

## **ABSTRACT**

### **TEACHING CHURCH AND GROUP REPRODUCTION: AN ADULT-EDUCATION APPROACH FOR SMALL GROUPS**

by

Geoffrey S. Geyer

Despite increased interest in church planting and multiplication in Western contexts, the work of multiplying churches and small groups is often fraught with challenges. Reproducing a church or group often means leaving one group to start another. Grief and sadness generally attend this phenomenon, no matter how natural it may be. Moreover, the loss of relationships and resources so that new works can begin elsewhere sometimes feels like betrayal, especially if good reasons for such a move are not given. All of these factors, and more, may contribute to a general lack of understanding, or lack of openness, on the part of lay people. And if lay people are not open to the idea of reproducing churches or groups, it is difficult to imagine a multiplication vision gaining much traction.

This research was an intervention designed to measure changes to understanding and attitudes about church and group reproduction among lay people. The research was designed to evaluate an adult education approach in the context of church-based small groups to producing changes in understanding or attitude. Participants were twenty-eight lay people from four churches in Muskingum County, Ohio.

Findings from this study showed significant changes in participants' understanding about the subject matter as a result of the intervention. Some participants also displayed an increased openness to church or group reproduction as a result of the

intervention. Findings from this study carry implications for Christian education with adults, small group ministry, and new church development.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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AN ADULT-EDUCATION APPROACH FOR SMALL GROUPS**

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AN ADULT-EDUCATION APPROACH FOR SMALL GROUPS

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
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Doctor of Ministry

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	VII
LIST OF FIGURES .....	VIII
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .....	IX
CHAPTER 1: NATURE OF THE PROJECT .....	1
OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTER .....	1
PERSONAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	3
PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT .....	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
<u>RESEARCH QUESTION #1</u> .....	4
RESEARCH QUESTION #2.....	5
RESEARCH QUESTION #3.....	5
RATIONALE FOR THE PROJECT .....	5
DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS .....	7
DELIMITATIONS .....	8
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	8
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	10

TYPE OF RESEARCH.....	10
<u>PARTICIPANTS</u> .....	10
INSTRUMENTATION .....	11
<u>DATA COLLECTION</u> .....	11
DATA ANALYSIS.....	13
GENERALIZABILITY .....	14
PROJECT OVERVIEW .....	14
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT.....	16
PART 1: BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS .....	17
PART 2: MISSIOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	49
RESEARCH DESIGN LITERATURE .....	68
SUMMARY OF LITERATURE .....	70
CHAPTER 3:RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT.....	72
NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT .....	72
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	73
RESEARCH QUESTION #1: WHAT UNDERSTANDINGS AND ATTITUDES ABOUT REPRODUCING CHURCHES AND GROUPS EXIST AMONG PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO THE BIBLE STUDY?.....	73
RESEARCH QUESTION #2. WHAT CHANGES OCCUR IN THE UNDERSTANDINGS OF, OR ATTITUDES ABOUT, CHURCH OR GROUP	

REPRODUCTION, DURING AND AFTER THE COMPLETION OF, THE BIBLE STUDY? .....	74
RESEARCH QUESTION #3. WHAT ELEMENTS OF THE TRAINING COURSE HAVE THE LARGEST IMPACT IN CHANGING PARTICIPANTS’ UNDERSTANDINGS OF, OR ATTITUDES ABOUT, GROUP AND CHURCH REPRODUCTION? .....	74
MINISTRY CONTEXT .....	75
PARTICIPANTS .....	76
CRITERIA FOR SELECTION.....	76
DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS .....	77
ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	78
INSTRUMENTATION .....	79
PILOT TEST OR EXPERT REVIEW .....	80
RELIABILITY & VALIDITY OF PROJECT DESIGN.....	81
DATA COLLECTION .....	83
DATA ANALYSIS.....	84
CHAPTER 4: EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT .....	86
PARTICIPANTS .....	86
RESEARCH QUESTION #1: DESCRIPTION OF EVIDENCE .....	88
RESEARCH QUESTION #2: DESCRIPTION OF EVIDENCE .....	106



RESEARCH QUESTION #3: DESCRIPTION OF EVIDENCE .....	118
SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS.....	119
CHAPTER 5: LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT.....	121
MAJOR FINDINGS .....	121
(1) EDUCATING ADULT LAY PEOPLE ABOUT CHURCH AND GROUP REPRODUCTION IN A SMALL GROUP SETTING USING THE <i>UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS</i> CURRICULUM INCREASES THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF THE CONCEPT. ....	121
<u>(2) HELPING ADULT LAY PEOPLE MAKE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MAKING DISCIPLES OF JESUS CHRIST AND THE REPRODUCTION OF CHURCHES/GROUPS POSITIVELY AFFECTS UNDERSTANDING ABOUT, AND OPENNESS TO, THE CONCEPT.</u> .....	122
(3) PROVIDING STEP-BY-STEP DESCRIPTIONS OF HOW SMALL GROUP REPRODUCTION CAN WORK MAKES IT SEEM MORE DOABLE FOR ADULT LAY PEOPLE.....	124
(4) WHILE EDUCATION OR EXPERIENCE MAY CREATE GREATER OPENNESS TOWARDS MULTIPLICATION, MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT THIS PHENOMENON ARE NORMAL. ....	125
MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS .....	126
LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	127
UNEXPECTED OBSERVATIONS.....	129

RECOMMENDATIONS .....	129
POSTSCRIPT .....	130
APPENDICES .....	133
APPENDIX A: FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS (INSTRUMENT #2) .....	133
APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANTS JOURNAL PROMPTS (INSTRUMENT #3).....	135
APPENDIX C: THE INTERVENTION.....	137
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER .....	176
APPENDIX E: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT.....	178
APPENDIX F: PASTOR PERMISSION LETTER .....	179
WORKS CITED .....	181

## LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 4.1 Participants' Initial <i>Understanding</i> of Church and Group Reproduction.....	89
Table 4.2 Participants' Initial Understanding About Leaving to Start New Churches or Groups.....	90
Table 4.3 Participants' Initial Attitude Towards Reproducing Their Own Small Group..	91
Table 4.4 Participants' Initial Attitudes Towards $\frac{1}{4}$ of Current Church Leaving.....	92
Table 4.5 Participants Initial Attitudes Towards "Apprenticing" .....	93
Table 4.6 Participants Initial Attitudes Towards Having a Teammate When Starting a New Group.....	93
Table 4.7 Correlation Between Initial Understanding/Attitudes and Age or Church Experience.....	95
Table 4.8: Changes in Understanding.....	107

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.1. Age .....	87
Figure 4.2. Gender .....	87
Figure 4.3. Education .....	88
Figure 4.4. Household Income.....	88

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## **CHAPTER 1: NATURE OF THE PROJECT**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter will provide a statement of the problem being investigated, as well as a summary of the researcher's own experience with that problem in his ministry context. The purpose of this research will be stated, along with the research questions. Next, rationale is given for why this project matters to church leaders, especially those pursuing a vision of multiplying groups or churches. A definition of terms, the delimitations of the project, and an overview of the literature that was reviewed for this research are also given. Finally, a description of the participants and research methodology is given.

### **Personal Introduction**

In 2010, I was hired to serve as Discipleship Pastor in a United Methodist congregation of about five hundred people in southeast Ohio. One of my primary responsibilities in my new post was to oversee and direct the church's small group ministry, so I quickly got to work reading, thinking, and brushing up on small group methodology. In doing so, I was soon confronted with the issue of group reproduction (or multiplication) and began thinking about that issue in the context of the local church I was serving. Ours was an attractional-model church that wanted everyone who came to our church to have the opportunity to connect with Christian community in a small group setting. In order for this vision of connection to become a reality (both for those already attending and those yet to come), we would need to multiply small groups.

I quickly found that multiplying groups is beautiful, inspiring, and strategic, but also fraught with difficulty. Although our church began making concerted efforts to

foster group multiplication, we experienced very little success. I began by talking with some of the larger small groups in our congregation (20–25 people) about dividing and forming two groups. I shared how breaking up the large groups could create room for unconnected people to join or enhance the experience of shared life among group participants by shrinking the size. But, to the participants, talk of breaking up these groups felt like just that—breaking up. Conversations about the matter were often awkward, tense, and painful. I also tried to create more groups by personally identifying and training new leaders. But this too proved challenging. Some of the new leaders we identified felt pressed into service or ill-equipped for the task. In the small group that my family and I attended—a close-knit group of mostly thirty-somethings with kids—I would bring up the subject of reproducing our group intermittently in an attempt to slowly work the concept into our group. But my attempts to embed a vision for multiplication into the group were consistently rejected as our members were not ready to abandon the close, family-like relationships they had developed. In short, none of the strategies for reproducing groups that I employed worked.

During this season of ministry, our church had the opportunity to host the well-known author and missiologist Robert Coleman as a visiting preacher and lecturer. During his visit, Dr. Coleman spoke to about twenty-five leaders from our church in a seminar setting where he made a passionate and ringing statement that I would not soon forget: “Growing churches multiply small groups!” He then moved on to talk about other things, but his assertion about the necessity of small group multiplication landed right in my lap. When I returned to my work after Dr. Coleman’s visit, I was more passionate than ever about a vision for multiplying small groups. But, despite my renewed passion, I



was still just as perplexed about how I might effectively share and teach that vision to our church.

During my four-year appointment to that post, I never did solve the puzzle of successfully communicating and implementing a vision for multiplication with the lay people I was leading. This reality was painfully punctuated when, near the end of my tenure there, I and a few others sensed God's call not only to start a new small group but a new church as well. While we experienced the joy and excitement of following God on a new Kingdom adventure, others were mostly hurt, confused, and disillusioned. For many, it felt like a kind of family break-up rather than the "natural" process of reproduction that is depicted in some of the literature. To me, it felt like this multiplication puzzle had suddenly turned very painful.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Therefore, the problem this research sought to address was a lack of understanding about, and openness to, church and group reproduction among lay people. This problem may occur in a variety of contexts and for a variety of reasons. Many people have had painful experiences with people leaving churches or groups, which can negatively affect both understanding and attitude. Others may lack an openness to the idea because of an unwillingness to sever treasured friendships with church family or small group members. Still others simply may not know what the term means or where to find examples of church or group reproduction in the Scriptures. There may be a variety of reasons for this significant problem.

Moreover, this is not only a problem that needs solved for leaders actively trying to reproduce groups or churches, like I was. Rather, any church that is making disciples

of Jesus Christ could someday find itself in a multiplication moment. If outsiders who have turned to Christ through the evangelistic efforts of a given church begin attending groups or worship services, there will be a need for people to start new groups, churches, or services. Or, if the disciple-making efforts of a church result in rapidly maturing Christ-followers who are ready to be “sent out” to reach others, there will be a need for the church to reckon with group or church reproduction. In short, a lack of understanding about, or openness to, church and group reproduction is a problem worth solving in any context where disciple-making is happening.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in understanding and attitude among lay people in Muskingum County, Ohio as a result of participating in a six-week, small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups.

### **Research Questions**

The small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups was authored by the researcher. It was designed to test the effectiveness of an intervention involving adult education in already-existing small groups. The researcher was seeking to measure the impact of the curriculum, experienced in the small-group setting, on understanding and attitudes about church and group reproduction. Therefore, the research questions chosen for this project were designed to uncover how this Bible study might have changed the participants’ understanding and attitudes about the topic.

#### **Research Question #1**

What understandings and attitudes about reproducing churches and groups exist among the participants prior to the Bible study?

**Research Question #2**

What changes occur in the participants' understanding of, or attitudes about, church and group reproduction during, and after completing the Bible study?

**Research Question #3**

What elements of the training course assist in growing the participants understanding of, and openness to, the reproduction of churches and groups?

**Rationale for the Project**

A 2017 Leadership Network study led by Warren Bird confirmed what many have been sensing for some time now: there is a growing interest in church planting and multiplication among church leaders in the West. Bird's research with more than 1,600 churches and multi-site churches in 2017 revealed that 74% of the churches in the study had a future vision to plant churches and/or launch multisite campuses (11). This, as well as other findings in the report, indicates that a vibrant multiplication vision is alive in the hearts and minds of today's church leaders. And these findings should not surprise us. There is greater interest in church planting now than there has been for some time (McPhee, 32). Moreover, a quick look around reveals that more and more people are talking about multiplying movements these days, rather than simply growing big churches.

It is because of the growing interest in all things multiplication that this study on helping lay people understand the reproduction of churches and groups matters. Pastors or movement leaders with any sort of vision must, sooner or later, communicate that vision with lay people in their church or movement. Effective vision-casting that allows lay people to understand and own the vision has always been an important part of a

leadership skill set. Therefore, research and thought about how to share this increasingly popular vision for multiplying groups, campuses, and churches with lay people is needed.

The research presented in this study is even more necessary because multiplying churches and groups can be so challenging. Though often lauded for its strategic power (multiplication is preferable to addition) and sometimes pictured as a natural phenomenon of a vibrant, organic church, there can be pain and problems associated with reproducing churches and groups as well. The shared life that characterized first century churches (1 Thess. 2.8) is also a part of the church experience of most people today, as it should be. But starting new groups or churches almost always means that some people will have to leave friendships, groups, and congregations behind in order to follow God on mission. This kind of leaving, even if it is done for all the right reasons, may cause confusion, anger, division, and grief among those who are leaving and those who are staying. Casting a vision for reproducing churches or groups is casting a vision for leaving friendships and long-standing relationships in a group or church—hardly an easy sell. This research will be valuable in providing insights for leaders as they help others understand what is, no matter how natural, an emotionally-charged topic.

Finally, this research takes an adult-education approach to this issue that is not frequently found in the literature. Admonitions towards vision-casting for multiplication or creating a church culture that fosters church and group reproduction are frequent. But, this study has sought to test an adult-education approach to preparing lay people for church or group reproduction. The study has been designed to give adult lay people the opportunity to share experiences and learn about the topic in a small-group setting. This format is an intervention strategy that allows lay people to wrestle with Biblical texts

relevant to multiplication and with their own emotions on the subject. It is hoped that this study will provide practitioners with insights regarding the role adult education can play in effectively sharing a multiplication vision.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

- **Reproduction:** creating a copy, or new edition, of something that already exists.

This study considers reproduction of churches and small groups. There is some difference between the terms reproduction and multiplication. Reproduction focuses on making a single copy of something (e.g., one church sending out people to start another church). Multiplication is the general phenomenon of something (churches or groups, in this case) becoming more numerous. Though the slight difference in these terms is acknowledged by the researcher, the terms will be used interchangeably in this study.

- **Multiplication:** when leaders, groups, or churches become more numerous by any means of reproduction. Whereas reproduction is the creation of a single new thing, multiplication refers more broadly to creation of any number of new leaders, groups, or churches; it is reproduction many times over. As was stated above, though the researcher acknowledges the slight difference in meaning between multiplication and reproduction, the two terms will be used interchangeably in this study.
- **Groups:** in this study, “groups” are small groups of three to twenty-five people that meet for purposes such as shared life, discipleship, and training for disciple-making. Groups in this study are connected with a larger body (a “church”) where

biblical elders provide oversight, sacraments are administered, and there is typically a pastor that provides leadership for the church.

- **Churches:** A church in this study is a group of ten or more people, at least one of whom is identified as an elder, and where sacraments are regularly practiced, and at least one leader (or pastor) is clearly identified. Many churches in southeast Ohio are very small in size, and so it is important to note that in the context of this study, a church is reckoned, not by size, but by the presence of leaders and the administration of sacraments.

### **Delimitations**

Included in this study were lay people (that is, those not currently holding clergy credentials) who are members, or regular-attenders, of four different churches in Muskingum County, Ohio. Two of the churches represented in this study are denominationally-affiliated churches, and two are independent churches. There were twenty-eight total participants in this study: eighteen women and ten men. Study participants were invited to use the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum in the context of their own small group and experience it within the normal rhythms of group life. All of the participants were lay people already belonging to a small group of some sort.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The literature review for this study will center on the issue of educating, or training, lay people about church and group reproduction. Biblical foundations for the necessity of reproducing groups and churches as the gospel spreads are taken as a given.

The matter of how people ought to be prepared for such an eventuality is of greater relevance for this study, as will be reflected in the literature review.

The review of the literature for this study is divided into two major sections: Biblical Foundations and Missiological Foundations. The Biblical Foundations section will draw exclusively from the New Testament. It will review the pedagogic practices of Jesus and Paul to see if the training they offered may have included advanced preparation or education about how new groups or churches were to be planted. Also, this section will consider the organizational or internal culture of the first century church and what impact that may have had on understanding and attitudes about church and group reproduction.

The missiology section will discuss what today's practitioners are discovering about how to effectively share a vision of multiplication with lay people. This section will also take up the matter of organizational culture—looking at cultural variables that missiologists are saying affect a congregation's readiness to reproduce. Finally, this section considers the role that adult education could play as part of a strategy to prepare lay people for the prospect of multiplication.

Both sections will draw heavily on literature related to new church development. Though the Biblical Foundations section will include commentary on key texts from New Testament scholars, both sections of this literature review will draw heavily on the work of missiologists—scholars and practitioners writing about the practice of Christian mission today, particularly the planting and multiplying of churches. The missiology section will be supplemented with a review of relevant change theory and adult education theory sources.

The literature review will include a detailed discussion of the “spontaneous expansion” strategy made famous by missionaries and missiologists, such as Roland Allen and George Patterson. Both the Biblical Foundations and Missiological Foundations sections include a discussion on spontaneous expansion. Additionally, the work of contemporary missiologist Alan Hirsch, particularly in regard to the concepts of “apostolic genius” and mDNA, will be featured along with others who are writing about similar ideas. Finally, literature related to the dynamics of Christian movements will be reviewed. Those writing about historical or present-day Christian movements offer tremendous insight into the dynamics of church and group reproduction. Therefore, the literature review will consider historic movements such as the early Methodist movement as well as more recent church planting movements, such as those described in the seminal work of David Garrison.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Type of Research**

The research described below was an intervention. The research design involved a researcher-authored curriculum on the topic of church and group reproduction. The curriculum was embedded into the normal rhythm of group life for five small groups in Muskingum County, Ohio, over the course of six weeks.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were twenty-eight lay people from four different congregations in Muskingum County, Ohio. Only churches from Muskingum County were invited to this study. Participating lay people from each congregation were selected by means of an open invitation made in conjunction with the pastor of each church. Small



groups in each participating congregation were invited to participate in the study by using the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum in early 2019. The intent was to embed the curriculum into the normal rhythm of group life for each of the small groups participating in the study.

Multiple churches were recruited to the study so that the researcher could gain insight as to how the curriculum was received in different contexts. Four churches agreed to participate in the study and had members from at least one small group or Bible study agree to become participants. Three of the four churches were congregations that have existed for more than one hundred years, while one congregation has existed for less than five years. Two churches were independent or non-denominational churches and two were affiliated with a denomination.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach for data collection. A pre- and post-survey was used as a quantitative measure. A pre- and post-focus group and a participant journal were used as qualitative measures.

### **Data Collection**

The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in understanding and attitude among lay people in Muskingum County, Ohio, as a result of participating in a six-week, small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups. The first research question asks what understanding and attitudes about reproducing churches and groups existed among the participants prior to the Bible study. In order to answer this question, the pre-survey was administered before the participants engaged with the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum, individually or

in their small groups. This web-based survey was administered via SurveyMonkey, and participants were instructed not to begin reading or studying the curriculum until they had completed the survey. In addition, a focus group was conducted in each small group prior to their study of the curriculum. The focus group was conducted during each of the small group's usual meeting times and in their usual locations. Focus group sessions were recorded and transcribed.

This study's second research question asks what changes occurred in the participants' understanding of or attitudes about church and group reproduction during and after the completion of the Bible study. To determine this answer, a post-survey was administered after the completion of the curriculum. The questions given were the same as the first survey, and it was also administered by SurveyMonkey. Also, a second focus group was held with each group. The schedule of questions used during the first focus group was repeated, and the sessions were recorded and transcribed, just like the first.

Participant journals were also used to gather data pertinent to the second research question. These journals were distributed during the first focus group, with participants being instructed to write in them following each week's session. The journal presented questions for each chapter or session that were designed to prompt reflection on what the participants had just read and discussed. Journal entries were used to measure changes in understanding and attitude that were occurring during the six-week Bible study.

Participant journals were kept by the participants throughout the course of the study and were then collected by the researcher during the final focus group session. These participant journals were also used to answer the third research question: what elements of the training course assisted in growing the participants' understanding of and openness

to the reproduction of churches and groups? Insights from the other two instruments (survey and focus group) were also used in answering this final question.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey results were coded and organized by the researcher. With the help of a statistician, the researcher used Microsoft Excel (2018) to perform analysis on the survey results. The pre-test results were analyzed to determine central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation) in order to provide data about understanding and attitudes *before* the beginning of the Bible-study experience (RQ 1). A t-test was used to measure change between pre- and post-test responses in order to determine changes to understanding or attitude that occurred during, or a result of, the Bible study (RQ 2).

Transcripts from the first round of five focus groups (before the Bible-study experience) were coded thematically to reveal a range of initial understanding and attitudes among participants (RQ 1). Transcripts from the final focus groups (after the Bible-study experience) were coded thematically and compared to the initial set of transcripts in order to discover any changes (RQ 2). Participant journals were also coded thematically by the researcher after the conclusion of the final focus groups. Participant journals were then compared to quantitative data from the initial survey and transcripts from the initial focus groups to assess changes in understanding or attitudes (RQ 2).

Participant journals were also analyzed to determine which parts of the curriculum were most impactful in affecting understanding and attitude (RQ 3). Two criteria were used in this analysis. First, the researcher identified explicit statements from participants that identified a particular new understanding or attitude as a result of a certain part of the Bible study. Second, the research identified which sections of the Bible

study received the largest quantity of comments. Both of these criteria were employed in making judgments about which portions of the curriculum were most influential in changing understanding and attitudes (RQ 3).

### **Generalizability**

There are several factors that limit the generalizability of this study, but also several factors that aid it. Among the factors that would limit the generalizability of this study are that participants in this study were small in number (24) and share many of the same demographics (e.g., all attend church in Muskingum County, all attend churches of fewer than 150 people). Conclusions about the effectiveness of an adult-education intervention like this one should be moderated by these factors.

However, no matter the demographic of a given church, its small groups (if it as has any) will have some things in common with the groups in this study. Namely, the groups will be small and filled with people that have been previously involved in group life. This research was an adult-education intervention among existing small groups, people already involved in group life together. Therefore, one may to expect find similar results when using the curriculum with already-existing small groups in a variety of contexts. Though certain demographics would differ from the ones present in this study, the experience of an existing small group learning together about church and group reproduction through an adult-education intervention like the one presented here could yield similar results.

### **Project Overview**

This research will be shared over a total of five chapters, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature relevant to the purpose of this

research. Chapter 3 details the design of the research and the collection of data. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the data gathered and a summary of major findings. Finally, Chapter 5 details the major findings of this research and the implications they bear for my ministry context and others.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter will explore a variety of literature related to affecting the understanding and attitude of lay people about church or group reproduction. This chapter is not a simple theology of church planting or reproduction. While many books or dissertations having to do with church planting or reproduction begin with such material, it is not warranted here. The purpose of this research was not to discern whether there are Biblical or theological reasons for planting new churches or small groups; in fact, this study presupposes that there are such reasons. So, there will be no review of the Scriptures or other relevant literature to construct a theology of church planting or reproduction in this chapter. Instead, the aim of this chapter is to review literature relevant to the matter of preparing or educating lay people about church and group reproduction.

First, this chapter will explore whether there is evidence of preparation for, or education about, church reproduction in the Biblical record. Were churches and individuals given information about how God would multiply churches or groups to prepare them for that eventuality? If so, what kind of education or preparation was given to first-century Christians about this process? Do the Scriptures offer any examples or wisdom for mitigating or eliminating the pain and difficulty that comes with reproduction? The first section will explore this problem from a Biblical perspective. The second major section in this chapter will turn to missiology to explore what practitioners are saying and have said about education and preparation for church and group reproduction in the church. With particular focus being given to the North American

context, the missiology section will survey best practices, as well as points of contention, related to preparing laity for effective multiplication that moves the mission forward. The survey of the best practices of those in the field today will provide a range of approaches to mitigating or solving this problem.

The researcher created a six-week Bible study entitled *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* to be used as an intervention for this research. This Bible study, as well as the research instruments that are described in detail in Chapter 3, were designed based on the Biblical and missiological literature surveyed in this chapter.

## **Biblical Foundations**

### **Jesus Preparing the Twelve**

There is no better place to begin building a Biblical foundation than the earthly ministry of Jesus himself. This section is not focused on demonstrating that Jesus *sent out* his disciples to spread the good news of the Kingdom of God and multiply disciples. It is clear that He did. The question that concerns this section is the kinds of preparation or education, if any, that the Master gave his charges before sending them out. For the purpose of this research project, it will be important to determine what Biblical precedent exists for the preparation of disciples for future ministry endeavors in general, and for church or group reproduction in particular. Simply put, as Jesus sent out the Twelve, were they told about what to expect or given any advance coaching for what they might encounter?

There is no record of Jesus explicitly preparing his disciples for the reproduction of churches or groups. The reproduction of churches and groups would be a result of the movement and church he was establishing, but there is no direct evidence of Jesus

instructing his disciples about this. While many have observed the evangelistic focus of Jesus's admonitions to his followers and the imperative given to his disciples to make disciples, the Gospels do not contain nuts-and-bolts instruction about church planting or reproduction. It is common, in church planting literature, to find a Biblical case for church planting constructed based on Jesus's command to make disciples. But Jesus does not speak to his disciples about church planting. As J.D. Payne asserts, there is no Biblical imperative to plant new churches (*Discovering*, loc. 266).

So, in the quest to find out *if*, *how*, and *when* education about or preparation for church or group reproduction happened in the Bible, an examination of Jesus and the Twelve will not suffice on its own. There is no record of instructions he gave to the Twelve about church or group reproduction. Nevertheless, some progress toward a Biblical foundation for education about this subject is made by examining Jesus's method of training/education in general. Indeed, the Gospels do depict some instances of *how* and *when* Jesus engaged his followers with training or education for other realities (persecution, evangelism, etc.). Thus, the first step in building this foundation is an analysis of Jesus's method of instruction in matters other than church and group reproduction.

**Early Preparation of the Twelve and the Seventy-Two Messengers.** When Jesus sent his disciples on short-term experiences of spreading the word of God, he did not do so without some level of preparation. One such instance was the sending of the seventy-two messengers to heal the sick and proclaim the Kingdom of God (Luke 10.1–24). On this occasion, Jesus's commissioning of the seventy-two was accompanied by detailed instructions on how they were to conduct the work. His instructions for this



mission ranged from what his disciples should and should not take with them (no purse, bag, or sandals, v.4), to what they should do upon entering a house and a town (vs. 5–9), to what they should proclaim once they got there (vs. 9–16).

Dennis McCallum finds great significance in Jesus's intentional preparation of his disciples. For McCallum, this was a coaching moment in the Jesus's ministry, and one that should get the attention of present-day disciple makers. In preparing the seventy-two, McCallum notices Jesus providing both clear direction for the mission and a detailed vision for what lay ahead. The picture of the upcoming mission that Jesus painted was multifaceted. He prepared them for temporal, logistical realities, as well as spiritual realities that they would encounter on the road. And his vision-casting effort with the seventy-two included a realistic picture of potential hardships and setbacks they may encounter on the way (McCallum loc. 3833–70).

When it comes to both the commissioning of the seventy-two, and the equipping of the Twelve, there is a great deal of emphasis placed on Jesus's instructions. R.T. France expresses surprise at the quantity of material devoted to the preparation of the workers compared to narrative accounts of the work (417). "Clearly," he writes, "Matthew is more interested in the principles underlying the disciples' mission (and therefore that of his readers) than in any contribution it makes to his narrative of Jesus' Galilean period" (417). In a similar way, Joel Green observes that virtually all of Luke's attention goes to Jesus's instructions for the seventy-two, while details of the actual mission are remarkably absent (417). Great attention is given in the gospels to Jesus's instructions and preparation of his disciples for future ministry endeavors.

Concerning the coaching and preparation of the Twelve, all three synoptic gospels describe a commissioning of the Twelve in the early stages of Jesus's ministry (Matt.10:1–42; Mark 6:7–13; Luke 9.1–6). Jesus's early commissioning of the Twelve in Matthew's gospel is especially noteworthy. The Matthean account includes a larger and more thoroughgoing set of instructions than the other two accounts. It includes both short-term instructions for the Twelve as they embark on their mission of proclaiming the kingdom, healing the sick, etc., in Galilee, as well as long-term training on the prospect of persecution in general. France notes that Jesus's warning about persecution during the Galilean mission allows for an easy transition in the discourse to a broader treatment of the subject of persecution that would serve them in the years to come (390).

Though the discourse in chapter 10 ends differently than the other major discourses in Matthew's gospel, its closure has the same effect. Matthew 11.1, signals the end of one phase of the narrative, and a transition to the next: "And then, when Jesus had come to the end of instructing his twelve disciples, he moved on from there in order to teach and preach in their towns" (France 416). It is for this reason and others that France counts the Matthew 10 discourse among the five major discourses in Matthew's gospel (416). That one of the major discourses of Matthew's gospel is devoted to *preparing* disciples for future ministry eventualities would seem to indicate the value placed on such preparation by the gospel writer and by Jesus.

**Jesus's Farewell Discourse.** The so-called farewell discourse is another example of Jesus's giving advance instruction to the Twelve apostles. The farewell discourse is a literary form that appears in various kinds of ancient literature and even other places in the Old and New Testaments (e.g., Deut. 31–34, Josh. 23–24, Acts 20.17–38; Paschal

229). However, there is some variation in the structure and content of this literary form in antiquity. Some farewell discourses take on an apologetic tone and are more backwards-looking, while others are dominated by forward-looking instructional material, exhortations, predictions, or prophecies (230). But whatever form or content variations there may be, the aim of the farewell discourse in biblical and classical literature is always “to teach and to instruct” (229).

The Johannine farewell discourse is significant because of its massive scope and size (John 13.31–16.33). However, as Rudolf Bultmann observes, all three synoptic gospels also have a significant amount of material that amounts to a farewell discourse within each gospel. Moreover, Bultmann suggests that all three synoptics, as well as John, follow the same basic pattern of Jesus engaging his disciples with instruction and teaching about the future *after* his public ministry has concluded and *before* his passion (457). The difference between John’s farewell discourse and that of the others is that the whole of the farewell material is “compressed” into a single night (Bultmann 457). Thus, while the volume of the material in John may still be greater than the other gospels, significant parting instructions are included in all four gospels.

Andreas Kostenberger divides the content of the Johannine discourse into three major sections, which summarizes the broad categories of Jesus’s farewell instructions: “Jesus’ Departure and the Sending of the Spirit” (13.31–14.31); “Jesus the True Vine” (John 15.1–17); and “The Spirit and the Disciple’s Witness in the World” (John 15.18–16.33) (419–81). The breadth of Jesus’s instruction can be seen in these three categories, as well as a note of finality or completeness to it all. Kostenberger argues that the consistent use of the perfect tense (*lelalēka*, “I have spoken”) by Jesus in this discourse

signals that Jesus's instruction of his disciples has been complete and sufficient (441). This sense of completeness and the wide range of forward-looking instruction that Jesus delivers reveal his priority of sending forth a well-prepared contingent to carry on his mission.

**The Overall Preparation of the Twelve.** Additionally, some have pointed out that Jesus's training of the Twelve was not limited to moments of explicit instruction. The aforementioned preparatory discourses of Jesus do not make up the sum total of his training efforts. Explicit teaching and instruction on the reproduction of churches and groups is not the only form of preparation there is; other factors contribute to getting a church or group ready to multiply. Likewise, Jesus's approach to preparing the Twelve for what was coming next was holistic and multifaceted.

The seminal work of Robert Coleman should be mentioned in connection with Jesus' holistic approach to preparing the Twelve. Coleman's concise book, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, is an exploration of eight principles that comprised Jesus's methodology for thoroughly preparing his disciples for the work that lay ahead of them. While Coleman, too, observes the length and detail of Jesus's instructions to his disciples before sending them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and heal the sick (Matt. 10; Mark 6.7; Luke 9.1, 2), his work looks at a number of different ways that Jesus prepared his followers (73ff.).

Coleman observes the care with which Jesus built his ministry in order that his followers would be prepared for theirs. Coleman claims that "Jesus was always building his ministry for the time when his disciples would have to take over his work and go out into the world with the redeeming gospel" (71). There was a need for spiritual readiness

as well as intellectual readiness for the work that lay ahead. The Twelve needed to learn to obey Jesus and count the cost (“consecration”), and they also needed the supernatural energy of the Spirit (“impartation”) to make disciples (43–61). Furthermore, even the selection of the Twelve was part of Jesus preparation for sending them out. He selected men he thought would carry the mission forward (“selection”). He then also chose to get these men ready by concentrating his time and efforts on them (“association”) (21–42). Clearly, for Coleman, Jesus was preparing his disciples for their future endeavors, in more ways than simply talking about it directly.

**Summary.** The testimony of Scripture, as well as the literature surveyed here, is that Jesus took great care to prepare the Twelve for their future endeavors. They were to carry on the mission of Jesus after his resurrection and his ascension, and it would seem that his intention was to leave behind a thoroughly-equipped church. Jesus prepared his disciples for short-term opportunities and long-term eventualities. And, as Coleman has demonstrated, he did it in a holistic way.

As was stated above, Jesus gave the Twelve no explicit instructions about church or group reproduction that are recorded in the New Testament. But, the care and detail that the Master put into preparing his disciples for future opportunities contributes to a biblical foundation for this study in a significant way. This research was about preparing lay people for something that could happen in their church or small group. Churches should consider, then, the high value that the New Testament places on training for future ministry endeavors.

### **Instruction About Church Multiplication in the Earliest Churches**

In the biblical data on the spread of Christianity after Pentecost there is little direct evidence for education about the reproduction of churches or groups. As was stated above, there is no explicit command to plant new churches anywhere in the New Testament (Payne, *Discovering*, loc. 266). Nonetheless, there may be indirect evidence from the book of Acts and the epistles of Paul to help build a biblical foundation for this study. The missionary journeys of Paul, as described in Acts, as well as his epistles, include accounts of the establishment of new churches in ways that the gospels do not. Therefore, a survey of the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of Paul may uncover further evidence about any kind of preparation for multiplication that occurred in first-century churches.

**The New Testament as Missiological Playbook.** A significant point of discussion and debate has to do with how missiologists read the New Testament account of the spread of Christianity and the work of the apostle Paul. Some contend that significant and timeless missiological and ecclesiological insights are available in the New Testament by a close examination of the methodology of the apostle Paul. The work of Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God*, is a prime example of this. McGavran finds biblical support for certain bits of church-growth theory by plumbing the Pauline letters and making missiological inferences about the way Paul approached his work (17–35). However, others urge caution in constructing a would-be biblical missiology based on inferences made from the often scant record we have of Paul’s travels and whereabouts. Carl R. Holladay even describes such efforts by modern day missiologists as “highly selective historical reconstruction” that creates “caricatures” of Paul to prop up present-day missiological theories (87). This debate affects the hermeneutic employed here to

find evidence of any kind of methodology employed by Paul or others to prepare churches to multiply.

There are some who believe that St. Paul planted churches in such a way that those churches would plant additional churches (Addison 140–144; Cole 110). So, while there is no evidence of Paul explicitly addressing the issue of church reproduction with his churches, some would contend that he must have done something to prepare his churches to multiply given the results. This, of course, is an inference. It is an inference that is based on two strands of Biblical evidence: (1) that there was a multiplicity of churches in regions where Paul worked, and (2) that there are statements regarding Paul's having reached entire regions, though he may have only worked, preached, or planted in a handful of localities. This section will deal with each of these strands of evidence in turn.

First, churches were planted in regions where Paul worked which were not planted directly by him. For example, while Paul was based in Ephesus, a number of other churches in Asia Minor were planted. Steve Addison observes that, based on data from the epistle to the Colossians (1.3–8; 2.1; 4.13), Epaphras may have established churches in the neighboring cities in the nearby Lycos Valley (140). Addison also believes that it was a possibility that the churches mentioned in the book of Revelation (Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, etc.) also came into being while Paul was in Ephesus (140), while Ellis and Mitchell believe that it was in fact probable that this occurred (83). Some infer from this data that the church planted in Ephesus that was primed for reproduction. Ellis and Mitchell view Ephesus as operating as a kind of “mother church” that was planting churches in the outlying villages and towns (83). Others imagine Paul

founding churches in places like Ephesus that would then spawn “satellites” along the major roads leading out of the city, perhaps with an interdependency between the churches akin to the multi-site models of today (Witherington 280; Nash 16–18).

Addison calls the church at Ephesus, shaped by the apostle Paul, a “Great Commission” church that influenced its region in significant ways:

For centuries the region was one of the leading centers of Christianity. Paul planted a church—a Great Commission church—in Ephesus that sparked a movement. A Great Commission church wants to reach their community, not just grow their church. A Great Commission church gives away people and resources to pioneer movements in unreached fields beyond their community. (141)

A second argument made by missiologists looking to deduce a multiplication strategy from available biblical data has to do with statements made by Paul about thoroughly evangelizing a given region, while he may have visited only a handful of localities. The work of early-twentieth century missionary and missiologist Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods*, has practitioners in the field look closely at the methods of Paul and pattern their work after his. Regarding planting churches that multiply, Allen notes that Paul claims in his letters to have evangelized entire regions simply by planting two or three churches in places from which the gospel could easily spread:

By establishing the church in two or three centres St. Paul claimed that he had evangelized the whole province. Ten years after his first start from Antioch, he told the Romans that he had 'fully preached the Gospel of Christ from Jerusalem and round about Illyricum', and that he had 'no more place in these parts'. In that single sentence we have the explanation and the justification of St. Paul's



establishment of the churches in important centres in a province. When he had occupied two or three centres he had really and effectually occupied the province.

(14)

The passage that Allen is referring to here is Romans 15.19–23, and he is not alone in citing this passage as evidence for Paul's completed work (cf. Comiskey, *Planting*, 55).

Luke also makes a statement about the evangelization of entire regions, despite apostolic visits to only a few cities. Addison claims that Luke's statement that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord" (Acts 19:10) reveals Paul's strategy for evangelizing a given region. Clearly, it was not Paul and his immediate associates who took the gospel all over this region, and so it is inferred that Paul planted, in the places he visited, the kind of churches that would spread the gospel and plant churches in the surrounding country. Given that Ephesus was a city of around 200,000 people and the population of Asia Minor at this time was at least ten million, Paul's claim that all the Jews and Greeks in the province heard the word is rather remarkable. Since Paul, during his three years in Ephesus, could not have taken the gospel everywhere on his own, Addison concludes that the sense of completion felt among Paul's team came from having planted churches with the potency to multiply disciples and churches throughout the region (140).

Some would urge caution, however, in seeking to deduce too much of Paul's methodology from summary statements such as Acts 19.10. I. Howard Marshall, while not denying that Paul certainly sent out other apostolic workers to carry the gospel into other parts of the region, also finds it likely that Paul probably took some forays into regions beyond Ephesus himself (310). Though Paul's base of operations was clearly

established at Ephesus, he may have extended his ministry into the surrounding country while based there. Marshall comments that this is one place where scholars certainly would like to know more (about the missionary methods of Paul) than Luke provides (310).

Whatever claims of entirety may be found in Acts or Romans, Carl R. Holladay finds the inference that Paul set up reproducing, mission-minded churches to be an errant one. Holladay argues that there “is little evidence that he actively sought to transfer his mission to his churches, so that mission would essentially become a lay movement.” There is nothing in the letters of Paul, he argues, that would indicate that his churches became “hives of missionary activity once he left them” (99–100). Regarding the longevity and sustained impact of churches planted and influenced by Paul, Holladay casts doubt on portraits of Paul as a brilliant movement catalyst:

Corinth, Thessalonica, and Philippi produced no churches of long-standing influence, and certainly never rivaled other holy sees. Ephesus appears to have been the most enduring, though oddly enough its more permanent reputation is more usually associated with John than with Paul. If one tries to assess the permanent results of Paul's mission in the Aegean, it may turn out that his real contribution to the church was his thought, not his missionary and administrative skill. (100)

Further, Holladay finds fault in setting up the mission strategy of the apostle Paul as a kind of biblical paradigm in order to multiply or grow churches. He finds in Paul, not the work of a master missions-strategist, but rather someone who responded well to frequent changes in plans and circumstances. Paul's ad hoc, Spirit-led approach should be viewed

as a unique and indispensable part of the spread of early Christianity, but not necessarily as a blueprint to be followed by those seeking to replicate first-century church growth (100).

In sum, a popular inference among some missiologists is that Paul did *something* in order to produce churches that multiplied, while others contend that there is far too little evidence to substantiate this claim. Whether this inference is reliable or not, this project will continue to look at the potential preparation for multiplication among first-century churches a little more deeply. If Paul did something to prepare churches to multiply, what was it that he did?

**‘Spontaneous’ Reproduction?** In considering what Paul could possibly have done to promote reproduction among his churches, this section will first consider the work of Roland Allen. For Allen, it is not so much a case of what Paul did, as what he *did not* do. He sees in Paul’s missionary method a kind of hands-off approach. Allen’s writings called the church back to what he famously described as the *spontaneous expansion* of the church. Spontaneous expansion is the idea that little, if any, outside prompting or pushing is needed to help a given local church grow and reach new people. In the most frequently quoted passage from his writing, Allen defines spontaneous expansion as:

the expansion which follows the unexhorted and unorganized activity of individual members of the Church explaining to others the Gospel which they have found for themselves; I mean the expansion which follows the irresistible attraction of the Christian Church for men who see its ordered life, and are drawn to it by desire to discover the secret of a life which they instinctively desire to

share; I mean also the expansion of the Church by the addition of new churches.

(*Spontaneous*, 10)

Along with Allen, others too have championed a hands-off approach that relies more on the power of the Holy Spirit for the reproduction of disciples than training or motivation from missionaries (Faircloth 46–47; Patterson 633).

Allen writes that the Apostle Paul sought to equip his churches with the basics and with the Holy Spirit. That was enough. It was enough for him to leave them as a fully prepared church capable of reproducing disciples and churches (Payne, *Roland Allen*, 65–66). Allen contrasts this approach with that of many twentieth century missionaries and mission agencies. Whereas modern missionaries may often linger for too long over a young church, only gradually relinquishing control to the people, Paul believed that doctrinal foundations, plus the Holy Spirit, left a new church in a good position to expand. Thus, Allen advocated for what he called “missionary faith,” which is faith in the newly-established congregation to thrive immediately without outside influence, because of its grasp of certain essentials and its experience of the Holy Spirit (Payne, *Roland Allen*, 77–82). Missionary faith was Paul recognizing that he did not need to explain everything to a church before leaving, or hover over it for years in order to leave a fully-equipped church in his wake. In sum, Allen and others have deduced from the New Testament evidence a Biblical formula: missionary faith + the Holy Spirit = the spontaneous expansion of the church (Payne, *Roland Allen*, 119–121).

Those finding evidence of spontaneous expansion in the New Testament point to references of a “pattern of teaching” in Paul’s letters (Rom. 6.17; 2 Tim. 1.13), but find that pattern to be a simple one, including only the basics. Donald Guthrie, commenting

on the word *hypotypōsis* (“pattern”) in 2 Timothy 1:13, notes that this word has to do with a kind of sketch or basic outline, such as that rendered by an architect at the beginning of a project and before any detailed plans were added (132). Writing from a biblical studies perspective, Guthrie thus confirms what missiologists have seen in passages like this one and others regarding Paul’s approach to training. Guthrie states with emphasis that Paul passed on a simple, bare bones pattern; he viewed the teaching that he transferred to his churches as merely a starting point (132).

Neil Cole also points to New Testament evidence for a simple pattern of teaching that was passed on by Paul and perhaps others (109–113). J. D. Payne, in his exposition of the thought and practice of Roland Allen, explains that Allen saw evidence from the Scriptures of Paul passing on a “simple gospel” of basic doctrinal standards, observance of the Sacraments, and an adherence to the Scriptures. Allen believed that Paul did not over-train his converts and did not venture far beyond simply passing on the “necessities” before allowing them to function autonomously as a church (Payne, *Roland Allen*, 60–62).

Describing the growth of the early church as spontaneous is akin to calling it organic, a term that also appears regularly in the literature. Proponents of organic models of church and mission find evidence in the Scriptures for a kind of church growth, or extension, that does not depend on outside intervention. Linda Adams notes that all of the New Testament word pictures for the church are organic, or natural ones, and that the church, as a living entity, is naturally disposed to reproduce all by itself (32–33). Christian Schwartz’s well-known Natural Church Development research also has biblical-theological underpinnings that have to do with church growth happening

naturally. Schwartz finds biblical footing for his well-known “all-by-itself” principle from Jesus’s parable of the sower in Mark 4 (13). In this growth paradigm, the soil quality that seed falls on will determine its fruitfulness to a greater degree than will the sower. In other words, a necessary condition of organic or spontaneous multiplication is that the seed fall on “good soil” (Cole 68–81; Schwartz 13ff.).

Regarding the organic nature of God’s kingdom, some scholars start at the very beginning, viewing God’s clear plan for the multiplication of life in the natural world as indicative that he also built in a propensity for spiritual multiplication (disciples, groups, churches) into his creation (Comiskey 153). Others note that God has always been in the people-building business, showing that, even in the Old Testament (Exod. 1; Ruth 4), God wanted to naturally build a people for himself (Vajko, 97).

This discussion is significant for this research because it may appear at times that those finding evidence of the “organic” or “spontaneous growth” see a kind of de-emphasizing of training in the methodology of Paul, and in the first-century Christian movement. That is, while Paul and others laid out certain basic principles, the rest they left to the newly planted church and the Holy Spirit. If this is true, then one might conclude that detailed instruction on anything beyond the basics was not a priority for Paul and other apostolic workers. And if this were the case, where does that leave detailed ecclesiological or missiological matters such as how to start new churches? Would instruction on church multiplication have been included in the set of basic instructions given by Paul and others, or was reproduction simply to happen spontaneously or organically without any instruction?

Whatever the first-century church may have thought about the organic nature of the church, those observing the organic nature of New Testament church growth are not necessarily de-valuing training and instruction. A more careful reading of the work of Allen and Patterson on this issue reveals a more nuanced position. They do not so much argue on biblical grounds against training or preparation but against an unhealthy dependency on apostolic workers or missionaries. Therefore, while they do not find in Paul an intentional withholding of training, they do find a willingness to leave a church with the Spirit and the basics and move on. The Spirit and the basics, when applied to “good soil,” will still allow for the reproduction of disciples and churches and the extension of the gospel, while not precluding more detailed instruction later.

Understanding this nuance is important, for otherwise Patterson and Allen seem to be making contradictory claims. George Patterson, for example, says that a local church can reproduce spontaneously “without outsiders pushing the process,” but he also goes on to advocate for training and mobilizing a new church for evangelism and reproduction (633, 640). How can he cite the power of spontaneous reproduction in an indigenous church but then also lay out copious training topics and coaching methods in evangelism, church reproduction, etc.? However, this is no contradiction. Patterson clearly finds training to be important, but persistent missionary or apostolic presence that insists on advanced training is not necessary for expansion and may, in fact, hinder it. These authors do not find in Paul or his letters an aversion to training.

After all, concluding that Paul or others modeled a kind of training-lite approach does not comport with the biblical evidence. It is hard to miss Paul’s penchant for training and instruction, both in its epistolary form and in the narrative accounts of his

missionary work in Acts. For instance, in Acts 15.36, Paul looks for opportunities to return to churches and monitor progress. Paul also stays in certain places for extended periods of time (Acts 18.18, 19.10). Did Paul only train the churches in Ephesus and Corinth in the basics given how long he stayed there? In addition to extended stays, the mere existence of epistles to these churches with detailed instructions about such things as orderly worship and dress would seem to indicate a more thoroughgoing approach to instruction on the part of the apostle (1 Cor. 14). Moreover, the New Testament contains notions of “building on a foundation” of basic doctrine, as well as admonitions to move beyond “elementary teachings” (1 Cor. 3.10–15; Heb. 6.1–3).

### **Cultural Factors that Prepared the Early Church for Multiplication**

Beyond evidence of direct training and preparation of disciples in the New Testament, what cultural factors might have influenced church reproduction in the early church? The cultural factors considered in this section will be limited to the culture or environment *within* the Church which can be ascertained from the Scriptures. External factors that may have contributed to the spread of Christianity are beyond the scope of this study. This section we will not consider how the social, political, or religious climate affected the spread of the gospel but only how the internal culture of early churches prepared them for multiplication. And, as detailed in the missiology section below, missiologists will argue that a church’s internal culture or environment may often determine its attitude toward sending out people to start new groups and churches.

Edgar Schein, writing on organizational culture and leadership, observes that organizational culture involves often unseen or unnoticed values and practices that cause certain kinds of behavior. Organizational culture often has to do with phenomena that are



“below the surface,” yet also “powerful in their impact” (14). So then, in the absence of direct evidence that Paul or others explicitly trained churches to reproduce, could there be other “below the surface” beliefs and practices in the first-century church that created an environment for reproduction? That is, if Paul and others did *something* to create the kind of churches that would readily reproduce, perhaps it was the creation of a multiplication culture. This section will review cultural characteristics of the earliest churches that are cited in the literature as potential factors in the reproduction of disciples and churches.

**Apostolic Environment.** Many find clear evidence of an apostolic environment in the Book of Acts and through the letters of Paul. “Apostolic environment” does not have to do merely with the presence and leadership of The Twelve. Rather, many have observed that the function or office of apostle was not limited to The Twelve. Fred Herron lists a number of notable missiologists who have highlighted the role of New Testament apostles other than the Twelve (39), and Alan Hirsch observes the same evidence for a multiplicity of New Testament apostles:

While Paul and, to a lesser degree, Peter stands in the spotlight of Scripture as the archetypal apostles, they were not the only ones doing apostolic ministry. The word apostle appears around eighty times in the New Testament, and many times it refers to people other than Paul or the original twelve. For instance, Paul, himself an apostle beyond the original twelve, casually mentions a cross-section of eight other people who are viewed by himself and his communities as apostles. (100–101)

Hirsch goes on to list a number of apostles (besides the Twelve) that are named in the New Testament: Barnabas (Acts 14.4, 14); Andronicus (Rom. 16.7); Junia (Rom. 16.7); Unnamed apostle of the churches (2 Cor. 8.23); Epaphroditus (Phil. 2.25); Silvanus (1 Thess. 1.1, 2.6); Timothy (1 Thess. 1.1, 2.6). In addition to noticing the ‘named’ apostles of the New Testament, he comments that “there were undoubtedly numerous other apostolic people who are not named as such but were behind the missionary growth of Christianity in the early part of the first century” (100–101).

The function of New Testament apostles may have contributed to a multiplication culture in the earliest churches. Recent literature on the nature of New Testament apostolic ministry finds apostolic function or gifting as normative in the New Testament. Alan Johnson finds a great deal of agreement among scholars about what it is that New Testament apostleship generally entails: it is not an appointment to an office (except for perhaps the Twelve) but has to do with the sending or authorizing of a messenger for a particular function or task (57–60). Johnson goes on to sum up apostolic function in this way: “It is the continual impulse, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to take the message of Christ from where the faith is rooted into places and peoples where it is unknown and plant churches that are obedient to Jesus Christ in their social setting” (87).

Others provide even more color and detail to a picture of New Testament apostolic function. Alan Hirsch, in his work *The Forgotten Ways*, provides one of the most fully-orbed accounts of apostolic practice—both in the first century, and today. Among other things, Hirsch provides a helpful job description of an apostle that includes three primary functions: to pioneer new ground for the gospel and the church, to faithfully work for the “doctrinal integrity” and organizational health of new churches or

networks, and to create an environment in which other Biblically sanctioned gifts, functions, and ministries can thrive (152–159).

Hirsch also underscores the importance of apostolic function by locating it in the five-fold gifting paradigm of Ephesians 4. He refers to this paradigm using the acrostic APEPT (apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, teaching), which he believes to be God’s manifest intent for the gift mix of his church (157–177). When all five functions are operational, the church can truly build itself up and reach maturity (Eph. 4.12–13). Steve Addison finds significance in the apostle Paul twice placing the gift of apostleship first in his listing of gifts (1 Cor. 12.28; Eph. 4.11). Addison and Hirsch contend, it is the ministry that makes all the others possible. If the gospel is not extended into new territory and to new people through apostolic work, the other APEPT functions will never have the chance to develop and spread in new places (Addison 42–44; Hirsch 157–158).

However, it is more than just a proliferation of New Testament-era apostles that is significant for this study. Hirsch, for example, believes that the presence of apostolic function or gifting among the earliest churches contributed to a genuinely apostolic “environment” (149ff.). J. R. Woodward also sees apostolic gifting as being able to “create culture” and comments that apostles “help us remember that the mission of the church is grounded in the mission of God and is to be proclaimed visually and verbally” (126). Hirsch and Woodward, writing on characteristics of the missional church, find in first-century apostles people who cast a missional vision and helped create and maintain an outwardly-focused, “sending” culture.

Hirsch has coined the phrase “apostolic genius” in an attempt to identify the culture or spirit of the New Testament church that was so effective at facilitating the

spread of the gospel. He explains that “in coining the phrase I hope to identify that primal energy, the spiritual current that seemed to thrust its way through those little communities of faith that transformed the world” (Hirsch 78). While this is not the place to unpack all of the aspects of “apostolic genius,” we should simply observe that Hirsch and others find in the New Testament a certain apostolic environment that propelled the early Christian movement. This apostolic environment was tied to the early Church’s recognition of apostolic gifting and function, but other factors contributed as well.

First-century Christians knew apostles. They knew them personally, or they were aware of their presence and function through the letters of the apostle Paul. Imagine then the picture painted by Hirsch of an environment that validated and supported certain people that traveled from place to place, set up new churches in doctrinally faithful ways, and generally promoted the spread of the gospel. In such an environment, people being sent out to new places and the starting of new churches would have been a regular part of the life of the church. In short, such an environment or culture of sending and multiplying may have meant that people were prepared for and even expected that people would come and go to start new churches.

**Holy Spirit Consciousness in the Book of Acts.** Another aspect of the internal culture of the New Testament churches is what one might call a *Holy Spirit consciousness*. These churches were aware of, and oftentimes dependent upon, the leading and power of the Holy Spirit as the gospel radiated out from Jerusalem and Antioch. Early church leaders had a culture of partnership with God in his mission, in the power of the Holy Spirit. Arguments about whether the Holy Spirit’s power which leads the church in the book of Acts was unique to that era of church history are not relevant

here. While a discussion of what the early church may have done to cultivate a Spirit-led culture would certainly be interesting in connection with this study, this topic will be left for another time as well. The concern here is simply to establish that a Holy Spirit consciousness was part of the culture of the 1st century churches found in the New Testament.

Paul and Barnabas leaving Antioch to take the gospel to the Gentiles may be the most important church-planting passage in the entire New Testament. The frequency with which it is discussed in the literature signals its significance for those wanting to construct a Biblical paradigm of multiplication. In this frequently-referenced passage, the Holy Spirit guides the process:

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So, after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus. When they arrived at Salamis, they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues. John was with them as their helper. (Acts 13.1–5)

This is the most straightforward report of church reproduction in the New Testament. Paul and Barnabas had been a part of this church for at least one year when they are called by the Holy Spirit to head for new territory (Acts 11.26). The sending out of a

missionary team to start new churches is clearly one of the ways that churches reproduce, and this was the normative mode of church reproduction in the New Testament.

As observed above, the Antioch church may very well have expected this eventuality. Paul and Barnabas were an apostolic tandem whose residency in Antioch was indefinite (Keener 1994). Nonetheless, the calling of the Holy Spirit is clearly in the foreground of this multiplication moment. Whatever advance preparation the church may or may not have had for this moment, they did have an experience of the Holy Spirit in their midst that preceded their sending out this duo to plant new churches.

John McIntosh has written a helpful article surveying the history of interpretation of what the Spirit's impacting decisions in the Acts churches actually entailed. As one would imagine, there is a range of interpretation on this point. Some have understood the references to the Spirit's influence in decision-making to be nothing more than church leadership merely attaching divine sanction to humanly-derived decisions. At the other extreme, commentators posit that the accounts in Acts refer to the Spirit offering truly "objective" testimony in the midst of the decision-making process, or somehow miraculously "ratifying" a decision that has been arrived at by the church (131–133). The distance between these two positions is marked with other interpretations of how the Spirit's influence was actually experienced. One such middle-ground interpretation on this point is that the prophets, already mentioned in Acts 13.1, heard the Holy Spirit's agenda in this moment and delivered it to the church (Marshall 215–216).

Besides the matter of how precisely the Spirit acted in leading early decisions is the matter of how many people were involved in the decisions. In this passage, I. Howard Marshall acknowledges a lack of clarity about whether it is the cadre of prophets and

teachers that sense the Spirit's leading in this text or the entire church. But based on evidence of other decisions being made in the presence of the entire church (Acts 1.15; 6:2, 5; cf. 14:27; 15:22), he favors an interpretation of this passage which sees the whole church as being involved in this moment (215–216).

If Marshall is correct, this reality would certainly say something about the culture of the Antioch church. If this is a moment of the entire church sensing (by whatever means) the leading of the Spirit, then it is the Spirit that is preparing a church for reproduction. The experience of the Holy Spirit in its midst then is what prepares this church to multiply. If it is not the entire church that is in view when this decision is made, this would perhaps curtail notions of a pervasive Spirit-consciousness among leaders and laity alike. Questions persist, therefore, about *how* the Spirit guided the decisions and work and *how many* were involved in the decision-making process in Acts 13.

Whatever uncertainty there is on these matters, Luke's priority in Acts to portray a Spirit-led church with God directing and initiating the mission is clear (Dadisman 41; Marshall 215–216; Payne, *Discovering* loc. 750). This priority is made clear from the very start. Jesus's commissioning of his disciples in Acts 1.8 is the first and perhaps most profound example of the Holy Spirit's involvement in the Acts mission. That Jesus's followers would be his witnesses in Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth is to be preceded by the Holy Spirit's empowerment. Shenk and Stutzman comment that "without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the early church would have been powerless . . . knowing this, Jesus commanded his disciples to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came" (loc. 215). Indeed, the thread of the Spirit's involvement is unmistakable throughout Acts. The Spirit gives boldness for witness (Acts 4.13, 31); he guides church decision-making (Acts

13.1–5, Acts 15). He directs the travels of Paul and others, telling them where (and where not) to go (Acts 16). He is present in the appointing of elders (Acts 20) (Payne, *Discovering* loc. 750). Robert Vajko observes that guiding the church on mission is a major category of Holy Spirit activity that we observe in the New Testament (99).

In contemporary literature on church planting, there is great emphasis laid upon the role of the Holy Spirit. Today's practitioners are finding a biblical model of dependency on the Holy Spirit to direct and empower the spread of the gospel and the reproduction of churches. While one may wish to know more about how the Spirit informed the Antioch church's decision to send out Paul and Barnabas, Luke does attribute much to the Holy Spirit throughout Acts. If a church's internal culture does in fact contribute to its readiness to reproduce and the Holy Spirit was a significant presence in the life of the early church, then the Holy Spirit was a factor in the multiplication of churches found in the New Testament.

**Summary.** This research has to do with the understanding and attitudes of lay people about church and group reproduction. While there is no direct evidence as to the understanding or attitudes of the lay people at Antioch about church or group reproduction, this section has highlighted some factors that may have contributed to a multiplication environment. Many have noted the apostolic environment and the Spirit's activity in leading the mission in Antioch and other places. This *may* have helped create a mission-focused culture that made the sending out of missionary teams and the reproduction of churches seem good or natural.

Nonetheless, little is certain about the understanding and attitude of the church in Antioch about church reproduction. It is possible that despite the Spirit's sending of Paul



and Barnabas, many in the church did not understand what was happening or were angry or sad about this development. This is especially possible if the Spirit's setting apart of Paul and Barnabas only happened among the leadership of the church. The possibility of the laity being bewildered or hurt by the whole thing seems even greater if they were not privy to this calling. It is also possible that the phenomenal expansion of the church recorded in the book of Acts could have happened with many lay people not understanding all of the *whys* and *hows* about what God was doing.

### **New Testament Attitudes and Emotions About Church Multiplication**

In addition to considering how prepared lay people in the earliest churches may have been for church reproduction (either by explicit training on the subject or by the church culture they experienced), this section will now consider any evidence as to the attitude that people had about this phenomenon. The purpose of this research was to evaluate changes in both understanding and attitudes about church and group reproduction among its participants as a result of a six-week Bible study. Therefore, a survey of the biblical data for signs of emotions or attitudes related to church reproduction is warranted. What evidence is there concerning the attitude or feelings of people in the early church about the process of reproducing churches or groups? And is there any evidence of anyone experiencing a change in attitude about this?

Luke's record of the expansion of the church in the book of Acts is heavy with emotion. Steven Voorwind notices the prolific emotional references in Acts; he counts eighty-nine of them (75). These range from emotions of anger and rage (Acts 15.39) to emotions of sadness and grief (Acts 20.37). It is Paul's well-known farewell to the

Ephesian elders that perhaps provides the most insight into the emotions and attitudes that attended the multiplication of churches:

When Paul had finished speaking, he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him. What grieved them most was his statement that they would never see his face again. Then they accompanied him to the ship. (Acts 20.37–38)

In his article, “When a Missionary Says Goodbye: Lessons from Miletus,” Daniel Mattson finds Paul’s actions and emotions in Acts 20 to be consistent with the way people from a host of eras and cultures might act when saying goodbye to close friends (79–92). The means by which the gospel was spread and new churches were begun during this era in church history was through the work of apostolic teams. The itinerant calling of Paul and others meant theirs was a lifestyle of leaving. And, a lifestyle of leaving people with whom one had shared the gospel and life in general for an extended time would seem to naturally result in feelings of grief and some tearful goodbyes (1 Thess. 2.8).

In addition to the emotion in the narrative account in the Book of Acts, there is also emotionally charged language in the epistles of Paul. The emotion that filled some of Paul’s letters was related to his itinerant ministry and his frequently leaving behind beloved brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians provides a striking example of the relationship he had with his churches and the difficulty he had in leaving them. There, he describes his relationship with the Thessalonians while he was with them in the tenderest, most familial of terms: “As a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you; we delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God

but our very lives as well; we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God” (1 Thess. 2.7–12).

For apostolic workers like Paul, such relationships would inevitably change. In order for the gospel to spread, and for disciples and churches to multiply, the apostolic worker would have to move on to other places. In terms of the attitudes or emotions that accompanied this moving on, it is difficult to miss the sense of grief or loss felt by Paul and, ostensibly, by the churches as well. Paul writes:

But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy. (1 Thess. 2.17–20)

Several commentators have found Paul’s choice of language here (“we were orphaned”) to be indicative of severe feelings of bereavement or loss. Leon Morris argues that “we were orphaned” is a particularly strong choice of words, which indicates a sense of desolation on the part of Paul (57). Ivor Jones agrees, noting that Paul’s statement that the Thessalonians were “lost to us” involves a word choice that calls to mind dreadful situations of children being torn from their parents because of various circumstances, even if only temporarily (34–35). Some have observed that the word “orphan” was used in the first century to describe both parents losing their children and children losing their parents (G. Green, 150–151). Which circumstance Paul has in mind here, makes no

difference; either way Paul's 'orphaning' metaphor is a particularly heart-wrenching way of depicting his feelings about having had to leave the Thessalonian Christians behind. Gene L. Green notices other instances of Paul's deep concern for and longing to visit churches that he had previously visited. He notes that expressing a desire to see distant friends and stating one's affection for them was a common convention used in letters during this time period, though, for Paul, such sentiments seemed to be genuine. He went to great effort to actually return to the Thessalonian church (150–151).

One should be cautious, however, in framing the issue as one involving a tension between Paul's affection and friendship for those he had met and his trans-local calling. Both Green and Jones, while not discounting a real sense of bereavement in Paul, find the tension to be between his trans-local calling and his pastoral concern for the churches that were already established (G. Green 150–151; Jones 45). Paul writes to the Galatians that he is "in the pains of childbirth," not until he can see them again, but until "Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4.19–20). Paul follows up his 'orphan' comments in 1 Thessalonians 2, with more emotionally-charged language in chapter 3. This time, however, Paul's longing to see the Thessalonian Christians is due to his desire to ensure that they are "standing firm" in their faith, and to supply anything that was lacking in their faith (1 Thess. 3.8–10). So then, even while he longed to return to churches, mission and discipleship seemed to be front-of-mind matters for Paul. He, therefore, experienced tension between his apostolic mission of extension and his pastoral concern to see the maturing of believers in the churches where he had previously been.

Nevertheless, the emotions of Paul cannot be dismissed in examining the severing of relationships, both in the Acts narrative and in his letters. Paul's sense of grief, as

exemplified in his letter to the Thessalonians, is important to this study. If apostolic giants such as Paul experience feelings of grief or sadness as a consequence of being sent by God on mission, perhaps present day leaders should expect the same emotions to surface in ‘sending’ situations today?

Attitudes about church or group reproduction today are often colored by the fact that reproduction usually means one or more people will be leaving the church or group to start a new one. While this study has sought to determine if attitudes or feelings about reproduction can change as the result of education, will an experience of grief when some are ‘sent’ and others stay always be present? Stuart Murray acknowledges the emotional “strain” and “upheaval” that sometimes comes with planting new churches (*Foundations*, loc. 2902–2909). Often, the literature only acknowledges emotional upheaval or anger in connection with ill-advised church or group reproduction efforts (Boren 101–102). But even when people leave to start new churches or groups under healthy circumstances, it often means leaving friends behind—sometimes for good, as with Paul’s goodbye at Miletus (Acts 20). To be sure, there does not appear to be anything particularly dysfunctional about Paul’s parting from the Ephesian elders or from his longing to see the churches he had visited. Rather, this sense of grief is expected between people who have shared life together.

### **Summary of Biblical Foundations**

The biblical foundations for this study have fallen into three major categories: training and preparation for the reproduction of churches; cultural (internal) factors that prepared the early church for multiplication; and New Testament attitudes and emotions about church multiplication. It has not been necessary to lay a foundation for new church

development or the reproduction of disciples and churches. This study presupposes that such a foundation can be easily found in the Scriptures, and such a foundation has been laid time and again in the literature. This section has focused on whether or not, and to what degree, the Scriptures contain evidence of preparation for or education about the reproduction of churches and groups.

First, the biblical evidence, as well as the literature cited above, would support the conclusion that training or preparation for any aspect of Christian discipleship is of value. The New Testament does not give explicit examples of training or preparation for church or group reproduction, but there are copious examples of people receiving training and instruction in other areas. It may be reasonably inferred that training about church reproduction must have occurred. The biblical evidence, on the whole, underscores the value of training or preparation for various aspects of Christian discipleship.

The spontaneous expansion of the church, championed by renowned missiologists such as Roland Allen and George Patterson, may seem at first glance to minimize the role of training in the expansion of the church. However, a more careful reading of these and other spontaneous expansion proponents reveals something different. The spontaneous expansion of the church has to do with trusting the Holy Spirit's power to work in an indigenous congregation and breaking patterns of hovering and dependence by foreign missionaries. As such, it is not hindered by training or education but by a failure to recognize the Spirit's power to naturally cause new Christians to evangelize their neighbors, make disciples, and start new churches. This kind of failure may result in over-training, over-staying, and creating unhealthy dependence on missionaries. Therefore, to affirm and seek the spontaneous expansion of

the church is not to disavow training and preparation to live the Christian life. One can affirm both the need for training and the need for leaders to trust the Holy Spirit's power to naturally grow the church.

Second, the internal culture of a church may impact its readiness to reproduce. Therefore, this section has considered what cultural factors may have been at play in preparing the earliest churches for multiplication. Two factors emerge from the literature as being cultural characteristics that may have favorably disposed the early church towards rapid reproduction: an apostolic environment and a Holy Spirit consciousness.

Finally, this section has surveyed the New Testament for any evidence of attitudes or emotions that accompanied the reproduction of churches. This study not only evaluates the understanding that lay people have about church and group reproduction but also attitudes. In the Biblical record is some amount of emotional turmoil that came with the itinerant work of the Apostle Paul, for instance. While the Scriptures do not contain the first-hand accounts of the emotions or attitude of lay people in Paul's churches (except perhaps in the Acts 20 account of Paul's farewell at Miletus), one may safely assume that lay people experienced at least some of the feelings of loss that Paul did. And so, when it comes to attitudes about multiplication, the New Testament confirms the expected emotions at the end of a close relationships. In short, at least one set of emotions in the New Testament was consistently connected with apostles moving on to make new disciples and church: grief and sadness.

### **Missiological Foundations**

The second major section in this literature review will deal with missiology. Having discussed Biblical evidence regarding training or preparing lay people for

reproduction, this section focuses on what practitioners are saying about this important task. What is working and what is not when it comes to talking with people or shaping attitudes about church and group reproduction? What are best practices in the West and around the world when it comes to getting churches ready to multiply? These are the kind of missiological questions that will be taken up in this section. Missiological considerations will be divided into three sub-sections: *Vision Casting and Creating a Culture of Reproduction*; *Leadership Development*; and *Education and Emotion*.

### **Vision Casting and Creating a Culture of Reproduction**

**Aiming for Reproduction: Notable Voices.** In turning to a discussion of the how-tos of educating lay people about church and group reproduction, this section will begin with broad approaches and then move to specific tactics. In terms of broad approaches, the primary assertion, made frequently in the literature, is that churches wanting to reproduce should *aim for reproduction*. That is, there should be forethought and intentional planning on how a particular local church will one day reproduce.

Some of the strongest evidence for the importance of planning for reproduction comes from the research of missiologist David Garrison, summarized in his book *Church Planting Movements*. Garrison's extensive research with church planting movements all over the world has been instrumental in identifying key characteristics of the exponential growth experienced in these movements. The findings of the research were summarized, in part, by identifying elements or characteristics that were present in every church planting movement that his team studied. Garrison's team found ten elements that were present in every church planting movement they studied, one of which was the "intentional planting of reproducing churches" (loc. 2601–2620).



In places where the gospel is spreading, with disciples and churches multiplying rapidly, Garrison found intentional planning and training for church reproduction to be present. Garrison cites the Bhojpuri Church Planting Movement as an example of the impact of training/education in reproducing churches:

In the Bhojpuri Church Planting Movement, for example, missionaries had been at work in the area for many years. They were evangelistic, pious models of Christian love and service, but they lacked a clear strategy for planting churches. A turning point occurred when the Strategy Coordinator developed an intensive church planter training school. Out of this practical training, Bhojpuri Christians began starting churches. Today, it seems that everyone working among the Bhojpuri is starting new churches. (loc. 2774–2779)

Garrison also makes important claims about the importance of intentional training vis-à-vis the notion of “spontaneous expansion,” that was explored in the previous section. As was demonstrated, spontaneous expansion and training are not odds, even though some see it that way. Garrison acknowledges this, referencing the lack of emphasis placed on training by some missionaries and missiologists who have held that “extraordinary” prayer and abundant evangelism are sufficient to create spontaneously multiplying churches and movements. More importantly, Garrison’s findings contradict this view. Garrison adapts a well-known axiom to drive home his conclusion: “If you want to see reproducing churches planted, then you must set out to plant reproducing churches” (loc. 2772–2774).

Others researching and writing about church planting or disciple-making movements have reached the same conclusion. David and Paul Watson have also written

a book summarizing their experience with fast growing disciple-making movements around the world. They include in their book, *Contagious Disciple-Making*, a list of strategic elements needed to begin and sustain a disciple-making movement. Like Garrison's list, their list includes an element of planning for reproduction. They, however, put it this way: reproduction of disciples, leaders, groups, and churches needs to become a part of the "DNA" of any would-be disciple-making movement (Watson & Watson 190–192).

Joel Comiskey has chronicled the rise of the cell church movement around the world, which shares many features with the church planting movements described by the Watsons and Garrison. Specifically, cell church models which Comiskey references are ones that include very intentional, step-by-step, planning for reproduction (*Cell Group Explosion* 124–126). But Comiskey goes one step further. In advocating for simple churches that are intentional about reproducing, he notes that churches should not only make plans for reproduction, but those plans should be simple and comprehensible enough that lay people can understand them (*Planting Churches That Reproduce* 151). For Comiskey, reproduction should be planned, and lay people should be able to understand the plan before it happens.

Finally, in this brief tour of seminal works and notable figures that have argued that churches plan for reproduction, the church-growth movement should also be considered. The term used for church or group reproduction in the church growth school of thought and literature is *extension growth*. Donald McGavran defines extension growth as a congregation planting daughter churches among its own kind of people in its own region or neighborhood (72). Though the church growth movement is often noted most

for its emphasis on *expansion growth* (the adding of new converts to a congregation), it is significant to this study that the school also identified extension growth as a major means of church growth. C. Peter Wagner, writing from a church-growth perspective, offered a high estimation of church planting, which has become one of the most frequently quoted statements in recent church planting literature: “The single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches” (*Harvest* 11).

But McGavran and Wagner do not merely emphasize reproduction; they also argue that churches should *plan* for reproduction. Wagner advocates goal-setting when it comes to both expansion and extension growth (154–157). McGavran argues from the Scriptures that churches need to make what he calls “hard bold plans” for reproducing churches (283–284). Churches, he argues, ought not suppose that church multiplication will happen all by itself if only they would give themselves wholly to other aspects of Christian discipleship. To the contrary, they ought to plan for and work towards extension growth.

**Casting the Vision Early, and Often.** Moving then from the general agreement among missiologists about the need for advance preparation and planning, this section will consider specific practices related to preparing the lay people of a congregation for the multiplication. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on casting a compelling vision for church reproduction. Aubrey Malphurs and J. D. Payne have both written books that cover, in detailed fashion, the many steps needed to plant a church, and both works contain sections on how to prepare an existing church for reproduction. In these sections, Malphurs and Payne offer multi-pronged approaches to casting a vision for

church planting and keeping it on a congregation's radar (Malpurs, *21<sup>st</sup> Century* 258; Payne, *Discovering* loc. 2252–2253).

The need for creativity and consistency in vision casting is a common theme in the literature. Joel Comiskey offers an important insight about the added weight and attention that should be given to this practice when attempting to sustain a multiplication vision. Comiskey finds that in the context of home cell groups and house churches, multiplication does not come naturally. If anything, the opposite is true. The natural tendency for these smaller expressions of ecclesia is to turn inward. As participants in a cell group or house church begin to share life, build friendships, and walk through seasons of life together, it becomes more natural, in many ways, for a group to want to remain together. The relational bonding of a group, though good, makes the need for an outward-focused, multiplication vision even greater (*Cell Group Explosion* 49–50).

There is also the matter of establishing that vision as early as possible. Malpurs states that a mother church should begin to cast the vision for daughter churches well before it is in a position to reproduce and that the ideal time for casting is “at its own inception.” A new church, therefore, should have an experience of being born pregnant. Such advance vision casting will mean that people in the congregation will not be surprised when the time comes for that church to reproduce (*21<sup>st</sup> Century* 258). Winfield Bevins also encourages church planters not only to begin with a vision to multiply churches but with a vision to multiply everything: disciples, small groups, churches, etc. (97–98). Bevins believes would-be church planters must envision starting a movement, not just a church. In order to start a movement, a vision for multiplication has to be

installed right from the very start, and at every level of the organization (See also Stetzer and Im loc. 2975–2995).

In *Planting Missional Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Daniel Im use a summary of findings from the *State of Church Planting in the U.S.* report to argue that new churches should pursue getting involved in some sort of church planting or reproduction within the first three to five years. A new church that aggressively pursues planting additional churches, they argue, would reap a number of benefits (loc. 6526–6615). But in order for such rapid reproduction to happen, a multiplication vision has to be cast from day one: “From the first day of a new church plant, the planter should also strategize for reproducing that church and for advancing the kingdom of God by producing daughter churches” (loc. 6615).

Im and Stetzer take the matter of early vision-casting and church planting even farther. Reproducing within a church’s first three to five years is not only the right time, it may be the only time. According to Im and Stetzer, new churches must get involved with casting vision for and actually planting new works early in their lifecycle because, if they do not, they likely never will (loc. 6631). If this assessment is true, it has massive ramifications for the way that churches think about preparing lay people for church and group reproduction, which is at the heart of this study. Im and Stetzer argue that a failure to cast vision for reproduction and actually see it happen early in the life of a church or small group will somehow make it more difficult for people to grasp such a vision later. If they are right, believers today will then have to temper their expectations about the possibility of older groups or churches reproducing.

**Creating a Culture of Reproduction.** There are, of course, other factors that influence a church's readiness to reproduce besides intentional planning and early vision casting. Missiologists frequently point to other facets of a church's culture that are positive indicators of its readiness to multiply. Therefore, just as above sections considered biblical evidence for an internal culture that may have predisposed first-century churches towards reproduction, this section will consider what today's practitioners are saying about cultural factors that impact church or group reproduction. As discussed above, preparing lay people (in both understanding and attitude) for church and group reproduction certainly involves more than just telling them about it. The cultural currents of a church will also have an impact.

Dave Ferguson is a leading voice on the topic of multiplication at the writing of this dissertation. His *Exponential* conferences and resources cast a compelling vision for multiplication among church leaders in the West. In his recent book, *Hero Maker*, Ferguson outlines a shift that he believes needs to take place in the hearts of leaders, and throughout the church, in general: today's leaders need to become "Hero Makers." A Hero Maker is "a leader who shifts from being the hero to making others the hero in God's unfolding story" (16). Ferguson believes that churches that are able to establish a culture of equipping, developing, and empowering others to lead is key to realizing a vision of reproduction. Therefore, his work includes a detailed discussion of creating a "hero-making culture" (203–207). For Ferguson, preparing people for multiplication is not merely running through the nuts and bolts of how to start a new church or group—it's building a culture of developing, equipping, and sending others.

Evangelistic impulse is another cultural variable that some consider a likely indicator that a church or group is ready to reproduce. Churches that have a “burden for lost people” or are already practicing “abundant evangelism” would seem to be better positioned to reproduce churches (Stevenson 92–94; Nebel & Pike 162; Garrison loc. 2601–2620). This indicator demonstrates that a given church is motivated to reach outsiders and may mobilize more readily to send out workers, start new groups, or start new churches. Bryan Collier, pastor of the multi-site church The Orchard in Tupelo, Mississippi, contends that a strong evangelistic impulse ought to be a pre-requisite for any church attempting planting a new church (a new site, or new autonomous church). While the mother church may experience other benefits experienced when it sends out a new site or church, the primary motivation, according to Collier, should always be to reach outsiders with the gospel (50). For him, not only should an evangelistic culture exist before reproducing, a church should not try it without such a culture.

Beyond evangelistic impulse, what other facets of a church’s culture might help predispose it towards multiplication? Alan Hirsch and Neil Cole have been leading voices in trying to capture the dynamics and practices of the early Christian movement and reclaim a more missional and movement-oriented form of church. Both suggest that churches need to realize and experience certain core characteristics that God has intended for the church all along. As these essential elements come to life and flourish in a local body, it becomes more capable of healthy reproduction.

Both Hirsch and Cole use a DNA metaphor to describe the coding that they believe God has put into his church. Hirsch’s essential elements are what he calls “mDNA,” and they include the following: a recognition of Jesus as Lord, missional-

incarnational impulse, disciple making, *communitas* (not community), organic systems, and apostolic environment (76–79). Cole refers to his list of essential elements as the “New Testament Discipleship Pattern,” and it is a bit shorter: divine truth, nurturing relationships, apostolic mission (114–116). From the point of view of these authors, it is up to the church to realize how God has intended it to function, and when it does, multiplication will follow. A church needs to uncover and live into these essential elements, which God already hard-wired into its nature, in order to be ready for reproduction.

The Biblical Foundations above discussed the “apostolic environment” and the function of apostles in the earliest churches that may have contributed to an internal culture that allowed for rapid multiplication. Hirsch would contend that a recovery of apostolic practice (the acknowledgment of the existence and function of apostolic gifting in the church) is essential for movements to happen today (149ff.). Apostolic environment, then, is one of the elements of the mDNA and “apostolic genius” that Hirsch believes is necessary for the multiplication of disciples and churches today.

Other discussions in the literature about a church’s readiness for reproduction have less to do with apostolic environment or missional acumen and more to do with pragmatic considerations. Both Malphurs and Nebel & Pike discuss church size and where a church might be in its own life cycle as indicators for success in reproduction (253–257; 161–162). Though both conclude that churches of various sizes are capable of reproduction, Nebel & Pike are wary of a church trying to reproduce while in decline or on the “downside of the sigmoidal curve” (162). They also mention financial health as an internal variable that affects a church’s readiness for reproduction (162).



## Leadership Development

Thus far, this review of literature has covered some of the broad concepts found in the literature about getting a church ready to reproduce. Most would conclude that it is incumbent upon leadership to intentionally plan for reproduction and to do so early as possible in the life of a church. Naturally, some intentional vision casting for multiplication will be a part of a church's plan as well. Finally, establishing the right kind of organizational culture matters. Although there is some variation in the literature about what the necessary DNA actually looks like, there is broad agreement that a church's culture makes a difference in terms of its readiness to reproduce.

Missiologists are also interested in finer, tactical matters related to getting a church ready to multiply. No matter how much vision one casts for reproducing churches or groups, it is difficult to imagine reproduction happening without the development of new leaders. Therefore, practitioners with a multiplication vision are highly interested in leadership development tactics. Doing the work of raising up new leaders, it would seem, is necessary if churches or groups are going to reproduce.

**Apprenticing.** One of the words that appears frequently in tactical discussions about raising up new leaders is the word *apprenticing*. Apprenticing is important for leadership development because it has to do with anticipated future action. Dave & Jon Ferguson preference this word because “it says that you not only are a learner but also are willing and ready to take action that will demand greater leadership responsibility in order to further the movement of Jesus. . . apprentices don't just learn; they do what they have been taught and aspire to lead themselves” (45). From their position as leaders in the Exponential movement, Ferguson & Ferguson find apprenticeship to be a “core

competency” of any movement, but they also lament that this essential reproduction tactic is often overlooked (44).

There are of course those who would characterize Jesus’ approach to training the Twelve as apprenticing. He was preparing them for future action. Frank Viola cites a number of Scriptures, as well as other sources, that reveal Jesus’ multi-faceted training approach with the men who would one day be movement leaders. For Viola and others, Jesus intentionally designed a training set-up for the Twelve that involved *modeling* and *watching*. The apostles were invited to be with Jesus—to see and experience all that He was doing—and therefore to become prepared to do those things themselves one day (78–84).

Apprenticing has also been cited as a fundamental aspect of reproducing small groups. Churches intent on multiplying groups know that, in order to do so, they must also multiply leaders. Apprenticing is a frequent tactic for the multiplication of leaders. One of the most cogent descriptions of the power of apprenticing in small groups is given by Kerrick Thomas and Nelson Searcy in their book, *Activate*. This book, which focuses on small group ministry, challenges conventional wisdom and traditional approaches to group life at many points. Regarding reproduction, the authors urge that churches jettison reproductive approaches that involve simply splitting existing groups. A healthier approach, they argue, involves the intentional raising up of new leaders through apprenticing. Then, rather than arbitrarily splitting a group, or hoping the group will form two groups when it gets too big, reproduction can happen through the apprenticing and sending out of new leaders to gather new people. As Thomas and Searcy say, “no one wants to split something they’ve become comfortable in. But everyone wants to raise up

something new” (76). For them, the focus has to be kept on raising up and training new leaders (72–76).

Other leaders also talk about the power of getting others actively involved in leading, co-leading, or at least helping with certain tasks in the context of a small group. Scott Bolen advocates a team leadership approach to groups; new groups should begin with a set-up that involves shared responsibility (94–95). Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowry encourage coaches of small group leaders to make sure they are not taking too much responsibility on themselves (loc. 4020–4027). Donahue and Robinson, however, want to make a clear distinction between sharing responsibility in the group with “assistants” and designating apprentices. While sharing responsibility is a healthy practice, and may uncover and empower some leaders, it is not the same as intentional apprenticing (117–118). Again, intentional apprenticing is identifying future leaders with the clear expectation that they will be group leaders at some point.

Searcy and Thomas also advocate for a “semester-based system” for small groups (117). A semester-based approach to group life means there is a set beginning and ending date for each group. Such an approach allows for participants to more easily join a group when a semester is starting or move on to a different group when a semester is ending. From the standpoint of reproducing small groups, this is another leadership development tactic. When used in tandem with intentional apprenticing, a semester-based system creates an environment in which new group leaders can emerge. As each semester begins, an opportunity is created for group leaders who have been apprenticing in a small group to begin a new group or take over an old group allowing the previous leader to plant a new group somewhere else.

**Appointing.** Small group multiplication was a major key to health and growth of the early Methodist movement. There, movement catalyst John Wesley was driven to multiply the small groups he called *class meetings*, which were an essential means of both evangelism and discipleship. Even if people were “awakened” through the field preaching of the Methodist preachers, it was in the nurturing environment of a class meeting that people could find assurance, saving faith, and discipleship, with the help of Christian community (Comiskey, *2000 Years* 183). Howard Snyder, in describing the essential role of class meetings in the early Methodist movement, calls the early Methodist class meeting the “cornerstone of the whole edifice” (54). The multiplication of these groups was essential for the growth of the movement, and Wesley was driven to see class meetings multiplied (184).

Methodist multiplication, unlike anything considered thus far, relied on the selection and appointment of class leaders by overseers in the movement. Originally, the appointment of such leaders was the prerogative of Wesley himself or his assistants; early class leaders were those in whom he could place a great deal of trust (David Lowes Watson, *Class Meeting* 98; Heitzenrater 118–119). Decisions about who was to lead the new classes were cast by leaders in the movement. It was not an apprenticed leader, a group-identified leader, or a self-identified leader that stepped up to lead new groups; it was an appointed leader.

This kind of set up is different than the movement ethos of modern-day church planting movements. The CPMs described by the likes of Garrison, Watson & Watson, and Addison are rapidly multiplying movements that rely on the Holy Spirit and the reliability of the word of God to shepherd newly formed groups without much oversight.

Furthermore, these authors suggest that every believer, and perhaps even unconverted persons of peace, should be empowered to lead discovery Bible studies in their neighborhood or village (cf. Addison, Watson & Watson,).

Early Methodist leadership development was different because, in the case of class meetings, being a class leader was regarded as a specialized calling or office. It was believed that some could do it and others could not. Leadership development in this historic movement was guided by a belief that leadership was a quality that could not be produced, only “recognized and trained” (Henderson 149). Moreover, class leadership was not only a matter of gifting, it was a matter of great importance! The calling to be a class leader was viewed as a vocation perhaps only slightly different from that of a travelling preacher, both in function and significance (David Lowes Watson, *The Class Leader* 45). Thus, an appointment system for class leaders makes sense when one considers early Methodist views on innate leadership ability and the critical role of the class leader.

**Summary.** Apprenticing and appointing are both leadership development tactics found in the literature on small group multiplication. Both could feature as specific aspects of an overall plan and process of reproduction in a given church or movement. They are both a means of preparation for reproduction, though neither necessarily involve the explicit education of lay people about how God reproduces churches or groups. It is possible that intentional apprenticing helps establish a sending culture in a church group as the constant presence of apprentices implicitly suggests that people are being prepared to leave and start new things. Likewise, it is possible that a church or movement that regularly appoints people to lead new groups creates a kind of expectation among lay

people that someone may be tapped at any moment to extend the gospel in new places or to new people. Such practices, when part of a comprehensive plan to reproduce groups or churches, may affect understandings and attitudes about church reproduction, even without explicit instruction about multiplication.

### **Education and Emotion: Helping Lay People Understand**

This discussion of missiological best practices in shaping understanding and attitudes about church and group reproduction began with observing the general consensus that those wanting to see reproduction happen ought to intentionally aim for it. From there, this review has discussed specific elements or tactics that a church might include in its overall plan to cultivate an environment of multiplication. These include activities ranging from early vision casting, to various leadership development strategies that position a church to multiply leaders, groups, and churches. However, a final piece needs to be added to this review of what practitioners are saying about preparing lay people for church and group reproduction: how should educating lay people about the mechanics of church and group reproduction come into play?

The literature reveals very little about the role adult education could play in affecting understanding and attitudes about multiplication. While there is, as one would expect, a great deal of emphasis placed on the quality and timing of vision casting done by leaders, vision casting is different than educating. Educating lay people about ‘how it works’ is often not a part of an overall plan for reproducing churches or groups. For example, Aubrey Malphurs offers a detailed description of the “conception” and “birthing” process that happens when a new church is begun in his book *Planting Growing Churches for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. But nowhere in Malphurs’s list of preparatory

steps are opportunities for detailed instruction or conversation with lay people about reproduction and how it works. Details about vision casting are included, but these have more to do with ways that leadership can communicate vision through different media than any plan for detailed education (257–258).

There are a few instances in the literature where a need for more in-depth education about this subject is acknowledged. One of the most detailed recommendations for the care that congregations should take in the planting of new churches is offered by Stuart Murray. Murray agrees with Roger Ellis in asserting that one should not imagine that plans for church reproduction, developed over months or years, would be simply transmitted to a congregation in one night of vision casting. Instead, Murray advocates that leaders take time to listen to lay people, weighing their concerns and convictions about the subject, in the hope that everyone in the church can have as much ownership and voice in the decision as possible. Murray argues that intense listening and discussion happen during the ‘conception’ phase of any church plant—that is, before a decision to plant has been reached (*21<sup>st</sup> Century* loc. 1211–1240).

The issue, here, is one of risk-mitigation. Murray’s reasoning for such thorough consultation with the congregation seems to be connected to the reality that church planting is a major undertaking, with many perceiving it to be risky and costly. (*21<sup>st</sup> Century* loc. 1211–1377). Regarding small groups, Scott Boren also links the difficulty and risk associated with reproduction with a need for educating group members about the reproductive process (101–102).

An unhappy aspect of the literature on church planting is cautionary tales about church planting situations that have gone awry. Sometimes called “splats,” or “unwanted

pregnancies,” there are numerous situations where a call to reproduce feels more like a church split to those involved. This may involve people leaving a church to start a new church without the agreement of the parent church, or leaving to start a new congregation because of doctrinal or other divisions (Herron 78–79; Murray, *21<sup>st</sup> Century* loc. 621–640; Ott & Wilson loc. 2843). Thorough education and consultation with the church may be able to mitigate or limit such negative experiences with reproduction.

However, Murray notices that even healthy, positive experiences with reproduction, with broad ownership and support, are not without challenges. Among missiologists writing on church planting, Murray leads the way in acknowledging the deep emotional impact of sending people out to start new churches:

Friendships are disrupted, the "church family" has members missing, and there is a grieving process that (using another life-cycle analogy) is similar to that experienced by parents when children leave home. Knowing that this is natural—even rejoicing at the maturity it demonstrates—does not fully offset the sense of loss. Planting churches need to be prepared for these feelings and encouraged to develop coping strategies. (*21<sup>st</sup> Century* loc. 1252–1269)

This recalls the life-cycle analogies and sense of bereavement found in the writings of the apostle Paul in the previous section. While serious strategies for dealing with the emotional upheaval that often comes with church or group reproduction are sometimes lacking in church planting literature, there are others who are arguing that greater attention needs to be given to emotional realities and health. Henry Cloud’s book *Necessary Endings* deals with processes and practices related to ending things well (both



personally and professionally). Cloud argues that people need to embrace grief and “metabolize necessary endings” in order to move forward effectively. Peter Scazzero bemoans the lack of attention given to emotional health in contemporary discipleship:

With one breath, God made us human. Yet, somehow, today we slice out the emotional portion of who we are, deeming it suspect, irrelevant, or of secondary importance. Contemporary discipleship models often esteem the spiritual more than the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual components of who we are.

Nowhere, however, does a good biblical theology support such a division. (51)

Perhaps then, opportunities for adult education or consultation could provide lay people with space to process and understand what’s happening when people leave to start a new church or group. One wonders how educating adults about church and group reproduction might help facilitate understanding and acceptance of this supposedly natural phenomenon.

Ellen Marmon, in an article on Transformative Learning Theory (TLT), notes how TLT could have implications for adult education in churches. Reflecting on how the core dynamics of Transformative Learning Theory could be applied to a Christian education context, Marmon comments that “perhaps one of the greatest gifts we can offer grown-ups is time to reflect...whether this happens in Sunday school, during worship at the campus student center, or through small group discussion in a classroom, teachers can create safe, quiet spaces—rich soil where growth occurs” (428). Additionally, Marmon points to core dynamics of TLT such as honest relationships, life experience, and possible realignment of attitudes as dynamics that would be welcome in Christian education

settings and asserts that adults often need time and space to “unlearn long-held, unexamined assumptions before they are ready to embrace new understandings” (425).

Given the difficulty and stigma that often attend conversations about church and group reproduction, such an educational experience that allows people to honestly sort through experiences and “unlearn” certain things might be of great value. Lampert & Rynsbarger argue that traditional small groups might be one setting in which this kind of ‘unlearning’ and rebuilding can happen. Drawing on insights from Cooperative Learning Theory, they find church small groups, with their “interpersonal connection and sharing of real-life situations” to be environments with great potential for genuine learning (406). The honesty and relational connection prized by TLT might also be achieved in small group settings where adults might learn about church and group reproduction.

In sum, the emotional and educational needs of lay people in moments of church and group reproduction are underrepresented in the literature. While vision casting and leadership development have gotten the majority of the attention when it comes to preparing a church or group to reproduce, other disciplines should perhaps be included in the discussion more fully. Insights from adult education theory, for example, could easily be brought to bear on this issue, but, to a large extent, they have not. Therefore, this research was designed to test an adult education approach, with the purpose being to observe changes to understanding and attitudes among lay people after an adult education experience on the topic of church and group reproduction.

### **Research Design Literature**

The final portion of the missiology section above provides the foundation for the design of this research. That is, because of the dearth of information or strategies about

how to actually educate lay people about church and group reproduction, the researcher wanted to design an intervention that involved an adult education approach. Other types of intervention, formal or informal, have been tested and talked about. Vision casting, apprenticing, and setting up systems like a semester-system for small groups are all interventions aimed at *preparing* lay people for multiplication. These have all been tried, talked about, and written about. But what about an approach that creates space for lay people to really learn about the phenomenon by personally looking at relevant Scriptures and discussing it with friends? Joel Comiskey's assertion, cited above, that churches should not only make plans for reproduction but those plans should be simple and comprehensible enough that lay people can understand them would seem to commend an education approach (*Planting Churches That Reproduce* 151). However, such an approach needs to be tested and examined the way that other approaches have.

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to measure the changes in understanding and attitude among lay people in Muskingum County, Ohio as a result of participating in a six-week, small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups. Because the purpose was to examine the understanding and attitudes of participants, research instruments were chosen that involved asking the participants directly about this topic. Instrumentation that involves asking and listening to participants directly is often the most reliable and efficient way to gather the desired data, from reliable participants (Morgan 9; Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele 15). To ensure the validity and reliability of the data gathered, the participants were asked about the topic using multiple data-collection instruments. The use of multiple instruments provided for a methodological triangulation in the study of understanding and attitudes about church and

group reproduction. Triangulation (whether in terms of data sources, methods, or investigators) is important for both broadening a researcher's understanding of a given topic but also increasing confidence in the results of a given study (Sensing, loc. 1902–1923; Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele 110–114). This study also employed a “mixed methods” strategy that involved both quantitative and qualitative measures to strengthen its findings. The study employed what John W. Creswell describes as a “concurrent” mixed methods approach, in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, with both sets of data being included in the study's final results (14–15).

### **Summary of Literature**

This literature review began with the observation that there is no explicit command in the New Testament to plant new churches (Payne, *Discovering* loc. 266). It follows then that there is also no evidence of explicit instructions being given to lay people about church or group reproduction. This review looked at the inference made by some that Paul and other apostolic workers must have done *something* to prepare the churches they planted to reproduce, given the multiplication of churches that followed. However, what precisely Paul and others might have done to get churches ready to reproduce is a matter of debate and speculation. It could have been the kind of pure, missional culture they created that primed churches for multiplication. It could have been early and explicit training on the subject. It could have been the “missionary faith” to not train extensively on the subject and allow the Holy Spirit to lead a church to reproduce. Or, it could have been a combination of these or other factors.

While one cannot be sure what Paul and others did to get churches ready to reproduce, one can observe a general emphasis on training in the New Testament. Jesus'

thorough method of preparing his disciples for future ministry opportunities and challenges is an important Biblical and theological foundation for this study. Clearly, Jesus saw value in a thorough and holistic program of preparation for his disciples, before their ministry was to begin, offering detailed instruction for a host of different eventualities. If the Incarnate God valued such thorough training of the original disciples, on a host of matters, leaders today ought to take seriously the task of training and preparing disciples of Jesus for future ministry endeavors and challenges.

Therefore, reflection and research on how to prepare and educate the church about multiplication is needed. And, as was explored above, there are other factors, in addition to the training example of Jesus, that underscore the need for research on this topic in churches today. First, there is a renewed interest in church planting and multiplication among church leaders. Second, in Western contexts the reproduction of churches and groups has proven to be a risky and sometimes painful proposition. Education and more extensive consultation with a congregation or group may help mitigate some of the pain and risk. Finally, there is more focus in the literature, on vision-casting and leadership development techniques than there is on educating people about the reproductive process. Church leaders need more research that sheds light on how education about church and group reproduction affects lay people.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this project. Detailed descriptions of the researcher-designed instruments, data collection protocol, and data analysis are given here. The reliability and validity of the research methods are also attested below. This study is being used to determine whether an intervention in the form of a small group Bible study is an effective way to significantly change the understanding and attitudes of lay people about church and group reproduction. A thorough explanation of the research methods in this chapter is essential for determining the strength of this intervention.

### **Nature and Purpose of the Project**

This project had to do with educating lay people in Southeast Ohio about group and church reproduction in the context of existing small groups. As more pastors and movement leaders in the North American church embrace a multiplication vision, it will be increasingly important that such a vision is shared with lay people in effective ways. Leading well in local churches involves communicating theological, ecclesiological, and missiological realities in ways that a broad segment of people can understand and embrace. Therefore, if leaders are to realize a vision of a multiplication, they must find constructive means for delivering the “whys” and “how-tos” of church and group reproduction to lay people in the churches and movements they lead.

This project tested one approach for delivering such a vision to lay people: an education strategy that delivers information about group and church reproduction to lay people in the form of a six-week, small-group Bible study. This intervention allowed lay

people to take a deep dive into this topic by grappling with relevant passages of Scripture and contemporary case studies in a researcher-developed curriculum called *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups*. The intervention also allowed lay people to experience the curriculum and have discussion about the topic in the context of existing small groups. Thus, a learning environment of familiar people and familiar surroundings was created. The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in understanding and attitude among lay people in Muskingum County, Ohio as a result of participating in a six-week, small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups

### **Research Questions**

#### **Research Question #1: What understandings and attitudes about reproducing churches and groups exist among participants prior to the Bible study?**

This research question was important in determining the understandings and attitudes the participants carry as they begin the Bible study experience. Two researcher-designed instruments were employed to help answer this question. First, a 23-question pre- and post-survey was used. Questions 1–6 were used to obtain consent and demographic information. Questions 7–13 and 16–17 were used to gather information about church experience and participation in small groups. Questions 14–15, and 18 were used to measure participants understanding about group and church reproduction, and questions 19–23 were used to gauge attitudes about reproducing churches and groups.

Second, focus groups were conducted prior to the beginning of the small group Bible study. Eight questions were provided for each focus group, with Question 1

designed to measure the understanding of the participants and Questions 2–8 designed to ascertain attitudes.

**Research Question #2. What changes occur in the understandings of, or attitudes about, church or group reproduction, during and after the completion of, the Bible study?**

This research question was important in order to measure changes in understanding and attitude that occur during, and after the completion of, the Bible study, which was the purpose of this research. Three researcher-designed instruments were used to answer this question. First, the same survey that was used at the outset was also administered after the completion of the Bible study. Second, the focus groups that were convened before the Bible study were gathered again upon its completion, with the same eight questions that were asked previously being asked again. Third, participant journals were used to measure changes in understanding or attitude during the course of the six-week Bible study. One journal prompt was given for each of the six sessions, with all six journal prompts designed to identify changes to understanding or attitudes.

**Research Question #3. What elements of the training course have the largest impact in changing participants' understandings of, or attitudes about, group and church reproduction?**

Measuring changes in understanding and attitude will also involve an analysis of which particular parts of the Bible study effect the most change among participants. A researcher-designed participant journal was used to answer this question. Journal prompts were given after each of the six sessions of this Bible study, with each prompt asking for thoughts and reflection based on the chapter that had just been completed. An analysis of



journal entries was then used to ascertain which chapters brought about the most significant changes in understanding or attitude.

### **Ministry Context**

This research was conducted in Muskingum County, Ohio. Muskingum County is one of thirty-two Ohio counties that the Appalachian Regional Commission identifies as part of the Appalachian region (arc.gov). Muskingum County is similar to other counties in Appalachian Ohio in per capita income, unemployment rate, and educational attainment among residents. Per capita income in Muskingum County is significantly less than in the United States as a whole (\$37,931 vs. \$49,246 in 2016), and unemployment is generally higher than the national average. Also, college completion is significantly lower here than it is nationally. Data from 2012–2016 reveals that 15.1% of Muskingum County residents had completed a bachelor’s degree or high, compared with 30.3% nationally (arc.gov).

Though less objective and measurable, certain social dynamics that are characteristic of the Appalachian region have also been identified in Muskingum County. Ministry leaders who have come to Muskingum County from other contexts have noticed the strong kinship bonds or “clannish” tendencies present in this context. If this is true, it may certainly have implications for how people from Muskingum County respond to notions about leaving groups or churches to begin new ones. Close bonds with friends and family may make notions of sending out or leaving to join God in a new endeavor particularly challenging.

In terms of the religious landscape of Muskingum County, outsiders and residents alike have noted the prolific amount of small churches that cover the area. A friend from

Columbus refers to this area as the “land of a thousand churches.” Somewhat paradoxically, however, Muskingum County like other segments of Appalachia has a larger percentage of religiously unaffiliated people than most other regions in the United States (“Adherents as a Percentage of Total Population,” [usreligioncensus.org](http://usreligioncensus.org)). Taking both of these observations together, in Muskingum County there are a lot of churches with not a lot of people. This fact leads to a popular refrain that is often heard in conversations about church attendance in our area: “We don’t need more churches; we just need to find a way to get people into the churches that we already have.” Therefore, if residents believe that there are already enough churches in the area, notions about reproduction may be unpopular or feel unnecessary.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

Selection of churches for this project was limited to churches in Muskingum County, Ohio. Within this geographical area, the researcher sought to achieve some variation in the sample of churches selected. A varied sample has the potential to add value to research if common patterns emerge across a diverse set of participants (Sensing loc. 2281). If, as a result of the intervention, similar changes in understanding and attitude about church and group reproduction were observed across a diverse group of churches, the findings of this study would be strengthened. Therefore, the researcher sought to gather a diverse sample of churches in terms of size, denominational affiliation, and length of existence.

Through serving in various capacities with three different congregations in the Muskingum County area since 2002, the researcher had established a significant pool of friends and colleagues serving local churches in the area. An initial email invitation asking

for their church's participation was sent to friends and colleagues of the researcher.

Following that email, the researcher also made several invitations via phone calls and during face-to-face meetings.

Every church that wanted to be involved was included in the study. There were no churches that wanted to be included that were turned away. Once participating churches were identified, the individual participants were selected in consultation with the pastor of the church. The research was designed to fit into the life and rhythm of the participating churches as naturally and unobtrusively as possible. Since this research was an intervention involving a small group Bible study, the aim was to have the churches conduct the Bible study in a way that was normal for them. Thus, pastors were encouraged to recruit already existing small groups or Sunday school classes to use the curriculum in their group/class during January–March 2019. Every small group that expressed interest in participating in the study was approved, via a signed permission letter, by the pastor of the church. Every small group that expressed interest and received the approval of their pastor was admitted to the study.

### **Description of Participants**

The recruitment period yielded a total of twenty-eight participants from four different congregations in Muskingum County and five different small groups. Some variation was achieved in the sample of churches included in the study. Three of the four churches have been in existence for longer than one hundred years, while one of the four churches is less than five years old. Two of the four churches are affiliated with a denomination, while the other two are independent churches. There was also some variation in the size of the churches, with one church having an average Sunday

attendance near 60 and three churches between 100–150. However, as would become clear during the course of the study, all of the participants viewed their churches as being relatively small.

Of the twenty-eight participants, nineteen were female and nine were male. The ages of the participants were well-varied, with various seasons of life being somewhat equally represented in this study. This was a particularly well-educated sample of participants. The level of education in this sample is not at all representative of the educational attainment that would be found in random samples from Muskingum County. The participants in this study also had a higher household income than one typically finds here.

Church involvement and experience among participants was very high; this was a very active and, ostensibly, devoted sample of lay people. Participants reported frequent worship attendance and small group participation. Many reported personal experience with church planting, small group reproduction, or both.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Participants from each of the churches were informed about the nature of this project by means of an informed consent letter. In that letter, they were informed that their responses to surveys as well as their responses in participant journals and focus groups would be kept in strict confidence. Therefore, no names, church affiliations, or any other distinguishing characteristics of the participants are used in this dissertation. Numbers were used in place of names when reporting noteworthy contributions from participant journals or focus groups.

Audio files containing focus group discussions, electronic transcripts of those discussions, journal entries, and survey results were kept on portable disks in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home, or on a password protected computer in the researcher's home office. Hard copies of survey results, focus group transcripts, and participant journals were kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office, with the researcher possessing the only key.

Confidentiality agreements were obtained from the two other parties having access to the project's data: a focus group moderator and statistician (See Appendix E). Pastors of the participating churches were informed of their congregants' participation in the research, and a permission letter was obtained from each pastor (See Appendix F).

### **Instrumentation**

Three research instruments were employed during this project, and all three were designed by the researcher. First, a survey was administered. The survey was emailed to participants using Survey Monkey before the start of the six-week Bible study and was also emailed to the participants after the completion of the six-week Bible study. The survey was used to measure changes in the participants' understanding and attitude about reproducing groups and churches. Questions 1–6 were used to obtain consent and demographic information. Questions 7–13 and 16–17 gathered information about church experience and participation in small groups. Questions 14–15, and 18 measured participants understanding about group and church reproduction; questions 19–23 gauged attitudes about reproducing churches and groups.

The second researcher-designed instrument used in this study was a focus group. Participants were gathered into focus groups both before and after the completion of the

six-week Bible study. Focus groups were organized in such a way that those who were experiencing this study together in their small group or Sunday school class were also grouped together in a focus group. There were eight questions used in the focus groups, with the same questions being given both before the start of the six-week Bible study and after its completion. Question 1 was designed to assess the participants' understanding of group and church reproduction. Questions 2–8 were designed to uncover participants' attitude towards group and church reproduction.

The third researcher-designed instrument was a participant journal. The participant journal was designed to measure changes in understanding and attitude that were occurring during the six-week Bible study. It was also used to study which sessions of the Bible study produced the most positive growth in understanding or attitude among participants. There were six journal prompts given, with each being given after the completion of one group meeting. The prompts were specific to the content just covered in the most recent group meeting.

### **Pilot Test or Expert Review**

Three people were consulted as expert reviewers for this study: Dr. Dirk Baltzly, Dr. Art McPhee, and Dr. Milton Lowe. None of the three observed any major problems with the design of the instruments or clarity of the questions. However, each of the three contributed in helpful, yet different, ways, which served to strengthen the validity of the research. Dr. Lowe observed some inconsistencies involving the scaling of some of the survey questions, which the researcher quickly fixed. Dr. Baltzly focused mainly on creating more precise language in the survey and focus group questions, as well as the journal prompts. Professor Baltzly suggested eliminating some questions that “loaded the

dice” towards one particular response and simplifying questions that were asking about too many variables at once. Most of Dr. Baltzly’s suggestions were implemented by the researcher.

Finally, Dr. McPhee suggested a protocol change for the focus groups. The original focus group protocol called for the research to *not* be present for the focus group meetings. It was thought that the researcher’s presence in these groups (comprised mostly of friends or parishioners) might inhibit participants from freely sharing thoughts and attitudes on the subject, weakening the reliability of the study. Dr. McPhee suggested, however, that the researcher’s presence in focus group sessions would allow him the opportunity to observe and record field notes from the sessions. In accordance with this suggestion, the researcher attended all focus group sessions to observe the groups and to ask clarifying questions.

### **Reliability & Validity of Project Design**

Several observations should be made about the reliability of the research design presented here. First, the incorporation of the expert review described above assisted in ensuring the reliability of the data that was gathered. None of the expert reviewers noted major concerns regarding the clarity of the questions or prompts included on any of the three instruments.

Secondly, procedures were developed for the consistent administration of the research instruments. A focus group protocol was developed for use in each of the ten focus groups in this study. Efforts were also made to ensure that each participant received the pre and post-surveys by email. Follow-up emails were sent to encourage participants to respond to the survey.

Regarding the validity of the research, none of the expert reviewers noted major problems involving the alignment of research instruments with the purpose and research questions of this study. Secondly, data sources were triangulated to help ensure the validity of the interpretation of the research. Multiple sources of data protect against an errant, or overly-inflated reading of one data set, which might lead to invalid conclusions (Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele 108–114).

In this study, the inclusion of focus groups proved valuable in strengthening the validity of the study. Focus groups are often valuable in uncovering more detail about a particular phenomenon, or problem—particularly ones that are often not easily understood (Morgan 12). In this study, they provided a more detailed lens through which to view results gathered from the survey. The focus group protocol and participant journal included open-ended questions/prompts designed to get people talking about information that would assist in answering research questions. A variety of question types were included in order to uncover as much detail as possible; hypothetical, descriptive, opinion, and quotation questions, as described by Sensing, were all used (loc. 2330–2368).

Finally, the educational attainment of the sample does weaken the validity of this study. Therefore, one should exercise caution in stating conclusions about changes to understanding and attitude among lay people as a result of their participation in the six-week Bible study experience on the reproduction of churches and groups. Participants in this study were highly-educated lay people, as regards levels of educational attainment locally and nationally. This fact will limit the generalizability of the study, as noted above, and to some degree weaken its validity.



### **Data Collection**

This research project was an intervention that was designed based on past and present experiences in the researcher's ministry context and in consultation with relevant literature. Tim Sensing indicates that intervention strategies arise out of ongoing practices and problems in a given context (loc. 1733). Having experienced a lack of openness and understanding about church and group reproduction in a number of different church contexts, the researcher evaluated approaches to talking about the matter that had been met with difficulty. Isolated, or episodic, attempts to cast vision for multiplication had not been successful; a different kind of intervention was needed.

Therefore, as part of an ongoing process of discovery concerning this issue, the researcher proposed an intervention that involved adult education about church and group reproduction in a small group context. Because this kind of an adult education approach to preparing churches for multiplication has not been found in the literature, the data resulting from this kind of intervention is especially needed.

A concurrent, mixed methods strategy was employed to evaluate the effectiveness of the data, with the researcher collecting multiple forms of data at the same time (Creswell 14). A researcher-designed survey was administered both before and after each small group began its study of *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups*. The same survey questions were given both before and after the participants' small group study of this book. The researcher collected email addresses of participants with help from the pastor and group leaders of participating churches. The first (pre) surveys were then sent to participants via email through the surveying platform SurveyMonkey. Each of the participants was instructed via email, and at focus group

sessions, to complete the first (pre) survey before reading any part of the Bible study or attending the first group meeting. The group leaders were instructed to contact the researcher upon finishing six small group discussions on *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups*, so that the research could promptly send the second (post) survey to participants whose group had finished their study of the curriculum.

Researcher-designed focus groups were also administered before and after each small group's experience with the curriculum. Participants were placed in focus groups with others from their small group. A time was arranged when each group could gather for the first focus group prior to its beginning the curriculum. A focus group moderator was hired by the researcher to lead the group through the eight questions provided by the researcher. The moderator also recorded each focus group session. The researcher was present during each focus group to observe the group's dynamics, body language, and to ask clarifying questions. The second (post) focus group was gathered and administered after a particular group had completed the curriculum. The moderator and researcher followed the same protocol for the second focus group as they did for the first.

Finally, participant journals were distributed by the researcher during the first round of focus groups, prior to the beginning of the Bible study, with instructions given by the researcher. The researcher then collected all participant journals, even those only partially complete, during the final round of focus groups, after the conclusion of the Bible study experience.

### **Data Analysis**

Survey results were coded and organized by the researcher. With the help of a statistician, the researcher used Microsoft Excel (2018) to perform analysis on the survey

results. The pre-test results were analyzed to determine central tendency (mean) and variability (standard deviation) in order to provide data about understandings and attitudes *before* the beginning of the Bible study experience. Pre-test answers involving understanding and attitude were also analyzed for possible correlation with age or church experience variables. A t-test was used to measure changes between pre and post-test responses.

Focus group transcripts and participant journals were coded by the researcher thematically. This allowed the researcher to assess the frequency with which ideas, insights, attitudes, etc., occurred across the ten different focus group sessions and the twenty-three participant journals that were turned in. Thematic coding also allowed the researcher to view subtle variations among a given theme that were present in statements from the various groups and journals. Field notes taken by the researcher were processed along with the transcripts so that the observations made during the focus group sessions might assist in interpreting the transcripts.

## **CHAPTER 4: EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

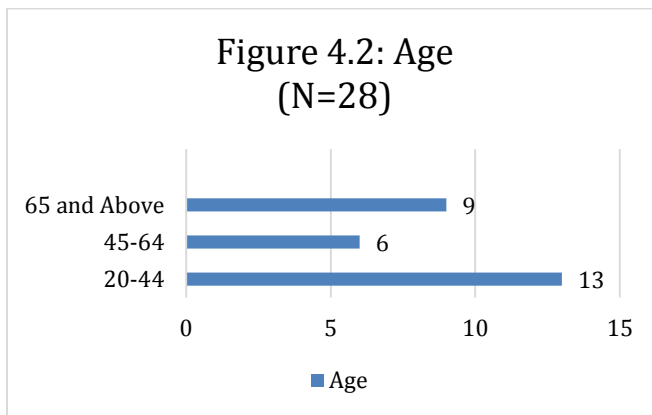
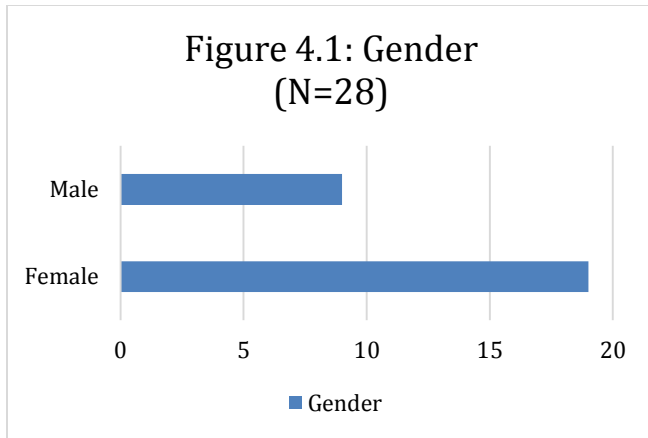
### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this study was to measure the changes in understanding and attitude among lay people in Muskingum County, Ohio as a result of participating in a six-week, small-group Bible study on the reproduction of churches and groups. The intervention was designed to test an adult-education approach at growing understanding and changing attitudes about the subject matter. The approach sought to address the problem of a lack of understanding about, or openness to, the reproduction of churches or groups.

This chapter includes data gathered from research conducted in January–March 2019. Demographic and church experience data about the twenty-eight participants in the study are found below. Also, analysis of data gathered from the pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-focus groups, and participant journals are presented here. Data has been analyzed to determine what changes to understanding or attitude occurred among the participants.

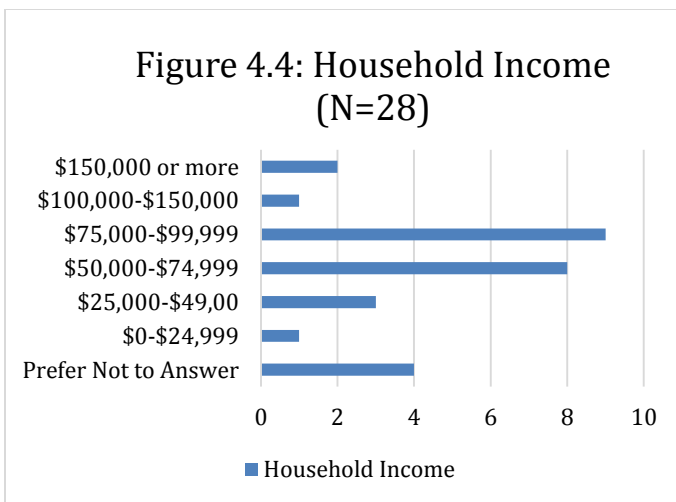
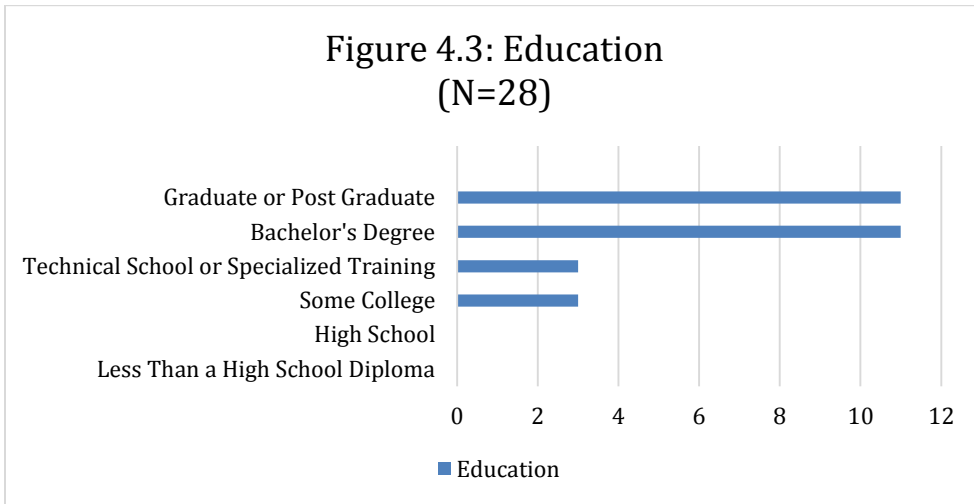
### **Participants**

There were nineteen female participants, and nine male participants in this study, for a total of twenty-eight (Figure 4.1). The participants were a diverse group, in terms of age, with thirteen participants between the ages of 25–44, six participants between the ages of 45–64, and nine participants 65 or older (Figure 4.2).



The participants were well-educated, with all participants having experienced at least some college education, and 79% of the participants having at least a bachelor's degree. Importantly, the level of education present in this sample was much higher than average educational attainment in Muskingum County, Ohio, where just 15.7% of the population attain a bachelor's degree or higher according to 2017 census data (census.gov). The unusual educational attainment of the participants in this study should be kept in mind when evaluating results. Similarly, household income among the participants was significantly higher than one would expect to find from a random sample of households from Muskingum County. According to 2017 census data, the median

annual household income in Muskingum County was \$43,325; 79% of the participants in this study have a household income of greater than \$50,000.



**Research Question #1: Description of Evidence**

*What understandings and attitudes about reproducing churches and groups exist among the participants prior to the Bible study?*

## Survey Analysis

The pre-test contained three questions that were designed to assess participants' *understanding* of church and group reproduction (Q14, Q15, and Q18). The survey contained five questions that were designed to assess participants' *attitudes* about reproducing churches and groups (Q19–23). 23 of 28 participants completed the pre-test.

Survey results show considerable variation ( $SD > 1$ ) in participants' confidence level when it came to *understanding* or *being able to explain* what is meant by church or group reproduction (Table 4.1).

**Table 4.1 Participants' Initial *Understanding* of Church and Group Reproduction**

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Not Confident (0)	Slightly Confident (1)	Somewhat Confident (2)	Confident (3)	Very Confident (4)
14. How confident are you that you understand what is meant by "reproducing groups or churches," or "multiplying" groups or churches?	23	2.65	1.03	Nil	17%	22%	39%	22%
15. How confident are you in your ability to explain what "reproducing groups or churches" is, and why it matters, to someone else?	23	2.39	1.16	4.35%	21.74%	21.74%	34.78%	17.39%

There was also a high degree of variation ( $SD > 1$ ) in participants' level of agreement with the statement that one should expect that our "sending" God will sometimes have people leave their current church to help start a new one (Q18). However, it should be noted that 73% of participants either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement (Table 4.2).

**Table 4.2 Participants' Initial Understanding About Leaving to Start New Churches or Groups**

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree (0)	Disagree (1)	Not Sure (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
18. Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: The God of the Bible is a "sending God," sometimes sending people out to spread the word of God to new people in new places. So, we should expect that God will sometimes have people leave their current church to help start a new one.	23	3.13	1.18	8.7%	Nil	8.7%	34.8%	47.8%

Turning to questions having to do with *attitude*, results from Q20 and Q21 were the same, with closely-grouped responses, and most either agreeing or strongly agreeing with both statements. It was hoped that making a distinction between whether someone *would* or *should* view this hypothetical instance of group reproduction as a good thing would reveal some differences. Results to both questions were, however, identical (Table 4.3).



**Table 4.3 Participants' Initial Attitude Towards Reproducing Their Own Small Group**

Questions	N	Mean	SD	Strongly Disagree (0)	Disagree (1)	Not Sure (2)	Agree (3)	Strongly Agree (4)
20. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: If some people wanted to leave the small group or Bible study that I attend to start a new small group or Bible study that might pull in some new people, I would view it as a good thing.	23	3.35	.57	Nil	Nil	4.35%	56.52%	39.13%
21. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: If some people wanted to leave the small group or Bible study that I attend to start a new small group or Bible study that might pull in some new people, I should view it as a good thing.	23	3.35	.57	Nil	Nil	4.35%	56.52%	39.13%

When participants were asked to imagine  $\frac{1}{4}$  of their current church leaving to begin a new church and were given a variety of options to describe their feelings if that were to happen, there was considerable variation in response ( $SD = .86$ ). A majority of participants (73%) selected one of the two responses that included the term “mixed feelings” (Table 4.4).

**Table 4.4 Participants' Initial Attitudes Towards  $\frac{1}{4}$  of Current Church Leaving**

Question	N	Mean	SD	Sad or angry, and opposed to the idea (0)	Sad or angry, but open to the idea (1)	Mixed feelings, but open to the idea (2)	Mixed feelings, and in favor of the idea (3)	Excited, and open to the idea (4)	Excited, and in favor of the idea (5)
19. Suppose ¼ of your current church claimed that God was leading them to leave and start a new church. Their proposal is to start a new church within 15 miles of your current one. Which of the following would describe your feelings about this?	23	2.74	.86	Nil	Nil	47.83%	34.78%	13.04%	4.35%

Questions 22 & 23 were designed to assess participants attitudes related to starting a new group themselves. Both questions showed much narrower distribution of responses than the previous questions regarding attitude. Both showed that apprenticing and having a co-leader would bolster the willingness/confidence of a majority of participants if they were to leave an existing small group to begin a new one. 66% of participants indicated that they would be more willing to leave and start a new group if they the opportunity to apprentice in their current group before doing so (Table 4.5). 83% of participants responded that they would be more confident in starting a new small group if they had someone go with them to help lead the new group (Table 4.6).

**Table 4.5 Participants Initial Attitudes Towards “Apprenticing”**

Question	N	Mean	SD	I would be less willing to lead a group or class (0)	My feelings about leading a group or class probably would not change (1)	I would be more willing to lead a group or class (2)
22. If the leader of your small group, Bible Study, or Sunday school class invited you to be an “apprentice” leader for a while before starting and leading a new group or class, how would this affect your willingness to start/lead a group/class?	23	1.61	.58	4.35%	30.43%	65.22%

**Table 4.6 Participants Initial Attitudes Towards Having a Teammate When Starting a New Group**

Question	N	Mean	SD	Less Confident (0)	About the Same (1)	More Confident (2)
23. If you were considering leaving your small group to start a new small group to reach new people, how would you feel if a trusted friend volunteered to co-lead the new group with you?	23	1.83	.39	Nil	17.39%	82.61%

Four of the above questions pertaining to initial understanding or attitude were also analyzed for possible correlations with the age or church experience of the participants. In most cases a weak ( $r$  value between .1 and .3, or -.1 and -.3) or very weak ( $r$  value between 0 and .1, or 0 and -.1) linear relationship was revealed. There was a

moderate, positive relationship ( $r$  value between .5 and .6) between a positive attitude about sending out  $\frac{1}{4}$  of a participant's existing church and past experience with church and group reproduction. That is (to a moderate degree), the more experience participants had in the past with church or group reproduction, the more likely they were to express a positive attitude toward the prospect of people leaving their current church to start a new one (Table 4.7).

**Table 4.7 Correlation Between Initial Understanding/Attitudes and Age or Church Experience**

Age or Church Experience	What is your age range?	How long has your church existed?	How frequently have you heard a pastor or staff member in your church talk about "reproducing groups or churches," or	Have you ever belonged to a church that had a group of people leave to	Have you ever been in a small group in which some people left to start a new group?
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Questions Addressing Understanding or Attitude			talk about "multiplication" in regard to groups or churches?	start a new church?	
15. How confident are you in your ability to explain what "reproducing groups or churches" is, and why it matters, to someone else?	0.026611	-0.13644	0.020023	0.202986	0.473291
19. Suppose 1/4 of your current church claimed that God was leading them to leave and start a new church. Their proposal is to start a new church within 15 miles of your current one. Which of the following would describe your feelings about this?	0.05295	0.06794	0.290503	0.591233*	0.54935*
20. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: If some people wanted to leave the small group or Bible study that I attend to start a new small group or Bible study that might pull in some new people, I would view it as a good thing.	-0.00738	0.215651	-0.01574	0.152043	0.198387
21. Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: If some people wanted to leave the small group or Bible study that I attend to start a new small group or Bible study that might pull in some new people, I should view it as a good thing.	-0.00519	0.053029	0.13938	0.349986	0.361348

\* **Moderate Positive Correlation**

### Focus Group Results

A focus group was conducted with each of the five small groups before each began using the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum. Question 1 in the schedule of questions was designed to gauge participants' understanding about church and group reproduction. Questions 2–8 were designed to capture the attitude of participants about church and group reproduction. What follows is a summary of participants' understanding and attitudes based on the researcher's analysis of coded data from the initial round of five focus groups.

*Short Answers, Varied Understanding about Church and Group Reproduction*

In general, the initial question about understanding did not garner as many or as detailed responses as the questions about attitude did. This may be attributed to this question being the very first question asked, with many of the participants perhaps hesitant to speak up at the outset. Field notes taken by the researcher during the initial round of focus groups include observations about some participants being “noticeably uncomfortable” as the discussion began. Indeed, the researcher observed at least one participant in four out of the five focus groups that was “noticeably uncomfortable.” This early discomfort, whether it was occasioned by the unfamiliar setting of a focus group or the discussion on an unfamiliar topic, may have contributed to the lack of responses to the initial question in the focus group schedule. Or, brief and limited amount of responses may be attributed to this question not being designed to promote the telling of personal stories or imagining of hypothetical situations like some of the following questions. Whatever the case may have been, responses to this question were short and to the point.

There was some variation in the content of answers given to the question “what does reproducing churches mean?” (Question 1). Answers mentioned more than once to were:

- Adding More Churches
- Something That Happens When Churches Get Too Big
  - *Physical Space*. Some participants indicated that “too big” means a given church is out of physical space and must reproduce in order to literally make more room for people.

- *Relational Boundaries and Service Opportunities.* Other participants also believed that a church was “too big” when the size of a congregation limited the intimacy of relationships or caused people to maintain too many relationships. Participant 14 commented on the potential relational strain and lack of enough service opportunities to go around that might come from being too big:

“I don’t know about anybody else, but I like sort of max out on the people that I can be connected to. My brain can only handle so many relationships. And so, you get to that state where you have maxed out, so you need to separate to build a new church, a new congregation so that those people can have jobs, and have stuff to do, and they can be investing.”

- Something that is Organic/Natural. Some participants used biological metaphors (mitosis, miosis, childbirth or rearing) to indicate their view of church reproduction, and reproduction in general, as being a natural thing.

### *Predominant Attitudes about Church and Group Reproduction*

Reponses to questions having to do with attitude (Q2–8) were coded and analyzed thematically. The predominant themes found in the first round of focus groups were:

**1. A Positive Attitude Based on Good Experiences.** Participants in the focus groups expressed a mostly positive attitude towards church and group reproduction. For many, this seemed to be linked to past experiences with multiplication. Question 2 asked participants to think back over the course of their lives and share experiences with church or group multiplication, positive or negative. Remarkably, most of the stories that were shared were positive. Numerous participants shared stories of churches or groups they had been a part of that had reproduced, with one even recalling an instance from their childhood:

(Participant 10) For me in my early Christian life, when I was a member of a different congregation than I am now, a “Denomination A” church, there was a group that broke off and became a “Denomination B” church, it was called. I was very young at that time, but it seemed like it was positive. I didn’t, in my young years, didn’t hear any negative—I only heard positive. And my family was one of the ones that started going to that church. And it seemed like a positive, because it was a smaller church and we got to know people better than in the larger churches.

Another participant shared a positive experience with reproduction during his or her college years. Though the participant used the word “split” to describe the situation, his or her summation of the event was positive:

(Participant 08) In college I was part of a huge church...and I was there when [the pastor] split and created his church. And the interesting thing about that was the different cultures of the two churches. I don’t think it was really a negative thing. I mean I think it was very well supported by everyone. But the two churches



definitely created their own cultures, their own feel, their own approach. So, I think that's sometimes what happens with churches when they split. People who were all so focused on God, but in different ways.

Still other participants shared stories of churches they knew of, but were not a part of, which had multiplied. Again, as participants thought back over instances of church reproduction that they had only heard about, the report was positive.

Participants also demonstrated a positive attitude towards the reproduction of small groups, and again, this was tied to past, positive experiences. One participant demonstrated a positive attitude towards small group multiplication by citing a past example of a group refusing to reproduce, and the negative outcome which followed:

(Participant 02) Almost every small group that I've been a part of, or Bible study, or that sort of thing, has had conversations about starting new, or people breaking off, or you know is anybody feeling God leading them to start a new group. And in almost every single case the answer was like "no." There was always a conversation: shouldn't we be splitting, or maybe we should split, and ours is so big? And it was "No we like it the way we are, no we like it the way we are." So, the idea of it was negative so that nobody was willing to do it, and so there was a, I don't know...it might have been really great, we just never did. And, in fact, one of those groups is still in existence. But because they never split, and because they never really dealt with that, they've slowly died. But they won't let it go. Like there's no life in the group anymore. But they still come together you know a couple of Sundays a month and pretend that there's still something there. Having

not split, and having not dealt with that maybe more proactively, it eventually died from the inside.

**2. Mixed Feelings.** Focus group data, while revealing positive statements about church and group reproduction, also revealed mixed feelings about the phenomenon. Numerous participants, across every focus group, acknowledged the emotional and relational difficulty that comes with leaving churches or groups to start new ones. A number of people used the word “sad” to describe instances of church or group reproduction of which they were a part, and others used even stronger language than that:

(Participant 20) I was very close to the associate pastor and his family at the church I had been going to for about a year. They were kind of like a second family. And then he was asked to leave and go to Florida and help start a church there. And it was actually pretty devastating for me.

(Participant 09) And then, the small group that I’m currently still in, used to have some people in it who decided to start their own church. And that was a very tough time. I think it was difficult as far as the group because we were so good at the “one-anothering,” it really felt like a little piece of our family was kind of breaking apart.

Participants in the initial round of focus groups seemed very aware of the tension that existed between their recognition of church and group reproduction as a good and necessary thing, and the emotional hurt that often accompanies it. It was apparent that some had wrestled with this tension for some time because of past experiences (Question 2). When asked to imagine future scenarios involving church or group reproduction

(Questions 3–6), the mixed feelings of group members surfaced once again. Participant 25 offered one of the most raw, straightforward descriptions of the tension between Kingdom expansion and relational loss in response to Question 6:

I know it's the right thing to do. But, there's a piece of me that likes the small group that continues with the same people. And I'm ok for somebody else to come in, but to say, "ok starting next week, you three I never see in small group again because we're in one group and you're in another." There's a piece of me that doesn't like that. So, I understand the concept and how it works, and I think that's great. I just don't want to live it. I do, but I don't. For the good of the church and the good of everybody, yes I do. For my personal relationships with each of these women that are here and a couple that aren't here this evening, I don't—since you asked me to be honest.

The above statement, with which one other participant in the group voiced agreement, is the most even-handed treatment of this tension from the first round of focus groups. The rest of the participants in the initial focus groups acknowledged the mixed feelings they have had, or would have, if their current church or group reproduced, but clearly prioritized the growth or expansion of the church or Kingdom over their own grief.

Participant 09 said that his or her “mature half” would be in favor of extending the gospel to new areas through multiplication. And, when talking about a past small group that had reproduced, Participant 21 also indicated that while many in the group were sad, “the group was mature enough” to see the good in what was happening. Participant 20 described his or her own feelings of grief when people left a past church to take on a new ministry as “selfish.” Additionally, both Participant 09 and Participant 21

used language having to do with the primary importance of doing what was best for the “Kingdom.” In sum, these statements acknowledge the emotion and grief associated with new groups or churches being born, but value these as of secondary importance to the growth of the Kingdom. While the experience of having mixed feelings about church or group reproduction was mentioned frequently in these focus groups, most participants affirmed the phenomenon as good or necessary, in spite of emotional pain.

### **3. Muskingum County Multiplication: Groups More Likely Than Churches.**

Questions 4–6 were designed to gauge attitudes about multiplication by asking participants to imagine people from their own congregation proposing to leave and start a new church, or people from their own small group proposing to leave and start a new group. During this round of focus groups participants in four of the five groups expressed concern about the prospect of people leaving their church to begin a new one due to the small size of their current church. None of the churches included in this study are large churches, and participants quickly noted that a group of 10–25 people leaving would severely impact the life of the parent church and its ability to continue its mission. Because the churches in this study (and most in Muskingum County) are small in membership, sending out a new church did not seem like a viable option to most participants. Questions about reproducing their current small group seemed much more relevant.

**4. Reasons Matter.** When asked hypothetical questions (Questions 3–6) about people leaving a group or church to begin new ones, some participants indicated that the *reason* for leaving would determine their attitude towards the event. Participant 09 cited recent experiences of people leaving for the wrong reasons, and went on to then affirm

the need to ensure any kind of leaving was done for the right reasons. Participants 03, 09, 10, and 21 all believed that some sort of vetting process was warranted when dealing with a possible call from God to start a new church or group. For these participants, their attitude towards reproduction happening in their contexts was open, but also cautious; they wanted measures put in place to help ensure that “this is something from the Lord” (Participant 21), and that the parent church could send them with “blessing and agreement” (Participant 10).

**5. Culture Matters.** One of the focus groups talked extensively about the culture of their church impacting attitudes towards reproducing both churches and groups. Regarding the culture of his or her church, Participant 06 indicated an evangelistic focus that impacted the way the church approached group life:

I think the culture of our church encourages that, would encourage that. I think that with these small groups that have split up, that's part of [it]. You know one of the questions is “who would we ask to come in and fill this empty chair.” You know I think it's always helpful for us to be thinking about new people coming in and maybe splitting if we do get too big, so I think that's always in the back of our (at least my) mind. That's kind of what we're supposed to do. That's kind of our goal is to multiply. I mean it would be...it's sad. There's that process of separation. It's not easy, but obviously if it's done in the right way and they're looking for support, that's one thing that our church would I think would be ok with.

In the course of the conversation on their church's culture, two participants from the focus group also referenced the “semester” system that their church uses, which they

believed help promote multiplication. Participant 01 claimed that, in his or her church, one is aware when joining a small group that it will not be “now and forever your small group.” Rather, due to the church’s system of resetting or reshuffling small groups twice a year, small group participants expected the make-up of groups to change frequently.

Participant 06 put the matter thusly:

The thing that I keep thinking is the culture of the church and of small groups, you know how we have it now—semesters. It may not be the same from one semester to the next. So, don’t expect it to be the same. Don’t expect to be in the same group. You can be in the same group—but having that mentality of it’s not always going to be—we are going to change. This is not going to be our small group forever. Maybe not even in the Fall. I think it’s helpful to have that temporary mindset of small groups rather than the permanent, whose gonna split up. You know if it does get to splitting off, who’s gonna be the ones to split off. So, I think having that is helpful for that purpose.

Additionally, on the issue of culture, Participant 04 commented that because his or her church had itself been a church plant, there was already an underlying culture of multiplication. Participant 02 highlighted the importance of his or her church having a “vocabulary” that contributed to the building of a missional, multiplication culture. Though lengthy, the entirety of Participant 02’s observation regarding vocabulary and culture is here:

I think the vocabulary that CHURCH A provides of constantly talking about “your neighborhood” wherever that is—where you live, work, and play, and thinking about impacting that place—it changes the expectation then. If you

started the small group out of a fairly large church and the goal of that small group is to do life together, and then one of the group says hey “we’re going to go over here and do life separately,” then it feels more like betrayal for lack of a better word, like they’re ditching you. But when the culture of the church is there’s always more neighborhoods to be influenced. And so, “we really sort of think that we need to get something going in this neighborhood that doesn’t have anything yet, and so we’re going to start focusing here.” There’s sort of an undercurrent where that already exists, there’s already a vocabulary in place for talking about that. Which a lot of, which I should say, none of the churches that I have been in in the past, had. So, to explain it “we’re going to go start a small group, we’re going to break up this small group, and we’re going to go” it feels like divorce, it feels like breaking a family apart. Whereas we’re meeting together, it’s not for the long term, it’s always in light of what neighborhoods we’re involved in, and what ones they need, and it’s just starting to be apparent that there’s a need in this other neighborhood and we are already there, so that ability to have a vocabulary to explain it helps facilitate it as well. Not speaking specifically of our group not that, “oh, you guys aren’t going to come anymore.” Like it wouldn’t be a happy thing but there’s a way to converse about it that is much more positive and effective than really any other situation that I’ve been a part of.

## Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

*What changes occur in the participants' understanding of, or attitudes about, church and group reproduction during, and after the completion of, the Bible study?*

Quantitative and qualitative data were used to answer this question, with each of the three researcher-designed instruments being used. A paired t-test analysis was used to measure changes in understanding and attitude between the initial survey results and the results of the survey following the completion of the Bible study. Transcripts from the second round of focus groups were coded and analyzed to discover changes in understanding and attitude. Participant journals were coded and analyzed to uncover changes in understanding and attitude that may have occurred during the six-week Bible study experience.

### Survey Analysis

Sixteen of the twenty-eight participants completed both the pre-survey and post-survey. The responses of those participants were analyzed using paired t-tests of survey questions having to do with *understanding* (Q14, Q15, and Q18) and survey questions having to do with *attitude* (Q19–23). Significant positive change was found in post-test responses to questions having to do with *understanding* ( $p < 0.05$ ; see Table 4.8). No significant changes were found in responses to questions having to do with *attitude*.

**Table 4.8: Changes in Understanding**

Question	Mean	SD	Pr >  t
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	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	
14. How confident are you that you understand what is meant by “reproducing groups or churches,” or “multiplying” groups or churches?	2.9375	3.625	0.995833	0.25	0.005436
15. How confident are you in your ability to explain what “reproducing groups or churches” is, and why it matters, to someone else?	2.5625	3.4375	1.329167	0.2625	0.005424
18. Rate your level of agreement with the following statement: The God of the Bible is a “sending God,” sometimes sending people out to spread the word of God to new people in new places. So, we should expect that God will sometimes have people leave their current church to help start a new one.	3.125	3.625	1.183333	0.25	0.043931

**Focus Group Analysis**

Twenty-two (22) of the twenty-seven (27) participants who were present for the first round of focus groups were also present for the second round of focus groups. No participants were present for the second round of focus groups that was not also present for the first round.

*Changes in Understanding*

Like the first round of focus groups, the second round did not produce a large volume of answers to Question 1, which was designed to gauge participants’ understanding of church and group reproduction. Field notes from the second round of focus groups reveal that participants were much more at ease than in the first round. However, the amount of data gathered in response to Question 1 was still limited. Coding

and analysis of data from the second round of focus groups revealed the following changes to participants' understanding of church and group reproduction.

**1. Connection with Making Disciples.** A major theme in the second round of focus groups was the connection participants made between *making disciples* and the reproduction of churches and groups. Chapter 2 in the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum is entitled "It's All About Making Disciples." This aspect of the intervention was designed to help make a connection between scriptural admonitions to make disciples and the reproduction of churches and groups. The *Fact of Life* given for that chapter states "there can be no reproduction of churches or groups without the reproduction of disciples of Jesus Christ" (11). Coded focus group data reveals that, on some level, participants' understanding changed by viewing the concept in connection with the Christian vocation of making disciples.

At least seven participants in the second round of focus groups mentioned making disciples in connection with the reproduction of churches or groups. Participant 24, in the course of sharing a story about a negative experience with church reproduction, commented that "I went to a church where a whole group of people left—not really to make disciples, but really to break away from us." Participant 24's interpretation implies a view of reproduction as needing to be connected with the goal of making disciples. Other participants made explicit connections between making disciples and the reproduction of churches and groups. In response to Question 1 (What does reproducing churches mean?), Participant 14 said that it means, "growing disciples who then go out and make more disciples." Participant 01 commented, regarding the curriculum, that he

or she liked “the focus on making disciples as opposed to making churches or groups, and that the kingdom is disciples, not churches.”

**2. Group Reproduction Can Happen Anywhere.** One focus group identified a change in understanding in response to Question 5 (“If people from your church left to start a new church, would you prefer that it be far away [out-of-state], or nearby [within 15 miles]? Why?”). Participant 09 indicated that his or her response to this question during the final focus group was different than it was during the initial focus group due to a change in understanding. The change in understanding involved seeing reproduction as less formal and more within reach of lay people. People could start a new group in their neighborhood or workplace tomorrow, and that would be a valid example of group reproduction. “It’s more about the groups rather than the institution,” Participant 09 said, “It doesn’t have to be I’m sitting down to write my own book of discipline from scratch, right? Like it doesn’t have to be this institutional thing, it can be, you know what, I want to make some more relationships, more connections. I just need to pick a time and a place and invite people.”

This particular change in understanding seems to be connected with the content in Chapter 3 of the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum. In that chapter, a step-by-step example is given of how, in a contemporary context, an individual or team can begin a new small group in a specific “neighborhood.” Following Participant 09’s comment about the change in understanding that he or she had experienced, a lengthy discussion ensued about this kind of group reproduction methodology. All the participants present, while not referencing Chapter 3 explicitly, cited numerous examples of people they knew who had planted groups or were thinking

of planting groups in “neighborhoods.” Later in the discussion, Participant 10 commented that the curriculum seemed to “bring up the idea that what [we are] being called to do is to spread the word—not necessarily divide to do it—but spread it in the laundry room there or, you know, at a football game.”

A second focus group also seemed to indicate changes to understanding brought about by the step-by-step example of how a lay person or team might begin a new group “in the neighborhood.” One participant cited the step-by-step approach given in Chapter 3 as helping to make planting a new small group much less intimidating, with others chiming in their assent:

(Participant 08) One of the things that really struck me in the book was there were steps, there was a church that has three steps. And for me I feel like that jump from step two to step three is probably the most intimidating and the most challenging in regard to new groups and starting new things. But if you think about it, and I think the book talked a little bit about this too, in step 2 you are walking with people and just sharing life, discipling, getting to know people and then it can become a much more natural thing to go to step three. If you can through that process find common ground and start your group with that sense of common ground. So anyways I really appreciated that thought and it made the idea of starting a new group less intimidating I think.

**3. “Sending” and “Kingdom” Language.** Two other concepts from the curriculum surfaced in the post-Bible study focus groups. Chapter 1 in the curriculum is entitled “A Sending God,” and Chapter 5 is entitled “Multiplying the Kingdom Mission.” In response to Question 1 (“What does reproducing churches mean?”), Participant 22 said

that it was “growing the kingdom of God.” Participant 26, responding to the same question, said that it meant “sending people out to grow the church.” No one in the first round of focus groups used “sending” or “Kingdom” language in answering Question 1.

### *Changes in Attitude*

Analysis of coded data from the second round of focus groups revealed no major changes to the predominant attitudes that were identified from the first round of focus groups. Those attitudes were summarized above under the following headings: Positive Attitudes Based on Good Experiences; Mixed Feelings; Muskingum County Reproduction: Groups More Than Churches; Reasons Matter; Culture Matters. Participants explicitly demonstrated all of these attitudes again at some point in the second round, and nothing was reported that indicated a major change to any of these attitudes.

However, while participants did not demonstrate a change to any of the attitudes initially reported, several displayed an increased *openness* to certain concepts—an *openness* that was not observed at the outset. One participant explained that after experiencing the curriculum with his or her small group, he or she was much more open to the notion that church reproduction could be a good and positive thing:

(Participant 07) I think I was going to say you know before reading and kind of going through these exercises I would have assumed it was a bad thing for a church to kind of go out, for people from a congregation to leave and go somewhere else. I don't think that's necessarily true. So, I mean if you're looking for ways I would answer that question differently, I think that I would answer it differently now knowing kind of that that's the way churches grow, right? That's

how you go out and reach new people. It certainly would be a trying time, but not necessarily a bad thing.

Though no other participants expressed a general change in attitude in the forthright fashion that Participant 07 did, there were three specific facets of multiplication concerning which participants displayed an openness that was not present during the first round of focus groups. First, there was a noticeable openness to reproduction that was clearly connected with making disciples. Second, there was a noticeable openness to reproducing small groups according to the step-by-step pattern given in Chapter 3 of the curriculum. Finally, there was a noticeable openness to multiplication that was prompted from within a small group or church, rather than from the outside.

It could be the case that all three of these attitudes were present to some degree before the Bible study experience. In that case, it may be that the curriculum simply gave participants language to express these attitudes. Or, it may be that certain follow-up questions asked by the moderator and researcher were more effective in bringing to light these attitudes during the second round of focus groups. Or, the following attitudes could represent a substantial change in the openness of some participants based on their experience of the Bible study. Whatever the case may be, participants displayed an openness connected to the following three issues that was not displayed at the outset.

**Connections with Making Disciples.** As was shown above, participants displayed a change in understanding about reproducing churches and groups—that it should be connected with, or a by-product of, making disciples. This new understanding or new language for explaining good reasons for church and group multiplication was also accompanied by an open attitude. That is, when talking about multiplication that was

tied to the Christian vocation of making disciples, participants displayed a positive and open attitude towards the phenomenon. Moreover, some seemed to use “making disciples” as a kind of lens through which they could evaluate a given instance of multiplication. If a person or group were leaving a church or small group for the purpose of making additional disciples, then participants displayed a high degree of openness towards the practice.

**Step-By-Step Pattern.** The step-by-step pattern for reproducing a small group in a given “neighborhood” also seemed to cause an increased openness to small group reproduction among certain participants. Not only did it change understanding (as shown above), but the fact that some participants found group reproduction more doable (Participant 09) and “less intimidating” (Participant 08) would seem to indicate a change in attitude as well. Moreover, in one focus group participants began actively brainstorming about groups that they might start in their community as a way of reaching new people where they live, work, and play.

**3. Reasons Matter: Reproduction Should Be Prompted from Within.** One exchange from one of the post-intervention focus groups uncovered more information about the “Reasons Matter” attitude observed during the pre-intervention focus groups. In that focus group, the researcher asked a series of follow-up questions in response to a participant’s comment about how the reasons given for a proposed group or church reproducing would make all the difference as to whether it was a good thing. In response to the follow-up questions, three participants responded, with others in the group voicing agreement with their comments:

(Participant 24): Sometimes I resist if somebody has an idea, if somebody has an idea, and they think I'm the person to execute that idea. I think if God lays it on my heart, that's one thing, but if he lays it on your heart, you do it.

(Participant 22): Fair enough.

(Participant 24): You know what I mean?

(Participant 22): Yeah.

(Participant 24): I don't think God tells you to have me do something.

(Participant 25): I think it would be different if, for example, Person A decided that God wanted her to lead the different group on Sunday night, and she still came on Thursday night every other week. I'm good with that. And I'm good if Person A says, "God laid it on my heart and I'm going to venture out and try this." I don't have a problem with that. I think it's when you split a whole group—to me, that's different. But I'm back to the relationships. I can have a relationship with Person A if I choose to do that...one-on-one, for lunch every Friday...go do your group on Sunday nights, type thing.

This exchange provided greater insight into the "Reasons Matter" attitude that was identified in both rounds of focus groups. Here, the participants indicated that their attitude would be more open to reproduction when an individual within a small group senses a call to begin a new group ("God laid it on my heart") than if a group was forced to "split" by some pre-determined or outside influence.

### **Participant Journals**

#### *Changes in Understanding*



Participant journals allowed the researcher to observe changes in understanding that occurred during the course of the six-week Bible study experience. Participants were instructed to write a response to a journal prompt after each session, providing immediate data about changes to understanding or attitude that might have occurred during a given small group discussion. Journal responses were coded and analyzed, and two major changes in understanding were observed.

**1. Connections with Making Disciples.** One of the new discoveries reported was the connection between the Scriptural admonition to make disciples and the reproduction of churches and groups, as well as the importance of which of the two activities (making disciples or making churches) should get the priority:

(Participant 19) I like the focus on making disciples—not making new churches/groups. More disciples will naturally lead to new/more churches and groups. But if we start with making new church is the hopes that new disciples come to it, we are not following the model that Jesus gave us.

(Unidentified Participant) Very interesting that there isn't really a command from God in the Bible to go and start new groups and churches. Instead, it was all focused on making disciples.

(Participant 01) The Church is not necessarily the Kingdom of God, but disciples are. We are commanded to make disciples. If disciples are made, groups and churches will follow. We do well to not get it backwards.

(Participant 14). Making disciples is the end game.

**2. A Sending God.** Two participants clearly indicated changes to their understanding of the nature of God in response to the journal prompt after Session 1:

(Participant 06) I have known that God sends people to do his work, but I have never thought of it as a characteristic that is attributed to Him. Now that I think of it as being his Nature to send us, it makes it more real and applicable to me.

(Participant 11) My new thought is actually a question: Why do we not talk more about “sending” as one of God’s attributes? Other than in the “Perspectives” class offered about eight years ago, I had seldom heard God described as a “sending God.” And yet it is so, so true.

“Go...go...go...go...”

### *Changes in Attitude*

The participant journals revealed no major changes in the predominant attitudes that were observed during the first round of focus groups and the initial survey. However, as was the case with the second round of focus groups, information was gathered from participant journals that seems to indicate an openness to certain aspects of church or group reproduction that was not observed at the outset.

**1. Motivation Matters.** Two participants (09 and an Unidentified Participant) wrote in their participant journals that a person or group’s motivation in leaving to start a

new thing matters. The Unidentified Participant wrote about the importance of correct motives in response to Journal Prompt #5:

My biggest take-away with this chapter is the motivation. When our focus aligns to getting more Jesus into more of the world, I think it is easier to work together. It is less sadness, anger, division, and more about working together in different ways to grow the Kingdom.

For this participant, a motivation to “get more of Jesus into the world” is more acceptable and causes fewer problems. Multiplication that flows from correct motives would make a big difference in terms of openness and acceptance by those affected.

**2. Motivation to Making Disciples.** Other participants also seemed to point to making disciples as being a worthy motivation for starting something new. The participant journals indicated, albeit implicitly, that a motivation to make disciples is an acceptable reason for church or group reproduction, whereas other motivations may not be. In the previous section on changes to *understanding* found via participant journals, quotations from participants were given concerning the connection between making disciples and the reproduction of churches. In those quotations, there seems to be tacit approval given to multiplication motivated by a desire to make disciples, vis-à-vis other reasons for starting a new church or group. Consider again the following quotations:

(Participant 19) I like the focus on making disciples—not making new churches/groups. More disciples will naturally lead to new/more churches and groups. But if we start with making new church is the hopes that new disciples come to it, we are not following the model that Jesus gave us.

(Participant 01) The Church is not necessarily the Kingdom of God, but disciples are. We are commanded to make disciples. If disciples are made, groups and churches will follow. We do well to not get it backwards.

(Participant 14). Making disciples is the end game.

Connections with disciple-making that were made in participant journals display more than a change in understanding; they display a noticeable openness to multiplication efforts that are connected to making disciples.

### **Research Question #3: Description of Evidence**

What elements of the Bible study assist in growing the participants understanding of, and openness to, the reproduction of churches and groups?

#### **Participant Journals**

To answer this research question, participant journals were analyzed by looking for instances of participants self-reporting significant impact on their own understanding of, or openness to, the subject matter. Using this criterion, the material in Chapter 5 was the part of the curriculum most clearly identified by participants as helping grow understanding about, and openness to, the reproduction of churches and groups.

#### **Responses to Chapter 5:**

(Participant 06) A thought that was reinforced was that of “allegiance to a church should always come after allegiance to Jesus and the kingdom.”

Jesus’ emphasis was on the kingdom and not the church. The church is an agent of advancing the Kingdom.

(Participant 02) The E. Stanley Jones quote has stuck with me. The church/kingdom difference is profound.

(Participant 11) Love Fact #5. 2<sup>nd</sup> Sentence in the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph on p. 27 is right on! We need to learn that church growth is/can be a by-product of making disciples. P. 29 is awesome. I plan to use Jones' quote. Get more of Jesus into more of the world—woo hoo!

(Unidentified Participant) My biggest take-away with this chapter is in the motivation. When our focus aligns to be getting more Jesus into more of the world I think it is easier to work together. It is less sadness, anger, division, and more about working together in different ways to grow the kingdom.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Four major findings are taken from the data analysis provided in this chapter.

Each of these findings will be explored in detail in Chapter 5. They are:

1. Educating adult lay people about church and group reproduction in a small group setting using the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* increases understanding of the concept.

2. Helping adult lay people make connections between making disciples of Jesus Christ and the reproduction of churches and groups positively affects understanding about, and openness to, the concept.
3. Providing step-by-step descriptions of how small group reproduction can work makes it seem more doable for adult lay people.
4. While education or experience may foster greater openness towards multiplication, mixed feelings about this phenomenon are normal.

## CHAPTER 5: LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

### Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, major findings are listed and examined in the light of the literature review and biblical-theological foundation for this study that were presented in Chapter 2. The limitations of the study, as well as unexpected observations, are also noted below. Finally, ministry implications and recommendations based on the findings are given.

### Major Findings

**(1) Educating adult lay people about church and group reproduction in a small group setting using the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum increases their understanding of the concept.**

Changes in understanding were observed using multiple sources of data, which strengthens the reliability of this finding. T test analysis of survey data revealed statistically significant changes between pre and post-test scores on questions related to participants' confidence in their understanding of the subject matter. Focus group and participant journal data revealed learning that happened during, or as a result of, the Bible study experience—particularly regarding connections with making disciples, and how lay people might reproduce small groups in their “neighborhood.”

Insights from both Transformative Learning Theory and Cooperative Learning Theory indicate that a small group environment might be a productive environment for learning, especially when dealing with a difficult and sometimes painful topic such as this one. Perhaps discussing curriculum like this in an already-established group provides the kind of environment where honest sharing about real-life situations involving church or group reproduction can happen. Furthermore, while Jesus may not have explicitly

instructed the Twelve about church and group reproduction, he certainly instructed them about a host of other matters while in the context of a small group environment.

The biblical and theological foundations that were laid for this study affirmed a God who is *for* training and education. The Son of God was incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth, a teacher. Moreover, Jesus' detailed preparation of the seventy-two messengers, the extensive nature of his so-called farewell discourse, and his multi-faceted preparation of the Twelve apostles demonstrate intentionality in preparing his followers for future ministry endeavors. Therefore, if God values preparation and education for future ministry eventualities, approaches to adult education that positively change the understanding of lay people should be sought after and valued. If curriculum like *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* can be shown to positively change understanding about this subject across a variety of demographics, then it will play an important role in preparing lay disciples to participate in 21<sup>st</sup>-century multiplication movements.

**(2) Helping adult lay people make connections between making disciples of Jesus Christ and the reproduction of churches/groups positively affects understanding about, and openness to, the concept.**

Data analysis of post-Bible study focus groups and participant journals revealed participants discovering a connection between the Christian vocation to make disciples and the reproduction of churches and groups. This connection seemed to affect both *understanding* and *attitudes* about church and group reproduction positively. *The Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum defined "making disciples" as both making new disciples (evangelism) and helping existing disciples grow



to maturity (discipleship) (13). It demonstrated a connection between church or group multiplication and making disciples by guiding students through a series of scriptures from the Book of Acts.

The positive impact of this connection is also an example of what was identified in focus groups as an acceptable *reason* for reproduction. Analysis of focus group data revealed that a predominant attitude among participants was that “reasons matter,” when it comes to how they would view a particular instance of reproduction. Leaders need to be able to answer the *why* question when sharing this subject matter with others. Making new disciples was, for participants in this study, a biblical and valid reason for a church or group to reproduce.

Of course, for *making disciples* to matter as a reason for reproduction, one needs to be sharing the curriculum with lay people that value evangelism. The missiology section of the literature review highlighted “evangelistic impulse” as a variable that some identify as an indicator that a church or group is primed for reproduction. Churches with a “burden for lost people” are more likely to reproduce, as some would argue (e.g., Stevenson 92–94). However, if no such burden exists in a given congregation, then selling a vision of multiplying churches and groups may be very difficult. If an evangelistic impulse is a part of a church’s culture, then showing lay people how church and group reproduction connects with evangelism is likely to create openness and buy-in. The participants in this study appeared to be people that not only believed in evangelism, but also displayed a high view of Scripture. The way that the curriculum used in this study used Scripture to demonstrate how multiplication works seems to have positively affected understanding and attitudes as well.

**(3) Providing step-by-step descriptions of how small group reproduction can work makes it seem more doable for adult lay people.**

In two of the five post-Bible study focus groups, participants demonstrated changed understanding and positive attitudes towards starting new small groups *themselves*. Several participants valued the “step-by-step” approach given in Chapter 3 of the curriculum. This chapter seemed to spur ideas on how they could naturally begin a group in one of their “neighborhoods.” This was a surprising, yet welcome, finding.

It was also a finding that comports with the biblical-theological basis for this study. God values educating and preparing his people for future ministry endeavors, as was discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, Jesus’ preparation of the seventy-two messengers included step-by-step instructions concerning how they were to carry out the short-term opportunity that lay in front of them (McCallum, loc. 3833–3870). Indeed, commentators have noted that the gospel writers have included more detail regarding the instructions Jesus gave than what actually happened on the mission (France 416–417; Green 417). The step-by-step approach of Jesus in this instance may have made the mission seem more doable to his seventy-two messengers, not less.

The discussion of Finding #2 affirmed the need to give lay people a good *why* for church and group reproduction. Finding #3 would seem to indicate that giving people a good *how-to* is also of value. Lay people responded favorably to the step-by-step description of how any individual or team might begin a new group in a given “neighborhood.” For some, this seemed more doable than ever before. This finding, involving giving lay people a step-by-step *how-to* has broad implications for leadership and adult education in the Church.

**(4) While education or experience may create greater openness towards multiplication, mixed feelings about this phenomenon are normal.**

I had experienced many emotionally-charged discussions about church and group reproduction prior to beginning this research. I was, therefore, not surprised when emotion was mentioned frequently during focus group sessions. Focus group sessions had participants reflecting on past experiences with church or group reproduction, which resulted in stories of severed relationships and tearful goodbyes. Participants were also asked to imagine hypothetical situations involving people leaving their group or church. These too revealed some of the emotions that are a part of this process.

The pre-test survey and initial round of focus groups revealed a generally positive attitude towards church or group reproduction. Focus group participants from each of the five initial focus groups shared multiplication stories that they had been a part of, or heard about, which they evaluated as good and positive. However, because of the experience of relational loss or, as one participant put it, of “a family breaking apart” (Participant 09), participants often described their feelings as mixed. When asked, in the quantitative survey, how they would feel if  $\frac{1}{4}$  of their current church proposed to leave the church and begin a new church to reach new people, the majority of participants (83%) chose a response with the words “mixed feelings” in it.

The general openness towards multiplication in this sample allowed people to characterize their feelings as mixed. Therefore, it is important to note that “mixed feelings” among people who are supportive of church and group reproduction may be the best we can do. Participants reported mixed feelings, despite sharing positive experiences with reproduction. They also reported mixed feelings both before and after the

intervention. This research indicates that mixed feelings about church and group reproduction are normal for those who are open to the concept.

Biblical data from apostolic work and writings of the apostle Paul provides ample foundation for mixed feelings being a normative experience as the word of God spreads and people are sent to begin new things. The literature review cited the impressive quantity of emotional references in the book of Acts (e.g., Voorwind 75). More specifically, we observed the grief experienced by Paul and others along the missionary trail when it was time to say goodbye (e.g. Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.37–38). The review of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians revealed the apostle's use of strong, family-separation metaphors to describe his feelings at having had to leave the Thessalonian Christians (1 Thess. 2.17–20). Interestingly, focus group participants also used family-separation metaphors to describe their experience of people leaving groups and churches as God moved them on to new things. Apparently, mixed feelings were normal for Paul as he joined God on a mission to extend Christianity to new people and places, just as they are for lay people today.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

The literature review revealed strong consensus among missiologists that, if churches want multiplication, they need to aim for multiplication. That is, clergy need to align the strategies and structures of churches in a way that helps realize a multiplication vision. As more and more leaders in the church today pursue such a vision, they will need to find effective ways to aim their efforts in that direction. This study has proposed an adult education experience as part of a church's preparation for the reproduction of churches and groups.

The literature review displays the thorough, careful, and detailed approach to training modeled by Jesus in the gospels. The brief survey of adult education theory given above demonstrates the value of giving adults time and space to think through difficult issues. These considerations should push leaders to consider taking the *long road* in getting a church ready to multiply, especially given the emotionally-charged nature of this issue. Indeed, this is an issue on which “one night of vision casting” is not nearly sufficient (Murray, *21<sup>st</sup> Century* loc. 1211–1240). These factors, coupled with the positive results of this study should, at minimum, prompt more trials of an adult education approach to getting churches and groups ready to multiply.

Finally, it is not solely churches aggressively pursuing group multiplication or church planting that should consider the results of this research. This study is more far-reaching. Any church that has *making disciples* as part of its vision may, sooner or later, have to reckon with how God reproduces churches and groups. And, as we know, making disciples should be a part of every church’s vision! At any point, new believers may come to faith, thereby changing the dynamics in a group or church; at any point, a maturing follower of Jesus may sense the Spirit’s nudge to step out and start something new. When these things happen, a church may all of a sudden find itself confronted with circumstances that involve the reproduction of a group or church. Therefore, the implications of this study are for a host of contexts, because every church needs to be prepared for the eventuality of multiplication.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The generalizability of this study will be limited by a number of factors. The three most significant limitations will be mentioned here. First, as was noted above, the high

educational attainment of the sample used in this study will limit its generalizability, both nationally and locally. The difference between the educational attainment of the sample (78% Bachelor's degree or higher) is significantly higher than the average level of educational attainment in Muskingum County (15% Bachelor's degree or higher). Therefore, we should be cautious in making conclusions about how a more typical sample of people from Muskingum County, or nationally, would respond to this intervention.

Second, though the researcher aimed for some variation in the sample of churches from which participants were recruited, the majority of participants were seasoned believers with a wealth of church experience. The design of the research—using the curriculum with existing small groups—probably had the negative effect of limiting the diversity of the sample. Most small groups are comprised of people who have been attending church for some time. In short, the study failed to find a way to include less-seasoned believers with limited church experience. Therefore, one should be cautious in making conclusions about how a less-experienced crowd would respond to the intervention.

Finally, the generalizability of the study was limited by the initial openness of the participants to church and group reproduction. Initial survey and focus group results revealed a sample that, though aware of negative experiences and attitudes towards multiplication, held mostly positive, open attitudes towards the idea. Additionally, twelve of the twenty-eight participants were from a newly formed church—a fact which seemed to contribute to greater openness to church and group reproduction from the start. In short, this was a sample that was mostly sympathetic to the subject matter. The

researcher, as yet, cannot make any conclusions about the efficacy of this intervention with a largely unsympathetic sample or a sample from a church where a multiplication vision or culture definitely does not exist.

### **Unexpected Observations**

One unanticipated, yet welcome, finding emerged from my analysis of the data. I was surprised to find that some participants responded to the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* curriculum by observing opportunities to plant new groups in their own context, even making plans to do so. I had imagined the curriculum provoking reflection and discovery around the concept of multiplication; I had not imagined the curriculum provoking immediate brainstorming and action regarding current ministry opportunities. Therefore, Finding #3 (Providing step-by-step descriptions of how small group reproduction can work makes it seem more doable for adult lay people) was a surprising, yet encouraging, finding. People immediately turning theory into practice demonstrates how *doable* the kind of group reproduction described in Chapter 3 of the curriculum seemed to participants.

### **Recommendations**

For reasons outlined above, more churches should attempt adult education approaches to preparing lay people for multiplication. However, additional research regarding this method of preparation is needed.

This research design combined several variables that, if controlled, could yield more reliable results. The study involved adults experiencing a six-week, Bible-study curriculum in the context of their existing small group. So, was it the experience of talking about issues related to church multiplication with their small group or the

curriculum itself that produced changes to understanding and attitude? A research design that had one sample do just the group discussion and one sample do just the curriculum (with no group discussion) would provide further insight. Additionally, future research that gathers a more diverse sample in terms of education and church experience would certainly bear fruit.

### **Postscript**

For me, this project was about listening and learning. It began with once again recalling and listening to difficult conversations about church or group reproduction from the past. I played back, in my mind, words and body language from conversations with lay people, which displayed a lack of understanding or openness about this issue. And, as I began doing research on this problem, I also listened (through the literature review) to the many voices that have contributed to the Church's understanding of this issue. Therein I found a variety of perspectives about how this ministry problem could possibly be solved. I was grateful, therefore, to find much in the literature review alone that has and will shape my future practice when it comes to faithfully and gracefully preparing a church or small group for reproduction.

The design of this research also involved more listening. Through three different instruments, I was able to listen to lay people talk about this issue in rich and detailed ways, adding to my learning about this necessary but sometimes challenging phenomenon. Several exchanges that happened during focus group sessions, in various living rooms, are ones that I will not soon forget. New discoveries were made, and higher levels of insight attained through listening to participants—all of which, have already begun shaping leadership in my context.



But this study was also about learning. Because of this research, I have a renewed appreciation for the necessity training and education in Christian discipleship. The painful puzzle of communicating with lay people about multiplication can be mitigated, if not solved, by regarding lay disciples as willing and capable learners. A disciple is, after all, a learner (*mathétés*), and this study treated them as such. Much can be gained in Western contexts from a slower approach to reproducing groups and churches---one that couples vision casting and other tactics with education that provides detailed information about the reproductive process. Education allows lay people to work through and “unlearn” negative experiences with multiplication, ask questions, and understand the concept. Clearly, Jesus took the time to educate and prepare his disciples for what lay ahead, often in a detailed manner. When it comes to educating lay people about church and group reproduction, it seems today’s leaders would do well to take the same approach.

All of this learning and listening has had the effect of growing my confidence in leading church and group reproduction in effective ways. This is important because, like others, I continue to be committed to leading a disciple-making movement in my context—a movement where new disciples are made, and where already-disciples grow to maturity. And if that, by God’s grace, is going to happen, then we certainly will need to help lay people learn how to multiply groups (and perhaps even churches) effectively. As this study has demonstrated, giving lay people the *whys* and the *how-tos* of multiplication through an adult-education approach is effective. And such an approach will be of vital importance if groups and churches are to be multiplied in my context.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol and Questions (Instrument #2)

#### Focus Group Protocol:

- Mr. Bryan S. Blau will serve as focus group moderator for each focus group. The researcher, Geoffrey S. Geyer, will be present for each focus group to observe and take notes. The focus groups will be conducted in comfortable and familiar environs for the participants, most likely the location where their group or Bible Study usually gathers. After a brief introduction to the research project, Mr. Geyer will answer any questions about the focus group or study that may be asked. Mr. Blau will then ask the group the following questions. During the focus group, Mr. Blau may ask for clarification or ask simple follow-up questions as he sees fit.

#### Focus Group Questions:

1. What do you think reproducing churches means?
2. Think back over the course of your life as a Christian: has any person (or group of people) ever left your church to start another church? Or, has any person (or group of people) ever left a small group you were in to start another small group? Tell us about those experiences. Would you say they were positive or negative?
3. Suppose a small contingent of people in your congregation (10–25 people), including one staff person from your church, proposed to leave the church to begin a new church that would potentially reach a new segment of people. How would you feel about that?
4. Do you think your *church* would be supportive of a group of people from your church leaving to start a new church? Why or why not?

5. If people from your church left to start a new church, would you prefer that it be far away (out-of-state) or nearby (within 15 miles)? Why?
  
6. Suppose you were in a small group of 6–8 people, and someone proposed that the group divide into two and meet on different nights of the week, and in different locations. The idea would be to create two groups, meeting at different times and different places, so that perhaps even more people could get connected with one of these groups. How would you feel about this proposal?
  
7. If you felt like God was asking you to start a new Bible study in your neighborhood or workplace, can you think of anything that would make that endeavor less intimidating to you as you began?
  
8. Do you think reproduction (or multiplication) of churches and groups is necessary? Why or why not? What are some of the conditions under which reproducing churches might be necessary?
  
9. Do you think there are other things about reproducing groups and churches that the author of the study should know?

## **Appendix B: Participants Journal Prompts (Instrument #3)**

### **Journal Prompt #1 (To be completed after the 1st group discussion):**

- In our first session, we talked about how we serve a “sending God.” In light of the Scriptures we have discussed, what new thoughts are you thinking about how God sends people out to do various things?

### **Journal Prompt #2 (To be completed after the 2nd group discussion):**

- In our second session, we reviewed the chapter on making disciples. What thoughts do you have about the importance of making disciples of Jesus Christ? How are you involved with making disciples?

### **Journal Prompt #3 (To be completed after the 3rd group discussion):**

- In the chapter entitled “Sending Out Individual Disciple-Makers or Teams,” we looked at the example of Paul and his associates in the book of Acts. They went to new areas to spread the gospel, and when people accepted it, new churches were formed. How do you feel about the possibility of starting a small group Bible study with some unchurched co-workers or neighbors? What do you think your approach would be in order to make it a successful venture? Would it help to be a part of a team when undertaking something like this?

### **Journal Prompt #4 (To be completed after the 4th group discussion):**

- Having considered the chapter entitled “Sending Out Disciple-Making Communities,” what new thoughts or insights do you have? If a significant number of people left your congregation to start a new one, how do you think that would go?

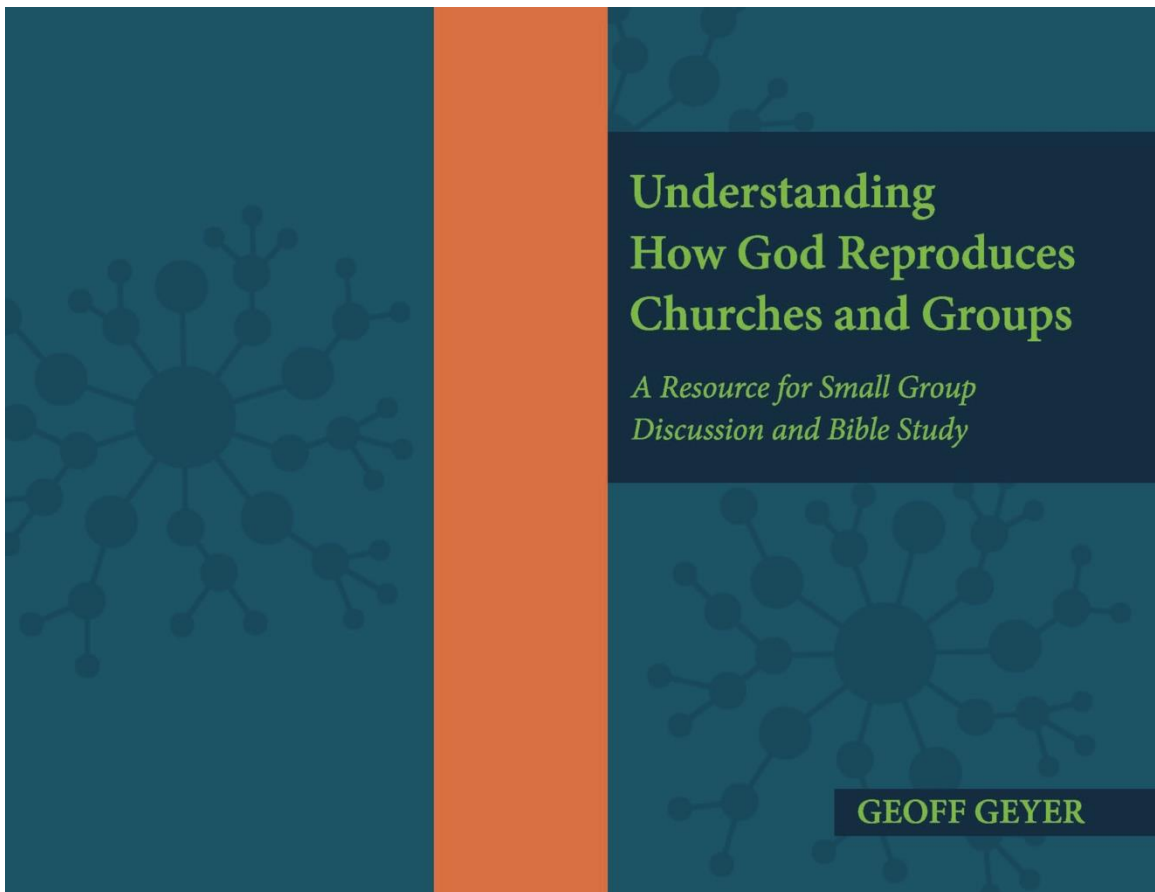
### **Journal prompt #5 (To be completed after the 5th group discussion):**

- What new thoughts or insights do you have about the Kingdom of God? What, if anything, does the Kingdom of God have to do with reproducing groups and churches?

**Journal Prompt #6 (To be completed after the 6th group discussion):**

- In the final chapter, we were reminded that the Holy Spirit is our guide when it comes to starting new groups and churches. What new thoughts do you have about the Holy Spirit functioning in this way? Have you experienced the Spirit's lead when it comes to starting anything new in your life?

**Appendix C: The Intervention**



**Understanding  
How God Reproduces  
Churches and Groups**

*A Resource for Small Group  
Discussion and Bible Study*

**GEOFF GEYER**

# **Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups**

*A Resource for Small Group  
Discussion and Bible Study*

Geoff Geyer



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## INTRODUCTION

# Sex Education for Churches

As I've searched for an appropriate metaphor for this Bible study, I've somewhat reluctantly settled on this one: sex education for churches and small groups. The aims of this training are analogous to those of your tenth-grade health class, or whatever other course about "the birds and the bees" you might have taken. But let us hope that this course about reproduction will not be nearly as uncomfortable as health class probably was!

Most high school sophomores have a general idea about human reproduction. They understand (and have experienced) sexual attraction. And, most would be aware of the connection between sex and human reproduction. But sex education for adolescents, whether it occurs in the school, home, or church, provides more detailed education about sex and reproduction in order to prevent unwanted, painful, and life-altering experiences with sex and reproduction. Young people who do not know the details of human reproduction may end up being badly hurt or damaged by this natural phenomenon. Education, it is believed, can help young people avoid painful mistakes and take a healthy approach to their own sexuality.

In the same way, many followers of Jesus may have a basic understanding of reproduction when it comes to churches or small groups. That is to say, on some level, many of us understand that new church-

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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es are started, and for that to happen, someone, or a group of people, left whatever church they were a part of to gather a new community of faith. Many of us may even sense that this too is a very natural thing: churches are living organisms, and living things reproduce! But it seems that many of us lack a detailed understanding of how God reproduces churches and groups. And, like the naïve high school student, a lack of knowledge about this subject can, and often does, prove costly.

There are complex feelings and competing interests that rise to the surface when it comes to starting new groups or churches. Oftentimes starting a new church or group means leaving an existing one. So there is a grieving process for both those who stay and those who go. Those who remain with the existing group may also experience feelings of betrayal. There may be uncertainty about the future of the mother church/group, now weakened by the loss of some mission-minded folks. And there is often confusion about what the purpose was in the first place (weren't we all working on just growing this church—why start another one?). At the same time, there may also be feelings of joy at having extended God's Kingdom to new people and places through a new group or church.

In short, like a naïve adolescent trying to figure out human reproduction, we, too, have to untangle a mess of feelings and thoughts as we try to figure out the reproduction of churches and groups.

What you have in your hands, then, is a study intended to help you untangle some of those feelings and thoughts about this subject. In addition, through education from God's word, this study may help us avoid some potential pitfalls of this spiritual reproduction by increasing understanding and reducing the hurt that often follows such an event. Finally, this study is intended to increase our overall awareness of the sending nature of God, and the multiplying nature of his Kingdom.

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This study is designed for small groups. I hope that groups will walk through this material together. However, because each chapter is somewhat lengthy, your group may want to read some of the passages and answer the questions in between group meetings. Approaching it this way would also allow time for personal reflection on these issues, along with group discussion.

Continuing with our tenth-grade sex education theme, the study is organized around six “facts of life.” Though you may not agree with all of the conclusions in this study, you will find that each of these “facts of life” for reproducing groups and churches are supported by God’s word. May they guide you as you discover more about how God uses church and group reproduction to grow his Kingdom!



## CHAPTER 1

# A Sending God

### Fact of Life #1:

*We serve a sending God, who sometimes sends people out to do new things for and with him.*

### INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, Yahweh, the one true and living God, has demonstrated a propensity for sending out his covenant people to do important things for and with him. God has repeatedly chosen to employ ordinary human beings as agents for his eternal Kingdom.

This, then, is our first principle: *in order for groups and churches to reproduce, ordinary people will need to be sent out to start new ones.* The passages we will explore in this chapter will serve as a foundation for the rest of our study, but as we move through this study and look in greater detail at what it takes to reproduce groups and churches, we need remember this fundamental reality—we serve a sending God.

As we will see, joining God in mission often means leaving friends, family, or familiar surroundings to join God in something new, for the sake of his Kingdom. Though we often think of the events in the following passages as grand instances of God sending chosen leaders

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

on a mission, we must understand that these stories are actually about simple, ordinary people whom God chose for a purpose. And even today, God sends all kinds of people on all kinds of missions all the time! He may send us around the world or just across town. The scale does not matter nearly as much as our willingness to be sent when God says “go.”

**SENDING PORTRAIT 1:  
ABRAHAM (LEAVING HOME)**

Read Genesis 12:1-9.

What purpose did God have in asking Abraham to leave home?

Have you ever had a time in your life when you sensed God was asking you to leave your ‘country, your people, or your home’ for a new thing? What was that experience like? Do you remember any of the emotions that accompanied that experience? What did that teach you about God and your relationship with Him?

**SENDING PORTRAIT 2:  
JONAH (REACHING THE LOST)**

Read Jonah 1:1-3; Jonah 3:1-10; Jonah 4:10-11.

What purpose did God have in sending Jonah to Nineveh?

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Have you ever experienced God pushing you out of your comfort zone so that more people could be reached, helped, etc.?

**SENDING PORTRAIT 3:  
NEHEMIAH (THIS THING GOD PUT IN MY HEART)**

Read Nehemiah 1:1-2:12.

What purpose did God have in sending Nehemiah to Jerusalem?

Nehemiah is broken-hearted by the report that he receives from Jerusalem. He clearly has a passion for Jerusalem and its restoration. In 2:11, he describes the rebuilding mission that he is on as something that the Lord had “put in his heart to do.”

Have you ever experienced God putting something in your heart to do? Has God ever put something in your heart to do that required relocating, changing jobs, or other big changes? If so, share about one of those times.

**WRAPPING UP**

We serve a sending God. He will send his covenant people to do different things, at different times, and for different purposes. But, make no mistake, it is something that he does. And, if we're open to it, God just might send us to do a new thing for and with him.



UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

A necessary component of reproducing groups and churches is the sending out of people, or groups of people, to do new things in new places. The reproduction of groups and churches requires sending and, more importantly, a sending God. The reality of a relationship with God is that he may send any one of us at any time to do a new thing. This is what comes with serving a sending God.

## CHAPTER 2

# It's All About Making Disciples

**Fact of Life #2:**

*There can be no reproduction of churches or groups without the reproduction of disciples of Jesus Christ.*

**INTRODUCTION**

There is no biblical command to start new churches or groups. Let that sink in for a moment. In a study about the “facts of life” for reproducing groups and churches, it may come as a surprise to us that God never commands followers of Jesus to go and make new churches or groups!

What God has commissioned us to do, however, is to go and make disciples. It is this work—the making of disciples—that should remain at the forefront of the Church’s consciousness. And it is only in connection with this work of disciple making that starting new churches or groups has any real value. *Indeed, without the reproduction of disciples there really cannot be the reproduction of groups or churches.*

As new disciples of Jesus are made, there is need for more communities to disciple them (more groups and churches). And, as the Church works to help existing disciples grow up in Christ, those disciples will

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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go and make new disciples themselves, perhaps starting new groups or churches along the way. The reproduction of groups and churches only happens when God's people make new disciples and help existing disciples mature.

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO MAKE DISCIPLES?**

Read Matthew 28:19-20. What activities are included in Jesus's command to make disciples?

Read Luke 15 and 2 Peter 3:9.

Based on these passages, why is making new disciples (evangelism) important?

Read Acts 6:1-7 and 16:1-5.

From these passages, would you say that the spread of the gospel and the addition of new disciples was celebrated and esteemed by the early church?

In addition to the spreading of the good news to new people, "making disciples" would also seem to include helping those who are following Jesus mature and grow up in Christ. Jesus commanded his followers to teach new disciples to obey everything he had commanded. So, disci-

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ple making must contain an element of helping believers grow to maturity and full obedience in Christ.

When the apostle Paul wrote to some of the churches he had ministered to, he often seemed most concerned with the growth of the people in Christ.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13.

What brings Paul joy about the report he has gotten from Timothy about the Thessalonians?

When Paul prays for the Thessalonians (3:11-13), what does he pray for?

## WRAPPING UP

As we have seen, God is very concerned about making disciples. Most specifically in the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20), we can observe that God has a heart BOTH for seeing the word of God spread and new disciples made AND for seeing disciples mature and obey him fully.

For our purposes, then, we will define making disciples as:

- Making new disciples
- Helping disciples grow to maturity in Christ

What then does making disciples have to do with making new churches or groups? In the next two chapters, we will explore that connection. But it was important to discuss making disciples first because it is really impossible to reproduce churches or groups in any meaningful way without making disciples. That is, if disciples of Jesus Christ are

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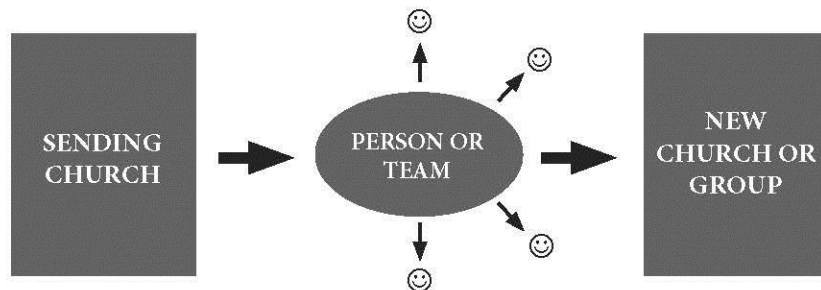
not maturing and new disciples are not being gathered, then there can really be no reproduction of churches or groups—only the rearranging of stagnant disciples into new cells or congregations. True reproduction happens when the word of God spreads to new areas and new people, and when disciples mature and allow God to send them out to reach new people and start new groups/churches.

CHAPTER 3

# Sending Out Individual Disciple Makers or Teams

Fact of Life #3:

*Sometimes God sends out individuals and teams to make disciples, resulting in new groups or churches*



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UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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## INTRODUCTION

This is far and away the form of church reproduction that we see most frequently in the New Testament.

In the Book of Acts we find Paul and his co-workers, for instance, setting out to make new disciples in new places. As people accepted the good news about Jesus in various places, churches were formed.

A similar thing happens in Acts 7-8. Following extreme persecution, the Jerusalem church is scattered, with many of the apostles then spreading the word of God in new regions as they leave Jerusalem. When the gospel is spread and people accept it, new churches follow.

In this session, we'll look at the example of the church in Antioch. What began with evangelistic efforts in Antioch due to the persecution in Jerusalem would eventually lead to the establishment of a well-known church that would send out people to make even more disciples.

## CHURCH VISIT: THE ANTIOCH CHURCH

Read Acts 11:19-26.

How did the church in Antioch get started?

In Acts 11:26, we read that Barnabas and Saul met with the “church and taught great numbers of people.” Apparently, the great number of people who believed and turned to the Lord at Antioch had been gathered into a “church” by the time Barnabas and Saul visited. Why do you think these new converts formed a community (“church”) upon receiving the good news?

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Read Acts 13:1-5. What was the church in Antioch sending out Saul and Barnabas to do?

Read Acts 14:21-28.

This passage provides a concise picture of the kind of work that Paul and Barnabas did on their journey. At the end of this passage, they return to where they started, the church in Antioch, and report all that God had done. Did their work include the reproduction of groups or churches? If so, what was their process for beginning a new church or group?

**Biblical church planting is evangelism  
that results in new churches.**

—JD Payne<sup>1</sup>

### **BRINGING IT HOME**

Okay. So, if sending out individuals or teams to make disciples is the main way that God reproduced churches in the New Testament, does he do the same thing today?

Most of us who live in a twenty-first-century American context have probably *not* witnessed something like this. We have most likely *not* witnessed one or two people forming an entire church from scratch by working just with not-yet-Christian people. God is able to do such a thing, but stories of this kind of church planting are few and far be-



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 UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS
 

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tween. Most of the new churches that are planted in the US come about by the second means for reproducing churches, which we will study in the next session.

However, while it might be hard to picture the creation of a new church through new disciples/evangelism alone, when it comes to reproducing groups, it's a different story. *Reproducing groups by this method should be easier for us to picture and much more within reach.*

A believer that forms a small group for the purpose of discipling those new to the faith, or for including people he or she know that are exploring Christianity, is doing what Paul and Barnabas did, in some ways. If groups are formed as part of a believer's evangelistic efforts in a neighborhood, friendship network, or subculture, this is in line with the kind of church/group reproduction we have just read about.

Have you ever been a part of a small group or Bible study in which a believer or two gathered a group that was comprised mostly of non-believers or new Christians? If so, share what successes or failures came out of forming such a group?

### **DISCOVERY GROUPS: STARTING A GROUP "IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD"**

In the Southeast Ohio congregation that I'm part of, we reproduce groups through a strategy called Discovery Groups. This is similar to the Discovery Bible Study method for evangelism that is employed in different parts of the world. There are three primary steps to this strategy for making new disciples/evangelism. Here's how it works for us:

#### **Step One: Naming the Neighborhood**

In our church, we believe that every believer can do mission with God and that every believer can take up the Great Commission of Jesus

and live the life of a disciple maker. We try to equip and empower people to join God in mission in their “neighborhoods.” A *neighborhood*, we say, is anywhere where we “live, work, or play.”<sup>ii</sup> A neighborhood could be a workplace, boy scout troop, sports team, after-school club, or literal neighborhood.

So, first of all, we ask the people in our church to name their neighborhood(s). This helps focus us on the places God has planted us and the people who inhabit those places.

### **Step Two: Disciple Making in the Neighborhood**

As followers of Christ, we have a witness in these neighborhoods by the way we live. And we influence others by seeking to make disciples in these places, as the Holy Spirit leads. We define disciple making as “walking with others while walking with Christ.” So, disciple making is not narrowly defined as sharing the gospel with someone, inviting someone to a small group, or discipling someone in a small group setting. It may include those things, but disciple making is also the cultivating of relationships with both believers and unbelievers. It is “walking with,” which may include a host of different activities.

As God’s people walk with not-yet-Christians in the neighborhood, they may then, as the Spirit leads, be able to invite them to a Discovery Group.

### **Step Three: Gathering a Discovery Group in the Neighborhood**

Gathering a Discovery Group in the neighborhood may then resemble the ministry of the apostle Paul and his coworkers in some ways. A believer (or team of believers) who have done some relational work in a given neighborhood may then invite non-believing, yet interested, friends to join them for a basic Bible study called a Discovery Group. They may also invite new Christians in their neighborhood who do not

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 UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS
 

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attend any church or group. The new group that is formed, however big or small, is a group that has been produced as the result of making new disciples/evangelism in a certain place or within a certain relational network or group.

Consider the table below, which compares the disciple making missions of the apostle Paul and his coworkers with the disciple making strategy outlined above.

	<b>Paul &amp; Co-Workers’ Disciple Making</b>	<b>‘Neighborhood’ Disciple Making</b>
<b>Location</b>	Traveled to various cities, regions, etc., as the Spirit led.	We inhabit different ‘neighborhoods,’ as the Spirit leads.
<b>Approach to Disciple Making</b>	Preaching the gospel in synagogues and other public venues.	“Walking with” not-yet-Christians in a way that promotes the gospel.
<b>Starting New Groups/ Churches</b>	Gathering interested people/new believers into churches.	Gathering interested people/new believers into Discovery Groups.

### WRAPPING UP

This session has been an exploration of one of the ways that God reproduces groups and churches. In this session, we have looked at a very biblical form of church/group planting: gathering recently evangelized people into new churches/groups.

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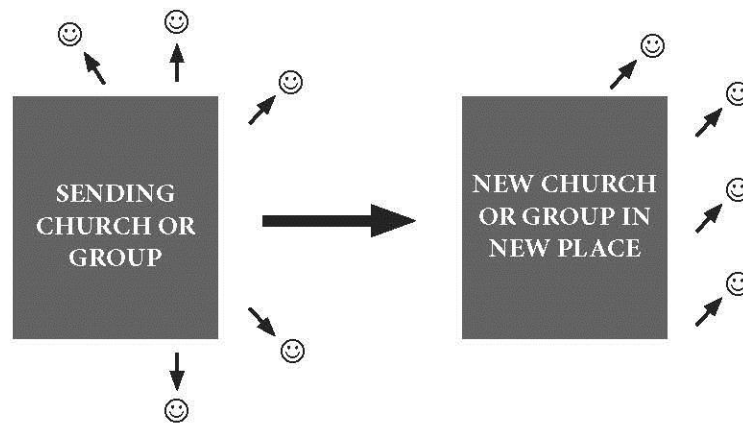
How do you feel about this way that God reproduces new groups or churches? Does starting a new church or group that is comprised mostly of new believers or seekers appeal to you, or does it sound intimidating or out of reach?

CHAPTER 4

# Sending Out Disciple Making Communities

**Fact of Life #4:**

*Sometimes God sends out disciple making communities—reproducing groups or churches so that more people can be reached.*



## INTRODUCTION

There are two primary ways that God reproduces groups and churches. We talked about one of them in our last session—individuals or teams making new disciples and gathering them into groups/churches.

In this session, we'll talk about the second way that new groups or churches are reproduced. The second way involves God sending out a new community (group or church) to make disciples in a given region or among a certain people. In this form of reproduction, the new church comes first, and the new disciples follow. Both of these approaches are ways that God can produce new groups or churches, and both are biblical. Let's study the second of these means of reproduction.

## CHURCH VISIT: THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

Scholars have observed that this second means of reproducing churches/groups is not nearly as common in the New Testament, and some would argue that it's not even there at all. However, as we look today at the Jerusalem church, we will find this to be at least one example from the Scriptures of God producing a disciple making community that would then go and make disciples in Jerusalem.

Read Acts 1:1-11.

According to Acts 1:8, how large was the scope of the disciple making witness of the Church that Jesus was sending out?

Where and when was the mission supposed to begin?

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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Read Acts 1:12-15.

What did this community do while they were waiting for the mission to begin?

How many people were in this church?

From what you may remember from previous study, what are some of the things this church experienced after the day of Pentecost?

Though Jesus seems to clearly envision these early disciples, and especially the twelve apostles, as spreading the gospel beyond Jerusalem (Acts 1:4-8), it should be noted what Jesus initially left behind in Jerusalem was a disciple making community.

Before individuals and teams took the gospel elsewhere (Method 1), what we see in Jerusalem is a community that Jesus formed in order to make disciples in Jerusalem (Method 2). And, beginning in Acts 2, we see that very thing happen. The Holy Spirit comes with power on the day of Pentecost, and the initial community of 120 believers quickly grows as more and more people are saved and the word of God spreads (Acts 2-6).

Jesus's intent was for a disciple making community (church) to reach Jerusalem. It would seem then that planting entire churches or groups of disciples to reach a certain population or region is one way that God reproduces churches or groups.

## BRINGING IT HOME

### *Churches*

This way of reproducing groups or churches is by far the most common in the United States today. “Church planting” has enjoyed a bit of a resurgence recently, and the way that people are planting new churches usually involves sending out new communities to reach new disciples. It is the “new church, then new disciples” approach to reproducing churches.

Notable mission expert Peter Wagner has called church planting “the greatest method for evangelism under Heaven.” He and others have noticed how the establishment of new churches can reach people that have previously not been reached. As Wagner says, some people just won’t go to their parents’ church, indicating that new churches may be required to reach new generations.<sup>iii</sup> Indeed, new churches may also be needed to better reach a whole host of different demographics.

New churches can be new “expressions” of church to reach populations that haven’t been reached by existing churches. And new churches can be strategically placed in areas where there is little church or gospel presence.

### *Groups*

The same can be said of groups. A small group that has grown large may sense the Holy Spirit’s leading to divide into two, with a new group being formed so that more people can be reached. This would be an example of group reproduction so that more people can be reached/ included. What are some ways that making two small groups instead of one could reach more people?



UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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**WRAPPING UP**

Are you familiar with any churches that came together and were sent out as disciple making communities? How did this come about, and how did these new churches fair?

What about groups—have you ever seen a small group split into two, so that more people could be reached? How did that go?

In this session, we have talked about the second of two ways that God reproduces churches and groups. Now, we're ready to turn our attention to how we discern when God may be sending an individual or a community to go and make new disciples by starting a new church or group. We'll do that in our next two sessions!

## CHAPTER 5

# Multiplying the Kingdom Mission

### Fact of Life #5:

*God is more concerned with the growth of his Kingdom, than with the numerical growth of any one church or ministry.*

### INTRODUCTION

The disciple making mission of any church or group may be limited by a preoccupation with its size. When we measure our success in disciple making by how big our group or church is, we may miss opportunities to make even more disciples by reproducing groups and churches.

When a church makes *new* disciples, sometimes the church gets bigger. Therefore, church growth can be a *by-product* of making disciples. However, a growing church must remember that the goal is to make disciples, not to grow big churches or groups. If a church gets this backwards, it may resist opportunities to reproduce groups and churches.

In this session, we'll talk about how what counts is the expansion of God's Kingdom as more disciples are made. This is more important than the size of any individual group or church.

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 UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS
 

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## DEFINING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

While Jesus never gave a concise definition of the kingdom of God, it was a constant theme in his teaching. The phrase kingdom of God (or kingdom of Heaven) appears frequently in the books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. In those books, Jesus often used parables to describe to it.

Another way that we might describe the kingdom of God is by thinking of it as God's "reign or dominion" in the world. When Jesus told his followers to pray "God's kingdom come" (Luke 11), he was instructing us to seek and pray for God's reign and rule to extend further and further in our world.

Read Matthew 13:24-52. What do these parables teach us about the Kingdom of God?

### *Jesus and the Kingdom*

After Jesus ascended to Heaven, the Church was launched on its disciple making mission. In the story of the early Church and in the letters of the apostle Paul, we notice a shift from kingdom language, though it by no means disappears. Instead, the kingdom of God concept is still employed (Acts 8:12, Acts 28:31, Romans 14:17), but it is also joined by the frequent affirmation of Jesus as Lord. Indeed, the New Testament writers add strength to the kingdom of God concept by identifying it with Jesus and the plan of salvation realized through Jesus Christ.<sup>iv</sup> Since Jesus is identified in the Scriptures as the risen and exalted Lord and the coming King, when we speak of God's kingdom, we are also speaking about Jesus.

*The Kingdom and the Church*

So, the Church and churches are not the kingdom. In fact, allegiance to a church should always come after allegiance to Jesus and the kingdom. The Church, when functioning well, can be an agent of the kingdom—by promoting love, peace, justice, making disciples, etc. But the Church is not the kingdom.

**“Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for it that He might redeem it. But he never gave Himself for the Kingdom to redeem it. For the Kingdom itself is redemption. It is not the subject of redemption—it offers it. The difference is profound. The Church may be, and is, the agent of the coming of that redemption, but it is the agent and not the Absolute. I am bound to be loyal to the Church to the degree that it is loyal to the Kingdom, but my highest loyalty is to the Kingdom, and when these loyalties conflict, then I must bow the knee finally to the Kingdom. Any false loyalty to the Church which would make it take the place of the Kingdom is destructive to the Church.”**

—E. Stanley Jones<sup>v</sup>

So what if the focus of every church was simply to get more of Jesus into more of the world? What if it was about spreading the good news about Jesus to more and more people, and discipling more and more believers to maturity? A genuine kingdom mindset would have us live as if extending the reign of God to more people and more places is the most important thing.

When people leave our groups or churches to start new ones, there is usually grief and sadness on many fronts. However, such moves have the potential to extend God’s kingdom.

UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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Is it possible for church planters or parent churches to make decisions about starting (or not starting) new churches or groups for the wrong reasons? What might some of those wrong reasons be?

What could help your church keep a “kingdom-mindset” at all times?

Do you believe God can use BOTH big churches and small churches to extend his Kingdom?

**WRAPPING UP**

Having a kingdom orientation is of great importance. Churches and groups must develop a consciousness about what is best for the kingdom (what gets more of Jesus to more people). This does not mean that big groups or churches should always send out people and reproduce. After all, God may want to use large bodies of believers to grow his kingdom in ways that smaller bodies cannot.

The key, however, is not to measure success based on size, and not to become preoccupied with the size of one’s congregation. It’s about God’s kingdom first, and getting Jesus to more and more people.

## CHAPTER 6

# Holy Spirit

### Fact of Life #6:

*The Holy Spirit is God's sending agent—the key is following his lead!*

### INTRODUCTION

In this study, we've talked about many details relating to the reproduction of groups and churches. However, there is one more vitally important "fact of life" that we need to remember. We started this study by affirming that we serve a sending God. And, we'll end our study by affirming the same thing. The Church needs to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit when it comes to starting new groups and churches. In the movement that Jesus started, the Holy Spirit is our sending agent.

Decisions about starting new groups, leaving one group to begin another, or beginning a new church in a new location can be daunting and difficult. So, even for people and churches that see the value of being sent out to start new things, it may not be easy to discern when the time is right.

There is no formula or preferred timeline offered in the Scriptures for how and when these kinds of things should happen. Nor should reproduction be forced, manufactured, or undertaken for the wrong rea-

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 UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS
 

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sons. It must be Spirit-led. Therefore, a guiding question for churches, groups, and individuals should always be: “What is the Holy Spirit doing in this situation?”

With a posture of openness to whatever the Holy Spirit is doing, no matter how fast or slow, how routine or drastic, we position ourselves to go wherever we might be sent. In this, our final chapter, we’ll look at some examples of Spirit-led reproduction.

### **RETURN CHURCH VISIT: JERUSALEM**

Read Acts 1:1-8.

Jesus instructed the Jerusalem church not to leave town until the promised Holy Spirit came. It is implicit in Jesus’s command that there will come a time when his followers will be sent out to make disciples, which would lead to the reproduction of churches. But, the disciple-making mission that he was sending them on could not commence until the Spirit came.

Why did they need to wait on the Spirit?

### **RETURN CHURCH VISIT: TO ANTIOCH**

We often think of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the Book of Acts as being associated with signs and wonders. And, to be sure, the Holy Spirit did produce signs and wonders in the early days of the Church. However, as we read further in Acts, we also find the Spirit providing critical guidance for the Church’s mission. It was the Spirit leading the way into new areas and providing the timeline for the spreading of the word of God. Sometimes the Spirit would say “stay,” and sometimes

GEOFF GEYER

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the Spirit would say “go.” But whatever the case, it was the Holy Spirit who set the pace for the disciple-making mission of the Church in those early days.

Let’s return to the church at Antioch and look at an example of the Holy Spirit directing the mission of that church.

Read Acts 13:1-5.

What do you notice about how this church decided to send out Barnabas and Saul/Paul?

The Antioch church seemed to agree about what the Holy Spirit was leading Barnabas and Saul/Paul to do. Do you think it’s possible for churches today to have everyone in the congregation be on the same page when it comes to what they think the Spirit is doing? Why or why not?

### **HOLY SPIRIT GUIDING THE MISSION**

Read Acts 16:6-10 and Acts 18:1-11.

What do you notice about how God was directing the steps of Paul and his companions in these passages? Are there examples here of God saying “go”? Are there examples here of God saying “stay”?

Just as surely as our sending God says “go,” he also says “stay.” Describe a time when the Holy Spirit asked you to stay in a situation, place, or



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UNDERSTANDING HOW GOD REPRODUCES CHURCHES AND GROUPS

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job? Have you ever sensed God asking you to stay put in a particular church or group?

### WRAPPING UP

What are some practical steps that you and your congregation could take to make sure that you're following the Spirit's lead when it comes to the individual and corporate mission you have in front of you?

How does the notion of Spirit-directed disciple making and group/church reproduction make you feel? Does it take some of the pressure off or make the whole thing more complex?

It is my great hope that this final “fact of life”—Spirit-directed disciple making—will make this whole enterprise seem within reach. While we may forget some of the details about how God typically reproduces groups or churches, if we remember that we serve a sending God and that it's God who will do the sending, we will be just fine.

Indeed, an open posture to the idea that God sometimes sends people out for the expansion of his kingdom will serve his people well. And a recognition that it does not rest solely with us to come up with the particulars or the timelines for reproducing groups or churches should bring a measure of peace. We must remain tethered to our guiding question: “What is the Holy Spirit doing in this situation?” It is God who will guide us, and send us, in his time.

## **“Facts of Life” for Reproducing Groups and Churches**

### **Fact of Life #1:**

*We serve a sending God, who sometimes sends people out to do new things for and with him.*

### **Fact of Life #2:**

*There can be no reproduction of churches or groups without the reproduction of disciples of Jesus Christ.*

### **Fact of Life #3:**

*Sometimes God sends out individuals and teams to make disciples, resulting in new groups or churches*

### **Fact of Life #4:**

*Sometimes God sends out disciple making communities—reproducing groups or churches so that more people can be reached.*

### **Fact of Life #5:**

*God is more concerned with the growth of his Kingdom, than with the numerical growth of any one church or ministry.*

### **Fact of Life #6:**

*The Holy Spirit is God’s sending agent—  
the key is following his lead!*

## ENDNOTES

- i. JD Payne. *Discovering Church Planting: an Introduction to the Whats, Whys, and Hows of Global Church Planting*.
- ii. We began defining “neighborhoods” in this way by using the “live, work, and play” language that Bill Mowry uses in his book *The Ways of the Alongsider*.
- iii. C. Peter Wagner. *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest*, p. 11ff.
- iv. Howard Snyder. *Kingdom, Church, and World*, 13.
- v. Howard Snyder. *Kingdom, Church and World*, 81, quoting E. Stanley Jones from *Is the Kingdom of God Realism*, 58-59.

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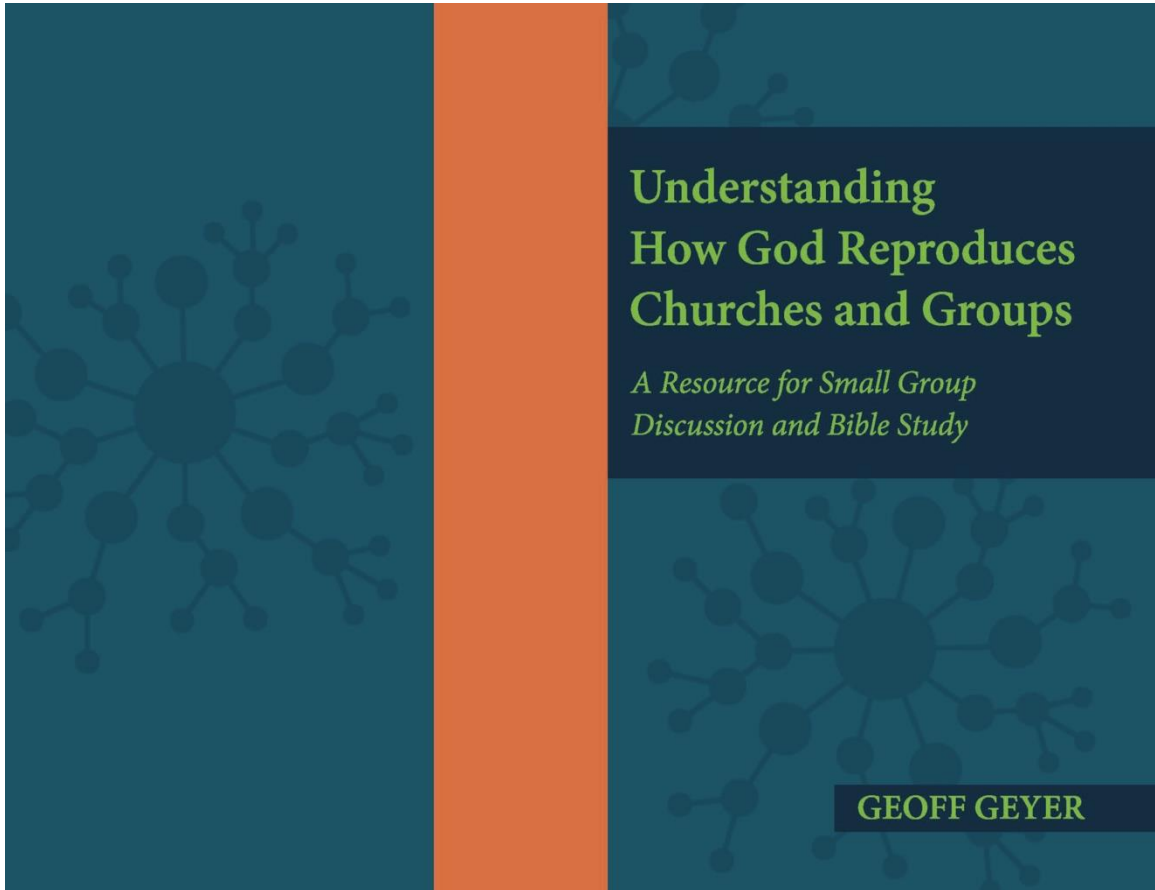
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### ABOUT GEOFF

Geoff Geyer is a church planter and the founding pastor of Zanesville Neighborhood Church, which he began with some friends in 2015. This Bible study is being piloted in 2019 among several churches in Muskingum County, Ohio, as part of a research project Geoff is conducting as part of the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary. It is a study designed to give lay people in a variety of church contexts a basic familiarity with church and group reproduction. The findings from this research will be used for further study and writing about church and group multiplication in Southeast Ohio.



**Understanding  
How God Reproduces  
Churches and Groups**

*A Resource for Small Group  
Discussion and Bible Study*

**GEOFF GEYER**

### Appendix D: Informed Consent Letter

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Geoffrey S. Geyer**, a Doctor of Ministry student from the Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because you are a lay person (not clergy) in one of the Muskingum County churches that has agreed to participate in this study.

It is hoped that the findings of this study will provide further insight into the sometimes-challenging nature of reproducing churches or groups. It is expected that the findings of this study will be published and will contribute to a larger body of knowledge that missionaries, pastors, and church leaders in a variety of different contexts draw on in order to lead more effectively, especially when it comes to planting and multiplying churches and groups.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in a six-week Bible study with your small group or Sunday school class. The Bible study is entitled *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups*. Participants in the Bible study will be asked to attend as many of the six group sessions as possible, and if unable to attend one or more of the group sessions, to carefully read the *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups* booklet. Participants will also be asked to complete an online survey and attend a focus group session before looking at the booklet or engaging with their small group about its contents. Finally, participants will be asked to write some notes in a participant's journal throughout the course of the study.

Your small group will meet over the course of six weeks at a place and time that is agreeable to all in the group. After the completion of your group's study of this material, you will be asked to complete an online survey once more, attend one final focus group, and turn in your participant's journal. You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study, and in the publication of findings. If any information about your answers is given, others will not know your name. A number will be used instead of your name. Audio recordings will be taken during the focus groups. Recordings used during the focus groups will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer, or that of the research assistant, Bryan S. Blau. Likewise, survey results will be kept on the researcher's password-protected computer. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, or you have any questions about it, please contact **Geoff Geyer**, who can be reached at **Geoff.geyer@asburyseminary.edu**. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdrawal from the process at any time.

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in

the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper, or even if you change your mind later. Signing this paper means that you agree that you have been told about this study, why it is being done, and what to do.

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Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

---

Date Signed

Researcher Contact Information:

Geoffrey S. Geyer

[Geoff.Geyer@asburyseminary.edu](mailto:Geoff.Geyer@asburyseminary.edu)

740-624-6022

Local Address:

1946 Normandy Drive

Zanesville, OH 43701

## Appendix E: Confidentiality Agreement

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will be assisting the *Researcher*, Geoffrey S. Geyer, by \_\_\_\_\_.

I agree to abide by the following guidelines regarding confidentiality:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) that may be revealed during the course of performing research tasks throughout the research process and after it is complete.
2. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher*.
3. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession (e.g., using a password-protected computer).
4. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher* when I have completed the research tasks.

After consulting with the *Researcher*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.



## Appendix F: Pastor Permission Letter

Dear Pastor,

One or more small groups from your church have been invited to participate in a research project being conducted by me, Geoffrey S. Geyer. I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary, and this research is being conducted for my doctoral dissertation.

For this study, the small group(s) from your church will be participating in a six-week Bible study called *Understanding How God Reproduces Churches and Groups*. The curriculum will be given to the leader of each participating group, with basic instructions on how to lead the group through the material. The group(s) will use the curriculum during their normal small group or Sunday school time, beginning in January and finishing by the end of February.

I will be working with each participating small group leader to gather contact information from group members for the purpose of sending them the pre- and post-survey, before the Bible study begins and after its completion. I will also arrange for a time that I can meet with the group, both before the Bible study begins and after its completion, to conduct a focus group. Finally, I will give participant journals to each group leader to distribute to his or her group for use during the Bible study. The participant journals will include instructions for how and when participants are to record entries. I will then collect these journals from the group leaders once the Bible study is complete.

Participation in this study is voluntary. And, once begun, participants have the option to not answer questions, or withdraw at any time. This will be made clear to them at the outset. Additionally, confidentiality will be maintained throughout this study, and in the publication of findings. If anyone else is given information about participants in this study, names will not be used. A number or initials will be used instead of names. Audio recordings will be taken during the focus groups. Recordings used during the focus groups will be stored on the researcher's password protected computer, or that of the research assistant, Bryan S. Blau. Likewise, survey results and transcripts from participant journals will be kept on the researcher's password-protected computer, or in a locked filing cabinet.

By signing this form, you are giving me permission to work with the members of, or participants in, your congregation in the research project outlined above. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Geoffrey S. Geyer  
Asbury Theological Seminary

Geoff.geyer@asburyseminary.edu  
1946 Normandy Drive  
Zanesville, OH 43701  
740-624-6022

I \_\_\_\_\_ (print name) give permission for members of, or  
participants in, \_\_\_\_\_ (church name) to participate in the doctoral  
research being conducted by Geoffrey S. Geyer of Asbury Theological Seminary in  
January–February 2019.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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