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What helps young Christians grow in discipleship?

Exploring connections between discipleship pathways and psychological type

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**Abstract**

Drawing on data provided by 299 12- to 18-year-old Baptists attending a week-long summer programme of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, the study explores the connections between personal factors (age and sex), psychological factors (introversion, sensing, feeling, and judging), and contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith), four discipleship pathways (group activities, individual experiences, church worship, and public engagement), and two indices of Christian growth (depth of discipleship and strength of vocation). The data demonstrate that psychological factors shape preferred pathways of discipleship, that perceived church support is important for growing both depth of discipleship and strength of vocation, that perceived challenges to faith weaken depth of discipleship, that the discipleship pathway of group activities is central to growing young Christians within the Baptist tradition, and that depth of discipleship is further enhanced by the pathway of individual experience, while strength of vocation is further enhanced by the pathway of church worship.

*Keywords:* Christian formation, discipleship learning, empirical theology, psychological type, youth ministry

### Introduction

Christians across various denominations in the UK have begun to give more serious attention to the implications of secularisation for the transmission of the Christian faith. For several decades, the data routinely collected by the British Social Attitudes survey have drawn attention to a consistent decline in the proportion of the population who describe themselves as belonging to a Christian denomination (see for example, Lee, 2012; Voas & Bruce, 2019). Commenting on these statistics in the context of the Church of England's Church Growth Research Programme, Voas and Watt (2014) stressed that religious decline in Britain is generational. People tend to be less religious than their parents, and then their children are even less religious than they are. In response to such findings, Churches may wish to examine more carefully the effectiveness of pathways into faith, and especially so among young people.

It is within this context that a new interest has emerged in the notion of Christian discipleship, and, in particular, notions such as 'education for discipleship' and 'discipleship learning' have come into greater prominence. For example, according to Bishop Stephen Croft (2005), the Church of England has initiated 'a new conversation about Christian discipleship' centred on the vision of the Church as a body 'called to be and to become a community of missionary disciples' (p. 1). This notion of the development of discipleship is at the heart of the report from the Archbishops' Council (2015), *Developing discipleship*. In an important essay, writing as theologian and educationalist, Astley (2015) refined the concept of discipleship learning as embracing the twin notions of formation and education. Astley draws widely on the international literatures concerning adult Christian education, formation and learning (including, McKenzie, 1982; Hull, 1985; Groome, 1991, 2011; Astley, 1994; Astley & Francis, 1994; Astley, Francis, & Crowder, 1996) and concerning discipleship (including, Bonhoeffer, 1959; Rengstorf, 1967; Müller, 1975; Dunn, 1992;

Koperski, 2010; Worthen, 2014). Astley argues that an analysis and understanding of both formation and discipleship should lead to a more profound and more honed understanding of what helps Christians grow.

A recent strand of research in the UK, established within the broad fields of empirical theology and the theology of individual difference, has begun to explore the science of Christian discipleship learning. In a pioneering and exploratory study, Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) drew on data generated by a detailed survey completed by 1,123 churchgoers in England to identify indicators of Christian growth in discipleship and to map distinctive pathways that may lead to such growth among different people. This study was rooted in a theology of individual differences that argues that different people may hear and respond to God's call to discipleship in different and distinctive ways. The present study has been designed to build on the foundations put in place by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) among a sample of young Canadian Baptists between the ages of 12 and 18 years, and to extend that study by exploring the effect of psychological type preferences on shaping pathways to growth in discipleship.

The initial study by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) involved four main steps. The first step proposed two scales to serve as indicators of growth in Christian discipleship: the Index of Depth of Discipleship and the Index of Strength of Vocation. The second step identified four distinctive pathways by which participants had been helped in their journey of faith: group activity, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement. The third step identified two further factors that either supported or challenged growth in discipleship: church support and challenges to faith. The fourth step assembled the jigsaw by employing multiple regression models to explore how much personal factors (age and sex), contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith), and discipleship pathways (group activity, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement)

predicted individual differences in the Index of Depth of Discipleship and the Index of Strength of Vocation. Each of these four steps will be outlined, before exploring the additional value that can be brought to this research tradition by introducing psychological type theory.

### **Measuring growth in discipleship**

In their exploratory study, Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) identified two scales that served as indicators of growth in Christian discipleship. The first scale of seven items was identified as assessing depth of discipleship and styled Index of Depth of Discipleship. These seven items that achieved an alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .82 assessed the extent to which individuals felt that they were good at: praying deeply in a range of different ways; understanding how to see the world and our times as God sees them; worshipping with mind, body and spirit; exploring the Bible; putting my faith into practice in daily life; nurturing and caring for others in church and community; speaking about my faith or personal journey.

The second scale of five items was identified as assessing strength of vocation and styled Index of Strength of Vocation. These five items that achieved an alpha coefficient of .70 assessed the extent to which individuals felt that the first three items were true for them, and the final two statements were not true for them: I have a particular calling; I am more or less on the journey God wants me to be on; I have been helped in my journey of faith by a direct call or experience I believe was from God; I don't know what my calling is; I am realising or ignoring my call.

### **Identifying pathways to growth**

In their exploratory study, Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) set out to identify distinctive pathways by which the 1,123 participants had 'been helped in their journey of faith'. Factor analysis, employing principal component and varimax rotation,

identified a clear four-factor structure. They interpreted these factors as: growth through group activity (factor one), growth through individual experience (factor two), growth through church worship (factor three), and growth through public engagement (factor four).

The Index of Discipleship through Group Activity, comprising seven items with an alpha coefficient of .82, identified help in the journey of faith by: being part of a small group/Bible study group; being part of my church's social life/fellowship; taking part in my church's outreach; a Christian course offered by a local church; leading others in worship, small group activity, or prayer; going on retreat; Christian conferences, festivals, events, or pilgrimage.

The Index of Discipleship through Individual Experience, comprising ten items with an alpha coefficient of .82, identified help in the journey of faith by: listening to sermons; praying by myself; reading/studying the Bible by myself; a spiritual director, mentor, soul friend, or prayer guide; listening to Christian teaching, discussion, or talks on tape, etc.; reading Christian/spiritual/theological books; my closest friendships or relationships; a particular person (e.g. missionary or teacher); trying to put my faith into practice in daily life; a direct call or experience I believe was from God.

The Index of Discipleship through Church Worship, comprising six items with an alpha coefficient of .74, identifies help in the journey of faith by: attending church/worship regularly; music in church worship; liturgy in church worship; participating in communion, etc.; a familiar pattern of worship; seasons and shape of the Christian year.

The Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement, comprising seven items with an alpha coefficient of .74, identified help in the journey of faith by: taking part in online discussion or conversation; taking part in a social justice/campaigning activity beyond my church; taking part in a practical Christian service or mission project not connected with my church; Christian education provided by college, university, or denomination; experiencing

different churches/Christian spiritualities; conversation with others whose faith or beliefs are different from mine; hobbies, leisure, or cultural activities not connected with church.

### **Identifying support for and challenges to growth**

In their exploratory study, Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) identified two further factors that either supported or challenged growth in discipleship. The first of these two measures they styled Index of Church Support. This seven-item measure, with an alpha coefficient of .84, invited participants to assess the extent to which the church that they attended was good at helping people to: pray deeply in a range of different ways; understand how to see the world and our times as God sees them; worship with mind, body, and spirit; explore and understand the Bible; put faith into practice in daily life; nurture and care for each other in the church community; speak about faith or personal journeys.

The second of these two measures they styled Index of Challenges to Faith. This seven-item measure, with an alpha coefficient of .73, invited participants to assess how much their Christian journey had been hampered by the following phenomena: the beliefs and attitudes of people close to me; having no-one to share my journey with; lack of opportunity to learn and grow; feel that Christianity is not true or makes no sense; understanding my faith differently from those around me; the quality of my church/worship community; the words of the creed or other articles of faith.

### **Assembling the jigsaw**

In their exploratory study, Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) employed multiple regression models to explore how much personal factors (age and sex), contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith), and discipleship pathways (group activity, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement) predicted individual differences in the Index of Depth of Discipleship and the Index of Strength of Vocation. These regression analyses indicated that, taking into account individual differences in sex,



age, church support, and hampers to faith, for this particular sample of churchgoers, growth through individual experience emerged as the most important factor in helping Christians to grow, both in terms of depth of discipleship and in terms of strength of vocation, while public engagement added weight to depth of discipleship and group activities added weight to strength of vocation.

Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) concluded their pioneering and exploratory study by making two suggestions for further research. First, they acknowledged the vulnerability of findings based on a single study and commend replication and extensions of the study among different distinctive samples. Second, they drew attention to other strands of research that suggest that discipleship learning may work differently for different psychological types (Francis & Robbins, 2015). In light of such findings, they argued that research investing in the core question ‘What helps Christians to grow?’ may be wise to include a measure of psychological type within the survey instrument. The present study is a response to these two challenges for future research.

### **Introducing psychological type theory**

The basic building blocks of psychological type theory distinguish between two orientations (extraversion and introversion), two perceiving functions (sensing and intuition), two judging functions (thinking and feeling), and two attitudes toward the outer world (judging and perceiving).

The two orientations are concerned with where energy is drawn from; energy can be gathered either from the outside world or from the inner world. Extraverts (E) are orientated toward the outside world; they are energised by the events and people around them. They enjoy communicating and thrive in stimulating and exciting environments. They may be drained by silence and solitude. They tend to focus their attention upon what is happening outside themselves. They are usually easy to get to know, and enjoy having many friends. In

contrast, introverts (I) are orientated toward their inner world; they are energised by their inner ideas and concepts. They may feel drained by events and people around them. They enjoy solitude, silence, and contemplation, as they tend to focus their attention on what is happening in their inner life. They may prefer to have a small circle of intimate friends rather than many acquaintances. It is hypothesised that extraverts may engage more readily than introverts with group-based pathways to discipleship.

The perceiving functions are concerned with the way in which people receive and process information; this can be done through use of sensing or through use of intuition. Sensing types (S) tend to focus on specific details, rather than the overall picture. They are concerned with the actual, the real, and the practical, and they tend to be down-to-earth and matter-of-fact. They may feel that particular details are more significant than general patterns. They are frequently fond of the traditional and conventional. They may be conservative and tend to prefer what is known and well-established. In contrast, intuitive types (N) focus on the possibilities of a situation, perceiving meanings and relationships. They focus on the overall picture, rather than specific facts and data. They follow their inspirations enthusiastically, but not always realistically. They often aspire to bring innovative change to established conventions. It is hypothesised that sensing types may engage more readily than intuitive types with traditional and practical pathways to discipleship.

The judging functions are concerned with the way in which people make decisions and judgements; this can be done through use of objective impersonal logic, or through use of subjective interpersonal values. Thinking types (T) make judgements based on objective, impersonal logic. They value integrity and justice. They are known for their truthfulness and for their desire for fairness. They consider conforming to principles to be of more importance than cultivating harmony. They may consider it to be more important to be honest and correct than to be tactful when working with others. In contrast, feeling types (F) make judgements

based on subjective, personal values. They value compassion and mercy. They are known for their tactfulness and for their desire for peace. They are more concerned to promote harmony, than to adhere to abstract principles. They are able to take into account other people's feelings and values in decision-making and problem-solving, ensuring they reach a solution that satisfies everyone. They are often thought of as 'warm-hearted'. They find it easy to empathise with other people and tend to be trusting and encouraging of others. It is hypothesised that feeling types may engage more readily than thinking types with relational pathways to discipleship.

The attitudes towards the outside world are concerned with the way in which people respond to the world around them, either by imposing structure and order on that world or by remaining open and adaptable to the world around them. Judging types (J) have a planned, orderly approach to life. They enjoy routine and established patterns. They prefer to follow schedules in order to reach an established goal. They tend to be punctual, organised, and tidy. They may find it difficult to deal with unexpected disruptions of their plans. They prefer to make decisions quickly and to stick to their conclusions once made. In contrast, perceiving types (P) have a flexible, open-ended approach to life. They enjoy change and spontaneity. They prefer to leave projects open in order to adapt and improve them. They may find plans and schedules restrictive and tend to be easygoing about issues such as punctuality, deadlines, and tidiness. They are often good at dealing with the unexpected. Indeed, they may welcome change and variety as routine bores them. It is hypothesised that judging types may relate more readily than perceiving types to tightly structured pathways to discipleship.

### **Research question**

Against this background, the aim of the present study was to build on the research tradition initiated by Fawcett that has begun to compile a systematic profile of the Christian experience of Baptist youth in Atlantic Canada who engage with the Tidal Impact mission

event. This research tradition has led over the years to a series of publications, including Fawcett and Francis (2009), Fawcett, Francis, and Robbins (2009), Fawcett, Francis, and Robbins (2011a, 2011b), Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, and Robbins (2012), Fawcett, Francis, Henderson, Robbins, and Linkletter (2013), Francis, Fawcett, and Linkletter (2013), Francis, Fawcett, Robbins, and Stairs (2016), Francis, Fawcett, Linkletter, Robbins, and Stairs (2016), and Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, Robbins, and Stairs (2017). The 2017 survey was completed by young participants engaged in simultaneous Tidal Impact events based in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. This survey was designed to address the core research objective posed by the title of this paper: ‘What helps young Christians grow in discipleship?’. This core research objective was addressed through a sequence of three research questions.

The first research question concerned developing and testing variants of the eight instruments designed by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) that were suitable and appropriate for use among 12- to 18-year-old adolescents: Index of Depth of Discipleship, Index of Strength of Vocation, Index of Discipleship through Group Activities, Index of Discipleship through Individual Experience, Index of Discipleship through Church Worship, Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement, Index of Church Support, or Index of Challenges to Faith.

The second research question concerned exploring the extent to which psychological type preferences may influence both the pathways to discipleship and the two measures of Christian growth, namely depth of discipleship and strength of vocation.

The third research question concerned the comparative effects of the four pathways of discipleship on the two indicators of Christian growth, after taking into account the effect of personal factors (age and sex), psychological factors (as proposed by psychological type theory), and contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith).

## Method

### Procedure

All the young people attending the week-long summer youth programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada in Eastern Canada in 2017, held in Halifax and in Bridgewater, were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire following the completion of seminars that provided training in spiritual disciplines. Following an explanation of the nature of the survey and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, the questionnaires were distributed to the young people. Participation was voluntary, but the overall level of interest in the topic meant that very few young people failed to complete the exercise. A total of 299 questionnaires were returned by participants between the ages of 12 and 18 years with data fully completed for the analyses reported in the present study.

### Participants

Of the 299 participants who provided full data, 109 were male and 190 were female; 17% were 12 years of age, 18% were 13, 23% were 14, 17% were 15, 11% were 16, 10% were 17, and 4% were 18 years of age. In terms of frequency of church attendance, 74% attended weekly, and a further 9% at least once a month, leaving 17% who attended less than monthly. In terms of frequency of personal prayer, 44% prayed daily, and a further 27% at least once a week, leaving 29% who prayed less than weekly. In terms of frequency of Bible reading, 9% read the Bible daily, 23% at least once a week, and a further 19% at least once a month, leaving 49% who read the Bible less than once a month.

### Measures

*Psychological type* was assessed by the Adolescent form of the Francis Psychological Type Scales (Fawcett, Francis, & Robbins, 2011a). This 40-item instrument comprises four sets of ten forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type theory: orientation (extraversion or introversion), perceiving process (sensing or intuition),

judging process (thinking or feeling), and attitude toward the outer world (judging or perceiving). Fawcett, Francis, and Robbins (2011a) reported alpha coefficients of .82 for the extraversion and introversion scales, .67 for the sensing and intuition scales, .69 for the thinking and feeling scales, and .79 for the judging and perceiving scales.

*Growing in faith* was explored by items concerned with experience of discipleship (12 items), experiences of vocation (8 items), my journey of faith (56 items covering the four pathways), church support (12 items), and challenges to faith (18 items). Each item was rated on a five-point Likert scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), not certain (3), agree (4), and agree strongly (5).

### **Analysis**

The data were analysed by the SPSS package drawing on the frequency, correlation, factor, reliability, and regression routines.

## **Results**

### **Assessing Christian growth**

- insert tables 1 and 2 about here -

The first step in data analysis was designed to expand or to develop the two measures of Christian growth identified by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019). From the new data generated by 12- to 18-year-old Baptists, one set of 12 items was identified as assessing depth of discipleship (table 1) and a second set of 8 items was identified as assessing strength of vocation.

The Index of Depth of Discipleship achieved an alpha coefficient of .82. The 12 items in this index followed the stem, 'I feel that I am able to...'. In descending order of endorsement, at least three quarters of the young Baptists felt that they were able to care for others in God's name (81%) and encourage others in their faith (75%). At least three fifths of the young Baptists felt that they were able to worship with their whole heart (68%), put their

faith into practice at home (66%), pray deeply (61%), and put their faith into practice in their daily life (60%). At least half of the young Baptists felt that they were able to worship with their whole heart (58%), explore the Bible in a meaningful way (56%), and speak to others about their faith (54%). At least two fifths of the young Baptists felt that they were able to see people as God sees them (48%), put their faith into practice at school/college/work (47%), and see the world as God sees it (40%).

The Index of Strength of Vocation achieved an alpha coefficient of .92. The 8 items in this index followed the stem, 'I feel that...'. In descending order of endorsement, at least three quarters of the young Baptists felt that God is shaping their future (84%), that God has a purpose for them (83%), that they are part of God's plan (82%), that God has shaped their whole life so far (77%), that God is their guide (76%), and that God is shaping their daily life (75%). They were somewhat less certain, however, that God was calling them for a particular purpose (59%), or that they were on the journey God wanted them to be on (52%).

### **Assessing pathways to growth**

- insert tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 about here -

The second step in data analysis was designed to expand or develop the four measures of pathways to Christian growth identified by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019). From the new data generated by 12- to 18-year-old Baptists the following four scales were developed: a 15-item measure concerned with growth through group activities (table 3), a 15-item measure concerned with growth through individual experience (table 4), a 9-item measure concerned with growth through church worship (table 5), and 16-item measure concerned with growth through public engagement (table 6). In the questionnaire the items comprising these four scales were randomly mixed following the stem, 'I have been helped in my journey of faith by ...'.

The 15-item Index of Discipleship through Group Activities achieved an alpha coefficient of .85. In descending order of endorsement, at least three quarters of the young Baptists had been helped in their journey of faith by taking part in a church social (or youth) group (86%), by attending Christian events (84%), and by taking part in a small group (75%). At least three fifths had been helped in their journey of faith by attending Christian camps (73%), by attending Christian retreats (66%), and by taking part in a Christian service project (64%). At least half the young Baptists had been helped on their journey of faith by taking part in a church outreach group (59%), by taking part in a mission tour (58%), and by attending Christian conferences (54%). Less than half of the young Baptists had been helped in their journey of faith by taking part in a fellowship group (46%), by taking part in a worship leadership team (42%), by taking part in a Bible study group (41%), by taking part in a prayer group (38%), by taking part in a Christian course offered by a church (34%), and by leading others in a prayer group (24%).

The 15-item Index of Discipleship through Individual Experiences achieved an alpha coefficient of .85. In descending order of endorsement, at least three fifths of the young Baptists have been helped on their journey of faith by being with an inspirational leader (73%), by praying by themselves (72%), by listening to sermons (70%), by listening to Christian music by themselves (66%), by talking with their closest friends (66%), by working with a youth leader or mentor (63%), and by making time to reflect on their life (61%). At least half of the young Baptists have been helped on their journey of faith by reading the Bible by themselves (57%), and by having a regular quiet time (50%). Less than half of the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by working with a spiritual director or soul friend (43%), by listening to Christian broadcasts on the radio (40%), by reading Christian books (39%), by listening to Christian talks or podcasts (29%), by listening to Christian music by themselves (23%), and by watching Christian TV (21%).



The 9-item Index of Discipleship through Church Worship achieved an alpha coefficient of .85. In descending order of endorsement, at least three quarters of young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by hearing God's forgiveness in church services (86%), by hearing music in church services (86%), by singing worship songs in church services (81%), by attending church services (78%), and by experiencing church services at Christmas (76%). At least three fifths of the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by experiencing church services at Easter (74%), by listening with others to preaching in church services (63%), and by participating in communion services (61%). Less than half of the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by following familiar patterns in church services (45%).

The 16-item Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement achieved an alpha coefficient of .86. In descending order of endorsement, at least three fifths of the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by taking part in mission outreach activity (79%), by taking part in practical Christian service activities (72%), by giving Christian service to help the poor (68%), by giving Christian service to clean the neighbourhood (67%), and by experiencing different kinds of churches (62%). At least half of the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by working to right wrongs in the world (59%), by giving Christian service to help the homeless (59%), by talking with people whose beliefs are different from their own (59%), by meeting people who belong to a different faith from their own (58%), by working to save the environment (55%), and by engaging with activities not connected with church (52%). Less than half the young Baptists have been helped in their journey of faith by working for world development (38%), by taking part in training events provided by their denomination (26%), by taking part in education courses provided by their denomination (21%), and by taking Christian education courses provided by a college or university (18%).

**Assessing support for and challenges to growth**

- insert tables 7 and 8 about here -

The third step in data analysis was designed to expand and to develop the two measures of church support and challenges to faith identified by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019). From the new data generated by 12- to 18-year-old Baptists one set of 12 items was identified as assessing church support (table 7) and a second set of 18-items were identified as assessing challenges to faith (table 8).

The Index of Church Support achieved an alpha coefficient of .94. The 12 items in the index followed the stem, 'My church is good at helping people to ...'. In descending order of endorsement, at least three quarters of the young Baptists felt that their church was good at helping people to encourage others in their faith (82%), to care for others in God's name (82%), and to put faith into practice in daily life (77%). At least three fifths of young Baptists felt that their church was good at helping people to explore the Bible in a meaningful way (73%), to worship with their whole heart (73%), to put faith into practice at home (71%), to speak about faith to others (71%), to worship with their whole mind (71%), to see people as God sees them (69%), to pray deeply (68%), to see the world as God sees it (68%), and to put faith into practice at school, college, or home (61%).

The Index of Challenges to Faith achieved an alpha coefficient of .89. The 18 items in this index followed the stem, 'For me faith is made difficult by ...'. In descending order of endorsements at least half the young Baptists felt that faith was made difficult for them by the attitudes of their friends (66%), and by the attitudes of others at school, college, or work (54%). At least one third of the young Baptists felt that faith was made difficult for them by the attitudes of their schools teachers, lecturers, or tutors (47%), by the attitudes of older Christians (47%), by the suffering they see in the world (44%), by listening to the claims of science (42%), by having to believe things that don't make sense (35%), by the disagreement

among the churches (35%), and by the problems religions cause in the world (34%). At least one fifth of the young Baptists felt that faith was made difficult for them by churches refusing to accept change (32%), by natural disasters like earthquakes (32%), by church teaching on LGBTQ issues (31%), by the attitudes of their family members (31%), by having to accept the authority of the Bible (24%), by church teaching on sex (22%), and by their church not wanting to listen to them (21%). Almost one fifth of the young Baptists felt that faith was made difficult for them by the demands made by church on their time (18%), and by church teaching on alcohol (16%).

### **Piecing the components together**

The fourth step in data analysis was designed to piece the component parts of the puzzle together in order to address the core research objective of the paper: ‘What helps young Christians grow in discipleship?’. This strategy involves correlational analysis and regression analysis using the 8 scales constructed and the four scales operationalising psychological constructs for integration in correlational analysis and regression models. The scale properties of all 12 instruments are summarised in table 9.

- insert tables 9 and 10 about here -

Table 10 examines the associations between the four pathways to discipleship (group activities, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement) and the four components of psychological type theory expressed through orientation (high scoring introversion), perceiving (high scoring sensing), judging (high scoring feeling), and attitude toward the outer world (high scoring judging). Four main conclusions emerge from these data. First, these data show that three of the pathways to discipleship (group activities, church worship, and public engagement), as experienced within the Baptist tradition, will favour extraverts. In other words, introverts find it less easy to engage with these pathways. On the other hand, the fourth pathway (individual experience) is equally accessed by introverts and

by extraverts, Second, these data show that three pathways (group activities, church worship, and individual experience), as experienced within the Baptist tradition, all favour feeling types. In other words, thinking types find it less easy to engage with these pathways. On the other hand, the fourth pathway (public engagement) is equally accessed by thinking types and by feeling types. Third, these data show that two pathways (individual experience and church worship), as experienced within the Baptist tradition, favour judging types. In other words, perceiving types find it less easy to engage with these pathways. Fourth, these data show that one pathway (public engagement), as experienced within the Baptist tradition, favours intuitive types. In other words, sensing types find it less easy to engage with this pathway.

- insert table 11 about here -

Finally, table 11 examines the collective contribution made by personal factors, psychological factors, contextual factors, and discipleship pathways to the two indices of Christian growth, the Index of Depth of Discipleship and the Index of Strength of Vocation. In constructing the two regression models (one on depth of discipleship and the other on strength of vocation) the four sets of predictor variables were entered in the fixed order of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (introversion, sensing, feeling, and judging), contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith), and discipleship pathways (group activities, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement). Five main conclusions emerge from the beta weights presented in table 11.

The first conclusion is that the two dependent variables (measuring depth of discipleship and strength of vocation) access somewhat different aspects of Christian growth, as reflected by the ways in which the predictor variables do not follow a consistent pattern in predicting these two dependent variables. Christian growth is itself a complex concept that may be best accessed by multiple measures.

The second conclusion is that, when the other factors are taken into account, neither sex nor age function as significant predictors of individual differences in scores recorded on the measures of depth of discipleship and strength of vocation.

The third conclusion is that psychological factors serve as significant predictors of strength of vocation, but not of depth of discipleship. Strength of vocation is stronger for feeling types (compared with thinking types) and for judging types (compared with perceiving types).

The fourth conclusion is that contextual factors do matter. Perceived support from the local church is a highly significant factor in shaping both depth of discipleship and strength of vocation. While strength of vocation is not significantly impaired by perceived challenges to faith, depth of discipleship is impaired by perceived challenges to faith.

The fifth conclusion is that for these young Baptists the discipleship pathway of group activities is the most significant in shaping both depth of discipleship and strength of vocation. Depth of discipleship is further impacted by the discipleship pathway of individual experience. Strength of vocation is further impacted by the discipleship pathway of church worship.

### **Conclusion**

Located within the discipline of empirical theology and informed by concepts refined by the theology and the psychology of individual differences, the present study was designed to build on and to extend the pioneering and exploratory study reported by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) into the scientific study of Christian discipleship. The research objective was to examine ‘What helps young Christians grow in discipleship?’. This broad research question was properly narrowed by the clear focus on one particular and specific stream of young Christians, those nurtured within the influence of the Canadian Baptists of

Atlantic Canada. This research objective was advanced by addressing three specific research questions.

The first research question concerned drawing on the method and theory proposed by Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) that developed eight relevant measures: two measures of Christian growth (depth of discipleship and strength of vocation), four measures of distinctive discipleship pathways (through group activities, individual experience, church worship, and public engagement), and two measures of contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith). Drawing on this model, the present study has developed and tested eight new instruments operationalising these constructs in ways appropriate for use among 12- to 18-year-old adolescents: Index of Depth of Discipleship (12 items), Index of Strength of Vocation (8 items), Index of Discipleship through Group Activities (15 items), Index of Discipleship through Individual Experience (15 items), Index of Discipleship through Church Worship (9 items), Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement (16 items), Index of Church Support (12 items), and Index of Challenges to Faith (18 items). The internal consistency reliability and the face validity of all items commend these instruments for further use.

The second research question concerned drawing on psychological type theory as employed within both the psychology of religion and empirical theology (Francis, 2009) to explore the extent to which psychological type preferences may influence individuals' scores both on the four pathways to discipleship and on the two measures of Christian growth. The first main finding from the research data is that the pathways to discipleship (as experienced by young people within the influence of the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada) may be more appealing to and more engaging for extraverts and for feeling types. This finding is consistent with the evidence reported by Fawcett, Francis, Linkletter, Robbins, and Stairs (2017) that the young people participating within these Churches tend to be extraverts and

feeling types. Taking seriously the insights from the theology of individual differences, these Churches may wish to debate whether their strength should properly reside in this sector of young people (perhaps recognising that other denominational streams may be better equipped to work with young introverts and young thinking types) or whether their programmes should be developed to be more inclusive of other psychological types. The second main finding from the research data is that psychological type factors also affect perceived strength of vocation as shaped within this Baptist tradition. Young people most likely to develop a strong sense of vocation within this context are feeling types and judging types. The God to whose call they are responding may be seen to reflect the God of mercy more than the God of justice, and may be seen to prefer disciplined spiritual structure more than spontaneous spiritual encounter.

The third research question concerned exploring the comparative effects of the four pathways of discipleship (group activities, individual experiences, church worship, and public engagement) on the two indicators of Christian growth (depth of discipleship and strength of vocation), after taking into account the effect of personal factors (age and sex), psychological factors (as proposed by psychological type theory), and contextual factors (church support and challenges to faith). The data demonstrated that, within the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, the two strongest influences on both depth of discipleship and strength of vocation were perceptions of being associated with a local church that was good at growing disciples, and engagement with the group activities pathway to discipleship. This finding offers encouragement for these Churches to prioritise the effectiveness of local congregations supporting the discipleship growth of young people and to maintain programmes of group activities. At the same time, the data demonstrate that the individual experience pathway was important for developing depth of discipleship and that the church worship pathway was

important for developing strength of vocation. These findings offer encouragement for these churches to support ministries appropriate for enhancing multiple pathways to discipleship.

While the present study has usefully extended the work of Francis, Foster, Lankshear, and Jones (2019) to being to establish the scientific study of Christian discipleship, further work is needed to explore the factors that help Christians to grow among other groups of Christians and drawing on other theoretical and methodological frameworks.



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Table 1

*Index of Depth of Discipleship*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I feel that I am able to:</i>		
pray deeply	61	.61
explore the Bible in a meaningful way	56	.59
see the world as God sees it	40	.54
see people as God sees them	48	.43
worship with my whole mind	58	.64
worship with my whole heart	68	.65
put my faith into practice in my daily life	60	.64
put my faith into practice at home	66	.55
put my faith into practice at school/college/work	47	.58
care for others in God's name	81	.60
encourage others in their faith	75	.57
speak to others about my faith	54	.54
Alpha		.88

Table 2

*Index of Strength of Vocation*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I feel that:</i>		
God has a purpose for me	83	.71
God is calling me for a particular purpose	59	.66
I am on the journey God wants me to be on	52	.65
God is shaping my daily life	75	.77
God is shaping my future	84	.80
I am part of God's plan	82	.78
God has shaped my life so far	77	.70
God is my guide	76	.72
Alpha		.92

Table 3

*Index of Discipleship through Group Activity*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I have been helped in my journey of faith by:</i>		
taking part in a small group	75	.40
taking part in a Bible study group	41	.54
taking part in a church social (or youth) group	86	.41
taking part in a fellowship group	46	.57
taking part in a church outreach group	59	.51
taking part in a Christian service project	64	.59
taking part in a Christian course offered by a church	34	.48
taking part in a prayer group	38	.56
taking part in a worship leadership team	42	.54
leading others in a prayer group	24	.47
attending Christian events	84	.48
attending Christian conferences	54	.52
taking part in a mission tour	58	.53
attending Christian camp	73	.45
attending Christian retreats	66	.49
Alpha		.86

Table 4

*Index of Discipleship through Individual Experience*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I have been helped in my journey of faith by:</i>		
listening to sermons	70	.46
praying by myself	72	.48
reading the Bible by myself	57	.51
reading Christian books	39	.54
working with a spiritual director or soul friend	43	.48
listening to Christian broadcasts on the radio	40	.57
watching Christian TV	21	.48
listening to Christian recorded talks or podcasts	29	.53
visiting Christian websites or blogs	23	.55
listening to Christian music by myself	66	.54
talking with my closest friends	66	.40
being with an inspirational leader	73	.37
having a regular quiet time	50	.49
making time to reflect on my life	61	.49
working with a youth leader or mentor	63	.41
Alpha		.85



Table 5

*Index of Discipleship through Church Worship*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I have been helped in my journey of faith by:</i>		
attending church services	78	.62
hearing music in church services	86	.54
listening with others to preaching in church services	63	.54
following familiar patterns in church services	45	.51
participating in communion services	61	.59
experiencing church services at Christmas	76	.64
experiencing church services at Easter	74	.60
singing worship songs in church services	81	.55
having God's forgiveness in church services	86	.49
Alpha		.85

Table 6

*Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>I have been helped in my journey of faith by:</i>		
taking part in mission outreach activity	79	.38
taking part in practical Christian service activities	72	.53
working for social justice	37	.53
working to right wrongs in the world	59	.51
working for world development	38	.62
working to save the environment	55	.53
taking Christian education courses provided by college/university	18	.31
taking Christian education courses provided by my denomination	21	.47
taking part in training events provided by my denomination	26	.43
experiencing different kinds of churches	62	.48
meeting people who belong to a different faith from mine	58	.54
talking with people whose beliefs are different from mine	59	.55
engaging with activities not connected with church	52	.37
giving Christian service to help the poor	68	.55
giving Christian service to help the homeless	59	.56
giving Christian service to clean the neighbourhood	67	.55
Alpha		.86

Table 7

*Index of Church Support*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>My church is good at helping people to:</i>		
pray deeply	68	.65
explore the Bible in a meaningful way	73	.70
put faith into practice in daily life	77	.74
put faith into practice at home	71	.70
put faith into practice at school/college/work	61	.65
speak about faith to others	71	.69
see the world as God sees it	68	.71
see people as God sees them	69	.70
worship with their whole mind	71	.76
worship with their whole heart	73	.80
care for others in God's name	82	.71
encourage others in their faith	82	.72
Alpha		.94

Table 8

*Index of Challenges to Faith*

	Yes %	<i>r</i>
<i>For me faith is made difficult by:</i>		
the attitudes of my friends	66	.32
the attitudes of my school teachers/lecturers/tutors	47	.44
the attitudes of my family members	31	.40
churches refusing to accept change	32	.50
having to accept the authority of the Bible	24	.54
listening to the claims of science	42	.47
the problems religions cause in the world	34	.63
the disagreement among the churches	35	.64
church teaching on sex	22	.63
church teaching on LGBTQ issues (sex and gender identity)	31	.56
church teaching on alcohol	16	.61
the demands made by church on my time	18	.58
having to believe things that don't make sense	35	.58
my church not wanting to listen to me	21	.51
the suffering I see in the world	44	.59
natural disasters like earthquakes	32	.59
the attitudes of older Christians	47	.55
the attitude of others at school/college/work	54	.50
Alpha		.89

Table 9

*Summary of Scale Properties*

	N items	Alpha	Mean	SD
Index of Depth of Discipleship	12	.88	43.4	7.4
Index of Strength of Vocation	8	.92	32.5	5.8
Index of Discipleship through Group Activities	15	.86	54.0	8.8
Index of Discipleship through Individual Experience	15	.85	52.0	8.9
Index of Discipleship through Church Worship	9	.85	35.1	5.5
Index of Discipleship through Public Engagement	16	.86	56.0	8.8
Index of Church Support	12	.94	47.8	8.4
Index of Challenges to Faith	18	.89	54.3	12.5
Orientation (high scoring = Introversion)	10	.77	4.9	2.8
Perceiving (high scoring = Sensing)	10	.65	5.1	2.4
Judging (high scoring = Feeling)	10	.73	6.5	2.5
Attitude (high scoring = Judging)	10	.73	6.9	2.5

Table 10

*Psychological type and discipleship pathways*

	I	S	F	J
Group activities	-.19***	-.03	.17***	.08
Individual experience	-.09	-.03	.18***	.15**
Church worship	-.16**	-.10	.25***	.12*
Public engagement	-.16**	-.12*	.11	.03

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 11

*Regression model on discipleship growth*

	Depth of Discipleship	Strength of Vocation
<i>Personal factors</i>		
Sex	.07	.09
Age	-.01	-.07
<i>Psychological factors</i>		
Introversion	-.04	-.01
Sensing	-.01	-.03
Feeling	-.06	.14**
Judging	-.02	.12**
<i>Contextual factors</i>		
Church support	.23***	.23***
Challenges to faith	-.15***	-.08
<i>Discipleship pathways</i>		
Group activity	.23**	.25***
Individual experience	.30***	.07
Church worship	.02	.19**
Public engagement	-.01	-.02
total $r^2$	.48	.48

Note: \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$