chinese people who have suffered through those traumatic political movements (Wong 37).

However, in order to survive and to protect themselves in the prevailing political environment, many Chinese have been conditioned to develop a kind of “dual personality” with which “everybody wears an official mask in public while living a different lifestyle in private” (T-S. Liu 3). Liu Tong-Su, an MCC-turned-pastor, has rich experience ministering to his own kinsmen and confirms that “such a dual personality has become a very important characteristic of China’s society and culture” (3). Rev. Liu also warns about the confusion that MCCs bring to their church communities. He notes that when people with such dual personality tendencies participate in church activities, they often give false impressions of spiritual maturity by their eloquence and mastery of church language and spiritual phraseology (3), yet without adequate discernment or emphasis on inner truthfulness from church leadership, this type of convert may continue to depend on such false impressions to survive their church life or even to serve in leadership without being challenged with inner transformation.

With the damaging impact from the past still lingering in its society, China’s recent unbalanced economic development further causes both personal and societal morality to deteriorate speedily. Under the Chinese government slogan of “All Out for Economic Boom,” the whole nation’s predominant pursuit is one of money and material success. A person’s value is considered in terms of performance, elitism, or how well one can excel amidst competition, often at the expense of overlooking others’ well-being. Wong Lai Fan is a Chinese Christian researcher studying the conversion experience among the mainland Chinese. He maintains that most Chinese intellectuals suffer distorted moral standards and interpersonal relationships as a consequence of having to grow up fighting for personal advancement in a highly competitive environment (39).

Thus, while many of them are willing to accept Christ as their Savior, their self-centeredness and unhealthy relational patterns remain unchanged. Wong echoes many other pastors in proposing the need to rebuild a new set of godly morals within these new converts (Chia 97; Wong 40; Chuang 137), especially in the understanding of the biblical concepts of sin (both inward and outward), genuine love among brothers and sisters in the Lord, and a biblical understanding of marriage (Chuang 137).

Immigration crisis/challenges. Like any transplanting process, the life of immigration can be painfully stressful and is full of challenges. Uprooted from their homeland and culture, diaspora Chinese in the US experience psychological stresses resulting from immigration. Due to the dramatic change of environment, most immigrants suffer a great sense of loss in social status, social network, and personal competency (Xu 2; Wong 21). In their striving for adaptation, Chinese immigrants often have feelings of alienation, frustration, anxiety, anger, loneliness, and powerlessness (Wong 23; Su 22). F. Yang observes that due to the premigration traumas in their homeland and the postmigration stress in the host country, “Chinese immigrants struggle to construct and reconstruct their identities” (35), ones that can provide them with a sense of belonging as well as purpose and meaning in life. Such an identity crisis adds even more uncertainty to Chinese immigrants in their effort to adapt to the host country.

This disequilibrium, which takes place in these immigrants’ personal world, inevitably impacts their immediate context. Studies show that the difficulties resulting from the immigration and acculturation processes generally place great strain on immigrants’ marriages as well as family life (Xu 12; A. Liu 28; Duncan 12-13). Hence, many Chinese immigrants face challenges in their relationships (Wong 187). Although no

official statistics exist to illustrate the severity of their relational issues, marriage breakdown, parent-child conflict, and domestic violence both at home and workplace among Chinese immigrants are “open secrets” within Chinese communities, if not also in most Chinese churches (Lin 4).

In the spring of 2011, I conducted four telephone interviews on the topic of discipleship with pastors whose CIC congregations are comprised mostly of MCCs. The pastors all identified marital issues, parent-child relationships, as well as work-related pressures as the most pressing issues for their congregations. Another experienced family and marriage counselor working among Chinese immigrants in the US, Dr. Lin Kuo-Liang, points out unavoidable consequences due to the weak foundation the Chinese immigrants inherit from their family of origin:

The series of political turmoil in China before its recent reformation carries a far-reaching damaging effect to numerous individuals, marriages, and families.... Growing up in that stormy environment, many Chinese did not know what parental care and love look like, worse yet, many often become scapegoats of their parents' inner wounds and bitterness. Carrying such a baggage from family of origin, they are ill-equipped to deal with relationship issues when situation gets tough. (35)

Deprived from role models at home, the various acculturation stresses thus become easy triggers for the many family and marriage problems they are now facing in the host country.

With the pressure coming from both inside and out, many Chinese immigrants live a super busy and unstable lifestyle. The typical immigrants' pursuit for a better life and material wealth causes many to work relentlessly in order to make more money and enjoy successful lives. In most cases, both the husband and wife have to work to measure up to their immigrant peers. Family members have little time to spend together, not to

mention setting aside time for spiritual matters outside of attending Sunday worship. Since most Chinese intellectuals are involved in scientific research and depend heavily on government funding, their positions are highly unpredictable, resulting in frequent moves. Their mobility makes discipling them through any long-term program difficult (Yu 50). As a consequence, with their busyness and acculturation-related challenge in life, many converts either gradually slip away from faith, citing that they cannot find practical help from church to solve their problems at home (Yu 212-13) or simply continue to live an uncommitted religious life at church.

Opportunities for Growth and Discipleship

This profile of MCCs in the US reveals that they are indeed standing in various crossroads in life. Nevertheless, the social, psychological, and spiritual crisis they encounter in their transition to a new land can serve as a great opportunity for discipleship and growth. Most adult learning theories agree that life events and transitions provide potent learning experiences and are the periods when transformation is most likely to occur (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 96). Prior to coming to the US, most of the Chinese intellectuals had to overcome many obstacles on the path of excelling academically in order to be qualified to study overseas. Their success often creates inside them a sense of pride and a tendency to self-reliance. However, as many veteran ministers to Chinese intellects have also discovered, the stress of coming overseas and adjusting to the new environment also causes them to realize their own limitations and the need to be humble (Su 22-23). During this period of time in their lives when they are most vulnerable and receptive, golden opportunities open up in bridging

them from their old culture to a new vision for life, as well as equipping them with new spiritual exercises and relational behavior to live in the new community of God.

Their opportunity for constructing a biblical worldview and identity. As discussed in the earlier section, Chinese people have suffered from many broken dreams and disillusionment in their modern history. After witnessing the cruel Cultural Revolution, Chinese developed a threefold crisis. First, they have “the crisis of faith,” for they lost faith in Marxism, Maoism, and Communism. Second, they have “the crisis of trust,” for they could no longer trust the Communist party and their political leaders. Thirdly, they have a “crisis of confidence,” for they lost confidence in the socialist system and its propaganda (Wong 36). Without a reliable ideology to guide people’s lives, the later unbalanced economic development only led China to become a soulless society that is polluted by corruptions and immorality, causing the majority selfishly to care only about money and material gain.

Therefore, Tsu-Kung Chuang’s study among the Chinese converts identifies “finding meaning for life” as the main motivation for their willingness to explore Christianity after they come to the West (97). Chinese ministry worker Katie J. Rawson, after years of interaction with Chinese intellectuals, confirms their deep longing: “They needed hope for the future, inner peace, and something or someone to believe in again” (164). The kind of answers they seek undergirds what is generally defined by anthropologists as a person’s basic worldview. According to Paul G. Hiebert, a worldview is a person’s belief system that “provides us with models or maps of reality that structure our perceptions of reality” (29). A worldview not only gives a person

emotional security and psychological assurance but, as J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh note, it also provides answers to a person's ultimate questions:

Where are we? Or What is the nature of reality? Who are we? Or What is the nature and task of human beings? What's wrong? Or How do we understand and account for evil and brokenness? And What's the remedy? Or How do we find a path through our brokenness to wholeness? (11)

Whatever explanations one gathers for these questions serve, in turn, as "the mental blueprints that guide our behavior" (Hiebert 29). Such an encompassing framework of thought is at "the very foundations of people's lives" (Hiebert 29). Loss of this sense of foundational order and meaning is a major felt need among many Chinese, both in their homeland and overseas.

With this increased spiritual hunger, Chinese intellectuals are turning to Christianity in record numbers. Many of them have already shifted from the worldview of atheism, dialectical materialism, and evolution to the belief of theism, the existence of spirit, and creationism. However, much work is still necessary to help MCCs construct a new, biblical worldview that provides them with unified meaning, direction, and hope for all aspects of their lives. As Hiebert warns, "If worldviews are not also converted, in time they distort the explicit message of the gospel and turn Christianity into Christopaganism. The behavior and beliefs are Christian, but the underlying assumptions, categories, and logic are pagan" (267). Many CICs suffer from such incomplete conversion among their congregation. Simply having many new converts to show up on Sunday to worship a benevolent God of love and celebrate their hope for eternal life but revert to worldly pursuit of health and wealth the rest of the week is not enough to fulfill Christ's commission to the church.

To construct a Christian worldview successfully, MCCs need to have a grand view and understanding of God's narrative from the Scripture. Under the influence of China's rich and diverse religious traditions, Chinese have Taoism to inform them of their relationship with the world, Buddhism to inform them of their relationship with heart, and Confucianism to inform them of their relationship with society. As many ministers to this group have discovered, these deeply rooted constructs continue to color the way MCCs look at the world and how they make decisions even after their conversion to Christianity (Bieler 229).

MCCs need to know from the outset that, far from being another ideological choice, the gospel message of the Bible reveals the unique metanarrative that "speaks of human life in the context of God's universal, cosmic Story" (Newbigin 89). This story sets before people a vision of cosmic history from the creation of the world to its consummation, gives understanding of the human person as a responsible actor in history, and answers all the ultimate questions that persons need to construct a unified worldview without any gaps (Bradshaw 41). According to Webber, such a fuller and comprehensive understanding of God's narrative is "the kind of knowledge that leads to deeper spiritual commitment" (19). Bieler, as well, sees the difference the Christian worldview can make among the Chinese students with whom she worked, and affirms that it provides them with a purpose for lives and work, challenging them to participate in God's greater work in the world (234). Teaching God's grand story comprehensively to MCCs is indeed a worthy effort.

Sound doctrinal teaching can be another foundational grounding in assisting MCCs to construct a Christian worldview. Coming from a non-Christian culture, most of

them have little or no background knowledge of the God of Israel, nor the hermeneutics for the understanding of the Holy Scripture. Their quick and dramatic conversion often leaves them with an insufficient understanding of the core beliefs of Christian faith. They embrace a God that is loving and forgiving but may not know his holiness and the high purpose of his calling. To many, prayer can be still conceived as getting God to do what humans want; the Bible is another sacred book that contains high moral teaching; and, salvation is often reduced to peace and happiness on earth and eternal life only after death. Such a weak foundation largely explains their crippled Christian walks that concern many Chinese pastors or those who work with this group (Bieler 228; Gan 11).

Speaking from his expertise in missiology, Dr. Timothy C. Tennent maintains that a new convert must not only have faith but that he or she needs to be brought into a common faith as well. The new convert must develop a long-term view of salvation and be united with all the saints (214). Evangelistic effort is, therefore, important not just to stop at their dramatic conversion experience but to take them into an ongoing conversion process through teaching the core tenets of the common faith that has been entrusted to the saints (Jude 3).

A well-formed worldview derived from sound doctrine benefits one's identity reconstruction as well. F. Yang's study on the trends in recent Chinese immigration bring to attention the immigrants' struggle between assimilating American society and retaining their ethnic identity (163). Knowing the foundational truth about God, the world, and one's place within it bestows upon Christians an identity that is beyond culture or ethnicity (Phil. 3:20; 1 Pet. 2:9). As one of Yang's interviewees shared, his Christian identity transcends the earthly Chinese and American identities. It provides him

an absolute ground on which he can reject or accept certain things Chinese and American (186). With a secure identity in Christ, Chinese converts no longer need to be aliens and strangers even with their frequent relocations. Their eternal home and permanent heavenly citizenship will enable them to live their earthly lives with purpose and certainty.

Opportunities for development. The social science of human development reveals that adults' personalities continue to evolve and change throughout their life spans. Different theorists interpret adult development from different lenses; however, most adult developmental theories agree that, rather than a smooth unfolding process, growth or maturity among adults often takes place when they encounter disjuncture or crisis during transition (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 306, 308).

The life situation of many Chinese converts automatically places them in a fertile soil for ongoing development. Socioculturally, they are a minority, marginalized, and unsettled. Biologically, most fall into the early to middle adulthood, which, according to research performed by the Religious Education Association, "is the time of the greatest struggle with resolutions to life-cycle tensions" (Droege 39). Psychologically, conflicts and problems surface from the immigration/acclimation stress and can cause even more internal crises. As such, ministry to them in this critical time becomes strategically important.

MCC developmental issues carry ministry significance because spiritual development is related to normal human development (Dettoni 87). David G. Benner explains the interrelation:

We are always either growing spiritually, that is, becoming more sensitive and responsive to the spiritual call in our life, or we are becoming more

spiritually dead. At times of crisis or transition in our lives, the opportunities for spiritual movement in one direction or another is particularly great. (*Care of Souls* 198)

Erik Erikson's psychosocial stages and their respective ideal resolutions—hope and trust, courage and autonomy, identity, intimacy, generativity, and integrity—relate to Christian characteristics for spiritual maturity, such as faith, hope and love (Steele 95-99; Aden 20-33).

Another reason for discipleship ministry to take into account adults' developmental tasks rests in the teachable moments that are naturally presented during learning. James C. Wilhoit lists "pain and loss," "problems in relationships," and "job difficulties" among the main factors that enhance adult spiritual receptivity ("Christian Adults" 55). Knowles also suggests that adults' readiness to learn "develops from life tasks and problems" (97). Raymond J. Wlodkowski's study finds that one of the motivators common and necessary to adult learning is that "the learning experience must focus upon what the adult perceives to be his or her needs" (qtd. in Patterson 127). In light of the adult learning theories, relevancy must be kept in mind in teaching or discipling adults in order to achieve maximal effectiveness and benefits.

Daniel J. Levinson's adult development model identifies the key components within the life structure of early to middle adulthood to be "marriage and family, occupation, friendships, religion, ethnicity, and community" (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner 308). These central components are those that carry the greatest significance for their lives: "They receive the greatest share of one's time and energy, and they strongly influence the character of the other components" (Levinson 36). In 2011, I executed a survey asking the congregation at ABC church to identify the most pressing

issues in their lives. The result revealed that among the age group of 30 to 45-year-olds, which comprises the majority of the congregation, relational difficulties at home and pressure and difficulties in the workplace top their list. When discussing discipleship issues among MCCs, many pastors also emphasize the importance of teaching biblical principles of marriage and family as well as training them to live healthy relationship lives (Chuang 137; J. Yang 23, 86). Zhao Yu's study on the church dropout phenomenon among Chinese intellectuals further finds that "poor family relationships between husbands and wives, between parents and children, and between in-laws made Chinese Christian scholars leave the church" (212). According to Yu's analysis, the reason for their leaving is a result of not finding church ministries that can help them in a particular struggle (213). Discipleship ministry to MCCs needs to be more relevant by focusing their life context as a divinely designed curriculum for growth.

A few ministries to MCCs that incorporate relational growth as a goal for discipleship have borne fruit in recent years and shed light on the holistic approach to discipleship. Ambassadors for Christ is a parachurch organization that focuses on evangelism and discipleship of mainland Chinese students and scholars in the US. After sponsoring for many years the popular and effective "Love for Life Family Conference," which teaches participants practical applications of biblical exhortation on relationships, this organization has decided to enhance its discipleship training by integrating relational maturity into a disciple's holistic growth (Chow 3).

Mentoring for a Christ-Centered Home (MCCH) is another successful ministry in this area. In an effort to become more involved in family ministries to mainland Chinese, its founder Rev. Johnny To quit his twenty-four year pastoral ministry in 2008 to dedicate

himself to a full-time mentoring ministry for Christ-centered homes. Those mentored all share testimonies about their life transformation, resulting in a more satisfying family life due to participating in MCCH's strategic ministry (*Mentoring4Christ*).

Both ministry groups recognize that relationship is at the core of God's redemptive purpose; relational wholeness and holiness is inseparably linked to Christian maturity and is, hence, worth the endeavor. Teaching Chinese Christian immigrants the biblical view on relationship and its applications is not only relevant to their developmental needs, it also facilitates their growth to be like Christ in character (Eph. 4:20-32).

Opportunity of joining a community for optimal development. Chinese people are community oriented. In Chinese culture, where "collectivism and interpersonal dependency are highly valued" (Bond and Hwang 241), seeking connection and a sense of belonging from a social group is a natural tendency, even more so in a foreign land. The attraction of a caring community that shares similar cultural values and identity has played a significant factor in the conversion of many Chinese intellectuals (Rawson 158). Such a strategic structure should continue to serve as a key context for their optimal development and discipleship training.

In the New Testament, the local Christian community/church is the divinely provided environment for spiritual growth (Acts 2:42-47; Rom. 12:3-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:11-16). Adult learning theory (e.g., Brookfield; Tisdell) also stresses the importance of a safe and supportive environment in which self-examination and transformation are more likely to happen.

After his extensive interview with many Chinese intellectuals who converted to Christianity, Wong concludes that in order for new converts to progress spiritually, they need a “healing environment” and “a safe and confidential place” where they can “recover from the past political trauma and present physical uprooting ... [to] be connected and learn from each other” (217). Joining a Christian community that holds both love and truth as its core values is their opportunity to experience such healing and reconciliation.

Gorman delineates several characteristics that belong to a true Christian community. Each one of the characteristics holds transformative power for MCCs. First, she contends that the purpose of Christian community is “for maturity and growth” toward Christlikeness (94). Many forms of small groups/community are prevalent in today’s society. Wuthnow’s study on the small group phenomenon in the US reveals, however, that even when people join small groups for religious reasons, the result may not be spiritual growth if the group’s agenda is human-centered rather than God-centered (7). Willard insists that Christian community as Paul articulates in Ephesians 4:1-16 is “the vision of a body of disciples (apprentices of Jesus in kingdom living, not just Christians as now understood) building itself up in love and mutual ministry and life together” (qtd. in Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation* 11). As much as MCCs desire belonging to a social network, the nature and purpose of a Christian community must require them to move beyond simply enjoying social connection to being honest with their spiritual condition.

Second, according to Gorman, Christian community is developed primarily by *renovation of the heart* (17). The secular goal for a successful group relies on group dynamic techniques. Gorman, in contrast, insists on the spiritual dynamics:

The building of community will never be achieved by the perfection of better techniques but by the development of spiritually attuned people who realized and respond to the interconnected system of relationships into which they have been placed by God himself. Community is developed not only by insights into relational skills but also primarily by cultivation of a heart that knows and loves God and his people. (17)

Spiritual formation is thus essential to living in community. Equally important are the various spiritual practices that cultivate a deeper, personal relationship with Christ and hold the potential to change a person from inside out.

According to many pastors to MCCs, the shallowness and superficiality of their spiritual lives pose the greatest obstacle to growth. Pastor T-S. Liu's article on the issue of dual personality among mainland Chinese exposes such a weakness:

When we claim that we accept the Christian faith, how many of us are merely accepting an outside system of dialogue? How many have merely learned the language, but have no real transformation in life? In the Chinese churches in North America, eloquence is a major characteristic among Chinese mainlanders... However, is that true faith? Our past cultural background enables us to intuitively grab and master the church language and dialogue, with the presumption that as long as we are fluent in the use of these language, we may survive in the church. If one only accepts an exterior language system but his inner self remains untouched, one is a false believer, and can only survive superficially in the church. (3)

Wilhoit confirms that such spiritual deformation is one key feature of adult spiritual life.

He states that adults possess "the ability to deceive themselves and others regarding their level of spirituality" and suggests "pushing people beyond pat answers and constantly reminding them that true spirituality and maturity result from a heart aflame in a Scripture-directed relationship with Jesus Christ" ("Christian Adults" 53). Developing a deeper relationship with Christ through spiritual disciplines is the cure for MCCs'

spiritual illness. They help MCCs open themselves to God's transforming grace that eventually results in renovation of their hearts and transforms them to become "kingdom people who ... naturally put into practice Spirit-directed skills of supporting, caring for, and building up others in the body relationship" (Gorman 17). In a Christian community, only transformed lives can influence other members to be transformed by God's grace.

Third, Christian community cultivates "trust and healthy interdependence" (Gorman 15). Traditionally, Chinese people draw their identities from the community—the greater self to which they belong. Chinese anthropologist Longji Sun notes, "In Chinese culture a man is defined in terms of a bilateral relationship.... [F]rom birth a Chinese person is enclosed by a network of interpersonal relationships which defines and organizes his existence, which controls his Heart-and-Mind" (32). Many Chinese scholars share that they used to study hard not for themselves but solely for the purpose of bringing fame to their family and being useful vessels for their government (Wong 212). Such a loyalty and dependency on the Self that is considered greater than themselves has undergone dramatic change in China's modern history. Realizing the discrepancy between their government's propaganda and reality, they no longer can put hope and faith in their leaders or authorities. China's recent moral corruption and pollution resulting from its unbalanced economic success further distances people from each other. Cases of being betrayed by spouses or being purposely utilized by their friends or business partners have made many Chinese hesitate to put trust or hope even in people who are close to them. In order to survive, many gradually develop a deep-seated self-reliance and self-centered mentality when dealing with life situations. (J. Yang 86).

Both extremes of dependence and independence can be brought to a middle point through powerful love encountered in Christian community: “True community is more than being together. It requires trust” (Gorman 81). Trusting God’s sovereign goodness and power in one’s life as well as in those of others is a risky step to take for many Chinese converts. They have long been accustomed to relying on their own abilities to navigate through life or even to change other people in the same manner. However, Larry Crabb, commenting on the key elements of a true community, insists that “our determination to fully trust no one must die and an eager willingness to receive what is best from others and to give what is best from within ourselves must take its place” (47). MCCs will grow in such trust when reciprocated by the mutuality exemplified in the group. The metaphor of the body (Eph. 4:15-16) shows that Christians “were made to live in dependence on the head and interdependently with the diverse parts of the body” (Gorman 12). As such, one of the signs for spiritual maturity, according to Jared P. Pingelton, is that one “learn to accept his or her authentic need for others, to receive affection and care, balanced by an increasing demonstrating of giving to the other” (108). Such an awareness of one’s own needs and of those in others moves persons to a healthy interdependence and is characterized by the ability of both being alone and being together with others.

A healthy interdependence corrects the prevalent utilitarian and pragmatic mentality that controls many Chinese people’s approaches to relationships and redirects them to a committed relationship based on covenant. An encounter with such a covenantal community is necessary and powerful in their transformation. Speaking from his various church-planting experiences among MCCs, pastor T-S. Liu also confirms the

critical role of a healthy and mature community that models authenticity, vulnerability, and a willingness to be challenged by the biblical truth (6). In similar fashion, Rawson's years of Chinese ministry experience proves that when joining a Christian community of love and truth, "Chinese people turn from unbelief to belief, and from dependence on self or the group to dependence on God and interdependence in His family" (171). She has witnessed much behavioral change as an outworking of participation in Christian community. She concludes, "[D]iscipling was actually happening in the context of the group" (168). Joining God's family and experiencing the true meaning of life together is the best way to grow MCCs.

The fourth characteristic of a Christian community is *respecting diversity and allowing participation* (Gorman 16). Wong's interview shows, "The group dynamics of small group discussion and sharing may enhance the Chinese intellectual's interest in learning and freeing up their constraints" (218). Both Rawson and Wong agree that to be able to share their unique stories, from their past hurts and pains to their present struggles, without being judged is "revolutionary and powerful" (Rawson 168; Wong 217) for MCCs. Sharing goes a long way in bringing about healing and restoration. The metaphor of the different members that comprise the body of Christ demands that every part's uniqueness is valued and that their different conditions are treated with care and sensitivity (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

Additionally, being allowed to participate in the group process makes one become a contributor to the growth of another. Just like the different gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the building up the whole body (1 Cor. 12:1-11), an adult's rich and diverse experience is a valuable resource in group learning as well (Knowles 97). Often times,

through candid sharing and discussion, their difficulties at home or work and their various acculturation issues receive practical help from their peer experts rather than having to go to professionals.

The fifth gift a Christian community provides to its members, according to Gorman, is *accountability for action* (122). MCCs intellectual ability often leaves them enjoying lofty theological discussion but passive in action. Pastor T-S. Liu reveals that the most common problems he observes from among the mainland Chinese Christians is “the big difference between the depth of their knowledge and the shallowness of their spiritual life” (7). Another pastor provides an even vivid sketch of this group by describing them as a person who “has [a] super-sized brain with immature limbs; [a] gigantic mouthpiece with tiny guts/cowardly actions” (Gan 10). MCCs need to be held accountable by supportive Christian community to practice what they preach, for, as stated earlier, the purpose of a true Christian community is for maturity and growth. Growth always involves change, but change is often uncomfortable. Nevertheless, a true community that challenges its members in the spirit of love and supports them to take actions with relational accountability provides “the optimum settings and ingredients necessary to create the conditions for transformation” (Ogden 14). Only by joining a community that is Christian can MCCs grow holistically in both their words and deeds.

Research Design

This project adopted an explanatory, mixed-method approach. I used pre- and postintervention spiritual growth assessment surveys (SGA) to collect quantitative data on participants’ attitudinal and behavioral changes in the area of relationship with God and relationship with people. After completing the training program, I also conducted

three focus group interviews to gather qualitative information and feedback to facilitate a fuller explanation of the possible reasons for the effectiveness of the intervention.

Recent researchers have viewed such integration as a form of methodological triangulation and have recognized its potent benefit in research (Creswell 22, 558). Lee S. Shulman contends, “Ways of seeing are ways of knowing and of not knowing. And knowing well is knowing in more than a single way” (23). Combining both quantitative and qualitative data provides a broader knowledge base to engage in the evaluation of the findings, providing a better and deeper understanding of the research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data by itself (Creswell 22). In addition, multiple means of datacollection provide a complex view of the intervention, “enabling a thicker interpretation” (Sensing 72). This research sought to assess the effectiveness of the intervention from multiple angles; therefore, mixed methods ascertain better validity of the conclusion.

Summary

Wesley once proclaimed, “I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer” (qtd. in Chilcote 6). This literature review reflects Wesley’s conclusion that faithful and responsible evangelistic efforts do not stop at making converts but must continue to lead them toward the ultimate goal of God’s salvation—transformation of human lives to be the likeness of his Son (Rom. 8:29).

Understanding MCCs and their background reveals even more the necessity of and challenges to transformative discipleship. MCCs various ideological and cultural

baggage requires intentional discipleship ministry to change their worldview, their perception, their attitude/commitment, and their behavior. In light of educational psychology and adult learning theory, synergistic teaching that integrates individuals' thinking, feeling, and doing holds the most potential for facilitating transformation. J. I. Packer and Gary A. Parrett emphasize repeatedly the importance of a holistic approach for effective religious education:

We must continually resist the temptation to reduce what must be whole-person engagement to something more narrow. If we fixate exclusively on stimulating the mind, or on simply warming the heart, or on busily engaging the hands, we shall miss the mark. All three concerns must be kept in view always as we labor to make disciples for Jesus. (188)

In response to Jesus' commission of making disciples of all nations, this ministry project sought to provide a holistic discipleship program by engaging participants' minds, hearts, and action in parallel through integrating Scripture teaching, spiritual practice training, and relational skill coaching in a communal setting.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

Mainland Chinese in the US have shown openness and receptivity toward Christian faith. In the past few decades, increasing numbers of them have accepted Christ and have become the majority of many Chinese immigrant church congregations (Wan 40; Yang 6). However, many of them have only received a weak foundation of an incomplete and fragmented gospel message from the time of their conversion. The lack of follow-up discipleship training further impedes the necessary spiritual growth of Chinese converts. Without being deeply rooted in the Christian faith and hope, many of them in their daily lives have fallen short in reflecting genuine Christian love for God and love for their neighbors. Chinese churches must not be complacent with believers simply showing up at Sunday services. Rather, they need to be intentional in providing ministries that correspond to Jesus' command of making disciples who will obey all his teachings, as well as to the apostles' exhortation to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet. 3:18).

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program with adult mainland Chinese Christians who attend the ABC Chinese Christian Church to determine whether it fostered growth in the participants' relationships with God and people in their current settings.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

The following four questions guided this study in measuring the impact of the training program in the participants' spiritual growth.

Research Question #1

What are the participants' initial relational quality with God?

The data collected for this question provided a baseline that measures the participants' self-perceived relational quality with God prior to the intervention. Question numbers 1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 12, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23, and 28 from the pre-SGA survey fulfill the purpose of answering this question.

Research Question #2

What are the participants' initial understanding and practices of Christian relational principles and behavior in their communities?

This question addresses the participants' current relationships with people prior to the intervention. Answers to question numbers 2, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 22, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, and 30 on the pre-SGA survey provided data for this question.

Research Question #3

To what extent does the program facilitate growth of the participants' relationships with God and with people?

This question seeks to evaluate whether or not the intervention fostered growth in the participants' relational quality with God and relationships with others in their communities. Answers to question numbers 1-30 from the post-SGA survey provided quantitative data to measure the change in their relationships with God and others.

Research Question #4

What elements/components in this program are most beneficial or influential toward the improvement of the participants' relationships with God and relationships with people in their communities?

The purpose of this question was to collect qualitative information beyond the descriptive statistics to facilitate a broader and deeper understanding of the intervention's impact. Questions 1-5 from the semi-structured interview protocol that I used to conduct three focus group interviews allowed group members to share freely their thoughts and feedback on their experiences of the intervention.

Population and Participants

Invitation to this training program was given to the entire adult congregation who regularly attend ABC's Sunday service (approximately one hundred people). Among this population, about 80 percent are mainland Chinese immigrants, students, or visiting scholars, while about 20 percent are overseas Chinese from southeast Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or Malaysia.

This training program was approved by the governing board of the ABC church. I obtained permission from the board to place a written announcement of this program in the Sunday bulletin starting on the first Sunday of January 2014 and to insert registration forms in the bulletins. The announcement remained for four weeks to give the congregation time to consider participation. On the first Sunday when the written announcement appeared, I also made a personal promotion of this program during the announcement time to encourage more participation. The open invitation provided the means with which to obtain a sufficient number of samples from the small congregation.

In addition, I employed random samples for the quantitative aspect of the study to enhance the breadth of the study population and, thus, the validity of the data (Sensing 82).

Participants responded to the invitation and registered for the program. However, the focus of this research was on mainland Chinese Christians; therefore, data was drawn only from participants whose demographic information indicated mainland China as their country of origin. Upon receiving the registration forms for attending the program, I personally invited six participants (both male and female) to serve as small group leaders during the eight-session span. They were either current small group leaders or people who have experience or the potential to facilitate small group functions. These leader-participants comprised focus group one and were at the same time purposive samples from which qualitative data was drawn. Their deeper involvement in this program and the interaction with the general participants provided me with rich information that can increase the depth to my data.

At the last session, I passed out sheets for participants to sign up for voluntary interviews that formed focus group two and three. They are the representatives of the general population whose experiences were useful in assessing the effectiveness of the intervention. Again, they are mixed-gender groups to garner broader perspectives.

Design of the Study

I implemented an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program at the ABC Chinese church from February to April 2014. This study adopted a mixed-method, explanatory design to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention.

At the beginning of the first session, a pretest survey was conducted to collect quantitative data on the participants' spiritual condition before the intervention. In the final session, the survey was again issued to collect the posttest data. A pretest-posttest comparison provides a clearer reading of the outcome than using either a pretest or posttest alone (Creswell 297). Both sets of data are needed to perform a comparative analysis to determine the influence of the intervention on participants' cognitive, attitudinal, and volitional changes in their relationships with God and others in their communities.

One week after the final session, I conducted a semi-structured interview session with focus group one. A week later, I used the same protocol to conduct an interview session with focus group two and three. The purpose of the interviews was to "allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher" (Sensing 103). The qualitative data gathered from the two interviews allowed me to gain insight into participants' perspectives that were not expressed through the survey. Consequently, the data provided me with a broader and deeper picture in understanding the effectiveness of the intervention project.

Instrumentation

Two researcher-designed instruments collected data in this study. The first one is the SGA survey, and the second one is the semi-structured interview protocol on spiritual growth.

The SGA survey is comprised of two sections. The first section contains six questions with fixed answers to ascertain the participants' demographic information. The

second section contains thirty questions using a five-point Likert scale for the participants to provide a subjective assessment of their personal relationships with God and with others in their communities. This same survey was used both before and after the project and provides descriptive data to measure changes in the dependent variables.

The semi-structured interview protocol on spiritual growth includes five open-ended questions that I used to conduct the two focus group interview sessions. The open-ended questions “establish the territory to be explored while allowing the participant to take any direction he or she wants” (Seidman 69), while the predetermined questions and sequence ensured that basic information for the purpose and research questions of the study would be obtained (Sensing 107). The semi-structured format also allows interviewer flexibility to explore or probe deeper answers whenever needed in order to gain a better understanding of the impact of the project and to answer Research Question #4 better.

Expert Review

I designed the SGA survey to collect specific data to measure Research Questions #1-3. In addition to writing my own questions, I also consulted LifeWay’s *Spiritual Growth Assessment*. LifeWay Christian Resources has existed since 1891 to assist churches and believers evangelize the world and grow disciples. Today LifeWay’s ministries reach across the United States and around the world through millions of Christian products used in more than 120 countries. The *Spiritual Growth Assessment* is one of the tools designed by the LifeWay staff to help Christians grow in Christlikeness by personal examination. From that resource, I generated a pool of questions related to a person’s relationships with God and people in communities. I then followed the

principles found in Floyd J. Fowler's work by selecting questions that "yield answers [that] correspond to what they are intended to measure," "mean the same thing to every respondent," and "ensure complete question wording" (74-78). These guidelines helped me finalize the preliminary survey.

The semi-structured interview protocol was designed to conduct the focus group interview session and to collect qualitative data to answer Research Question #4 specifically. I followed the principles found in Irving Seidman's work in designing seven open-ended, but guided, questions in order to obtain insight from the participants' experiences of this intervention project.

Both instruments were submitted to four experts for review:

- Dr. Reg Johnson, professor of spiritual formation at Asbury Theological Seminary, who provided his comments from the viewpoint of spiritual formation;
- Dr. Samuel Law, pastor of the ABC Chinese church with a background in biomedical research, who holds a PhD in biomedical engineering and is also a PhD candidate in intercultural studies at Asbury Theological Seminary, who provided comments from the viewpoint of pastoral ministry;
- Dr. Shan Shan Li, who holds a PhD in instructional system design and was a potential participant of this project; and,
- Mrs. Jing Guo Wang, a current PhD candidate in biostatistics at the University of Kentucky, who was also a potential participant of this project.

All four of them received a documentation package containing a brief description of the project, purpose statement, research questions, definition of terms, and the two instruments. A detailed evaluation form was also included for them to express their

opinions and suggestions on each of the questions (see Appendix A). Upon recollecting the evaluation forms, I discussed with my dissertation mentor the suggestions made by the four reviewers. Several changes were made to refine the survey and the interview protocol.

With regard to the suggestion to add more categories for collecting demographic data (e.g., marriage status, educational background), I decided not to adopt it for two reasons. First, the items are not critical intervening variables in this study. Second, questions about marriage status or educational level are sensitive topics within the study population. Consequently, I chose to avoid asking questions that would arouse a strong emotional reaction. Concerning the comments regarding ambiguity or incomplete wording, I made changes accordingly. Concerning suggestions for adding more questions to cover the broader aspects of participants' spiritual lives, I made the decision of whether or not to integrate them based on the curriculum content. I adopted Guo's suggestion to mix questions that measure the same variable in order to ascertain better congruence on the part of the respondents.

Two reviewers made comments regarding question number 6 of the interview protocol, which asks "What do you think about this discipleship program? Has it impacted you? In what ways?" They suggested that I should solicit opinions on specific components of the discipleship program. I decided to ask the question open-endedly first and then give prompts if necessary in order to garner more specific data. Therefore, questions 6 and 7 were combined and reworded: "This discipleship program consists of different components. What do you think of each of them (e.g., oral teaching; hands-on,

on-site practice; small group experience; homework practice)?" The revised instruments were submitted to my mentor for final approval (see Appendixes B and C).

Variables

The *independent variable* in this study was the eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program. Several components of this program are factors that may influence the measured outcomes. I led the teaching of a comprehensive presentation of God's will and purpose for his salvation plan based on Ephesians 1-3. This overview teaching was designed to increase the participants' understanding and appreciation of their privileged relationship with Christ as well as with his body—the new community of which they are now part. I led the participants to practice various spiritual disciplines/activities that they could flexibly incorporate into their daily lives (see Appendix E). Such practices are designed to facilitate their awareness/experience of God's presence in their daily lives and thus increase their commitment to and satisfaction with their relationship with God. I taught from Ephesians 4-6 on what Christian relationships should look like in the new community God created through Christ in order to change the participants' understanding of Christlike relational behaviors. On-site practice of these relational behaviors sought to provide practical ways for participants to apply those behaviors in their daily settings. According to Ogden, "positive peer pressure leads us to follow through" on commitments (169). The small group portion of each session sought to provide a relational accountability that would encourage participants to put into practice what they learned and to offer support to the participants as they implemented these behaviors in daily life. Such accountability serves as one of the factors that might enhance change in participants' relational behaviors.

The *dependent variables* in this study are any measurable changes in the participants' relationships with God and with others in their communities. An operational definition on growth in relationship with God is their knowledge about God's purpose and God's way throughout human history and as well as their capacity to experience God's loving presence in their daily lives. Changes in this understanding can be attributed to the teaching and the guided practices they receive from the independent variable.

Growth in relationship with others in their communities is the second dependent variable. The definition for such growth in relationship with others in their communities is whether they understand and know how to practice the various Christian behaviors delineated in the book of Ephesians 4-6. The teaching and guided practices they received from the independent variable can have the potential to cause change in this regard.

In this study, several *intervening variables* can affect the outcome. I have taken steps to control their effect on the dependent variables.

Length of participants' attendance in the program. The eight-session training program sought progressively to construct and integrate the concepts and practices in the hearts of the participants. Absence from any number of the sessions could impact either their understanding or actual practices of what was taught in the session. To ensure a more stable attendance, I sent out weekly e-mails as reminders. I also asked the small group leaders to encourage their group members to participate faithfully.

Participants' faithfulness in doing their take-home practices. Each session of the program left participants certain practices to do during the week. The experience gained through practices deepened their understanding of a particular concept. Positive experiences could even increase a person's willingness and commitment to do what they

desire to do. Lack of practice and the experience resulting from practice also inevitably affected growth in the subject area. To encourage application in daily life, I sent mid-week reminders via e-mail to elicit active participation.

Teaching methods and learning styles. The way each participant learns may be different due to his or her different demographic background or learning style (David Kolb). Teaching that focuses on only one dimensional style may impede the learning result of participants who prefer another style. To optimize the maximum effect, this program strived to employ a variety of teaching methods to allow participants options and experiences that were most meaningful to them.

Effectiveness of the small group leaders. Small group participation played an important role in this program. Whether the small group leaders were effective in leading discussion, sharing, and cultivating an atmosphere of love and trust among the members could greatly influence participants' desire or commitment to carry out their desired practices during the week. To increase the small group leaders' effectiveness in facilitating change in the understanding and behaviors of participants, I met with them on a weekly basis during the implementation of the project.

A total of ten meetings took place every Sunday morning from 9:45-10:30 in one of the classrooms at ABC. I trained the leaders in three ways. First, they learned about the role and characteristics of an effective group leader, such as building trust, exhibiting genuine care, listening reflectively, and providing real-life examples/testimonies (Ogden 154-60). Second, as a group, they learned to share with one another their own experience of practicing the homework from the project. Third, we discussed ideas on how better to facilitate each respective group's different dynamics and scenarios. Leaders trained and

equipped by these weekly meetings were more likely to serve as catalysts of change among the groups they led (Watson 81).

Demographics, such as gender, educational background, personal situation, and length of being a Christian could very likely be intervening variables in this study as a consequence of different learning styles and abilities. I included these variables when performing multivariate data analysis to show their respective effect on the dependent variables.

Reliability and Validity

Consistency of the design and administration procedures of instrumentation ensured the reliability of the measurement, while correspondence among the test scores and the subjects being measured supported the validity of the findings. The following actions describe how I increased the reliability and validity of the study.

Reliability. Both the pretest and posttest were administered at the beginning of the session when the participants were most focused and not as tired as toward the end of the session. I arranged for the participants to answer the survey at the same time and place, which allowed them to hear the same instructions on the procedure for completing the survey.

All questions on the survey are necessary, according to the four reviewers, for measuring the variables. They marked the wording of most questions as clear, including the two potential peer participants. On those questions that were marked unclear, I considered their comments and made changes accordingly after discussion with my mentor. Respondents to the survey were encouraged to ask questions on any item that

was not clear to them. Clarification for those questions was made to the whole group so that all respondents had a similar understanding of special terms.

The survey forms that all respondents received had a standardized format with the five-point answering scale printed below each question to ease the procedure for response. All completed surveys were returned on-site to avoid distraction and, as well, to garner a higher response rate. The whole procedure was administered consistently during both pre- and posttests.

To ensure consistency within the qualitative aspect of this study, I served as the proctor for both focus groups. I followed the same semi-structured interview protocol and used the same audio recording method for data collection.

Validity. I carefully designed and selected questions for the survey so that the test content and the lesson content matched the purpose of the research and to measure the independent variables of this study appropriately. The reviewers also confirmed the same correspondence regarding the semi-structured interview questions.

The five-point scale provided respondents with a broader range to express their subjective understanding or feelings about a construct and, consequently, provided more precision in measuring change of distribution (Fowler 96). Some questions were asked more than once using a different angle and with different wording to reveal patterns of association among respondents. At the last session, when I administered the posttest, I asked the respondents to return the survey on-site. The 85 percent response rate increased both the validity and generalizability of the study, which make the findings suitable to apply to other Chinese immigrant churches in the US. These were the efforts made to create a reliable and valid study.

Data Collection

This eight-session discipleship training program ran for eight weeks consecutively. At the beginning of the first session, after a brief welcome for the participants, I explained the purpose of this research and the significance of the survey. While assuring them that taking the survey was voluntary, I also encouraged them to participate in the survey so that they could contribute to improving the church's future ministry design.

A standardized, clearly printed pretest survey was placed in advance in each participant's student folder with an identifying number on both the survey and folder. I then went through the procedure by giving instructions on how to mark their answers on the scale and announced that they could ask questions at anytime during the survey. Completed surveys were returned via a collection box. The whole process took about ten minutes.

On the last session of the program, I set aside ten minutes before the mid-session break for the participants to fill out the posttest survey. I passed out the surveys and asked those who chose to respond to write down their ID numbers on the surveys. A separate sign-up sheet was also passed around for those who wanted to volunteer to form the participants' focus groups. I gave the same instructions as previously but added explanation about the purpose of the focus group as well as reminded them to put down the number of sessions they actually attended out of the eight meetings. Completed surveys were again collected on-site to assure a higher return rate. Data collected from both pre- and posttests were recorded and a database created using a Microsoft Excel (2010) spreadsheet for further analysis.

To collect the qualitative data for this study, I conducted three focus group interviews. The leaders' focus group interview took place one day after the last training session on a Sunday morning at ABC. Upon collecting back the posttest survey and the volunteer sign-up sheet, I contacted all the volunteers for interview by e-mail within three days after finishing the program and confirmed with them the time and location to meet. The two participants' focus group interviews took place the following week on a separate timeframe in one of the classrooms at ABC church. Three months later, I met with six participants on separate locations to conduct another postsession interview. Together, the three focus groups and the postsession interviews helped me discern the overall impact of the program.

Before conducting the focus group interview, I set up the room by arranging chairs in a circle and tested the audiotaping system to ensure a successful recording of the whole interview. Procedures and issues about confidentiality were explained to the interviewees at the beginning of the meeting. I followed the protocol in asking questions and used probes to obtain additional information when needed. I then transcribed the recorded information and coded the data by descriptions and themes for further analysis.

Data Analysis

The SGA survey provided the quantitative data for this study. The data was organized in Microsoft Excel (2010) and analyzed by comparative analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistics. I used a t-test to compare individual variance between their pre- and posttests. In addition, I used a frequency table to observe any significant correlation between the intervening variables and the dependent variables.

The semi-structured interview protocol provided qualitative data, which was recorded in its entirety and later transcribed. I performed a preliminary exploratory analysis by reading through the transcribed data and writing notes in the margin to record my general sense of the data. In this initial step, I sought to find what the interviewees described as having the greatest impact from the intervention on their spiritual lives as well as what components of the project played a significant role in changing their relationships with God and with people. After a few more such readings, recurring descriptions and themes were coded and divided into groups for content analysis.

Ethical Procedures

Participants' psychological well-being were protected throughout the study. A consent form that explained the purpose of the study and guaranteed confidentiality was given to and signed by each participant (see Appendix D). By signing the form, participants also understood that responding to the survey and participating in the focus group interview were completely voluntary.

Each participant's identity remained confidential during data collection. Only a random number was given to each of the pre and postsurvey forms for analysis purpose. When transcribing the audio recording of the focus group interview, I also used random numbers to represent each interviewee instead of using their real names.

During the process of data analysis, only one outside analyst and I viewed the documents. All survey forms, along with the recording and transcriptions, were destroyed after I completed my dissertation defense.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

Mainland Chinese scholars/students and immigrants are converting to Christianity in increasing numbers in the US and have become the majority of most immigrant Chinese church congregations in the US. However, many of them have only received a weak, incomplete, and fragmented foundation of the gospel message since their point of conversion. The lack of follow-up discipleship training further impedes the necessary spiritual growth that Christ desires for his followers. Without a growing relationship with God, their Christian witness consequently suffers both at home and in the community.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program among adult mainland Chinese Christians who attend the ABC Chinese Christian Church to determine whether the program fostered growth in the participants' relationships with God and people in their current settings.

Participants

Thirty-two people from the ABC church registered for the discipleship training after the initial announcement in January 2014. Of those who agreed to participate in the research through the pretest and posttest evaluation procedures (survey and focus groups), twenty-two samples were considered valid based on the following two criteria: (1) country of origin (only those who are from mainland China fall into the target of this research) and (2) number of training sessions completed (only those who participated in six or more sessions were included in the data). Of the twenty-two valid samples,

eighteen people completed the full session, three attended seven sessions, and one participated six times.

The demographic profile of the twenty-two valid samples is a close portrait of the ABC congregation (see Figure 4.1). They are between 20-60 years of age. Most of them are married and hold college degrees and above. More than half of the participants are young believers (response to years since conversion being less than five years and between five to ten years); less than half have come to the Christian faith for over ten years.

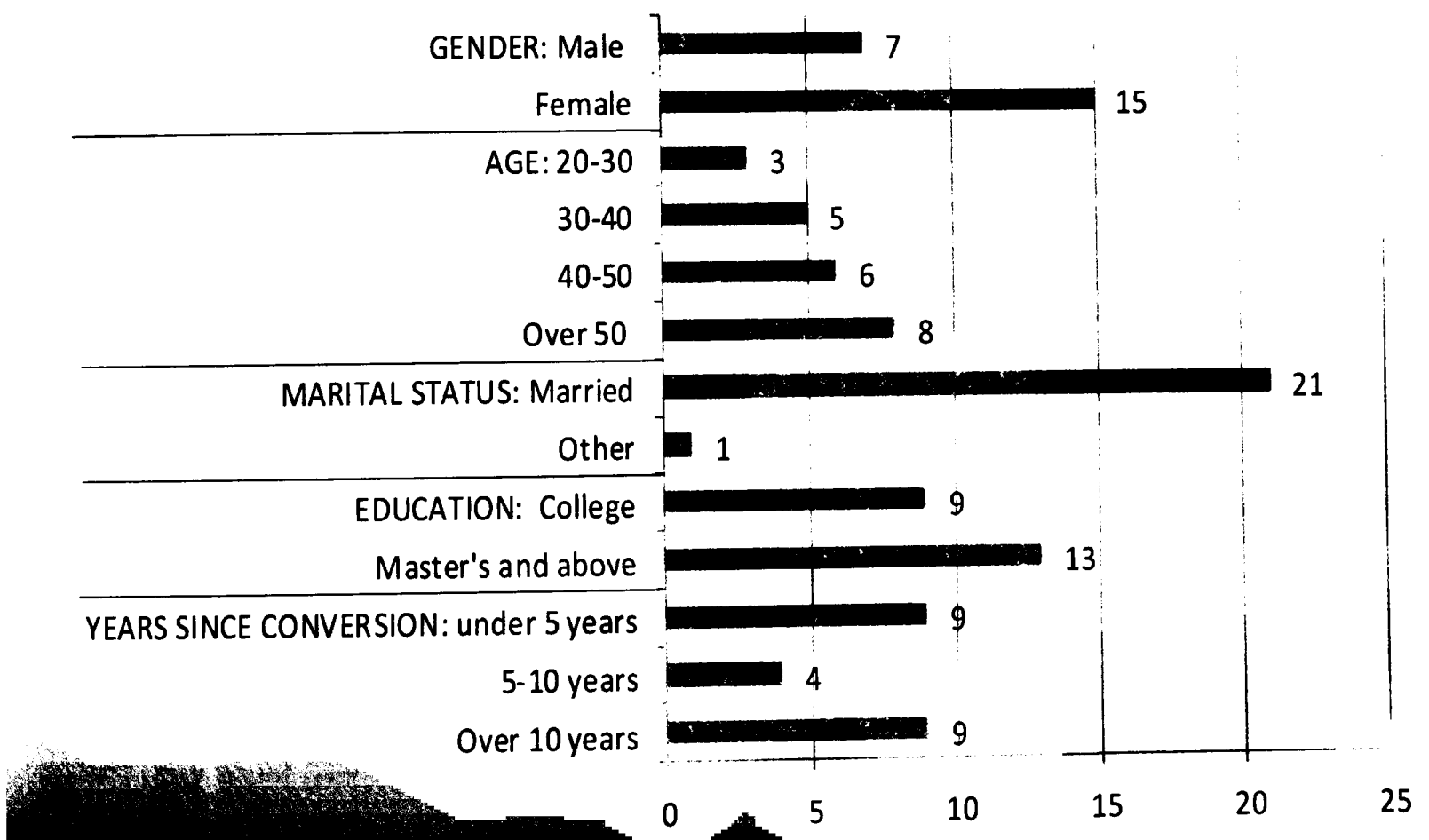


Figure 4.1. Demographics of participants (N=22).

Research Question #1

What is the participants' initial relational quality with God?

The survey contains twelve questions (categorized as Q1) that define this relational quality with God. These are subdivided into two subgroups. One group of four questions (categorized as Q1a) measured the participants' understanding of God's will and his ways for the Church and the world, while another group of eight questions (categorized as Q1b) pertain to their attitude toward and practices of devotional time with God.

The pretest scores of the first group of questions (Q1a) show that participants varied in their understanding of God's will and his ways for the church and the world (see Table 4.1). They are most broadly varied on the concept about sanctification ($SD > 1$). In contrast, scores lean toward a narrower distribution ($SD =$ or < 0.5) on the category of devotional experience and practices (see Table 4.2), demonstrating a consistency in quality of devotional life across the participants. All twenty-two samples chose either agree or strongly agree for question number 7, indicating that they can sense God's loving hand working in their lives. Additionally, 95 percent of the participants (answering agree/strongly agree) express little or no difficulty praying to God with complete honesty about their thoughts and feelings. As well, 95 percent of them (answering agree/strongly agree) pray more than for their own needs but include giving God praise and thanksgiving.

Table 4.1. Participants' Initial Understanding of God's Will and His Way (N=22)

Questions	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
3. The transformation of my life is solely by God's grace; there is nothing I can do to participate in that change.	3.32	1.55	18	18	9	23	32
4. I read/study the Bible for the purpose of allowing God's word to change my thinking and actions.	4.36	0.95	Nil	9	5	27	59
18. I know God's overall will for the world, including me.	4.27	0.77	Nil	Nil	18	36	45
28. I understand true repentance to be telling God how sorry I am about not obeying his commands.	4.09	0.97	Nil	9	14	36	41

Table 4.2. Participants' Initial Attitudes and Practices of Devotional Time (N=22)

Questions	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. I am aware of God's presence with me.	4.27	0.88	Nil	5	14	32	50
7. I have a sense of how God in his love is working in my life.	4.73	0.46	Nil	Nil	Nil	27	73
9. I find it difficult to pray to God.	2.05	1.13	45	18	23	14	Nil
12. I practice regular (approx. 3-4 times per week) devotional time/activities.	4.05	0.90	Nil	Nil	36	23	41
16. I look forward to my daily devotional time with God.	4.23	0.81	Nil	Nil	23	32	45
19. I can be completely honest about my thoughts and feelings in my prayer to God.	4.45	0.60	Nil	Nil	5	45	50
21. My prayer includes thanksgiving and praise, not only presenting requests or expressing needs.	4.55	0.60	Nil	Nil	5	36	59
23. When God makes me aware of his displeasure in an area of my life, I respond to his leading.	4.14	0.64	Nil	Nil	14	59	27

Research Question #2

What are the participants' initial understanding and practices of Christian relational principles and behavior in their communities?

Eighteen questions were used to define this relationship (categorized as Q2), and were divided into two subgroups. The first group (categorized as Q2a) measured the participants' understanding of Christian principles on interpersonal relationship (see Table 4.3), while the other group (categorized as Q2b) inquired as to their attitudes toward, and actual practices of, those Christian relational behaviors (see Table 4.4).

Table 4.3. Participants' Initial Understanding of Christian Relationship Principles

Questions	n	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
2. I believe that members of the Church should avoid conflict.	21	4.33	0.73	Nil	Nil	14	38	48
5. I need to give absolute submission to leadership at home and church without questioning them.	22	2.82	1.10	14	23	36	23	5
8. I need other people to help me in my spiritual growth.	22	4.73	0.46	Nil	Nil	Nil	27	73
24. To tell a person what he/she has done wrong is too risky to our relationship; I should just pray for him/her.	22	3.41	0.91	Nil	18	32	41	9
27. Expressing anger does not please God; I should try to control it as much as possible.	22	4.14	1.08	Nil	14	9	27	50
30. I believe my words or actions have impact on the spiritual well-being of other people in my community.	22	4.45	0.60	Nil	Nil	5	45	50

Table 4.4. Participants' Initial Practice of Christian Relationship Principles

Questions	n	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
6. I find it difficult to forgive others when their words or actions hurt me.	22	2.68	1.25	18	32	23	18	9
10. Before I offer feedback/comments to others, I pray and consider whether it benefits others.	22	3.41	0.91	Nil	23	18	55	5
11. I often encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than criticizing their weaknesses.	22	3.86	0.77	Nil	Nil	36	41	23
13. I often am willing to admit my errors in relationships (with families, coworkers, neighbors, etc.)	22	3.73	0.94	5	Nil	32	45	18
14. I regularly set aside time to participate in small group meeting.	22	4.73	0.55	Nil	Nil	5	18	77
15. I am intentional about seeking to live in harmony with members of my family.	22	4.36	0.66	nil	Nil	9	45	45
17. I almost always humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt.	22	3.68	0.89	Nil	5	45	27	23
20. I ask for feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth.	22	3.59	0.91	Nil	9	41	32	18
22. I take time to listen and understand other people's thoughts or feelings.	21	4.14	0.65	Nil	Nil	14	57	29
25. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my spiritual growth.	22	3.95	0.65	Nil	Nil	23	59	18
26. My attitudes and behaviors are consistent at home and church.	22	3.91	0.68	Nil	Nil	27	55	18
29. I am willing to share my personal issues/struggles in my small group/community.	22	3.55	0.80	Nil	5	50	32	14

Pretest scores gathered from the first group of questions (Q2a) show that participants were consistent in their understanding of certain topics but varied in others. To question 8, all respondents acknowledged their need for others in spiritual growth (answering agree or strongly agree), which closely corresponds to question 30 where 95 percent of participants (answering agree or strongly agree) hold the belief that their words and deeds would have impact in other people's spiritual well-being. In accordance with

such belief, 95 percent of them (answering agree or strongly agree) indicated that they regularly attend Christian fellowship or small group meetings (question 14). When answering questions relating to more negative emotions and situations such as conflict and confrontation, respondents largely fall on the conservative side of avoidance (questions 2 and 24). Additionally, they varied widely in their understanding on topics such as obedience toward authority or leadership in church as well as how best for Christians to deal with anger issues ($SD > 1$; see Table 4.3, questions 5 and 27).

Responses to the other questions that evaluated participants' relational behaviors with people are generally well clustered ($SD < 1$). The data implies that the participants exhibited similar behavioral patterns in their community.

A linear regression analysis performed on the two question sets between participants' relationship with God (Q1) and relationship with People (Q2) is shown to be significantly correlated ($p = 0.0271$). The fit plot is shown in Figure 4.2. Correlations across the subgroups of questions were not significant ($p > 0.05$).

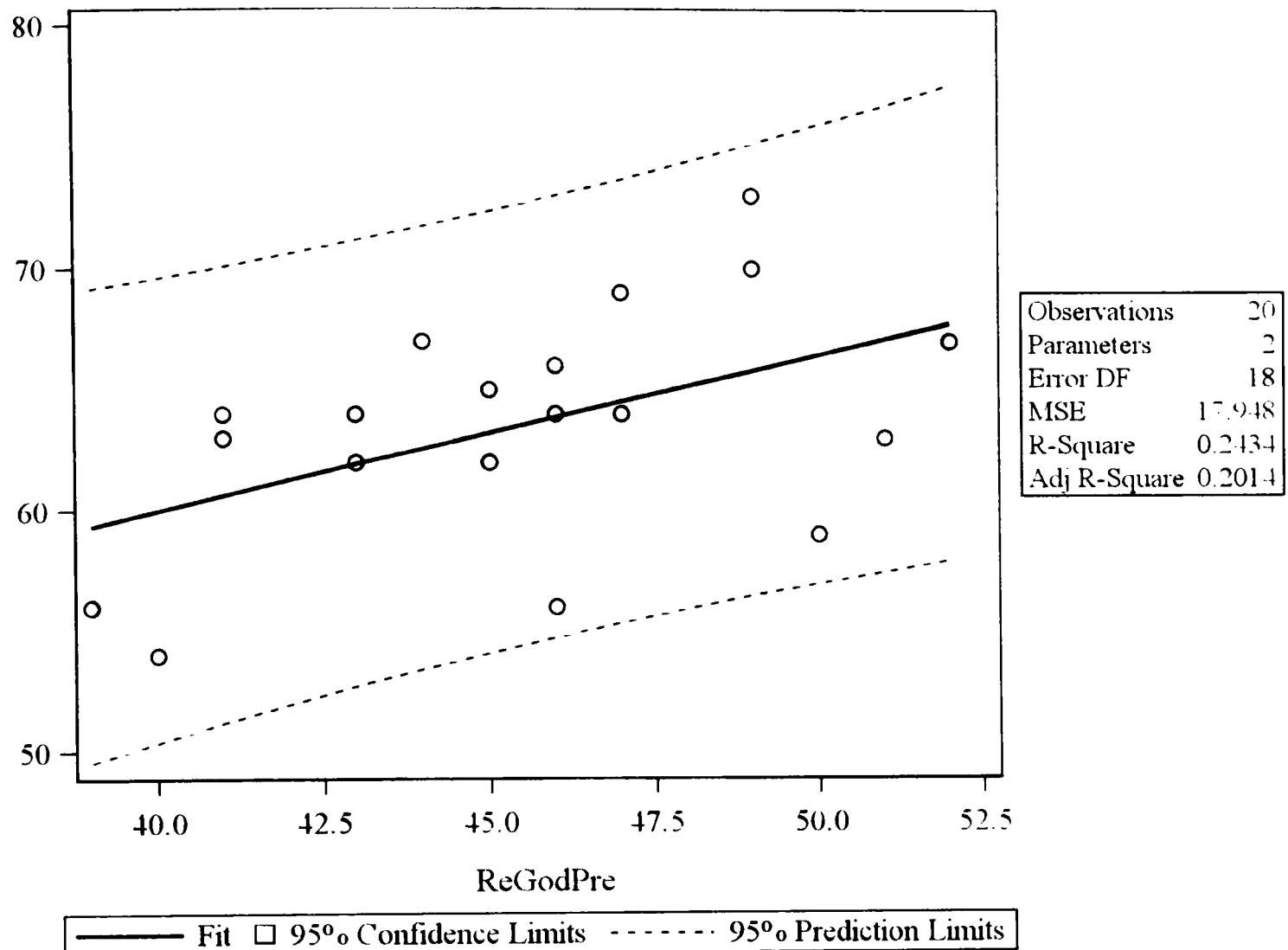


Figure 4.2. Linear regression of relationships between God and people (pre).

Research Question #3

To what extent does the program facilitate growth of the participants' relationships with God and with people?

To answer this question, I collected both quantitative data and qualitative data. Paired t-test analysis was applied to the participants' pretest and posttest scores to measure changes resulting from the intervention. To address areas which the quantitative analysis could not acquire, qualitative analysis was gathered through three focus group interviews to provide further evidence of the overall impact of the intervening discipleship program. I first present findings from the quantitative data and supplement

them with a summary of major themes that arose from the qualitative data collected from focus group interviews.

T-Test Analysis

Data analyses using paired two sample t-tests were performed on individual questions and on the various question sets (Q1 and Q2 and their subgroups Q1a, Q1b, Q2a, and Q2b), comparing pre- and posttest responses. Of the thirty questions, only four were found to have significant change ($p < 0.05$; see Table 4.5). Of the six sets analyzed, only one set, reflective of participants' understanding of God's will and his way (Q1a), was found to be significant ($Pr > |t| = 0.017$; see Table 4.6).

Table 4.5. Paired Sample T-tests, Significant Individual Questions (N = 22)

Question	Mean		SD		Pr > t
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
Q3. The transformation of my life is solely by God's grace; there is nothing I can do to participate in that change.	4.32	2.68	0.99	2.04	0.000032
Q4. I read/study the Bible for the purpose of allowing God's word to change my thinking and actions.	3.32	4.36	2.41	0.91	0.004000
Q20. I ask for feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth.	3.59	3.86	0.82	0.50	0.040000
Q28. I understand true repentance to be telling God how sorry I am about not obeying his commands.	4.09	3.59	0.94	1.87	0.030000

Table 4.6. Paired Sample T-test Results (N = 22)

Group	Mean	SD	Pr > t
Relationship with God (Q1)	-1.136	3.968	0.194
Q1a	-1.227	2.224	0.017*
Q1b	-0.091	2.910	0.885
Relationship with people (Q2)	-0.684	5.745	0.610
Q2a	-0.571	2.520	0.311
Q2b	0.350	4.233	0.716

* $p < 0.05$

Relationship with God. In the four questions that evaluate participants' relationships with God in terms of their understanding of God's will and his way (Q1a), three questions show significant change (see Table 4.5). Participants' mean score of their concepts of sanctification changed from a mean of 4.32 to 2.68 (question 3). Their understanding of the purpose of studying the Bible increased from a mean of 3.32 to 4.36 (question 4). In addition, their conception of repentance changed from a mean of 4.09 to a mean of 3.59 (question 28). The t-test analysis shows no significant change in participants' devotional practices or satisfaction (Q2b).

Relationship with people. I found no significant change from the group of questions that evaluate participants' understanding of Christian interpersonal relationships as a whole (Q2) and as subgroups (Q2a and Q2b). However, their answers to question 20 regarding relational practice were found to have significant change (mean score from 3.59 to 3.86, $p < 0.05$), indicating that participants are more willing to ask for feedback from others to help them discover areas for relationship growth.

Correlation between Relationships with God and with People (Posttest)

A linear regression analysis performed on the two posttest question sets (Q1 and Q2) between participants' relationships with God and with People remained significantly correlated (see Figure 4.3). Linear regression analysis performed across the subsets (Q1a, Q1b, Q2a, Q2b) did not show significant correlations.

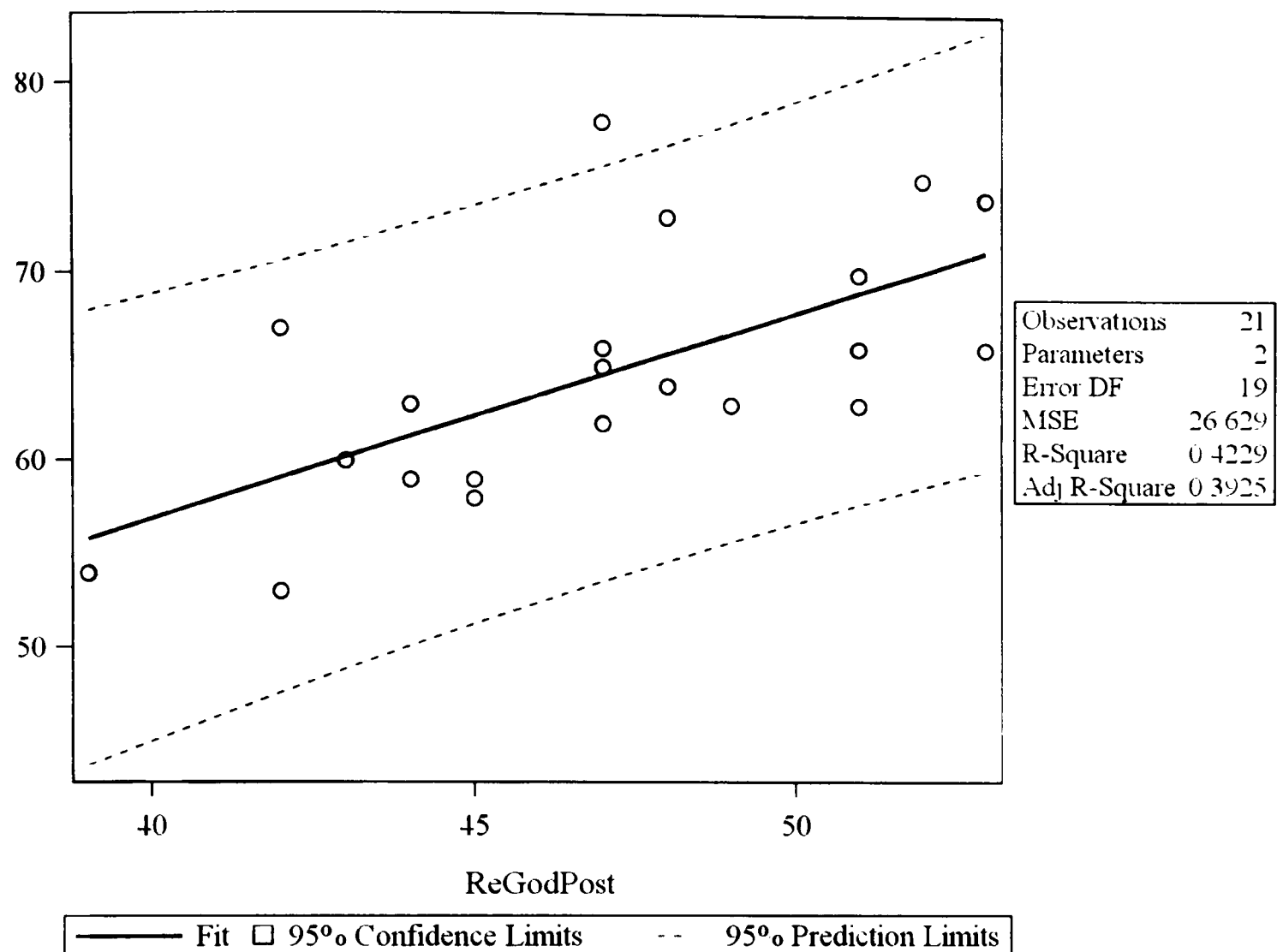


Figure 4.3. Linear regression of relationships between God and people (Post).

Correlation with Intervening Demographic Variables

Intervening variables including participants' demographics also underwent paired t-test analysis to determine any significant correlations with changes in understanding or behavior. The results reveal that only education at college levels and above were significantly correlated with participants' understanding of God's will (Q1a, $p = 0.0358$) and participants' understanding of Christian relational principles (Q2a, $p = 0.0257$). The other demographics, such as gender, marital status, and years since conversion, were not significantly correlated with changes in understanding or behavior.

Summary of Focus Group Findings concerning Change/Growth in Participants' Relationships with God and with People

A total of twenty volunteers participated in three focus group interviews, which took place at three different times. The first three open-ended questions from the interview protocol inquired about participants' self-perceived change in their relationships with God and with people, resulting from the eight-week discipleship training. The following subheadings surfaced as recurring themes from their answers.

A fuller understanding of God's will and saving purpose. Almost identical to the results from the quantitative data, the majority of the interviewees shared dramatic improvement in their understanding of God's overall will and his ways for humanity and the world. "Broadened vision" is the one phrase interviewees repeatedly used to describe their change in understanding. Additionally, they claimed to gain a "more clear," "more complete," and "more comprehensive and deeper" picture of God's ultimate will, which reaches its climax in bringing the whole universe to unity in Christ. Interviewee H described vividly her altered understanding: "The understanding of God's will had broadened my vision to see the mystery of God, and brought me to the realization that I am not to ask God to join my small world, but rather, we are to join his grand plan." Similarly, interviewee K shared her new perspective as the result of the biblical worldview lesson:

[S]eeing my role in God's world changed my understanding of his purpose of calling me into faith. It is no longer simply for my personal need.... I now can see a much deeper and further purpose of his calling which is bigger and wider than I used to imagine.

Interviewee J resonated with a similar contrast:

Before, I only knew that being a Christian is good for everyone and is good in each period of life on the earth.... Now that I learned how God renewed his covenant with humanity to reveal his everlasting love for us, I have come to realize how wonderful and perfect God's plan is for each human being.

The impact of the biblical worldview on persons' relationships with God is thus evident and should not be overlooked in discipleship ministry.

An increased sense of personal value, meaning, and missional purpose in life.

The change in understanding leads to shifting attitudes as well. Overwhelmingly, the interviewees expressed an increased sense of value, meaning, and missional purpose in life due to the expanded perspective on salvation's cosmic implications. The following quotes reflect the majority's transformed mentality.

The biblical worldview had indeed deepened my sense of mission and purpose in life. I now understand that being a Christian is not just learning how to become a better person. In actuality, our lives are very significant, carrying decisive impact in the world. We may seem very small, but our every word and deed to others carry eternal meaning in God's grand plan. (Interviewee L)

I gained a stronger sense of living a missional life ... spreading the gospel and living a holy life so that our church would glorify God on earth. (Interviewee G)

I used to see church simply as an organization. Now I see that our church's life together is as significant as a divine revelation to both humans and angels. I have a new missional sense of life. (Interviewee C)

I used to perceive Christian faith to be the means for personal benefit or heavenly blessings. The first lesson on God's ultimate will revealed a much bigger goal for my life. I now feel greater significance in being a Christian. The broader perspective on God's will also has enlightened my vision, granting me specific goals and direction in life. (Interviewee H)

The greatest impact of the eight-week learning is the understanding of the value of my life. I used to have a low self-esteem; but during these eight weeks, I came to understand how important and valuable I am to God. I

am his child and the purpose of my life is to unite with him; this is the highest state of life I have ever imagined for myself. Only when I began to see my value, can I begin to love myself.... (Interviewee M)

These representative responses reveal a direct connection between persons' understanding of God and attitudes toward life.

Understanding of Christian growth. Several interviewees shared how their conceptions about Christian sanctification were challenged and evolved as result of the training program. For example, L shared her new insight:

My confusion was resolved by realizing that I have a responsibility to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the process of Christian transformation. Before, I was not sure of whether I should rely entirely on God's grace or rely on my efforts. Now I know who is working within me to will and to act. Even if it is only a small matter, I can sense the divine motivator behind my action.

Moreover, many have been awakened by seeing Jesus' life and death as the template for Christian growth and that trials and suffering are likely to be part of this growing process. "No longer do I pray for a trouble-free life," and, "I now know that I must endure all the difficulties in life as Christ did" were repeated expressions from the interviewees.

Importance of unity in church. Interviewees shared their renewed understanding of the importance of church unity and the resulting changes in their attitudes toward others in the church community. Many described the before-and-after contrast with phrases such as, "before I tended to keep my relationship with God as a private matter," and, "now I learn to see people and happenings in church from the perspective of the need for unity." Interviewees, as well, expressed their change of attitude and actions as a result of learning the significance of unity in God's world. B indicated, "I am now more willing to open myself to fellowship with others." G is an elder of ABC church and one of the small group leaders during the eight-week training. She admitted, "I used to avoid

confronting church members with their wrong doing; but realizing the significance and the true spirit of unity encouraged me to speak the truth in love with others.” Such transformed attitudes toward relationship with people fulfill the goal of the intervention project.

Renewed desire to enrich devotional life. The various spiritual disciplines introduced in the eight-week discipleship training were well received. Several interviewees shared that they gain new understanding on the practice of prayer to be “more than just asking for things”; on the contrary, they learned to pray for “spiritual enlightenment” and “spiritual discernment.” Additionally, many interviewees came to appreciate the practice of the prayer of examen. The following highlights some of the sharing:

- D—“The prayer of examen helped me in improving my relationship with others.”
- J—“The prayer of examen is very helpful. It causes me to look at my inner motivation.”
- H—“The prayer of examen has changed me quite a bit. Before I tended to focus on others’ wrongdoings, but now, through the intentional practice of self-examen, I am able to recognize my own shortcomings as well.”
- F—“The prayer of examen greatly helps me in cultivating inner holiness. I learn to serve from inside out rather than emulating what other people do in church....”

Other interviewees mentioned how incorporating spiritual practices taught in the discipleship training enriched their devotional lives: “My devotional time becomes more focused and has a direction,” and, “My devotional time becomes much more fruitful,”

were the two most repeated phrases used. One of the small group leaders shared that her group members appreciated the spiritual disciplines because most of the disciplines taught are not time-consuming; they are “very suitable and practical for busy career people who cannot afford spending hours in connecting with God.” In general, participants showed renewed desire to enrich their devotional lives in a fresh way.

Useful and practical Christian relational principles. While few interviewees mentioned changes in Christian relational principles, almost all interviewees stated that they experienced changes in their attitudes toward others and shared stories and examples of how they began to practice the relational principles taught in the discipleship program. The following quotes illustrate their application:

- B—“I like how applicable these relational principles are to me. For example, I came to understand how to say things that would build others up and found the principles very helpful when I applied them to my family life and workplace.”
- D—“Empathetic listening skill is very helpful. I applied it with one of my lab coworkers last week and found that our conversations went much deeper than usual.”
- F—“These principles made biblical teaching come to life. I learned to think before responding to my family and began to see change in our relationship.”
- G—“Before, I knew that Christians should control our temper, but I never treated it as a big deal, and often still lost my temper. However, seeing the significance of our relationships in God’s ultimate purpose, I have resolved not to sin in my anger and have applied the steps that were taught, especially to my relationship with spouse and children.”

- J—“The understanding of Trinity greatly changed my view of other people. I am able to accept and understand those who are different from me.”
- L—“I learned to write down my thoughts in order to slow down my emotional reaction, and in this way I was able to avoid sinning in my anger....”

In summary, the findings from the focus group interviews reveal that participants experience most noticeable change/growth in their understanding of God’s will for humans and their world. They also identified changes in the area of Christian relational behavior. Comparatively, less noticeable changes appeared in their improvement of devotional life and their conceptual change of Christian relational principles.

Research Question #4

What elements/components in this program are most beneficial or influential toward the growth of the participants’ relationships with God and with people in their current settings?

Qualitative data collected from the three focus groups provides some answers to this question. My coded data analysis shows that the interviewees repeatedly identified the following elements as very helpful in enhancing their learning and, consequently, contributing to their improvement in relationships with God and with people.

Seeing the Big Picture

Interviewees overwhelmingly voiced the benefit of learning key biblical truths in a more systematic and comprehensive way compared to the sporadic teaching they normally received at ABC church. Interviewee H noted, “[W]e often are pointed to see the individual tree but failed to comprehend the more significant forest that stands at the background.” A majority stated that systematic teaching on central biblical themes, such

as worldview or salvation, allows them to see, both mentally and visually through the teaching props, the big picture of which they are a part and, consequently, enables them to shift their attitude toward God and people. Interviewee A described her change:

I am able to connect all the dots that were previously there in my mind. Knowing God's ultimate will for this world has changed my goal in life—I now desire to pursue his greater purpose. As a result of seeing the big picture, I also find myself having more compassion and patience in my interactions with difficult people in my life.

Similarly, Interviewee C shared that the vivid worldview from the portraits in the book of Ephesians helps her: “[I] feel the presence of God in my life in a more intimate way; before, I could only view God as an abstract being.” One small group leader reported her members’ deep appreciation for the comprehensive presentation of central biblical themes. She commented, “Such insight into the whole Bible is something that laypeople, even with years of conversion, cannot glean by themselves. This panoramic view of how God unfolds his plan in history is of great importance to our knowledge.” Hence, presenting the bigger picture of the biblical stories is indeed a worthy effort for today’s Christian education.

Multisensory Learning Experiences

The interviewees gave very positive affirmation on the multisensory teaching methods that they experienced in this program. Specifically, they repeatedly highlighted the pictorial diagrams used in the program to show relationships between subjects, skits, on-site communication practice, songs, video clips, and the various teaching props that provided the participants with tangible reminders of the topics covered in the program as “effective,” “engaging,” and “memorable.” Interviewee D stated, “I may not remember everything you said in the class, but I will always remember the three diagrams that were

displayed on the wall.” Many others shared the same long-lasting effect from the multisensory experience they received in the program.

Small Group Experience

The cross-generational small group format was different from the usual age or background-oriented settings to which the participants belong; however, while one small group leader reported that his group members (all male members) were not used to candid sharing with one another, the majority of the interviewees gave positive feedback on their experience of participating in such a group. For example, Interviewee B stated, “I am encouraged by the candid sharing from other group members; it enables me to open myself to others in a reciprocal way.” Moreover, other people affirmed the benefit of the small group component in promoting deeper understanding among church members and hence, creating a more genuine sense of unity in the ABC church. Interviewee J commented, “I came to know them as people with feelings and weaknesses as well.... [S]uch sharing shortens our distance.... I really like the sense of transparency among church members.” Interviewee G summarized the benefit she gained through participating in the small group session:

I have learned to listen to people who have a different background and belong to different age group from me. I certainly gained new perspectives from them, and learn from their life experience. This is a very meaningful relational practice for achieving unity in our church.

In summary, the small group component in this intervention project proved to be a valuable experience for ABC church and supported its central role in growing disciples as noted in Chapter 2.

Practical Steps to Follow

Interviewees appreciated the take-home sheets that contained practical steps to follow for practicing each new skill and spiritual disciplines taught in the class. Several of them shared the similar discovery that Interviewee H found: “[S]piritual matters no longer are abstract or beyond my reach, for I now have some concrete exercises to cultivate spirituality.” Interviewee K shared her story of how reviewing the steps for attentive listening before visiting a sister in spiritual crisis had “dramatically changed [their] conversation into a positive turn.” Still, Interviewee L commented that while she has been Christian for a long time and had learned from the pulpit the importance of holy living, she however “never had people teach [her] how to love, how to forgive, or how to deal with conflict.” She was relieved to find simple, yet doable, steps to begin the journey.

Other Findings from the Posttraining Interview

In order to gauge the long-term effect of the eight-week discipleship training program, I collected qualitative data through interviews and field notes from six participants between three to four months after the completion of the training. I asked them to reflect upon whether what they had learned left an impact on their faith journey in any way. The following descriptions summarize the most common themes derived from their reflections.

Gradual effect of transformation. Interviewees all shared that a deeper and broader understanding of God’s will and his way has continuously and subtly created a transformative effect in their ongoing faith journey. Most of them mentioned their change of attitude toward difficult relationships and circumstances in life. The words/phrases

they used most often when describing their attitudes were “more patience,” “more empathy,” “more willingness to forgive,” and “more effort to control anger.” They also shared stories about how such attitude changes led to improvement in their relationships with others. For example, Interviewee L experienced transformed relationship with her coworker:

There used to be tension between my lab co-worker and I, but now I learn to understand her background and the possible underlining cause of her actions without quickly jumping into conclusion.... Our relationship has greatly improved to the point that she now even shares with me her personal issues.

Their desire to preserve in difficult relationships was both evident and encouraging.

Additionally, most interviewees agree that a more comprehensive understanding of God’s will and his ways has the effect of strengthening their faith. They claimed to “gain a stronger sense of direction in life,” “greater confidence in decision making,” and “more confidence when discussing faith topics with nonbelievers.” B expressed the effect of the training succinctly: “When you know the truth more, that firm knowledge gives you more faith and confidence when it comes to application.” In general, they identified gradual and lasting change even after three months since the intervention project and the focus group interview. Hence, taking the time to build a solid biblical foundation in believers would certainly produce a good crop in time.

Devotional practices. Interviewees voiced their difficulties in practicing the newly introduced spiritual disciplines. They admitted the benefit of those disciplines; however, “lack of self-motivation” and “lack of self-discipline and accountability” were mentioned most often as reasons for inconsistency. The majority believed that homework

combined with accountability from the covenant group could help them build the long-term habits.

The need for continued training. Repeatedly, interviewees expressed the need for conducting such training and teaching routinely/continually rather than as a one-time event. The following quotes revealed their shared aspiration:

- C—“Such learning atmosphere is very positive; we must keep it going in our church....”
- G—“Now that I know the significance of my role in God’s cosmic plan, I feel the need for continued pushing and accountability to assist me in living out my role.”
- E—“We need to keep this going, ... connecting the biblical teaching to our real life.”
- J—“It will be beneficial for our church to conduct this kind of training again.”

In general, the majority saw the benefit of learning in a committed group setting. They described such learning experiences to be “very encouraging” and “contagious.” More importantly, according to interviewees, it “promotes unity within the ABC church.”

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings emerged based on the data analysis. They are listed here only in summary form and will be further discussed in the next chapter:

1. A biblical worldview that enables people to see God’s bigger story greatly increases disciples’ sense of meaning and purpose in life.
2. Teaching biblical truths in a systematic and comprehensive fashion is critical in forming holistic understanding of important theological concepts.

3. A person's conceptual understanding of biblical truths impacts his or her practices and applications.

4. Applying adequate adult learning theories in discipleship training can facilitate growth and transformation.

5. Sustaining behavioral change, such as adopting new devotional habits or practicing Christian relational principles, needs continued training and support.

6. Demanding commitment for discipleship training has a greater effect than discipleship without clear requirements.

7. The character of a teacher is just as critical as the content taught.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

This research project sought to provide a deeper discipleship experience to assist mainland Chinese who, as a people group, continue to convert to Christian faith in great numbers in the US but often lack of evidence of transformation in life, especially in the area of relationships with people. I approached this task with an integrated discipleship program that informs their minds, moves their hearts, and inspires their actions in their relationships with God and people. The result of the program suggests the following findings.

A Biblical Worldview That Enables People to See God's Bigger Story; Increasing a Sense of Meaning and Purpose in Life

Ever since our family began to attend the ABC church five years ago, I noticed that the manner in which church leaders normally prayed in worship services and what they normally shared with seekers in evangelistic settings often reflected a self-centered gospel message and a faulty biblical worldview. As a result, asking mainland Chinese converts to continue to grow and mature in Christ is a challenging ministry due to a disconnect between what is presented and what is biblical.

To correct such self-centered tendencies, I designed the first two lessons of the discipleship program to introduce participants to the biblical worldview that is vividly depicted in the book of Ephesians, especially the five heaven-earth interrelation passages from 1:9-10, 18-23; 2:5-10; 3:10-11; and, 6:11-12. After being exposed to the grand cosmic view of God's ultimate purpose for his church and the world, participants

overwhelmingly claimed to have had an eye-opening experience. They professed that such a broader horizon enabled them to grasp the deeper meaning of salvation and their own historical and geographical responsibility as God's redeemed and chosen people. Many participants shared that they now have a sense of mission in life that is bigger than their own personal benefit and enjoyment in this world as Christians.

As the literature review in Chapter 2 suggests, familiarizing believers with God's single, universal, and unified metanarrative unfolding in Scripture is of tremendous importance and value (Webber 25; Gladding; Bartholomew and Goheen 18). Such ministry helps construct a biblical worldview that provides a foundation for believers' life and faith, thought and action. The effect and benefit of understanding God's big story as part of the worldview teaching is both supported by the literature and the findings of my ministry project.

The biblical foundation on which this research is based points to the need for a fuller understanding of God's saving purpose. Since salvation from God pertains to the whole person—mind, heart, and body/action, cultivating Christians in a holistic way should be the goal for any discipleship endeavor. A biblical vision of God's intent for his world is the key to informing the Christian mind and the heart's imagination and, consequently, to motivating followers of Christ to be active participants of God's mission rather than being passive bystanders.

The implications for discipleship ministry with MCCs are notable. Already, the literature review indicated the necessity of constructing a biblical worldview among mainland Chinese Christians in the US (Chuang 97; Bieler 229, 234). Most mainland Chinese have been influenced by diverse religious traditions and have carried with them

various lens as to how they know and interpret the world. Effective discipleship with them requires that the Christian faith be presented not as one of the better ways of understanding and interpreting the world but, as Newbigin insists, as a “God’s universal, cosmic Story” (89) in which Christ is the only answer for the destiny of human life and the world.

In Matthew 12:43-45, Jesus described a man formerly possessed by evil spirits but who was left “unoccupied” in his inner chamber. Jesus’ prognosis for such a man is that “the final condition of that man is worse than the first” (v.45). A biblical worldview serves as a mental map that occupies a person’s thought life and, consequently, directs a person’s actions.

To my knowledge, a worldview education that highlights God’s universal intent is not a common ministry among Chinese immigrant churches in the US. Hence, as mainland Chinese continue to turn to Christ, reconstructing their worldview by teaching them the theological meaning of God’s story should be considered a foundational component for discipleship ministry to MCCs.

Teaching Biblical Truths in a Systematic and Comprehensive Fashion to Form Holistic Understanding of Important Theological Concepts

As noted previously, one of ABC church’s weaknesses rests in its historical shortage of committed ministers who conduct ministry plans with a long-term perspective. The pulpit teaching by a rotation of guest speakers often leaves the congregation with many puzzles pieces of random topics and without a coordinated effort to build a complete picture. As a result, the questions that I often hear members from the congregation ask, in either small group settings or in our private conversations, reveal

their incomplete understanding of key doctrines such as justification, sanctification, the kingdom of God, and the concepts of serving God and discerning God's will.

Seeing such shortcomings in ABC's education ministry, when I designed the curriculum for the intervention project, I intentionally chose to give two theological concepts, sanctification and the progression of Christian life, a more thorough treatment. My intent was to see if such teaching would make a difference in participants' minds. After the third and fourth sessions, which covered these two topics, two participants approached me and made the following comments: "[B]efore, we see only certain parts of the elephant, but your systematic treatment on this subject corrects many of our misunderstandings," and, "I have learned more from these lessons than I have learned in the past two years [she became a Christian two years ago and had faithfully attended ABC's Sunday services and small group meetings]." A systematic and comprehensive approach to teaching biblical truths had indeed made a difference in perfecting their theological understanding.

The need for systematic teaching of the elements of faith came to me in my literature research on discipleship as the alarm was sounded by Packer, Parrett, Kang, and many other Christian educators' diagnosis of the condition of today's church. They argue that one of the causes for a lack of maturity among the vast majority of Christians rests at the inadequacy of biblical grounding and offer a catechetical style of systematic teaching on the core Christian faith as the remedy for curing the malaise.

The biblical framework for this research project also points to a need for a more thoughtful and intentional process of growing disciples. In particular, the temple/house analogy for Christian growth (1 Cor. 3:16; Eph. 2:21-22) requires "sound workmanship,

thoroughness of construction, solidity, stability, and utility with no weak spots, defects, or malfunctions that might reduce the building's quality" (Packer and Parrett 16). To produce such quality in Christians, individually and corporately, is thoughtfully to lay an essential biblical foundation and to teach the content systematically and comprehensively. The result of the intervention project shows the dramatic difference systematic teaching can make in producing "clarity" instead of "blurriness," (as noted by participants.)

My findings have at least two implications for ABC church or any other Chinese immigrant church that lacks long-term workers. First, church leaders should make an effort to coordinate the rotation of speakers to preach on one topic from all necessary aspects in order that the audiences gain enough insights to construct more a complete theological concept. Second, if the first option is not possible, churches should consider developing a Sunday school curriculum plan and/or Bible study series that aims to teach essential biblical truths to believers systematically. ABC church can consult other larger churches that have more experience in Christian education ministry for assistance in such planning.

Impact of Person's Conceptual Understanding of Biblical Truths on Practices and Applications

My initial observation about ABC church was that they have never been short of converts, with approximately fifteen to twenty people baptized each year, but the church seems to lack proportionate evidence of converted lives. During the first year when we joined this church, I heard disheartening accounts of disputes among members, numerous divorces, and disharmony among families, even long-time Christian families. Relational

transformation was not evident, if not emphasized, in the Christian witness of ABC church.

I chose the book of Ephesians as the source material for the discipleship training curriculum because of the apostle's conviction on the consequential link between understanding/theology (chs. 1-3) and practices (chs. 4-6). I designed the curriculum to teach how relational holiness is an integral part of God's saving purpose and his ultimate will for humanity and the world. With these biblical concepts as the background, I then went on to teach specific Christian relational principles and highlighted how such practices embody Christian spirituality, hence fulfilling God's desire for human life (see Appendix E).

Following Ephesians' inner logic and exhortation for new relational practices in community, I began to witness changes in the participants. In the focus group interviews following the intervention, accounts were given of how they consciously put principles into practice as a consequence of their new understanding of the biblical truths. Moreover, even after the interviews, in informal settings where I had private conversations with participants, they continued to seek advice on how to improve their relationships with their spouses, all while clearly referring to the biblical concepts that were emphasized in the discipleship program.

Biblical sanctification, as surveyed in Chapter 2, permeates every area of believers' lives and seeks to restore not only relationships with God but, equally important, relationships with others in the community. The correlation between vertical and horizontal relationships as proposed in the book of Ephesians provides an overarching theological framework of this intervention project and has proved its impact

in participants' lives. Additionally, the literature survey suggests first teaching the distinct beliefs of the Christian faith before expecting believers to have a distinct way of living (Persaud 360; Harrold 56).

In response to mainland Chinese immigrants' unique cultural background and challenges in the host country, CICs in the US have developed various types of workshops or ministries in order to help mainland Chinese immigrants improve their family relationships. ABC church, without exception, also has made similar efforts. While the relational knowledge and skills taught in such training events are undoubtedly helpful, they tend to isolate such learning in the context of promoting a person's overall happiness or harmony in life. When applications to life are motivated by the pursuit of personal interest, long-lasting change may or may not be possible. People tend to lose their resolve to change in difficult relationships when situations do not seem to work as expected and when God is not in the equation. In contrast, changes that are grounded in the firm conviction of faith and commitment to God hold a greater potential in sustaining believers to grow in relational holiness even in the face of challenging relationships, just as the interviewees shared. As such, ministries that seek to produce genuine transformation need to work on a more faithful integration of beliefs and life.

Applying Adequate Adult Learning Theories in Discipleship Training to Facilitate Growth and Transformation

The teaching ministries at ABC, from the pulpit, Sunday school, to small group Bible study, is generally characterized by a unilateral teaching style, focusing more on passing on knowledge and information to listeners. I believe that such a tradition has its roots in the church's cultural background. At ABC, most of the speakers and teachers

come from Asian countries where social structures are hierarchically in a top-down, authoritative fashion; moreover, an individual's cognitive abilities are more valued than other aspects of personality. Educated in such an atmosphere, speakers and teachers are likely to follow similar patterns when they teach others.

When I presented the lesson outline of the discipleship training to ABC's Elder Board, one elder responded by saying, "We know all this [referring to the Christian relationship topics]; what we need are the tools and the how-tos." His comment made me resolve to create a learning experience that was not merely theoretical or abstract. In both the small group leader training and discipleship training, I provided multiple opportunities for interaction among participants and on-site practice of the concepts/principles that were taught. In addition, I gave personal examples to help them visualize concrete steps that they can emulate and put to real-life application. I also encouraged them to share their experiences with one another during the small group section so they could learn from each other's perspective and experiences.

The responses from the participants were overwhelmingly positive. Even the elder who was previously skeptical approached me in person after one of the sessions and remarked, "[T]his is very good!" referring to the mock church board meeting in which people practiced attentive listening and showing mutual respect. In addition, many interviewees listed such experiential and participatory learning opportunities as one of the elements that had greatest impact toward change in their relationships with God and people.

Most adult learning theories support a holistic approach to teaching that engages students' whole person—thinking, feeling, and doing (Tolliver and Tisdell 39; Yount 4).

In particular, transformative learning theory that seeks to facilitate change emphasizes the importance of multidimensional learning that is “rational, affective, somatic, spiritual, and sociocultural” (Tolliver and Tisdell 39; Knowles 97). As the literature review also notes, the Bible presents a holistic view of a person, a unified body-soul-spirit (Benner 52; Kirwan 33, Packer and Parrett 12). If new birth is one of the biblical analogies for growth in Christ, Christian educators cannot but take into account the biblical conception of personhood and the insights provided by adult learning theories in discipleship ministry to MCCs.

The implications of this finding are ample. First, and perhaps the most direct, is to change the traditional one-way, monologue teaching style. Recognizing that the persons being discipled are multidimensional in nature should encourage teachers to invite participation from students and, better yet, interactions among the students.

Second, many materials developed for disciple training need to involve more than cognitive absorption; they must include aspects for life integration. ABC uses as its standard for discipleship the training manual entitled *The Abundant Life* (Christian Renewal Ministries); it covers the basic knowledge/practices that a follower of Christ should possess. I was once asked to lead a discipleship group using this manual at ABC and was overwhelmed by how much Bible knowledge was conveyed in each lesson. A few other teachers also had voiced their concerns over whether new converts at ABC, who normally come without any prior exposure to biblical knowledge, could digest all the information every week. While basic Christian doctrines are important knowledge, Christian education should not overlook disciples’ life context and processes for fostering real-life experiences. Based on the findings, persons’ life situations must be equally

important components of any curriculum and should be incorporated into the teaching/learning process rather than placing priority heavily on teaching knowledge.

Encouraging disciples for real-life applications and regular reflection of their experiences would help them develop a lifelong habit of integration of faith and life.

Third, and related to the first two implications, Christian educators should consider providing practical steps for disciples to follow and opportunities to share personal examples/stories to inspire actions. A teacher should not assume that students will automatically know how to formulate applications from the teachings. In creating an experiential pathway that walks people through practical action steps, one can transform abstract, spiritual concepts into concrete, applicable thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The conversion of these implications to solid action will facilitate a more holistic learning experiences and, as such, creates further potential for growth and transformation.

Continued Training and Support for Sustaining Behavioral Change, Such as Adopting New Devotional Habits or Practicing Christian Relational Principles

Classical spiritual disciplines that promise a deeper and richer spiritual life are largely new to most of the people at ABC. I incorporated practicing different means of grace, as defined by Wesley, into the discipleship training program, believing in their value for Christian growth. As well, during the eight-week intervention, I assigned homework for the weekly practice of each spiritual exercise introduced in the class.

Several interviewees in the focus groups affirmed the benefit of these spiritual disciplines, expressing that they experienced richer devotional times. However, some of them, at the same time, honestly expressed uncertainty as to whether they could successfully continue to practice the spiritual exercises after the training ended and the

small group dissolved. The three-month postinterviews confirmed such backsliding. Interviewees lamented their lack of self-discipline and voiced their desire for continued support in their pursuit of growth in Christ.

The biblical framework for this research project resonates with the interviewees on the critical role of community as both the means and goals for Christian maturity. In addition, educational psychology and the adult learning theory from the literature review confirm the value of the communal aspect in a person's learning process (Knowles 97; Patterson 131; Brookfield 43). The kind of loving support and mutual accountability that a person receives from a committed community is highly valued as "ideal conditions" (Merriam, Carafell, and Baumgartner 134) and "the Three Necessary Ingredients" (Ogden 153) for transformation to occur.

Right now, ABC only offers one formal discipleship program for new converts' postbaptism training, using *The Abundant Life* (Christian Renewal Ministries) material. After new believers complete the program and after granting them the certificate for completion, these new members find no other planned ministry to assist them for further growth. In light of the findings, ABC needs to develop an intentional communal structure and process that can sustain their newly learned habits from *The Abundant Life* while, at the same time, progressively nurturing mainland Chinese converts from spiritual infancy to maturity. In doing so, ABC can fulfill Christ's commission of making disciples to further his kingdom work.

Greater Effect of Demanding Commitment for Discipleship Training Than Discipleship Without Clear Requirements

Commitment is certainly not the norm at ABC. From the postbaptism *The Abundant Life* training to becoming church members or coworkers, to attending Sunday school or small groups, ABC asks little commitment from the congregation. Even when some requirements are stated, members normally see no serious follow-through from the part of church.

The background for such phenomena could be a result of the fear of resembling the political pressure and control that most mainland Chinese experienced under the Communist regime, or it could be a reflection of the kind of incomplete gospel message that the congregation is so used to hearing. Nevertheless, for any training to be effective, commitment from all parties that are involved is necessary. I decided to demand a high commitment level for those who wanted to attend the small group leaders' training, asking for registration, signing the covenant card, and promising to help lead the small group sessions of the eight-week discipleship training. I, however, did not ask for the same level of commitment from participants of the discipleship-training program for fear of not being able to recruit enough participants for this research project.

While I expected only five to eight trainees for the small group leadership training, over fifteen people signed up and faithfully participated throughout the whole process. I was also encouraged by the spirit of commitment that the participants exhibited throughout the eight-week discipleship program. One of the elders commented, “[U]sually for this kind of training, the attendance dwindles after two or three weeks; but this time we have very steady attendance.” Indeed, the whole program not only survived

but also overcame a few severe winter storms and even the NCAA college basketball play-offs. I concluded that if leadership teaches the importance of commitment and demand it, people seeking true faith will rise to the challenge. When people begin to see the benefit of being committed to a calling, their commitment becomes contagious with each other. When asked about which element in this program was influential, the expectation for commitment was one of the themes that was repeatedly voiced by the interviewees.

In the New Testament, whenever discipleship or its equivalent is mentioned, it is always followed by explicit requirements for commitment (Mark 8:34; John 8:31; Phil. 2:12; 2 Pet. 1:5-11). Without commitment, said Jesus, no one “is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 10:62). The process of becoming a mature Christian, that is, the process of being sanctified, is, according to the biblical foundation of this research, a lifelong, ongoing journey in which disciples’ active and intentional participation is no less necessary than God’s sanctifying grace through the Holy Spirit. Forgoing the prerequisite quality of commitment is one of the reasons for today’s shortage of disciples and lack of Christian maturity. Therefore, it must be reinforced among today’s Christians (Ogden 39-56; Hull 41-44; Willard; Stott).

ABC, and all other resource-lacking Chinese churches, should not be concerned about institutional success (i.e., fear of not being able to attract enough people to church); they must heed the commission of the Lord Jesus to make disciples. If church wants to make discipleship an effective ministry in churches, ministers would do better to follow the Master’s way of making disciples—by both teaching and exemplifying commitment.

The Character of a Teacher as Critical as the Content Taught

Prior to the discipleship training, many of my thoughts were devoted to preparation of the lessons in aspects such as teaching goals, lesson outline, preparing the handout, and PowerPoint presentations. One of the elders advised me beforehand, “[M]ake sure you have the logistics ready for the class.” However, what I noticed during the eight-week period was a kind of learning process that went beyond my teaching goals and plans. I noticed how participants learned to set up the chairs, prepared beverages, and brought refreshments to share with one another. In addition, during the focus group interviews, several participants shared that one of the elements that impressed them and influenced them most were “the way” and “the spirit” that I conducted the lessons. One interviewee surprised me by saying, “It came to the point that I would ask myself, ‘What would Esther do in this situation?’” A new realization dawned on me that everything that happened in the classroom—external and internal alike— could serve as vehicles for both teaching and learning, that they have equal shaping force on the learners. Thus, the way that teachers conduct themselves and the spirit they display throughout the teaching process is just as critical as the content that is conveyed verbally.

This finding confirms the proposition made in the literature review that teaching faith and making disciples is an organic and contextual process; hence, it cannot be treated as a rigid, mass-produced project (Richards and Martin 226). Moreover, disciple making as Jesus exemplifies, is a highly relational ministry in that a teacher’s life and deeds are equally formative factors as the words themselves (Hull 210-223; Ogden 59-74, 121-135; Yount 19-39).

The biblical analogy of a newborn baby in relation to Christian growth (1 Pet. 2:2) calls for a nurturing and teaching ministry from the faith communities and, as such, coincides with the important role that the teachers' quality of life can play in the life of learners. The apostle Paul's exhortation to the believers in Philippi aptly illustrates this relationship: "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice" (4:9). As such, those who teach should not overlook the impact of both their words and deeds.

At least two implications can be applied to ABC in addition to other Chinese churches. First, since the life of the teacher is influential, conducting discipleship outside of traditional classrooms by moving it to real-life settings where both the discipler and the disciple have opportunity to see and learn from each other's context as well as behaviors will probably be more beneficial. I believe such life-to-life contexts can also correct the kind of spiritual superficiality among mainland Chinese Christians that often impedes their transformation (T-S. Liu 3).

Second, and as a corollary of the first, ABC church needs to continue to train teachers and nurture them toward maturity in order that they bear good fruits in the disciple-making process. As briefly mentioned earlier, when I discussed the fourth finding, the traditional ethic that has long defined the teacher-student relationship in the Asian context is "Do not question authority," or, "Honor your teachers by respecting their teachings." Less emphasis is placed on the character or morality of the teachers. However, both Packer (15-16) and Yount highlight the need for teachers to grow in Christlikeness. Yount, for example, notes, "[C]overing content is merely the beginning of good telling. There are elements of the heart that must be nurtured along the way if we

[teachers] are to get the whole person involved in our journey” (52). Among the elements of the heart, “sensitivity, flexibility and grace” (28) are some of the qualities that will help create a learning atmosphere of openness and love and should be developed more in teachers. Yount appeals to those who are involved in the teaching ministry to “honor his [Jesus] name and his example by the way we learn, the way we teach, and the way we grow—head, heart, and hand” (39). Yount’s advice encourages Chinese churches to nurture teachers/disciplers in such a holistic manner.

Implications of the Findings

This research project along with its findings provide at least two implications for the Chinese church. First, an awakening among CICs about the importance of prioritizing disciple making in church ministries has already been raised, causing many CICs to move from focusing on quantity to quality, and from holding large-scale revival or evangelistic events to smaller ministries that seek to improve believers’ life transformation. During the past five years, leading organizations that specialize in overseas mainland Chinese ministry, such as Ambassador for Christ and Overseas Campus Ministry, has produced conferences or publications around the topic of discipleship. Their impact spills over to many local CICs where the concepts and practices of discipleship are gaining momentum. However, articles that discuss and promote discipleship appear largely motivated by the need to cultivate committed coworkers for the local churches and to cultivate more effective local evangelistic outcomes with the end, for some, of building a new China through the adoption of Christianity and its higher moral teachings (*Ambassadors* 2014).

This study, however, indicates the need to increase the breadth, length, and depth of both the concept and practice of disciple making in Chinese churches. The breadth refers to the biblical worldview that goes beyond personal and national considerations to encompass God's cosmic unification in Christ (Eph. 1:10). The depth refers to possessing a historical sense of the unfolding nature of God's salvation story and, consequently, a deeper understanding of church's identity—the gathering of Christ's disciples—and mission in specific time and place. The length refers to seeing discipleship as an ongoing and lifelong process rather than simply as the completion of some chosen materials that cover the basics of how to live a Christian life.

The divinely originated spiritual hunger among the mainland Chinese, domestic and overseas alike, was evident as described in the introduction. This research reveals that most of these new converts desire deep spiritual lives and are not satisfied with a self-centered faith that seeks simply worldly gain as do their nonbelieving kinsmen. Their hunger and thirst for righteousness are part of my unexpected observations. Some of them include the Chinese millennial generation (see Figure 4.1, p.101) The foundations that CICs lay in the lives of the new followers of Christ will determine the spiritual landscape of the next generation of Chinese Christians and their global impact. A thin and shallow gospel produces Christians who will be unfit for God's services, whereas Christians who receive disciple training with breadth, depth, and length hold more potential to develop deeper spirituality, broader vision, and long-term impact in the world. This research project offers positive results that encourage such efforts.

Second, conventional disciple training in most Chinese churches is done through highly structured programs that tend to be informational or knowledge based and move

through content in a uniform fashion. Ogden argues that such practices are generally ineffective:

Each disciple is a unique individual who grows at a rate peculiar to him or her. Unless disciples receive personal attention so that their particular growth needs are addressed in a way that calls them to die to self and live fully to Christ, a disciple will not be made. (43)

The relationship-focused discipleship training described in this dissertation, endeavors to integrate Bible learning with specific life issues that are relevant to participants and supported within a small group setting. The results of this customized approach suggest a higher level of integration of faith and life among the participants. This finding also suggests the need to alter future discipleship methodologies from program and knowledge-based approaches to customized approaches that address “a person’s knowledge, character growth, obedience in thought, word and deed, discernment of unique ministry identity and so on, all need to be dealt with in the context of Jesus’ radical and total claim upon an individual’s life in the setting of community” (45). In this respect, this research project offers a promising alternative.

Limitations of the Study

This intervention project was designed for a specific church context—ABC church—where the *status quo* is usually a shortage of committed ministers who can plan and implement teaching/discipling ministries from a long-term perspective. Most of the CICs in the Midwest face this disadvantage. However, CICs in other cosmopolitan cities of the US with larger Chinese immigrant populations who can more easily recruit well-trained long-term ministers and have more readily accessible Christian resources may not find this study relevant.

The instrumentation I used to gather the quantitative data can be refined in a way that assesses the impact of the intervention project more comprehensively. With only a general teaching outline and teaching goals in my mind, I designed the pre- and postsurveys that contained only thirty questions several months prior to the training program. The actual project, however, became clearer by the time I actually implemented the discipleship training. While most of the questions corresponding to the content were covered in the training sessions, some questions could have been worded more specifically in order to gauge changes in participants' thinking, attitude, and behaviors. For example, question 2 was originally written as, "I believe that members of the Church should avoid conflict." Modifying this question to read, "I believe that members of the Church should not avoid conflict but always seek to resolve conflict in an open and loving fashion," would correspond better to the lesson presented in the training program.

For those who want to generalize this study, they will need to consider the fact that this project did not use a standardized curriculum. I designed about 80 percent of the content, as well as the manner in which each lesson was taught. Different teachers and their styles in teaching the same topics may lead to differing results.

Unexpected Observations

Along with the qualitative data, I also kept records of conversations with participants before and after the classes during the eight-week span. Together, I found some unexpected feedback that may, or may not, be directly related to the research questions; however, they do shed light on my understanding of their experiences. The following description summarizes these unexpected findings and observations throughout the training period.

Importance of both the Content and Methods

People learn not only from the content of the lessons, but through the teaching methods as well. Two small group leaders shared the following:

C—“I really appreciate your providing us the step-by-step guided instructions to follow. It is almost like a parent teaching their children who are learning how to walk. It inspires me to apply the same spirit in training new coworkers in my department [at work] by giving them beginning steps that they can gain confidence to serve.”

H—“I see the effect of using object lessons to enforce learning. I need to use these methods more often when I teach children....”

Another surprise came through a rather trivial matter. The first week, I prepared a few refreshments for the participants for ice-breaking and fellowshiping purposes. One sister called me the following week and offered to bring refreshments for the next class. By the third week and continuing to the last week, several people voluntarily brought refreshments so much so that they filled the whole refreshment table; the participants clearly enjoyed the lively conversation around the table. Such learning by imitation was indeed a pleasant surprise to me.

The Power of Pictures, Images, and Diagrams

During the first lesson, when diagrams and images were introduced and displayed on the wall, several people came up to take pictures of these diagrams and images using their cell phones. The fact that they thought these pictures were worth keeping convinces me the benefit to take time to create clear and representative pictures, even for adult learning. The power of visual aids is not limited to children alone.

External Matters

For improving logistics and preparation on my part, I prepared registration forms that included the outlines of topics that were to be covered in the discipleship training program. Surprisingly, one participant embraced the idea of such a procedure, commenting, “[I]t teaches us to have commitment in attending any training or meetings like this.” Later, she shared that she discouraged other people who did not register to drop in during the middle of the eight-week session for the same reason: “[I]t is against the spirit of commitment.”

Another unexpected result involves the external aspect of the program. In order to accommodate the number of participants, I had to move the class to another room with a larger space and had to rearrange the seating in a way that all participants could gain a clear view of the presentation. Unexpectedly, simple elements such as “the seating arrangement,” “the long tables,” and “the lighting and music” were complimented by two participants as “enhancing and facilitating learning.”

Surprising Level of Desire to Learn

I was originally concerned about the inconvenient class time (Saturday morning) and the weekly homework I required of the participants, being uncertain of whether people in ABC church would be willing to invest their time in growing deeper in their faith. What surprised me was that, other than the consistent and dedicated attendance throughout the eight weeks, some participants actually desired more. Participant H expressed that she wished I could give them more “homework” and demand more “rigorous” discipline from them. Another participant shared that she often thought that the class time passed by too fast and had wished for “longer hours.”

Recommendations

This project sought to improve believers' relationships with God and with people among the mainland Chinese converts at ABC church. While the results are encouraging, adding certain changes may enhance the fruitfulness of this disciple-training project:

1. Those who wish to reproduce this project may want to consider extending the time frame from eight weeks to ten weeks or longer. The theological subjects that were covered in this project were packed in content. To help participants to learn well and digest better, dividing the lessons into two may be beneficial. In addition, the small group component may benefit from a longer period of time for relationship building. If a person applies this program to an existing small group where members have already formed habits of trust and mutual accountability, the results may be even better.

2. The homework (i.e., reading and devotional practices) given to the participants during the program were minimal because I was not sure about their commitment level. Those who want to experiment with this same project may wish to consider more requirements for homework in order to reinforce the learning results.

3. To collect the qualitative data, one might want to provide a written option form in place of the focus group interviews. Those who are introverts who do not usually opt for sharing thoughts in public would have another avenue to voice their feedback, thus, increasing the volume of the data collected.

4. Churches that want to multiply the effect of this program should consider conducting a follow-up teacher training by recruiting participants who are interested in teaching the materials in their own churches or in other settings.

Postscript

The completion of this research was, in every sense, an amazing journey of partnership with God. He first used each of the classes I took from the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary to form gradually a vision of growing Christians in the context of a Chinese immigrant church. In the process, God continued to create in me the burden to fill a gap I have observed from the discipleship ministries among most CICs. For me, taking on this task was very much like a child learning how to walk for the first time, for I have never conducted a church-wide ministry with such complexity. God has proved to me that his grace is sufficient in all circumstances. With every single challenge and hesitation along the way, our heavenly Father's big hands were always before me, behind me, and around me to support my wobbly steps. Now that I have completed this project, I have begun to grasp, on a beginner's level, the meaning of being led by the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, and praying in the Spirit as a colaborer of God in ministry. This experience has certainly transformed me to be more courageous while, at the same time, more reliant on the sovereign leading of God to birth in me any future ministries for him.

In addition, through this study, I have come to appreciate the tremendous value of having a research reflection team in any ministry endeavor. In my case, the three focus groups provided me with invaluable feedback to assess the research project and to make improvements for future application. This practice teaches me that if ministry is to be for the people of God, it will benefit by involving the people of God in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Such corporate participation guarantees a much richer

experience. The triune God models this pattern for ministry; it will certainly guide my future practices as well.

APPENDIX A

DOCUMENTS FOR EXPERT REVIEW

September 28, 2013

Dear _____

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary and am currently working on my dissertation project. As part of the research process, I am using two researcher-designed instruments to collect data. The first is a spiritual growth assessment survey for collecting quantitative data. The other is a semi-structured interview protocol, which I will use to conduct focus groups to collect qualitative data.

I am in need of four expert reviews for the two instruments and am writing to invite you to serve as one of my reviewers. I have included a copy of the following:

1. Ministry project description, purpose statement, and research questions;
2. Definition of terms;
3. The two researcher-designed instruments; and,
4. Evaluation forms for expert review.

Please kindly evaluate the two instruments using the evaluation forms included. Feel free to share any comments that you believe would help improve the data collection. Please kindly return the evaluation to me in the enclosed envelope by October 13.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Esther Law

Topic of the Project: From Diaspora to Disciples—Training Immigrant

Mainland Chinese to live Christlike Lives

Problem: Immigrant Mainland Chinese are embracing the Christian faith, but they show a significant discrepancy between their belief and actual life due to lack of a Christian cultural background.

Project: To implement a relationship-focused discipleship training program, teaching Mainland Chinese Christians the comprehensiveness of God's saving plan/purpose, spiritual practices that deepen one's personal relationship with God, and Christian relational practices in community.

Purpose statement: The purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of an eight-session, relationship-focused discipleship training program among adult mainland Chinese Christians who attend the ABC Chinese Christian Church and to evaluate whether the program will foster growth in the participants' relationship with God and relationship with others in their current settings.

Research Question 1

What are the participants' current understanding of, commitment to, and satisfaction with their devotional lives?

Research Question 2

What are the current understanding and practices of Christian relational behavior in participants' relationships?

Research Question 3

To what extent does the program change participants' understanding of, commitment to, and practices in the areas of their devotional lives, and Christian relational behavior in their daily settings?

Research Question 4

What elements/components in this program are most beneficial or influential toward the improvement (deeper understanding of and stronger commitment to a more satisfied devotional life and Christian relational behavior) of the participants' relationship with God and relationships in their communities?

Definitions of Terms

In this study, the following terms are given specific meaning.

Growing relationship with God. Based on Paul's prayer for the Ephesians (1:15-23; 3:14-19), this term refers to believers' growth in grace and knowledge of God.

Specifically, it measures believers' capacity to receive and experience God's love in their lives and their wisdom to comprehend his purpose and will for the Church and the world.

Christian relational behavior. This term pertains to behaviors that Paul details in Ephesians 4-6, such as putting off falsehood, speaking truthfully to one's neighbor, anger management, speaking only what is helpful for the purpose of edification, being kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, and submission to one another. etc.

Spiritual Growth Assessment Survey (for expert review only)

Demographic Information (this section only appears in the pretest)

- A. Age Range _ 20-30 _ 30-40 _ 40-50 _ 50 and above
- B. Country of Origin _ Mainland China (including Hong Kong)
 -Taiwan _ Southeast Asia _ Others
- C. Gender _ Male _ Female
- D. Marriage Status _ Single _ Married _ Others
- E. Education Background _ High school _ College/Some College _ Graduate school
- F. Years since becoming a Christian _ 1-5 years _ 5-10 years _ 10 years and above

Spiritual Growth Information (the following questions will be measured by a five-point interval scale)

1-Strongly disagree 2-Somewhat disagree 3-Neutral 4-Somewhat agree 5-Strongly agree

1. God's presence feels very real to me.
2. I have a sense of how God in his love is working in my life.
3. I practice regular devotional time/activities.
4. I look forward to my daily devotional time with God.
5. I read/study the Bible for the purpose of allowing God's word to change my thinking and actions.
6. I find praying to God difficult.
7. My prayer includes thanksgiving and praise other than presenting requests or expressing needs.
8. I can be completely honest about my thoughts and feelings in my prayer to God.
9. I know what God's will is for me and the world.
10. When God makes me aware of his displeasure in an area of my life, I respond to his leading.
11. The transformation of my life is solely by God's grace; there is nothing much I can do to produce that change.
12. True repentance means telling God how sorry I am about not obeying his commands.
13. Members of the Church should avoid conflict.
14. Showing anger is an un-Christian thing; I should try to control it as much as possible.
15. Submitting to leadership at home and church is a biblical command; I have no other choice.
16. I need other people to help me in my spiritual growth.
17. I find forgiving others difficult when their words or actions hurt me.
18. I admit my errors in relationships.
19. I humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt.
20. Before I offer feedback/comments to others, I pray and consider whether it benefits them.
21. I listen to feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth.
22. I take time to listen and understand other people's thoughts or feelings.
23. I have a practical action plan to live in harmony with members of my family.
24. My attitudes and behaviors are consistent at home and church.

25. To tell a person what he/she has done wrong is too risky to our relationship; I should just pray for him/her.
26. I am willing to share my personal issues/struggles in my small group/community.
27. I encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than criticizing their weaknesses.
28. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for spiritual growth.
29. I regularly set aside time to participate in small group meetings.
30. I believe my words or actions have impact on the spiritual well-being of other people in my community.

Semi-structured interview protocol with the focus group

1. Have you noticed any changes in your understanding of God's salvation plan, the role of the church, or the significance of Christian community life? Could you tell me more about it?
2. How do you connect to God in your daily life? Have you experienced any changes in your devotional life recently? Could you give some examples?
3. Do you participate in any small group or fellowship meeting? Why or why not?
4. What do you think about the small group experience you had during the program? Do you want to belong to such a group in the future? Why or why not?
5. Have you noticed any changes in your relationships either at home, workplace, or in the church communities? Please describe more.
6. What do you think about this discipleship program? Has it impacted you? In what ways?
7. What do you like or dislike the most about this program?

Evaluation Form for Expert review on **Spiritual Growth Assessment Survey**

Question	Needed	Not needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestion to clarify
A					
B					
C					
D					
E					
F					
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					
16					
17					
18					
19					
20					
21					
22					
23					
24					
25					
26					

Question	Needed	Not needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestion to clarify
27					
28					
29					
30					

Recommendation of questions that are not asked that need to be added:

Review completed by _____

Signature _____

Date completed _____

Evaluation Form for Expert Review on Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

Question	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestions to clarify
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					

Recommendation of questions that are not asked that need to be added:

Review completed by _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B

SPIRITUAL GROWTH ASSESSMENT SURVEY

Spiritual Growth Assessment Survey

Demographic Information

- A. Age Range _ 20-29 _ 30-39 _ 40-49 _ 50 and above
- B. Country of Origin _ Mainland China _ Hong Kong
Taiwan _ Southeast Asia _ Others
- C. Gender _ Male _ Female
- D. Marriage Status _ Single _ Married _ Others
- E. Education Background _ Highschool _ College/Some College _ Graduate school & above
- F. Years since becoming a Christian _ 1-5 years _ 6-10 years _ 11 years and above

Spiritual Growth Information

1-Strongly disagree 2-Somewhat disagree 3-Neutral 4-Somewhat agree 5-Strongly Agree

1. I am aware of God’s presence with me.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

2. I believe that members of the Church should avoid conflict.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

3. The transformation of my life is solely by God’s grace; there is nothing I can do to participate in that change.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

4. I read/study the Bible for the purpose of allowing God’s word to change my thinking and actions.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

5. I need to give absolute submission to leadership at home and church without questioning them.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

6. I find forgiving others difficult when their words or actions hurt me.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

7. I have a sense of how God in his love is working in my life.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

8. I need other people to help me in my spiritual growth.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

9. I find praying to God difficult.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

10. Before I offer feedback/comments to others, I pray and consider whether it benefits them.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

11. I often encourage others by pointing out their strengths rather than criticizing their weaknesses.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

12. I practice regular (approx. 3-4 times per week) devotional time/activities.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

13. I often am willing to admit my errors in relationships (with families, coworkers, neighbors, etc.).

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

14. I regularly set aside time to participate in small group meetings.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

15. I am intentional about seeking to live in harmony with members of my family.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

16. I look forward to my daily devotional time with God.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

17. I almost always humbly seek forgiveness from the one I've hurt.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

18. I know God's overall will for the world, including me.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

19. I can be completely honest about my thoughts and feelings in my prayer to God.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

20. I ask for feedback from others to help me discover areas for relationship growth.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

21. My prayer includes thanksgiving and praise, not only presenting requests or expressing needs.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

22. I take time to listen and understand other people's thoughts or feelings.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

23. When God makes me aware of his displeasure in an area of my life, I respond to his leading.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

24. To tell a person what he/she has done wrong is too risky to our relationship; I should just pray for him/her.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

25. I allow other Christians to hold me accountable for my spiritual growth.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

26. My attitudes and behaviors are consistent at home and church.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

27. Expressing anger does not please God; I should try to control it as much as possible.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

28. I understand true repentance to be telling God how sorry I am about not obeying his commands.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

29. I am willing to share my personal issues/struggles in my small group/community.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

30. I believe my words or actions have impact on the spiritual well-being of other people in my community.

Strongly disagree 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Strongly agree

APPENDIX C

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol with the Focus Group

1. Have you noticed any changes in your understanding of God's salvation plan, the role of the church, or the significance of Christian community life? Could you tell me more about it?
2. How do you connect to God in your daily life? Have you experienced any changes in your devotional life recently? Could you give some examples?
3. Have you noticed any changes in your relationships either at home, workplace, or in the church communities? Please describe more.
4. This discipleship program consists of different components: oral teaching, hands-on, on-site practice, small group experience, homework practice, etc. What do you think of each of them?
5. Have any of these components impacted you? In what ways?

APPENDIX D**CONSENT FORMS****Consent Form for Survey Participation**

Welcome to this eight-week discipleship training program! I invite you also to consider participating in the research I am conducting for my DMin dissertation project. The purpose of this research is to study the effectiveness of an integrated discipleship training on believers' growth in their relationship with God and with others in the communities. I am trying to learn more about how best to grow believers who attend our to become mature Christians in Christ.

Procedure: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to answer the questions of the enclosed survey and return it to me immediately after you complete it. It should take you approximately 10-15 minutes. If any of the questions appear unclear to you, please feel free to ask me in the process of completing the survey.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with answering this survey. However, by expressing your subjective view about your experience of this training program, you will help me as well as the church leadership to evaluate our ministry design and, in addition, to plan our future ministry.

Confidentiality: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. The data I collect from your survey form will only be identified with a random number. I will be the only person who will process all the information given by you.

By signing below, you are agreeing to answer the survey and allow me to use it as part of the data source for my study analysis.

Participant's signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

Consent Form for Interview

Welcome to this eight-week discipleship training program! I invite you also to consider participating in this research I am conducting for my DMin dissertation project. The purpose of this research is to study the effectiveness of an integrated discipleship training on believers' growth in their relationship with God and with others in the communities. I am trying to learn more about how best to grow believers who attend our church to become mature Christians in Christ.

Procedure: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate, you will be asked several questions in an oral interview with a few other volunteer interviewees as well. I will make an audio-recording of the interview. The process should take approximately 60-90 minutes.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with answering this survey. However, by sharing your experience of this training program with me, you will help me as well as our church leadership to evaluate our ministry design and, in addition, to improve on our future ministry.

Confidentiality: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. I will be the only person who listens to the audiotape and will use a random number to identify you when quoting your statement in my dissertation. The tape will be destroyed when I complete my project.

By signing below, you are agreeing to participate in this interview and allow me to use it as part of the data source for my study analysis.

Participant's signature: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX E

OUTLINE FOR THE DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

TOPIC	SPIRITUAL EXERCISES	SMALL GROUP SESSION
Christian World View based on Eph. Chs. 1-3 (teaching goal: see the invisible Reality; know God's cosmic reunifying movement)	Meditation Journaling	
"The mystery of Christ" – how was it administered in history? (Eph. 2) (Goal: Know the story that God is telling through history and discover our role in this on-going drama).	Examen prayer: Gratitude	
The Church as "in Christ" (Eph. Chs. 1-3) (Teaching goal: know the salvation's past, present, and future aspect; gain a fuller view of Christ's whole life—his descent, death, resurrection, ascension, glorification—as our pattern for Christian maturity)	Examen prayer: Petition	
Live a life worthy of the calling (Eph. Chs. 4-5) 1. "put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor"; "speak what is helpful for building others up"	Examen prayer: Review	
Live a life worthy of the calling (Eph. Chs. 4-5) 2. "In your anger do not sin"	Examen prayer: Renewal	
Live a life worthy of the calling (Eph. Chs. 4-5) 3. "be kind and compassionate to one another"; "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ"	Examen prayer: all four steps	
Live a life worthy of the calling (Eph. Chs. 4-5) 4. "forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you"	Centering prayer; practice the presence of God	
We are in Wartime—are you prepared? (Eph. Ch.6) (Goal: understand the nature of spiritual warfare and the importance of spiritual disciplines)	Developing rule of life	

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