

Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

A Biblical Understanding of Making Disciples

A Thesis Project Submitted to
the Faculty of Liberty University School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

By

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Liberty University John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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One of the many functions of the local church is to make disciples. Unfortunately, thoughtful and consistent efforts have not always proven to yield the results that accompany transformational living. This thesis project seeks to address and remove some of the barriers around discipleship and disciple-making in the local setting. This study provided a discipleship training course targeted toward spiritually mature male leaders. Individuals were invited to attend a six-session training course where they were equipped with a biblical understanding of discipleship, and training in spiritual disciplines, to aid in their personal growth and ability to teach others. Data was collected prior to the intervention through surveys, during the intervention from discussion questions and feedback, and after the intervention via a debrief survey and follow-up conversations. The resulting implications of this project proved the necessity of having a proper biblical understanding to aid in one's lifelong allegiance to Christ.

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Abbreviations

CDC	<i>Centers for Disease Control</i>
DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
IHCC	<i>Indian Head Community Church</i>
IRB	<i>Institutional Review Board of Liberty University</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is a necessary component for Christian living. Believers are implored to grow into spiritual maturity and become disciple makers themselves. What is required of a Christian? How can one grow? What steps need to be taken to promote transformational living? While there is no shortage of content that seeks to support in the biblical understanding of discipleship there remains an apparent and abundant need for clarity and understanding.

This thesis project aims to create, implement, and test a small group-style curriculum that gives male leaders at Indian Head Community Church¹ (IHCC) a proper understanding of biblical discipleship. With this curriculum, the anticipated outcomes for a selected group of men would include having accurate biblical knowledge of what discipleship requires, incorporating scriptural direction in their lives, and cultivating those qualities in those they lead.

Coinciding with the current discipleship pathway at IHCC, this thesis employs the same structure, timeline, and format as the church's existing approach. However, this project will utilize an in-depth training course that will challenge participants into a deeper level of spiritual commitment and understanding. To test the curriculum, the thesis specifically targets men who are committed to the church, currently serve in an existing leadership role, and exhibit positive authority and influence over others. By training male church leaders to hear, obey, and act on Jesus's commands in their lives, the church, and its surrounding communities will benefit from stronger leadership within its lay ministry. This benefit is made possible by directing the participants to true discipleship, and in turn, equipping those they lead.

¹ The name of the actual church where this qualitative research and project took place has been anonymized and pseudonyms have been used for all church references and leaders mentioned by name throughout this thesis as requested by the church for privacy.

At present, IHCC is meeting the consumerism mentality of the weekly attendee, with an attractional atmosphere and relevant messages that shift focus from consuming to contributing. Such an environment invites attendees to experience God on their own terms and then ushers them into IHCC's discipleship pathway to know Jesus better. IHCC recognizes the common expectation that the church must provide for all of one's spiritual needs, and act as the primary point of evangelism and discipleship. By training participants in following Jesus's lead, with the intention of training and making their own disciples, the discipleship pathway of IHCC will be further defined and strengthened.

In Mark 3:14, Jesus demonstrated how mature believers are to be sent out: "He appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach."² As with the first apostles, mature believers are to be equipped through teaching and a transformational experience with Jesus, before going out and sharing their gospel-impacted account with others. Able to develop and articulate their faith, mature disciples of Jesus have the means, and desire, to impart their knowledge on to others effectively. Through proper biblical discipleship, the desired outcome of this project would see its participants exhibit personal transformation in ways that lead, influence, and equip other men within their spheres of influence. If successful, this thesis would serve not only as a discipleship program or course but as an equipping tool for males at IHCC to contribute to the church and the community it actively serves.

² Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016).

Ministry Context

History

In 1991, a handful of committed couples launched IHCC as a church plant, led by Darryl and Karen Steckel, and those couples dedicated themselves to inviting individuals who had no church affiliation. To identify the needs of this unchurched population, IHCC's founding members went door to door in Chino and Chino Hills, asking a simple question: do you currently have a home church? If the answer was yes, they thanked the homeowner and moved on. But if those asked said no, IHCC leaders would inquire about the reasons why the church did not appeal to them, as well as specific needs the homeowner wanted a potential home church to meet.

The resulting community data, along with an organizational commitment to pursue the unchurched, ushered in steady growth during the formative years of IHCC. The church, which had met at Ayala High School in Chino Hills since its inception in 1991, soon purchased a 22-acre property in Chino Hills to build IHCC's current venues and facilities. Under Darryl and Karen Steckel's leadership, IHCC held its first on-campus service in 1997. Since then, IHCC has welcomed thousands of people onto its campus every weekend.

True to its roots, and the community's needs, IHCC's growth is attributed to Sunday messages that engage, and appeal to, the unchurched—while staying rooted in biblical wisdom. IHCC has also sought to implement discipleship strategies observed in larger, seeker-sensitive churches such as Saddleback, Willow Creek, and North Point. Small groups, in particular, have been the primary source of ongoing, intentional discipleship at IHCC.

The ministry and discipleship efforts of IHCC were severely tested in 2011 when Darryl Steckel was diagnosed with leukemia. Although treatments were successful through two bouts with aggressive cancer, Darryl's leukemia returned a third time in 2015, leading to his passing in

the fall of that year. In response, the congregation rallied together and pressed in by worshiping, giving, serving, and attending small groups.

In the immediate aftermath of Darryl's death, small groups often functioned as support groups, as members became more open about sharing their feelings of grief and loss. To a large degree, IHCC's focus on inviting and equipping the unchurched proved vital during tragedy, mobilizing thousands of committed members who desired to lead the church forward with the vision and purpose in which it began.

Shortly before Darryl passed, he appointed his eldest son, Stanley, to be IHCC's Lead Pastor. Even as he grieved his father, Stanley sought to lead the church through their own feelings of loss. During Stanley's tenure, IHCC continued to seek the unchurched and disciple attendees through small groups.

However, two short years after the church lost Darryl to leukemia, Stanley became plagued by anxiety, depression, and panic attacks. On the precipice of exhaustion and moral failure, Stanley was forced to take a six-month sabbatical after Easter in 2018. By the following August, at Stanley's insistence and with the approval of his doctor and therapist, Stanley returned to his role as Lead Pastor. Although resuming work had been envisioned as a necessary step to Stanley's recovery process, another setback occurred during the third week of his return. Two days later, Stanley attempted suicide just hours before IHCC's annual celebration for volunteers. As volunteers arrived that evening and heard the news, Stanley was rushed to the hospital, where he passed two days later.

Within three years, IHCC had experienced the death of the only two lead pastors in its history. For several weeks, the attention of the world and the church focused on IHCC. Many were wondering if the church could endure two high-profile tragedies. Many IHCC members—

some of whom were a part of the church since its formation—expressed doubts about the church, and Christianity, amid personal grief and public scrutiny. Of the latter, news outlets, YouTube influencers, and personal blogs asserted negative opinions about IHCC’s future, and even Stanley’s salvation. The collective disbelief that a young, physically healthy, respected pastor would succumb to suicide left the congregation feeling confused, angry, and hurting.

In losing Stanley, a greater need arose for a strong discipleship pathway at IHCC, and the small group structure became the backbone of the church—much like it had after Darryl’s death. As a safe, supportive space for honest conversation, prayer, grief, and growth, IHCC’s small group attendance grew even as Sunday church attendance decreased. With small group participation rising from 30% to 60% within 8 months, a larger opportunity for intentional discipleship arose.

In August 2019, IHCC named David Crane as Lead Pastor, one year after Stanley passed—during which the church had sought healing from the aforementioned tragedies. As a clear starting point for discipleship at IHCC, David launched *Activate*—a 4-week course that shares the vision and purpose of IHCC, defines an attender’s purpose in the church, and invites them to become an IHCC member. By joining a volunteer team and regularly serving at IHCC, new members are given the next steps along their path to becoming a mature disciple.

Another major step in that path is the newly implemented 10-week course, *Rooted*, which focuses on the foundations of Christianity. In a group format, *Rooted* is designed to give participants a basic understanding of discipleship, along with healthy challenges to incorporate prayer, Bible reading, and outreach as a means of consistent obedience. At present, *Rooted* is still in the infancy stages of being integrated into IHCC’s existing discipleship efforts. Bolstered by

newly formed relationships from the shared *Rooted* experience, each of its 10-week sessions are set to launch new IHCC small groups.

At present, many IHCC small group leaders and coaches have not yet gained a thorough understanding of the church's new discipleship model. IHCC intends to fully integrate its existing small groups into the new discipleship framework within the next two years—a timeframe influenced by Covid-19, which requires additional consideration.

During the pandemic, IHCC's weekly average attendance has been limited or even moved entirely online, due to California's Covid-19 restrictions—resulting in a 40% drop in serving, small groups, and event participation. This decrease in church involvement has caused, or been caused by, congregational frustration over the lack of meaningful social interaction. The community enjoyed during the Sunday experience, as well as youth programs for families with children, have both been altered dramatically to follow government mandated social distancing guidelines.

As IHCC continues to adhere to the recommendations from the state government and health officials, a significant amount of people have ceased attending church or have begun to attend another local church that has chosen to ignore CDC (Centers for Disease Control) guidelines. To move IHCC's congregation through the pandemic and beyond, this project aims to equip leaders to disciple others in ways that speak to the community's unique population and needs, which will next be discussed at length.

Demographics

IHCC is located on the city of Chino's west end, bordering Chino Hills; both cities are located in San Bernardino County, in the Inland Empire region of Southern California. IHCC attendees predominantly live in Chino Hills, Eastvale, and Chino, in descending order. While

these cities share some similar demographics, Chino Hills and Eastvale are marked by much higher affluence. Schools in both cities are rated higher, and give higher priority in infrastructure and beautification, than schools in Chino. While IHCC is technically located in Chino, the church's primary audience has resided in Chino Hills and Eastvale.

Both of those cities mostly consist of highly educated people who earn a higher median income than Chino residents. Chino Hills has a median household income of \$104,590, with Eastvale slightly higher at \$114,230,³ compared to the \$79,477 median household income of Chino. This substantial difference is reflected in church attendance as well; more than 50% of IHCC attendees claim an income of over \$100,000.⁴ IHCC's ethnic diversity also reflects that of Chino Hills and Eastvale: IHCC attendees are predominantly Caucasian, Hispanic, and Asian.⁵

Much of the congregation commute to other cities for work. The Chino Valley sits in southwestern San Bernardino county, closely neighboring the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside—which is where a substantial portion of the congregation is employed. Most congregants work in a managerial capacity, while some are small business owners. In wake of Covid-19, most church members were able to continue working, instead of being furloughed or laid off. Partly due to that fact, IHCC's strong benevolence fund that has not been exhausted as a result of church member unemployment. This relative job stability during the pandemic highlights the influence and affluence that many IHCC members possess.

³ "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/eastvalecitycalifornia,chinocitycalifornia,chinohillscitycalifornia/PST045219>.

⁴ "2019 IHCC Survey," Survey (Chino, CA: Indian Head Community Church, October 2019).

⁵ United States Census Bureau, "QuickFacts."

Family Structure

Part of IHCC’s mission is to seek out and welcome young families—particularly parents with children between ages 0–18. According to a survey of IHCC adults conducted in 2019, the median attendee age is between 36–50 years old; very few were categorized as young adults or senior citizens. One-third of those surveyed—approximately 36%—identified as single or divorced. In terms of women and children, the data aligns with IHCC’s mission: two-thirds of the congregation are female, and children under the age of 18 comprise one-third of IHCC’s population.⁶

Congruent with that data, the culture of IHCC and its surrounding cities place a strong emphasis on children. In fact, local families often prioritize their child’s future potential over their present well-being. After-school programs, tutoring, private lessons, club sports, and other extracurricular activities thrive in the Chino Valley, and parents are driven to involve their kids in these programs to benefit their eventual college enrollment and vocational preparation. As children juggle increasingly full schedules, parents are burdened with the sign-ups, meetings, practices, drop-offs, and pick-ups included with overloading their child’s plate. Such busyness often causes involvement in Sunday and/or student ministry services to decline.

The demands of busy schedules, maintaining affluence, and work expectations highlight another challenge: family units and marriages are struggling within the church. This issue has become known due to trends in IHCC’s pastoral care: marital issues and infidelity are two major reasons why people seek specialized care from IHCC pastors.

Another factor contributing to church involvement: IHCC’s demographic mostly consists of two parents working outside the home—having one stay-at-home parent is a rare occurrence.

⁶ Indian Head Community Church, “2019 IHCC Survey.”

Of married women, most will attend services without their husband due to illness or scheduling conflicts; conversely, men are far less likely to attend without their wives.

To clarify, men are not completely absent from services but are overshadowed by the presence, commitment, and effectiveness of the women who represent two-thirds of the congregation. This overshadowing occurs in small groups as well, where women's groups outnumber the men's groups two-to-one—and the same ratio holds true for volunteer serving positions, baptisms, faith commitments, membership classes, and IHCC's current discipleship pathway. From this data, the need to educate and equip men in discipleship at IHCC increases.

Finally, in terms of political affiliation, IHCC is geographically located in one of the few conservative pockets in Southern California. While the church strives to be apolitical in its messaging and mission, many attenders strongly connect their faith with their political views.

Before 2019, IHCC small groups were heavily depended upon to facilitate discipleship. In a focused group setting protected by trust, confidentiality, and established relationships, attendees were expected to learn and live like Jesus through Bible study, care, and outreach. However, this approach proved problematic when small groups were advertised to the congregation only a few times a year—which contributed to a lower participation rate and a focus on Sunday community over consistent discipleship.

IHCC's weekend experience was specifically geared toward the unchurched which caused a disconnect from mature Christians seeking spiritual meat. Currently, the discipleship process—including *Activate*, *Rooted*, church membership, and other steps—is lessening the gap and attempting to address the previous lack of discipleship, but the process is still in its infancy. In response, this project will promote and implement the newly identified discipleship

pathway, while multiplying disciples who can model Christ in daily life and spread the gospel both within the congregation and outside the local church.

Problem Presented

The problem this project seeks to address is that IHCC's male leaders, overall, lack a biblical understanding of discipleship. On a macro level, the congregation does not appear to live consistently with the teachings of Jesus regarding discipleship and evangelism. Jesus's call to evangelism and discipleship is not fully reflected in the lives of the attendees as evidenced through their inability to practice the spiritual disciplines as well as invite others into a growing relationship with Jesus.

Speaking to the aforementioned data and church history, attendance and giving at IHCC have remained steady without showing significant growth. Similarly, small group attendance has increased in the past three years, while church attendance has stagnated by comparison. These trends suggest comfort and insulation on behalf of the church community. IHCC's population appears to reflect an inward, consumer-based attitude rather than an outward focus on evangelism and a desire to influence the community for Jesus.

Providing training and education in biblical discipleship has not been a strength during IHCC's history. In effect, small group leaders have been assigned the daunting task of teaching members to live committed to Jesus and his teachings without being fully equipped themselves. This gap in foundational training, as well as the relative lack of church growth, correlates with a lack of biblical understanding of discipleship among leaders.

That lack of understanding is far more prevalent in the male population at IHCC, observed through low church participation in comparison to female congregants. In addition to

the previously mentioned 2–1 ratio of church attendance and serving between women and men, women’s events at IHCC draw six times the number of participants that men’s events do.

Intentional spiritual milestones like baptisms and decisions to follow Christ also reflect this unfortunate trend of under-involved men at IHCC. The large female presence and involvement at IHCC also leads them to participate in acts of discipleship and evangelism at a much higher rate than men. Altogether, the core problem of uninvolved men at IHCC also means this project offers immense potential for them to be properly disciplined, and to effectively disciple others.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research thesis is to train male leaders at IHCC with sound biblical teaching on discipleship. IHCC has a strong leadership system that already provides an avenue to train male leaders without a significantly increased time commitment. Leaders are currently asked to commit to meeting with a mentor—referred to as a coach or division leader at IHCC—every month; these meetings can shift to discipleship training and application, rather than general guidance for facilitating a small group.

The system and training method would not need to be overhauled, but rather adjusted, in terms of the content covered. A small group discipleship study will be designed and implemented, equipping current and prospective leaders with the expectation that they will: 1) adopt discipleship principles in their lives, 2) pass these principles on to their small group members, and 3) evangelize to and disciple those they encounter on a regular basis.

Basic Assumptions

The most basic assumption in this project is that a strong grasp of biblical discipleship will encourage an individual’s spiritual transformation—and necessitate similar transformation

in others around them. This assumption includes the idea that—information does not correspond with transformation—but that information can promote transformation. Such knowledge and comprehension of truth should play a factor in removing barriers of ignorance and unfamiliarity. The assumption that a proper understanding of what to do and how to do it will motivate a person to better live for Jesus.

Second, it is assumed that the reason for a lack of discipleship is that there is also a lack of understanding of why God values it. Once a follower of God clearly understands what he asks of them, obedience and adherence to discipleship becomes possible.

Third, is the assumption that proper discipleship training will inspire participants to teach and train others. The men involved in the project, once properly trained, will ideally have an increased desire to evangelize and disciple people within their sphere of influence.

A fourth assumption concerns the indirect impact of this project on IHCC. As the participating men become better disciples of Jesus, they will become better leaders at church, at work, and at home. The potential impact of this project does not seek to change the existing discipleship methodology at IHCC but influence the lives of attenders by providing an avenue for them to grow deeper in their commitment to discipleship.

Fifth, it is assumed that the participants want to become better disciples of Jesus and that the sample size will comprise an accurate representation of men at IHCC. Participants may not give honest or accurate feedback during the project for assorted reasons. This researcher assumes participants will participate in the project with honest motivation and feedback.

Lastly, this researcher also assumes that discipleship best takes place within the context of a relational and intentional small group setting. The small group setting is not the only place

discipleship may occur. For the purposes of this project and problem addressed, the small group context will provide the best setting for discipleship training.

Definitions

Discipleship is the process by which a person helps another person better follow Jesus.⁷ During this process, discipleship involves a person living a wholly devoted Christian life as an example for others to follow.⁸

A *discipleship pathway* is the chosen process of assimilation within a local church context. At IHCC, the expectation is that attenders will become increasingly connected to the church by following a specific, orderly path designed by informed church leadership.

The discipleship pathway begins with a person self-identifying as wanting connection. This self-identification can come through several different avenues such as: speaking with a staff or volunteer member at an info center, turning in a fill-out card, or speaking directly with a pastor.

The person's next step is to attend *Activate*—the four-week course that offers an introduction to the Christian faith. *Activate* also focuses on the history, vision, and function of IHCC, as well as God's purpose and call for the person attending.

After completing *Activate*, the person will join a ten-week *Rooted* small group that uncovers the foundational principles of Christianity. Basic tenets such as Bible reading, prayer, giving, freedom from sin, and evangelism are taught and discussed with other group members.

⁷ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 69.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

Upon finishing *Rooted*, the last step in the discipleship pathway is to attend an ongoing small group, ideally with their existing *Rooted* group members.

A *disciple* is a self-identified follower of Christ. A disciple abides in Christ through the Word and prayer. A disciple bears spiritual fruit and responds to God's love with obedience. A disciple possesses joy and loves as Christ loved.⁹ A disciple obediently follows the teachings of Christ and seeks to imitate his life in all regards.

Evangelism is the proclamation, either oral or written, of the gospel message to unbelievers. Evangelism is declaring the message of the person and work of Christ, who he is, and what he has done on behalf of sinners.¹⁰

A *small group*, alternatively known as a Bible study group, life group, or cell group, refers to approximately ten people who gather for a set duration and time. These groups are usually formed based on common demographics such as gender, age, location, or life stage. Regularly meeting small groups are a form in which church attenders can experience community and discipleship.¹¹

A *coach*, or small group coach, is a volunteer leader in the church who seeks to assist and care for small group leaders. Coaches are experienced leaders themselves, who also play a key role in training leaders and conveying church information. Coaches at IHCC typically oversee 3–5 leaders that they interact with every month.

⁹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 47.

¹⁰ R.C. Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?* (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2015), 16.

¹¹ Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 25–27.

A *small group season* refers to one of the three periods each year in which IHCC small groups actively meet. Small groups at the church operate during a fall, winter, and spring seasonal structure, with each season lasting up to 10 weeks.

Limitations

The limitations of this project are based on a variety of factors—the greatest of which is the unpredictable nature of Covid-19. Like most churches, maneuvering through a variety of restrictions caused by the pandemic has proven to be challenging at IHCC: indoor in-person meetings are not currently allowed and considered unsafe in Southern California.

According to current government guidelines, participants may meet in person if they are wearing face coverings, social distancing, and meeting outside. The primary alternative to heavily restricted in-person gatherings is the option to meet virtually, which has limitations of its own. Technical issues, screen fatigue, distractions, and lack of face-to-face interaction are just a few major examples of virtual meeting shortcomings.

Another limitation arises in the sample of participants. While this project seeks to target men who embody the typical male leader at IHCC, the final sample of participants may or may not accurately represent the congregation; participants will be selected based on availability and convenience, rather than by random selection or representing specific demographics. This researcher must also consider the commitment level and due dates required for this project, which may limit the selection pool even more.

Further, individuals participating may not respond with entirely truthful answers; their desire to fulfill the direction of the project, or appeal to their pastor, may prevent them from fully achieving the intended desire and outcome of the project. Participants may also feel social or relational pressures to answer questions and consume the material in a manner that is not fully

authentic. For example, a participant who wants to be seen as an ideal, obedient leader may stay silent if they are struggling to understand or model a key aspect of discipleship.

Time is another limitation of this project. Ideally, the project would produce a measurable outcome that could be observed over several years. To complete this thesis project within the time allotted, a long-term observable outcome is not attainable.

The intended outcome of participants experiencing transformational life change is also challenging to measure and record. This project does not seek to follow the daily lives of participants to observe their lifestyle, but rather trust that their reporting and feedback accurately represents their lives and faith. However, this project will utilize a debrief element that will help each participant gauge their individual outcome—though again, the debrief may potentially be limited by the level of honesty in participant feedback.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this project include group size, gender, age, time, and topic. From these identifiers, ten male IHCC leaders will participate in a six-week study within the context of a small group setting. These male leaders will have been believing Christ-followers for at least two years prior to this project.

As shown in IHCC's demographics, the lack of many young adults and senior citizens at the church will likely result in a sample group of men between the ages of 30–55, who are predominantly Caucasian or Hispanic; factors that may not accurately represent the complete male population at IHCC. While diversity in age and race are two areas in which IHCC desires to improve, this project will pull participants from the existing demographics for the sole focus of providing a biblical understanding of evangelism and discipleship to current attenders.

Thesis Statement

This project asserts that when male leaders at IHCC receive a biblical understanding of discipleship, they will seek a transformational experience with Jesus and encourage others in their sphere of influence to know Jesus as they do. IHCC follows the meta-model system, which empowers leaders to equip and care for a specific number of volunteers, who in turn do the same for the individuals in their care. Through this project and the existing meta-model system, creating a small group discipleship curriculum and equipping the selected male participants has the potential to reach and teach many more than just ten men.

As such, the entire IHCC congregation, and the communities it serves, could benefit from this project's study—one that imparts a correct biblical understanding of discipleship. As leaders gain knowledge through the process of discipleship, they will also be trained to clearly communicate that wisdom to those they lead. The trickle-down effect of the meta-model will not only enhance discipleship amongst coaches, leaders, and small group members, but also positively impact IHCC's relationships between spouses, parents and children, and ministry team members. Applied in this way, an effective discipleship pathway may be transformative for the entire church as well as individuals.

Using the existing discipleship pathway, leadership model, and small group structure will provide a familiar, healthy framework with which to train male leaders in biblical discipleship. Once the participants learn what it means to be a disciple and evangelize to others, they can apply it to their lives, experience transformation, and effectively convey their changed life to the benefit of their group, church, and community. In summation, this project seeks to establish an ongoing process of grasping and living out discipleship principles by following the example of Christ and making disciples with wisdom and enthusiasm.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The desire to impart Christians with a better understanding of how to follow Christ is not new or unique. An immense and ever-growing amount of research has been done to aid the implementation of Jesus's teachings in the lives of believers. As expressed in the Bible, the transformative life that Jesus offers his followers is indeed obtainable. Therefore, Christians can have a proper biblical understanding of discipleship.

To that end, churches and religious leaders have sought to supplement the Bible with programs and written materials for individuals and groups to foster discipleship. However, in the haste to address a deficiency in spiritual maturity within the church, an unfortunate overabundance of literature has muddied the clear picture of discipleship. Worse, this oversaturation of materials has proven insufficient in addressing the lack of devotion among Christians in terms of discipleship. To identify useful resources, the following section examines literature that determines the factors behind the lack of healthy discipleship among Christians today.

Literature Review

From the literature reviewed, several factors contribute to the lack of discipleship among modern-day Christians. The foundational aspects of what it means to be a Christ-follower are clearly expressed in the biblical narrative, through the giving of both the Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20) and the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36–40), but Christians simply are not heeding the words of Jesus.¹²

¹² David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (New York, NY: Multnomah Books, 2010), 171.

Typically, believers understand the most basic elements of evangelism and discipleship, even if they have little comprehension or desire to adopt those principles into their lives—or use them to engage others. Christians mostly agree that discipleship and evangelism are supposed to be active components of their faith, and even recognize the need to positively influence people by sharing the gospel.

While today's Christians may know what is required of them to become spiritually mature, two problems usually arise. First, the believer simply fails to follow the directives of Jesus. Second, and more relevant to this project, the believer has not been shown the meaning and value of discipleship. As more Christians believe the teachings of Jesus without putting them into practice, the church finds itself in a steady decline; the number of practicing Christians in the west (those who have attended church within the past month and identify faith as a strong component in their life) has dropped by nearly half since 2000.¹³

The reviewed literature seeks to find causes for the widening gap between discipleship as described in the Bible, and how it is regarded in modern western culture. The literature also reveals observable themes by which to promote transformational life change in followers of Christ. Perhaps most importantly, the reviewed materials lay bare several remedial actions: the need for Christians to understand discipleship and follow Jesus's example and commands; the responsibility of the church and ministry leaders to better instruct and train those under their care; the potential roadblocks and negative influencers involved in such instruction; and the growing need for evangelism and discipleship in the recently shrinking western church.

¹³ Barna Group, "Signs of Decline & Hope Among Key Metrics of Faith," Barna: State of the Church, March 4, 2020, <https://www.barna.com/research/changing-state-of-the-church/>.

A More Robust Understanding of Discipleship

Consumerism is so prevalent in the world that it is often adopted into modern Christian culture. Consequently, people often have the belief that the Christian life is about personal gain.¹⁴ In seeking the fullness of life promised in John 10:10, they do so from a purely selfish and internally focused position. Fletcher affirms this position by simply stating, “people naturally point to themselves.”¹⁵ He explains that Christians are typically happy to serve the church, and even join a small group, if they can see the personal benefit—but the real benefits are only found when people are able to recognize and live into their calling.¹⁶ By seeking personal gain instead, Christians miss the full value of living wholly devoted to God and in service to others.¹⁷

White claims that church leaders and world culture have bought into the concept of Christian consumerism.¹⁸ Platt thinks that this me-focused brand of Christianity lacks the complete transformation that compels people to devote themselves fully to the ministry of others.¹⁹ Western Christians seem to be drawn to Christianity precisely for selfish gain and personal benefit. Churches often recognize this mentality, but too often seek to accommodate it rather than push against it. White states that churches and ministry leaders will often give “ample rhetorical support to evangelism intent but resist violently at the point of implementation

¹⁴ James Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones: Understanding and Reaching the Religiously Unaffiliated* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 83.

¹⁵ Michael Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership: How A Leadership Development Culture Builds Better Leaders Faster* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 129.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 83.

¹⁹ David Platt, *Counter Culture: Following Christ in an Anti-Christian Age* (Chicago, IL: Tyndale, 2015), 104.

because—at the point of actually doing it—it costs them.”²⁰ The church has become filled with a consumer-based audience—and leaders are either afraid, or unwilling, to challenge their congregation to eschew a feed-me mentality in favor of becoming devoted disciples of Jesus.

Sensing a lack of devotion to Jesus and his direction, many churches also attempt to implement programs that do not show how discipleship encompasses all aspects of the Christian faith. Adversely, this program-based discipleship model potentially instills a viewpoint that obedience to Christ is a task that can be checked off through a specific program.²¹

For discipleship to become the central point of Christian life, every aspect of the church needs to have an intentional focus on discipleship.²² Preaching, ministry events, worship, small groups, evangelism, classes, and other programs must all take place alongside discipleship.²³ Discipleship programs may contribute to individual life change, but transformational living comes from lifelong, consistent practice borne of enthusiasm from life change, rather than inconsistent, uneven church programs.

Sproul reminds church leaders that although these programs may be helpful, they are a human enterprise and thus, can never replace the message of the gospel.²⁴ Living in service to Christ as King should be the embodiment of the Christian life, over self-edifying consumerism.²⁵ Most programs focus on specific training to equip the believers to better know the gospel, and

²⁰ Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 83.

²¹ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 36.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid, 37.

²⁴ R.C. Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, Crucial Questions (Sanford, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2015), 8.

²⁵ Ibid.

how to say the words contained within it—but they fail to equip the Christian to personally embrace the gospel message.²⁶ The solution, then, is not the increase of programs or classroom time. As Geiger points out, “the essence of discipleship is transformational, not informational.”²⁷

Since transformational discipleship forms from biblical wisdom and a genuine encounter with Jesus, a consumer-based or purely informational program will not prove adequate for life-changing Christian living. People must have a meaningful and connected relationship with the person of Jesus, which in turn motivates them to seek intellectual understanding over what their faith means—and what faith requires them to do—to become more like Jesus.

Lack of Obedience

In every reviewed resource, a common theme arose: being a Christian requires obedience to God and His commands. Willard points out that Christianity is more than just believing that Christ died for our sins so that we can go to heaven.²⁸ Authentic Christianity submits to the lordship of Jesus in every decision, situation, and relationship in the believer’s life.

By another definition, a true disciple is someone who is following and learning after Christ.²⁹ Being a disciple of Christ is an ongoing process of continually dying to self for the sake of allowing Christ to come alive.³⁰ Johnston states, “A disciple is a person in process, one who is

²⁶ Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1993), 35.

²⁷ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), Kindle, Locations 232–235.

²⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus’s Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2006),

²⁹ Thomas P. Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church for Harvest: Voices and Views from the Southern Baptist Professors of Evangelism Fellowship* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 209.

³⁰ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials: A Guide to Building Your Life in Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 10.

growing in the love for and obedience to Christ.”³¹ It is impossible to affirm the lordship of Christ in one’s life without that declaration positively directing the actions of that person.³² Following Christ demands a respect for, and agreement with, the commands that Jesus taught.

Stott concluded that in the upper room, Jesus presents an ultimatum for his followers. They could choose to adhere to the values, culture, standards, and lifestyles of the world, or else abandon all they knew in favor of following him.³³ Jesus offered a new lens with which to regard oneself and the world. Abandoning self-importance, and placing a reverence on the commands of Christ, was the prescribed expression of how to love Jesus (John 14:21).³⁴ Willard affirms the idea that one cannot be a Christ-follower without committing one’s whole life to the discipleship of Christ.³⁵ Johnston agrees by stating, “a disciple is a person who has a supreme love for, loyalty to, and obedience to Christ.”³⁶

Platt further asserts, “It is impossible to be a follower of Christ while denying, disregarding, discrediting, and disbelieving the words of Christ.”³⁷ Christians cannot be divided in their spiritual motivations if they are to obey Christ. Many may be unaware of the obedience that is required of men and lack fruit in their lives (Matt 7:16). Medearis suggests that even if someone proclaims to be a Christian, goes to church, participates in ministry programs, and

³¹ Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church*, 209.

³² Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 49.

³³ John Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Kindle, Ch 1.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 58.

³⁶ Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church*, 209.

³⁷ Platt, *Counter Culture*, 17.

recites sound doctrine, they still may not actually be a follower of Jesus.³⁸ Following Christ is expressed through assenting to the will of God. Without the fruit of obedience, the legitimacy of discipleship is in question.³⁹ Bonhoeffer famously said, “only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”⁴⁰ Ogden agrees that it is possible for one to know and affirm the gospel story and believe in the resurrection—yet live a life completely unchanged by Christ.⁴¹

Hull believes that the church is responsible for much of the lackadaisical attitude in the lives of those who profess to be Christian. According to him, the church has propagated an incorrect gospel that promotes the idea of salvation based on doctrinal understanding rather than behavioral obedience.⁴² Wright argues that rules are designed to be restrictive and keep one down, when God actually created humans to give and receive creativity, beauty, love, and laughter. For Wright, rules are not to be the focal point of Christian living—but rather, attention is to be given to possessing the character of Christ.⁴³ Wright continues by asserting that salvation is not a sufficient motivator when seeking the virtues described in the New Testament.⁴⁴

³⁸ Carl Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus: The Art of Not-Evangelism* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2011), 75.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1959), 54.

⁴¹ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 49.

⁴² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2006), 43–44.

⁴³ N.T. Wright, *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010), 47.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 69.

Hull does not claim that obedience is a model for salvation, but rather a proof of salvation.⁴⁵ A church that teaches a correct doctrine of discipleship is marked by the multiplication of disciples, rather than a church full of inert consumers merely claiming to be followers of Christ.⁴⁶ Hull agrees that correct discipleship “involves one person influencing another,” but it is not dependent on a program, training method, or strategy.⁴⁷ Discipleship occurs when a transformed person is so deeply impacted by the love of Christ that they cannot resist expressing their experience to those around them.⁴⁸

Responsibility of Church Leaders

Fletcher stresses that the church has a responsibility to develop and train its congregation, owing to the belief that all Christians were made to influence and change their world.⁴⁹ With the help of the church, Christians can bring the hope of Christ into their social circles. To that end, a church’s effectiveness largely depends on pastoral leadership. Sproul views the equipping and training of believers as the pastor’s primary job.⁵⁰ The congregation is a flock that looks to a pastor to shepherd and strengthen them, but many pastors instead shoulder the weight of administrative and planning duties—thereby missing their vital task to equip believers to impact the world by the power of the gospel.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 43–44.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 44.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 28.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

⁴⁹ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 81.

⁵⁰ Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, 29.

⁵¹ *Ibid*.

Johnston agrees that the pastor's role is to demonstrate the sacrificing of self and culture for the presentation of the gospel.⁵² The pastor is expected to model godly living as a means of leading his congregation into a deeper commitment to Christ. By exhibiting the characteristics of spiritual maturity, a pastor can stimulate his flock to proclaim the gospel outside their church.

Even closer to this project's focus, Geiger believes that the fundamental reason why the church exists today is to make disciples.⁵³ The church should be known as a place that makes disciples, and Platt asserts that there are limitless possibilities for the expansion of the kingdom of God, when the church actively seeks to equip and develop its people accordingly.⁵⁴

Geiger ascribes to a bigger solution than merely charging church leaders to train, equip, and increase the commitment level of believers. From his perspective, churches and church leaders have contributed to the problem by treating discipleship as behavioral modification. Put simply, a lack of discipleship cannot be corrected by teaching people to live better. The responsibility of church leaders, therefore, is to teach others that Jesus always focused on the heart of the believer.⁵⁵

Dever stresses the importance of church leaders that influence honestly and transparently.⁵⁶ Church leaders do not need to lead with the appearance of having all the right answers or being perpetually wise in all topics. Far too few leaders disciple by way of confessing their weakness and sin. When urging leaders to disciple through weakness, Dever states, "by

⁵² Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church*, 16.

⁵³ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle Locations 131–133.

⁵⁴ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (New York, NY: Multnomah Books, 2010), 200.

⁵⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle Locations 326–328.

⁵⁶ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 36.

doing so, you demonstrate what it looks like not to find your justification in yourself, but in Christ.”⁵⁷ By embracing their imperfections, leaders in the church can honestly move others in the direction of Jesus, rather than themselves.

In reaching the unchurched, Stott points out that church leaders must impress upon their congregations the importance of caring for the world around them. To do so effectively, Christians are to live and serve as a witness to the world around them, without being contaminated by the desires of sin. Avoiding vices like conformity and escapism, Christians can more freely train to become disciples of Christ. Church leaders have an obligation to help attenders recognize separate worldviews and value systems; rather than indulge in the culture of the world, Christians are to seek the revealed good and pleasing will of God.⁵⁸

While avoiding external distractions, Christians also have a personal responsibility to grow in their spiritual maturity, becoming better disciples of Jesus in the process. The principle behind discipleship involves one person encouraging another toward Christ, and Hull states that “discipleship occurs when a transformed person radiates Christ to those around her. It happens when people so deeply experience God’s love that they can do nothing other than affect those around them.”⁵⁹ By their example and demeanor, church leaders are expected to model the principle of discipleship to their congregations.

While most agree that the primary role of the church is to make disciples, the method of how disciples are made differs vastly. Hull warns against discipleship programs that divide

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Stott, *The Radical Disciple*, Kindle Ch 1.

⁵⁹ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*. 28.

groups into those who have completed and checked off the box, and those who have not.⁶⁰ White concurs that the church is best when it is not focused on what it does, but rather what it is.⁶¹

Platt believes that individuals are to live fully committed to the specific gospel call in their own life. That call is to die to sin and self and then live with a radically unshakeable trust in Christ.⁶² Fletcher claims that the church must recognize the believer's responsibility to fulfill the Great Commission and seek to develop a leadership culture that helps those individuals change their world.⁶³

Roadblocks and Negative Influencers

While Christian leaders and churches seek to develop discipleship and evangelism among their people, they encounter various obstacles that hinder their efforts. One such roadblock is culture, which Fletcher defines as the filter by which people view morality and life, shaping how they think and function.⁶⁴ Aldrich would agree that the center of how one thinks, and even acts, flows from their culture.⁶⁵ Such strong influence on a person will impact their ability to learn and grow as a disciple of Jesus.

Another obstacle to discipleship is the average believer's passive attitude toward evangelism. Clark identifies the primary reason that a person is unwilling to share the gospel

⁶⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁶¹ Emery White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 111.

⁶² Platt, *Counter Culture*, 180.

⁶³ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 81.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 36.

⁶⁵ Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 57.

message is that they are embarrassed.⁶⁶ Fear is not preventing most from sharing but, shame.⁶⁷ Geiger disagrees that shame is as big a factor as Clark suggests, believing instead that the younger generations are less ashamed and are more willing to share their faith—but are unsuccessful as a result of a disapproving world.⁶⁸ Geiger would suggest that the world is less receptive to the gospel message.⁶⁹

The internet, and its sheer amount of messaging and information, may distract young generations and lessen the overall impact of the gospel. However, Christians also have easier access to evangelism materials online, enabling them to be equipped with the tools, resources, and words needed to share the gospel. With such easy access, Christians are not prevented from sharing because of a lack of resources.⁷⁰

Medearis believes that the prevention of successful, multiplying discipleship among believers is the result of western churches' desire to legislate morality.⁷¹ He believes that the church has become so caught up in enforcing Christian values politically and legally into modern culture, that they can view unbelievers as the opposition rather than the lost. Upholding such high moral standards to society, the church by default appears less welcoming of unbelievers – who have little motivation to adhere to a moral code they do not understand, much less fit

⁶⁶ Elliot Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles: Life on Mission as Strangers in Our Own Land* (Deerfield, IL: The Gospel Coalition, 2019), 29.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle Locations 2289–2290.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid

⁷¹ Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus*, 170–171.

comfortably within. Nonplussed, the world accuses the church of attempting to take on a moral hierarchy, and thus the church responds with a defensive posture.⁷²

By contrast, Wright believes that the believer's expression of tolerance overshadows their desire to see another person experience love and forgiveness.⁷³ By his viewpoint, Christians will silently tolerate a person's differences, rather than commit to the challenging task of loving and valuing them for being different from themselves. The difficulty of understanding the belief system of another person, and imparting godly love to them, is avoided because of the potentially high personal cost.⁷⁴ Wright claims that it is much easier to walk away allowing someone to "do their own thing" instead of going through the trouble of demonstrating the love of Christ.⁷⁵

Coleman suggests that disciples of Christ are sent men and women committed to the proclamation of the gospel.⁷⁶ Therefore, the absence of evangelism is indicative of poor discipleship. The problem with inactive evangelism, according to Breen, stems from the lack of interaction Christians have with unchurched people.⁷⁷

Breen believes that while the mission of the church and the commands of God have not changed, Christians and church leaders today are simply spending most of their time isolated from nonbelievers. In fact, many Christians will surround themselves with other Christians for

⁷² Ibid. 171.

⁷³ Wright, *After You Believe*, 254.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 1993), 88–89.

⁷⁷ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did* (Greenville, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2016), 121.

the entirety of their lives.⁷⁸ Sproul agrees that believers have distanced themselves from unbelievers in such a way that they begin to think that no one is actually lost.⁷⁹ When Christians isolate themselves from the nonreligious or adherents of other belief systems, they cannot understand the extent of lostness that exists in the world.

Further obstacles and negative influencers merit mention, as they also prevent believers from obediently living by the call and direction of Jesus. Confusion over how one actually becomes spiritually mature is a common hurdle to clear. Understanding scripture can be daunting for those who are not prepared to navigate the historical, cultural, philosophical, and linguistic gaps.⁸⁰ Of these, grasping God's Word is a necessary component in the discipleship process that may present more challenges for those without proper training.

Fee agrees that Christians are to read and understand the meaning of the Bible to properly obey what it says.⁸¹ According to Fee, preachers and teachers have complicated the process of understanding scripture by placing too much emphasis on the uniqueness of a particular passage—so much so that the plain and simple meaning becomes lost to the average reader.⁸²

The value of correctly interpreting the Bible cannot be overstated in the pursuit of spiritual maturity and making disciples of others. Without the tools or experience to ascertain the scripture authors' intended meaning, a believer can grow confused, or unknowingly misinterpret

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, 49.

⁸⁰ Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 20.

⁸¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 27.

⁸² Ibid.

the purpose and intent behind any given passage. Misunderstanding scripture may also lead an uninformed Christian to entertain a variety of foreign ideas into the text, eventually leading them astray.⁸³ By contrast, the ability to understand the will and direction of God through the Scripture is crucial to proper discipleship.

Christians Have the Needed Tools

In the reviewed materials, many sources shared the common theme that Christians already have the tools they need to be successful witnesses of the gospel and grow in their spiritual maturity. In wisdom gained from the Word, the Spirit, and the church, Christians innately possess the gifts, skills, and information they need to share their faith and help others become a disciple of Jesus. By this logic, training and equipping are a means of fostering stronger confidence in evangelizing and discipling, rather than imparting new information. This theme reveals a major reason for the modern church's poor evangelism and discipleship: in presenting structured information instead of being shown their God-given gifts and potential in their own lives, people are not being transformed into the image of Christ.⁸⁴

The entire mission for believers is to make disciples, but the lack of transformation reveals how deficient churches are in the areas of evangelism and discipleship.⁸⁵ Bonhoeffer concludes that Christians do not need to try to become the light of the world, because they already are the light of the world.⁸⁶ Rather, Christians simply need to step into what God has already prepared for them. Willard asserts that through the giving of spiritual gifts, Christians are

⁸³ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁴ Medearis, *Speaking of Jesus*, 75.

⁸⁵ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle Locations 127–128.

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 85.

equipped to make a difference in their world.⁸⁷ Platt describes how God has entrusted Christians with specific freedoms, resources, and opportunities; all they need to do is be faithful to what they have been entrusted.⁸⁸

White claims that with an invitation, 82% of unchurched people are willing to attend a church or Bible study.⁸⁹ If true, churchgoers have far more influence than they realize on their non-Christian friends, who are just waiting for that invitation. Dever proposes that Christians simply need to live their lives transparently; modeling their weakness, and demonstrating their need for a savior.⁹⁰

Leaning more toward devoted routine, Johnston suggests that if believers can accomplish simple spiritual disciplines such as prayer and having quiet times, then they are equipped to teach someone else to do the same.⁹¹ Clark explains that because Christians can freely share with others their favorite sports team, restaurant, music, politicians, and family, they are more than equipped to talk to others about Jesus.⁹²

Aldrich describes how sharing the gospel message is easy for Christians, because they often share many cultural similarities with those around them. Social and cultural intimacy is already built naturally with neighbors as a result of close proximity. That familiarity opens avenues for people to share the gospel: more common ground makes someone easier to reach.⁹³

⁸⁷ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 146.

⁸⁸ Platt, *Radical*, 215.

⁸⁹ White, *The Rise of the Nones*, 152–153.

⁹⁰ Dever, *Discipling*, 69–70.

⁹¹ Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church*, 218.

⁹² Clark, *Evangelism as Exiles*, 64–65.

⁹³ Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 69.

Geiger notes that 74% of Christians agreed with the statement: "I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ with someone else effectively."⁹⁴

According to Sproul, Christians can proclaim the gospel message through evangelism, but have instead shifted the focus from the person and work of Jesus, and toward their own personal benefit. Living an exemplary life, inviting others to church, and sharing personal testimonies are all good things, Sproul says—but they are not answering the evangelistic call to make disciples.⁹⁵ While Coleman would agree that evangelism requires proclamation, he places a higher emphasis on the believer to practically live out the gospel. He believes that “it is good to tell people what we mean, but it is infinitely better to show them.”⁹⁶ For Coleman, the demonstration of the gospel message takes precedence above the explanation.

While Christians are regarded as fully equipped and able to share the gospel message and the basics of discipleship with those around them, the reviewed literature finds that Christians are not understanding or heeding the command to disciple and evangelize. Regrettably, they are more concerned with receiving personal benefits as part of a Christian community, than they are with living committed and transformed lives for Christ.

Conclusion

The literature reviewed revealed several prominent themes that address the issue of dwindling evangelism and discipleship in today’s church. Many Christians lack a proper understanding of what it means to be a follower of Christ, because they view Christianity through the lens of selfish gain rather than self-sacrifice. Many proclaiming believers, by

⁹⁴ Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle Locations 2284–2288.

⁹⁵ Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, 16.

⁹⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 77.

avoiding any spiritual actions that involve risk or cost, have lacked the obedience necessary to follow the instructions of Jesus, in both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

Church leaders are called to respond to the inaccurate views held by modern-day Christians, rather than pander to what their congregation wants to hear. As with any difficult and counter-cultural movement, some aforementioned obstacles need to be addressed and overcome. Christians already have all the tools they need to effectively reach the world, but they need to make a conscious decision to put their faith into action—a decision made clear when their church instills in them the desire, and the means, to be obedient.

In summation, the reviewed literature addresses the great lack of discipleship among Christians in western culture. These resources seek to root out the cause for the lack of commitment to discipleship and spiritual maturity and find it to be the result of believers' hearts that have not been transformed by the work of Christ. Effective literature attempts to shed new light on a long-standing problem that information does not lead to heart change. Therefore, a different approach is necessary to foster obedience to the will and work of Christ within all believers. Once identified and implemented, an effective discipleship strategy will develop the skills and desire in Christ-followers to live a life devoted to discipleship.

Theological Foundations

While the word *disciple* is found almost exclusively in the Gospels and Acts, the concept of being a learner and follower of Jesus is apparent throughout the Bible.⁹⁷ Jesus presented himself as an example of how Christians are to live and obey; as such, believers are to submit to his teachings.

⁹⁷ Paul Helm, "Disciple," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 629.

Through the Great Commission, Jesus sent his disciples into the world, training others to become disciples themselves, and passing on the wisdom of God that Jesus taught them.

Principles can be gleaned from Jesus's unique approach to discipling—and specifically, how he insisted they leave their current situations and worldviews, commit to a lifestyle of self-denial, and follow him fully.

By Jesus's measure, a disciple is committed to obediently following his mandates and instructions, actively proclaiming the gospel message through evangelism, and showing faith and trust as they teach his life-giving truths.

The Mandate to Make Disciples

The Great Commission (Matt 28:16–20; cf. Mark 16:14–18; Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:7–8) is the most notable and straightforward imperative of Jesus for disciples to tell the world about his good news. In the process, Jesus charges Christians to embrace the personal allegiance required to follow him.⁹⁸ Against the backdrop of John's preparatory ministry of repentance and identification (John 3:22–26; 4:1–3; Matt 3:11), Jesus establishes a fuller commitment and expectation for hearers of the gospel message. By his standard, full allegiance to Christ is evidenced through baptism, obedience, and ongoing discipleship, and evangelism.⁹⁹

Jesus uses the term *mathētēs* (learner) in his command to go and make disciples of all the nations (Matt 28:19), demonstrating that teaching others his ways is integral for a believer to become a disciple themselves. As Byrley states, “Jesus clarifies this command by instructing them to baptize these converts in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as well as

⁹⁸ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 420.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

teach them to do all that he commanded. Again, the individual who becomes a disciple must alter his behavior as well as his mind.”¹⁰⁰ Paul reinforces the perpetual and reproductive concept of discipleship in 2 Timothy 2:2; in service of, and in addition to, making more disciples, believers are to observe the instructive, challenging, inspiring lessons that Jesus has entrusted them with.

In order to commit Jesus’s sermons, parables, and teaching moments to action, disciples are to lead spiritually mature lives without reservation and in devotion to their teacher.¹⁰¹ As Weder states, this devotion “includes the participation in the uncertain life of a traveling preacher and then also in the suffering and death of the teacher (Mark 10:39; 8:34).”¹⁰² A disciple is called to abandon all personal desires for the sake of perpetuating the message of Jesus, requiring a great deal of obedience to accomplishing their evangelistic mission.

Scripture directs disciples to be effective witnesses for people all over the world, intending them to observe and follow. Luke 24:47 speaks to how the proclamation of Jesus will occur among all the nations. The scriptures would be fulfilled through the calling for repentance, the promise of forgiveness, and the hope of Jesus beginning in Jerusalem and going out to the entire world.¹⁰³ Acts 1:8 emphasizes that Jesus’s disciples will be his witnesses to the whole earth. Toussaint notes that when the disciples were told that they would be Jesus’s witnesses,

¹⁰⁰ Chris Byrley, “Discipleship,” ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

¹⁰¹ Hans Weder, “Disciple, Discipleship,” ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Dennis Martin, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 208.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, vol. 3, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 421.

they were given a clear imperative to take the message of Christ to the entire world.¹⁰⁴ This understanding is further clarified in Acts 10:42 when the disciples were commanded to preach to the people.¹⁰⁵

Matthew 5:14–16 further describes the influence that disciples are to have in the world. Their devotion to Christ through good works is to be visible and obvious, done with such integrity that all who observe them will credit the Father in heaven.¹⁰⁶ The illustration of light and salt used in this lesson shows that disciples of Jesus have a responsibility to make a difference in the world by their proclamations and personal example.

How Jesus Made Disciples

The biblical concept of discipleship can be understood to mean learner (*mathētēs*), or follower (*akolouthein*), through the use of two different Greek words. Weder points out that “all 261 references to ‘disciple’ in the NT are found in the Gospels and Acts.”¹⁰⁷ Weder draws attention to the term *akolouthein* (to walk behind, to follow), stating that it should be considered when trying to understand discipleship, because it characterizes the central meaning of being a disciple as understood in the NT.¹⁰⁸ The term *akolouthein* occurs 90 times in the NT, 79 of which are in the Gospels and Acts. The specific books in which these terms are used make a

¹⁰⁴ Stanley D. Toussaint, “Acts,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 354.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, vol. 1, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 62.

¹⁰⁷ Weder, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 207.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

strong argument that the concepts of discipleship and following are closely associated with Jesus himself.¹⁰⁹

The Gospels offer several accounts of Jesus inviting others into a discipleship relationship with himself. Jesus displayed personal interactions where he would encounter someone, before asking that they leave behind their current life to follow him instead.

This pattern occurs during the calling of many notable disciples, beginning in the book of Matthew. First, Jesus asked Simon and Peter to join him (Matt 4:18–19). Intriguingly, Jesus recommended that a disciple follow him instead of attending his father’s burial (Matt 8:22). Jesus also called Matthew himself while he was sitting at the tax collector’s booth (Matt 9:9). Later, in the presence of his disciples, Jesus instructs an assembled crowd to take up their cross and follow him (Matt 16:24). Lastly, he commanded a rich young ruler to sell his possessions and join him (Matt 19:21). In each instance, Jesus expected the immediate and complete devotion of others when he invited them to share his life and ministry.

The concept of following Jesus is further explored in the rest of the New Testament. In 1 Peter 2:21, believers are encouraged to follow Christ as the perfect example of pleasing God. Elsewhere, Jesus tells a crowd that they can avoid walking in darkness by following him (John 8:12). In John 12:26, Jesus tells listeners that by following him, they serve him—and thus will be honored by God the Father. Colossians 3:17 explains how every action and word of a believer is to be done in the name of Jesus. Believers are told to imitate the humility and self-sacrificing example of Jesus, according to Philippians 2:1–11. Ephesians 5:1 tells readers to follow God’s example as dearly loved children.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Along with following him, Jesus called believers to be free from the enslavement of their sin. With authority from the Father, Jesus offered forgiveness and freedom from condemnation (John 8:30–36) and proclaimed freedom and good news (Luke 4:18). Blum points out that the sign of a true follower of Christ is the salvation truth that liberated them from the bondage of sin.¹¹⁰ Jesus offered freedom from this bondage because, as Pfeiffer states, “the committing of sin puts one in the position of being the servant of sin.”¹¹¹ In addition to casting off the yoke of sin, Jesus also required that his followers make a complete break from their past lives.

According to Weder, many potential conditions existed for one to be eligible to become a disciple of Jesus. Disciples immediately left their families behind to follow Jesus (Mark 1:16–20; 2:14). Some were told to hate their own families if they were to become a disciple (Luke 14:26). They were to abandon customary values (Luke 9:60) and embrace a lifestyle of self-denial (Mark 10:41–45; 8:34). The cessation of the formerly adopted mindset and lifestyle was not, in itself, discipleship—but such actions made discipleship possible. Following Jesus meant entering a lifelong relationship of learning and participating, without the reservations or pitfalls of one’s past.¹¹²

The Example of Mark 3:14

Jesus demonstrates many ways throughout the Bible in which he makes disciples; one of which is recounted in Mark 3:14. Here, Jesus deliberately appointed the twelve apostles that he would train and send out to preach. Wuest points out that, when Jesus says the disciples would

¹¹⁰ Edwin A. Blum, “John,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 305.

¹¹¹ Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett Falconer Harrison, eds., *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), Jn 8:30.

¹¹² Weder, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 208.

be with him, the verb is in the present subjunctive form, thus durative in action.¹¹³ This choice of word and meaning indicates that throughout their preliminary training, the disciples would constantly be in the presence of Jesus.¹¹⁴

Radmacher suggests that this understanding highlights the community principle.¹¹⁵ By working in a group, Jesus emphasized his relational connection to his followers. Radmacher continues by noting, “in our case this is even more important because on the one hand, we don’t have all the gifts, and, on the other hand, we are sinful and give a distorted portrait of the Christ we seek to reflect.”¹¹⁶

Jesus next sends his disciples out to preach (Mark 3:14), commissioning them to be his missional ambassadors.¹¹⁷ The disciples would make such a public proclamation that they would display the power of Christ while healing the sick and casting out demons. They would be acting as the personal representatives of Jesus. Cole states that “their mission was defined as that of being heralds of the news of the establishment of God’s rule.”¹¹⁸ The disciples would continually accompany Jesus, learning from his example and instruction while being sent to proclaim everything they had experienced. As his commissioned representatives, Jesus also designated

¹¹³ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek New Testament: For the English Reader*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 70.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1211.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Wuest, *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*, 70.

¹¹⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 138.

them with authority to evangelize in his name.¹¹⁹ Taken as a whole, Jesus and his disciples' example of preparatory learning, while actively on mission, can be applied to the lives of modern-day disciples.

How Disciples of Jesus are to Live

To be a disciple of Jesus today requires the utmost self-denial. In his ministry, Jesus called his followers to set aside all their desires, take up their cross, and follow him (Luke 9:23–24). The visual symbolism of “taking up their cross”¹²⁰ most likely provoked familiar images among the disciples of others who had been crucified previously. According to Morris, the disciples were accustomed to observing the one-way journey that many men took down the Roman road toward death.¹²¹ The implication that the Christian life is submitted for the sake of Christ, and others, is also reinforced in other areas of scripture (Luke 17:33; Matt 10:39; John 12:25). In these passages, there is nothing self-indulgent about being a disciple of Christ.

Similarly, Jesus told his disciples that their demonstration of love for one another would serve as evidence to the world that they are his disciples (John 13:34–35; 15:12); according to Kruse, Jesus had upped the ante from the previous command to love their neighbors as themselves (Lev 19:18).¹²² Disciples were now expected to love others by the same measure that Jesus had loved them.

¹¹⁹ David Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, Vol 11: Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 428.

¹²⁰ Luke 9:23.

¹²¹ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 189.

¹²² Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 289.

Elsewhere in the Bible, the concept of Jesus' followers being urged to love others is an ongoing theme. First John 3:16 describes the sacrificial love that disciples are to have by laying down their lives for another person, as another passage asserts that believers are even expected to love their enemies (Matt 5:43–48). Continually, followers of Christ are told to love one another (Jas 2:8; 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; 2:17; Eph 4:2).

To demonstrate such sacrificial love, disciples must commit to a lifelong, ongoing process of growing in their understanding of, and relationship with, Jesus. During the sermon on the mount, Jesus told his listeners to be perfect, as God is perfect (Matt 5:48). Stuart Weber explains that Jesus used the word *teleios* (having reached its end, mature, complete, perfect), indicating that “the goal for the kingdom servant is to behave like his Father, and so to reach the mature level of supernatural transformation.”¹²³ Here, the directive to continually strive for Christlike maturity by God's standards becomes paramount.

To exhibit the perfect love of God, living within the will of God as Jesus did is also a widely discussed priority in scripture. In Ephesians, Paul writes about growing up to be more like Christ (Eph 4:14–15). Paul goes on to encourage followers to imitate Christ (Eph 5:1–2). Philippians 1:6 describes how the believers are a work in progress that will be completed—a process that 1 Peter 2:2 details further by telling Christ-followers to grow into their salvation, and thus follow in Jesus's steps. Jesus himself explains in Luke 6:40 that a disciple aims to be like their teacher; yet unlike the rabbinical system, where students might surpass the knowledge of their instructor, Jesus's followers were called to strive for a completion of spiritual maturity that could not be fully realized in their lifetime.¹²⁴

¹²³ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, 70.

¹²⁴ Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, 153.

To grasp the love and will of God, Jesus directed his followers to emulate the example that he showed them. Just before the Passover festival, Jesus demonstrated the humble act of washing the disciple's feet. After the foot-washing, Jesus revealed that he had set an example by his actions and told his disciples to do as he had done (John 13:1–17). Jesus' example also calls believers to forgive in the same manner that he forgave (Col 3:13; Matt 6:14; Luke 6:37).

Jesus modeled the discipling of others throughout his life on Earth. He instructed others by the heart and will of God and sent them to teach all that they had been instructed to the world (Matthew 28:20). By this teaching method, the disciples would take over the role of teacher as they continued to make more disciples. Turner and Bock state that, “since Jesus was a teacher, indeed the ultimate and definitive teacher of the Torah (4:23; 5:2; 17–48; 7:29; 9:35; 11:1; 13:34; 21:23; 26:55), it is not surprising that his disciples are to continue in this vein.”¹²⁵

Jesus modeled discipleship in such a way that his followers would adopt a lifestyle committed to making other disciples. Hull claims that “discipleship is trusting God's presence as we intentionally enter into the lives of others, to guide them to trust and follow Jesus and obey all his teachings.”¹²⁶ Disciples are to enter others' lives by engaging in evangelism as an essential part of their commitment to follow Jesus.

Evangelism is Connected to Discipleship

While the word evangelism does not exist in the Bible, the principle of preaching the good news is woven throughout the fabric of scripture.¹²⁷ Communicating God's message to the

¹²⁵ Turner and Bock, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, 376.

¹²⁶ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship: Can They Effectively Work Together?* (Franklin, TN: Exponential Resources, 2014), Kindle.

¹²⁷ G. William Schweer, “Evangelism,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 518.

lost is only a portion of the complete evangelism picture portrayed in the Bible. Schweer describes evangelism as the “Spirit-led communication of the gospel of the kingdom in such a way or ways that the recipients have a valid opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and become responsible members of His church.”¹²⁸ In its purest form, evangelism is the call and invitation into discipleship.

The NT disciples were tasked with expanding the witness for Christ to all parts of the earth by the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8). Even as they were driven from their homes through persecution, they would continually preach the gospel message (Acts 8:4). Amid often and violent opposition, obedient disciples of Jesus contributed to the furtherance of the gospel.¹²⁹ Evangelism is included in discipleship because evangelism is an inseparable component to discipleship. It is carried out by disciples who recognize the missional imperative of reaching people and producing more disciples.¹³⁰

Evangelism is not only the obedient act of spreading the love and will of God, but also imparts in true disciples a supernatural compulsion to share his good news. The defiance of the civil and religious authorities in Acts 4:20 by the disciples demonstrated this compulsion for Jesus’ followers to spread his teachings and the gospel message.¹³¹ As such, God’s command to share the gospel supersedes the laws and demands of humanity (Acts 5:29). The early disciples of Jesus witnessed his ministry and authority, and this firsthand experience compelled them to proclaim the fullness of life only offered by him (Acts 22:15; 23:11; 26:16).

¹²⁸ Ibid., 519.

¹²⁹ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 2 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 181.

¹³⁰ Hull, *Evangelism or Discipleship*, Kindle.

¹³¹ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), Ac 4:20.

Using another illustration, disciples of Christ are sent into the world (John 17:18) to become fishers of men (Matt 4:19; Luke 5:10; Mark 1:17). According to Weder, discipleship is directly connected to the proclamation of the Gospel.¹³² This helps illustrate why the disciples were specifically sent out to preach (Matt 10:7; Mark 3:14). Weder states, “analogous to the sending of the Son, the disciples are also sent into the world (John 17:18).”¹³³ Disciples are called to learn from their teacher and share without reservation their knowledge for the benefit of others.¹³⁴ Evangelism is a result of discipleship, rather than a separate, self-contained ministry.

Furthermore, instances exist in the NT where discipleship and evangelism have an unmistakable connection. In Acts 14:21, the making of disciples is the direct result of preaching the gospel. First Thessalonians 2:8 highlights how the proclaiming of the gospel message through evangelism is more than words, but also the sharing of genuine, compassionate actions with fellow believers. Hull states, “evangelism is simply a form of pre-conversion discipleship. The two—evangelism and discipleship—are the front and back of the same coin, if you will. When we engage in this disciple-making process, Jesus tells us that He will be present with us—to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).”¹³⁵ Evangelism is the process of disciples making more disciples by proclaiming the good news, with the aid of Christ.

Parks proposes that “the New Testament paints a picture in which *every* disciple of Christ is normally and naturally involved in evangelism as much as in Bible study, prayer, and

¹³² Weder, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 208.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹³⁵ Hull and Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship*. Kindle.

corporate worship.”¹³⁶ Proclaiming the gospel through evangelism is a required component of discipleship because it fulfills the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). Furthermore, the imperative of the Great Commission involves helping people who are not yet disciples to become disciples.¹³⁷

Obedience to Christ

Colin states, “the hallmark of the true disciple is remaining in Jesus’s word, i.e., obedience to His teaching.”¹³⁸ Discipleship fundamentally involves all of one’s being, going beyond just one’s intellect or academic engagement. Byrley suggests that all the biblical terms used to convey the concept of discipleship involve obedience, and adherence, to what was being taught. He continues by stating, “Moses made clear that the teaching of the law was meant to result in obedience to what it said rather than just intellectual acceptance (Deut 4:5).” True discipleship demands action and adherence to the commands and character of God.¹³⁹

Jesus commands his followers to make disciples of all nations in his name (Matt 28:19). Moreover, the believer who chooses to submit to baptism in Jesus’s name identifies with God’s name as well as the spiritual family of other believers,¹⁴⁰ thus aligning with the purpose of the

¹³⁶ Brian Parks, “Six Benefits of Evangelism for Discipleship,” *9Marks*, Discipling in the Church, no. September–October 2012 (August 27, 2012), <https://www.9marks.org/article/journalsix-benefits-evangelism-discipleship/>.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 207.

¹³⁹ Byrley, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, “Discipleship.”

¹⁴⁰ Stuart K. Weder, *Matthew*, 485.

triune God. The gospel calls individuals into a radical new way of life, that also requires radical obedience to the will of God (Mark 9:33–50; 10:42–45).¹⁴¹

The NT focuses great attention on the obedience required of the disciple to give up everything to follow Jesus—including fully devoting themselves to his teachings (Luke 6:40).¹⁴² Scripture continually illustrates that obedience to Jesus is the method and hallmark of being a disciple. Luke 14:26–27 speaks of the need to forsake all else for the sake of Christ. John 8:31 emphasizes abiding in Christ’s word, while John 15:8 speaks of bearing fruit as a sign of being a true disciple. Luke 6:40 reiterates that in the kingdom of God, the student does not surpass the teacher, but emulates them by being fully trained in the teacher’s ways. Matthew 10:24 reinforces the value of training and knowledge by focusing on a Christ-follower’s desire to learn. Learning is motivated by a love for God and others, as John 13:34–35 describes a disciple as one who loves other believers selflessly. Lastly, Luke 6:46 stresses that to love Christ is to obey Christ. As a quality of faith that connects to and enhances all others, discipleship is an ongoing commitment to the teachings and character of Jesus.

Conclusion

Christians are to imitate Christ as they seek to make disciples themselves. Their training and wisdom are reproduced in the people that they reach through the gospel, resulting in new disciples. Being a fully formed and effective disciple of Jesus is not a task that can be completed on this side of heaven, but it is a direction toward which one constantly strives. Knowing the spiritual deficit of humanity, Jesus offered himself as the example of how one is to know God

¹⁴¹ Weder, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 209–210.

¹⁴² Byrley, *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, “Discipleship.”

and teach others about him. By definition and by love for Jesus, disciples consistently grow in spiritual maturity as they seek to better imitate Christ.

Mark 3:14 offers a rich and specific formula for disciples. Disciples are to remain in Jesus's teachings during their preparatory training and learning, much like Jesus' twelve apostles did in-person. They were to continually abide in him and proclaim the message of good news to a lost world. To communicate that message as Jesus did, the Bible displays connected properties between evangelism and discipleship, declaring that evangelism is a required and necessary aspect of discipleship. Finally, discipleship requires obedient action on the part of the Christian. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus without submitting to, and gaining inspiration from, his exemplary instructions and actions as depicted in the gospels.

Theoretical Foundations

The literature reviewed for this project has highlighted the urgency to address a lack of discipleship among believers and churches in America. These findings complement the theological foundations, which demonstrate a strong biblical mandate and standard for discipleship. The theological aspects of this stance do not require a specific setting, or unique formula, for believers to make disciples.

Of chief importance, however: any discipleship development process, as championed in scripture, must be intentional, informative, transformational, and reproductive. And while many parachurch organizations and educational outlets exist, the local church has the greatest access, responsibility, and reach, to institute the biblical example of discipleship among believers.

Intentional Learning

As Breen points out, discipleship today in the local church is mostly in an educational format, learning in a classroom setting, Sunday School, weekend sermon, or small group

format.¹⁴³ He comments on the various types of discipleship settings offered in the local church by stating, “notice that all of this is completely information driven, in some sort of classroom-esque experience.”¹⁴⁴ The problem with such an approach, alluded to previously, is that becoming a disciple of Christ is not accomplished in a six-week program, an eight-week mini-series, or even in a special one-time, all-church study.

The church has often been guilty of creating a factory-like approach to discipleship, where a glut of information, instruction, and encouragement is provided to believers within a finite timeline. Upon completion of this programmatic discipleship process, the participant often believes they have bridged a gap in their spiritual knowledge and has now graduated as a fully formed disciple of Christ, but this is not an accurate depiction of how Christ himself disciplined.

The transformative experience of becoming a disciple of Christ does not rest solely on the intake of knowledge alone. It must come with a commitment to being a lifelong learner, applying said knowledge, taking obedient action, and multiplying new disciples as a healthy byproduct of a well-rounded disciple’s transformed life. Hull states that “program-based discipleship can divide a community of people into those who have been through ‘the program’ and those who haven’t.”¹⁴⁵ To expound on the negative effects of faulty programs, Hull goes on to say: “the most damaging result is that churches categorize discipleship as just one of the ministries of the church, rather than the core of the ministry.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Breen, *Building a Discipleship Culture*, 27.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 36.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

Instead of a short-term, isolated program, discipleship is to take place alongside every ministry of a healthy church, as the foundation for knowing and following Christ. Plainly, discipleship is the heart of what it means to be a Christ-follower.¹⁴⁷ Dever points out that churches do not need programs, so much as they need to create a congregation-wide culture of discipling to develop mature leaders. Believers need to be taught how to disciple and prioritize the spiritual health of others.¹⁴⁸

Informative and Transformational

Churches, and their leaders, need to train and equip their congregants to love the world as Christ loved the world—that is, sacrificially. Far too often, churches have instead recognized the naturally selfish ambitions of people and decided to pander to their desires. This pandering takes the form of portraying a church as an authority and a model for others to gain personal success, to the detriment of discipleship. As Fletcher points out, “real success and growth are found in a life of complete devotion to Jesus and in service to others, a life where people discover their calling and begin to function in it. It’s all about others, not about self, not about me and mine.”¹⁴⁹

By prioritizing a joyful life devoted to Jesus and others, churches have an opportunity to inform and teach their attendees to properly become disciples. Most churches consider the weekend service and message as the main platform by which to introduce attendees to discipleship. While a sermon is often treated as the focal point for church-led teaching and instruction, it is only successful if it introduces listeners to a community that can understand and

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Dever, *Discipling*, 68.

¹⁴⁹ Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 129.

apply the given concepts.¹⁵⁰ When promoting relational community—and including small groups in the process—a weekend sermon can give individuals an ideal environment to grow in their faith and develop life-changing spiritual habits.

That relational community is necessary for a disciple of Jesus—and by extension, is not only central to the life of every believer, but crucial for the mission of the church.¹⁵¹ According to House, small groups represent one of the best avenues for churchgoers to experience community; additionally, small groups should be the most palpable expressions of the gospel in the local church.¹⁵² Small groups promote providential relationships, where individuals can hear from God through someone else, and observe God working in each other’s lives.¹⁵³ On a functional level, small groups can provide an avenue for believers to practice spiritual gifts and fulfill the “one another” commands in Scripture.¹⁵⁴ Small groups can also offer an accessible and functional vehicle for the dissemination of important church vision and information.

Small groups have served as the backdrop of many discipleship training approaches. Jesus spoke to the masses but was intentional to specifically build into his small group of disciples. He would teach and equip his twelve for the precise purpose of having them teach and equip others in the future. Jesus requires complete allegiance from his followers and expected them to function relationally by loving others as a reflection of their love for him.

¹⁵⁰ Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 133.

¹⁵¹ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 42.

¹⁵² Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 45.

¹⁵³ Stanley, *Deep and Wide*, 132.

¹⁵⁴ Carl F. George, *Prepare Your Church for the Future* (Tarrytown, NY: Revell Company, 1991), 129–131.

A requirement of discipleship, as mandated and demonstrated by Jesus, is to teach the tenets of God. In the Great Commission, Jesus clearly told his followers to make disciples and teach them to observe everything he commanded them (Matt 28:18-20). Allin believes that one of the biggest downfalls of many contemporary discipleship programs is their assumption that the more information that is given, then the more transformation will result.¹⁵⁵ He states, “while information is certainly an important part of discipleship, information is only one of several aspects needed for life change.”¹⁵⁶ Therefore, information must be given in service of a transformational response.

Stanley explains how transformation is more likely to happen in the context of a small group, as opposed to sitting in a row in a large weekend service. He states, “life change happens when there is accountability, a sense of belonging, a sense of care. Life change happens when I learn how to implement the principles of scripture in my daily life, and that’s not going to happen sitting in a row.”¹⁵⁷ The small group setting is where individuals find accountable community and an opportunity to grow in their walk with the Lord. By cultivating relationships and shared spiritual experiences, small groups are an effective way to teach, correct, and equip believers to follow God wholeheartedly, within the context of biblical community.

Donahue describes how small groups offer a platform to explore the three main personal spiritual practices of study, prayer, and community.¹⁵⁸ As leaders study the Bible, they are reminded that biblical study is for transformation, and not just information. God’s word is

¹⁵⁵ Dana Allin, *Simple Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2018), 24.

¹⁵⁶ Allin, *Simple Discipleship*, 24.

¹⁵⁷ Dallas Theological Seminary, “Andy Stanley Says: Life Change Happens in Circles not Rows – Andy Stanley”, June 1, 2015, 02:21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2uuBEdR6r-0>.

¹⁵⁸ Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 64–73.

transformative, because the study of scripture is mainly for the purpose of personally connecting with the author (God).¹⁵⁹ The programmatic, classroom-like approach to a discipleship model can be avoided within the relatability and accountability achieved in a healthy small group.

A necessary aspect of the life of allegiance and obedience to Jesus calls is following the call to put into action all that they learn as they grow in maturity and understanding of biblical wisdom. Lancaster suggests that ongoing, transformational, disciple-making movements can exist anywhere and everywhere. Families can disciple each other during family devotion times. Churches can disciple through Sunday School classes and small groups. Believers can disciple through one-on-one mentoring relationships. In all discipleship situations, Lancaster promotes a focus on training over teaching. The main distinction he sees is that teaching is for the sake of disseminating knowledge, while training provides actionable processes. When disciples are trained in a specific area, they can be held accountable for the task in which they were equipped.¹⁶⁰

The Reproductive Aspect of Discipleship

Discipleship is a lifelong pursuit of growing in maturity with God. Church programs alone do not and cannot perpetually motivate someone into spiritual transformation. However, programs augmented by small groups can place an individual on the correct trajectory toward life change, supported by the ongoing presence of other believers within relational community. The body of believers are to live purposely by the instructions given in Matthew 28:18–20 and in 2 Timothy 2:2 to teach others to observe all that Jesus taught, and to make more disciples. This

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel B. Lancaster, *Making Radical Disciples* (Nashville, TN: Lightkeeper Books, 2014), 31.

replicating focus, modeled by Jesus to his disciples, is also the key to successful discipleship within the church.¹⁶¹

The Great Commission reinforces the notion of a disciple-making process that is perpetually replicating. Healthy disciples will continually make more disciples, who will repeat the process—which is also referred to as evangelism. As such discipleship and evangelism are symbiotic in their relationship. One cannot exist apart from one another.

The typical western church teaches discipleship and evangelism as separate concepts using short-term instruction. In this structure, discipleship is often viewed as the ministry that takes place within the church among congregants, while evangelism occurs in the world outside the church.

Some churches go one step further by separating evangelism and discipleship into different staff and ministry teams. As Jesus' apostles discovered, an obedient disciple does not exist absent of the presence of evangelism in his or her life. Discipleship requires evangelism, yet churches do not often make the effort to connect the two.¹⁶²

This project has the potential to take advantage of the community aspect of accountable learning and training within the context of a small group. In a group setting, participants can interact with the material presented, and ask necessary clarifying questions of those they know and trust. Such relational qualities allow participants to be trained to embrace and pass on biblical discipleship that promotes spiritual transformation and replication.

¹⁶¹ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 49.

¹⁶² Geiger, Kelly, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*. Kindle.

Local Setting

Aside from weekend services, small groups present immense discipleship opportunities at IHCC. Groups are often more impactful to individuals, as they can connect and within a foundation of relationship and community. Dynamic, informal, two-way communication allows group members to encourage, challenge, share, and grow as a spiritual family. With these benefits, the small group environment will provide the best setting for this project. The approach fits perfectly at IHCC, as its small groups are currently the primary vehicle for transformational growth at the church.

The small group system has been widely adopted by current IHCC attendees as their main form of Bible study. Since IHCC is considered a megachurch, with thousands of attenders each week, individuals can easily remain anonymous in the crowd and never connect with the church's discipleship pathway.

With the potential for so many unengaged faces in the crowd, community must be intentionally created and sought out—and small groups have historically been IHCC's most successful avenue for community. Additionally, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, small groups have been able to continue meeting in residential, public, and virtual settings, while the church property remains closed to indoor gatherings per government restrictions. Altogether, IHCC's small groups are primed to receive, train, and replicate healthy discipleship within the church, and in its surrounding communities.

Conclusion

The church-wide crisis surrounding the lack of discipleship in the local church is often met with a program-based approach. Christians move from class to class checking off each box accordingly. With programs, and classes readily available, the problem still exists—biblical

discipleship is lacking. There is a need to teach the appropriate information in a manner that is understandable and poised toward promoting life change. The element of transformational living is often lost when the process is solely about checking off boxes and providing information.

The literature reviewed, theological foundations, and theoretical foundations all demonstrate without question the abundant need for believers to grow in their knowledge and commitment to discipleship. Success can be found when discipleship principles are able to be incorporated into the life of the individual. A conducive context and environment can contribute to the learning process for individuals. The small group discussion-based setting has been a proven methodology for helping Christians learn and find accountability. Additionally, Christians who can rightly understand Christ's love for all people are prompted to obediently adopt the reproductive aspect of discipleship. Discipleship training should incorporate proper biblical information given in a manner that is contextually appropriate and promotes the ability for participants to share the learned information with others in their sphere of influence.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the intervention used to address the lack of understanding of biblical discipleship among men at IHCC. Action research will be employed to protect and enhance the dignity of participants.¹⁶³ The intervention design is intended to address the perceived problem while empowering each participant—through proper and informative training—to actively make disciples. Although information does not equal transformation, it may act as a conduit to that end; conversely, a lack of knowledge can prevent someone from becoming a transformed Christ follower—and by extension, an intentional disciple maker.

This project seeks to conduct an intensive discipleship training course to establish biblical discipleship among the men at IHCC. This course will remove many of the obstacles causing spiritual ignorance, and bolster participants toward fuller allegiance to Christ. This action research will identify such obstacles to Christian obedience by incorporating the lives, experiences, and realities of those participating.¹⁶⁴

To account for various time constraints and Covid-19 safety measures, this project has been modified from the original intervention design. Regarding time-dependent factors: IHCC operates on a seasonal calendar, meaning programs and small groups begin and end according to ten-week trimesters. Originally, this intervention design would have correlated with the start of the winter trimester.

After consideration, the executive pastor at IHCC expressed concerns about the project launching at the same time as the launch of small groups. Chief among these concerns: individuals might choose to participate in the intervention design, opting out of their ministry

¹⁶³ Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 4th ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2013), 39.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

commitment for the season—or commit to both programs and risk overwhelm. As a solution, the executive pastor requested that this researcher delay the original start time by five weeks, allowing potential participants to properly manage existing obligations before joining the intervention design. The resulting delay in this project’s start would require a modification in the training course to accommodate the DMIN project timeline.

As mentioned before, the spread of Covid-19 also contributed to the modification of the intervention design. During the scheduled time of the project, Covid-19 infections had reached their highest rate in southern California, affecting IHCC and the church community; several potential participants in the project had either contracted Covid-19 or were placed in mandated quarantine after possible exposure.

Consequently, the intervention design was modified from a six-week, six-session, training course into a three-week, six-session training course, including two training sessions per week instead of one. As elaborated on later, session content was shaped according to participant responses; of the sixty-five male leaders who responded to the initial survey, twenty-seven expressed interest—further condensed to eight participants in the discipleship training course.

Original Intervention Design

In its initial format, this six-session course targets men at IHCC who currently serve in a leadership capacity. The method of conveying proper biblical understanding aims to equip each man with the ability to apply all aspects of training into their personal life and become adept at reproducing the material to other persons within their sphere of influence.

Each session will last an hour and a half, separated into three equal segments. The first segment will contain a teaching element focused on a specific passage or biblical theme. The second segment involves group discussion of highlighted passages or biblical themes, driven by

questions that reinforce Jesus' example and expectations of discipleship. The third and final segment will challenge participants to consider how they will share their gained wisdom with another person. By applying action to the topics covered, participants will learn to articulate their retained knowledge to others, thus discipling them.

Between each session, there will be short homework lessons for each participant to complete in advance of the next session. Presented in a devotional format, this homework is intended to foster a transformative connection between the participant and God, preparing their heart and mind for future session content. Each session will also include a recommended resource—a book, article, or Bible passage—that encourages participants to further explore the topics and themes provided.

After permission is granted from the lead pastor at IHCC, and once approval is instituted by the Institutional Review Board of Liberty University (IRB), this researcher will invite male individuals to participate in various portions of the project. The first section of this project will involve an email sent to existing male leaders at IHCC. The email will be sent to no more than one hundred leaders, providing a summary of the project, and requesting their informed consent. Additionally, the email will explain what participants are consenting to, emphasizing that their involvement is purely voluntary and confidential.

Should leaders choose to participate, they will click on a link embedded within the email directing them to the Recruitment Survey (Appendix A) questionnaire on SurveyMonkey. The first question in the Recruitment Survey will formally ask recipients to give their informed consent to participate. Each subsequent question in the Recruitment Survey will be measured on a sliding scale of 1–100, instructing participants to answer questions in a manner that accurately reflects their current position.

The results of the Recruitment Survey will help this researcher tailor the content toward the needs of the group, gauge overall level of interest, and narrow the selection pool to eight to ten participants. These selected participants will comprise the intensive small group discipleship cohort, chosen for having the lowest levels of understanding discipleship, while possessing the highest potential to learn and be properly equipped.

These eight to ten participants will receive a subsequent email inviting them to take part in the six-session project. The email will contain a more detailed explanation of the project's content and purpose and instruct recipients to complete a Discipleship Training Questionnaire (Appendix B) on SurveyMonkey, which will establish a baseline for the spiritual maturity and discipleship training experience of each participant.

To obtain such an effective vignette, the Discipleship Training Questionnaire will be presented in essay form, allowing for greater insight and background from each participant. The results of the questionnaire will influence project content; while session topics will be chosen based on the reviewed literature and theological foundations, greater focus may be given to a specific topic if a common need is revealed amongst the participants.

One concrete example: if the Discipleship Training Questionnaire determines that the male participants only have a basic understanding of discipleship, the intervention design will contain a greater emphasis on inviting them to live into the call and purpose that Jesus has given them. This approach will make clear what Jesus asks of the participants and equip them accordingly. In a similar vein, if the men have a good intellectual foundation of discipleship yet lack the appropriate lifestyle, this project will be tailored to convey the transformational aspects of following Jesus.

Once the selection process is completed, and as Covid-19 guidelines allow, the participants will meet in-person at a reserved room on IHCC's campus at an agreeable time and date. Should Covid-19 guidelines change, the six-session project will be conducted online.

Each participant will be asked to commit to attending the entire duration of the project. With the permission of IHCC and IRB, the project will commence on the week of January 10th, just after the start of the winter small group season. IHCC employs a seasonal small group schedule that includes three ten-week seasons each year; for convenience and congruency, this project will align with the winter small group season.

Each participant will be given a complete study guide that includes weekly topics, passages, and homework assignments. Discussion questions will be predetermined by this researcher based in part on survey responses and included in the participant study guide. This project's small group sessions will employ the discussion method of learning because it is IHCC's main form of discipleship, which leaders at the church are already accustomed to.

The goal of this intervention is to create a curriculum that provides a clear understanding of discipleship and promotes a transformational change in participants. This program will be simple and concise enough for each participant to teach its material to another person or group. IHCC leaders are expected to have some understanding of biblical discipleship, but they may not have the know-how to accurately apply it to their spiritual lives. This project will equip and train each participant so that their understanding of biblical discipleship increases—to the point that they are compelled to embrace transformational change in their life and share their experience with others.

Original Six-Session Discipleship Training Course

The discipleship training course will focus on six distinct aspects of discipleship, with the intent that each participant will gain a deeper biblical understanding of each. Participants will be challenged to seek God deeply and more intimately, by which they will experience transformation. By practical application, each man in attendance will be given the tools to share what they learned with someone else. By the end of the six-session training course, each participant will ideally gain a greater sense of confidence and understanding of how they can make disciples of others.

The topics of focus will be determined by literature review, theological foundations, theoretical foundations, survey responses, and *The Wheel*¹⁶⁵ illustration.

Illustration 1 – “The Wheel,” Navigators



The Wheel illustration illuminates six different elements required in the discipleship of a Christian. Christ is the center point of the wheel, as his lordship over the life of a disciple is

¹⁶⁵ *The Wheel* © 1976 *The Navigators*. Used by permission of *The Navigators*. All rights reserved. www.navigators.org.

necessary for spiritual growth. *The Wheel* next highlights four core aspects of every disciple: witnessing, prayer, fellowship, and the Word.

For the purposes of this project, the aspect of fellowship will be assumed as an existing participant trait, as each recruited male is already actively involved in the church community by leading small groups and/or ministry volunteers. For this reason, the aspect of fellowship will be replaced by a session centered on defining discipleship. The final part of the wheel reveals the aspect of obedience, which will be addressed as a necessary component for converting information into action and heart change.

Regarding session content, the first session will focus on knowing God transformatively, outlining the biblical expectation of discipleship taught by Jesus. The supporting biblical passages will be 2 Timothy 3:15–17, 2 Corinthians 5:17, and Mark 12:3, which highlight the process between knowledge, action, and heart change. Each participant will be challenged to better identify Jesus' expectations for themselves and those they regularly encounter.

The second session will investigate the uniqueness of Jesus and the necessity for people to hear the gospel message. This session will explore the biblical basis of how someone becomes a disciple, and what basic knowledge they need to accurately communicate the gospel message. Emphasized verses will be John 14:6, Romans 1:18–20, and John 1:1–14.

Session three will discuss the directives of Jesus and the specific call to make disciples. A biblical connection between evangelism and discipleship will be made using Matthew 28:16–20, Luke 5:1–11, John 17:3, John 3:34, and 2 Timothy 2:2. Practical tips will be given on how to help others express their faith effectively.

The fourth session will focus on how one can accurately read and interpret the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:20–21 will provide a backdrop for

exploring biblical examples of how God speaks and explain the importance of understanding the Bible for oneself. This session will instruct the participant in helping others read and interpret the Bible, as well as understand the will of God.

Session five will use Matthew 6:5–15 and Ephesians 1:15–17 to illustrate the biblical importance of prayer and describe what it means to have a heart after God. The participants will learn concise directions for how to pray, empowering them to seek deeper connection to God and commit to leading others to a faithful prayer life.

Finally, the sixth session will bring attention to the requirement of obedience in a disciple's life. Passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:37–38, John 10:27–30, John 14:15, and Luke 6:46 will outline how a lack of obedience can prevent someone from experiencing a fulfilling life promised by God. This session will also integrate all session topics in a comprehensive, conclusive manner for participants.

Modified Intervention Design

The modified intervention includes much of the original intervention, condensed into a shorter, more intensive format: the original plan of six ninety-minute sessions over six weeks would be adjusted to fit six sixty-minute sessions across three weeks. The sessions will take place on a Sunday afternoon outside the main auditorium of IHCC, per Covid-19 guidelines. Each participant is expected to attend every session throughout the three-week intervention.

The Discipleship Training Questionnaire (Appendix B) will not be used, as there is an insufficient amount of time for potential participants to complete the survey before the first session. Originally, the Discipleship Training Questionnaire would shape the project's content based on submitted responses, but time constraints would not allow for content modification.

However, a high level of interest in spiritual disciplines from the Recruitment Survey would result in greater attention placed on those disciplines during the project.

The expedited timeline significantly shortens the amount of time each person would have to complete the Discipleship Training Questionnaire; potential participants would be given the survey on the Monday before the project begins on the following Sunday. This would not allow this researcher to shape the project according to participants' survey responses. Instead, this researcher will ask specific, targeted questions during the first session, thus tweaking the project to have greater relevance and impact for participants.

Each week's meeting will complete two of the original six sessions, and the previous session order will be adjusted so that two complementary topics will be covered on the same week. Another adjustment of note: the assigned homework between sessions will be removed from the condensed three-week format. Previously, the homework would recap the previous session and set up the upcoming meeting; however, combining two sessions each week doubles the amount of homework and preparation between meetings. After potential participants expressed concerns over such an intensive timeframe, this researcher decided that the homework element provided too large of a barrier for participation.

Modified Discipleship Training Course

The modified discipleship training course will still be conducted in six sessions, with two topics paired together for each of the expedited course's three meetings. Each meeting will offer one session that is theoretical in nature, followed by a second session that focuses on practical application. In addition, participants will be given a revised overview of the discipleship training course (Appendix D).

The first group meeting will cover sessions one and five from the previous format, giving attendees biblical expectations for discipleship and spiritual maturity. Week one, session one will teach participants how a relationship with Jesus requires more than acquiring information about him. Participants will also learn the importance of transformational living and genuine connection with God. Using the theoretical and practical approach mentioned before, session one will focus on theoretical aspects of discipleship and spiritual maturity, setting up practical application for the second session.

Week one, session two will highlight the importance of prayer and connection to God. Those in attendance will be asked to share the approaches to prayer that they have utilized and taught. The group will then discuss the different manners in which God has chosen to communicate with humanity, alongside the importance of hearing his voice. Matthew 6:5–15 will be used as a template for how Christians can pray.

The second group meeting will consist of sessions six and four from the original format. Week two, session three discusses the obedience required to be a disciple of Jesus. Biblical passages such as John 10:27–30, John 14:15, and Luke 6:46, will explain that God expects his followers to be obedient to him, know how he speaks, and be able to discern his voice. This session will also illustrate how disobedience can hinder a full life promised by God.

Week two, session four concerns accurately reading and understanding the Bible. Second Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:20–21 will provide biblical examples of how God speaks, underscoring the importance of comprehending his word. Practical tools will be given to participants to pass on to others as part of practical discipling.

The third and final group meeting will present sessions two and three from the original course format. Week three, session five emphasizes the link between evangelism and

discipleship using Matthew 28:16–20, Luke 5:1–11, John 17:3, John 3:34, and 2 Timothy 2:2. Participants will discuss the multiplication methodology included in biblical discipleship.

Week three, session six reveals the importance of evangelism in terms of sharing the gospel message for others to hear and explains that Jesus is necessary for salvation—reinforced by John 14:6, Romans 1:18–20, and John 1:1–14. Following biblical discussion, effective methods of evangelism will be elaborated on, and provided to, participants.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

Triangulation will be achieved in this intervention project using surveys, questionnaires, and group discussion. Survey sample size will be limited to the male leadership currently active at IHCC—approximately one hundred men. The information gathered from the participants will identify the best method of presenting intervention content.

Following project completion, a Debrief Survey (Appendix C) will acquire feedback to determine whether the intervention successfully addressed the establishment of healthy discipleship. Consisting of the same sliding scale questions as the Recruitment Survey in addition to several others, the Debrief Survey will contrast participants' responses in both surveys—and reveal the effects of the intervention on the daily lives of participants. Since survey responses were collected before and after the project, the data should determine whether the project resolved the lack of biblical understanding of discipleship among male leaders at IHCC.

Biases are not completely avoidable with such a small sample of participants but can be mitigated by an effective selection questionnaire for initial participation. Should initial survey findings prove inconclusive, an additional debrief interview will be administered.

Throughout the intervention, a reflection journal will be kept, recording the process and documenting data in a timely, accurate manner. As a comprehensive collection of information

gathered from surveys, questionnaires, and group meetings, the reflection journal should prove a valuable resource for improving the ongoing discipleship pathway at IHCC.

Recruitment of Participants

The initial email project invitation was sent to eighty-three male leaders on January 22. This recruitment email carefully detailed the nature of the project and included both an informed consent form, and a link to the Recruitment Survey (Appendix A) on SurveyMonkey.

Of the eighty-three men invited to participate, sixty-five completed the Recruitment Survey, which featured questions that—when answered truthfully—would offer a baseline understanding of each participant’s knowledge of, and commitment to, discipleship. Each statement was offered on a sliding scale from one (disagree) to one hundred (agree). Those invited to complete the survey were considered mature believers, based on their years of faithful participation and church leadership. As a result, an assumption formed that each male surveyed would agree in varying levels to each statement, without disagreeing with any.

From the field of men who completed the Recruitment Survey, twenty-seven were invited to join the discipleship training project based off their survey responses. The men with the lowest overall scores—and the men with notably low scores in specific areas—were chosen to participate, because of their potential to benefit most from the project.

A follow-up email invitation was sent to these twenty-seven men to participate in the modified three-week, six-session discipleship training course. Due to participant availability and Covid-19 complications, eight men accepted the invitation to participate. The original recommendation called for at least eight to ten participants, and the interest resulted in an

appropriate number of men to complete the intervention.¹⁶⁶ A group of eight is ideal for individuals to express ideas and thoughts in a safe, appropriate environment.¹⁶⁷ Additionally, Sensing recommends that for qualitative research, it is more important for the individuals sampled to meet the essential criteria, rather than meeting a certain sample size.¹⁶⁸

Stringer recommends meeting in a location where, “each stakeholder group feels at home” and is not threatening.¹⁶⁹ As a result, the project would take place at the IHCC church campus after the last in-person weekend service concluded. Additionally, to comply with Covid-19 guidelines, the meeting was conducted outside with each person wearing a face covering.

Part One of the Intervention Design

Session One

One of the most significant findings of the Recruitment Survey: most felt that the church was responsible for training them in discipleship yet disagreed that they were responsible for their own training. While many church leaders would agree that the main purpose of the church is to train people in discipleship,¹⁷⁰ this does not negate the individual’s responsibility to pursue personal spiritual maturity. This lack of personal responsibility in discipleship self-training influenced how the intervention content addressed the biblical mandate to seek spiritual maturity for oneself.

¹⁶⁶ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach for Doctor of Ministry Projects* (Downers Grove, IL: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 227.

¹⁶⁷ Stringer, *Action Research*, 129.

¹⁶⁸ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 83.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁷⁰ Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, 29.

The first session of the discipleship training course defined what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, alongside the biblical mandate for believers to gain maturity. The group was posed with a simple question: what is discipleship? Answers varied from descriptions of a disciple's actions to several character qualities that a disciple embodies. Astoundingly, not one lay leader knew that disciple means "learner."¹⁷¹ As a result of the confusion over this definition, careful attention was given to explaining the usage of *mathētēs* in the NT.

Participants read Bible verses that supported the individual's responsibility to mature in the discipleship with God. By seeing scriptural examples, participants learned that they must take initiative in own spiritual growth. Further, the church's responsibility to disciple people does not negate the personal responsibility of each Christ follower; put simply, the charge to make disciples is both individual and corporate.¹⁷² The replication mandate was reinforced along with personal obligation. As believers grow into spiritual maturity, they are expected to make more disciples—teaching others and thereby multiplying God's kingdom.

Next, the session reiterated the project's purpose: to offer a proper understanding of biblical discipleship so that leaders can both embrace it for themselves and facilitate it to others. To accomplish this in healthy, biblical terms, the importance of heart transformation was emphasized. While information is helpful, it is not transformational. However, information can enable transformation by removing barriers of misconception or ignorance.

The session affirmed that a biblical understanding of discipleship yields effective information that can foster heart change. Once participants understood what they must learn and

¹⁷¹ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 226.

¹⁷² Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 78-79.

do to become a disciple of Jesus, they became aware of a choice: to obediently follow and pledge allegiance to Christ, or else live opposed to his instruction.

The first session also established the primary goal of learning biblical concepts and values: to draw closer to the heart of God in pursuit of transformation—but that is dependent on the individual. Such heart change can be explained and demonstrated, but it cannot be transferred from one person to another. Instead, the dissemination of biblical wisdom can clarify what is required of a person, and how to grow accordingly. With this knowledge, participants saw the need to commit to do what God asks. This commitment both originates and perpetuates the heart change that disciples of Christ are called into.

Session Two

The second session focused on properly communing with God, how participants could know God more intimately, and what it means to have a heart committed to him. As a precedent, Mark 3:14 depicts Jesus spending substantial time with the disciples before they were sent out to preach. As with the twelve, disciples today are to “be with him” (Mark 3:14). Group discussion focused on how participants could achieve this goal. The group responded with prayer and Bible reading as the primary methods for drawing close to God.

The session next explored the necessity and purpose of prayer. Biblical examples detailed the distinct types of prayer; in particular, Ephesians 6:18 directs believers to pray all the time with all manner of prayers. Matthew 6:5–13 was used as a model for how Jesus taught the disciples to pray. These verses were discussed so that participants could better grasp their meaning and context. For example, the prayer in Matthew 6:5–13 was examined as a potential template for prayer, but not the only way one could pray. Using prayer to align with the heart of God was the prevailing takeaway for the group.

Prayer was also desired to be a means of hearing from God, and the group explored the ability to hear God's voice in John 10. The resulting discussion touched on two points: the observable ways that God spoke in the Bible, and the danger of expecting him to speak in a specific manner, thereby missing his words in the process. The handout "How God Speaks in the Bible" (Appendix H) was presented to help participants understand how God communicates. The group accepted that trusting the Bible as special revelation from God was the foundation for accurately hearing his voice.

In summation, the first two sessions comprising part one led participants to discover what it means to follow Jesus, and commune with God through prayer and Scripture. Participants learned the purpose and meaning of discipleship and the value of connecting with God. Attention was given toward how to listen and obey God's voice. The following sessions expound upon hearing from God and obeying his commands.

Part Two of the Intervention Design

Session Three

The third session focused on the aspect of obedience, which is required of all disciples. Believers are told to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (Jas 1:22), and are directed thus: "obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance" (1 Pet 1:14). Obedience to God is the necessary element that draws believers into a rewarding spiritual relationship and puts into practice the tools and knowledge gained from this intervention.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, "only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes."¹⁷³ According to Bonhoeffer, only true believers live in obedience to God. The

¹⁷³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1959). 54.

participants unanimously agreed that obedience is required to be a disciple and noted the difficulties that they—and those they have led—have encountered while doing what God asks.

Further into the session, the participants discussed the observable outcomes of living as an obedient disciple. Responses included: desiring to know God better, following his commands, praying regularly, reading the Bible, evangelizing, and seeking transformational growth. The group was next asked why they believe many Christians appear to live in disobedience to God. While responses varied, the root cause of sin was named as a consistent barrier. Participants identified that godly living comes with a cost that many are unwilling or unprepared to pay. Jesus iterated this concept in Luke 9:23, stating: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me,” thereby distinguishing the conflict between the sinful flesh and the desire to follow Jesus.

At this, participants expressed their struggle to break free from the bondage of sin and live in consistent obedience to God. They mentioned that many try to balance their sinful ways with maintaining the benefits of being a Christian. Discussion of a believer refusing to repent of a specific sin or lifestyle raised the question of whether they truly are a Christian.

The issue of ignorance arose as well, in reference to people who are unknowingly disobedient to God; they may not know what is required of them to be a true disciple of Jesus. In that case, teaching, training, and effective discipling could allow someone the opportunity to know and obey God’s directives.

Session Four

The fourth session explored the Bible as a means of growing in one’s discipleship and spiritual maturity, completing part two’s assertion that the Bible is God’s revelation and a means of knowing what he desires for us. The Bible reveals the known person of God, and his character

and commands, which—when properly studied—can confirm or correct what a believer perceives to be God’s will. To that end, session four sought to equip participants with the tools needed to read and properly understand the Bible.

Scripture is self-identified as, “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). From their personal experience, participants affirmed the Bible as beneficial and indispensable for growing in their faith—enabling them to identify the will and voice of God and providing a fulfilling life by correctly applying its content.

Much attention was given toward helping each participant grow confident in reading and understanding the Bible, because discerning the original meaning of the text is the starting point for devotional reading and life change.¹⁷⁴ Differences among Bible translations, and the spectrum by which they prioritize thought-for-thought versus word-for-word analysis, were addressed in-session. Books such as *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*¹⁷⁵, *Grasping God’s Word*¹⁷⁶, and *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation*¹⁷⁷ were given as resources to discover the original meaning of the biblical text.

Discussion then shifted toward reading biblical passages in context, identifying genre and literary styles, recognizing background elements and how they enhance comprehension, and studying the usage of themes and recurring phrases. Of these areas, high priority was placed on context and biblical genres, where participants were given a handout titled, “Biblical Genres and Literary Styles” (Appendix I).

¹⁷⁴ Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 33.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God’s Word*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).

¹⁷⁷ Virkler and Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics*.

Provided examples from Philippians 2:13 and Jeremiah 29:11 demonstrated how reading a single verse, apart from the greater context of its paragraph, chapter, and book, can greatly alter its intended meaning. The participants read each verse in their own Bibles and considered how their complete context differed from their previous understanding. Reading each Bible verse contextually proved crucial according to the participants, as it helped them grasp the proper meaning of a passage rather than its cultural appropriation.

To highlight the value of biblical genres and literary styles, this session also focused on wisdom literature in the Bible. Each participant received the handout, “The Wisdom Genre” (Appendix J). Modern-day proverbs were used as a way for participants to see that biblical proverbs are not promising a specific desired outcome but stating godly wisdom for the readers. Participants saw how possessing the correct literary biblical context could provide a complete picture of the text; consequently, they left this session with a heightened understanding of how to read and interpret the Bible.

Part Three of the Intervention Design

Session Five

The fifth session centered around the necessity of knowing Jesus and his mandate to invite others into a discipleship relationship through evangelism. Mark 16:15 and Matthew 28:19–20 illustrated the commission that Jesus placed on his followers: to share the good news with the world. Romans 10:14 reinforced the idea that the gospel message must be communicated. Sproul states: “Evangelism, on the other hand, is the actual proclamation—either oral or written, but certainly verbal—of the gospel.”¹⁷⁸ These resources led participants to

¹⁷⁸ Sproul, *What Is the Great Commission?*, 16.

consider that acts of service and social projects are helpful but are not considered evangelism unless the truth about Jesus is verbally proclaimed.

The session content posited that, for Christian disciples, proclamation of the gospel is not optional. Rather, a disciple obeys the call to carry out the mission of Christ—going out into the world to declare the redemptive fulfillment of Christ’s incarnational work.¹⁷⁹ By accomplishing this, a disciple finds meaning and purpose in their faith.

Participants offered reasons why Christians fail to evangelize, the most prominent being a lack of confidence and training. Intentional instruction can alleviate this hurdle, which was further confirmed when most participants stated willingness to share their faith but refrain due to feeling inadequate in conveying the good news correctly. For this reason, the participants noted that it is easier to live disobediently than seek training to overcome their evangelism challenges.

Despite those obstacles, participants agreed that being a disciple of Jesus requires that they tell others about him. Jesus claims that he is the “only way” (John 14:6) for a person to know God the Father. Discussion turned to the basic, essential knowledge needed to become a disciple of Jesus. Participants gave several good answers that spoke to the truth behind accepting and sharing the gospel: they must trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins.

Session Six

The sixth and final session in the discipleship project sought to equip each attendee with the practical skills needed to share the gospel. Citing Luke 5:1–11 strengthened the connection between discipleship and evangelism: Christ proclaims that the disciples will trade their fish for

¹⁷⁹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 89-90.

people and become disciplers themselves. Individuals committed to imitating Christ will seek to impart their experiences to others.¹⁸⁰

Participants were given the “Evangelism Methods” handout (Appendix K), asked which evangelism methods they were familiar or comfortable with, and encouraged to demonstrate those methods for the group. This exercise showed that while each method offered a different approach, they shared the same core principles and communicated the same gospel message. Although some methods proved more, or less, effective in certain settings, participants found that obedience took priority over method or setting. They learned that evangelism is not about relying on the perfect opportunity or methodology, but obediently engaging others with the gospel message regardless of how optimal the situation may be.¹⁸¹

The session’s focus shifted to the practical steps of prompting a spiritual conversation and asking an individual for a response at the end of each spiritual conversation. Participants were taught that their evangelistic attempts are important, regardless of whether they result in conversions. First Corinthians 3:5-9 reminded them God is the one who ultimately makes faith grow, while the disciple’s responsibility is to share the gospel.

Finally, the concept of relational evangelism was discussed as a means of creating opportunities to share the gospel. Relational evangelism builds relationships for the purpose of sharing God’s love. In this methodology, Christians are to gain genuine love and interest in the lives of unbelievers. They actively leverage such relationships as a means and opportunity to

¹⁸⁰ Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*, 66.

¹⁸¹ Johnston, *Mobilizing a Great Commission Church*, 29.

share the gospel story. Unbelievers are not to be conquered, but authentically befriended as a display of God's authentic love.¹⁸²

Finalizing the Intervention

One week after the intervention concluded, each participant was asked to complete a Debrief Survey (Appendix C). Ideally, this researcher would have allotted more time for attendees to digest the content before giving detailed feedback, since the revised intervention presented a large amount of material in just three weeks' time.

The Debrief Survey contained the same questions as the Recruitment Survey, listed in a different order to gauge participants' confidence in understanding and fostering discipleship. Additional questions in the Debrief Survey assessed participants' overall comprehension of the material. Upon completion, the Debrief Survey would determine whether the men could define discipleship, and whether they identified as a follower and learner of Christ.

¹⁸² Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism*.

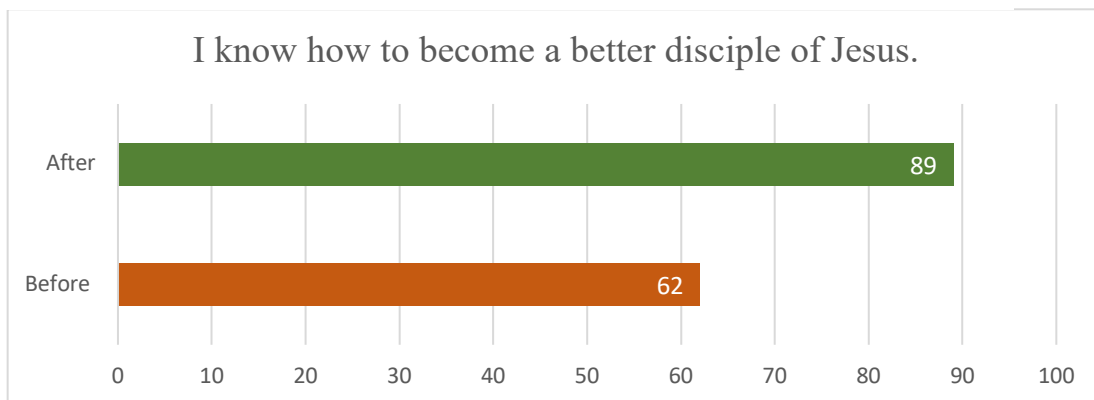
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The goal of this action research project was to address the lack of biblical understanding of discipleship among male leaders at IHCC. This issue was addressed through the implementation of a six-session discipleship training course. A baseline of each participant was achieved through the Recruitment Survey before the project, with a Debrief Survey administered after the intervention plan. The data and variations between both surveys measure how successfully the project addressed the problem presented.

The Recruitment Survey first prompted participants to offer their informed consent and personal contact information. Each of the following questions posed a statement and a sliding scale response format—on a range of one to one hundred—for individuals to record their level of agreement or disagreement with the given statement. A lower score indicated an individual’s level of disagreement, while a higher score marked their level of agreement. The questions on the Recruitment Survey were repeated on the Debrief Survey, arranged in a different order.

Statement One

Table 1 – I know how to become a better disciple of Jesus



This first question in the Recruitment Survey helped establish a baseline for participants’ understanding of discipleship. Since the intervention project was targeted at mature believers

who serve in leadership at IHCC, it was assumed that the average score would place above fifty, noting a proper understanding of discipleship.

Surprisingly, an average score of sixty-two denoted only slight agreement with the statement, a peculiar response from participants regarded as mature believers and lay leaders in the church. In fact, many of them had been serving in ministry roles that included discipling others. The lower-than-expected score suggested that participants were not only uncertain of how to become better disciples, but also uncertain of how to disciple others.¹⁸³

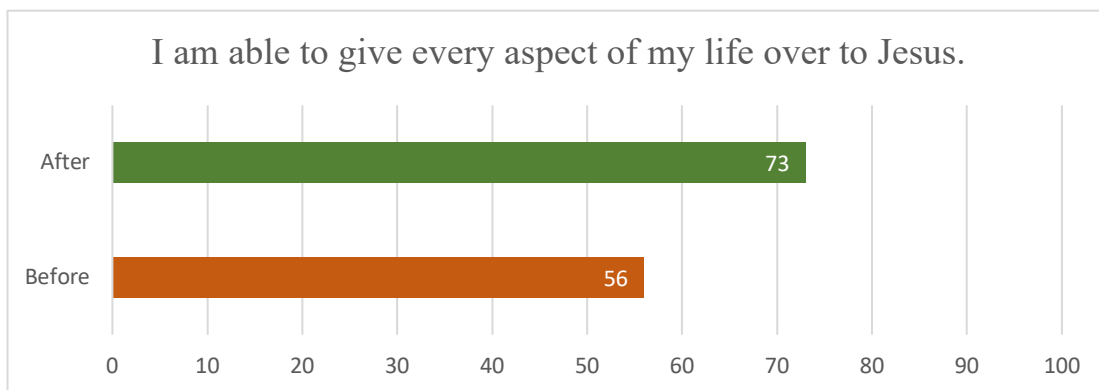
This question's results influenced the structure and content of the intervention. Group discussion questions during the project also confirmed participants' confusion over the proper definition of disciple. Once they were taught that a disciple was a learner or follower of Jesus, their confidence increased. One additional question from the Debrief Survey was, "I know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus," which resulted in an average score of ninety-three.

This finding was potentially the most significant outcome of the project: participants received a better understanding of biblical discipleship by means of a simple, clear definition. It serves as a reminder that churches must help lay leaders under their care to understand biblical terms. Terminology that might be commonplace among pastors and theologians might be lost among parishioners.

¹⁸³ Statement Ten will further explore this understanding.

Statement Two

Table 34 – I am able to give every aspect of my life over to Jesus



This statement also formed a baseline of each participant’s commitment to Jesus and proved helpful during group conversations about obedience leading to transformed lives. Like statement one, participants after the intervention recorded greater agreement that a true disciple of Christ goes beyond learning—but initial survey responses showed otherwise.

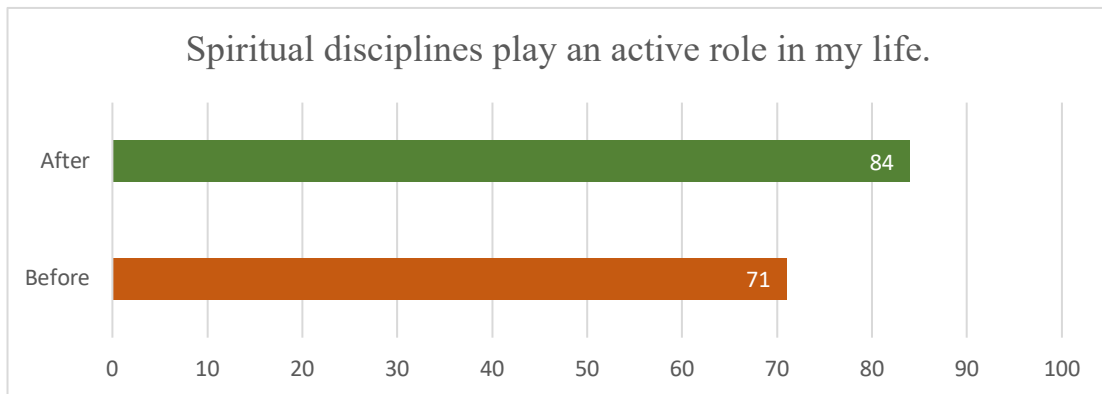
On average, participants before the intervention did not agree or disagree with the statement, “I am able to give every aspect of my life over to Jesus.” Their average score of fifty-six rested almost squarely in the middle of the scale. This question does not measure one’s *desire* to give every aspect of their life over to Jesus, but rather their *ability*; based on pre-intervention responses, participants were not able to fully commit their lives to Jesus’ teachings.

The average score of the same statement in the Debrief Survey rose to seventy-three—seventeen points higher than the pre-intervention results. This significant increase is not solely attributed to the intervention project: in this researcher’s opinion, three weeks of training should not account for such a substantial improvement. After meaningful conversations with several participants after the intervention, the greatest contributor to this increased score was a deeper commitment to specific spiritual disciplines.

One participant admitted: “I always avoided sharing my faith. I knew it was hampering my relationship with God because he wanted me to do it. I feel I need to stop making excuses and do it.” Another said, “I have a good foundation to where I want to be and I’m ready to take my discipleship seriously.” A third participant added, “I feel like I have a new interest for reading the Bible.” Of the eight participants, six noted a renewed commitment to prayer, Bible study, evangelism, or the discipling of others. This renewed passion and obedience likely incited their higher agreement to submit every aspect of their lives to God post-intervention.

Statement Three

Table 67 – Spiritual disciplines play an active role in my life



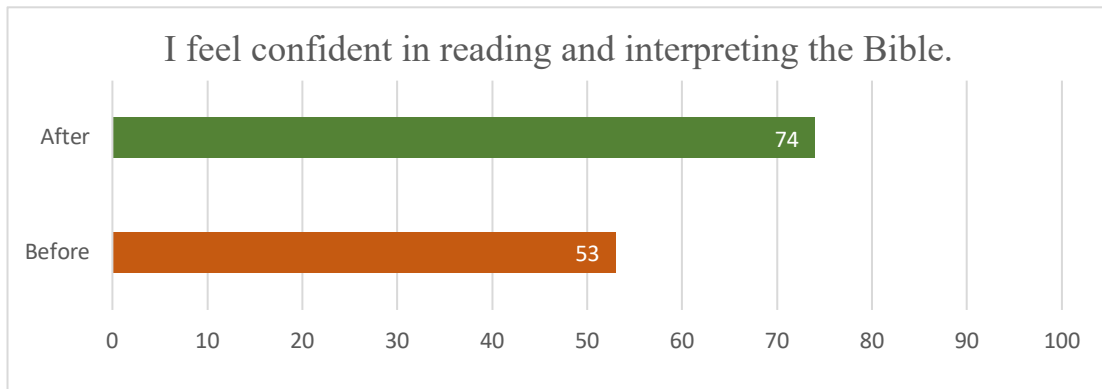
Most participants recognized spiritual disciplines as playing an active role in daily life. The average score of seventy-one before the intervention was thirteen points lower when compared to the score of eighty-four afterward. Of all survey questions, this yielded perhaps one of the least noteworthy in terms of results. The Debrief Survey and session conversations indicated that increased information about spiritual disciplines prompted higher interest in applying the material.

This project does not offer long-term data to clarify whether the interest in spiritual disciplines was temporary, or life-altering. While participants would ideally exhibit a lifelong

desire to incorporate spiritual disciplines, the observable results from the shortened intervention period reveal only short-term increased interest.

Statement Four

Table 100 – I feel confident in reading and interpreting the Bible



Admittedly, the initial score of fifty-three was surprising from mature, longtime lay leaders in the church, most of whom being small group leaders who facilitate weekly Bible studies. The expectation had been that participants would already be confident in reading and understanding the Bible, but a lower initial score also suggested considerable progress could be made during the intervention.

The Debrief Survey distributed after the project indeed revealed a substantial increase of twenty-one points, attributed to intentional study and interpretation of the Bible during sessions. Careful attention was placed on giving each participant a clear process and methodology for understanding Scripture. As a result, five of the eight participants reported that this content proved the most beneficial for them. An overlapping five participants stated that reading the Bible was an area that they would like to learn more about. Such feedback affirmed that this project addressed the deficiency in biblical understanding among participants.

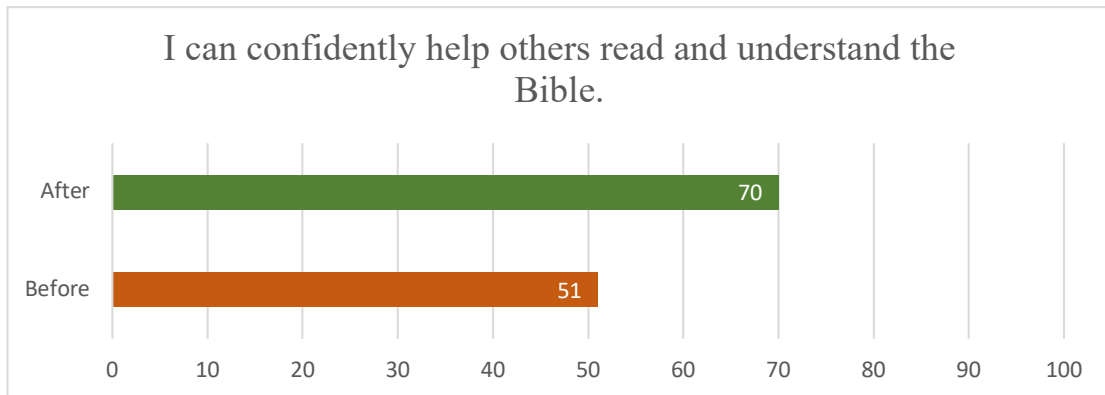
The entirety of session four was devoted to equipping participants to read and understand the Bible, which was presented as a means to knowing God better through his revelation and

growing in discipleship. Attendees learned how context and literary styles can help discern the original intent of a passage. Most of session four’s content proved new for each participant, resulting in a dynamic discussion where questions about literary styles and genres were addressed.

The participants’ newfound ability to read and interpret the Bible with a new set of tools, as noted in the twenty-one-point increase in statement four, is a significant step toward alleviating the lack of biblical understanding. Taken a step further, the increased confidence in biblical comprehension could directly correlate to the increased interest in spiritual disciplines measured in statement three.

Statement Five

Table 133 – I can confidently help others read and understand the Bible

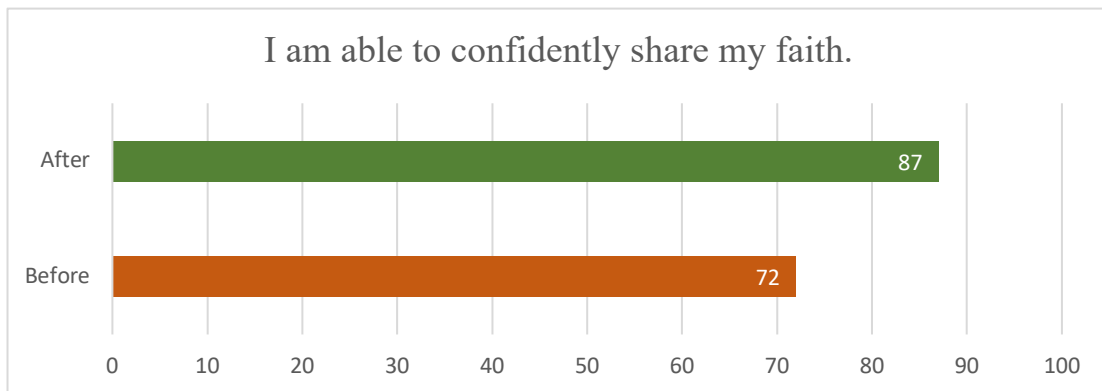


Considering the participants’ increased personal aptitude for reading and interpreting the Bible, it comes as no surprise that statement five’s average score also increased after the intervention. In the Recruitment Survey, participants did not exhibit a high proficiency in understanding the Bible, and even less so in helping others do the same. Through the project’s instruction and practical application, the average score increased by nineteen points.

Crucially, the results of this statement gauge the project’s success in imparting a biblical understanding of discipleship. Two objectives toward that goal included leading participants to grow closer to God in part through knowledge that led to transformation, and to articulate that wisdom to others for the purpose of multiplication. Based on the average scores of this and related statements, the participants showed noteworthy progress in reaching objectives toward the overall goal of effective discipleship.

Statement Six

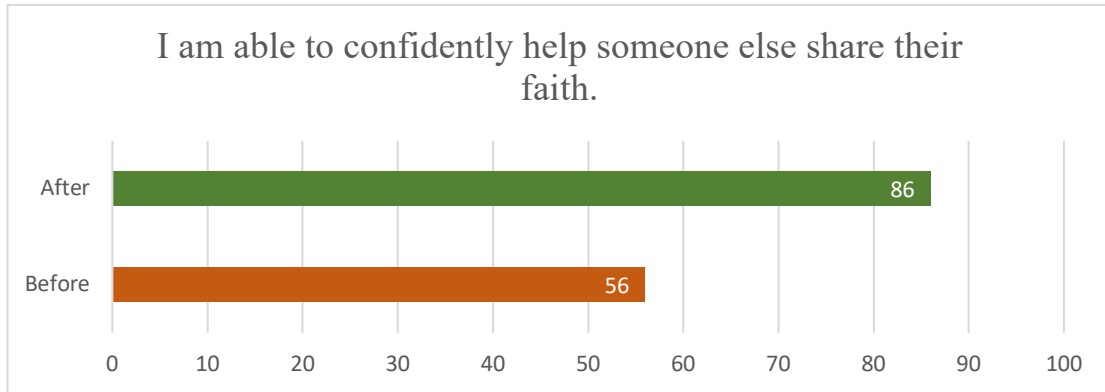
Table 166 – I am able to confidently share my faith



Before the intervention, the male leaders identified as able to share their faith confidently, as evidenced by an average score of seventy-two. The resulting increase to eighty-seven in the Debrief Survey is a substantial improvement, but pales in comparison to the following statement’s results: on average, participants expressed confidence in evangelizing, but an even greater ability to foster another’s evangelism potential.

Statement Seven

Table 199 – I am able to confidently help someone else share their faith

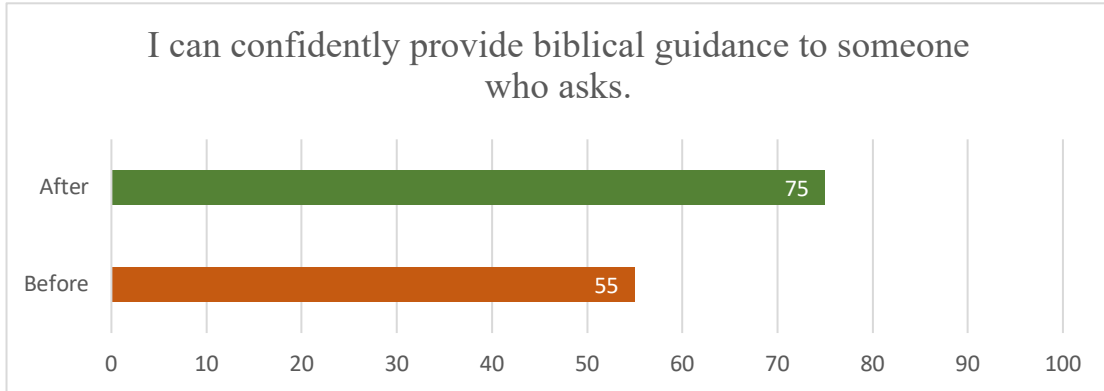


The ability to help someone evangelize, as measured in this statement, represented the second highest increase of the Debrief Survey: participants gained confidence in this statement by a thirty-point average. Before the intervention, the participants only felt mildly able to train and encourage others to evangelize.

Sessions five and six framed evangelism as an observable result of a healthy disciple: such believers are committed to personal spiritual growth, and the growth of others. Teaching and discussion not only emphasized evangelism as a necessary component of discipleship, but also highlighted the knowledge one needs to possess to have a growing relationship with God. The survey results noting increased confidence in evangelizing, and inviting others to do the same, affirmed the effectiveness of sessions five and six. In addition to recording increased evangelistic aptitude, participants were also asked to name the most beneficial and interesting topics covered; four of the eight participants named evangelism, while four stated that they want to learn more about sharing their faith.

Statement Eight

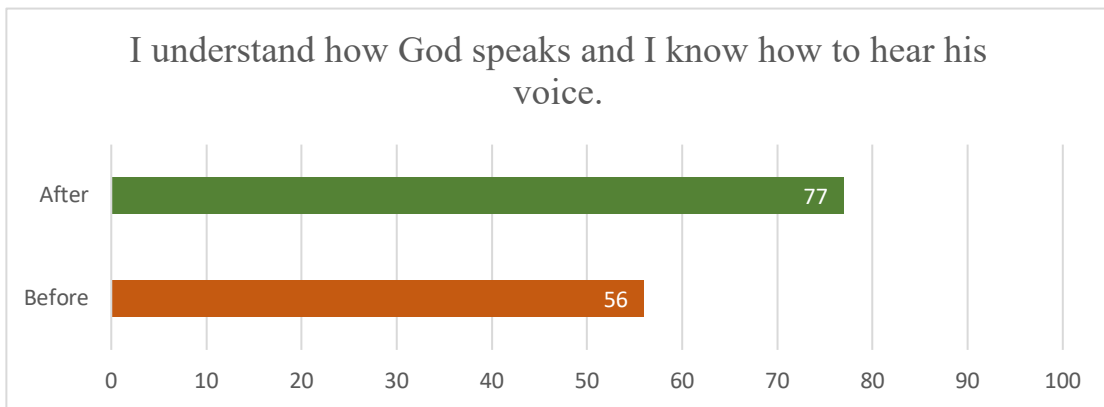
Table 232 – I can confidently provide biblical guidance to someone who asks



On average, the participants recorded a twenty-point increase in offering biblical guidance confidently. While significant, this statement was not directly addressed during the intervention. However, this finding further confirms that the intervention successfully imparted practical information to participants regarding discipleship.

Statement Nine

Table 265 – I understand how God speaks and I know how to hear His voice



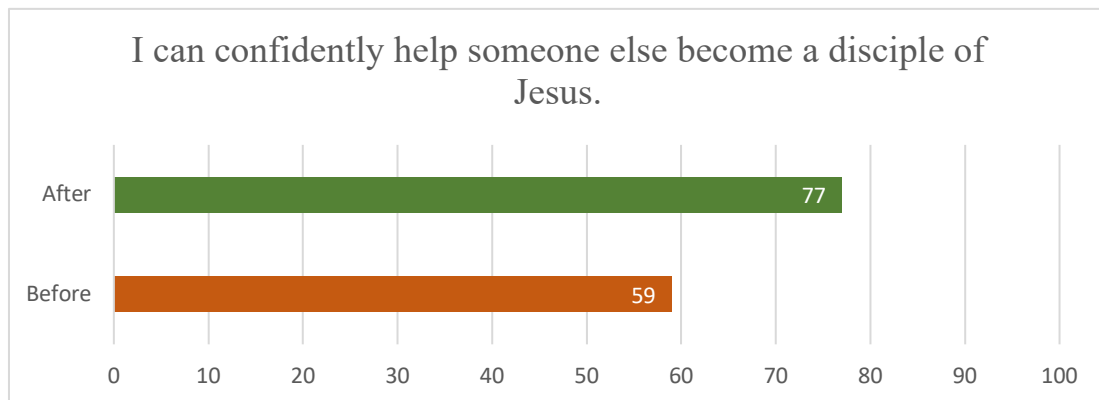
In contrast to statement eight, the participants' improved ability to hear God can be attributed to focused attention on the topic during the intervention. Participants were given a handout that described every method God used in Scripture to communicate with humanity.

Much discussion centered on the disconnect between how God spoke in biblical times, and how people today expect God to speak to them.

Each participant identified how they most desire to hear from God—but more importantly, they could point to God’s revelation in the Bible as a direct means of hearing him. With an average increase of twenty-one points after the intervention, participants demonstrated a deeper understanding of the ways God speaks, and how to hear him.

Statement Ten

Table 298 – I can confidently help someone else become a disciple of Jesus



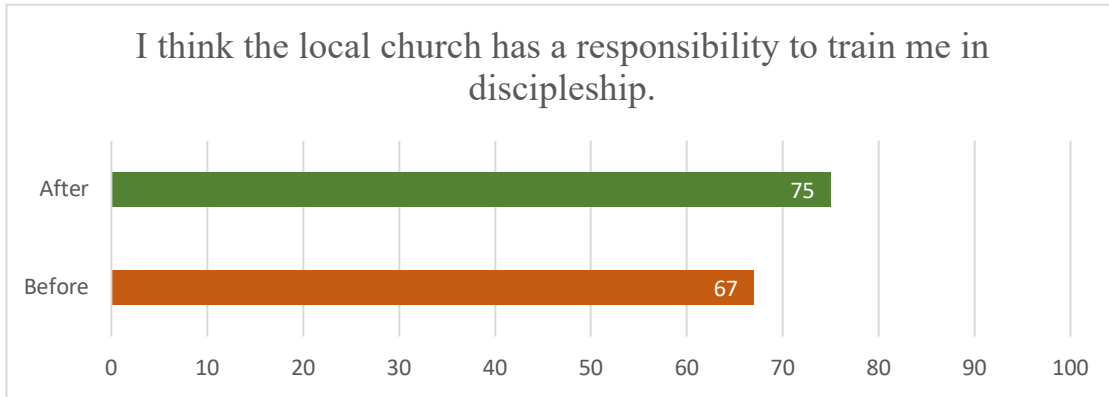
This statement proved crucial in establishing the baseline for participants’ pre-intervention understanding of discipleship. To clarify, this question was not intended to explain why a participant felt confident in making disciples; such an insight would be gleaned from other survey questions.

From the initial baseline, participants’ confidence in discipling others increased from fifty-nine to seventy-seven—an upturn linked to improvements in biblical comprehension and prayer. From the Debrief Survey results, participants felt more equipped to disciple others as a result of the intervention’s focused content.

Statement Eleven

Table 331 – I think the local church has a responsibility to train me in

discipleship.



Knowing the church exists to make disciples,¹⁸⁴ and that IHCC has recently communicated its desire for parishioners to take the next step in their spiritual journey, this researcher initially assumed that the findings would reveal general agreement that the church was responsible for training people in discipleship.

Although the average response was not considerably high, ratings still landed on the positive end before the intervention. After project completion, participants' views of the church's responsibility increased from sixty-seven to seventy-five. It is important to note that at no time during the intervention was the local church's purpose defined as existing to make disciples.

This post-intervention increase could be connected to this researcher's involvement within the church. To alleviate any potential bias, the recruitment phase clearly explained that an individual's involvement in the project was voluntary, and not connected to IHCC's ministry. Further, they were told that their standing in the church would remain unaffected whether they chose to participate or abstain.

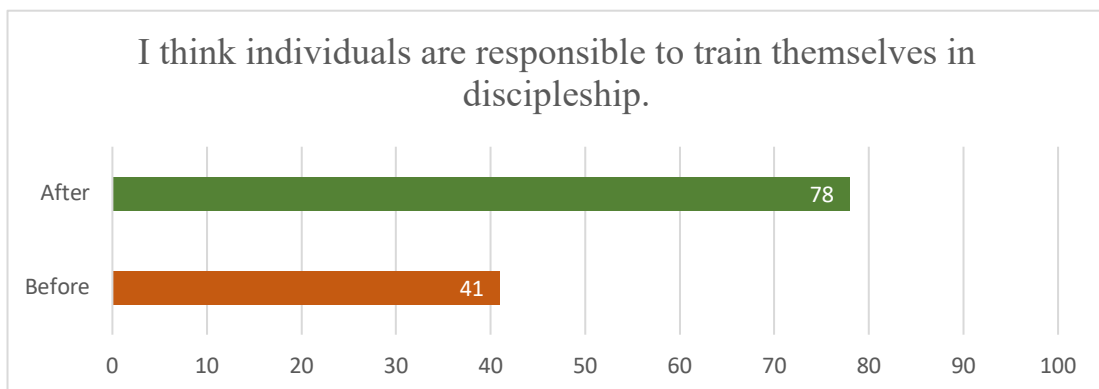
¹⁸⁴ Geiger, *Transformational Discipleship*, Kindle.

While such measures were taken to separate the intervention project from church ministry, the fact remains that this researcher is a representative of the church. Participants may view this researcher's commitment to train them in discipleship as a formal church ministry, because the project was conducted on IHCC's campus by a church pastor. It is possible that these factors led participants to further agree that the church is responsible for discipling them.

Another reason for this increased expectation could be the participants' newfound awareness of their prior lack of knowledge. Seven of the eight participants revealed that they learned valuable information that they did not know existed, possibly prompting them to conclude that the church should have previously trained them. The lack of available discipleship resources in the church may have also strengthened the notion that the church needs to do more to equip its people.

Statement Twelve

Table 364 – I think individuals are responsible to train themselves in discipleship



With an average score of forty-one marking mild disagreement before the intervention, this statement brought unexpected results, since each person surveyed serves in ministry roles that include discipling others. On further consideration, the commitment to train others in

discipleship may have created the expectation that proper training must primarily come from others—resulting in a lack of personal responsibility.

The expectation was that respondents would identify the church’s responsibility for discipleship training, while also acknowledging that individuals are also responsible for training themselves. Instead, survey responses on average suggested that discipleship did not require personal responsibility, but rather the church must take the initiative to train them.

Another perplexing observation on this statement’s low initial score was the lack of overwhelming agreement with statement eleven; with an initial score of sixty-seven, participants only somewhat agreed that the church must initiate discipleship training. When combined with the disagreement over individuals training themselves, the question must be asked: who then is responsible to train people in discipleship?

It is possible that respondents perceived question twelve as a contrasting, either/or question to number eleven, resulting in mild, noncommittal responses: the statement eleven’s church responsibility noted only slight agreement, while statement twelve’s slight disagreement on personal responsibility similarly lands near the center of the scale.

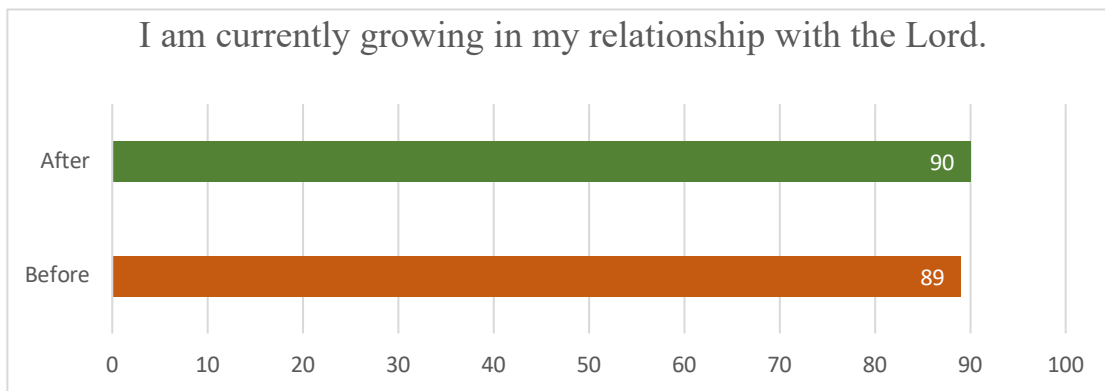
Another potential cause of lukewarm initial responses is that survey responders simply did not know what they believed in terms of how discipleship happens. Recruitment Survey responses for statements eleven and twelve widely varied, with no consistent range or clumping of scores, seem to reflect the initial confusion over who is responsible for discipleship training.

After the intervention concluded, statement twelve’s findings became much more definitive. The Debrief Survey’s score of seventy-eight represented a clumping of similar scores, forming a more accurate average. Participants could clearly identify their personal responsibility to grow as a mature disciple of Christ.

The initial responses to statement twelve were the most surprising observable result of the project. This researcher did not expect that the biggest change from the Recruitment Survey to the Debrief Survey would regard personal responsibility. Still, the intervention effectively taught participants what a healthy disciple is, how they can take ownership of their own discipleship, grow as a follower of Jesus, and obey the commission to make more disciples.

Statement Thirteen

Table 397 – I am currently growing in my relationship with the Lord



This final question did not yield a significant result, with an initial average score of eighty-nine impressively close to the debrief score of ninety—denoting strong participant agreement that they were actively growing in their relationship with the Lord. This finding is consistent with this researcher’s expectations for mature believers.

Statement thirteen also revealed that the project successfully provided a biblical understanding of discipleship yet did not prompt transformational change. Additional time may reveal that the intervention helped move participants from information to transformation, but the project’s truncated duration did not prove as an immediate catalyst for transformation. While the intervention educated participants in seeking discipleship for themselves and others, their

commitment to growing in their faith remained unchanged. However, further time may show that the intervention project had positive long-term effects toward life transformation.

Final Results

After the intervention, six of the eight participating men requested their desire to go further into several of the topics covered, with special emphasis on reading and interpreting the Bible and evangelism. This researcher's conversations with the six participants took place in-person after church or by phone, during which they expressed appreciation for being included in the project, noting how helpful they found the prepared materials.

Five of the six individuals inquired about continued training, asking if the church would conduct similar sessions in the future. Every participant stated they would participate in further training, attesting to this project's effectiveness in stoking their desire to grow in spiritual knowledge and action.

In summation, the intervention design successfully created, implemented, and tested a small group-style curriculum that gave male leaders at IHCC a proper understanding of biblical discipleship. Each participant grasped the meaning of discipleship, the biblical mandate to grow in their maturity, and the command to make disciples of others.

This researcher is eager to see if the intervention design will produce a long-term impact on the spiritual transformation of each participant. One measurable expectation of the project was for leaders to demonstrate transformational change as a result of session content, which would remove obstacles to living in full, obedient discipleship. Due in part to the shortened timeframe, this project did not yield such results. While there is no current indication that participants have seen transformative change, the hope is that this project has led them toward experiencing such growth in the future.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Purpose of Study

Discipleship is a necessary element in the Christian life. Discipleship is the process from which one transitions from knowing about Jesus into a meaningful growing relationship with him. Discipleship is learning and following after Christ. This project sought to address the apparent lack of discipleship in the local church through the implementation of a training course. Participants would be informed and trained with theoretical and practical tools to aid them in their pursuit of spiritual growth.

Successfully prompting believers to grow into spiritual maturity and become disciple makers themselves requires awareness of their specific areas of ignorance and a commitment to train and equip. This project addressed with clarity the biblical requirements of Christ followers and offered concise training on how individuals can grow in their faith through the promotion of transformational living. The apparent need for a biblical understanding of discipleship at IHCC was addressed through diligent research and a beneficial six session training course.

Learned Implications

Research regarding discipleship could be further explored in other church or ministry settings. The intervention design indicated that the participants were unaware of basic definitions that pastors, theologians, or other churches consider common. This was evidenced by the initial misconception about the definition of disciple: while participants could describe aspects or behaviors of a disciple, they could not properly define it as the intervention began.

This project's participants solely involved mature believers, some of whom had been Christians for over thirty years. The fact that no participant could define discipleship as being a learner or follower of Jesus significantly affected the entire project. Had the intervention not

taught participants the correct definition, they likely would have continued their spiritual journey ascribing to their own incomplete understanding.

This finding raised the possibility that even mature Christians might be ignorant of important definitions. In the case of discipleship, how can one follow the commission given in Matthew 28 if they do not know what a disciple is? In this case, simply clarifying terms can solve potential problems. Had the confusion around discipleship been apparent beforehand, this researcher would have reshaped the intervention design, or potentially addressed a different problem within the local church. This finding was not a flaw in the study itself but rather an area of misconception that required additional attention during the intervention project.

Ultimately, this thesis sought to give a correct understanding of biblical discipleship. One cannot help but wonder how much confusion could have been avoided had the simple definition been provided prior to the intervention. Doing so would not fully solve the issue, because the lack of defined, effective discipleship was still observed within the context of the local church. In retrospect, a portion of intervention preparation would have been better spent asking the right questions to the right people near the project's inception. As a result, attention had to be spent addressing the meaning of biblical discipleship that possibly could have been spent in other areas of the intervention.

Realizing the misconception over basic biblical terms raises suspicion over how well the average attender or ministry volunteer knows what they believe. While one might expect believers of over thirty years to know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. In reality, average Christians may or may not have a working understanding of what it means to follow Christ. This thought prompts the question: how much does one need to know to rightly follow Jesus? The

necessity of such information is without question: one must know what Jesus requires of them before choosing to follow him.

That is why the topic of obedience was continually referenced throughout the intervention's reviewed literature. Several authors emphasized the necessity to adhere to the tenants of Christ. Hull suggests that doctoral understanding must be coupled with behavioral obedience.¹⁸⁵ Willard affirms the necessity of obedience in the life of a Christian growing in spiritual maturity.¹⁸⁶ Ogden uses the concept of obedience in his definition of the discipleship process.¹⁸⁷ Obedience is the aspect of the Christian life that transitions the accrual of information into actionable results. Plainly, obedience moves information into transformation.

Application into Other Settings

This intervention successfully addressed the perceived problem through a six-session discipleship training course. If timing would have permitted, participants would have been given a few months to digest the provided content. By condensing the sessions into a three-week period, participants regarded the content as relevant and helpful, but also heavy. Several attenders expressed interest in a format of one weekly session over a six-week period. This expanded timeline would help individuals gain a fuller understanding of each topic. Considering the condensed three-week intervention, participants wanted more content than time permitted.

To optimally revise the format, the content could have been broken down into smaller sections, presented over a period of twelve to fifteen weeks. Participants who are not accustomed to retaining heavy content at a fast pace would benefit from an expanded intervention timeline;

¹⁸⁵ Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*. 43–44.

¹⁸⁶ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 58.

¹⁸⁷ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 10.

the topic of reading and interpreting the Bible, by itself, could warrant its own six-session course. Since the material presented was new to most participants, having more time and sessions would have been advantageous for exploring and retaining content.

Likewise, the topic of sharing one's faith would have benefited from additional time to roleplay various evangelism methodologies. Observing evangelism in practice would have proven beneficial to participants for practical application and reinforced the concept of multiplication. In actuality, this intervention project only allowed for theoretical and theological discussion rather than practice.

There is potential for applying this project beyond mature male leaders at IHCC. While women were not among the initial participants, they certainly could benefit. The scope of this project targeted and was only offered to men at IHCC. There was nothing gender specific within the intervention content that would necessitate the exclusion of women. On the contrary, all of the material could be suitable and beneficial for women. An additional area of inquiry could be to conduct the intervention among both men and women together to compare the observable outcomes.

While only leaders were considered for this intervention, another potential application could include new believers or casual attenders. This would require adjusted content for believers who may not share the same level of spiritual maturity as the original participants. Less mature believers may stand to gain more from this type of discipleship training course; they can develop a firm foundation for their spiritual journey, whereas mature believers might just need course correction. By utilizing future courses to build a strong spiritual foundation across the entire church population, this intervention might yield even better results without spending session time correcting misconceptions of the past—something this project encountered.

Future Implications

This project effectively addressed the lack of biblical understanding of discipleship in a manner that proved comprehensible and advantageous for participants. Each person involved in the intervention identified areas of growth in their understanding of biblical discipleship and gained confidence to become a better disciple-maker. Participants also indicated that the intervention established a biblical, foundational view of discipleship. Based on survey results, every measurement of the project found increased agreement and improvement.

The short-term interaction of this intervention focused on laying essential groundwork for biblical discipleship, and equipping participants to incorporate such principles into their lives. The short-term results proved successful in imparting discipleship knowledge and action, but there was no design to measure long-term effects in participants. However, this researcher has the benefit of interacting with the participants on a regular basis through shared ministry, and future interactions may reveal long-term observable outcomes.

Moving forward, this intervention project could be a valuable tool to create a solid foundation of biblical discipleship in various settings; all believers, regardless of their level of spiritual maturity, could gain wisdom and transformation from the material covered. To better measure participant growth, all future intervention applications would benefit from including a long-term element to determine if individuals have successfully applied the course material.

Allin reminds his readers that heart change does not happen rapidly. Life transformation does not take place from a single lesson, application question, or Bible study. Allin suggests that, “[we do] several different types of activities and focus intensively on allowing the Spirit to produce joy in us over a longer course of time.” Jesus demonstrated the intensive labor and

considerable time commitment in his development of the disciples. That process took place over a span of three years with intentional and intensive training.¹⁸⁸

Incorporating methods for measuring long-term results could be accomplished in the local church setting. Training administrators could offer secondary training that provides a deeper exploration of the same material. As stated before, a second program can gauge how well participants are living out the material, supported by a questionnaire administered before and after the course. As with this intervention, the results of both surveys can be compared to measure changes or improvements.

Another method of measuring training effectiveness would be a follow-up interview or conversation, taking place six to twelve months after the training course. Future applications with a long-term element would allow for detailed follow-up that this intervention's shortened timeline could not accommodate.

An additional element of the design that would promote multiplication: train previous participants to lead the teaching portions of future courses. Such practical equipping would demonstrate the intention and benefits of the multiplication model. Separate preparation would be necessary to raise up someone to facilitate sessions—most likely receiving direction from the original administrator.

The final suggestion for employing this training to promote spiritual transformation: incorporating accountability. Disseminating biblical information can spur heart change but could also fail to do so if improperly applied. When accountability is emphasized in the training process, learners are expected to apply actionable steps from the material. After a sufficient amount of time, the instructor could ask the participants specific questions to determine their

¹⁸⁸ Allin, *Simple Discipleship*, 25–26.

application of the learned material. By setting healthy benchmarks for growth, accountability moves informative teaching into the realm of training for transformation.

Final Remarks

The work of the church is to raise up new leaders and disciples of Christ. Fletcher points out that the vehicle that advances the kingdom of God is the development of church-people into leaders. Building a culture of leadership development helps people grow into maturity and develop new leaders.¹⁸⁹ This desire “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” is shared among many church and ministry leaders.¹⁹⁰ The church serves as an ideal resource to train believers in discipleship and equip those believers to become disciplers themselves. Ed Stetzer states: “our evangelism has to be focused on making disciples who become disciple-makers, and our discipleship has to be mission-driven, leading those disciplined to share Christ.”¹⁹¹

Throughout the entirety of this project, one point has remained: the need to effectively raise up and equip disciples of Christ within the local church. In the journey toward a transformative discipleship pathway, there are a few fundamental steps that this project has made clear. By defining the word disciple, an expectation set by Jesus is put into place. Once an individual is aware of that expectation, the opportunity arises to provide the dissemination of information. After the regular and consistent delivery of this knowledge, one must begin to put

¹⁸⁹ Michael Fletcher, *Empowering Leadership*, 111.

¹⁹⁰ Ephesians 4:12.

¹⁹¹ Ed Stetzer, “Disciple-making: How Do Evangelism and Discipleship Go Together,” *Christianity Today*, December 2019, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/edstetzer/2019/december/how-do-evangelism-and-discipleship-go-together.html>.

into action the principals taught to them. The final component in the transformation process is the implementation of systematic and personal accountability.

Jesus often demonstrated the life and commitment he wanted his followers to have, thus creating the desired expectation for their lives. He often used situations to equip and allow for questions, which would further increase their knowledge, before sending the disciples out to perform that for which they had been equipped.¹⁹²

The power of teaching a proper understanding of discipleship in this context is that it strips away naivete or ignorance that once hindered spiritual growth and obediently living for God. Individuals, once informed and trained, must choose either to live in allegiance to Jesus, or to ignore the actions and heart change required of disciples.

Enduring disciples of Christ continually seek to grow into spiritual maturity and make other disciples. Gaining spiritual wisdom, coupled with healthy accountability to apply that wisdom, can propel a person to gain a transformed heart that is committed to Christ.

¹⁹² Matthew 17:19–20; Matthew. 10:5–15; Mark16:14.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT SURVEY

The questions below present a sliding scale. Indicate your disagreement or agreement with the following statements by selecting a number that accurately reflects your current position in the appropriate location. Your answers will be kept confidential and only accessible to the researcher conducting this project.

1. Completing this survey means that you voluntarily agree to participate and offer your informed consent.
 - a. Name
 - b. Phone
 - c. Email

2. I know how to become a better disciple of Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

3. I am able to give every aspect of my life over to Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

4. Spiritual disciplines play an active role in my life.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

5. I feel confident in reading and interpreting the Bible.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

6. I can confidently help others read and understand the Bible.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

7. I am able to confidently share my faith.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

8. I am able to confidently help someone else share their faith.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

9. I can confidently provide biblical guidance to someone who asks.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

10. I understand how God speaks and I know how to hear His voice.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

11. I can confidently help someone else become a disciple of Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

12. I think the local church has a responsibility to train me in discipleship.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

13. I think individuals are responsible to train themselves in discipleship.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

14. I am currently growing in my relationship with the Lord.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

APPENDIX B: DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING QUESTIONNAIRE

1. How long have you been a follower of Jesus?
2. In a sentence or two, how would you describe biblical discipleship?
3. What steps would you take if you wanted to become a better disciple of Jesus?
4. How do you differentiate between someone who is a disciple of Jesus and someone who is not?
5. What *should* discipleship training look like?
6. What responsibility does the local church play in teaching and equipping you to become a better disciple of Jesus?
7. If you were asked to disciple someone, how would you do it? What steps or resources would you use?
8. List and describe any past discipleship training you have had? (What was the program called? How many other participants were present? What specific lessons were taught? When did you participate? What did you learn most from your experience? Was this a positive experience? Do you feel confident in the area of discipleship as a result of your participation? Etc.)
9. List and describe any past evangelism training you have had? (What was the program called? How many other participants were present? What specific lessons were taught? When did you participate? What did you learn most from your experience? Was this a positive experience? Do you feel confident in the area of evangelism as a result of your participation? Etc.)
10. What would you like to learn about discipling others?

APPENDIX C: DEBRIEF SURVEY

The questions below present a sliding scale. Indicate your disagreement or agreement with the following statements by selecting a number that accurately reflects your current position in the appropriate location. Your answers will be kept confidential and only accessible to the researcher conducting this project.

1. I know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

2. I know how to become a better disciple of Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

3. I am able to give every aspect of my life over to Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

4. I desire to have more obedience to God in my life.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

5. I think individuals are responsible to train themselves in discipleship.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

6. I can confidently help someone else become a disciple of Jesus.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

7. I can confidently provide biblical guidance to someone who asks.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

8. I feel confident in reading and interpreting the Bible.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

9. I can confidently help others read and understand the Bible.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

10. I understand how God speaks and I know how to hear His voice.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

11. I am able to confidently share my faith.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

12. I am able to confidently help someone else share their faith.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

13. I think the local church has a responsibility to train me in discipleship.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

14. Spiritual disciplines play an active role in my life.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

15. I am currently growing in my relationship with the Lord.

1 ----- | ----- 100
Disagree Agree

16. What part of your participation in this project was the most beneficial?

17. What areas of discipleship would you like to learn more about?

18. Contact Information

- a. Name
- b. Phone
- c. Email

APPENDIX D: DISCIPLESHIP TRAINING COURSE OVERVIEW

The six-session discipleship training course that you are being invited to join is intended to help you grow in your faith and also meant to equip you with the tools you may need to invite others into a deeper relationship with Jesus. You have been selected to participate in this course because of your spiritual maturity and leadership influence. This course will seek to give you a deeper biblical understanding of discipleship and the practical tools to actively make disciples within your sphere of influence. Each session will cover a specific topic designed to offer you a fuller biblical understanding of Jesus' concept of discipleship.

The modified project will contain all the original information and planned sessions, but in a revised order. The original six weeks have been condensed into three weeks. As a result, the order of the sessions has been modified to pair like topics to be explored each week. The first session of each week will be more theoretically focused, and the second session will be more practically focused.

Part 1, Week 1

Original Session 1/ Modified Session 1:

“Knowing God transformatively”

(2 Timothy 3:15-17, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Mark 12:30)

This session will explore the biblical expectation of discipleship that was taught by Jesus. We will focus on the necessary connection between knowledge, action, and heart change. We will also seek to identify Jesus' expectations for his followers.

Original Session 5/ Modified Session 2:

“Praying for what God desires”

(Matthew 6:5-15, Ephesians 1:15-17)

This session will focus on a biblical understanding of what it means to have a heart after God. We will dive into the concept of prayer and how a disciple is expected to pray. We will also seek to empower you to teach others how to pray and how to have an effective prayer life.

Part 2, Week 2

Original Session 6/ Modified Session 3:

“Obedience required”

(1 Corinthians 14:37-38, John 10:27-30, John 14:15, Luke 6:46)

This session will seek to pull together each aspect of being a disciple. We will focus on the concept of obedience and how the lack of obedience can prevent someone from experiencing the full life promised by God.

Original Session 4/ Modified Session 4:

“Reading and interpreting the Bible”

(2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21)

This session will focus on how one can accurately read and interpret the Bible. We will explore the biblical examples of how God speaks and why understanding the Bible is important. This session will help you know how to help someone read and interpret the Bible and how to understand the will of God in your life.

Part 3, Week 3

Original Session 2/ Modified Session 5:

“There are many ways to Jesus, but Jesus is the only way to God”

(John 14:6, Romans 1:18-20, John 1:1-14)

This session will focus on the necessity for people to hear about Jesus. We will explore the biblical understanding of how someone becomes a disciple and what basic knowledge is needed to accurately communicate the gospel message.

Original Session 3/ Modified Session 5:

“Following Jesus and fishing for men”

(Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 5:1-11, John 17:3, John 3:34, 2 Timothy 2:2)

This session will focus on understanding the directives of Jesus and the specific call to make disciples. The biblical connection between discipleship and evangelism will be explored and how they can be modeled today. Practical tips will be given on how to help someone else effectively share their faith.

APPENDIX E: TEACHING NOTES FOR PART ONE

Session 1.

The purpose of this course is to better empower you as you seek to disciple others. You are all mature believers, and my purpose is not to convince you of the value of discipleship, but rather give you practical tools to increase your confidence as you disciple and pour into others.

What is discipleship?

Being a learner and follower of Jesus.

What makes someone a good disciple of Jesus?

Participant Responses:

- Tell others about God Read the Bible
- Go to church
- Volunteer/serve
- Pray
- Love others
- Live a selfless life
- Seek God
- Love God and love others
- Spend time with God
- Read more
- Learn
- Discipline
- Obedience

How do we become better disciples?

- Grow in maturity
- Tell others/multiply

Grow in maturity

2 Timothy 3:15-17

2 Peter 3:18

Hebrews 5:12-14

Hebrews 6:1

1 Peter 2:2-3

Colossians 1:9-10

Colossians 2:6-7

Ephesians 4:13-16

Ephesians 4:20-24

Tell others/multiply

Mark 12:28-31

Matthew 28:19-20

2 Timothy 2:2

John 15:16
Romans 10:14-15
Luke 8:14-15
Matthew 4:19-20
Acts 1:8
Mark 16:15
Luke 6:40
Titus 2:3

How do we do those?

We know that we are to grow as disciples. How can we actually become better followers of Jesus?

Here is the challenge: information does not equal transformation.

Heart change. We cannot give this to anyone else. We can *model* it so that others desire it, but we cannot make them *desire* it. All the information in the world on how to know God better is useless without the desire and obedience to follow God.

Heart change is not the same as head knowledge, but head knowledge can help foster heart change. Something must be done with the information. You can know how to better connect with God—but it is not good if you do nothing with it. Our job as disciples and leaders is to make connecting with God easier for others.



I believe that for us to be good disciples and disciple well, we must commit to merging three things: **information**, **allegiance**, and **action**. Think of these as blocks that build upon the other. *Basically: you have to know what to do, be committed to do it, and then actually do it.*

All three are needed for good discipleship to happen.

- Information: knowing what to do. How to pray, read the Bible, evangelize, and mature.
- Allegiance: commitment to what is known, obedience, faith.
- Action: putting what is learned into practice.

Information is the first step to the three-step process (**information**, **allegiance**, and **action**).

At the most basic level you must know something to be able to respond (action) to it through allegiance.

Proper actions can also promote heart change. Actioning in obedience to God can also promote heart change. “I don’t always feel like praying or reading my Bible, but I make them a priority. By doing so, I am able to have a meaningful connection with God.”

A correct understanding of discipleship, and what God expects of us, connects us with God in a meaningful way.

Galatians 3:1-14

According to the passage, what can someone do if they wanted to become a better disciple of Jesus?

Participant Responses:

- *Nothing*
- *Not Rely on the Law*
- *Heart, not works*
- *Have faith*
- *Trust God more*
- *Be faithfully obedient*
- *Commit fully to God*

What can someone do to be a better Christian?

Session 2.

For this course we will focus on specific aspects of being a disciple of Jesus. My hope is that you will all be able to teach and train someone else to do the same.

Mark 3:14

He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he might send them out to preach.

We will focus on:

- **Being with God (Prayer)**

How can someone be with Jesus today?

Participant Responses:

- *Prayer*
- *Bible reading*
- *Fasting*
- *Bible memorization*
- *Meditation*
- *Listening*
- *Silence*

PRAYER:

Through your experience: why is prayer necessary?

Participant Responses:

- *Keeps us connected to God*
- *Helps us know what God wants*
- *Quiets our spirit*
- *Spend time with God*
- *Helps us grow*
- *Gives us peace*
- *Ask for things*
 - *Protection*
 - *Help*
 - *Wants*
 - *Needs*
 - *Jesus' Example*
- *Communicating with God*
- *Obedience*
- *Spiritual discipline*
- *Repent*
- *Give thanks*
- *Align with God*

When we pray, what should we pray for?

Participant Responses:

- *Forgiveness*
- *Needs*
- *Wants*
- *Thanks*
- *Strength*
- *Answers*
- *Others*
- *God's will*
- *Wisdom*
- *Understanding*
- *Obedience*
- *Guidance*

What is the point of prayer?

- *Aligning your heart to the heart of God*
- *Commune with God*
- *2 Chronicles 7:14*
- *Hebrews 4:15-16*
- *In obedience to God*
- *“This is how you should pray...” – Matthew 6:9*
- *“When you pray...” – Matthew 6:5*
- *“Devote yourselves to prayer...” – Colossians 4:2*
- *Following the example of Jesus*

“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” -Luke 5:16

Also: Matthew 14:23, Matthew 26:36, Mark 1:35. Luke 6:12, Luke 18:1

What are some hang-ups that people have with prayer?

Participant Responses:

- *Afraid*
- *Timid*
- *Insecure*
- *Doubtful*
- *Embarrassed*
- *Social Pressure*
- *Model presented is not easily reproduceable*
- *Has its own language*
- *Cause and effect culture*
- *Scared of the silence*
- *Unworthy*

- *Lack of Answers*
- *Am I doing it right?*
- *Comparison*
- *Embarrassment*
- *Confidence*
- *Disappointment*
- *Is God present/ care?*

Which are external/ internal? Society hang-ups or personal hang-ups?

Participant Responses:

- *No time*
- *Narcissistic pressure from society*
- *Don't know what to say*
- *Not doing it right*
- *Think my requests are not important or too selfish*
- *Bored*
- *Fear of God*
- *Doubt; do my prayers matter?*

What do we pray for?

Offering requests- Philippians 4:6, 1 Timothy 2:1

The message of God to proceed

Pray for those who persecute us – Matthew 5:44

For enduring hardships- Romans 12:12

Thankfulness- Colossians 4:2, 1 Timothy 2:1

Power over evil and temptation- Matthew 26:41

Romans 15:30-32

I urge you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.³¹ Pray that I may be kept safe from the unbelievers in Judea and that the contribution I take to Jerusalem may be favorably received by the Lord's people there,³² so that I may come to you with joy, by God's will, and in your company be refreshed.

Ephesians 6:18-20

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.¹⁹ Pray also for me, that whenever I speak, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel,²⁰ for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Colossians 4:2-3

Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.³ And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

Hebrews 13:18-19

Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way. ¹⁹ I particularly urge you to pray so that I may be restored to you soon.

In what manner should we pray?

All the time in many ways; 1 Thessalonians 5:17, Ephesians 6:18

“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests”

When someone asks you how to pray, what do you tell them?

What are some ways people can pray?

Participant Responses:

- *Conversation*
 - *Lord’s Prayer*
 - *Give thanks*
 - *Be completely honest and open*
 - *Ask of anything*
 - *Tell God you need help*
 - *Your heart to God’s heart*
 - *Worship Music*
 - *Psalms*
 - *Morning and night*
 - *Prayer walks*
-
- Pray the Lord’s prayer - simple
 - Pray the Lord’s prayer - meaningful

Matthew 6:5-13

This, then, is how you should pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,

Who is God? Who are you in relation to God?

Recognize God’s attributes and characteristics – holy

your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

For God’s ruling power to be here on earth like heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

To have our basic needs provided for

And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.

Acknowledge our sinfulness and seek forgiveness to the same measure we forgive others.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Acknowledge spiritual battle. To live free of sin and temptation.

- Pray the Psalms- 13, 23,

- Meditate on the Word

Joshua 1:8

Psalm 1:1-2

Psalm 119

Philippians 4:8

“Whenever the Christian idea of meditation is taken seriously, there are those who assume it is synonymous with the concept of meditation centered in Eastern religions. In reality, the two ideas stand worlds apart. Eastern meditation is an attempt to empty the mind; Christian meditation is an attempt to fill the mind. The two ideas are quite different.”¹⁹³

Bottom line: To communicate with God.

“Father thank you for _____, help me with _____.”

“Father thank you for your forgiveness, help me with temptation.”

“Father thank you for my family, help me with my anger.”

“Father thank you for providing, help me find a job.”

There is a misalignment with how God speaks and how we expect God to speak.

In John 10, Jesus say’s my sheep know my voice...

How can we better recognize God’s voice?

Handout on Hearing God’s Voice in the Bible with material from Dallas Willard’s *Hearing God*, pages 91-102.

¹⁹³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1988).

APPENDIX F: TEACHING NOTES FOR PART TWO

Session 3.

Recap

Responsibility to grow in our discipleship.

What does it mean to be a disciple?

- Responsibility to teach and tell others.
- Multiply ourselves.

Prayer: Communing with God. Aligning ourselves with God.

We can do this all the time in many ways.

How does God speak? How can we better understand his voice?

- People
- Still small voice
- Our thoughts can be deceiving; need to compare to God's message in the Bible.

Allow for questions

Obedience Required

Luke 6:46-49

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, “*only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.*”¹⁹⁴

What does it mean to be a disciple?

Participant Responses:

- *Learner*
- *Follower of Jesus*

How can you be a better disciple of Jesus?

Participant Responses:

- *Spend more time with God*
- *Grow*

¹⁹⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1959). 54.

- *Tell others*
- *Heart Change*
- *Pray*
- *Increase trust/faith*
- *Read the Bible to know God more*
- *Obedience*
- *Live it out*

We talked about discipleship and a few spiritual disciples– why do you think people are disobedient toward God?

Participant Responses:

- *It calls them into more than they are willing to give*
- *Costs too much*
- *Lazy*
- *Do not know what to do/ignorant*
- *Immature*
- *Trapped in sin*
- *Unwilling repent/ change*
- *Not real Christians*
- *Battle of sin nature*
- *Do not try for fear of failure*

Identify one area of your life that you need to be more obedient toward God?

Session 4.

Reading and understanding the Bible¹⁹⁵

Why is it important to read and understand the Bible?

Participant Responses:

- *Guidance*
- *Hear God’s message*
- *Hear God’s voice*
- *Learn about Jesus*
- *Letter from God*
- *Strengthen faith*
- *Application*
- *Makes life better/fuller life*

¹⁹⁵ Much of this content has been adapted from Gordon d. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014) and Henry A. Virkler and Karelynn Gerber Ayayo, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007).

What are some challenges people face when trying to understand the Bible?

Participant Responses:

- *Context*
- *Feels old or outdated*
- *Hold them accountable to a specific way of living*
- *Over their head*
- *Long and boring*
- *Literal vs. allegorical?*
- *The truth hurts*
- *Requires sacrifice*
- *Asks for obedience*
- *The need to submit to what is asked*
- *Requires humility*

What are some ways that you try to help others understand the Bible?

Participant Responses:

- *Experience*
- *Do it together*
- *Start with gospels*
- *Use faith*
- *Pray*
- *Use support books*

When someone asks you how to best read the Bible, what do you say?

Participant Responses:

- *Read the NT*
- *Gospels*
- *Find a good version*

What is the Bible?

- The Bible is a collection of books
- Multiple authors
- Different Audiences
- Spans 100s of years
- Written in different languages

Time Traveler Illustration

When you read the Bible, consider yourself a time traveler. For a moment, think about what it would be like if you were to travel back in time to this exact spot 200 years ago. What differences you would observe? What would life be like? 200 years ago, there were no cars, no electricity, no cell phones, no television. Think of how different life would have been.

Now multiply that by 10. Go back 2000+ years, to a different part of the globe. Add in the changes in the environmental like topography, elevation, climate. Think about the different animals, trees, and insects they would have. Think about the uniqueness of SoCal. If you have spent some time here, you quickly realize that it is difficult to lose your sense of direction. I'm not talking about getting lost—we all get lost. But we have a mountain range that constantly reminds of which direction we are heading.

All these aspects are unique and important when trying to a document that was written to a different people. And we didn't even mention culture and language!

Main Point: The Bible was written *for you* but not *to you*.

Basic tools for reading the Bible

- 1. Multiple Translations**
- 2. Context**
- 3. Genre/ Literary Style**
- 4. Background**
 - Culture
 - Language
 - History
 - Political elements
 - Religious aspects
- 5. Themes /Topics/ Reoccurring Phrases**

1. Multiple Translations

Let's talk about the different translations of the Bible.

The Bible was not written in English.

How many of you speak another language or tried learning another language?

There is not always a 1-to-1 equivalence.

Spanish Hace Calor = "it makes hot"

Greek Kanie Zeste= "(he) makes it hot"

English Bibles try their best to portray the biblical message accurately.

To do this they each make deliberate decisions when they translate.

Word for word vs. meaning for meaning.

2. Context

When trying to understand the Bible, you should always start by reading the passage within its context. You can often illuminate the meaning of a passage simply through context. It's the low hanging fruit that we often forget. Easy, simple, and often all you need to understand a passage.

How do we read in context?

Book/ Chapter/ Paragraph

Philippians 4:13
I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Jeremiah 29:11
For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

3. Genre/ Literary Style

Handout on Biblical Genres

Genres are a big part of our everyday life. They are commonplace (Netflix searching). The Bible is full of different genres. We rarely apply literary genres to the biblical text. We often look at the Bible as a whole, rather than a collection of individual books.

Modern genre examples:

Netflix Searching: “Killing Them Softly”

News Headline: “Ducks slaughtered”

Biblical books may employ several different genres throughout them

Wisdom Literature

Job

Ecclesiastes

Song of Solomon (Songs)

Proverbs

Wisdom is not looking to tell you how much something costs, weights, or how old it is. It is giving you a truthful piece of information to help you live better. Proverbs are universally true, wise sayings. They are not promises, spiritual laws, or magical formulas to give you your desired outcome.

Modern-day wisdom/ proverbs

You are never too old to learn – You can’t teach an old dog new tricks

Silence is golden – The squeaky wheel gets the grease

Birds of a feather flock together – Opposites attract

The pen is mightier than the sword – Actions speak louder than words

4. Background

- Culture
- Language
- History
- Political elements
- Religious aspects

John 15:1

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser.

Look up “vine” in Bible dictionary to illuminate the importance of background information.

“The Bible frequently uses vine or vineyard as a symbol. Vine is speaking of Israel. Thus, Israel is said to have been brought out of Egypt and planted as a vine on the land but was forsaken (Ps.80:8:13; cp. Isa. 5:1-7). Israel was planted as a “choice vine” but became a “wild vine” (Jer. 2:21; cp. Hos. 10:1).”¹⁹⁶

5. Themes /Topics/ Reoccurring Phrases

What are some themes/topics/reoccurring phrases you’ve observed in the Bible?

- God the deliverer
- Two or three witnesses
- Numbers
- “Declares the Lord”

Together, these can help us have a better understanding of the character of God from the Bible.

¹⁹⁶ John C. H. Laughlin, “Vine,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 1633.

APPENDIX G: TEACHING NOTES FOR PART THREE

Session 5.

Recap

- Disciple means *learner*
- Christians are to grow in their knowledge of God and help others do the same

Why is it important for disciples of Jesus to tell others about Jesus?

Participant Responses:

- *Jesus commanded it*
- *Obedience*
- *Strengthen our faith*
- *Better connect with God*
- *Self-sacrifice*
- *A way of showing you love your neighbor*
- *Demonstration of God's love*
- *They need to hear– someone needs to tell them*
- *Jesus is the only way*

To be a disciple is to be a learner

Part of discipleship is growing in our faith and telling other about Jesus.

- Grow into maturity
- Multiply

Mandates to go and tell others:

Mark 16:15

And he said to them, “Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.

Matthew 28:19-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Romans 10:14

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

“Just love them until they ask why”¹⁹⁷ = biggest piece of garbage from the enemy. Someone needs to tell them. Use words.

What challenges prevent Christians from sharing their faith?

¹⁹⁷ unknown

Participant Responses:

- Lack of knowledge
- Uncertain/don't know how
- Lack of confidence
- Fear
- Rejection
- Too busy
- Lack of opportunity
- Unequipped
- Embarrassed
- Ashamed

What basic information does someone need to know to be saved?

Participant Responses:

- *Admit sinner*
 - *Accept Jesus*
 - *Ask for forgiveness (sin)*
 - *Know who Jesus is*
 - *Have a prayer life*
 - *Call Jesus Lord*
-
- Believe Jesus dies for sins
 - Believe the whole story

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Romans 1:18-20**John 1:1-14**

Need Jesus – there are many ways to Jesus, but Jesus is the only way to God.

Ephesians 2:8-10

By grace, through faith – trust or believing allegiance to God.

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Sin= death

Jesus offers eternal life

Bottom line: Trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins.

Session 6.

Luke 5:1–11

What are some different ways/ methods of evangelism?

Participant Responses:

- *ABC’s Admit – Believe – Confess*
- *Confess – Believe – Receive*
- *Ray Comfort: Confrontational approach*
- *Testimony*
- *Street evangelism*
- *Ask good questions*
- *Invitation to church*
- *Mission trips*

Other Examples:

- 100-word testimony¹⁹⁸
- Bridge diagram¹⁹⁹
- Three Circles²⁰⁰
- “The Romans Road”
- Tools (tracks, apps, bracelets, etc.)
- Relational Evangelism

*Which one is the best one? **The best one is the one you use.***

It might not be the most effective – but it is WAY better than doing nothing.

I believe that most Christians would be able to communicate the Gospel well if they were in a situation that required it of them.

The Open and Close

Typically, the most difficult part of an evangelism conversation is the “open” and the “close.”

- The “open” initiates the spiritual conversation and
- The “middle” part of the conversation is where you share the good news about Christ. (Typically, not an area of struggle for most people)
- The “close” seeks to call for some kind of decision from the other person.
 - Receive Christ

¹⁹⁸ Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006).

¹⁹⁹ “The Bridge to Life” (The Navigators, 2021), navlink.org/bridge.

²⁰⁰ “3 Circles: Life Conversation Guide,” Life on Mission, February 1, 2021, <https://lifeonmissionbook.com/conversation-guide>.

- Commit to further exploration



What are some ways that you can initiate (open) a spiritual conversation?

Participant Responses:

- *Subject matter*
- *Pray in public*
- *Read Bible in public*
- *Build trust*
- *Intentional friendships*

Start Simple

Simple truths that let others know that you are a Christian and that you are open to spiritual conversations.

Recognize that not everyone is ready to have a full gospel conversation. (stream vs. fire hose)

- “Last week my pastor talked about...”
- “Have you ever been to Guatemala? I was thinking of going there on a mission trip”
- “My church is doing this new program; I think it’s going to be really great for the community”
- “Yesterday my bible study group talked about...”
- “It seems like there is a lot of hate and violence in the world, how do you think Christians should respond?”
- “How would you expect a Christian to show love to people to they disagree with?”

Use Helps

- Put a bible verse up
- Leave a Bible or Christian book out. i.e., coffee table, office desk, passenger car seat etc.
- Jesus junk. i.e., crosses, pictures, decorations, etc.
- “I took a class this weekend about sharing my faith– it was really cool; can I tell you about it?”
- “I just learned this new way to tell people about Jesus, can I try it out on you?”

The Close

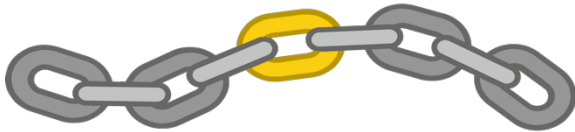
It’s okay if a person doesn’t make a decision to follow Christ the first conversation you have with them. It is important that the person is given an opportunity to take one step further in their spiritual journey.

1 Corinthians 3:5-9

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters

are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

Chain Illustration



Consider your life is a chain, and each link represents a spiritual step toward conversion. The gold link represents your decision to follow Christ. Each conversation you have with a person is a potential link in their spiritual journey. While your conversation might not be the gold link in someone's life, you may be bringing them one link closer to their gold link. Just think of all the links in your life that you needed before you were able to follow Christ. They were all necessary and important.

What are some questions you can ask someone to prompt a spiritual decision (close)?

Participant Responses:

- "What's holding you back?"
- "What do you think?"
- "Does this all make sense?"
- "Why? Why? Why?"

Other Examples:

- "Would you like to commit your life to Jesus right now?"
- "What is preventing you from making a decision to follow Christ?"

What are some questions you can ask to help someone take the next step in their spiritual journey?

Participant Responses:

- "Can I give you a ride to church?"
- "If I bought you a Bible, would you read it?"
- "Can we talk more about this later?"

Other Examples:

- "Would you be willing to ask God to give you more clarity on this?"
- "Can we talk about this again next Monday at lunch?"
- "Would you be willing to read the Bible/ go to small group/ attend church with me?"

- “If I was able to answer every question you had about God to your satisfaction, would you commit your life the Jesus?”

Another Way? Relational Evangelism

Normalizes Spiritual Conversations

What if you talked about Jesus so much and so often that it was a natural conversation topic?

Mention early on that you are a follower of Jesus Christ.

“One thing you might need to know about me is that I had a pretty life-changing experience at the age of 17 and it’s changed every aspect of my life. I only tell you this because I might bring it up from time to time.”

Relational Evangelism²⁰¹

Building relationships with nonbelievers for the purpose of introducing people to the Jesus in a way that displays God’s authentic love for the lost.

Genuinely building relationships to share Christ’s love.

Make an invitation to be a part of their life

- Not have them join your life, but have you join their life
- Show them *genuine* interest and love. Don’t view people as notches or conquests
- Don’t compromise your integrity, but be present in their life
- What sphere of influence do you already have?
- What sphere of influence can you create?
 - o Join a bowling league
 - o Meetup.com
 - o Go to events and mingle
 - o Meet your kid’s friend’s parents
 - o Take your dog to the dog park
 - o Online gaming

²⁰¹ Content adapted from Joe Aldrich, *Lifestyle Evangelism: Learning to Open Your Life to Those Around You* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1993).

APPENDIX H: HOW GOD SPEAKS IN THE BIBLE²⁰²

Phenomenon plus audible voice

Burning bush (Genesis 15:17-18)
Mountain of fire (Deuteronomy 5:23)
Spirit descends like dove at Jesus's baptism
(Matthew 3:17)
Blinding light on road to Damascus (Acts
9:3-8)

A supernatural messenger or angel

Three men at Abraham's tent (Genesis 18)
Two angels with lot (Genesis 19)
Man with sword (Joshua 5:13-15)
Entertaining angels without knowing it
(Hebrews 13:2)
Balaam (Numbers 22:22-35)
Gideon (Judges 6:11-24)
Isaiah (Isaiah 6:6-13)
Daniel (Daniel 9:20-27)
Joseph (Matthew 1:20-25)
Zacharias (Luke 1:11-20)
Mary (Luke 1:26-38)
Women at empty tomb (Matthew 28:2-7)
Peter (Acts 5:19-20)
Paul (Acts 27:23-26)

Dreams and visions

Paul's vision to Macedonia (Acts 16:9)
Ananias vision (Acts 9:10-13)
Peter's vision to eat (Acts 10:9-19)
Jail mates (Genesis 40:5-19)
Pharaoh (Genesis 41:1-7)
Joseph (Genesis 37:5-9)
Jacob's dream (Genesis 40:5-19)

Audible voice

Abraham on mount Moriah with Isaac
(Genesis 22:11-12, 15-18)
Samuel learns to recognize God's voice (1
Samuel 3)

The human voice

God speaks through Moses (Exodus 4:12)
Paul ineloquent (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)
Uneducated and ordinary people (Acts 4:13)
The Prophets
God speaks through other people

The human spirit or the "still small voice"

The most subjective
Discern the spirit of God (1 Corinthians
2:11)
We have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians
2:16)

Our thoughts are not always to be trusted

My thoughts not your thoughts (Isaiah 55:8)
Hearts are wicked (Jeremiah 17:9)
Mind needs to be renewed (Romans 12:2)
Asking God to search me (Psalms 139:23)

Need to compare our thoughts to the
revelation provided in Scripture.

²⁰² Content adapted from Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 91-102.

APPENDIX I: BIBLICAL GENRES AND LITERARY STYLES²⁰³

Biblical books may employ several different literary styles or genres to convey a particular message. Most information taken from *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart.

Narrative

Narrative comprises of approximately half of the Bible. Narrative means story. They are purposeful retelling the historical events that are intended to give meaning and direction.

- Not allegory or hidden meaning.
- Their purpose is not to teach moral examples of right or wrong but tell what God did in the history of Israel.
- They illustrate what is taught explicitly and categorically elsewhere. i.e., 2 Sam 11 (David and Bathsheba) does not state the adultery is wrong but illustrates Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:14)

Examples of OT narrative:

- Genesis, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Acts.
- Parts of Job, Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and the Prophets

Sub-Genres:

Gospel

- Eyewitness accounts of the life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus.
Examples of Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Each account has a different author that features a different retelling of the event. Events are historical but may be told in a different manner to convey or emphasize a different principle or lesson.
- *Mark:* focus is on the Son of Man motif in Isaiah. Jesus is a suffering servant.
- *Matthew-* Jesus is the Messiah (Christ). Kingly focus delivered in 5 distinct topical sections or sermons.
- *Luke:* targeting non-Jews (Gentiles). Focus on Jesus' humanity and redeemer of sinners.
- *John:* focus on the divine nature of Jesus. 7 "I am" statements.

Parables

Teaching device. True or fictional stories that are used to convey a teaching or principle.

Discourse

Teachings of Jesus. Sermons.

²⁰³ A debt of gratitude is owed to the diligent work in biblical genres and their unique challenges for interpretation by Gordon d. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014). See also part 4 and 5 in J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *Grasping God's Word*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

Law

Outlines the guidelines for the covenant relationship between God and his people. Binding contract between two parties.

- Moral Law- laws about how to live.
- Ceremonial Law- laws about tabernacle and temple worship.
- Civil or Judicial Law- laws that governed, specified penalties for crimes, preserved and protected Israelite society.

Examples of Biblical Law:

- Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, and parts of Exodus.

Poetry

Stylized writing that conveys emotion, symbolism, metaphors, word pictures, etc.

Poetry is woven throughout the OT and NT.

Examples of Poetry:

- Psalms
- Philippians 2:4-11

Sub-Genre:

Psalms

Collection of Hebrew prayers and hymns.

Examples of Poetry:

- Laments (sorrow), thanksgiving, praise, celebrating God's Law, wisdom, confidence, historical, and prophetic.

Wisdom

Scripture that reveals the collected wisdom of generations of godly people. Offers general rule for wise living. Communicate wise sayings and principles (not promises) that are usually true but not necessarily universally true.

Examples of Wisdom Literature: Proverbs, Job, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes.

Prophets

Biblical prophecy recounts specific messages from God for a specific audience for the purpose of reinforcing the covenant in Israel. Prophets were to speak the word of God to the people. Most messages include a call to change and a warning for what would happen if the change did not happen. Some prophecy has future implications that might not have been understood by the original audience.

Dedicated Prophecy books: (arranged by length)

- *Major Prophets:* Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.
- *Minor Prophets:* Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi.

Not all prophets have their own books. There are also prophecies interwoven throughout historical narrative in the Bible.

Other Examples of Prophets: Moses, Balaam, Elijah, Elisha and John the Baptist.

Apocalyptic Literature

Literature that uses symbolism, word pictures, numbers, etc. to convey the end of days. Often woven throughout other portions of scripture.

Examples of Apocalyptic Literature: Revelation, parts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Joel, Zechariah, Daniel, Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and 2 Thessalonians 2.

Epistles (letters)

Specific letters written to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Individuals, churches, corporate audiences, etc.

Examples of Epistles by author:

- Paul: Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus and Philemon
- Peter: 1-2 Peter
- James: James
- John: 1-3 John
- Jude: Jude
- Anonymous: Hebrews

APPENDIX J: THE WISDOM GENRE²⁰⁴

Wisdom is not looking to tell you how much something costs, weights, or how old it is. It is giving you a generally truthful piece of information to help you live better. Proverbs are *generally* true but not always universally true. They are not promises, spiritual laws, or magical formulas to give you your desired outcome.

Proverbs seek to give you wise advice for the specific situation you are in.

Proverbs 22:6

Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.

Proverbs 21:5

The plans of the diligent lead surely to abundance, but everyone who is hasty comes only to poverty.

What are some examples of modern-day proverbs? What are their contradictions?

- You are never too old to learn – You can't teach an old dog new tricks
- Silence is golden – The squeaky wheel gets the grease
- Birds of a feather flock together – Opposites attract
- The pen is mightier than the sword – Actions speak louder than words

Biblical contradictions?

Proverbs 26:4

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest you be like him yourself.

Proverbs 26:5

Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.

-or-

Proverbs 2:2

Making your ear attentive to wisdom, and inclining your heart to understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

How can knowing the genre/ literary style help us understand these verses?

²⁰⁴ Content adapted in part from Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2014), Ch 12.

APPENDIX K: EVANGELISM METHODS

The 100-word testimony²⁰⁵

“Before I was a Christian, I felt alone and like my life was meaningless. When I was 25, my friend invited me to a Bible study. The people there introduced me to God. I realized that God loved me and wanted to have a relationship with me. I learned about how Jesus died for my sins to make that happen. I asked God to forgive me and help me follow him. I don’t feel alone anymore. I know God is always with me and for me. I feel like my life has meaning and purpose now.”

Needs to answer these simple questions:

- What was your life like before you became a Christian?
- When and how did you decide to follow Jesus?
- How is your life different as a result of following Jesus?

The Romans Road to Salvation

Uses verses from the book of Romans to build a biblical case for the sinful state of humanity and the need for the forgiveness of sin through Christ. Presupposes the validity of the Bible in the mind of the recipient.

Romans 3:23

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 6:23

The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 5:8

God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 10:9

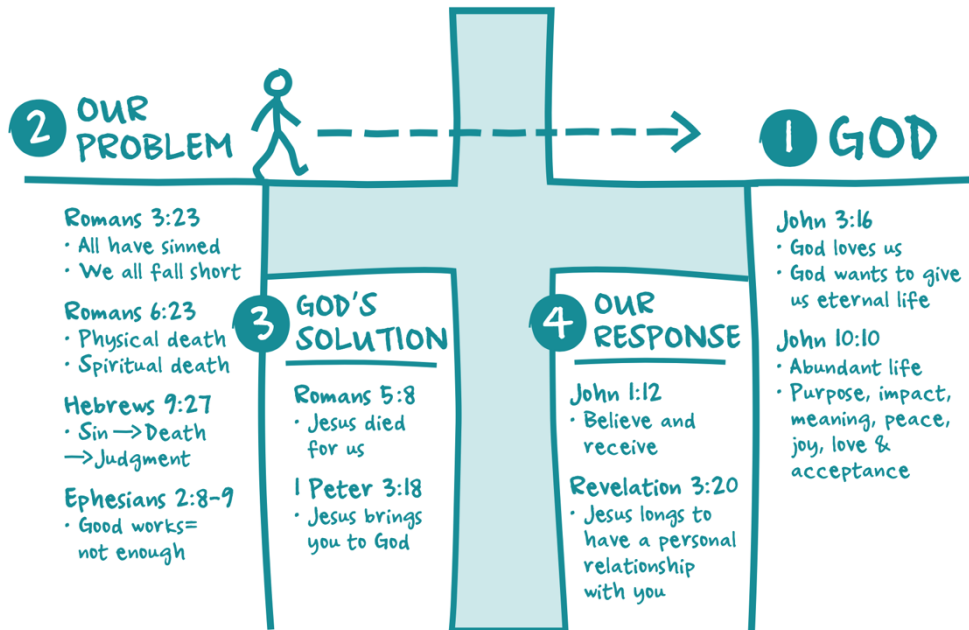
If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

Romans 10:13

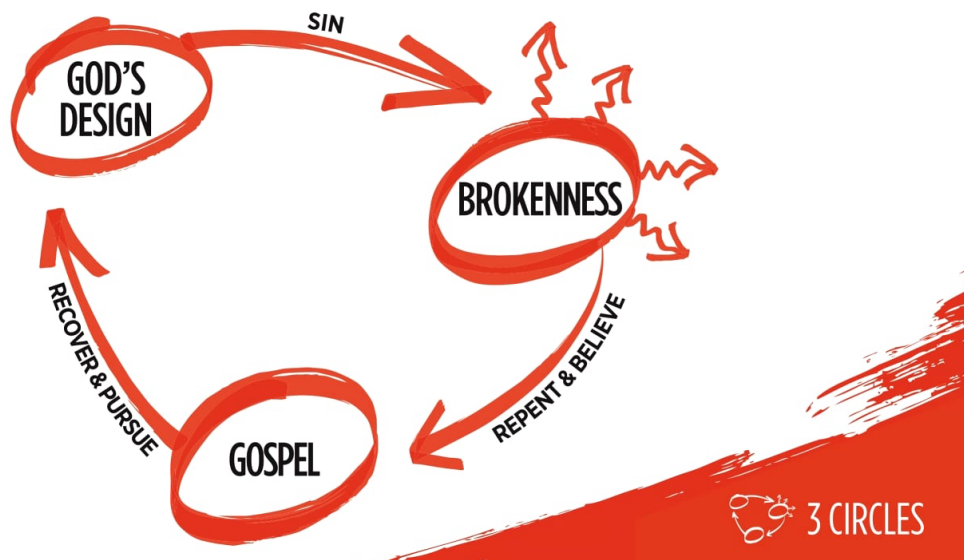
Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

²⁰⁵ Adapted from the 100-word testimony content in: Bill Hybels, *Just Walk Across the Room: Simple Steps Pointing People to Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), Ch 6.

Bridge Diagram²⁰⁶



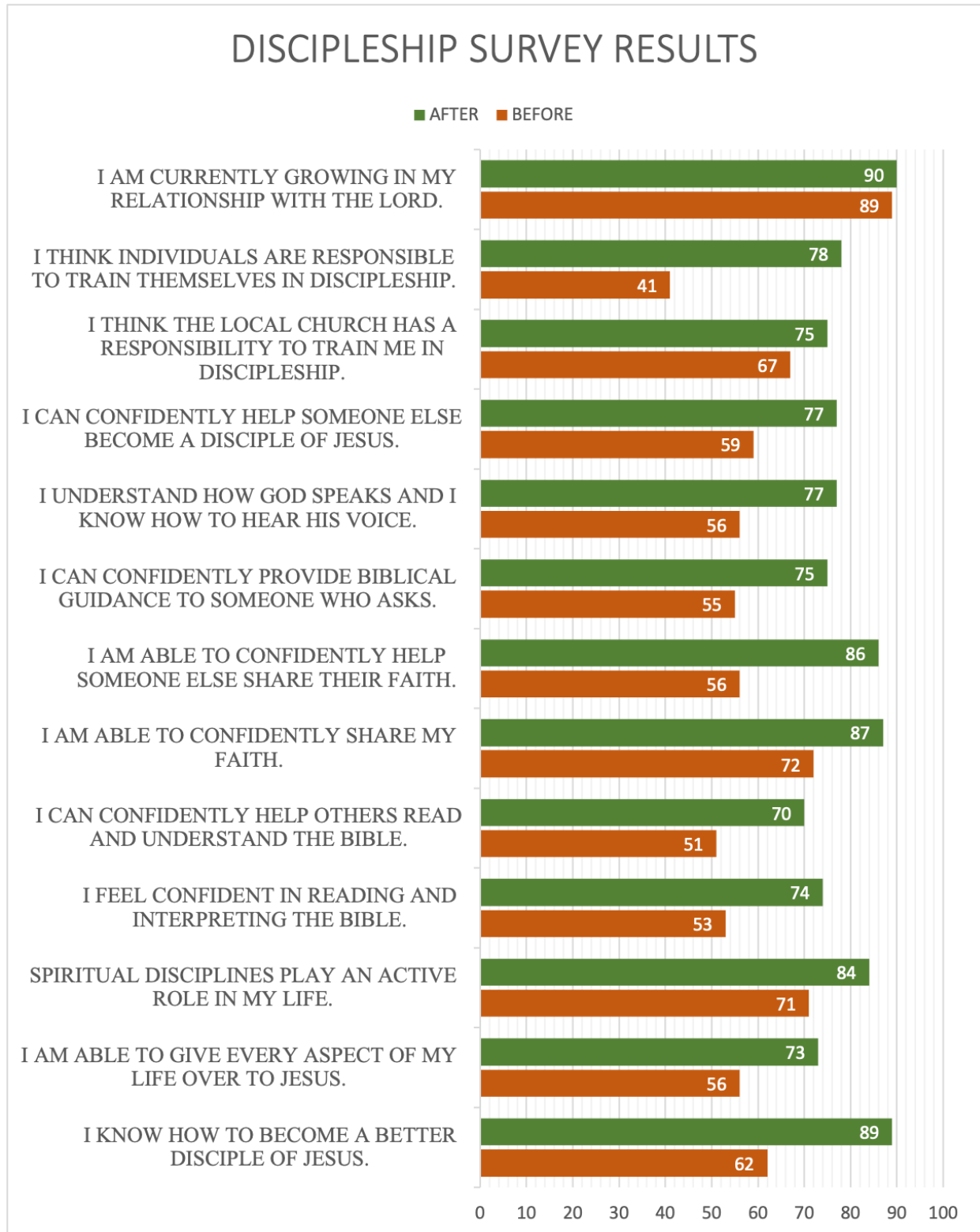
Three Circles (Life on Mission)²⁰⁷



²⁰⁶ *Bridge to Life* © 1969 The Navigators. Used by permission of The Navigators. All rights reserved. www.navigators.org.

²⁰⁷ *3 Circles* © 2014 The North American Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Used with Permission. www.namb.net.

APPENDIX L: DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY RESULTS



IRB APPROVAL/WAIVER

November 24, 2020

Gregory Brown
Brian Sandifer

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY20-21-351 A Biblical Understanding of Making Disciples

Dear Gregory Brown and Brian Sandifer,

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study does not classify as human subjects research. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your IRB application.

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

Explanation: Your study is not considered human subjects research for the following reason:

Your project will consist of quality improvement activities, which are not "designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge" according to 45 CFR 46. 102(l).

Please note that this decision only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued non-human subjects research status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination, or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

PUBLICATION PERMISSIONS

The Wheel and The Bridge



Cindy Caruso

May 28, 2021 at 11:22 AM

[External] FW: [NavPress.com](https://www.navpress.com) Contact Form Inquiry :: * Customer Service: General Inquiry

To: gbrown47@liberty.edu

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

Gregory,

Your request for permission was forwarded to me as The Wheel and The Bridge Illustration are belong to The Navigators specifically.

You have permission to include the two illustrations mentioned above in your thesis. Please do not publish your thesis for commercial use without an additional discussion with us.

Please include a credit line with each illustration as shown below.

Bridge to Life © 1969 The Navigators. Used by permission of The Navigators. All rights reserved. www.navigators.org
The Wheel © 1976 The Navigators. Used by permission of The Navigators. All rights reserved. www.navigators.org

Thanks.

Cindy Caruso
Legal and Insurance Administrator
Corporate Affairs & Risk Management (CARM)

Cindy.caruso@navigators.org
CARM@navigators.org
O: 719-594-2465
F: 719-594-2304

3820 N 30th St
Colorado Springs, CO 80904
[Navigators.org](http://www.navigators.org)



From: NavPress <no-reply@email.navpress.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 27, 2021 1:43 PM
To: csresponse <csresponse@tyndale.com>
Subject: [NavPress.com](https://www.navpress.com) Contact Form Inquiry :: * Customer Service: General Inquiry

Contact Form

sent to: csresponse@tyndale.com
email: gbrown47@liberty.edu
category: 112

message: To Whom It May Concern: My name is Gregory Brown, I am a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am concluding my thesis on the topic of discipleship for the Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Studies. I am writing you to request permission to use and to publish your illustrations within my thesis. The illustrations that I am requesting are: The Wheel and The Bridge to Life. Thank you for your time and consideration, Gregory Brown

3 Circles

Found in Sent - gbrown47@liberty.edu Mailbox



Greg Brown

June 2, 2021 at 9:45 AM

Re: [External] Permission to use and publish in Thesis

To: Legal Services

Jill,

Thanks so much for the permission to use and publish your illustration of the 3 circles in my DMIN thesis. I do have a question around the limited use. The document states that the permission ends after three years. This thesis will be published in the Liberty University library. Would I be able to have permission to use and publish for an indefinite time period?

Thank you for your time,
Greg Brown

[See More from Legal Services](#)



Legal Services

June 2, 2021 at 11:00 AM

RE: [External] Permission to use and publish in Thesis

To: Brown, Gregory

You will be fine. This technically falls under fair use, so the permission form is really a formality so you will have it for your thesis.



Jill Owen

Legal Services Coordinator
North American Mission Board
4200 North Point Pkwy
Alpharetta, GA 30022
W: 770.410.6549 |
NAMB.net

From: Brown, Gregory <gbrown47@liberty.edu>

Sent: Wednesday, June 2, 2021 12:45 PM

To: Legal Services <legal@namb.net>

Subject: Re: [External] Permission to use and publish in Thesis

Caution: This email originated from outside of NAMB. Do not click links or open attachments unless you know the content is safe.

[See More from Brown, Gregory](#)



Permission Request for Non-Profit Use of Intellectual Property

This form is designed to request permission for **non-profit, short-term** (less than 3-year) uses of NAMB articles, videos, or photos (or short excerpts of larger works) **in the U.S.**

To Whom It May Concern:

My name is Gregory Brown, I am a graduate student in the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University. I am concluding my thesis on the topic of discipleship for the Doctor of Ministry in Biblical Studies. I am writing you to request permission to use and to publish your illustration within my thesis. The illustration that I am requesting is "3 Circles."

*Thank you for your time and consideration,
Gregory Brown*

Date: 5-28-2021

User Information:

Church or Ministry Name ("Ministry"): Liberty University

Requestor's Name: Gregory Brown

Address: [REDACTED]

Email: gbrown47@liberty.edu Phone: [REDACTED]

Ministry requests permission to use the following article, recording, resource, material, or excerpt thereof ("NAMB Work"):	Ministry is requesting permission to use the NAMB Work only as follows, in a new work to be created by ("User Work"):
	Illustration: 3 Circles <i>Requesting permission to use and publish in DMIN thesis.</i>

Please email the requested information above to permissions@namb.net and your request will be reviewed by our permissions team. If permission is approved, you will receive a permission form by email through DocuSign. Please review the terms and conditions and follow the prompts to sign the permission. Be sure to click on the "Finish" button to complete the process.

You will receive an email of the completed copy of the permission form for your files.