

## **ABSTRACT**

### **MISSIONALLY ENGAGING OUR NEIGHBORS: EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS TO REACH THEIR NEIGHBORS FOR CHRIST**

by

T. Scott Rawlings

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the knowledge, attitude and behavior of select members of Living Stones Church, in Katy, Texas in regard to missional living within the context of multidiverse and multi-cultural suburban neighborhoods.

Participants in this study encountered hands on training, surveys, and focus group throughout a two and a half month period.

This project determined if intentional missional living motivate Christians to engage in the art of neighboring as they fulfil the Great Commandment to love their neighbors. Fifteen members of Living Stones Church participated in this study. The research was an intervention with mixed qualitative and quantitative methods. The research looked at a member's knowledge, attitude, and behavior of engaging their neighbors missionally. Participants underwent a pre survey and a two-week missional formation training. Afterwards, each member spent two months living out what they learned in their missional formation training with their immediate neighbors. When the two months concluded, there was a post-survey to see if their knowledge, attitude, and behavior had changed as a result of engaging with their neighbors. This was followed up with a focus group with questionnaire.

Findings from this project suggested that having a clear biblical understanding of God's mission does equate to believers in Christ actually participating in it. They also

reveal that more intentional communication from church leaders on how to be a blessing in one's locality, through teaching of the Great Commandment and Great Commission could lead to effective change, not only in the members of the church, but in the community as well.

**MISSIONALLY ENGAGING OUR NEIGHBORS:  
EQUIPPING CHRISTIANS TO REACH THEIR NEIGHBORS FOR CHRIST**

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by

T. Scott Rawlings

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this research was to have members of Living Stones Church missionally engage their immediate neighbors for Christ. Fifteen members of Living Stones Church participated in this study, and the research included both pre and post evaluation.

To add support for the project, Chapter 1 discussed the critical rationale, contextual background, and major themes highlighted in the literature review. In addition, the research questions evaluated each member's knowledge, attitude, and behavior of engaging their neighbors. There was a pre survey and two-week missional formation training used on each participant. Afterwards, each member spent two months living out what they learned in their missional formation training with their immediate neighbors. When the two months concluded, a post survey was given to see if their knowledge, attitude, and behavior had changed as a result of engaging with their neighbors. A focus group was also used to determine the effectiveness of the research project. In addition, the rationale for the project was explained with delineations and methodologies used.

### **Personal Introduction**

In January of 1999, Jesus Christ slammed into my soul. That is the best way I can describe what it was like to encounter God when I was not looking for Him. I found myself on my knees crying realizing I was communicating with the God who knew everything about me. A God who knew I was arrested twice, once for doing drugs, and once for theft. I found God who knew all my failures, all my shortcomings, and all my sinful rebellions, and yet loved me anyway. I was utterly and totally paralyzed in that

moment, knowing how broken I was over what my life had become and absolutely amazed at the mercy and forgiveness that God provides.

Three months after I became a Christian, I invited a friend to church and after a little prodding and horrific persuasion skills, he prayed to accept Christ in his life. In that moment, I felt an emotion so powerful that it became my life journey to never let that emotion go. It took me several years to fully understand the scope of that feeling, but once I understood what it was, it became a drug more powerful than any I have ever tried before. That emotion, I came to find out, was joy.

Luke 15:7 says, “Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” The joy that erupts in heaven when a sinner repents, is the same joy I felt when my friend gave his life to Christ. It is a joy that is contagious and addicting and beautifully present all in one. I do not want it to ever go away. I truly believe it is the joy that Habakkuk talks about when he says, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:18 ESV). A joy that comes when they take part in seeing loved ones, friends, neighbors and total strangers come to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Not wanting to lose that joy, in the beginning of 2000, I took Evangelism Explosion. Evangelism Explosion is basically a training program that will enable a person to have a thirty-minute conversation with a complete stranger that will hopefully, in the end, lead them to Christ. (Yes the presentation took 30 minutes!) In 2005 I was part of F.A.I.T.H Evangelism within my local church where we went door to door and shared the F.A.I.T.H curriculum. After all this training, I felt like I could share my faith with a

total stranger and lead that person to Christ. To a certain extent there are some positive results, but in 2019, we do not go door to door anymore. The video doorbells made it almost impossible for a stranger to get a door to open, let alone a thirty-minute conversation about salvation in Christ. I feel like everything I was trained and taught does not apply anymore to this present culture. Now, more than any time in my life, I feel like I can lose this joy.

Everything I was taught about reaching people for Christ was based solely on announcing certain information about Jesus and then hoping and praying that something clicks, and said person will eagerly and enthusiastically embracing Christ right there on the spot. In 2019, however, that approach no longer works. Proclaiming the gospel is powerful, but in a world where the words of the gospel often no longer fit into the plausibility structure of the gospel, the best gospel may actually be a community that demonstrates the gospel through the very way they live together.

I am currently the senior pastor at Living Stones Church. We reside in the western part of Katy, Texas that is one of the fastest growing cities in the US. In September 2016, our county was the most diverse county in America (Christian). The majority of the people in West Katy are upper to middle class, and because of the oil and gas industries in nearby Houston, we have people from all over the world are moving to Katy. There are over 30 languages presented in my children's elementary school; and at Tomkins High School, the school my children will eventually attend, I mentored a group of twenty students and, of those twenty, eleven of them were born outside the US. It is very diverse with multiple subsets of cultures present. It mostly consisted of 35-55 year-old professionals with 2.5 kids. There are more married people living in my

neighborhood of Cinco Ranch than 96 percent of all neighborhoods in America. Within a twelve-mile radius of my house, there are over three hundred thousand people

[\(http://datausa.io/profile/geo/katy-tx/\)](http://datausa.io/profile/geo/katy-tx/).

So how do I reach our multidiverse, multicultural suburb of Katy, Texas for Christ? How can I continue to experience the joy of God's salvation as I join Him in His mission? How can I get my community, who may have no interest in church, to see Christ demonstrated, fall in love with God, embrace the church and utterly turn our community upside down? Well, I cannot do it. At least I cannot do it by myself. I need the help of the local church to begin to demonstrate Christ in their daily living and in their neighborhoods. I need the local church to embrace a bold and exciting paradigm shift within the church culture. A shift from being impersonal with our neighbors, to being incarnational. God is already in our neighborhoods; we just need to find out what he is doing and join him in it! If we can embrace this, then there is no telling what God can do in our lives, and in our communities and neighborhoods.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The plausibility structure of old makes it seemingly impossible for others to embrace the gospel in this present culture. Missionally equipping members of the church to engage their neighbors should be the new paradigm for reaching people for Christ. In this culture, the Church can no longer assume that, if they have a building, that people within that community will come to it. Something has to change.

Outside of old evangelism techniques no longer working, another misconception is that if a church has all the bells and whistles and myriads of programs, then people will come. Pastors and lay leaders assume that people from within the local community will

attend their church without any effort of the church going out and engaging the community missionally. Reggie McNeal, in his book *The Present Future*, states that “[t]he current church culture in North America is on life support. It is living off the work, money, and energy of previous generations from a previous world order” (1). McNeal will go on to say that in this present culture, only 26 percent of Americans even go to church (3). Having myriads of programs at a church, or hanging on to old evangelism strategies, appear to be outdated and ineffective if done the same way the previous generation have done. A new paradigm of missionally engaging our neighbors must take place.

This study shows how a local church, sitting in the middle of one of the largest culturally diverse suburbs in America, can become more missional in their focus and at the same time educate and train members to engage a community that is currently not interested in attending church

### **Purpose of the Project**

**The Purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of a missional formation equipping process at Living Stones Church on member’s knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding engaging their neighbors for Christ in Katy, Texas.**

### **Research Questions**

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

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

What were the members’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living before the equipping process?



**Research Question #2**

What were the members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living after the equipping process?

**Research Question #3**

What elements of the missional formation equipping process had the most impact on the participants?

**Rationale for the Project**

All throughout Scripture, God is on a mission. From the earliest of days when Adam and Eve were in the garden, to Jesus sending out his disciples, God has been sending his people to live out his mission. God seems to have a global plan for the people of God to fulfill. The mission is simple: be a blessing to all people while proclaiming the greatness of God, the goodness of God, the mercies of God, and the joy of God's salvation and redemption to all the nations. In Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah heard the voice of God say, "Whom should I send? Who will go for Us?" To which Isaiah replied, "Here I am, send me." Jesus said in John 20:21, "Peace to you! As the Father sent me, I also send you."

God is on a mission, and he is constantly sending out his people to live out his mission. God sent out Moses, Isaiah, and even Jesus himself. Jesus sent out the disciples, and then the disciples began sending out their disciples. However, as consumerism has plagued the church in the West, Christians may have forgotten that they are the sent ones. Part of this problem may stem from poor leadership within local churches, and the other part falls on Christians themselves for not seeing within the Scriptures that all the people of God are to be joining God in his mission. With outreach and mission strategies being

outdated, Christians will need to learn and live what it is like to reach the nations for Christ in new ways. Local churches will have to train and equip them for this new way of living missionally. Lastly, the local church needs to explain to its members how to join God in His mission.

This research is focused on finding those answers. In a limited sense, this research tries to discover each participant's knowledge, attitude and behavior in joining God in his mission as they engage their neighbors in Katy, Texas. With old style evangelism strategies becoming outdated, this research will move away from using the term "evangelism" as being a presentation one would use to reach a lost person for Christ, and begin to move toward becoming holistically missional in all aspects of life.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

#### **Missional Formation**

Missional formation is the practice in the life of a Christian whereby God centers that person's heart, gifts and desires in a direction that intersects with the mission and reign of God.

#### **Neighboring**

When taking the Great Commandment seriously, all believers should see their own neighborhoods as their personal mission field. This research will use the term "neighboring" as a missional endeavor to learn each neighbor's names, hurts, hopes, and histories for the sake of the Gospel (Rusaw and Mavis xxi).

### **Knowledge**

Knowledge is the degree to which the participants considers themselves informed, educated, and experienced with the missional mindset of God, whereby he has set all believers to join him in his mission by missionally engaging their neighbors.

### **Attitude**

Attitude is the degree to which each participant's state of mind either agrees or disagrees with the knowledge of missionally joining God in his mission to engage their neighbors.

### **Behavior**

Behavior is the action, activity, and/or process that can be measured or observed when a participant missionally engages their neighbors for Christ.

### **Neighbors**

The word neighbor has such a far-reaching meaning to it. "Neighbor" can mean a literal neighbor across the street, or it can mean anyone anywhere. For the sake of this research, neighbor mean a literal neighbor living in close proximity to the participants.

### **Missio Dei**

Karl Hartenstien popularized this term which has been traditionally known to mean "The Mission of God." For this research, the researcher will refer to Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch's definition of *Missio Dei*: "The God on Mission" (24). They believe the Latin phrase "describes more the divine nature of God rather than the practical nature of Christian mission" (24).

### **Delimitations**

The participants for this research consisted of fifteen members, both men and women. Ten of these members have been discipled and trained by their pastor prior to this research, and five of them are new in their faith and have had no training. The reason for the difference is to see if theological knowledge and biblical understanding is truly needed to join God in his mission. In other words, this study seeks to find if a person has to have a full understanding of God and know everything the Bible says to join him in his work. The geographic location is the suburb of Katy, Texas. Living Stones Church was the object of this research, and the reason why this church was chosen is because it is in the heart of West Katy where the majority of the population growth is occurring. This area is fairly new and did not have enough churches within to pull more participants.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The types of literature used in this project came from several disciplines. In order to determine the biblical foundations for this project, numerous passages in the Bible were consulted along with the authors of a number of books, journals, dissertations and other web-based articles related to those particular passages. Authors, such as David J. Bosch, Alan Hirsch, Michael Frost, Christopher Wright, Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon. These individuals among others, addressed biblical and theological issues related to practices that demonstrated how one can effectively reach their literal neighbors for Christ by understanding the missional mindset of God in one's locality.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Type of Research**

The research model for this study was an intervention. This research used both quantitative and qualitative methods. To answer Research Question #1, a pre-test survey was passed out to each participant, before engaging their neighbors, in order to determine the missional knowledge, attitude, and behavior of each participant's engagement of missionally joining God in their neighborhoods (Appendix D) A post-test survey was given to each participant after the Missional Formation Equipping Process was complete to answer Research Question #2 (Appendix E). In order to answer Research Question #3, a select group of participants served as a focus group who responded to qualitative questions (Appendix B). In addition, the researcher conducted a two-week intensive training on how to engage their neighbors. Afterwards, all the data was tabulated on the level of knowledge, attitude and behavior from the participants (Chapter 4).

### **Participants**

Fifteen members of Living Stones Church participated in this study. Ten of these members have had discipleship training and five of them were new to their faith, and thus have had no formal training. Living Stones Church, the source for this study, is a new church plant in a very fast-growing area. The researcher self-selected these participants for this project. Both male and female participated.

### **Instrumentation**

An online survey asked each participant about their knowledge, attitude and behavior regarding engaging their neighbors for the mission of God. The survey comprised of fifteen Likert-style questions and two open ended questions. The open-

ended questions measured the actual behavior patterns of living on mission for God that existed before and after this study was concluded.

In addition to the survey, a two-week, missional formation equipping class at Living Stones Church to helped assist the participants in their knowledge, attitude and behavior in joining God in mission. After the two-week missional formation class, these fifteen members spent two months in their neighborhoods learning to live on mission with their immediate neighbors as they put into practice what they learned in the class. When the two months ended, a focus group met using a semi-structured model.

### **Data Collection**

A pre test was given to fifteen members of Living Stones Church determined their knowledge, attitude and behavior on engaging their neighbors for Christ. After the two-week missional formation class, and the eight weeks in their neighborhoods living on mission, each participant were given a post test. In addition, a semi-formal focus group was conducted at the end of the eight-week period.

### **Data Analysis**

The quantitative data yielded scores for each question and for each section, including knowledge, attitude, and behavior. The pre test and post tests were submitted to determine if there were significant changes in the participant. The qualitative focus group yielded trends that provided insight from these members.

### **Generalizability**

One limitation from this study is that it stemmed solely from members living in a suburban setting. Living in a suburban area as against an urban area, as well as being marriage or single, present certain unique points and differences. Therefore, some data

might not be applicable to all people groups. The value of joining God in mission, however, is realistically generalized. God has a global plan and desires all his people to join him in this plan. Living on mission should not be optional for Christians, but rather all should have a fundamental desire of the heart to see all people, everywhere, come to know Christ.

### **Project Overview**

Chapter 2 reviews selected literature, research, and Scripture, examining both the biblical and theological foundations of actively engaging our neighbors as one lives life on mission. In addition, this research revealed themes that assisted the researcher to educate and train the fifteen participants in engaging their neighbors. Those themes were as follows: a contextual approach to culture, attractional vs incarnational models of church, the art of neighboring, and missional disciple-making.

Chapter 3 presents a detailed explanation of the project's design, research methods, and the methods of data analysis. Chapter 4 reveals a detailed analysis of the data from the survey's and focus group, which leads into a report on the major results of the study. Lastly, Chapter 5 concludes the study by offering interpretations of the project and some recommendations for identifiable practices for engaging one's neighbor for Christ.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

The problem in Chapter 1 rises from the lack of following the current trends in our culture and asking one of the most fundamental questions all pastors, ministry leaders and followers of Jesus should ask: Can Christians “be more effective in reaching people” in this pluralistic culture, for Jesus Christ? (Stetzer and Putman 46). At the heart of Christianity should be a desire to missionally engage our neighbors for the sake of the kingdom of God. This chapter will formulate how both biblical and theological foundations can form a missiological ecclesiology.

This chapter looks in depth at both the Old and New Testament where God is consistent in his mission as he sends out his people. Recent literature has helped to clarify what exactly it means for people to be missional by establishing a biblical and theological foundation for the missional identity and purpose of the Christian church. If being missional is the identity of the church, then becoming an incarnational church is the method. This research sheds light on the Trinitarian viewpoint of *Missio Dei* and what methods followers of Jesus should embrace to connect with a missional church. In conclusion, this chapter addresses some problems that Living Stones Church faces in this present culture and how missional practices will enable them to stay connected with the new missional church paradigm. Some of the theoretical literature and foundations include a contextual approach to culture, understanding attractional versus incarnational church models, as well as learning the art of neighboring with an emphasis on missional disciple-making. If missional is the identity and incarnation is the method, then the



neighborhoods provides the context for taking Living Stones Church to this new missional church paradigm.

## **Missional Church**

### **A Biblical Foundation for the Mission of God's People**

If Living Stones Church is to understand how to missionally engage their neighbors with the intent of joining God in redeeming and restoring humanity back to a relationship with him, then understanding what is the mission of God's people through a biblical lens becomes paramount. God has always been on mission. His mission was made clear at the beginning of the Bible, in the book of Genesis, where God initiated the search for Adam when he was in the Garden of Eden after the fall. God's pursuit of Adam was in direct correlation with God's determination that sin in this world would not terminate his relationship with humanity (McNeal, *Kingdom Come* 88). From Genesis through Revelation, the mission is the same: God's pursuit of humanity for the sake of redeeming and restoring them back into a relationship with him. From his call to Abraham, Moses and the nation of Israel, to sending Jesus Christ and later his disciples, God's mission has never waned.

The term "Mission" can have a different meaning to different people. Christopher Wright claims that most Christians believe mission is about "helping God to get over those barriers of strange cultures and faraway places that he seems to have such difficulty crossing" (Wright, *Mission of God's People* 19). Wright believes that the Christian's biblical understanding of who God is and what his mission is about, differ (19). Michael W. Goheen would add to that and say that mission is viewed as more of a "geographical expansion" as Christians take the gospel to people who have never heard it before. (4).

God's mission for His people, and more importantly, how are God's people to live out God's mission, can be seen differently by different people and context.

God is in the business of sending his people on a mission, but the range of "sentness" is wide. Joseph was sent to help in times of severe famine (Gen. 45:7). Moses was sent to save people from being oppressed (Ex. 3:10). Elijah was sent to deal with politics (1 Kings 19:15-18). Jeremiah was sent to share God's word (Jer. 1:7). Jesus claimed that Isaiah was sent by God to preach the good news, to release captives, give sight to the blind, and to help those oppressed (Luke 4:16-19; cf. Isaiah 61:1). The disciples were sent to proclaim the kingdom of God by being imitators of Jesus (Matt. 10:5-8). The Apostles were sent to make disciples whom they baptized and taught (Matt. 28:18-20). Paul and Barnabas were sent for famine relief (Acts 11:27-30) and then later to proclaim the kingdom of God as they started churches (Acts 13:1-3) (Wright, *The Mission of God's People* 23). Wright says, "So, even if we agree that the concept of sending and being sent lies at the heart of mission, there is a broad range of biblically sanctioned activities that people may be sent by God to do, including famine relief, action for justice, preaching, evangelism, teaching, healing and administration" (24).

Since God on mission can appear to be wide-ranging, Living Stones Church needs to narrow this down to fully grasp, in its simplicity, what God's mission is all about. To help clarify, John Stott's claims, "Missions arises from the heart of God himself, and is communicated from his heart to ours. Mission is the global outreach of the global people of a global God" (*The Contemporary Christian* 335). The goal is not to have believers in Jesus viewing God's mission as merely delivering a message of the gospel, but to fully live out and embody God's mission of redeeming and reconciling humanity back to him.

Goheen says that "'missional' describes not an *activity* of the church but the very *essence and identity* of the church as it takes up its role in God's story in the context of its culture..." (4). If ever Living Stones Church becomes "confused about who [they] are and whose [they] are, [they will] become anything to anyone" (Stackhouse 9). To prevent this from happening, looking into the Old and New Testament views of the mission of God's people is in order.

### **The Identity of the Church: Being a Blessing**

The Abrahamic Covenant, where God gave the great promise of blessing to Abraham, came twelve chapters into the book of Genesis.

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen. 12:1-3)

In order for one to understand the magnitude of this passage, one has to understand what went on in the previous eleven chapters. Before this great promise of God to Abraham, God created this beautiful world, and everything was in harmony with one another and very good. It lasted for two chapters; then everything went into chaos. Starting in Chapter 3 until this great promise of blessing in Chapter 12, a complete rebellion against God resulted. Due to this rebellion, a lack of trust with a disregard for authority ensued, while relationships continued to get shattered and split. As a result, sin ran rampant in the world and in just a few chapters human sinfulness broke entirely from the original plan and design of God. It got so uncontrollable; God sent a flood to try to eradicate the crippling effect of sin on the world (Gen. 7-8). Afterward, God renewed His promise to creation and once again gave his blessing for humanity to multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 9:1).

However, it did not take long before things got unmanageable again as Chapter 11 paints a picture of utter contempt for God's will in the story of the Tower of Babel. Overall, Genesis 3 -11 depicts how life devastatingly fell apart and away from the glory of God.

McNeal states, "After molding Adam 'of dust from the ground,' God did something extraordinary. He breathed into this new being 'breath of life' (Genesis 2:7). God's first gift to us humans is *life*—straight from himself!" (*Kingdom Come* 24). If life is the greatest gift that God could give us, then sin would be the antithesis of life. In Genesis 3-11, instead of humanity enjoying life with God; anger, hate, murder, corruption, sexual disorder, and complete arrogance filled the hearts of the people. Every predisposition of the human heart became corrupt and evil. These chapters in Genesis show a universal problem that God will have to provide a universal answer for (Wright, *The Mission of God's People* 66).

The call to Abraham is the beginning of restoring life to a world filled with evil and sin. Like the creation account in Genesis 1-2, the call to Abraham has the theme of blessing. Five times in Genesis 12:1-3, the root word for bless (*barak*) or blessing is used (Wright, *The Mission of God's People* 66). Goheen says that this is deliberate since the word "curse" is used five times in Genesis 1-11 (31). Wright adds, "Blessing, then, at the very beginning of our Bible, is constituted by fruitfulness, abundance and fullness on the one hand, and by enjoying rest within creation in holy and harmonious relationship with our Creator God on the other" (Wright, *The Mission of God's People* 67). This blessedness is seen in Genesis 1 where God blessed the fish and birds, then blessed humanity, and finally the Sabbath. Therefore, when one gets to Genesis 12, one must use the same context of blessing here, as stated in Genesis 1 (66). However, this blessing is

both vertical and horizontal. Vertically, those who are blessed by God seek to live out their lives in relationship to him. All the patriarchs knew that their blessing is in direct relation to their worship of God (67). One can see this in Genesis 48:15-16 when Jacob was blessing the two sons of Joseph. Jacob knew that whatever blessing he could bestow on his children was a direct result of God's blessing to him. Horizontally, this blessing then reaches out to their neighbors. In several occasions in Genesis, those whom God has blessed in turn blessed other people. Laban enjoys God's blessing on Jacob (30:27-30), Potiphar is blessed because of Joseph (Gen. 39:5), and Pharaoh is blessed by Jacob (Gen. 47:7,10) (Wright 68, Bauckham 30). Wright shares the missional importance of this blessing that is both vertical and horizontal. He states:

Thus, the blessing of Abraham becomes self-replicating. Those who are blessed are called to be a blessing beyond themselves—and this is one feature that makes it so profoundly missional. For if we see ourselves...as those who have entered into the blessing of Abraham through faith in Christ, then the Abrahamic commission becomes ours also—“be a blessing” (68).

In Genesis 10, God told humanity to fill the earth. In chapter 11, they scatter and fill it, but now with division and confusion. In chapter 12, God still has the whole nation in mind. The problem in chapters 3-11 now is answered in this promise to Abraham: "All the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). To make sure God gets his point across as to the all-encompassing nature of this promise, the word bless or blessing is repeated four more times in Genesis (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14) (Bauckham 29). It is a blessing that speaks to the "clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations" in Genesis 10:31, and it is this blessing that falls on "every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" in Revelation 7. As Bosch argues, "If there is a missionary in the

Old Testament, it is God himself" (171). God desires for the "breath of life" to be restored back to all the inhabitants of this earth.

A question may come up: if Abraham was to be a blessing to all nations and all people, leading to the culmination of Christ's return and the establishment of the new heaven and earth, then how can he do this being just one man living one lifetime. According to Genesis 25:7, Abraham only lived to be one hundred and seventy-five years old. That is not enough to impact all nations, peoples, tongues, and tribes that Revelation 7:9 refers to. John Calvin states, "Certainly God does not make his will known to us so that knowledge of him should die with us. He requires us to be his witnesses to the next generation, so that they may in turn hand on what they have received from us to their descendants" (177). Though Abraham was just one man living one lifetime, his calling of being a blessing to the nations required him to become missional. Genesis 18:19 provides more clarity of what this missional requirement requires:

For I have chosen him [Abraham], that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he promised him (Genesis 18:19).

This passage conveys two crucial aspects of a missional church. The first is the theology of God, and the second is God's view of mission. The theology of God is found in the phrase, "to keep the way of the LORD" and God's mission is "so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he promised him." The latter refers back to Genesis 12:1-3.

Keeping the ways of the Lord is full of meaning. If one understands that God's commands are not random rules and regulations, but are related to the character, values, and desires of God, then Deuteronomy 10:12-19 shines brightly on what keeping "the

way of the LORD” looks like. In Deuteronomy 10:12-13, God gives five examples of keeping the way of the Lord: fear, walk, love, serve, and keep (obey):

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I am commanding you today for your good?

Given the command to "keep the way of the Lord" as found in Genesis 18, then one must fear God; walk in his ways of love, grace, and truth; love him as one continues a relationship with him; serve him, and obey his commandments and statutes. If one does that, then they enter into the goodness of God. Of course, these are very broad terms of keeping the ways of the LORD, but God will begin to narrow to more specifics in the following verses:

Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the heaven of heavens, the earth with all that is in it. Yet the LORD set his heart in love on your fathers and chose their offspring after them, you above all peoples, as you are this day. Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn. (Deut. 10:14-16).

Here God reminds them where the promise comes from and thus their blessing. What comes next gives a precise definition of keeping the ways of the Lord:

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribes. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. Love the sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt. (Deut. 10:17-19)

In verses 12-13, God uses generalities to show what it means to keep His ways, but in verse 17-19, God gives very particular details to what he means to fear, walk, love, serve, and keep him. Here God’s character and act come into focus. As Wright would say, if one wants to keep the way of the Lord, then one must do “for others what (in Israel’s case) God has already done for them (delivered from [sojourner] status in Egypt and

provisions of food and clothing in the wilderness)” (*The Mission of God’s People* 89).

God is saying to Israel that they have known what God is like because they have seen him in action, therefore go and do to others what God has done for them. Goheen claims that God’s people are a “*so that people*: they are chosen *so that* they might know God’s salvation and then invite all nations into it” (31). “Keep the ways of the LORD” in Genesis 18:19, in the truest sense, means to missionally engage one’s neighbors with the same love that God has shown on his followers.

What is remarkable about Genesis 18:19 is that God is having a conversation about being missional in the middle of the disaster that was Sodom and Gomorrah. Everything that Sodom and Gomorrah represented was in stark contrast to keeping the ways of the Lord. They were heartlessly oppressing sojourners and had no desire to care for the needy. Amid this evil, God shows that the fundamental part of God’s mission for his people is to renounce the ways of Sodom and Gomorrah and love the sojourners. By doing so, they will then be a blessing to the nations. Wright adds, “The community God seeks for the sake of his mission is to be a community shaped by his own ethical character, with specific attention to righteousness and justice in a world filled with oppression and injustice” (*The Mission of God’s People* 93-94). Said differently, when the church loves the sojourners and cares for the needy, then they will become a blessing to the nations. Missional churches are to live by different standards and reflect the God who is radically different from the evil of the world. For God loves the sojourners and brings food and clothing to the needy. When churches do not live by the mandate God placed on Abraham, then by what voice do they speak to their culture? A divided church has no voice in a divided world (94).



The Abrahamic Covenant of being a blessing to the nations seemed to lose its glamor as the nation of Israel was constantly turned their backs on God and leaving the "ways of the Lord." Leslie Newbigin claims that the story of Jonah was a clear picture of how Israel lost their identity in being a blessing (*The Open Secret* 32-33). However, the psalmists and the prophets were beacons of light throughout the Old Testament, trying to draw the nation back to God's missional ways. The Psalms (47:9; 67; 72:17; 86:9; 87; 96; 102:15, 21-22) consistently reiterates the Abrahamic covenant. The prophets tend to spend most of their letters focusing on Israel and their need to get back into a relationship with God; however, when they widen their focus to the nations, the Abrahamic Covenant is remarkably visible (Isaiah 19:19-25; Isa. 56:3-8; Isa. 60; Jer. 4:1-2; Amos 9:11-12; Zech. 2:10-11).

In Jeremiah 4:1-2, the prophet Jeremiah pleads for the nation of Israel to reclaim their identity. He states, "If you return, O Israel, declares the LORD, to me you should return. If you remove your detestable things from my presence, and do not waver, and if you swear, 'As the LORD lives,' in truth, in justice, and in righteousness, then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory." Richard Bauckham adds, "What is notable here is that it is Israel's fulfillment of her covenant obligations, her practice of truth, justice and righteousness, that will bring blessing to the nations... In order for the nations to be blessed Israel need only be faithful to YHWH" (31). What Jeremiah says and Bauckham agrees with is that blessings could have just overflowed to Israel's neighbors if only Israel were faithful. Here, Jeremiah, whom God called a "prophet to the nations" (Jer. 1:5), suggests that the future of Israel and also the future of

the nations could have turned out so much differently if only they stayed faithful to the calling that God has placed on his people (Bauckham 31).

Though many Western churches join the Israelites of old, a missional renaissance seems to be taking place as churches are now beginning to wake up to the reality that they are losing ground to their culture. (McNeal, *Missional Renaissance* 1). God's promise to Abraham should become a mandate to all missional churches, and their identity as well. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile assert that the Abrahamic Covenant has a three-fold purpose. It is to be a "sign" signifying that the "redemptive reign of God is already fully present;" a "foretaste," meaning that the "redemptive reign [of God] has already begun;" and an "instrument" which was under the "leadership of the Spirit to begin that redemptive reign to bear on every dimension of life" (*The Missional Church* 38). In a missional church setting, God is fully present in every neighborhood, every community, and in every aspect of life. God's redemptive reign has already begun, meaning that this is God's work, not Christians', and followers of God have the privilege to join God in a work that is already in progress. Lastly, the Holy Spirit is the one true evangelist; he alone redeems every facet of life.

Steve Sjogren, states that "the Holy Spirit is the only true evangelists who has ever existed" (55). In referencing The Westminster Confession's role of the Holy Spirit, Sjogren concludes that God's mission on earth to redeem and restore humanity rests primarily on the Holy Spirit. He adds, "Our role is to *enjoy* the flow of God's life through us as we share our joy with others. When we abide in God, we don't just speak or even demonstrate the message of His love; we *embody* that message in a way that makes people stand up and take notice" (55). If God's covenant with Abraham required his

people to be a blessing to the nations, then the Holy Spirit will do the rest. What this covenant did was take the pressure off of God's people to redeem and restore all of humanity. Secondly, this idea of blessedness gave God's people an identity. It was an identity of love and compassion on the nations as a whole. It was an identity of following God's missional heart in a world that desperately needed the "breath of life" breathed back in them.

### **The Identity of the Church: A Kingdom of Priests**

The Abrahamic Covenant was God's way of revealing his glory to and displaying his glory through his people. It gave the nation of Israel an identity. McNeal proclaims, "The church was created on purpose, *for* a purpose—to partner with God in his redemptive mission here on earth" (*Kingdom Come* 90). He states that God gave his people a powerful image to illustrate this missional identity, that of a priest. This priestly imaginary was given to Moses on Mount Sinai after God successfully led his people out of Egypt during the Exodus. During this monumental encounter with God, God spoke not just to Moses, but all his people.

The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.'" (Exod. 19:3-6)

This idea that God's people are now a kingdom of priests was a "significant directive—giving further definition to the Abrahamic covenant—[that] reveals that Israel had the responsibility to act as God's priests *to* and *in* the world" (McNeal, *Kingdom Come* 91-92). If God promised Abraham that a great nation would come from him to be a blessing

to the nations, then this passages in Exodus tells about "that 'great' nation formed and called and redeemed to bring that blessing" (Goheen 37). In other words, to fulfil their identity of being a blessing to the nations, they must now carry out this blessedness in the form of priests.

Wayne Grudem says that God appointed priests to offer up sacrifices as well as prayers and praise to God on behalf of the people. This priestly act “sanctified” the people of God and allowed them access to come into God’s presence (626). John Piper adds that the most noticeable privilege that these priests had was intimate access to God (“God’s Covenant Through Moses,”) Peter acknowledged this privilege when he claimed all believers to be “a royal priesthood” (1 Pet. 2:9). Eugene Merrill goes further and declares, “Their role thenceforth would be to meditate or intercede as priests between the holy God and the wayward nations of the world, with the end in view not only declaring his salvation but also of providing the human channel in and through whom this salvation would be effected” (57). In short, the role of a priest is someone who has intimate access to God and is being used by God to draw people into his presence for the purpose of salvation.

When God later appointed the Aaronic Priesthood, this priestly role became more about ceremonial adherence and strict obedience than drawing the nations into the presence of God. For this reason, priests became seen by the people as a duty solely given to Aaron and his sons (Num. 3:10). Over time, this beautiful picture of being a kingdom of priests congruent with the missional heart of God lost ground to the more formal understanding of priest. When the people perceived God as limiting the priesthood to a single family (Aaron) and tribe (Levites), the idea of everyone being a priest began to

begin to diminish, and the traditional understanding of a priest, one who offered sacrifices as an intermediary to the divine, began to take shape. With Aaron and the tribe of Levite now the priestly line, the concept of being a kingdom of priests was lost once Aaron and his sons began performing more "traditional" priestly duties. Unfortunately, that shift should never have happened, nor did God change his mind once Aaron was consecrated to be a priest.

The change of all God's people being a kingdom of priests, to a priest performing traditional duties became evident in the eyes of the prophets. McNeal claims that the Old Testament prophets constantly reminded Israel of their calling to be a kingdom of priests (*Kingdom Come* 92). Part of this missional drift was the result of the Levitical priests forgetting the covenant God made with the nation of Israel as being a kingdom of priests to the world. In Malachi, God reprimanded the Levitical priests for not being the spiritual leaders they were consecrated to be. Instead of leading the nation of Israel into being a nation of priests, the Levitical priests were getting fat off of their pride that their sacred calling gave them and was leading the people astray. In Malachi 2:4-8, God rebukes the Levitical priests for forsaking their duties to instruct the nation of Israel of their identity. If the nation of Israel's identity is to be a blessing to the nation and a kingdom of priests, then the Levitical priests were to lead them in that direction, as Levi once did when he "turned many from iniquity" (Mal. 2:6) Instead, the nation of Israel stumbled because of their leadership and turned aside from the way of this calling. In practical terms, missionally engaging one's neighbors is hard when the spiritual leadership is apathetic to that call. Part of the reason why Western churches have lost ground to the ever-changing culture is that they lost sight of their identity of being God's missional people, and

focused more on preaching and programs. Instead of going to the sojourners and the needy, many churches expect people to come to them.

In the messianic chapter of Isaiah 61, Isaiah reminds the nation of Israel why this role of being priests is so important. Isaiah states, "But you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in the land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy" (Isa. 61:6-7). Here God is speaking through Isaiah and giving him this vision of how Israel can fulfill its destiny as a nation by serving other nations as priests.

Marthe Himmelfarb explains: "Here the whole people are to enjoy the benefits that Israelite society conferred on [Levitical] priests. Recognizing the special status of the people of Israel, other nations will provide its needs in exchange for its role of mediating between God and humanity" (2). What Himmelfarb is saying, and what Isaiah is referring to, is that nations will notice Israel being a blessing and having the identity of a priest, and as a result, they will look upon them favorably for drawing them into the presence of God for the purpose of salvation. This is exactly what God was saying to Moses and all the Israelites some 700 years prior on mount Sinai. God's missional heart does not change.

The shift from the Old Testament to the New Testament did not remove God's identity for His people to be a kingdom of priests. The Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter 2:5-9 that all believers are a holy priesthood (2:5) and a royal priesthood (2:9) for the sake of proclaiming the "excellencies" of God (2:9). As the Apostle John begins the book

of Revelation, he proclaims to the churches that God has "made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever" (Rev 1:6). Later in Revelation, John describes a worship scene where twenty-four elders worship Jesus. John declares:

"And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom of priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.'" (Rev 5:9-10)

McNeal expounds, "Note that the role reserved for Israel in the Old Testament is now extended to every ransomed person, regardless of background. The entire church inherits the call" (*Kingdom Come* 93).

To McNeal, word structure matters. In Exodus 19, God spoke to Moses, saying, "you shall be to me a kingdom of priests," signifying a status that would be carried out in the future. In Revelation, John states, "you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God." John sees this idea of a kingdom of priests as an already finalized action. However, Peter uses the present tense when explaining to followers of Jesus their role as priests when he states, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood" (93). Throughout Scripture, God's calling to the church has never wavered. The church is called to be a blessing and priest to the nations. Their identity is bound in their being a blessing, and in their being priests whereby they draw others into the presence of God.

When God chose his people, he did not choose them to be a superior race, but rather to have a special uniqueness. An accurate presentation of these two covenants by God (a blessing to the nations and a royal priesthood) shows his people that God's mission is at the center of all he does. The fact that Christians can be a part of this

mission makes them unique, especially in the realm of this sinful culture where being a blessing to others or drawing people into God's presence is weakening. It also shows how ecclesiology is built on people living out this uniqueness rather than being an institution built off of structures and programs (McNeal, 94). If the church ever becomes intentional in engaging their neighbors for Christ, then they must bear the responsibility of embracing God's mission, because God's mission is and has always been the church's mission. The church needs this identity to embrace God's mission fully. A church cannot try to be a blessing to the nations without a desire to draw them into God's presence. Likewise, the church cannot draw their neighbors into the presence of God without being a blessing to them. There needs to be a beautiful marriage between the two. That is why when one leaves the Old Testament and moves into the New Testament, God is still vigilant in making sure his mission is embraced and carried out. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to reiterate the church's identity as he represents the kingdom of God.

### **The Purpose of the Church: The Kingdom of God**

Bauckham adds another dimension to the mission of God's people. In addition to God's people being a blessing and a kingdom of priests to the nations, Bauckham believes that God purposely singled out David to be the king of Israel to show the world what the kingdom of God looks like. He claims:

The trajectory that moves from Abraham to all the families of the earth is the trajectory of blessing. The trajectory that moves from Israel to all the nations is the trajectory of God's revelation of himself to the world [kingdom of priests]. The trajectory that moves from God's enthronement of David in Zion to the ends of the earth is the trajectory of rule, of God's kingdom coming in all creation. (27).

The choosing of David as king was an adoption of a sort. David is seen as being adopted as God's son, who rules on behalf of God as he enacts God's justices to the nations (42).



In other words, as king, David shows the world what the kingdom of God looks like by ruling the way God rules. As in the case with Abraham and the nation of Israel, this promise of God was not limited to a specific individual or group. The Davidic kings, from David all the way through Jesus, enact God's reign to all the nations, with the purpose of being God's "sons" declaring the reign of God to the nations ( Ps. 72:8-11, Zech. 9:9-10, Mic. 5:4-5, and Ps. 2:7-8). However, just like being a blessing and a kingdom of priests, the modeling of this Davidic kingdom "creates a tension, even a contradiction, between the ideal and the actual" (42). Throughout the Old Testament, the kings of Israel were far from perfect, and some were downright evil. The prophets often sternly disapproved of the kings of both Israel and Judah. To remedy this disconnect between the ideal and the actual, God sent his son, the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

God's missional purpose may begin with a single individual or group, but it never ended there. As Bauckham says, "It was never God's intention to bless Abraham purely for his descendant's sake. It was never God's intention to reveal himself to Israel for Israel's sake. It was never God's intention to base his kingdom in [David] so that he might rule the immediate locality" (46). God's purpose was and always has been universal. With God's people endlessly losing sight of this, God sent his Son, Jesus Christ to show his people what being missional people should look like. Jesus, a descendant of Abraham (Matt. 1:1) assumes for himself his nation's role by becoming a priest to the world (Luke 2:31-32; Heb. 2:17; 4:14) by representing the kingdom of God to all nations (Luke 1:32-33). No longer will the nation of Israel see a poor representation of what God desires from his people. No longer will the nation of Israel need prophets to steer them in the right direction. Jesus became the perfect representation of what a blessing, a priest,

and the kingdom of God looks like. His compassion on the poor, the needy, and the sick covers every page of the Gospels, as Jesus laid bare what being a blessing indeed looks like. His ability, as a priest, to draw people into the presence of God was uncanny. Jesus' ministry on earth exposed the world to what the reign of God looks like; so much so that Jesus uses the phrase "Kingdom of God" 121 times in the Gospels (Pathak and Runyon 179).

Since God's purpose is universal, Jesus did not become a blessing, priest, or reveal the kingdom of God for his benefit only. As the true fulfillment of the identity and purpose of God's mission, Jesus passed God's universal mission on to his disciples. The most exceptional example of this is Jesus speaking to his disciples in Matthew 5:13-16.

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

All three aspects of God's missional people are laid out in this passage. Followers of Jesus are to be the salt of the earth. They are to be a blessing by adding flavor to life. Christian's must engage their neighbors for the sake of being a blessing to them. Without being a blessing, Christians have forfeited the missional calling of God, and as Jesus says, they are no longer good for anything. Followers of Jesus are to be the light of the world. 1 John 1:5 states that "God is light."

As priests, believers in Christ are to draw people into God's presence for the purpose of salvation by shining God's light on them? People can escape the curse of darkness and sin only if someone penetrates that darkness by drawing them into the light.

Lastly, God's people are to be a city on a hill. This city represents the kingdom of God, where his people live together under one rule. Though Jesus never explains what he means by the kingdom, "all his listeners would have understood that the kingdom is the restoration of God's rule over the whole world" (Goheen 77). In this passage, one sees the beautiful harmony of God's mission to God's people. First, they are a blessing. This blessing will lead to shining a light of the realities of God, as God's people draw them into God's presence for the purpose of salvation, and lastly, the nations would be drawn into God's kingdom as they enjoy community with one another on the "city on the hill."

Jesus' fulfillment of the Davidic kingship was to "restore an eschatological community that takes up that missional role and identity again" (Goheen 76). The mission of God's people is to declare that in Jesus, the curse of sin has finally been overturned and that God's last and effective word is his blessing on all of creation. This identity and purpose of God's missional people is lived out in the "life, death and resurrection of Jesus, broadcast by those who like Paul cannot but pass it on, so powerful is its effect, over-flowing with blessing from those who, blessed by it, become a blessing to others" (Bauckham 36). Mission is not something Christians can "add to" their lives, but something that should be intrinsically engraved in them. For the Western church, and Living Stones Church in particular, "the task of recontextualizing the word of God is a missional project that has its basis in Scripture itself and has been part of the mission of God's people all through the centuries of their existence" (Goheen *Reading the Bible Missionally* 110). When the church finally understands that God is on a mission, and they can join him in that mission, then and only then will they see their true identity and purpose!

## Missional God

### Theological Foundation of the *Missio Dei*

The fundamental reason the New Testament church communities gathered is rooted in *missio Dei*, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit sends the church into the world (Bosch 390). The sole purpose why the early church met together was to participate in God's mission together; as a result of their understanding of *missio Dei*, the world was radically changed. In the twenty-first century, the Western church as a whole has had a hard time grasping the meaning of *missio Dei*. Only in the last twenty-plus years have Western churches begun to see the importance of what *mission Dei* means, in no small part due to the writings of Newbigin, Bosch, Hirsch, Gelder, Moltman, Guden and many more. Churches are now beginning to see that mission is no longer a ministry of the church, but rather it *is* the church. It is its identify and purpose. In this multidiverse, multi-ethnic culture that is turning further away from God, understanding *missio Dei* could be the catalyst that brings the twenty-first century church back into the fold of the first century church, as they live life on mission together. This section covers historical shaping of the term *mission Dei* and what it means for the missional church movement.

For hundreds of years, the church saw mission as more of a geographical expansion of the Christian faith in parts of the world that were deemed non-Christian (Flett 6). Simply put, mission was something that God's people did as a result of fulfilling the Great Commission, but it was not overtly seen as joining God in his mission. Wright claims that for the longest time, theology was all about God, but missiology was all about God's people. Mission was only something that God's people did (*The Mission of God*,

21). John G. Flett adds that part of the problem was that God's people did not distinguish God's mission to the world as the identity of the church; instead, it was more of an extension to the church. Flett claims, "the problem of the church's relationship to the world is consequent on treating God's own mission into the world as a second step alongside who he is in himself. With God's movement into his economy ancillary to his being, so the church's own corresponding missionary relationship with the world is ancillary to her being" (3). This is very important. Flett is saying is that the church cannot and will not be the church unless it is missional, because God is by nature missional. His missional being should lead the church to be a missional being. In the often-quoted definition of mission by Christopher Wright, he proclaimed "fundamentally, our [churches] mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God's people, at God's invitation and command, in God's own mission within the history of God's world for the redemption of God's creation" (*The Mission of God* 22-23).

If God's people are on mission because God is a God on mission, then every act of God can be seen as mission (Flett 7). Missiologist Ed Stetzer writes, "Missional is an important word because it doesn't describe what we *do* as Christ-followers; it describes who we *are* as Christ-followers...Our mission isn't our mission at all... It's Gods" (10). Even if the church sees itself as a mighty fortress in the midst of a carnal world where the church hides behind the walls and occasionally sends out missionaries, Flett claims that "Missions would continue because, while provisional, they originate in—and are sustained by—God's own acting in calling the world to himself" (7). The Church is not the place of origin for all missional organizations and initiative, rather it is the mission of

God throughout history that has embraced the church to take up the workings of God in the world. In other words, mission is all across this world because God is all across this world and where God is, mission exists. This shift of seeing God on mission will become pivotal behind the backdrop of the Western churches thinking that mission was just another function of the church that could be seen as “apart from the central life of the congregation” (7).

After World War I, Western civilization changed. Christendom was no longer the societal norm. Flett adds, “the West’s own encounter with secularism and pluralism, the fierce reactions to colonialism, the growth of indigenous nationalist movements and related resistance of the non-Christian religions to Christian expansion—all challenged the right of cross-cultural missions to exist” (4-5). With Christendom fading, a shift in theological thinking had to take place. Gelder and Zscheile asserted that “one of the key theological developments in the first half of the twentieth century that began to shift the conversation from a *theology of mission* to *mission theology* was the renewal of interest in trinitarian studies” (26). This idea of *missio Dei*, the Triune God as a God of mission, began to take root.

David Bosch best describes this concept of *missio Dei* as follows:

Mission [is] understood as being derived from the very nature of God. It [is] thus put in the context of the doctrine of the Trinity, not of ecclesiology or soteriology. The classical doctrine of the *missio Dei* as God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and Son sending the Spirit [is] expanded to include yet another 'movement': Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world. (390)

With the Western church traditionally shaping and fitting the gospel of Jesus Christ into their Western cultural context, the Western church has, whether intentionally or not, made the church's institution more of a priority than the movement of God on mission

(Guder 5). Jacques Matthey stated, “if we were to lose the reference to *missio Dei*, we would again put the sole responsibility for mission on human shoulders and risk to fall, missiologically speaking, into salvation by our own achievements.” This whole concept of *missio Dei* started to radically change the church's view of mission, in that it no longer is about going and doing, but rather it is about being. Newbigin eloquently penned:

We are not engaged in an enterprise of our own choosing or devising. We are invited to participate in an activity of God - which is the central meaning of creation itself...All things have been created that they may be summed up in Christ the Son. All history is directed toward that end. All creation has this as its goal. The Spirit of God, who is also the Spirit of the Son, is given as the foretaste of the consummation, as the witness to it, and as the guide of the Church on the road toward it. (78).

*Missio Dei*, therefore, is God's work in the world in which the church can participate.

This was a shift away from the previous theology of the church where mission was just another ministry of the church.

The Trinitarian idea of *missio Dei* can be dated back to Thomas Aquinas. In *Of Mission of Divine Persons* in question 43 of the *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas discussed two Trinitarian missions. One was the “sending of the Son” and the other was the “Sending of the Spirit” (qtd in Hoffmeyer 108). The view of the Trinity being used as missional was not a theme often pursued until Aquinas articulated it, but it took centuries later for this idea of God being a God on mission and his people joining him to take traction. In 1932, Karl Barth, expanded this idea, at the Brandenburg Missionary Conference (Daugherty, 163; Meyers 40). Barth claimed that God was a missional God who wanted his people to create missional churches that would testify to the nations as witnesses of God (Althouse 231; Thompson 71). A couple of years later, Karl Hartenstein took Barth’s idea about a God who desires his church to be witnesses to the

nations and penned the Latin term *missio Dei*, meaning God's own sending (Schuster 65). This *missio Dei* concept ended up being debated and discussed for many years, but a theological shift in ecclesiology began to take a more missional stance.

In 1952 at the Willingen Conference in Germany, *missio Dei* became the overarching topic of discussion. The discussion dwelt on whether it was the Church's mission to reach the world for Christ or if it was the triune nature of God's mission to reach the nations for himself (Hibbert 323; Daughtery 163; Swart et al. 76; Van Gelder 3). In the end, the conference ratified a Trinitarian foundation for missions. They wrote:

The missionary movement of which we are a part has its source in the Triune God Himself. Out of the depths of His love for us, the Father has sent forth His own beloved Son to reconcile all things to Himself, that we and all men might, through the Spirit, be made one in Him with the Father in that perfect love which is the very nature of God. (Swart et al. 76)

Before the ink had dried though, Lesslie Newbigin and Komad Raiser both disagreed with the meaning of *missio Dei*. Newbigin interpreted it to mean "the unique witness of the church as it continued the mission of Christ;" Raiser interpreted it to mean, "God's providential action through his Spirit in the world" with minor significance to the church (qtd in Goheen 100). In the end, the conference chose the views of Newbigin over Raiser, and a new movement began. Newbigin's views that ended up becoming the catalyst for the missional church movement.

At the International Missionary Council in Achimota, Ghana, Newbigin's view crystallized when they quoted: "The mission is not ours, but God's, and we are invited to participate in an activity of God which is the central meaning of creation itself" (Hoffmeyer 108; Newbigin 4). For Newbigin, a former missionary in India who later went back to Great Britain, realized that most missionaries from the West were trying to



communicate the gospel through the lens of their Western culture. In 1983, Newbigin's short thesis, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*, began to address the issue that most Western missions were very European and very church centered (qtd in Guder 3). The issue that Newbigin observed was that Western culture had changed and what was once a very Christian society was now post-Christian and, in some respects, very anti-Christian. In other words, the gospel that these missionaries have been spreading throughout the world was very Western-focused, and in many places not very well received. (Guder 3).

What earlier scholars and what Newbigin set into motion was the belief that the key to understanding God's purpose for the church is the idea that the church does not exist solely for itself, but rather it exists to be a community of Jesus followers who become witnesses of God in their own culture and context, by joining God in his already existing mission to the world. In essence, this idea is what became known as the missional church movement (Goheen 40; Althouse 231). The purpose of the missional church movement then is to engage their culture, to become the very likeness of Jesus within the neighborhoods and culture that they live in, rather than expecting the culture and the neighbors to come to the institutional church. Darrell Guder states:

Unlike the previous notion of the church as an entity located in a facility or an institutional organization and its activities, the church is being reconceived as a community, a gathered people, brought together by a common calling and vocation to be a *sent people*. This understanding arose out of global reflections on the church's nature mainly in the light of the worldwide missionary movements of the previous several centuries and the fruit of that work in the existence of new churches throughout the world. (80)

As a result of the missional church movement, the theology of the church began to shift from being ecclesiocentric to the more missional view of theocentric. This Trinitarian

theocentric missional theology, according to Newbigin, enabled a community of Christ-followers to “trust in the reality and power of the Holy Spirit” and, at the same time, trust “God’s fatherly rule in the events of secular history,...in the revolutionary changes which are everywhere taking place in the life of the world” (Newbigin 77). In other words, cultures will change repeatedly, but the mission of God does not. Therefore, keep to what is true about God’s nature, that God is a missional God calling his people to mission. The Holy Spirit will move regardless of cultural preference because it is God’s will for his followers to partake in his mission to impact, and become a blessing to, the whole world by ushering in the kingdom of God here on earth.

A question could arise from the missional church movement: If the shift becomes more theocentric rather than ecclesiocentric, what then becomes of the church? Does the church slowly cease to exist as individual Christ followers move away from their meeting places and solely become missionaries within their communities? Guder believes that the modern missional trinitarian theology of ecclesiology has brought to light the importance of the church gathering together while still maintaining a missional focus (82). This discovery is the concept of *perichoresis* (Woodward 90; Boff 232). *Perichoresis* is an Eastern Orthodox notion that does not translate well into the English language. It could be understood as interpenetration, which communicates the idea that each divine Person of the Trinity “permeates and is permeated by the others without confusion” (Woodward 90). Alternatively, as Leonardo Boff proclaims, “Each Person is *for* the others, *with* the others and *in* the others. The everlasting love that pervades them and forms them unites them in a current of life so infinite and complex as to constitute the unity between them” (138). Jesus speaks of this “permeation” when he states in John 10:38, “The Father is in

me, and I in the Father." It is the same principle in John 15:4, where Jesus said, "Abide in me, and I in you" as he was instructing the church. It is this mutual respect that the Persons of the Trinity have for each other, that they gladly share in each other's work. It sees "the Son and the Spirit join[ing] the Father in creation; the Father and Spirit join[ing] the Son in redemption, and the Father and Son join[ing] the Spirit in sanctification" (Woodward 90). It is also the same respect that Jesus has for the church to be sent as a blessing to the world as Jesus was sent into the world as a blessing, both empowered by the Holy Spirit to usher in the kingdom of God together.

Colin E. Gunton elaborates a little more by claiming that in *perichoresis*, "the nature of God is communion" and that the church should embrace being called "a temporal echo of the eternal community that God is" (72, 79). Strictly speaking, if the nature of the Triune God is missionally communal, then the church should manifest itself the same way, by being a community that embraces one another and cares and delights in one another, while at the same time joining in God's missional work. It is Jesus saying to the church, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). Therefore, if one takes the Trinitarian view of *missio Dei* and the theology of *perichoresis* concerning ecclesiology, one would have a missional church. A missional church is a church where mutual respect, reciprocal love, sharing, and communal care all take place under the umbrella of conjointly joining God in His mission. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit mutually have a role to play in redeeming and restoring the world to himself, and all Three work together in harmony to make it happen. In like manner, the church should regularly come together in harmony for the sake of God's mission.

The theological view of *missio Dei* and the missional church movement is in direct contrast to the perspective of many of the members of Living Stones Church who grew up in a program-driven church. If this theological view of *missio Dei* is what will catapult Christ followers in seeing their true identity and purpose, then the goal is to get these members to abandon the long-held ecclesiocentric ideology that programs and church buildings are what constitute a good church. The goal is for Living Stones church to become a blessing to their neighbors, a kingdom of priests, to see the kingdom of God revealed. In the following section, the researcher looks into several missional practices that Living Stones Church could embrace to transition out of a program-driven style of church and become a *missio ecclesia*.

## **Missional Practice**

### **Research Themes for the Missional Church**

As Western churches face an uphill battle in their culture to remain relevant, certain missional practices must be developed. This section addresses particular practices that can help the missional church movement cultivate its identity of being a blessing and a kingdom of priests to the nations as they partner with God in ushering in the kingdom of God. These practices include a contextual approach to culture, understanding the attractional versus the incarnational models of church, as well as practicing the art of neighboring. It concludes with the practice of creating a church of missional disciple-makers.

### **Contextual Approach to Culture**

If one were to sit in a coffee shop in any major city suburb, it would not take long to see many diverse cultures represented. With the American landscape being

multicultural, ethnically diverse, and postmodern, the church finds it difficult to effectively reach and minister to such a diverse group of people. Therefore, if the missional church is to join God in his mission, then a contextual approach to this ever-expanding multidiverse culture is imperative.

McNeal, in his book *Missional Renaissance*, explains that the problem with the American church today can stem back to the Constantinian world order. Constantine's proclamation of his conversion to Christianity and declaration of Christianity as the religion of Rome had a far more reaching impact than one would have expected. Before Constantine, Christianity was once an illegal religion made up of men and women proclaiming the love of Jesus wherever they went. "Church" was wherever they could meet and discuss Scripture and have fellowship with one another as they encouraged one another to continue in the mission of God. McNeal states, "After Constantine, Christianity became a clergy dominated religion centered on designated places of worship" (13). Now, instead of Christianity being an organism where every member is a part of the body, with Christ as the head, the church became an organization where the bishop, priest, pastor, pope, etc...is now seen as the head and a hierarchy system of worship and mission took root.

The Edict of Milan (AD 313) declared Christianity to be the state religion, "thereby delegitimizing all others" (Hirsch 58). Alan Hirsch adds that Constantine "sought to bond the church and state in a kind of sacred embrace, and so he brought all the Christian theologians together and demanded that they come up with a common theology that would unite the Christians in the empire and so secure the political link between church and state" (58). As a result, some historic changes took place. Not only

was everyone supposed to be Christian, but Christian morality was then imposed on everyone. A hierarchical ecclesiastical system ruled the day. The burden of tithes on the people increased the wealth of the church where construction of massive church buildings began the formation of large congregations, as opposed to the small clusters of God's people meeting in homes. The Church/State now had a political and military force that could be used to enforce the Christian faith. Freedom of religion was dead, and the division between "Christendom" and "heathendom" brought war to the world, all in the name of Jesus Christ (Hirsch 59-60). Michael Frost claims, "The net effect over the entire Christendom epoch was that Christianity moved from being a dynamic, revolutionary, social, and spiritual movement to being a static religious institution with its attendant structures, priesthood, and sacraments" (Frost, *Exiles* 5). Frost adds that Christendom has been in decline for the last two hundred and fifty years, and most historians now call this period "post-Christendom" (5).

For Living Stones Church to ever breach the "Christendom" approach to church and take on a more missional stance, a contextual approach to this ever-changing culture is essential. David T. Olson, claims that only 17.4 percent of Americans attend church regularly (28-29). The Barna Group claims that the average attendance in the Protestant church in America is down to less than 90 people and that 48 percent of all Americans have no confidence in the church. In 1985, Americans had on average three people with whom they can share anything with. By 2004, there were fewer than two, and one out of four proclaimed they had no one to confide in (Ford and Brisco 7). In addition to this, Marguerite Ward claims, "Recent data indicated that the typical American worker is no longer adhering to an eight-hour workday. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics,

the average American works 44 hours per week” (Ward, *A Brief History*). Considering that most homes are dual income, the total hours worked amount to around 90 hours a week. According to Ward, Americans now work more than any other nation in the world. Not only are people not interested in church, but they are also too busy to even go. Given what Mark Scandrette says that many "of us work in one place, live in another and seek friendships and spiritual support elsewhere," one can quickly see how difficult it is for the church to reach this culture when they are continually living in the "Christendom" past (Loc 2123).

From the statistics above, one would think that the culture in America is secular at heart. However, the opposite is true. McNeal, in his book *A Work of Heart*, claims that less than 10 percent of the United States would identify as atheist. McNeal adds:

People are increasingly engaged in a search for meaning, purpose, love, self-worth, compassion, dignity, transcendence, a sense of unity with others and with the universe, along with a search for a means to express these things. Every sector of society now talks openly about spirituality. (80)

In other words, the preconceived notion that secularism is on the rise is not valid. Science, technology, and material things are not bringing the American culture the euphoria that they thought or want, they are craving something more. For the church to reach out to the culture, a different kind of conversation about the gospel, the church, and missions need to take place in the American context (Gelder and Zscheile Loc1305).

When taking a contextual approach to culture, one must understand the changing composition of the makeup of the American people. In the book, *Participating in God’s Mission*, Gelder and Zscheile explain some shifts that have occurred that changed the makeup of American culture. First, the population of the United States grew exponentially in the last fifty years. In 1960, the American population was 180 million; in

2015, it rose to 320 million, almost an 80 percent increase (loc. 553). They claim the new immigration laws that began around 1965 opened up the gates for men and women from Latin America, Africa, and Asia to migrate to the United States, and that by 2060 over 78 million will be foreign-born Americans. They add, "This presents a significant challenge and opportunity for many of the historic faith traditions in the United States, who built their membership primarily around white European immigrants from previous decades" (loc. 560).

The second shift is the ever-growing racial diversity of the United States. According to Gelder and Zscheile, the Hispanic/Latino population, which accounted for around 4 percent in 1960, became 17 percent in 2014 and is projected to reach 29 percent of the population by 2060 (loc. 567). Not only is the Hispanic/Latino population growing, but so is every minority group in America. Gelder and Zscheile state that "the growing population and the changes in its composition and lifestyle patterns have far-reaching implications for the churches in America. This is especially true of the predominantly white churches that have struggled to reflect the changing face of race and ethnicity in America" (loc. 576). They conclude that even though most immigrants coming to America have Christian roots, over 25 percent coming to the United States affiliate with a religion other than Christianity, whereby Muslims are the majority. These studies show that America is not only becoming increasingly ethnically diverse, but it is also becoming more religiously diverse (Loc. 575).

In their earlier book, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Gelder, and Zscheile address the issue of why churches are losing ground to the culture. They claim, "We have entered a vastly complicated era of hybridity—the mixing and fusing of cultures—



especially within the context of globalization" (127). Most churches do not know how to adapt to such changes that take place at such a rapid pace. American culture is filled with microcultures and macrocultures, an "interpenetration" of peoples always on the move (127). Robert J. Schreiter declares, "the compression of time, the world of cyberspace, and the movement of peoples mean that people are now participating in different realities at the same time—there are multiple belongings" (26). It is from this rise of multicultural and ethnic and diverse growth, with the addition of lack of trust in the church and increasing busy schedules, that the longstanding tradition of having a church building with programs attracting people to attend is no longer useful in America. The build-it-and-they-will-come model is no longer sufficient.

Ryan K. Bolger poses some great questions in his book *The Gospel after Christendom*. He believes every church should wrestle with these questions as they come up with ways to reach this culture. He asks:

What is the good news of Jesus in a context of the twenty-first century, fragmented by war, terrorists, violence, ecological catastrophe, and the dehumanising effects of the global market? What is the church called to be when it has colluded with the rich and absorbed the values of competition, oppression, economic injustice, and the unsustainable rape of the world's natural resources? What does it mean for followers of Jesus Christ to live "in" but not "of" the world? And by the same token, how can the church be a life-sustaining and life-giving community in the context of a culture where many have reawakened to the need for spirituality, but where the church has rightly been seen as one of the contributors to all that is wrong? (100).

Bolger believes churches have played a large part of the cultural shift away from the church. McNeal adds, "the church in America abandoned the culture long before the culture abandoned the church" (*Kingdom Come* 15). A hundred years ago, the church was heavily invested in society. They built schools, hospitals, food kitchens, orphanages, and tended to the poor and sick. Meeting the basic needs of the people were a staple of the

church, but now the church “prides itself with holding a prophetic role of being countercultural” (Bolger 101). The church is finding a harder time being relevant in this culture.

Hirsch explains missiologist Ralph Winter’s idea of how the church can contextually approach this American culture with what he calls "Cultural Distance" (qtd. in Hirsch 56). The cultural distance model helped churches assess how far a people group is from “*meaningful* engagements with the gospel” (Hirsch 56). The model looks something like this:

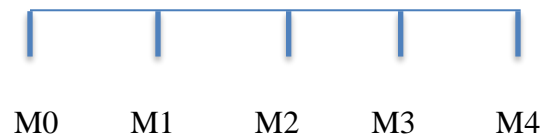


Figure 2.1 Cultural Distance

Hirsch explains: “Each numeral with the prefix *M* indicates *one significant cultural barrier to the meaningful communication of the gospel*” (Hirsch 56). Some of these cultural barriers represent meeting someone that spoke a different language or had a different religion or worldview than them. From a church’s viewpoint, Hirsch breaks down the graph as follows:

- M0 – M1:** Those with some concepts of Christianity who speak the same language, have similar interests, are probably of the same nationality, and are from a class grouping similar to yours or your church.
- M1 – M2:** A person who has little real awareness of, or interest in, Christianity but is suspicious of the church...these people might be politically correct, socially aware, and open to spirituality.
- M2 – M3:** People in this group have absolutely no idea about Christianity. They might be part of an ethnic group with different religious impulses or some fringy subculture.
- M3 – M4:** This group might be inhabited by ethnic and religious groups like

Muslims or Jews. The fact that they are in the West might ameliorate some of the distance, but just about everything else gets in the way of a meaningful dialogue. (57).

What Ralph Winter suggests and what Hirsch implies is this: for the church to reach out to those who have the same cultural preference (M0-M1) is one thing; for the church to reach someone with cultural barriers (M1-M4) is another. Hirsch will conclude by saying, "The problem is that the average church in the Christendom mode tends to be reasonably effective only within its cultural reference (M0-M1). The Christendom church was built for that—it's called *outreach and in-drag*" (62).

The real problem is that the church is no longer in "Christendom mode." The church is now in the midst of a very racially, religiously, and ethnically diverse culture. Living Stones Church happens to be in the most diverse county in the United States where, according to the 2010 federal census, 19 percent is Asian, 24 percent Latino, 21 percent African-American, and 36 percent Anglo (Carol Christian, "*Fort Bend County is Nation's Most Ethnically Diverse*"). This means that Living Stones Church will need to learn to have meaningful encounters with their neighbors who are more in the M1-M4 category. What the "Cultural Distance" shows for Living Stones Church is that to have these meaningful encounters, it needs to be missional. The cultural context shows that a new approach of *being* the church is needed to cut down these barriers. The program-driven / attractional models of the church do a good job reaching the M0-M1 crowd, but Living Stones Church does not have that luxury. In order for Living Stones Church to thrive, they will need to become missionally incarnational.

### **Attractional versus Incarnational**

In the post-Christendom era in the West, where church attendance is in decline, churches all across the United States of America are trying to reinvent how “to do” church (Frost and Hirsch 53). In the book *The Shaping of Things to Come*, both Frost and Hirsch claims that around 95 percent of all churches in the West are trying to reinvent themselves by becoming attractional (62). Attractional means a “church [that] expects people to be willing to come to some centrally located religious institution at the heart of the culture to hear, respond, and be nurtured in the gospel” (60). It is a come and hear approach, whereby the church expects people outside of the church to come to them and hear the gospel. These churches become attractional in their community by offering programs, childcare, ministries, and a whole assortment of activities for the community to come to them to enjoy. There is, however, several glaring problems to this approach to church that scholars and missiologists are beginning to notice.

The first issue with an attractional approach to church is that it has a limited shelf life. Gelder and Zscheile claim that an attractional approach seeks to “target and reach a niche market of the population amidst the breakdown of the geographic-neighborhood church” (*Participating in God’s Mission* Loc 604). They declare that, because this approach is largely tied to a specific generation, it will last about fifteen to twenty years. Put differently, the attractional church model is not self-sustaining. The second concern with the attractional church is that it coincides with this culture’s consumer mentality. Attractional churches desire for their people to enjoy the product that they produce. Stetzer claims that this contemporary approach is nothing more than the church becoming a “vendor of religious goods and services” (21). As such, most attractional churches

position themselves to where the audience are more spectators than participants to God's redemptive work. It has created an environment of passive consumers rather than faithful contributors. (Scandrette Loc 483). This approach is contrary to the way Jesus lived. Jesus did not expect people to come to him, he went to them. He constantly placed himself in their social spaces and market places and visited people in their homes. (Hirsch and Hirsch 237). The attractional church forgot that they need to position themselves within the culture and community they are in for the sake of seeing and responding to the needs around them (239). Difficulties arise when the entire approach to church is to have people come to them.

The third problem with the attractional church, according to McNeal, is that it can appear to be as secular as the culture in which the church resides. In his book *A Work of the Heart*, McNeal states, "Many Christian leaders are uncomfortable with genuine spiritual realities that involve the powerful and immediate presence of God. The truth is, many churches are more secular than the culture" (81). McNeal adds that most attractional church leaders, lead from their own talent and creativity, leaving out the Holy Spirit to do his work. Church leaders are seen as CEO's where the number of consumers they cater to is what determines success. As the church grows off of the talents of the paid leaders, the church may look successful with large groups of people attending, but it is not. McNeal adds, "What church culture people see as evidence of success matters little to pre-Christians...Pre-Christians are looking for God, not for a successful church" (81). Those who are outside the church are not concerned with elaborate programs, savvy leaders, or buildings to meet in. Pre-Christians are more concerned with how God can address the needs and issues in their lives. Stetzer declares that by being attractional

the church has lost the transformational edge it once had when it was more concerned about those outside the church than those that are on the inside (17).

Lastly, the attractional church model is geared towards “doing” rather than “being.” Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson surveyed over a thousand churches to gauge their spiritual vitality. One of the problems they found with attractional churches is that they make it harder for the people to become more and more like Christ, simply because they complicate things with so many activities. (164). They declare that guilt-ing people into church attendance, frequently attending small groups and Bible studies, serving the church regularly, and inviting friends and neighbors to come to their church has created an environment that the church is all about doing and not being. They state, “When the church incessantly promotes all the things people should *do*, it’s very easy for them to lose sight of the real goal—which is who they should *become*” (165). McNeal will take this a step further by claiming that the average American is so busy that they have little time for themselves, and that these program-driven churches do nothing to alleviate this need to slow down. McNeal adds, “The real estate-bound and program-based church models that characterize most expressions of contemporary churchianity do not address these needs. The programming in many churches can actually be counterproductive in that it contributes to these problems” (85).

If the church in the West wants to reclaim its biblical roots, then it needs to abandon the attractional model and become missionally incarnational in its ecclesiology. In the book *The Shaping of Things to Come*, Frost and Hirsch declare that missionally incarnational churches are not about creating sacred spaces where people have to come to hear the gospel, but rather, incarnational churches are those who “seep into the cracks and

crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don't yet know him" (25). Frost and Hirsch lay out some foundational ways in which the missional incarnational model of church can be applied to any context or culture.

First, they claim that incarnational churches provide missional means in which the gospel of Jesus can "become a genuine part of a people group without damaging the innate cultural framework that provides that people group with a sense of meaning and history" (Frost and Hirsch 56). In other words, understanding the multi-cultural subgroups of people that the church finds itself in is crucial. A missionally incarnational church goes out into their neighborhoods and communities and finds ways to see, hear, understand, and be a part of those communities.

Secondly, missional incarnational churches identify with those subgroups of people "in all ways possible without compromising the truth of the gospel itself" (Frost and Hirsch 57). This means that there is now a personal "buy-in" by becoming involved in the culture around them. The church, in reaching these subgroups of people will need to be a part of said subgroups for the sake of overcoming the significant cultural barriers that these people have with the church. Only then can the gospel be communicated clearly. Frost and Hirsch state, "To identify incarnationally with a people will mean that we must try to enter into something of the cultural life of a 'people'; to seek to understand their perspectives, their grievances and causes, in other words their real existence, in such a way as to genuinely reflect the act of identification that God made with us in Jesus" (57). In contrast to the attractional church where they become an isolated body of believers in the midst of their culture, missionally incarnational churches

are in the very center of the culture, learning and identifying with the culture for the sake of removing those cultural barriers so that Christ is clearly seen and embraced.

Third, missionally incarnational means a “*real and abiding* incarnational presence among a group of people” (Frost and Hirsch 58). If attractional churches are “come and see,” then missionally incarnational churches are “go and tell” (Stetzer, 17). If God’s church wants to reach the culture and the various subgroups within that culture, then it needs to live where they live and interact with people where they are. To understand the organic vivacity of a given community, or their cultural rhythms and patterns it becomes difficult if one is not deeply immersed in it. Missional incarnational churches find creative ways in which to immersed in their culture. They practice being the “missional disciple of presence and identification” for the sake of reaching people (Frost and Hirsch 59). Attractional churches are in essence “extractional,” in that they extract people from their culture or subgroups and make them follow the norms, practices, and rhythms of the church. According to Frost and Hirsch, missionally incarnational churches are more centrifugal rather than centripetal; the missional church moves towards the center of the culture rather than moving away from it, as most attractional churches do (59).

Lastly, when a church becomes missionally incarnational, people who come to know Jesus Christ will do so within their own culture. For Frost and Hirsch, this is crucial because in terms of the public perception of Christians from those outside the church, a Christian is synonymous with “becoming a somewhat happy but bland, usually white, almost always middle-class, middle-of-the-road kind of person” (59). The incarnational church then moves into the neighborhoods where multiform people and subcultures can encounter Jesus within their own communities. By doing so, it allows these people to



encounter Jesus in a way that is seamlessly connected with their life and experiences (60).

An attractional approach to church is no longer sustainable in the post-Christendom era. In order for the complex, postmodern, multicultural Western world to come and know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the church needs to embrace a missionally incarnational approach to ministry. Attractional churches can appear to be successful, and many are doing great things, but their approach is always the same: come to where the church is to hear about Jesus. For the most part, this approach will only reach the M0-M1 cultural groups. If the church ever wants to be fully present in this culture and reach all groups of people (M1-M4), then the church will need to become missionally incarnational. They will need to find ways to “seep into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t yet know him” (Frost and Hirsch 25). After all, missionally incarnational is the mode by which God himself engaged the world, and it should be no less how the church today should reach out to the world.

### **Missionally Engaging Neighbors**

Missionally incarnational is the established purpose of God when he declared to Abraham that he would be a blessing to the nations. Become a blessing to a culture, city, or context, each Christ follower can breach the M1-M4 culture barriers. Being missionally incarnational could be as simple as just saying hello to a neighbor.

### **The Roseto Effect**

In the early 1960s, in the small town of Roseto, Pennsylvania, researchers found a net-zero cardiac mortality rate in men aged fifty-five to sixty-four, and half the national

average for those over sixty-five (Ford and Brisco 65). With rarely any heart disease in this Italian-immigrant town, researchers thought it must have been their diet or exercise. However, the inhabitants of Roseto ate hearty and fried Italian food, drank much wine and smoked almost on a daily basis. In addition, most of the men worked in the local slate quarries, out in the elements with toxic conditions. When the researchers went door-to-door they noticed several things. One, this small little town had no crime. Second, everyone in Roseto participated in a social life together, regardless of income or education. Third, the elderly were not placed in institutions when they got older, but were taken care of by everyone. No one was left alone. After spending a considerable amount of time, the researchers concluded by saying the “people in the community had healthy hearts because the community had a heart for one another” (66).

In 1992, the *American Journal of Public Health* conducted another survey of the men and women of Roseto and found that they suffered the same heart mortality rate as every other major town (Positano, “*Mystery of the Roseto People*”). From the 1960’s to the 1990’s, this little town carelessly disassembled the social ties between family and community. The lessons one can learn from Roseto are notable. While its residents were no different from other inhabitants of local cities or towns, their quality of life was drastically improved as a result of their connectedness. When the connectedness was broken, so too was their quality of life.

One of the overarching and catastrophic failures of the post-Christendom church is that they lost touch with this connectedness. To be fair, the American culture played a major role in this as well. According to Lance Ford and Brad Brisco, after World War II many servicemen came home to a very booming economy where they needed adequate

housing for their new families. As a result, modern suburbs were born (42). Within the last five decades, these suburbs have taken the shape of a “circular, asymmetrical system made of curving subdivisions, looping streets, and cul-de-sacs” (Gallagher 40). Combined with the zoning ordinances, suburbs were made to minimize traffic flow for safer living and eradicate marketplace activities where people can go to interact (40). Conversely, if someone wanted to go to the bank or the grocery store, they had to leave their neighborhoods and drive there. Further, in the last five decades, the move of more and more families away from where they do business to live in a house in the suburbs led to a sixty percent increase in travel (Ford and Brisco 44). Research has found that every ten minutes of commuting results in ten percent fewer social connections (Gallagher 68). So, not only are people who live in suburbs forced to drive more, but the sacrifice made from zoning laws made commercial establishments obsolete in the places where they live, which resulted in social interactions being extinct as well (Ford and Brisco xix). With the introduction of the suburbs, the vast majority of Americans are now devoid of relational vitality simply because of the loss of “informal public places” (4). People now have less opportunities for human interaction, and less connectedness.

Less human interactions lead to isolation and loneliness. Studies show that Americans are more “connected” than ever through social media and the internet; however, nearly a quarter of Americans will say they have no one to talk to about core issues or concerns (Ford and Brisco 6). According to one study, forty percent of adults between forty-five and forty-nine said they were very lonely. That same study claims that almost half of those who lived in their current homes for less than a year reported to feeling lonely (Anderson, “*Loneliness Among Older Adults*”). Michael Frost asserts that

this isolation and loneliness result from a detachment of place, where most Americans are seen as tourists who are always moving and never belonging (Loc 153). The Western culture has become more and more rootless as people have become disengaged from relational interactions in the pursuit of moving up and onwards.

If ever a time existed to reach a very lonely and isolated culture, now would be it. The church is living in a culture that is not only distancing itself from the church, but also distancing themselves from themselves. To bridge the distancing gap of culture and church, the church will need to take the Great Commandment seriously.

### Who is My Neighbor

When a young lawyer stood up and asked Jesus what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus asked him what the Law says and he replied in Luke 10:27 by saying, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” Jesus then answered him and said, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live” (10:28). In Jesus’ words, everything that God has said and everything God ever commanded hangs on these two principles: love God and love your neighbor. The lawyer, though he was trying to justify himself, asked a profound follow-up question: “And who is my neighbor?” (10:29). Darrell L. Bock brings a little clarity to this question.

Jesus answers with an exhortation to “do” as the Samaritan has done. The real issue is not whom we should serve, but that we serve. The concern moves from how we see others to how we are to act. The shift internalizes the demands and radicalizes them. We are not to ask who our neighbor is; we are to be a neighbor (1018).

The lawyer asked the wrong question. “Who is my neighbor” is too open and broad of a question. For Jesus, what matters is not “who is my neighbor,” but rather, “are you a neighbor?”.

Jay Pathak and Dave Runyon in their book, *The Art of Neighboring*, would declare that if ever the second part of the Great Commandment (love your neighbor) were to be accomplished, then one would have to take it, not just seriously, but also literally (36). For Pathak and Runyon, gone are the days where followers of Jesus can say, “everyone is my neighbor.” For them, if the church sees “neighbor” as everyone, then the expectation to love everyone becomes too daunting of a task. They proclaim, “If we don’t take Jesus’ command literally, then we turn the Great Commandment into nothing more than a metaphor. We have a metaphoric love for our metaphoric neighbors, and our communities are changed—but only metaphorically, of course” (36). In other words, seeing everyone as a neighbor is not sensible, but seeing their literal neighbors as “love your neighbor” makes it practical (Chan 281).

Eugene H. Peterson paraphrases John 1:14 as “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” Meaning, Jesus became incarnational by taking it upon himself to enter this world determined to reconcile humanity back to himself. It was God’s decisive missional participation in creation. Jesus, however, did not move into every neighborhood in the world, just a particular one. Simon Carey Holt adds:

The story of the incarnation is the story of God en-fleshed in a particular place at a particular time and within a very specific community. So too for us, the call of God is to be in a particular place and there to embody the presence and grace of God. It’s a call to locality (Loc 1399).

Holt profoundly states that for the Church to become incarnationally missional, then it must see itself as missionaries to the neighborhoods in which they live. The Apostle John writes, “And he [God] made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). In other words, God knows when and where people will live. When followers of Jesus begin to see that God has specifically called and placed them in their neighborhoods (“the boundaries of their dwelling place”), then will they begin to live out the Great Commandment of loving their neighbor as themselves. They will begin to feel this call to locality.

In the nomadic nature that Western culture has produced, Christians need to see the importance of being called to a place. In this call to locality, believers in Christ can make the greatest good, especially in their neighborhoods where their neighbors may feel isolated and lonely. Simone Weil profoundly states, “To be rooted is perhaps the most important and least recognized need of the human soul” (qtd. in Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen 135). When people have no relationship to place, they will have no responsibility to place. Steven Garber adds that people never flourish if they feel like no one knows them. Likewise, he adds that humans never flourish if they feel like they do not belong to a place and no place cares for them (115). Churches need to instill in their members a sense of responsibility to the place in which they live, as they see the importance of the Great Commandment. Only then will they see their calling to love their neighbors.

### Know Your Neighbor

Scott Nelson, has seen a longing in many Christians for their faith to be lived-out in a deeper way. He shares the laments of Christians across this world when he states, “It

is a feeling that something about the way I am participating in church and faith seems to be missing; it seems to be too easy or too shallow. Conversations with Christians across the country reveal a longing to be challenged, to do something significant with their faith” (10). A very program-driven, consumeristic church culture reveals why many Christians feel like their faith is not being challenged. Many churches have bought into the consumerism mentality of getting as much as they can with the least amount of effort. Consumerism shifts the church off its true call of loving God and loving neighbor, to more of an “it’s all about me” mentality. Hugh Halter and Matt Smay add, “It pushes responsibility and expectations onto others instead of self and exchanges true spiritual growth for ankle-deep personal devotions and self-help measures” (74). Churches with a consumeristic bent tend to be more inward focus and not outward. They tend to cater to those who are already in their church, and as a result miss out on God’s greatest commandment to love their neighbors.

One of the main reasons why church attendance is declining in America is because the members of the church have forgotten what it was like to leave their comfortable pews and mingle with their neighbors. Without doing so, one will never know how many pre-Christians are in these neighborhoods (Lively 89). In order for the church to know their neighbors, they will need to exegete their neighborhoods. John Fuder says, “When we exegete a community, we draw meaning from it. We discover the underlying history, context, and culture of that place and its people” (13). Fuder calls this community analysis. Only when one makes sense of their neighborhoods can they begin to meet the needs of their neighbors and give way for an opportunity to proclaim and demonstrate the gospel (14-15).

Around 125 years ago, both Christians and Muslims found their way to Indonesia. When the Christians arrived, they did many great things and provided many services to the men and women of Indonesia. The only problem is that when they arrived, they built great walls around their compounds to do their ministry. The Muslims, however, moved into the neighborhoods and became a part of the framework of the Indonesian communities. Today, Indonesia is 86 percent Muslim (Rusaw and Mavis 83). Many churches in the West are still in their walled compounds wondering why their neighborhoods are not participating with them. For churches to join God in his mission, they must leave the comforts of their buildings and get to know their neighbors.

David E Fitch and Geoff Holsclaw claim that neighbors are too busy and too distracted to even notice if a church is putting on a well-produced program at the church. They claim that most of them are living too fast and are too cynical to even bother coming to find out what it is. They say, “Only an encounter with something real, humble, and embodied, where they encounter a set of eyes, a conversation, and an authentic life, will cause them to take notice” (Loc 830). The culture has changed, and with it so too must the church. People are craving authentic relationships, and program-driven churches are no longer suited to these individual-type needs. Training and equipping members to go into their neighborhoods will not only allow the church to see what the community wants and needs, but it will produce many authentic relationships on the way.

Rick Rusaw, one of the pastors at LifeBridge Community Church in Colorado, asks a profound question: “If our church disappeared, would anyone care?” (Rusaw and Mavis 3). Often pastors and members alike hope their church is the greatest church *in* their community. However, the question is if they are the best church *for* their



community. (4). For missionally incarnational churches to be the best church for their community, they need to know what their community needs and not what they think they need. A grassroots effort, from all members and staff alike, is needed to make a holy habit of getting into their neighborhoods and intentionally getting to know their neighbors. The beautiful thing about loving neighbors is that it is 100 percent all-inclusive. Not every Christian is called to be a pastor, or a Bible study teacher, or an elder or leader, but everyone is a neighbor. Every church has neighbors that fit every demographic: young, old, rich, poor, single, married, home-owners and apartment dwellers. All walks of life are literally right around the corner (64). Missional churches must see the need to begin equipping their members in the art of neighboring.

Neighboring:

Learning to be a good neighbor is not only a biblical mandate, but one which, if done correctly, can radically change a community. Pathak and Runyon provide a neighboring map they call the “block map” (Pathak and Runyon 183). This map (below) is designed to get members of the church to go out and meet their neighbors. The goal of this map is to force members out of their pews and into their own neighborhoods. They are to write three things on this map: First, the names of their immediate neighbors; Second, some relevant information about each person; Finally, some in-depth information about them that they would know after they have connected with them on a deeper, personal level (37). The idea is that when one takes the Great Commandment literally, it brings strangers and makes them acquaintances, with the goal of moving them toward genuine relationships (21). It is a radical shift from getting people to come to church, to the church going to the people.



Figure 2.1 Block Map

Rick Rusaw and Brian Mavis explain how Max Lucado’s church, Oak Hills Church, has what they call a “My5” which is similar to the block map. Oak Hills Church desires all their members to actively pursue five of their closest neighbors. To help them be better at neighboring, they came up with an acronym, “BLESS,” as a means of reaching their neighbors:

- **B**egin with prayer
- **L**earn their names
- **E**ngage in conversations
- **S**eek to be intentional
- **S**hare your stories (Rusaw and Mavis 59-60).

LifeBridge Community Church, another church working on the art of neighboring, created a *be* statement to challenge their members to be better neighbors and an *action* step are as follows:

- **STAY:** Let's be a people who love our neighbors by getting to know them
- **PRAY:** Let's be a people who love our neighbors by praying for them
- **PLAY:** Let's be a people who love our neighbors by offering hospitality
- **SAY:** Let's be a people who love our neighbors by sharing Christ with them  
(Rusaw and Mavis 91-114)

Michael Frost, in his book, *Surprise the World*, understands that to be a good neighbor, one must cultivate missional rhythms and habits. He uses the acronym BELLS to bring home his point:

- **BLESS:** I will bless three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.
- **EAT:** I will eat with three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.
- **LISTEN:** I will spend at least one period of the week listening to the Spirit's voice.
- **LEARN:** I will spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.
- **SENT:** I will journal throughout the week about all the ways I alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ. (Frost *Surprise the World* 22)

All of these missional practices and rhythms of neighboring offer varying nuances, but they all agree on four things. First, they would agree that the art of neighboring begins with doing. One can never be a good neighbor, or even know their neighbors, if they do not make a conscious effort to put themselves out in their neighborhood. Jesus' followers should learn their neighbors' "names, hopes, hurts and histories," but it will never happen if they do not put themselves out there (Rusaw and

Mavis xxi). Secondly, hospitality is called for. Jesus says that every time a Christians eat or drink with or welcomes in a stranger, they are doing it as if with him (Matt. 25:31-40). God honors the efforts made to show hospitality to neighbors. Henry G. Brinton adds, “We can celebrate the fact that every time people sit down to eat and drink together, there is the possibility that community will grow, people will be reconciled to one another, and we will gain new perceptions of God’s inclusive love. That is good news for a broken, fractured, and polarized world” (124).

Third, Christians should pray for those in their neighborhood. The Apostle Paul prayed for all believers to have the eyes of their hearts enlightened (Eph. 1:18). When a follower of Christ begins to pray for their immediate neighbors, their eyes begin to become enlightened to the things going on in their neighbors’ lives and in their community. In addition, prayer refocuses how they see their neighbors around them. Prayer enables them to see them as God sees them and to show them how to love them in the way God loves them (Rusaw and Mavis 98). Prayer also enables the Holy Spirit to move and guide followers of Christ to see how the reign of God is unfolding in their neighborhoods. Lastly, they show the importance of sharing their Christian story with their neighbors. Pathak and Runyon do caution believers that neighboring is not an evangelism strategy. They claim that “we don’t love our neighbors to convert them; we love our neighbors because we are converted” (102). As believers move from strangers to acquaintances to relationships with their neighbors, Christ should be brought up for the simple reason that Christ is who made them who they are. If neighboring is done right, Christians find themselves not only fulfilling the Great Commandment, but also the Great Commission as well.

Jesus had a reason why he only used the word “church” three times in the Gospels and the word “kingdom” one hundred and twenty-one times (Pathak and Runyon 179). Countless pastors and leaders who are more concerned about “their” church buildings and programs than God’s kingdom advancing. When Jesus affirmed that the greatest commandment in all of the Bible was to love God and then to love neighbor, he showed all believers how to live out the call to be a blessing to all the nations, and to become the true priesthood that all believers are intended to be. Neighboring, in its simplicity, can be the catalyst that brings this multicultural, ethnically diverse, and postmodern culture into the kingdom of God.

#### Missional Disciple-Makers in the Neighborhoods

According to a Barna Group study, “post-Christians” rose from 37 percent of Americans in 2013 to 44 percent in 2015 (Nothstine, “*Are You Living in a Post Christian America*”). If the trend continued, then in 2019 close to 56 percent of all Americans labeled themselves as post-Christian. The challenge for the church in America today is dealing with the certainties of this post-Christian context. This is where missional disciple-making becomes crucial.

David M. Gustafson says that missional disciple-makers are all believers whose life “extend outward to join the triune God in his mission in the world—locally, regionally, or globally” (Breen and Gustafson 12). For far too long, churches in America would create disciple-making programs that were “ecclesio-centric or church serving” (Scandrette 14). In other words, the local church discipleship programs became the end rather than a means of sending disciple-makers into their communities where God’s mission was taking place. Discipleship was merely another program of the church,

compartmentalized from the sole missional focus of the church. However, if the church is to see God as a missionary God, where he is sending his people into the neighborhoods, and if the church is to see all of Scripture through the lens of God's mission, then ultimately disciple-making needs to be viewed in the same missional way. Somewhere down the line, the Church made disciple-making a program to be taught and not a life to be lived. Gustafson adds, "Clearly, there must be missional disciples if there is to be a missional church and there must be *missional disciple-making* if there are to be missional disciples" (20). For this reason, Hirsch argues that Jesus taught his disciples how to be disciple-makers by showing them how to live missionally (Hirsch, *Forgotten Ways* 120).

Michael J. Wilkins echoes this. He proclaims, "Discipleship is not just a limited program within the church. Discipleship is the life of the church. Since the true church is composed only of disciples, the overall activities of the church are to provide for the care, training and mission of the disciples as they follow Jesus in this world" (299). C.S. Lewis reasons that if the church is not actively seeking to make disciples who make disciples, then "all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself are simply a waste of time" (190). Missional disciple-makers then extend beyond their church buildings into their neighborhoods to reach the ever increasing "post-Christians." Simply put, missional disciple-makers are followers of Jesus who allow God to work through them as God works in them as they begin to enter their neighborhoods and meet people there (Breen and Gustafson 38).

As the missional church prepares Christians to engage their context and to enter missional spaces where non-believers live, for the sake of making disciples, some practices whereby these Christians can approach missional disciple-making are needed. If

Living Stones Church wants to get its members to be more missionally engaged with their neighbors for the sake of making disciples, then it has to choose what practices they should adopt. Nelson believes that there are eight practices missional disciple-makers should exercise. In the book, *Missional Disciple-Making*, edited by Breen and Gustafson, Nelson lists these practices as: (1) aligning oneself to God's mission; (2) interpreting the Bible from a missional perspective; (3) discerning where and how God is at work in the world; (4) alerting people to the reign of God; (5) engaging the local context; (6) contextualizing the gospel; (7) transforming all that is marred by sin and evil; and (8) collaborating with a community of faith (Breen and Gustafson 63).

The first practice missional disciple-makers should pursue is aligning oneself to God's mission. This practice removes the current church tradition of thinking discipleship is a man-made program that circulates only within the local church itself. Missional disciple-makers "holistically align his or her entire life for participation in the entire mission of God in the world" (64). According to Nelson, when one aligns to God's mission then each disciple will "identify and celebrate the purposes of the Father...embody the life of the Son...and live in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit" within the neighborhoods in which God calls them (64).

The second practice for missional disciple-makers is interpreting the Bible from a missional perspective. For missional disciple-makers to make a difference in their neighborhoods, they must no longer see the Bible as rules by which to live or doctrines on which they are to follow, but as a "narrative about how the reconciliatory mission of God has been launched through Jesus Christ in an irrevocable way and is being continued through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit at work in the world and in the

church” (68). According to Nelson, when a disciple-makers confronts the Bible this way, they will gain a profound awareness that God is at work in their world and will cultivate a clearer vision for what God is actually doing in their neighborhoods. Consequently, a more serious longing to join in the work that God is doing (69).

The third practice for missional disciple-makers is discerning where and how God is at work in the world. For Nelson, this takes place when a missional disciple-maker prays, discerns and have a daily awareness (70). In essence, praying for God to reveal where he is at work, discerning what one can do to join God in his work, and then daily awareness of how one can move into the space where God is present, is a crucial element of missional disciple making. The fourth practice is alerting people to the reign of God through both announcement and demonstration (72). Announcement is where a disciple-maker actively proclaims the good news of God to those in their missional spaces (neighborhoods); demonstration is putting into action the love of God through one’s deeds and behaviors.

The fifth practice is engaging the local context. Missional disciple-makers must learn the art of living incarnational lives. For Nelson, this means each disciple must “(1) make time to be present in the context; (2) genuinely be “one of” the context, identifying with the people of the context as an insider; (3) partner with people in the context for the good of the context; (4) and deeply love the context as one who humbly serves and sacrifices for the common good” (74). Missional disciple-makers can only happen when followers of Christ embrace their context as their own and find ways to love it and sacrifice for it.



The sixth missional disciple-maker practice is contextualizing the gospel. It is the idea of asking the central missional question: “What is God up to in the world, *and*, what does it mean in *this* place in *this* time?” (75). Contextualizing the gospel is what Paul did when he was in Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13 when he addressed the large Jewish congregation about how their Jewish forefathers foretold the coming of Jesus. His context was mainly Jewish so Paul contextualized the gospel for them, quoting a lot of the Old Testament to them. When Paul was in Greece in Acts 17, he was no longer addressing a Jewish crowd and so he contextualized the gospel by bringing up an altar where they worshiped an unknown god. Paul said, “For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as an unknown, this I proclaim to you” (Acts 17:23). From there Paul went on to tell them about the God who made the “world and everything in it” (17:24). For missional disciple-makers, this is a crucial aspect alerting specific contexts about the redemptive reign of God in a language in which they can understand and comprehend.

The seventh practice is transforming all that is marred by sin and evil. For Nelson, this means that churches “must not merely participate in social programs, but must have a socially engaged way of life” (78). Missional disciple-makers are those who work towards the destruction of evil in our culture. These disciples are those who are not just involved in social programs that feed the homeless, or clothing the poor, but are ones who “live on and for the margins of society” (78). This is more than just joining another program at the church that makes minimal contact with those involved, but rather it is a lifestyle to be lived out as the disciples shows hospitality to all, care for those in need,

provide for foreigners, and demonstrate loving the poor. In these acts, transformation can take place and sin can be eradicated.

Lastly, the eighth practice for missional disciple-making is collaborating with a community of faith. For Nelson, this does not necessarily consist of the local church, though it could, but rather a smaller group of like-minded believers who are joining God in His mission for the redemption of all people. It is within these communities, with their “shared set of missional rhythms or practices that will define their way of life and mission together” that serves as preparation and encouragement that “open up space for the Spirit to transform the world *and* develop disciples as he or she enacts mission in local contexts” that enables missional disciple-making to excel. (80)

If these eight practices are applied to the mission of neighboring, not only will believers move away from a longing to be challenged and to do something significant with their faith, they will actually find themselves immersed in the will of God as they watch their faith reach heights they never dreamed or imagined by making disciples with their neighbors. However, to make these practices holy rhythms in the lives of churches, pastors and leaders need to make these practices seen, felt and observed on a regular basis. By doing so, not only will the church fulfil the Great Commandment, but it will accomplish the Great Commission as well.

### **Research Design Literature**

This project identified practices that can create effective incarnational methods for believers at Living Stones Church to engage their neighbors for Christ. This research was founded on an intervention structure and represented both qualitative and quantitative styles of research. These mixed methods of research, having a pre and post surveys and a

semi-structured focus group, were used to investigate incarnational practices of engaging local neighbors for Christ.

The quantitative pre and post surveys attempted to measure the selected members of Living Stones Church in their knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding engaging their neighbors missionally. Tim Sensing claims that a survey should describe “characteristics or understandings” from a selected group of people (115). Judith Bell adds that the main objective of surveys is fact-finding. She says, “If a survey is well structured and piloted, it can be a relatively cheap and quick way to obtaining information.” (14).

Similarly, this project also used a qualitative semi-structured focus group to complement and enrich the research gained through the pre and post surveys. Sensing asserts that the synergy from focus groups can often provide “richer data” than if a researcher chose to interview each participant separately (120). Likewise, by using a qualitative focus group, the researcher is able to gather data from participants who differ in age, gender, education, and resources that may not emerge from participating in an individual interview setting (120).

### **Summary of Literature**

God’s yearning for creating contextual communities on mission is a persistent foundation throughout the Bible. Genesis 12 demonstrates the significance God has for his people to be on mission when he called Abraham and all of his descendants to be a blessing to the nations. This multi-ethnic plan of redemption on behalf of God’s mission to the world resulted in the nation of Israel becoming a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19) assisting God in his redemptive plan by being a people who usher in outsiders and

“foreigners” into the presence of God. This missional plan gave Israel their identity. By singling out David to be king over Israel, God showed the world what the kingdom of God looks like, thus giving all of God’s people a purpose. However, with God’s people endlessly losing site of their identity and purpose, God sent his son, who assumed his nation’s role by becoming a priest to the world, a blessing to the nations, and representing the kingdom of God to all peoples.

When Jesus ascended to heaven, the early church followed Jesus’ path by coming together as small communities for the sake of joining God in his mission together. With the rise of Constantine, these small communities on mission dissolved into a state church, where buildings and programs became the driving force, and joining God on mission was but an afterthought. Over two thousand years later, the church is still struggling to find its missional being. Thankfully, with the help of Newbigin, Bosch, and other leading missiologists, the church in the West is beginning to show some semblance of the early church communities found in the New Testament. Nevertheless, a resistance to change still persists. Many churches desire to cling to their Christendom past and as a result allow the culture to pass them by. Attractional church models are losing ground to the culture who are less likely to attend their well-produced programs. Consumerism has affected the church where discipleship is nothing more than training believers to serve in specific ministries within their churches. As a result, churches are breeding men and women who are searching for a deeper faith but do not know how to find it.

Contextualizing the culture shows that not only has the West become more diverse, but they have become more isolated and lonely. Only when the church follows Jesus lead of “moving into the neighborhood” (John 1:14 *Message Bible*) can churches

begin to meet the needs of their communities. People do not want more programs; they want people who actually care about them. The ministry of neighboring becomes critical in recapturing our culture for the kingdom of God. It fulfils the Great Commandment, where they love their neighbors; but it also fulfils the Great Commission, where believers in Jesus now become missional disciple-makers as they move into their neighborhoods, presenting the reign of God to their neighbors and, with the leading of the Holy Spirit, watching as their neighbors become followers of Jesus.

Neighboring is not a new fad or ministry; it is as old as the Bible itself. However, in our culture, the art of neighboring is slowly rekindling and taking shape. With limited research on effective practices that might facilitate the ministry of engaging neighbors for the sake of Christ, the researcher conducted a research project to that end. Utilizing pre and post surveys to gather qualitative and quantitative data and a focus group with semi-structured questions to gather qualitative data, the researcher sought to identify new practices in engaging neighbors. Furthermore, the researcher sought to understand which of these effective practices might be utilized to further accommodate a greater understanding of contextualization of culture and the need to fulfil the Great Commandment of loving neighbors for the sake of Jesus Christ.

## **CHAPTER 3**

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

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

This chapter describes the research methods used in this study, as well as explain the nature and purpose of the project, specifies the research questions, and discusses the data collection instruments. In addition, it describes the ministry context and defines the participants, describe the criteria used for participant selection, and focuses on the ethical considerations essential to the study. It discusses the procedures used for collecting data from participants and the procedures for analyzing the data collected. Lastly, it reports the reliability and validity of the research project design.

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

The nature and purpose of this project was to evaluate the impact of a missional formation equipping process at Living Stones Church on member's knowledge, attitude, and behavior regarding engaging their neighbors for Christ in Katy, Texas.

#### **Research Questions**

The research methods used addressed the following research questions. This intervention project utilized a mixed methods research methodology, employing in the data collection process a pre and post surveys as well as semi-structured focus group questions. There were fifteen participants, both male and female, who participated in this project, and all of them were members of Living Stones Church. The semi-structured interviews and online pre and post surveys addressed all three research questions.

**Research Question #1. What were the members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living before the equipping process?**

The first question sought to determine which current missional practices, if any, the members lived out in their day to day lives. To answer this question, a pre-test survey was given to each member which related to their knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of missional living. Five statements were about their knowledge of missional living, five statements were on attitude, five statements were on behaviors, followed by two open ended questions. For the knowledge-based statements, the researcher used the Likert Scale of (1) strongly disagree to (4) strongly agree. Concerning knowledge, the statements were:

- I have a biblical understanding of God's mission.
- I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.
- I have a biblical comprehension of God's plan for me concerning mission.
- I believe my home is not just for my family and our resources but placed in my care to be enjoyed and shared with others.
- I believe that my life is rooted not only in my relationships with others but also in relation to the place I live in.

The survey statements for both attitude and behavior used a scale that describes each participant in general, where "(1) Does NOT describe me at all" to "(5) Describes me extremely well." Concerning attitude, the statements were:

- I could be satisfied if I never get to know my neighbors personally.
- I am inspired to provide margin in my life for adding more relationships.
- I take the initiative to know my neighbors' names, hopes, hurts, and histories.
- I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.
- I am dedicated to inviting my neighbors over for dinner frequently.

The five statements for behavior were:

- I am an active participant in my neighborhood.
- I am living in my neighborhood based on how it would serve my personal wants and needs.
- I have significant conversations with my neighbors frequently.
- If I see there is a need in my neighborhood, I am eager to help.
- I pray for my neighbors often.

The two open ended questions at the end of the pre-test survey were:

- Excluding members, if Living Stones Church disappeared, would anyone in Katy, Texas care? Why or why not?
- What does it look like to be the best church *for* our community?

**Research Question #2. What were the members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living after the equipping process?**

To answer this question, each member spent two weeks (two evenings for two hours each) being trained on how to live missionally within their neighborhood. In addition to the training the participants of this study were encouraged to participate in a six-week sermon series conducted by the researcher on the topic of missionally engaging their neighbors. After the two-week training, each participant then spent two months engaged in their neighborhood, with tasks they must try to complete each week. These tasks were:

- Week One and Five: Spend two days prayer walking around your neighborhood. Talk to any neighbors you see. Begin to fill out the Neighboring Map (Pathak and Runyon 38).



- Week Two and Six: Intentionally meet a neighbor not recorded on the Neighboring Map.
- Week Three and Seven: Find one way in which you can serve a neighbor.
- Week Four and Eight: Have a neighbor over for dinner.

After the two-month engaging process, each member was given a Post-Test Survey.

This survey had the same statements and open ended questions as the Pre-Test Survey.

**Research Question #3. What elements of the missional formation equipping process had the most impact on the participants?**

To answer this question, the researcher picked a focus group, from the fifteen participants, that consisted of four men and four women. The following eight questions were asked in the semi-structured interviews:

- Describe what impacted you most during the missional formation equipping process?
- Can you describe any practices that worked well in connecting with your neighbors and filling out the Neighboring Map?
- How did you go about learning more about your neighbors?
- Explain what you learned about your neighbors, i.e. names, hurts, hopes, histories, etc.?
- Share one experience that significantly impacted you during this training process?
- If your attitude toward God's mission has altered in any way, please describe that change?

- Is there anything I would do differently, or keep the same, if I were to do another missional formation group?
- Is there anything else you would like to add that none of these questions addressed?

### **Ministry Context**

In Western culture, God's churches have found themselves in a post-Christendom world. In addition, more and more of the population are growing up with little to no Christian background. However, God, as a global God, places a high premium on his global church to join him on mission in the locality they find themselves in. Christians in the West are now seeking new practices which enable them to seek God's missional plan, starting in their own neighborhoods.

The ministry context of this project included members of Living Stones Church, living in the suburbs of Fort Bend County, which is considered to be the most diverse county in the United States of America (MacLaggan). Suburban values, practices, and beliefs are highly unique compared to even most urban settings, in that there is an equal blend of racial and ethnic diversity. Fort Bend County is being hailed as the new America, where all peoples from all walks of life can find a home, thanks in part to the oil and gas industries and leading medical facilities in the Houston area (MacLaggan). However, due to the cultural congruency of Fort Bend County, strong harmonious relationships with peoples in the M-2 to M-4 cultural barriers are overtly absent. Though it is a very friendly and welcoming place, most people seem to find safety in numbers within their own M-0 to M-1 subsets. In other words, this multidiverse context is still inflexible in breaking cultural barriers for the sake of engaging them for Christ.

## **Participants**

### **Criteria for Selection**

The individuals in this study were members of Living Stones Church in Katy, Texas and were selected by the researcher, who is also the pastor of Living Stones. Three criteria were used in the selection of these participants: (1) must be a member of Living Stones Church for at least a year, (2) must be an active participant in a LifeGroup at Living Stones, and (3) serves in some capacity at the church.

### **Description of Participants**

Fifteen members of Living Stones Church were selected for this study. These individuals consisted of eight men and eight women. Some participants in this study had undergone extensive discipleship training previously at the church, while others were new to their Christian faith. Those chosen for this study ranged from the mid-thirties to early sixties. All of the participants were professing Christians.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In order to secure informed consent from participants in this study, a consent form that explained the purpose of the study and ensured confidentiality was provided to and signed by each participant (Appendix C). By signing the form, each participant understood that responding to the pre and post surveys and participating in the semi-structured focus group was completely voluntary.

Each participant's identity remained confidential during data collection. Two questions on the pre and post survey were used to identify each participant. Those questions were: (1) birthdate (mm/dd/yy) and (2) name of first pet. For the sake of data analysis, each participant was identified by their birthdate numbers, since no two

participants had the same birthdate. For example, P050476 would be used to describe a participant whose birthday is 05/04/76, where “P” stands for participant. During the process of data analysis, only the researcher viewed the documents. The questionnaire associated with the focus group, along with the recordings and transcriptions, were deleted permanently after the researcher completed his dissertation defense.

### **Instrumentation**

Data-collection instruments for the intervention project were all researcher-designed. The instrumentation consisted of two measures, including one quantitative and one qualitative tool. The quantitative tool consisted of pre and post surveys with a set of twenty questions to determine the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors that members of Living Stones Church had in regard to missionally engaging their neighbors for Christ.

The qualitative tool consisted of a semi-structured focus group with four men and four women who participated in this research. These methods embraced the research questions and responded to intent of the purpose statement. Since these tools were researcher-designed, a panel of experts were enlisted to review and approve the tools before the research began.

### **Expert Review**

In shaping the pre and post surveys and semi-structured focus group, the researcher asked for feedback from three colleagues: Scott Nelson; Pastor of RiverTree Jackson Campus, and an expert in the field of missiology; Milton Lowe, DMin Associate Director and Academic Coach at Asbury Theological Seminary; and Ellen Marmon, Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Asbury Theological Seminary. All three played a role in shaping the researchers pre and post surveys and focus group questions.

After suggestions of shaping the questions to fit the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors or missional living, that tied in with the research questions, those suggestions were implemented. No more suggestions were made by the experts.

### **Reliability and Validity of Project Design**

Several steps were taken to ensure the reliability and validity of the project design. In order to safeguard the reliability of the data collection instruments (the pre and post surveys and focus group questions) the researcher purposely calculated each survey and question to address the three research questions.

In order to ensure the validity of the project design, the researcher asked Dr Scott Nelson, Dr. Ellen Marmon, and Dr. Milton Lowe to review the survey and focus group questions. Dr. Nelson spent the majority of time with the researcher to make sure the survey questions were aligned with the research questions of this project. Both Dr. Marmon and Dr. Lowe were familiar with the data collection process and the nature and design of the data collection instruments. The ideas and recommendations of these three experts provided precious leadership and support in designing the data collection instruments. With the reliability and validity of the project design, the research methodology was evaluated and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Asbury Theological Seminary, which has an arduous approval process.

### **Data Collection**

Once the IRB approved the research, the researcher began the process of communicating with the sixteen members of Living Stones Church for the purpose of engaging their neighbors missionally. In most cases, the members met face-to-face with the researcher (also their pastor) for an explanation of the project and to be asked if they

would be interested in participating. In some cases, a phone call was made to the members with an explanation and invitation to join the research project. Each participant understood that partaking in this research meant agreeing to complete a pre and post surveys, spend two months engaging with their neighbors, and have the possibility of being a part of a semi-structured focus group. If the participant was interested in engaging in this research, an email was sent with a more detailed explanation of the project, time and location of the training, and an attached copy of the consent form.

Sensing describes the advantages of conducting a focus group this way: “Through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a particular theme imposed by a researcher and enriched by the group’s interactive discussion. The synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately” (120). The Living Stones Church conference room served as the location for the focus group. Prior to beginning the focus group, the members’ identifying information was documented and a video camera recorded the focus group discussion.

Following the focus group, the researcher thanked each member for participating in this study. The focus group video was then downloaded onto the researcher’s personal computer which was password-protected, and placed in a hidden file. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher erased the video SD card from the video camera once the footage was downloaded on the computer.

For each pre and post survey, the members were sent an online link and asked to complete the survey within a two-week period. Reminder phone calls were made by the researcher to participants who had not completed the survey by the end of week one. Both pre and post data were downloaded to the researcher’s personal computer that was

password protected. The online survey was deleted at the end of the research period. All hand-written notes, consent forms, and the transcribed focus group meeting were locked in a safe at the researcher's office where only the researcher had the key.

### **Data Analysis**

The pre and post surveys delivered the quantitative data for this research project. Each member's data was prepared in Microsoft Excel (2012) and analyzed by comparative analysis using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Furthermore, a frequency table was used to discern any noteworthy connection between the intervening variables and the dependent variables.

The semi-structured focus group provided qualitative data, which was video recorded in its entirety and later transcribed on a computer. The researcher implemented a preliminary empirical analysis by reading through the data and adding notes in the margin to record some general sense of the information. In this early phase, the researcher sought to detect practices which the members of Living Stones Church described as having the greatest impact on missionally engaging their neighbors for Christ. Afterwards, recurring accounts and topics were coded and divided into groups for content analysis.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

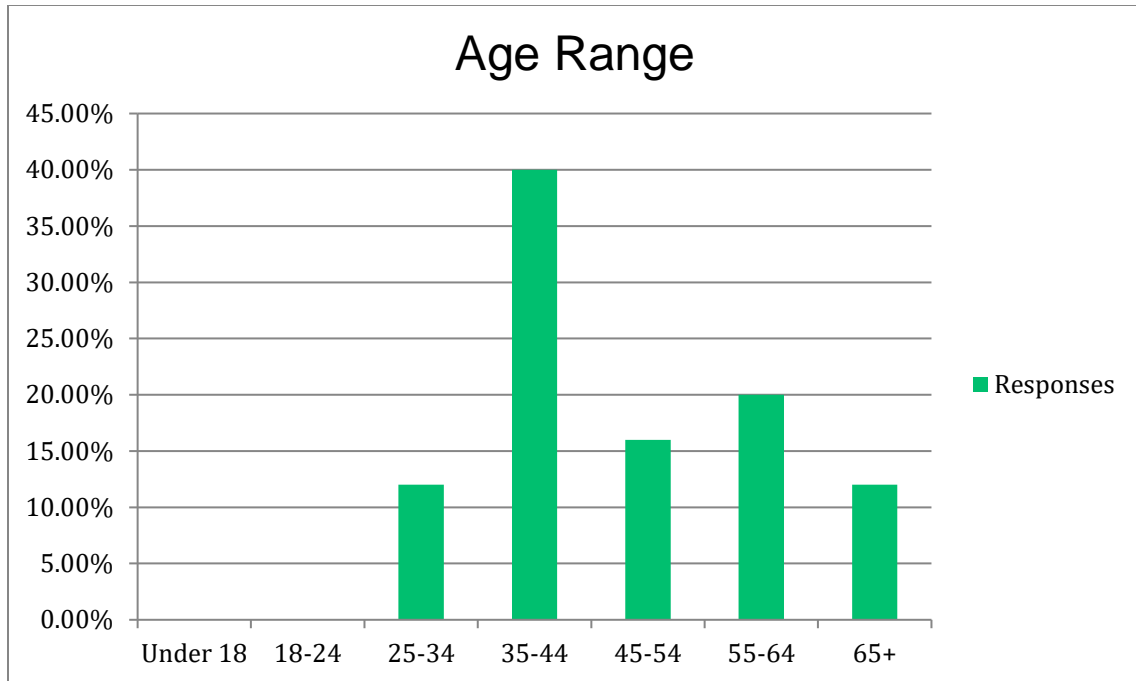
#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of select members of Living Stones Church, in Katy, Texas in regard to missional living within the context of multidiverse and multicultural suburban neighborhoods. This chapter profiles the participants in this study, as well as presents the quantitative and qualitative data from the online pre- and post-test surveys and the semiformal focus group conducted after the research project. Chapter 4 concludes with a list of major findings derived from the presented data.

#### **Participants**

The individuals in this study were members of Living Stones Church in Katy, Texas and selected by the researcher, who is also the pastor of Living Stones. Three criteria were utilized in the selection of these participants: (1) must be a member of Living Stones Church for at least a year, (2) must be an active participant in a LifeGroup at Living Stones, and (3) served in some capacity at the church. These three criteria showed the researcher their commitment to Living Stones Church and to its success. Fifteen participants were chosen to participate in this study. Table 4.1 depicts the age ranges of those who took part in the Missional Formation Equipping Project, which included a two-week in-depth study on the mission of God, as well as the pre and post-test surveys. Seven of the fifteen participants were involved with the focus group. Their ages ranged from the mid-thirties to over sixty years of age. Fourteen were Caucasian, whereas one was Hispanic; they all held American nationality and lived in Katy, Texas.





**Figure 4.1**

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

**What were the members' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living before the equipping process?**

In the pre survey, questions 4-8 addressed the member's knowledge about missional living. Questions 9-13 dealt with their attitudes and questions 14-20 were on behaviors.

#### Knowledge

Before the missional equipping project, each participant was asked five questions regarding their knowledge on the mission of God, and their role in it. In the pre-test survey, all the participants either agreed (60%) or strongly agreed (40%) that they had a

biblical understanding of God’s mission (Table 4.2).

Q4 I have a biblical understanding of God's mission.

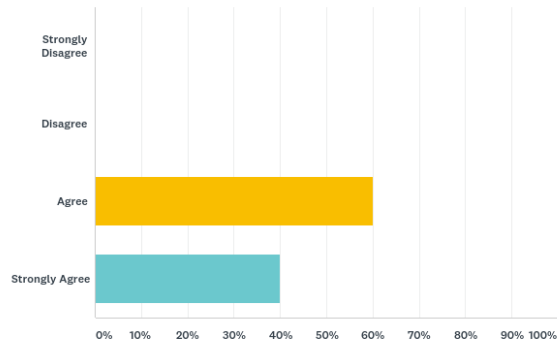


Table 4.2

However, when the participants were asked if they have a biblical comprehension of God’s plan for *them* concerning mission, 20% disagreed and only 6.6% strongly agreed. The participants’ agreement declined significantly when asked if they understood a variety of methods by which they can live on mission for God in their local context. 26.6 percent strongly disagreed, 53.3 percent disagreed, and only 20 percent agree.

Q5 I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.

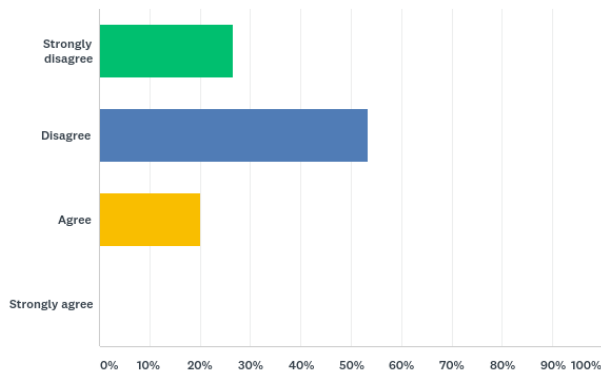


Table 4.3

All of the participants either grew up in church or attended church semi-regularly throughout their adolescence and into adulthood. Their knowledge of God being on mission was unquestioned, but their joining God in his mission, according to question 5 signifies that a certain amount of knowledge on a subject does not equate living it out. One member of the focus group stated it like this, “I always knew I should be more missional, I just didn’t know how to begin to do it.” Another added: “Before this class [the missional equipping project], I never would have thought that my own neighbors and neighborhood was [sic] a part of God’s mission. I just kind of thought mission was more for those who were sick, hurting or in desperate need of help. None of my neighbors are those people and so I blindly turned [a blind] eye [to] them.”

Attitude

Questions 9-13 in the pre survey examined the participants’ attitude toward joining God in his mission, specifically, joining God in mission in their local context. When asked if the participants could be satisfied if they never got to know their neighbors personally, 33.3 percent claimed it described them moderately well, while 20 percent asserted it describes them very well.

Q9 I could be satisfied if I never got to know my neighbors personally.

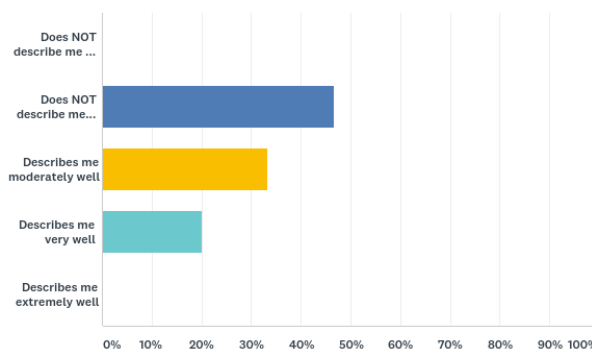


Table 4.4

Question 10 states that 33.3 percent of all participants were not willing to provide margin in their lives to add more relationships. In addition, questions 11 and 12 shows that 66.6 percent of all participants do not take the initiative to even get to know their immediate neighbors names, let alone anything about them. 80 percent of all participants have never invited their neighbors over for dinner.

Behavior

Of the five questions concerning their behavior regarding joining God on mission, specifically in their local context, 60 percent of all participants claimed that they were active contributors in their neighborhoods in which they live. 86 percent of all members in this equipping series declared that the only reason why they moved into their neighborhoods was to meet their own personal desires and needs. Although the majority of participants (93 percent) expressed willingness to help out in their neighborhoods if they ever see a need, only 26 percent claimed that they pray for their neighbors moderately well.

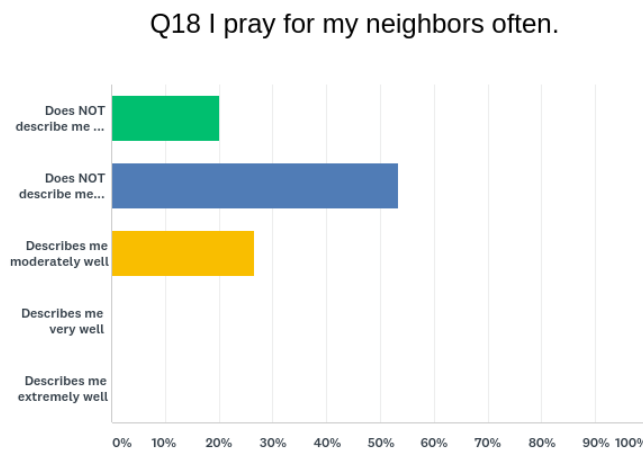


Table 4.5

From the data collected from the pre-test survey, one of the participants summed it up eloquently by saying, “When you first presented this to us, I was both excited and nervous. I knew that God was on mission, I just didn’t know how to join Him in it. I guess my nervousness was that I was going to be pressured into jumping on in, but excited because I knew I should have been doing this a long time ago.” Most of those in the focus group agreed that knowing that God is in mission is vastly different from joining God in his mission. The pre-test survey backs up this data.

### **Research Question #2: Description of Evidence**

#### **What were the members’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding missional living after the equipping process?**

The post survey is identical to the pre survey, where questions 4-8 addressed the member’s knowledge toward missional living, questions 9-13 dealt with their attitudes and questions 14-20 were on behaviors.

#### Knowledge

After the missional equipping project each participant was asked five questions regarding their knowledge of the mission of God and their role in it. In the post survey, all participants either agreed or strongly agreed with having a biblical understanding of God’s mission. This is very similar to the pre-test, but with 13 percent more having strongly agreeing than the pre-survey (40 percent to now 55.33 percent). Regarding whether the participants have a biblical comprehension of God’s plan for *them* concerning mission, all participants either agreed or strongly agreed. In the pre survey only 6.6 percent strongly agreed, whereas in the post survey 46.67 percent strongly agreed. This is a 40 percent increase in their comprehension of God’s plan for them

regarding mission. Perhaps the largest increase in the participants' responses was Q5 which asked if they understood a variety of methods of living incarnationally in their local context. In the pre survey, nearly 80 percent of all participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed and only 20 percent agreed; in the post-survey 86.6 percent of all participants either agreed or strongly agreed that they now had a variety of methods of living incarnationally in their neighborhoods. A little over thirteen percent disagreed and none strongly disagreed.

Q5 I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.

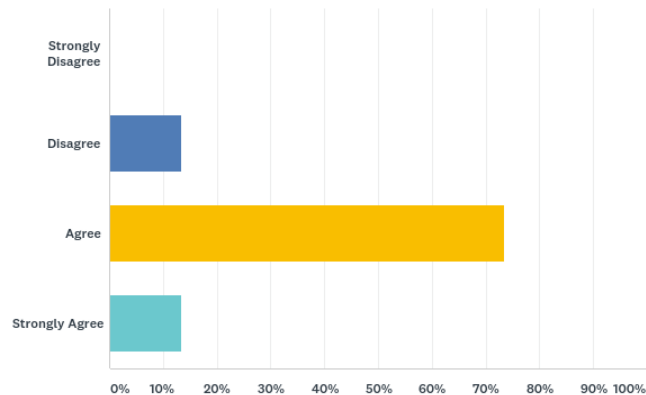


Table 4.6

During the focus group, each participant had a chance to share some variety of methods of living incarnationally in their neighborhoods. One participant said, “Making cookies! Making and having something to bring over; it was crazy how that one simple gesture allowed me [to be invited inside someone’s house]. That to me was super effective and didn’t feel threatening.” This participant would add that it took over three hours to pass out cookies to five neighbors because of the conversation that was had. Some of the other variety of methods were being intentional during Halloween when all

the neighbors are out and about. Another took walks at particular times when more people would be out. Others still invited neighbors over to watch football with them.

### Attitude

Questions 9-13 in the post survey examined the participants attitude toward joining God in his mission, specifically, joining God in mission in their local context. When asked if the participants could be satisfied if they never got to know their neighbors personally, the pre survey stated that over 53 percent of the participants were satisfied if they never got to know their neighbors. After the equipping series, 86.7 percent of all participants claimed that this does not describe them at all or does not describe them very well. Only 13 percent said that it described them moderately well.

Q9 I could be satisfied if I never got to know my neighbors personally.

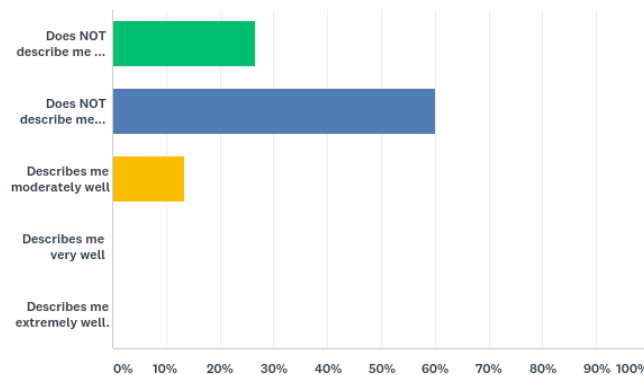


Table 4.7

Question 10 asked if the participants would provide margin in their lives for adding more relationships. In the pre survey 33.3 percent of the participants were not willing to add margin to get to know someone new. After the post survey, 100 percent of all participants saw value in adding margin in their lives to add more relationships.

Questions 11 and 12 in the pre survey showed that 66.6 percent of participants did not

take the initiative to get to know their neighbors' names, hopes, hurts, or histories; 80 percent have never invited a neighbor over for dinner. After the equipping series, 60 percent claimed it described them moderately well, 26.7 percent describes them very well, and 6.7 percent stated that it described them extremely well concerning getting to know their names. Only 6.7 percent claimed that it did not describe them very well. In addition, the post survey concluded that 80 percent of the participants were now dedicated to inviting their neighbors over for dinner frequently, and 20 percent described them very well. No participants were described as not being dedicated to this endeavor.

During the focus group, one participant described a time where they got to know their neighbors by simply bringing some cookies over (a different participant than the one above, who also brought over cookies to meet their neighbors). After spending an hour in their foyer talking, they made plans to have dinner together later in the week.

Afterwards, the participant said, "We decided to start off with cookies and say 'hi' and [as the relationship began to grow] it was neat to see that and it made me feel bad for not doing it sooner."

### Behavior

Of the five questions concerning their behavior regarding joining God on mission, specifically in their local context, the pre survey stated that 60 percent of all participants claimed that they were active contributors in their neighborhoods. After the equipping series, 86.7 percent of participants regarded themselves as active participants in their neighborhoods. The pre survey concluded that 86 percent of all members in this equipping series declared that the only reason why they moved into their neighborhoods was to meet their own personal desires and needs. Afterwards, 60 percent of participants



believed that this did not describe them moderately well (20%) or does not describe them very well (40%). Though the majority of participants (93%) will help out in their neighborhoods if they ever see a need, only 26 percent claimed that they prayed for their neighbors moderately well in the pre survey. The post survey concluded that 66.7 percent of participants pray for their neighbors moderately well and 13.3 percent now prayed for their neighbors extremely well.

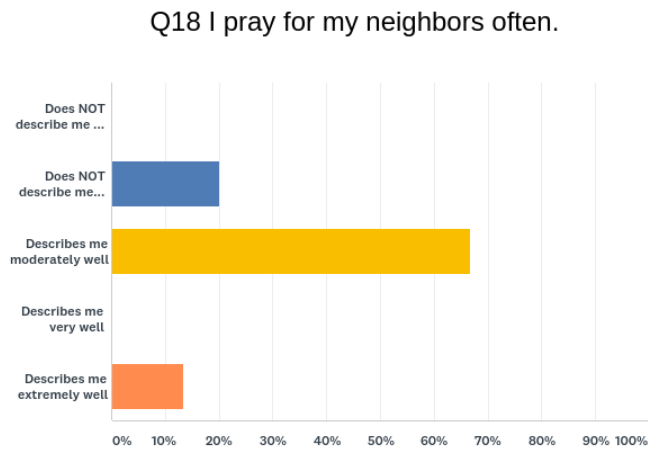


Table 4.8

From the data collected from the post survey, one of the participants summed it up powerfully by saying, “I was challenged to take the Great Commandment literally. To love my literal neighbors. What a novel idea. But the more we talk about it and the more we do it, can you imagine what would happen if all Christians took [the Great Commandment] literally, and started loving on their literally [sic] neighbors, I just feel like we would change the country.”

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

**What elements of the missional formation equipping process had the most impact on the participants?**

Each of the fifteen participants underwent a two-week missional equipping class to help better equip them for engaging their neighbors for Christ. Afterwards they were sent into their neighbors for eight weeks to show practical ways of love to their neighbors. Twice they took prayer walks around their neighborhoods, praying for and meeting neighbors as they went. Twice they met new neighbors and wrote down their information on the neighbor Block Map. Twice they found ways to serve their neighbors in tangible ways. Lastly, they invited two neighbors over for dinner within that eight-week period. This research project was conducted over the Thanksgiving holiday, and the beginning of the Christmas rush. From the pre and post surveys, and specifically through the semi-formal focus group, three elements surfaced that had the most impact on the participants. These three elements were clear direction, being present, and listening.

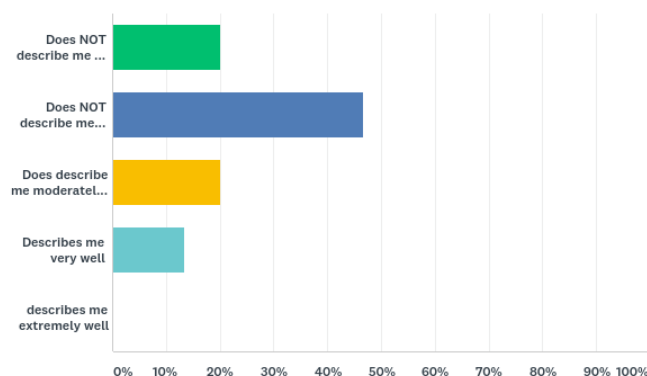
#### Clear Direction

During the pre-survey, all the participants were asked in Q20, “What does it look like to be the best church *for* our community?” Over 75 percent of those involved in this project claimed that the only way for their church to be the best church for the community was to actually be *in* the community. The phrases, “meet the needs,” “involved,” “meaningful relationships,” “serve,” and “sharing God’s love” were used frequently in explaining Q20. Yet, before the missional equipping project 80 percent of all the participants either strongly disagreed or disagreed that they understood a variety of

methods by which they could serve, or meet the needs of those in their community by living incarnationally in their local context (Q5 of pre-survey).

What the researcher found lacking in the participants was not a desire to serve and show God's love to their community, but rather a clear direction on how to do it. In Q4 of the pre-survey, 100 percent of all the participants claimed that they either agreed or strongly agreed to have a biblical understanding of God's mission, but when it came time to joining God in that mission, there seemed to be a disconnect. Through the missional formation equipping project, the participants gained clear and simple directions on how to practically share God's love with their immediate neighbors. In Q12 of the pre survey, over 66 percent of all participants did not get excited about engaging their neighbors for Christ. After the missional equipping project, only one participant (6%) claimed they still did not get excited to engage their neighbors for Christ. In addition, an increase of 33 percent of participants put engaging their neighbors for Christ as now something that either described them very well, or extremely well. Overall, a clear direction on how to join God in his mission within their local context was the catalyst that enabled these participants to move beyond just knowing to doing.

Q12 I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.



Q12 I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.

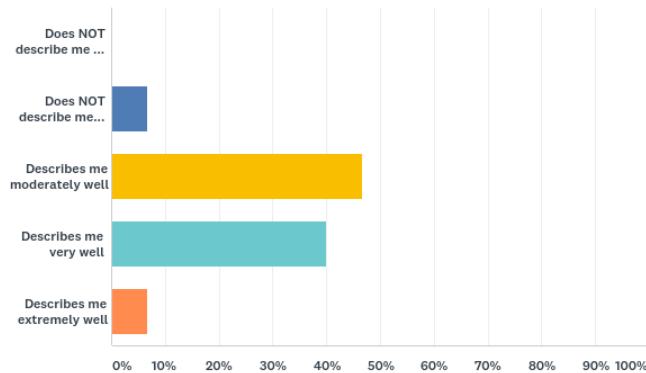


Table 4.9

(Top is pre-survey and bottom is post)

### Being Present

One of the greatest barriers to reaching neighbors for Christ has to do with time, or what Lance Ford and Brad Brisco refer to as a, “lack of margin” (101). According to them, there is a sense of anxiety prevails when it comes to clearing up time to welcome others into one’s life. However, without margin little to no interest occurs when opportunities arise to serve or meet the needs of neighbors. Without margin, there is no occasion for being present. Not being present leads to a constant struggle with meeting new neighbors, or even being an active participant in the community. In Q14 of the pre survey, 60 percent of all participants claimed it did not describe them at all or very well when it came to being an active participant in their neighborhood. The other 40 percent said it described them moderately well. When asked about this in the focus group, some of the participants explained how being busy was the biggest factor in just being present in their neighborhoods.

In the book *Next Door As It Is In Heaven*, Ford and Brisco explain the difference between alignment and addition (103). Instead of thinking of adding more relationships to an already busy schedule and life, what if each participant aligns what they are already doing with their neighbors. For example, all the participants eat dinner at least 7 times a week during the evening. They could align one of those evenings to allow their neighbors to come over and have dinner with them. In that way, each participant is allowed to be more present in their neighborhoods without the added stress of auditing and cutting things out of their schedules. With this in mind, in Q13 of the pre survey, 80 percent of all participants were not dedicated to inviting their neighbors over for dinner frequently. Only 20 percent claimed that it described them moderately well. However, after aligning their time to be more present in their neighborhoods, the post survey stated that 80 percent were dedicated to inviting their neighbors over for dinner moderately well, while 20 percent declared that it described them very well. None replied that it did not describe them at all or very well. Additionally, Q14 of the post survey saw a 47 percent increase in active participation in their neighborhoods. Just the habit of being present allowed the participants to be more active in their own neighborhoods.

### Listening

According to Rusaw and Mavis, most people are aware that this culture does not listen well (96). More often than not, people are more interested in telling their own stories than listening or even empathizing with others. For most, this is a reason why it is hard to remember names. Or worse, people tend to listen, but with the lens of listening for similarities and differences. If people hear similarities, they tend to think they can get along with that person, but if they hear differences, then there is this assumption that

because of those differences, they will not be able to get along (97). Part of the missional equipping project was to get the participants to actually listen to those they are sent to bless in their neighborhoods. Listen for their names, their hopes, hurts and histories. However, without significant conversations with their neighbors, listening for those things will never take place.

In the pre survey, Q16 asked, “I have significant conversations with my neighbors frequently.” Eighty-six percent of all participants either responded that this does not describe them at all or very well. The rest of the participants claimed that this described them moderately well (33.3%). With such a low number of participants having significant conversations with their neighbors, the data suggests that before the missional equipping project, the participants experienced little to no impact from listening to their neighbors’ needs and desires. After the missional equipping project, 80 percent of all the participants claimed that they had significant conversations with their neighbors moderately well to extremely well. None mentioned that this did not describe them at all (previously it was at 20 percent). However, 20 percent still claimed that it did not describe them at all; participants who had significant conversations with their neighbors increased by 46.7 percent.

In regard to listening, Q11 states, “I take the initiative to know my neighbor’s names, hopes, hurts and histories.” In the pre survey, 66.6 percent stated that this did not describe them at all (13.3%) or very well (53.3%). In the post survey, 93 percent claimed that they now take the initiative in listening for their neighbors’ names, hopes, hurts, and histories. Sixty percent claimed that this described them moderately well, while 26.7 percent say very well and 6.7 percent extremely well. The data determined that the art of

listening can have an impact on significant conversations with neighbors as well as picking up information about those neighbors that can help the participants understand them better and be able to shine the love of Christ on them.

Concerning listening, one of the participants concluded with a very profound statement:

“Another thing was learning [to] remember how to really listen. So many times in life I find my mind wandering off while ‘listening’ to someone. Maybe what they say triggers a thought or I’m thinking about what I want to say next. During this intentional process, I knew I would have to write down facts about those I met, so it forced me to really listen and focus on what they said. In doing so, it usually kept the conversation more about them and less about me. It’s easy to tell stories about myself but then when I walk away I am no different than I started. I found that meeting new people and learning about them brought something new to my life each time.”

### **Summary of Major Findings**

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of select members of Living Stones Church, in Katy, Texas in regard to missional living within the context of multidiverse and multicultural suburban neighborhoods. Four major findings became clear from the data analysis of both the surveys and focus group:

1. Intentionally living missionally creates a profound awareness and clearer vision for what God is calling his people to do in their neighborhoods.
2. Biblical hospitality plays a pivotal role in engaging one’s neighbor for Christ.
3. More intentional communication from church leaders on being a blessing to neighbors could lead to effective change, not only in the members of the church, but in the community as well.
4. Loving one’s neighbors should never be a program of the church, but rather a lifestyle that each member of the church should embrace.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this project was to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of select members of Living Stones Church, in Katy, Texas in regard to missional living within the context of multidiverse and multicultural suburban neighborhoods. This chapter identifies four findings from this research project and explains how they parallel with the researchers observations, the pre and post survey's and focus group, and the biblical context of the project. Additionally, ministry implications of the study, research limitations, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further study are explored. Lastly, a postscript is offered by the author.

#### Major Findings

##### First Finding

**Intentionally living missionally, creates a profound awareness and clearer vision for what God is calling his people to do in their neighborhoods**

From the Abrahamic covenant till this present time, God's purpose is to build his kingdom while the church exists to join God in this mission. For this reason, the church then is to equip and disciple Christ followers to bring Christ's authority (i.e., the kingdom) to every aspect of life. However, in our Western culture, the church appears to have lost sight of this endeavor. With the religiously pluralist world that the West has become, Christians are now having to reexamine their traditional "stereotypical views" of other faiths and, at the same time, realize that those "other" faiths seem to be more



aggressively missionary than most churches (Bosch 3). Hirsch adds, “We find ourselves lost in a perplexing global jungle where our well-used cultural and theological maps don’t seem to work anymore” (*Forgotten Ways* 15). Hirsch goes on to add that churches and church leaders have become “painfully aware that our inherited concepts, our language, and indeed our whole way of thinking are inadequate to describe what is going on both in and around us” (16). To put it bluntly, the church in the West is having a hard time seeing clearly their role and identity in its culture.

In this new identity crisis that the church is facing, Halter and Smay are calling for the church to return to its missional roots. They add, “Returning to something ancient, something tried, something true and trustworthy. Something that has rerouted the legacies of families, nations, kings and peasants. Something that has caused hundreds of thousands to give up security, reputation, and their lives” (*Tangible Kingdom* 10). A returning to the true identity and role that God has ordained for the church: a blessing to the nations and a kingdom of priests. A return to living missionally, not because this is an activity of the church that will help expand God’s kingdom, but rather a mentality of knowing that mission is inherently God’s work and as followers of Christ, Christians will be able to see with more clarity and awareness what God is already doing and join in.

When encouraged to live missionally in their neighborhoods, participants experienced a heightened awareness and clarity of not just what God was doing in their neighborhood, but what they can do to join God in it. Prior to the research project, the surveys and focus group made clear that the majority of participants understood that the Bible declared God to be a missional God, inasmuch as God sent his son to save the world from their sins. However, it was not until the equipping process that these members

of Living Stones Church understood that God was not missional in and of himself, but rather was calling all believers to live out his mission in their local context.

During the missional formation equipping project, each participant was required to do certain projects during each week of the eight-week project. In weeks one and five, they were to spend two days prayer walking around their neighborhood. In weeks two and six, they were to intentionally meet a neighbor they have yet to know. In weeks three and seven, they were to find a way by which they can serve one of their neighbors. Lastly, in weeks four and eight, they were to have a neighbor over for dinner. In each case, the researcher gave a brief explanation and a couple of examples on how to carry this out, but left it somewhat open-ended. The idea here was to get the participants to see with their own eyes what God was doing in their neighborhoods, and find a way to join in. For the researcher it was invigorating to receive emails and texts messages on how certain participants were living out these weekly objectives. From getting to know neighbors they never knew, to unexpected encounters that led to fruitful conversations, each participant experienced a clearer vision and a more focused awareness of how God was moving and how he can use them to engage their neighbors for Christ.

The researcher's literature review confirmed the importance of awareness and clarity in regard to missionally engaging neighbors for the kingdom of God. Having these participants seek missionally the kingdom of God in their context is a thread that is intertwined through scripture and theology. However, to seek missionally the kingdom of God in their local context, each participant had to experience scripture through the lens of a missional God. During the equipping process, the researcher spent two weeks with each participant defining and explaining scripture through such a missional lens. They covered

topics such as the Abrahamic Covenant of being a blessing to all the nations, God explaining to the nation of Israel the idea of being a kingdom of priests, and seeing the reign of God in every neighborhood. The researcher wanted each participant to understand that mission is not just an activity of the church, but rather it is God's global outreach to the world, and his followers can become participants in it. It is becoming a community of people who can become witnesses of God in their own neighborhoods by joining God in his already existing mission in those neighborhoods. With this knowledge, participants went into their neighborhoods with eyes wide open and hearts prepared to listen to the voice of God as they served their neighbors in acts of kindness.

The fundamental reason the New Testament church communities gathered was rooted in *missio Dei*, where the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit send the church into the world to be a blessing (Bosch 390). Within this biblical and theological framework of *mission Dei*, the early church understood that mission was not about going and doing, but rather it is about being. It is being a blessing as they seek to show hospitality to their neighbors (Rom. 12:13). It is not letting kindness and truth leave them, but binding them around their necks and writing them on the tablets of their hearts (Prov. 3:3). It is being an integral participant in the activities of God, by being a blessing to the nations. When the participants understood this, it brought about a profound awareness and clearer vision for what God was already doing in their neighborhoods and what they can do to missionally join in.

## Second Finding

### **Biblical hospitality plays a pivotal role in engaging one's neighbor for Christ**

Jesus says that every time a Christian eats or drinks or welcomes a stranger, is as if they are doing it with him (Matt. 25:31-40). God honors the efforts made to show hospitality to neighbors. Brinton adds, it is through hospitality that communities can grow and people can be reconciled, and “we will gain new perceptions of God’s inclusive love” (Brinton 124). Biblical hospitality, if done regularly can bind the broken, fractured and divided world. God, after all was the original and first good neighbor to show hospitality. God did not just give Adam and Eve a place to live, he created an Eden experience where he gave them the best community possible, one where God gave breath and life and connected with humanity by spending time with them (Rusaw and Mavis, 31).

The researcher intended to equip the participants for missionally engaging their neighbors through biblical hospitality. Whether the participants engaged the “BLESS” model:

- **B**egin with prayer
- **L**earn their names
- **E**ngage in conversations
- **S**eek to be intentional
- **S**hare your stories (Rusaw and Mavis 59-60).

Or the BELLS model:

- **BLESS**: I will bless three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.

- **EAT**: I will eat with three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.
- **LISTEN**: I will spend at least one period of the week listening to the Spirit's voice.
- **LEARN**: I will spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.
- **SENT**: I will journal throughout the week about all the ways I alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ (Frost 22).

Or chose to do something different, the goal was to get each participant to show hospitality to their immediate neighbors by inviting them over for dinner (Rom. 12:13).

The pre survey indicated that 80 percent of all participants never invited their neighbors over for dinner; 20 percent claimed it describes them moderately well. None declared that it described them very well or extremely well. Part of the reason for these high percentages are the barriers that Halter and Smay declare in their book, *The Tangible Kingdom*. Halter and Smay talk about two barriers that they believe lead to “one-dimensional Christianity,” which are individualism and consumerism (150). Individualism is this deep-seated bias that fights against committing to anything that does not “directly serve our individual interests” (150). This barrier goes against the deep-seated need to be in community with one another (John 15:12-13, Rom. 12:16, Gen. 2:18, Zech. 7:9-10).

The other barrier is consumerism. Where individualism creates a barrier where community is served, consumerism will actually keep Christians from being able to “participate in God's mission to the world” (Halter and Smay, 151). Consumerism is based on the belief that one cannot help out another until all their wants and needs are

taken care of. In essence, it says that Christians may want to show hospitality to their neighbors, but believe that they are not prepared to answer any questions that may arise about their faith or God. Too often Christians believe that they need to know everything there is to know about the bible and God before they are ready to reach out and engage their neighbors. Both individualism and consumerism, not only hinder a community-filled neighborhood, but hinder the mission of God as well.

After the equipping project, where the participants were required to invite their neighbors over for dinner twice in an eight-week period, an incredible increase in willingness to continue this practice ensued. 100 percent of the participants exclaimed that they are now dedicated to inviting their neighbors over for dinner frequently, either describing them moderately well or very well. The researcher believes that once Christians tear down the barriers of individualism and consumerism, it becomes much easier to show hospitality to their neighbors.

Biblical hospitality shows that “our homes are the most underutilized physical resource in the Kingdom” (Rusaw and Mavis, 102). From a biblical viewpoint, if one were to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12), then one must learn the art of biblical hospitality by opening up their homes for the strangers around us. The biblical word for hospitality comes from the Greek word *philoxenia*. This is a combination of two words: *Phileo*; a brotherly love, almost like family, and *Xenos*; which means stranger. Hospitality therefore means to love the strangers around us almost like one would with their family (Ford and Brisco, 94; Rusaw and Mavis, 103-104). It is seen most pointedly in Leviticus 19:33-34, “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you,

and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.” This passage stresses that, from the very beginning, the motivation behind hospitality comes from God. For the people of God, the duty of hospitality comes right from the center of who God is. God is a God of loving strangers.

Jesus Christ said that “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). The primary evidence whether a person is a believer in Jesus or not, is their choice in obeying his commands or not. One of those commands come from Romans 12:13, where Paul proclaims, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.” Seeking to show hospitality is not an option in the eyes of Paul. Peter adds to this when he states, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Pet. 4:9). The author of Hebrews will take it a step further by stating that one should not neglect seeking hospitality (Heb. 13:2). One sees a beautiful picture of biblical hospitality when Abraham in Genesis 18:2-8 saw three strangers in front of his house. He went to them, invited them into his home, and with the help of his wife, prepared a meal for them and provided them with some shade and rest.

For biblical hospitality to take root, then one must understand that hospitality is not the same as entertainment. Entertainment puts the focus on the host, whereas hospitality puts the emphasis on the guests. Ford and Brisco explain how this type of entertaining “can easily become more about *appearances* than *persons*” (92). In other words, instead of showing hospitality to our neighbors, one is more concerned about how their house looks, or if their food is gourmet quality, or if their table setting is magazine photo worthy. There is this deep-seated desire for others to like them and like the place in which they live. When it comes to offering up their homes to strangers (neighbors), it can

become such a burden to have everything spotless and prepared. Maybe this is why Peter stresses that one should not grumble, and the author of Hebrews presses that one should not neglect hospitality. Maybe they saw the difference between entertaining and true biblical hospitality where the focus and sole attention is on the guests and not what ones house looks like. Garber claims, “when we have no sense of relationship to people or place, we have no sense of responsibility to people or place” (115). In other words, entertaining is hard work and very time consuming. Over time, it is easy to neglect it, and by doing so one can close the door on the people around them. Biblical hospitality declares that one should not only have a relationship with those around them, but that they have a responsibility to those around them.

From this research, the researcher believes that recovering biblical hospitality will involve opening one’s home to their neighbors. It offers up an opportunity to connect to a community, while at the same time joining God in his mission. To be a blessing to the nations and a kingdom of priests, then the household and the church need to reconnect. In doing so, these two beautiful foundations of God can work together for the sake of the world and for building up the kingdom of God. Rusaw and Mavis ask this question: “What if all the kitchens, back porches, grills, garages, tools, guest bedrooms, bathrooms and kitchen tables were available for use in the kingdom?” (Rusaw and Mavis, 103). It is a great question, and one that can be easily realized when believers in Christ offer up their homes in true biblical hospitality, for it is with this type of hospitality that believers can engage their neighbors for Christ.



### **Third Finding**

**More intentional communication from church leaders on being a blessing to neighbors could lead to effective change, not only in the members of the church, but in the community as well.**

The most startling revelation to the researcher was the fact that before the research project began, 100 percent of all participants involved claimed that they had a biblical understanding of God's mission. Sixty percent claimed to agree, while 40 percent stated they strongly agree. In addition, 80 percent of them believed that they had a biblical comprehension of God's plan for them concerning mission. However, when it came to living out God's missional plan, over 80 percent claimed that they do not know how. For the most part, before the equipping project, these participants had no biblical idea on how to live incarnationally in their local context. From the researcher's point of view, there is a huge disconnect separates what the churches teach and preach, and what God actually says and desires believers to be.

JR Woodward and Dan White paint the disconnect very clearly when they state, "A natural impulse for an organism is to collect resources into its own center of gravity" (25). They believe that the church has become an industrial complex, meaning they see the church in the West turning "spirituality into a product, church growth into a race, leadership into a business and members into consumers" (25). For the most part, the church has turned on itself. The center of gravity is focused solely on what is happening inside the church building on Sunday mornings and not on what is going on in the neighborhoods. Outreach, evangelism, acts of kindness, and being a blessing to the nations is not being intentionally communicated clearly. If churches claim they are, then

as the research has pointed out, it is being communicated in a way in which members are not understanding, or embracing it. Frost, in his book, *Incarnate*, concludes that study after study has shown that “Christians feel they receive no help from churches in how to live under the reign of God in every sphere of their life” (134). Something needs to change in the communication from church leaders to bring about missional change in its members.

Upon conclusion of the research project, 86 percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed that they then understood a variety of methods of living incarnationally in their local context. The researcher believes this total reversal from the pre survey to the post survey was because the message of God being on mission and sending his people on mission was clearly communicated and challenged in each participant. If church leaders can clearly communicate the biblical viewpoint of being a blessing to the nations and a kingdom of priests, and that by proclaiming such a message clearly and challenging their members to live this out, church leaders can bring about effective change in both the members and the community. However, according to Rick Rusaw, the reason this is so hard “for church leaders to embrace is because it doesn’t pay” (Rusaw and Mavis 13).

In a very consumeristic culture, where people and organizations are valued by what they are measured by, the church is no different. Rusaw, in explaining the importance of both gathering (worshiping and fellowshiping together at church) and scattering (being a blessing to your neighbors), adds, “Gathering may be a resource hog, but it’s what we are measured by and what builds brand identity and brings in the bucks” (14). Individualism and consumerism are not only barriers for biblical hospitality, but also for church leaders who believe their bread and butter comes from gathering and not

scattering. Church leaders know that this culture values what they are measured by. Preaching and teaching from a missional biblical viewpoint mean that the attention is on scattering and not just gathering.

Newbigin and many scholars proclaim in this research that the Trinitarian viewpoint of *missio Dei* is about sending. God sent his Son, and then both the Father and the Son sent the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, in one accord with the Father and the Son, then sends the church. This theological stance shows that God's purpose for the church is not to exist solely for itself (gathering), but to be a community of people who become witnesses of God in their own context and culture, by joining God in his already existing mission to the world (scattering). When churches focus solely on self, they can build walls around their church buildings and neglect the most fundamental biblical mandate: Go and be a blessing and make disciples of the nations. Without this viewpoint, believers have a difficult time uniting what they read in Scripture and what they experience in church (Chan 22). As a result, the church has a hard time connecting its people with those in their world. Fitch and Holsclaw write:

In a culture that distrusts Christianity, a society that no longer sees the church as positive, why do we seek to attract people to come to us? Why not instead use this time and energy to be in our neighborhoods, at our local park district gymnasiums and fairs, donating our time, getting involved, knowing the people, and bringing the gospel there. We were living in a culture that no longer wanted to do the things churches do, yet we were doing them anyway." (Loc 642-45).

Fitch and Holsclaw further elaborate the identity crisis in the church and the disconnect with the culture when they break down this current culture. Basically, they believe that this culture is too distracted to even notice a well-produced service going on in their town, because they are moving too quickly from one thing to the next. They

believe that most people live too fast and are too cynical to adhere to what the church is trying to sell on their church properties. They add, “Only an encounter with something real, humble, and embodied, where they encounter a set of eyes, a conversation, and an authentic life, will cause them to notice” (Loc 827-30). Frost calls this encounter, “surprising the world” (*Surprise the World*, 5). For Frost, it is living a life that is “questionable”, and he uses 1 Peter to help illustrate this.

1 Peter 3:15-16 states, “But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” This passage should inspire all believers to live questionable lives. Questionable, in the sense that as Christians go and be a blessing, provide acts of kindness, biblical hospitality and love towards their neighbors, then according to Frost, they will evoke questions to where opportunities for sharing faith can occur. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “to anyone who asks you.” The key component here is living and acting in such a way that will surprise people into asking questions. For Frost, acts of philanthropy by Christians, or churches who donate money to certain causes, or opening up feeding programs or hospices are no longer surprising the world (13). More often than not, churches are expected by outsiders to do those things. What the researcher has found that does surprise the world is believers in Jesus living out the Great Commandment where they intentionally go and love their next-door neighbors, by providing acts of kindness to them and opening up their homes for meals and conversations.

Lastly, the researcher has observed that when communication is clearly taught on the identity of the church and God's mission, not only does it bring about positive change in believers, but it also brings out positive change in the community as well. As part of this research project, each participant participated in a service project to bring about a blessing to their neighbors. In essence, participants were instructed to do something that will surprise their neighbors. For some, it was mulching their yards for free. Others passed out free water at youth events happening in their neighborhoods. Still others escorted costumers at a local grocery store to their cars with an umbrella when it was raining outside. In each case, these deeds impacted the recipients, even if it just brought about a smile to their faces. Acts of kindness will never into a void. When believers in Christ live out God's mission to their world in acts of kindness and love, it can bring about a significant change in the community as a whole. Frost adds that it was through these acts of kindness that the early church literally transformed the Roman Empire (7). If leaders in the church can communicate clearly God's mission and then challenge believers to act on this message, then something astronomical can happen. Literally hundreds of thousands of ordinary Christian men and women can infiltrate every aspect of their society with their acts of kindness that would surprise this culture to respond. In the end, studies have proved that obeying Jesus command to love one's neighbor leads to safer neighborhoods, healthier neighborhoods and even more hopeful neighborhoods (Rusaw and Mavis, 46).

Nelson observed how so many Christians long for a more lived-out and deeper faith. How Christians throughout the West are longing to be challenged to do something meaningful with their faith (10). During the semi-formal focus group at the end of this

project, one participant asked, “How can we keep this going? I am not sure I want this to end, so what are some ways we can sustain this because this should not be a start and stop thing?” Another said, “I truly believe what we are doing is right in line with God’s mission for the church, and for me, that is what excites me about this church.” Finally, a very shy and introverted participant said, “One of the questions you did not ask was, ‘Are you glad we did this?’ and I am glad we did this. It has changed me on how I look at people and it made me realize that I can do this. I am shy, but I can do this. It was life changing for me and I think it affected us more than it did them.”

Something profound and life changing happens in the lives of Christians when they are challenged to do something significant with their faith. When leaders of the church are intentional about communicating the mission of God and how each member plays a significant role in God’s mission, and then challenge them to do something about it, it can change the course of the church forever. In the same way, it can surprise this culture, to the point where they begin to ask questions and faith sharing can be had. Overall, if church leaders were to teach, communicate, and challenge God’s people to join God’s mission it can have a significant impact on the members as well as the community.

#### **Fourth Finding**

**Loving one’s neighbor should never be a program of the church, but rather a lifestyle that each member of the church should embrace.**

If churches are going to realize their true identity and begin to love their neighbors, then they need to realize that this cannot be another program added to their list of programs. Obedience to Jesus by living out the Great Commandment should be

primary. Wright adds, “Blessing the nations is the declared mission of God, and that is the reason why he calls this people into existence...”(82). God has from the very beginning called his followers to join him in his mission. This is not an option, a program, or a weekend church-wide event. The church by nature is missionary, to the extent that if it ceases being missional, it will not just fail in one of its programs, it will cease to be the church.

The problem with Church programs is that they always come to an end. Loving our neighbors is something a Christian never stops doing. This is the prime imperative of God, and as such, it should be carried out by all believers until it becomes the normative behavior in the church. Church leaders throughout the West have been programmed to create more and more programs to the point where its members have been conditioned to accept it. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis pointedly exclaim, “Programs are what we create when Christians are not doing what they are supposed to do in everyday life” (Loc 50). This could be the reason why the pre-survey stated that 66 percent of all participants in this project were not excited about engaging their neighbors for Christ. Not that they did not want to, they simply did not know where to start. Our church culture has programmed our members to leave the world and all that is in it and come to them to have all their needs and desires met. Most churches offers programs ranging from discipleship, marriage counseling, to even child care. With all these programs, church members are hesitant to leave the church building and actually join God in his mission in the world.

When the participants were stripped of their programs and challenged to live like Christ in their neighborhoods, most found it a bit nerve wracking. However, one

participant said, “All it took was for me to say hello to one neighbor and start a conversation for me to know that I can do this. From there on out, it became easier and easier.” In the post survey, a staggering 93 percent of all participants now claim to be excited about engaging their neighbors for Christ. Forty percent stated it described them very well, and 6.6 percent proclaimed it describes them extremely well. None of these were marked in the pre survey. This is not to say that programing is wrong, but relying solely on programs to nourish one’s faith will come up wanting.

Neighboring is not a program. In the simplest of terms, engaging our neighbors should be a value that is taught and lived out (Rusaw and Mavis, 50). If, as the research has pointed out, the church will cease to exist if it is not on mission, then this is too big to be a program. Neighboring should be what drives the church. All ministries, programs and events should be aligned with this in mind. For example, LifeBridge Church believes this so much, that it has become one of their core values. They see loving their neighbors as a value to be lived out in every area and life-stage of ministry in their church. They illustrate this by this design:

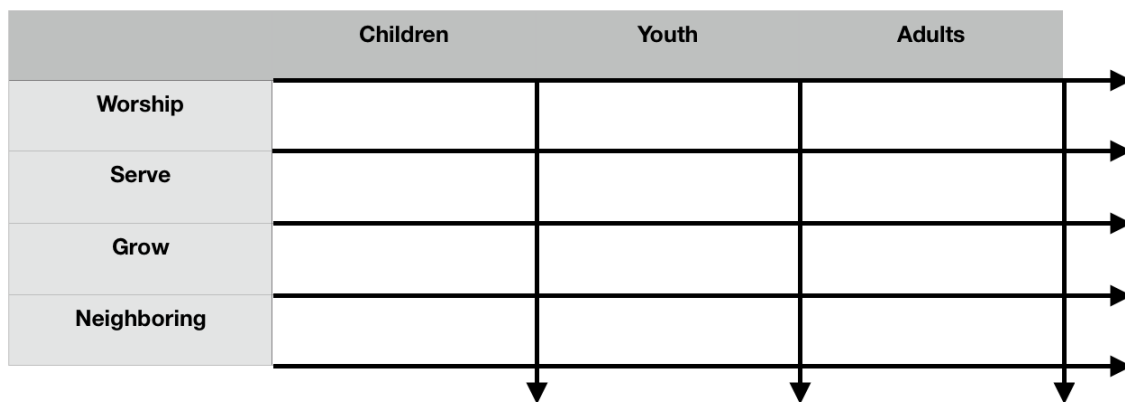


Figure 5.1 LifeBridge Core Value Chart (Rusaw and Mavis, 51)



Every ministry or program at LifeBridge will have to answer the following questions:

1. How can this help people love their neighbors better?
2. How can we take what we have been doing in our ministry on campus and flow it out into people's homes and neighborhoods?
3. How and when are we teaching and modeling how to love our neighbors as ourselves?
4. Do the people in our ministry area of influence have the margin in their lives to love their neighbors, or are we keeping them too busy at the church? (Rusaw and Mavis, (51).

Every effective organization knows how to measure what it values. If a church measures their programs as what they value, then they will be a very heavy program driven church. If a church values neighboring, then it must measure that. Loving one's neighbor does not always lead to seeing one's neighbor come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior or be baptized in the name of Christ. Loving one's neighbor does not necessarily lead that neighbor to come to one's church. How to measure neighboring is an issue. Kevin Colón came up with a concept called "Plus One" as a way to measure loving one's neighbor (qtd in Rusaw and Mavis, 53). Plus One is any act of kindness, service, prayer, or intentional conversation with one's neighbors. Plus One can also be something a neighbor does for the Christian. It can also be anything done for a neighbor that is not seen by the neighbor. For example, moving their trash can at the curb to their garage door can be seen as a Plus One. This idea comes from Matthew 15:40 where Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

Jesus was a great model of the Plus One. In *Moving Back into the Neighborhood*, Alan Roxburgh shows us how Jesus seems to always appear in the ordinary things in life. He states, “Jesus is shown to us in the ordinariness of birth, family, place and time. In Jesus, God is always turning up in the ordinariness of the everyday, the local and the regular rhythms of life” (29). Through Scripture one can see multiple Plus One’s from Jesus:

- Jesus asking for a drink (John 4:7)
- Jesus attended a wedding (John 2)
- Jesus making wine for friends and family (John 2)
- Jesus was a guest at someone’s house (Luke 7:36)
- Jesus grieved with friends (Matthew 26:38-39)
- Jesus had compassion and visited the sick (Matthew 14:14)
- Jesus went fishing (Luke 5)
- Jesus saw people and their potential (“Simon, do you see this woman?”)(Luke 7:44).

These Plus One’s were amazingly non-spiritual, yet they proved to be powerful. Jesus in the midst of these countless Plus One’s, was touchable, genuine, and available. Jesus intentionally made contact with people where the people were. In the same way, the church cannot take neighboring and place it as a program. It cannot be stuck in a box; it needs to be organic.

In Acts 1:8, Jesus’ last directive to his disciples, and incidentally to all his followers was to receive the power of the Holy Spirit and to be witnesses both locally and globally. Jesus’ last command, “you will be my witnesses,” was for his followers to go

and be a blessing to the nations and carry the role of a kingdom of priests as they draw people into the presence of God. This research has shown that if God's people would spend more time placing a value on neighboring and witnessing to their neighbors as church leaders do in programs, then the church in the West will no longer be seen as a church in decline. Believers can see an exorbitant amount to life, growth and vitality happen in the church. As Ed Stetzer and David Putman strongly declare, then "maybe we would not be living on the only continent in the world were the church is not growing" (40).

God's desire for churches to become communities on mission is not only a foundational pillar in the Bible, but a lifestyle he calls all believers to embrace. God's redemptive plan of being a people who usher in outsiders and "foreigners" into the presence of God is what gave Israel their identity. Programs, though they may have some intrinsic value in the church, should not be what gives a church an identity.

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

Firstly, these findings inform the need for practical steps to re-create the vision for the Church where God's mission is first and foremost in the hearts of all church leaders and members alike. Furthermore, they point to resources that will help congregants see how God's love can be known and felt in neighborhoods and houses, not just in church buildings. In addition, these practical steps place a high value of neighboring as a fundamental ministry in the church.

Secondly, the findings inform church leaders that the laity are craving for something deeper with their faith. These findings show that church leaders are failing in their responsibility to help members understand the reign of God in all aspects of their

lives. The findings have shown the disconnect between what the members are reading in their Bibles to what is being taught and lived out in their church. Additionally, these findings show how churches can move from being attractional/program driven churches to incarnational by moving away from the church building as the center of gravity to navigating into the neighborhoods and joining God in his mission there. The research has shown that deeper faith is felt and lived out when their faith is practiced outside of the church building.

Thirdly, the findings identify the culture's disconnect from the church and how reclaiming God's mission can bring about positive change. In this present culture, the church is not doing anything that is intriguing or surprising. No one is asking questions about the church, or the church's role in the society. If anything, a lethargic lack of attention to anything the church does seems to pervade. As the research has shown, churches that feed the hungry, or visit the sick in the hospitals, brings no reaction from the culture. Simply because this is expected from the church. Living incarnationally in local neighborhoods by performing random acts of kindness, biblical hospitality, and deeper faith-building conversations is what has been found to surprise these communities to stop and pay attention.

Lastly, these findings pave the way for missional disciple making as a foundational commitment of the Church as it fulfills the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. If Christians would align themselves to God's mission, then they can identify the purposes of the Father, experience the life of the Son and the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit within their local context. It is having a daily awareness as one discerns moving into the space where God is present (Nelson 72). It is a need to

engage in praying for where God is working and join in. In essence, it is learning to live incarnationally in their local neighborhoods.

Genesis 12 demonstrates the significant missional plan of God when he commanded his people to be a blessing to the nations. Through this mission to the world, the nation of Israel became a kingdom of priests in Exodus 19, assisting God in his redemptive plan, and giving them their identity. When God sent his son Jesus into this world, Jesus assumed his nation's role by becoming a consummate blessing to the nations and priest to the world, by representing the kingdom of God to all people. As followers of Christ, each believer must carry this identity and purpose with haste. The research findings provide clear instructions on how the mission of God can be carried out in this present culture, to every church and every member alike. Clear and instructive communication from church leaders, and vulnerability from each member, are required, but the findings show a deeper-lived-out faith and a re-awakening of the heart of God. Overall, with limited research on effective practices for engaging neighbors for Christ, this research sought to identify new practices in engaging neighbors for Christ.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Although the researcher faced some limitations during the research, he does not believe it impacted the study findings. The most notable limitations was persuading the participants to complete this project during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday season. With travel and family visits, some of the participants found it difficult to complete each weeks project in a timely manner. Another limitation was a lack of effective practices on how to engage their neighbors for Christ. If the researcher were to do this again, he would provide more examples on how to engage their neighbors for the

purpose of learning their names, hopes, histories and hurts. Finally, the researcher would not alter his instrumentation or data collection because of these limitations, because he believes that they did not hinder quality data analysis.

### **Unexpected Observations**

The following observations were unanticipated by the researcher:

1. Research showed that people are extremely busy and move from one thing to the next; however, they also crave relationships. The researcher was surprised by how long most of the first encounters the participants had with their neighbors were. When engaging a neighbor for the first time, most of those encounters lasted an hour or more. Neighbors are yearning for significant relationships with their neighbors.
2. Outside of one participant, the rest were married couples participating in this study together. Unexpectedly, those marriages were strengthened as a result of this equipping project. These marriages found themselves praying together more often, and for some, for the first time. Joining God in his mission in their neighborhoods brought them closer as they relied more on God together.
3. The participants felt greater joy in their lives as a result of this project. When the seventy-two came back from ministering to their neighbors in Luke 10, it states, "The seventy-two returned with joy." It was this joy, of serving the Lord and seeing God move that was experienced by all participants.
4. The research project was designed with the Great Commandment in mind, especially the second part on loving neighbors. The participants are now

yearning to fulfil the Great Commission as a result of living out the Great Commandment.

5. Participants have expressed ways in which they can share their personal findings with the church on how to efficiently engage their neighbors with practices they found to be effective.
6. Being vulnerable was foundational to opening doors for deeper conversations with neighbors as they learned their names, hopes, histories and hurts.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the combination of this project's literature review, personal experiences, data from the surveys and focus group, the researchers recommendations are as follows:

1. After reading the findings from this project, one should investigate how to connect being a blessing to being a kingdom of priests to their neighbors. With this study being more limited to being a blessing to neighbors and not so much of being a kingdom of priests, becoming missional disciple makers should be examined more. Both are needed to build the kingdom of God.
2. The literature review has shown how the church in the West has moved away from being a missional church. The research of the church pulling away is sizable and varied, but literature is limited in the ways of practical steps on how to reverse course. Most research and books point out the theological and biblical foundations for being missional, but only few cover the practical. The researcher found less than a half-dozen books on how to practically love their immediate neighbors.

3. The research has shown that the majority of the population of the United States live in the suburbs. It would be of value to research ways to missionally engage suburban neighbors. A lot of research on urban missions and living missionally in general are available, but to place value on the suburban context would be treasured.
4. With the Trinitarian viewpoint of the *missio Dei*, there is a lack of research on the Holy Spirit's role in supporting believers in carrying out the mission of God in their local context.
5. Anyone who wishes to better understand the role of missionally engaging local neighbors for Christ, within biblical, theological, and missional history, would benefit from reading this research and incorporate the findings into current studies.

### **Postscript**

What started off as a requirement by my local denomination turned into something that will forever change how I see church and do ministry. Prior to this study, my way of doing and thinking church was to get as many people in the church as possible, by attracting them with well-maintained programs and gimmicks. This research opened my eyes to how missional God desires his church to be.

A year after being admitted into this Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary, I decided to leave my former denomination and launched a non-denominational church. I had an opportunity to do what many could not, and that was to have a re-do. When we launched Living Stones Church, I decided to follow God's blueprint on how to be a missional church. Utilizing the APEST model of ministry, found



in Ephesians 4, to fulfilling the Great Commandment by loving our literal neighbors, Living Stones Church is slowly making an impact in Katy, Texas. Instead of having a staff heavy church doing most of the ministry, we scaled significantly back and are now laity-run. We strive to implement these practices mentioned in this study and as a result are seeing more and more members not only being challenged, but also growing exponentially in their faith.

One of the issues that this study did not address was how difficult it was to take consumer fed members and make them into missionaries. It literally took me twenty years of full time ministry before I truly saw the importance of joining God on mission in our neighborhoods. Members, who previously have only been required to attend and watch the “show,” are now beginning to see the fruit of this study. It was not easy, and there are some today who still want to fight, scratch, and claw in order to maintain the previous way of doing church. Two years after launching Living Stones Church, the majority of our members are finally beginning to see the impact of what living life on mission is all about. Our APEST groups are constantly coming up with innovative ideas to reach our neighbors, and we give them freedom to run. Our evangelists have launched kindness outreaches where, for 35 weekends a year, we connect with our neighbors as we show them God’s love in a practical way. Some of these are just passing out water bottles at youth events, to mulching people’s yards, to just putting up prayer cards on peoples car windows at the grocery stores on Valentine’s Day, letting them know we are thinking of them. Our apostles are in the process of investing in block party neighboring kits for our members to use to throw block parties in their neighborhoods, and our teachers are in the developmental stage of running VBS-type programs at our local parks. Our shepherds

love the opportunity to meet new neighbors and strike up conversations, and our prophets are making sure we don't screw it up!

Overall, this study has changed me completely on what church should be. I am forever thankful for the opportunity to work on this, and thankful for all the members who have had to put up with me as we learn as we go. Our desire is to surprise the world with sacrificial acts of kindness to our neighbors, and this study has enabled us to do just that.

## APPENDIXES

### APPENDIX A

#### MISSIONAL EQUIPPING SURVEY

##### Voluntary Consent Form

The purpose of this research project is to learn more about God's mission and how we, as Christians, can participate in it. This research project is being conducted by Scott Rawlings, a DMin candidate at Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited to participate in this research project because you are a member of Living Stones Church that has agreed to take part in the research project. Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate in this research survey, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you withdraw from participating at any time, you will not be penalized. The procedure involves filling an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes. Responses will be confidential and identifying information such as your name, email address or IP address will not be collected. All data is stored in a password protected electronic format. The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with Asbury Theological Seminary representatives. This research has been reviewed according to Asbury Theological Seminary IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

##### ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. Clicking on the "Yes" button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information.
- you voluntarily agree to participate.
- you are at least 18 years of age.

Q1. Do you agree to the above terms? By click YES, you consent that you are willing to answer the questions in this survey.

1. Yes                      2. No

Q2. Date of birth (mm/dd/yy)

Q3. Name of first pet

##### **Instruction:**

Please read each statement below and indicate how well you agree or disagree by

choosing one of the options from the four point scale.

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Agree

4 = Strongly Agree

Q4. I have a biblical understanding of God's mission.

1. Strongly Disagree    2. Disagree    3. Agree    4. Strongly Agree

Q5. I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.

1. Strongly Disagree    2. Disagree    3. Agree    4. Strongly Agree

Q6. I have a biblical comprehension of God's plan for me concerning mission.

1. Strongly Disagree    2. Disagree    3. Agree    4. Strongly Agree

Q7. I believe my home is not just for my family and our resources but placed in my care to be enjoyed and shared by others.

1. Strongly Disagree    2. Disagree    3. Agree    4. Strongly Agree

Q8. I believe that my life is rooted not only in my relationships with others but also in relation to the place I live.

1. Strongly Disagree    2. Disagree    3. Agree    4. Strongly Agree

**Instruction:**

Please read each statement below and indicate how well the statement describes you IN GENERAL (i.e. how you are most of the time) by choosing one of the options from the five point scale.

1 = Does NOT describe me at all.

2 = Does NOT describe me very well.

3 = Describes me moderately well.

4 = Describes me very well.

5 = Describes me extremely well.

Q9. I could be satisfied if I never got to know my neighbors personally.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.  
2. Does NOT describe me very well.  
3. Describes me moderately well.  
4. Describes me very well.  
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q10. I am inspired to provide margin in my life to add more relationships.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q11. I take the initiative to know my neighbor's names, hopes, hurts, and histories.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q12. I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q13. I am dedicated to inviting my neighbors over for dinner frequently.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q14. I am an active participant in my neighborhood.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q15. I am living in my neighborhood based on how it would serve my personal wants and needs.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.

4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q16. I have significant conversations with my neighbors frequently.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q17. If I see there is a need in my neighborhood, I am eager to help.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

Q18. I pray for my neighbors often.

1. Does NOT describe me at all.
2. Does NOT describe me very well.
3. Describes me moderately well.
4. Describes me very well.
5. Describes me extremely well.

**Instruction:**

Please type out the following two questions honestly and to the best of your ability.

Q19 Excluding members, if Living Stones Church disappeared, would anyone in Katy, Texas care? Why or why not?

Q20. What does it look like to be the best church for our community?

**APPENDIX B**

**Missional Formation Equipping Focus Group Questions  
(Semi-Structured)**

1. Describe what impacted you most during the missional formation equipping process?
2. Can you describe any practices that worked well in connecting with your neighbors and filling out the Neighboring Map?
3. How did you go about learning more about your neighbors?
4. Explain what you learned about your neighbors, i.e. names, hurts, hopes, histories, etc.?
5. Share one experience that significantly impacted you during this training process?
6. If your attitude toward God's mission has altered in any way, please describe that change?
7. Was there anything I could do differently, or keep the same, if I were to do another missional formation group?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add that none of these questions addressed?

**APPENDIX C**

**MISSIONAL EQUIPPING STUDY CONSENT FORM**

Dear Colleague,

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Scott Rawlings from Asbury Theological Seminary. If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey before and after the equipping study, spend two days in equipping training, and then two months living out what was taught in the two day equipping training. There will be a focus group after the two months and you may be asked to be interviewed on your experience. No compensation is provided for your participation in this study-

I want to assure you that your responses in the survey will be kept confidential. I will not ask for your name on the survey. The data will be collected using a code and all of the surveys will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person.

If you decide at any time you do not want to finish the study, you may stop whenever you want. You can ask Scott questions any time about anything in this study.

I believe this study will ultimately help form effective practices for Living Stones Church on reaching our diverse community for Christ.

Signing this paper means that you have read this, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, you don't need to 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



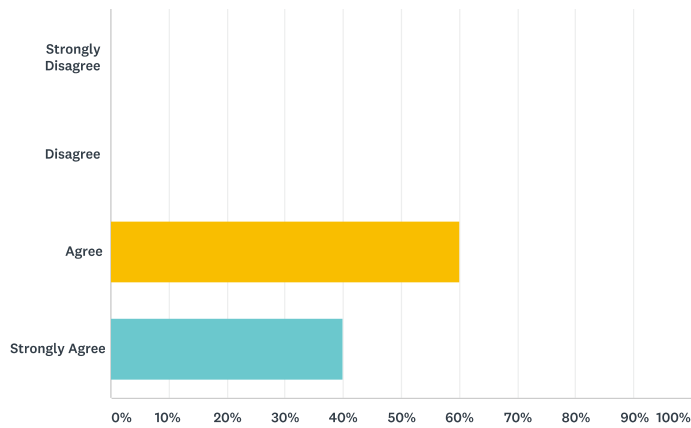
**APPENDIX D**

**MISSIONAL EQUIPPING PRE-SURVEY RESULTS**

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q4 I have a biblical understanding of God's mission.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

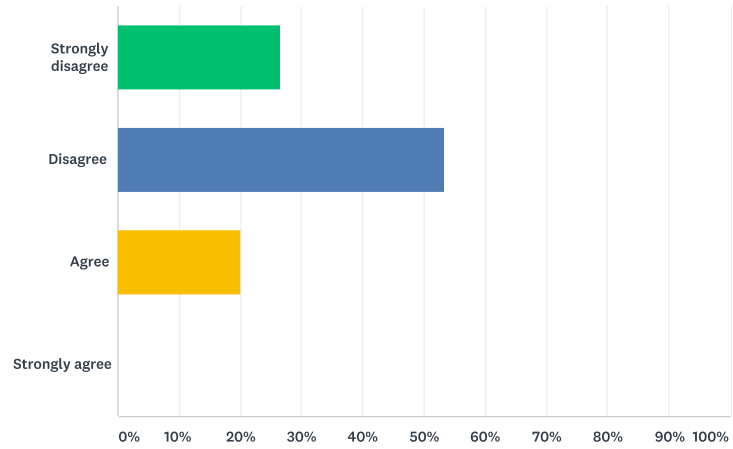


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Agree	60.00%	9
Strongly Agree	40.00%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q5 I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

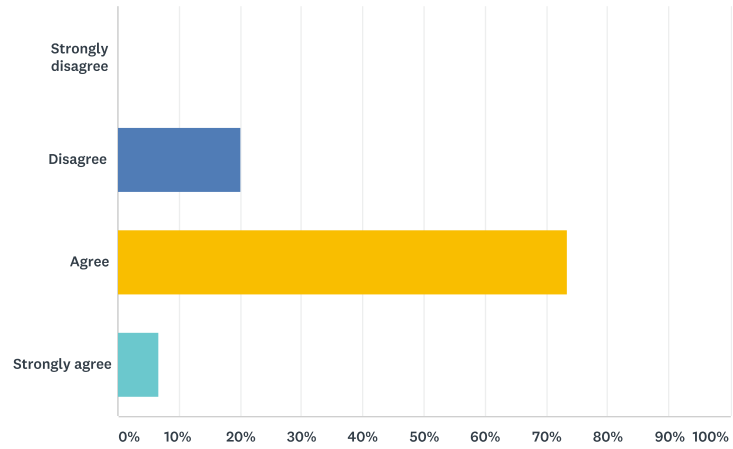


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	26.67%	4
Disagree	53.33%	8
Agree	20.00%	3
Strongly agree	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q6 I have a biblical comprehension of God's plan for me concerning mission.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

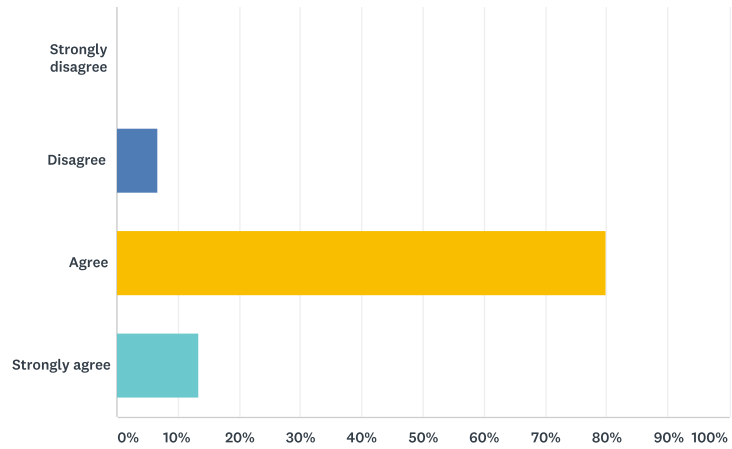


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	20.00%	3
Agree	73.33%	11
Strongly agree	6.67%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q7 I believe my home is not just for my family and our resources but placed in my care to be enjoyed and shared with others.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

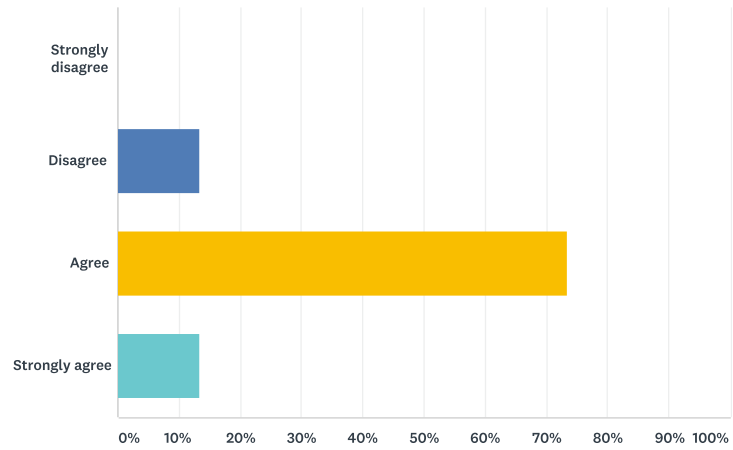


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	6.67%	1
Agree	80.00%	12
Strongly agree	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q8 I believe that my life is rooted not only in my relationships with others but also in relation to the place I live.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

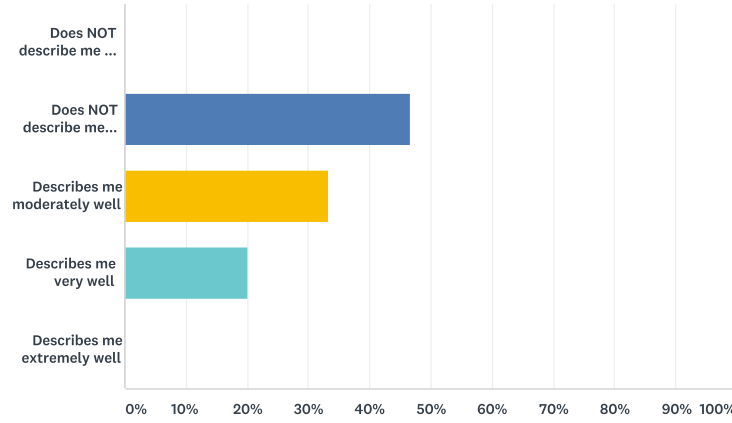


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	13.33%	2
Agree	73.33%	11
Strongly agree	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q9 I could be satisfied if I never got to know my neighbors personally.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

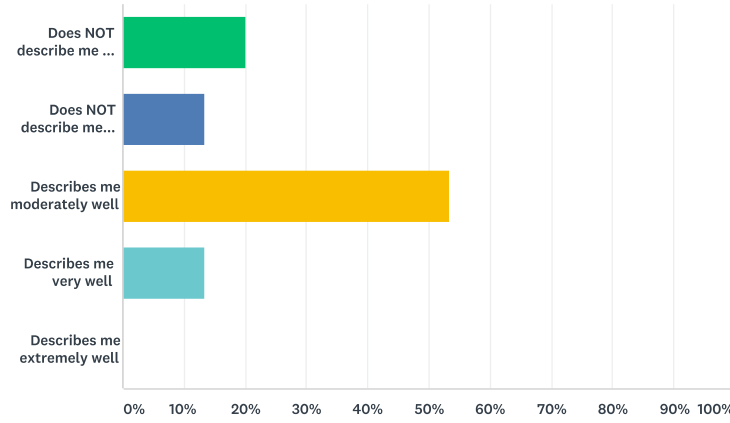


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	46.67%	7
Describes me moderately well	33.33%	5
Describes me very well	20.00%	3
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q10 I am inspired to provide margin in my life to add more relationships.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

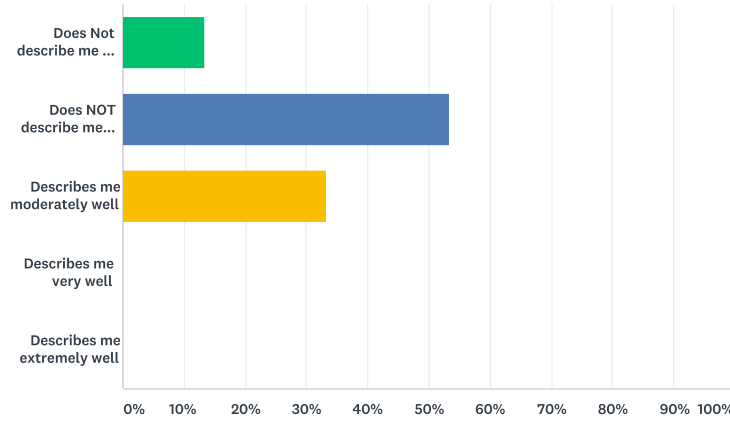


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	20.00%	3
Does NOT describe me very well	13.33%	2
Describes me moderately well	53.33%	8
Describes me very well	13.33%	2
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q11 I take the initiative to know my neighbor's names, hopes, hurts, and histories.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



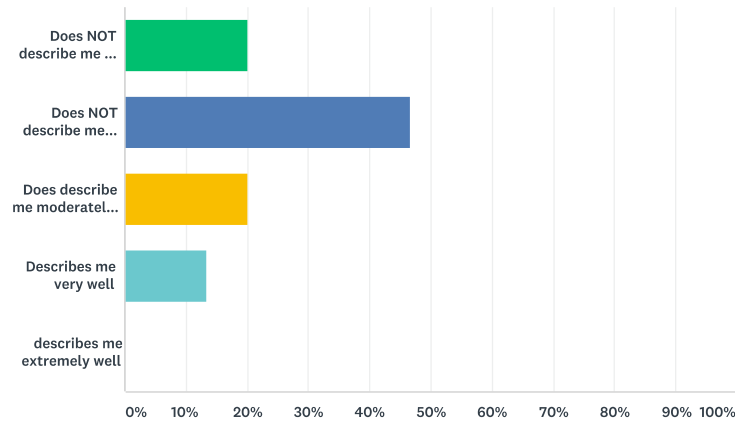
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does Not describe me at all	13.33%	2
Does NOT describe me very well	53.33%	8
Describes me moderately well	33.33%	5
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15



Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q12 I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

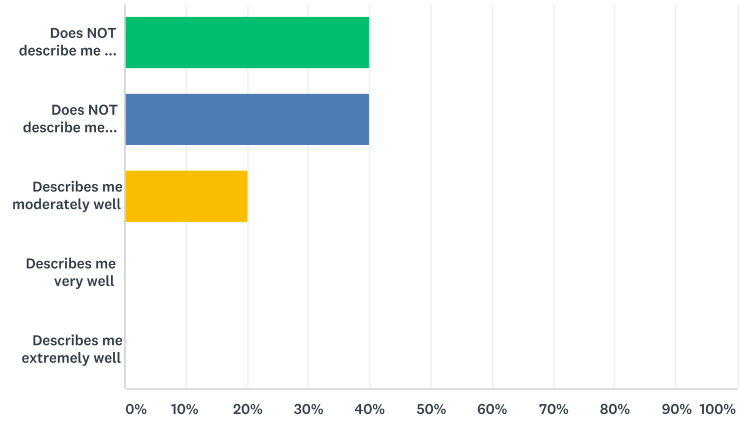


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	20.00%	3
Does NOT describe me very well	46.67%	7
Does describe me moderately well	20.00%	3
Describes me very well	13.33%	2
describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q13 I am dedicated to inviting my neighbors over for dinner frequently.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

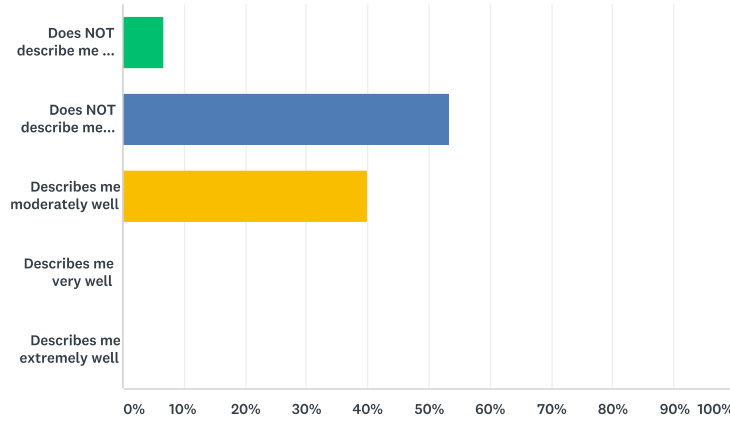


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	40.00%	6
Does NOT describe me very well	40.00%	6
Describes me moderately well	20.00%	3
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q14 I am an active participant in my neighborhood.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

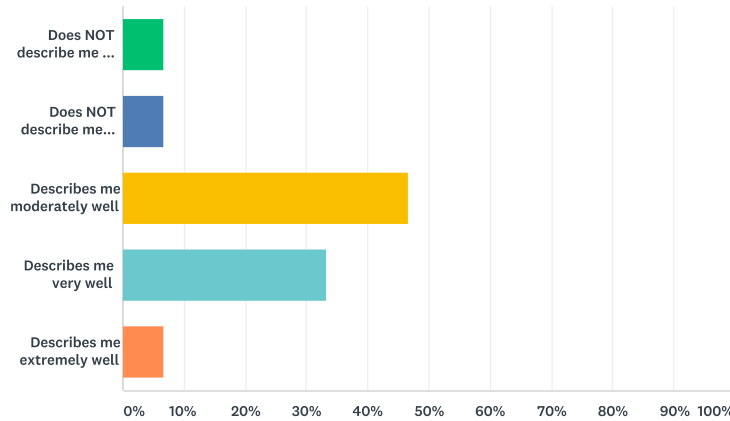


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	6.67%	1
Does NOT describe me very well	53.33%	8
Describes me moderately well	40.00%	6
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q15 I am living in my neighborhood based on how it would serve my personal wants and needs.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

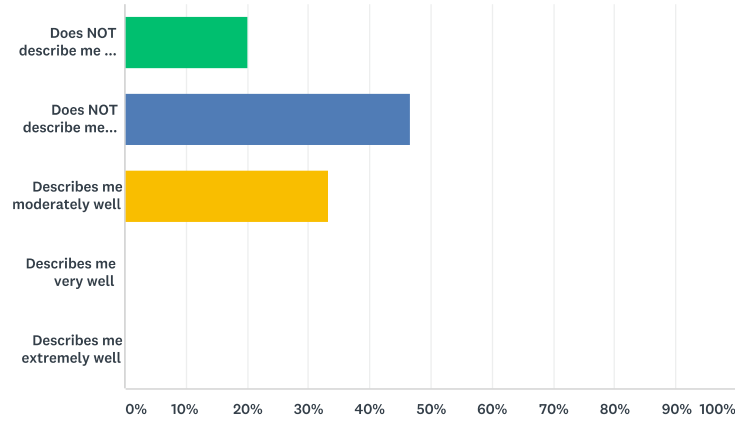


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	6.67%	1
Does NOT describe me very well	6.67%	1
Describes me moderately well	46.67%	7
Describes me very well	33.33%	5
Describes me extremely well	6.67%	1
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q16 I have significant conversations with my neighbors frequently.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

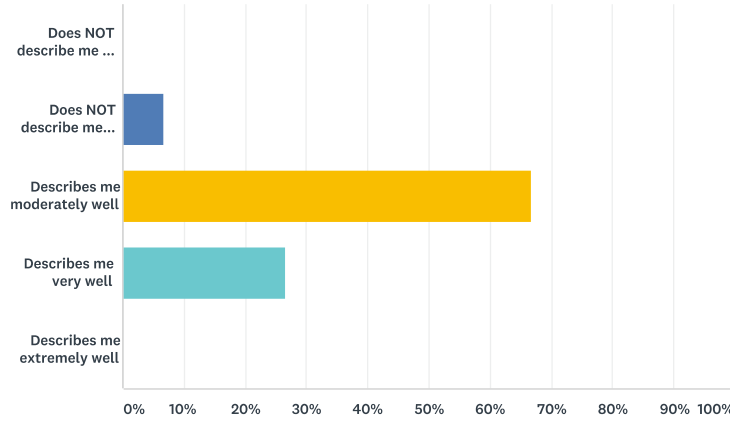


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	20.00%	3
Does NOT describe me very well	46.67%	7
Describes me moderately well	33.33%	5
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q17 If I see there is a need in my neighborhood, I am eager to help.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

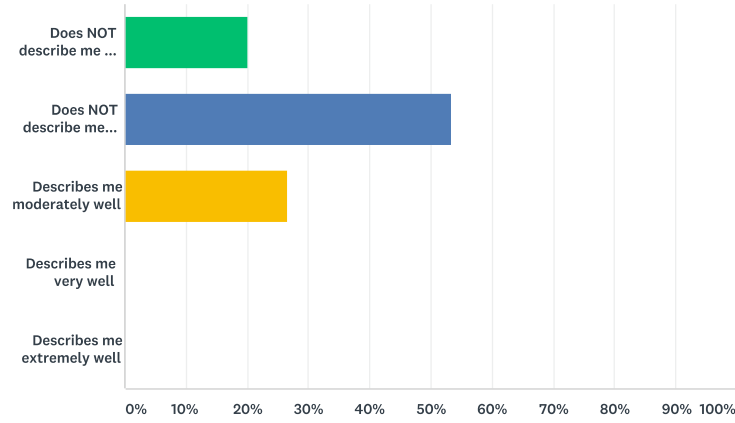


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	6.67%	1
Describes me moderately well	66.67%	10
Describes me very well	26.67%	4
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

Q18 I pray for my neighbors often.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	20.00%	3
Does NOT describe me very well	53.33%	8
Describes me moderately well	26.67%	4
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
TOTAL		15

## Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

## Q19 Excluding members, if Living Stones Church disappeared, would anyone in Katy, Texas care? Why or why not?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	God would care because God IS love and so is Living Stones Church	10/23/2019 2:13 AM
2	Katy would only be impacted if something that Katy needed went away. I am not sure that Living Stones is providing anything that Katy finds that it needs so would anyone care - probably not very much.	10/23/2019 2:09 AM
3	Probably not, there are a lot of churches of various denominations in Katy. But at the same time not all do local missionary work.	10/20/2019 8:52 PM
4	No. We have not established ourselves in the community.	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
5	Maybe not. Might not be doing enough that makes a big enough impact.	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
6	Would not due to lack of outreach and community involvement	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
7	No, because we are making significant impact to our community yet	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
8	Probably not at this point as the reach into the community is just in the beginning stages	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
9	No not yet	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
10	No. Not been around long enough to make significant impact	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
11	Not yet. I feel that I personally need to make more of an effort to be a blessing to those outside of the church.	10/20/2019 8:48 PM
12	No, because they don't know us. I think we are trying to reach out more, but most people do not know us.	10/20/2019 8:48 PM
13	No. We are not a well known commodity	10/20/2019 8:47 PM
14	No, because right now we aren't in the community very much. But that is changing!	10/20/2019 8:46 PM
15	I don't believe non-members would care. They wouldn't care because they have not been affected by our church in any way.	10/20/2019 5:42 PM



## Missional Equipping Pre-Survey

## Q20 What does it look like to be the best church for our community?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	A church that can see humanity with the eyes of God	10/23/2019 2:13 AM
2	I am not sure that I would know what the best church looks like, but I believe a better church for our community would be one involved in helping to meet the needs, some more basic than others.	10/23/2019 2:09 AM
3	A church that the community knows well. A church that is involved in the community.	10/20/2019 8:52 PM
4	For us to be a very welcoming church. Making sure we meet our congregation where they are spiritually and encouraging them grow in their faith.	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
5	Lots of mission work and meaningful relationships	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
6	Being present for larger missions and available for more frequent community involvement	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
7	A church that is intentional in making a difference in our community and is open to all cultures and sinners	10/20/2019 8:51 PM
8	Reaching out to those in need	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
9	Going out serving and spreading the love of God	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
10	Meet the needs of the people in our community	10/20/2019 8:50 PM
11	By doing all we can to help the greater community and to share God's love and message.	10/20/2019 8:48 PM
12	We are serving our neighbors in meaningful ways, and we are sharing God's love. They know God because they know us.	10/20/2019 8:48 PM
13	People eager to see what LS is about	10/20/2019 8:47 PM
14	Community-centered not self-centered	10/20/2019 8:46 PM
15	I'm technically not sure...I think it would be one that was very visible but also very intentional. We would have met with, prayed with, come along side them in some capacity.	10/20/2019 5:42 PM

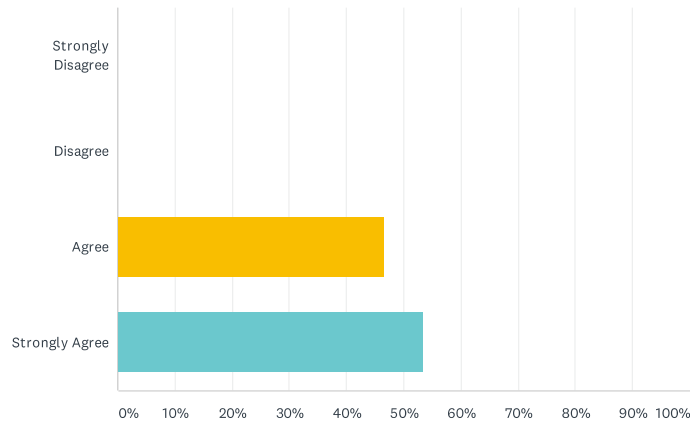
**APPENDIX E**

**MISSIONAL EQUIPPING POST SURVEY RESULT**

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q4 I have a biblical understanding of God's mission.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

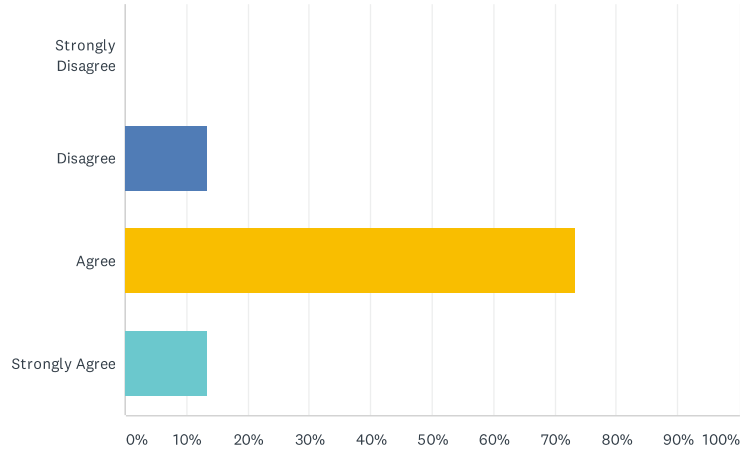


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Agree	46.67%	7
Strongly Agree	53.33%	8
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q5 I understand a variety of methods of living incarnationally in my local context.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

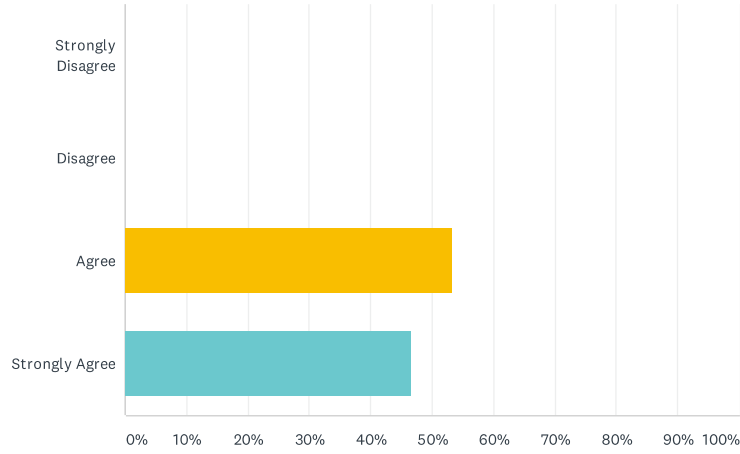


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	13.33%	2
Agree	73.33%	11
Strongly Agree	13.33%	2
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q6 I have a biblical comprehension of God's plan for me concerning mission.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

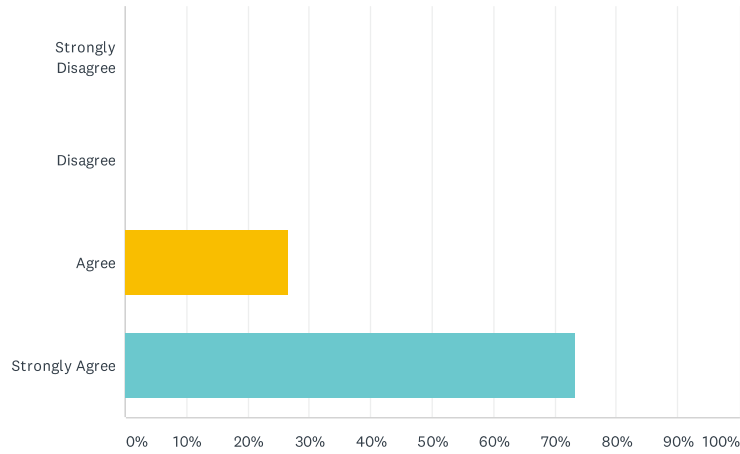


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Agree	53.33%	8
Strongly Agree	46.67%	7
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q7 I believe my home is not just for my family and our resources but placed in my care to be enjoyed and shared with others.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

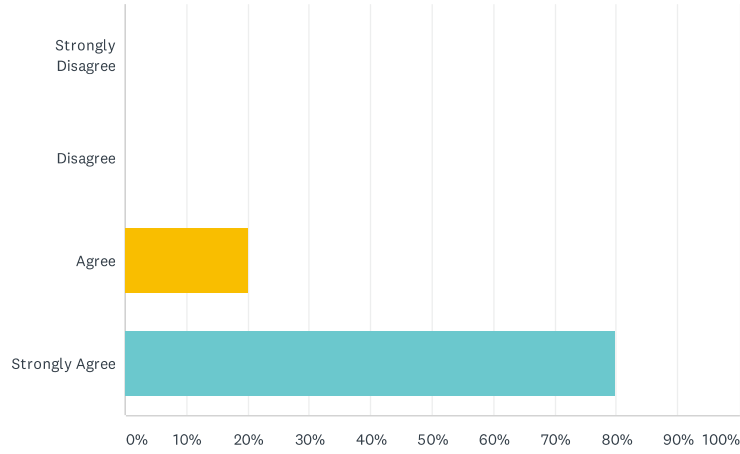


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Agree	26.67%	4
Strongly Agree	73.33%	11
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q8 I believe that my life is rooted not only in my relationships with others but also in relation to the place I live.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

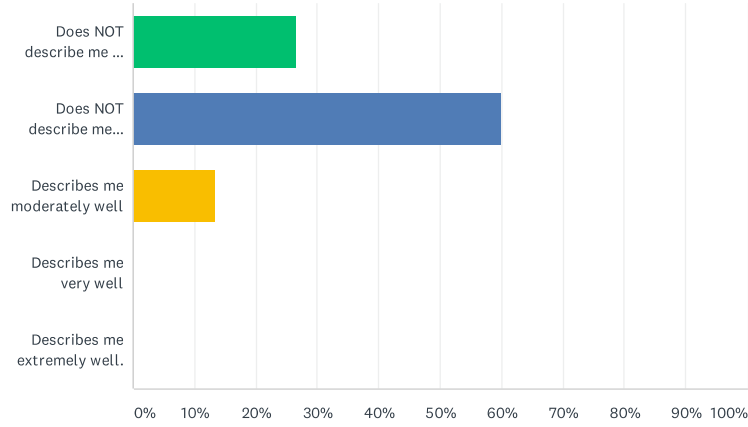


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strongly Disagree	0.00%	0
Disagree	0.00%	0
Agree	20.00%	3
Strongly Agree	80.00%	12
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q9 I could be satisfied if I never got to know my neighbors personally.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

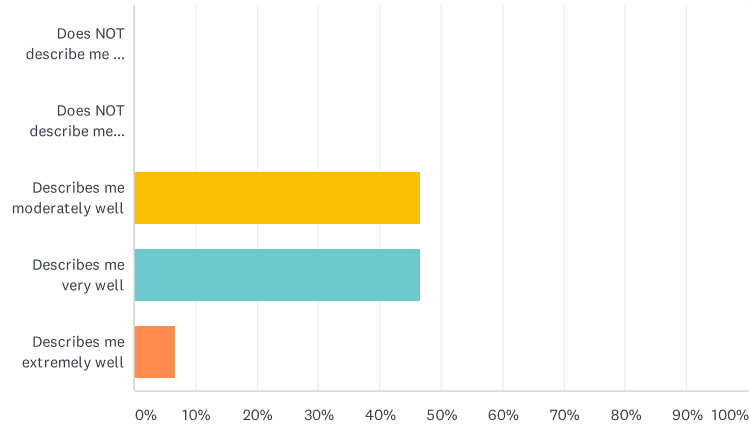


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	26.67%	4
Does NOT describe me very well	60.00%	9
Describes me moderately well	13.33%	2
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well.	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q10 I am inspired to provide margin in my life to add more relationships.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



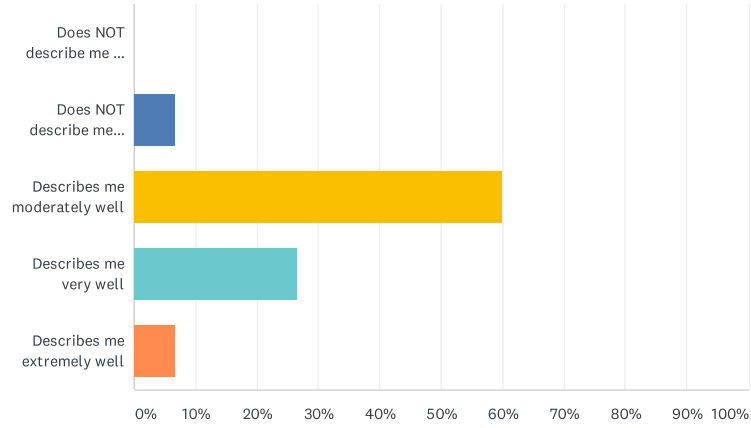
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me moderately well	46.67%	7
Describes me very well	46.67%	7
Describes me extremely well	6.67%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>



Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q11 I take the initiative to know my neighbors names, hopes, hurts, and histories.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

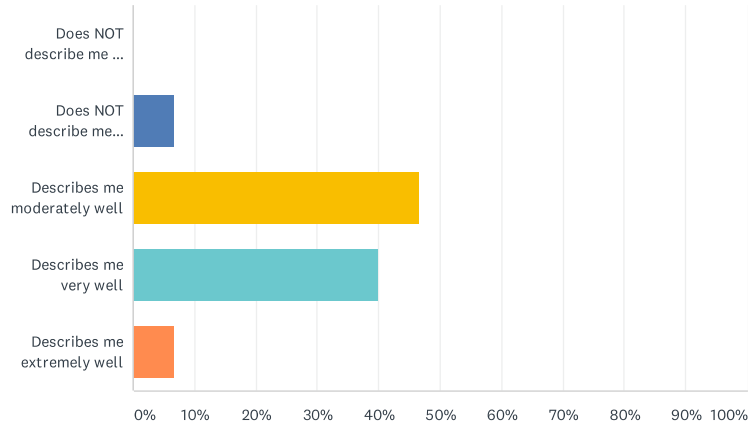


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00% 0
Does NOT describe me very well	6.67% 1
Describes me moderately well	60.00% 9
Describes me very well	26.67% 4
Describes me extremely well	6.67% 1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q12 I get excited about engaging my neighbors for Christ.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

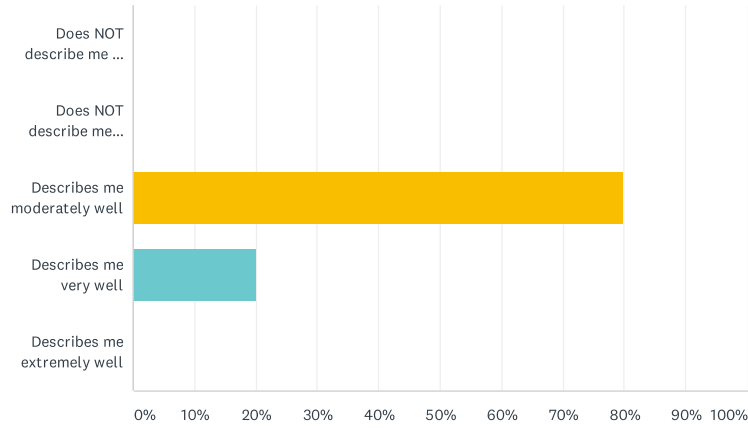


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all.	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	6.67%	1
Describes me moderately well	46.67%	7
Describes me very well	40.00%	6
Describes me extremely well	6.67%	1
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q13 I am dedicated to inviting my neighbors over for dinner frequently.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

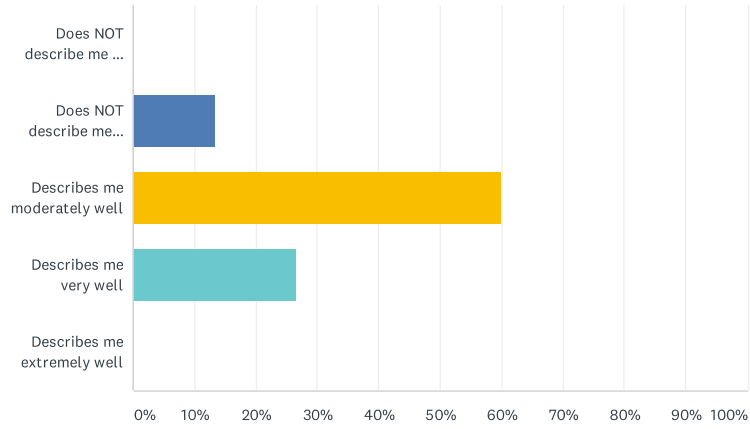


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me moderately well	80.00%	12
Describes me very well	20.00%	3
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q14 I am an active participant in my neighborhood.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

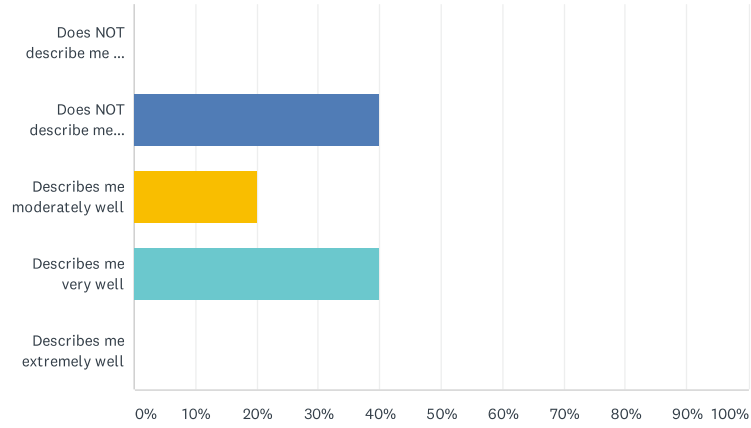


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	13.33%	2
Describes me moderately well	60.00%	9
Describes me very well	26.67%	4
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q15 I am living in my neighborhood based on how it would serve my personal wants and needs.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

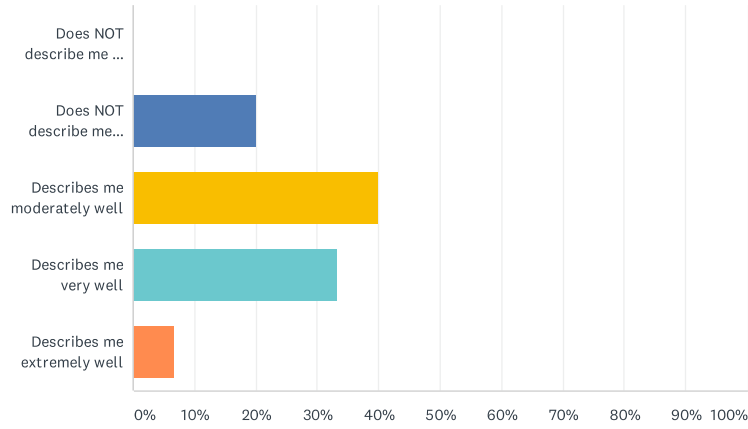


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	40.00%	6
Describes me moderately well	20.00%	3
Describes me very well	40.00%	6
Describes me extremely well	0.00%	0
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q16 I have significant conversations with my neighbors frequently.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

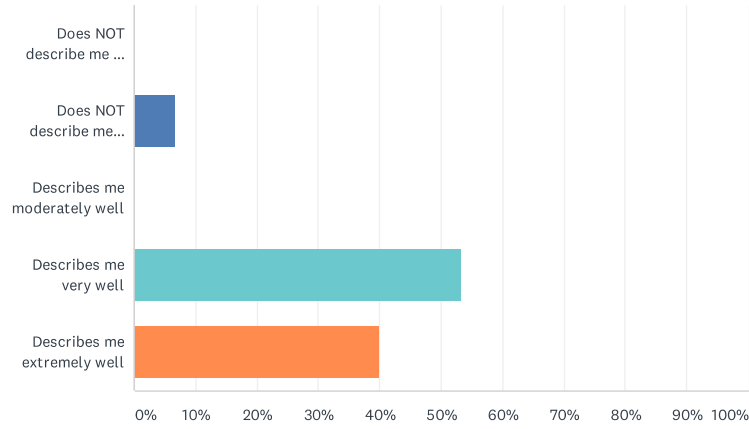


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	20.00%	3
Describes me moderately well	40.00%	6
Describes me very well	33.33%	5
Describes me extremely well	6.67%	1
TOTAL		15

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q17 If I see there is a need in my neighborhood, I am eager to help.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

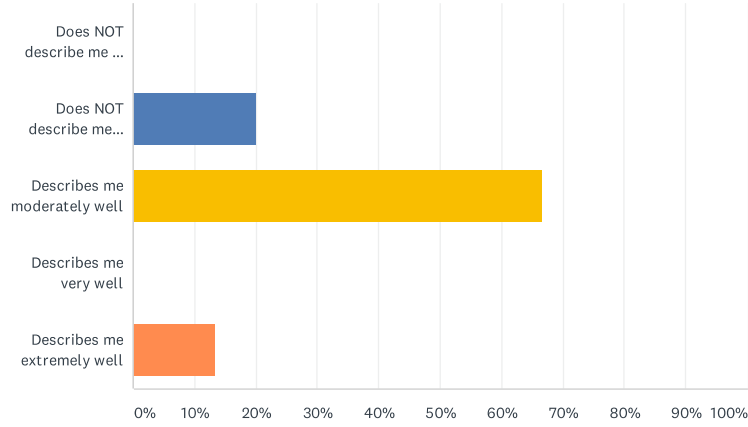


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	6.67%	1
Describes me moderately well	0.00%	0
Describes me very well	53.33%	8
Describes me extremely well	40.00%	6
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>

Missional Equipping Post-Survey

Q18 I pray for my neighbors often.

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Does NOT describe me at all	0.00%	0
Does NOT describe me very well	20.00%	3
Describes me moderately well	66.67%	10
Describes me very well	0.00%	0
Describes me extremely well	13.33%	2
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>15</b>



## Missional Equipping Post-Survey

### Q19 Excluding members, if Living Stones Church disappeared, would anyone in Katy, Texas care? Why or why not?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Yes, I believe it would. LSC goes out of it's way to make a difference in the lives of the boys at New Hope, they have made a difference in the lives at Krausse House, they have supported numerous other organizations and individuals so those particular organizations would feel the difference. I also believe that God's Word is spoken dynamically and plainly enough for many to grow in their faith so those individuals hearing God's Word through Pastor Scott on Sundays in person or online would be greatly missed. We are a small church with a mighty impact in our community.	1/21/2020 8:18 PM
2	yes, Because we have made an impact on the neighborhood surrounding Living Stones by various mission based neighborhood projects.	1/16/2020 10:16 AM
3	Yes. I really believe we are making a difference outside of our church on a regular basis to the point that people count on us to make a difference.	1/12/2020 11:34 AM
4	Yes, I believe New Hope and Ballard House ministries would care.	1/8/2020 11:17 AM
5	Right now, no, BUT I think that we are beginning to form relationships in our community, and I think my answer would change a year from now.	1/8/2020 9:24 AM
6	Yes, I believe the focus of the members of living stones live by example and reach out to neighbors and community consistently and with genuine intent.	1/7/2020 9:24 AM
7	Probably not. Katy is a transient community so people don't look for deep relationships more superficial ones. For living stones to be missed we will have to a continuous presence in community.	12/20/2019 8:43 AM
8	More and more, I believe the answer to be yes. As our church is moving in the direction we are going by making personal relationships with our neighbors, we will make a bigger impact.	12/19/2019 1:20 PM
9	I'd like to think so, but I suspect not. To matter, we need time to impact our community, our neighbors. It took Mother Theresa years to matter so should we expect differently? We need to be blessings to New Hope, the Ballard House..... and maybe in the years to come things will be different	12/19/2019 9:43 AM
10	Yes, as we are becoming more integrated into the community & without neighbors.	12/19/2019 9:25 AM
11	Probably not. But I think the love of Christ will continue to ripple out through the community and time because our people have been taught that demonstrating God's love of His creation is what we have been created to do.	12/19/2019 9:22 AM
12	I would like to think we would be missed. If we are taking the great commandment literally we will make a difference in Katy, Texas and people will notice. I think our church is starting to make headway in this area.	12/19/2019 9:16 AM
13	We are a young church and haven't made much of an impact in our Katy community yet. Only a few would take notice and care if we were to disappear. As the years go by I believe our community will take notice of our deeds and will see the love of Christ in and through us.	12/19/2019 8:48 AM
14	Not many. We are still a young church that hasn't been established...yet. But we are working towards making it known that we are here to love and serve.	12/19/2019 8:27 AM
15	Yes! We are making an impact on the community. New Hope is a perfect example.	12/19/2019 8:18 AM

## Missional Equipping Post-Survey

## Q20 What does it look like to be the best church for our community?

Answered: 15 Skipped: 0

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Everything I said above. And also living as Jesus would have here on Earth. Spending time with least of these...	1/21/2020 8:18 PM
2	Are we fulfilling the needs of the community where Living Stones is located? Are we making a positive impact to the community surrounding Living Stones?	1/16/2020 10:16 AM
3	To constantly be looking for ways outside of church that we can be a blessing to the community.	1/12/2020 11:34 AM
4	A genuine loving, caring, accepting, and serving church.	1/8/2020 11:17 AM
5	We are actively serving our community and meeting them where they are meaning we are out in the community and serving in various capacities. Jesus drew people to him through his service and loving them.	1/8/2020 9:24 AM
6	Being present and representing Christ's intention as a neighbor in the community often and with authentic intent	1/7/2020 9:24 AM
7	Loving on each other. Be the family that everyone longs for.	12/20/2019 8:43 AM
8	Start Small. Make specific, intentional relationships (neighbors, partner with specific missions, etc.) Do God's work.	12/19/2019 1:20 PM
9	To help our members connect with the passions in their hearts and help them understand how to use their gifts for our community	12/19/2019 9:43 AM
10	Loving God first & then loving our neighbors	12/19/2019 9:25 AM
11	Each member exudes the love of God automatically, so much so that other people in the community get a sense of joy from any encounter with our members.	12/19/2019 9:22 AM
12	To be meeting the needs of those around us. Intentionally looking for opportunities to meet people in our community and then find a tangible way to be a blessing to them. Also getting to know and love on our actual neighbors. Also to be in prayer for those in our neighborhoods and community.	12/19/2019 9:16 AM
13	Loving our community and being the hands and feet of Jesus.	12/19/2019 8:48 AM
14	To somehow become a present at schools and school sports	12/19/2019 8:27 AM
15	A church that gives whole heartedly to others and welcomes everyone.	12/19/2019 8:18 AM

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