

## ABSTRACT

### RECLAIMING THIS GENERATION FOR CHRIST: WHY DO LATINO PENTECOSTAL YOUTH ABANDON THEIR FAITH AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

by

Robert Rodriguez

In an article published by Barna research in 2019 titled, *Hispanic America: Faith, Values and Priorities*, they found that Hispanic teens in the U.S. are more likely than other ethnic groups in their generation to have a negative view of Christianity, noting that they “have a hard time believing that a good God would allow so much evil or suffering in the world” (39%) and “that there are too many injustices in the history of Christianity” (20%) (Barna Group). Despite being brought up in a culture that values the practice of religion, the younger generations of Hispanic Americans are not as certain as their elders. They are either searching for authenticity within Christianity—a faith that addresses family, justice, work, and other concerns and priorities of the community—or opting out of it entirely (Barna Group).

This research addresses the issue of why young Latino/as in the Central District of the Church of God are opting out of the faith when they reach the age of eighteen, graduate high school, and then go off to college. Through the use of mixed-methods, data was gathered from 5 focus groups with a total of 43 participants, 7 personal interviews—5 with Senior pastors and 2 youth pastors—and a digital survey with a total of 53 participants, information was gleaned from them which helped to understand their

definition of discipleship, how important discipleship was to them, and whether or not lack of discipleship contributed to them abandoning the Faith.

The findings concluded that event-centered Bible studies (short-term, with no continuity) for young adults result in short-term impact. Young adults, in general, value long-term discipling and relationships in small groups. Pastors and youth workers are not equipped for engaging young adults in the life of the church. The Central District of the Latino/a ministry of the Church of God is not training its youth workers, and young adults value mentoring from the generation that went before them.

RECLAIMING THIS GENERATION FOR CHRIST:  
WHY DO LATINO PENTECOSTAL YOUTH ABANDON THEIR FAITH  
AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

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

by

Robert Rodriguez

May 2020

© 2020

Robert Rodriguez

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	ix
CHAPTER 1 NATURE OF THE PROJECT .....	1
Overview of the Chapter .....	1
Personal Introduction .....	2
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Project .....	7
Research Questions .....	7
Research Question #1 .....	7
Research Question #2 .....	7
Research Question #3 .....	7
Rationale for the Project .....	9
Definition of Key Terms.....	9
Delimitations.....	11
Review of Relevant Literature .....	14
Research Methodology .....	15
Type of Research .....	16
Participants.....	16
Instrumentation .....	17
Data Collection .....	19

Generalizability .....	21
Project Overview .....	22
CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT .....	23
Overview of the Chapter .....	23
Biblical Foundations .....	24
Models of Discipleship and Mentoring: Old Testament.....	25
Moses and Joshua .....	25
Elijah and Elisha .....	28
Samuel and Eli .....	29
Ruth and Naomi .....	31
Models of Discipleship and Mentoring: New Testament .....	32
Jesus .....	32
Jesus Defines Discipleship.....	37
Jesus and The Great Commission.....	45
Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos .....	49
Timothy.....	49
Theological Foundations.....	51
Definition and impact of Discipleship .....	52
Historical Ecclesiastical and Cultural Themes of Discipleship .....	64
Research Design Literature.....	109
Summary of Literature .....	109

## CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter.....	111
Nature and Purpose of theProject.....	111
Research Questions.....	112
Research Question #1.....	112
Research Question #2.....	112
Research Question #3.....	112
Ministry Context.....	113
Participants.....	114
Criteria for Selection.....	114
Description of Participant.....	115
Ethical Considerations.....	115
Instrumentation .....	116
Reliability & Validity of Project Design .....	117
Data Collection .....	118
Data Analysis .....	119
CHAPTER 4 EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT.....	121
Overview of the Chapter.....	121
Participants.....	121
Research Question #1: Description of Evidence .....	123
Research Question #2: Description of Evidence .....	146
Research Question #3: Description of Evidence .....	153
Summary of Major Findings.....	157

CHAPTER 5 LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT .....	152
Overview of the Chapter .....	158
Major Findings .....	158
First Finding .....	158
Second Finding .....	161
Third Finding .....	164
Ministry Implications of the Findings .....	165
Limitations of the Study .....	167
Unexpected Observations .....	168
Recommendations .....	169
Postscript .....	171
APPENDIXES	
A. Digital Survey Questions .....	169
B. Focus Group Consent Letter .....	180
C. Letter of Permission to District Pastor to conduct focus group .....	183
D. Letter of Permission to Zone Pastor. To conduct focus group .....	185
E. Confidentiality Agreement .....	187
F. Focus Group Research Questions .....	189
G. Personal Interview Questions: With Senior Pastors and Youth Pastors .....	190
WORKS CITED .....	191

## LIST OF FIGURES

### Digital Survey Questions

Figure 4.1: Q-1) Did you receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues? .....	122
Figure 4.2: Q-2) If you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of Speaking in other tongues, would you agree that this experience contributed to your discipleship development as a believer? .....	123
Figure 4.3: Q-3) As a Pentecostal, do you agree that a believer who does not or has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but is nevertheless involved in an effective discipleship program, can be just as spiritual as one has been baptized with the Holy Spirit? .....	125
Figure 4.4: Q-4) Would you define discipleship as a program or a process or both? .....	128
Figure 4.5: Q-5) If you abandoned the Christian Faith at one point in your life, would you say that it was due to a lack of discipleship? .....	131
Figure 4.6: Q-6) Do you believe that a good discipleship program or philosophy contributes to a young adult remaining faithful to the Christian Faith? .....	133
Figure 4.7: Q-7) Would you agree that discipleship has strongly contributed to your development as a believer in Christ? .....	135
Figure 4.8: Q-8) Do you believe that you are being discipled in your experience as believer? .....	137
Figure 4.9: Q-9) Do you agree that a believer can grow without an effective means of discipleship, beyond a "multi-week" program that is designed to prepare you for water baptism and church membership?.....	140



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, to my Lord and savior, Jesus Christ, thank you. Thank you for the abundance of blessings that you have given me, including the honor of serving you in ministry. Despite the fact that I often fail you, you are faithful. Several years ago, I asked you to open a door for me to work on a doctoral program, and in your perfect timing, when I least expected it, you answered my petition by leading me to Asbury Theological Seminary. Not only did you open this door for me and my family, but you have been with me all along throughout this journey as a constant reminder of your eternal faithfulness.

Whenever I felt discouraged and not sure if this was the right idea to begin with (and I felt this way often), You, Holy Spirit, strengthened me. Your voice often spoke to my heart in the quiet still of the night. In addition to this, since you know my nature, you strategically placed the right people around me and used them to encourage me over and over again. You, oh Lord, initiated this journey in my life, and you made sure that I finished it. Yes, you were in it after all! Thank you, my Lord!

To my wife, Dr. Nidia Urbaez-Rodriguez. You are a woman of great faith. Whereas I'm constantly worrying and asking if and how things will work out, your words constantly inspire me, because you always believe that God is faithful and that He will always make a way. It's a lesson that I learn from you on a daily basis. When I initially spoke to you about this opportunity, and asked what you thought about it, despite the fact that you knew how much time this would take away from both you and from our kids, you didn't hesitate in telling me that you were with me and that I needed to do this.

The Holy Spirit spoke to your heart, and you immediately said yes, do it. This is a door that God has opened for you, so do not reject it, because it doesn't come around

often. And If that weren't enough, when everything was foggy for me, when, after the first cohort meeting, I couldn't figure out what topic to research and write about, you said, "Why don't you go back to your first love: youth ministry." That was a turning point for me in this journey; it made all the difference. I love you, and I always will. Thank you for being sensitive to the Holy Spirit, and for allowing the Lord to use you in such a special way.

I thank my precious children, Helen and Caleb. The both of you inspired me in your own ways. I spent many days away from home doing research for this project. And even when I was at home, I often found myself in some corner of the house reading and writing. That time was supposed to be yours, but the both of you, as young as you were, understood that daddy was working on a project that was given to him by God. The both of you are wise beyond your years.

Helen, I'll never forget what you told me when I explained what a Doctor of Ministry is all about. You said, "Oh, so you're not going to be a real doctor, like mom; she's a dentist, and she actually helps people in pain." Caleb, you defended me by saying that there are people who need God, and what I was doing was going to help them, too. The both of you motivated me, and I hope that this project will motivate you in your life and future endeavors

I would also like to thank the church that I've been pastoring for the last eight years, Church of God: Cathedral of Hope, in Orlando. I know that throughout this journey I've often seemed distant and probably not attentive to your spiritual needs. Nevertheless, you always understood the importance of this project, and you graciously allowed me the time and space to proceed with this work, even when it took valuable

time away from you. Dr. Angel Marcial, my presiding Bishop when I started this journey. One day, unexpectedly, we had a conversation in the Regional Offices of our denomination in Tampa. You surprised me by sharing with me that there was a great doctoral program being offered by Asbury Theological Seminary, and that if I was interested applying for it, you would recommend me for the program and in the process, I would most likely receive a scholarship which was part of the program. That conversation, in fact that recommendation, changed my life in terms of my theological training. Thank you for opening that door, Bishop.

My brothers and sisters, you believed that I was called for this, and you often shared that you were proud of me, and you encouraged me. Thank you! Mom, there was a time when I was far from God, but you constantly reminded me that God was not mad at me, that He was simply waiting for me, with open arms, to return to Him. Those words have always carried me, in my life as a disciple, in ministry, and throughout this journey. Dad, you're no longer with us. The Lord called you home in 2015, just when I was about to begin this journey. But you were so happy for me when I told you about the program. If you only knew how much you inspired me to love and respect the ministry, the pulpit, and the sermon. Thanks, dad! We will see each other again.

Dr. Ellen Marmon, my dissertation coach. You are such a blessing, Ellen. You are patient, insightful, and wise. Your observations and suggestions have helped me to become a better writer. Your constant encouragement has had a profound effect on me throughout this entire journey. Among the many gifts that you have, the Lord has also given you the ability to make people (including me!) believe that we're smart enough to complete a project such as this one. Thanks, Ellen!

To my first coach, Dr. Daryll Smith, thank you for those early days. You played an important role helping me to shape this project, while it was still in its infancy. To Dr. Milton and Verna Lowe for your help and wise counsel. You made the complex understandable in the world of research. Thanks to Dr. Jose Hernandez for all of your work and for the hospitality that you provided for our cohort in Spain. I learned so much on that trip. To all of the staff and the professors at Asbury Theological Seminary: you are making a real difference in the lives of countless people throughout the world. Finally, to the Beeson Scholarship program, thank you. Without your generosity, this dream would not have become a reality. Now and always, to God be the glory!

## CHAPTER 1

**Overview of the Chapter**

Within Christianity, one could safely say that the Latino Pentecostal Community has a unique way of worshipping God. Similar to their non-Pentecostal brethren, they believe in a powerful, active, and involved God. However, beyond that they also believe that they can regularly encounter God.

They believe that He will touch their hearts in a very real and intimate way through personal experiences. For them, not only are personal experiences through the Holy Spirit a vital part of the worship service, it is expected that they will happen. Otherwise, as far as many of them are concerned, the worship service was a waste of time.

These personal experiences with the Holy Spirit in church services are known to bring about immediate and powerful changes in the lives of those who are touched by God. As a result of this, Pentecostals are very passionate about sharing their life-changing experiences as a way of doing evangelism. For Pentecostals, their personal stories are an effective tool when sharing the gospel.

Since many young people today are hungry for something real, as opposed to what several say is a dry, boring religion with endless rules and regulations, Pentecostalism has a certain appeal to them. In their evangelism efforts, Latino Pentecostals have reached scores of young people with their personal story. But too often as time passes, many of the youth tend to abandon the Christian faith.

This chapter identifies a concern that many contemporary Latino Pentecostal youth leaders and pastors are experiencing: the exodus of young people from the Pentecostal movement. Despite the fact that the youth admit to having a powerful, life-changing experience

which brought them to Jesus in the first place, too often they abandon the very Pentecostal church where they found Jesus.

The question is why? Why do young adults, ages eighteen and older, adults who claim to have encountered God in a powerful way, abandon the Christian Faith.

### **Personal Introduction**

Although I have seen young adults abandon the faith by the time they turn eighteen, despite the fact they had testified about having powerful experiences with God, such as being baptized the Holy Spirit with evidence of speaking in other tongues, I became more interested with this issue a few years ago.

I had a conversation with a friend who was also a fellow Christian. We grew up together in church. This young person was a member of the worship team, a youth leader, and a person that others in the youth group looked up to. She was an example for many; they wanted to be like her because she had demonstrated a deep love for the Lord. Things were going very well for her in church and in ministry, it seemed.

But in our conversation, she shared that she no longer believed that Christ was the only way to God. She said that she loved and appreciated everything that she learned throughout her years in church, but she was no longer committed to the belief of Jesus as savior. She said that she loved Jesus, and that he was, indeed, a great teacher. But maybe he was not this unique Messiah like she was taught all of her life.

“What happened?” I asked her. She shared with me that her new experience in college “opened her mind” as it were. In particular, she had several conversations with a fellow student who befriended her, a Muslim who challenged her worldview in such a way that she found herself questioning her faith.

He challenged everything that she was brought up to believe in as a Christian: the Trinity and the Bible, both as inerrant and as God's inspired Word. He challenged her on the divinity of Christ. "Jesus was a great Prophet, but that's it" he told her. "He was not God, for God is not a man!" But the final blow, the argument that inflicted the worst injury on her Christian beliefs, were the writings known as *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

All of this was too much for her to digest. And she was not prepared to do battle with him. He went on and on about how these writings, these ancient tablets, were much older than the Bible. He informed her that much of what is written in the Bible was actually stolen from these writings. So, according to him the Bible was not genuine or unique: it was just a copy of other greater, older, and wiser books.

He maintained that stories such as the Genesis Flood narrative and the Garden of Eden, among others, were not unique to the Bible. He contended that they were written in other sources before the Bible was even written. She could not believe what she was hearing. This was the first time she had heard of this.

"Why was she misled for so many years?" was her question. So, she gave up. My question is, if she had been a good Pentecostal, then why didn't her experience help her? Why didn't her experience mark her enough for her to push back?

There is another example of a young man who chose another way. He too, was a youth leader who grew up in a Pentecostal church, and he had powerful experiences with God. However, there came a time in his life when he decided that predestination and eternal salvation was the true way.

Despite having several powerful spiritual experiences with God while growing up in a Wesleyan-Pentecostal context, one day he came to the conclusion that Calvinism was the way,

and that his experience as a Pentecostal, while good, was not completely right. Now, he did not make the harsh decision to abandon Christianity altogether, as did the first young lady that I mentioned. But he left what he was taught, what he learned, what he knew, and what he experienced, because he saw Pentecostalism as missing the point. What happened to him?

When I was a denominational youth minister, for many years before being named a senior pastor in 2012, I saw several examples like these within the churches that I dealt with. As a regional youth leader, part of my job was to visit churches and assist the pastor and youth pastor in developing their youth ministries.

After that, I would move on to the next church. I did not have to deal with the problem of discipleship and working directly with young people who were questioning their faith in Jesus. Unless they were known leaders within the denomination, I didn't know much about the personal lives of the individual young people of the church.

When I was named as a full-time pastor, I met with our youth group one day and had the opportunity to converse with them about several issues. It was an "ask the pastor" and "get to know the pastor" sort of event that the local youth minister organized. After they asked several questions, I asked them two questions:

1. If a friend of yours were to ask you, "Why Jesus and nobody else? Why is He the only way?" How would you respond?
2. Similar to the first question, I asked them what would you say if asked, "Why the Bible? If someone asked you about the so-called contradictions in the Bible, how would you respond?"

They all had a deer-in-the-headlight look. None of them were able to give me a basic, coherent answer. As for the question about Jesus, some said, "Jesus is everything." "Ok, that's

good, but it's not enough," I said. You have to be able to say something a little deeper. As for the Bible, they just said, "It's the Word of God."

Again, I said, "That's true and it's good, but can you give me a little more?" There was nothing. There was no response. They did not know why they believed that Bible was the Word of God, only to say that this was the way they were taught. I then realized that there was a problem in the relationship between experiences and knowledge.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In an article published by Barna research in 2019 titled, *Hispanic America: Faith, Values and Priorities*, they found that Hispanic teens in the U.S. are more likely than other ethnic groups in their generation to have a negative view of Christianity, noting that they "have a hard time believing that a good God would allow so much evil or suffering in the world" (39%) and "that there are too many injustices in the history of Christianity" (20%) (Barna Group).

Despite being brought up in a culture that values the practice of religion, the younger generations of Hispanic Americans are not as certain as their elders. They are either searching for authenticity within Christianity—a faith that addresses family, justice, work and other concerns and priorities of the community—or opting out of it entirely (Barna Group).

Pentecostal, Latino young adults have been leaving the faith for several years, despite their spiritual experiences. So, the question for this project is why? Why do Latino young adults, in the central district of the Church of God abandon their Christian Faith by the time they reach eighteen and go off to College?

The long-term goal is to create a curriculum that will help disciple young Pentecostal adults in the central district of the Latino community of the Church of God in Florida. During conversations with different youth groups the researcher realized an alarming lack of

discipleship. As a Wesleyan-Pentecostal movement, the Church of God believes in living a holy, sanctified life.

They also believe that the Holy Spirit goes further in His work with the church today. For example, they believe in the baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues, in miracles, and in healings. That is who they are.

However, it seems that many within this community of believers lack in the area of serious and profound discipleship. Although spiritual experiences are very important to Pentecostals, it would appear that within certain circles in this group, too much emphasis is sometimes placed on these experiences. Unfortunately, it is done to the detriment of biblical discipleship and follow-up. This is dangerous, because as impactful and transformative as they are, a believer cannot live on experiences alone. Spiritual experiences are powerful, but it is necessary to compliment spiritual experiences with discipleship in order to grow and mature as a believer.

The key to Christian growth is discipleship. Discipleship moves the believer beyond their initial decision to follow Jesus into a relationship with God. Discipleship forms the believer into the image of Christ. Dr. Robert Mulholland defines discipleship as, “The process of being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others” (15).

Discipleship will take on different forms for different people within Christianity. As a group that believes in the *experience* of the work of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals would find it easy to study and adhere to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral, which is a methodology for theological reflection. This methodology basis its teaching on four sources: Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.

### Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project was to investigate the nature of discipleship of the Latino youth ages eighteen and older in the central district of the Church of God in the Southeastern Hispanic Region, and how discipleship or the lack of discipleship impacts whether or not they choose to abandon the Christian faith.

### Research Questions

The questions that need to be answered regarding the impact that youth discipleship has on whether or not young people leave the Christian faith are:

1. What factors contribute to young adults, ages eighteen and older, in the Central District of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region abandoning the local church after graduating High School?
2. How are our young adults being discipled during their teenage, Junior High and High School years?
3. What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, central district contribute to discipling youth so that they do not abandon the local church after graduating High School?

### **Rationale for the Project**

First and foremost, this project matters because young people matter to God. Christianity is not some boring religion targeted only to adults, as some might believe. The Gospel is for all. The biblical narrative informs readers that God called and used young women and men in His redemptive work.

From Joseph to Jeremiah and from Ruth to Mary, the mother of Jesus, God demonstrates that He does not despise or look down on individuals because of their youth. Paul speaks to this

when he advises Timothy: *Let no one despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity* (1 Tim. 4.12).

Second, if the Latino Pentecostal church in the central district of the Church of God is going to retain the young adults that it works so hard to win over for Christ, then it has to make sure that it is discipling and affirming them in their daily walk with God. The church has a huge responsibility to help young adults mature in their spiritual walk with the Lord.

Third, too many young people have either abandoned the Christian faith altogether, or they attend church but have no real conviction. They have been introduced to and live a watered-down faith that does not challenge or fulfill their spiritual needs.

Fourth, today's young people do not feel as compelled as their parents did to be faithful to the church. Believers have to make a real case for Christianity if they are to convince them to make a decision for Jesus, and if they are going to keep them in the Christian faith.

Finally, it is important to understand that young people bring life to the church. Yes, it is true that they are the future leaders of the church. But they have a lot to contribute to the church today. Today's young adults are tired of empty words and a dry religion.

They are hungry for something real. If young people find something real in church and are changed by the power of God, they can and will reach other young people for Jesus. Their encounters with the Holy Spirit have to be balanced with effective discipleship, from a biblical (and Pentecostal) perspective.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

1. Speaking in Tongues: The specific spiritual manifestation that accompanies the baptism with the Holy Spirit. It is a sign of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. As in Acts chapter 2, and in other occasions in the New Testament, tongues are

given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and are spoken in a way that cannot be humanly learned. Pentecostals understand it as the initial evidence of being baptized with the Holy Spirit and a post-conversion experience.

2. Anointed: The belief that a true preacher and minister of God has a unique, effective, and powerful ability to communicate the Gospel, as a result of being baptized with the Holy Spirit. This anointing can only come upon a preacher that lives a life of prayer and fasting. Anything less is considered to be empty words by the messenger. As a result, the messenger is seen as a dry, non-spiritual preacher.

3. Preaching in the Power of the Holy Spirit: The belief that the only way to be a really effective preacher is when the preacher's sermon is (always) accompanied by the same signs and wonders which were present in the apostles' ministry in the primitive church. The sermon, in order to be considered godly, has to include a word of knowledge. Otherwise, God was not present.

4. Holiness: The belief that a holy life is internal and external. However, in addition to this many within the Latino Pentecostal community define a holy life as one who is constantly giving a word of knowledge, either in his/her sermon or when praying for a person.

5. Word of knowledge: The belief that at any given moment, the Holy Spirit uses an individual to speak into the life of a person concerning something very personal in his/her life. The word of knowledge can include a hidden sin, a future blessing that God plans on giving the person, or a confirmation of God calling someone to ministry.

6. Being a Teacher of the Word vs. a Preacher of the Word: Many Latino Pentecostal churches believe that in order to be a true preacher of the Word one has to have the ability to revive the church in their sermons, by giving a word of knowledge to most or all in attendance.

In the absence of this supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, the person who is speaking from the pulpit is not a real preacher. He or she is just a teacher of the Word of God, but one who lacks anointing, and therefore is not as effective on the pulpit as a so-called anointed preacher. It is important to understand that this term/phrase (teacher or teacher but not preacher) is commonly used with a pejorative connotation in many Latino Pentecostal circles.

7. Having knowledge of the Word of God, but not having the presence of the Holy Spirit: The belief that a teacher of the Word of God might know the Bible very well, but the presence of God is not with them because the sermon does not include a word of knowledge, miracles, or signs of wonder.

8. Spirituality: As understood in several Pentecostal circles, is the belief that the true measure of a person's spiritual life is how much they speak in tongues and whether or not they have been given the gift to communicate a word of knowledge from God at any given moment.

### **Delimitations**

For this project, the researcher chose to work with young adults age 18+ in the Central (Florida) district of the Church of God, Southeast Hispanic Region. The researcher served as Regional Youth & Discipleship Director for the Southeast Hispanic Region for six years, from 2000-2006 and therefore, he has some understanding of the nature of discipleship in this district.

He is currently serving as the senior pastor of Cathedral of Hope Church of God in the city of Orlando for the last 8 years. For this reason, he has a good relationship and access to the local churches and their pastors, the denomination leaders, the youth pastors, and their young adults.

The project will exclude adults and senior pastors in the church. The researcher wants to hear from the young adults directly and, in some instances, via interviews with Senior Pastors

and Youth Pastors. Although adults bring wisdom and experience to the table, young adults, their pastors, and their youth pastors are the ones who are best equipped to contribute to this project's conversation regarding their experiences in the area of discipleship. The central district of the Latino Church of God is made up of 19 churches. So, it makes it fairly easy to contact the young adults.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

This project consulted biblical, theological, and youth-ministry literature to glean insights into the topic of youth discipleship. The research studied reasons that cause many young people to leave the church, and finally, how to reclaim them for Jesus. The researcher studied the effects of spiritual experiences in the overall growth and discipleship of the young adult believer.

For many young adults in the Latino Pentecostal church, spiritual experiences such as speaking in tongues and giving a word of knowledge are so vital that they become the criteria by which a believer's spiritual formation is measured. Pastors and preachers are only described as anointed if they are constantly speaking in tongues and giving a word of knowledge. There is no discipleship in many cases. So, the spiritual experiences become somewhat of a de-facto discipleship program.

It was the intent of the researcher to analyze models of youth ministry within the local church in order to gauge their long-term effectiveness with regard to their relationship to God and, in the process, have a better understanding of what works when it comes to reaching and keeping young adults.

For this research to be integral, it is important to have an understanding of the history of the Pentecostal Church. Since the Pentecostal Church started as a revival movement characterized by prayer services, by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit (which saw believers speaking tongues), the presence of miracles, (similar to what is written in Acts 2), and not necessarily an intellectual movement such as the Reformation of the 1500's, it makes sense to understand their philosophy regarding discipleship, and answer key questions like:

1-Was there discipleship taking place in the local church?

2-How much emphasis was given to spiritual formation post conversion?

3-What was the role of Scriptures in the movement's worship?

4-Did the Pentecostal movement depend too much on experience for their spiritual growth?

5-Was there ever a time in the Church of God, where an immanent "end of times" mentality influenced the movement so much so that not much attention, if any, was given to the topic of discipleship and spiritual formation?

Answering many of these questions helped to better understand the reasons that many Latino Pentecostal churches are not as discipleship oriented as their sister denominations. *Like a Mighty Army*, by Charles Conn, was helpful in this research. Dr. Charles Conn was the Church of God Historian before he went home to be with the Lord. In his book, which is the official book of the history of the Church of God, Dr. Conn traces the history of the denomination from its humble beginnings in the 1880's. Conn writes about how the church almost destroyed itself in its infancy due to religious excesses and fanaticism.

Although many of the early believers abandoned the church as a result of feeling disillusioned due to these excesses, and never came back, some did return. However, what saved

the small denomination was not so much the fact that people were returning to the church. It was the fact that they were returning to a church that was now receiving instruction and Bible-based teaching which ultimately saved the fragile group.

Dr. Conn also writes that the church often celebrated evangelistic services, at the expense of profound, pastoral teaching. This is very important. True teaching and discipleship have to begin with the senior pastor. For this topic, the review turned to *The Disciple-Making Pastor*, by Dr. Bill Hull. Dr. Hull writes that the church is in deep crisis today and that crisis is due to fact that the church is winning members but not producing disciples of Christ.

Dr. Oliver McMahan, in his book *Deepening Discipleship*, looks at the *Practical Commitments* of the Church of God and integrates them into contemporary living. He places special emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the discipleship process. This book is helpful, especially from a Pentecostal perspective. It allows the young believer to see the many roles of Holy Spirit by going beyond what he is accustomed to hearing within many Latino Pentecostal congregations.

In *Growing True Disciples*, George Barna researches the state of discipleship today. He discovered that while spiritual growth is a matter of general importance for believers, it is not something they are pursuing with passion. Mr. Barna does not state the problem; he offers a solution, particular strategies that leaders can use in order to effectively disciple the church.

Dr. Jimmy Harper, Professor of youth ministries, campus pastor, and youth leader, is one of the leading voices that is speaking into the issue of Youth Ministry. In his book, *Launching a Forever Faith*, he dedicates an entire chapter to the subject of discipleship. He emphasizes the seriousness of discipleship, describing it as a move from knowledge of Christ to a deeper understanding of who He is and what He means to each believer.

In his book, *Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*, Dr. Robert Mulholland was a very helpful resource. Mulholland gives one of the best definitions of discipleship. He refers to it as a “Process in which one is conformed to image of Christ for the sake of others” (15).

### **Research Methodology**

In order to find out why some young people have not been discipled in their Christian journey and have left the Community of Believers, the researcher had to reach out and speak with them directly. As a former youth leader and current denomination leader, access to young adults was not a problem. The research was limited to several focus groups, a digital questionnaire via SurveyMonkey, and personal interviews with senior pastors and youth pastors.

The researcher was given written permission by the Administrative Bishop of the Southeast Hispanic Region of the Church of God to conduct focus groups, interviews with local Senior pastors and Youth pastors, and speak about the research in local churches.

Initial contact was made by sending out an email to the young adults, ages 18+, during denomination events and by speaking with young adults, youth pastors, and senior pastors. In the emails and the personal conversations, the researcher asked young adults, ages 18+, if they were willing to participate in a focus group and also complete an anonymous questionnaire via SurveyMonkey.

In the email, the researcher asked if they were willing to complete a questionnaire and participate in a focus group. The researcher also attached an Informed Consent letter that was completed and returned to the researcher before they participated in the focus group.

Finally, the information which was gathered was analyzed by the researcher in order to glean information about their discipleship experience and to find out some of the reasons why

young adults choose to either leave or stay in the faith during the crucial ages of eighteen and older.

The researcher included a mixture of participants: there were young adults who were born and raised in church, but have never left the faith; there were participants who were born and raised in church but at one point left the faith, and finally, there were those who were not born into a Christian family, but came to the faith as young adults.

In addition, there were participants who knew of others, close friends, that chose to leave the faith and shared they shared why they left. Finally, the researcher included the voice of youth pastors. The importance of their input cannot be ignored, as they are on the “front lines” of youth ministry.

### **Type of Research**

The researcher used an intervention, mixed-methods type of research, which included several focus groups, personal interviews with pastors and youth pastors, and a digital questionnaire via SurveyMonkey.

### **Participants**

The participants were young adults, men, and women who were invited from different churches within the Central district of the Latino/Latina ministries in Southeast Hispanic Region of the Church of God. In order to participate, they had to be eighteen and older; this way, they could legally consent to be part of the focus groups. The researcher included this group in order to listen to them and have a better understanding as to their views and experiences in the ministry of discipleship.

The researcher also included youth pastors from several churches of the central district of the Latino Church of God in Florida. It was the intent of the researcher to find out from the

participants what was their understanding of discipleship, how discipleship impacted their lives, and how they were being disciplined.

In addition to speaking with the youth, the researcher also wanted to find out from the youth pastors what was their experience ministering to young people. The objective was to have a better understanding as to how they disciplined the youth that were under their ministry and to glean from them why, in their opinion, young adults in the central district abandoned the faith when they went off to college.

The researcher chose to include the voices of several local senior pastors of the Latino central district of the Church of God who also had a strong background in youth ministries. In addition, youth pastors were also interviewed, since they are ministering to, and working with, young adults on a daily basis. They know what motivates them and what turns them off. They know the needs of young people, and they also know how to help them grow as disciples of Christ.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher prepared an online survey (via SurveyMonkey) in which he asked young adults several questions regarding the participants experience in the area of discipleship. It was the intention of the researcher to glean from them their understanding of discipleship and to find out whether or not, as believers and followers of Christ, they were living out a of life which reflected their understanding of what it meant to be a true disciple.

The researcher was intentional in asking the participants if they understood discipleship as a local church program which was established for baptism and membership after conversion or if they understood discipleship as a lifetime commitment to Jesus, a way life, as it were, which was based on conviction, belief and service to others. Several questions were asked in the survey

which were meant to find out from the participants the importance, understanding, and impact that both discipleship and their experience as Pentecostals has had on their lives.

Another equally important instrument was a series of focus groups. These groups were conducted in a controlled, secured environment (an environment which allowed them to speak freely), which allowed the young adult ages eighteen and older the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences as Pentecostals.

There was a total of five focus groups conducted within the central district of the Latino/a district of the Church of God. In two cases, two young youth pastors, one male and one female, participated in the focus group. As for digital survey, there was no way of knowing if youth pastors participated, since the question of leadership was not asked as part of the survey.

They were also given the opportunity to express their understanding of discipleship. The idea was for them to share whether or not they believed that they were being disciplined, and if they were, how were they living out their discipleship. If the participants expressed that they were indeed being disciplined as a way of life, then the researcher asked them how they would define the best practices of their discipleship.

Finally, while no one can guarantee that the questions asked will obtain the desired answers, the instruments were informed by the literature review and underwent an expert review. This increases the likelihood of the questions getting the desired outcome.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected over period three months. First, there were five focus groups conducted with participants who were no younger than eighteen years of age. The majority of the participants were in their mid-twenties, and a small minority was in their early thirties. As for

their educational background, it was mixed. Some were college educated or had some kind of degree in higher education.

Second, several interviews were conducted with pastors and leaders. There were five interviews with senior pastors, all of which had a background in youth ministry. There were also two interviews conducted with youth pastors. Finally, there was a digital questionnaire conducted via SurveyMonkey.

A person who wants to repeat this project can. First, they would have to pinpoint a topic of interest, such as discipleship practices within young adults in their area of ministry. If not the subject of discipleship, they could choose a particular area of ministry that they as researchers and church leaders are interested in or that they believe is in a state of crisis within their group, local church, or their denomination. It would make a great difference if the researcher believes that the topic or issue is beneficial to the church.

After the researcher decides on the topic, he would seek permission from the overseer or superintendent of that particular geographical area, the person with the authority to grant such permission. The request should be in writing and it should be very specific in terms of the scope and the study that the she wants to investigate. In addition to this, the letter requesting permission should identify the benefits that the denomination will reap.

Once the permission is granted to the researcher, he would recruit a group of participants. The participants should 18 years of age+, and there should be at least 30 individuals in total, including youth pastors and young people, if the target audience are young adults. In addition to this, the researcher should ask probing questions in the initial questionnaire or survey. The questions should be interesting enough to attract the target group. These questions should

challenge the participants to reflect and do some introspection, and in the process entice the group to participate.

To begin with, they would start with the young people who are closest to them, such as young adults within their denomination and within the churches that are in their sector, zone, district, conference, or region. These terms are important as every denomination has a different way of dividing, defining and grouping their area of work. For instance, in the Latino Ministries of the Church of God the local churches are divided by Regions, then Zones, and then Districts. They are narrowed down this way so as to make the work easier for the denomination leaders. So, it all depends on how a particular denomination divides the churches within their state, county, city, or country.

The researcher should ask a few questions in order to gain insight and, as a result, then obtain the pertinent information for their study. Such as: Why are young people abandoning their faith at an alarming rate when they go off to College after High School? Why have so many young adults abandoned their faith in the local church? What are they seeing (or not seeing) in their local congregations and with their pastors and the leadership in general, which tends to turn them off when it comes to the Christian faith?

Are young adults finding fulfillment in other non-Christian faiths? If so, why? Are young people being challenged in their local churches to live a life commitment and conviction to Christ, or are they being offered a social club where good deeds are the mark of a true believer? Finally, what are the practices of the believers who are committed to Christ? These questions should help a researcher to duplicate and repeat the project that is being conducted in this particular study.

### **Generalizability**

Young adults tend to abandon the Christian faith for several reasons. In some churches young adults might say that they found no community, and that is why they gave up on the church. But if a researcher witnessed that there is a pattern of young adults abandoning the church in their area, they might be able to transfer this project to their setting.

It would help if they had a certain suspicion regarding the reasons that their young adults are abandoning the faith. They can then ask some young adults and some of their leaders what is their opinion in order to glean some of their insight.

Discipleship has the same purpose in any Christian setting, which is to mold believers into the image of Christ and learn to be His followers. This might look different in certain settings, but in the end, it is the same, as it is the same Lord: Christ.

It is because discipleship is meant to mold a believer and help her grow into the image of Christ that this project is important. Also, it is because too many believers abandon the faith because they do not know how to love out their faith as believers, that this project is vital.

### **Project Overview**

This chapter has outlined the purpose of the project, the means that were used in order to gather data, and the participants that were included. Chapter two discusses the most influential voices which have spoken to the to the topic of discipleship throughout the history of the church and are still speaking to this issue today. Chapter three outlines the model that was used to answer the research questions. Chapter four analyzes the findings of the questionnaire and the focus group. Chapter five outlines the study's major findings, shares surprises which the researcher discovered in his journey, and then makes discipleship recommendations for to share with the leadership of the Church of God for use and implantation, if they desire to do so.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

This chapter investigates several issues that are associated with discipleship and the importance of mentoring. The researcher sought out the voices of ecclesiastical leaders, historians, and biblical writers to hear what they had to say about the subject of spiritual formation. It was important to study the lives of believers throughout church history, and especially in the Scripture, to understand how they lived out their lives as disciples and how these patterns can impact the lives of present-day followers of Christ.

In addition, the researcher wanted to glean insight from those who have already dealt with the subject of discipleship so as to have an understanding of the impact and the contribution to the church and youth ministries. The researcher wanted to know how meaningful discipleship was to the church throughout its history and to men and women of God as found in Scriptures.

The researcher examined many authors whose literature was relevant and substantive to the topic of discipleship. In particular, important subjects such as the definition and history of discipleship were reviewed. In addition to the aforementioned, the researcher provided biblical and theological foundations for discipleship, plus research into the developmental needs of youth ages eighteen and older.

This chapter considers several models of discipleship that were implemented at different times throughout the history of the church. It also reviews the merits of a mixed methods, intervention project.

### **Biblical Foundations**

The Bible is replete with examples of women and men, both in the Hebrew Bible and in the New Testament, who shape, form, or set an example for the younger generation. They did so by sharing words of wisdom and sound, timely advice. In addition to their words, they lived out their discipleship and practiced what they preached, they demonstrated to have the courage of their spiritual conviction, both in private and in the public arena.

Joseph is an example of a young man who, when faced with the temptation to have an affair with Potiphar's wife, refused to do so because he did not want to sin against God. Daniel is another example of a believer who lived out his discipleship and commitment to God. He did not give in to the day's modern culture. In his case, several leaders (princes), who were motivated by

jealousy, asked King Darius to sign a decree which stated that no one shall pray and ask anything of their gods for thirty days and if they did, they would be thrown into the lions' den. When Daniel heard of this, he did not give in; he refused to comply. Instead, he prayed towards Jerusalem with his windows open for all to see (Dan. 6.1-10).

Esther was a young woman who chose to petition the king in person, despite the fact that, according to Persian law at that time, it was illegal to go and see the king unless he called for you. However, an enemy of the Jews, Haman, manipulated the situation to the point of getting a decree passed which would kill all Jews. Esther was in a position to make a difference. But was she hesitant at first because she had not been invited by the king to enter into his court. So, she obviously feared for her life. However, her fears did not stop her from making a difference. And not just a small difference, but one which would ultimately save lives.

She was motivated by her cousin Mordecai who warned her of the consequences to her and to the Jewish community at large. When the time came, she actually accepted the challenge in order to save her people stating, "If I perish, I perish." One can say that someone in her life (Mordecai), poured into her.

One can also say that Esther led by example and not just words. Whether these young men and women were moved directly by the Holy Spirit or whether or not the Holy Spirit used the words and lives of others who had influence over them is unknown. The fact is that they lived out a life of commitment to God, and when the time came, they demonstrated that commitment with their actions.

### **Mentoring and Discipleship:**

#### **Old Testament Models**

**Moses and Joshua (Num. 11.28; Deut. 34.9; Josh. 1):**

Discipleship is not just a New Testament concept. In fact, it can be seen taking place in the Hebrew Bible by way of *mentorship*; such is the case between Moses and Joshua. Joshua is a faithful aid to Moses, and Moses mentors and empowers Joshua for the work of God.

Fazel Freeks describes the Joshua-Moses model of mentoring and discipleship as such: Joshua was a model of faithful obedience to the Lord's law and was a warrior who fought on behalf of Moses and who also led Israel to victory (Deut. 34.9-12; Josh. 1.1-18; 2-3). His characteristic role was a general of the armies with authority approved by Moses. Joshua was also the designated assistant of Moses when he ascended the mountain of God (cf. Exod. 24.13). According to Numbers 27.18-23, Joshua was commissioned to succeed Moses. At that point in time he was referred to as someone in whom the spirit was. Joshua is further described as one who "stood before" Moses. So, God commanded Moses to strengthen Joshua because Joshua would cause Israel to inherit the land (cf. Deut. 3.28). (Freeks, 242).

Freeks argues that Joshua was a faithful, obedient leader. He was a man full of the Spirit and a man who clearly received his calling from God. Joshua was hand-picked by God to complete the work that was started by Moses, to lead Israel into the promise land. However, it was that very same God who gave Moses the power and jurisdiction over Joshua's leadership. Yahweh delegated the very delicate process of developing a great leader to Moses.

This concept is strengthened by Duane L. Christensen who states:

...the very endowment of wisdom on Joshua came through the hands of Moses; and Moses like YHWH himself, is incomparable (v. 10). The conclusion of the matter is clear: the people of God are to submit themselves to the leader God raises up in their midst, in this instance Joshua, as Moses commanded. (869)

While many communities in the modern church tend to take the laying of hands over an individual for ministerial consecration and confirmation a little too lightly, Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown affirm the importance of this ceremony. They see it as more than just a symbolic act. They state that it was a “powerful testimony of the of the Divine Spirit” referring of course to the Holy Spirit. (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, 146).

In the Pentecostal tradition, the laying of hands over an individual for ministry is a very important and profoundly spiritual ceremony. Generally speaking, Pentecostals believe that the Holy Spirit is present and active in these ceremonies. They believe that at that very moment God touches them, and they can touch God. Although it has lost some of its impact in some circles within Pentecostalism, ordaining a candidate for ministry is still seen as a very serious act, taught as a lifelong commitment. You do not “turn off” the ministerial switch when it no longer suits you.

How seriously the ceremony is performed depends on the Presiding Bishop. Some Bishops, Superintendents, or Overseers (the title depends on the organization) have reached the point where it has become a routine that is taken lightly. Some of these leaders simply repeat the same prayer that they have repeated in other ceremonies. Then they proceed to shake the new minister’s hand or hug them; finally they welcome them to the ministry and wish them well. While there is nothing wrong with that in and of itself, it often feels dry and empty.

Other overseers within the Pentecostal community take the act of laying hands over a new minister so seriously that the prayer is very personal, spiritual, and prophetic. In fact, it is not unusual to witness an Overseer in the Pentecostal community pray so intense and profoundly that they actually speak in tongues and then give a specific and direct message from God to the minister about their calling, their direction, and their purpose in ministry.

Many of these Overseers take the time to prepare themselves spiritually by praying and fasting before performing such an important ceremony. While this might seem crazy in other evangelical communities, it is a very serious act for most Pentecostals, and it's something that the newly ordained ministers never forget. This type of ceremony is something that Pentecostals get directly from stories such as this one from Moses and from Paul to Timothy.

The message that is given to the new ministers is often one of complete submission and obedience to God and their earthly, ecclesiastical leaders as seen in the life of Joshua under Moses. Submitting, they are told, brings a blessing from God. In submitting himself to Moses, Joshua grew in wisdom. This model of leadership has proven to be valuable throughout history. Submitting oneself to the wisdom and authority of godly leader contributes to the development of mature leadership.

**Elijah and Elisha (II Kings 2.1-14):**

Another example of the mentor/disciple relationship can be found in the Elisha/Elijah narrative. While it true that Elijah *mentored* Elisha, the circumstances were different than the relationship between Moses and Joshua. The Lord did not order Elijah to disciple Elisha, as He did with Moses and Joshua. However, there is no doubt that Elisha was called to be a prophet of God, and that Elijah played an important role in Elisha's ministry. Freeks speaks to this issue:

Elisha was further the apprentice of Elijah because his own prophetic career did not begin until the end of Elijah's work. The prophet Elijah acted as a possible current "mentor" to Elisha who took over Elijah's ministry after he had been taken up to heaven (2 Kings 2.1-18). He refused to be separated from Elijah the older man, which means that he kept to the things he learned such as valuable advice, instructions, faithfulness as a virtue, discipleship, etc.

(245)

Likewise, D.E. Orton writes, “Elijah cast his mantle upon Elisha as an indication that he would follow Elijah and receive valuable advice and instructions from Elijah” (61).

### **Samuel and Eli (I Sam. 1.24-28; 3.1-1)**

Another important example of a *mentor* relationship is that of Eli and Samuel. Eli was a man of prayer, and therefore, understood both the calling that was upon Samuel’s life and what it meant to be a mentor who pours into another person’s life.

Father Michael Cummins writes:

In the third chapter of 1 Samuel, we find the well-known scene of the young Samuel hearing the voice of the Lord, mistaking it for the voice of the old priest and going each time to the sleeping Eli until finally Eli catches on to what is happening and instructs the young man in how to respond. He told Samuel that he should respond the next time by saying, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.” (Cummins 1)

He adds that there are four things that Eli does which are worthy of reflection and emulation:

- Eli has a relationship with the young Samuel while not pretending to be Samuel’s peer.
- Eli was a man of prayer who was able to eventually recognize what was occurring and then give good instruction to the young man.
- Eli put what was in Samuel’s best interest before his own.
- Eli trusted in God. (Cummins 1)

Although far from being a perfect man, Eli understood the importance of guiding and mentoring young Samuel in such a way that he could recognize the voice of God. Eli had allowed his sons to do as they pleased, and, therefore, slowly but surely, he brought the wrath of

God upon his family and his legacy. Nevertheless, he still had a lot to offer. While it is true that he lost a sense of moral authority, it seems that in this case, at least, Eli did not lose the ability to know and understand when God was doing something supernatural.

The mentoring/discipleship process works best when the mentor is on the right track. However, one should not be quick to dismiss people whose lives might not be that which they believe it should be. It is quite possible for a leader to be experiencing a dark season in their journey but still have something of value to offer. Eli demonstrates this by being a man of prayer who was able to advise and offer wise counsel to young Samuel at crucial moment of his life. Although Samuel was the man who would replace Eli, and the boy who was doing the right thing, he did not recognize the voice of God. However, Eli recognized the voice of the Lord and this made the difference.

Concerning this, Birch writes:

With humility, we realize that, like Samuel, we may not by ourselves recognize the call of God. It may be others, like Eli, who discern the divine presence first and name the divine name so that we may be enabled to respond. This text calls for openness to seeking the advice and wisdom of others who might aid us in discerning God's call. (995)

Too many people are quick to run right out and "work for God" when they believe that the Lord has called them. They never take into consideration the importance of sitting down with an experienced person who has already been through the process in order to get a better understanding of God's will. Unfortunately, too often arrogance takes over the understanding of a person who has been called by God. They look down on other older leaders and see them as somehow being less spiritual, not spiritual, or not good enough to be listened to regarding godly matters.

## **Ruth and Naomi**

Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law, advises Ruth regarding Boaz. She wanted the best for Ruth. She wanted her to marry again and be happy. In chapter 3 of the Book of Ruth Naomi tells her, "shall I not seek security for you, that it may be well with you?" Naomi advises Ruth to wash and anoint herself, to put on her best garment, and after he eats, to go and lie down at his feet. Ruth responds, "All that you say to me I will do." Ultimately, this results in a tremendous blessing for Ruth, as she married Boaz, a humble, godly man.

The story of Ruth and Naomi is special in so many ways. One can see the hand of God working in the lives of two women who had suffered a great deal due to the loss of their husbands. Soon after the death of Naomi's husband, Elimelech, and the death of Naomi's two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, who were married to Ruth and Orpah, rather than staying behind in Moab with her family, Ruth follows Naomi back to Bethlehem and commits herself to the "God of Naomi" (Ruth 1.d17). Naomi becomes a strong and very influential mentor to Ruth.

Laura Darling writes:

The thing that stays with me about Naomi's mentorship of Ruth is its mutuality and its maturity. It's not so much leaning in as it is both of them leaning on each other. Naomi's deep caring for Ruth is equaled by her savvy. Her mentorship is not a soft pat on the head, but strong-minded analysis on how to help Ruth succeed. Ruth, meanwhile, does not sit passively by, waiting for Naomi to call the shots. Instead, she takes steps, refined by Naomi's insights. (1)

## **New Testament Models**

The term disciple was the most common way of referring to believers or followers of Christ, as can be seen in the New Testament. The word 'disciple' appears 269 times in the New

Testament. The term Christian appears three times, and even then, it was done to refer to the disciples. This was done once they could no longer be considered a Jewish sect. The New Testament is a book about disciples, written by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ (Willard 259). For this reason, one can say that one of the best ways to learn about effective discipleship, and what it means to be a disciple, is to refer to the New Testament and study the lives of those Christ's disciples.

So beyond being a book of rules and regulations, sound doctrine, and do's and don'ts (all of which are very important), when the different authors of the New Testament wrote about Christ and about their experiences with Him, they were interested in making sure that their readers would come to Jesus and ultimately live a life of intimacy with their Lord. To seek this kind of life of deep intimacy and discipleship, which is born out of love for the Lord, goes a long way in growing in Christ and being faithful to Him.

this reality, discipleship as a way of life is not as prevalent in the 21<sup>st</sup>. century. Maybe it is because many present-day believers are not quite sure what it means to be a disciple. For many Christians, discipleship is some sort of 10-week course that new believers have to take in order to be baptized or accepted into the local congregation as a member, depending on the denomination. "However, when Jesus walked among humans, it was easy to be His disciple; primarily it simply meant to walk with Him and have a teachable spirit. An attitude of obedience, and the desire to imitate Him" (Willard 261). It seems that, for a host of different reasons, this kind of attitude that was seen in the New Testament is lacking in today's church. Today, there are too many individuals who care more about their rights, too many with-a-holier than though attitude, or too many political activists mixing things into the local church that should not be

there, and in the process, they pass off what they do as “for the Lord” and in the “Spirit of Christianity.” There are more personal agendas in the church today than there are disciples.

The true disciple wants to follow and imitate her Lord. In the heart of the disciple there is a desire to serve the Lord. “Having reached a sense of understanding of what it means, and having calculated the cost, the disciple of Christ desires, above all things to be like Him” (Willard 262).

The modern church does not seem to demand much of the believer. There is no challenge made to the believer to grow in his faith. Leaders and pastors seem to go out of their way so as not to offend people with their sermons. In fact, many worship services are more of a show and entertainment prepared for the delight of the attendees. Instead of taking the opportunity to communicate the consequences of living a watered-down Christian life, too often preachers, pastors, and leaders are preoccupied with self-help sermons. These sermons feel good for the moment, but they do nothing to help the believer become a better disciple.

Willard writes, “In 1937, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave the world his book title *The Cost of Discipleship*. It was an attack against easy Christianity or cheap grace. He was right in pointing out that one cannot be a disciple of Christ without abandoning those things which she normally seeks in this life” (263). This is a stark contrast to what passes for Christianity today. Too often Christians look for a “comfortable” church. In fact, a church that will not challenge them to live out a life of discipleship that confronts them as believers. Many Christians just do not want to be bothered.

Although a form of Christianity without the challenge for real growth seems attractive, in reality, the result of being a believer without true discipleship is at best a boring life, at worst eternal damnation. Willard continues, “The cost of not being a disciple, costs us our permanent

peace; the absence of a life which is totally connected with the love and faith that sees everything in light of God's complete government over our lives" (264).

Willard clearly believes that it is not enough to be a nominal Christian. Anybody can become a member of a local church, but that does not make them a disciple. He challenges and confronts the church by informing the community of believers that discipleship is a lifetime commitment in which the individual dedicates her life to God in total obedience. Willard says that the tragedy of the modern church is lack of conviction. The church has traded-in its unique identity as disciples of Christ in return for some sense of greatness, fame, and "Broadway" lights. After all, the religious show must go on. Numbers and membership have taken the place of genuine intimacy and discipleship.

If believers would adopt an attitude of servants, servants of the Lord, servants of the church, servants of the community, and servants of humanity, they would not seek the so called "lights", "fame" and "recognition" that Willard is referring to. In fact, instead of falling into the temptation and selfishness that attaches itself with the attitude of looking inward, they would be so busy in service to others that there would be no time for a life of "me and my needs" but only the needs of others, as Jesus did.

Henry Blackaby speaks to this when he says, "To be involved in God's work, you must be a servant. Many Scripture passages describe Jesus as God's Servant to accomplish God's will in the redemption of humanity" (Blackaby & King 38).

## **Jesus**

Jesus is the central figure in the history of the church. Although He forcefully challenged the religious establishment of the day, He was not, as many would like the world to believe, dedicated to being some sort of political revolutionary. He was not dedicated to a life of rebellion

against the system, an angry rebel searching for his identity. In fact, together with His 12 disciples, Jesus spent the three years of his ministerial life dedicated to teaching.

Several elements of His teaching ministry were evident. First, there was his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. However, once it became obvious that the nation would reject that message, Jesus turned his ministry to teaching. His ministry became a people-centered type of instruction, and it was this second element that characterized His ministry (Campus Crusade for Christ 30).

As Christ turned from proclamation to teaching, the twelve who were always with him became known as disciples, or learners. “Although he often addressed large crowds, the heart of His approach was His involvement with the twelve disciples. Jesus expected this group of twelve to use the same approach and pattern of discipling that He used, to begin the church” (Campus Crusade for Christ 30).

He employed four principles in His approach of discipleship, which were His methods of spiritual formation. Jesus preached and proclaimed the gospel to large crowds. However, when it came to the development of closest followers, He poured quality time into their lives on a more personal level. “After carefully seeking guidance from His Father, Jesus selected His disciples and then spent the majority of His time with them. Part of this qualitative building process involved teaching His men in the context of *real-life experience*” (Campus Crusade for Christ 31). This was His first principle.

Second, was Jesus’ principle of multiplication. Believers and leaders should have the ability to pour into and build up the lives of others around them. If something has positively affected the life of a person, to the point that the individual has been holistically transformed, it

would make sense that he would want to share that life-changing process with others who have not had that experience, and in the process, grow and reproduce the Kingdom.

“Christ viewed each disciple as the center of a reproducing ministry. He understood that when you build your qualitatively into the lives of a few, you begin a multiplication process that never ends” (Campus Crusade for Christ 33). “The third principle that Jesus believed in, and one that was evident in His life, was His willingness to make discipling of others a priority” (Campus Crusade for Christ 34).

Simply from a practical perspective, these two principles have proven to be successful in the area of church growth. Many churches that have adopted the approach of small groups and have given the members of the congregation a sense of ownership of the overall vision of the church, have seen huge returns, so to speak, on their investment. The key word here being investment. Investing your life in the life of others for sake of the gospel is a powerful and effective means of growing the kingdom. For too long the church has left the work of growing the kingdom to a few professional ministers. While full-time ministry is a real and important part of the church in general, the church would do good in taking an approach that includes more people and more voices. Everyone in the Body of Christ has something to contribute.

In studying the life of Jesus one would see that he was a disciple-maker who did not invest time selfishly looking inward. Instead, he spent time looking outside of Himself, and in that way, Jesus invested in others. He looked for the best in people, and He was dedicated to teaching them how to grow and how to help others grow. That said, he placed demands on those whom He called to be His disciples.

### **Jesus Defines Discipleship**

In describing what a disciple is and what a disciple does, the voice of Jesus must be heard. Jesus' definition of discipleship is not limited only to what he or she may do for the kingdom, e.g., winning souls and training them to win other souls. To be sure, this is part of the journey. However, regarding discipleship, Jesus said, "Love one another; as I have loved you...By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples..." (John 13.34 NIV).

Dr. Hiram Almirudis, in his interpretation of Mark 8.34-38 in which Jesus explains what it means to be His disciple, defines discipleship as a price to pay. "When the Lord rebuked Peter, he did so for another reason: Christian discipleship demands a price, a very high price: the price of loyalty to the Lord at all times and under any circumstances, the price of sacrifice, the price of total surrender to God, and the price of perseverance" (Almirudis 143).

Similarly, Milam argues:

Jesus imposes a condition that raises the level of difficulty from an already difficult task.

He commands us to love one another as he has loved us. The love of Jesus is filtered through the love God. Everything He did was done according to the "Will of God,"

something we can't possibly do without the help of His Holy Spirit. Becoming a true

Discipleship is directly related to our act of love toward one another. (Milam 10)

Milam's main point is that Jesus demonstrated His love for humanity by way of action, and action is exactly what he demands from us. Christians are to go beyond talking about love; they are to act in love. The most difficult part of being a disciple, according to Milam, is not limited to picking up sound doctrine, as important as this is for a believer. Genuine discipleship is shown in loving each other as Jesus loved us, and to do so in fellowship. This is the more difficult aspect of discipleship, and this defines a true disciple.

In addition to imposing a condition and demanding an action, there are other aspects of Jesus' approach to discipleship that the modern church can learn. Jesus is the central figure in the history of the church. Although He challenged the religious establishment of the day, He was not, as many would like the world to believe, dedicated to being some sort of political revolutionary, who was just dedicated to a life of rebellion against the system, for the sake of rebelling. Along with His 12 disciples, Jesus spent the three years of his ministerial life dedicated to teaching.

Three elements of His teaching ministry were evident. *First*, there was his proclamation of the Kingdom of God. However, once it became obvious that the nation would reject that message, Jesus turned his ministry to teaching. His ministry became a people-centered type of instruction, and it was this second element that characterized His ministry (Campus Crusade for Christ 30).

As Christ turned from proclamation to teaching, the twelve who were always with him became known as disciples, or learners. "Although he often addressed large crowds, the heart of His approach was His involvement with the twelve disciples. Jesus expected this group of twelve to use the same approach and pattern of discipling that He used, to begin the church" (Campus Crusade for Christ 30). He employed four principles in His approach of discipleship, which were His methods of spiritual formation.

Jesus preached and proclaimed the gospel to large crowds. However, when it came to the development of His closest followers, Jesus poured quality time into their lives on a more personal level. "After carefully seeking guidance from His Father, Jesus selected His disciples and then spent the majority of His time with them. Part of this qualitative building process

involved teaching His men in the context of *real-life experience*” (Campus Crusade for Christ 31). This was His first principle.

*Second*, was Jesus’ principle of multiplication. Believers and leaders should have the ability to pour into and build up the lives of others around them. If something has positively affected the life of a person, to the point that the individual has been holistically transformed, it would make sense that he would want to share that life-changing process with others who have not had that experience, and in the process, grow and reproduce the Kingdom. “Christ viewed each disciple as the center of a reproducing ministry. He understood that when you build qualitatively into the lives of a few, you begin a multiplication process that never ends” (Campus Crusade for Christ 33).

“The *third* principle that Jesus believed in, and one that was evident in His life, was His willingness to make discipling of others a priority” (Campus Crusade 34). Jesus was not fixated on people’s weaknesses. At the very least, it did not stop Him from calling them and challenging them to follow Him. On the contrary, Jesus saw what a person can become, not what they were. “...Jesus’ ministry was focused on potential, not problems, but that did not stop Him. In part, this was a result of personally involving Himself into the lives of those whom He called to follow Him. “Forming close relationships with either one person or ten brings us into a painful awareness of each individual’s needs and problems. The basic issue, however, is our perspective. Do we relate to individuals on the basis of their problems or their potential?” (Campus Crusade for Christ 35).

Jesus saw what a person can become, not what they were. The idea of not allowing your past to define you or your future, a concept that is often preached, as it were, both in church and in many secular circles today, was at the core of the ministry of Christ. It’s not that Christ wanted

people to ignore their past lives altogether. He wanted to them to know who they were, but to move forward after coming into a relationship with Him.

Jesus did not want broken people to remain broken because they were unable to find forgiveness and healing in Him. He knew that humanity was broken, that all have sinned, and that all needed to be forgiven. But beyond forgiveness, the life of the individual who finds Christ should then be defined as one of joy, intimacy with the Almighty, proclaiming the gospel, doing amazing things for the Lord, and in so doing, fulfilling your potential as a believer.

In many circles within the Church of God, discipleship is a process that begins at spiritual rebirth. “A new life begins with the new birth. Just as a newborn baby doesn’t understand his physical life, and is required to grow and develop, even so newborn believers must mature in Christ through prayer, worship, study of Scriptures, and fellowship with others” (Cossey 7).

The Youth Department of the Church of God, picks up and expands on Jesus’ definition of discipleship:

Making disciples is not just about introducing people to Christ; it edifies them in the faith and sends them into their own harvest field. The process of making disciples includes a leader that shares his burden and vision to lead people into an eternal relationship with Christ. This process is called spiritual maturity. Making disciples in Youth Ministries carries with it the responsibility of presenting the of the Word of God, the revelation of His will for their lives, and the profound ways that guide the disciple of Christ towards maturity. (El Gran Libro de Ministerios de la Iglesia 97)

“Jesus revealed that God’s ideal for humans entails life-in-community. From Jesus, we learn that we only come to participate fully in our humanity as we live in fellowship with God,

with others, and with creation around, us” (Grenz 284). With these words, Grenz proposes an essential axiom: true discipleship cannot take place apart from community and fellowship.

He further explains:

discipleship as patterning our lives after Jesus means that Jesus’ model and teaching become the standard by comparison to which we evaluate our innermost attitudes and our outward actions. Like Jesus, we live conscious of our presence before God who is our Abba. As a consequence, we continually seek to follow after the life of community with God, others, and creation. (Grenz 292)

Grenz makes a profound connection between believers and Christ. “Jesus’ story becomes our story in the life of discipleship in another way as well. He becomes the universal human in our experience as we derive our identity from his, which he shares with us” (Grenz 292). Finally, Grenz connects the Church, the Spirit and Christ. This life of discipleship after the paradigmatic life of Jesus takes disciples out of their separate and separated existence. Jesus becomes the universal human in the believer’s experience as they enter the fellowship he offers, the life-in-community to which he directs them. This fellowship is from beginning to end a corporate reality, the community of his disciples. Because these themes lead us beyond Christology into pneumatology and ecclesiology (293).

He affirms the idea that discipleship goes beyond an individual relationship with Christ, as is preached in many circles. Discipleship begins with a ‘one on one’ intimate relationship with Christ. However, so that it may grow and mature in a healthy manner, this relationship needs to be developed within the community of saints and in the power of the Holy Spirit. Otherwise, it becomes another dry tasteless religion.

At the very center of Christianity lies a theological truth: humanity was created for relationship. Women and men are not meant to live alone and isolated. The very first relationship is the relationship with God. That relationship with God needs to be reflected in human relationships which, at least for the believer, should be expressed in love for one another.

As Milam shares regarding this concept, “The Word of God, the Bible, is a love story. It reveals the love of God for all mankind. His love was poured out in the flesh so that the Word could be seen and felt, as well as heard. Christ was and is God’s love. He was and still is, our teacher, our hope, and our example of all that God’s love should be” (Milam 145).

“Early in his ministry Jesus gathered around him a group of followers who were then called disciples. Since he was popular, crowds of people followed him, and on one occasion he expressed to them the terms of discipleship. *And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple...In the same way, be any of you who do does not give up everything he cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14: 27, 33 NIV). Jesus was saying in effect, ‘if you do not love me enough to do this, there is no way you can be one of my disciples. No way!’” (Cosgrove 9).

“A disciple, then, is a follower and a learner committed to developing his character and growing more Christ-like. When we are willing to learn, we emerge as trophies of his grace and products of His tender, loving care” (Cosgrove 36). So, as Cosgrove defines it, before disciples can love one another they need to love God. True love for God is demonstrated in knowing, loving, and obeying Jesus. Christians also show our love for Him in their willingness to commit their lives to Him and allow Him to teach them.

When trying to glean what a disciple is, many tend to ask questions as a means of having a better understanding:

When discerning the vitality of a particular church member, some of the traditional questions that are asked are those of regular church attendance, bible Study activities and helping the poor and tithing. These questions place value on certain behaviors. And while behavior is obviously important, it alone does not accomplish the goal of spiritual formation. What if we asked a different set of questions? What would our churches look like if, more than anything, we valued a particular set of redemptive relationships? (McDonald 19)

Relationship is at the core of McDonald's approach to discipleship. In fact, he goes on to suggest six questions that can and should ask as a means of defining what a disciple is:

**Who is your Lord?** When everything is said and done, whose agenda are you truly following?

**Who are you?** At the beginning of each day, do you wake up knowing that you'll have to go out and win your own share of security and significance, or can you truly say that those are priceless gifts you have already received?

**Who is your Barnabas?** Who is your spiritual mentor, the one from whom you are learning how to follow Jesus?

**Who is your Timothy?** Who is your apprentice, the one to whom you are passing along the lessons that God has entrusted to you?

**Where is your Antioch?** What small cadre of special friends is helping you to discern God's direction for your life?

**Where is your Macedonia?** What field of ministry is most closely aligned with God's call on your life and hauntingly stirs your deepest passions?

As believers wrestle with these questions and seek God’s answers to them, teaching others to do the same—our congregations will become different kinds of places. Success will be measured in a different manner, and we will surrender our futile quest to discover the one-size-fits-all program and grasp that God is powerfully and quietly at work within the mystery of discipling relationships. (McDonald 19)

### **Jesus and the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20)**

“Go and Preach the gospel” is a very common theme that is proclaimed by local churches who want grow. Annual crusades and evangelistic outreach services are not unusual in many evangelical, charismatic circles. It is believed (and rightly so in many cases), that if you just preach, or plant the seed of the “Word” of God, sooner or later that seed will grow in people’s hearts.

But that does not always work. In fact, there are many people who listen to message, are deeply and emotionally touched by what they hear, and then they make emotional decisions as a reaction to the sermon. But too often it is made without a true sense of conviction. These decisions do not always last. Many tend to backslide when life throws them a curveball or when someone challenges or questions their worldview.

Making disciples was the last command that Jesus gave to his followers. The reason for this is because the process of disciple-making establishes and affirms a person in their belief more so than challenging someone to respond quickly to message or a sermon. Jesus did not say go and evangelize in order to see how many decisions you can get in a particular service. To be sure, the message of the gospel is not lost in the practice of disciple-making. On the contrary, if done correctly, the gospel is preached when a person is discipling. In the end, it is the Holy Spirit

who brings people to Christ when believers are about the business of making disciples. Making disciples is extremely important.

There are several reasons for making disciples. First, because of who Jesus is and because He said to do it. Hull writes:

Jesus told us to be disciples and to make disciples. When he issued the Great Commission, he could have spoken about contemplation, study, worship services, or gathering people together for revival meetings in the Temple. He could have restated the Great Commandment. But he didn't. Instead Jesus got straight to the point with simple words: 'all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations. (25)

Hull is stating that while all of the practices and traditions that are associated with the business of the church, such as coming together for worship and studying the Bible, the one time that the Lord gives a commandment he says, "make disciples." He does not speak about programs or songs. While programs are good and important, they fall short when there is not a discipleship process which is taking place. He states:

When Jesus told the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, they knew what He meant: He had taught them by His example, and they understood the principles and priorities they had seen in His behavior. They were to win others to the faith and make more of what they were. Jesus modeled both a strategy and a lifestyle. (Hull 22)

Making disciples and forming believers goes beyond the responsibility of the 'paid' leaders of the church. It should be the responsibility of the entire church. The entire church should be about the business of teaching because this is what Jesus said to do: "Go therefore and

make disciples of all nations...teaching them to observe all the things that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Many within the church have abandoned the idea of discipleship and spiritual formation after conversion, for the sake of the numbers. In too many circles the church has entrenched itself in this game:

“Jesus was the greatest of all teachers. His example was followed by the disciples as is clearly seen in the book of the Acts and other letters of the New Testament. This example should challenge the entire church today; the church needs to understand that it is responsible for the very important task of Christian Formation” (Mas allá de la Escuela Dominical, 8).

After establishing once again who he is, Jesus goes on to declare his commandment, which is to “Go.” Because of who he is, he can now declare, with full authority, “Therefore...” in Matthew 28:19. The original Greek word for ‘therefore’ is *oun* (oun) (Strong’s #3767). This is a term that Jesus used ninety-five times before his death, but he used it only once after his resurrection; and it is the only recorded cause and effect statement that he makes in the forty days since Easter morning. “I have resurrected, and all power has been given to me.” “The consequence of his resurrection is what follows. Now the gates of heaven are open. God’s sacrifice was the death of His Son. The mission was to save humanity. The end (God’s dream), would surpass the means (God’s sacrifice)” (Stier, 59).

The commandment to go is not to pronounce judgment on the nations or to use the sword (or emotional manipulation) as a means to force people into conversions. It is “Go to the nations and make them Christian; not go to the nations and pronounce destruction against them as Jonah

did against Nineveh, and as many of the Old-Testament Prophets were accustomed to doing. It was to *Go and disciple them*. Christ was setting up a kingdom in the world, bring the nations to be his subjects” (Henry 446).

Discipleship deepens intimacy with God, in the words of Clarke, “...in order to bring humans into a relationship with God, who has paid a price for them” (83). In the process of being discipled, Christians deepen their knowledge of God. They read His word, they pray, they fellowship and worship with other believers, they seek Him, and, in the process, a genuine and profound desire grows in the heart of the believer to be the person that God intended them to be.

The Fruit of the Spirit begins to blossom in the life of the believer as she seeks to know the Lord. True discipleship helps the believer to reject that which offends God. It does not happen overnight, but it does happen when the person is being spiritually formed. Discipleship also helps the believer to look at others, believers and non-believers alike, with a sense of compassion.

If a believer wants to grow into the image of Christ, she must love others as Christ loved her. So, discipleship is not only an inward process, which can have the negative effect of believing that he is holier than though attitude towards others. It is also an external process that takes the attention away from oneself and puts it on others and their needs, too.

True discipleship informs and forms; it educates and provides spiritual formation to the believer. Christians do not learn in a vacuum. For this reason, there is the Bible, the church, and teachers. Believers need mentors to pour into their lives. “Mankind is ignorant regarding godly issues and should be taught” (Clarke 83). The principle source of truth and authority for making disciples is Scriptures. Simpson states, “one is not born a disciple, it is essential that the making of a disciple be grounded in the simplicity of biblical truth” (Simpson, 68).

### **Priscilla, Aquila, and Apollos (Acts 18.26).**

A key disciple-maker in the New Testament is Priscilla. The book of Acts speaks of a Jew named Apollos, describing him as one who is, “eloquent,” “mighty in the Scriptures,” and “fervent in the spirit.” He was obviously well-versed in the ways of God, as the writer of Acts informs. However, obviously he was missing something since he only knew of the baptism of John. Luke writes, “When Aquila and Priscila herd him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God” (Acts 18.24-28).

Jesus and the early church valued and elevated the status of women as equal to men. Whenever the name of Aquila is mentioned, his wife is right there with him. It is not difficult to see that this couple ministered in the church as a team. They are mentioned in the book of Acts, I Corinthians, Romans, and II Timothy, and never mentioned apart. So, it is apparent that when one was teaching, the other one was there, too.

### **Timothy**

When Paul writes to Timothy it not only serves as a reminder to him about the positive influence that both his mother and grandmother had upon his life, it is also a great reminder to believers about the godly women who have influenced their lives.

Whether it is mothers, grandmothers, a teacher, a pastor, a leader, or an evangelist, history reveals that women have greatly influenced the lives countless men and women who have then gone on to do great things in their lifetime.

A mentor relationship is evident when reading the two letters from Paul to Timothy. Time and again the reader will find Paul encouraging Timothy on different topics. Specifically, he encourages Timothy to “...fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands” (II Tim. 1.6 NIV).

Paul demonstrates successful mentoring when he ensures that Timothy is the right person for the job, equips him for ministerial tasks, empowers him for success, employs him in a challenging environment to develop effectiveness, and communicates to Timothy the value of their relationship (Hoehl 35).

Throughout the entire article Hoehl establishes the serious nature of mentors and of those who take on the task of discipling others. He is careful to make sure that the reader understands the fact that often mentors become a very important part of the life of the mentoree. So, it would not be unreasonable to see mentoring and discipling simply as a way giving sound advice every so often (although that is one aspect of mentoring and discipling).

Contrary to the idea of a short-term program for baptism, it is possible that mentoring can become a life-long relationship in which the mentor is involved in the lives of the people that they are discipling. The mentor has to be certain that he/she is effectively preparing the individual for the task at hand and that he/she continuously follow-through.

Dr. La Verne Tolbert shares that making disciples is an education and leadership calling, and it includes the very important role of the Holy Spirit:

In cooperation with the Holy Spirit, Christian education is perhaps one of the most important ministries in the local church today. As Christian educators, we teach classes, train teachers, develop new ministries and oversee every area under our leadership. We are called to make disciples and learners. We are to make men, women, and children into disciples of Jesus, learners after God's own heart. (19)

However, the disciple is not just a learner of the Word of God; she is also a doer His word. Dr. William Simmons speaks to this very issue. He says, "the step to dedication is a call to spiritual commitment, but discipleship demands a concrete action" (Simmons 68). Discipleship

is not an academic exercise; true discipleship calls the believer to action. Otherwise there is no genuine growth. “Jesus spent the majority of His earthly ministry training His disciples. This training prepared them to obey His mandate to ‘go’ and ‘Make disciples’” (Carey 7).

### **Theological Foundations**

According to Genesis 1.26 God created humankind in His image. When they disobeyed God’s commandment, they lost the innocence that He had bestowed upon them when they were created. Nevertheless, it has always been God’s intention that humans recover and keep His image. He wanted humanity to be the creation that He originally intended. That is why, from the very beginning, He sought out Adam and Eve, despite the fact that they had disobeyed Him.

Throughout the biblical narrative God is in pursuit of His creation, desiring that they live to their fullest potential: from Enoch, who walked with God, to Noah, whom God instructed to build an Ark in order to save a minority of humans, to the call of Abraham and the creation of Israel. Finally, through the incarnation of Christ, God has always demonstrated His will and His desire to have humans live as He created them: in His image and in His likeness.

A close analysis of Scriptures shows that Christ is the perfect example of what it means to live a life in the image and likeness of God. In Matthew 11.29, Jesus instructs us to, “learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” Above all, He commanded that believers love and serve each other, as he loved and served people while He was on earth during His earthly ministry. He demonstrated this by dying for humanity. Also, when He shared the last supper with His disciples, Christ washed the feet of His disciples. Paul was so devoted to Christ that in his first letter to the Corinthians he encourages believers to imitate him as *he* also imitates Christ (I Cor. 11.1). The entire biblical narrative can be described as God working with people. It is spiritual formation for those who choose to seek and obey Him.

### Definition and Impact of Discipleship

So far, the researcher has used the terms discipleship and, at times, mentoring interchangeably. The intention throughout the project has been to communicate a clear and functioning way of expressing what it means to live out a life that exemplifies a follower of Jesus. While there are several definitions, ultimately the idea is to understand that the life of a disciple of Christ is not static. Believers cannot define or limit their Christianity or their Christian experience to a decision that was made on a certain date, in a certain place, and at a certain time, however important that might be.

Throughout church history, many have attempted to define or describe what it means to be a disciple. For the purposes of this project, *spiritual formation* would be an acceptable way of approaching the concept of discipleship.

But even that approach can have its weaknesses, as Robert Mulholland shares:

There are many definitions of spiritual formation. Some call for unquestioned and absolute obedience to a leader or a ruling group (Observe the extreme consequences of this in the tragedy of David Koresh and his followers). Some call for “certain evidences” that are believed to confirm one’s spirituality (such as speaking in tongues or handling snakes). Some promise plenty and prosperity to those fulfill certain requirements. Some consist of do’s and don’ts. Some seem to allow almost any behavior as part of their spirituality. (15)

While Mulholland’s assessment in general is correct, it is worth pointing out that the issue of “evidence,” which is a specific characteristic within the Pentecostal and Charismatic community, has changed. Pentecostals as a movement do not define speaking in tongues as evidence of being spiritual. They have longed moved away from this understanding.

To be sure, yes, there are local churches and individuals who still believe that spirituality and speaking in tongues are one and the same. However, Pentecostals in general define speaking in tongues as the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Ghost, which is a post-salvation experience. That said, for the purposes of this investigation the term Spiritual formation is acceptable and can be used interchangeably with discipleship and even mentoring. As Pettit writes, “At the most basic, foundational level of any discussion on spiritual formation is the topic of change, and it is there we must start. The ideas and patterns involved in the process of spiritual formation involve a Christian changing or maturing from one form to another” (18).

Pettit continues:

One way to arrive at what we mean by spiritual formation is to define the terms and provide understandable flesh” to the sometimes overly academic “bones.” By using the term *spiritual*, we are referring to the dynamic, holistic, maturing relationship between the individual believer and God and between the individual believer and others. (20)

Since much has been said concerning discipleship and Spiritual formation, it would be beneficial to mention what it is not. Hull writes:

Discipleship isn’t a program or an event; it’s a way of life. It’s not for a limited time, but for our whole life. Discipleship isn’t for beginners alone; it’s for all believers for every day of their life. Discipleship isn’t just *one* of the things the church does; it *is* what the church does. It’s not just part of the advancement of God’s kingdom; the existence of serious disciples is the most important evidence of God’s work earth. (24)

Pastor Eric Russ contributes to this approach by stating that discipleship is a word that gets thrown around a lot in church. For many it is a seven-week course or a program. Some even understand it to be something which is reserved for a select group of mature Christians. But

discipleship is far from this. It is not an option or a twelve-step program. It is a way of life for all who call themselves believers and followers of Jesus (Russ 1).

Russ defines discipleship in the following words:

As we study the Great Commission and examine the practical ministry models of Jesus and Paul, we can conclude that discipleship is: Pouring into others, training them in Word, in Relationship, and in Ministry, so that they might develop as healthy believers who can walk by faith, share their faith and multiply their faith. (1)

He believes in three core components of discipleship:

**Word:** The Word component involves teaching disciples to learn and obey all that Christ commanded and modeled throughout the Scriptures.

**Relationship:** This component of discipleship is building a relationship with our disciple that features love, commitment, and intentionality.

**Ministry:** Service and evangelism dovetail together to form the Ministry component. Perhaps the most difficult thing for modern Christians is to engage in ministry. But if we are to disciple holistically, we must not only engage in service and evangelism, we must also teach and model service and evangelism. (Russ 1)

Sarah Glover, a Church of God youth pastor with many years of experience in youth discipleship, seems to agree with many of the sentiments expressed by Hull. However, in some cases, particularly what discipleship is not, she seems to agree with Russ. She says that discipleship in youth ministry has a very broad definition, and it is usually based on the definition of the youth leader or the discipler. In addition, she supports the need for intense Bible teaching and for teaching discipline in a daily walk with Jesus. However, discipleship should not

only be taught in a strategic program or class setting, but it should be happening anytime a youth leader is present with the students (Glover 141).

Glover goes on to share how she failed at certain attempts in the area of discipleship. She writes:

For years, I looked for the best book or curriculum on the market for discipleship classes. I have used some very good ones and have written my own. However, I learned a very hard lesson about discipling: You cannot force a student into an intense discipleship program; it has to be a choice made by students. I worked out a point system that required *every student* who attended Wednesday night service to fill out a form each week answering the following questions: Did you read your assigned Scriptures? How many chapters in the Bible did you read? Did you memorize the assigned passage of Scripture? List your outreach endeavors this week and describe each. (Glover 142)

Glover goes on to describe her error with this type of approach. She was astonished in discovering that many of her youth did not participate in the program that she had established, or the fact they did not take seriously the important lessons that she was teaching them. Instead of maturing in their faith, and growing in numbers, the youth were apparently turned off by her model of youth discipleship. Even the ones who initially participated, did not stay on for long. It was so bad that the group diminished in numbers. She writes:

In fact, attendance began to fall off, and finally, I took a real look at what I had done. Some of our core students were not willing to make this total commitment. Instead of attending church, they just stayed home the weeks they had not met the requirements and I had made them feel condemned (see Rom. 8.1). Also, the number of visitors began to fall off because they felt pressured, too (Glover 142)

Glover did not give up. She found a way to correct the situation. “The best way to get students involved in a specific program is to advertise it and explain the purpose. Make it a privilege to attend the discipleship course. Openly brag on students who participate in discipleship training and give them responsibilities of leadership within the youth program as they become qualified” (Glover 143). As she describes it, it was obvious that Glover’s students felt pressured and forced but not invited into participating in her discipleship program. The program was a “to-do” list.

Brad Fiscus agrees with the notion that discipleship is best done when it is not forced on people. Discipleship is best when it focuses on people. This was the model that Jesus adopted. His approach to discipleship was challenging but not threatening. He called individuals to leave everything and follow him. His calling was transformational for those who embraced him. Fiscus writes:

If we look at the Scriptures from Matthew 4 when Jesus said, “Come, follow me,” we see three very simple words that became an invitation to something more. Jesus didn’t say to them, “After you believe I am the Son of God, come follow me.” He said, “Come, follow me.” As they travelled and followed, Jesus shared with them what He wanted them to know. (108)

Jesus taught his disciples as he ministered to the needy. His attention was focused on others. “Jesus exhibited certain behaviors he wanted to them to learn. He invited them to grow, to learn, to be transformed. He brought them into community with God Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As they did the things that Jesus did, their belief in him grew stronger” (Fiscus 108).

Fiscus continues:

That invitation was the key first step. Jesus didn't ask for a decision. He invited them to be with him. So much of our evangelism and discipleship practice is rooted more in decision than invitation. Consider the ways you've seen young people presented with the opportunity to engage in the Christian life: an open door, a great youth space, teaching, events, social media, printed material, and so on. Each one implores teens to decide, "will I do this or not?" These methods certainly get the message out there; however, they lack the personal nature of God's invitation to be with Jesus. (109).

Discipleship can be defined in many ways. Greg Oden believes that "Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. This includes equipping the disciple to teach others as well" (17).

Oden points out several important characteristics and key terms related to discipleship, such as walking with others, equipping, and growing into a mature believer. But it is his belief that part of discipleship is *intentional relationship* that cannot be overlooked. Building a relationship is one of the most important aspects of being a disciple. More than a religion, Christianity is a relationship with God and with fellow humans. "When you look up the word *disciple* in a dictionary, you find that its basic meaning is 'a follower or a learner,' similar to an apprentice in a trade like carpentry. "The disciple in Christianity is a follower of Jesus Christ, desiring to learn his ways and apply them to his life" (Cosgrove 25).

As for the concept that part of discipleship is an intentional relationship, Dr. Oliver McMahan amplifies this idea, particularly when interpreting the Bible. He writes:

Discipleship values are not a private matter. Scripture is the source of the believer's values. Interpreting Scripture and forming values comes from the believer working with

the body of Christ. Even in the early church, warnings were given against privately interpreting the Scripture because truth was corrupted in isolationism. Peter warned the church against the fallacy of developing interpretations and morality separated from other believers. (McMahan 191)

McMahan rightly points out that studying the Bible is not just a personal matter. One should never underestimate the value of coming together as a group to read, study, discuss, and analyze the Scriptures. Beyond the great errors that can be avoided when studying in the presence of peers, there is understanding in the counsel of many.

Others define discipleship as a process. “Discipleship is the process that leads teens from a general knowledge about Christ to a deeper understanding of who He is and what He means to each believer” (Harper 123). Harper understands discipleship as more than a program. He sees it as process by which one grows and matures in Christ, to the point of knowing and Him and recognizing His voice in the heart of the believer. This is the knowledge that Eli had, but Samuel lacked. This can also be applied to adults. Harper goes on to share, “not only is discipleship a serious process, it is also a very involved process” (123).

Discipleship is so much more than gathering Bible texts or a well-planned lesson, as important as those practices are. Far from being just a good program, discipleship is a profound issue; it is a matter of transforming heart and mind. “The distinguishing mark of Christian discipleship is a transformed heart, transformed affections. When someone becomes a true disciple, Christ radically changes the person’s appetite” (Geiger 29).

Geiger says that discipleship is not merely the transfer of information that a teacher in the church communicates to a new believer in a weekly Bible study class. Anybody can adopt a new

set of life rules by which to live. But that does not necessarily mean that there has been a real spiritual change.

True discipleship is characterized by a genuine change of heart. It is the interruption of the Holy Spirit in the life of a person to the degree where he/she is now saved and, therefore, sees life from a different perspective. Their new priorities are the priorities of Christ. Bonhoeffer writes:

With an abstract idea, it is possible to enter into a relation of formal knowledge, to become enthusiastic about it, and perhaps even to put it into practice; but it can never be followed in personal obedience. Christianity without the living Christ is inevitably Christianity without discipleship, and Christianity without discipleship is always is always Christianity without Christ. (63)

Bonhoeffer is positing the possibility that an individual can become a nominal Christian simply by adopting its belief system, fulfilling certain requirements such as baptism, and attending worship services in a local church. But at the end of the day, that person can be found not to be a true follower or disciple of Christ because their religion is based on head knowledge but not a sense of commitment, conviction, and obedience.

“It was David Bosch who rightly noted that ‘discipleship is determined by the relation to Christ himself not by mere conformity to impersonal commands’” (Hirsch 113). So, beyond a certain set of rules and information, Bosch maintains that discipleship is founded on a relationship with Christ which can only come by knowing Him, not just knowing things about Him or about Christianity.

Discipleship and spiritual formation demand a life of holiness. “Spiritual formation is growth in holiness, employing the traditional means of spiritual devotion and discipline. It is

‘becoming a Christian’ when a person already is one” (Stanger 16). Stanger goes further in sharing that it is a journey. This journey never ceases since it is always moving towards a desired spiritual objective and always displaying a sense of clear evidence in the life of the believer that a personal and relational achievement has been reached by her. The process of spiritual formation goes beyond making a difference in the soul. Spiritual formation is a journey of the total person toward wholeness.

Kempis argues:

“God’s kingdom lies within you,” the Lord says (Lk. 17.21). You must turn to him, the Lord with all your heart, and leave this wretched world behind you, if your soul is to find rest. Learn to despise this world of outward things, and devote yourself to what lies within; there, within you, you will see the coming of God’s kingdom. (qtd. in Kerr 131)

In his definition of who is a Methodist, John Wesley makes a declaration that describes a believer and a disciple of Christ:

A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him: one who “loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength.” God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Though art the strength of my heart, and my portion forever! (qtd. in Kerr 193)

Spiritual growth and spiritual development as a believer of Christ means many things for many people. For some it is defined as dedicating your life to reading the Bible; for others, it is understood as a life of prayer; and yet for others, it is a life in which one dedicate himself to doing

many good, social deeds. After all, isn't feeding the poor what Christ wants from us? They see Jesus as a social worker or a social warrior, who dedicated His life to the cause of the poor.

Although all of these are valuable, when you choose to emphasize one to the exclusion of the other, you compartmentalize Jesus, and you are not looking at the entire picture of His life and what He taught. When a believer takes this approach, she loses out on living the fulness of Christ.

Although he does not give a complete list concerning the nature of spiritual formation, Frank Stanger at least begins to inform that the process of discipleship includes several areas of importance which must be observed. He shares:

Viewed scripturally, spiritual formation is growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. It is "gaining weight spiritually." Theologically speaking, it is the process by which the image of Christ is formed in us. From a psychological perspective, spiritual formation is the pursuit of maturity. It is the intentional and systematic process of growing into the image of Christ through obedience to the Scriptures by the power of the Holy Spirit in our total personality (Stanger 17).

Hugh Halter contributes to the concept of the whole picture by adding that discipleship was a process:

Discipleship, according to Jesus is also a process. Halter writes:

For Jesus, the process of discipleship was just that: *a process*. He wasn't concerned about who was in 'in or out,' their level of knowledge or prior experience, lack of sin, or love of people. What he did know was that if he could get these guys involved or helping others alongside of him, they'd learn about him and his kingdom, and someday they'd get the whole picture. (Halter 119).

In keeping with Christ's view of discipleship and spiritual formation, Mulholland defines it as "(1) a process (2) of being conformed (3) to the image of Christ (4) for the sake of others" (15). Mulholland does not seem to understand discipleship as head knowledge of adopting a set of rules. Spiritual formation and discipleship go much deeper than that. It is a process of being molded to the image of Christ.

"Christian discipleship is the process of following Jesus Christ and radically reorienting one's life to subscribe to his countercultural kingdom. This reorientation develops through the living out Christlikeness, obeying God's commands, doing God's will, and losing one's life in order to find it" (Godissart 9). In so far as it is a process, and it calls for reorienting oneself to become countercultural, Dr. Godissart's definition of discipleship is very much similar to Dr. Mulholland's definition.

However, Dr. Mulholland goes even further. While Harper and Godissart state that discipleship is a process, in fact, a serious process, Mulholland adds that the process of being conformed in the image of Christ is not for the sake of the believer; it is for the sake of others. This understanding reflects perfectly who Christ is. He became a human for the sake of humans.

Furthering the important relationship between leadership and discipleship, and how it should form the believer into the image of Christ, Alan Hirsch states:

If this is not already obvious by now, let me say it more explicitly: the quality of the church's leadership is directly proportional to the quality of discipleship. If we fail in the area of making disciples, we should not be surprised if we fail in the area of leadership development. I think many of the problems that the church faces in trying to cultivate missional leadership for the challenges of the twenty-first century would be resolved if we were to focus the solution to the problem on something prior to leadership

development per se, namely, that of discipleship first. Discipleship is primary; leadership is always secondary. And leadership to be genuinely Christian, must always reflect Christlikeness and therefore...discipleship. (119)

### **Historical Foundations of Discipleship**

The concept of discipleship has existed for thousands of years. In the pre-Christian, Greco-Roman world, they helped spiritual guides who worked to temper people's lack of focus, their tendency to fall into temptation, and live a life a laziness. They were sort of like a modern day-life coach or personal trainer. What believers now call discipleship, provided relationships to nurture, apprenticeship for competency, accountability for tasks, submission for shaping, and wisdom for decision-making (Hull 52).

#### **The Greco-Roman World**

When Alexander the Great died, his empire was divided into four parts. In this same area as the Hellenistic empires emerged that of the Roman Empire. This is where one gets the concept of the Greco-Roman world, or civilization. "In the world of togas, sandals, the Parthenon, temples, and little white homes perched on hillsides overlooking the sea, discipleship permeated Greek life—from aristocrats to peasants, from philosophers to tradesmen" (Hull 53).

Concerning discipleship in the Greco-Roman world, Hull writes:

We can find the concept of disciple—a person following a master—among the great masters of Greece. Plato, Socrates, and Herodotus all used *disciple* to mean 'learner' or 'one who is a diligent student.' These and other Greek philosophers generally understood that the disciple's life involved apprenticeship, a relationship of submission, and a life of demanding training. (53)

#### **The Semitic World of the Hebrews**

“A Disciple, *mathetes*, is a learner or follower---usually someone committed to a significant master” (Hull 32). “The Hebrew equivalent to *mathetes* is *talmidh*, which literally means ‘taught one’” (Hull 55).

The prophet Ezra used this word to describe a community of musicians in the temple (see 1 Chronicles 25:8). Isaiah used a closely related word, *limmudh*, several times to speak of disciples (see Isaiah 8.16; 50.4; 54.13). ‘Bind up the testimony and seal up the law among my disciples’ seems to indicate that Isaiah had some disciples’ (8.16)” (Hull 55).

“In Jeremiah, *Limmudh* is translated “accustomed to” in familiar saying, ‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil’ (Jeremiah 13:23). Here it means that someone has been disciplined or taught to do evil. These uses make it clear that all of us are someone’s disciple” (Hull 55).

Bill Hull is basically communicating two things here: 1-in one way, shape or form, all are being disciplined by someone: directly or indirectly, evil or good, and even whether or not they choose to believe it; and 2-if it is to be effective, true discipleship must go beyond the idea of transferring information from one person to another. Effective discipleship requires a relationship.

Hull expands by sharing the following:

The use of *talmidh* and *limmudh* also indicates a personal relationship as the master teaches and trains a pupil/disciple. Ancient Hebrew culture didn’t naturally lead to the kinds of formal relationships we have now. Yet the words do indicate a teacher-student relationship. This was true in families, among elders at town gates, and

among the wise men who served as keepers of Israel's wisdom and traditions (Hull 55).

### **The Rabbinical Schools**

Bill Hull discusses five characteristics of the rabbinical schools:

1. The disciple chose to submit to his teacher.
2. The disciple would memorize his teacher's words.
3. The disciple would learn his teacher's way of ministry.
4. The disciple would imitate his teacher's life.
5. The disciple would be expected to find his own disciples.

While this list is very helpful in understanding how the mentor-disciple relationship functioned during the times of Christ, as it includes the idea of submission, imitating, the freedom to choose, and the concept of seeking others with the purpose of expanding, it is missing ingredient- that of a true relationship between teacher and student. Hull further states:

The rabbinical tradition was very strict. Students had very little freedom, and when they graduated, they would go into a career as a teacher. Many started their own academies or band of followers. The followers were bound to their teacher's interpretation of Scripture for life and were expected to multiply the traditions (Hull 13-14).

Connecting this concept to his disciples and to the church, and including the disconnection that existed between the religious leaders of Jesus' day, Hull adds:

Jesus used the Pharisees as an example of how not to disciple others. He explained why their training was abusive, selfish and hypocritical (Matt. 23.1-7). They represented the traditional way to influence others, but Jesus offered an alternative. But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the

Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. They were brothers, and they were to serve others, not lord it over each other. They had only one teacher and that was Christ. They were not to open the school of John or Peter or Thomas. The purpose of their teaching was to produce more followers of Jesus. Jesus taught the power of humility in spirit and submission in community (Hull 14-15).

This style of discipleship is not simply meant to discipline individual believers to be good Christians within the church; Christ was intentional in making this a transformational program.

### **In the *Primitive Church***

Hull posits, “This is the way to get transformational traction, to practice a faith that transforms. Adopting the characteristics of a first-century disciple, as modified by Jesus, is the secret to *personal transformation* that will lead to church *transformation* that will result in *cultural transformation*” (15).

According to Hull, the primitive church modified the rabbinical school to Jesus, and the modern church practices the same format in its discipleship efforts. He says:

A Disciple submits to a leader who teaches him to follow Jesus. This is what rescues discipleship from being a process without results: A disciple learns Jesus’ words.

A Disciple learns Jesus’ way of doing ministry: Doing works of power, pursuing the habits of his life for personal transformation, and training others to be Jesus’ disciples.

Discipleship in the twenty-first century is based on the same principles.

A Disciple imitates Jesus’ life and Character. The disciples desired to live the life that Jesus displayed for them. A disciple finds and teaches disciples to follow Jesus. (Hull 15-20)

It is learning, being transformed, following and imitating Jesus, and striving to grow that gives a believer the title of disciple. It does not mean that one is perfect in her journey as a

Christian; it means that she is on her way. She is actively in pursuit of that goal of perfection.

The Apostle Paul spoke to this very topic in his letter to the Philippians. He wrote:

Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: **but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also, I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.**

Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3.12-14, KJV)

Bruns comments on the nature of discipleship in the early church, writing:

All of the other means by which the church created, and reinforced discipleship were found in the celebration of the sacrament. It was only celebrated when the people gathered together as the church. Because it was only open to Christians, it reinforced the concept that they were different — a new race in the world, one not belonging to any nationality or tribe but to God above all else. Holy Communion was the climax of corporate worship. It was an extensive exercise in prayer. (Bruns 1)

Bruns reinforces the concept of coming together to study Scriptures, as opposed to individual, isolated readings of the Scriptures:

The worship service itself was a time when Christians were discipled in a general way. This was one of the only times they would encounter the Scriptures, as most did not have a copy of the Old Testament or any of the individual books that would make up the New Testament. It was a time to be encouraged by one another to keep the faith and persevere through whatever trials they were encountering at the time. It was a time to be reminded

that Jesus Christ is God and that the individual members of the Church were integrated into His life, His body. (Bruns)

### **Early Church Models**

The history of discipleship, particularly some of the early models are fascinating. The focus will be how these early leaders of the church intentionally or unintentionally, knowingly or unknowingly, went about the business of providing spiritual formation in the early church. In other words, how did they disciple? What were their “best practices” in this area?

#### Clement of Rome: 35–100 A.D.

Whenever Christianity becomes a religion of do’s and don’ts, and discipleship is reduced to simple matter of transferring information from one person to another, it loses its essence. That essence being one of relationships: a relationship with God, through Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and a relationship with fellow human beings. It becomes a religious discipline.

The disciple of the Lord has to understand that her life as a believer is one of healthy relationships, and the first relationship that needs to be healthy is the one with God. The foundation of that relationship is intimacy with the Almighty. True intimacy with God helps the disciple to understand His heart, as it were, for the Church and for all of humanity. As one looks back at some of the Church Fathers, Clement’s life sheds light on this concept.

For Clement, prayer, fasting, and almsgiving constituted the regular and essential structure of Christian spirituality. There is no true inner life in the service of Christ that is not marked by them. Such an approach gives Christian spirituality a character of ‘profound’ relatedness to the real world: care for others and a deep sense of humility are necessary in the believer, even though such a person has received election of the loving God. It was this that kept Christianity, in the early period, from becoming just another elitist spiritual movement concerned with inner purity, or a mystical movement that emphasized an individualism disconnected from society. Very simple and real. Power and mission—the impulse to reach out and serve as Christ did—come out of personal transformation (Hull 76).

For Clement, discipleship was a matter of developing intimacy with God via prayer and fasting, but it was also a practical matter via giving. Reading and studying the Scriptures were not included because the canon was not yet final during his time. In fact, the Bible as people know it today (one final and complete book), was not available until the fourth century A.D.

Ignatius of Antioch: The Bishop of Bishops: 50-117 A.D.

As was the case with Clement, prayer and service were important aspects of discipleship. “The most important part of a disciple’s life was his life in Christ and in the community of Christ, so living in unity with Christ and those in the community was the central task of the leader” (Hull 77).

However, Ignatius went a little further. He accepted his status as a prisoner as a means of proving that he was a disciple. His model of discipleship was to both live *and* die for the faith, for Christ. He writes:

Toward the end of Emperor Trajan’s reign, Ignatius traveled throughout the empire on his way to Rome to be tried for being a Christian. He visited with Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, and Irenaeus, the bishop of Lyons, who considered himself Ignatius’s disciple. Ignatius wrote to the church at Rome, begging them not to arrange for his release; he desired to be martyred to prove that he was a disciple. Martyrdom was the *sin e qua non* (or “essential” quality) for being a true disciple during that period. (Hull 77)

In the same letter, Ignatius also urged members of the church to submit to their local leaders in the bishop’s absence. Ignatius saw daily submission to a practical authority as critical to spiritual development. This foundational truth returns back to the very beginning of discipleship and builds the believer’s confidence that it remains true now (Hull 78).

So, for Ignatius submission to one's local leader and submission to Christ, even if it meant death, were characteristics of discipleship. It seems that no matter how much one would read and study Scriptures, give alms, or be a good person, anything less than submission to God and to each other meant that one was lacking in discipleship. It meant that there was something missing in the process of spiritual formation.

Polycarp: 69–156 A.D.

“Polycarp, who was martyred in 156, believed that a true disciple would be martyred, because it meant to imitate Christ and his suffering. This bishop stressed love for the poor and attacked those who made Christ a mere intellectual symbol” (Hull 78).

In the ‘air condition,’ and somewhat easy Christianity that many enjoy today, the life and the voice of Bishop Polycarp has a lot to say, for all, but especially to believers who refuse to give up almost nothing but want it all. It is believed that he was the last person to have known an Apostle. If that is the case, he knew what the Apostles suffered for the cause of Christ. Therefore, for him it was probably not that difficult to do the same for the Lord when his time came.

“After his martyrdom, he was best remembered for his encouragement of self-control, prayer, and fasting as a means of not falling into temptation. Through Polycarp's life, death, and ministry, we can conclude that the life of a disciple has always been a life of discipline. Often that needed discipline only touches a life when a community of believers works together under the authority of its leaders” (Hull 79).

“These men were willing to die for their faith, and Ignatius and Polycarp actually did. But they also desired to live Christ in a daily sacrificial way to be good examples to the people

they led. In all the best ways, they represented what being witnesses for Christ includes. By practicing the same disciplines as Christ, they became godly and disciplined men” (Hull 80).

The model of discipleship of these men went beyond what many understand discipleship to be. Yes, they prayed, fasted, studied, gave to the needy, and submitted themselves to one another. In fact, ultimately, two of them even gave their lives for the cause of Christ. But in the end, their model of discipleship is best seen in their legacy.

Hull puts this in perspective as he goes on to describe one of the most important axioms of discipleship, which is the ability to impact the lives of others. “The power of one life to influence another is the beginning of discipleship. As Jesus said, when a disciple is fully taught, he ‘will be like his teacher’ (Luke 6:40). These three early bishops set the standard for others, and they’re worthy of imitation.” (Hull 80).

### Marcus, Lucius, and Gaius

Discipleship goes beyond memorizing verses or belonging to a church. A serious model of discipleship calls for a deep level of proven dedication and commitment. Jones writes:

Once upon a time there was a 16-year-old named Lucius. Lucius lived in Agnani, a small hill town south of Rome, in A.D. 296.

The father of his friend, Marcus, frequently traveled to Rome on business and had become a Christian through his business contacts there, Lucius had known Christianity, but it wasn’t until Marcus’s father converted that he realized there was a good-sized band of followers of this new religion right in his own town Marcus followed in his father’s footsteps and became a Christian, too.

Now as they daily tended the olive trees outside the city walls, Marcus told Lucius about his excitement at following Christ. Ultimately convinced that “The Way”

Marcus described was more desirable than the combination of household gods and imperial deities his family followed. Lucius agreed to let Marcus pray for him one day on the hillside. During that prayer, Lucius felt something he had never before experienced-it seemed that God himself was there! (Jones 168)

The experience does not end there. This was only the beginning of a journey:

Lucius said that he would like to join the Christian community of Agnani. Marcus was overjoyed, and he set up an appointment for Lucius to meet Gaius, one of the elders of the Agnani church. Gaius and Lucius began a long and involved mentoring program.

For *two* years, Gaius met with Lucius twice a week. One of the meetings concerned the theology and doctrines of the followers of Christ. Lucius was schooled in Jesus' teachings, his fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, the meaning of Easter and the writings of the Apostles. The other weekly meeting focused on prayer-mainly Gaius praying for Lucius and exorcising him of demons. (Jones 168)

Unfortunately, faith and discipleship have been watered down. An individual makes a decision for Christ, and in many cases, goes through a program for a few weeks, or months, and then is baptized. But the story of Lucius is an example of what it means to actually challenge a believer into a profound life of discipleship even before being baptized.

The case with Lucius was different, as Jones shares when writing about the day of his baptism, which was in and of itself, a long journey:

Bishop Antoninus asked Lucius, "Do you renounce Satan and all his ways?" "I renounce them," Lucius replied. Then the Bishop anointed Lucius' head with the oil of exorcism, meaning that all demons and devils had been removed from Lucius. Lucius then followed Bishop Antoninus into the pool where he was asked, "Do you believe in the Father?" "I

believe.” And he was immersed. Do you believe in the Son?” “I believe,” And he was immersed. “Do you believe in the Spirit?” “I believe.” And he was immersed. Lucius climbed out of the water and put his clothes back on. Then—*finally*—Lucius and the other newly baptized believers got to join the rest of the church at communion.

Three years and an incredible journey after that innocent prayer in the olive grove, Lucius was a member of Christ’s Holy church! (Jones 172).

Becoming a Christian was not easy, for several reasons. While it was true that the church was going through a horrific time of persecution before Constantine’s conversion experience, the truth of the matter is that it was the church which ‘policed’ itself. This account is what it might have been like to be matriculated into the Christian community of a small Roman town before A.D. 313—before Constantine granted Christianity most-favored-religion status.

It was no easy road! And notice that there is no dichotomy between evangelism and discipleship. Hippolytus, an early church historian describes a thorough and difficult process before joining the Christian body.

Reflecting on the process described above, Richard Osmer writes:

The practice of initiation was designed to prepare prospective members for participation in a community that was *embattled*. It was a lengthy and demanding process. Ironically, this demanding process of initiation was offered precisely as the church was growing by leaps and bounds. This practice has much to teach the contemporary church about the importance of holding together catechetical instruction, spiritual direction, and liturgical formation. (qtd. in Jones 173)

Profound Spiritual formation and discipleship were initiated at least three years before a person was even baptized. That was their model of discipleship. It was making sure that an individual was a true disciple of Christ before making you a member of the church.

### **The Medieval Church**

This practice continued through to the Middle Ages. As Hull writes:

The Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, Medieval times—all label a rather distasteful time for humankind, with decadent church leadership, high illiteracy rates, and frequent wars and famines. During that time, the Black Death killed 40 percent of Europe’s population. Yet Wycliffe, Anselm, Bernard of Clairvaux, Thomas Kempis, Thomas Aquinas, Dante and other giants of literature and thought also came out of this era.

The major factor affecting people’s spiritual formation was illiteracy. The vast majority couldn’t read or write. Few books existed and only the elite could afford or read them. The elite included the clergy, who were among the best educated. However, we do know that three primary influences affected the intentional discipling of the common person: the Eucharist, community of life, and art. (Hull 89)

Hull appeals to the conscience of the modern church. It is interesting to read that even without the programs and fancy buildings which today’s church cannot afford to *not* have, hundreds of years ago believers managed to come together for worship, fellowship and discipleship. “The people worshipped as a community—many times on a daily basis---and shared life because they depended on each other. Because books were rare and most people were illiterate, the people related to God as a group” (Hull 94).

### **The Reformation Age**

#### Martin Luther

\_\_\_\_\_ Martin Luther was the voice, in fact the prophet of the Reformation. He was not perfect, as none are perfect. However, his willingness to stand up and speak out against the abuses of the Church during his day, opened the doors for others to do the same and in their own way, make difference in the Church's history.

“There are few personalities in history as colorful as Martin Luther. Born November 10, 1483, in a small Bavarian town in modern Germany, Luther was raised in a strict, austere religious environment. His father's remoteness, coupled with his mother's severe religious temperament, colored Luther's view and approach to life at an early age” (Foster & Beebe 100).

“Luther places a dual emphasis on the work of Christ in redemption and the work of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification. We cannot ascend to God the way others advocate. We can only respond to the promptings and leading of the Holy Spirit. For Luther, the whole tone and nature of the Christian life is the response of our spirit to the Spirit of God” (Foster & Beebe 102).

Luther believed that one could only know God through faith. As Foster and Beebe write: Faith creates godliness. It drives out sin. It produces strength. It enlightens spiritual blindness. It guards against moral relapse and empowers the believer to perform good deeds in fulfilling God's command to love our neighbor. The commands of God are clear and, when we respond in faith, they become not an onerous responsibility but liberating structure of mercy and grace. (102)

They continue:

Faith reveals the purposes of spiritual formation. It also shapes our inner life as Christians and molds us into the image of Christ. This inner formation leads to transformation and allows us to respond in active service and witness in the world. We do works of love and service not to earn our salvation but to respond to the living witness of God in our life. (Foster & Beebe 102)

Luther does not ignore, undermine, or cheapen the necessity of doing good works, seeking God, and growing in His knowledge, which are all part of the experience of discipleship and spiritual formation. But rather it is the writer's intent to demonstrate that these practices, in order to be genuine, have to be motivated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### John Calvin

According to Calvin, the Holy Spirit is the agent that brings it all together:

Here he introduces a principle that will become a hallmark of his work. "It is neither human reason nor even the authority of the church that establishes the authority of the Scripture, but the inward testimony of the Holy Spirit. This is the hinge of Calvin's entire system. The Holy Spirit's work confirms the reliability of Scripture, our knowledge of God, the provision and acceptance of salvation through Christ, the election of God, the ability of leaders to discern who should be ministers and the viability of our Christian faith." (Foster & Beebe 113)

For Calvin, the work of God, the significance of Jesus Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit are best known through the life of the Christian community. In the church, Christians learn to love both God and neighbor. This love is cultivated through the faithful exercise of the sacraments, the core responsibilities of the Christian life and active participation in civic affairs (Foster & Beebe 116).

The church's ultimate aim is to bring people to faith in Christ, to see them grow in Christ, to preach God's word, to disseminate discipline, to prepare the leadership of God's people and to administer the sacraments. In this way, the church becomes the body of Christ, perpetuating the will and way of God in the world (Foster & Beebe 116). In speaking about the role of the Reformation and the individual believer, Historian Phillip Schaff states, "The ultimate aim of

evangelical Protestantism is to bring every man into living union with Christ as the only and all-sufficient Lord and Saviour from sin and death” (16).

Schaff is stating that the goal of the believer is to go beyond church membership or memorization of Scriptures (as important as these things are). Why? Because beyond a religion or a set of beliefs and principles, Christianity is a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, and this relationship grows by way of discipleship.

### Thomas Cranmer

In the age of the internet, smartphones, remote libraries, and instant information, the Church has become accustomed to the ease with which it receives its information. That is a good thing. One of the things that any disciple, or for that matter anybody, can obtain at a moment’s notice, is the daily devotional which usually sent by the pastor, the youth leader, the bishop, or any number of worldwide ministries that one might choose to follow.

However, technology did not invent daily, short devotionals; it just makes easier for the author to disseminate and for the rest of the world to access it. Daily devotionals can be an invaluable tool for a believer’s spiritual growth and his spiritual formation. The idea of easy access to simple and profound daily devotionals can be traced back to Thomas Cranmer.

Cranmer deserves mention for his introduction of the *The Book of Common Prayer* in 1549. *The Book of Common Prayer* was a devotional guide for the common person, just as the title indicates. The rapid rise in literacy among the English people along with the production of books made it possible for the average person to practice a personal devotional life” (Hull 98).

“*The Book of Common Prayer* was the first-time common people had a book in their hands that gave them a daily structure, the church calendar, special days, along with plenty of Scripture and prayers. This book remains a rich resource for millions of members of the Catholic Church, as well as the worldwide Anglican Communion and its counterparts in other denominations (Hull 98-99).

### Philip Jacob Spener

Although the small group movement is connected to John Wesley, Jacob Spener was practicing the concept of small groups before Wesley was born. “Spener is the father of Pietism, best defined as an emphasis on the heart and passion of spirituality. His *Pios Desires* had several dimensions, including passion toward God, a focus on living one’s neighbor, and healthy focus on oneself” (Hull 99).

Because of his belief in the practice of spiritual disciplines, Spener would fit today’s spiritual formation movement. Spener noted that “in Pietism the Bible is not only read and studied, but also meditatively discussed in groups of believers.” He urged people to get together in small groups and, as believer-priests, to minister to one another—a new and radical concept in that time” (Hull 100).

### John Wesley

John Wesley is perhaps the most influential person with regards to the impact of modern-day discipleship. His impact is post-Reformation. Cairns writes:

The Methodist revival was the third religious awakening in England, coming after the sixteenth-century Reformation and seventeenth-century Puritanism. It was associated with the name of John Wesley (1703-91), and some subscribe to the idea that Wesley’s preaching saved England from a revolution similar to that of France. (Cairns 382)

Wesley’s preaching of the gospel changed so many hearts that it was felt on a national level. After two years of helping his father establish a second parish, Wesley then returned home and became the leading spirit in the “Holy Club,” which included his brother Charles. The members of this club were nicknamed Methodists by the students because of their methodical Bible study and prayer habits and regular attempts at social service in jails and homes of the poor (Cairn 384).

“When the churches were closed against him and his fellow workers, and preaching in the open air was forbidden, he built chapels for himself. The first was opened in Bristol in 1739. When his ordained associates were too few for the work, he obtained the assistance of lay preachers. He founded two kinds of religious societies: The *united societies* embraced all, the *band societies* only the tried and proved of his followers” (Kurtz 130). “Then he divided the *united societies* again into classes of from ten to twenty persons each, and the *class leaders* were required to give accurate accounts of the spiritual condition and progress of those under their care” (Kurtz 130).

“This was the rise of the United Society, first at London and then in other places. Such a society is no other than a company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation” (Outler 178).

The Methodist church accepted an Arminian theology after Wesley’s break with Whitefield, but the major doctrine that Wesley stressed was justification by faith through an instantaneous experience-regeneration. He also laid great emphasis on the doctrine of Christian perfection or perfect love (Cairns 384).

“This was a belief in the possibility of absolute Christian perfection in motive in this life because the love of God so filled the heart of the believer that God’s love would expel sin and promote absolute holiness of life” (Cairns 384).

“Wesley insisted that the gospel should have an impact on society, and no one can deny the impact of the Methodist revival on English society. He opposed liquor, slavery, and war. There is some reason to believe that England might have had an uprising of the workers similar

to that in France if they had not been won to Christ. Most of the later labor leaders got their training in speaking in the class meetings” (Cairns 384).

Not only that, but Wesley also “had an influence on Robert Raikes, the popularizer of the Sunday School movement, and on John Howard, the leader in prison reform” (Cairn 384). “John Wesley’s work has had a double impact: Direct and Indirect. On the one hand, it started the great organization known as Methodism; on the other hand, it initiated a great religious movement which has transformed evangelical Protestantism” (Lelievre 361).

According to these historians, John Wesley had a profound impact on the theology of many preachers, on the modern-day small group form of discipleship and on the Sunday School movement. The influence of Wesley’s approach to spiritual formation and discipleship cannot be overstated. For over two hundred years Sunday School in the United States was, as they say, as “American as Apple pie.” In fact, Sunday school was the primary way of learning the Bible and the Biblical stories with which many are familiar. And it was John Wesley who had a profound impact on the person who popularized it.

His small group societies were so effective that major denominations successfully adopted this format as a means of discipling their members. Wesley deeply believed in the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also understood the importance of being intentional in discipling the believer after conversion. He stated:

*I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer. — John Wesley, 1763.*

*John Wesley’s Quadrilateral:*

The Wesleyan quadrilateral provides a method for doing theology. It is a way of exploring God, ourselves, and our relationship with God. The problem for many people in the church is that the word ‘theology’ can be intimidating, or even boring. Beyond that, many believers are suspicious when the word theology comes into play.

On the one hand, believers see the task of doing theology as the responsibility of the professionals, which in this case are clergy, writers, and seminary faculty. On the other hand, they are suspicious of the very people which, they believe, are tasked with going about the business of doing theology. But Manskar seeks to assuage believers of their fear. He states,

If this article does one thing for you, I hope it helps you realize that whenever you talk about, teach, and write about God you are doing theology. In God’s reality, all of God’s people are theologians. Theology and doing theology both are the work of the whole people of God. It is not, and was never intended to be, the preserve of the “professionals.” The Wesleyan quadrilateral is the method given to the people called Methodists to help us to do theology. (Manskar 1).

In his article, Manskar goes on to define this method as a four-point approach to discipleship, and its ultimate goal. The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is composed of theological reflection, teaching, and practice; Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience are the core ingredients. What makes theology simple is that the goal of doing theology in the Wesleyan spirit is ‘holiness of life.’

This means that in attempting to seek God through studying His Word, praying, writing about Him, the believer grows in her love for God. In the process of doing this, they live out that love for God by loving their neighbors as they love themselves.

A life guided by and filled with the unconditional, self-giving love of God is the “outcome” believers desire. The ingredients of Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience work together toward helping the church live out its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ who seek to grow in holiness of heart and life. Each of these points are essential to the development of the believer:

**Scripture:** Scripture is the primary source for Christian theology. It is where God reveals God’s self to the world. Scripture contains the witness of God’s work and relationship with the world through the Hebrew people, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the witness of the apostles and the early church. The Bible contains God’s word of love, freedom, healing, compassion, justice and hope for a world that is hurting and oppressed by the powers of sin and death (Manskar1).

**Tradition:** Tradition helps us to read and understand Scripture. Through it we are connected to those who have gone before; who have read, struggled with, and prayed Scripture. Tradition is the living witness of the good news of God given to the world in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the witness of the vast tradition of the one holy universal church of Jesus Christ we can know who and whose we are: children of God by adoption through the power of the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ (see Rom. 8.12-17). The tradition also teaches that the church is the living, breathing, witnessing body of Christ in the world. (Manskar 1).

**Reason:** Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all of your soul, and with all of your mind” (Matt. 22.37). God sheds light on God’s word through the gift of reason. God gives us the freedom to question, think, and teach in order to watch over one another in love. Reason allows the light of God to illuminate and animate

Christian faith and life. Reason opens our minds to interpret and understand God's word in Scripture and through tradition. Reason helps us to perceive God's presence, and it helps us to be aware of God's majesty and mystery. In other words, reason equips us to know how much we don't know which leads to humility (Manskar1).

Experience: Experience is our real-life encounter of God-with-us in our ordinary, every-day life. These encounters with the divine bring us to and keep us with God. They inform our thinking and understanding of who God is and how God works in the world (reason) and breathes life into our reading of Scripture and living out of the tradition. Experience is the Holy Spirit's work in, with, and through us that gives life and meaning to the good news of God for the world in Jesus Christ. Experience allows the Holy Spirit to work in us to make faith vital and life-giving (Manskar 1).

“The Wesleyan Quadrilateral gives us a rich and vital way for seeking truth, knowing, loving, and serving God, and for making disciples of Jesus Christ who have the form and the power of godliness. The four ingredients (Scripture, tradition, reason and experience) work together to help Christians grow in holiness of heart and life” (Manskar 1).

However, it is important to point out that Wesley's ministry did not come in a vacuum. Wesley had a tremendous influence in his life: his mother, Susana Wesley.

*Susana Wesley:*

One need not look further than Susana Wesley, who is known as the mother of Methodism. Mrs. Wesley was a great example of a person who had the power to influence, shape and form others, without the benefit of Seminary training. In the fashion of Timothy's mother and grandmother, Susana Wesley poured into the lives of her children. Pellow writes:

Although she never preached a sermon or published a book or founded a church, (she) is known as the Mother of Methodism. Why? Because two of her sons, John Wesley and Charles Wesley, as children consciously or unconsciously, applied the example and teachings and circumstances of their home life. (1)

Steve Cole emphasizes the importance of motherhood by pointing out that, among other things, mothers are of greater influence than maybe they even realize at times:

By looking at the influence of a godly mother and grandmother, one will have no other choice but to elevate the important discipleship roles of women. An example of this can be found in 2 Timothy 1.5. There it is learned that a young man named Timothy came to faith through the preaching of Paul. But it is important to understand that behind Paul's preaching there were years of godly influence by Timothy's mother and grandmother. In 2 Timothy 3.14-17, we learn that the sincere faith of these women was combined with instructing Timothy from his earliest days from the Scriptures. Their example and results in Timothy's life show us that through faith in God and by honoring His Word, godly mothers have a great influence as they train their children (Cole 1).

In the same spirit that Cole emphasizes regarding the profound importance and the role of women as teachers, influencers and disciple-makers, and in particular that of Timothy's mother and grandmother, Ralph Earle, in his contribution to the Expositor's Bible Commentary writes:

It was this very teaching and influence that would prove invaluable during the toughest times of his ministry, when false teachers were already having a negative impact on the church. Timothy is not led astray by these impostors. Instead, he is to continue in what he had learned and had 'become convinced of' (*epistothēs*, only here in the NT), 'have been firmly persuaded of,' or 'have been assured of.' Why? 'Because you know those from whom you learned it.' Who were his teachers? His grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice (1:5), as the next clause shows: "and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures (Gaebelein, Frank E.).

## **Church of God Discipleship Foundations**

The Church of God, as is the case with the Pentecostal Movement in general, can be considered as the “new kids on the block” within Christendom. While it is a Protestant movement, it is not directly related to the Reformation, or the post Reformation movements, such as the Presbyterians and Baptists. Although it is important to note that the Church of God, at its roots is a Holiness-*Wesleyan* movement:

The Church of God began on August 19, 1886, in Monroe County, Tennessee, near the North Carolina border. Former Baptist Richard Green Spurling preached in a millhouse along Barney Creek and eight persons formed a Christian Union for the purpose of following the New Testament as their rule for faith and practice, giving each other equal rights and privilege to interpret Scripture, and sitting together as the church of God. Twenty-one years later the growing movement formally adopted the name Church of God

Ten years after the organizational meeting, a revival at the Shearer Schoolhouse in nearby Camp Creek, North Carolina, introduced the doctrine of sanctification to the community. Opposition to this doctrine led to severe persecution, but a spirit of revival prevailed, and the Holiness believers experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit that included speaking in tongues and divine healing. Such experiences prepared the way for the explosion of the Pentecostal movement in the early twentieth century (Roebuck 1).

As is the case with many religious movements throughout history, the beginning of the Church of God (originally known as the Christian Union) did not take place in a vacuum. There were situations that were taking place within the established church in the United States which led to the beginning of the denomination that today we know as the Church of God. Religious liturgy and boring routines were gripping the weekly worship services throughout many churches in 19<sup>th</sup> century America, and this provoked some believers to go on a spiritual quest in search of something deeper and more meaningful.

The vision for Christian union rose up in the heart of R. G. Spurling (1857-1935) and his father Richard Spurling (1810-1891). As Roebuck writes:

R. G. Spurling had been a licensed minister in the Missionary Baptist church. Along with his father, an ordained elder, he began to seek God regarding abuses that he saw in the local churches around him. According to the earliest chronicler of these events, Spurling became disturbed about certain traditions and creeds that he considered a hardship for God's people.

He saw a need for further reformation of the church beyond the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century. While Luther, Calvin and other reformers had brought about important changes, their legacy focused on right belief rather than on a right relationship with Jesus Christ and on assent to doctrine rather than love for one another. Creeds became more important than the leading of the Holy Spirit and one's own conscience (Roebuck 2).

Roebuck correctly shares that while the Reformation rightly sought out to make sure that the church believed in sound doctrine, at some point it became so rigid that doctrine became more important than intimacy and relationship, with God and with people. If you add to this problem the issue of Higher Criticism which ran rampant in the 1800's, the church was losing its purpose and its sense of being a prophetic agent on earth. Conn comments:

In 1884 the dissatisfaction of the condition of the established churches led Richard Spurling Senior a Baptist preacher from the Unicoi Mountains of Tennessee, to study the Scriptures for two years, and the history of the church seeking for a revival. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of August, 1886, the Christian Union was organized in Monroe County, Tennessee, with eight members (Roebuck 15).

“After ten years of hard work, but little results, the much desired and sought-after revival suddenly and unexpectedly arrived, moving the hardened sense of indifference of those who

lived in the mountains. The revival did not come to the Christian Union of Tennessee through the ministry of Richard G. Spurling. Three men from nearby *Coker Creek*, motivated by the message of holiness of the Christian Union, were powerfully moved by the Holy Spirit” (Conn 50).

“They were two Baptists and a Methodist, but none of them were ordained ministers. They had a Wesleyan concept of holiness and declared that they had received an experience similar to John Wesley’s account on *Aldersgate St.* in London, on May 24, 1738. Similar to Wesley they rejoiced in this passage: <<...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>> (II Peter 1.4). These men felt the strange warmth of God in their hearts” (Conn 50).

The Church of God did not begin as an intellectual reaction to biblical errors; it began as a movement which was characterized by profoundly seeking the presence of God. These early believers felt that there was more to the Christian life than what they were practicing. They found what they were looking for. However, as time passed after this initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Christian Union, fanaticism and error took hold of the small group and almost destroyed the movement altogether. As Conn notes:

The group was infiltrated by fanatical teachers who misled many. They maintained a doctrine which stated that there were many ‘*fire baptisms*’ for those who had received the baptism in the Holy Ghost. They led the believers into looking for an erroneous doctrine of ‘holy-dynamite’, and then ‘Holy Picric Acid’ and ‘Holy Oxide’. These religious-chemical terms represented the different steps which had to be taken in the quest for spiritual power. (70)

While many believers at first abandoned the young movement, others remained, and a few of them returned. “Some of the believers who left the movement returned to a well-balanced Christian life and became loyal members of the church. However, the majority remained spiritually destroyed by the disillusion, confusion and anguish” (Conn 70). As horrible as this experience was, it taught the church a lesson. They were forced to do some introspection and make the necessary changes. These changes ultimately helped to firmly establish and propel the church into worldwide movement.

During the year that followed these events, the church was able to reorganize itself in many ways, and there was a change in the church services. “Teaching occupied a prominent place in the services and the Scriptures were discussed by the group. These sessions reflected their determination to avoid being taken by surprise by fanaticism” (Conn 76). Conn continues:

In the past, they celebrated services with the purpose of evangelizing the masses at the expense of profound, pastoral teaching. In the beginning, basic instructions of the Pentecostal faith were enough. However, as the group was reduced the attention was then turned to the study of the Scriptures. . . .

Nevertheless, they preserved the spiritual manifestation. It seems that this year of deficit was a blessing because in the end, they were able to successfully maintain an equilibrium between doctrinal teaching and enthusiasm for evangelism. From that moment on the church has made sure that their missionary and evangelistic ministry does not lose its teaching element. That is how they learned their lesson. (76)

In the beginning, there was no intentional discipleship or spiritual formation taking place in the church. There was a zeal for evangelistic preaching and for reaching the lost. However, the

experiences that almost destroyed the church made it clear to them that biblical teaching and sound doctrine was critical to the church's survival.

Teaching began to take a prominent place in the church, and there are three elements mentioned by Conn which made a huge difference in this new approach:

1. The teaching was Scriptural, thereby grounding the believers in the Word of God and moving them into a process of maturity.
2. The teaching was profound, as opposed to basic instructions.
3. The teaching was pastoral.

Although all are necessary, the last one is particularly important for many reasons. Pastoral teaching goes beyond evangelistic preaching, because pastoral teaching makes disciples of those who have been won over to Christ. Pastoral teaching is not about making people feel good and feel happy about themselves; it is designed to confront believers and to meet the spiritual, theological, and emotional needs of the people. Pastoral teaching in its purest form, deepens intimacy with God. Finally, the pastor is the one who sets the tone for the church.

It is no coincidence that Conn would include this in his work on the history of the Church of God. From that moment on, in addition to evangelism and outreach, teaching, discipleship, and spiritual formation would become central to the local church, and, in the long run, that helped to shape the Church of God as a serious Pentecostal organization which has survived for over one hundred years.

Youth ministry in the Church of God did not have an official beginning in the very early days of the church. However, that does not mean that there was not youth work or that youth discipleship was not 'happening' so to speak. Dr. Fidencio Burgueño of the Church of God shares some insight:

Youth ministry in the Church of God began unintentionally and simultaneously throughout several states. However, it is safe to say that the official movement owes its beginnings to a woman by the name of Alda B. Harrison, whose concern and enthusiasm forced the church to make a formal effort to have a youth organization. It was in the State of Florida where the name “Young People’s Endeavor” was first used, and from there the name was adopted for the national organization. The principal reason for these groups was to provide a place within the church to work with youth and promote fellowship (social Christian life) and spiritual progress. (Burgueño 8)

It is important to understand this part of the history of the Church of God, since it was there that one can safely say early youth discipleship, as the church understood it, began to take form. “The church of God does not have a catechism program as many other denominations have. Nevertheless, discipleship, bible teaching and instruction has been done in different ways throughout its history” (Roebuck 15).

Discipleship throughout the history of the Church of God was accomplished by studying the Scriptures together; these believers understood the powerful effects of this approach: The Great Commission is at the heart of the Church of God ministry as the church reaches people for Christ and leads them to experience His transforming power. Through the years, her members have developed creative ways of obeying Christ’s mandate to make disciples.

Since our formation, it has valued God’s Word and interdependence, each of which is vital to effective discipleship. The bold step taken by R.G. Spurling in 1886 to assemble together his Christian neighbors was as purposeful as it was revolutionary. Spurling desired for individuals to embrace their faith and understand why they held certain beliefs, not simply follow creeds or traditions. Spurling believed true discipleship is accomplished when Christians study the New Testament together and discuss how to apply its teachings to their lives (Living the Word 24).

While many have forgotten the importance of Sunday school and family worship, the Church of God, at least in its infancy, understood how influential these practices were for the believer and even the minister. Spurling believed true discipleship is accomplished when Christians study the New Testament together and discuss how to apply its teachings to their lives. His mission was for his neighbors to know God's Word and then live according to it, and it was this emphasis that gave birth to our movement.

Our first General Assembly in 1906 emphasized family worship and Sunday school as means of discipleship. The importance of spiritual guidance in both the church and home were seen as integral to spiritual development. As the church expanded into new locations, equipped ministers became essential. By 1910, R.G. Spurling, A.J. Tomlinson, and T.L. McLain were compiling examination questions and Bible references for interviewing potential ministers. Consequently, their work produced the church's core teachings used to disciple members. The teachings, which were revised in 1988, and the doctrinal statements issued in 1948 in our Declaration of Faith serve as the biblical foundation of our movement (Roebuck 24).

Discipleship also came through publications in the early days of the Church of God:

At the turn of the twentieth century, publications were a popular medium for communicating the gospel. Prior to joining the church, A.J. Tomlinson had published *Samson's Foxes* (1901–1902) to encourage his mountain readers and to inform those outside the region of his missionary work.

When Tomlinson was called to pastor, he wanted a publication to connect the local churches. In January 1904, he began *The Way*, and he and M.S. Lemons served as editors until it was discontinued the following year. Church members also read and contributed to various Holiness and Pentecostal publications, such as *The Bridegroom's Messenger*, a periodical started by G.B. Cashwell and for which Tomlinson was an early corresponding editor.

On March 1, 1910, the inaugural issue of the *Church of God Evangel* (first titled *The Evening Light and Church of God Evangel*) was published with 125 subscribers. Referred to as the “white-winged messenger,” the paper lived up to its title by pro-

claiming Christ and introducing the Church of God into communities across the globe. Upon reading the testimonies and doctrinal articles, individuals often were intrigued about sanctification, the Holy Spirit baptism, and the Church of God.

When the *Evangel* announced a Church of God preacher was needed in Texas in 1914, J.T. Priest answered the call and soon the *Evangel* reported he was preaching the “red-hot gospel.” Three years later, an *Evangel* was tossed from a train and picked up by a Holiness minister, who also requested a Church of God preacher come to his community—resulting in a church being organized in Strawn, Texas.

Similarly, when Katie Free saw her first *Evangel* in 1919 near Vardaman, Mississippi, she shouted with joy after reading the line: “People are receiving the Holy Ghost and speaking in other tongues.” Having received the Holy Spirit baptism while praying at home, it wasn’t until reading the *Evangel* that she discovered others also shared her experience.

The *Evangel* even found its way into Romania after George Bradin read a Church of God publication about healing and the Holy Spirit baptism and contacted the church requesting literature. As a result, Bradin started a Pentecostal church in his home in 1922 with Church of God literature providing guidance for its doctrine. Today, the Apostolic Church of God in Romania has over 500,000 members.

As the church grew, so did our need to own a printing operation to publish literature from a Pentecostal perspective. By 1917, we had purchased a publishing house, hired members to write literature, and began publishing our own Sunday school curriculum.

In 1945, the church adopted the broader evangelical curriculum promoted by the National Sunday School Association, which eventually included the *Evangelical Sunday*

*School Lesson Commentary*. According to Lance Colkmire, this commentary is our best-selling nonmusical book. Started in 1953, it has been published by Pathway Press since 1963 with Church of God members serving as editors and Pentecostals as its main writers since 1974. Realizing the need for more relevant literature for youth and children, Pathway Press introduced New Life curriculum in 1975 with assistance from Atlanta's Mount Paran Church of God (Living the Word 25).

Church of God Publications had a powerful and positive influence among countries and cultures outside of its core founding group in the States of Tennessee and the Carolinas: In the 1930s, Peter C. Hickson led the Young People's Endeavor for our Black congregations when we were divided into black and white governmental structures. Burdened for more literature for youth, he asked for a monthly publication, which the Black Assembly authorized. In 1936, Hickson published the inaugural issue of the *Church of God Gospel Herald*.

Although its original purpose was to facilitate youth ministry, the *Gospel Herald* soon developed into the primary voice for Black ministries. As we have grown, our publications have increased, with many departments printing specialty magazines.

Other countries also publish literature in their native languages. As early as 1944, a Spanish version of the *Evangel* was published in Mexico. Three years later, San Antonio, Texas, became the publication base for *El Evangelio* until its editorial offices relocated to Tennessee. Other widely circulated international publications have included *Moving Waters* (South Africa), *InSpirit*, formerly *Stimme der Wahrheit* (Germany), *Cuvântul Adevărului* (Romania), *Suvisesha Nadam* (India), and *Risveglio* (Italy) (Living the Word 25).

Discipleship among the Youth in the Church of God is not new; there were people who felt a burden to reach, mentor and train young people from its early days:

By the 1920s, local churches were conducting youth-centered discipleship programs, such as “Children’s Day” services and weekly youth services. Beginning in 1923, M.P. Cross and Houston R. Morehead established Young Harvesters Clubs throughout Michigan, and in 1926, E.L. Simmons of Florida organized a Young People’s Missionary Association. In Tennessee, Alda B. Harrison organized a Young People’s Mission Band in 1923 and encouraged the Church of God to start a national youth society.

Sensing the growing importance to connect with youth, General Overseer F.J. Lee asked Lettie Cross to preach the first General Assembly sermon for youth in 1924. With continued encouragement from youth leaders, we began a general youth program in 1929, adopting the name *Church of God Young People’s Endeavor*. That same year Harrison began publishing *The Lighted Pathway* as a youth magazine, which the church officially adopted in 1937, and she continued serving as editor until 1948.

By 1932 the first national Y.P.E. convention for Black ministries was held in Jacksonville, Florida. The Youth Program Committee, appointed in 1945, sponsored a Youth Congress prior to the 1946 Assembly, at which meeting a National Youth Department (now the International Youth and Discipleship Department) was established with Ralph E. Williams as first director. In 1950, the church developed standards to assist congregations in improving local discipleship programs, and by 1953, it began “steering toward better youth programs” for the Y.P.E. with the publication of *The Pilot*.

Today, local churches utilize a variety of discipleship models. Some maintain the traditional Sunday school, while others have adopted cell groups. Many churches conduct

midweek classes for all ages, known as the Family Training Hour since 1966. Modeled after the Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts organizations, the Church of God utilizes effective kids clubs.

Boys ministries include Pioneers for Christ or Royal Rangers. Girls clubs first began in 1969 when the Women's Ministries Department initiated Young Ladies Ministries (grades 7-12), obeying the scriptural admonition for older women to teach younger women (Titus 2:3) Eventually, clubs for younger girls were created—Joy Belles (grades 4-6) in 1974, Bluebelles (grades 1-3) in 1984, and Little Sweet- hearts (preschool) in 2002. Both boys and girls clubs complete workbook activities and service, by which they are awarded patches and advance in rank.

#### Youth Camps

One of the most successful and short-term impact models of young adult discipleship program is youth camp. Louisiana conducted the first camp in 1948 with Cecil B. Knight as speaker, and Washington followed in 1949. Most states conduct camps annually for various ages. The structured Bible study, worship services, and recreation help young people focus on Christ and connect to the broader church (Living the Word 26).

There is a common denominator, goal, and/or core values which can be found in every one of these programs and events: fellowship with the Saints; worship; studying the Scriptures; and finally, spiritual renewal and experiencing the presence of God, not just talking about it.

#### In the Central District of the Southeast Hispanic Region of the Church of God

The Latino ministry of the Church of God has approached youth discipleship differently, depending on the Country in Latin America or the Region country within the U.S. that it serves. For the most part, leaders find themselves purchasing material from outside the denomination.

Or, at times, they are forced to develop their own material. The central Hispanic district is not an exception. This was the case with Pastor Abdias Pimentel.

Reverend Pimentel, current pastor of Bethel Church in Tampa, former local youth pastor for 15 years, and district (or area) director for the Tampa Bay area for two years, shares his experience as a leader in the area of youth discipleship. He explains that in his personal experience as a youth leader he found that it was a challenge to get good discipleship material for his students.

For this reason, he says, “it was up to me to research, find, and even write discipleship materials. While I used some of the material that we were given, I did not use it often because in large part, it was not relevant to my youth” (Pimentel). He continues:

In fact, I often found myself writing new material in order to keep up with the needs of our young people. I found that many of our youth did not know much doctrine, so I developed discipleship material that started their journey with a basic, biblical and theological doctrine. As a local youth pastor, I developed a program which I named T.A.G.G.E.D. (Truth About God; Grasping Essential Doctrine). I chose this name because ‘doctrine’ is a boring term and youth would not come to church to listen to it. (Pimentel)

“The literature includes revelations about God in the Bible; the Bible as God’s authoritative Word; how to explain and defend the existence of God; the creation of humanity; the nature of Satan and fallen angels; and the consequences of a fallen world. The material was adopted by the International Youth and Discipleship Department, to be included in the annual discipleship manual which is given to youth pastors at the Winterfest Conventions” (Pimentel).

### Small Groups

The concept of small groups has been around for a long time, and it has proven to be an effective way of reaching and discipling individuals. This format has impacted the church in its growth and in impacting lives. It was unfortunately abandoned for too long by many churches, but it has made a comeback. And it is making a difference.

The resurgence of the small group movement has been profound in the last 100 years.

Some groups formed as places where people could discover vital faith in Jesus—something lacking in the week-to-week attendance of their denominational congregations. Others found congregational settings to be a frightening place to share struggles or attempt to belong (Smith 66).

### *The Early Church*

The approach of small groups discipleship has been popularized at different times throughout church history. Many churches have benefitted by adopting this model. The primitive church understood its importance. “Certainly, the early Church knew the value of small groups. The book of Acts records the struggle of small groups who prayed, shared studied and suffered together. Through their ‘incendiary fellowship,’ the first century Christians set the whole world aflame” (Campus Crusade for Christ 30).

### *John Wesley’s Societies*

In terms of church growth and discipleship methods, the question is often asked, “what is the best and most relevant way to go about it?” How can a church be effective with its responsibility to disciple and develop believers in the area of spiritual formation? For several years Sunday school was the answer. It proved itself to be an effective way of teaching the Word of God.

Today it has been abandoned and referred to as an old dinosaur. Also, local ministries focused on youth, men, women, and children. Both approaches have had one thing in common: small groups. Small groups have proven to be effective, but small groups are nothing new.

“The small groups societies were first started in London, in 1678” (Gonzalez 307).

Gonzalez continues:

The purpose of these societies was not to take the place of the church, but rather to supplement the worship of the church with devotions, study, and experience of smaller groups. As was the case also with the Pietist groups in Germany, they soon became involved in acts of mercy by which they tried to alleviate the suffering of those caught in the social evil of the times—poverty, imprisonment, lack of roots, etc. (307)

Small groups were so effective, that they led to the establishment of a worldwide and influential denomination. From the small groups of Christians Methodists derive their name.

Concerning this emergence, Gonzalez writes:

As early as 1702, Samuel Wesley, John Wesley’s father, had organized a religious society in his parish at Epworth. Years later John and Charles Wesley, who were students at Oxford, became members of a small group, which was originally designed by Charles in order to help each other in their studies. (307)

“However, as the activities of these groups became known among their fellow students, they were dubbed first ‘the holy club,’ and eventually ‘Methodism’” (Gonzalez 308).

“In reality, most churches already have some small groups. They may not realize it, but they are there. The groups might take the place of a Sunday school class or a music group, etc. Still they are a small group; carrying out many good functions. You must begin to identify them and then get on with the task of starting new ones” (Smith qtd. in Carl George 64).

What the church and the pastor need to work on is how to use small groups to the advantage of the congregation, so that they can be healthy small groups. Small groups need to understand that they are part of a congregation. They need to understand that they are not there to replace the local congregation.

They need to have a clear vision and purpose, which is to make disciples. They do not exist for the purpose of having its members meet in order to commiserate and attack the pastor or the church. They are there to glorify God and contribute to the church's well-being and growth.

“From my theological heritage, John Wesley may be the most important historical guide. He founded an entire movement on a set of groups designed to meet specific needs. Burning outside-the-walls of the Anglican Church, the group movement became the Methodist denominations in the United States” (Smith 65).

#### The Church of God Cleveland, TN

Although the Church of God does not have a catechism type program, such as other denominations, it is not without discipleship literature. There are three manuals which help the local church in preparing, training, and discipling its members, from basic preparation for baptism to deep discipleship. The organization also assigns its discipleship programs to its four core ministry groups: Ladies Ministry; Men's Ministry; Youth Ministry; and Children's Ministry.

#### Basic Discipleship for new believers and baptism

##### *The New Covenant Study*

This small manual covers seven basic introductory topics of the Christian faith, such as: What does it mean to be Saved?; Living for Jesus; Telling Others About Our Salvation; Spiritual PowerDaily Devotions; Live Like I'm Leaving; Financial Partnership with God. According to

Cossey, “The purpose of this study is to assist you in understanding who you are in Christ, and what it means to be a Christian---a follower of Jesus” (7).

*Exploring the Declaration of Faith-A Manual for understanding the doctrinal foundations of the Church of God.*

This manual assists the believer in her next step of the discipleship process (after water baptism). It is meant to help the believer go deeper into the Scriptures and the belief system (doctrine) of Church of God, with the Purpose of having a better of understanding of the faith

Author Dr. French Arrington explains:

The purpose of this study is to lead God’s people toward a deeper understanding of the truths of the Bible---toward a greater dedication to Spirit—filled living, toward a more passionate commitment to sharing the good news of Christ’s saving love with others, and toward a more fervent expectation of the return of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

To accomplish this purpose, we all need the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Since the author of the Bible is the Spirit, we can have no better help in understanding Christian doctrine than from the author Himself.

A willingness to learn from the Holy Spirit is essential to understanding His book. The human mind by itself is unable to understand the ways of God, but the Holy Spirit illuminates our understanding to the mysteries of God’s Word. This study is organized so that it may be used by individuals or groups (Arrington 12).

*Discipleship Manual for Adults: Developing the Christian Life*

The third resource which is written by the Church of God, which can also be used in small group settings, is a manual which is intended to teach, guide, support, and direct the disciple after they have gone through the basic teaching programs of the Church. It covers the

topics of life: life in God; life in the Word; life in the Spirit; life in the church; life in the family; life in the world; and finally, how to be a witness to others.

In explaining the purpose of this manual, the author shares the following about this resource:

The mission of the church is to “go into all the world” (Mark 16.15) and “make disciples” (Matt. 28.19). The church is composed of people: individuals who have answered the call of Christ to follow Him. The mandate “to make disciples” is so that disciples can make other disciples. The person should *be* a disciple before they can help others develop features of discipleship.

Jesus spent the major part of His earthly ministry training His disciples. This training prepared them to obey His mandate of “going” and “making disciples.” In a condensed format, the goal of these discipleship studies is to:

**HELP** you to understand the meaning of Biblical Stewardship; **GUIDE** you in a systematic study of the Bible and how to relate its teachings with your daily life; **SUPPORT** you in developing study habits which will reinforce a mature discipleship; **DIRECT** you to follow with others the way in which a disciple should walk and share the characteristics that they need to develop; and **PROVIDE** opportunities to help others in the process of learning, serving and growing and in the image of Christ (Carey and Stone 7).

The approach of this Church of God manual mirrors John Wesley’s philosophy in many ways. Wesley’s most important group was the well-known *Class Meeting*, where the majority of believers met with the purpose of growing as followers of Jesus. They were places of high accountability and deep honesty, with the goal of bringing about a transformation of motives. They trained for leadership and were equipped for other

ministries, too. In addition, the opportunity for freedom from addictions and struggles was offered (Smith 66).

This model of discipleship has the potential of making a profound difference in the life of the Christian, and in the process, the church. It goes beyond the so-called 10-week program, or the check-list approach to discipleship, which, as was discussed earlier, was the same approach that Susan Glover found to be ineffective. It contains the fundamental ingredients which promote true spiritual formation, maturity, and growth for the believer.

This model challenges believers because it holds them accountable and demands honesty from them. It is deep and heart-changing, in so far as it attempts to transform not only the behavior of the person, but their motives, too. It is also fundamental with the numerical growth of the church, as it provides the believer with a sense of purpose. When a person is trained to lead be a leader, he understands that now he belongs to something greater than himself, which is to lead others to Jesus and help them to live a Christ-like life.

#### Developmental needs of young adults between the ages of 18-25

Millennials, (particularly those who are single), have their own, particular, outlook on life. Linda Hard shares several characteristics about them:

1. They feel disillusioned:
2. They feel separated from God, from one another, and lack a sense of life.
3. They feel abandoned: May believe that they are receiving unjust treatment, and also feel cheated. To them the older generation forgot them.
4. They want a high-quality of life: They want it all, they want it now, and they do not want to hear excuses from the older generation.

5. They are independent: They think and act according to their own instincts. They might listen to someone's advice, but they make their own decisions, reject demands without debate.
6. They are on the defensive: Brought up in an age of materialism and prosperity, they expect more than what they will apparently receive. They generally believe that you cannot trust people because each person is alone in defending himself in this competitive world.
7. They are comfortable with change: Having grown up in chaos, they know nothing else.
8. They are used to a fast rhythm and a lack of stability. Traditions do not last long. They actively accept change because it allows them to reject the mentality and the culture of those who were born from the 40's to the 70's.
9. They are more sensitive to people: They are less oriented towards their own careers.
10. They are pluralists: They accept different focuses and permit the coexistence of different points of view and apparent contradictory perspectives.
11. They are flexible: They have few absolutes and lesser immovable standards in their lives. They are convinced by what works, not by what "should" be.
12. They are pragmatic: They do not waste time explaining theories; they want to move with their own lives. They ignore a chain of command and hierarchy; they are not going to make an excessive effort; they do not believe in paying their debts and will avoid the process or will move on to another place if their contribution is not appreciated. (Single Source 144)

### **Research Design Literature**

The Literature Review researched several aspects related to discipleship within the young adult community in the church. The researcher was able to glean a wealth of information regarding this subject. It was his intention to investigate the history, impact, and models of discipleship within the church throughout its history. In addition to this, the researcher wanted to understand what models of discipleship contributed to young adults being faithful to God, their church and their faith during their college and post-university years.

The review investigated and established different definitions of discipleship as understood by several authors throughout church history, and what were the biblical, theological, best practices, and examples of discipleship in both the church and in the lives of different characters in the Bible. The literature review section spoke to these topics.

### **Summary of Literature**

Several themes were covered in chapter two by the researcher. It was important to understand what the Scriptures had to say about the subject of discipleship, spiritual formation, and the concept of mentorship. Regarding the concept of mentorship, several examples and models were used. Among these were men such as the Elijah/Elisha and the Eli/Samuel model of discipleship.

In addition to these men, young women such as Esther and Ruth were presented. They were chosen because, in addition the many things that one can learn from studying the lives of these women, they made life and history changing decisions as a result of what learned. Ruth is an example of a young woman who was mentored by her mother-in-law, and, in a specific moment in time, she made a decision to follow God.

Also, several different definitions of discipleship were investigated. It was discovered that the best way to understand discipleship was as Jesus taught it. More than a program for

church membership, discipleship is a commitment to follow and serve God, a lifetime process which produces spiritual growth and maturity, and the desire to serve others.

Several leaders throughout the history of the church, and in some cases contemporary leaders, pastors, authors, and experts were quoted. It was important to listen to the voices many of these leaders who, in several different ways, have made important contributions to the concept of discipleship and mentoring.

In understanding how several individuals in the Bible lived out their lives, and how the church, throughout its history disciplined believers was helpful as it made an important contribution moving forward with the investigation. This was particularly true in answering the research questions: 1) What factors contribute to youth within the churches of the central district area of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region abandoning the local church after graduating High School; 2) How are our young adults being disciplined during their teenage, High School years; and 3) What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, central district contribute to discipling young adults so that they do not abandon the local church or the faith in general after their High School years.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this chapter was to gather information from young adults ages 18+ regarding their definition of discipleship, how they lived out their lives as disciples of Christ, and how discipleship has impacted their lives. In addition to this, it was the intention of the researcher to glean from the participants whether or not they were being discipled in the central district of the Church of God Southeast Hispanic Region.

The researcher approached this particular study via mixed methods, using both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to gain the necessary information. The young adults participated in a focus group and a digital questionnaire, which was conducted via SurveyMonkey.

Finally, it was important to invite the voices of Senior Pastors and Youth Pastors from different churches within the Central District of the Latino Ministries of the Church of God. These two groups were personally interviewed by the researcher.

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

The purpose of this project was to investigate the nature of discipleship of the Latino young adults, eighteen and over, in the Central District of the Church of God in the Southeastern Hispanic Region, specifically how discipleship impacts whether or not they choose to abandon the Christian faith after the age of 18.

## **Research Questions**

**RQ # 1: What factors contribute to young adults, eighteen and older , in the central district of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region abandoning the local church after graduating High School?**

This question was asked directly in the focus groups. The researcher asked participants if they had ever abandoned the faith, as young adults; if they knew anybody who abandoned the faith as young adults; and finally, why did they or their friends abandon the faith. The question was also asked by the researcher when he interviewed Senior Pastors and Youth Pastors. In addition, questions 6-10 of the digital survey addressed this issue.

**RQ #2: How are our young people being disciplined during their teenage and high School years?**

The researcher asked this question in the focus groups and in his interview with the pastors and youth pastors. In addition, throughout the focus group the participants were asked to share several ways in which they were living out their discipleship experience.

**RQ #3. What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, Central District contribute to discipling youth so that they do not abandon the local church after graduating High School?**

The researcher asked this question in the focus groups and in his one-on-one interviews with Senior Pastor and Youth Pastors. It is important to note, that although this question was not directly asked in the survey, questions three and four of the survey gave a glimpse into how the participants understand and define discipleship.

## **Ministry Context**

The central district of the Latino/a ministry of the Church of God, includes the major cities of within the Tampa Bay area, Orlando, Kissimmee, Poinciana, Apopka, and a few others. It has a majority Puerto Rican and Mexican constituency. However, there is an established Cuban community, and growing Dominican and Central and South American minority.

In addition, there is huge Hispanic-American community within the churches. It is important to understand this because, although a common language unites Latinos/as, the reality is that each of these groups think differently. Although there is a majority males pastors, in the last 15-20 years that has been a growing community of female pastors and female leaders in several areas of ministry.

For a long time, only male ordained Bishops served on the Sate Council, as these are the rules per the Church of God Minutes. However, for the last ten years at least two female ordained ministers have been elected to represent the Region in general, and to give voice to the female ministers and pastors. They have a voice on the Council but not a vote. It is also important to note that more than 50% of the pastors and leaders have Bible training.

For several years, the Latino/a leadership brought with it their customs from their native countries in Latin America. This included the fact that what the pastor said, was the last word, no questions asked. However, the las two generations have changed this way of thinking. The pastor is still the man or woman of God, in charge of the church, but the voices of the congregation carry more weight than it did before.

Also, while there was time when young adults were a little more willing to accept the teachings of their elder generation, this generation of Latino/a youth tend to reflect their non-Latino/a, millennials peers in questioning religious and political institutions, wanting what they

want, and they want it now. They will shut down very easily if they believe that their needs are not being met in church.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

The focus group participants were young adults, men and women, who were invited from different churches within the central district of the Latino/Latina ministries in Southeast Hispanic Region of the Church of God. In order to participate, they had to be eighteen and older; this way, they could legally consent to participate.

The researcher included this group in order to listen to them and have a better understanding as to their views and experiences in the ministry of discipleship. In fact, this was the group that he targeted for research.

Also included, were interviews with several senior pastors and youth pastors from several churches of the central district of the Latino Church of God in Florida. It was the intent of the researcher to find out from them how, in their opinion, discipleship was making a difference in the lives of the young adults that they were serving.

The researcher chose to include the voices of several local youth pastors of the Latino central district of the Church of God, because they are on the frontlines of youth ministry. Youth pastors are ministering to, and working with, young adults on a daily basis. They know what motivates them and what turns them off. They know the needs of young people, and they also know how to help them grow as disciples of Christ.

### **Description of Participants**

The participants were Latino, young adults, ages eighteen and older. They were active in their local church, and they came from different vocational backgrounds. Some of them were

university students; some were working in local church ministry. There was a mixture of youth who were born and raised in church, and others who came to faith later in life.

The youth pastors and the senior pastors were well educated leaders. They either had university backgrounds, Bible college backgrounds, Bible institute backgrounds, or seminary backgrounds.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher wrote an official letter requesting permission from the District Pastor of the Latino/a Central District of the Church of God, and the broader Zone Pastor, which includes a greater amount of churches, in order to conduct the study within the nineteen churches that he oversees. The researcher also requested that the District Pastor allow his District Youth Director to assist in recruiting the participants.

Once permission was granted by the district pastor, the researcher proceeded to request an opportunity to address the denomination at different events. In addition to this, he attended local church services and spoke with the pastor, in order to ask for permission to speak with the church. The researcher also engaged in personal, one-on-one conversations with senior pastors and with several young adults in which he shared with them the project and the nature of the project. In these conversations, the researcher asked if they would be willing to participate in the focus group and the SurveyMonkey questionnaire. The questionnaire was shared via social media. The researcher sent a link on his Facebook page explaining the project and inviting people to take part in survey and asking that they share the link with their friends.

In every instance, whether through personal conversations, addressing several local churches directly, via SurveyMonkey or by way of the focus groups, the researcher informed every person which he engaged that their participation would be confidential. In addition to this, every

participant was required to sign a (hardcopy) consent form in order to take part in the focus groups; otherwise, they could not participate, due to the confidential nature of the study. Finally, although the senior pastors and youth pastors which were interviewed consented to be quoted by name, the researcher did not include their identities so as not to cause them any problems with the denomination leaders in the future.

### **Instrumentation**

The researcher prepared an online survey (via SurveyMonkey) in which he asked young adults several questions regarding the participants experience in the area of discipleship. It was the intention of the researcher to glean from them their understanding of discipleship and to find out whether or not, as believers and followers of Christ, they were living out a of life which reflected their understanding of what it meant to be a true disciple.

The researcher was intentional in asking the participants if they understood discipleship as a local church program which was established for baptism and membership after conversion or if they understood discipleship as a lifetime commitment to Jesus, a way life, as it were, which was based on conviction, belief and service to others. Several questions were asked in the survey, which were meant to find out from the participants the importance, understanding, and impact that both discipleship and their experience as Pentecostals has had on their lives.

Another, equally important instrument was a series of focus groups. These groups were conducted in a controlled, secured environment (an environment which allowed them to speak freely), which allowed the young adult ages eighteen and older the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences as Pentecostals.

There was a total of five focus groups conducted within the central district of the Latino/a district of the Church of God. In two cases two young youth pastors, one male and one female,

participated in the Focus Group. As for the digital survey, there was no way of knowing if youth pastors participated, since the question of leadership was not asked as part of the survey.

They were also given the opportunity to express their understanding of discipleship. The idea was for them to share whether or not they believed that they were being discipled and, if they were, how were they living out their discipleship. If the participants expressed that they were indeed being discipled as a way of life, then the researcher asked them how they would define the best practices of their discipleship.

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

The five focus groups which were held with young adults, turned out to be the best among the methods which were utilized. Not only did these particular events offer the researcher an opportunity to speak directly with the participants, but they also provided them an open forum in which they could speak and interact with each other. This approach enriched the conversation since the experiences and ideas of one person served to remind others of their own experiences. So, you can say that this method sparked well thought out conversations among the participants.

The one on one nature of the personal interviews, which were held with the Senior pastors and Youth Pastors, provided the opportunity for a more focused conversation. In addition to this, the researcher requested that the focus group participants also take the discipleship survey. This conversation allowed for greater sense of openness in their responses. Because of the mixed-method approach of a quantitative survey and the qualitative focus groups and personal interviews, the instruments were reliable.

Much of this is due to the fact that the research questions were asked in the interviews, the focus groups, and, in different ways, in the survey. For example, question six, seven and eight of the survey were similar in nature to research question number one. They provide insight

as to the influence of discipleship in the life of the believer. Finally, the instruments received a positive expert peer review.

### **Data Collection**

The project design was a mixed-methods intervention which used a quantitative survey and a qualitative approach which used focus group and personal interviews. The survey was conducted using SurveyMonkey. It was shared on social media via Facebook. In addition to this, the focus group participants were asked to complete survey. The survey received a 76% response rate via these methods.

The qualitative part was completed via five different focus groups, which are here titled as: focus group #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and dated. These were conducted with young adults ages eighteen and older. The average age of the focus group participants was twenty-five. None were older than thirty-five, and none of them were younger than eighteen. There were seven personal one on one interviews. Five of the interview participants were senior pastors with a background in youth ministry, and two were current youth pastors.

Speaking with pastors who had a background in youth ministry, and in some way were actually still dealing young adults in their capacity as senior pastors, and with current youth pastors strengthened this research. The reason for this is that it allowed the researcher to include the voices of the leaders who are working directly with young adults on a daily basis. They are on the frontlines of youth ministry. By doing this, the researcher was able understand if there was a disconnect between what the young adults were saying, versus what their leaders were saying, and where they agreed on the issues.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was collected using a mixed-method format, via a quantitative survey which was shared via social media and through the focus groups. The qualitative personal interviews were conducted with senior pastors and youth pastors who agreed to share their experiences with young adults, within the central Latino/a district of the Church of God in Florida. SurveyMonkey provided the data for the quantitative survey. The results were analyzed by the researcher, paying attention to the questions and then comparing the responses with that of the focus groups and the answers that were provided in the personal interviews.

The focus groups and the personal interviews provided the data for the qualitative method. The focus groups were conducted with young adults, and they were all recorded. In addition to recording these sessions, the researcher's assistant took notes of each one of these focus group meetings. The researcher then listened to the recordings and compared them to the notes, thereby making sure that they were accurate.

The other personal interviews were conducted via phone conversations with the senior pastors and youth pastors. The researcher informed each one that he would be taking notes, and they agreed that it was fine for them. He asked each pastor the three research questions. The interviews lasted an average of one and half hours. The interview notes were then compared with the focus group responses and the survey.

In every focus group conducted, there were a few recurring themes. This generation of young adults want is very relational; they want to be a part of something big. They want to be given the chance to serve, and they are asking that their local church leaders open the doors of opportunity in order to be counted. This is one of the best ways for them to be disciplined and to live out a life of discipleship.

In addition to this, small group gatherings were also very important to them because it allowed them the opportunity to connect. Listening to their peers sharing testimonies of how God changed their lives was very important to them. These stories served to give them hope, and it brought the God of the Bible alive in their own lives. Also, technology is very much a part of their everyday lives.

They will attend the services, but they need to see a contemporary techy church in order to feel part of the community. However, technology is not the only thing that they value. With exception of one focus group, every group that the researcher worked with said that they welcome the older generation into their lives. The word ‘mentor’ was repeated over and again among this group. They want to the older generation to pour into their lives.

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

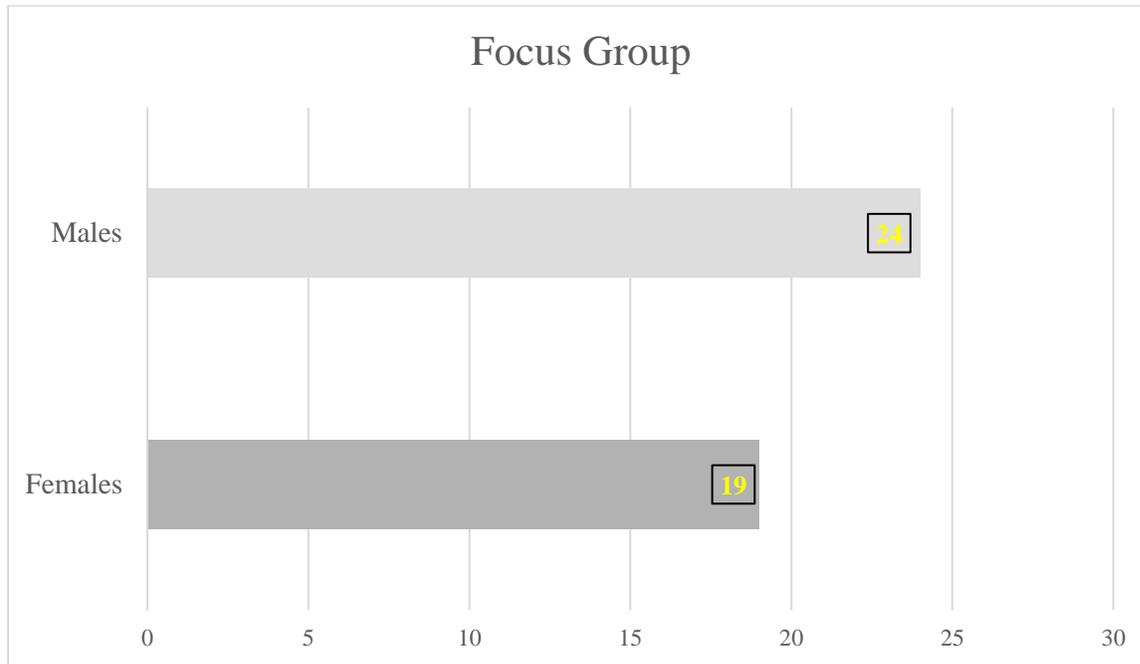
### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this project was to investigate the nature of discipleship of the Latino youth ages eighteen and over in the central district of the Church of God in the Southeastern Hispanic Region and how discipleship impacts whether or not they choose to abandon the Christian faith. The researcher was curious as to why so many Latinos within this district of the Church of God abandon their faith when they reach the age of eighteen. The researcher held several focus groups, a digital questionnaire via SurveyMonkey, and seven personal interviews.

### **Participants**

The focus groups participants included Latino young adults as follows: nineteen women and twenty-four men, ages eighteen and over. They came from different churches and cities within the central district of the Hispanic Ministries of the Church of God and different

economic backgrounds. Most of the young adults graduated high school, and at least half of them were either university students or college graduates. There was also an even mixture of low-level to mid-level family income.



In addition, there were seven personal interviews which were conducted by the researcher. First, there were interviews with five senior pastors. It is important to note that all of the senior pastors began their ministry as youth leaders on many different levels of the Church of God: from local leaders to national leaders. This means that their insights and contributions were extremely invaluable. Why? The reason is simple. Because of their background, these pastors were able to give an assessment on the current state of youth discipleship, particularly within central

district of the denomination, which was based on two different perspectives: 1) their experience as youth pastors and 2) their experience as senior pastors. Finally, interviews were conducted with two youth pastors within the central Latino district. Their voice was also very important in order to glean some insights from them as to why the issue of young adults abandoning their faith was an ongoing problem within this specific district of the Latino Church of God in central Florida.

**Research Question #1: What factors contribute to young adults ages eighteen and over, within the central district of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region to abandon their faith or the local church after graduating High School?**

### **Focus Groups**

Throughout the different focus groups, the researcher had the obvious advantage of engaging directly with the participants. They all had a lot of different and interesting things to say about the issue of discipleship. When it came to this specific first question, they offered up many answers. There seemed to be a recurring response, a motif, as it were, from the participants.

There were forty-three total participants divided in the five different focus groups. The consensus among all of the participants was that the lack of true, profound, intentional, and consistent discipleship was the major reason for young adults abandoning the faith. Several participants went further in their response regarding discipleship.

Many of the participants stated that even where there was some sort of discipleship, it was not enough, since it did little to nothing to help them grow as believers. They stated that the programs which were offered in their local churches did not give them a solid sense of

foundation in the Christian faith. They also shared that the discipleship programs were given by well-meaning teachers who lacked the ability to share and teach from the Bible.

They felt that tough questions about the Christian faith were not answered; instead, they were dismissed. Finally, they said that their experience in the area of discipleship did not provide them with a real understanding of either Christianity or Pentecostalism.

Although many of the participants said that lack of discipleship was a big reason for many of them and some of their friends abandoning the Christian faith, they, nevertheless, said that in fact they were being discipled in way shape or form. Their pastors cared about their spiritual growth. Many also agreed that they liked the fact that they were coming together, which is something that they cherished.

Despite the fact that the general consensus for abandoning the faith, as shared by the participants, was lack of discipleship by the church, other reasons were also given by many participants. Many of them shared the following reasons for abandoning the faith:

- Strict people, leaders, and churches who were in the business of harshly imposing their views, in such a manner that if any believer failed to do certain things, they would lose their salvation.
- For many the church was irrelevant therefore it had nothing to offer by way of spiritual growth.
- Being forced to go to church. Several participants shared that being forced to go to church ultimately had the effect of having them reject the church completely.
- Several abandoned the faith because they wanted their freedom.
- Several of the participants shared that their parents' attitude, specifically their hypocrisy, was a big reason for abandoning the faith. When asked exactly what they

meant, they answered that their parents were one thing in church, very spiritual and godly, but at home they were completely different in the way that treated each other, their children, and other people.

- The influence and so-called attractiveness of the things that the world had to offer, was also the cause that led many of them or their friends to abandon the church.
- Not being accepted by many of their peers, by the church leaders, and at times even by the senior pastor.
- Fake friends in church who at some point betrayed them.
- Falling for the temptation of the world and its so-called attraction.
- Fear of the future. A few participants shared that they witnessed many of their friends who were so preoccupied with their future, due to their fear, that they dedicated a good portion of their lives to making sure that they were prepared for the future. As a result of this, everything else, including their relationship with God and the church, took second and third place in their lives. In the end, the sad result was that they abandoned the church.
- The church did not work out a plan to help them towards the future and growing; they felt stuck.
- Not being used or not being involved in church. Participants shared that they experienced a sense of disconnection from the church. They were a number, they were not taken into account, and their talents were not utilized by the church. So, they felt unimportant.

- Many participants communicated that they were hurt and attacked by the many in the church; this caused them to abandon the faith altogether, as they believed that all Christians were the same.
- Lack of mentors/mentoring by the older generation made many of the participants feel as they were not important to them. So, they ended up leaving the faith altogether.

Several participants stated that, in their experience, the churches that they attended, including their denomination, were very much event-oriented institutions. This realization was disappointing for them. The churches worked extremely hard at developing and running events such as youth camps, revival rallies, and evangelistic services, among other events. For the participants, all of these events are very good, and they offer a good spiritual experience. However, they were disappointed because there was never a sense of a teaching and follow-up after the event. There was no one to teach and explain to them what their experiences meant, and how it was a blessing. They felt that, while the events were good, great, and awesome, as described by different participants themselves, sooner or later the spiritual experience that they enjoyed would wither away. The lack of follow-up after the event, especially by the local church, left them somewhat empty. After finding themselves repeating the same thing over and over again, they figured that it was best to abandon the faith completely. As they saw it, non-believers had it right, Christianity was all about feelings.

### **Interviews with Senior Pastors**

*Pastor #1: Orlando, FL*

Pastor #1 stated that the church lacks a catechism. He said that because of this, there is no true discipleship taking place within the denomination, such as one would find in the Catholic

church. He stated that the model of the Catholic church, which takes on the responsibility of teaching believers the moment they come out of their mother's womb, while not necessarily perfect, is, however, a good one.

They baptize them at birth; then they go through their first catechism after that; and then first communion; moving forward they can be involved in the church and feel part of it by becoming an Altar boy, for example. He said that every step in the believer's life is well-defined. In the Church of God, he said, we do not have a well-defined set steps or rite of "passage," so to speak. There is no sense of continuity, and there is no sense of "what's next?" This, according to Pastor Victor, contributes to many young adults abandoning the faith when they come of age. They do not know, much less understand what they believe in and what the church stands for.

*Pastor #2: Tampa, FL*

The second pastor that was interviewed spent the first fifteen years of his ministry as a local youth pastor. He was then named as district director for youth ministries in the Tampa Bay area, where served for 3 years, until he was appointed senior in Tampa, FL.

In this interview, he shared that reason several young adults abandon the Church and/or the Christian Faith by the time that they are eighteen, is that the "majority of our Latino/a churches are not relatable." According to him, several students go to church because they are forced by their parents to attend. By the time they are eighteen years of age, they choose to abandon the church altogether.

In addition to that, he says that the local church gives these students no other option but to either leave or look elsewhere with the hopes of finding a more relevant church. But it does not always work out. He states that too often the local church does not fulfill the need within

young adults to become a part of and enjoy a sense of brotherhood and community in their own congregation. So, they are left to fend for themselves.

Finally, he states that there is a lack of teaching sound doctrine and true discipleship. Also, the young and old generations are separated. They are separated by dogmas and traditions, instead of uniting under the banner of good theology. Not only that, but teenagers and young adults are made to feel guilty when they do not follow the strict traditions of their elders. For this reason, many of them tend to go to Anglo churches, where they feel at home with the language (English) and even with the bilingual services that so many Anglo churches are choosing to adopt.

It is his opinion that non-bilingual churches in the SE Hispanic Region, central district are either dead or dying as this contemporary, Latino culture tends to prefer English over Spanish. He is concerned because many of these churches refuse to change. This language problem is causing many Latino young adults to disconnect.

*Pastor #3 Tampa, FL*

Before serving as Senior Pastor of his local church, pastor #3 served as a youth pastor in the cities of Miami and Tampa for ten years. He also served as director of youth ministries for the Tampa district of the Church of God for two years and was a member of the Youth Board for the denomination in the Southeast Hispanic Region.

Finally, he served as the Regional Director for Youth & Discipleship within the denomination for two years. His area of responsibility during that time was the youth of 120 local churches from South Georgia and Florida, all the way down to the Keys.

He believes that there are several reasons for young adults abandoning the Christian Faith by the time that they reach the age of eighteen. To begin with, there is a lack of intentional

discipleship within the local churches of the central district. He believes that this is the number one reason for young adults abandoning the Christian Faith by the time they reach eighteen.

Basically, they do not know what they believe.

He also said that even when he witnessed some youth discipleship being practiced in a local church, it was not a relevant, contextualized discipleship, which uses a language that youth can understand. He explained that by this he means, they were not preaching to young adults where they are in life.

In addition to this, he states that the error of the central district of the Latino ministry of the Church of God has been that for too long they want to disciple young adults by using the model and language of their parents, instead of using young adult language in order to reach them where they are.

Finally, in his many years working in youth ministry, he has observed that the Latino church has a so-called service-model way of doing church. He believes that many wanted to connect to the following model of service: Sunday service, midweek Bible study, revival services, etc., and for a long time it worked, but the reality is that over the years this model has lost its strength and no longer makes sense to today's young adults.

Young adults were exposed to good Sunday School material but not a systemic program of discipleship. The gospel was imposed upon them, but once they left High school, they found the freedom to do as they wanted. He says that for several young adults the reality is that their hearts had departed the local church a long time, before they actually left. But it was not until they left their parents that they followed through and stopped going to church.

*Pastor #4: Kissimmee, FL*

Pastor # 4 is a successful female pastor. In the interview with her, she stated that she believes that there are three areas which contribute to young adults abandoning the Christian Faith by the time they reach eighteen years of age: family, church and influence.

1) The Family: She believes that true discipleship begins at home, but for several reasons many families have completely turned over the responsibility of discipling their kids and their young adults to the local church. So, there is no discipleship taking place in the home, and this leads to young adults abandoning the Christian faith when they reach eighteen years of age.

She is very intentional about communicating this concept to the church that she pastors. She teaches her church that the family is the first and the primary teachers and educators concerning God and who He is. She also teaches them that they should not drop this responsibility on her as the pastor.

She also says that the lack of a solid family structure is the main contributor to the present vacuum of a Godly, biblical foundation among young adults. In her several years of youth and pastoral leadership, she says that there was a time when these things were not a foreign idea to the church. In fact, they were taught by the churches, the pastors, and the church leaders at one point in time, and people/families understood and accepted this concept.

2) The second reason why there is no discipleship taking place and as result young many adults abandon the faith is lack of preparation or training for the teacher. She says that there was a time in the local church where an average teacher could actually not only teach but also disciple young adults. However, today many Bible teachers in the local church do not know how to teach, especially how to teach and reach different types of kids.

Today's Bible teachers tend to focus more on the majority, and those who are struggling in their faith or do not know how to understand and see what God is doing with them, are usually

left behind. Whenever one of these young adults approach a modern Bible teacher or Sunday School teacher with a question concerning their faith or a struggle, they are told to just pray through it, to keep praying, and it will all work out.

Many churches are not ready to meet the needs of struggling young adults. They lack the ability to train and prepare their teachers in areas such as apologetics, and when these young adults go off to college, they do not understand, much less explain and defend, their Christian faith. This leads many young adults to just go with their feelings, and many leaders do not know how to teach them beyond their feelings.

She said that at one point it got so bad in her church, that a young adult even told her that God spoke to him and gave him permission to disobey for the greater good. This young person was not well-disciplined, did not know how to listen to the Holy Spirit, and when faced with a challenge he simply went with his so-called feelings in order to make his final decision. Which in this case, according to him, was to simply disobey his parents and disobey the church.

3) The third reason why young adults abandon the Christian faith has to do with their peers. The influence of young adults from outside forces is great in high school, but it intensifies after high school, especially in college. Their circle of influence widens, but the connection to their church and to their family decreases. Since there is no discipleship going on, they do not even have the concept of what it means to be a follower of Christ. So, they fall prey to dangerous influences.

*Pastor #5: Orlando, FL.*

Pastor #5 served as a youth pastor for 3 years and as the District Youth Leader over 18 local churches for two years in the area of Orlando, Sanford and Apopka, FL.

He says that if people look at the history of the Church of God, they will notice that at one point in its beginnings there was a sense of chaos. There were several experience-oriented events, evangelistic and revival rallies. Although there was nothing wrong with these events, the problem was that there was no teaching and discipleship.

He fears that in many ways history is repeating itself. During his time as youth pastor and district youth director, he saw a similar pattern. There are many movements, activities, youth camps, and revival services but very little Word of God. The lack of teaching, discipleship, and follow-up are leaving young adults without a sense of foundation. For this reason, many of them end up abandoning the faith once they turn eighteen and face the world.

The other reason that many young adults abandon the faith, according to Pastor 5, is the disconnection and constant attack that comes from the older generation. He fears that the older generation attacks the modern generation, and then, when they try to reach and disciple them, they lose them. Why? Because they have not earned the right to be heard.

### **Youth Pastors**

*Youth Pastor #1: Orlando, FL*

Youth Pastor #1 says that young adults abandon the faith due to strong and negative influences from society and from schools. But in his experience, it is mainly in the schools. These are places where the faith of the young adults is constantly being challenged, either by their peers or even by their non-believing teachers.

He says that home is really where discipleship begins, but unfortunately parents are leaving it all up to the local church. He says that youth are babied and pampered at home, and not properly taught or challenged to be true disciples; instead, they are given spiritual milk and not spiritual meat at home.

It is for this reason that they never grow up and mature as believers. So, in the grand scheme of things, there really is not true discipleship happening, so to speak, either at home or within youth ministries.

But if and when one finds some discipleship taking place among youth, it is often irrelevant. Old methods are still being employed for this new generation. In the end, this leaves a void in young adults because they are not paying attention, and therefore, they are not being really disciplined. So, when all is said and done the first chance that they get, they abandon the Christian Faith.

*Youth Pastor # 2: Orlando, FL*

Youth #2 Pastor shares that in his opinion, young adults abandon the Christian Faith in the Latino Community of the central district of the Church of God for several reasons. The very first reason is the lack of discipleship. In his experience, there is a lot of good preaching but not enough teaching and true discipleship taking place in the local churches.

He goes on to add that, although there is a healthy dose of the manifestation of Spiritual gifts in the local church, as set forth in Scriptures, there seems to be a lack of the manifestation of the Fruit of the Spirit. He posits that the lack of good Bible teaching by the leaders to the young adults results in Bible illiteracy and, he adds, this is alarming.

He also believes that there is too much emphasis placed on irrelevant traditions in the churches, and this is something that today's generation tends to reject easily. Finally, young adults are witnessing a great deal of hypocrisy among their believing parents. He says that they demonstrate to be one thing in church but something completely different at home.

This contradiction on the part of the part of the parents, he says, causes many young adults to reject Christianity and to ultimately abandon the Faith when the time comes for them to

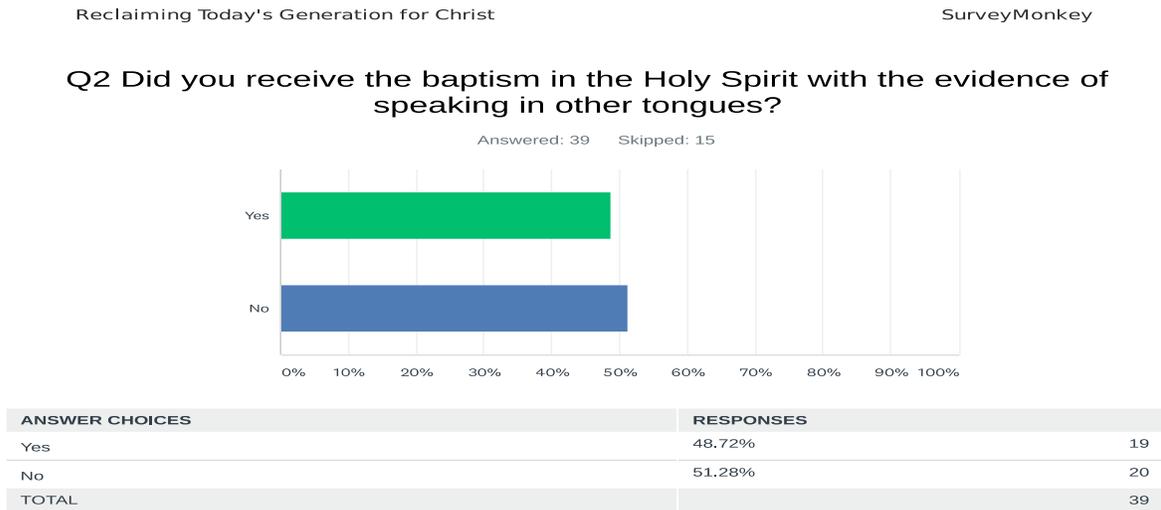
make their own decisions about God. This youth pastor strongly believes that if discipleship is really going to make a difference in the lives of young adults, it has to begin at home. He concludes by stating that, although he strongly believes that lack of good discipleship is the principle culprit in the exodus of young adults from the church, at the end of the day, it is a combination of all the reasons which he has shared that causes young people to lose faith in the church.

### **Digital Survey**

In total, fifty-four individuals responded to the digital questionnaire. Below are some of the results. The digital survey was conducted with the purpose of gleaning from the participants how they understood the concept of discipleship, and how discipleship has impacted their lives. The researcher also wanted to understand their understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives. Since the Church of God is a Pentecostal movement that places a great deal of importance on the experience of being baptized with the Holy Spirit, with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, the researcher was curious as to how this generation views that experience, especially in the area of their discipleship and spiritual maturity. In order to obtain some insight on this subject, the researcher asked a total ten questions. The questions received expert peer review.

When asked: Did you receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit, with the evidence of speaking in other tongues? They answered as follows: Nine participants: 48.72%, said yes; twenty participants: 51.28%, said no; 15 participants skipped this question.

**Figure 4.1**



When asked: If you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of Speaking in other tongues, would you agree that this experience contributed to your discipleship development as a believer? They answered as follows: 19 Participants: 48.72%, said, a great deal; 3 participants: 7.69% said, a lot; 6 participants:15.38%, said a moderate amount; 2 participants: 5.13%, said a little; and 9 participants: 23.08%, said none at all.

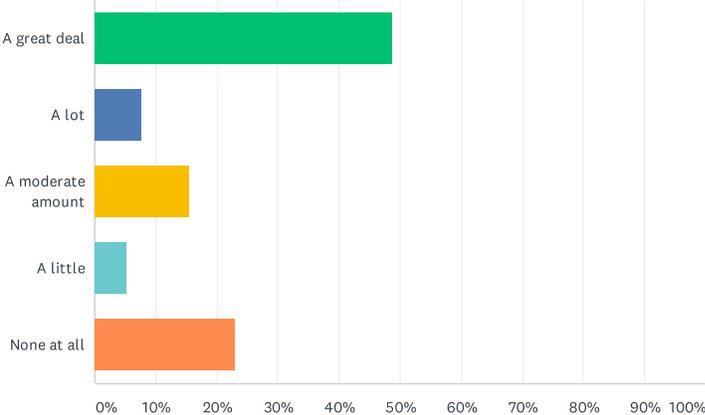
Figure 4.2:

Reclaiming Today's Generation for Christ

SurveyMonkey

Q3 If you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of Speaking in other tongues, would you agree that this experience contributed to your discipleship development as a believer?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 15



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
A great deal	48.72% 19
A lot	7.69% 3
A moderate amount	15.38% 6
A little	5.13% 2
None at all	23.08% 9
TOTAL	39

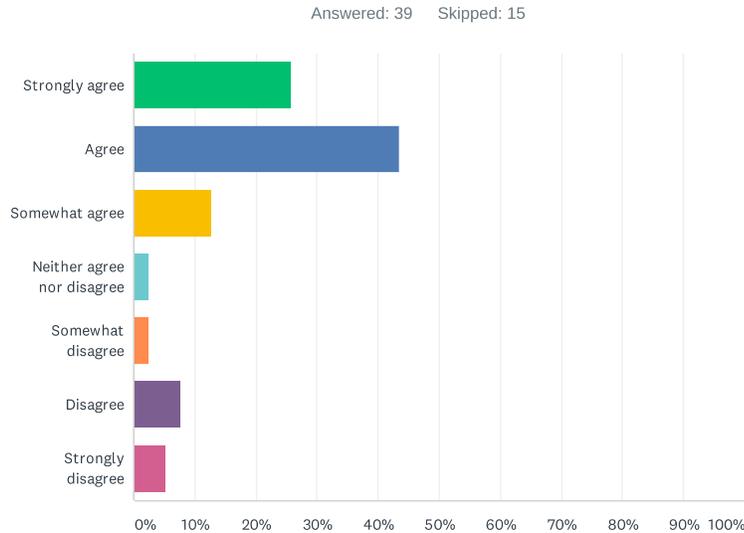
When asked: As a Pentecostal, do you agree that a believer who does not or has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but is nevertheless involved in an effective discipleship program, can be just as spiritual as one who has been baptized with the Holy Spirit? They answered as follows: 10 participants, 25.64%, strongly agree; 17 participants, 43.59%, agree; 5 participants, 12.82%, somewhat agree; 1 participant, 2.56% neither agree nor disagrees; 1 participant, 2.56%, somewhat disagree; 3 participants, 7.69, disagree; and 2 participants, 5.13%, strongly disagree.

**Figure 4.3:**

Reclaiming Today's Generation for Christ

SurveyMonkey

**Q10 As a Pentecostal, do you agree that a believer who does not or has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but is nevertheless involved in an effective discipleship program, can be just as spiritual as one has been baptized with the Holy Spirit?**



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	25.64%	10
Agree	43.59%	17
Somewhat agree	12.82%	5
Neither agree nor disagree	2.56%	1
Somewhat disagree	2.56%	1
Disagree	7.69%	3
Strongly disagree	5.13%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>39</b>

Figure 4.1 shows that while there are still young adults receiving the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in tongues, it represents less than half of the group, at 48.72%. The reason that this number of 48.72% is so significant is because of the biblical/theological nature of the Pentecostal movement. Although baptism in the Spirit is not something that the Church of God, or most major Pentecostal movements, preach as a

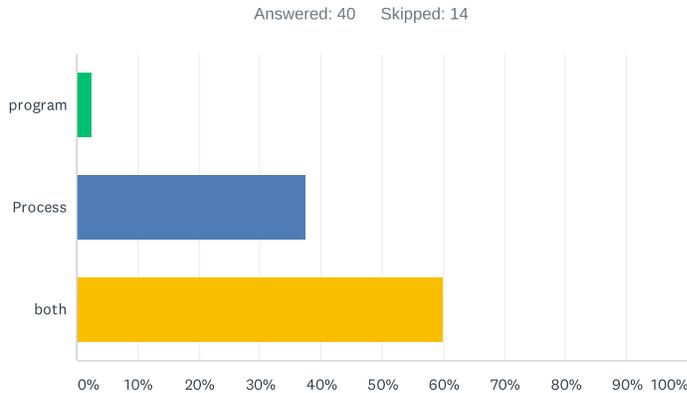
requirement for salvation, it is, nevertheless, a very important distinctive. One can make the argument that it is tantamount to Calvinism for many Baptist movements.

Figure 4.2 demonstrates that of this group, more than half, which is 22 out of the 39 who answered this question, or 56.41%, agree that this experience contributed to their discipleship development as believers. Finally, the great majority, over two-thirds of the participants, agree or strongly agree that a person who has not received this experience can be just as spiritual as those who have received it, as long as they are involved in an effective discipleship program. Of course, what effective means for them is not clear, as it was not asked in this survey.

However, the majority of participants have at least a basic understanding of discipleship. When asked: Would you define discipleship as a program, a process, or both? One participant: 2.50%, said that it was a program; fifteen participants: 37.50%, said that it was a process; twenty-four participants: 60%, said that discipleship is both a program and a process; fourteen participants did not answer this question (see Figure 4.4).

**Figure 4.4:**

Q4 Would you define discipleship as a program or a process or both?



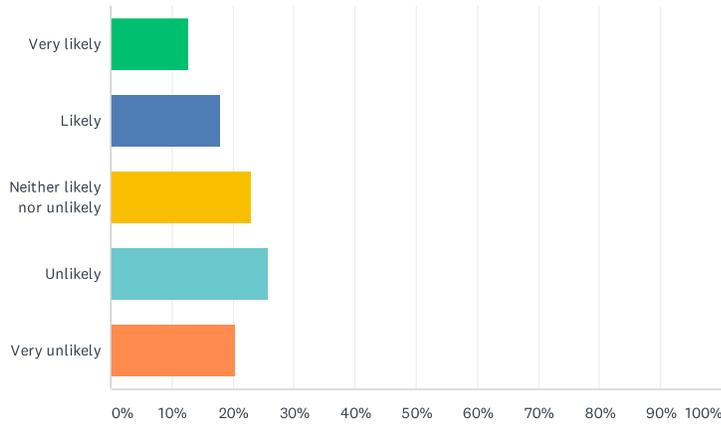
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
program	2.50% 1
Process	37.50% 15
both	60.00% 24
TOTAL	40

Figure 4.5 shows how the participants personally felt about the relationship between discipleship and abandoning the faith. When asked: If you abandoned the Christian Faith at one point your life, would you say that it was due to a lack of discipleship? They answered as follows: five participants: 12.82%, said that it was very likely; seven participants: 17.95% said that it was likely; nine participants: 23.08%, said that it was neither likely or unlikely; ten participants: 25.64%, said that it was unlikely; eight participants: 20.51%, said that it that it was very unlikely; and fifteen participants did not answer this question.

Figure 4.5

**Q6 If you abandoned the Christian Faith at one point in your life, would you say that it was due to a lack of discipleship?**

Answered: 39 Skipped: 15



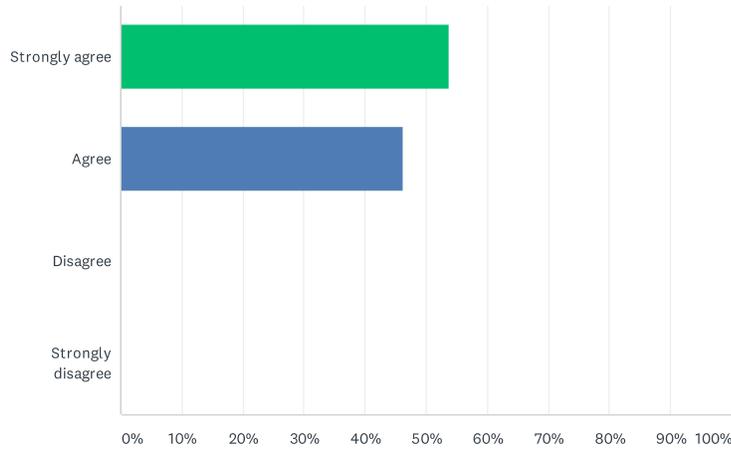
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Very likely	12.82% 5
Likely	17.95% 7
Neither likely nor unlikely	23.08% 9
Unlikely	25.64% 10
Very unlikely	20.51% 8
TOTAL	39

When asked: Do you believe that a good discipleship program or philosophy contributes to a young adult remaining faithful to the Christian Faith? They answered as follows: Twenty-one participants: 53.85%, said that they strongly agree; eighteen participants 46.15% agree; of the remaining two possible answers: disagree or strongly disagree, none of the participants answered; and fifteen participants did not answer this question.

**Figure 4.6**

**Q7 Do you believe that a good discipleship program or philosophy contributes to a young adult remaining faithful to the Christian Faith?**

Answered: 39 Skipped: 15

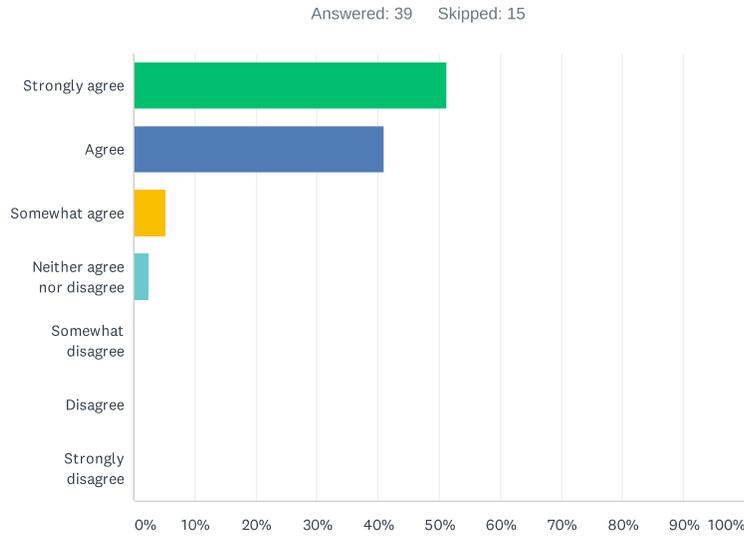


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly agree	53.85%	21
Agree	46.15%	18
Disagree	0.00%	0
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
TOTAL		39

When asked: Would you agree that discipleship has strongly contributed to your development as a believer in Christ? They answered as follows: Twenty participants: 51.28% strongly agree; sixteen participants: 41.03%, agree; two participants: 5.13%, somewhat agree; one participant: 2.56%, neither agreed nor disagreed; and fifteen participants did not answer this question.

**Figure 4.7**

**Q8 Would you agree that discipleship has strongly contributed to your development as a believer in Christ?**



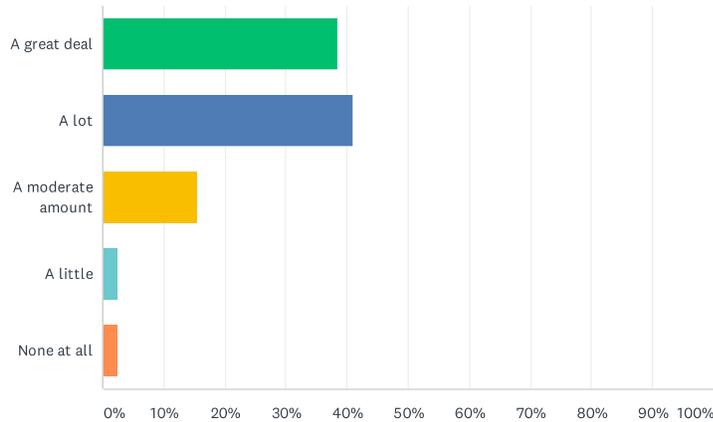
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	51.28% 20
Agree	41.03% 16
Somewhat agree	5.13% 2
Neither agree nor disagree	2.56% 1
Somewhat disagree	0.00% 0
Disagree	0.00% 0
Strongly disagree	0.00% 0
TOTAL	39

When asked: Do you believe that you are being discipled as a believer? They answered as follows: fifteen participants: 38.46%, answered: a great deal; sixteen participants: 41.03%, answered: A lot; six: 15.38%, answered: A moderate amount; one participant: 2.56% answered: one participant: 2.56%, answered: none at all. Fifteen participants did not answer this question.

**Figure 4.8**

**Q5 Do you believe that you are being disciplined in your experience as believer?**

Answered: 39 Skipped: 15



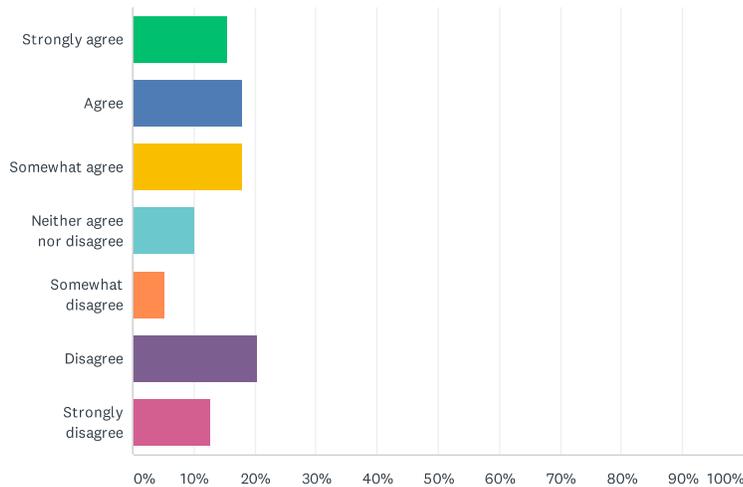
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
A great deal	38.46% 15
A lot	41.03% 16
A moderate amount	15.38% 6
A little	2.56% 1
None at all	2.56% 1
TOTAL	39

When asked: Do you agree that a believer can grow without an effective means of discipleship, beyond a multi-week program that is designed to prepare you for water baptism and church membership? They answered as follows: six participants:15.38%, answered: strongly agree; seven participants: 17.95%, answered: agree; seven participants: 17.95%, answered: somewhat agree; four participants: 10.26%, answered: neither agree nor disagree; two participants, 5.13%, answered: somewhat agree; and five participants: 12.82%, answered: strongly disagree. Fifteen participants did not answer this question.

**Figure 4.9**

**Q9 Do you agree that a believer can grow without an effective means of discipleship, beyond a "multi-week" program that is designed to prepare you for water baptism and church membership?**

Answered: 39 Skipped: 15



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	15.38% 6
Agree	17.95% 7
Somewhat agree	17.95% 7
Neither agree nor disagree	10.26% 4
Somewhat disagree	5.13% 2
Disagree	20.51% 8
Strongly disagree	12.82% 5
TOTAL	39

The focus groups shared that they abandoned the faith because there was a lack of intentional discipleship. They felt disconnected from the church, and the events did not result in long-term connections. There was a consensus among the majority of the group which was that the church was, unfortunately, irrelevant for them, and that they were not being used or mentored by the leadership of the church,

The interviews with senior pastors and youth pastors revealed that young adults abandoned the church due to lack relevant discipleship that gave them an understanding of the

Christian faith and a discipleship which was offered to them in their own language. When the pastors spoke about “their own language,” they were referring to two aspects: First, English; and second, contemporary language which millennials can identify with. In addition to this, they felt that there was no training for young adult leaders.

The survey revelations were a little mixed. Twelve out of the thirty-nine participants likely and very likely agreed that they abandoned the faith at point in their life due to lack of discipleship. The reason that this part was a mixed is because the ten said that it was unlikely; eight said that it was very unlikely; and nine said that it was neither likely nor unlikely.

Now, there was some consensus in the responses to Research Question 1. The majority, twenty-two in total believed that the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues, believed a great deal or a lot, that this experience contributed to them remaining faithful to the faith; all thirty-nine participants agreed or strongly agreed that a good discipleship program contributes to a young adult remaining faithful to the Christian faith.

**Research Question #2: How are our young adults being discipled during their teenage and High School years?**

**Focus Groups**

were several different responses from the focus groups as to how young adults are being discipled. There were a few participants who answered this question by stating that they practice a sense of self discipleship. They engage in personal intimacy with God in deep prayer; they read and meditate on the Bible. They read Christian books; they listen to Christian music. They listen to and watch Christian podcasts, and many of them pray for each other using social media.

Every focus group said that one of the most effective ways that they are being disciplined is via small groups. The small groups meet in different places, and for the most part, it is done with the purpose of studying and trying to understand the Bible in a community setting. Sometimes they meet in church, sometimes they meet in different homes, and sometimes they meet via their laptops or smartphones by employing several, digital meeting platforms.

They use this time to study the Scriptures, to address different contemporary issues, and to discuss the ways in which the Bible talks to these issues. Some of the young adults stated that they meet in public places like malls, college campuses, or even parks, with the purpose of indirectly attracting other people to join and ask them what they are doing. They said that this gives them the opportunity to share the Gospel, which they believe is an important aspect of discipleship.

In one of the focus groups, a few participants shared that they engage in social gatherings amongst themselves, outside of the church building, but they do not speak about church-related issues. They just have different, healthy activities. They testified that these types of meetings are good for their relationships because in the process of doing this, they mature as a group and also as individuals.

They contend that since Christianity is about relationships, whenever they engage in this type of practice they grow and understand the trinitarian God. They shared that since God is three in one, and the three have an intimate relationship with each other, then this kind of socializing is a way of imitating and understanding God.

Another way that the participants said they are being disciplined is by attending church on a regular basis in order to worship God in community, to listen to their pastor preach, and to see each other in a church setting. There was one participant who said that she keeps a journal of

everything: sermons, Bible studies, small group meetings, etc., and she often goes back to her notes to see if and how she has grown as a disciple.

In light of their responses, the question that was asked was, how are you being disciplined by the central district of the Latino Community of churches, of the Church of God in the central district? There was a consensus among the participants that there really is not a system of discipleship for them. For this reason, they find themselves having to depend on their local church an on each other.

### **Interviews**

#### *Senior Pastors*

Pastor #1 states that there really is not system of discipleship in the central district. He states that wherever you find a church engaging in serious discipleship, it is because the pastor, the local church, and/or the local youth leader took it upon themselves to be intentional about discipling their young adults.

He states that most of the effective discipleship that he has observed comes by way of small groups that meet in homes, churches, or via social media. He says that every major, viable denomination has developed some sort of systematic small group program.

However, the denomination in the Latino central district of Florida lacks this kind of consistent, measurable system: a system that, one, takes a child and puts her through a discipleship program. Once they become teenagers, the system then graduates them to the next level, and the same thing when they become adults; and two, is consistent and can be contextualized to meet the needs of the local church. He is referring to a type of adopt and adapt type of system and not a one size fits all system.

Pastor #2 states that young adults do not identify themselves with the Church of God; they do not take “pride” in their church or in the denomination. All too often, he has witnessed Latino Church of God young adults go another church, like a mega church, and they are immediately impressed by many things that they see, among them is their discipleship programs.

He says that they then share it on social media and tell people how much they loved the experience of ‘that other church’ and why do we not have something like this? He was sad to admit that this was not the case with the Church of God within this district.

He admits that there really is not a discipleship program being practiced in the central district. He says that if there is some sort of program, then they are not marketing and/or promoting it. For this reason, local churches are discipling their young adults on their own.

As a local, senior pastor, he is one of those leaders who, together with his youth pastor, is discipling young adults on their own, using the small group model on a weekly basis. For the first six months, they focus more on the concept of teaching, establishing, developing, and then applying the concept of relationships. He says that this model is a Christ Model. Christ was relational, and this made a huge impact on the lives of His disciples and the people that He touched. He believes in earning the right to be heard through relationships.

Pastor #3 says he believes that the intention is there to do the job: the job of discipling in the central district. He says that denominational leaders and teachers in the central district really want to do the job. The problem, according to him, is the method. Sunday school, small groups, and youth gatherings are good, but they are not effective.

He says that they are not effective because despite the fact that important themes are often covered in these meetings, there is no sense of continuity, using an effective discipleship program and discipleship literature which will meet the needs of today’s young adults.

He says that leaders are answering questions that youth are not even asking. In addition to that, youth leaders and teachers are not being trained in Scriptures and in apologetics, an area of theology which can answer questions that young adults are asking. In his experience, the Bible is absent in discipleship, as it is only being taught on the surface, as it were.

According to him, there is no sound strategy for discipleship in the central district; there is no process that would take them from A-Z. It is for this reason, that leaders often find themselves jumping from issue to issue every week.

Pastor #4 says that the Church of God in the central district does a good job in offering events such as annual Youth Camps, annual Winterfest events, and a young adult retreat. Many of the youth will go, because, one, they are young, and, two, they like the idea of worshipping in community with their friends.

To a certain extent this concept is understood as a means of discipleship by the denominational leadership. According to her, if you understand discipleship as a lifelong process then you can say that there is a lot of truth to this approach. Rev. She believes that the nature of these events have a unique way of contributing to that process, as it allows young adults to live out their discipleship.

However, according to her, there is no literature, no resources, and no systematic discipleship program being offered at these events. In addition to this, the denomination lacks in the follow-up after the events; there is no addressing the “now what?” that young adults desperately seek. She argues that the church is good at taking them to the spiritual mountaintop in these events, but then it lacks the structure to follow through after the event. So, while we provide a discipleship space for them, we fail in the area of follow-up, the training of local leaders, and in providing a system whereby we can see them grow in their faith as disciples.

Pastor #5 stated that youth pastors do the best that they can to disciple their young adults with what they have. In addition to this, they do so in the same manner that they learn from their leaders and senior pastors. However, he says, there is no real teaching in too many cases. There is more of an exhortation, but no structured Bible-centered programs of discipleship.

In fact, according to him out of the nineteen churches in the central district, only two were well-structured in discipling their young adults. They had a systematic program that discipled young adults from the age of seven until they reach college age. After that, they enter into adult discipleship. The programs include Bible teaching, service to God and to others, leadership training, apologetics, and reaching others with the Gospel.

There is very little being done to challenge young adults to repentance, to teaching, to living out a life of disciples. This has led many young adults to stay stagnant, and not grow in their love for Christ and for people. He believes that young adults are not being challenged by their leaders, and this out of fear of offending and losing them. This pastor says that when it comes to discipleship in the central district, this is what he sees taking place.

#### *Youth Pastors*

Youth Pastor #1 says that churches that disciple their young adults do so on their own through different weekly gatherings, but there is no structure. Youth Pastor #2 says that young adults are, for the most part, a forgotten group for a certain time throughout the year. However, when they do receive some type of discipleship from the central district, it happens through annual youth camps and other youth events such as retreats. He says that these events actually have tremendous impact on the lives of the youth who attend.

So, in that sense, it is safe to say that this is a (limited) and short-term way of receiving discipleship. says that young adults who participate in these events return to their local churches

showing signs of change. The spiritual experiences that they enjoy in the worship services and the break-out sessions really do offer them the opportunity to grow as disciples.

However, the fact that these events are short-term, that there is no sense of follow-up by the central district, and that they are not designed to have a long-term impact means that whatever discipleship young adults do experience, is short-lived. He believes that the lack of a structured discipleship program leaves young adults and many of their local leaders without a sense of direction.

Young adults, pastors and youth pastors agreed that despite the fact that there is no program or systematic form of discipleship being offered by the central district, it is still happening. In the churches where discipleship is taking place, young adults are being discipled by way of small group gatherings. In addition to this, literature for discipleship is obtained from sources outside of the denomination.

They agreed that even though there is some sort of short-term of discipleship taking place in the district events, there is no sense of follow up. In addition, there is a lack of discipleship structure, especially one which includes Bible oriented teachings and apologetics programs or studies which will prepare them for awaits them in the hostile university environment that believers usually find themselves in when they go off to college. One of the youth pastors lamented the fact that, in his experience, young adults are often ignored by the denomination throughout the year. They are only remembered when the denomination event comes around, but after that, everybody goes back to what they were doing, and no sense of connection or contact is made with the young adults.

**Research Question #3: What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, central district, contribute to discipling youth so that they do not abandon the local church after graduating High School?**

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups participants stated that for them, small group meetings are an effective means of discipleship. They have the opportunity get together, talk to each other, and discuss the Bible and different contemporary issues in a safe environment. They shared that in small groups, when done effectively and with a trustworthy leader serving as host, they tend get a lot out of them, and they grow as disciples. They also said that the best way to help them to grow in their life as disciples is to be taught and then to be challenged to live out their lives as disciples.

The other effective means of discipleship which young adults said helps them to grow are events which allow them to connect with each other. These events can include monthly youth services, weekly gatherings, and opportunities to serve. Young adults shared that the opportunity to come together, share, engage with each other, and develop relationships are an invaluable aspect in the area of discipleship.

They also said that mentoring and mentorship are important concepts. The majority of the young adults that participated in the focus groups shared a deep desire to connect with older generations who are willing to mentor them, connect with them, and develop a relationship with them. They valued the input of the older generations.

Young adults were very adamant in their desire to be used by their local churches. They communicated that when local churches allow them the opportunity to work and serve, it tells them that they are important to the church, and it allows them to live out their discipleship. They

believe that they have something to contribute, and they want to be given the chance to contribute what they have.

One young person said that he wants to have skin in the game. According to him, the church belongs to them, too, and when the church gives them the chance to become involved, it encourages him to take ownership of the vision. He says that this approach has a great impact on the lives of his friends as seek to live their discipleship. They said that sharing and applying what they learn in the Bible study groups, is are great ways to grow and to live out their discipleship.

### **Interviews**

Pastor #1 said that on a macro level the district has done a fine job of offering opportunities for growth in discipleship. He says that events such as Winterfest and Youth Camps are great practices for short-term discipleship. However, these tools have limitations, as they are only good during a specific time of the year.

He said that the most effective way in which he sees discipleship taking place is when local churches implement an effective means of follow-up on the micro level in their local church. He says that there are churches that offer sustaining, life-changing programs that complement the macro, general events offered by the denomination in the central district. He laments the fact that there is not a viable catechism to sustain the denomination at a local level, and this leaves churches to do their own thing.

The contemporary church has abandoned great programs such as Sunday school, and this approach has proven to be a catastrophe for those churches. There was a time when kids and young adults were encouraged to memorize Scriptures, and then they would have to say the text out loud during Sunday school or weekly gatherings.

In addition to this, many of them were asked to share how they were practicing the Bible text that they chose to recite. This practice offered a sustainable means of discipleship as it encouraged young adults to live out their lives as disciples of the Lord. Pastor #1 says that in his experience the churches who still practice this are effectively discipling their youth.

Pastor #2 says that small group, weekly gatherings, mentoring, and the opportunity to serve, all of which he practices in his church, are the most effective means of discipling young adults in the central district.

Pastor #3 observes that, in his experience, the central district there has been an intense intention to include young adults, thereby opening ministerial doors for them. He says that the churches in this district have been inclusive, and they have integrated the young people in several different areas of the church. There are no barriers, and there is a willingness to include them by the pastors and leaders, so as to make sure that they feel part of the local church ministry.

He says that this approach is very good, but it can have a downside. Some pastors tend to use this as a means to 'keep them busy.' The problem is that when it is not accompanied by Bible education and teaching, young adults will cease to grow.

Pastor #4 shares that in his time as district director for youth and discipleship in the central district, he observed an approach by a local church which was making a difference. This church disciplined their young adults by teaching them apologetics so that they would be ready and know what to expect in College, how to defend their faith, how to stand for Christ on college campuses, and not be intimidated by atheist professors and philosophers. He said that the church had a good track record when it came to helping young adults not abandon their Christian faith when they went off to college.

Youth Pastor #2 says that giving young adults an opportunity to be more interactive, the chance to be listened to, and a sense of transparency by their leaders in open forums have proven to help young adults stay in church. Young adults are very tech-oriented, and they want to share their stories. He observed that churches who tend to use social media platforms as part of their discipleship program are retaining their youth at a higher level than those who do not use this means of technology for discipleship.

Youth Pastor #1 believes that involving young adults in ministry and leadership has helped to maintain young adults in the local church. He adds that sports, activities outside of the church, and healthy events that they are attracted to have helped to keep young adults committed to the Christian faith. Finally, he says, events that include spiritual aspects such as Bible studies, fasting, lock-ins, etc. help develop the discipleship aspect of the young adults.

The best discipleship practices within the central district, which came up over and over again, was the small group gatherings. The focus groups, the youth pastors, and the senior pastors all agreed that the best way to effectively teach and disciple young adults is to get them involved in meaningful, small-group gatherings. But it is not only a matter of getting them involved; it is also encouraging them to serve. This generation of young adults want to feel that they belong, and one of the best ways of accomplishing this, according to this research, is to give them the opportunity to serve.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The research that was conducted used mixed methods, such as focus groups, personal interviews with pastors and youth pastors, and a digital questionnaire via SurveyMonkey. All of

these tools yielded a great deal of information. Although it is not an exhaustive list, below are some of the major findings which were gleaned.

1. Event-centered Bible studies (short-term, no continuity) for young adults result in short-term impact.
2. Young adults, in general, value long-term discipling relationships in small groups.
3. Pastors and youth workers are not equipped for engaging young adults in the life of the church.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to investigate the nature and impact of discipleship within the Latino youth ages eighteen and older in the central district of the Church of God in the Southeastern Hispanic Region and to find out how discipleship or lack of discipleship contributes to whether or not they choose to abandon the Christian faith. The guiding question for me throughout this research was, why? Why do so many Latinos within said district of the Church of God abandon their faith when they reach the age of eighteen? The researcher held several focus groups, a digital questionnaire via SurveyMonkey, and seven personal interviews.

Every denomination and every group can point to their own specific reasons as to why their young adults abandon the Christian Faith. But after observing this trend within the Hispanic constituency, I wanted to know what were some of the reasons for the exodus among Latino young adults in the central district of the Church of God and, in the process, offer my findings to other sections of the Latino ministry with the hope that it might help them with their groups.

#### Major Findings

**Event-centered Bible studies (short-term, no continuity) for young adults result in short-term impact.**

I observed that Church of God events such as one-week Youth Camps, three-day young adult retreats, and two-day Winterfest events (also known as youth conventions), offered Bible studies via breakout sessions. These events are known for providing small-group conferences, and they use different speakers. However, they were topical in nature, as opposed to series oriented, which would offer more of a long-term impact.

In addition, it is important to note that while the youth and denominational leadership endeavor to minister to young adults in these events, and more often than not they hit mark, the actual impact is short-lived. The leaders invite very good speakers and preachers, and they task them with addressing different youth-oriented, contemporary, and relevant issues. Young adults are touched by God, which is a good thing.

However, there is no direct follow-up, no effective literature, and no structured programs provided to the local leaders to continue the work after the event. In short, the events, while good, are not structured to have a long-term effect. I also observed that young adults enjoy these short-term events, but they lament the fact that, in general, the impact has a short shelf-life. Again, there is no follow up. By this I mean that there are no intentional attempts to create a far-reaching, regional level means of connecting young adults to each other.

There are no mentorship programs to connect the younger generation with the older generation, and this is something that many young adults would welcome. In addition to this, there is no attempt by the denominational leaders, at the district or regional level, to train youth workers so that they can become effective leaders. Again, the system is very much oriented towards making sure that the event went great and that all spoke well about the event, regardless of whether or not it reaches young adults once the proverbial lights of the event are out.

In my literature review, I discovered that small group gatherings were indeed effective. In fact, John Wesley almost perfected this concept. He saved England from a civil war and evangelized a nation by reaching and bringing together men in small groups. His small group societies were so effective that major denominations successfully adopted this format as a means of discipling their members. Wesley deeply believed in the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also understood the importance of being intentional in discipling the believer after conversion. He

stated, “I was more convinced than ever, that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer” —John Wesley, 1763 (Rowe 185).

Historically, the concept of small group gatherings also contributed in ‘saving’ the Church of God as a denomination. When weekly evangelistic revival services defined the denomination, to a great extent there was a lack of teaching and follow-up with new and older members. All were accepted into the communion based on their faith (in Christ) testimony. As a result of this, there was no way of knowing whether or not believers were learning about their faith. The Bible was preached, but it was not taught.

“There was no recourse to hold accountable or excommunicate those who preached spurious doctrines or initiated waves of fanaticism” (Conn, 44). This almost destroyed the very young movement. As a result, there came a time when many believers who were won over to the faith grew to become disenchanted and abandoned the denomination altogether.

When the organization reorganized on May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1902, one of the results were that the leaders of the denomination met with smaller groups. These smaller meetings changed in that the Scriptures were discussed in community; there was Biblical instruction and individual needs were addressed and met. “In the past, when the services were very evangelistic-oriented, pastoral teaching was neglected” (Conn, 44). The new approach of small-group gatherings, community interpretation of Scriptures, and pastoral teachings provided a sense of discipleship program for its members. This provided a sense of long-term continuity, as the church grew, and it grew with a new sense of joy and enthusiasm for Christ and evangelism. Also, it was accompanied with a better sense of organizational structure.

The biblical and theological framework that this emphasized can be found in Jesus' approach to ministry. Yes, of course Christ preached and taught in front of large crowds. However, he poured personal, quality time into the lives of some of his closest followers. For instance, he allowed a few them to witness events that others were not necessarily privy to. An example of this can be seen with Peter, John, and James.

At different times throughout his earthly ministry, these three disciples were the only ones who were present in some of Jesus's actions or experiences. First, at the transfiguration (Mark 9; Matt. 17; Luke 9); second, during his agony at Gethsemane (Mark 14.33; Matt. 26.37); and finally, at the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5.37; Luke 8.51).

**Young adults, in general, value long-term discipling relationships in small groups.**

I observed that young adults want events that connect them to other youth on a long-term basis. While they enjoy the annual events that are offered by the central district, it is the opportunity of meeting with their peers on weekly or bi-weekly basis that they believe makes a difference in their lives. In one of the focus groups, a few participants shared that they engage in social gatherings amongst themselves outside of the church building, but they do not always speak about church-related issues. They just have different, healthy activities. They testified that these types of meetings are good for their relationships because in the process of doing this they mature as a group and also as individuals.

The other effective means of discipleship which young adults said helps them to grow, are events which allow them to connect with each other. These events can include monthly youth services, weekly gatherings, and the opportunity to serve. Young adults shared that the opportunity to come together, share, engage with each other, and develop relationships are an invaluable aspect in the area of discipleship.

A consistent discipleship program, such as a Bible study series, contribute to an effective, life changing process. The opportunity to meet and interpret Scripture in community allows young adults to interact and learn from each other. But this only makes a difference when it goes beyond the two-day or one-week event. This approach allows for the opportunity for them to get to know each other and develop life-long relationships, connecting authentically over a long period of time. All of these concepts are important for young adults. As far as they are concerned, these models of discipleship offer them an effective means of spiritual growth. The mentoring aspect of this principle makes a difference in the lives of young adults.

In my literature review, I shared an interesting story from author Tony Jones. In his book *Postmodern Youth Culture*, Mr. Jones writes about a man named Lucius who lived in the third century in small town of Agnani, Rome. He became a follower of Christ, but before he could become a member of the church, his journey was long. He met twice a week with an elder of the church named Gaius; they met for prayer and mentoring. In addition to this, Gaius was a teacher to him. He taught him about the Old Testament, the teachings of Christ, the writings of the apostles, and the meaning of Easter.

In the process of their meetings, they developed a friendship. It was only after two years of being mentored and discipled by Gaius that Lucius was finally ready for baptism, acceptance, and membership. Lucius was baptized by Bishop Antoninus, and it was then that he became part of the Christian community. This might sound extreme, but, in those days of persecution, this was the best way of making sure that a person was committed to the cause of Christ.

Today, in many churches, a person comes to believe in Christ, goes through a program, is baptized, and becomes a member of the church in less than a year. Generally speaking, there is nothing wrong with that; after all, it is a person's faith in Christ that saves them. However, there

is something to be said about establishing long-term relationships and friendships within the community of believers. This generation of young adults might not know about this story, but they have demonstrated that they desire long-term, meaningful, relationships.

The biblical theological design of this project states that God is in pursuit of humanity, and He is in it for the long run. In fact, God is in it for all eternity. God's plan when He created humanity was to enjoy a perfect, eternal relationship with His creation. If this were not true, he would have destroyed humanity after the fall and started over again. But He did not do that. He invested the life of His Son in order to restore humanity and bring His creation into a perfect intimacy with Him. So, today's young adults' desire for long-term relationships is biblical, theological, and natural.

**Pastors and youth workers are not equipped for engaging young adults in the life of the church.**

I observed that there is a gap. There is something missing. Many pastors, youth pastors are not adequately equipped for engaging young adults in church life. While the desire is there and their hearts are in the right place, too many youth workers are not trained in youth ministry, and they do not speak the language, as it were, of today's young adults.

They do not connect because they are "answering questions that young adults are not even asking," as shared by pastor #3. Many leaders are assigned to work with young adults because they are charismatic, they are willing to help out, or simply because there is no one else who will do it. And these reasons are not enough to qualify a person for youth work. In this scenario, one finds Youth workers leading young adults as if they are leading the older generation.

In the literature review, I stated that a long-time youth worker, Sarah Glover, was very much involved in youth ministry. She filled all the check marks in the boxes, such as having young adults memorize verses, getting them to church, and asking them how many chapters they memorized during the week. She thought that she was doing the right thing in order to keep young adults interested.

But the problem was that she was not connecting with the younger generation. She was not speaking their language. She decided that the best way to connect was to give them a purpose to be discipled. This is part of what is missing from many youth leaders: they are not equipped to lead young adults, and even when they realize that they are missing the mark, they refuse to change and equip themselves as leaders.

John Wesley, the father of Methodism, was a man who was able to ride into town, look into the eyes of individual men, and he knew whether or not they were ready to receive from the Lord. He created small groups and societies that made an enormous difference in the history of the church. But it must be understood that he was trained and influenced by his mother, Susana, despite the fact that she never attended a Bible School.

From the biblical theological perspective, one can see that a leader needs to be equipped, if she is going to lead effectively: Elijah mentored Elisha; Moses mentored Joshua; Eli taught the young man Samuel to recognize the voice of God; Naomi at one point in her life poured into the life Ruth; Paul poured into the life of Timothy; and all of them were able to do so because they were trained and/or equipped for ministry.

Although each one of them learned about God and the Scriptures in different ways, they were able to mentor, disciple, teach, and influence the lives of others because they knew God, understood their calling, and knew how to effectively transmit what they received from God into

the lives of those who were under their leadership. They knew how to speak the language that in one way, shape, or form pierced the hearts of those who followed them. This is what made them effective, transformational leaders, and this is what youth workers need today.

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

1) If the leaders of the central district of the Latino ministry of the Church of God take these findings seriously, I believe that they will realize that our young adults not only *need* to be disciplined, but they *want* to be disciplined. They should also be cognizant of the fact that if they do not find what they are looking for in the Church of God, they will go elsewhere to find it because they do love the Lord.

2) The Church of God youth ministry leaders need to take very seriously the training of their youth pastors. If they do not, youth pastors will seek training with other organizations that do not share the central distinctives of the Church of God, such as holiness, sound doctrine, and the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues. This is not small aspect of the denomination; in fact, it defines who the much about the Church of God and its founding over one hundred-thirty years ago.

3) The central district of the Latino Ministry of the Church of God does not have to go outside of the denomination as its first option in order to find discipleship literature. The Church of God produces literature which offers a Pentecostal discipleship, oriented to teach motivate young adults the importance of the experience of being baptized by the Holy Spirit, as a post conversion experience. This is an experience that changes a person's way of looking at and interpreting Scriptures, among other things.

4) It is evident that small group gatherings and meetings are very important to young adults; they are also an effective means of discipling youth. So, the church would do well in

listening to what young adults are saying, especially in these times of crisis (particularly the COVID 19 pandemic) that we are currently living in. The time has come for believers to take the church to the unchurched and not wait for the unchurched to come to the church building.

5) The local churches should not be afraid of using technology to its advantage. If the coronavirus has taught us anything, it is that technology (when used correctly) is our best friend. So, the church should embrace it; young adults already have.

6) The church should take the family very seriously as a means of discipleship. They should teach the families how to go about discipling their kids.

7) I began this project by sharing that I had a friend who abandoned Christian faith in college because her beliefs were challenged by a fellow student, and she had no way of defending herself. Unfortunately, this is very common for young believers. For this reason, I believe that local churches would do well by intentionally embracing a study in the area of apologetics in its training and its discipleship programs.

With so many young adults with impressionable minds, going off to college and falling into confusion when they face ungodly professors, they need to be intellectually well armed, and well founded in their beliefs, in order to defend themselves in an intolerant, hostile environment that does not like them at all.

8) The Church of God has a proud history of being a Wesleyan-holiness movement. A movement which, at its core believes in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and manifestation of the Gifts of the Spirit. The Latino/a ministry in this district should not be afraid of embracing this history and boldly teaching it to a generation of believers that would greatly benefit from this experience. Otherwise, this movement might run the risk of becoming a monument. Monuments

are symbols that people approach, look at, and respect. They tell a story, and they represent something or someone that was great-in the past.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited in its scope. The purpose of the study was to find out why young adults, ages 18+, were abandoning the Christian faith in the central district of the Latino ministry of the Church of God. It included women and men from different backgrounds and education. I was able to speak with young adults, youth pastors, and senior pastors in order to glean from them why so many young people were abandoning the faith in the central district when they reached the age of eighteen.

I wanted to interview five senior pastors and five youth pastors, but it became impossible as several of the ones that agreed to speak with me were difficult to get a hold of. However, I was able to make up for it because all of the senior pastors that I spoke with had an extensive background in youth ministry. It was also limited in its reach. The Southeast Hispanic Region of the Latino/a ministry of the Church of God covers South Georgia all the way down to the Florida Keys. This study was limited to central district of the State of Florida.

I believe that we hit the target with the sample of participants that took part in the methods. However, it would be nice to be able to expand the study in order to cover the entire region, sometime in the future, and see how other young adults from different areas respond to these questions.

### **Unexpected Observations**

I was surprised to see that the family was mentioned as an important means of discipleship. I never considered the importance and influence of families in this ministry. Not only that, but the fact that the Church of God understood this several years ago and implemented

the Family Training Hour in order to deal with that very issue was very impressive. So, it cannot be said that the Church of God did not and does not this family ministry seriously.

The second unexpected surprise that I found was the fact that this generation does not know and, in some cases, does not care about the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues as a post conversion experience. In fact, of the forty-three young adults who participated in the focus groups, only three said that they actually had that experience. Most impressive was the fact that they all agreed that this is not being taught in their local churches. One young adult actually said about the experience, “it is not part of my Spiritual agenda.”

These young adults were not interested in receiving this gift. Why would they? First, their churches are not teaching it as part of a Pentecostal discipleship approach; and second, they believe that in order to be a spiritual person, you do not necessarily need this experience. Ray Hughes, who was one of the most prominent General Overseers of the Church of God, said “the day we reach the point where 51% of our members do not have this gift and do not want it, we will cease to be a genuine Pentecostal movement; we will be an evangelical movement without a unique identity that separates us.”

It seems that if things do not change, this generation will be known as the generation that changed the Church of God by taking away this distinctive. The reason that this is so important is that one; it is a core belief and distinctive of Pentecostalism, especially in the Church of God; and two, it is more than just a one-time experience. It is an experience that has the effect of deepening your faith, giving you spiritual discernment unlike anything else, and it allows you to interpret the Scriptures from a totally different perspective. Those who really have received this gift understand what it means. It is not necessary for salvation, but it makes a difference.

### **Recommendations**

Every denomination has its own identity and distinctives, and most of them are very proud of who they are. They do not hide it; in fact, they promote who they are in, part, by naming their major schools, universities, and seminaries after their denomination so that people know exactly who they are. I recommend that the central district begin to promote the things that made the Church of God effective in its growth and outreach. We should be proud (not arrogant), to be who we are. We should not hide it. With this in mind, I believe that:

1. The Latino Ministry of the Church of God in Florida should begin by writing and adopting a resolution that serves to remind all, especially the younger generation, who they are, what makes them different, and *why* it makes them different from other denominations. In addition to the major distinctives, the resolution should include the major contributions that the Church of God, and Pentecostalism in general, have made to Christendom. This resolution should not only be adopted as an official document of the church in the central district, but it should include the entire South Georgia and Florida Region that falls under the umbrella of the Latino/a ministry of the Church of God.

2. We should emphasize this resolution in all of our denomination events.

3. Every local church and their pastor should speak about this on a regular basis.

4. We should once again the things that made us who we are; we need to promote the seeking of the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the distinct evidence of speaking in other tongues. We should do it in our local churches, in our local bible institutes, and in our youth ministry events.

5. We should teach our history emphasizing that we are a Wesleyan-holiness movement, but one which was founded as Holy Spirit baptized church, whose initial evidence is speaking in

other tongues, as stated in its International constitution, officially known as: Minutes: Church of God Book of Discipline, Church Order and Governance.

6. In addition to promoting it, we should encourage our churches to ask God to give us an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as He did on the day of Pentecost, and in 1896 for the Church of God.

7. We should develop a Pentecostal discipleship curriculum for children, young adults, and adults.

8. We should continue to promote the concept of small group gatherings as a model for doing church, as they are popular among the youth, and they are effective.

9. We should balance our event-oriented approach, such as Youth Camps and Youth Retreats, with a strong emphasis on a Pentecostal, biblical discipleship.

I believe that if the Church of God Latino Region, and specifically in the Florida Central district, begins to dwindle and lose its influence as movement, and it begins to ask why this is happening, they can look at this study in order to understand the why and the when it began. This study can also be used as means to understand why young adults in the Church of God, abandon their faith at different points in their lives.

### **Postscript**

I began this journey with my fellow students in the summer of 2015. That year is very peculiar for me. In 2015 I lost three very influential men in my life. First, I lost my father, Diego Rodriguez to Pancreatic cancer. He was diagnosed, and thirty days later, he went home to be with the Lord. My father did not attend a Bible College or Seminary, but more than anyone else in my life, he taught me the importance of respecting the altar and how important it is to the

sermon, and the calling to the pulpit ministry seriously. He did this more than any other Bible teacher I ever had, and I've had excellent professors, so it's nothing against them.

But my dad never knew this because I never told him. I never told him, because I honestly did not realize just how much he had influenced my preaching ministry, until he passed away. When he passed away, I began to reflect on his life and wrote certain things about him. While I was writing, I was pleasantly surprised at what I had discovered regarding my dad's huge influence in my life. Nevertheless, he was still alive when I got into the program, and he was proud of that fact.

Second, I lost my lifelong pastor, Rolando Gomez. He was a man of prayer and a man who had an insatiable appetite for planting new churches, evangelizing, and winning souls to Christ. Preaching about the Great Commission, planting new churches, and doing evangelistic and missionary work were all part of his mission as a pastor. He carried out that mission with great passion and success. He taught me the meaning of praying in the Spirit. He was a powerful, anointed preacher. When pastor Gomez preached, he inspired people to the point that we wanted to go out and win the world for Christ immediately.

Finally, I lost my cousin, Joshua Pimentel, in a fatal car crash in August of 2015. Joshua was a young pastor who had a fire in his soul for youth ministry. He too was a powerful preacher. On several occasions I was blessed to be his translator, and I enjoyed translating for him. We went to Bible college together in Dallas, TX. We learned together, we preached together, and we grew up together. At forty years old, he was taken from us too young. Joshua was a humble young man, and several ways, he taught me the meaning of humility.

I share this for two reasons. First, because I want to honor these men. Second, because when the program began in 2015, I felt that I was punched in the gut several times by the deaths

of these men, and I almost made the decision to drop out of the program altogether even before it started. I was felt emotionally drained. But I knew that this is not what they would have wanted me to do. Somehow, the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit always does, made me understand this and gave me the strength to move forward. To this date, I do not know how I made it through this program. I can only say that it was with the Holy Spirit's help.

Even then when I started the journey, I must admit that I did so with the selfish purpose of simply obtaining a doctoral degree so that I can prove that I can do it. Also, I wanted to do it, and get it out of the way, hoping that maybe one day this degree can open new ministerial doors and opportunities. I remember that my denomination rejected me for a position because I did not have a doctoral degree, and at the moment it happened, I felt very disappointed.

In fact, one day I said to myself, "never again will the Church of God turn me down because I do not have a post-graduate degree." I did not even care about the area of study or the topic that I was going to choose; I just wanted to get the degree. However, this was the wrong motivation for seeking a degree. The Lord dealt with my heart, made me understand this, and as a result I grew as a disciple.

The Lord revealed my heart to me, and he taught me a couple of lessons. One of them was to never minimize or take for granted the doors that He opens for me, because opportunities such as these only come once in a lifetime. Also, I believe that the Lord was teaching me that I was being ungrateful. I was committing a sin by taking this program so as means to settle personal issues. I understood that every ministry and every door that comes from God should be seen as holy ground.

It was not until I had a heart to heart conversation with my wife Nidia one day, and I shared these struggles regarding what topic I should research, that I came to understand a few

things. She was the person that God used to open my eyes. She gave me the idea of researching youth ministry.

I will never forget the day when she said, “Why don’t you dedicate this project to researching your first love in ministry: Youth Ministry.” At that moment, my eyes were opened, my heart was touched, and the Holy Spirit confirmed to me that He was speaking to me through my wife. So, I hugged her, and I thanked her for putting up with me and for being sensitive to the Spirit of the Lord when she advised me to research an area of ministry for which I had passion.

It has been a long, and at times very frustrating experience. I often thought to myself “what are you doing here?” “You’re wasting your time.” “You’re a pastor, and the church needs you, so stop this and get back to church work!” But every time that I felt helpless and hopeless, God would put me back on track; at times He used my wife to do it. She knows when I am not being myself, and she knows how to pick up what is causing me frustrations. In the case of my project, she knew when my frustration was due to my seminary work, especially my dissertation.

Through this journey I have matured as a husband, as a believer, as a disciple, and as a pastor. In many ways this experience has worn me down emotionally, but I can honestly say that it has been worth it. I can say to God, “Lord, you were in it after all-Thank you! The research can be improved. But I believe that there is a purpose for this study; it is a purpose which goes beyond the limits of receiving a degree. I feel in my heart that this study will change lives and ministries. In the years to come. To God be the glory!

## Appendix A

### Digital Survey Questions

#### Reclaiming Today's Generation for Christ

You are invited to take the following survey conducted by Pastor Robert Rodriguez, a doctoral student from Asbury Theological Seminary. The survey is aimed at finding out the effectiveness of discipleship among our Latino young adults in the Central District of the Church of God, and whether or not discipleship or lack of discipleship has contributed to your Faith commitment.

The reason that you have been asked to take this survey is because as a Latino, Christian, Pentecostal young adult, between the ages of 18-29, and living in the area of Central Florida, your experience gives you the ability to speak about the effectiveness of discipleship in your local church and your denomination, and how it has affected your life. The Survey should take no more than 15 minutes. Should you have any questions concerning the survey, please, feel free to contact me at: robert.rodriguez@asbudryseminary.edu; robertrodriuez1022@yahoo.com; or 813---3628.

Please note that If you agree to take this Survey it will be confidential. Your IP address, name and identification will not be known by the researcher. The only purpose of this survey is to collect information that will assist us in finding out the state of discipleship in the Central District of the Latino Ministry of the Church God. If you agree to take to survey, please, click "consent to agree"; if not, just click "not agree," and you will be removed. Thank you!

Top of Form

**Question Title:**

Consent to Agree

1. Have read the above consent, and I would like to participate in this study.

Yes

No

2. Did you receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in other tongues?

Yes

No

**Question Title**

3. If you received the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of Speaking in other tongues, would you agree that this experience contributed to your discipleship development as a believer? w

A great deal

A lot

A moderate amount

A little

None at all

Question Title

4. Would you define discipleship as a program or a process or both? w

program

Process

both

**Question Title**

5. Do you believe that you are being discipled in your experience as believer? w

A great deal

A lot

A moderate amount

A little

None at all

Question Title

6. If you abandoned the Christian Faith at one point in your life, would you say that it was due to a lack of discipleship? w

Very likely

Likely

Neither likely nor unlikely

Unlikely  
Very unlikely

**Question Title**

7. Do you believe that a good discipleship program or philosophy contributes to a young adult remaining faithful to the Christian Faith? w

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

**Question Title**

8. Would you agree that discipleship has strongly contributed to your development as a believer in Christ? w

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Somewhat agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Somewhat disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree  
Question Title

9. Do you agree that a believer can grow without an effective means of discipleship, beyond a "multi-week" program that is designed to prepare you for water baptism and church membership? w

Strongly agree  
Agree  
Somewhat agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Somewhat disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

**Question Title**

10. As a Pentecostal, do you agree that a believer who does not or has not received the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but is nevertheless involved in an effective discipleship program, can be just as spiritual as one has been baptized with the Holy Spirit? w

Strongly agree  
Agree

Somewhat agree  
Neither agree nor disagree  
Somewhat disagree  
Disagree  
Strongly disagree

Bottom of Form

## Appendix B

Consent Letter:

Focus Group Participants

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

*RECLAIMING THIS GENERATION FOR CHRIST:*

*ARE LATINIO YOUTH BEING DISCIPLINED EFFECTIVELY*

You are invited to be in a research study being done by **Robert Rodriguez, a doctoral student** from Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because *As a Latino, Christian, Pentecostal young adult, between the ages of 18-29, and living in the area of Central Florida, your experience gives you the ability to speak about the effectiveness of discipleship in your life.*

If anyone else is given information about you, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name.

The only people, besides the participants, who will be in the sanctuary where the study will take place, are: the Researcher (Robert Rodriguez), Vicente Acevedo (District Youth leader), Nidia Rodriguez (Robert Rodriguez's wife), and Agustino Bonet (Local youth leader for Cathedral of Hope Church of God)). They are there to take notes for the researcher and will not interact with the participants. The researcher is striving for the strictest confidentiality possible. For this reason, only the three (above) named adults will participate.

However, since the nature of the study is a focus group, there will be other people in the room who will listen to your responses. We will use one recording device in order to ensure the accuracy and analysis of the responses. That recording will not leave the hands of the researcher, and will be destroyed after the researcher completes the focus groups and analyzes the results, no

later than the last day of March, 2020. Your name will not be included in any of the researcher's writing. You will be anonymous. The researcher is only interested in gathering general information about the nature of youth discipleship in the Latino community of the Church of God in the Central Florida area.

The benefits of this study will contribute to the development of better discipleship materials, if needed, better discipleship programs, where needed, and a better understanding of what today's contemporary generation is seeking from the church. This will help your leaders and youth pastors as they strive to help young adults grow in their relationship to God, the church, and the community that the local church is serving.

The risks are minimal. However, it is possible that you may find disagreement with the way others and they with you, when it comes to the state of youth discipleship in the Latino Community of the Church of God-Central District.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell (**Nidia Rodriguez**) who can be reached at (**nidia\_urbaez@hotmail.com**). You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact (**Nidia Rodriguez**) at (**nidia\_urbaez@hotmail.com**).

Signing this paper means that you have read this, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind

later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

---

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

---

Date Signed

## Appendix C

### Letter of Permission to Conduct Focus Groups

Addressed to the District Pastor

From: Pastor Robert Rodriguez

Church of God: Cathedral of Hope

7600 Winegard Rd.

Orlando, FL 32809

Date

Recipient Name

District Pastor: Central-North District

Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region

Dear Recipient Name:

I am writing as a follow-up to our recent conversation regarding my Doctor of Ministry Dissertation. As I informed you, I have to conduct a survey and a Focus Group within the Central Hispanic District of the Church of God, Southeastern Region for Latino Ministries. As the Superintendent/District Pastor of the Central district, I am formally requesting your permission to conduct a survey and a Focus Group, of young adults, between the ages 18-29, within the Central Latino District of the Church of God.

The Focus Group will be held on Saturday December 7<sup>th</sup>., between the hours of 10:00 am to 1:00pm, at Cathedral of Hope Church of God, located at 7600 Winegard, Orlando, FL 32809. A Continental breakfast will be served. The nature of the focus group will be confidential so as

to protect the participants, and to allow them the opportunity to speak freely. The title of the study is “Reclaiming this Generation for Christ: Are Latino youth being disciplined effectively.”

The Study will be respectful of the denomination, and the leadership. I will not allow anything out of order to be entertained as I conduct the Study. The purpose to listen to the voices of many young adults concerning their discipleship experience.

The information gathered will be shared with the leadership of the denomination, so as to assist the church in the area of youth discipleship within the Latino Church of God Community. You can respond to my request in writing, and by signing below that you give consent for me to have the Focus Group, using young adults between the ages of 18-29, from the district that you oversee.

Thank you,

Pastor Robert Rodriguez

If you consent, Please, sign below and include a letter with this request.

**Appendix D**

Letter of Permission to Conduct Focus Groups

Addressed to the Zone Pastor

From: Pastor Robert Rodriguez

Church of God: Cathedral of Hope

7600 Winegard Rd.

Orlando, FL 32809

Date

Recipient Name

Zone Pastor: Zone Two: Orlando, Kissimmee, Palm Bay,

Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region

7712 Chelsea St.

Tampa, FL 33610

Dear Recipient Name:

I am writing as a follow-up to our recent conversation regarding my Doctor of Ministry Dissertation. As I informed you, I have to conduct a survey and a Focus Group within the Central Hispanic Zone of the Church of God, Southeastern Region for Latino Ministries.

As the Zone Two Pastor the Latino Ministry of the Church of God in Florida, I am formally requesting your permission to conduct a survey and a Focus Group of young adults, between the ages 18-29, within the Central Latino District of the Church of God.

The Focus Group will be held on Saturday December 7<sup>th</sup>., between the hours of 10:00 am to 1:00pm, at Cathedral of Hope Church of God, located at 7600 Winegard, Orlando, FL 32809.

A Continental breakfast will be served.

The nature of the focus group will be confidential so as to protect the participants, and to allow them the opportunity to speak freely. The title of the study is “Reclaiming this Generation for Christ: Are Latino youth Youth being disciplined effectively.”

The Study will be respectful of the denomination, and the leadership. I will not allow anything out of order to be entertained as I conduct the Study. The purpose to listen to the voices of many young adults concerning their discipleship experience.

The information gathered will be shared with the leadership of the denomination, so as to assist the church in the area of youth discipleship within the Latino Church of God Community.

You can respond to my request in writing, and by signing below that you give consent for me to have the Focus Group, using young adults between the ages of 18-29, from the district that you oversee.

Thank you,

Pastor Robert Rodriguez

If you consent, Please sign below and include a letter with this request.

## Appendix E

### Confidentiality Agreement

I agree to participate in the Focus Group led by pastor Robert Rodriguez.

I understand that my participation will be to simply observe and take notes, which will be handed to Pastor Rodriguez. I also understand that part of my participation is to help analyze the information once the focus group is over.

I also understand that I am NOT to interact with the participants during the event. Finally, I also understand that this is a confidential focus group, and I agree to respect and divulge names and/or identities of the participants.

This form may be used for individuals who will be assisting the researcher with a variety of research tasks (e.g., audio or video recording, transcribing data, etc.)

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will be assisting the researcher by  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (specific job description, e.g., being an interpreter/translator)

1. I agree to abide by the following guidelines regarding confidentiality: Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) that may be revealed during the course of performing research tasks throughout the research process and after it is complete.
2. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher(s)*.
3. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession (e.g., using a password-protected computer).
4. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher(s)* when I have completed the research tasks.
5. After consulting with the *Researcher(s)*, erase or destroy all research information in any form or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the *Researcher(s)* (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

---



---

(Print Name)

(Signature)

---

(Date)

*Researcher(s)*

---

(Print Name)

---

(Signature)

---

(Date)

## **Appendix F**

### Focus Group Research Questions

1. What factors contribute to young adults, ages eighteen and older, in the Central District of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region abandoning the local church after graduating High School?
2. How are our young adults being discipled during their teenage, Junior High and High School years?
3. What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, Central District contribute to discipling youth so that they do not abandon the local church after graduating High School?

## **Appendix G**

### **Personal Interview Questions:**

#### **For Senior Pastors and Youth Pastors**

1. What factors contribute to young adults, ages eighteen and older, in the Central District of the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region abandoning the local church after graduating High School?
2. How are our young adults being disciplined during their teenage, Junior High and High School years?
3. What best practices in the Church of God Southeastern Hispanic Region, Central District contribute to discipling youth so that they do not abandon the local church after graduating High School?
4. Why are young Pentecostal adults not interested in the Baptism of the Holy Spirit?

## WORKS CITED

- Almirudis, Hiram. *Antologia de Homilias Biblicas: Sermones de Mateo 4:19 a Marcos 16:17,18*. Vol. XI, Distribuidoras de Libros, 1991.
- Arrington, French L. *Exploring the Declaration of Faith*. Pathway Press, 2003.
- Barna, George. *Real Teens: A Contemporary Snapshot of Youth Culture*. Regal Books, Gospel Light, 2001.
- Barna, George. *A Snapshot of the Values, Views & Faith of Hispanic Americans*. Barna.com. October, 2019. <https://www.barna.com/research/snapshot-hispanic-americans/>
- Beebe, Gayle D., and Richard J. Foster. *Longing for God: Seven Paths of Christian Devotion*. InterVarsity Press, 2009.
- Birch, Bruce C. *The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*. Vol. 2, Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*. Revised and unabridged ed., Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1963.
- Boucher, Barry. "The Making of a Disciple-Elijah & Elisha." *Ministers Matter*, 22 Aug. 2012, [barryboucher.typepad.com/ministers\\_matter](http://barryboucher.typepad.com/ministers_matter).
- Bruns, Stevens D. "Corporate Worship as Discipleship in the Early Church." *Seedbed*, Nov. 2014, <http://www.seedbed.com/corporate-worship-discipleship-early-church-2/>.
- Burgueño, Fidencio. *Pastoral Juvenil*. Editorial Evangelica, 1991.
- Cairns, Earle E. *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*. Revised and enlarged ed., Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.
- Campus Crusade for Christ. *The Discipleship Series: Leaders Guide*. Vol. 1, Here's Life Publishers, Inc., 1980.

- Carey, Floyd D., Stone, Hoyt E. General Editors. *Discipulado: Manual para Adultos: Development of the Christian Life*. Editorial Evangelica.
- Certo, Samuel. *Chasing Wisdom*. Tate Publishing, 2014.
- Christensen, Duane. *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 6b, Thomas Nelson, 2002.
- Clarke, Adam. *Comentario de la Santa Biblia*. Vol. 3, Casa Nazarena de Publicaciones, 1974.
- Cole, Steve J. “The Influence of Godly Mothers.” *Bible.Org*, 13 Sept. 2013, [bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-godly-mothers-2-timothy-15-314-17](http://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-11-godly-mothers-2-timothy-15-314-17).
- Conn, Charles. *Like a Mighty Army: A History of the Church of God: 1886-1996*. 3rd. ed., Pathway Press, 2011.
- Cosgrove, Francis M. *Essentials of Discipleship: Practical Help on How to Live as Christ’s Disciple*. NavPress, 1980.
- Cossey, James E. *New Convert Study: Welcome to the Family of God*. Revised ed. by James Cossey, Pathway Press, 2008.
- Darling, Laura. “Mentors of the Bible: Naomi and Ruth.” *Confirm Not Conform*, 16 Jan. 2015, [www.confirmnotconform.com/blog/mentors-bible-naomi-and-ruth](http://www.confirmnotconform.com/blog/mentors-bible-naomi-and-ruth).
- Departamento Internacional de Juventud y Educacion Cristiana de la Iglesia de Dios: Division de Ministerios de la Iglesia. *El Gran Libro de Ministerios de la Iglesia de Dios Para lideres y Maestros de Juventud y Educacion Cristiana*. Pathway Press, 2003.
- Dunn, Richard R., and Mark H. Senter III, editors. *Reaching a Generation for Christ*. Moody Press, 1997.

- Evangelical Training Association. *Mas alla de la Escuela Dominical: Como Alcanzar los Objetivos de la Iglesia Mediante un Ministerio Educativo*. Evangelical Training Association, 1997.
- Fiscus, Brad Caro, Stephanie. *Small(ER) Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem*. Abingdon Press, 2016.
- Fr. Michael Cummins. "Eli, and the Value of Spiritual Mentors." *Word on Fire*, 31 Jan. 2018, wordonfire.org. <https://www.wordonfire.org/resources/blog/st-john-bosco-eli-and-the-value-of-spiritual-mentors/21611/>
- Freeks, Fazel. "Old Testament Figures as Possible Current 'Mentors': Exploratory Pastoral-Theological Reflections." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament: An International Journal of Nordic Theology*, vol. 30, no. 2, Nov. 2016, pp. 236–48, <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sold20>.
- Gaebelein, Frank E. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Vol. 11, The Zondervan Corporation, 1978.
- Geiger, Eric. *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow*. B&H Publishing Group, 2012.
- Glover, Sarah. *Building a Youth Ministry: One Leader's Journey*. Pathway Press, 2007.
- Godissart, John Albert. *Equipping Parents to Nurture Their Children in Christian Discipleship: A Family Discipleship Program for the McConnellsburg United Methodist Charge*. 2008. Asbury Theological Seminary, D.Min dissertation.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. *A History of Christian Thought: From the Protestant Reformation to the Twentieth Century*. Revised ed., vol. II, Abingdon Press, 1987.
- Grenz, Stanley J. *Theology for the Community of God*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000.

Halter, Hugh. *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*. Jossey-Bass, 2008.

Harper, Jimmy. *Launching A Forever Faith: A How-To Guide for Youth Leaders*. Pathway Press, 2004.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary*. Vol. 5, Mac Donald Publishing Company.

Hirsch, Alan. *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church*. Brazos Press, 2006.

Hoehl, Stacey E. "The Mentor Relationship: An Exploration of Paul as Loving Mentor to Timothy and the Application of This Relationship to Contemporary Leadership Challenges." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership*, vol. 3, no. 2, Summer 2011, pp. 32–47, [http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol3no2/JBPL\\_Vol3No2\\_Hoehl\\_pp32-47.pdf](http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol3no2/JBPL_Vol3No2_Hoehl_pp32-47.pdf).

Hull, Bill. *Jesus the Disciple Maker*. Baker Book House Company, 2004.

---. *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*. Tyndale House Publishers, 2006.

---. *The Disciple Making Church*. Baker Book House Company, 2002.

---. *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith*. Revised and expanded ed., Baker Book House Company, 2007.

Jones, Tony. *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community*. Zondervan, 2001.

Kerr, Hugh T. *Readings in Christian Thought*. Second ed., Abingdon Press, 1990.

Kurtz, Johann Heinrich. *Kurtz's Church History*. Vol. III, Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1889.

Langford, Michael D. "Spirit-Driven Discipleship: A Pneumatology of Youth Ministry." *Theology Today*, vol. 71, no. 3, 2014, pp. 323–36.

- Lelievre, Mateo. *Juan Wesley: Su Vida y Su Obra*. CNP Editorial, 2002.
- Manskar, Steven. "Teaching the Quadrilateral." *Accountable Discipleship*, 21 July 2009, <http://accountablediscipleship.blogspot.com/2009/07/teaching-quadrilateral.html>.
- McDonald, Glenn. *The Disciple Making Church: From Dry Bones to Spiritual Vitality*. Revised and expanded ed., FaithWalk Publishing, 2007.
- McMahan, Oliver. *Deepening Discipleship: Contemporary Applications of Biblical Commitments*. Pathway Press, 2000.
- Milam, Matthew II. *The Jesus Command: "Love One Another As I Have Loved You" The Mark of Discipleship*. WestBow Press, 2014.
- Mulholland, Robert M. *Invitation to a Journey: A Roadmap for Spiritual Formation*. InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Oden, Greg. *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ*. InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Orvis, Lisa, Richlyn Poor, and Jim Stier. *His Kingdom Come*. YWAM Publishing, 2008.
- Outler, Albert C. *John Wesley*. Oxford University Press, 1964.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994.
- Pettit, Paul, Editor. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. Kregel Publications, 2008.
- Pimentel, Abdías. *How Did You Go About Discipling Your Students When You Were a Youth Leader?* Personal Interview on 3 May 2017, quoting his contribution in the area of discipleship ministry for the training manual: *N.E.Y.C.L.A.: MOVE To Effectively Train*

- Your Youth Leaders.* (Northeast Youth & Children's Leadership Association). 2013. Allentown.
- Rowe, George Stringer. *Wesley: His Own Biographer: Illustrations of His Character, Labours, and Achievements. From His Own Journals.* Elliot Stock, 62, Paternoster Row, E.C. 1871.
- Roebuck, David G. "A Brief History of the Church of God." *Church of God*, <http://www.churchofgod.org/about/a-brief-history-of-the-church-of-god>. Accessed 10 Apr. 2017.
- . *History of Discipleship in the Church of God*. 28 Apr. 2017. Personal Interview with Church of God Historian, Dr. David Roebuck, in which he shares personal insights on his published work regarding the history of the Church of God and the role that discipleship played in the denomination.
- . "Restorationism and a Vision for World Harvest: A Brief History of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN)." *CYBERJOURNAL FOR PENTECOSTAL-CHARISMATIC RESEARCH*, vol. C5, Sept. 1998, p. 34, <http://www.pctii.org/cyberj/cyberj5/roebuck1.html>.
- Roebuck, David G., and Louis F. Morgan, *Living The Word: 125 Years of Church of God History*. Squires Library, 1 Mar. 2016, <http://leeuniversity.libguides.com/yearbooks>.
- Russ, Eric. "What Discipleship Is Not." *Discipleship Defined*, 2013, [www.discipleshipdefined.com/what-discipleship-not](http://www.discipleshipdefined.com/what-discipleship-not).
- Schaff, Philip. *History of The Christian Church*. Second ed., vol. 7, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987.
- Simpson, James D. *How to Lead Your Church Beyond 100: Strengthening the Smaller Church*. Pathway Press, 1991.

Smith, Daryl L. *The End of Small Groups: Leading Incarnational Villages*. Don-Q-Dox, 2015.

Stanger, Frank Bateman. *Spiritual Formation in the Local Church*. Francis Asbury Press, 1989.

Tolbert, La Verne. *Teaching Like Jesus: A Practical Guide to Christian Education in Your Church*. Zondervan, 2000.

Vassell, Daniel J., editor. *Single Source: Safe. Adult. Fellowship. Experience: Adult Single Youth Ministry Manual*, "Guiding Your Single Youth to Fell Complete." Pathway Press, 2006.

Willard, Dallas. *El Espiritu de las Disciplinas: Como Transforma Dios la vida?* Spanish ed., Editorial Vida, 2010.