

ABSTRACT

4D'S OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH:

THE LOCAL CHURCH'S ROLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND DISCIPLESHIP

by

Christopher M. Johnson

In a world that prioritizes secular academy, and adult education outside of the church, the intervention sought to discover the best practices of the local church that help adults grow spiritually and engage in God's mission. This project researched the field of discipleship, spiritual formation, spiritual direction, and adult education in order to develop the intervention and assessment. To research the topic of discipleship, spiritual formation, and the local church I utilized information that has been found by The Barna Research Group, Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Mike Breen, and Steve Murrell.

The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among fifteen congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. The assessment focuses on the subjects of discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment is a researcher-designed survey in which participants self-assessed their spiritual maturation using the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar to measure changes. This study is a qualitative intervention that utilized mixed methods for research and data collection. Major findings from this project concluded people are longing for practical steps of spiritual disciplines, spiritual direction, decision making, and

discipleship relationships. The local church has a great opportunity to foster spiritual growth in others that would result in active mission.

**4D'S OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH:
THE LOCAL CHURCH'S ROLE IN SPIRITUAL GROWTH AND
DISCIPLESHIP**

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By

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter one covers the need for ongoing spiritual growth and discipleship for the local church. This chapter will explore the divine call to believers of discipleship that leads to continual spiritual growth. This will include 1) an overview of discipleship examining the Great Commission, 2) examples of Jesus' discipleship methods, and 3) other biblical passages that provide the framework for ongoing discipleship and spiritual growth efforts of the church.

Personal Introduction

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine, which you have carefully followed. But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance (New Living Translation, 1 Timothy 4:6-9).

As a young believer just starting to read my bible, I found a place of comfort in the epistles Paul wrote to Timothy. Long before I knew the significance of this portion of scripture, there was something in them that felt personally empowering. I longed to understand what it meant to grow in Christ. I piecemealed different practices that I heard and observed in others in an attempt to discover the best practices of a Christian who desires to grow spiritually. While attending Eastern Mennonite Seminary in pursuit of my Masters of Divinity, I learned the value of spiritual formation. Eastern Mennonite

Seminary had a healthy emphasis on spiritual formation, a more contemplative approach to Christianity than I was accustomed to. This turned out to be the exact change I needed in my walk with Christ. My studies there yielded a more thoughtful and rhythmic approach to my Christianity that positioned me to experience continual inner transformation and spiritual growth.

Through my time at Eastern Mennonite Seminary, I learned the value of spiritual retreats. Spiritual retreats created an intentional space for me to take a metaphorical seat on the Potter's wheel that Christ could continue to mold me into the person He had created me to be. During retreats, I longed to discern and be deepened by God's voice through His word and prayer. After a few years in seminary, I began the practice of taking annual retreats

Now, I do not say that I have heard God often, but on a particular retreat it was undeniable that I heard the Lord speak and it forever changed my life. What I heard was neither harmonious nor "kind," but it was necessary. As I was journaling, I felt the Lord say "Chris, you don't have the character to achieve any of these goals." Surely, I wasn't expecting to hear something like that. One thing that I have learned through reading scriptures and many testimonies is that God doesn't give rebuke without instruction. As I was hearing this and wondering what it meant, I began to receive a set of principles, or instructions, to live by. I've come to call this set of principles the 4D Principle: Discipleship, Discipline, Discernment, and Direction. As the Lord spoke to me, revealing that He wanted to do some internal work before external results, He gave me three principles to live by: Discipline, Discernment, and Direction. Through these four principles, I have continually been trained for godliness.

God's bold words to me on that day of reflection led me to focus on 1 Timothy 4:7-8, "train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come." The value of training for godliness that Paul shares with his young protégé captures the essence of what it means to, "workout your salvation with fear and trembling." To have a healthy and growing relationship with Christ takes great discipline. One must take on the mindset of training for a grueling race or competition. Having been an athlete for the majority of my life, the idea of working hard and training is not foreign, but to translate it to a relationship with Christ was quite unique.

People recognize two things in finely-tuned athletes: appearance and performance. Sadly, people most often want the products of training: being fit, looking good, and performing well; but rarely are willing to endure the process of training that it takes to get those benefits. While most look at appearance and performance, it is the process that needs more attention. A closer look at the fit or trained person, would reveal their discipline and commitment in how they spend their time, how they eat and sleep, and how they spend their resources. Paul recognizes that there is great value in physical exercise, and you will indeed see some of the benefits here on earth. He then takes a step further and encourages Timothy to train for godliness. This part of Paul's letter to Timothy is like the epic motivational speech that is seen in movies such as: Rocky, Warrior, Fighter, Men of Honor, Lone Survivor, and my favorite, 300. One thing that completely captures me in those type of movies is the level of commitment the characters display to the task at hand. As I reflected on Rocky doing one-handed pushups, punching meat in the freezer, and running through the streets of Philadelphia, I realized that our

relationship with Christ should model that same type of commitment and tenacity. While all of us may not be movie fanatics, I am sure that you can capture the idea that we are not taught how to train for godliness in this society. Paul instructs Timothy to train for godliness, like an athlete presses towards a prize, how a farmer works his land, and how a soldier goes to war (2 Timothy 2:3-7).

The idea of training for godliness sometimes is treated like a fad diet, where we do just enough to see results while never experiencing change in our mentality. My desire is to help people to train for godliness, as Paul instructed Timothy to do. As a pastor, I want to help people discover the best practices for spiritual growth and maturation for individuals in the local church.

Statement of the Problem

Jesus spent years with a motley crew of guys who later became known as the twelve. Many others began to follow Jesus, and upon His resurrection and return to His disciples, Jesus announces the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Jesus commissions His followers to go and make disciples who will obey the teachings of Christ. To make disciples is to help others grow spiritually. The key action of Jesus’ commission is the action of going.

There is a unique relationship between growing and going. In order for one to go, they must grow. Without continual spiritual growth, the church is unable to continue the mission of Jesus to go, therefore slowly distancing itself from its identity and purpose.

For believers to go, they must grow, but also to grow we must go. In a culture that prioritizes secular academy, collegiate, vocational, and academic education, how can the church create and foster an interest in spiritual growth and ongoing discipleship? What are the factors of continual spiritual growth in the life of the believer and the role of the local church in that process? What are the factors that hinder continual spiritual growth? What are the factors that contribute to continual spiritual growth? What is the role of relationships in the church that contribute to spiritual growth? What is the role of spiritual disciplines that contribute to continual spiritual growth? What personal practices of faith contribute to the continual growing and going of individuals in the local church?

Those who have had an invigorating relationship with Christ over a long period set an example of continual spiritual growth and discipleship worth following. What were the factors and practices of those people's lives that encouraged them to continue reading their bible, praying consistently and faithfully, trusting God, and sharing the faith with others? Ignorance, apathy, and complacency can plague the life of the believer and the local church. Paul warns Timothy that many will have a form of godliness, but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5). What are the factors that lead to apathy, complacency, and plateaued growth in one's relationship with Christ? What are the factors that lead to a "form of godliness," rather a continual and renewing relationship with Christ?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth

Assessment. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment focuses on the subjects of Discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction.

Research Questions

In quest to discover the effectiveness of this intervention, the following research questions were developed. The use of the journey journal, pre- and post-assessments of the participants outlined the effectiveness of the spiritual growth and discipleship seminar.

Research Question #1

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding spiritual growth and discipleship among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an eight-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment prior to the seminar?

Research Question #2

What was the level of spiritual development, based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, of those who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar at Divine Unity Community Church after the seminar?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar contributed most to the observed changes based on the Journey Journal and 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment?

Rationale for the Project

This research is important for three reasons: A call to Go, to Godliness, and to Grow

Foundation 1: The Call to Go

The Greek transliteration of disciple, *mathétés*, means learner. Jesus, in His final words recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, shares the Great Commission, to repeat what He had done, make disciples.

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:19-20). This portion of scripture has been termed the Great Commission in the Christian tradition. In this moment, the resurrected Savior enlists all of his followers to be active participants in the spreading of the Gospel and the redemption of humanity. This commission does not contain any limits in regards to either how many disciples one should make or how long it would take. The strong emphasis here is that those who are followers of Christ are meant to help others experience life change through the gospel marked by understanding (teaching) and obedience to the teachings of Jesus. Sharing the gospel is the post-incarnational method Jesus has chosen to reach all people. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus' plan and commission is exemplified through faithful followers through the formation of the church. Both the book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles afford Christ-followers detailed examples of what it looks like to carry out the commission. Paul shares the commitment and goal of the Great Commission in Colossians 1:28-29, So, we tell others about Christ, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all the wisdom God has given us. We want to present them to God, perfect in their relationship to Christ. That's why I work and struggle so hard, depending on Christ's mighty power that works within me. (NLT)

Foundation 2: The Call to Godliness

Godliness is not something that one can will. It is a gift from God that is stewarded. Peter shares that God has given us all we need to live a life of godliness. To those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Peter 1: 1-4). Godliness most often is not easily defined by people, and the image of godly is often limited to the outward appearance of piety rather than a deep-rooted devotion to become Christ-centered. “A godly person is one who ceases to be self-centered in order to become God-centered” (Swindoll xv). Godliness, *eusebeia*, means to live in devout and reverent piety, especially toward God. “The words godly and godliness actually appear only a few times in the New Testament; yet the entire Bible is a book on godliness. And when those words do appear they are pregnant with meaning and instruction for us” (Bridges). God, through His divine power has given mercy and grace in all the things needed to obtain godliness (2 Peter 1:3). The continuing sanctification of the believer is a unique partnership between Christ and the believer that requires divine intervention, and personal discipline. The call to godliness is an invitation to escape the corruption of the world. We escape corruption by maximizing our connection with God through whole hearted devotion. The Apostle Paul would recommend that one not only receive godliness, but train for it.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4 to train for godliness captures this unique partnership. Training for godliness will set Timothy on a trajectory of continual renewal and transformation in his walk with Christ and ministry. Training for godliness sets our desires and efforts to become more like Christ exemplifying those characteristics in our attitudes, pursuits, and relationships. Pursuing godliness, however, should not be motivated by the desire to get things right, but should be motivated by the love of God demonstrated towards us through Christ. Training for godliness points people in the direction of extreme devotion, reverence, and trust towards God. That devotion, reverence, and trust towards God results in personal transformation. Godliness is not about the outward manifestation, but the everyday determination to embrace the process of becoming Christ-like.

Foundation 3: The Call to Grow

Spiritual formation is the transforming journey of the disciple. Henri Nouwen says: "Spiritual formation prepares us for a life in which we move away from our fears, compulsions, resentments, and sorrows, to serve with joy and courage in the world, even when this leads us to places we would rather not go. Spiritual formation helps us to see the face of God in the midst of a hardened world and in our own heart" (Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*).

The disciple is to seek a centeredness in Christ that enables them to model the life of Christ that is distinct from the value system of the world around us. A life of centeredness is a life that is hidden in Christ. A life eclipsed by the presence and power of God is what Paul spoke of in Galatians 2:20: "It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives through me." Seeking spiritual growth for individuals in the church is

ultimately highlighting the life of Christ. Discipleship and spiritual growth transforms individuals to model the life of Christ in our current day. It never ends, and it is beneficial to all. When it comes to spiritual growth, often the thought is that growth will just happen.

Spiritual growth does not just happen, it takes an intentionality of both the individual and the church (Holladay). God has graced the church to facilitate an atmosphere of growth in both individuals and the body of Christ at large (Ephesians 4). The church helps structure a rhythm and rule for life that helps humanity embrace a pathway of spiritual growth. “When it comes to spiritual growth, human beings are much like these plants. We need structure and support. Otherwise our spirituality grows only in a confused fused and disorderly way” (Thompson ch. 9). Spiritual growth is a place of shared responsibility between the believer and the local church. According to Ephesians 4:14-16, individual growth contributes to the corporate growth, and the corporate growth also contributes to the individual growth of believers in the church.

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms require specific definition: discipleship, discipline, discernment, and direction.

4D Principle

The 4D principle of spiritual growth represents: Discipleship, Discipline, Discernment, and Direction. The 4D Principle was implemented during the 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar as the curriculum.

Discipleship

A disciple is a learner and follower of a specific doctrine. Specifically, this project will refer to a disciple of Christ. A disciple of Christ defined by the Easton's Bible Dictionary is: "one who (1) believes in his doctrine, (2) rests on his sacrifice, (3) imbibes his spirit, and (4) imitates his example." (Easton "Disciple") Discipleship is the process of teaching and empowering others in the doctrine and lifestyle of Christ.

Discipline

Discipline within the 4D Principle refers to living a disciplined life marked by self-denial, dependency on God, and a proper confrontation of sin and struggle in the life of the believer. As Hebrews 12:10-11 (NIV) states: "...but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness." No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." God uses discipline to grow the believer to exhibit a life of holiness that reflects the creator. The disciplined life also incorporates the rich practices of spiritual disciplines.

Discernment

Discernment, *diakrisis*, means to rightly judge between good and evil. Discerning of spirits is also listed as one of the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12:10, and highlighted to be active in the mature believer's life in Hebrews 5:14. Discernment enables the believer to see and understand from God's perspective in relation to good and evil. Spiritual disciplines such as bible reading, prayer, meditation, enhances one's ability to hear and understand God's voice, and discover the unique gifts that God has instilled in them. In the spiritual life of the believer, discernment enables one to distinguish the

voice of God above other voices in matters of judging between good and evil, wisdom for decisions, and direction for one's life.

Direction

Ephesians 5:17 "Don't act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do." Direction indicates individuals understanding the will of God for their life and their unique contribution to the God's mission.

Delimitations

The goal was to develop a long-term spiritual growth plan for Divine Unity Community Church. To be most effective we targeted those that exemplify, or have expressed a profound interest in, spiritual growth and discipleship. Some spiritual qualities that we considered as we looked at this group are those that are Faithful, Available, Involved, Teachable, and Hungry (Murrell and Murrell 99). To be most effective we needed to have a group that represented the church's demographics: Co-ed, Multi-ethnic, and multi-generational 18 years and older. The aim was to assess a group of 12-15 participants that represent a variation of people from different age groups, life stages, spiritual backgrounds, Christian experience, and participation in Divine Unity Community Church. The group of participants were from the general body of the church, and they voluntarily signed up for the seminar. Some participants had been preselected and others volunteered for seminar.

This project did not include parishioners from other congregations in order to expedite the stage of building rapport and trust between facilitator and participant. Also, the emphasis of the project was first to develop a spiritual growth plan for this specific

congregation of Divine Unity Community Church. This project excluded minors to emphasize the spiritual maturation in the adults of Divine Unity Community Church.

Review of Relevant Literature

The measures of success in the local church have become more about programs, attendance numbers, and budgets. While these things are not wrong, being consumed and measuring success by these causes us to drift from the Great Commission to make disciples. Dallas Willard has coined the thought that the Great Commission to go and make disciples has become the Great Omission in the church (Willard *The Great Omission* 7). This project needed input from several fields of study and ecclesial practice. Primarily discipleship, spiritual formation, adult learning theory, and modern ecclesial works that speak to discipleship and spiritual development. To research the topic of discipleship, spiritual formation, and the local church I utilized information that has been found by The Barna, Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Mike Breen, Steve Murrell, Rick Warren, and Edward Hammond. The presenting challenge in discipleship is prioritizing yet decentralizing disciple making in the local church.

The primary people group that this project was designed for are adults who attend church. The difficulties in discipling adults could be aided by an understanding of adult learning. To further discover the best methods to help adults engage in spiritual growth and missional living the fields of adult learning, Christian education, and theology had to be explored. Articles from *The Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* helped explore the correlations of traditional spiritual formation, adult education, and discipleship in the local church. Discovering the overlapping principles from those fields would help the local church foster and facilitate spiritual growth for the adults who are

part of the congregation. Concerning adult learning, I utilized resource journals from the realm of Christian education and the traditional andrological thought centered around Malcolm Knowles work in that field.

Research Methodology

This section will discuss some the research methodology of the project including the type of research, the participants, instrumentation, data collection and analysis.

Type of Research

This study utilized mixed methods for research and data collection. Qualitative and quantitative methods used included: Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and participant journals (electronic). The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar. Participants self-assessed their spiritual maturation using the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar to measure changes. Throughout out the seminar, some participants were also asked to participate in semi-structured interviews to gauge qualitative changes during the seminar.

The participant journal, otherwise referred to as the “Journey Journal,” encouraged participants to chronicle their process throughout the seminar noting changes and realizations along the way. At the conclusion of each seminar session, the participants were given prompted questions to guide their reflections. The prompts used:

1. Did you find information from today’s lesson intriguing? If so, please share.
2. What personal call to action do you sense from today’s session?
3. On a scale from 1-5 (5 -very strong and 1-not strong at all) how strong do you feel about today’s lesson (weekly subject)?

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the impact of an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar at Divine Unity Community Church with the eventual goal of developing and implementing a long-term, ongoing spiritual growth and discipleship process for the church.

The 8-week seminar covered the 4D Principle of spiritual growth. The 4D principle encouraged participants to explore different spiritual growth practices through a bible study that utilized biblical characters, disciplines, and principles that contribute to transformation and spiritual growth. From the 8-week study, individuals were coached to develop a more individualized spiritual growth plan in light of the 4D Principle of spiritual growth.

Participants

The effort of the church to foster spiritual growth for those that are weekly attenders, volunteers, and developing leaders. In an effort to cultivate a spiritual growth culture for Divine Unity Community Church, male and female members, volunteers, and developing leaders ages eighteen and above participated in the eight-week spiritual growth course. This project excluded minors to emphasize the spiritual maturation in the adults of Divine Unity Community Church.

Instrumentation

The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an eight-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar. Participants self-assessed their spiritual maturation using the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar to measure changes. The 4D Spiritual

Growth Assessment is a researcher-designed survey. Due to the original content of the assessment, the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment underwent an expert review.

The participant journal, the Journey Journal, encourages participants to chronicle their process and progress throughout the seminar noting changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors throughout the eight-week spiritual growth seminar. Participants will be assessed by the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment to determine what their spiritual development was prior to the seminar, and after the seminar. Participants will be assessed by the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment to determine what their spiritual development was prior to the seminar, and after the seminar.

Data Collection

This eight-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar was preceded with the pre-test of the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. Prior to the first session each participant gave consent to facilitator and the facilitator's assistant to collect, analyze, and utilize findings from this seminar. Each participant was given access to a digital copy of the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment to complete prior to content instruction in the first session. The overall data collection and intervention took place over eight weeks. During the eight-week course, participants and facilitator were able to engage in conversation surrounding the impact of the seminar on their spiritual growth. To collect qualitative data for this study, participants shared their reflections via the Journey Journal. The Journey Journal served as a primary source to capture what is being produced in the life of the participant throughout the seminar (Sensing ch. 4). Participants submitted their Journey Journal electronically, to the facilitator exclusively via google form. At the

conclusion of the eight-week course, participants took a post-test of the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment.

Data Analysis

I developed and facilitated the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar for a sample size group of participants who participated in a pre-assessment and post-assessment survey utilizing the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. I used the 4D Spiritual Growth assessment pre seminar and post seminar to measure knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of participants prior to the intervention, and following the intervention. This study utilized mixed methods for research and data collection primarily depending upon qualitative methods. The Journey Journal served as the semi-structured interview to collect descriptive data from the spiritual growth seminar. The entries from the Journey Journal provided descriptive qualitative data to measure the impact of the spiritual growth seminar on the participants as they engaged with the weekly content based on the values of the 4D Spiritual Growth principal. Qualitative analysis was used to gather information about what was beneficial for the participants throughout the seminar.

Generalizability

Spiritual growth is among one of the highest callings for the believer and the church. It is the essence of continuing discipleship and encouraging disciples to make disciples. According to John 15:1-7, it is a divine expectation for those that are connected to Christ to continue to bear fruit in their lives. This fruit is seen in one's character, service, outreach, and personal piety. Spiritual growth also can be difficult to measure or foster in churches. As a young church plant, discovering the best practices and factors of spiritual growth is key to the church's health, communal effectiveness, and longevity.

Many young leaders and plateaued leaders will be able to use this project to contribute to individual spiritual growth, church health, continuing discipleship, leadership development, volunteer recruitment and retention, and community impact.

This project has utilized biblical principles, a wide range of research topics of spiritual growth, spiritual formation, discipleship, Christian education, and adult learning to develop an original researcher designed spiritual growth assessment. Due to the original content of the assessment, the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment underwent an expert review. The results that have been found through this project gives a framework for pastors and leaders to implement spiritual growth seminars that will contribute to the spiritual growth and discipleship.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature and research on the areas of discipleship, spiritual formation, discernment, and adult learning. Subsequent research discusses the key aspects that contribute to effective on-going discipleship and spiritual growth in the local church. Chapter 3 explains in detail the design of the study, its methodology, and data-collection process. Chapter 4 includes the analysis of the research gathered from the intervention. Chapter 5 discusses the major findings from the intervention and suggestions for further study and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Chapter two, the literature review, will cover the biblical and theological foundations to establish and sustain ongoing discipleship and spiritual growth efforts of the church. In effort to discover the best practices for discipleship, and spiritual growth for individuals in the local church, this chapter will progress using the themes of: Ecclesiology, Discipleship, Spiritual Disciplines, Discernment, and the theological implications of Andragogy (Adult Education). These themes helped to properly explore and outline a process for growing mature disciples of Jesus Christ marked by how the disciple loves, lives, and leads in a way that honors the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Biblical Foundations

Ecclesiology

Ecclesiology will be looked at in three major themes: the grounding, the gathering, and the growing of the church. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus says: “on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” In this passage, Jesus announces the vehicle of His mission to redeem humanity, the church. The church exists to gather, grow, and go: Gather God’s people together as one body and many members, help facilitate spiritual growth in the life of believers, and fulfill Jesus’ command to go and make disciples. The foundation of early Christianity was belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Nystrom and Nystrom 33). Early believers gathered around this core belief that Jesus had risen, and therefore continued to follow and promote His teachings. This was contrary to all other messianic like followings post the death of the

founder. The followers normally disperse to never be heard of again. Acts 5:34-40 testifies to that statement. During a heated discussion in the Sanhedrin, a Pharisee named Gamaliel made statement that gives the context of how movements would rise and fall:

But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honor by all the people, stood up and gave orders to put the men outside for a little while. And he said to them, ‘Men of Israel, take care what you are about to do with these men. For before these days Theudas rose up, claiming to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him. He was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean rose up in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him. He too perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone, for if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fall; But if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God! (Acts 5:34-40)The followers of Jesus were put on trial and persecuted for teaching about Jesus who was crucified but rose from the grave to prove He was the messiah. This was the first message preached by the Apostle Peter on the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2:22-36. In this inaugural message of the church, Peter outlined how Jesus Christ was handed over to be crucified, but He was raised proving that it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him. This message of Jesus continued to spread through the apostles and disciples who were determined to keep teaching about Jesus despite the threats and persecution. This determination and faith the apostles displayed caused Gamaliel to consider that this new sect of people may not be motivated by a mere human, but this may be an act of God. As the disciples continued to persevere and preach about Jesus, the early church multiplied

(Acts 2:47; 4:4, 6:7, 9:31, 14:21, 16:5). The message of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection was the grounding theology in Peter's message on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the church was birthed. Three thousand people were baptized as an outward sign of their belief in this Jesus. The days following Pentecost, followers of Jesus gathered together to discuss this doctrine of faith, share with one another, and the power of God was demonstrated among them. This gathering of believers eventually became the church, the *ekklesia*.

The terminology most commonly used for church is *ekklesia*, which captures the assembly of the people, and majority of information on the early church in Jerusalem is found in the book of Acts (Nystrom and Nystrom 34). *Ekklesia* is properly defined as a "gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place" (Thayer). *Ecclesia* denotes all believers, including smaller gatherings of believers in a particular location (Easton). They both have some value and merit; *ekklesia* is most commonly used capturing what Jesus spoke in Matthew 16:18 when He said "Upon this rock, I will build My church." Joe R. Jones proposes a theological definition of the church that is congruent with what is found throughout the book of Acts and the New Testament. "The church is that liberative and redemptive community of persons called into being by the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit to witness in word and deed to the living triune God for the benefit of the world to the glory of God" (Jones 25). There are different ecclesiological models of the church throughout scripture. The first two themes: The Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:22-33), and the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12,27). Each of these pictures of the church point towards the uniting of believers to Christ through salvation, and to one another through reconciliation.

The Bride of Christ

The Apostle Paul eloquently communicates the beauty of marriage between a man and a woman to lead to a greater revelation of the church as the bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:25-32,

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of the water by the word, that HE might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

The mystical union (great mystery) between Christ and the church is a picture that connects Old Testament Israel with the New Testament church (Guzik). The covenant between God and His people is that of a marriage requiring fidelity, and fruitfulness. Some scholars suggest that this imagery of the church as the bride of Christ dates back to the Song of Songs, that speaks of the loving pursuit of a groom after his bride through the future (Kreitzer 306). Jesus as the groom pursues His bride the church through the Cross. In the Garden of Eden, God brought forth Adam's bride, Eve, from his womb. The bride of Christ was brought forth out of His womb, and together the command of Genesis 1:28 “be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it” is reinstated through the Great

Commission: “go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” The regeneration of believers that takes place through the gospel is the result of the union between Christ and the church. The church is one with Christ to produce children of righteousness (Kreitzer 315).

The Body of Christ

The body of Christ is the other biblical metaphor of the church. “The identity of the ecclesial body is not simply an amalgam of the various individual identities of its members, but is rather determined by the head as the source and goal of the body’s growth” (McFarland 239). The Pauline epistles give the most allegorical of the church as the body of Christ. Romans 12:4-5 says “For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.” Other scriptures that speak to this theme include: 1 Corinthians 10:17, 12:27, and Ephesians 4:12-16. The church as the body of Christ has “both an individual and a corporate dimension” (Liubinskas 405).

The unity and oneness of believers is what Jesus prayed for in John 17, and what Paul emphasized in Ephesians 4:1-7 and Philippians 2:1-5. The application of this Pauline thought of the church as the body of Christ emphasizes the harmonious collaboration of believers with one another to share and model the good news of Jesus Christ. “Thus, the church as a body serves the world by exercising its diverse gifts in unity whose use is evidenced both in a winsome, godly lifestyle and in active proclamation” (Liubinskas 409-410). The church as the body of Christ is a repetitious analogy of the incarnation of Christ, church is both divine and human, but not hypostatic

(McFarland 233). The church is God's act, and humanity participates under God's authority to share the redemptive work of Christ.

The Family of God

The theme of family is essential to the gospel of Christ and a model for the church. Before God entrusted the revealing of His authority and likeness to the church, He did it through the family. God's mode of creation, and redemption journeyed through the family throughout the Old Testament. Following this theme from Old Testament through the New Testament reveals that family is important to the heart of God and a model for the church.

The Calling: The first family is introduced in Genesis 1-3 along with the creation story. The history of the first family outlines the call, conflict, children, and covenant that essentially serves as a guide from creation to salvation. The calling of the first family appears in Genesis 1:27-28:

So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

God created man and woman to be both revealing and reproducing. God wanted his authority and likeness to be revealed through their oneness, and reproduction. He empowered humanity to have dominion over all of creation, and to steward the order of how creation interacted with itself.

The Conflict: Genesis 2:15-17 God gives one command Adam and Eve to not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The penalty for disobeying this command would be death. Genesis 3 the first conflict occurs between God and man when Adam and Eve ate from the tree. Their eyes were opened, and their fate immediately changed. Sin entered the world, inviting the penalty of death, and the punishment of enmity between God, man, and creation. Immediately a promise was given by God to Adam and Eve that Eve's seed would defeat the serpent that cunningly deceived them. The birth of the first children however did not serve as the fulfillment of this promise. Actually, the evidence of humanity's conflict with God was exemplified in Adam and Eve's first two sons, Cain and Abel.

The Children

Cain and Abel were Adam and Eve's first two sons. Cain grew angry at God's acceptance of Abel's sacrifices. In an act of jealousy and anger Cain murders his brother Abel. It is telling that one of the first effects of sin was division in the family. In this moment of darkness, a new son is born, Seth. Through this new son, a lineage that eventually leads to the first picture of salvation in the Old Testament emerges. In the midst of conflict, God still calls family to be a vehicle of redemption. Seth however is not yet the promised seed that would bring ultimate salvation.

Eight generations after Seth, comes Noah. Genesis 5:29 says, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord has cursed." After the fall of man, God invited humanity through Noah to take part in His judgement and redemption of creation. Hebrews 11:7 recounts Noah's faith by saying: "By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly

fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” 1 Peter 3:20 explains how only Noah and seven others, his family, were saved from the flood. God’s plan and Noah’s motivation were deeply connected with and through the family. Noah’s ark is a picture of how the church can preserve those that are in it. Noah’s ark of salvation from the flood is not the ultimate salvation, but yet another Old Testament sign of the coming Savior.

The thread of family continues with the introduction of Abram and Sarai in Genesis 12. Genesis 12:3 God says to Abram: “And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.” God promises redemption and continued revelation through Abraham’s seed and Sarah’s then barren womb. God supernaturally depicts new birth through the barren womb. Abraham and Sarah have a son named Isaac. Isaac and his wife Rebecca, who also had a barren womb experience a miracle, and they have Esau and Jacob. In Genesis 32, Jacob’s name is changed to Israel, and a family is set on the path of becoming a nation. God later reveals Himself throughout the Exodus story as the God of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” to the children of Israel (Jacob). This one family over generations became an entire nation, the Children of Israel that leads to the eventual birth of Christ.

Matthew 1 outlines forty-two generations of family that led to the birth of Christ. This genealogy summarizes the Old Testament through family, strategically weaving in both Jew and Gentile gives a picture of what the new family of God will be like through Christ. Upon the birth and death of Christ the family of God was expanded beyond the

Jewish ancestry to a confession of faith in the work of Christ. The work of Christ is outlined in Ephesians 2:14-17,

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is the, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.

(NKJV)

The wall of hostility between God and humanity, and humanity with one another is torn down through the Cross, creating a new family of people united through the faith in His death and resurrection. The church can now model an environment of both divine and relational reconciliation with God and with others.

Jesus, during His earthly ministry, teaches His followers to pray. Specifically, in Matthew 6:9, Jesus teaches His followers to address God as such in prayer: "Our Father in heaven". This is a profound and revelatory invitation for all to see God not just as Creator, but also as Father. Paul in Ephesians 3:14 bows his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Through Christ, all who believe are adopted into sonship (Romans 8:23, Galatians 4:5). Through the gospel individuals are united under One Father and are now brothers and sisters in Christ. This new understanding of family is further illuminated by Christ in Matthew 12:50: "For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother." The church is the proper setting for the new-found relationship with Christ and one another to be explored and further understood.

The Gathering: The Local Church

The word church can reference the church universal or the local community of believers gathered in a specific locale, and group of people (Hultgren 127). From the overarching understanding of the church as the body of Christ, there must also be clarity given to the local church. The local church refers to specific congregations as represented in Romans, Corinthians, and Thessalonians (Hultgren 127). This view is also further reflected in the seven churches of Asia named in Revelation: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea (Revelation 2-3). Each church has its own geographical location, established leadership, and unique personality. Each of these churches represent a small segment of the larger Church, the body of Christ. Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, in their book *Vintage Church*, define the local church as,

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism, Communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God's glory and their joy. (Driscoll and Breshears 353)

This well thought out definition contains eight qualifications of the local church. Each of those eight qualifications are explored below:

Regenerated Church Membership.

The marker of the church is not simply a gathering of people on what is consider a holy day in a holy place. The local church is marked by regenerated people. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old have passed

away; and see, the new has come!” Regenerated people are those that have been made new by entrusting Jesus as the Savior and redeemer of their soul. Kreitzer’s ecclesial thought on the true Christian church states: “The church begins with those repentant individuals who desire to receive the true baptism and live a regenerate Christian life” (Kreitzer 308). The church helps individuals use their initial confession of Christ as a “launching pad for a lifelong quest to become individuals who are completely sold out—emotionally, intellectually, physically, spiritually— to the Son of God” (Barna 3).

Regenerated church membership is much more than a cultural association with the Christian faith, “regenerated church membership means that those who are members have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, resulting in both saving faith and persevering faith in the members” (Patrick 183). It is a pure and holy passion to participate actively in the Great Commission of becoming and making disciples of Christ.

Qualified Church Leadership

This saying is trustworthy: “If anyone aspires to be an overseer, he desires a noble work.” An overseer, therefore, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, self-controlled, sensible, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not an excessive drinker, not a bully but gentle, not quarrelsome, not greedy. He must manage his own household competently and have his children under control with all dignity. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God’s church?) He must not be a new convert, or he might become conceited and incur the same condemnation as the devil. Furthermore, he must have a good reputation among outsiders, so that he does not fall into disgrace and the devil’s trap. (1 Tim. 3:1-7 CSB)

The local church is organized under spiritual leadership as outlined in scripture. “Qualifications are important in every job, and the more important the job, the more important the need for stringent qualifications... When an unqualified doctor performs surgery, or an unqualified pilot flies planes, or an unqualified architect builds a house, people get hurt and things fall apart” (Patrick 43-44). Spiritual leadership is outlined in several passages of the New Testament epistles emphasizing the importance of qualified leadership in the church. In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-7 the terms elder and overseer are used interchangeably to describe “one who looks after, considers, examines, and provides covering for someone or something” (Patrick 45). Qualified leadership is not an option for the church, but it is a biblical mandate that reminds churches and leaders that souls are at risk. Church leadership should not be viewed as a platform of personal success, but a blessed privilege and righteous burden.

Preaching and Worship

On the day of Pentecost, Peter stands up and publicly proclaims the gospel of Christ, and in response to that proclamation three thousand people were saved. Paul exclaimed that the priority of his preaching was to preach Christ. To preach is to publicly proclaim the truth of the Gospel of Christ. Preaching consistently requires the Holy Spirit to help the preacher navigate and communicate the need and relevancy of the Gospel in this present age.

It is the duty, then, of the interpreter and teacher of Holy Scripture the defender of the true faith and the opponent of error, both to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless,

and to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future. (Augustine 78)

Rightly Administered Sacraments

Acts 2 captures the picture of the New Testament church where proclamation of God's word, and gathering together for worship and the sharing of sacraments was of utmost priority. Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus tells the disciples to go and make disciples teaching them to obey everything that He had taught them, and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Chiefly two regularly practiced sacraments are baptism and communion, found in Matthew 28:19-20, 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, and Acts 2:40-47.

Spirit Unity

Spiritual unity is what Jesus prayed for in John 17, and what Paul admonishes and says believers must endeavor for in Ephesians 4 it states, "Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit- just as you were called to one hope at your calling- one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3-6 NKJV).

The goal of spiritual unity is that the world will know who Christ is (John 17:21). Ephesians 4:3-6 explains that the very foundation of our faith is spiritual unity. The local church should indeed strive in doctrine and duty to display spiritual unity as a testament to the Triune God.

Holiness

The local church marked by regenerated members "seeks to maintain practical holiness by repenting of sin and believing the promises of the gospel, as exhibited by

obedience to scripture” (Patrick 183-185). 1 Peter 1:13-21 houses a call to holy living to Christians who were living in an unbelieving society. The Apostle Peter communicated that believers should live distinct lives that avoid sinful desires and continually maintain exemplary patterns of life, so that unbelievers will be saved and God glorified

The Great Commandment to Love

Jesus on the night He was betrayed said to His disciples: “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are to love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Version? John 13:34-35). That is the consistent message of Jesus that His followers are marked by their love of the Father, and of one another.

The Great Commission to Evangelize and Disciple the Church

The priority of the church is to honor God and make disciples. While church has polity, budgets, and organizational structures the main priority has already been stated: make disciples. The priority of the church is not to draw a crowd, or simply be a place of social reform, but a place of soul reform that can only happen through the Gospel of Christ been shared, displayed, and followed.

These eight qualifications reflect the picture of the church throughout the New Testament. As the first century church grew in Acts, they faced growing pains that required more structure to be given to what was birthed at Pentecost. The qualified leadership Jesus had empowered, the apostles, reached a point in Acts 6:1-7 where they needed to install another level of church leadership.

Several times in the book of Acts there is documented church growth (Acts 2:47, 4:4, 5:14, 6:1, 6:7, 14:1, 14:21, 16:5, 17:12). The increased reported in Acts were not

simply attendance numbers, but indicated conversions and multiplied disciples. The purpose of the eight qualifications of the church is not to attract a crowd, but to effectively serve people with the gospel of the Jesus Christ and make disciples. Acts 6:1-7 begins in a paradoxical moment of growth and conflict for a community of faith. Acts 6:1-7 sits in a unique transitional space in the book of Acts. While the church is experiencing rapid growth by the thousands, there is both internal and external tension mounting. This problematic situation has required the existing leadership structure to change. The delegation of tasks is a new venture for the twelve. The growth and use of administration is a major developmental moment for the leadership team in Acts 6. The response of the twelve was to add more qualified leaders for this movement with different functions, and the result of this shift is recorded in Acts 6:7 where the number of disciples increased rapidly. This marks a church that is embracing the call to spiritual growth in and through the local church.

The Church and Spiritual Growth

Spiritual maturity captures the progression of one's morality, faith, and understanding of God. Spiritual maturity is the process that the secular mind decreases, and the sacred increases. In Richard Foster's work, *Streams of Living Waters*, he explores the expression, pursuit, and perspective of sanctification through the lens different streams of Christian traditions (Foster, *Streams* 78). Foster outlines 6 major streams of the Christian tradition and how spiritual development is practiced and or achieved. In order for one to experience humanity in the manner God has planned, there is a deep darkness in the human soul that needs to be overcome. This darkness of the soul affects

one's moral, emotional, and spiritual health. Spiritual growth is the process of being enlightened by God and overcoming that darkness.

Paul, in Ephesians 4:1, exhorted the believers to, “walk worthy of the calling in which you were called”, signifying a call to be set apart from the world and committed to the way of Christ, sanctified. Paul continues in Ephesians 4 to lay the foundation of the spiritual duty of the Christian life, provide a snapshot of the pathway to spiritual growth, and describe the role of the church.

And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph. 4:11-16 NKJV)

Spiritual maturity does not just happen. According to Ephesians 4, spiritual maturity and growth is the responsibility and result of the church. “The Church is the place where the process of conforming humanity to the person and event of Christ is begun, the place where people dedicate themselves, in a faith that listens and obeys, to

this event that is a person, are formed by him and seek through their existence to make him effective in the world” (Hirsch *Reactivating*, 143).

The church helps structure a rhythm and rule for life that helps humanity embrace a pathway of spiritual growth. “When it comes to spiritual growth, human beings are much like these plants. We need structure and support. Otherwise our spirituality grows only in a confused fused and disorderly way” (Thompson ch. 9). Spiritual growth is a place of shared responsibility between the believer and the local church. According to Ephesians 4:14-16, individual growth contributes to the corporate growth, and the corporate growth also contributes to the individual growth of believers in the church. God has given gifts and spiritual leadership to the church (apostle, prophet, pastor, evangelist, and teacher) to equip believers for the work of ministry specifically to build up of the body of Christ. God has graced the church to facilitate an atmosphere of growth in both individuals and the body of Christ through divine power, devoted partnership, and daily progress. Followers of Christ are invited to participate in the spiritual awakening and growth of others through Jesus’ commission to make disciples.

Theological Foundations

Training for Godliness: Discipleship as Sanctification

Training for Christlikeness moves us from knowing, to believing, and then to living. The journey of spiritual formation and discipleship leads us down a path that breaks the bonds of sin in our lives that causes us to have automatic responses contrary to the Kingdom of God (Willard *The Divine Conspiracy* 374). The objective of our spiritual journey is to move people from the life of bondage to experience the life of abundance that is gifted to us through Christ (John 10:10). This is the sanctifying process that

distinguishes the Christian from the corrupt lusts of the world. Embracing the process of becoming like Christ, advances the Christian from participating in the self-destruction of one's soul through sinful indulgence to experiencing and sharing the wonderful gift of new life through the Gospel. The believer is granted the opportunity to experience a unique oneness with the Creator and live in Christlikeness.

All who call on the name of the Lord are saved (Romans 10:13), and at that moment new life takes place. That is the starting point, which is also initial sanctification. The call to discipleship is to continue that process of sanctification by understanding and morally responding to the love of God through Christ. This proper response is explained by the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15 (NKJV) where he says: "For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again." The love of Christ compels one to live a life fully committed to the Christ. The great commandment of Jesus should reverberate throughout the soul of a disciple to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind (Matthew 22:37 NKJV). The disciple's love for God move them into what Oswald Chambers calls unconscious holiness: "The new life manifests itself in conscious repentance and unconscious holiness" (Chambers).

Process of Sanctification

Jesus, our ultimate example, cultivated an awareness of God the Father through the practices of prayer, solitude, and meditation upon the Scriptures. Jesus assumed that his disciples fasted and encouraged them to do so in a particular way in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:16-18). Jesus imparts what holiness is into His followers

especially His disciples. He then commanded His disciples to go and teach others what He had taught them (Matthew 28:19-20). The New Testament after the four gospels, captures the teachings of Jesus being carried out and passed on to others through Peter, Luke, Paul, James, and John where Jesus followers are invited put away old ways of living according to the flesh, and partake in the divine nature that comes along with new birth in Christ. Theosis is the partaking of the divine nature promised to believers in 2Peter 1:4 (Rakestraw 258). Genesis 1:28 says that humanity was created in the image of God, and theosis serves as the Christian's reintegration into the life and image of God (Rakestraw 258). Process sanctification or progress by degrees is growing in grace (Collins). This stage of sanctification flows from the pure heart of initial sanctification that occurs at salvation (Wynkoop ch.12). A thorough picture of progressive sanctification can be seen in 2 Peter 1:3-10,

as His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to

make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble. (NKJV)

Notice the language given by Peter in this: "God have given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:3-4). God has given believers grace upon grace to progress in holiness and continual spiritual growth to escape the sinful appetites and thoughts that exists in the world. Now, with all diligence, verse 5, adds eight essentials of the Christian life. The eight qualities that should be present and growing in the life of the Christian: Faith, Virtue, Knowledge, Self-Control, Perseverance, Godliness, Brotherly Affection, and Love.

- Faith- Believing Christ as the word of truth, which is saving faith (Romans 10:9-10, Hebrews 11:1). Sanctifying faith is then the commitment to steadily obey Christ. (Hebrews 11:6).
- Virtue (goodness)- with your faith there should be a level and desire for moral excellence. This speaks to the diligence that should be present for those who have had an authentic encounter with Christ (Expositors Greek Testament). This also represents the ethic after moral excellence that should flow from loving God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength.
- Knowledge- this is not simply having knowledge of Jesus Christ, but the moral wisdom to honor Christ (Ellicott).
- Self-Control- also translated temperance and appears in Galatians 5:22-23 as a fruit of the Spirit which is complete submission to Christ as Lord.

- Perseverance- often interpreted as patience indicating that the Christian believer possess to hold to the teachings and standards of Christ despite trial (James 1:4; 1 Corinthians 15:58).
- Godliness- piety and reverence towards God, and reflective of God.
- Brotherly Affection- this virtue is one of the most popular and challenging commands. John 13:35, Jesus emphasized that our love towards one another will reveal to the world who His disciples are. this is also one of the characteristics in Philippians 2:1-5 of having the mind of Christ.
- Love- This is the ultimate anchor and chief virtue among them all. To love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, will keep the other seven virtues alive and well.

The idea behind spiritual maturity recognizes that there is a deep darkness in the human soul that needs to be overcome or enlightened by God in order for one to experience humanity in the manner God has planned. This darkness of the soul affects one's moral, emotional, and spiritual health. Jesus, in John 17, prays that we are made one with the Father as He is one. This profound sense of unity with God, is the powerful and transformative work of God continually molding the human heart and life into the image of the Son. The concept of spiritual growth and formation is encouraging people to intentionally and incarnationally engage the power of Christ in one's daily life and mission. Spiritual maturity captures the progression of one's morality, faith, and understanding of God. Spiritual maturity is the process that the secular mind decreases, and the sacred increases.

The Nature and Practice of Discipleship

Discipleship is the call given by Christ for his followers to participate in the growing and going of the church. A person is called to follow Christ, be a disciple, which is described in Colossians 3:10 as a putting off of the old self and the putting on the new self in Christ. A person is also called to go and make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19). This call to follow and go is to make the commitment of being conformed into the image of Christ, and to help others do the same. Vanhoozer highlights that discipleship is not only the simple external change of a person's behavior, but also the internal change that occurs in the heart (Vanhoozer 149). Vanhoozer goes on to say that discipleship is embodying the mind of Christ at all times and places to everyone (154). Christian discipleship is a process that continues to bring transformation to all aspects of the human experience. While it is Jesus' mission to build the church (Matthew 16:18), it is the believers' duty to make disciples. "Discipleship is the pattern God gave us to build His kingdom" (Murrell *Iron* 44).

The Greek transliteration of the word disciple, *mathétés*, is often used to mean learner, disciple, or pupil. *Mathétés* further defined is "properly, a learner; a disciple, a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle they require; someone catechized with proper instruction from the Bible with its necessary follow-through" (Helps-Word-Studies). A key distinction between the discipleship relationship that Jesus had with His disciples and the relationship that Greek philosophers like Socrates had and even the Jewish Rabbi's had with their disciples is that: "...Jesus binds exclusively to Himself. The Rabbi and the Greek philosopher are at one in representing a

specific cause. Jesus offers Himself. This obviously gives a completely different turn to the whole relation of the disciples to Him” (Kittel 447).

The life of the disciple is marked by the application of doctrine and instruction that reflects the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission outlined in Matthew 28:19-20 captures Jesus’ instruction for His followers to make disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” This commission is the centralized mission of Jesus followers. That to be a disciple is also to make disciples. Although Jesus’ commission to His followers has been clearly spelled out in scripture, the definition and application of biblical discipleship has become a lost art in many forms Christian practice. There is an epidemic of non-discipleship in the church. If the church does not disciple people to reflect Christ, the world will disciple people to reflect the world.

The Current State of Discipleship

Disciple occurs 269 times in New Testament (Willard, *Great Omission* 1). The goal of discipleship is to help people enter into a life-transforming relationship with the Savior that continually conforms them into the image of Christ. The Great Commission is not that people attend church, but they embrace true discipleship. Dallas Willard has coined the thought that the Great Commission to go and make disciples has become the *Great Omission* in the church (Willard, *Great Omission* 5). While the call and practices to become students, apprentices, and practitioners of Jesus must be reclaimed there appears to be an increase of biblical illiteracy, an acceptance of inactivity, and a de-

emphasis in discipleship training in churches (Willard, *Great Omission* 6). Once people experience the life-changing power of the gospel, Jesus' commission is a call to stir up a passion in others to be godly. This passion to be godly is evident by a personal priority of spiritual maturation.

Disciple is a term that was given by Jesus to a person that has made the decision to follow Christ by submitting every area of their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. This decision to follow and exemplify Jesus is not marked by conversion alone, but by obedience to the teachings of Christ, the exemplar. Disciples are not only followers of Jesus' teachings in thought, but also in action. The call to be a disciple is also a call to make disciples. Discipleship is all encompassing of both the inward (formation) and outward (mission) journey of the Christian. "The disciple is one who; intent upon becoming Christ-like and so dwelling in his 'faith and practice,' systematically and progressively rearranges his affairs to that end" (Willard, *Great Omission* 7).

Discipleship has appeared to become more of an option and a stage for the Christian rather than the requirement. *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* outlines four possible levels of the Christian life: the convert, the disciple, the worker, and the leader (Eims 61-62; 124). This view primarily focuses on leadership development. Leveled descriptions of the Christian life that allude to discipleship as a stage rather than a continued lifestyle of a Christian subtly communicate that one can be a Christian and not a disciple. This view of the Christian life is often westernized, and removes the biblical priority of discipleship for the Christian (Willard, *Great Omission* 4). There is an over emphasis on the difference between a leader and a disciple that does not fully represent Jesus' teaching on discipleship. The Great Commission encompasses what is also

required of leadership development. Hence discipleship is not a stage in leadership development, but leadership development is a part of discipleship. Essentially, there should not be a gulf between what defines a Christian and what defines a disciple.

The culture of many churches have erred largely on being overly evangelistic, prioritizing large numbers of converts, over discipleship. The result is a crop of shallow Christians who do not represent a true disciple of Christ (Harrington and Absalom 5). The question that emerges is: What are some factors that contribute to this the epidemic of non-discipleship in the local church? The growing amount of literature on the epidemic of non-discipleship continues to point back to a needed paradigm shift of churches and ministries. Barna, one of the leading Christian researchers, suggests that there are nine reasons churches and ministries struggle to make true disciples:

1. Few churches or Christians have a clear, measurable definition of spiritual success.
2. We have defined discipleship as head knowledge rather than complete transformation.
3. We have chosen to teach people in random rather than systematic ways.
4. There is virtually no accountability for what we say, think, do or believe.
5. When it comes to discipleship, we promote programs rather than people.
6. The primary method on which churches rely for spiritual development—small groups—typically fails to provide comprehensive spiritual nurture.
7. Church leaders are not zealous about the spiritual development of people.
8. We invest our resources in adults rather than in children.
9. We divert our best leaders to ministries other than discipleship (Barna 88-97).

Discipleship is a commitment to the person and work of Jesus Christ. Discipleship is not a program in pursuit of Christ, it is a relationship with Christ lived out. The Christian should adequately depict the picture of what a disciple is. A Christian is a then a disciple of Christ, and a disciple of Christ is a Christian. Discipleship teaches and trains the believer to be obedient to the teachings of Christ, thus aiding the transformative process into a Christ bearer. Discipleship is a complex command that involves many different practices and disciplines of the Christian faith and tradition such as “Christian education, spiritual formation, and Christian counseling, as well as the skill of coaching” (Byrd 246).

Barriers of Discipleship Making in the Church

The opportunity to foster discipleship relationships and systems through the church is very present and needed. Sarah Eekhoff Zylstra on behalf of the Navigators, NavPress and Barna Group, studies the state of Protestant spiritual growth. In her text, *Gleanings: The important Developments in the Church and World*, Zylstra interviewed more than 2,000 Christian adults, and 800 Protestant pastors to discover the *State of Discipleship* (Zylstra). The most effective discipleship methods for the church seem to vary based on how adults want to engage. Of those who say that spiritual growth is a priority for them, “16 percent prefer one-on-one, meetings and 21 percent would rather do a mix of individual and group options. But a plurality (37%) prefer to pursue discipleship on their own” (Zylstra). The research mentioned above from Zylstra, says that twenty-seven percent of pastors would like to develop a more clearly articulated plan or approach to discipleship. In addition to this, the lack of a clear, measurable, definition of spiritual success ranks among the top reasons why discipleship has been ineffective in

churches. “Our research also points out that most born-again adults are limited in their ability to grow spiritually because they have failed to set any goals for their spiritual development” (Barna 36).

Discipleship relationships require one of society’s prized possessions: time. A lack of spiritual passion makes room for believers to pour their passion into other things such as schedules filled with life, a life that is not fully devoted to prioritizing spiritual growth. The epidemic of non-discipleship is also a conversation about time, values, resources. The busyness of culture has become a great opposition to the formation of discipleship relationships. Clear processes, time, and general busyness of life rank as the highest barriers to spiritual growth in both practicing Christians and non-practicing Christians (Platt et al.). Edward Hammett summarizes this challenge by saying: “we are in a high-tech world calling for high touch relationships” (Hammett 109). Adults are motivated to learn when programs are sensitive to their time constraints by keeping commitments short in terms of duration and offering choices of times for participation” (Roberto and Minkiewicz 4).

There is a great need for quality relationships to be established while yet adhering to the demands of society. Many adults live within a low-risk, high-reward mentality. They want to receive the most with the least amount of effort and time. This has presented a great challenge for churches to discover effective discipleship systems. Adults are flooded with commitments to work, family extracurricular activities, and constant presence of technology for entertainment, education, or social interactions. Quality spiritual and discipleship relationships that once were nurtured through more daily interaction and programs are being pushed to the margins. Interactions between

people have become more utilitarian than camaraderie based and due to this paradigm shift in relationships, we have lost the trust to journey with other people in life (Hammett 109).

The Opportunity of the Local Church

The church now has opportunity to create a healthy atmosphere where people can learn to both trust one another and journey together spiritually. The lack of priority on discipleship and meaningful relationships in our culture and churches has caused a cognitive disconnect in regards to discipleship. Often people are not rejecting discipleship outright when approached with it but are instead puzzled by the idea (Willard, *The Great Omission* 6). Hammett presents stages of the spiritual journey that can coincide with discipleship (Hammett 179). These four stages do not exclude discipleship or communicate that one can be a Christian and not a disciple, but rather captures a possible process of discipleship that can be seen in individuals and the church.

Hammett's four stages are: Experience Discovery, Experience Belonging, Experience Empowerment, and Experience Mission (Hammett 179-182). Stage one, Experience Discovery, provides entry points that offers nonbeliever opportunities to be introduced to Christ, and nurture greater interest. Often, in stage one, a person is actively seeking ways to connect with an ecclesia to further explore curiosities about the faith. Stage two, Experience Belonging, captures Jesus' statement, "Come and follow Me" (Mt. 4:19, Mk. 1:17). This is a building stage that helps new believers connect with the ecclesia's theological, cultural, and historical identity. In this stage, meaningful relationships are formed that contribute to the discipleship process that lead to stage three, Experience Empowerment. Stage three incorporates spiritual formation through

disciplines for the inward journey. As one is conformed into the image of Christ from walking in obedience, that inward journey begins to emerge into a missional component, stage four. Stage four, Experience Mission, highlights the intimacy and productivity found in John 15, where Jesus invites His followers to abide in Him. The engagement of spiritual disciplines and mission help this cycle of discipleship continue.

Nurturing discipleship as a church is a matter of clarifying systems, but also redefining ministry success. Barna, in his work *Growing True Disciples*, emphasizes that there must be a paradigm shift in churches that redefine what ministry success is. Often ministry success is limited to attendance, buildings, and budgets. Much like Dallas Willard, Barna encourages that ministry success and focus remains central to Jesus' commission to make disciples. Barna goes on to state that a church committed to making disciples redefine success in the following ways:

- Congregants who worship not just on Sundays but every day of the week- not just in the sanctuary but wherever they are
- Complete submission to the Holy Spirit in both decision making and behavior
- Hearts that are sensitive to sin and wounded every time they do something that offends God
- Individuals who joyfully share their resources- time, money, skills, information, relationships, possessions- with those in need, especially those who share a love of Christ and a commitment to His people
- People who live differently from the norm because of their faith, leading lives that conform to the dictates of scripture without cutting corners or trying to interpret biblical passages for personal comfort or advantage

- A church body that projects (and lives up to) an image of being loving, caring, focused, and clear minded in its pursuit of the ways of God
- A deep commitment to building a lasting and life-changing community among those who profess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. (Barna 4-5)

Discipleship Making: Processes/Systems

Leaders of different generations in the local church have sought the best practices and processes of discipleship. There are many modes and tools of discipleship processes and systems that have emerged for and from the local church. Adam Mabry, Church planter, and pastor of a rapidly growing church in Cambridge, Massachusetts has done extensive study on existing discipleship processes and trends that churches and Christian groups are utilizing. He has acknowledged that there are several discipleship approaches that are available and valuable for the local church to utilize. Mabry who trains church planters from around the world, encourages church planters to develop or adopt a clear discipleship process as early as possible. Clear and simple processes of discipleship will help remove discipleship barriers for both the disciple and those who are discipling others. Out of the many discipleship processes that Mabry highlights the chief goal remained to help individuals mature in their relationship with Christ both inwardly and outwardly. Comprehensive discipleship processes are marked by continuing the process of discipleship by making other disciples. Two popular discipleship processes have been categorized as linear, or cyclical in nature (Mabry 134-136).

A discipleship culture is ultimately a narrowed focus of the church that does not confuse vitality with busyness but prioritizes helping individuals grow spiritually as followers of Jesus. A narrowed focused of the church is ultimately a shift from

discipleship programs to discipleship processes (Robinson 25). The shift from programs to process is the crux of Rainer and Geiger's work *Simple Church*. "To have a simple church, you must design a simple discipleship process. This process must be clear. It must move people toward maturity. It must be integrated fully into your church, and you must get rid of the clutter around it" (Geiger and Rainer 26). The shift from program to process is not an abandonment of all programs, nor is it a quick fix to church growth issues. It is a biblical and theological shift that reprioritizes the maturation of believers that moves them to the work of ministry.

A *Simple Church* has removed the clutter and complexity of the discipleship process and in many ways have married the mission of the church with the discipleship process: "loving God, loving People, and serving the world" (Geiger and Rainer 37-38). With the use of axioms and alliterations, this process is understood to be simple enough to be grasped in a fast-moving society. The clear process can help the local church essentially close the back door, and clearly articulate a plan for transformation, and movement towards ministry (Geiger and Rainer 139). "New believers are the greatest resource your church has to influence the community. When vibrant churches nurture new believers, they are nurturing the movement of the gospel (Geiger and Rainer 156).

The linear process was also made popular in Rick Warren's work, *Purpose Driven Church*, where he emphasized the church's role in facilitating individual's growth by presenting a clear discipleship system. The circular process is an unending cycle of being and making that never ends.

Every Nation Churches and Ministries is a global family of churches that focuses on church planting, campus ministry, and world missions. This global family of churches

hold to five core values: Lordship, Evangelism, Discipleship, Leadership, and Family. With discipleship being one of the core values, many churches of Every Nation Churches and Ministries much emphasis has been put on this worldwide for the local church. Every Nation Churches and Ministries has found great success in discipleship through the utilization of the circular process represented by four E's. The four E's or movements of this discipleship process are: Engage, Establish, Equip, and Empower (Murrell *WikiChurch* 169-170).

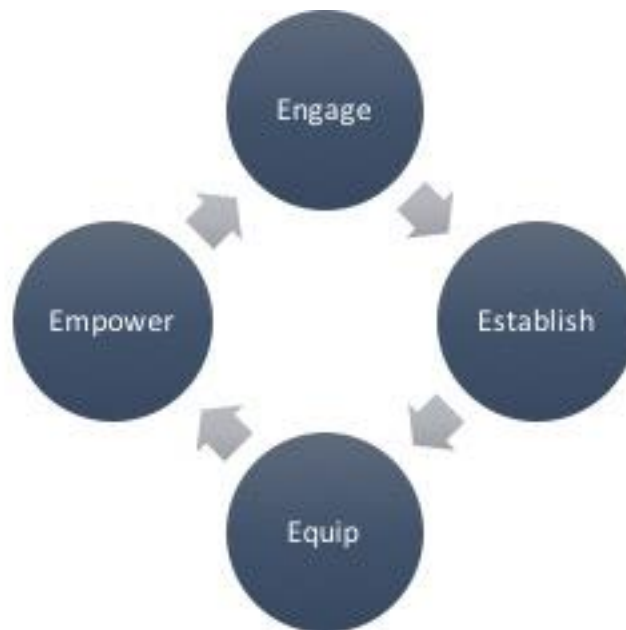


Figure 0.1 The four E's of discipleship. The diagram seen here is adapted from *WikiChurch*.

Jesus' command was to make disciples, so the question remains: "how does one make a disciple?" Disciple means apprentice, which means there has to be a combination of relationship, experiences, and information (Harrington and Absalom 22). Disciple making, also called discipleship, is the art of teaching someone how to follow Jesus. In His time on earth, Jesus spent only a tenth of His time ministering, and the other ninety

percent of His time was building a unique relationship with humanity. His three years of documented ministry in the gospels gives insight to the best discipleship process. His intentional time spent with the twelve was spent in several unique ways: a boat ride (Mark 4:8), special events such as weddings (John 2), funerals and graveyards (John 11), and shared meals (Matthew 15, John 13-15, 21).

Jesus brings new wine to an empty situation in John 2:1-12 at the wedding feast to give a practical picture of the value of family, and a prophetic picture of the joy of salvation that was to come. Jesus arrives at a wedding with some friends of an unnamed wedding party. One of the guests there at the wedding is Jesus's mother who makes Jesus aware of a problem: "They don't have any wine" (John 2:3). This was a devastating and even embarrassing moment for the host. Wine ultimately communicated joy and celebration. To run out of wine was a symbol of no longer having joy. The spiritual implications of this event begin to unfold. Jesus's response to his mother's statement in John 2:4 "What does that have to do with you and me, woman?" Jesus asked. "My hour has not yet come." Mary the mother of Jesus instructs some servants to follow Jesus's instructions. At this point in the Gospel of John, Jesus has not performed any miracles, yet this is a normal moment with supernatural potential. Jesus instructs the servants to fill water jars with water, draw some out and take it to the headwaiter. When the headwaiter tasted it was better than the first. John 2:11-12 (CSB) says, "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee. He revealed His glory, and his disciples believed in him. After this, he went down to Capernaum, together with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they stayed there only a few days." This moment the disciples had with Jesus at the Cana of Galilee deepened their faith in him. They had the opportunity to see

Jesus apply the commandment: “Honor your father and mother” (Exodus 20:12) when he performed the miracle at her request. This miracle was about much more than a wedding. The miracle that they witnessed was a prophetic picture of the new wine to come. The joy of salvation through Jesus. Although the disciples were with him, following him, they had yet to truly believe.

Jesus, during His time here on earth, exemplified a great importance on relationships. In John 11 Jesus models Family and Grief Ministry. This is very clear in the Gospel according to John. As stated earlier, Jesus’s first miracle was performed at a wedding. Jesus’s last miracle before going to the Cross, involved a family that he frequently visited and raising Lazarus from the dead. This group of siblings: Mary, Martha, and Lazarus experienced severe crisis, when Lazarus was sick. Mary and Martha asked Jesus to come heal him, but Jesus strategically delayed. They knew if Jesus would have been there, that Lazarus would not have died. Even in the midst of this crisis, Jesus was discipling His followers to believe in Him even when faced with crisis.

“Your brother will rise again,” Jesus told her. Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me, even if he dies, will live. Everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

“Yes, Lord,” she told him, “I believe you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who comes into the world.” (John 11:23-27 CSB)

Discipleship helps believers believe when faced with crisis. Jesus has the power and authority to raise Lazarus, but He is teaching His followers the lesson to trust and obey. While Jesus observes the grief of both Mary and Martha something happened.

“When Jesus saw her crying, and the Jews who had come with her crying, he was deeply moved in his spirit and troubled. ‘Where have you put him?’ he asked. ‘Lord,’ they told him, ‘come and see.’ Jesus wept. So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’” (John 11:33-36 CSB).

Jesus, although He was the solution to the problem, still allowed His heart to empathize with this grieving family. The witnesses saw a tangible moment of compassion. Jesus’s tangible compassion is a reminder that discipleship is not simply the transfer of information, but it is engaging in deep meaningful relationships that help people in their greatest times of crisis, need, and bewilderment.

In each of these contexts, the disciples had opportunity to witness Jesus interact, serve, and minister to people. The relationship that had been built between Jesus and the disciples afforded the disciples with both information and experience that led to them being empowered to continue the cycle of discipleship (Matthew 28:19-20, Acts 1:8).

To nurture a discipleship culture within the church, churches will need to embrace the idea of growing in smaller settings to make a larger impact. This may take the form of small groups discipleship. Mike Breen and Steve Murrell both agree that smaller intentional groups nurture a discipleship culture within the church that moves one from addition to multiplication in regards to discipleship. Mike Breen highlights that Jesus’ model of discipleship followed a model of intentional organized, yet organic, moments of investment which is named the “8:6:4 Huddle Principle” (Breen and Team 38). See the diagram below:

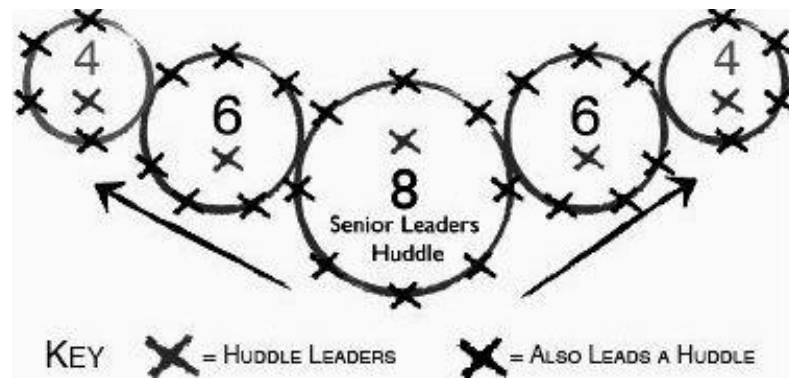


Figure 0.2. 8:6:4 huddle principle from *Building a Discipleship Culture*

The core of the cycle process of discipleship is this: “Every disciple disciplines. You can’t be a disciple if you aren’t willing to invest in and disciple others. That’s simply the call of the Great Commission.” (Breen Team 39). Breen’s huddle principle of disciple making is closely linked with discipling and developing leaders that will develop other small groups that make disciples. Huddles are meant to be small pods of 4-10 participants for 6-12 months at a time. Huddles have found success because of these six principles:

1. An expectation of multiplication: When one enters into a huddle, they have been invited by another leader to discover their leadership ability and opportunity. The expectation early on is that one would complete a huddle start a huddle of their own (Breen and Team 173).
2. High Commitment: The group agrees to make the huddle a priority on their schedules, and in their hearts. The huddle participants are expected to hold one another accountable to huddle participation.
3. Group Learning: “Huddles work because they expose people to the learning of a group rather than only one-on-one mentoring” (Breen and Team 2011). The effectiveness of the shared learning experience increases camaraderie and

exposure to what a disciple looks like in other's lives. Once again this keeps all participants accountable to not simply attend the huddle but to engage in the transformative process.

4. Time: "Huddles allow us to disciple a good number of people while still being wise with one of our most precious resources: our time" (Breen and Team 174). Rather than having a one-on-one with each person being disciplined, huddles allow the maximum amount of investment at one time.
5. Balance of Invitation and Challenge: When people are part of a huddle where both invitation (grace) and challenge are present, it expedites their growth because individuals are not questioning other's motives. "This allows the person to live out of a place of security rather than insecurity" (Breen and Team 175).
6. Continued Investment: "Most people experience the most spiritual transformation not when they are first being disciplined, but when they start discipling people themselves" (Breen Team 175-176). Once one has completed a huddle, the discipleship relationship of the former huddle is not severed. The continued growth of the disciple happens as they start a new huddle, and those who disciplined them continue to invest in their spiritual growth.

Discipleship process, programs, and curriculums are good, but not complete. All processes considered, the one thing that cannot be replaced in discipleship is relationship. "We must give people access to our everyday lives" (Breen and Team 40). Jesus' invitation to believers are to follow, abide, and join. The essence of Jesus' incarnation

was a living and tangible invitation for His followers to have access to His life. Discipleship happens beyond the small groups and classrooms. The small groups and classrooms are entry points to one another's lives being welcomed into spiritual family. "Discipleship is primarily about imitation over information, and it is through relationships that it most powerfully occurs" (Harrington and Absalom 22). This method of discipleship as imitation is repeated throughout the Pauline epistles. Much of Paul's life in Christ is recorded throughout the New Testament, and it is rare that Paul is mentioned by himself. Timothy, Silas, Priscilla and Aquilla, John Mark, and Epaphroditus, to name a few, were those who traveled with or learned from Paul.

The Apostle Paul gave people access to his doctrine and his life. This is risky business. Consider Paul's words of exhortation to the Corinthian church: "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Paul is strategic in saying that Christ is the ultimate pattern, and as he follows Christ, others will be able to follow him. Paul repeats the exhortation multiple times (Harrington and Absalom 19). In Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:16 and 1 Cor. 11:1), Philippians (3:17 and 4:9), and Thessalonians (1Thessalonians 1:6 and 2:14) Paul exhorted believers to love and serve one another, suffer for the gospel, and live lives that model the righteousness of Christ. Paul's ministry conveyed a tangible authenticity that invited others to trust Jesus. The exhortation to follow me as I follow Christ demands a disciplined life.

The Power of Story Telling: The healthy atmosphere of discipleship within church gives opportunity for people to tell and re-tell their journey, which helps them connect the dots of life events. Nathan C. Byrd III recognized that many young adults were able to form and maintain deep discipleship relationships through a storytelling

method called “connecting the dots” (Byrd 246). The storytelling allows people to discover how events and experiences are connected. The discovery of these connecting dots allows one to see how life experiences and events are ultimately used by God to form the spiritual life. The sharing of this discovery invites others to take an inward spiritual journey with the hopes of connecting dots of their own lives. This sentiment of storytelling helps individuals share and engage in the faith journey of one another, and it echoes the rhythms of life that affords opportunity for discipleship. Through the sharing of trials and triumphs of life, testimony begins to emerge that helps individuals learn how to trust and follow Jesus in everyday life. The joy of storytelling translates information and instruction into practice. Knowing and sharing the story of God is how believers’ lives are interwoven in that great story.

Spiritual Growth

Christian perfection is a distinctive of Wesleyan tradition. “Perfection is integrity at any point along the line of maturation. It is the process of ripening of Christian character. It begins in the genesis of Christian life and continues so long as integrity is essential to love” (Wynkoop ch. 10). Christian perfection is “The loving God with all our heart, and mind, and soul, Deut. 6:5” (Collins 63). Christian perfection is not a matter of Christian performance, it is a perfection of the heart and of the intent. Wynkoop says this about Christian perfection: “Christian Perfection does not imply an exemption either from ignorance, or mistake, or infirmities, or temptations. Indeed it is only another term for holiness” (Wynkoop ch. 7). Sanctification is not an elongated process of behavioral modification, but the actual regeneration of the being. Sanctification as described by Wesley “is to be renewed in the image of God ‘in righteousness and true holiness”

(Collins 63). Wynkoop further clarifies Wesley's definition of sanctification: "It is intensely practical and religious. Basically, it means separation from sin to total devotedness to God" (Wynkoop ch. 11). The transformation of the being, then transforms the doing.

The conversation about spiritual growth, spiritual formation, and spiritual maturity in the life of the Christian must be in light of the biblical theme of sanctification. Spiritual development and growth capture the progression of one's morality, faith, and understanding of God. Spiritual development in Christianity is rooted in the theological theme of sanctification. Sanctification is the moral and spiritual transformation that occurs in a person's life once they have received salvation (Law 17). Sanctify, *hagiazō*, means to make holy by consecration and separation of something for the purposes of God. Sanctification, *hagiasmos*, is the gift and process of preparing the heart and life of a person to be like Christ and to see Christ face to face. It is the active process of confronting of the sin nature that lies within people's heart and life. This continual work, sanctification, is the active work of Holy Spirit in the believer's life that follows salvation to bring forth Christian maturity and holiness. For the emphasis of this specific project the discipleship as the active process of sanctification will be explored further.

Psychological work has been done in the field of faith development by James Fowler in his book *Stages of Faith*. While the religious experiences that many people have are represented in the Fowler's Stages of Faith Development, his stages are not centered around or limited to the religious experience. It captures a structural perspective of humanity's quest for meaning, and morality (Fowler 4, 14). It is in the search for meaning where one discovers both what they value and consider to be good and evil. His

work has led to many articles, journals, and further research in the field of faith development. Joining this thought with the thought of faith formation in adults can help the church help members of their churches identify where they are on their journey, and how to progress forward in their journey of Christlikeness.

Moving from a psychological perspective of faith development to a spiritual journey mindset, the component of outward service is a clear stage of faith development. Edward H. Hammett list four stages of the spiritual journey.

1. Stage One- Experience Discovery (Come and See)

- a. Providing entry points that offer the nonbeliever opportunities to express initial interest in, and an introduction to, Christ
- b. People begin to question life's purpose and/or the meaning of events/ experiences
- c. A growing awareness of my inadequacy and sinfulness
- d. Seeking a way to connect with a church family and/or those who care about me
- e. A growing hunger for truth
- f. Curious about other people who can relate.

2. Stage Two- Experiencing Belonging (Come and Follow Me)

Helping new believers and other new church members connect with the church's theological and historical identity. The connection to their history and heritage is then supported through support structures that have a strong relational dimension

3. Stage three- Experience Empowerment (Come and Be with Me)

Engaging in spiritual life directions through disciplines that enhance the development of an inward journey.

4. Stage Four- Experience Mission (Come Abide in Me)

Engagement of spiritual disciplines that enhance the development of an outward journey and equipping of leaders that can help lead others along this same journey that make an impact on the world for Christ (Hammett 179-182).

What is spiritual formation and where did it come from? The definition of spiritual formation must start at the story of Creation. God created humanity in His image, forming what is the *imago Dei*. A working definition of spiritual formation adapted from Alex Tang is: “The working definition of Christian spiritual formation is the intentional and ongoing process of inner transformation to become like Jesus Christ himself, to become with others a communal people of God, and to become an agent for God’s redemptive purposes” (Tang ch.3). Spiritual formation is the working out of one’s salvation that goes far beyond behavioral modification but addresses every area of one’s life. The goal of spiritual formation, as well as discipleship does not stop at knowledge alone, but the goal is transformation. Some of the best theological support for spiritual formation is hinged on the goal of transformation in the life of the believer. Specifically, 2 Corinthians 3:18 “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.” The ultimate effect of turning to the Lord is transformation into the *imago Dei*.

Henri Nouwen has defined spiritual formation as the, “opportunities to enter into the center of the heart and become familiar with the complexities of our own inner life (Nouwen 38).” Spiritual formation is the field of spirituality that prompts people to move from inward transformation to outward witness that helps individuals discover Christ dwelling within, and among (Ford 11). It incorporates the discovery of identity and mission in Christ for the believer and the body of Christ. Spiritual formation as an inward movement that incorporates spiritual disciplines that promote spiritual growth in the life of the believer. Some of those disciplines include contemplative prayer, meditative scripture reading (*Lectio Divina*), bible study, silence, and living the spiritual life amongst a community of believers. Spiritual formation in the outward movement incorporates disciplines and acts of care, compassion, mission, evangelism, and attentiveness to the needs of the people we are around and connected to. Spiritual formation is an aide in the sanctification process and can serve as a portion of discipleship, but it is not limited to that.

Christian spiritual formation is an interactive transformative relationship between Christ and the reborn Christian that is nurtured through the practices of spiritual disciplines. Dallas Willard describes spiritual formation as “a process of increasingly being possessed and permeated by such character traits as we walk in the easy yoke of discipleship with Jesus our teacher” (Willard *Why Bother with Discipleship*). The practice and pursuit of spiritual formation is more of a methodology of spiritual progression rather than a theology. At the heart of spiritual formation is the theology of spiritual growth, character formation, and life transformation. It is an act of love for the One who first loved you.

Transformation being the goal does not mean that transformation happens in a location and space of life that is absent from all other areas of life. Transformation can occur any and every day of normal life. Dallas Willard explains the normalcy of transformation through The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth. The Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth suggests that true transformation occurs in everyday life when coupled with spiritual disciplines and interaction with God and people.

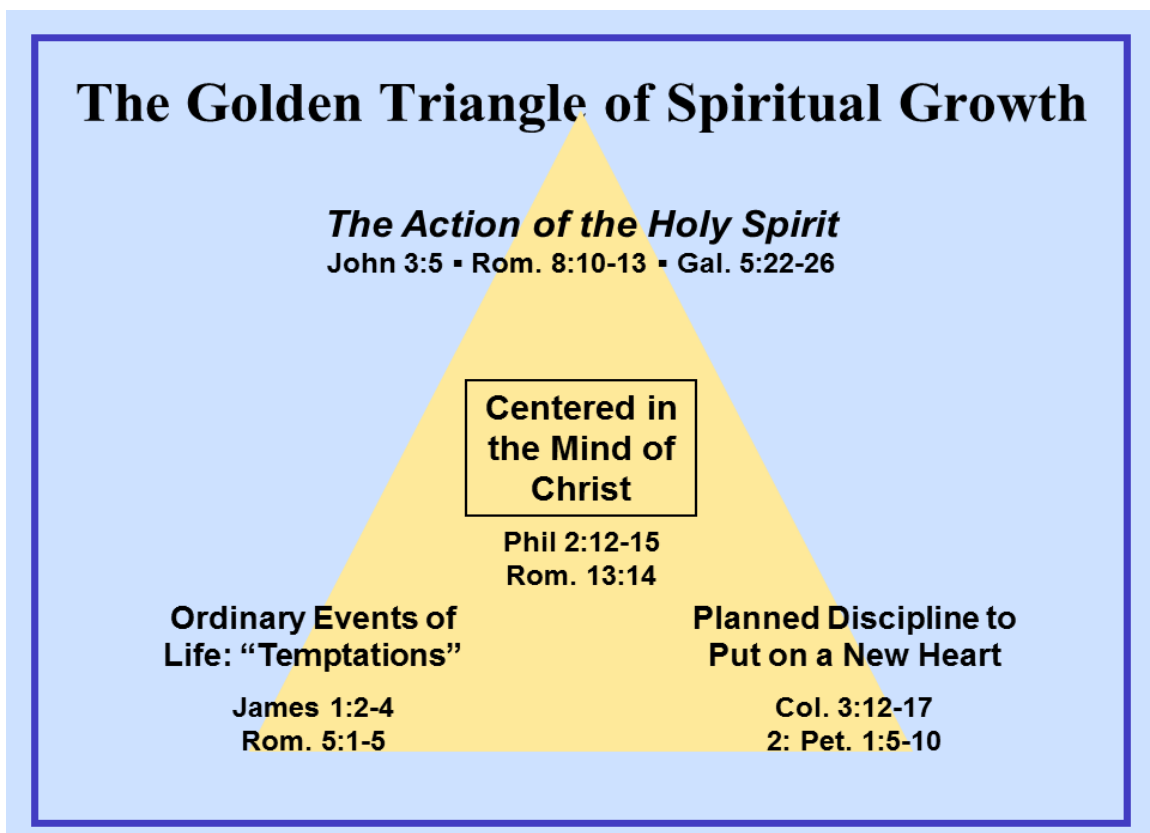


Figure 0.3. The golden triangle of spiritual growth adapted from Willard, *Divine Conspiracy* 379

Dallas Willard suggests there are three factors of spiritual growth: The Action of the Holy Spirit, Acceptance of Ordinary Life: "Temptations", and Planned Discipline to put on a New heart.

1. *The Action of the Holy Spirit*- “The intervention of the Holy Spirit is set at the apex of the triangle to indicate its primacy in the entire process” (Willard *Divine Conspiracy*, 380). Transformation does not occur without the Holy Spirit revealing to the truth of Jesus to people’s minds and souls. It is essential that the work of the Holy Spirit is not underemphasized in the process of becoming Christ-like. For the Holy Spirit bears witness to the eternal kingdom of Christ in the heart of the believer ultimately shaping the believer to have a transformative perspective of the work and glory of Christ. The action of the Holy Spirit is to help one be and do as Jesus. Willard utilizes the fruit of the Spirit as one of the key indicators of a transformed life in the spirit. The fruit of the Spirit are: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22). The next two parts of the triangle are essentially the believers’ response to the miraculous power and action of the Holy Spirit.
2. *The Indispensable Role of Ordinary Events: “tests”*- “So it is absolutely essential to our growth into the ‘mind’ of Jesus that we accept the ‘trials’ of ordinary existence as the place where we are to experience and find the reign of God-with-us as actual reality” (Willard *Divine Conspiracy*, 383). Life is filled with unavoidable, unexpected, and unfavorable challenges. This point in the triangle helps believers see that life challenges are not to be avoided but embraced as an opportunity for spiritual growth. James 1:2-4 jolts the believer to be both faith-filled and faithful amid all circumstances, trials, tribulations, temptations, and tests: “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into

various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4 NKJV)

Believers were faced with intense trials such as physical persecution in the day of James. Many believers at the time wanted to escape the trials, but James reveals that each trial one faces is a tool of further growth. To the point where one is further perfected through seemingly undesirable circumstances. This point in the triangle coupled with this passage from James encourages believers to embrace challenges and circumstances as an opportunity to see God’s divine competency and presence through what one may face (Willard *Divine Conspiracy*, 383). Everyday people have everyday challenges that may be tests of moral character, sickness, relational turmoil, or financial crisis. A growth mindset in all circumstances will further the inward and outward transformation.

3. *Planned Disciplines to Put on New Heart*- This point of the triangle is about partnership. Willard highlights Colossians 3:5-10 as the process of putting on the new heart. The Apostle Paul outlines the believer’s response to the work of Christ, and how individuals are to participate in the renewing process,

Therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to

put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.

This is where the “whatsoever” it takes comes into play for the life of the disciple (Willard 384). After receiving the intervention of the Holy Spirit, and understanding the life, work, and love of Christ, it is now the responsibility of the disciple to pursue a life that models the actions and attitudes of Christ. The strategic stripping away of attitudes and behaviors that are representative of a life marked by immorality, lust, greed, anger, wrath, and betrayal. The planned disciplines of putting on the new heart has emerged as spiritual disciplines. “A discipline is any activity within our power that we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort” (Willard *Divine Conspiracy*, 386).

Willard’s Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth is a beneficial and comprehensive work on the different aspects of spiritual growth. The three points of the triangle display a healthy partnership between humanity and divinity while holding to a healthy eternal perspective not daring to cheapen the continued work of Christ in a believer’s life, nor the responsibility of the believer. The last point of the Willard’s Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth, Planned Disciplines to Put on New Heart, discussed above requires a more extensive look at commonly practiced spiritual disciplines. This next section will highlight disciplines named in Richard Foster’s work: *Celebration of Disciplines*.

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines for Christians have their roots in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Having observed the personal piety of Jesus, the disciples asked Him, “Lord,

teach us to pray just as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1). Jesus taught them what would become referred to as, “The Lord’s Prayer.” Something about the prayer life and practice of Jesus was noticeably different so much so that His disciples asked Him to teach them to pray.

Jesus overtly challenged the accepted religious practices of the day, eating when the Pharisees expected Him to fast. “At that time Jesus passed through the grain fields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick and eat some heads of grain. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘See, your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath’” (Matthew 12:1-2). Jesus was not condemning fasting, rather, He was pointing out the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. Later, Jesus would spell it out plainly to them in a series of “woes” (Matthew 23). “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup, so that the outside of it may also become clean” (Matthew 23:25-26). Jesus was after the hearts of humanity not the outward show of religious practice.

The Desert Fathers

During the fourth century AD, a monastic movement in the deserts of Egypt began to flourish. With the advent of Christianity being made the official religion of the Roman Empire in 313 AD, due to the conversion of Emperor Constantine, came a great influx of followers of Christianity. The monastic desert movement in the next century was in reaction. “Society was regarded [by the Desert Fathers] as a shipwreck from which each individual man had to swim for his life” (Merton 3). Their inspiration came from St. Paul, “Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of

your minds” (Romans 12:1). Merton further notes, “What the Father’s sought most of all was their own true self, in Christ. And in order to do this, they had to reject completely the false, formal self, fabricated under social compulsion in the world” (Merton 5).

In the recent history of the church, Richard Foster, a late twentieth century pastor and author, introduced a generation of Christians to spiritual disciplines in his book, *The Celebration of Discipline, The Path to Spiritual Growth*. The book was first published in 1978 and his opening lines ring true today: “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (Foster *The Celebration of Discipline* 1). The spiritual disciplines he highlights are the pathway to a deeper life and are available for all followers of Christ, not just for “spiritual giants.”

Foster begins with the inward disciplines then moves to the outward and corporate disciplines. His Quaker background most certainly influenced his adaption of these spiritual disciplines. “Quakerism began as a spontaneous outpouring of religious fervor but survived because people found its institutions conducive to experiencing the Inward Light and developing Christian character” (Barbour and Frost 107). Having begun in seventeenth century England and spread to the Americas, by the eighteenth century the Quakers became known as “a people who lived by rules” (Barbour and Frost 109). Foster, however, is quick to point out that turning spiritual disciplines into “laws” is “the way of death” (Foster 9). The way of grace is actually through the exercise of spiritual disciplines, albeit not a cheap grace.

Spiritual disciplines, also referred to as spiritual practices, are the disciples' intentional efforts to practice kingdom of living while here on earth. These disciplines are modes of worship and devotion that continue to transform the disciple through worshipping God. Foster refers to the disciplines as "the door to liberation" (Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines* 1). Engaging in spiritual disciplines directly combats superficiality and instant gratification, which Foster refers to as the curse of this age (Foster 1). The disciplined life helps the believer go deeper into the active truth of God in their lives.

Foster's classical spiritual disciplines that are outlined in the book *The Celebration of Discipline* is instructive: (1) inward- meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; (2) outward- simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; and (3) corporate- confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. "These disciplines are considered classical because they are central to experiential Christianity. In one form or another all of the devotional masters have affirmed the necessity of the Disciplines" (Foster 1). Foster's view of the disciplines is not 'dull drudgery' but liberation marked by the keynote of joy (Foster 2). Life in Christ is marked by the joy of salvation (Psalm 51:12). This great joy is the response to being liberated by the Spirit of God through faith, by grace and then being transformed from glory to glory into the *imago Dei*. In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, the Apostle Paul writes about this journey that starts with revelation of Christ, to liberation in the Spirit, and then transformation.

Nevertheless, when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being

transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord (2 Corinthians 3:16-18 NKJV).

When people turns to the Lord in repentance of sin, their eyes have been opened by and to the wonderful revelation of the Savior. That revelatory moment is marked by liberation in and by the Spirit of the Lord. The process does not stop at liberation. Yes, freedom is important, however freedom is not the complete work of Christ. Liberation leads to transformation. This continued process of transformation comes with the believer's faithful engagement with Christ. That faithful engagement with Christ comes through the disciplines. The good news is this experience of revelation, liberation, and transformation is not just for the elite of believers, but for all who call on the name of the Lord. Specifically, Foster highlights that "God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns" (Foster 1). For this reason, the education and exercising of the disciplines should be present in the local church. Ordinary people are pouring into churches of all sizes and styles, but one thing that is in common, they all need to grow spiritually.

Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

In a letter to theologian Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer defined discipleship as an "interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount and the Pauline doctrine of justification and sanctification" (Green and DeJonge 455). Bonhoeffer founded two seminaries outside of the approval of the state Lutheran church and German government, one in Zingst and one in Finkenwalde. Both seminaries were eventually shut down by the Gestapo, the German secret police under Hitler. His students lived in community with Bonhoeffer as he taught

them at Finkenwalde. They would begin and end their days with long worship services. Bonhoeffer would then lead them in academic work in between services. Regarding Christian community, he writes: “What does it mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others for the sake of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that from eternity we have been chosen in Jesus Christ, accepted in time, and united for eternity” (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* 31).

The title to Bonhoeffer’s classic regarding discipleship, *The Cost of Discipleship*, displays his emphasis upon costly grace over cheap grace. “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, it is the Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without the living, incarnate Jesus Christ” (Bonhoeffer, *Cost of Discipleship* 44-45). As a leader within the Confessing Church, the church opposed to government intervention in Germany, Bonhoeffer insisted that those who claimed to be followers of Jesus Christ must live according to His teachings found in the Sermon on the Mount and those of Paul in his epistles.

Is spiritual formation simply an updated way to say discipleship? Spiritual formation does not and should not replace discipleship. Spiritual formation is part of the life of the disciple, but a primary act of the Holy Spirit’s work on the inner person (Teo 140). Spiritual formation and discipleship intersect to develop what Dallas Willard has named as the “Curriculum for Christlikeness” where it is not simply the input of information that causes spiritual growth, but it is when one believes “with their whole being the information they already have as a result of their initial confidence in Jesus (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 349). This inward journey deepens the belief of the

Christian to move from knowledge to faith. Training to be like Christ essentially moves the disciple from having faith in Jesus, to having the faith of Christ (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 350). In chapter 9 of *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard refers to discipleship as the *Curriculum of Christlikeness*. The *Curriculum of Christlikeness* in conjunction with Diane Chandler's work *Christian Spiritual Formation* offers a very unique integrated approach for both personal and relational wholeness. In this work, she integrates Christian Spiritual Formation, also referred to as CSF, with seven dimensions of humanity. These seven dimensions of human wholeness are: Spirit, Emotions, Relationships, Intellect, Vocation, Physical Health and Wellness, and Resource Stewardship.

The role of spiritual formation in the local church can be answered by asking the following questions. How does the church set the trajectory of spiritual growth and maturity for those in their congregation? What is the role of the local church in the spiritual growth and maturation of congregants? If there is a predominant responsibility of the local church to help individuals grow spiritually, are there clear growth tracks that are present in churches?

Prior to spiritual formation becoming popular, C.S. Lewis called for it in his book, *Mere Christianity*, by stating: "Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else" (Lewis 171). Ruth Haley Barton in an article featuring five thought leaders in the field of spiritual formation, defines spiritual formation as: "the process of Christ being formed in us for the glory of God, for the abundance of our own lives, and for the sake of others" (Barton, *Spiritual Formation* 96). Very similar to Barton, Mulholland offers a succinct definition of spiritual

formation: “Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others” (Mulholland ch. 1). James Wilhoit of Wheaton College, Richard Foster, and Robert Mulholland agree that spiritual formation should be of the top priorities of the local church (Foster, *Christianity Today*). The call to spiritual formation is written into the essence of Jesus’ commission to His followers to make disciples that will obey His teachings. Wilhoit even goes to the extent of suggesting that “Spiritual formation is the task of the church. Period” (Wilhoit 15).

Christian community and the local church serve as a vital component of spiritual formation in the life of the believer and discipleship. The spiritual growth issues that many churches and church leaders have faced are found in a lack of clarity, conviction, and constructs that promote spiritual growth. Many churches and church leaders have lacked clarity on what spiritual growth is. The lack of clarity of definition has also led to a lack of competency and strategy to develop the constructs necessary to promote spiritual growth on both the individual and communal level. The one challenge that is beyond clarity and competency is conviction. If churches are not convicted about the priority of fostering spiritual formation in individuals nearly nothing will change.

A shift in ministry philosophy must occur for the local church to promote healthy spiritual formation of believers. Many churches are conversion focused. “The focus of conversion model is towards salvation for pre-believers and helping them to stay in churches as Christians after their salvation experience.” (Teo 146). This model is often focused on numerical growth but limits the intentional engagement in sanctification that can come through spiritual formation. The conversion model of ministry is good, but not complete. The Great Commission is not to make converts, but to make disciples. So,

conversion is the first step in the discipleship process. Conversion more clearly defined is the proclamation or confession of faith in the Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. When one believes in their heart, and confesses with their mouth, they are saved. Sins are forgiven, and they are justified by faith. Once justification occurs, then the focus is sanctification. One's faith partners with God through Christ and they are justified, at once.

Sanctification, to be talked about more later, not only requires one's confession of faith, but a commitment of faithfulness to a life that reflects Christ. Spiritual formation exists as the practical steps and constructs that moves one from conversion to transformation. Therefore, a suggested ministry shift from simply conversion model to transformation model churches would lead individuals through intentional processes of spiritual growth marked by both being faith-filled and faithful.

Robert Mulholland gives an analogy of spiritual formation within the faith community as: "We can no more be conformed to the image of Christ outside of corporate spirituality than a coal can continue to burn bright outside of the fire" (Mulholland 145). The church has a role to both develop the individual and further the mission of God. Spiritual formation is the pursuit of the Christian to experience the complete humanity that is only available through Christ Jesus. Many church leaders, and Christian educators have dedicated much time and effort to understand and communicate the cycle(s), systems, and journey of spiritual growth. There appears to be a consensus from many that there should be a clear view of spiritual growth and progress presented in the local church. Rick Warren suggests that "people in churches are at one of six levels of commitment: Community, crowd, congregation, committed, core, or commissioned" (Warren 309). The church, in essence, does not make one mature but should show one

what it takes to grow spiritually, and create the space for people to make a commitment to the next step of spiritual growth and mission. Tom Holladay highlights Saddleback Church's Eight Laws of Spiritual Growth that help people move from one level of commitment to the next. Those Eight Laws are: Intentional, Incremental, Personal, Practical, Relational, Multi-dimensional, Seasonal, and Incarnational.

1. Intentional – "Spiritual growth is not accidental. You must intend to grow; you must make a choice to grow. (Holladay)" Churches are to set systems and constructs that move church attenders to the next level in their walk with Christ.
2. Incremental- Systematic steps of spiritual growth. Clearly defined steps help individuals move incrementally through in their commitment to Christ, and involvement in the local assembly of believers.
3. Personal- "There is no one-size-fits-all for spiritual growth." encourage personal spiritual growth with spiritual growth campaigns and initiatives. While the spiritual growth campaign may be church wide, it engages the individual and their relationship with Christ.
4. Practical- Establishing spiritual habits that promote spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is practiced with spiritual disciplines such as bible reading, scripture memorization, prayer, quiet time with God. This is where spiritual disciplines are instituted and encouraged.
5. Relational- Holladay says: "We grow in community with others... Hebrews 10:24-25, "Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do,

but encourage one another... (NLT).” While spiritual growth is personal, it is not alone.

6. Multi-dimensional- “We are to grow warmer through fellowship, deeper through discipleship, stronger through worship, broader through ministry, and larger through mission.” Each dimension listed above encourages and solidifies spiritual growth in individuals and ultimately the church.
7. Seasonal- The local church can help individuals understand that spiritual growth looks and feels different in different seasons of life. It is not that one stops growing, but that growth is different in different seasons. Some seasons of growth may come through an abundance of individual time with Christ through personal inward forming disciplines, while other seasons of growth may be marked by outward formation of mission and service.
8. Incarnational- “growth is not about what you can accomplish; rather, it’s about the person of Jesus Christ living inside you.” Spiritual growth helps individuals recognize that Christ lives inside of them, and is forming them from the inside out. (Holladay)

How can the church foster spiritual formation and growth? In addition to the Eight Laws of Spiritual Growth listed above, the church can encourage and foster the continued process of spiritual formation through biblical education of expectations of spiritual maturity with the use of assessments, curriculum, and other group dynamics (Gushiken 195; Barber and Baker 270). The local church can assist in the development of groups and structures that encourage congregants to develop what has been named the *ecclesiola in ecclesia*—“the little church within the church” (Foster, *Spiritual*

Formation). In many churches this has often been referred to as small groups or life groups. Despite what these groups are called, the *ecclesiola* in ecclesia, gives place for the church to truly function as the body of Christ as outlined in 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. This scripture is a reminder that believers are many members, but one body joined together in Christ to support, suffer, and succeed with one another. The local church has the opportunity to foster healthy environments where continued spiritual growth and formation can occur. Whether this is done by small groups, spiritual growth campaigns, weekly Bible studies, Sunday services, or missions' trips, the church has been given a platform to help people grow into the likeness of Christ both in personhood and mission.

Discernment: Hearing as Disciple

Spiritual disciplines increase one's ability to hear and obey God's word. Christian meditation simply put "is the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word" (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 17). The disciplined life does not simply mute other messages and voices that people are constantly faced with, but it helps an individual hear God's voice more clearly. Life is filled with words, opinions, distractions, and dilemmas that cause difficulty in relating with God. Liebert, in her work *The Way of Discernment*, describes discernment as one of the most important Christian spiritual practices:

How are we to live our lives thoughtfully and faithfully in the midst of all the forces, options, and decisions that characterize modern life? Discernment, the Christian practice of seeking God's call in the midst of the decisions that mark one's life, may very well be the single most important Christian spiritual practice for dealing with this contemporary dilemma (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* intro).

Discernment answers the basic questions: A) Where is God in this? B) How do I know what God desires of me? C) What is the will of God? Each of these questions are vital to the Christian journey (Liebert ch. 1).

Discernment has multiple definitions, but primarily is defined as the ability to judge and decide between truth and error. In the Christian context, it captures the ability to understand and apply God's word and obtain direction and understanding from God. Throughout the Bible, the combination of truth and wisdom points towards discernment. Discernment without truth is disillusionment. Discernment void of wisdom is hypocrisy. To know God's truth is to apply God's truth in how one lives, leads, and loves. Truth indicates what is correct and acceptable in the eyes of God, and wisdom is the application of truth in the life of the believer. Liebert synthesizes what the contemporary understandings of discernment are:

- Discernment is a gift: "Discernment, then, arises from God's gracious initiative: We do not discern except that God works the work within us" (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
- Discernment is simultaneously a habit of faith: Discernment is an act of faith because one chooses to believe that God has a larger plan that extends beyond a moment, and that He has a future waiting to be grasped.
- Discernment is the desire to follow the Spirit of Jesus, who is present within daily life. We grow in this gift of discernment through fidelity to a discerning lifestyle which demands trust, includes failure, and matures through self-reflection and prayer: "Nothing is wasted- neither success nor failure, happiness nor grief, faith nor doubt" (Liebert ch. 1). This particular point

correlates with one of the points from Dallas Willard's "Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth" where he emphasizes that ordinary events play an indispensable role in one's spiritual growth (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 383).

- Discernment grounds the capacity to live a fully and truly human life. Christian discernment means living in such a way that the basic fact that we are daughters and sons of God shapes and colors our decisions, both small and great.
- Discernment is a process: "We gradually 'put on the mind of Christ' (Phil. 2: 5; 1 Cor. 2: 14) every time we search out and choose that which better aligns us with the Jesus of the Gospels, the Christ of faith" (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1). Even though discernment is concrete, particular, and ultimately personal, Christian discernment is always set within the larger community of faith: The involvement of the larger community reiterates Foster's emphasis that many spiritual disciplines are best practiced as a community of believers. Specifically, the spiritual practices of: confession, worship, guidance, and celebration (Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines* 141).
- Discernment is a framework that enables us to join in partnership with God (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).

Biblical Foundation of Discernment

There are three primary words used for discern, discernment, and discerning in the Old Testament: *biyn* (understand), *nakar* (to know), and *shama* (to hear). Each of these words point towards having some level of insight to make wise judgements,

properly discriminating knowledge. The proper discrimination of knowledge is a marker for the maturing Christian. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The distinction of the believer is their mind which houses knowledge, wisdom, and the ability to rightly judge truth from lie.

Discernment is the fruit of the transformed mind of the believer.

A discerning mind is having the mind of Christ which is what Paul exhorted believers to have in Philippians 2:5: “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.” Paul’s exhortation to believers was a calling to relate with others as Christ did. The transformed mind is closely connected to the transformed heart that enables one to love God and others as Jesus commands His followers to do. In the New Testament there are five different words used for discern: *anakrino* (to examine, judge, ask question, or search), *diakrinō* (doubt, judge, or contend), *diakrasis*, *dokimazō* (to prove, try approve, or allow), and *kritikos* (discerner). Each of the Greek words used for discern (discerning, discernment) points towards having clear knowledge of good and evil, or critical knowledge of something to make a proper judgement. “The Latin root of the verb “to discern” means to discriminate... in the Christian spiritual tradition, discernment refers to the process of sifting out what is of God, discriminating between that which expresses God’s call and anything that runs counter to it” (Liebert, *Way of Discernment*, ch. 1).

Spiritual discernment takes the idea of being able to clearly judge, and clearly see a step further. It incorporates the activity of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer to hear the voice of God, understand and apply scripture, and receive guidance from the God concerning decisions and general life. A highly functional definition for the Christian context is found in Challies’ writing: “Discernment is the skill of understanding

and applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong” (Challies 72).

What is the role of discernment in the life of the believer?

Discernment, while slightly obscure, solidifies one’s ability to see and hear according to God’s will. Ephesians 5:17 says “Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is.” Tom Challies, in his work *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, suggest that discernment is proof of three things: 1) a spiritual life, 2) spiritual growth, and 3) spiritual maturity (Challies 27-29). Discernment impacts the way one thinks and lives because it us discovering God’s will, and shaping one’s life to in faithfulness to the vision of God (Lavalle 13; Challies 107). Those who are followers of Christ display the fruit of discernment by understanding and obeying the will of God which causes growth and maturity. Challies would go on to say that “Spiritual discernment is our frontline defense against worldliness, the very opposite of thinking rightly about God” (98).

Throughout the Bible there are several scriptures that point towards the need for discernment in life, and especially the life of a believer. 1 Kings 3:6-9 Solomon, the son of David is given an opportunity of a lifetime, to ask anything of God, and he asks for an understanding heart, and the ability to discern between good and evil. This request pleased God to the point that God blessed Solomon with wisdom beyond what had ever been seen, and riches and honor that were unparalleled to any other king. Discernment gives one the ability to separate the truth of God from error distinguishing right from wrong in all kinds of settings and situations (Challies 121). Discernment is a vital component of spiritual growth and vitality. This section will primarily focus on spiritual

discernment in the life of a believer. The essence of discernment is the ability to clearly judge between right and wrong. Discernment is hearing and understanding God's voice, obtaining spiritual direction, and making sound decisions that reflect God's will.

The discerning individual sees both good and bad decisions as opportunities to be further formed in the likeness of Christ. Discernment has transcended typical Christian settings such as church meetings and individuals making decisions. Discernment is now a term that is being used in secular environments. Discernment is being used among executives and account managers to help determine the direction of a company, or organization (Liebert, *The Way of Discernment* ch. 1). Good Christian decision-making needs to be multifaceted. Learning to make faith-based decisions is essential for church leadership, congregational health, and personal development. If the ultimate desire is to please God, then decision making is more of a discovery process where one gains further clarity of who God is. Decision making is a very complex aspect of everyday life. People make decisions in a variety of ways. These include using physical intuition: physical intuition "I know in my gut", spending time in solitude, the process of elimination, imagination, trial and error, or discussing an important decision with trusted individuals such as pastors, counselors, friends, family, or a church community (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 2). Everyone is faced with the task to make both large and small decisions on any given day at any time. The mark of a spiritually mature person is not simply making a decision but being able to discern and obey God's voice in the midst of all the variations and challenges that one may be presented with in life. *The Way of Discernment* gives seven steps for decision making that also continue the journey of spiritual formation in a believer's life.

1. Seek spiritual freedom, the inner disposition upon which discernment rests and which creates the climate for discernment. (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
2. Discover and name the issue or choice you face: “Carefully framing the issue not only helps to clarify the matter for discernment, but it also actually begins the process of sifting and discriminating that is at the heart of discernment” (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
3. Gather and evaluate appropriate data about the issue: “Discernment is not magic. We have to do our homework” (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
4. Reflect and Pray: throughout the process it is important to renew your attention to prayer.
5. Formulate a tentative decision: this is like making an educated hypothesis, but not formally submitting your hypothesis as the final decision. (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
6. Seek Confirmation: “Seek confirmation from God and the community of faith. ‘In confirmation, we ‘discern the discernment’ We ‘test the leadings’” (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).
7. Assess the process: “We look back over and examine the entire process. Was there anywhere that we acted without spiritual freedom? Any place where peace deserted us? Any part filled with anxiety? We let some time pass and look to see what kind of fruit has appeared in our lives and the lives of others as a result” (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1).

Scripture has a vital role in discerning the will and voice of God. A foundational belief that God will not contradict Himself, would require one to understand what He has already said. The primary vehicle of communication of God to His people is through His word. Paul reminds Timothy of this very fact in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete thoroughly equipped for every good work. (NKJV)” The prophet Isaiah says,

For just as rain and snow fall from heaven and do not return there without saturating the earth and making it germinate and sprout, and providing seed to sow and food to eat, so My word that comes from My mouth will not return to Me empty, but it will accomplish what I please and will prosper in what I send it to do. (CSB, Isaiah 55:10-11) If one is convinced that scripture is true, and God will operate within the framework of scripture a solid foundation of discerning God’s voice is present. “Spiritual discernment equips us to believe in God in a way that is consistent with his revelation of himself. It equips us to know and serve Him rightly” (Challies, 107). Discovering and understanding more about God is an act of discerning God’s voice and will. The more one discovers about God through scripture, the more equipped one will be to separate what is good and evil, what is true and false, and what is godly and ungodly. Discernment is a partnership, process, and a lifestyle. Discernment is a partnership of intentionally partnering with God in our everyday life to understand and follow truth. It is also a process of intentionally seeking out the will of God with a hope of being on one accord with Him in both big and small decisions that we face in life. Lastly, we understand that

discernment is ultimately a heart posture, or lifestyle, of a disciple. The process of discipleship may change as the partnership and posture grows.

Holy Spirit and Discernment

Discernment is evidence of the activity of the Holy Spirit. In John 14:26 Jesus declared that the Holy Spirit will continue to guide His followers according to truth. Often the activity of the Holy Spirit is overlooked, but it is absolutely necessary for one to make a spiritual decision that reflects and honors God. The Holy Spirit reveals what we have yet to learn or discover about God and reminds us of what we already have learned about God and the teachings of Christ. The Counselor, Holy Spirit, impresses truth on our hearts that is in line with scripture, and leads believers in a way that honors God's will and word. The spirit of God is vital for one hearing and discerning the voice of God and His will. One of the spiritual gifts that Paul names is the ability to distinguish between spirits (1 Corinthians 12:10). This is often referred as the gift of discernment (Challies 128). The gift of distinguishing spirits is the Holy Spirit inspired ability to both determine what are godly words and deeds and separate what is true from what is false (Challies 131).

Romans 8:14-16 says "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God. (NKJV)" Being led by the Spirit of God is the result of a faithful and faith-filled relationship with Christ. The role of the Holy Spirit is to remind the believer that they are in a secure relationship with Christ. The result of this reminder is confidence and clarity in God's will for one's life as a child of

God. This confirms what Dallas Willard says is guideline number one to hearing God: “Love God with all our being...Only our communion with God provides appropriate context for communications between us and him” (Willard, *Hearing God* ch. 2).

The Church and Discernment

It is important to understand that discernment is not just an individualistic practice, it is vital for the community of believers, the church, as well. Foster, Challies, and Liebert all zero in on the importance of discernment on a corporate level.

Discernment is awareness of God’s activity in your life. Integrating a daily practice of pausing, reflecting, and listening for God’s activity opens the heart and mind to hear and follow the voice of God. Discernment is interwoven in Foster’s spiritual disciplines listed in *Celebration of Disciplines* because the disciplines create space to hear and obey God’s voice as an individual and a community. “God does guide the individual richly and profoundly, but he also guides groups of people and can instruct the individual through the group experience” (Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines* 176).

Discernment is not just in the decision making of the church but also in the defense of the church. “Discernment functions like the church's immune system, protecting the body from false teaching” (Challies 183). Discernment must be applied on a daily basis for the church to withstand the sinful drift to worldliness. 1 John 4:1, the beloved Apostle John writes to the church: “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. (NKJV)” With these words, John stood as a gatekeeper to truth for the community of believers. He encouraged them to not be deceived by false teachings and spiritual activities. Discernment serves as a weapon of spiritual warfare that keeps the

believer and the church from being ensnared by the enemy's cunning craftiness and lies. Disciples with the skill and ability to discern between truth and lie is needed for the church to partner with God on His mission and vision to see more disciples made. Understanding and following the activity of God, will launch the believer and the church into a life of mission.

Moving from Inward formation to Outward Mission

Formation of the spirit is a posture of discovery and pursuit of God's design for humanity in personhood and mission. Spiritual formation helps combat the consumeristic mindset of the secular culture in which we live. Spiritual disciplines keep the heart and soul fixed on Jesus. Hirsch shares about the deceptive dangers of consumerism in our culture by saying:

One of the most alluring religious appeals of consumerism is that it offers us a new immediacy, a living alternative to what heaven has always stood for in the Judeo-Christian tradition- the fulfillment of all longings... Offered 'heaven now.' We give up the ultimate quest in pursuit of that which can be immediately consumed... Consumerism has all the distinguishing traits of outright paganism- we need to see it for what it really is (Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways* 111).

Spiritual formation is the continued exercising of freedom that is afforded through salvation, and it is the constant divorce from bondage of sin presented through media, material, and me. Spiritual formation is the continued exercising of freedom that is afforded through salvation, is the constant divorce from bondage of sin presented through media, material, and me. Yes, me, the biggest idol that many face is themselves. This idol is fueled by self-gratification and greed. Contemporary Christians would be familiar with

most of the spiritual disciplines Foster cites, all perhaps except for “Simplicity,” and “Solitude.” “Simplicity is freedom. Duplicity is bondage. Simplicity brings joy and balance. Duplicity brings anxiety and fear” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 79). He goes on to cite the Shaker hymn, “Tis a Gift to be Simple” (‘Tis a gift to be simple, ‘tis a gift to be free”). Simplicity keeps one’s heart from being entangled with civilian affairs such as material gain. Foster articulates this modern-day struggle by saying: “We are trapped in a maze of competing attachments” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 80). Competing attachments to possessions, people, and false ideologies we have built to make life seem meaningful. Simplicity is not a renouncement of all possessions, but a proper perspective of possessions. “Asceticism finds no place for a ‘land flowing with milk and honey.’ Simplicity rejoices in this gracious provision from the hand of God” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 80). How does this impact disciples and living out their mission for God? Simplicity helps the disciple to “shun anything that distracts you from seeking first the kingdom of God” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 95). When one is content with the provision of God they are free to serve the purposes of God.

The spiritual discipline of “solitude” was most likely not as well-known as some of the other disciplines like prayer and fasting. “Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 96). What are the benefits of solitude? “The fruit of solitude is increased sensitivity and compassion for others. There comes a new freedom to be with people. There is new attentiveness to their needs, new responsiveness to their hurts” (Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* 108). Those who study social behavior are touting the benefits of solitude as well.

Throughout history, many philosophers, spiritual leaders, and artists have attested to the benefits of solitude. For example, following a common template for spiritual leaders, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and the Buddha all sought solitude and then returned to share with others what they discovered. Likewise, many writers, such as Thoreau, Dickinson, Kipling, and Kafka have been noted for the role solitude played in their creative processes (*Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 21).

Increased compassion and creative capacity are benefits of solitude. In a culture that touts “24/7 365” access to goods and services, solitude can be difficult to find and maintain.

There is a growing need for spiritual formation and growth to move beyond the individual care of the soul to the outward movements of the souls that extend the Kingdom of God in the earth. Spiritual formation promotes active participation in God’s plan of redemption of humanity through mission and the spreading of the gospel. There is a great dichotomy that many people find themselves in: being and doing. As people are transformed and formed into the likeness of Christ, being like Christ results in doing like Christ. Spiritual formation and soul care should incorporate some level of mission carrying out the heart of Christ from Matthew 25. Being like Christ is a matter of doing like Christ in the realm of social justice, evangelism, and visiting the sick and imprisoned. Spiritual formation is not compartmentalized to the individual impact but intended to extend the love and ministry of reconciliation that the believer has been given through Christ (2 Cor. 5:20). Christopher J. H. Wright stresses that the biblical hermeneutic of mission, reveals the heart of God and unlocks the grand narrative of the story of God (ch. 2). If the goal of spiritual formation is to discover a greater sense of

God, then it is also to discover God's mission. The Christian upon coming to Christ becomes a change agent for each broken and sin blemished area of creation. The mission given to Adam to rule, subdue, and multiply has not changed and remains the great invitation from God for creation to participate in His plan for creation. Betsy Barber supports this missional perspective of spiritual formation: "As the church, we who have been made God's family are entrusted with his continuing and compelling action of reconciliation within creation (2 Cor. 5:18). Soul care becomes participation in the reign of the King" (Barber and Baker 274).

Adult Learning and the Local Church

This biblical command of discipleship includes some key words that will set the framework of this section: teach, learn and obey. The goal of the Great commission is not simply a transfer of information, but an invitation to life transformation. "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). To make disciples is to engage the culture with the gospel, establish biblical foundations of the faith, equip people to do the work of ministry, and empower disciples to be devoted to making more disciples (Murrell, *WikiChurch*). This is spiritual education. It is education with the goal of spiritual growth marked by thinking, relating, behaving, and helping others live in a way that represents Christ. This project is aimed at helping adults in the realm of spiritual growth and discipleship within the context of the local church. For effective and continuing education of spiritual growth to exist within the context of the local church, the subject of andragogy will be explored.

Andragogy is the method and teaching of adult learners (Henry 181). “The most overt connections between adult learning theory and spiritual formation is in the realm of Christian higher education” (Beard 249-250). It is most explored in academia, but not the local church. The goal of this section is to explore the impacts that adult learning theory could have on discipleship and spiritual growth practices in the local church. This section will answer this basic question: How can andragogy and related adult learning theories be utilized in the effectiveness of spiritual growth and discipleship methods of the local church?

Malcolm Knowles, in his classic, *Andragogy in Action, Applying Modern Principles of Adult Education*, explains the differences between the “pedagogical model” of education and the “andragogical”.

Traditional Learning – The Pedagogical Model

The traditional pedagogical model of learning focuses on the subject matter more than the learner. With this model the learner is primarily subjected to the subject, and knowledge is expected be retained based upon the instructors guidelines. More specifically the five points of the pedagogical model are outlined below:

- Regarding the concept of the learner (and therefore, through conditioning in prior school experience, the learner’s self-concept): “The learner is, by definition, a dependent personality...” as a child learner. “The only role for the learner, therefore, is that of submissively carrying out the teacher’s directions” (Knowles 8)

- Regarding the role of the learner's experience: "It is the experience of the teacher that counts...." (Knowles 8). As opposed to what little experience a child learner may have.
- Regarding readiness to learn: "Students become ready to learn what they are told that they have to learn in order to advance to the next grade level; readiness is largely a function of age" (Knowles 8)
- Regarding orientation to learning: Learning and curriculum are orientated around subjects, not the limited experience of a child.
- Regarding motivation to learn: "Students are primarily motivated by external pressures from parents and teachers, competition for grades, the consequences of failure, and the like." (Knowles 9).

A New Approach to Learning – The Andragogical Model

The new approach to learning emphasizes the relationship of the learner's life experiences, the subject, and the learning environment. The readiness to learn is primarily spurred by the learner rather than the structured environment alone. In this model of learning, the presented subject is many not be the only thing learned. Learning is an experience for the learner that can apply to multiple areas of life.

- Regarding the concept of the learner: The learner is self-directed, and as adults, "we develop a deep psychological need to be perceived by others, and treated by others, as capable of taking responsibility for ourselves" (Knowles 9). When adult learners are not given the opportunity to be self-directing in their learning, they can become resentful and resistant to the learning environment.

- Regarding the role of the learner's experience: Adults come with greater volume and different quality of experience than youth. This means that "adults are themselves the richest resources for one another; hence the greater emphasis in adult education on such techniques – group discussion, simulation exercise, laboratory experiences, field experiences, problem-solving projects, and the like...." Knowles notes "a more subtle and perhaps even more potent consequence of adults' greater experience: it becomes increasingly the source of an adult's identity" (Knowles 10-11). For example, when a child is asked who he or she is, that child will most likely name parents and school and church as ways to identify self. For adults, however, one's experience makes up much of their identity. "So if in an educational situation an adult's experience is ignored, not valued, not made use of, it is not just the experience that is being rejected; it is the person" (Knowles 11).
- Regarding readiness to learn: "The andragogical model assumes that adults order to perform more effectively in their lives" (Knowles 11). There are things that can be done as well to induce learning such as effective role models, career planning, and assessments that help highlight the gaps in one's learning. One of the most helpful assessments is a person acknowledging "the gap between where they are and where they want and need to be" (Knowles 11). Hammond and Cronshaw refer to this stage of learning as "conscious incompetency" which will be discussed later (7).
- Regarding orientation to learning: "Because adults are motivated to learn after they experience a need in their life situation, they enter an educational activity

with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning” (Knowles 11). This makes it important from the beginning to make it clear that the relevance of the learning will enable them to better meet life’s challenges and solve problems.

- Regarding motivation to learn: While “adults will respond to some external motivators – a better job, a salary increase, and the like – the andragogical model predicates that the more potent motivators are internal – self-esteem, recognition, better quality of life, greater self-confidence, self-actualization and the like...” (Knowles 12).

The goal of education within the local church is that individuals and the larger community bear the fruit of knowledge and obedience to the teachings of Christ which is a transformed life. A transformed life reflects the biblical standards of Christian character outlined in scriptures such as John 15:5 and Galatians 5:22-23. These standards of Christian character are marked by brotherly love, joyfulness, kindness, perseverance, and self-control. Richard Holt’s, *Adult learning theories and the implications for the local church*, spotlighted researchers’ efforts to determine the factors that actually produce substantive life change. Bible reading has often served as a major impetus that produces life change and growth, however, there appears to be a large number of Christ-followers that own a Bible but fail to read it (Holt 142). The local church therefore must build more strategically in its efforts of increasing interest and discipline of spiritual education in the life of believers. The question that begs to be answered is: what can be done to help individuals become more engaged with Christian education, spiritual formation, and discipleship in the local church?

With the variances of ages and stages present in the local church, an awareness of the needs of the learner emerges as a top priority when it comes to adult education the context of the church. Many churches are in the tension of keeping people over 60 while still reaching people 40 and below. The age range in the local church is very vast ranging from young adults (24-34), middle adulthood (34-60), mature adult/ later adulthood (60-75), and very old (75+). This wide range of adult learners presents the church with a complex challenge. Richard Johnson recognizes the complexity of spiritual formation and continuing discipleship within the local church. This complexity continues to develop due to the vast age range, increased life spans, and quality of life in maturing adults (Johnson 39). Johnson goes on to say that the least understood, and most overlooked age group in the church is maturing adults. Churches typically give little focus to faith formation in this age group. In many age classification breakdowns this generation is also referred as the silent generation. Essentially the church must utilize interdisciplinary methods of andragogy, spiritual formation, and discipleship to answer this challenge.

The local church while faced with this challenge, also is faced with an opportunity to discover effective practices of adult faith formation, and life-long learners. A healthy Christian education seminar or class will help the student know what they will learn and how it will be measured at the conclusion of a class or seminar. A detailed objective outlining this information increases one's ability to retain and apply the information. Jesus does an amazing job with this in His Great Commission. He summarized His entire mission in just one statement: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20

NKJV). “The purpose of teaching in the Christian context is to support the making of disciples” (Holt 139). While the information that is taught is very important, Jesus’s objective was not simply information exchange, but life transformation. The Great Commission is about the learners having a transformative experience due to the information shared. Richard Holt concluded that the following four principles should be representative for adults in Christian education (Holt 152-153).

1. The Why? “Adults need to know why they need know” (Holt 152). The adult learner wants to know why the information is pertinent before the information is shared. What is the relevancy of the information from a Bible study, discipleship group, leadership training, or small group? An aspect of spiritual formation is outward formation which captures the essence of the Christian moving beyond personal holiness to participating in God’s mission. Individuals who participate in some outward action are able to process and grasp information at a greater more meaningful rate. Many adult learners want to know the significance of information before they commit to learning it.
2. Doing is as good as listening: “Adults need to learn experientially” (Holt 153). Adults most often learn better through experience rather than lecture. Participatory education increases and encourages the adult learner to engage with new ideas ending in transformation of ideas, affections, and aspirations.
3. Does this solve a problem? “Adults approach learning as problem solving” (Holt 153). Effective Christian education should address the identified needs of the participants. Classes and seminars that address identified needs entices the adult learner to engage with new information with less resistance.

4. What is the value? “As individuals mature, ‘Their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application’” (Beard 254). Adults learn best when there is some level of immediate responsibility associated with the learning. Adults are most ready to learn when faced with a situation that demands it.

The adult learner benefits from moments of conscious incompetence because they are most ready to learn when faced with a situation that demands they either apply learned information or that they acquire new information to solve a problem. Humanity has an impossible goal, and a fundamental problem. The impossible goal is to be like Christ, the fundamental problem is sin. With this goal and problem coexisting, all people live in one or two stages of change in regard to spiritual transformation: unconscious incompetence, or conscious incompetence. The stage of unconscious incompetency, “People in this stage are simply not aware of the issue at hand; they are incompetent, and they don’t even know it... At this stage holy discontent, accompanied by an imaginative search for answers will move people toward the changes necessary” (Hammond and Cronshaw 7). The problem is not always that clear to a person, but the symptoms are. At this stage it is the leader’s responsibility to present the problem or help people identify the problem. The fundamental problem is that all have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God, and all are in need of a Savior. Jesus commissions His followers to present the answer to that problem to all people: make disciples, teaching them to obey things I have taught you. Once the problem is identified, the learning gap is ready to be filled, this is the stage of conscious incompetency. “Here the learner becomes aware of the issue but at the same time becomes aware of their own relative incompetence inadequately ‘doing

it' ... This stage involves significant amounts of unlearning- even repentance where necessary – in order to move on” (Hammond and Cronshaw 7-8).

Holt’s four principles are reflective of Malcolm Knowles five assumptions of andragogy, and Roberto and Minkiewicz’s best practices of adult faith formation (Beard, 254; Roberto and Minkiewicz 2-5). Transformative learning theory has a clear correlation with the Great Commission and Christian education (Beard; Holt; Roberto). Each of these theories and practices (andragogy, discipleship, adult faith formation, and spiritual formation) share a common goal of transformation.

Learning Theories and their Impact on Developing Effective, Life-Changing Christian Education

The goal of the Great Commission is a calling to go and make disciples, teaching them to obey the teachings of Christ. The goal of Christian education is not simply to impart information about the Bible, but it is meant to encourage significant life change that conforms the learner to reflect the life and teachings of Christ. The objective of any teaching environment therefore should have both moral and missional application resulting in a transformed life. Romans 12:1-2 highlights that the believer is not to be conformed to the pattern of the world, but be transformed by the renewing of their mind. A robust Christian education presence in the local church fosters a healthy learning environment where people’s faith can be nurtured.

Christian education is meant to engage the entire person leading to a transformed life (Bass, *Process Not Program* 1). Faith formation emerged as common terminology in Christian education among adults. Faith formation emphasizes that education is not the only goal of the church. It stresses that the goal is the reformation of the entire person.

Churches have an opportunity to foster environments that engage adults to nurture faith and encourage transformation. Diana Butler Bass's profound statement captures the church's role and opportunity to nurture the faith of adults:

“Churches are communities of transformation – places where people come to encounter God and know God more deeply...Adult formation is the gathering and strengthening place for learning to be a Christian, for mentoring others in faith, and for practicing faith corporately” (Bass 2).

The busyness of adults that attend church require other means of effective discipleship. “Discipling busy adults calls for churches, associations, and judicatories to determine the best ways to decentralize discipleship opportunities” (Hammett 110). Adult learning theory used in the context of the local church and discipleship shows the importance of decentralizing discipleship. Many universities and colleges have developed learning settings for non-traditional adult learners. These learning settings include but are not limited to: cohort learning environments, and the use of online platforms (video, and discussion boards). College education has been decentralized from the campus and classroom to allow busy adults to continue to pursue college degrees. The decentralizing is not meant to replace the traditional classroom, but to supplement it. Likewise, the traditional classroom setting still maintains some effectiveness for Sunday school and discipleship, however there are other opportunities that will help further the church's discipleship efforts.

Decentralizing discipleship in the church is a matter of allowing the discipleship process to be more incarnational, and the use of other resources. Hammett lists several

ideas that could help disciple busy adults. Many of the ideas are centered around the theme of making discipleship mobile and incarnational. Here are some of the ideas:

- Use of Media: the use of media to go where the disciples are, in their homes, offices, vacation homes, cars, boats, etc.” (Hammett 111).
- Use of Support Groups: “The teachable moments for adults are when they need to learn” (Hammett 111). Adults are more likely to learn in support groups where they can ask questions, and converse with people that are gathered for mutual support and encouragement. When people are gathered together based on a similar need, it aides the transformative learning experience.
- Retreats/Seminars/Workshops: “Such events offer excellent short-term or long-term discipline for adults” (Hammett 112). If churches host strategic spiritual growth seminars and retreats, it can serve as a strategic moment of spiritual growth and enlightenment that will translate into daily practices.
- Meal times: “Meals are much-overlooked opportunities for effective discipleship for busy adults” (Hammett 112). Inviting people to have a physical meal while serving them a spiritual meal creates an opportunity for effective discipleship. Inviting people to have a physical meal while serving them a spiritual meal. The sharing of a meal reflects life on life moments of Jesus who spent time feeding His followers and eating with His disciples.

These ideas along with other adult learning theories will surely help the church make disciples. Three primary adult learning theories that research suggests should be utilized in adult Christian education in the local church are: Self-Directed learning,

Experiential learning, and Transformative Learning (Holt 170). Using each of these theories allows for a more integrated approach to the different elements of Christian education such as basic Bible knowledge, Christian doctrine, ecclesiology, worldview, and Christian behavior.

1. Self-Directed Learning – learning theory encourages learners to take more autonomy over the content and desire to learn
2. Experiential Learning – learning theory promotes active learning (immediate application of information) rather than passive learning (sitting and receiving information) mainly through role plays, case studies, and simulations (Holt 124). This learning theory interweaves thinking and doing to affect learning. Bible studies that encourage mission projects, and journaling could be utilized in Christian education and discipleship to help learners internalize content.
3. Transformative Learning – “requires fostering change in the underlying belief structures of the learner such as emotion, personal values, and motivation” (Holt 116). In the transformational learning theory, the learner is made aware of the need or opportunity to change and is willing to question or reexamine prior assumptions and beliefs. In relation to Christian education, this learning theory “appears to be well suited to reach deep within the learner and bring about the change for which Jesus seems to be calling” (Holt 104).

Much of transformation and discipleship is captured in life events and transitions. Much of the spiritual growth that church leaders desire to see in believers occurs not only in traditional Bible studies or classes, but also in life events, and experiential learning environments, and truth put into practice (Beard 248). This very fact echoes the value of

participatory learning in the adult. Experience and immersion are effective in the adult learning as it helps the adult make meaning of their lives (Marmon 81).

Marmon's study of missional discipleship, "Cross-Cultural Field Education: A Transformative Learning Experience", revealed that adult learning principles serve as important elements of spiritual formation for individuals engaged in an experiential process of identity formation. The results of this experiential missional discipleship and spiritual formation showed direct correlations between the assumptions of andragogy and the experience of participants (Beard 248). The two primary correlations between spiritual formation and adult learning theory were andragogy and transformative learning theory. Beard acknowledges that there is a little literature that overtly attempts to reveal the connections between spiritual formation, andragogy, and transformative learning theory (Beard 249-250). Many of the thinkers that Beard referenced also appear in the overall body of this dissertation. Some of those thinkers are also referenced throughout this research such as Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Jim Wilhoit, and Robert Mulholland.

Beard, in his work on connecting spiritual formation and adult learning, attempts to fill the void in literature that connects the overlapping principles of spiritual formation and adult learning theory. Spiritual formation and adult learning theory thrive in community and have a focus on the learner. In addition to that, the aim both for andragogy and spiritual formation is transformation in the learner. Both fields focus on holistic development of the individual learner as well as the learning community. The greatest treasures of adult learning and spiritual formation are identity, self-discipline,

transformation, and some aspect of mission. The information taught is meant to move one to greater action, and not simply attain more knowledge.

Spiritual formation, and discipleship in adults is often caught in the gaps and natural movements of life. Life coaching has emerged as a common and effective practice of discipleship and adult education in the local church (Holt 147). While Bible knowledge is important, the transmission of knowledge does not equate to the goal of transformation. If the goal of Christian education and discipleship is to see transformed lives, there must be other methods employed to minimize that ineffectiveness of the local church. Researchers have found coaching as a promising model for teaching in the church (Holt 147 , Hammet 113). Many are in favor of coaching because it helps people navigate gaps and frustrations of life by channeling their frustrations and anxieties to produce action steps that help them both maximize life experiences, and draw on the presence of the Holy Spirit (Hammett 138-139). There are several types of coaches that have emerged that cover leadership, parenting, speaking, business, and more. Coaching is one step removed from teaching and does not replace teaching. As Hammet and Holt both found, coaching provides the proper space and skill to help individuals listen for and learn from life's teachable moments. As described in the four principles of andragogy, adult learners desire to feel responsible for their learning. Much of coaching is helping individuals embrace life and spiritual growth through the lens of a transformative learning experience. Coaching provides the structure and autonomy that aid the adult learner to identify strengths and best practices, increase efficiency and focused actions, and enhance organization of life.

Research Design Literature

This study utilized mixed methods for research and data collection. Mixed methods research allows collected data to be compared or related to provide an in-depth and generalized interpretation (Creswell 269). Qualitative and quantitative methods used included: Surveys, Semi-structured interviews, and participant journals. The crux of the project was an intervention to measure the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar.

Due to the original nature of the intervention, both quantitative and qualitative research was used to provide unique insights to further development of spiritual growth efforts in Divine Unity Community Church. Sensing says, “Qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data critical for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches” (Sensing ch. 3).

Summary of Literature

The local church has a fraction of time to educate, train, and mobilize adults. The presenting challenge of discipleship is prioritizing yet decentralizing disciple making in the local church. The discipleship methods of Jesus and the disciples modeled a balance of incarnational, instructional, and interventive methods of discipleship and mission. Jesus did not stop His mission to disciple. He disciplined while on mission. However, the current state of culture and discipleship in majority churches war against this method. Discipleship has been treated more static rather than organic adaptable.

This project needed input from are several fields of study and ecclesial practice. Primarily discipleship, spiritual formation, adult learning theory, and modern ecclesial works speak to discipleship systems and spiritual development. Methods of cell group

discipleship models found in Mike Breen's and Steve Murrell's discipleship systems have proven valuable to be used in the local church.

The goal of the church is not to increase attendance, but to nurture congregants to engage with the Great Commandment and the Great Commission of Jesus. This requires the mobilization of disciples who make disciples. Dallas Willard's laser focus approach to the life and the mission of the disciple requires both inward and outward formation. Decentralizing discipleship in the church is a matter of allowing the discipleship process to include a healthy balance between instructional and incarnational methods of discipleship and Christian community.

Discipleship and spiritual growth cannot be fully accomplished through the means of a new church program. A church program would allow the measures of success to simply be the size of a gathering, or the amount of people who completed a curriculum or class. The use of adult learning methods as well as spiritual formation are essential for the church to move beyond that paradigm of success. The use of these methods would help the church have an engaging, equipping, and empowering discipleship culture. A rich discipleship culture emphasizes the value of each congregant's spiritual journey and how that individual journey contributes to the overall community of faith. When congregants are able to understand the value of spiritual maturation beyond information it positions the church to be active in God's mission to the world.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter first gives a detailed description of the nature and purpose of this project; the reason I used a mixed methods data collection approach to this qualitative intervention; and a description of the tools that I utilized to measure the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of those who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth course at Divine Unity Community Church.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

In a culture that prioritizes secular academy, collegiate, vocational, and academic education, how can the church create and foster an interest in spiritual growth and ongoing discipleship? Discipleship, spiritual formation, and missional living are often segregated among modern ecclesial thought. The local church should be designed to effectively disciple individuals to grow in Christlikeness both individually and as a community.

The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an eight-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment that focuses on the subjects of discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction

The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an eight-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth

Assessment. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment focuses on the subjects of Discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction. The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar. Participants self-assessed their spiritual maturation using the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar to measure changes.

Research Questions

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

Research Question #1

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding spiritual growth and discipleship among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment prior to the seminar?

To collect data for this question, participants participated in the 4D Spiritual Growth Pre-Test at the start of the 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship Seminar. The data collected for this question provided a baseline that measures the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors prior to the intervention: Questions 1-4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship. Questions 5-9 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of engagement with spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. Questions 10-13 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discernment. Finally questions 14-17 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of direction, living on mission.

Research Question #2

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding spiritual growth and discipleship among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment following the seminar?

To collect data for this question, participants participated in the 4D Spiritual Growth Post-test. The data collected for this question provided a baseline that measured the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors after the intervention: Questions 1-4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship. Questions 5-9 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of engagement with spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. Questions 10-13 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discernment. Finally questions 14-17 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of direction, living on mission.

Research Question #3

What aspects of the 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar contributed most to the observed changes based on the Journey Journal and 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment?

The purpose of this question was to collect further qualitative data to understand a deeper and more authentic impact of the intervention. For this question, participants shared reflections from their Journey Journal to measure their attitudes during and after the spiritual growth seminar. The Journey Journal provided a baseline that measures the participant's self-assessed changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors during and after the 8-week spiritual growth seminar prompted by three Journey Journal questions:

Question number 1 addressed knowledge. Question number 2 addressed behavior.

Question number 3 addressed attitudes. The purpose in using the Journey journal was to assist in my evaluation of participants' engagement, and change on a more authentic level.

The quantitative data collected from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment measured the impact of the intervention. Questions 1-4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship. Questions 5-9 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of engagement with spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. Questions 10-13 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discernment. Finally questions 14-17 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of direction, living on mission.

Ministry Context

A young adult and campus ministry that began in 2005 eventually grew into a church plant in Harrisonburg, Virginia. That church would be named Divine Unity Community Church and was founded in February 2012. Harrisonburg has evolved from a small city with an agricultural and poultry focus, to a cultural melting pot with over 50 languages spoken by the children in our school system. Harrisonburg's nickname "The Friendly City" captures the hope that anyone can feel at home in our city. Divine Unity Community Church is a rapidly growing and very diverse church in age and ethnicity with approximately 35% college or university students, and a growing population of people that are 50 years old or older. In a recent congregational study of this church it has 54% Anglo, 34% Black, 9% other and 4% Hispanic. The majority of the people in this church have some level of post high school education. Those who are beyond traditional college age would be consider middle or working class. The political climate in this area

is in the tension from being traditionally conservative to being more liberal. This political tension is seen in the interaction between the socioeconomic classes, ethnic groups, and moral ethics surrounding the traditional Judeo-Christian faith.

The diversity of Divine Unity Community Church is also reflected in the faith context people have previously come from. Those that are 45 years or older are well-versed in church experience. Many of them have migrated to our church from a wide range of other denominations. Those denominations include but are not limited to: Baptist, Assemblies of God, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Pentecostal, and general Non-Denominational. Several of those of that age range have previously served as leaders, but found themselves burned out, or exited their former church due to church conflict. Those ranging from ages 21-40 represent a wide range of spiritual maturity. Many are new believers that are being exposed to Christian faith for the first time, while others are looking for something deeper and more meaningful out of their Christian formation and mission. The congregation and attendees of this church have noted that they enjoy exegetical teaching and preaching from the Bible that inspires them to live a life for Christ. The teaching and preaching culture of this church contextualizes the significance of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ to be the central component of all aspects of life. That is done in effort to inspire people to embrace an incarnational model of evangelism and discipleship. Individuals are encouraged to maximize and utilize their location, vocation, and recreation as a mission field.

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The goal is to develop a long-term spiritual growth plan for Divine Unity Community Church. As the Matthew 5:6 says: “Those who hunger and thirst for righteousness shall be filled.” There was an open invitation given with the thought that those who are most interested and eager to learn about spiritual growth and discipleship would respond. This contingent of people helped us set the pace of spiritual growth that will reverberate throughout the congregation. To be most effective we needed a group that represented the church’s demographics: Multi-ethnic, multi-generational and co-ed. The aim was to assess a group of at least 12-15 participants that represented a variation of people from different age groups, life stages, spiritual backgrounds, Christian experience, and participation in Divine Unity Community Church. Invitation to this 8-week Spiritual Growth seminar was given to a select group of congregants at Divine Unity Community Church. Pastoral staff made an invitation announcement two different Sundays during all morning services with an electronic sign-up and sent out via "Slack" to all volunteers and leaders. Potential participants were able to sign-up via the DUCC App utilizing Google Forms. Participants were then selected based on the best representation of the congregation of Divine Unity Community Church.

Description of Participants

The group of participants were from the general body of the church and voluntarily signed up for the seminar. Some participants were pre-selected and others volunteered for the seminar. The preselection of some participants ensured that the

seminar had the varied representation of people and levels of involvement to measure the effectiveness of the spiritual growth seminar.

This project did not include parishioners from other congregations in order to expedite the stage of building rapport and trust between facilitator and participant. Also, the emphasis of the project was first to develop a spiritual growth plan for the specific congregation of Divine Unity Community Church. This project excluded minors to emphasize the spiritual maturation in the adults of Divine Unity Community Church.

Ethical Considerations

Each participant was given a consent form prior to taking the pre-test for the spiritual growth seminar giving the facilitator and the facilitator's assistant permission to collect, analyze, and utilize findings from this seminar. In order to maintain confidentiality, all hardcopy information collected was kept in a secure location of the facilitator's locked office. Participants were given assurance of confidentiality for the data collected. When the findings collected were reported each participant had a corresponding number that identified him or her in order to protect His or her identity (Please see Appendix for consent form.) Electronic data was kept on a password protected computer and google form that only I and intervention assistants had access to, and that the data will be destroyed after the project is completed.

Instrumentation

This study was a qualitative intervention that utilized mixed methods for research and data collection. I used mixed-methods for my intervention project with the hopes to get what Sensing refers to as "thicker" interpretation of the data found (Sensing ch. 3). Qualitative and quantitative methods used included: Pre-test and post-test, and electronic

participant journals. The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar. Participants self-assessed their spiritual maturation using the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar to measure changes.

The participant journal, the Journey Journal, encouraged participants to chronicle their process and progress throughout the seminar noting changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors throughout the 8-week spiritual growth seminar. At the conclusion of each seminar session, the participants were given prompted questions to guide their reflections. These three questions were used:

1. Did you find information from today's lesson intriguing? If so, please share.
2. What personal call to action do you sense from today's lesson?
3. On a scale from 1-5 (5 -very strong and 1-not strong at all) how strong do you feel about today's lesson (weekly subject)?

The 8-week seminar covered the 4D Principle of spiritual growth. The 4D principle afforded participants to explore different spiritual growth practices through a bible study that utilized biblical characters, spiritual disciplines, and adult learning principles that contribute to transformation and spiritual growth. From the 8-week study, individuals were coached to develop a more individualized spiritual growth plan in light of the 4D Principle of spiritual growth.

Discipleship is the boot camp of godliness that initiates spiritual fitness. The 3D's that follow (Discipline, Discernment, and Direction), all promote continual growth in the life and service of the disciple. The 4D Spiritual Growth seminar lasted 8 weeks and focused on discipleship, discipline, discernment, and direction in the life of the believer

to promote spiritual growth. The 4D Spiritual Growth seminar outline can be viewed in the appendix.

Expert Review

Due to the original content of the assessment, 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment underwent an expert review.

- Dr. Bill Evans, professor of psychology and leadership at James Madison University, holds a PhD in Psychology, and a MDiv from Duke University. He offered interdisciplinary insights of education and discipleship for the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment.
- Cherelle Johnson holds a Master in the Science of Education from James Madison University and currently serves as an adjunct professor in continuing education, organizational science and adult learning. She offered insights as leader in Divine Unity Community Church, and as a professor's perspective on educating adults.
- Dr. Robert Buchanan, who holds a DMin from Gordon Conwell, and has served as a senior pastor for 15 years and as an Associate Pastor in Divine Unity Community Church currently for 2 years, provided pastoral insights of spiritual growth trends in individuals and congregations.
- Gilpatrick Hornsby, PhD is a professor at James Madison university in the hospitality and tourism management. His insights on methodological approaches to my research helped me expand and separate some questions on the assessment to reach a broader range of thinking among the congregation.

All four of them received a documentation package containing a brief description of the project, purpose statement, research questions, and the 4D Spiritual Growth assessment.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The instruments used, Journey Journal, Pre-test and Post-test, are reliable due to the nature of the research design being an intervention. Reflective inquiry is a recommended qualitative research method to measure understandings, attitudes, and processes (Lowe). Based on research of adult learning, and spiritual formation based on reflection and utilizing life experience have been found to be helpful for spiritual growth (Hammett 109; Holt 152-153). The development of this project utilized the following research topics: ecclesiology, sanctification, spiritual formation, discipleship, discernment, Christian education, and adult learning.

The development of the pre-test and post-test questions were informed by the research of ecclesiology, sanctification, spiritual formation, discipleship, discernment, Christian education, and adult learning. That research is found in chapter 2. Also see appendix C to review the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. Due to the original content of the assessment, the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment underwent an expert review. To ensure the consistency within the qualitative aspect of this study, I served as the facilitator of the spiritual growth seminar.

This is a researcher informed intervention to assess the spiritual growth of individuals in the local church. The development of this project utilized the following research topics: ecclesiology, sanctification, spiritual formation, discipleship, discernment, Christian education, and adult learning. The language of the 4D Spiritual Growth assessment underwent an expert review to communicate carefully and clearly to

people of different educational and cultural backgrounds. The use of the Likert scale gave participants a broader range to express were any changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors as a result of the spiritual growth seminar. The results found through this should offer a framework for pastors and leaders to implement spiritual growth seminars in the local church.

Data Collection

This 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar was preceded with the pre-test of the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. At the beginning of the first session, I welcomed the participants with light refreshments. Many adults are looking for healthy friendships, and learn best through relationship (Hammett 109). This time was given for casual introductions to foster an environment of relationship and group learning. After the time of casual introductions, I explained the purpose of this research and the significance 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, and Journey Journal. I reiterated the importance of the matter of spiritual growth in the local church and how this research will contribute to improving the church's future discipleship and spiritual growth design.

Prior to the first session each participant gave consent to the facilitator and the facilitator's assistant to collect, analyze, and utilize findings from this seminar. Each participant was given access to a digital copy of the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment to complete prior to content instruction in the first session. I read through the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment aloud to ensure clarity and give opportunity for participants to ask questions at any time during the completion of the assessment. Completed assessments were password protected on google forms, and access to the assessment was closed after the first session.

The last session concluded with a family style dinner that included completion of the post-test assessment and open sharing. I set aside ten minutes before the mid-session break for the participants to fill out the post-test assessment. After the completion of the post-test assessment we had a time of questions and answers. This half of the class was a facilitated recap to hear participants' changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a result of the seminar. As they volunteered to share aloud among fellow participants, data was collected via observation to highlight emerging themes from the reflections.

To collect qualitative data for this study, participants shared their reflections via the Journey Journal. The Journey Journal served as a primary source to capture what is being produced in the life of the participant throughout the seminar (Sensing ch. 4). Participants submitted their Journey Journal electronically, to the facilitator exclusively via google form.

Data Analysis

The Journey Journal served as the semi-structured interview to collect descriptive data from the spiritual growth seminar. The entries from the Journey Journal provided descriptive qualitative data to measure the impact of the spiritual growth seminar on the participants as they engaged with the weekly content based on the values of the 4D Spiritual Growth principal. My assistant and I read through Journey Journal entries in order to extract themes that imply change in knowledge, attitudes, or behaviors. The data was then used for content analysis to develop themes and explain data. I sought to find what participants described as having the greatest impact from the spiritual growth seminars.

I used the 4D Spiritual Growth pre-test and post-test to measure knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of participants prior to the intervention, and following the intervention. The responses were collected and coded into a chart. A chart was developed to synthesize and analyze data collected.

The audio of the individual seminars was recorded to collect and analyze themes that may not have appeared in Journey Journal or indicated on 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. Adult learners engaging in a community learning setting often yield further insight to changes in attitudes and application of knowledge gained from presented content through question and answer portions of the seminar sessions.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

In a culture that prioritizes secular academy, collegiate, vocational, and academic education, how can the church create and foster an interest in spiritual growth and ongoing discipleship? Discipleship, spiritual formation, and missional living are often segregated among modern ecclesial thought. The local church should be designed to effectively disciple individuals to grow in Christlikeness both individually and as a community. The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment focuses on the subjects of discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction. The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar.

This chapter describes the participants who joined the seminar. It shares the quantitative and qualitative data collected from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment pre-seminar and post-seminar, as well as themes that emerged from the participant journey journals. Finally, this chapter identifies five major findings gathered from the data.

Participants

The participants of the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar were members and consistent attendees of Divine Unity Community Church. Their range of time attending the church varied. While the church is only eight years old, there were some that had

been part of the church for five years or more, and some that were still relatively new to the church. The aim was to assess a group of at least 12-15 participants that represent a variation of people from different age groups, life stages, spiritual backgrounds, Christian experiences, and volunteerism at Divine Unity Community Church. An invitation to participate in this 8-week Spiritual Growth seminar was given to congregants at Divine Unity Community Church. Pastoral staff made an invitation announcement two different Sundays during all morning services and an additional announcement was sent out via “Slack” – a cloud-based instant messaging platform utilized by more than 60% of our church volunteers, staff, and ministry leaders. With an electronic sign-up, potential participants were able to sign-up via the DUCC App utilizing Google Forms for a period of eight days.

There was an overwhelming response to participate in the seminar. A total of fifty-two people signed up and attended the first session. Of that fifty-two, myself along with my dissertation assistants selected a sample of fifteen that would best capture the demographics of our church membership. Sixty percent of the participants have been at DUCC for 5 years or less. Forty percent of the participants are between the ages of 20-29. Nine were Caucasian, four African American, and two Latino or of Spanish speaking decent. These demographics accurately capture our church at large. The demographics of the sample group are displayed in Figure 4.1.

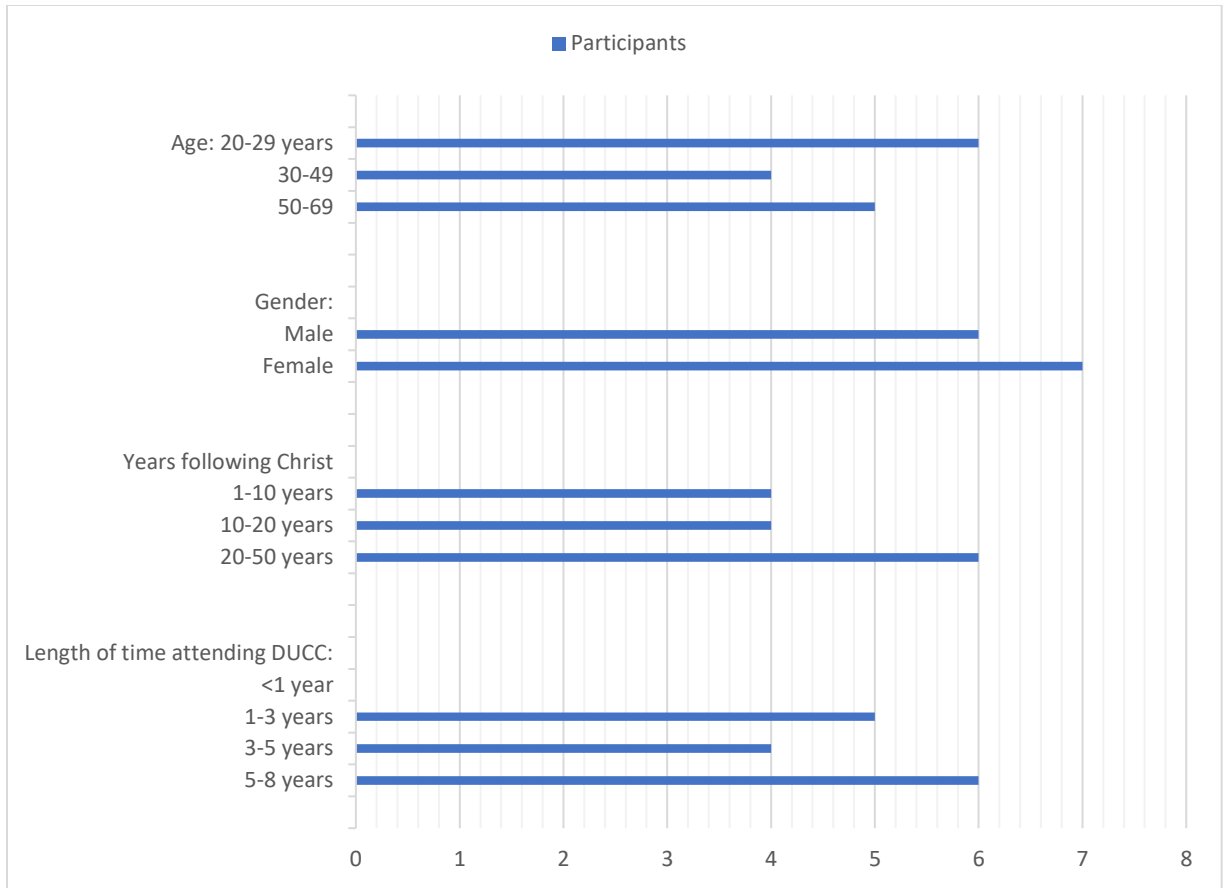


Figure 0.1. Demographic of seminar participants.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding spiritual growth and discipleship among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment prior to the seminar?

The tool used for collecting the answer to this research question was the pre-assessment via google forms. To collect data for this question, participants participated in the 4D Spiritual Growth Pre-Test at the start of the 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship Seminar. The data collected for this question provided a baseline that

measures the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors prior to the intervention.

In the pre-assessment,

- Questions 1-4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship,
- Questions 5-9 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of engagement with spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith,
- Questions 10-13 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Discernment, and
- Questions 14-17 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Direction and living on mission.

Each of these categories are discussed in turn.

Table 0.1 The 4D's Pre-Test Assessment Means

	Pre-Test Mean
Discipleship	2.8
Discipline	3.5
Discernment	3.4
Direction	2.9

The pre-test assessment results can be seen in Table 4.1. The data collected and displayed in the chart shows that 87% of participants have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith. The highest average response from the sample group

had a mean of 4.3 to Question 1 which stated: "I have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith."

To gain a more accurate interpretation of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors on discipleship questions two, three, and four had to be considered as the scores to those questions were significantly lower than the question one. Participants while they had a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith, were not actively participating in discipleship. Question two with a mean of 2.2, 66.6% of participants rated themselves as a two or below indicating they are not currently engaged in a discipleship relationship where someone is discipling them. Fifty-three percent responded to question four with a two or below when asked if they were actively discipling another individual.

Table 4.2 Research Question #1 Assessment Means

Question	Mean
1. I have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith.	4.3
2. I am currently engaged in a defined discipleship relationship where someone is regularly teaching me how to bring all things in obedience to Jesus Christ.	2.2
3. I have completed the One to One book (or another discipleship training curriculum) with another person teaching me.	2.0
4. I am actively discipling another individual	2.5

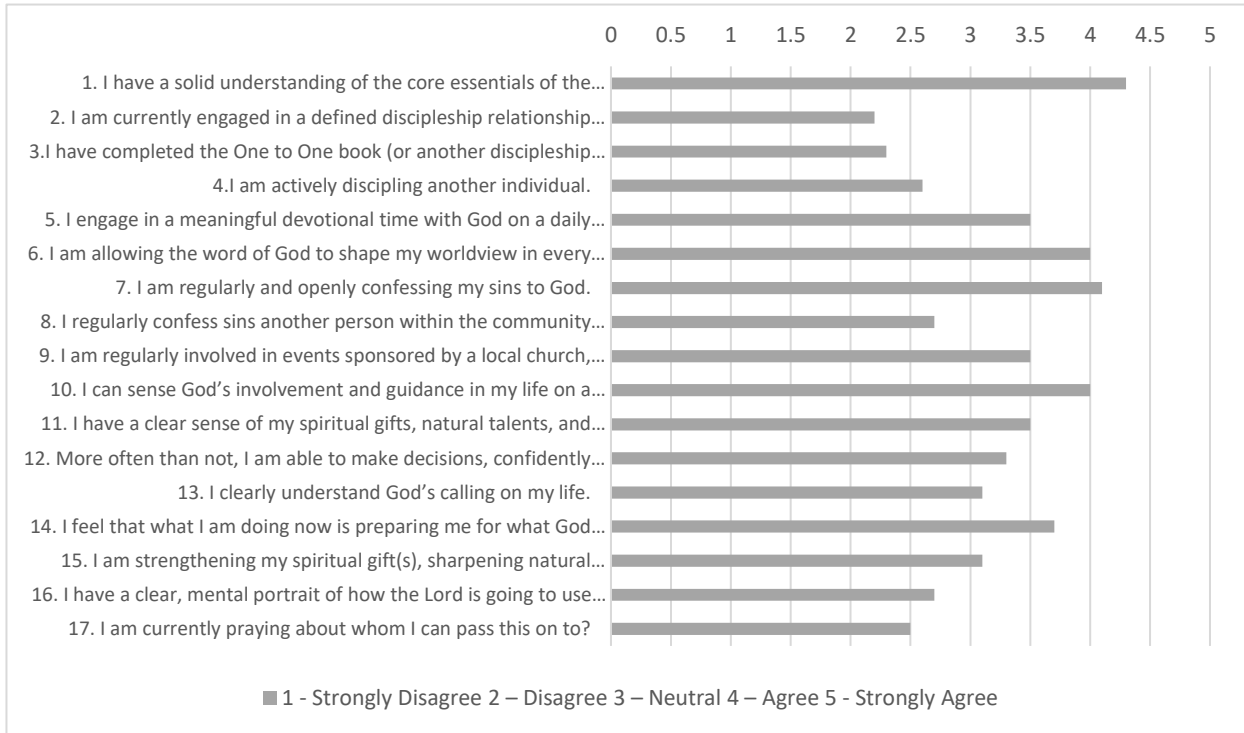


Figure 0.2 Average Responses to Pre-Test

What were the levels of knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding spiritual growth and discipleship among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment following the seminar?

The quantitative data collected from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment measured the impact of the intervention. Questions 1-4 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship. Questions 5-9 addressed knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of engagement with spiritual disciplines of the Christian faith. Questions 10-13

addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discernment. Finally questions 14-17 addressed the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of Direction, living on mission.

Table 4.3 4D's Pre and Post Assessment Means

	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Significance of Change
Discipleship	2.8	3.4	.011
Discipline	3.5	3.9	.011
Discernment	3.4	3.9	.030
Direction	2.9	3.8	.003

Discipleship had the lowest total score, but still saw significant change from pre-test to post-test. The significance between pre-test and post-test for discipleship and discipline were of the same value. The greatest level of change from the pre-test assessment to the post-test assessment was seen in the category of direction. Questions 14-17 specifically focused on attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors concerning spiritual direction, outward formation, and missional living. Direction, living on mission, helped individuals apply the information they have received and discovered about themselves throughout the 4D Spiritual Growth seminar. People are longing to understand their purpose in life, and some are not confident that their aspirations are pure and holy. When given the opportunity to share what they are really passionate, and skilled in, some hesitated to openly share. As we talked about the 4E's of discipleship (Engage, Establish, Equip, and Empower), several participants saw that their first place of application was in

their vocational sphere. One participant stated: “I feel like God is calling me to step into the purpose He has called me to. A purpose I do not have a clear picture of but am confident that discipleship is part of it.” This participant later testified about starting to engage his/her coworkers with encouraging emails that included scripture, part of his/her testimony, and an invitation to join a prayer group for the local school that his/her have been employed at for over twenty years.

The pre and post question pairs that had significance of .05 or greater are the following:

Table 4.4 Research Question #2 Pre and Post Assessment Means

Question	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Significance
3. I have completed the One to One book (or another discipleship training curriculum) with another person teaching me.	2.0	2.6	.040
4. I am actively discipling another individual.	2.5	3.6	.008
5. I engage in a meaningful devotional time with God on a daily basis.	3.5	4.0	.003
6. I am allowing the word of God to shape my worldview in every area of life	4.0	4.57	.003
8. I regularly confess sins another person within the community of individuals who are holding me accountable.	2.7	3.2	.029
9. I am regularly involved in events sponsored by a local church.	3.5	4.1	.022
11. I have a clear sense of my spiritual gifts, natural talents, and other areas where I need to grow.	3.57	4.0	.029
16. I have a clear, mental portrait of how the Lord is going to use me on His great mission.	2.7	3.5	.006
17. I am currently praying about whom I can pass this on to.	2.3	3.6	.001

As seen above, the pre-test and the post-test pairs with the greatest significance were questions 4, 5, 6, 16, and 17. I would like to give greater attention to these five questions first.

Question four of the assessment asks, “I am actively discipling another individual.” This question had a significant shift from the pre-test to the post-test. As seen in the pre-test and post-test all participants with the exception of one indicated a score of 4 or above to question 1: “I have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith.” While individuals had a solid understanding of the Christian faith, many were not in active discipleship relationships where they were discipling someone else to bring all areas of their lives under the Lordship of Christ. During the 4D Spiritual Growth seminar sessions on discipleship great emphasis was given to the “Great Commission” that is found in Matthew 28:19-20 where Jesus commissions His followers to go and make disciples. The seminar emphasized the lack of emphasis that discipleship is given in many modern-day Christian circles and churches. The session also explored the obstacles that discipleship faces in this modern time. Obstacles such as time and competing priorities that come from everyday life of adults. The sessions on discipleship leaned heavily on Dallas Willard’s work *The Great Omission*. Participants were encouraged to seek out discipleship relationships as part of their personal spiritual growth and response to the Good News.

Due to the similarity of questions 4 and 17 I would also like to give attention to the significance between the pre-test and post-test findings for question 17 which states: “I am currently praying about whom I can pass this on to?” To help participants apply and pass on what they had learned, an exercise was done in the last session of the 4D

Spiritual Growth seminar entitled the VIP List. This exercise helped individuals explore potential people that they could engage with the gospel and disciple. Participants spent time putting names of family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, and such that could be potential discipleship relationships. Participants were encouraged to reach out to some of the individuals that they had listed to start their outward formation of going to make disciples. This brought the Great Commission and Great Commandment into central focus for the life of the disciple. Christ's commandment to love, and His commission to reach emerged as the clear first steps to living a life on mission for God. Two primary ways the disciple can love their neighbors are through service and sharing the gospel. The clarity of Christ's chief commandment and commission helped participants answer question 16: "I have a clear, mental portrait of how the Lord is going to use me on His great mission."

I wanted to explore the significance of questions 5 and 6 because they were both core aspects of the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar that emphasized discipline.

- Question 5: "I engage in a meaningful devotional time with God on a daily basis. (Spiritual disciplines, Prayer, Reading Scripture, Journaling, Meditation, fasting etc.)"
- Question 6: "I am allowing the word of God to shape my worldview in every area of life (work, marriage, family, sex, exercise, eating habits, politics, etc.)"

The sessions on discipline leaned heavily on Dallas Willard's Golden Triangle of Spiritual growth (Willard, *Divine Conspiracy* 379), Richard Foster's *Celebration of Disciplines*, and the basic exhortation to have a daily bible reading and devotional time. While many individuals had basic knowledge of the importance of having a meaningful

devotional time with God on a daily basis, the structure of the seminar served as a great support system for individuals to start or enhance their daily devotional practices.

Throughout the seminar participants read a chapter a day from the Gospel of Luke, and the book of Acts. They were encouraged to “Read it. Live it. Share it.” Each session opened up with reflections from the readings, and participants had an opportunity to share what questions and insights that they were able to gain from the readings. As participants engaged more with the word, question 6 was then influenced: “I am allowing the word of God to shape my worldview in every area of life.” The discipline section of the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar had great emphasis on the life of the disciple. Spending quality time engaging with God through prayer, scripture reading, spiritual disciplines, and Christian community had a significant impact on knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in regard to the actual life of the disciple.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What aspects of the 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar contributed most to the observed changes based on the Journey Journal and 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment?

Many Christian principles people indicated they knew on an intellectual level, but yet they struggled with application. The course helped them close the gap between information and application. The how to of the life of the disciple. Participants communicated that they had hit a wall in their spiritual journey, some indicated they felt stuck prior to the seminar, and found inspiration as the different subjects were covered. The major aspects of the spiritual growth course covered Discipleship, Discipline,

Discernment, and Direction. The observed changes for each of those four quadrants of the spiritual growth seminar are below.

Discipleship

What were the observations concerning knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship? The lowest ranking responses in both pre and post assessments were in discipleship. The how, when, and who of discipleship served as a challenge. All but one participant indicated that they did not have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian life. It was not a lack of information that hindered discipleship, but people lacked the tools and empowerment for making disciples. The feeling of incompetency was the indicated hinderance to pursuing discipleship for some participants. Most participants had not participated in formal discipleship training where they were disciplined, or where they were taught to disciple others. Several people came to the realization that they were not actively pursuing people to disciple and felt the challenge to do so. Participants were greatly motivated to pursue discipleship relationships where they are learning and where they are leading. Interestingly enough, many of the discipleship relationships that people began to engage in were people that they already knew yet had not intentionally taken time to disciple. Two exercises that participants engaged in had a significant impact on the participants view of engaging others with the gospel, and the power of discipleship. The two exercises were learning to share the “Two-Minute Miracle’ and reading biblical models of discipleship.

Participants were able to get a first-hand experience with the power of testimony as we did an exercise entitled the “Two-Minute Miracle”. Participants learned to share their salvation story in two minutes by answering these four questions:

1. What- What did He save me from?
2. When- When did I get saved?
3. Where- Where was I when I got saved?
4. Who- Who was there? Who helped me?

Individuals partnered up together to share their stories, and many were encouraged. Many who had been committed Christians for years, were refreshed by recalling their own salvation story. Participants indicated hearing other's salvation stories encouraged them. One participant who has not yet fully committed to Christianity found the salvation stories were very motivating and felt a personal call to action to ask others to share their salvation stories with him. Two participants who heard about this individual who had not yet committed to Christianity were motivated to reach out and disciple.

The other exercise was reading biblical models of discipleship. Participants got in groups of three to read and discuss the discipleship relationships and models of Paul and Timothy, and Elijah and Elisha. Half of the participants did the Old Testament reading and discussion of scriptures that pertain to Elijah and Elisha, and the other half of the participants did the New Testament reading and discussion of scriptures that pertain to Paul and Timothy. Observing these relationships through the lens of ongoing discipleship was a big take away from Session 3 of the spiritual growth seminar. One participant simply indicated that their call to action following this session was to read the story of Elijah and Elisha more thoroughly to glean more discipleship principles. Another participant had a greater understanding of Paul's paternal care for Timothy. This deepened their understanding of discipleship and their appreciation for Paul's letter to Timothy. This fresh perspective helped the participant see that the discipleship is

relationship more than knowledge transfer. The life and practice of the disciple is meant to go deeper according to Luke 5:4 where Jesus instructed Simon Peter to “Put out into deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” This served as a great analogy for participants who indicated that they were ready to go deeper in their relationship with Jesus, that they may serve as a Paul or an Elijah figure for others.

Discipline

The theme of going deeper led into the portion of the seminar focused on discipline. Participants were led through teachings and exercises focused on spiritual disciplines. Participants clung to Richard Foster’s quote from *Celebration of Disciplines*: “Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people” (Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines* 1). The exploration of the specific discipline of meditation was new and beneficial for many participants. Following this specific session, participants were encouraged to engage with meditation for ten minutes a day for one week. This exercise turned out to be transformative for participants. Some realized how much stress they were carrying, while others realized how they had never intentionally paused to meditate. They indicated their joy in engaging with this discipline, and their hopes to further involve this discipline in their personal disciplines. A large majority of the seminar participants had never engaged with the spiritual disciplines and indicated that they would appreciate more time dedicated to this portion of the seminar.

The call to a deeper life of devotion served as a wakeup call to many participants who indicated that the sessions on spiritual disciplines renewed their desire to spend time

in solitude, and study of God's word. Participants indicated that they were encouraged from the spiritual disciplines session to not look at reading and studying the word as a mundane action. One participant specifically said: "Reminded me the of the power of scripture. It is not a mundane routine, it keeps you grounded, connected to the will of God. It shapes our thoughts and the way we look at life." This was a consistent thought in reflection to the spiritual discipline's sessions.

The last reflection to highlight from the spiritual growth seminar on the disciplines is about deeper relationships. Richard Foster names four corporate disciplines that are impactful for the life of the disciple, and one of them was confession (Foster, *Celebration of Disciplines* 143, 158, 175, 190). During the talk on confession, the topic of accountability was also covered. Some of the older participants in the seminar indicated that they need to renew deep meaningful Christian relationships where they can be vulnerable and hold one another accountable.

Discernment

The sessions on the spiritual disciplines transitioned into the topic of discernment. Multiple participants had never considered discernment as a spiritual practice directly impacted by knowledge and engagement with the Bible. Steps to discernment and spiritual decision making simplified the topic of discernment. Participants noted that talking about discernment in light of decision making made the subject practical and encouraging. One participant directly connected the topic of discernment to their ability to understand God's calling in their lives. Learning more about the topic gave them much clarity and comfort that God was moving them to something greater: "I honestly have felt some passions and desires being stirred up within me because of how practical

discernment is. So, I think God is calling me to follow those steps so that I can hear him more clearly.” Another participant noted: “This lesson helped me think more strategically about discernment. I believe in practicing the steps to discernment I will not only have a greater capacity of discernment, but I will also have a greater confidence in the decisions made as a result of discernment.”

Direction

Participants were given an exercise entitled the Dream Anatomy that helped individuals identify their skills, passions, calling, and purpose. Working through the Dream Anatomy, four participants said they would like to spend more time working through the exercise, and that this exercise was quite impactful for them understanding God’s calling on their lives. One participant stated that their call to action after talking about it was this: “I want to work on the dream anatomy with my wife. We have had a common sense of calling, vision, and mission in the past, but we need unity and clarity in pursuing God's vision for the future at this stage in our lives.”

The initial announcement and invitation to the congregation to participate in this course was encouraging and telling. Simply announced as a “Spiritual Growth Seminar”, over fifty people signed up in just over a week. There was a clear sense that people want to grow spiritually. The overall seminar seemed to have a very introspective and inspiring effect on the participants. The journey journals that were completed weekly and the ranking of the overall course was high. Eight of the fifteen participants completed the final journey journal and one hundred percent ranked the course at five out of five. Here are a few participant reflections on the course:

- “This course was amazing. It was like Neff Avenue DUCC brought into 2020. This course was refreshing to me and has challenged me to get out of my comfort zone and spend time with people other than the folks that I am most comfortable with. I have begun discipling an individual and I believe there may be opportunities with 2 other young ladies.”
- “As a result of my participation in the 4D course, I feel like I engage each day with more awareness and inquiry of what might be pleasing to God. I am more thoughtful especially about the relationships I encounter and how I might be able to make a God connection with them. I have especially enjoyed scripture reading through more of a story lens, so rather than a topic or word study. I have appreciated the characters more as I have read the fuller story rather than a segment here and a segment there. I believe I will continue to read in this format. As a side note, during the course of this class, I became so keenly aware of God's hand in my daily schedule. Things have continually been changing up in a way that I have so needed and be grateful for. I see God working on things in my life for my best interest in ways that I have not been attune to before. So, I have prompted a greater since of gratitude for a very personal heavenly father. A reawakening has been my experience since I have attended DUCC, but this class helped launch me forward. I am grateful.”
- “I feel a need for me to be in community at a deeper level of discipleship in order to go deeper and grow in my walk with God. The challenge for me is to find the right people or setting for that. I have been in a position of leadership in ministry for so long that I am unsure how to find someone who can walk

with me to a deeper level. In general, I need to be more open with others at a deeper level of confession and challenge to become all that good has for me.”

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings became clear from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, Journey Journal, and observation of the overall 8-week Spiritual Growth seminar. I have listed them here in a numbered list.

1. People want to learn more about practical steps of discernment and spiritual decision making.
2. Lifelong discipleship relationships are difficult to find and maintain.
3. People are longing for spiritual direction (this includes finding purpose, and meaning).
4. Meaningful and consistent devotional time is a key contributor to continued spiritual growth and active mission.
5. The local church has a great opportunity to foster spiritual growth in the life of their congregants.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment focuses on the subjects of discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction. The crux of the project was an intervention to discover the changes of spiritual maturity of those who participated in an 8-week spiritual growth and discipleship seminar.

This chapter identifies five findings from the research project and explains how they correspond to personal observation, literature review, and the biblical framework of the project. This chapter also includes limitations of the research study, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further study.

Major Findings

Several major findings became clear from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, Journey Journal, and observation of the overall 8-week Spiritual Growth seminar. These five findings offer insights gathered from the intervention. These five findings help further study that may continue from this project, and the implementation of 4D Spiritual Growth seminar in the local church.

First Finding – Practical Steps of Discernment

People are longing for clarity on how to handle everyday life. Several people indicated that they wanted to learn more about discernment and direction. Everyday life

decisions and general direction seemed to be a theme. There was quite a positive response to the sessions that covered discernment and decision making. These sessions ultimately gave greater clarity for the fourth D of the 4D spiritual growth model – direction.

Listening as a disciple turned out to be one of the most engaging topics for participants. Some participants were facing decisions such as job and geographical location change, what type of treatments to pursue for a medical issue, and how to live life as a disciple on their job without being defiant to authority. It is evident that these types of life situations require discernment. What was surprising during the discernment sessions was the daily practice of discernment for daily choices. Participants remarked and reflected that they had not previously viewed or considered discernment as an ordinary practice. Discernment plays a vital role in decision making. The reality is that all decisions, both big and small, are important.

Discernment is ultimately about making one decision after another by seeking, understanding, and following God's guidance. The session on discernment reviewed three basic questions: a) Where is God in this? B) How do I know what God desires of me? C) What is the will of God? Each of these questions are vital to the Christian journey (Liebert, *Way of Discernment* ch. 1). The approach of discernment and spiritual decision making had often thought to be mystical or hyper spiritual. Sharing the Seven Steps for Discerning Decisions that are in Chapter 2 of this dissertation served as a very practical approach and helpful resource for the participants.

As stated in my literature review, Tom Challies, in his work *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment*, suggests that discernment is proof of three things: 1) a spiritual

life, 2) spiritual growth, and 3) spiritual maturity (Challies 27-29). The difference between the believer and the unbeliever primarily exists in the mind. The renewed mind keeps the believer from being conformed to the world, and further transformed into the image of Christ. The disciple embraces discernment as a form of continued spiritual growth and mission. Solomon's prayer in 1 Kings 3:6-9 was a request that he may operate in good leadership. Solomon needed wisdom to accomplish the mission that was set before him. He paused long enough to ask God for a discerning heart. His response is the essence of Proverbs 3:5-7 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. (NKJV):" The life of the disciple brings all things into subjection to the Lordship of Christ. Discernment is not a practice for only big decisions, but it is a daily practice for the disciple that continues to yield spiritual growth.

Second Finding – Difficulty in Maintaining Lifelong Discipleship Relationships

The lower scores represented here display the epidemic of non-discipleship. The participants who previously participated in campus ministry were more active in discipling than others. For the specific nature of our church which started as a campus ministry, discipleship was highly emphasized in the earlier stages of one's relationship with Christ. As the church has grown, my hypothesis was that many newcomers who were already believers may not have participated in clear discipleship efforts. There is a miseducation and lack of priority given to discipleship relationships. It seems many people are living life through the lens of personal holiness, but not mission. For the

modern adult, being a disciple and making disciples presents several challenges. One of the biggest challenges is time.

The Great Commission is not that people attend church, but they embrace true discipleship. In my literature review, I discussed Dallas Willard's *Great Omission*. This epidemic of non-discipleship was evident as I reviewed the discipleship scores from the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. Our local church has put intentional effort verbally and structurally to emphasize and prioritize discipleship. However, even in our church where there is a heavy verbal emphasis on discipleship from the pulpit and classes, the epidemic was still present. The alarming lack of discipleship led me to realize that the case of non-discipleship in a church may not always be due to a lack of passion or value. The lack of discipleship is connected to a lack of discipleship systems that educate, train, and provide accountability. The opportunity the church has been given is to train people to be disciples and make disciples. This is an essential part of Christian living and community. This opportunity must be seized. The reality about discipleship is this – it takes time. Building meaningful Christ-centered relationships that furthers people's spiritual growth has no short cut. Even with the factor of time, the church has the opportunity to develop systems that spur on discipleship.

Discipleship across generations is a vital task of the church. While the content of discipleship may not change from generation to generation, the methods must be more fluid. Leveraging technology in the local church is essential to discipleship. Small groups that formerly took place in individual homes may now take place through online video meeting platforms such as Zoom, or through teachings being made available on

YouTube, Vimeo, and social media. Being aware of the obstacles and opportunities of discipleship across generations could help people bridge generational and relational rifts.

The goal of this project was to discover the best practices for discipleship and spiritual growth for individuals in the local church. Continued spiritual growth of individuals and active discipleship of those who regularly attend church require a commitment to both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The heart to make disciples must come from the heart of a disciple who is fully devoted to Jesus. If there is a more unified theological thought of our devotion and discipleship, discipleship would not seem like an added measure of Christianity, but a necessity. A person who loves Jesus with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength will be able to love others by being a disciple and by making disciples.

Third Finding – Discovering God’s Mission and Purpose

The vision of our church is to see revived lives actively glorifying God. People are longing to get off the fence and the bench. I noticed while all the other sessions on discipleship contained good information, and needed information, I sensed the greater need of participants was for spiritual direction and purpose.

My research showed heavily that people are longing for spiritual direction. I developed the Dream Anatomy (*seen in* Figure 5.1) as a spiritual direction tool. When I taught on the Dream Anatomy during the seminar, people indicated on their journey journal that they wanted to spend more time working through this model of discovering mission.

The Dream Anatomy served as an insightful exercise for the participants. It gave them an opportunity to look at their skills and passions, as well as their desires to see how

God will use what he has given them to advance the Kingdom. During the class, we had a few participants share their dream and respond to the various components of this four-tiered model. As the facilitator, I was able to help them clarify and go deeper into the composition of their dream anatomy which allowed them to construct more thorough analysis than what they had previously written down. The response to this level of clarity for one's outward formation, encourages individuals to no longer be stuck in a place of fear, complacency, or "I wish I would have". This gave very practical steps for people to engage and put action into what they had gleaned and learn from the seminar. Having a clear sense of the God's mission output through us adds greater motivation and stability.



Figure 0.1 Dream Anatomy

An additional hope of this project was to help people discover and engage God's mission. The truth that is found in Ephesians 2:10 served as a divine reminder and

motivator. Ephesians 2:10 says, “For we are God’s masterpiece, He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (NLT)” Several people during my seminar found great joy and encouragement in this truth. It is a healthy reminder to know that God created each of us with a specific purpose in mind. God wants to reveal something unique about Himself, and His Kingdom through each of us. The question that we wrestled with during the sessions on direction was “What does God want to reveal through you?” It is our duty as disciples to be active in the will of God. Ephesians 5:10 reminds us “to not act thoughtlessly, but understand what the Lord wants you to do. (NLT)” God has created each person as an expression of heaven, and He wants to share an aspect of Himself through each and every person.

Fourth Finding – Meaningful and Consistent Devotional Time

Prior to the seminar, several participants indicated that they were looking forward to the 4D Spiritual Growth seminar to help spark a renewal in their walk with Christ. Some had been overrun by the busyness of life and had lost their spiritual rhythms of devotional time with the Lord while others simply felt like they were stuck or complacent. During the seminar, the entire class was encouraged to read a chapter a day from the books of Luke and Acts. While doing so, they were instructed to highlight a major thought or finding, make it applicable to their life, and share it with someone else. People recalled our times of reading the book of Luke and Acts, in and out of the seminar sessions, as being extremely beneficial. Luke really informed the initial discipleship relationship with Jesus – the ultimate model of life we should follow. The book of Acts motivated people to live on mission. The reading of Luke and Acts helped participants

see the progression from inward formation (following Jesus), to outward formation, being on mission with Jesus.

“Spiritual growth is not accidental. You must intend to grow; you must make a choice to grow” (Holladay). The intentionality of spiritual growth is a matter of Holy Spirit transformation, and spiritual discipline. Spiritual disciplines serve as the active partnership with God for spiritual growth. Direct engagement with the bible has been noted as the most effective practice for spiritual growth. The issue is not the power of Bible reading, but the actual practice of Bible reading. As noted in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, many Christ-followers appear to own a Bible but fail to read it (Holt 142). Engaging in personal bible reading, devotional time, and the opportunity to discuss your process with others in a learning community prove to be effective practices for adults who desire to live as disciples of Christ.

To effectively get adults actively engaging God’s word, and having a consistent meaningful devotional life, is first an act of the Holy Spirit. An individual must engage with God’s word in response to his or her understanding of God. As the Holy Spirit bears witness to the revelation of Jesus Christ, one is drawn closer to God. A clear and active discipleship process then encourages and instructs individuals how to answer the spiritual yearning that can only be satisfied through meaningful and consistent devotional time with God.

Teaching people the power and relevancy of God’s word in their lives is an essential part of discipleship and spiritual formation. We are reminded in Matthew 4:4 that “man shall not live upon bread alone, but every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. (NKJV):” The word of God nourishes the soul and directs Christ-followers in life

and mission. The word of God is the ultimate tool to shape the mind and heart of believers. We hold on to the truth found in Hebrews 4:12 “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. (NKJV)” The word of God searches and discerns the heart. The Great Commission says that we should teach others the things that have been taught to us. Jesus modeled an active devotional life for His disciples as He went away to pray and spend time with the Father.

Fifth Finding – Fostering Spiritual Growth in Congregants

Participants remarked how a class like the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar was refreshing and much needed for them. It truly stretched some, revived others, and encouraged all. To hear the participants joyfully share how grateful they were to have a church that would provide opportunities such as this reminded me of the vital role the church has to provide a healthy and vibrant spiritual growth atmosphere for the parishioners.

The Eight Laws of Spiritual Growth from Saddleback Church suggest that effective spiritual growth must be intentional, incremental, personal, practical, relational, multi-dimensional, seasonal, and incarnational (Holladay). I see the value of having annual spiritual growth campaigns, weekly Bible Studies and missions’ opportunities, and small groups for people to continue to grow and be empowered to make disciples. When a church is committed to making disciples, church success is redefined. The heart of Christ was that His followers bear witness to the good news and make disciples. As

seen in Chapter 2, the Barna research group gives a list of what a church looks like that has redefined success to be more Christ centered. They include:

- Congregants who worship not just on Sundays, but every day of the week – not just in the sanctuary but wherever they are;
- Complete submission to the Holy Spirit in both decision making and behavior;
- Hearts that are sensitive to sin and wounded every time they do something that offends God;
- Individuals who joyfully share their resources- time, money, skills, information, relationships, possessions- with those in need, especially those who share a love of Christ and a commitment to His people;
- People who live differently from the norm because of their faith, leading lives that conform to the dictates of scripture without cutting corners or trying to interpret biblical passages for personal comfort or advantage;
- A church body that projects (and lives up to) an image of being loving, caring, focused, and clear minded in its pursuit of the ways of God; and
- A deep commitment to building a lasting and life-changing community among those who profess Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. (Barna 4-5)

When success has been redefined as such, the efforts of the church will align with practices that make a holy difference in the lives of the people who attend the church.

The church must strive to not confuse vitality with busyness.

Acts 2:42-47 helps us see the simple yet very effective spiritual growth praxis of the early church: “and they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many

wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (NKJV)”

The people focused on the Word, gathering together, serving one another, and living with an attitude of gratitude. One of the most intriguing things about this picture of the early church is in verse forty-six where it says the people had a “gladness and simplicity of heart.” The church as we know it right now must stay tethered to those two values. Often, the programs and busyness of society can crowd the essence of the *ekklesia*. The church should serve as an extension of the Potter’s Wheel where the Lord forms and commissions His followers in purpose. We often are allowing people to search and discover purpose and meaning outside of the church. The church is God’s organization and training center for His followers to discover their identity and purpose in Him.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This study gave clear and practical steps to spiritual growth, and discipleship. The “how to” of the life of the disciple is one that has alluded many devout Christians. Christianity as we know it should be looked at as more of a training ground rather than a resting place. The impact of this study helped people develop a mental framework for spiritual growth and the priority of discipleship in the life of the Christian. Complacency erodes the spiritual vitality of believers who are not actively engaged in disciplines that further

their spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is not an event, but a lifestyle. My findings suggest that there are many believers who understand the foundations of Christianity but are not passing it onto others.

As lead pastor of my church, this study has helped me see that in my role I must ensure the church does not become consumed with programming for numbers sake and neglect the practices of ministry that spur spiritual growth. It was once said that the larger organizations grow, they will drift from simplicity to complexity. As a pastor and leader, my task is to lead the development of a culture that is active in discipleship. The church must carry out both the Great Commandment of Jesus as well as the Great Commission. I will use this course as a major part of assimilation for new people who join Divine Unity, and as an annual spiritual growth course for members to continue to engage in intentional Christian community and spiritual advancement.

One of our church's leadership and service principles is this: "We must be the work before we do the work." This means we must be the work of Christ before we do the work of Christ. We want to drive home that outward mission flows from inward formation. The 4D's of Spiritual Growth will also be used for leadership development for leaders and volunteers in the local church. Establishing healthy spiritual disciplines and a lifestyle of discipleship would help small group leaders, lay leaders, and ministers in training have habits that sustain ministry.

Limitations of the Study

The instrument that I designed, the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, could have used more generalized language in regard to spiritual practices. The wording of some of the questions in the 4D Spiritual Growth pre and post assessment may have hindered the

responses of the participants. Some of the questions on the assessment may have restricted the responses of the participants to show substantial change in individuals' behaviors. The timeline of the seminar and the opportunity to see change proved to be a narrow window. Application of the information taught in the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar may require longer than 8-weeks to enact. Questions 2-4, and 8 were questions that dealt with significant relationships such as discipleship, mentorship, and accountability which could take much longer than 8-week seminar to discover and develop.

Question 3 referenced a specific discipleship curriculum. I think, if this question would have been worded differently, it would have possibly yielded a different response from individuals. The language of discipleship training, or even the *One 2 One* book, could have been restrictive because the *One 2 One* book is relatively new material for our church (Murrell *One 2 One*). It was only incorporated to our pools of resources within the past five years. Newcomers would not have readily had access to that material. Also, individuals may have received the information from the *One 2 One* book yet without knowledge that it came from that curriculum during our membership classes at the church. During my 8-week seminar, I could have invested more time in teaching and training from the *One 2 One* book. This reflection further emphasizes that the discipleship language and training in our church needs to be clarified and clearly displayed. Greater clarity and display would help individuals be aware of what they have received in teachings, classes, seminars, and small groups. This would also help us further equip and empower others to make disciples.

One person did not complete the journey journal, and based on that participant's spiritual background, it was difficult to get a grasp on his or her journey through the course. This specific participant indicated during the seminar that he or she were not yet a follower of Christ, but decided to take the class to learn more about Christianity and the Christian life. This particular participant was quite engaged in the course and only missed one session. I am not sure if the lack of response on the journey journal was a technological issue or an aptitude issue. His or her overall assessment of the seminar was very positive, and other participants began to be more intentional with engaging with him for the sake of discipleship. Having more feedback from this individual would have yielded more insight for my qualitative data in regard to what the individual experienced throughout the course.

Unexpected Observations

One unexpected observation that I had from this study was having an individual participate who was not a Christian. While this individual attends church faithfully and attended the seminar, there did not seem to be a significant change in the person's Christian confession. This experience made me examine exactly who would benefit most from a seminar such as this. This seminar was not designed for a non-believer. Foundations of the Christian faith were included, but this was not a doctrinal seminar that would address thoughts or questions about the Christian faith. This seminar was designed to help believers grow in their existent faith. The seminar was devotional and developmental, and it deployed the believer to be a disciple and to make disciples.

Recommendations

This study was impactful for the participants and insightful for me as the facilitator, but there are still areas of improvement and possible expanded research opportunities. I have summarized three:

1. **Spend more time on the Dream Anatomy.** The Dream Anatomy can serve as a tool for spiritual direction and personal mission discovery. Given the number of participants, I believe a one-on-one with a spiritual director or mentor would help participants process the information received and develop an action plan to apply the long-term spiritual growth efforts they learned. A short one-on-one conversation with one of the participants post-seminar provided that individual much clarity and direction. The information was present, and the passions were within them, but they needed more space to process and gain greater clarity to what the Lord was doing in them and through them.
2. **Extend the 4D Spiritual Growth Course from 8 weeks to 10-12 weeks.** The time to practice the principles and disciplines that were taught during the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar may need to be extended. I believe that the seminar could have been longer, possibly twelve weeks instead of eight. The amount of information did not give much room for other experiential learning which is an important tenant of adult learning. A longer class may have challenged the retention, but it would have allotted more time for participants to engage with one another and put the teachings into practice. In addition to engagement and application, a greater level of change could have been seen if there was a longer period of time between the pre and post assessment.

3. **Expand the use and the format of the 4D Spiritual Growth Course.** The hope is that churches of all different sizes and demographics will be able to use the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar and Assessment to help individuals grow in their relationship with Christ and mission for Christ. I would research the potential impact of changing the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar into an online platform, along with monthly physical meetings to encourage in person interaction and collaboration. This would yield insight on the need and effect of doing the 4D Spiritual Growth Seminar on an annual basis. I believe this would be a helpful tool for a rapidly growing church focused on making disciples and empowering leaders.

Postscript

It was quite shocking to see the number of people who were faithful to church and had a solid foundation in the Christian faith, however, they were not in active discipleship relationships. I am also intrigued by the simple yet profound spiritual formation of disciple making. I understand the union between inward and outward formation through the lens of discipleship clearer than before. We want our church to have a go-mentality where it is known: You will not grow, if you do not go.

Teaching this course was refreshing for me as the facilitator. It helped renew my personal discipleship, discipline, discernment, and direction. Since the completion of the class, there has been a new online bible study group that formed for the men in my church journeying through the Gospels, and another through the book of Nehemiah. Many of the participants from our sample group, as well as the larger group, are putting into practice the Bible study and discipleship principles explored in the 4D Spiritual

Growth Seminar. It has been a joy to hear testimonies of people who are being disciplined by those who participated in the seminar.

APPENDIX A**CONSENT FORM FOR 4D SPIRITUAL GROWTH SEMINAR PARTICIPATION**

Welcome to this 8-week 4D Spiritual Growth seminar! This Spiritual Growth Seminar is being held for my DMin dissertation project. The purpose of this project is to measure changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among congregants at Divine Unity Community Church who participate in an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment. The 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment focuses on the subjects of Discipleship, discipline, discernment, and spiritual direction. I am seeking to learn more about how best to grow believers who attend our church to become mature Christians in Christ.

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

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

Confidentiality: Your name will be kept confidential in all of the reporting and/or writing related to this study. The data I collect from your assessment and journal

reflections will only be identified with a random number. In addition to myself, my assistant will have access to the information given by you.

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

Participant's Name: _____

Print Name: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

JOURNEY JOURNAL

The Journey Journal is an open format to encourage you to chronicle your process and discoveries from today's lesson, noting changes in thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors.

- Did you find information from today's lesson intriguing? If so, please share
- What personal call to action do you sense from today's session?
- On a scale from 1-5 (5 -very strong and 1-not strong at all) how strong do you feel about today's lesson (weekly subject)?

APPENDIX C

4D SPIRITUAL GROWTH ASSESSMENT PRE AND POST SEMINAR

The goal of this is to discover factors that contribute to the spiritual growth of those in the local church.

Assessment Questions: Use the scale below to respond to each statement. (fill in the blank with a suggested type of measurement)

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 - Strongly Agree

Discipleship – The Foundation for Spiritual Growth (Training)

1. ____ I have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith.
2. ____ I am currently engaged in a defined discipleship relationship where someone is regularly teaching me how to bring all things in obedience to Jesus Christ.
3. ____ I have completed the *One to One* book (or another discipleship training curriculum) with another person teaching me.
4. ____ I am actively discipling another individual.

Discipline – Pursuing Holiness and Living Out Spiritual Growth

1. ____ I engage in a meaningful devotional time with God on a daily basis.
(Spiritual disciplines, Prayer, Reading Scripture, Journaling, Meditation, fasting etc.)
2. ____ I am allowing the word of God to shape my worldview in every area of life
(work, marriage, family, sex, exercise, eating habits, politics, etc.)
3. ____ I am regularly and openly confessing my sins to God.

5. ____ I regularly confess sins another person within the community of individuals who are holding me accountable.
6. ____ I am regularly involved in events sponsored by a local church, including the attendance of at least 3 Sunday services, a small group gathering, and 1 one-on-one discipleship time per month

Discernment – Understanding God’s voice and His will

1. ____ I can sense God’s involvement and guidance in my life on a regular basis.
2. ____ I have a clear sense of my spiritual gifts, natural talents, and other areas where I need to grow.
3. ____ More often than not, I am able to make decisions, confidently knowing I have heard the call of God.
4. ____ “I clearly understand God’s calling on my life.”

Direction – Living on Mission (Applied Spirituality)

1. ____ I feel that what I am doing now is preparing me for what God wants me to do later.
2. ____ I am strengthening my spiritual gift(s), sharpening natural talents, and stretching other areas where I need to grow so that I am able to contribute to kingdom work right now.
3. ____ I have a clear, mental portrait of how the Lord is going to use me on His great mission.
4. ____ I am currently praying about whom I can pass this on to

APPENDIX D**4D SPIRITUAL GROWTH PRINCIPLE: SEMINAR OUTLINE**

1. **Sessions 1-2: Discipleship Foundations** - Instilling the Core Essentials of Christian faith and developing discipleship relationships by using the 4E Discipleship Process (Murrell)
 - a. Engage- Engaging the culture with the gospel
 - b. Establish- Establishing biblical foundations
 - c. Equip- Equipping to do the work of ministry
 - d. Empower- Empowering others to make disciples

2. **Session 3-5: Discipline** - Pursuing God through the spiritual disciplines (3 Lessons)
 - a. What are the daily practices of spiritual growth?
 - b. This will explore the 12 classic spiritual disciplines found in Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*.

3. **Session 6: Discernment - Hearing God: Clarity & Confidence in the will of God**
 - a. Do people have a clear sense of God's voice concerning their lives? Do they get the sense that they understand what God requires of them?
 - b. This included a presentation on Willard's Golden Triangle of Spiritual Growth (Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*)
 - c. A bible study from 1 Kings 3:1-14, and 1 Corinthians 12-14.

4. **Session 7: Direction** - Direction indicates individuals understanding the will of God for their life and their unique contribution to the God's mission.
5. **Session 8:** The last session was an interactive review of activities from the topics of discernment and direction.

APPENDIX E
DOCUMENTS FOR EXPERT REVIEW

Dear _____:

I am Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary. The topic of my dissertation is: the *4D's of Spiritual Growth*. *"The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the impact of an 8-week Spiritual Growth and Discipleship seminar at Divine Unity Community Church with the eventual goal of developing and implementing a long-term, ongoing spiritual growth and discipleship process for the church.*

In quest to discover the effectiveness of this intervention, the following research questions will be answered. The use of the journey journal, pre- and post-assessments of the participants will outline the effectiveness of the spiritual growth and discipleship seminar. As the research questions are answered, there will be a framework that will contribute to the development of a long-term, ongoing spiritual growth and discipleship process for Divine Unity Community Church.

Research Question #1

What was the level of spiritual development, based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, of those who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar at Divine Unity Community Church *before* the seminar?

Research Question #2

What was the level of spiritual development, based on the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, of those who participated in an 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar at Divine Unity Community Church *after* the seminar?

Research Question #3

What aspects of the 8-week Spiritual Growth & Discipleship seminar contributed most to the observed changes based on the Journey Journal and 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment?

However, as a part of my dissertation-project, I am using the **4D Spiritual Growth Assessment** as a pre-test and post-test to collect data. Prior to implementing the 4D Spiritual Growth Assessment, I am in need of an expert review. I am asking you to serve as one of my reviewers.

Please review the above description of my dissertation. Please evaluate the attached document using the evaluation form included. Please return the evaluation to me via email by August 25, 2019. Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Chris Johnson

APPENDIX F
EXPERT REVIEW

4D Spiritual Growth Assessment:

The goal of this is to discover factors that contribute to the spiritual growth of those in the local church.

Assessment Questions: Use the scale below to respond to each statement. (Fill in the blank with a suggested type of measurement)

1 - Strongly Disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neutral 4 – Agree 5 -

Strongly Agree

Discipleship – The Foundation for Spiritual Growth (Training)

1. ____ I have a solid understanding of the core essentials of the Christian faith.
2. ____ I am currently engaged in a defined discipleship relationship where someone is regularly teaching me how to bring all things in obedience to Jesus Christ.
3. ____ I have completed the *One to One* book (or another discipleship training curriculum) with another person teaching me.
4. ____ I have completed the *One to One* book (or another discipleship training curriculum) teaching another person.

Discipline – Pursuing Holiness and Living Out Spiritual Growth

1. ____ I engage in a meaningful devotional time with God on a daily basis. (Prayer, Reading Scripture, Journaling, Meditation, etc.)
2. ____ I am allowing the word of God to shape my worldview in every area of life (work, marriage, family, sex, exercise, eating habits, politics, etc.)

5. ____ I am regularly and openly confessing my sins to God and to the community of individuals who are holding me accountable.
6. ____ I am regularly involved in events sponsored by a local church, including the attendance of at least 3 Sunday services, a small group gathering, and 1 one-on-one discipleship time per month

Discernment – Understanding God’s voice and His will

1. ____ I can sense God’s involvement and guidance in my life on a regular basis.
2. ____ I have a clear sense of my spiritual gifts, natural talents, and other areas where I need to grow.
3. ____ More often than not, I am able to make decisions, confidently knowing I have heard the call of God.

Direction – Living on Mission (Applied Spirituality)

1. ____ I feel that what I am doing now is preparing me for what God wants me to do later.
2. ____ I am strengthening my spiritual gift(s), sharpening natural talents, and stretching other areas where I need to grow so that I am able to contribute to kingdom work right now.
3. ____ I have a clear, mental portrait of how the Lord is going to use me on His great mission.
4. ____ I am currently praying about who I can pass this on?

4D Spiritual Growth Assessment

Question #	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestion to clarify
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					
11					
12					
13					
14					
15					

Recommendation of questions that were not asked that needed to be asked?

Review Completed by

Signature _____ Date Completed _____

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