

ABSTRACT

MISSIONARY TRAINING BEST PRACTICES: EQUIPPING CHURCH MEMBERS TO BE EFFECTIVE MISSIONARIES IN THEIR OWN CONTEXTS

by

Rev. Todd Wilson

In the beginning of the summer of 2003, my family and I had an amazing opportunity to live overseas in Eastern Europe. We picked up and moved in order to serve as missionaries in a city of over 500,000, where there were, at first, only twelve churches. On average, there was one Christian congregation for every 42,000 people, a daunting task, especially considering that a "mega-church" there was three-hundred members. But, as we plugged away, one day at a time, we were excited to see tremendous progress over the eight-plus years that we served there. We had opportunities to directly assist with several new church plants and saw thousands of people come to know Christ. However, after returning from the mission field in at the end 2011, I was dismayed by the spiritual condition of America. It seemed to me that churches in my home state of Indiana had *lost* significant ground, during the same period that we were seeing tremendous gains overseas. My suspicions would later be confirmed.

According to church growth expert and missiologist, George Hunter III, America, as a nation, had by 2010, become the third largest mission field in the world. This was in spite of the fact that there is an average of one Christian church (not counting parachurch ministries, Bible-studies, or other small Christian groups) for every 911 Americans. According to worship attendance statistics, nation-wide, there is an average of one church

member for every twelve Americans, or over 26.5 million regular church goers who self-identify as Christian in the U.S (Hartford Institute).

Examining the impact of the twelve apostles in the Book of Acts and considering what we had experienced among new believers on the mission field, it would seem that 26.5 million ought to have made more of a difference. It was apparent to me that something was significantly wrong in the American church. Over the past ten years, I have come to believe that there has been a breakdown in the awareness of the mission of God among church members and a breakdown in the discipling of church members that has become a barrier to the fulfilling of Jesus' Great Commission. The goal of this research project was to identify best practices for such discipleship and mentoring programs that would be capable of equipping American church members with the understanding and skills to become effective missionaries to their own neighbors. I anticipated that American church members, once empowered with missionary understanding and skills from such discipling, and the understanding of their call to be missionaries, would rise to the occasion and become more effective at impacting those around them for Christ.

I found this to be true, along with some other major findings:

1. There is a common core of fundamental missional discipleship themes and principles that appear across biblical, historical, and missional literature, in trainer interviews, and in trainees' self-reported "most significant" elements of their discipleship experience.
2. Agency trainers do not see recorded, on-demand, web-based forms of training in the same light as their trainees, perceiving these forms to be significantly more

important to the modern missional discipleship process than do those they are training. By contrast, trainees perceived collaborative, in-person, live, small group formats and live, in-person mentoring and coaching, as well as learning by doing, to be most effective for absorbing training that sustained missional action in their lives.

3. There are a handful of discipleship content themes that eventually came out in trainer interviews, as if an afterthought, and typically only were addressed by trainers after the researcher asked them what their mission sending agency was doing related to such themes. Likewise, these themes failed to receive attention in the vast majority of formal agency training curricula examined by the researcher. Yet these were themes that the researcher found to be significant, if not central themes of teaching, modeling, and sending people into God's Mission within the biblical narrative. These included addressing brokenness in the personal lives of disciples, spiritual warfare as a central component of Jesus' mission from God, and the biblical concerns regarding social justice and environmental care, often highlighted by the prophets. The researcher noted that trainees self-reported, decidedly less commitment to acting on such concerns when compared to other themes that were explicitly detailed by trainers and curricula (e.g. evangelism, prayer, Bible study, and other traditional evangelical foci).
4. All training programs examined served to produce a very significant increase in missional activity on the part of trainees. The data reported by trainees suggests that while some forms of training seem to be more effective, the mere fact that

training and discipling are taking place at all makes a huge impact in the lives of trainees.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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OWN CONTEXTS

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by

Rev. Todd Wilson

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CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter identifies a generationally challenging problem, which seems to be manifesting in American church culture today: a lack of enduring missional activity on the part of God's people. This lack is a significant contributing factor to the decline of the positive influence of the church in American culture, and the decline in the number of those who self-identify as Christian in the US. This chapter also addresses a potential solution to the problem, a return to biblically based, missional discipleship on the part of mission sending agencies, nation-wide. It is possible to identify essential elements and best practices of intentional discipleship and training programs that effectively empower and equip participants to fulfill the Mission of God in their own daily, personal life contexts once they have been discipled/trained in such programs. Finally, this chapter details the research methodology by which essential elements and best practices of such discipling experiences are teased out during the investigative process.

Personal Introduction

After serving for eight years as a missionary church planter in Eastern Europe at the beginning of this century, I returned "home" to find a very different spiritual situation in the United States than I had left. I was truly shocked that in a mere ten years, even in the "Bible Belt" Midwest, church attendance, Christian commitment, and even value placed on Christ and biblical teaching had declined so rapidly. A study by George Barna's group found that "About one in five (millennials) say the Bible is "an outdated book with no relevance for today" and 27% go so far as to say the Bible is "a dangerous

book of religious dogma used for centuries to oppress people” (Barna Group). A recent article comparatively analyzed a variety of religious surveys aimed at millennials. The results were troubling.

- 59% of Millennials who were born with a religious affiliation tend to unplug from their church
- Two of 10 Millennials consider church attendance as important
- 35% of Millennials think that the church does more harm than good (Zuckerman)

I personally observed that, while many of my new neighbors were very interested in all kinds of spirituality, Christianity had been dismissed as obsolete. I sensed that I was back on the mission field again and also suspected that this was a phenomenon occurring across America. My suspicion was confirmed by church growth expert and missiologist, George Hunter III. He writes, "Today, at least 180 million people in the United States have no adequate understanding of the Christian faith; this country has become the third largest mission field on earth" (3). Unfortunately, the rising need for the American church to make an impact in culture and society has not created a corresponding response from the local churches to meet that need.

According to a recent study, there has been a net increase of over 50,000 in the number of Christian congregations in America since 1998 (Randall). Yet, in spite of this, the number of Americans who label themselves as “nones” or those who have no religious affiliation has increased to become the largest *religious* category in the country, rising above both those who call themselves Catholic and those who refer to themselves as Evangelicals (Nussman). This is a troubling statistic. There are more Christian communities now than ever in America, nevertheless, those who call themselves Christians have become increasingly ineffective in reaching the larger population and

making an impact in the lives of their neighbors. This suggests that there is likely a lack of missional activity present in the life of the average American church member today or, at the very least, that such activity is ineffective in making new disciples. This inactivity may stem from ignorance related to what God's call is relating to how He wants His people to join Him in His Mission to the world. It may stem from other obstacles such as a lack of "know-how" or a lack of focus. Regardless of why more effective missional activity in the lives of American churchgoers is not taking place, the reality remains that it needs to.

I have personally witnessed this reality after returning to America from the mission field. In October, 2011, I had walked straight from missionary church planting into an established, congregational pastoral ministry, looking forward to working alongside "mature" Christians that would be able to engage their cultural context more fully and more immediately than the "baby" Christians we had been working with on the mission field. However, pastoral ministry over the next few years showed me that those church members here in America that I encountered on any kind of regular basis were ill-equipped to conduct the kind of missionary operations that were needed to reach this emerging field of secularized unbelievers.

Unfortunately, due to the history of the influence of Christianity in this nation, many current church members, even those that are absolutely devoted, have a perspective and attitude toward life and ministry that mission researchers are now calling Christendom or a Christendom mindset. "Christendom" is the socio-political reality of a partnership between church and state, where Church and State have historically been viewed as the two pillars of Western society. Historians generally agree that this process of wedding state and church agendas began with Constantine's rise to power in the 300s AD and was firmly

entrenched by the time of Pope Leo III, when baptism became the official form of birth registration in most of Europe, taxes supported the church, and attendance at Mass became compulsory.

Today, Westerners, especially those in the church, often fail to realize the profound impact that the cultural dynamic of Christendom has had on the Western mindset. The problem of the modern, Western church in its cultural milieu today may stem from a concept that the Reformers developed centuries ago, during the height of Christendom, that has now taken root in such a way as to have unexpected influence on the self-perception of what it means to be church. David Bosch of South Africa notes that Protestant churches that were nurtured by the vision of the Reformers “came to conceive the church as a place where certain things happen.” By emphasizing marks of the true church as “wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered and church discipline exercised,” they narrowed the definition of what it meant to be church to a “place where” concept. The church in a Christian society became the place where a Christian civilization gathers for worship and the place where the Christian character of society is cultivated (Bosch 80).

This led to the *identity* of the church being located in organizational structures and the professional class of clergy who perform the church’s authoritative activities. Even the missionary movement of the nineteenth century did little to alter this perception as such missionaries were “sent out” *from* the place where Christianity happened to establish new places where it might happen again. In the Christendom cultural model, American churches—and as a result, church members—based their identity nearly completely on this concept of place. As a result, they also generally connected having a

church building to a favored relationship to State and Society. When both the Government and the larger culture began to move on from the church, the vast majority of church members responded with the same kind of denial that a jilted lover expresses. Rather than adjusting to the new reality and adopting a more missionary approach and skillset, the American church doubled down, working even harder at performing the activities that had always seemed to work in the past, all the while, failing to realize that culturally American society had meandered into a completely different future than the Christendom-based church was prepared to handle.

In Post-Christendom, the Christian story now no longer meaningfully defines societal life. The mega-church model has not changed the cultural shift away from the Christian story. It is only shifting people from one church to another. There must be a radical re-visioning in our society today regarding what it means to be a disciple. If the church is to meaningfully impact American society from this point forward, there must be a fresh understanding among God's people of both the cultural paradigm shift that is taking place currently and a corresponding realization that new approaches must be taken and new skill sets developed in order to effectively fulfill God's mission.

From my personal experience dealing with American Christians over the last decade, as well as from my review of what many missional authors are discussing in their works over the last two decades, it seems that a primary obstacle to the church being able to fulfill the Great Commission in America is a lack of understanding regarding the paradigm changes in American society. This lack of understanding, coupled with a loss of imagination regarding how the gospel ought to impact daily life contexts, leads to a lack of realization and motivation needed to begin to make wholesale changes to the

average believer's approach to living within a post-Christian society and interacting with his or her neighbors. These obstacles are followed in significance by the lack of discipling/training and skill development necessary to make a transition from past ministry practice and daily life choices to new ministry practice and daily choices that are more effective in seeing the mission of God fulfilled.

It is my conviction that if the American church is to counter the paganization of the nation and effectively fulfill her call to make disciples for Jesus Christ in the coming generations, members of the church must transition, mentally, spiritually, and in daily practice from moral *stewards* of society to *missionaries*, infiltrating a now increasingly pagan culture with the Gospel.

Statement of the Problem

The specific issue being investigated revolves around overcoming a lack of American church members' engagement and participation in the Mission of God. The decline in the American church's cultural impact has been noted above, as has the lack of incarnational and missional expression in the lives of many Americans who self-identify as Christian. It is the researcher's theory that these issues mostly stem from a chronic challenge that impedes the people of God in the US from becoming all they need to be on behalf of their culture and neighbors. The ongoing generational challenge that this study will examine is a lack of biblically based missional discipleship in the lives of American church members.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements/best practices essential to creating a learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending

agencies in order to enhance the enduring practice of missional action in the personal contexts of participants (trainees).

After reviewing biblical and theological material related to God's missional goals, as well as reviewing modern literature and research regarding the same, a framework was created with which current missionary training practice and curriculum might be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses via document study. Further, by interacting directly with mission trainers and trainees via surveys and interviews, a picture of what they personally believed to be most effective in such training experiences provided a practical and living parallel by which cross-evaluation of what "experts" in the literary review believed to be best practices was examined. These surveys and interviews were intended to flesh out which elements of teaching or training were most useful for creating and sustaining enduring missional action in the lives of participants. This then leads to a better understanding of what are best practices for any missionary sending agency, including the local church.

My goal in conducting this study was to harness the combined insights of biblical and theological texts, practitioners and participants of missionary discipling, and current discipling/mission training curriculums and programs in order to flesh out the most fundamental elements and most effective (best) practices necessary to equip participants for sustained, enduring missional activity in their own personal contexts. In other words, the end goal of this study was to produce a body of evidence which might be used to formulate future missionary training and discipling experiences that will equip participants more effectively to actively engage in enduring missional activity in their daily lives and contexts.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What are fundamental/essential elements/best practices necessary for creating a learning experience to equip participants to more effectively and regularly conduct enduring missional action in their daily life contexts?

Research Question #2

What are the common obstacles (including gaps in training and knowledge) that mission participants experience, which hinder them from conducting enduring missional action in their personal life contexts after their learning experience?

Research Question #3

How do the resources available currently for equipping mission participants to conduct enduring missional action in their own daily life contexts compare and contrast to missional goals expressed in the scriptures?

Rationale for the Project

This research study is significant because particularly in western culture nations, there is an increase in the percentage of church members who have little or no understanding of the emerging cultural postmodern mindset, much less understanding of how to engage that culture with the gospel, or the tools to do so. Additionally, there is also a significant decline in the number of Christian disciples and a corresponding increase among those who self-identify as secular or with no religious affiliation, likely a result of the lack of Christian impact by current church members. It is anticipated that this trend can be reversed with proper training of American church members. However, there is currently not enough research related to the essential elements or best practices of a hands-on curriculum or training process available to the American church that can equip

members to become missionaries in their own context, with regard to both the teaching of knowledge and the development of actual skills necessary to their missionary task.

Definition of Key Terms

The key technical terms used in the purpose statement and research questions that may need explanation are as follows:

- 1) **Mission of God/missional goals** – the Mission of God is defined as the mission that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit carry on in order to bring salvation, redemption, and restoration to the entire Creation. This mission includes working through the church to accomplish what God has purposed. It derives from the very nature of God who is constantly sending (His Son, His Spirit, His church, etc.), so as to restore others and the Creation to Himself and His original purposes.
- 2) **Missionaries** – those who engage in the Mission of God in cooperation with God.
- 3) **Missional Action** – actions engaged in by God’s people/church members that participate in the fulfillment of God’s Mission, revealing His character and purposes to the world, as well as providing a foretaste of His coming reign and rule. For this study, those activities and actions are grouped into three broad categories of tasks: relationship tasks, stewardship tasks and redemptive tasks. Relationship tasks involve developing and nurturing right relationship with God and others. Stewardship tasks revolve around working with God to rightly care for the Creation, creating or recreating a world where justice, order, beauty, life and righteousness flourish. Redemptive tasks are those tasks engaged in that redeem fallen and broken things and situations within the Creation so that God’s character and purposes might be more

fully revealed through them and realized in them. Subjects that took part in questionnaires or interviews were told that missional action is:

continuing what Jesus came to do, because God has sent us to do it, for the same reasons that Jesus had for doing: connecting people meaningfully and genuinely to God in a way that brings reconciliation. Therefore, missional action is very broadly defined as doing anything in word, deed or attitude, as our response to God's action in our lives, that aids people to connect to God more deeply, meaningfully and genuinely in a way that brings reconciliation and right relationship between God, others, and Creation around them. (see Appendix B)

- 4) **Personal/daily life Context** – whatever life context an individual church member finds themselves in: work setting, home and family, school, shopping, banking, interacting with others in the course of daily life, and so on. This concept includes both the larger idea of simply living as models of Kingdom life in order to make disciples per the Great Commission (“as you are going, make disciples” Matt. 28.19). It also includes the more particular concept of “sentness”. That is, there is an inherent recognition by Kingdom disciples that they are on a mission and have been sent with that purpose into the world. Therefore, intentionality with respect toward fulfilling that mission must be embraced on a daily basis within the spheres of influence God has sent the disciple into.
- 5) **Enduring practice** – those actions that align with the Mission of God and continue in an ongoing fashion for the long term in a person’s life.

- 6) **To equip** – to train, teach, inspire, empower, and assist an individual or group to become more proficient in engaging in any of the three aforementioned groups of missional tasks (Relationship, Stewardship and Redemptive tasks).
- 7) **Learning/discipling experience** – the collective training experience of receiving teaching from a mission trainer related to any of the thirty Short-Term Mission organizations' mission curriculums and the skills training received in the same programs that were investigated for this research project. It also includes the active engagement and practice of those things learned, during a Short-Term Mission trip.
- 8) **Short-Term Mission (STM)** – a STM organization is any organization that supports American church members to train in missional action and then actively engage in missional action for a short period of time, typically one to two weeks in length, but sometimes shorter or longer. Generally, the goal of such organizations is to give American church members a taste of what it means to actively participate in the Mission of God in the hope that this will inspire such individuals to continue to participate with God in His Mission. A STM trip is the literal time frame and project that allows for American church members to envision what it is like to cooperate with God in His Mission via training and live experiences.

Delimitations

Participants in this study were church members that participated in discipleship or mission training with mission sending organizations. These participants came from a wide variety of geographic, economic, and ethnic backgrounds, included men and women and a range of ages from teens to those in their nineties. There was a mix of both male and female participants.

This training was not tested with a general church membership population, as there was deemed little or no opportunity to incorporate the skills training component into the participants' experience to the degree that is offered in an intensive short-term mission environment. This was not deemed a bad situation, as those church members that are willing to invest time and resources into a short-term mission trip are already motivated to learn, grow, change, and invest in reaching out to others. These participants were seen as ideal training partners. If the curriculum/training program elements identified in this research being examined could produce effective change in these church members, the potential for them to return to impact their local communities was deemed to be high. Further, such essential elements might then be used to create more comprehensive and more effective training programs in the future which could be employed more generally by American churches to equip their members to become missionaries in their own personal life contexts.

Unfortunately, due to the financial commitment required of short-term mission team members, the participant base was skewed toward those church members from wealthier, suburban churches. Urban churches tend to deal with membership that is less capable of laying out \$2000 for a ten-day trip. However, it was possible to test this curriculum to a limited degree with such a population doing service-based short-term mission projects within the U.S.

Review of Relevant Literature

Several works were useful as historical references, identifying key historical understandings of the concept of mission within the Church as a whole, as well as noting significant shifts that have taken place over the decades and centuries regarding how the

church saw her role as participant in the Mission of God. The works of Darrell Guder, Miroslav Volf, Leslie Newbigin, David Bosch, N.T. Wright, and others were significant resources. Historical changes in the basic definition of the word church that has profoundly shaped the self-understanding of Western Christianity were highlighted by many of these same authors. Several of these authors noted that the Reformers inadvertently shifted the concept of church as dynamic and organic to an organizational model and shifted the self-identity of the church from being primarily the Body of Christ, an incarnational and sent people, to merely being "a place where" God's people could meet God or gather with each other for comfort, support and instruction (Bosch 80). By allowing and eventually embracing this very different definition of the term church, a self-defining vision of reality has taken root in American congregations and culture that is ultimately pagan at heart. In examining classic, historical paganism, one of the key elements in the belief system is that the deity is rooted to place and therefore can be isolated from everyday life to the convenience of the worshiper, a concept that has become an obstacle to missional lifestyle in American church culture.

Craig Van Gelder, Dwight Zscheile, David Seamands, Michael Frost, and Jurgen Moltmann have much to contribute to the understanding of the Mission of God and what it means to live and act missionally. They highlight the primacy of understanding that the Mission of God was never intended to be fulfilled without God, but it was intended to be fulfilled with Him, walking and working alongside Him, relying upon both His guidance and His empowerment. Some even goes so far as to say that disciples do not even understand the kind of witness God wants to bring forth until they are in the midst of it. In most Western contexts, the presumption is that the church planters are in control.

However, in the New Testament, the apostles who plant new expressions of Christian community are definitely not in control. The Holy Spirit is the One leading, directing, and building every step of the way. It is the primary responsibility of the missional disciple then to align oneself with the Holy Spirit to realize the fulfillment of God's Mission, not merely go out and work or act independently.

Perhaps one of the most insightful and unique contributions to missional action and calling is Walter Brueggemann's statement that "loss grieved permits newness, loss denied creates dysfunction and eventually produces violence" (87). This has profound implications for the call of the missional disciple in any context today. His concept may also explain the level of dysfunction in society, especially the dysfunction that seems to be erupting into violence more and more frequently. Brueggemann notes that the mentality of the world systems "counts loss as simply the cost of doing business; wants grief to be voiced quietly and quickly - or not at all" (104). Since structures of society, and even the people within them, want to avoid addressing loss, grief, suffering, and pain, God's agents are in a unique position to address the deep sense of loss that many are feeling. In fact, the community of disciples known as the church not only has the opportunity to provide an atmosphere for healing, restore dignity, provide place, and belonging to those who have experienced pain and loss, but this community is also called to do so. This aspect of healing and freeing the oppressed was important to Jesus' Mission while he was on earth, but it is lightly addressed by American churches now.

Michael Frost, Alan Hirsch, Alan Roxburgh, Kathy Escobar, N.T. Wright, and Michael Scandrette are key voices in identifying that restoring justice, order and beauty to the Creation is a significant aspect of the Mission of Order, is something highly valued

of God, and something that God actively works to create. They paint a picture of how powerful the impact of such pursuits can be to transform whole neighborhoods by using the broken window principle. This principle suggests that violence occurs in neighborhoods where people get the impression that no one cares—places with high concentrations of graffiti, garbage and broken windows. An apprentice to Jesus learns to make the realization of God’s creative and restoring work their core purpose (Scandrette 1720). When God's agents clean up broken glass and paint over graffiti, they are practically introducing order into chaos. In the process, they introduce healing and restoration into communal brokenness and pain. They introduce love and hope into a neighborhood defined by apathy and despair. Another important concept that these authors highlight is how important obedient action is to the process of transforming people into enduring missional disciples. This counters the common Western belief that faith involves merely assenting to a set of propositions but fails to include obedience and action. Scandrette adds, “It is the practice of knowledge that brings transformation, not mere knowledge, and spiritual transformation does not primarily take place in solitary meditation and contemplation, but in communal activity” (987).

Mike Breen, Woodward, Alan Hirsch, Michael Scandrette, Kathy Escobar, Barbara Brown, and George C. Hunter III identify that the culture of a group or organization is what truly is key to producing individuals and leaders that carry on the mission and vision of the group. Some of them practically modeled and tested this, effectively fostering missional transformation among average Americans. Their collective works demonstrate that the culture of a group naturally fosters members into ways of understanding, valuing, and acting, which in turn, either promotes missional

faithfulness, or contradicts it. They then point the way toward creating a group culture that will support the Mission of God by equipping members to work alongside God to fulfill it.

Research Methodology

This research project was developed in a three-fold manner. The process of development included an examination of: 1) the nature of the Mission of God; 2) anthropology, particularly with regards to the nature of human learning, motivation, behavior modification, and spiritual formation; 3) contextualization studies related to culture and history.

Testing of principles and fundamental/essential elements to a comprehensive biblical, missional training program is beyond the scope of this particular research study. This study was a pre-intervention to initially identify what potential practices seem to be most useful in effectively equipping participants to engage in enduring missional action in their daily life contexts (beyond a week-long mission trip, for example). The effectiveness of these principles will hopefully be further investigated in the future, using a pre-test/post-test instrument that might gauge participants' increase in: 1) cognitive understanding of cultural/societal changes in the American, postmodern, post-Christendom context, and the corresponding need to change ministry practice to keep up with such changes; 2) a sense of urgency to change ministry practice 3); the development of skills necessary to make real changes in ministry practice.

In addition to the literature review, a document analysis with regards to current, existing mission discipling/training curriculum/experiences was also conducted. Interviews with mission trainers were performed to gather the views of experienced

leaders as to what elements of any mission training experiences are essential, in terms of content and of teaching practical skills. Finally, a questionnaire was offered to mission trainees who underwent such discipling experiences to determine if the training was effective in producing enduring missional action in their lives.

Type of Research

The researcher used a mixed-methods approach for this pre-intervention. The methods used were primarily qualitative, but they did include a quantitative element with the inclusion of mission participant surveys which were scored numerically. A document analysis tool was created by the researcher to study current mission training curriculums and programs for the numbers and types of fundamental missional elements present. Mission trainer were interviewed to identify what they found to be most essential to creating enduring missional practice and action in their trainees. Finally, those trainees were studied via survey/questionnaire in order to find out whether they were continuing to practice the missional actions they had learned from the trainers and Short-Term Mission programs.

Participants

The document analysis portion of this research included curriculums from a number of STM and LTM agencies around the US, as well as parachurch ministries and local church groups that focus on missional discipling. Letters of invitation were sent and/or personal phone calls were made to six parachurch ministries known for disciple making: YWAM, Navigators, CRU (formerly Campus Crusade), Alpha Course, Teen Challenge, and Youth for Christ. These were chosen based on the researcher's experience seeing leadership trained by these organizations. Six local church groups were invited to

participate based upon the recommendation of the researcher's mentor/coach. These were identified as American based church groups that were doing excellent missional discipleship training and leadership development. The researcher invited ten of the top STM organizations in the country, in terms of adherence to biblical and operational standards of excellence, as rated by the organization Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission. Finally, the researcher invited participation from members of four of the most effective LTM organizations in American history: OM, AIM, Ethnos 360, and Pioneers. The disciplers/mission trainers interviewed and participants surveyed were also associated with these same groups. They were chosen based upon their missional connections with the organizations that accepted the invitation to participate in this study.

For those organizations that responded positively to the invitation to participate in this study, the researcher requested a copy of each organization's formal missional training/discipling curriculum in order to cross-reference each curriculum against the missional framework tool (MFT) grid produced by the researcher based upon the literary review of this study. Each organization that agreed to participate simply sent an electronic copy or paper copy of their curriculum for the researcher to examine.

The researcher requested that each organization that agreed to participate offer researcher-supplied e-survey invitations and a participation link to as many of their trainees/disciples as they felt comfortable sending to. The researcher requested that they send to no less than ten of their participants/trainees. It was left up to each individual organization to determine to whom the surveys were offered. Care was taken by the researcher to emphasize that all data collected would remain entirely anonymous. The researcher requested that the individual organizations contact their trainees directly so

that no participant contact information would be given to the researcher, better preserving anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

After collecting the survey data, the researcher analyzed survey results to identify which mission sending agencies seemed to be producing the most enduring missional action in the most people that participated in their missional discipleship experiences/programs. The researcher then chose the top five organizations in terms of producing trainees that exhibited the most enduring missional action. The researcher requested an interview with each of these five organizations' primary trainer. It was made clear in the written request/invitation that trainers with more experience were desired. The suggestion was made that if, for example, a veteran trainer of many years had retired and was no longer serving but might be willing to participate in this study, that the retired trainer be invited to participate by the organization as well as the current primary trainer.

The human subjects participating in the research project were drawn from two groups: mission curriculum/program trainers/disciplers and mission training/program participants. These subjects were all volunteers and were invited to participate in the project as a result of their connection with mission sending organizations. In summary, the researcher contacted mission sending agencies directly to invite them to participate in the research study by 1) providing the researcher with a copy of their training curriculum, 2) providing an "invitation to participate and consent" letter to at least ten individuals that had previously completed a mission training program and participated in missional activity with their agency, as well as emailing them a SurveyMonkey link to answer the questions found in Appendix B, and 3) allowing the researcher to contact their primary mission curriculum/program trainer to request an interview with that trainer.

Instrumentation

The investigative instruments employed by the researcher for this study were threefold. Each instrument was designed to gather data from participants—both individual and organizational—in order to answer the research questions.

Document Study – Instrument #1

The first instrument used to conduct research was a document study. A request was made to each of the organizations mentioned above to provide a copy of their official training curriculum for the research purposes of this study. Those documents received were analyzed according to the Missional Framework Tool (MTF – see Appendix B) designed by the author of this study. Training curriculums and programs were evaluated with respect to best practices for meeting biblical goals of the Mission of God as identified by the researcher in the literary review, according to the framework. Both content and training technique/practices were taken into consideration when available. The researcher took care to note both what was present in each training curriculum/program with respect to the biblical goals of Mission identified in the MFT as well as any elements that were lacking.

Semi-Structured Interview – Instrument #2

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview. This interview was used to probe select primary missional discipleship trainers, those who were tasked by mission sending agencies with the equipping of the trainees and mission participants before those participants began to engage in missional activity with the organization. The researcher requested that each organization suggest one person to be interviewed for the study, with preference for a trainer that had more extensive experience conducting training with

mission participants. Since the interview questions aimed to uncover what best practices as well as training content that each particular trainer has found most successful in inspiring and sustaining missional action on the part of trainees, more experience in training rather than less was significantly more useful to the research process. The trainer was asked to respond to a series of pre-constructed questions, in a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix B). They were given the freedom to answer and expand upon what he or she felt was the best way to interact with each question before moving on to the next. The goal of the questions was to delve deeper into what each individual trainer found to be the most useful elements in the content of the curriculum or discipling experience, the most useful means or exercises that they used to teach participants, and the most important elements related to the atmosphere of the training. Some questions also addressed what the trainers saw as obstacles in the lives or life contexts of trainees that the trainers felt inhibited sustained or consistent missional action on the part of trainees. The researcher was able to create interview questions based upon findings in the literary review of the study.

Survey/Questionnaire – Instrument #3

The third research instrument was a questionnaire format. It was presented to trainees of mission sending agencies using the web-based tool SurveyMonkey. The SurveyMonkey questionnaire was used to both present questions to trainee participants and to collect data submitted by these participants. Individuals were sent an email inviting them to participate in the research project. Those that agreed to participate were sent a survey link by the mission organization that they had received training with (supplied by researcher to the organization). After consenting to the survey, they

answered questions related to their perspective on their engagement in missional activity after their training experience. The survey also asked participants to identify obstacles to their personal engagement of missional activities in their life contexts after training. Individuals filled out the surveys anonymously, without help or prompting from anyone, answering questions related to the above topics (see Appendix B). Respondent ages ranged from 18-92 and acknowledged having gone through an organizational mission training program, curriculum, or learning experience of some sort which led to active participation in some form of missional activity. The data gathered from these surveys was used to better understand what mission agency training content and practices tended to produce consistent and sustained missional activity in the trainees, as well as to identify what the trainees perceived to be obstacles to continued missional action. The researcher created interview questions based upon findings in the literary review of the study and personal life experience as both a trainer and trainee of mission sending agency learning experiences.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval for the project was secured, invitations to participate were sent to multiple organizations that fell within the four categories of mission sending agencies as detailed by the researcher: parachurch groups, local churches, Short-Term Mission organizations (STMs), and Long-Term Mission organizations (LTMs). In order to participate, these agencies agreed to send the researcher a copy of their current discipleship program/mission training curriculum. They also agreed to send researcher supplied letters of invitation to participate and a SurveyMonkey link to at least ten individuals that trained or disciplined under their respective missional ministries.

When the researcher received copies of missional training materials, they were evaluated against the Missional Framework Tool (MTF) created by the researcher. This evaluation was conducted to collect data related to what essential missional elements were present in each program/experience and what elements were missing from each program that the researcher identified as essential or best practices based upon the literary review. Data from such document analysis was gathered and reviewed to identify what discipleship programs included more of the identified essential elements and best practices, which were then cross-referenced against trainees' self-reports of continuing to practice missional action. Data was also collected to ascertain what elements to identify what might need to be added to existing or new missional discipleship programs to potentially increase the degree of enduring missional action in the lives of participants.

For those disciples/trainees that agreed to participate after reading the letter of invitation and description of the project, the SurveyMonkey survey link took them to a consent page. Once confirming consent, participants filled out a survey to indicate what kinds of missional activity they were still engaging in after receiving their missional discipleship. SurveyMonkey collected the data submitted by these participants. Tools built into the software enabled the researcher to evaluate which agencies' trainees were more often engaging in missional action and thus, which were more effectively training missional disciples.

The researcher then used this data to determine which agency mission trainers to interview. Trainers/disciplers from the five most effective mission sending agencies (in terms of producing the most disciples that were engaging in the most missional action) were invited to participate in semi-structured interviews. After signing a consent and

confidentiality letter, trainers were contacted by phone. Their responses to interview questions (see Appendix B) were recorded digitally with their permission. Data gathered from the interviews was analyzed to determine what, if any, common elements or discipling practices were employed by the top trainers, as well as investigating what means were employed to overcome common obstacles to trainee's engagement in enduring missional action.

Data Analysis

The key to interpretation is not in the tools, or the reporting of the information guided by a set of techniques, but rather in how one makes sense of the experiences of everyday life. Any single approach will have limitations.

Subsequently, triangulation (multiple data-collection technologies designed to measure a single concept or construct) provides a complex view of the intervention enabling a "thicker" interpretation. (Sensing 1879)

In order to gain a thicker view of what elements of a mission training program might be more effective in producing enduring missional action in participants, many tools were employed. Document analysis of mission curriculums, discipleship materials, and training programs was conducted to ascertain what emphases current learning experiences have, both in terms of content taught and practical training/exercises/ministry action that participants were asked to engage in as part of the discipling process. The gathered data was analyzed over against what elements biblical and current missional literature deem essential. The analysis tool formulated by the researcher was based upon research into those fundamental elements and best practices. This tool was used to systematically analyze various formal missional training programs. This process was

used to identify themes common to all mission training and discipleship experiences as well as to highlight what essential elements might be missing from many or all of the learning experiences based upon theological, biblical, and literary research.

To gain a better understanding of what the trainers themselves thought essential, semi-structured interview questions were posed to those leaders deemed most effective at equipping disciples to engage in enduring missional action. The interviews were conducted to ascertain what these leaders were convinced were the most essential elements of teaching and skills training for their trainees. Trainers were asked what, in terms of elements/practices, they believed or perceived was most responsible for seeing participants engage in enduring missional action following their training. They were also asked what they felt most contributed to enduring missional action in such participants after the trip. Review of these various trainer interviews was then used to highlight common themes of what such disciplers believed to be the most essential elements or best practices they have used to equip mission participants to engage in enduring missional action.

Finally, the trainees themselves were surveyed using a questionnaire to determine if they were still engaging in missional action following their training and what in those learning experiences they felt helped them to do so. Questionnaires were tabulated for the mission program trainee's degree of enduring engagement in missional action as denoted by self-scoring at least 50% of the questions with a score of 3, 4, or 5 (describes me moderately well, well, or very well). The questionnaires contained the requisite scores were then examined for the final open question, "What element(s) of the STM mission training program most has helped you to maintain ongoing missional action in your life?"

Other questionnaires were also examined for their answers to this final question, but were weighted less than those who actually demonstrated enduring missional action.

Generalizability

The goal of this study was to identify best practices and essential elements of a missional learning experience that produce enduring missional action in the lives of trainees, as well as to identify what current missional discipleship programs are lacking in terms of what elements are deemed fundamental or essential as determined by the researcher's study of biblical and missional literature. The goal of such analysis was to engender a more comprehensive understanding of what elements are effective in producing enduring missional action in trainees, as well as to identify what elements may be missing from missional discipleship training experiences. These findings could, in turn, better inform future iterations of discipleship training experiences so that more enduring missional action might result in the lives of trainees. In identifying these practices and elements, it is the position of the researcher that such can be more intentionally incorporated into future learning experiences. The ultimate goal of this study is to better equip trainers/disciplers to better equip American church members to become effective missionaries in their own neighborhoods and daily life contexts.

Project Overview

The literature review, below, examines biblical, theological, and expert opinion on what the Mission of God is and what elements and practices are deemed essential to fulfilling the Mission of God. The methodology of this project proceeds out of the examination of relevant materials, using a mixed-methods, pre-intervention approach to study the impact of effective training (or failing to effectively train) real

people in these fundamental principles and practices. The study investigates enduring missional action that was produced in the lives of trainees and how this was attested to by those who trained them. Research is presented, accounting for correlation of all data gathered, and results are delineated with a view to informing the creation of future mission learning experiences that will more effectively equip trainees to engage in enduring missional action.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The scriptures, as well as theologians and practitioners from ancient days until the present age, have addressed the nature of the Mission of God and how best to fulfill it. There have been many misguided attempts, particularly in the post-apostolic age that historians now refer to as Christendom. There has also been a resurgence of writers and disciples in the last few decades seeking to recapture what it means to cooperate with God in fulfilling His Mission. This chapter examines biblical, theological, and practical literary sources related to the fulfillment of the *Missio Dei*, with special attention paid to the most recent contributions. This research study is conducted to discern what essential elements are necessary to both understanding what the Mission of God is and what best practices are needed to fulfill the Mission of God. This literary review will form the backdrop of the study, allowing a more comprehensive overview that concretely identifies what elements are essential to an understanding and practice of missional action. It will also aid in identifying what elements are essential to a discipling/training program or experience that equips others to engage in enduring missional action. The insights collected from this literary review have been grouped into three distinct categories and deal with what the researcher has labeled Missional Tasks. After reviewing the works of literary experts in the field of missions, theological authors who discuss the Mission of God, and the Bible's accounts of God's missional work and purposes, the researcher has become convinced that the faithful missional disciple is

called by God to engage in three types of missional tasks: relational tasks, stewardship tasks, and redemptive tasks. These will be detailed in the following chapter.

What is the Mission of God? God's original mission was to create a family for Himself, a family that He could be in relationship with and with whom He could work alongside to fulfill His goals for His Creation, participating with Him in stewarding the Created Order He had put into place. God originally created both angels and human beings to be in relationship with Him and to work with Him to justly and righteously govern and steward His Creation. He created human beings to be "like Him," to reflect His character and then to "multiply and fill the earth" with the loving care, justice and righteousness that flowed naturally from His character. In this process of filling the earth with His Image, those whom God created were tasked with being a witness to His holy, just, and loving character. These elements of God's Mission have not changed and will not change, but His mission was modified slightly with the introduction of sin and corruption into Creation. Redemption and revelation of the coming restoration of God's full reign over His Creation became necessary components of His Mission after angelic rebellion and humanity's fall. Jesus' mission from God was to secure the redemption of humanity and to reveal the coming fullness of the Reign of God in microcosm, to give a glimpse into the future of what life would be like when sin, death, rebellion, and corruption were once again removed from God's created order. Jesus was then to invite human beings to voluntarily join Him in living into and under that Reign even before it had fully arrived.

Those who responded to Jesus' invitation (disciples) were redeemed and restored into a family relationship with God, their Father. They were then more than invited; they

were called to work alongside Jesus and the Father, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to continue to further God's Mission. This work starts with redemption, but it continues into former areas of God's focus: stewardship and relationship development. People that responded to God's call, like Jesus, would be sent out into a world full of death, rebellion, and corruption to incarnationally live out a witness to what life could be like in the present and what it will be like in the future once God's Reign is reinstated fully. Such missional disciples would cooperate with God to restore order, justice, and righteousness within God's Creation. They would become the living embodiment of the answer to the Lord's Prayer: "Your Kingdom come and Your will be done (through me here and now) on earth, as it is in Heaven." However, they would not stop there. Missional disciples would be called to invite their neighbors around them to come and experience redemption as well. In short, they were to continue to follow in Jesus' footsteps and to continue to do what He has started until the day when Jesus returns and fully establishes God's Reign again.

Missional disciples are called to engage in actions and tasks, pursuing the goals that God the Father, Himself desired to see fulfilled: 1) that humanity would more fully live into a loving, intimate family relationship with God and neighbors; 2) that they would more fully embrace the strength, grace, vision, and guidance that God gives to empower them to work with Him to bring justice, righteousness, beauty, and order into their spheres of influence; 3) that they would more fully engage in the redemptive task of inviting their neighbors to submit to the reign of God and become members of His divine family.

So what might the fulfillment of such missional goals look like when lived out? In other words, how might one better understand what the foundational elements of God's Mission are so that missional disciples might be most effectively trained and raised up in such a way that the *Mission Dei* is fulfilled?

In this study, the above concepts are grouped into three categories of foundational missional goals. First is God's goal of creating a family—the missional goal of Relationship. Second is God's goal of rightly caring for all He has made—the missional goal of Stewardship. Third, God's desire to restore Creation to her original intent and purpose—the missional goal of Redemption. The original tasks of multiplication and being a witness, reflected in Genesis, will be incorporated into two of the larger goals referenced above. As will likely become evident, the three categories that follow are imposed and as such are not truly rigid or as clear-cut as some might like them to be. They are often fluid and interconnected as all reflect the singular mission and heart of God. However, there is value in at least attempting to organize themes and goals into these categories to promote reflection and study.

Missional Tasks

Examining the three larger categories of missional tasks cited above, Relationship tasks were the first cluster of tasks that God ordained. Relationship tasks include the worship of God—loving God with one's whole mind, heart, soul, and strength. Worship is not narrowly identified as singing songs, as it is (unfortunately) thought of in many Western churches today. Rather, it is, as Apostle Paul expresses in Romans 12, the spiritual act of living in conformity (incarnationally) with God's will in everything that is done, said, valued, desired, thought and pursued. Certainly singing praise songs,

absorbing the scriptures, to get to know God and His character more, and praying in conversation with God to draw closer and into a deeper intimacy with Him are included in this larger definition of Worship. Other examples include participation in individual and communal spiritual disciplines as well as participation in rituals and memorial celebrations. All of these aid the growth of a disciple into deeper relationship with the Father. Fellowship and community/culture building are a relational task entrusted to missional disciples. One concrete aspect of fellowship and loving one's neighbor is the sacred task of "bearing one another's burdens." This task will be examined in more detail below.

Stewardship tasks are the second grouping of missional tasks which flow from God's heart and desire for humanity and His Creation. An example of a Stewardship task is the providing of an incarnational witness of what God is like through the living out of righteousness. Another set of examples is the serving and blessing of one's neighbors, giving and sacrificing to care for them, and caring for the "neighborhood" in which they live. Stewardship tasks include the responsibility of intercessory prayer, intervening on behalf of others, and presenting their needs before God. Finally, such tasks include creating beauty, justice, and order where previously there was ugliness and despair, oppression, and chaos. These tasks, when missional disciples actively engage in them, reveal to the larger world the currently obscure Kingdom of God, and they also alert others to the coming reign of God. Further, such tasks engaged in by disciples, work to stir a curiosity and hunger within observers to know more about this Reign and Kingdom, which leads in turn to an opportunity to expression of the redemptive tasks.

Redemptive tasks are the final category of missional tasks this study will examine. A key redemptive task of the missional disciple is evangelism or the invitation to submit under God's Reign and become a family member of His Kingdom. This invitation is intended to accompany the stewardship tasks addressed above, and it leads to a second redemptive task. Mentoring and disciple making are the natural outgrowth of invitation. Those who respond to the disciple's offer of joining the family of God must learn how to live within the structure and boundaries of the new family setting. They must be taught what is expected of responsible family members. They must be nurtured and guided so as to become participating members of God's household. Finally, authoritative prayers prayed by Kingdom subjects serve to limit the effects of evil and reveal the power and character of God. God's adversary is constantly trying to counter and oppose the work of God and redirect humans away from God's Mission. A significant task of what missional disciples are called to is opposing the opposer via God-directed, authoritative prayer which includes (but is not limited to) the work of casting out of demons that Jesus and His disciples engaged in.

Each of these three larger categories of missional tasks—Relational, Stewardship, and Redemptive— will be examined in further detail in this chapter.

Biblical Foundations

The goal of God, in the beginning, was to enjoy fellowship and intimacy (companionship) and community with and among people. So God's goal was that humanity would receive love from Him and return it and in doing so that people would also learn to receive love and give love to one another. God intended from the beginning

to create a family that He could share life with. This was Eden, before the Fall, and this will be the "new earth" united to the "new heaven" of Revelation. Loving God and loving others—the primary relational missionary task—becomes the wellspring of missional action as well as the benchmark that directs and defines it.

The Mission of God without attachment to this goal/end is meaningless. It takes on meaning only in relation to the goal of God—the vision and dream of God for humanity's future. The mission of God is the means by which He accomplishes His end. If believers do not keep this focus firmly before them, the temptation will be to redefine "mission" as any number of other things. But any work on the believer's part which does not lead people into greater love and unity with God and others, regardless of what it may be and what other good it may seem to accomplish, cannot properly be identified as the Mission of God. God calls people to engage in His Mission with Him. That faithfulness in mission can be expressed by means of engaging in missional activity within relational, stewardship and redemptive tasks.

Old Testament Foundation Themes

God's mission was laid out even before the Fall: "Let us Make Humanity in our image, in the likeness of God create them. Let them increase, multiply and fill the earth. Let them govern/rule, care for and steward the earth" (Gen. 1.26-28). Inherent in the initial call of humanity was the notion of going forth. In order to fulfill the requirement of God to fill the earth, more than simply multiplying was necessary, spreading out was as well. As bearers of God's likeness, God's love, beauty, righteousness, justice, and holiness would fill the earth as humanity spread out into all the world. In spreading out, humans would have the opportunity to engage in activities that brought the wild nature of

Creation into order so that its full potential might be realized. In a sense, this was a foreshadowing of the redemptive task that humanity would later engage in on a much larger scale. This aspect of the original mission of God reflects the call to Stewardship that would later be expressed by missional disciples by engaging in stewardship tasks.

The Fall modified God's original mission, though not foundationally. The goal was still that God's character, love, holiness, and beauty might be seen, expressed, and experienced everywhere through His community of people. It was also crucial to God that this community of humanity might experience true relationship with Him and with each other. After sin entered the world, a necessary precursor of reconciliation and redemption was added to the mix as part of the process by which God's Mission would be fulfilled. People were still called to multiply and spread out, carrying the character, justice, love, and glory of God with them. Now they also needed to be redeemed. Having been redeemed they would in turn redeem what had been corrupted by sin. This is the foundation of redemptive missional tasks.

Humanity's reclamation started fitfully with Noah as God 'wiped the slate clean' in an effort to start fresh. However, this erasure of structures and systems was not enough. Structures and systems sustain and perpetuate sin, evil, and suffering, isolating people from one another and from God and hindering the fulfillment of the Mission of God. But the real source of alienation, and the reason those structures and systems continue to oppress and isolate today, is not found in the inherent evil of systems themselves but in the inherent sinfulness of the human heart. The story of Noah proves that more than the forms must be addressed and more than the systems and structures. The core of who humans are must be changed at the level of identity. For the Mission of

God to be fulfilled, there must be an essential restoration of the Image of God in people. Redemption of the individual must take place before redemptive tasks can be engaged.

The next logical step in the *Missio Dei* was to start with the redemption of an individual, Abram. God chose him, called him, and sent him. Abram was sent out from his place of former identity—his home, family connections and support, friends, property and work, his religion and history and traditions—to go out to a place of God's later revealing. Abraham became, not just the Father of Nations, but the Father of Missions. He embodied 'sentness' as he responded to the call of God to participate with God in His divine Mission.

More than just one individual was needed to effect the kind of transformation that God's mission envisioned. One was a start, but more were needed to fulfill this Great Commission to fill the earth with His true Image and engage in missional tasks that would bring redemption and restore right relationships between God, others, and the created order. In other words, for the Mission of God to be realized, and to see humanity engaging in both the stewardship tasks and relational tasks that God envisioned for humanity, a collective people needed to be secured that could engage in redemptive tasks.

This kind of redemptive missional community was also desired by God because God's very Image, God's nature as Trinity, is community. As Genesis 1:26 reads, "Let us create man in *our* Image." The one Abraham had to become more than a solitary friend of God, more than a man of great faith. He must become the father of faith, the father of many friends of God, and the founder of a community that would be transformed toward the likeness of God, demonstrating God's character in a community that carries out the three primary missional tasks to re-introduce the rest of humanity to God and His

Mission. The Hebrews would become an alternative community, a model of what God's missional people was supposed to look like to provide an inviting option to the remainder of humanity that still needed to rejoin God in His Mission.

The Hebrews were called to set themselves apart as holy unto the LORD for the purpose of fulfilling their God-given missional tasks. However, rather than separating themselves merely from the moral uncleanness of the peoples around them, Israel separated themselves entirely: culturally, religiously, spiritually, and relationally. While some of this may have been necessary to preserve the Image of the Holiness of God, it thwarted the Image of God's love. Their deep call of 'sentness', which their father Abraham embraced, they rejected.

The prophets were sent by God, primarily to call His people back to the Image and Mission that they had been called to fulfill. Jonah serves as an anomaly to that pattern, being sent by God to prophesy to a foreign people. Jonah is an example of God's Missional heart for the nations, albeit an unwilling one, as he continued the trend of humanity's stubborn resistance to God's desire to send people out to bring redemption, restoration, and reconciliation to all. God called Jonah to "Go to the great city of Nineveh" (Jon. 1.2). Rather than going to whom God wanted to send him, Jonah ran away from the LORD (Jon. 1.3), essentially retreating from the Mission of God and his missional tasks. God patiently called Jonah back, using a storm and a whale. God convinced Jonah to cooperate with Him to reach the people of Nineveh that needed to be redeemed and reconciled. In the end, Jonah had physically cooperated with the Mission of God, but he had not embraced the vision and heart of God, though Jonah did personally recognize God's Missional heart and vision. The text states, "Oh Lord, is this

not what I said when I was still at home? I knew you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jon. 4.2). The Lord makes it clear to Jonah that He is concerned about not only His chosen people Israel but also about Israel's enemies. This is a vision that Jonah was not able to wrap his mind around, and one that most of humanity has a difficult time with even today, as the average tribe seeks to co-opt God to serve their own particular mission in life rather than submitting to His Mission.

Some hope for humanity might be found in the rest of the story of Jonah. Though the Scriptures never record a change of heart or vision for Jonah, that Jonah never returned to his native Israel, and was buried there just outside of Nineveh in a memorial tomb (Nebi Yunus) with great honor, revered by the local populace, may indicate that he did finally catch God's missional vision and heart and spent the rest of his life ministering to the people of that area. Regardless of whether Jonah finally embraced God's Mission to redeem and reconcile humanity or simply died there in his stubborn resistance against that Mission, his story highlights God's plans and goals for all of humanity. God would send His people to engage in a mission of redemption, restoration, and reconciliation to all the peoples of the earth. By definition, the people of God are *always* a sent people. By virtue of being connected with God and His Mission, they are called to engage in both the original missional tasks that God entrusted to people: a faithful stewardship of Creation and engagement in genuine relationship and loving God and others in concrete and practical ways, as well as the post-corruption tasks related to the redemption of Creation that God desires to bring about.

New Testament Foundational Themes

Normally, with a review of New Testament themes, one might begin with the life of Jesus as the ultimate model of One who embodies and expresses the Mission of God Incarnate. However, both John's gospel and Mark's gospel begin with Jesus' forerunner, John the Baptist, who offers an important picture of principles that are foundational to humanity's ability to fulfill the Mission of God and their call of God to engage in missional tasks. If the end goal of God is to be connected to and united with humanity so that people might know God in the same way that He knows people (being redeemed and transformed as a result of this revelation/knowledge), then the Mission of God is to see this realized.

John the Baptist presents concrete ways of "preparing the way" for God to draw near so that humanity can be connected to God and come to really know Him. The precursor to this relationship is repentance—turning away from that path and direction that the worldly, anti-God systems offer and turning towards God's alternative path and ways. John goes on to speak of "producing fruit (action) in keeping with repentance" (Matt. 3.8). In other words, John advocates engaging in *right action*, as defined by God in the scriptures, as a precursor necessary to prepare one's self to enter into the Mission of God. This makes perfect sense, if "Justice and Righteousness are the foundation of [His] Throne" (Ps. 89.14). If God's reign, kingdom, and character are revealed in the presence of righteousness (defined as individual moral and spiritual rightness) and in the presence of justice (defined as community rightness), then God's Mission is more concretely fulfilled and His end goal realized to the degree that His human agents engage in actions and expressions of righteousness and justice.

When individuals repent and act in morally and spiritually "right" ways, God's Mission moves forward toward fulfillment. As communities repent and engage concretely in actions and expressions of justice, God's Mission moves forward toward fulfillment. These are, expressions of the missional tasks mentioned earlier: redemptive, relational, and stewardship tasks assigned by God that He aims to use to further His mission as they are expressed through people.

God uses human agents to fulfill His Mission. Human agents must respond to God in order to be used by Him to do this. According to John, repentance is the means by which fallen humans reengage with God to begin to do this. This kind of individual and communal expression leads to both a deeper connectedness with God and to a deeper revelation of who God is and what His desires are for humanity. In other words, repentance that leads to a concrete expression of both righteousness and justice leads toward the fulfillment of the Mission of God.

Jesus, as the second Adam, lived out the mission of God and continued to reveal God's unchanging model of mission. First, Jesus was *sent* from heaven. He left His natural home in order to enter into a different world to reveal God's love and call to the world. Jesus was called to 'multiply and fill the earth' with the Image of God, just as Adam had been, though this multiplication would be spiritual as opposed to biological. But to secure these goals, Jesus had to first provide a way to restore humanity to the Image and likeness of God, so that the original intent of God could be potentially reached: that the glory of God (His character and action) could spread and fill the earth via people made in His Image and likeness. Then Jesus would extend the call to go and fill the earth afresh by way of The Great Commission: "As you are going [inherently

implying a spreading out that is assumed in the very nature of being created human], make disciples" (Matt. 28.19). Jesus fulfilled the relational missional tasks that God had assigned to humanity by rightly relating to God and others. He fulfilled the stewardship tasks by promoting justice and righteousness within the community. He also fulfilled the redemptive missional tasks of God's mission by working to overcome sin and alienation in those around Him, empowering people to be reconciled to God.

Jesus' first offspring, His family of disciples, would become the foundation of a new community of missionally sent ones. They would also pick up the original commission of Israel to be separate/holy and yet be witnesses to the world: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. As You have *sent* Me into the world, I have *sent* them" (John 17.16, 18 emphasis mine). Pentecost multiplied this calling and potential fulfillment exponentially. The Spirit empowered a growing number of disciples to fulfill God's Mission. By becoming a people that are being restored to the nature and calling of the first humans, the Church is a people that embodies the Image of God and spreads out into the world to reveal Him to others.

John's Revelation refers to the consummation of the current age, where God comes once again to live and walk among His people as He did in the Garden of Eden. The end of the book reflects God's plan and purpose—the creation of a place where there will be no separation between God and humans, where relationship that God's missional agents are called to strive towards—will finally be perfected. It is expressed as a time and place where all will be brought together in love, holiness, and unity, a place where all will finally reflect the glory of God and nothing will contradict the likeness of God. It is

described as a place where all that can be will finally be redeemed, restored, and reconciled, and the rest will be removed from Creation forever.

Peter's reflection on this time also sums up well the missional heart and vision of God: "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3.9). Redeeming humanity and the Created Order from the corruption of sin and death is one of God's primary missional goals. For this reason, God calls His people to become agents of redemption and engage with Him in tasks that enable both people and systems to be redeemed for His purposes. God is a missionary God. He sends His people to fulfill His Mission of redeeming, restoring, and reconciling the entire world back to Him that all may dwell with Him, basking in and reflecting His Image and Glory and resting in the perfect peace that flows out of living in right relationship with Him, one another, and all of Creation. As a result, God calls His people to be a missionary people. The Church has been charged with fulfilling the Mission of God, expressed in relational, stewardship and redemptive tasks.

Insights Drawn from the Biblical Themes

Relevant observations from the above review of the biblical accounts, include:

1) God persistently calls His people to engage with Him in His Mission. This engagement includes calling people to step out of their comfort zones, to not allow themselves to become so enamored with their own tribe, customs, and traditions that they fail to move out into other tribes, and to take God's character and message with them. For those seeking to encourage God's people to faithfully step into God's Mission, a consistent and persistent calling of others to fulfill the *Missio Dei* must always be in the

forefront of missional activity. To persistently call others to join God in His Mission is to faithfully reflect the Image of the Father. Two obstacles to the fulfillment of God's Mission are highlighted here. Agents of God's mission do not fulfill their potential when they are ignorant of their calling of being sent and when they allow their desire for comfort to override their mission.

2) As a result of sin, redemption was a necessary precursor for fulfilling the Mission of God. It would be impossible for humanity to be sent out to fill the earth with God's glory if the *Imago Dei* within them was so marred by sin as to be virtually invisible. It would be impossible for humanity to be sent out to connect with and reveal God's love to those who were different from themselves if they did not genuinely love them with God's heart of love. Sin brought about a condition of each individual heart that had to be reckoned with before any progress could be made toward humans being used as agents to fulfill the Mission of God. Another obstacle to the fulfillment of the *Missio Dei* is reflected here. Individuals resist cooperating with God in His Mission as a result of selfish sinfulness.

3) A community of transformed people is necessary to effectively fulfill God's Mission to reveal His love and character to the world and fill the earth with His Glory. God understood that individual transformation was not enough. Not only does God desire that individuals be redeemed, God understands that whole systems need to be addressed, redeemed, and transformed for the sake of the Mission. Without systemic, community-wide change, individuals would eventually be dragged back into the mire of sinful corruption. As Paul suggests, the systems of the world threaten to conform all people to their image. God's people must be transformed by being renewed in the ways of God

(Rom. 12.1-2). Community was God's answer to this problem, a new system that would assist in redemption and character transformation. A redeemed and transformed community would allow God's character to be sustained more fully among the individuals within that community so they might more fully reveal His character to those who were not yet part of that community. Therefore, another obstacle to the fulfillment of God's Mission is the presence of systemic sinfulness and evil that hinders individuals from embracing stewardship, redemptive, and relationship tasks.

4) God also empowered this new community with His very Spirit. The Spirit supports and upholds the kind of culture that facilitates real transformation needed to fulfill His Mission. Pentecost allowed the incarnation of God that was initiated in the coming of Christ to be possible for the rest of God's people. This was revolutionary. Whereas Israel had instruction and accountability, the Body of Christ has power to truly change and respond to the call of God in ways Israel never did. Now, the character of God can literally be present within individuals and the larger alternative community of Christ. In turn, those individuals and that community can now reveal God's character to the rest of the world in ways that would not have otherwise been possible. Human hearts, empowered by the heart of God, can forgive and love their enemies, blessing those who persecute and spitefully use them. This is something that is beyond human capacity and enables the witness of God's people now to a degree that was impossible before the coming of His Spirit. The action of sending the Spirit to empower His agents of mission overcomes another obstacle in humanity: inherent weakness. Weak wills, a bent toward fearfulness, character flaws, a tendency toward isolation, and prideful independence are

aspects of weakness in humanity that present an obstacle to the fulfillment of God's goals and tasks. The empowering of the Holy Spirit was God's way of addressing this obstacle.

5) God reveals His end goal to His people, a vision of the future, to stir imaginations and draw people into the passion of His Mission via John's Revelation.

God's uses scripture to paint a picture for His people of what He desires to accomplish through them. These depictions are indispensable to the process of fulfilling His Mission. Without a working knowledge of the scriptures as a guide and blueprint to what God is looking to create and also how to get there in the ways that He deems appropriate, the community of God might succumb to fear or discouragement in the light of opposition or in light of what appears to be a lack of progress/success. This gift of vision works to overcome the natural obstacles of fear and discouragement in the lives of missional agents, empowering them to continue to pursue missional tasks.

Theological Foundations

Missionary and author, Greg Okesson notes, "We (Christians) have been trained to do theology privately, in an academic, antiseptic environment, but people are doing their own theology in public life: experiential, ordinary, mystical, embodied...where spirituality is whatever works" (Okesson, class lecture, August 10). Beliefs, especially beliefs about the spiritual world, profoundly impact daily behavior. For this reason, it is critical for the church to embrace a holistic and biblical theology with regards to a theology of mission. A healthy, biblical, and holistic theology of mission will impact values, choices, and actions and therefore impact missional activity in the average believer's life. It is important to examine some foundational theological ideas to reflect upon how they speak to and inform the daily activity of missional disciples.

Missio Dei

Richard Bauckham notes that God the Father always seems to choose "the least of these" to cooperate with Him in fulfilling His redemptive purposes, and God constantly moves from the particular to the universal (49). Abraham is chosen to bless the nations. A Jewish carpenter and His Galilean followers would eventually carry that blessing to the ends of the earth. God starts with one localized individual or people, calling them to be the agents He works through. God then, using those agents to fulfill His Mission, moves out to the universal from there.

However, becoming faithful agents of God's Mission requires understanding God's Mission. In the West, among even church leaders, missional understanding has become cloudy at best. The lack of a holistic and biblical theology of "mission" in America today has created a misperception among God's people. The notion of *mission* has become the victim of severe reductionism in the modern Western church. For example, mission has been re-defined as a *strategy* of the church rather than *core identity*. Mission has been understood to be a sacred task performed by Christian special-ops soldiers (missionaries) and undertaken over there, somewhere, as opposed to being understood as the work of all of God's people. Westerners have also wrongly associated God's Mission as merely a reference to activities that churches engage in. By adding an *s* to the end of the term *mission*, Christians also label various church activities and projects as what they do for God rather than understanding *mission* as what God is doing for all people as His purposes unfold.

Missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, in contradiction of these reductions, states, "Mission is concerned with nothing less than the completion of all that God has begun to

do in the creation of the world and of humankind. Its concern is not sectional but total and universal" (768-69). Michael Frost adds:

Mission cannot be rightly understood at all, if we start with the church at the center of the definition. Rather, the term can only rightly be understood by beginning with the universal, divine call of God: a call to participate in alerting the world to the present, and still coming, reign of God through Christ. (277)

This reign is revealed via the three categories of missional tasks identified earlier. By redeeming individuals, communities, and systems, God's Spirit restores the capacity to rightly relate and steward as God originally intended.

In other words, God desires to redeem *all* that was lost or corrupted through Adam's original sin, bringing restoration of life and reconciliation with Him. This aspect of God's Mission leads to restoring to humanity the intimate connection with Himself that people desperately need, and then leads people to relate rightly to and steward properly creation around them. The Creator's mission is broader than mere redemption. It encompasses bringing *all* of Creation into harmony with Him again. God seeks to accomplish this relational goal through humanity and specifically through humanity's submission to His mission. This is where discipleship fits in. Discipleship aims to holistically form human beings so that they might be able to receive, understand, and obey the Father to join Him in fulfilling His mission.

Imago Dei/Trinity

One important theological concept related to the Mission of God is the centrality of the *Imago Dei*. It could be argued that this is the most important aspect necessary for anyone desiring to cooperate with God in the fulfilling of His Mission. So central to the

fulfillment of the *Missio Dei* is this foundational building block that the Mission of God cannot and will not be fulfilled without a recovery of the Image of God in humanity—a redemption of and transformation of character. In the beginning, God created humanity in His Image, with the goal of seeing His glory and character "fill the earth" via humanity (Gen. 1.28; Hab. 2.14). God intended for people bearing God's Image to spread throughout the Creation, stewarding all God had made. This would allow God's love, justice, righteousness, and goodness—His character—to be manifested everywhere.

This was the Mission of God: to see His justice and righteousness fully manifested in His Creation so that He might also live among those He had created. God longed to have fellowship with those He had created as evidenced by how He had walked with Adam in the cool of the day (Gen. 3.8). God proclaims His intent to once again live in the midst of His people once the old order, corrupted by sin and death, is eradicated (Rev. 21.3).

Unfortunately, this plan was hijacked for a time as Satan convinced the first humans to rebel against God. Now sin and corruption fill the earth more than God's perfect Image. The Psalmist writes, "Righteousness and Justice are the foundation of [God's] throne" (Ps. 89.14). These character qualities are the pre-requisites of God's Kingdom. Therefore, they are pre-requisites for His presence being manifested on earth. Without these character qualities being evidenced in His people, the presence of God could not safely draw near as He desired to. The LORD shared this reality with Moses in the process of bringing His people out of Egypt, "I will send an angel before you...But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way" (Exod. 33.2-3). In order for God to truly fulfill His missional goal of being

rightly related to His people in the way He desires, the character of God, the *Imago Dei*, must be present among His people.

Traces of the *Imago Dei*, as marred as it is in humans, can yet be seen wherever people live. It is this original character of God, woven into the fabric of humanity, that Jesus came to redeem, reclaim, and restore. "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation: the old has gone and the new has come. All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ," proclaims Paul (2 Cor. 5.17-18). God's original plan for humanity was for people to reflect His glory. It is for this reason that any kind of real missional activity must flow out of the missional character of God. The *Imago Dei*, being genuinely restored, bit-by-bit, daily disciples via the work of Christ and the Spirit and through cooperation with Christ and His Spirit. Author, Marva Dawn affirms:

We don't merely assent to doctrinal propositions or "cherish a dream," but we constantly enact the new reality of the Kingdom that we perceive has broken into our lives. We *behave* as the new creation, for each of us is a new person, whose citizenship has been changed irrevocably. (2669, emphasis mine)

Theological Anthropology/Hamartiology

When considering the agents that God has chosen to fulfill His Mission, one must wonder whether God made a wise choice. Human beings have not been reliable when it comes to choosing God's best over what seems to be in their own self-interest. Sin and rebellion play a serious role in the failure of humanity to effectively fulfill the *Missio Dei*. Chief among such rebellion is the tendency humans have to pursue idols rather than rightly relate to God. There is a real danger faced by God's people of falling prey to self-pursuit and the idolatries that accompany it (Brueggemann 46, Escobar 243; Hirsch &

Catchim 227; Holt 301; Scandrette 227). The temptation to compromise with the idols that offer security or comfort is strong and presents a significant obstacle to the fulfillment of God's Mission. God's people have been called to be living examples of a community that offers an alternative to the worldly systems of control, but all too often this has not been the case. Alan and Debra Hirsch put it best when they say, "To bring an alternative message, we must...live an alternative life" (1787). The Church, God's alternative community today, often does *not* live as an alternative example for the rest of the world. There is a great difference between the view of people toward the Christ of the gospels and their view of Christians (Escobar 94). Many authors reviewed for this study noted serious shortcomings in the Western church's ability to effectively fulfill the mission of God, due to reliance on the unholy trinity of knowledge, wealth and might.

A reliance on knowledge in many churches has led to a false conviction that right belief is king and faithful action is less consequential (Sheldrake 7). However, it is not orthodoxy (right thinking/ knowledge) alone that reveals the alternative Kingdom of God to the world. Orthopraxy (right practice/action) must also be present (Brown 44; Escobar 68; Holt 343; Scandrette 1373). Real "knowing" according to the scriptures is achieved only through participation in life with God and others, not merely the acquisition of information. Further, *practice* of faith leads inevitably to failures as well as successes, instilling a sense of humility in the disciple, and countering pride that often rises from merely accumulating knowledge.

A reliance upon money has also created many issues in the church's quest to fulfill the mission of God. Some authors directly referenced Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6.24, "No one can serve two masters", while others talked about the ways in which a

dependence on wealth leads God's people away from Him and His purposes (Brueggemann 71; Hirsch & Hirsch 3572; Holt 873; Scandrette 1967). Thomas Aquinas' encounter with Pope Innocent II is famously quoted on this point:

Entering the presence of Innocent II, before whom a large sum of money was spread out, the Pope observed, "You see, the Church is no longer in that age in which she said, 'Silver and gold have I none.'"—"True, holy father," replied Aquinas; "neither can she any longer say to the lame, 'Rise up and walk.'" (qtd. in Bartleby)

The final member of the unholy trinity has also proven to be a snare for God's people and a hindrance to fulfilling God's Mission. Might, whether that is expressed in terms of literal, physical strength, manpower, influence, or some other power-based leverage, also promises to assist people in the control of others or situations around them. Humans fear change and the loss of control and so strive to gain power in various ways to maintain control. By contrast, living out the mission of God and revealing the Kingdom to others means letting go of power and control (Escobar 172; Hirsch & Catchim 2210). Jesus became the penultimate model of dependence and weakness when He was born as an infant. Hirsch writes, "We become truly human in a way that conforms to the image of Christ when we give up our sense of power and control" (Hirsch & Hirsch 3372). At a communal level, the church is able to live out this Christ-like example by "diffusing power," finding ways to offer "leadership, value and voice" to all people (Escobar, 153). Too often, however, the church has sought to maintain control and concentrate power in the hands of a few rather than diffuse it into the Body as a whole. The people of God have an opportunity to demonstrate an alternative to the ways, systems, and structures of

this world. In other words, God's people have an opportunity to redeem communities and structures. In order to do so, there must be a willingness to let go of control and resist the temptation to fall back on sinful idolatries of wealth, knowledge and power.

Pneumatology/Sanctification

At the end of His life, Jesus pulled His disciples aside to remind them that, "apart from Me you can do nothing" (John 15.5b). Later He states, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you to be My witnesses" (Acts 1.8). Jesus, Himself, relied upon the Spirit of God to empower Him to fulfill God's Mission when He walked the earth (cf. Matt. 3.16). He was not remiss in teaching His disciples that they would have to do the same. The role of the Spirit is to empower and enliven the Body of Christ to fulfill the Mission of God. The Apostle Paul states that it is "God who works in you, both to will and to act according to fulfill His good purpose" (Phil. 2.13). Paul might have just as easily shared: "It is God who works in you...to fulfill His Mission." Fulfilling the Mission of God without the power and presence of the Holy Spirit is simply impossible. This begins with the reality that the *Imago Dei* within each of person, what one might refer to as *Christlikeness*, cannot more fully emerge without the *Spiritus Dei*, the Spirit of God.

Sanctification, becoming more practically righteous before God in thought, word, attitude and action, is one of the primary reasons that the Holy Spirit was sent to the Church by the Father and the Son. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," shares Paul (Gal. 5.22). The Holy Spirit was sent by Jesus to make His agents of Mission holy. Francis of Assisi states:

It is no use walking anywhere to preach unless our walking is our preaching...As for me, I desire this privilege from the Lord, that never may I have any privilege from man, except to do reverence to all, and to convert the world by obedience to the Holy Rule rather by example than by word (qtd. in Arpin-Ricci).

In order to fully empower the witness of God's Church to fulfill God's Mission, the Holy Spirit was sent to catalyze actual holiness in God's people so that now, according to Paul, "the righteous requirements of the Law might be met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8.4).

Further, living according to the leading of the Spirit means following where the Spirit leads and obeying what He calls God's people to do. The Spirit guides the church into adventure, risk, and bold mission. As people trust in the leading of God through the Spirit, they know with confidence that they are not alone and that what they do will accomplish the result that the Father desires. As Paul reassures believers, "A person reaps what he sows," and for that reason, "we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Gal. 6.7, 9). Therefore, believers can boldly advance under the Spirit's guidance and act in His power to fulfill the Mission of God. Further they can continue, despite not seeing results, because they trust in God's vision of the future that He will bring the growth. Finally, they are able to act boldly because they know that, though they are unwise, impotent, and unable to do much good for God's Kingdom, He is able to do abundantly more than they can ask or even imagine. As they listen to God and rely upon His Spirit all things are possible. Not only does redemption become possible, first for the self, and then for others via the ministry of the Spirit, but people are also empowered through the Spirit to engage in the relational and stewardship missional tasks.

Ecclesia

Ekklesia is a word made up of two other Greek words, *ek* and *kaleo*, which literally mean “out of” and “called” respectively. The word *ekklēsia* itself means “a group of people that is called out.” By using this word, Jesus is communicating that as rightful King and ruler of God’s Kingdom He has summoned all who will respond. Jesus has put out the call for all who would gather under His banner to fulfill His Mission.

One historical reference details some of the ways in which Greek city-states of the ancient world would use the *ekklēsia* gathering. On occasion, the local rulers of a city-state might become corrupt or oppressive of the people under their authority. The people could gather as an *ekklēsia* to collectively agree to no longer participate in the governmental structure that was controlled by such people (Lambert 651). This paints a picture of what the Head of the Church is expecting of those that make up His Body. Jesus calls His people out of the world’s systems, ways of thinking, values, and pursuits. He calls His own to reject those values and systems and no longer participate in the corruption and sin that are found everywhere around them. He calls His people to gather together and collectively stand against what is wrong or oppressive. In other words, Jesus calls His people to be redeemed and then become proper stewards over His Creation with Him. This is what it means to be His Church.

The term church has been defined in many ways over the years. Some definitions have hindered the fulfilling of the Mission of God. In the book, *Missional Church*, Darrell Guder notes a key historical shift in the basic definition of the word church that has profoundly shaped and I would add 'dangerously' shaped, the self-understanding of Western Christianity ever since. Missional author, David Bosch, also shares this insight:

By emphasizing marks of the true church as 'wherever the gospel is rightly preached, the sacraments rightly administered and church discipline rightly exercised' [the Reformers] narrowed the definition of what it meant to be church to "a place where." (80)

This redefinition shifts the meaning of Church from an organic model to an organizational model. It shifts the self-identity of the church from being primarily the Body of Christ, an incarnational and sent people, to church merely being "a place where" God's people could meet God or gather with each other for comfort, support, and instruction. The understanding this kind of language creates causes God's people to be ineffective in the fulfillment of the Mission of God. It even has potentially led God's people into idolatry. By allowing and eventually embracing this very different definition of the term church, a self-defining vision of reality has taken root in many congregations that is ultimately pagan at heart.

When historical paganism is examined, one of the key elements found in the belief system is that the deity is rooted to place. Adopting this view of reality leads to a particular perspective about God that limits divine authority, power, and influence to a specific location. A biblical view affirms that God's authority, power, and influence have no limitations and must necessarily then impact every aspect and area of life. Missional discipleship, in order to be truly effective, must address such issues.

The Church is not merely a group of people that occasionally gets together to do a few things in God's Name. The Church is the primary agent chosen by God to fulfill His mission of redeeming and reconciling all of Creation to Himself. Every member of the church is called to bring transformation everywhere they go and to all they encounter.

Every member of the church is called to engage in relational, stewardship, and redemptive tasks in cooperation with God to work towards fulfilling His Mission.

Missional Literature Reviewed

Missional disciples are called to pursue the goals that God the Father, Himself desired to see fulfilled: 1) that humanity would more fully live into a loving, intimate, family relationship with God and neighbors; 2) that they would more fully embrace the power, vision, and guidance that God gives to empower them to work with Him to bring justice, righteousness, beauty, and order into their spheres of influence; 3) that they would more fully engage in the redemptive task of inviting their neighbors to submit to the reign of God and become members of His divine family. So what might the fulfillment of such missional goals look like when lived out? In other words, how might believers better understand what the foundational elements of God's Mission are, so that missional disciples might be effectively trained and raised up in such a way that the *Mission Dei* is fulfilled?

The three categories of foundational missional goals that have been highlighted thus far are imposed by the researcher for organizational purposes. As such, they may not be as rigid or clear-cut as some might like them to be. They are often fluid and interconnected, as all reflect the singular mission and heart of God for people. However, there is value in at least attempting to organize themes and goals into these categories to promote reflection and study. Again, those three are: God's goal of creating a family—the missional goal of Relationship, God's goal of rightly caring for all He has made—the missional goal of Stewardship, and finally, God's desire to restore Creation to her original intent and purpose—the missional goal of Redemption. For the purposes of this

study, the original tasks of multiplication and being a witness will be incorporated into two of the larger goals referenced above. Humans can fulfill God's missional goals in these areas as they engage in Stewardship and Redemptive tasks.

Relationship tasks include worship of God—loving God with one's whole mind, heart, soul and strength. Worship is not to be narrowly identified as singing songs, as it is (unfortunately) thought of in many Western churches today. Rather, it is, as Paul expresses in Romans 12, the spiritual act of living in conformity (incarnationally) with God's will in everything that is done, said, valued, desired, thought, and pursued. Certainly singing praise songs, absorbing the scriptures, and praying in conversation with God to draw closer and into a deeper intimacy with Him are included in this larger definition of Worship, as would be participation in individual and communal spiritual disciplines, rituals, and memorial celebrations. All of these assist in the process of aiding growth of a disciple into deeper relationship with the Father that loves them. Further, fellowship, community, and culture building are relational tasks entrusted to missional disciples. One aspect of fellowship and loving one's neighbor is bearing one another's burdens.

Stewardship tasks for the missional disciple provide an incarnational witness of what God is like through living out of righteousness. Stewardship also includes the serving and blessing of one's neighbors, giving and sacrificing to care for them, and caring for the neighborhood in which they and the disciple live. Stewardship tasks include the responsibility of intercessory prayer—intervening on behalf of others and presenting their needs before God. Such tasks also include creating beauty, justice, and order where previously there was ugliness, despair, oppression, and chaos. These tasks,

when missional disciples actively engage in them, reveal to world the Kingdom of God and alert others around the disciple to the coming reign of God. Such tasks work to stir a curiosity and hunger within observers to know more about this Reign and Kingdom, which in turn leads to examination of the redemptive tasks.

The redemptive tasks of the missional disciple include evangelism/invitation to submit under God's Reign and become a family member of His Kingdom. This invitation is intended to accompany the stewardship tasks addressed above. It leads to a second redemptive task. Mentoring and disciple making are the natural outgrowth of invitation. Those who respond to the disciple's offer of joining the family of God must learn how to live within the structure and boundaries of the new family setting. They must be taught what is expected of responsible family members. Then they must be nurtured and guided to become participating members of God's household. Finally, authoritative prayers prayed by Kingdom subjects serve to limit the effects of evil and reveal the power and character of God. God's adversary is constantly trying to counter and oppose the work of God and redirect humans away from God's Mission. A significant task of what missional disciples are called to is opposing the opposer via God-directed, authoritative prayer, which today still includes (but is not limited to) the casting out of demons. It would be useful to examine these in further detail.

Relationship Tasks

Significance of the Spirit

The primary foundation for redeeming and transforming human beings into agents of God's Mission, as well as creating and sustaining the community through which the

Mission of God is fulfilled, is to cooperate with God and remain in the presence of God.

As Kenneth Ross writes:

Rather than mission being about the aggrandizement of any community or interest group, its true nature is understood in terms of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which brings the transforming love of God into the life of the world. Our calling is to discern where and how the Holy Spirit is working – and to join in. (90)

It is no coincidence that Jesus did not begin publicly fulfilling the Mission of God until receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nor is it a coincidence that Jesus commanded His disciples to "wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about" (Acts 1.4-5) before they began to fulfill the Mission of God after his ascension.

The Mission of God was never intended to be fulfilled without God. It was intended to be fulfilled with Him, walking and working alongside Him by relying upon both His guidance and His empowerment. Even Jesus said, "the son does nothing except what He sees the Father doing" (John 5.19). The significance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the fulfilling of the Mission of God cannot be overstressed. Without the power and presence of God manifested via the Holy Spirit, God's Mission cannot be carried forward. As Van Gelder and Zscheile write:

The Holy Spirit is the Christian way of talking about God's power and presence in the here and now. In this sense, the Spirit is the primary actor in God's mission today. From the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God acts to bring forth the world, to form people into community, and to call them into the adventure of God's mission (1146).

Jürgen Moltmann goes so far as to argue that God's mission is "nothing less than the sending of the Holy Spirit from the Father, through the Son, so that the world might not perish, but live" (271).

Based upon the biblical account, it would seem that there is nothing more essential to the fulfillment of the Mission of God than the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit, with the notable exception of the Incarnation of Christ. Volumes have been written about the significance of the Incarnation of Christ, especially with regard to how this sets the tone for God's people to model their lives and serve God and community. Yet there is an alarming lack of current missional literature on this topic. The vast majority of missional literature currently available focuses on strategies and techniques for engaging in missional activity or on effectively becoming a missional community and witness within a local given context. Such volumes have a great deal to offer in terms of stirring the imagination of members of the Body of Christ toward the fulfilling of the Mission of God, but they rarely address the foundational nature of how that Mission is directed and empowered by God's Spirit. As has been noted by missional thinker and author, Dwight Zscheile:

The Holy Spirit, whose role in creating and restoring community, is central to the biblical story and Christian teaching. The Holy Spirit is the agent of so much of the innovation that we find in the Bible— innovation that emboldens, encourages, and equips ordinary people for transformational witness. (171)

Fortunately, there are some emerging voices calling for this kind of focus. Chammah Kaunda, professor of Missiology at the University of KwaZulu, argues:

The missional position of life-giving African Pentecostalism...should be grounded in an affirmation that authentic transformation is the activity of the Holy Spirit because human ingenuity and innovativeness can never genuinely bring about the fullness of life for all. (324)

Kaunda recognizes that the model inherited from Western missionaries and church planters, a model that focuses primarily on human effort, knowledge, and strategies, has proven insufficient to the task of fulfilling the transformation Mission of God in local African contexts. The local church is designed by God to be a crucible for making [Holy Spirit empowered] disciples for social transformation (Cray 118), but this transformation is impossible to accomplish with human effort alone. While God's people certainly occupy a central role in the fulfillment of the *Missio Dei*, they do not occupy *the* central role. If the Mission of God is to embody the radical redemption and re-transformation of the entirety of Creation, then such a mission can only be accomplished under the direction and empowerment of the Holy Spirit of God.

Not only is the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit necessary for God's people to participate in the fulfillment of the Mission of God, the presence of the Holy Spirit is necessary to even enable God's people to recognize and take their place in the fulfillment of His Mission. In his doctoral research, John Freeland discovered that his control group experienced an increased awareness of missional opportunities around them as well as an increased sense of "being on mission with God" wherever they went (105).

The reality that must be addressed is that the very human agents which God intends to use as His agents to fulfill His Mission must themselves be radically

transformed before they are able to be used for such a monumental and culture-shifting task. Whole cultures cannot be transformed without the transformation of individual communities, and individual communities cannot be transformed without the transformation of individual residents within those communities. It is these individual agents of God's Mission that the heavenly Father wishes to use to bring about the fulfillment of His Mission of all-encompassing transformation. But this work cannot even begin, such agents will not even come to exist, without the transforming power and guidance of the Spirit of God, ever-present, among the people of God. As Zscheile writes:

If the primary challenges facing the church in its life and witness today are cultural, spiritual, and theological (not merely organizational, financial, institutional, or programmatic), we must attend carefully to what it might mean for us to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2.5), or to be "transformed by the renewing of your minds" (Romans 12.2). How do God's people experience the transformation of their minds so as to see, interpret, and experience the world in light of the triune God's presence and activity? Such a process involves learning through the work and influence of the Holy Spirit.

(957-58)

The starting point for those who desire to truly become agents used by God to fulfill His Mission must be an awareness of what the Spirit of God might want to bring forth, as opposed to beginning with preconceived plans that just need to be implemented properly and efficiently. This is because, as Woodward writes, "The church is not just another social organization or human institution. While it has organizational and institutional

dimensions, it is more than just the sum of these. The church is the creation of the Spirit" (62).

This is, ultimately, the nature of the Mission of God. His human agents cannot fulfill any aspect of such a mission apart from the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. No matter how many brilliant strategies, extravagant resources, or wealth of talent is employed, human effort alone will never be enough to accomplish what God has called His people to do with Him. The Global Board of Missions of the United Methodist Church has officially recognized this reality in a statement they put out in 2011. It states:

The strong emphasis on Spirit as the source and energizer of mission resonates with the United Methodist Church's Global Ministries which invokes the Holy Spirit as the moving force in the divine mission. There is assurance and hope through keeping the focus on ru'ach – Spirit, that the Spirit is always moving to sweep the Church into a new mission age. (General Board of Global Ministries, website)

This is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to His apostles at Pentecost, and this is why Jesus modeled a continual reliance upon the daily guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Wherever human beings begin in their desire and effort to cooperate with God in fulfilling His Mission, the Holy Spirit must have preeminence or the efforts will collapse in upon themselves and avail nothing. As Karecki writes:

Mission, then, is much more than the work we do; in itself it becomes a means of ongoing transformation of our own lives. Mission leads us into a more profound sharing in the paschal mystery of Christ. It makes possible a kenotic participation in this mystery of the humility of God made visible in Jesus the Christ as we

allow ourselves to be broken and poured out for others in the service of mission.

This kind of spirituality, which is not for the faint-hearted, can be embraced only through the work of the Holy Spirit. (192)

This reality then begs the question of how? How might an individual disciple come to be connected to the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit to become an effective agent in the fulfilling of God's Mission? If the above idea from Karecki is to be taken seriously. It mirrors the incarnational example of Jesus' and the early apostles' missional activity in the scriptures. The empowerment of the Holy Spirit enables the people of God to fulfill the mission of God. God's agents of mission are first Baptized into the Holy Spirit as Jesus was and then maintain that intimate connection via the development of an intimate and dependent relationship upon the Spirit of Christ. This leads to a second theme that emerged from the literature review which points the way forward toward building disciples that are able to act as effective agents of God's Mission.

Cooperation with God Leads to Incarnation of His Character

The key to acting in ways that move toward fulfilling the Mission of God is to imitate the One who set the standard for doing such: The Son of God. Therefore, becoming "like Jesus" is of paramount importance to all those who long to act as true agents of God's Mission. As noted above, the initial key to incarnational living is one's connection with the Spirit. Baptism into the Spirit initiates the process of empowerment that allows human individuals to become more like Jesus. But after this initial encounter with the Spirit of God, there must also be cooperation with God in allowing Him to redemptively reshape the individual agent's character, vision, purpose, desires, actions,

thoughts, relationships, and interactions in the world. Theologians over the years have often labeled this reshaping sanctification. Some call the process discipleship; while still others refer to it as growing in grace. Regardless of what it is called, the process of becoming more like Jesus is absolutely critical to the fulfilling of the Mission of God. In the economy of God, the end never justifies the means. Rather the means is the end. "God is far more interested in *who you are* than in *what you do*. We are human beings, not human doings" (Baker 147). The Mission of God is ultimately about redemption and transformation. Neither takes place without the initiation of God via the work of His Holy Spirit. Likewise, neither takes place without the responsive cooperation of the human agent being changed.

So what might be done from a human perspective to cooperate with God in the transformative process that leads one into the fulfillment of God's Mission? A review of current literature suggests that experiential incarnation happens in two different but equally important contexts: individual and communal contexts.

Mark Dunwoody, a leader of the Fresh Expressions revitalization movement in Britain, shares this insight regarding communal transformation into Christlikeness that then leads individuals within that community context toward the fulfillment of God's Mission:

Practices that have laid down sustainable pathways to maturity of new contextual churches throughout the ages include: (i) Making disciples who understand their active role in faith, and that this faith is permeable into all areas of their lives; (ii) creating worship that is relevant to the context in which the church operates; (iii) focusing on building a community of believers who hold fast to a sense of

belonging and acceptance of one another; and (iv) creating sustainable physical, emotional and spiritual structures that are healthy, life giving and have a positive approach to stewardship. (40)

In other words, creating a community culture that promotes opportunities for disciples to choose personal and relational health, responsible stewardship, meaningful worship, and dynamic faith—the kind of faith that impacts daily life choices and actions—is critical to fostering the development of effective agents of God's Mission. In order to build disciples that become missionary agents who in turn make more such disciples, the proper atmosphere/culture must be established. This atmosphere begins with opportunities to cooperate with God and experiencing God's presence, both at a personal level and at a communal level.

The Power of Communal Relationships

Just as garden plants thrive in the texture of abundant sunlight and rainwater, the texture in which discipleship thrives is family. Family on Mission is how we stop doing discipleship as a class, program, or curriculum, and start living it as a way of life. (Breen 160)

As noted in the biblical review, humans were created to be in connection. God made human beings to fully thrive when in right relationship with others. A healthy family atmosphere is the way God created all of humanity to learn (cf. Gen. 18.19; Deut. 4.9; 6.7; 11.19). So, this principle is grounded in the Created order. Further, the Bible is full of references to how an individual learns to live out their mission, both in understanding and practice, by witnessing the role model of those in community with them. Modern psychological research has confirmed the power of role modeling to

enhance understanding and endurance of behavior practice. Role models "act as behavioral models of the possible and they can act as inspirations...role models influence aspiration and goals by increasing associated expectancy and value that role aspirants attach to goals" (Morgenroth et al. 13). Paul commands the Corinthian believers to follow him, as he followed Christ. He calls them to emulate his lifestyle and missional action, goals, and values. This emulation is empowered all the more when an individual is surrounded by a like-minded community that shares the same values and practices: "assimilation toward an upward target is facilitated by a shared group membership" (Collins 52).

Relationship building is key to missional formation because God created human beings for relationship. As Alan Hirsch puts it, " Our deepest longings are to be in relationship with God and others" (Kindle loc. 3005). When relational intimacy is not taken seriously as a building block of spiritual and missional formation, the formation process is arrested, growth is stunted, and fulfillment of the Mission of God is impeded.

"Discipleship is the capacity to lovingly embody and transmit the life of Jesus, but we have tended to limit it to issues of personal spirituality" (Hirsch 144). Community is the best context for discipleship. It was never intended by God to be a strictly personal endeavor. Yet, in a Western individualistic context, this is exactly what has been made of spirituality and relationship with God. It is no coincidence that Jesus linked together the "two greatest commandments" of loving God and loving neighbor. The two were intended from beginning to go hand-in-hand. Right relationship with God must necessarily impact being rightly related to one's neighbor and vice versa. "More is at stake than our personal salvation. The gospel can't be limited to my personal healing and

wholeness and my salvation but must extend to the salvation of the whole world" (Hirsch 307).

To be rightly related to God and His Mission is discipleship, this must necessarily involve being rightly related to others around us, which ultimately leads to disciple making. To fail in discipleship and disciple making is to fail the primary mission God has entrusted to His family. There is no dualism in biblical discipleship. We have tended to limit [discipleship] to issues relating to our personal morality, thereby neglecting our missional involvement in the world. We come to know ultimate reality not via study or belief but by intimate personal involvement and interaction with it, hence the Hebrew term 'yada' for knowing God also was used to denote sexual relationships" (Hirsch 885). True worship (encountering God) wakes us up to the purposes of God in the world and calls us to live lives that actually show that we've awakened (Hirsch 1088).

N. T. Wright adds another important element to the understanding of the significance of relationships to missional discipleship. Not only must the fostering of relationships, occupy a premium position for those who are striving to build missional disciples but also the *restoration* of relationships must be a focus (1785). Inevitably, relationships come with misunderstanding, conflict, mistakes, failures, damaged trust, and hurt feelings. Even the premier missionary example of history, Paul the Apostle, was not immune to relational difficulty (cf. Acts 15.35-39). Therefore, if missional understanding, value, and action is to be not only fostered but to endure among disciples, setbacks, failures, and relational conflicts that threaten to derail that process must also be addressed and overcome.

Another key to growth in missional discipleship that takes place through the vehicle of personal and communal relationships is found in "bearing one another's burdens" particularly with reference to the overcoming of grief related to loss. Significant losses in life often cause people to get stuck emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. This can hinder or even prevent them from being able to move forward in all aspects of

life. "Unmourned loss and hurt is a barrier that prevents access to our deepest self" (Grassman, Soul Injury seminar).

Not only does unmourned loss hinder the disciple's ability to become all that God intended, powerful emotions of fear, anxiety, and anger that flow from unmourned loss and undealt with grief can emotionally cripple those who are seeking to love God and love neighbor. One cannot love one's neighbor, as God's mission requires, while at the same time hating oneself. Nor can disciples love God and others when they close their hearts to protect themselves from the pain of further hurt, loss, and disappointment. Honestly addressing the pain of loss and healing through hurt and loss by genuinely mourning and grieving is critical to the missional disciple's walk. As a community of faith, disciples are called to bear one another's burdens by creating a safe atmosphere that allows people to mourn and grieve fully. In contrast, in general Western society there is an active attempt to ignore, if not an outright reject, the power of brokenness to affect the human spirit and impact daily life. This rejection of brokenness usually leads to creation of a false self where people put up masks for others to see instead of living authentically (Escobar 42). Pain is something actively avoided by most (Escobar 110).

Missional disciples need to incorporate a theology of redemptive suffering into a larger understanding of God, for this helps to make sense of what we or others, may experience (Hirsch 3453). Through such a process of embracing pain and creating a safe community where expression of pain, loss, and grief is possible, hearts are healed, fear and anger are overcome, and people are freed to be able to more fully love God, themselves, and their neighbors. This in turn empowers missional disciples to incarnate

the life of Jesus more fully, which leads to the ability to fulfill the Mission of God in Jesus' footsteps that Jesus began.

Walter Brueggemann's writes that "loss grieved permits newness, loss denied creates dysfunction and eventually produces violence" (87). If true, this has profound implications for the call of the missional disciple in our society today. This may also explain the level of dysfunction in society, especially the dysfunction that seems to be erupting into violence more and more frequently. Brueggemann notes that the mentality of the world systems "counts loss as simply the cost of doing business; wants grief to be voiced quietly and quickly—or not at all" (104).

Since structures of society, and even the people within them, want to avoid addressing loss, grief, suffering and pain, God's agents are in a unique position to address the deep sense of loss that many are feeling. In fact, the church not only has the opportunity to provide an atmosphere for healing, restore dignity, provide place and belonging to those who have experienced pain and loss but also is called to do so (Brown 171; Escobar 42). It is worth investigating more deeply how God's people might meet that pressing need and potentially bring "newness" of life to hurting people. But again, this aspect of healing and freeing the oppressed which was so important to Jesus' Mission while he was on earth is ultimately dependent upon the discipleship process with which new agents of God's Mission embrace the centrality of relationships and community.

The Power of Culture

Community has the power to create a group culture. Unfortunately, the modern, Western church has failed to fully unlock the potential of the inherent dynamic of culture in creating and deploying disciples that understand and endure in missional action.

Disciples of American churches are not engaging in the missional activity to the degree that Jesus calls all His disciples into. If they were, more transformation, both individually and communally, would be evident. The natural follow-up question to this observation is, "Why not?" The answer lies in identifying what the current (dysfunctional?) culture of the American church is producing. As Alan Hirsch puts it, "the systems we are presently working within are perfectly designed to produce the results we are seeing" (Hirsch lecture). In the typical American context, church culture more closely resembles a mall or a corporation than a family setting. Disciples are encouraged to come shop around for what they want to entertain them or make their lives more comfortable. Upper echelon leaders make all the decisions about how to carry out the mission while others relax and drink coffee. Further exacerbating the creation of a missional culture in local American churches is the fragmentation in society at all levels and actual collapse of the natural family structure. "Contemporary society is haunted by yearnings for community and connection that the shape of contemporary life continually frustrates" (Zscheile 433). Nevertheless, it is this kind of family-style environment where not only missional discipleship can and does thrive but also humanity thrives. JR Woodward put it this way:

Culture has particular narratives, institutions, rituals and ethics that shape us as people. Becoming more like Jesus is not a matter of trying [harder] but yielding, setting the sails of our lives to catch the wind of the Spirit. It happens when we develop a communal rhythm of life—a collection of thick, bodily practices (liturgies) that engage our senses, grab our hearts, form our identities and reshape our desires toward God and his kingdom. As we collectively engage in grace-filled spiritual practices, we cultivate particular environments that help to create a

missional culture, which in turn reshapes us. As coworkers with God, we create culture and culture reshapes us. Understanding the transformative power of culture is vital if we want to have mature communities of faith. (30-31)

The compelling question is: how much power does the prevailing culture of any group have in shaping disciples within that group? To a degree, this question is answered by additional questions: Which group culture is doing the primary shaping of local American church disciples? Is consumer culture informing discipleship more than the church community? Is corporate culture reshaping understand and values more than missional culture? Are Hollywood mores shaping goals and corresponding actions more than biblical mores? It is beyond the scope of this paper to investigate the reasons why church culture in America has failed to consistently create missional disciples. It is also beyond the scope of this paper to identify all the adjustments to community culture that local churches would need to make in order to create a culture that would more effectively foster the development and nurturing of missional disciples. The primary reality is this: culture matters. The culture of a group naturally fosters members into ways of understanding, valuing, and acting, which in turn, either promotes missional faithfulness or contradicts it.

Witness via Relationship

It is out of the context of right relationship with God and with others that naturally flows proper witness to the rest of the Creation what God is like and what His desires are. N.T. Wright suggests three broad elements of the coming universal reign of Christ which provide a summary of how God's subjects might participate with Him now in witness to others regarding that coming reign. In other words, these elements empower disciples to

embrace the mission for which they were called, enabling others to experience a foretaste of what Kingdom life will be like under Jesus' full reign in the future. The first of Wright's broad elements in accomplishing this missional goal is the restoration of true relationships. Wright suggests that relationships must be restored, that is,

...the essential outworking of the gospel in reality is peace, peace with God and with others through Christ (1750). This is more than mere serenity or absence of conflict, this is the 'much desired state where things are finally made right between us all' it suggests a restoration of our relationship even with the land/the earth and ourselves (1761) The father of the Prodigal Son parable, in that Middle Eastern culture, had every right to be angry and even to punish or condemn his sons (both sons!) yet instead, he relinquished his rights and instead offered grace and forgiveness, because in the Kingdom, restoration of relationships is more important than preserving our rights, or image before others. The father risked humiliation before his servants and neighbors in order to restore relationship. Jesus also endured humiliation to restore us to God and one another. He gave up His rights and did not demand what was due Him, neither in terms of respect and reverence, nor submission as Creator and King of the Universe that was due Him. This reveals a framework for our Christian discipleship and mission. We must reprocess our anger (even justified anger) into a response of grace, for this is what it means to cooperate with the universal reign of God (1805). Such cooperation with God's reign is evidenced by reconciliation, hospitality, and generosity no matter how costly (1825).

“Cultivating community requires an extremely high level of relationship”

(Escobar 82). It has been said that values and many behaviors are caught rather than taught. This is a reference back to the power of modeling just mentioned. Of course, if the family is dysfunctional, then those growing up in the family model learn values, goals and behaviors that are counterproductive. Culture is important. Not just any relational, family-style church context will produce the kind of missional understanding, values, and action that Jesus and Paul modeled. While community is the vehicle by which individual disciples are transformed, it is the culture of that community that ultimately determines whether missional disciples are being nurtured and raised up.

Stewardship Tasks

Centrality of the Narrative

Bridging the gap between Relationship Tasks and Stewardship Tasks is the Word of God. Without communication, relationship is impossible. The narratives of the Scriptures are necessary for assisting missional disciples to come to know God and grow into a relationship with Him. However, the Word of God is also something that needs to be guarded and passed forward to new disciples. As a result, rightly managing the Word of God is also a stewardship task.

The Scriptures are vital to the missional disciple at three levels. First, the Word of God is necessary for creating the awareness of sentness and shaping the missional intent of disciples/trainees. Second, it is foundational for shaping the disciple/trainee, and so, equipping them to fulfill the Mission of God rightly. Third, it plays the critical role of informing the structuring of the community by which transformation and missional action are both sustained and moved forward. As Moltmann writes:

The identity of the church lies within the triune God's mission. Its very nature is inherently missionary. In the way the church has been understood historically, this is a reality that has often been missed, because for much of the history of Western Christianity, mission was viewed as an activity that the church did—Mission is at the heart of God's own life and is constitutive of the church's identity. (964)

The lack of understanding among American Christians of being “sent ones” was highlighted by a Pew Research Center study conducted at the end of 2017. In that study, participants who attended church at least weekly were asked why they attended church primarily. Participants were allowed to give their own answers which were then tabulated

into broad categories. Over sixty percent of those surveyed indicated that the primary reason they attended church was to “get closer to God”. Other top responses included: to become a better person, to find comfort, to give our kids a moral foundation, to meet new people, to find a spouse/partner, to uphold tradition/duty, and “because I like the sermons.” While it is noble that people want to get closer to God or become a better person, the disturbing connection among all these responses is that they are all self-centered, with the possible exception of wanting children to have a moral foundation, which nonetheless, is human-centered. Not a single participant in the entire study mentioned anything related to fulfilling God’s mission or attending church in order to be better able to fulfill their purpose in life. Clearly the American church has not faithfully provided stewardship of the divine calling to engage her disciples in the Mission of God. The notion of sentness is almost non-existent in the American church (Gecewicz et al.) The content of the teaching of the Scriptures makes disciples aware of the nature of their sentness, as agents of God’s Kingdom, and it also enables them to understand the nature of the Mission of God, as well as equipping them to fulfill it.

Faithful stewardship of the content of the scriptural narrative also impacts the structuring of the community and individual’s lives, out of which transformation and missional action are sustained and moved forward. Mike Breen conducted a missional leadership experiment by creating a small group which demonstrated the significance of the role of narrative in forming disciples (91). A principle of effective discipleship that was evidenced in this group was that the lives of disciples are shaped and transformed by the individual choices they make. However, these choices are largely shaped by the narrative framework within which they see themselves living. When people are living

according to the world's mantras, exemplified by sayings such as "He who dies with the most toys, wins," their daily decisions and actions will be radically different than when they hold up Jesus as the role model and base their choices and actions upon His values and teaching. The narrative that scriptures supply as a framework for how one might learn to live in daily situations is a powerful force for transforming discipleship. It was discovered afresh in this experimental group that a serious study of Jesus' life and teaching, followed by a reflection together on how lives of the participants measure up by comparison, had a profound effect on all the members. This simple process of study and reflection of the narrative was enough to create a motivation for transformation and lead disciples into specific decisions and actions that paved the way for such transformation. Once again, the content of the narrative proves indispensable to the discipleship formation process.

Another useful narrative that complements the foundational narrative of Christ's life comes via the Appreciative Inquiry model found in Mark Branson's work. A leader can identify and tap into spiritual DNA present among a local people to reignite the missional vision and passion that launched them in the first place by inquiring into the stories of the life-giving forces that birthed their faith community (Branson 26). Typically, this kind of local, community-based narrative also flows out of the larger narrative of the gospels and can assist a congregational family to not only get reconnected to its spiritual roots but also to Jesus and His missional call.

Finally, one of the most serious responsibilities that all leaders have is the necessity to translate the narrative of God's Word into their specific context. Exegesis is the term used to label the science or process of bringing the timeless principles of the

scriptures across in such a way that such principles might be understood in a different cultural time and place than the historically ancient context in which they were originally delivered. Any good language translator will know that it is not enough to be skilled at studying and understanding the grammatical structures and proper definitions of words within the language they seek to help others make sense of. A good translator will also affirm that one must thoroughly study *both* the foreign language and the culture of those who will be listening to the translator explain meanings to them. If the translator does not understand how to connect his or her words into a format that an audience can understand, then no matter how accurate and professionally correct the translation may be, it is useless to those listening. In the same way, a missional disciple must not only be proficient with the narrative of the Scriptures, but they must also become a student of the culture into which s/he hopes to translate the message of the Scriptures. A church that is faithful with the missionary task given her must strive to make God's promises in Christ understandable and accessible. This is particularly important in a post-modern American society that is in the midst of a dramatic cultural paradigm shift. "The gospel always comes embedded in cultural forms, and as the cultural context changes, the shape of the church's life and witness too must change" (Zscheile 283). As Roxburgh puts it, "The role of a missional leader is translation, helping people see that 'this is that'" (Roxburgh, *kindle loc. 2131*). The ultimate stewardship role of the missional leader, with respect to the Narrative of the Scriptures, is summed up well in the following statement:

The church always faces the task of living and becoming embodied within a particular context; and, as such, it faces the challenge of stewarding its identity so that it can maintain the strengths of a tradition, while also trying to respond to

new cultural realities that are emerging. A church that is forming is missionally engaging its context; a church that is reforming is reflecting carefully on its biblical and/or confessional heritage. (VanGelder & Zscheile 1201)

Being Faithful Stewards of the Call to Witness

In the former section on Relational Missional Goals, it was noted that witness must necessarily flow out of a vibrant relationship with God. Witness is both birthed and then sustained by the kind of authentic relationship that God desires to maintain with His people. The distinction in this section, as Stewardship is examined as a missional goal, is that witness is something that must be faithfully embraced and stewarded. Effective disciples/agents of mission are not raised up in a sterile vacuum, separated from the world, but rather within the context of a communal culture that embraces God's vision for the world and its need for redemption. It is a community of like-minded people, shaped by God's vision and Mission that provide, living and believing what Jesus taught that provide "the best [interpretation] of the gospel" for a world that has lost sight of what God is calling people to (Frost 585). In other words, proper stewardship of the narrative leads to proper stewardship of the missional call to faithfully witness to Creation what God is like and who He is.

In his book, *The Road to Missional*, Michael Frost suggests some practical ways in which such a community can alert others to the overlapping reign of God. The church, if it wants to be missional, must 'move into the neighborhood' to incarnate the message of Christ (2101). "Slow evangelism" is the practical living out of a life of faith with one's neighbors that invites honest and open discussion and questions. It involves much more than the hit-an-run tactics of tract or door-to-door evangelism favored by many today.

Instead, it allows neighbors to experience for themselves what submission to Christ's reign looks like on a daily basis. It allows them to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34.8 NIV). Hence, it might be referred to as *dynamic incarnation*.

Frost advocates a slow discipleship that allows new believers to be formed into the image of Christ via a mentoring process that he associates with the ancient practice of apprenticeship. Discipleship must be caught more than it is taught for "this kind of learning defies attempts to codify it. Jesus' curriculum has to be lived and felt in order to be passed on" (Frost 1690). Together, these slow methods embrace that radical restoration of relationships, the reestablishment of justice in society, and the rediscovering of beauty around us in all forms. These become the universal signs that God's order is now breaking into our world.

Personal Sanctification, or the incarnational Christlikeness that the missional disciple strives for, requires more than knowledge. Unfortunately, members of Western culture have been all too much like the Greeks of old that Paul debated, enamored with the idea of knowledge. "Knowledge is power," as the saying goes. Yet, the biblical concept of knowledge runs much deeper than having a wealth of information at one's fingertips. From God's perspective, all the right knowledge in the world is virtually useless unless it is acted upon. "A spiritual thought does not bring the Kingdom of God to earth, but a spiritual action does" (Escobar 68). As Escobar further elaborates:

Many [in the church] have spent a great deal of time learning what the Bible says to believe but haven't learned to practice what it says to do. Christianity has become a system of belief rather than a practice of love. I use the words 'try' and 'practice' a lot. There's no convenient formula to

follow or easy way to master Jesus' commands to practice love. To learn is a lifelong journey of successes and failures. (266)

Credibility in the Kingdom will not come from what one knows or how they perform publicly, but from their lived experiences, practicing and teaching the Way of Jesus (Scandrette, 1281). Rachel Held Evans stated, “When I left church at age 29, full of doubt and disillusionment, I wasn’t looking for a better-produced Christianity. I was looking for a truer Christianity, a more authentic Christianity” (qtd. in Dias & Roberts). Authenticity is the mark of a true missional disciple, and it becomes the greatest means of witness to people that need yet to meet Jesus. Authenticity should not be confused with perfection, as imperfection gives opportunity, perhaps even greater opportunity, for an agent of God’s mission to be authentic. Owning up truthfully to mistakes and shortcomings, rather than hiding them, can create an atmosphere of trust with others whereby the disciple can speak Kingdom truth into neighbor’s lives and situations. Further, such trust developed because of authenticity is the foundation for the creation of relationships. As discussed earlier, relationships provide the fertile ground in which missional discipleship is planted and grows. Incarnational and authentic living are essential to fulfilling the Mission of God.

Closely associated to authentic living is the concept of simple neighborliness—building relationships with one’s neighbors. Neighborliness and neighborhood are closely connected to the call/mission of God (Holt 1023).

The problem is, we find it easier to think of our neighborly obligations in far off places, rather than focused on those who live next door. Committed, accountable and interdependent relationships are the enduring context where transformation

takes place, but the fracturing and fragmentation of our society requires us to be more intentional and conscious about sharing life together. (Scandrette 2122)

Forging a greater connection between mission and the daily task of loving neighbors is a task worthy of our time (Holt 343). Holt goes one step further to connect the *Missio Dei* not only to building right relationships with neighbors but also to building a right relationship with one's *neighborhood* as well. Holt writes, "A spirituality that does not nurture our connection with the daily places of life fails to reflect the life-transforming nature of the Christian faith" (333). "Nurturing" is investing in the neighborhood's present and future well-being and building toward its potential. Holt's concept does not have to do with nurturing individual relationships with neighbors. However, this too is important to the concept of missional stewardship. That is, creating a culture where life thrives. "The discipline of nurturing neighborhoods is gospel work. This is what 'loving the neighbor' is about" (Holt 2284). The "broken window principle" suggests that violence occurs in neighborhoods where people get the impression that no one cares—places with a high concentration of graffiti, garbage, and broken windows (Scandrette 1670). Where garbage is cleaned up, broken windows are repaired, and graffiti is painted over, the atmosphere of neighborhoods change. Again, it is the role of the missional disciple to nurture not only individuals but also to nurture the culture and environment where individuals live. Doing so reflects faithfulness to the missional goal of stewardship showing that God is interested not just in saving individuals out of broken places in which they live but also is interested in redeeming and restoring the broken places themselves.

An essential aspect of missional discipleship and an integral aspect of God's missional goals for humanity from the beginning is participating with God in this hands-on process of redeeming one's neighborhood as well one's neighbors. Seemingly mundane "unspiritual" tasks like planting trees and flowers to beautify the environment, or cleaning garbage to bring order and restoration into chaos and brokenness can begin to transform the environments in which people live and meet deep needs that they have—to feel loved and valuable. Addressing the needs of one's neighborhood connects to addressing the needs of one's neighbors as well. Individuals thrive where there is a sense of belonging, hope, beauty, order, loving concern, and justice. "It is important to be aware of needs and longings of the people and place where you live. This presumes that we see ourselves as rooted and committed to a place" (Scandrette 587). To be committed to a place is to be committed to the people that live in that place. Such commitment is both observed and felt by those who live in the disciple's neighborhood. When this commitment is felt, it fosters the kind of trust that builds relationships God can use to fulfill His mission in both individual lives and whole communities.

Both the biblical and literary witnesses bear out that the pursuits of justice, beauty, and order by the faithful of God are inextricably interwoven into the *Missio Dei*. American churches that are currently significantly impacting the culture of their cities seem to have intuitively grasped these values of the Kingdom of God and are pursuing ways to see these expressed genuinely within their local communities (Whitesel v-vii). N.T. Wright associates the "coming universal reign" of Christ with these same qualities of "justice reestablished" (1835) and "beauty rediscovered" (1900). Wright goes on to define justice reestablished as:

The process of making things right between individuals in one step, but [then understanding that this] must extend to a corporate, community and society-wide level. The prophets of the Old Testament never merely dream of the coming Kingdom as some individualized hope for eternal life. They speak of the reestablishment of an equitable and just society on earth. Isaiah prophesies about the coming reign of God being marked by international justice and global peace. (1835)

Gregory Okesson identifies three iterations of justice-related work: *relief work* to address the immediate needs of people, *development work* to intervene in ways that enable sustainability—addressing needs in ways that are ongoing or long-term—and *advocacy*—the addressing of structures and systems to transform them. The latter is a step that often goes unaddressed by the evangelical wing of the church, but it is a key component in creating a more just society. Changing the culture as a whole requires transforming the underlying anti-biblical structures to help them become more godly. As Okesson states:

Anywhere you find idolatry, you find injustice. Wrong understanding of God's character leads to social disorder and destruction. Everything hinges upon our understanding (or misunderstanding) of God's character. People function, live, make life choices and act out of their perceived self-identity...and so do structures and systems, cultures, and peoples. To change the structures, we need to help them change identity. (class lecture)

At the heart of justice is the fundamental assumption of human dignity. Each human bears the image of God and therefore has inherent value. When dignity is stripped,

ignored, or oppressed, there is injustice (Escobar 183). "One of the biggest problems in any community including most churches is that so many people feel invisible, worthless and purposeless. It is our job [as missional disciples] to call out the dignity, beauty and worth of every human being" (Escobar 45). According to Alan Hirsch, the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8) is a perfect illustration of Jesus revealing the Kingdom value of justice expressed through offering basic dignity to a person. "[This story] is important because of the order of the components of Jesus' response: He restores dignity to her, offers her His grace and then calls her to repent - not the other way around!" (Hirsch & Hirsch 3214). When a person is treated with dignity and valued as someone with worth, this impacts their behavior. "The connection between identity and behavior can't be denied. How you perceive yourself will work itself out in your behavior" (Hirsch & Hirsch 2595). The self is formed primarily in relation to God and completed in the act of loving others (Hirsch & Frost 2634). Repentance flows naturally from having a proper understanding of one's identity before God. If believers assume that the primary truth is that every person is created in the Image of God, but is fallen and capable of evil, they will see others (and themselves) as something very special that went badly wrong (Hirsch & Hirsch 2742). If this is true, Christians will not focus on outward behavior but rather what Image of God remains in a person and how that can be called out, no matter how hidden (Hirsch & Hirsch 2766). Acting justly toward others necessarily flows from recognizing them as created in the Image of God. For example, unjust statutes and regulations legalizing the murder of infants while still in the womb would not be viable, nor accepted, in a society that recognized that such infants bear the Image of God and are not merely blobs of tissue. Injustice toward others originates with a

devaluing or outright denial of the Image of God within them, no matter how hard it may be to see. It is the task of missional disciples to not only view every person from this perspective and not only act on this perspective and personally treat all justly but also to sound the clarion call to society around them when injustice is taking place. This was the standard role of the prophet in Old Testament times. Those disciples that have embraced God's coming reign recognize that there will be no unjust treatment of anyone in God's Kingdom. Therefore there ought not to be injustice now if it is within the power of the disciple to change it. N.T. Wright challenges disciples to wrestle with this very issue.

Wright writes:

Note a problem created by wrong theology which leads to injustice: Why try to improve the present prison if release is at hand? Why oil the wheels of a machine that will soon plunge over a cliff? That is precisely the effect created to this day by some devout Christians who genuinely believe that “salvation” has nothing to do with the way the present world is ordered. By contrast, it has often been observed that the robust Jewish and Christian doctrine of the resurrection, as part of God’s new creation, gives *more* value, not less, to the present world and to our present bodies. What these doctrines give, both in classic Judaism and in classic Christianity, is a sense of continuity as well as discontinuity between the present world (and the present state), and the future, whatever it shall be, with the result that what we do in the present matters enormously. Resurrection, by contrast, has always gone with a strong view of God’s justice and of God as the good creator. Those twin beliefs give rise not to a meek acquiescence to injustice in the world but to a robust determination to oppose it. Because the early Christians believed

that resurrection began with Jesus and would be completed in the great final resurrection on the last day, they believed that God had called them to work with him, in the power of the Spirit, to implement the achievement of Jesus and thereby to anticipate the final resurrection, in personal and political life, in mission and holiness. those who belonged to Jesus and followed him and were empowered by his Spirit were charged with transforming the present, as far as they were able, in the light of that future. (Wright 550, 854)

Likewise, Wright identifies the pursuit of beauty as the pursuit of God, the Creator of all beauty (1964). Not only Wright, but other authors have recently argued that the people of God have a serious obligation to actively reveal the beauty of God through a myriad of mediums and expressions of beauty, from art and music to dramatic expressions and literature, to architecture and landscape design (Frost 1900, Holt 1992, Scandrette 1671). One church has even attempted to use tattoos as a medium to both express the beauty of God and to share the Easter Story with their neighbors (Hirsch, class lecture). The extravagant beauty of the Old Testament Temple was intended to convey to onlookers the Majesty of God. Faith communities in Western nations are rediscovering the power of artistic mediums to both convey and fulfill the Mission of God. Creativity is a mark of the presence of God. If there is no creativity, one should question the Spirit's presence in a church (Hirsch & Frost 1331). Believers need to call creativity out in people and stop measuring it as talent. Being creative is part of who humans are as created in the Image of God (Escobar 206).

Order is something highly valued of God and something that God actively works to create. In the beginning, God spoke into the primordial chaos to bring order (Gen. 1.1-

3). Part of the Creator's original mission for humanity was to help Him steward Creation, to bring order out of the unruliness, to rule over it, and bring it under submission. This remains part of the disciple's mission today. Mark Scandrette, author and community organizer, speaking about living in and ministering in his neighborhood in urban California shares the following story:

We became familiar with the “broken window principle,” which suggests that violence occurs in neighborhoods where people get the impression that no one cares—places with high concentrations of graffiti, garbage and broken windows. We decided to create an experiment to address the escalating violence, calling it Barrio Libre, or neighborhood freedom. For eight weeks we gathered as a group each Wednesday evening to walk the streets praying, picking up trash and greeting neighbors. When a nine-year-old girl approached me on the sidewalk and asked, “Whatcha doing?” I explained our dream for a safer neighborhood. “There were gunshots outside my house at midnight last night,” she said matter-of-factly. As I told her how sorry I was, she said, “You can put them posters up, but somebody’s just goin’ to tear them down.” “We’ll just have to keep working together to love the neighborhood until it gets better.” From street violence to ecological destruction to global poverty and warfare, we are clearly in the midst of a great struggle to see God’s shalom become manifest on earth as it is in heaven. An apprentice to Jesus learns to make the realization of God’s creative and restoring work their core purpose. (Scandrette, 1720).

What Scandrette is reflecting on is the task or ordering that God has assigned to missional disciples. When God's agents clean up broken glass and paint over graffiti, they are

introducing order into chaos and in the process introducing healing and restoration into communal brokenness and pain and introducing love and hope into a neighborhood defined by apathy and despair.

Faith Community as Steward of Identity

In comments related to faithful stewardship of the Narrative, identity was mentioned as flowing from narratives that people embrace. When a faith community embraces the role of becoming a faithful steward of the narrative of the scriptures, they also play a significant role in stewarding others toward finding their identity in Christ. This can be seen in the significance of relationships to missional formation.

It was argued in a previous section that without intimate personal relationships individual spiritual formation and fulfillment of the Mission of God are impeded. A factor that makes this so is the proclivity of human beings to learn via modeling (Bandura 2). Modeling for missional and spiritual formation does take place one-on-one, as in the case of the apostle Paul mentoring Timothy. However, it more often takes place corporately. This method is more effective as an entire missional community models the kind of character and behaviors that promote missional lifestyle. Unfortunately, all too often the local Western faith communities that individual believers participate and "grow up" in have failed in their stewardship to faithfully witness to the identity and character of God and have instead reflected values that do not conform to the ideals of the world around them. Hirsch notes:

The church has drunk deeply from the wells of consumerism, adopting a consumer-driven model that treats people as customers and the church as vendors of religious goods. Rather than existing to fulfill the Great Commission, the

church exists to fulfill/meet 'my' spiritual needs. The community exists for me rather than me for the community. (Hirsch 1959)

Problems result when the church embraces the world's option. There is often a huge difference between what Jesus looked like and what Christians look like to unbelievers around them today (Escobar 94). "We have made Jesus look a lot more like us that we would care to admit. We have cut him down to size and repackaged him into an image of ourselves on a good day. We project our concerns onto God and co-opt Him to serve our agenda" (Hirsch 496). The "formation of disciples" that takes place in Western churches today looks more like a conformation into the values and pursuits of the prevailing culture rather than a transformation into the Image of Christ.

Walter Brueggemann writes about the human pursuit of power, which unfortunately, is often taken up by the church. He argues that the "triad of worldly power: wealth, might, wisdom (the power to control based upon the use of knowledge) is a triad of death because it violates neighborliness" (Bruggeman 65). Yet, as Hirsch notes above, modern Western churches all too often aspire to use these three sources of power in order to expand their influence over a people or locale. Further, as a result of not confronting the seeking of power, but even actively embracing such, local churches and church leadership inadvertently promote a worldly agenda for their disciples of the value of seeking comfort, security, and living for the betterment of oneself (or one's immediate family) over sacrifice, missional living, and seeking to better others and the larger community around them. "Jesus doesn't call us to a life of ascent...and upward mobility: a life of comfort, predictability and self-protection. He embodied downward mobility and calls us to the same" (Escobar 14). It is easier to think money power and status will give

people security or a stronger sense of self, yet Jesus says the opposite is true: to find one's life they need to lose it (Escobar 25). Power stems from a desperate desire to control. Control feeds off insecurity and fear (Escobar 161). This desire to control inevitably feeds into an idolatry of power, which then forms people into disciples of the values of this world, rather than disciples in mission with God. "We are compulsive idolaters and rebels who seek to fit reality into something far more convenient and self-referential than taking cues from God" (Hirsch 781). At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by three things: physical comfort, material power and public reputation (Scandrette 2325). So much of people's lives are designed around minimizing risks, avoiding pain, and managing the chaos and uncertainties that are inherent to the human condition. People are tempted to look to governments, corporations, or other social structures (including religion) to give them the certainty and security they crave. (Scandrette 2610). People are tempted to pursue power, in any form, as a means of securing for themselves the control that they desire over a chaotic and uncertain world around them. But attaining power that the world offers does not secure the control over life circumstances that humans often hope for. Morisy writes:

We must take seriously how prone we are to deluding ourselves that we have truth. Furthermore [we must recognize that] the scope of delusion is greatest when we are powerful - and when we are anxious, and may God help us when the powerful are anxious. Truth is relational, in other words, our journey towards truth relies on an encounter with others -especially an encounter with those who are different from us. (ix)

Power, apart from the One Who created power in the first place, is ultimately useless in the human pursuit of security and significance. "In a world where we claw to find significance through who we know or what we achieve, we are invited to discover our truest identity as beloved children of God" (Scandrette 1363).

The formation of correct identity is crucial to discipleship and mission, because how people imagine themselves is what they become (Hirsch 2838). For example, Jesus renamed Simon, "Rock", based on what could be and what Jesus saw Peter becoming, rather than what was at that time or at least rather than what Simon saw himself as. Properly understanding who one is in relationship to God and also to others is "profoundly important, both for mission and discipleship" (Hirsch & Hirsch 596). As Brown writes:

If we fail to understand who God is, we will eventually be guilty of idolatry, and lead others into idolatry. If we fail to understand who we are in relationship to God and others, we stand to devalue them or ourselves. Either stance puts us in a position where we will be less able to fulfill the mission of God. (42)

Everything related to discipleship and missional activity flows from proper identity. Service to God and others will be misdirected if missional disciples fail to understand who they are in relationship to God. Kathy Escobar points this out by shining a light on the prideful tendency people have to minister/serve "to" or "for" others, rather than "with" them (57). A view as serving for others creates a top-down power structure where the more powerful are helping those that cannot help themselves. Rather, leaders should come alongside and simply share how Christ has helped all—including them—offering hope that Jesus could help them too.

Likewise, disciples' relationship with others will be misdirected if they fail to truly grasp who they are in relation to God. First in importance is grasping that all are created in the Image of God. This is the basis not only for human dignity generally, but also for empowering people to understand why God would care about human beings and, therefore, why humans should care about other humans. Understanding that people are God's workmanship, created to be like Him presents a vision that God cares for all people equally. Likewise, God has plans and purposes for all, not just those that society values. "The doctrine of *theosis* in Eastern Orthodox teaching, teaches that 'image' and 'likeness' are not the same. The first is a gift; the second a goal. With these words, God distinguished what humans were from what they were to become" (Hirsch 2812-19). This thought also seems to be fruitful grounds for further exploration. It could offer much in terms of helping Western believers better grasp where they need to go in their personal journey with God (towards Christlikeness) but also can pointedly inform their collective responsibilities toward society and Creation, particularly with respect to promoting justice wherever disciples find themselves.

Within the communal context of a larger faith family, this deeper understanding of identity is truly "caught" as it is modeled and experienced. Values and convictions that run counter to those of society are absorbed more readily when an entire community is modeling and living out those values and behaviors than when a single individual does. This is the beauty of communities of faith and is what God had in mind when He originally created Israel to be a people unto Himself (Deut. 7.6). As Van Gelder and Zscheile write:

God's mission is the generative, creative, and redemptive sending by which the cosmos first came into being and continues to be healed and restored in the midst of its brokenness. The church is a community created by the Spirit, intended by God to fully participate in God's mission. It exists, not for itself, but for God and for its neighbors both at home and around the world, pointing toward the horizon of an alternative future of a healed creation. (957)

The Stewarding of Leaders

"Leadership creates culture" (Woodward 20). Without a doubt, St. Patrick's leadership profoundly impacted not only the local culture of his immediate disciples but also set the stage for them to create culture shaping movements. Chuck Hunter, in his book on Celtic Christianity, shares that there are still "more than 6,000 place names containing the element *Cill*— the old Gaelic word for church in Ireland alone" (14). John and Charles Wesley had a similar impact in creating Christian communities that in turn created more Christian communities. Numerous other historical church leaders could likewise be cited as models of success in creating communities that shaped disciples in understanding, valuing, and acting on the missional calling of Jesus.

Mike Breen discusses the missional leader's art of combining invitation, openness, and vulnerability with challenge and accountability. He cites this as Jesus' model of disciple making: "[Jesus] was able to create a discipling culture in which there was an appropriate mix of invitation and challenge in the way he related to [people]" (Breen 223). This atmosphere takes time to create, as men especially are often slow to open up and trust in others. The only way to set this kind of tone for a group and create such a culture that fosters the development of missional disciples is to have the leader model it

(Breen 644). Leaders set the tone for others to follow and provide an incarnational model to help them visualize what it looks like to live life as missional disciples. A leader that understands, values, and consistently acts on missional principles gives others around him or her the opportunity to themselves better understand, value, and act on those principles. Leadership, especially incarnational leadership that embodies missional lifestyle, is critical to building missional disciples that will endure in missional action.

Another way in which leadership contributes to the creation of missional disciples that showed up in the literature has less to do with the abilities, actions, or qualities of individual leaders and more to do with their willingness to share leadership with others. Kathy Escobar, in her book, details a framework for missional community building that focuses on diffusing power. By intentionally giving people leadership, value, and voice, leaders within a group can begin to create a culture that builds new leaders who can then multiply more leaders. “Giving away power means that ‘the least, the last, the marginalized, those who aren't as pretty, talented, educated, or socially acceptable’ are able to both participate and contribute in real and meaningful ways” (Escobar 155). This is a very difficult practice to practically integrate as Western church settings tend to strongly emphasize excellence, professionalism, education, clear communication, and especially harp on keeping everything on a Sunday morning in a nice, neat timeframe. As Escobar notes, however, that the key to missional and incarnational living is not putting on a good show but in creating an atmosphere where people genuinely feel more loved, connected, valued, and where they walk away changed for the good of the community (215).

Incarnational, Christlike living evidenced by a leader, serves to encourage and inspire those followers of that leader. This is entirely expected, as Paul, himself, commanded his disciples to “follow me as I follow Christ” (1 Cor. 11.1). This was Jesus’ primary means of disciple-making. The character of the leader is absolutely critical to the formation process of disciples. Likewise, in order to create effective missional disciples, the disciple maker must consistently demonstrate the character of Christ in daily life, not merely during times of training and teaching.

Stewarding Leadership Structure: Polycentric vs. Hierarchical

Leaders are vital in any organization. Vision and mission flounder at any level of society without proper leadership. In the church, this is particularly evident. The church is called to not merely succeed, prosper, or keep their doors open. The church is called to fulfill the *Missio Dei*. For that reason, the church needs leaders that are more than merely skilled or trained administrators. There is a significant distinction between the seminary trained and organizationally "ordained" pastors and the Spirit-commissioned and gifted leaders discussed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Ephesians. Paul addresses five specific leadership roles/gifting/callings in his letter to the Ephesians: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Shepherd/Pastor and Teacher (APEST). In a modern, Western context where training and structure are glorified, the roles that are exalted in church leadership tend to be qualified teachers and/or shepherds, and perhaps even talented managers. In this context, the other three roles of apostle, prophet, and evangelist are typically downplayed even though Paul speaks of them necessary for church growth. "As far as we can discern, it is simply not possible to be the church that Jesus intended if three of the five constitutional ministries are removed, according to the explicit teaching of Ephesians

4:1–16, it cannot be done" (Hirsch & Catchim kindle loc. 1256). Further, even if one leader did have four, or even all five, of the giftings and callings spoken of by the apostle in Ephesians, having a solitary leader is not the ideal model that God has created for the church. As Woodward writes:

Cultural shifts highlight the vulnerabilities of a centralized leadership structure, which I contend never should have characterized the church in the first place. If we are to meaningfully connect with the digital generation and live more faithfully to the narrative of Scripture, we need to shift from a hierarchical to a polycentric approach to leadership, where equippers live as cultural architects cultivating a fruitful missional ethos that fully activates the priesthood of all believers. (60)

The cultural developments and shifts over the last fifty to seventy years have led to an emphasis on decentralization of authority and power. The Enlightenment started this trend with the questioning of established authority, but the World Wars and economic collapse of the Great Depression sped the development of an attitude of distrust toward all authority and power among the general population of Westerners. In America, the events of Watergate and the Catholic Church sexual abuse scandals solidified this movement. But the true nail in the coffin for centralized leadership around the world has been the advent of the internet. As the adage goes, knowledge is power. Now, particularly with the worldwide distribution of handheld devices, *everyone* has access to the power that knowledge lends. Any authority can now be legitimately called into question within seconds, whether it is a mechanic quoting prices at a shop, a politician claiming she voted to support one idea ten years ago, or a church leader teaching on a Sunday morning.

Anyone can simply "fact check" for themselves what is being stated, and any number of websites will produce information to support or counter such claims. This cultural phenomenon has empowered people to be more confident decision makers (not necessarily good decision makers, but more confident nonetheless), leading to a natural progression of the decentralization of leadership. This has been typically viewed as a negative by established churches, who during the Christendom period, believe they have thrived in the centralized leadership model, but many would argue, have become less fruitful and less faithful as they have done so. The biblical model of leadership is decentralized (human) leadership, based upon the Body of Christ model detailed by the apostle Paul. In the current social milieu, God has brilliantly provided His Church with an opportunity to return to a biblical model of decentralized and team leadership that the prevailing culture will respond to. However, this adaptation will only be possible if current church leadership will respond to the shifts and take advantage of the opportunity. Now is the ideal time to make the transition away from a one-leader/pastor model to what Alan Hirsch refers to as the APEST model of polycentric church leadership. Those disciples who cooperate with God's Spirit in this process will find it much easier to fulfill the Mission of God as they strive to fulfill it using the tools and structure God originally provided to do so.

Polycentric leadership aids in engaging all church members in the mission. This differs from the current model where a professional leader does the work. Polycentric leadership is absolutely critical for the church to become what she needs to be (Branson 37, Roxburgh 2161, Woodward 20). Polycentric leadership is a wiser, more useful model of leadership for effectively reaching the emerging polycentric culture of the West.

"Hierarchical leadership tends to breed an individualistic approach to spiritual formation, while polycentric leadership lends itself to a more communal approach. If we desire to connect with the digital generation, we need to learn to live as a community of leaders within the community" (Woodward 20). But, even more importantly, such a model of leadership flows out of the very Image of God, who leads His Church into His Mission as a Trinity of leaders: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each one alternatively leading and submitting to the others. To return to this biblical model of leadership in the church is not only more effective in fulfilling the Mission of God today in our changing culture but also more faithful to the church's calling to be the Incarnation of God on the earth as she fulfills that Mission. A polycentric leadership model reveals the character of God to a world that needs to see Him and come to know Him.

This researcher gained valuable insights and experience regarding the reality of the benefits of polycentric leadership by personally forming a small group along the lines of Mike Breen's 3DM model, referenced earlier. From time together with that group, the clear-cut importance of the variety of leadership gifts that the Holy Spirit endows to God's agents within the community of faith became evident. Just in that group, the gifts of pastor, prophet, and teacher were all evident. This combination of callings and personalities made for enlightening discussions that pushed all to be better disciples, while at the same time creating a supportive atmosphere that encouraged the members to press forward without fear of failure. Individuals grew in discipleship as each employed their individual gifts for the greater whole. However, the shortcomings of the group were also very evident. The two APEST gifts that were missing from that Huddle group: apostle and evangelist, are the two types of leaders that equip and empower outward

momentum. Not coincidentally, by far the weakest aspect of that group was in practically living the outwardly focused component of reaching community and neighbors beyond the borders of the members immediate family or church context. While God consistently challenged each member in these areas (one member was being called, every week, week-in and week-out, to witness to his co-workers), the group failed to come up with any impacting ideas to evangelize or serve those outside their immediate sphere. One group member even suggested for an "outreach" event, that members serve others by helping with a construction project in the church sanctuary!

This was a microcosm of what the American church has become, generally, as a result of not embracing the full range of APEST leadership gifts and callings. Without those leaders present, who naturally call disciples to get out into the world, the church quickly becomes self-serving and ingrown. Unfortunately, this writer saw firsthand the result of not having the full range of leaders needed to facilitate the fullness of the growth God wants to give His church. It also became painfully evident that without this fullness of growth, this local group was not well equipped to fulfill the Mission of God. In this regard, it proved true what Alan and Debra Hirsch have said: "The shepherd and teacher are basically maintenance ministers—they maintain health in an existing community. What is needed for missional impact beyond the congregation are the more generative ministries associated with the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic giftings" (144). Without leaders who set the cultural tone for any given group, no matter what informational content is stressed, what truth principles from the Narrative of Scripture are highlighted, and what practices are intentionally engaged in, missional discipleship will

never be complete. If the God-given APEST structure of polycentric leadership is not employed, the Mission of God will not be fulfilled.

Closely related to this is the cultivation of leadership within the Body of Christ by empowering and equipping disciples to better recognize and understand the spiritual gifts they have received from the Holy Spirit. These gifts are the natural abilities and personality strengths and weaknesses they have been born with. They also include how their life experiences have prepared them for roles of service and stewardship to their larger community as well as within the community of faith. By helping members of the Body of Christ better understand how God has created them and how the Holy Spirit has equipped them for service, they are able to better understand their capacity to serve and join God in His Mission. There are different resources available to help disciples better understand their calling and role in God's Mission including the program S.H.A.P.E. created by Eric Rees and P.L.A.C.E. created by Jay McSwain. These resources aid disciples in identifying what possible avenues God could use them to work alongside other believers to fulfill His Mission. Of course, simply serving and trying out various types of ministries within a local church and community could accomplish the same, particularly with the guidance of mentoring leadership that values aiding the development of members of the Body of Christ. Such a culture focused on leadership expansion and development is critical to the Church becoming the effective agent on Mission that God intended her to be.

Rituals and Spiritual Disciplines

Another important means of creating culture in a group and aiding people

to understand and endure in missional action the employing of a rule of order or group structure, with ethics, rituals, shared language, and experiences. "According to cultural theory, culture is largely made up of artifacts, language, rituals, ethics, institutions and narratives... [which] have the power to shape our lives profoundly" (Woodward 32).

Spiritual disciplines have long been essential to the creation of discipling culture and community, as much as they have been essential in creating individual disciples (Bolger 355). Spiritual disciplines are older than the church. God called Israel to practice life together to create a culture that was different from the other nations around them. Part of establishing this kind of culture was the collective engagement in rituals, traditions, and spiritual disciplines that forged both the individual and the community into the people of God. Many authors feel that such communal practice and discipline is indispensable in missional discipleship formation. For example, Roxburgh writes, "One of the most critical leadership issues for the innovation of a missional church is the capacity to form communities of God's people around practices of Christian life" (2054).

These practices, in turn, begin to shape participants perspectives and values. They drive decisions and actions.

Lived spirituality is an ongoing dynamic activity in which individuals and groups create and recreate meaning, joy, and shared life from whatever materials are at hand. It is always a bricolage (a patching together, a creative reinterpretation, a claiming-as-one's-own) of a somewhat happenstance conglomeration of elements from nature, historical accident and established traditions. (Frolich 68)

As Frolich suggests in the above quote, nearly anything could become a part of a group's habitual spiritual formation if the group finds it helpful to move them communally to

become more faithful in their understanding and active fulfillment of God's mission. However, there are classic spiritual disciplines that virtually all authors of spiritual formation literature agree upon. A good summary of these appears in Richard Foster's work, *A Celebration of Discipline*. These include such historical church practices as: Scripture meditation and study, prayer, fasting, service and generosity, submission, solitude/silence, simplicity, self-examination and confession, worship, and fellowship/celebration (Foster viii). Many modern writers add evangelism to this list, and many are also now adding spiritual journaling (Whitney 206). Secular research has recently identified multiple benefits of the practice of journaling. Engaging in physical spiritual practices to heighten spiritual formation and discipleship have also proven to promote missional practice: drama, plays, dance, as well as postures, can aid in spiritual growth as does "the engaging the full five senses in a worship experience" (Sheldrake 11). Historically, the sharing of food together has also been an important act of sharing life. Regardless of what specific disciplines are chosen by a community, as real-life groups live into such practices, the key is active and habitual participation in the activities to aid spiritual growth and formation into missional understanding and engagement, as well as the expectation, challenge, and corporate accountability associated with community wide practices and a rule of order. Mike Breen suggests, "Challenge is one of the main ingredients of a discipling culture" (266). As groups engage in spiritual practices together, such disciplines can effectively assist in the ongoing development of creating a culture that supports spiritual formation and missional understanding and endurance.

A practical suggestion Mark Scandrette has value in constructing missional discipleship experiences: "there is a need to engage in two aspects of discipline in order to see real change in our lives. We must initiate both abstinence and engagement" (2416). In other words, disciples must understand that in order to intentionally pick up a healthy habit that promotes growth into missional effectiveness certain other habits or engagements must be decreased or stopped entirely. There is not enough time in a day to do everything. The missional disciple must be discerning, intentionally weeding out of his or her life the things that hinder missional effectiveness. This also is a spiritual discipline and seems to be a commonsense principle. Yet, it is rarely discussed or practiced in church settings. Jesus came to set people *free from slavery to sin* so that they could become *slaves to righteousness* (Rom. 6.18). Western churches often instruct people regarding what they should stop doing but rarely take the next step to offer opportunities to engage in the practice of following Jesus with the newly freed time, energy, and resources. This kind of intentional redirection is critical.

Redemptive Tasks

Invitation/Evangelism

The first task that Jesus assigned to His disciples was preaching that the Kingdom of Heaven was near and that people were required to respond as a result. This preaching was an invitation—a call to come and follow, to be welcomed into the family of God, and join with Him in His Mission to seek and redeem all that was lost. Michael Heiser points out that God always intended to have a family, which includes both angelic and human beings: “the nation of the holy ones refers to the human followers of Yahweh aligned with Him and His council” (Heiser 258). After the Tower of Babel, the majority of the

human family that God had created was disinherited and separated from a relationship with God. A significant part of the *Missio Dei* that Christ came to fulfill was the reintegration of these disinherited nations back into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, sharing of the Good News that God has offered to bring all the nations back under His reign and care became central to Jesus' message and mission. Jesus came with not only this Good News but also with an invitation to leave the captivity of the idolatrous old gods and come back to the Creator to become a welcomed member of His family and Kingdom. The missional disciple recognizes this central theme of the *Missio Dei*, as well as the necessity of the redemptive task of evangelism. Unfortunately, according to Michael Frost, "98% of those in the church today don't understand the 'significance of sentness', and do not see the opportunities they have in their respective spheres of influence as the work/calling of God. We need to help them see that they are doing the mission of God in all they do and need to be intentional about it. All work done under the reign of God is the work of God" (Frost, lecture 2016). Invitation to submit to under the reign of God and to become a part of His family is a key redemptive task. Another key redemptive task of the missional disciple is the multiplication of disciples.

Mentoring and Discipling

It is no coincidence that the second of Jesus' original tasks for His original disciples involved healing the sick. Jesus was interested in restoring human beings in different ways. He was not only interested in healing their bodies, but He was also invested in restoring and redeeming their minds, desires, values, actions (past, present and future), and their relationships. God's Mission is about redeeming all aspects of life. Unfortunately, the modern (especially evangelical) church has focused merely on the

invitational aspect of redemption to the exclusion of bringing redemption to all aspects of the new family member's life and relationships. 'Discipling' and 'spiritual formation' are terms that reflect Jesus' missional strategy. Jesus mentored a handful of individuals in missional ways of thinking, living, and acting. He did this first via invitation into relationship with Himself. He followed this with modeling how to live in relationship and cooperation with God the Father, intentionally pursuing the Father's Mission. After showing His disciples what missional life looked like, Jesus then took the next step of inviting them to participate with Him in Mission of God, acting in and pursuing ways to work along with God in the fulfillment of that mission. Finally, Jesus helped His disciples reflect on their experiences and tasks after the fact, both holding them accountable to carrying out the Mission of God in godly ways, and helping to practically sharpen them so that they might be more effective in the future. It is no coincidence that these reflection sessions often challenged the disciples' wrong ideas or values more often than not. Part of shaping missional disciples involves shaping attitudes and ideas even more than teaching and directing actions. This kind of change/transformation takes place most effectively in the context of positive relationships. Analyzing modern change initiatives in modern corporate culture settings, Chiag Metre identified twelve steps that are needed to support, or create an atmosphere for change. Of the twelve, eight were either explicitly or implicitly connected to building relationship with employees/followers (Metre 24).

Most of the literature relating to discipleship published in the last century focuses on discipling and mentoring individuals. But Jesus' model seems to favor community mentoring as a means by which missional disciples can be formed effectively. As has been noted earlier in this writing, creating a missional culture that

mentors individuals collectively into transformation is something that quite powerfully creates momentum to multiply missional disciples. However, just as in the corporate world, the creating of such a culture requires an intentional systemic model for moving new disciples forward in their growth into Christlikeness and their fulfillment of God's Mission. Thom Rainer and Eric Geiger published the results of their research on this topic in their book *Simple Church*. They posit that one of the most significant elements of shaping disciples in the fulfillment of their mission is to create what they call a "discipleship pathway." A discipleship pathway is an intentional blueprint by which new disciples might be systematically led into new stages of growth and faithfulness. According to Geiger and Rainer, it is the intentionality and continuity of the plan that, alongside the goal of Christlikeness, makes the most impact in formation (112). In other words, spiritual children, if they are going to become effective missional disciples, must be intentionally raised.

Another important aspect of mentoring with respect to missional disciple formation is the presence of accountability. Human beings do not do what is expected of them, but rather they do what is checked. Consistent follow-through on concrete missional action is vital to the ongoing life and formation of disciples. Yet, the natural human tendency is toward laziness and distraction, which mitigates against faithful and consistent fulfillment of missional goals and commitments. The mentoring relationship is a counter to such obstacles. Built into such a relationship is the right to challenge and hold disciples accountable. With respect to parenting, modeling, instruction, challenge, reflection, practice, accountability, and correction all work together to shape a child into an adult. These also are powerful tools used to shape disciples. When these tools are

employed alongside a life-transforming narrative as powerful as the one that is presented in the gospels, missional disciples are formed toward the end of fulfilling the *Missio Dei*. "To be a disciple of Jesus is to be a student, learner, or apprentice in a community of mutual growth in love. It means collaborating together, using all the spiritual gifts with which God has equipped us. It also involves mutual support, accountability, and encouragement" (Zscheile 309).

As noted previously some of the topics within each category bleed into others. A typical trait of mentoring and discipling programs is the incorporation of spiritual disciplines into the life of the one(s) being invested in. Spiritual disciplines have long been recognized for their transformative and redemptive value. Since these were dealt with in the Stewardship section, they will not be addressed again here except to say that such practices are essential to the redemptive task of reforming people, empowering them to step out of old habits and patterns of thought and action, and stepping into new mission-oriented patterns.

Authoritative Prayer and Freeing the Captive

The third of the primary tasks that Jesus assigned to His original disciples, alongside the preaching of the Kingdom, was the call to cast out demons. Jesus authorized His disciples to rein in the spiritual criminals that were assaulting and abusing those that God was interested in saving and redeeming. The emphasis on the black and white nature of the opposition of God's Kingdom to the kingdom of the devil was illustrated early on in Jesus' ministry. Following his baptism, Jesus began immediately casting out demons and declaring the coming of the Kingdom of God. Michael Heiser

argues that this culminates with the transfiguration moment on Mount Hermon. Heiser writes:

When Jesus chose to go to Mount Hermon to be transfigured, He was claiming it for the Kingdom of God. As the Gospel chronologies tell us, these events provoked His death, the linchpin event for reversing the human predicament and ensuring the defeat of the powers of darkness. (102)

John shares that “the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work” (1 John 3.8). It is important for the modern church to recognize that this was a key element of Jesus’ mission. Unfortunately, this aspect of Jesus’ mission has been largely ignored, in spite of the fact that opposition to the devil and his servants was a significant theme of the early church. Apostolic baptismal formulas included a renunciation of the devil and his demonic servants: “When we are going to enter the water, but a little before, in the presence of the congregation and under the hand of the president, we solemnly profess that we disown the devil, and his pomp, and his angels” (Menzes et al. 95). Further, not only is a passive rejection of evil inherent to the DNA of the church but also is the active opposition, and even conquest, of the Kingdom of Darkness. To be the Body of Christ is to continue Jesus’ missional task of defeating the work of the devil and freeing captives from slavery to sin.

Although such “spiritual warfare” was central to Jesus’ mission, there is a stunning gap in the current missional literature on this topic. This is an area of teaching and ministry that needs to be addressed if the church is going to be able to fulfill the Mission that God has entrusted to her. In addition to the clear biblical precedent that leads to the conclusion that the modern missional disciple must re-engage in the ministry of

exorcism on behalf of individuals, some authors also suggest that Jesus' usage of siege warfare imagery in His teachings (Matt. 16.18; Mark 3.27) calls the church to engage the enemy over physical and geographical spaces or "territories" as part of the fulfillment of Christ's original mission (C. Peter Wagner; George Otis Jr.). "But since the birth of the Church at Pentecost, there has been an ebb and flow of satanic power in specific places at specific times. [Satan] is like a squatter that the legal owner of a building must evict" (Wagner 16). In fact, in order to be able to complete the other redemptive tasks of the *Missio Dei* in a given geographical region the church victorious must engage in prayer and action that "evicts" spiritual forces of evil that actively oppose the fulfillment of that mission. It is important for the missional disciple to employ all the biblical tools at his or her disposal to ensure that the mission of Christ is realized. Certainly, informed and authority-based prayer has been one of the most underutilized tools in the arsenal of the church since the days of the early church.

Research Design Literature

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements needed to create a learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies which enhances the understanding of and enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees).

Tim Sensing summarizes the qualitative tools most commonly employed in research studies: 1) In-depth, open-ended interviews; 2) direct observation; and 3) written documents (Kindle loc. 2200). For this project, the researcher employed options one and three. Judith Bell advises using quantitative tools to balance data gained from qualitative approaches. Quantitative tools, such as surveys, serve "not only to describe but also to

compare, to relate one characteristic to another and to demonstrate that certain features exist in certain categories” (Bell & Waters 14).

A mixed-methods approach seemed to the researcher to be a way to collect data in a balanced way by providing focused, insights from invested experts (interviewing trainers), yet also gathering insights from those that were the recipients of their training. This approach potentially countered bias inherent in the “expert” interviews and provided a more well-rounded picture of the effect trainers and their training actually had on trainees, a benefit of mixed methods approach that Sensing also highlights (1636).

The research portion of this project was based on a Pre-Intervention format and employed both qualitative and quantitative tools. Document Analysis of agency curricula and one-on-one semi-structured interviews with official agency trainers were used to investigate the current teaching content and practices being employed by mission sending agencies. Finally, a survey questionnaire was supplied to trainees of these agencies to accomplish two ends: 1) to further investigate the effects of the mission learning/training experience on participant behavior, and 2) to better understand from trainees what they believed to be the elements of training that proved most impactful, in terms of producing long-lasting behavioral and value change in their lives (specifically, what process and/or content in the training led to an increase in enduring missional action on their part).

The quantitative survey was distributed to trainees by the mission sending agency that provided them their mission learning experience, therefore the researcher was dependent upon agency cooperation. When a mission sending agency was invited to participate in the study, the researcher requested that each organization provide access to their current mission training curriculum for document analysis, provide access to a

primary mission trainer for a semi-structured interview, and finally provide to their body of trainees a qualitative survey to gauge the impact of the training on participants. The researcher supplied an invitation and consent letter to each mission sending agency that they could then forward to their constituents.

Summary of Literature

In conclusion, the literature review brought into stark relief the continuity between ancient biblical formulations of God's mission and missional goals and modern expressions of the same. In examining these holistically, the researcher concluded that foundational elements of missional goals and tasks within the larger *Missio Dei* might be generally grouped into three broad categories: Relationship goals, Stewardship goals and Redemptive goals. These three categories are not clear-cut and often, the missional tasks, best practices or essential elements within these broad themes bleed over from one to another. However, the researcher believes that these are useful groupings to use to further reflect on the particulars of the missional goals of God and also, to use as a framework to better evaluate whether or not missionary training programs and curriculums are adequately addressing the multiple dimensions of biblical mission in their current iteration.

Examining, again, the three larger categories of missional tasks cited above, Relationship tasks were the first cluster of tasks that God ordained. Relationship tasks focus on drawing closer and into a deeper intimacy with Him and developing right relationships with others, both in terms of being rightly related to individual persons, and also to one's community as a whole. Such "right relating" would be augmented via participation in individual and communal spiritual disciplines, as well as participation in

rituals and memorial celebrations. Fellowship and community/culture building are a relational task entrusted to missional disciples. One concrete aspect of fellowship and loving one's neighbor is the sacred task of 'bearing one another's burdens', which was practically detailed as aiding people in their grieving of loss.

Stewardship tasks are a second critical grouping of missional tasks which flow from God's heart and desire for humanity and His Creation. An example of a stewardship task is the providing of an incarnational witness of what God is like through the concrete living out of righteousness. Another is the serving and blessing of one's neighbors, whomever they may be, giving and sacrificing to care for them and also caring for the "neighborhood" in which they, and the disciple, live. Stewardship tasks include the responsibility of intercessory prayer, intervening on behalf of others, presenting their needs before God, as well as faithfully keeping and presenting the Biblical Narrative as the key to understanding both individual and community identity and purpose. Finally, such tasks include creating beauty, justice and order, where previously there was ugliness and despair, oppression and chaos. These tasks, when missional disciples actively engage in them, reveal to the larger world, the currently obscure Kingdom of God, and also alert others around the disciple to the coming reign of God. Further, such tasks engaged in by disciples, work to stir a curiosity and hunger within observers to know more about this Reign and Kingdom, which leads in turn to an opportunity to expression of the redemptive tasks.

Redemptive tasks are the final broad category of missional tasks this study will be examining. A key redemptive task of the missional disciple includes evangelism or the invitation to submit under God's Reign and become a family member of His Kingdom.

This invitation is intended to accompany the stewardship tasks addressed above, and it leads to a second redemptive task. Mentoring and disciple making are the natural outgrowth of invitation. Those who respond to the disciple's offer of joining the family of God also must learn how to live within the structure and boundaries of the new family setting. They must be taught what is expected of responsible family members and then must be nurtured and guided to become participating members of God's household. Finally, authoritative prayers prayed by Kingdom subjects serve to limit the effects of evil and reveal the power and character of God. God's adversary is constantly trying to counter and oppose the work of God and redirect humans away from God's Mission. A significant task of what missional disciples are called to is: opposing the opposer via God-directed, authoritative prayer. This includes the casting out of demons. An additional redemptive task is the necessity of the disciple to address system oppression that flows from broken institutions and widespread cultural views that oppose God's design for creation. Taken together, the literary review provided the researcher with a foundational set of common missional values and categories from which the Missional Framework Tool was created. This tool became the lens by which mission sending agency training curricula would be reviewed and analyzed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methods used in this study: document analysis, survey questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews. It explains the nature and purpose of the project, to identify essential elements and best practices in mission training/discipleship programs that lead to enduring missional action on the part of trainees. This chapter also details the research questions and discusses the data collection instruments used to address those questions including the Missionary Framework Tool, a survey based upon The Missional Practices Scale Plus (MPS+), developed and tested by Dr. Scott Nelson, and a semi-structured interview designed by the researcher to investigate mission trainers deeper perspectives on effective discipling practices and content.

This chapter sets forth the ministry context: US based mission sending agencies. It describes the participants, explaining the criteria used for participant selection: parachurch ministries, local churches, STMs and LTMs that were identified by the researcher, the researcher's mentors, or by qualified outside sources as effective disciplemakers and mission training groups. It addresses ethical considerations inherent in the study. The chapter discusses the procedure used for collecting evidence from participants and the procedure for analyzing the data collected. Lastly, it addresses the reliability and validity of the research project design.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements needed to create a

learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies in order to enhance the understanding of and enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees). By reviewing biblical and theological material related to God's missional goals, as well as reviewing modern literature and research regarding the same, a framework was created by which current missionary training practice and curriculum might be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses via document study. Further, by interacting directly with mission trainers via personal interviews and trainees via surveys, a picture of what they personally believed to be most effective in such training experiences provided a practical and living parallel by which cross-evaluation of what "experts" in the literary review believed to be best practices. These surveys and interviews were intended to flesh out which elements of discipling or training were most useful for creating and sustaining missional action in the lives of participants, leading to a better understanding of what are best discipling practices for any missionary sending agency, including the local church.

The goal in conducting this study was to harness the combined insights of biblical and theological texts, practitioners and participants of missionary training, and current training curriculums and programs to flesh out the most fundamental elements and most effective (best) practices necessary to equip participants for sustained missional activity in their contexts. In other words, the end goal of this study was to produce a body of evidence which might be used to formulate future missionary training/discipleship programs and experiences that will equip participants more effectively. After such a training participants should actively engage in consistent and enduring missional activity in their daily lives and contexts.

Research Questions

Research Question #1 What are fundamental/essential elements/best practices necessary for creating a learning experience to equip participants to more effectively and regularly conduct enduring missional action in their daily life contexts?

This question cuts to the heart of the purpose of this study: to identify fundamental elements/practices essential to creating a discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies in order to enhance the enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees). In order to answer this question, the formalized documentation of mission training and discipling curriculums and programs of the target mission sending agencies were analyzed using the Missionary Framework Tool (MFT). This tool was created by the researcher and based upon the review of biblical, theological, and practical missional sources. Potential answers to this question were further investigated by inviting mission trainees to participate in a survey which asked them about what aspects of their training they felt were essential to empowering them to conduct missional action in their lives. Finally, semi-structured interviews with organizational mission trainers were conducted to ascertain what, from their professional perspectives, were the most significant elements of content and practice essential to create missional action in the lives of those whom they had trained.

Research Question #2 What are the common obstacles that mission participants experience, which hinder them from conducting enduring missional action in their personal life contexts after their learning experience?

Any good mentor or discipler understands that training alone is not enough to effect lasting change. There are many obstacles that stand in the way of the practical fulfillment of the best practices that disciples have been trained in. Semi-structured interview questions with mission trainers 1, 2, 10, and 14 sought to identify what the trainers believed were the greatest obstacles to enduring missional activity in the lives of their disciples and how they worked to overcome those in the lives of their trainees. The MFT also had a category to analyze official organizational curriculum for any obstacles that were identified within their documentation. Finally, the trainee SurveyMonkey questionnaire asked mission participants what they perceived was the greatest obstacle for them in conducting ongoing missional action in their lives.

Research Question #3 How do the resources currently available for equipping mission participants to conduct enduring missional action in their own daily life contexts compare and contrast to missional goals expressed in the scriptures?

There are many missionary and discipleship training programs and curriculums available to American church members that seek to empower and equip participants to better fulfill the Mission of God. Since these are aimed at fulfilling the same goals, there ought to be consistency and similarity amongst them, regardless of how varied they may be. It was a goal of this study to compare and contrast these formalized programs and training curriculums in order identify the common themes found in them all. It was hypothesized that any common themes identified in a document analysis would show up as missional priorities in the biblical, theological, and literary accounts examined. Another goal of the document analysis was to recognize best practices in terms of both content and means of discipling, as well as to identify what essential elements might be

missing from individual programs, which perhaps ought to be included in a more comprehensive training experience in the future. In other words, for the researcher, it was important to identify what the current missionary and discipleship training programs exclude that could or should be included in future discipling experiences, so as to empower and equip more sustained and consistent missional action in the lives of participants. The MFT was used to answer this question via document analysis. Further, interview questions 1, 3, 5, and 6-9 were used to probe mission trainers' views to help answer this question.

Ministry Context

The research setting for this study involved an examination of the discipling practices of four different types of mission sending groups: local church organizations, parachurch ministries, Short-Term Mission (STM) organizations, and Long-Term Mission (LTM) sending agencies. The researcher was most interested in identifying the fundamental elements in a missional learning experience within the American context that best equip participants to engage in enduring missional action. The goal of the study was to provide insights into essential elements of missional discipleship that would then serve as a reference in creating, or at least shaping, future training and discipleship programs for mission sending organizations in the US. Ultimately, the desired end result of this study was to contribute to more effectively equipping and empowering American church members to engage in sustained, intentional, and consistent missional activity in their contexts. Therefore, all the examined training curriculums, programs, and missional discipling experiences, as well as all leaders and participants that were interviewed and surveyed, were connected with American-based missionary sending agencies.

As noted above, the research context for this study was focused on four different types of mission sending agencies based in America: Short-Term Mission organizations (STMs), Long-Term Mission sending agencies (LTMs), parachurch ministries and local church groups. An emphasis was put on STMs, inviting ten such groups to participate, as opposed to only four LTM organizations. The rationale behind this decision was the acknowledgment that the latter type of organization disciplines participants who are already committed and motivated to engage in missional activity to the point that they have sacrificed significantly in order to receive additional training. It would therefore be safe for the researcher to assume that for this group of more committed participants there is an additional variable introduced that may skew evaluation of particular programs or curriculums. In such circumstances, rather than the training experience itself leading to more consistent and sustained missional activity in the lives of participants, such activity may simply be a product of the participants' greater motivation and commitment.

The researcher was most interested in identifying the fundamental elements necessary in a learning experience within the American context since the goal was to create or at least shape future training programs for organizations in the US that would prove to be more effective at equipping and empowering people to engage in enduring missional activity. Therefore, all training curriculums and programs examined, as well as all leaders interviewed and participants surveyed, were connected with the aforementioned four types of American-based missionary sending agencies.

Participants

The document study portion of this research included curriculums from a number of STM agencies around the US, a handful of other formalized learning experiences that

are used by local churches, discipling programs used by long-term mission (LTM) sending agencies, and training and leadership development programs employed by selected parachurch ministries. All trainers interviewed and trainees surveyed were also connected with these groups.

Criteria for Selection

The researcher sent invitations to what are considered to be the top 10 STM organizations in the country, in terms of adherence to biblical and operational standards of excellence, as rated by the organization, Standards of Excellence in Short-Term Mission (<https://soe.org/member-directory/>). The researcher also invited participation from members of four of the most effective LTM organizations in American history and invited participation from trainers and participants of select church-based and parachurch ministry discipleship programs.

The document analysis portion of this research included curriculums from a number of STM and LTM agencies around the US, as well as parachurch ministries and local church groups that focus on missional discipling. Letters of Invitation were sent and/or personal phone calls were made to six parachurch ministries known for disciple making: YWAM, Navigators, CRU (formerly Campus Crusade), Alpha Course, Teen Challenge, and Youth for Christ. These were chosen based on the researcher's experience seeing leadership trained by these organizations. Six local church groups were invited to participate based upon the recommendation of the researcher's mentor/coach. These were identified as American based church groups that were doing excellent missional discipleship training and leadership development. The researcher invited ten of the top STM organizations in the country. Finally, the researcher invited participation from

members of four of the more effective LTM organizations in American history: OM, AIM, Ethnos 360, and Pioneers. The disciplers/mission trainers interviewed and participants surveyed were also associated with these same groups. The latter were chosen based upon their missional connections with the organizations that accepted the invitation to participate in this study.

For those organizations that responded positively to the invitation to participate in this study, the researcher requested a copy of each organization's formal missional training/discipling curriculum in order to cross-reference each curriculum against the missional framework tool (MFT). Each organization that agreed to participate simply sent an electronic copy or paper copy of their curriculum for the researcher to examine.

The researcher requested that each organization offer researcher-supplied e-survey invitations and a participation link to as many of their trainees/disciples as they felt comfortable sending to. The researcher requested that they send it to no less than ten of their participants/trainees. It was left up to each individual organization to determine to whom the surveys were offered. The researcher emphasized that the data collected would remain anonymous. The researcher requested that the individual organizations contact their trainees directly so that no participant contact information would be given to the researcher, better preserving the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

After collecting the survey data, which focused on gauging enduring missional practice in the lives of the mission training participants/disciples, the researcher analyzed survey results to identify which mission sending agencies seemed to be producing the most enduring missional action in the most people that participated in their missional discipleship experiences/programs. The researcher then chose the top five organizations,

in terms of producing trainees that exhibited the most enduring missional action, and requested an interview with each organization's primary trainer. It was made clear in the written request/invitation that trainers with more experience were desired. The suggestion was made that if a veteran trainer of many years had retired and was no longer serving but might be willing to participate in this study, that the retired trainer be invited to participate by the organization as well as the current primary trainer.

Those human subjects participating in the research project were drawn from two groups: mission curriculum/program trainers/disciplers and mission training/program participants. These subjects were all volunteers. They were invited to participate in the project as a result of their connection with aforementioned mission sending organizations around the US. In summary, the researcher contacted mission sending agencies directly to invite them to participate in the research study by 1) providing the researcher with a copy of their training curriculum; 2) providing an "invitation to participate and consent" letter to at least ten individuals that had previously completed a mission training program and participated in missional activity with their agency, as well as emailing them a SurveyMonkey link to answer the questions found in Appendix B; 3) allowing the researcher to contact their primary mission curriculum/program trainer to request an interview with that trainer.

Description of Participants

Human subjects participating in the research project were drawn from two groups: mission curriculum/program trainers and mission training/program participants. These subjects were all volunteers. They were invited to participate in the project as a result of their connection with the mission sending organizations around the US that were invited

to participate in the study. The researcher contacted these mission sending agencies directly to invite them to participate in the research study requesting that they 1) provide the researcher with a copy of their training curriculum; 2) allow the researcher to contact their primary mission curriculum/program trainer to request an interview; and 3) provide an “invitation to participate and consent” letter with survey link to 10 individuals that had previously completed a mission training programs and participated in missional activity with their agency to answer the questions found in Appendix B.

Ethical Considerations

In order to maintain confidentiality, all potential participants were provided with a written explanation of the goals of this study and a description of how their role and relationship to the study was perceived by the researcher. In addition, all those who agreed to actively participate in the study were provided with a digital consent form explaining the nature of the study and the steps that would be taken to protect their confidentiality. These voluntary consent documents took two forms. One type of consent form was provided to mission curriculum trainers which discussed the general nature of the interview and questions that they would be answering. The survey participants were provided with an email explaining the nature of the study and the steps that would be taken to protect their confidentiality, as well as a link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire. Recipients of these emails were instructed to delete or ignore the email and link if they did not want to participate in the study. They were told that if they did want to answer the survey questions, they needed to consent to doing so by checking the box on the first page of the survey before they could proceed further. Additionally, a third letter of consent was presented to the organizationally designated authority in charge of training to request the use of a copy of

their training curriculum for research purposes. These specific consents were presented and collected before the researcher conducted any personal interviews with trainers and before curriculum programs were received and evaluated. Each organization also agreed in their document study consent form to electronically send at least ten copies of the Individual Consent Form to their disciples/trainees along with the researcher-supplied SurveyMonkey link. Before any of these trainee participants were able to begin electronic surveys via the included weblink from their respective mission agencies, their consent to participate was required on page one of the survey.

All trainers who agreed to voluntarily participate in the study were required to sign their respective consent form in order to proceed with the interview for the study. All hard-copy information gathered from individual participants and participating organizations that was not readily available to the public was secured in a locked room when not being directly consulted by the researcher for this study. The digital information gathered for the same purposes was secured by the use of passwords. Further, where applicable, participants' confidentiality was protected via the use of general titles or explanation as opposed to using personal names or other information which might be used by some to connect specific individuals to certain comments or data. Names of Organizations or locations have been changed for the same reason. Upon completion of the project, all digitally recorded data was deleted, and physical copies of all data were shredded. This study did not share any information that might otherwise be considered sensitive for the participating individuals and organizations outside the research team or those immediately advising the research project. There was neither personal financial interest related to this study nor was any monetary or non-monetary inducement offered to participants or organizations involved in

the study. Neither organizations nor participants suffered any costs related to taking part in this study.

Instrumentation

The investigative instruments employed by the researcher for this study were three-fold. Each instrument was designed to assist the researcher in gathering data from participants—both individual and organizational—in order to answer the research questions of the study.

Document Study – Instrument #1

The first instrument used to conduct research was a document study. A request was made to each of the organizations mentioned above to provide a copy of their official training curriculum for the research purposes of this study. Those documents received were then analyzed according to the Missional Framework Tool (MTF – see Appendix B) designed by the author of this study. Training curriculums and programs were evaluated with respect to best practices for meeting biblical goals of mission as identified by the researcher in the literary review. Both content and training technique/practices were taken into consideration when available. The researcher took care to note both what was present in each training curriculum/program with respect to the biblical goals of mission identified in the MFT, as well as any elements that were lacking.

Semi-Structured Interview – Instrument #2

The second instrument was used to engage primary trainers, those who were tasked by mission sending agencies with the equipping of the trainees and mission participants before those participants began to engage in missional activity with the organization. The researcher requested that each organization suggest one person to be

interviewed for the study, with preference for a trainer that had more extensive experience conducting training with mission participants. Since the interview questions aimed to uncover what best practices as well as training content that each particular trainer has found most successful in inspiring and sustaining missional action on the part of trainees, more experience in training was significantly more useful to the research process.

Organizational trainers were asked to respond to a series of pre-constructed questions in a semi-structured interview format (see Appendix B). Each trainer was given the freedom to answer and expand upon what he or she felt was the best way to interact with each question before moving on to the next. One goal of each question was to delve deeper into what each individual trainer found to be most useful elements in the content of the curriculum. Another goal was to identify the means by which they taught participants. Yet another goal was to tease out what impact the atmosphere of the training may or may not have had on the discipleship process. Finally, a goal was also to determine whether trainees continued to engage in missional action, not only during the time of learning under the trainer, but also afterwards as the disciples re-entered their personal life contexts. Some questions also addressed what the trainers saw as obstacles in the lives or life contexts of trainees that did inhibit sustained or consistent missional action on the part of trainees. The researcher created interview questions based upon findings in the literary review of the study.

Survey/Questionnaire – Instrument #3

The third research instrument was a questionnaire format, presented to trainees of mission sending agencies using the web-based tool SurveyMonkey. Individuals were sent

a survey link by the mission organization that they had received training with along with a letter explaining the purpose and goals of the research project. After consenting to participate, trainees then answered questions related to what elements of their missionary training impacted their engagement in missional activity after their training and for how long. The survey also asked participants to identify obstacles to their personal engagement of missional activities in their life contexts after training. Individuals filled out the surveys anonymously, without help or prompting from anyone. Respondent ages ranged from 18-92, and all acknowledged having gone through an organizational mission training program, curriculum, or learning experience which led to active participation in some form of missional activity. The data gathered from these surveys was used to better understand what mission agency training content and practices tended to produce consistent and sustained missional activity in the trainees as well as to identify what the trainees perceived to be obstacles to continued missional action. The researcher created interview questions based upon findings in the literary review of the study and personal life experience as both a trainer and trainee of mission sending agency learning experiences.

Expert Review

The MPS+ instrument used to survey mission trainees via the SurveyMonkey platform was borrowed from Dr. Scott Nelson, who verified and validated its use during his doctoral research in 2015. The Missionary Framework Tool (MFT), created by the researcher of this project and used to perform document analysis of mission training curriculums, was reviewed by the researcher's doctoral coach, Dr. Scott Nelson, and doctoral program director and mentor, Dr. Milton Lowe. The MFT was based upon the

literary review conducted by the project researcher and was also shaped to best address the research questions of this project. Feedback from the expert reviewers were incorporated to fine-tune questions within the survey and semi-structured mission trainer interviews to better address research questions of the project.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The researcher worked to ensure the reliability and validity of the project design through various means. In order to ensure the reliability of the data collection instruments, the researcher designed both the semi-structured interviews and surveys to address the three research questions. In addition, the questions used predominantly in the participant survey were drawn from an existing and already verified tool.

In order to further ensure the validity of the project design, the researcher consulted with mentors, Dr. Ellen Marmon, Director of Doctor of Ministry program, Asbury Seminary, and Dr. Scott Nelson, director of discipleship for Forge Mission Training Network. These mentors were well-suited to assist the researcher in the validation process as they are familiar with data collection and the nature and design of the data collection instruments employed by the researcher. The guidance and counsel provided by these mentors were invaluable in verifying the proper path forward to correctly gathering and analyzing data. The project design and research tools were also evaluated and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Asbury Theological Seminary.

Data Collection

Once IRB approval for the project was secured, invitations to participate were sent to multiple organizations that fell within the four categories of mission sending

agencies as detailed by the researcher: parachurch groups, local churches, Short-Term Mission organizations (STMs) and Long-Term Mission organizations (LTMs). In order to participate, these agencies agreed to send the researcher a copy of their current discipleship program/mission training curriculum. They also agreed to send researcher supplied letters of invitation to participate and a SurveyMonkey link to at least ten individuals that trained or discipled under their respective missional ministries.

When the researcher received copies of missional training materials, they were evaluated against the Missional Framework Tool. This evaluation was conducted to collect data related to what essential missional elements were present in each program/experience and what elements were missing from each program that the researcher identified as essential or best practices based upon the literature review. Data from the document analysis was gathered and reviewed to identify what discipleship programs included more of the identified essential elements and best practices. These findings were then cross-referenced against trainees' self-reports of continuing to practice missional action. Data was also collected to identify what elements might need to be added to existing or new missional discipleship programs to increase the degree of enduring missional action in the lives of participants.

For those disciples/trainees that agreed to participate after reading the letter of invitation and description of the project, the SurveyMonkey survey link would take participants to a consent page. Once confirming consent, participants filled out a survey to indicate what kinds of missional activity they were still engaging in after receiving their missional discipleship. SurveyMonkey collected the data submitted by these participants. The tools built into the software enabled the researcher to quickly evaluate

which agencies' trainees were more often engaging in missional action and thus, which were more effectively training missional disciples.

Mission sending agencies were also asked to connect the researcher with their organizational trainers/disciplers. After receiving a consent and confidentiality letter, trainers were contacted by phone to confirm their willingness to participate. Finally, a Zoom call was set up by the researcher, and each trainer was interviewed. Trainers' responses to a set of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) were recorded digitally with their permission. Data gathered from the interviews was analyzed to determine what, if any, common elements or discipling practices were employed by the top trainers, as well as investigating what means were employed to overcome common obstacles to trainees engagement in enduring missional action.

Data Analysis

In order to gain a thicker view of what elements of a mission training program might be more effective in producing enduring missional action in participants, three tools were employed: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and survey questionnaires. Document analysis of mission curriculums, discipleship materials, and training programs was conducted to ascertain what emphases are present in current learning experiences, both in terms of content taught and in terms of the process of training. The gathered data was analyzed over against what elements biblical and current missional literature deem essential. The analysis tool formulated by the researcher was based upon literary research into those fundamental elements and best practices and was used to systematically analyze various formal missional training programs. This process was used to identify themes common to all mission training and discipleship experiences

as well as to highlight what essential elements might be missing from many or all of the learning experiences.

To gain a better understanding of what the trainers themselves thought essential, semi-structured interview questions were posed to the leaders deemed most effective at equipping disciples to engage in enduring missional action. The interviews were conducted to ascertain what these leaders were convinced were the most essential elements of teaching and skills training for their trainees. Trainers were asked what, in terms of elements/practices, they believed or perceived were most responsible for seeing participants engage in enduring missional action following their training. They were also asked what they felt most contributed to enduring missional action in such participants after the trip. Review of these various trainer interviews was then used to highlight common themes of what such disciplers believed to be the most essential elements or best practices they have used to equip mission participants to engage in enduring missional action.

Finally, the trainees were surveyed using a questionnaire to determine if they were still engaging in missional action following their training. If they were, they were asked to identify what in those learning experiences they felt helped them to do so. Questionnaires were tabulated for the mission program trainee's degree of enduring engagement in missional action as denoted by self-scoring at least 50% of the questions with a score of 3, 4, or 5 (describes me moderately well, well, and very well). Those questionnaires that were so scored were then examined for the final open question, "What element(s) of the STM mission training program most has helped you to maintain ongoing missional action in your life?" Other questionnaires were also examined for their

answers to this final question, but they were weighted less than those who demonstrated enduring missional action.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements/best practices essential to creating a learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies in order to enhance the enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees). It was important to the researcher to ensure that these fundamental elements and best practices were also biblically and theologically founded and that they have contributed to the effective multiplication of disciples that engage in enduring missional action, both historically and currently.

This chapter identifies the participants in the study and their demographic makeup. It provides a document analysis of current training/discipling curricula being used by various types of US based mission sending agencies and relates the analysis to the three research questions. It contains the coded qualitative data from the semi-structured interviews conducted with mission agency trainers related to each of the three research questions. It presents the quantitative data from the online questionnaire filled out by trainees of these agencies and connects this data to the research questions. Finally, Chapter Four concludes with a list of major findings from the presented data.

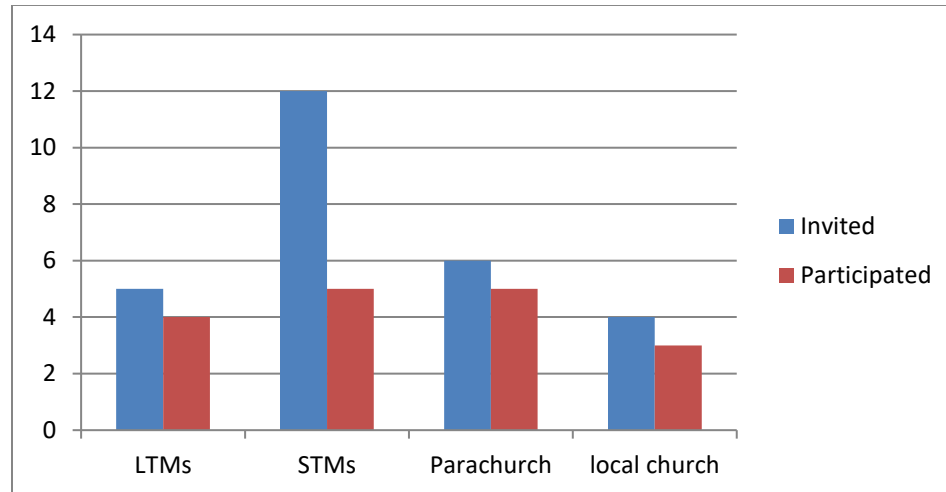
Participants

The initial invitation to participate in the project was offered to twenty-seven mission sending agencies. These agencies represented four categories of missional entities: Long Term Mission agencies (LTMs), Short Term Mission agencies (STMs), Parachurch organizations, and local church and/or denominationally based groups. In

total, seventeen of the twenty-seven invited agreed to participate at some level (63%).

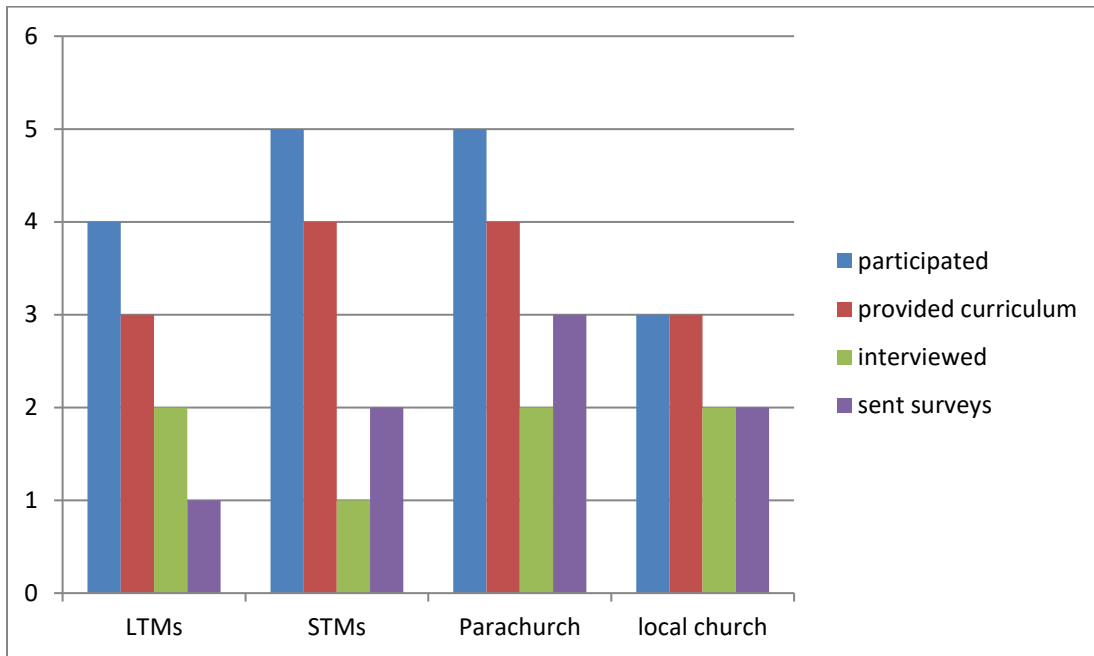
Out of five LTMs that were invited, four chose to participate (80%). Of the twelve STMs invited, five chose to participate (42%). Three church-based groups opted to participate out of four invited (75%), and five of six Parachurch organizations agreed (83%).

Figure 4.1 Participating Mission Sending Agencies



Of the seventeen agencies that agreed to participate in the study, twelve sent training materials/discipleship curriculum for the researcher to analyze, eight agreed to send out surveys to their trainees, and seven organizational trainers agreed to be interviewed. Of the seventeen mission sending agencies that opted to participate in the study, seven provided the researcher with the opportunity to interview primary trainers: two LTMs, two Parachurch organizations, two Local church groups, and one STM.

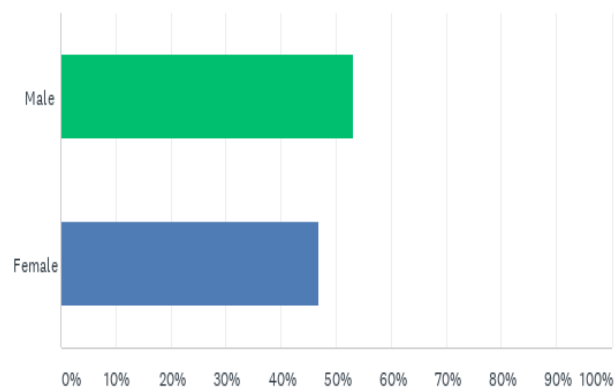
Figure 4.2 Mission Sending Agencies' Level of Participation



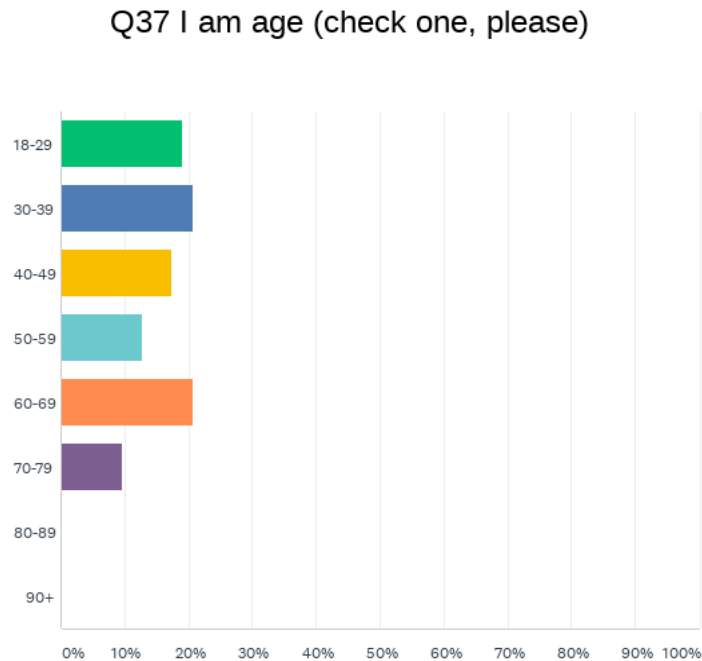
The survey participants that responded to the offer to participate were fairly balanced in terms of gender (53% male, 47% female).

Figure 4.3 Survey Participant Gender Balance

Q38 I am



Likewise, variation in the age brackets of participants was distributed evenly.

Figure 4.4 Survey Participant Age Balance

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

What are fundamental/essential elements/best practices necessary for creating a learning experience to equip participants to more effectively and regularly conduct enduring missional action in their daily life contexts?

The researcher employed the Missionary Framework Tool (MFT), a self-designed thematic grid developed from literary research, to organize data gathered from the document analysis portion of the study. The grid below identifies fundamental elements that appeared in the researcher's analysis of the twelve curricula, noting in how many organization's materials each theme appeared. Only if a theme explicitly appeared in the curricula examined was it recorded. For example, "necessity of growth" was implied in all material examined, but it was not always explicitly stated as a core goal of the training.

Table 4.1 MFT Missional Tasks Identified in Document Analysis of Curricula

Relationship Tasks		Stewardship Tasks		Redemptive Tasks	
Daily HS connection	11	Value of the Bible Narrative	12	Gospel proclamation	12
Intimacy w/God	11	Narrative impact on identity	11	Discipling others	12
Incarnating Jesus via time spent	8	Narr. impact on life structure	11	Spiritual war/free captives	4
Necessity of growth	11	Narr. impact on community structure	10	Community action/free the oppressed	5
Community needed to grow	11	Exegesis of Scripture	10		
Accountability	9	Exegesis of Community	9		
Modeling+mentoring	12	Incarnate witness	12		
Address trainee brokenness	6	Communal witness	8		
Create org culture	10	Leader development	10		
Right relationship w/others	12	APEST emphasis	1		
Right relationship w/creation	2	Using spiritual disciplines	10		
Right relationship w/community	10	Using personality/gifts/experiences	8		

In addition to the above themes, there were additional important, foundational concepts that emerged from the document study that the researcher believes warrant further investigation. The theme of “powerlessness/power sharing by leadership” came up as an essential cultural component and training concept in one organization. Similar to this was an emphasis on teaching and concrete expression of “the priesthood of all believers” in four organizations, where there was a strong emphasis on allowing lay ministries to develop and expand and multiply. However, in all but one case, this expansion was reliant upon lay people going through the organizational training program. In one mission sending agency, all training was optional and offered “as needed/requested” by the lay missionary. Two organizations explicitly highlighted the

element of “liminality,” the concept that there are transition moments inherent in the life track of every disciple, and also emphasized the need to aid disciples during those transition moments to direct and support them to make a healthy transition into the next stage of discipleship and spiritual growth. One organization also drew specific attention to the theme of proxemics, that there is a need for trainees to understand how to strategically use physical space for missional action and connecting with God. The above additions also showed up in biblical and missional literature, but they were not included in the MFT. Finally, one organization explicitly mentioned in their documentation that they have intentionally fashioned their training in an online, adult-interactive, open-source format as a strategy to engage more people and especially to engage younger generation learners. While this was detailed only in one curriculum, it was implied in the format of six other agencies studied by the researcher. So, this also proved to be a core process element of many organizations’ training experiences.

As a second means to investigate the first research question, semi-structured interviews (SSIs) were conducted with mission agency trainers in order to gather what they felt to be the fundamental/essential elements/best practices in their training curricula for creating a learning experience to equip participants to more effectively and regularly conduct enduring missional action in their contexts. Seven of the seventeen organizations participating in the study offered to provide an interview with one of their lead trainers: two LTMs, two local church agencies, two parachurch organizations, and one STM. Many of the essential elements highlighted in these interviews corresponded with elements identified by the researcher in the MFT. So, for comparison and contrast, the researcher has reproduced a similar table below to highlight in red what elements SSIs

with mission trainers brought out, and how many trainers addressed these issues. By contrast, if an element of the MFT was *not* mentioned at all, it remains in black, with no number designation.

Table 4.2 MFT Missional Tasks Identified in Trainer Interviews

Relationship Tasks	Stewardship Tasks	Redemptive Tasks
Daily HS connection 6	Value of the Bible Narrative 5	Gospel proclamation 2
Intimacy w/God	Narrative impact on identity	Discipling others 7
Incarnating Jesus via time spent	Narr. impact on life structure	Spiritual war/free captives 2
Necessity of growth	Narr. impact on community structure 6	Community action/free the oppressed
Community needed to grow 2	Exegesis of Scripture	
Accountability 4	Exegesis of Community 6	
Modeling+mentoring 6	Incarnate witness 4	
Address trainee brokenness 2	Communal witness	
Create org culture 4	Leader development	
Right relationship w/others 4	APEST emphasis	
Right relationship w/creation	Using spiritual disciplines 6	
Right relationship w/community 6	Using personality/gifts/exper 3	

One trainer referred to the centrality of the scriptural narrative in the discipling process as both a map and a compass. The trainer said that “scripture guides both the disciple and discipler with the understanding of where they need to go, providing the goal and purpose of the journey, but also serves as the compass, pointing the way, every step of the way, correcting course and keeping both on track.” In addition to the above foundational elements of discipleship that the interviewers felt were essential to their training process, several other key concepts emerged. They have been charted below

along with the number of trainers that expressed an opinion about the importance of the element.

Table 4.3

Other essential elements of missional discipleship identified by trainers	No. of Trainers
Having a conceptual model of growth stages & transitions between stages to assist trainee's maturation	4
Include coaching as a support service to assist trainees with understanding & implementation	5
Using Jesus 3-step model of disciple making as expressed in "Master Plan of Evangelism"	3
Training in the proper use of space (proxemics) to create discipling environment	2
Having universal continuity of training for all trainees to provide a common culture and foundation	1
Having a training process that equips trainees to be lifelong learners (learn how to learn)	1
Specific training on why submission under authority is needed and how to submit	1
Decentralization of authority/structures to empower new leaders; intentional power-sharing; freedom to create new forms; priesthood of all believers; open set vs. closed set participation in the mission	4
Training in asset-based ministry creation in cooperation with a community/local church	3
Being intentional about connecting disciples' learning to the goal/mission of Christ & the agency	2
Contextualize the learning process based upon trainees' background, ethnicity, age, etc.	2
Training the principle of reciprocity: trainees need to allow their neighbors to serve them to build relationship with them	3
Strong emphasis on trainees coming to grips with the Lordship of Christ	2
Inclusion of team building exercises and conflict resolution training	2
Emphasis on online, digital, open source, easily accessible/referenced, adult interactive learning format	6
Emphasis on in-person learning	3
Training process must be easily reproducible to allow multiplication of trainers and new trainees	2
Sought to create a collaborative learning environment/group interaction to	2

utilize trainees to assist in training one another via reflection, discussion, etc.	
Emphasized use of story-telling as a medium to communicate content effectively	2
Emphasized a “sand-box” approach to training (buffet style choosing what to train in and when) vs. “pathway”/directed training	1

Having a conceptual framework of how disciples can see themselves in transition along the journey toward spiritual maturity was of high importance to four of the seven trainers. They felt that having such a model was very helpful to both motivating trainees to continue the maturation process and helpful in encouraging trainees when they began to bog down in various stages by highlighting the reality that setbacks were normal and an expected part of the process. The three-step model of Jesus’ discipling method, as expressed by Robert Coleman in his book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, was mentioned by name by three of seven trainers. The method involves modeling missional lifestyle and action, engaging in mission with/alongside disciples, then sending disciples out to carry aspects of the mission forward, sans the mentor, with a debriefing and reflection time afterwards. This reflection time is critical in the methodology to correcting mistakes and strengthening successes in missional engagement. The theory of proxemics involves a recognition that certain sized groups and certain sized physical spaces are conducive to specific types of discipleship and training. For example, one-on-one mentoring in a smaller office sized space allows for a deeper level of intimacy and accountability than would a sanctuary-sized gathering. Two trainers felt that training their disciples in this method was essential to trainees being able to most effectively disciple new people. Six of the seven trainers believed that online training was necessary for the current cultural milieu and had worked hard to transfer most of their training into such digital formats. However, two of these trainers stated that the format was a “necessary

evil.” While they felt a need to use it based on cultural shifts, they believed that in-person training was more effective. One trainer argued for the outright superiority of in-person training and resisted a wholesale shift to web-based, digitized training. Four trainers emphasized their conviction that the hierarchical model of the church power structure generally, and discipleship within that structure specifically, has greatly hindered the multiplication of disciples and the fulfillment of the *Missio Dei*. They prized power sharing, giving trainees permission to step into ministry and leadership roles without the typical educational or experiential pre-requisites that traditional denominations have expected (like ordination). Luther’s “priesthood of all believers” concept exemplifies the goal these trainers are striving towards. As an extreme example of this, one local church sending group has intentionally structured their training program as a “buffet-style training smorgasbord” where potential new leaders can pick and choose what trainings they feel best fit what they need. The organization refers to this method as a “sandbox” approach to discipleship. The term is taken from a genre of video games that allows individuals to explore what they want to do, rather than following a set script. Finally, collaborative discipleship was seen as essential for two trainers. This process envisions that groups are being disciplined together and are actually also “collaborating” in the discipleship process themselves. In this model, the trainer is not the only expert in the room from which to learn. Rather each member of the group has much that is valuable to share with the others, and together they are able to learn and process via discussion and reflection to a much greater degree.

The final tool used to gather data to investigate potential answers to Research Question #1 was a questionnaire sent to mission agency trainees. In the survey,

respondents detailed what they felt was the single most important aspect of their training experience via an open-ended question: “In your opinion, what is the one thing you have learned or experienced that you believe has helped you more than anything else to engage more in missional action than you did before your training?” Fifty-nine trainees answered this question with varying responses. Nearly all of the items they identified as “most significant” to aiding them in engaging in ongoing missional expression clustered around themes that have already been identified in missional and biblical literature and highlighted by agency trainers.

Five respondents (5) shared that the most significant thing they took away from their training experience was the importance of understanding how culture shapes and influences people. One person said, “It’s so important to see the world through other’s eyes.” Eight (8) stated that realizing that building relationships was the key to making new disciples and growing in one’s own discipleship was the most impactful takeaway. Twelve (12) cited deepening knowledge of the biblical narrative and noted that being able to see people and the world through via God’s perspective through studying the Bible was most helpful for engendering enduring missional action in their lives. Seven (7) believed that developing a regular habit of prayer and spiritual disciplines, which led to more intimacy with God and concern for others, empowered them to exhibit more missional expression. Eleven (11) attributed training to making all the difference in their lives, with six of those specifying that field training was what turned the light on for them. The other five spoke of specific ministry skill training as being most helpful. One (1) cited good mentoring as the key to their growth and perseverance in missional expression. Two (2) others cited “intentionality,” that is, the commitment to be

intentional about making disciples and investing in others, as the key to their missional fruit. Two (2) believed that having a team focused on missional goals was necessary for them. Another one (1) was convinced that learning a better method of time management was what made the difference in his life. The final nine (9) drew attention to some internal character quality that developed within them during the course of the general training process. The qualities cited were: gratitude (2), humility/having a teachable spirit (2), standing firm in faith (1), being kind (1), having a desire to help others (1), coming to recognize the Lordship of Christ (1), and empathy (1)—“learning how to identify specific needs of people around me inspired me to do more for God.”

Respondents’ answers did not as closely correlate to concepts believed by trainers with regard the most significant factors to multiplying the expression of missional action in their trainees. However, there were several themes that emerged in survey participants’ responses that also were highlighted by trainers and in missional and biblical literature.

These are noted in the table below.

Table 4.4

Essential elements of missional discipleship identified by trainees	No.
understanding how culture shapes and influences people	5
realizing that building relationships was the key to discipleship	8
deepening knowledge of the Bible Narrative especially being able to see people and the world through via God’s perspective	12
developing a habit of prayer/spiritual disciplines, creating intimacy with God and concern for others	7
Field training and skill training to overcome ignorance/inability	11
Time management	1
Mentoring/coaching	1
Necessity of community/team	2
Intentionality	2

The only aspect that trainees identified as “most significant” in aiding them in developing more missional expression in their lives that did not share commonality with previous concepts was the notion that the training experience produced some internal quality or characteristic in the lives of the trainees that motivated and sustained them in conducting ongoing missional action. Nine of fifty-nine (15.25 %) cited this reality.

Trainees’ survey responses to three additional questions were also informative in uncovering what they believed to be helpful to them in growing in and persevering in missional action. Participants were asked to rate themselves on how often they engaged in missional activity both before their training experience and after. Their responses are depicted in the chart below.

Figure 4.5 Survey Respondent Level of Missional Action Pre-Training

Q33 Rate yourself on engaging in missional action before your training and mission experience.

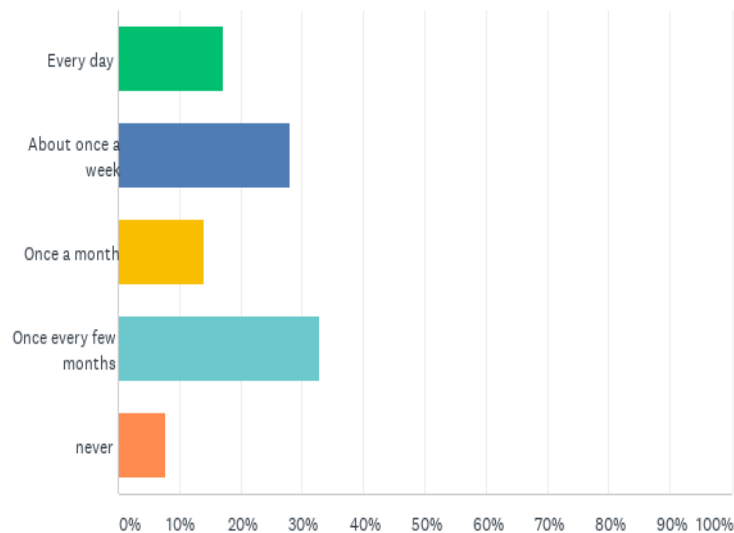
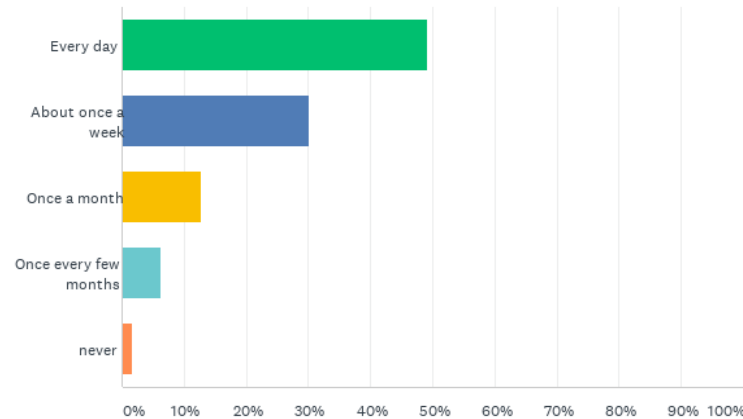


Figure 4.6 Survey Respondent Level of Missional Action Post-Training

Q34 Rate yourself on engaging in missional action after your training and mission experience.



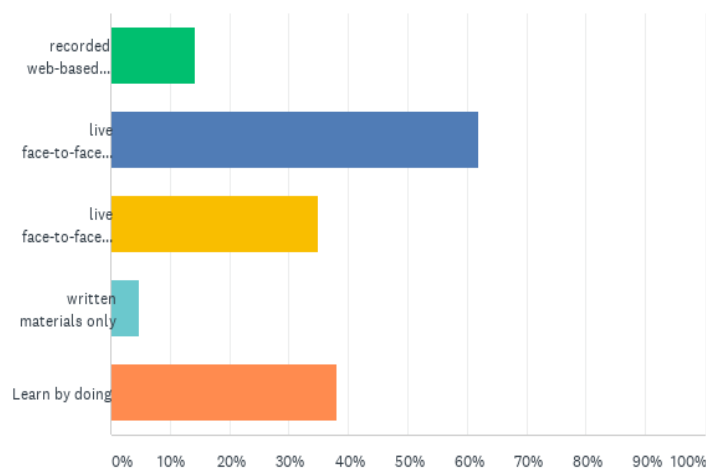
Before receiving missional training of any kind, less than 16% of respondents self-reported that they engaged in some form of missional action (as defined for them in the survey questions) on a daily basis. More reported engagement on a weekly basis (28.6%), but nearly half reported that they acted missionally once a month or less (48%). By contrast, after some form of discipleship/training, participants reporting daily engagement in missional action jumped to 48.4% from 16%, a 300% increase. Weekly engagement did not increase appreciably, but it did increase by 2.1%. Those who had previously engaged in little (once every few months), or no missional activity, dropped from 33.3% to 6.5% and from 8% to 1.6% respectively, a decrease of nearly 500% in both cases.

The final survey question of relevance to the investigation of fruitful training processes examined vehicles of discipling that trainees utilized during their learning experiences. The chart below details five categories of learning vehicles and details which the trainees believed to help them most to engage in enduring missional action.

Respondents were allowed to rate the effectiveness of all forms they experienced, but they were asked to identify the one they found most helpful. Many participants rated several, however.

Figure 4.7 Trainees' report on type of training that produced missional action

Q41 Which type of training did you find most helpful to you related to engaging more in missional action? (pick the one that you found most helpful, please)



Surveyed trainees reported that web-based, online training without a live human mentor or coach was identified as one of the least productive in their experience of producing missional action in their lives. Only 14.5% of those surveyed believed it to be effective, a stark contrast to the view expressed by 4 of 7 expert trainers. The most valued form of training identified was a live group session, either in-person or online, that allowed discussion, interaction, and reflection (61.3%). It was followed by the category of “learning by doing” or discipling “in the field” with real-life experiences and hands-on application of training (37.1%) and learning one-on-one with a live mentor, either in-person or online (35.5%). Trainees deemed making their way through written materials as the least effective to equipping and inspiring missional action (4.8%).

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

What are the common obstacles (including gaps in training and knowledge) that mission participants experience, which hinder them from conducting enduring missional action in their personal life contexts after their learning experience?

The researcher employed the Missionary Framework Tool (MFT), a self-designed thematic grid developed from literary research, to organize data gathered from the document analysis portion of the study. The grid below identifies obstacles to the internalization of training skills and content that were identified by the researcher in the prior literary review, leading to a lack of enduring missional action on the part of trainees. The grid below also notes the number of training curricula expressly documenting such obstacles during the researcher's analysis of the twelve curricula, noting in how many organizations' materials each theme appeared. Only if a theme explicitly appeared in the curricula examined was it recorded.

Table 4.5

MFT Obstacles that curricula identified as barriers to missional expression	
Fear	6
Ignorance/lack of training	8
Selfishness	8
Time management	7

In addition to the above obstacles that were originally identified by the researcher, the training curricula also highlighted other obstacles that trainers within the twelve

organizations faced. The primary obstacle not recorded in the MFT but addressed explicitly in multiple training materials was the problem of seeking to control situations and a lack of flexibility. This concern was discussed in training materials from two different perspectives: an inflexibility/desire to control on the part of leadership, which led to an inability on the part of new disciples to grow into maturity, and an inflexibility/desire to control on the part of trainees, which hindered them from being able to move into maturity that God/leaders were calling them to. While this issue could be identified within a subcategory of “fear,” the researcher felt that this showed up as a concern in training materials enough times (6) to warrant special mention. Also of note is that of the six agencies that identified control/inflexibility as a serious concern and obstacle to discipleship and the internalization of mission training, four were STMs. One LTM and one local church also noted this obstacle, but no parachurch materials expressly addressed it.

Two other obstacles that training curricula directly addressed as concerns that interfered with missional expression were isolation and pride. One local church curriculum identified isolation, perceived or actual, as an obstacle that often led to burnout, discouragement, and eventually abandonment of attempts to fulfill God’s mission. Pridefulness was cited by one STM as an obstacle that often lead to conflict, team breakdown, and corruption of authentic missional expression. One local church curriculum also connected the notion of “tribalism” to both fear and selfishness as something that inhibits missional expression. This may be an additional obstacle worth examining further at a later date.

With respect to the semi-structured interviews, trainers expressed a number of perceived obstacles that hindered missional expression in the lives of disciples/trainees. The original four obstacles identified by the researcher in the MFT were Ignorance, Fear, Selfishness and Time Management issues. Trainers being interviewed for the project also expressed variations of these themes. Four cited the problem of a lack of training, especially with respect to conceptual models regarding spiritual transitions, means of understanding growth into spiritual maturity, and even basic unawareness of the *Missio Dei*. One discipler mentioned the problem of fear on the part of disciples that hinders them from stepping out in faith and meeting expectations of Christ. Two trainers referenced a concern related to time management among American trainees who confessed to the trainers that practical implementation of their training was impeded by busyness and the distractions of life that consumed their time. One trainer also made note of the selfishness of their trainees' which led to a lack of missional expression as trainees pursued comfort to the point of stagnation and risk avoidance, rather than moving beyond comfort zones into obedience that leads to growth. A comparison chart to the MFT might look something like this:

Table 4.6

MFT Obstacles identified by trainers as barriers to missional expression	
Fear	1
Ignorance/lack of training	4
Selfishness	1
Time management	2

In addition to the above obstacles expressed by those interviewed, many other elements were brought up that trainers believe have slowed or even halted growth and the expression of missional action in the lives of their disciples. The chart below details these along with the number of trainers concerned about the obstacle.

Table 4.7

Other obstacles identified by trainers as barriers to missional expression	
Wrong attitudes, desires and/or expectations on the part of trainees, lack of missional impulse	1
Too much control by established leaders, lack of power sharing, not providing opportunities Or sufficient resources/support for trainees to grow into leadership	4
Inflexibility of trainees and/or trainers; idolizing forms	5
Trainee lacking support, resources, coaching, mentoring and/or feeling isolated and/or discouraged, which leads to quitting/failure to persevere	6
Lack of accountability, either due to lack of structures of accountability or unwillingness of the trainee to be held accountable	2
Pridefulness of trainee (which may express itself through trainee impatience or lack of desire/willingness to work with others to create missional community/expressions	3
Sins/temptations that entangle the trainee	2
Brokenness of the trainee that sabotages growth in discipleship/missional expression	4
Lack of trainee Emotional Intelligence	1
Lack of trainee ability/training/desire to deal with interpersonal conflicts in a healthy way	1
Trainee lacking intimacy with Christ (which leads to succumbing to pressures/temptations) and a hindering of witness	2
Rebellion against authority by trainee	1

Survey respondents also shed light on what they felt was the most important aspect of their missional learning that was *not a part* of their initial training experience. This information was gathered via an open-ended question, asking respondents what they now recognize would have been helpful to know: “Looking back, what do you think

could have helped you to engage in missional action more effectively, if it had been present in your initial training?” While answers varied widely, most touched on themes that had been already addressed in the literature and by agency discipling trainers.

Of fifty-two responses, nine (9) clustered around the desire for more coaching, mentoring, and modeling from leaders and trainers, as well as expressing a desire for more accountability to help them persevere in missional engagement. One of these felt that having a team of mission-minded people would have helped foster enduring action. Fourteen (14) felt that they lacked sufficient training to be able to missionally engage with others as they wanted to. For five (5), this was related to not feeling they possessed a sufficient biblical foundation for missional expression after the training. Some (2) desired to have more information about specific topics that allowed engagement with people in their context, especially in areas like social justice or environmental concerns. Some (4) stated that they wanted to see more concrete field training in the practicing of missional skills, and others (3) wanted more training generally. Two (2) respondents indicated they would have liked more focus on dealing with brokenness in themselves and others. Seven (7) indicated that the most significant aspect of the training that they felt was lacking was an understanding of how to listen to God more closely and to follow God and His leading. Eight (8) cited a felt need to develop their ability to listen to members of a given community and be trained in skills to develop relationships with others, especially those different from them. They also cited a need to expand relational discipleship, as well as to develop asset-based missional community services/ministries. Six (6) shared that they wanted to have more training in culturally relevant disciple making, so as to better understand how to avoid cultural mistakes and overcome cultural barriers to the gospel.

Two (2) felt they needed more support and encouragement from local church leadership, permission to take bold steps of faith and risks, as well as resourcing missional activity.

Two (2) felt they needed more help with time management development. Two (2) others felt they needed more help with identifying their role, gifts and place in God's mission.

To categorize the responses of survey participants of self-perceived obstacles to the expression of missional action, in a format which easily compares and contrasts to trainers' insights and literary contributions, the researcher has reproduced a table below. Responses that correspond to previously expressed themes are highlighted in red and have received a value correlating to the number of trainees that cited the theme.

Table 4.8

MFT obstacles that trainees identified as barriers to missional expression	
Fear	1
Ignorance/lack of training (including lack of seeing one's place/gifts/role in mission)	16
Selfishness	
Time management	2

Additional hindrances were noted by trainers, over and above those listed in Table 4.8, as seen below in Table 4.9:

Table 4.9

Other obstacles to missional expression noted by trainees vs. trainers	
Wrong attitudes, desires and/or expectations on the part of trainees, lack of missional impulse	
Too much control by established leaders, lack of power sharing, not providing opportunities Or sufficient resources/support for trainees to grow into leadership	2

Inflexibility of trainees and/or trainers; idolizing forms	
Trainee lacking support, resources, coaching, mentoring and/or feeling isolated and/or discouraged, which leads to quitting/failure to persevere Lack of accountability, either due to lack of structures of accountability	9
Pridefulness of trainee (which may express itself through trainee impatience or lack of desire/willingness to work with others to create missional community/expressions)	
Sins/temptations that entangle the trainee	2
Brokenness that sabotages growth in discipleship/missional expression	2
Lack of trainee Emotional Intelligence	
Lack of trainee ability/training/desire to deal with interpersonal conflicts in a healthy way	
Trainee lacking intimacy with Christ due to lack of understanding/training in listening	7
Rebellion against authority by trainee	

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

How do the resources available currently for equipping mission participants to conduct enduring missional action in their own daily life contexts compare and contrast to missional goals expressed in the scriptures?

The Missional Framework Tool was initially created by the researcher to reflect fundamental and essential elements for equipping disciples in missional expression found in the scriptures and fleshed out in missional and theological literature. Therefore, to address the findings related to Research Question #3, an expanded table has been reproduced below.

Table 4.10 Connecting MFT biblical themes to agency curricula

Relationship Tasks		Stewardship Tasks		Redemptive Tasks	
Daily HS connection	11	Value of the Bible Narrative	12	Gospel proclamation	12
Intimacy w/God	11	Narrative impact on identity	11	Discipling others	12

Incarnating Jesus via time spent	8	Narr. impact on life structure	11	Spiritual war/free captives	4
Necessity of growth	11	Narr. impact on community structure	10	Community action/free the oppressed	5
Community needed to grow	11	Exegesis of Scripture	10		
Accountability	9	Exegesis of Community	9		
Modeling+mentoring	12	Incarnate witness	12		
Address trainee brokenness	6	Communal witness	8		
Create culture	10	Leader development	10		
Right relationship w/others	12	APEST emphasis	1		
Right relationship w/creation	2	Using spiritual disciplines	10		
Right relationship w/community	10	Using personality/gifts/exper	8		
		Power sharing Priesthood of All Believers	5		

Likewise, -the obstacles to training and missional expression that were identified in the curricula of the twelve organizations were nearly always connected to biblical concepts by the training authors, including the obstacles identified by agencies that were not in researcher's original MFT. Therefore, a revised table below shows a comprehensive list of obstacles to discipleship and missional expression that related to biblical teaching as contrary to and hindering of God's Mission.

Table 4.11

Obstacles curricula identified as barriers to missional expression	No.
Fear	6
Ignorance/lack of training	8
Selfishness	8
Lacking Time management(distracted/busyness)	7

Control/Inflexibility	6
Isolation	1
Pridefulness	1

SSIs with mission agency trainers yielded several foundational elements of a discipleship learning experience/training process that corresponded to the biblically informed MFT. A comparison/contrast chart has been recreated below, noting the number of trainers that specifically cited principles of content or process from the MFT that they deemed essential to a biblical and missional disciple's training.

Table 4.12 Trainers corroborate MFT biblical essentials to missional expression

Relationship Tasks		Stewardship Tasks		Redemptive Tasks	
Daily HS connection	6	Value of the Bible Narrative	5	Gospel proclamation	2
Intimacy w/God		Narrative impact on identity		Discipling others	7
Incarnating Jesus via time spent		Narr. impact on life structure		Spiritual war/free captives	2
Necessity of growth		Narr. impact on community structure	6	Community action/free the oppressed	
Community needed to grow	2	Exegesis of Scripture			
Accountability	4	Exegesis of Community	6		
Modeling+mentoring	6	Incarnate witness	4		
Address trainee brokenness	2	Communal witness			
Create org culture	4	Leader development			
Right relationship w/others	4	APEST emphasis			
Right relationship w/creation		Using spiritual disciplines	6		
Right relationship w/community	6	Using personality/gifts/exper	3		

In addition to the above biblical themes that trainers referenced in their interviews, the following items from their observations also connected directly with either scriptural teaching and principles observed in Jesus' life and/or the early church.

Table 4.13 Trainers' other biblical essentials to missional expression

Using Jesus 3-step model of disciple making as expressed in "Master Plan of Evangelism"	3
Having a training process that equips trainees to be lifelong learners (learn how to learn)	1
Specific training on why submission under authority is needed and how to do so	1
Decentralization of authority/structures to empower new leaders; intentional power-sharing; freedom to create new forms; priesthood of all believers; open set vs. closed set participation in the mission	4
Training in asset-based ministry creation in cooperation with a community/local church	3
Being intentional about connecting disciples' learning to the goal/mission of Christ	9
Contextualize the learning process based upon trainees background, ethnicity, age, etc.	2
Training the principle of reciprocity: trainees need to allow their neighbors to serve them to build relationship with them	3
Strong emphasis on the Lordship of Christ	2
Inclusion of team building exercises and conflict resolution training	2
Emphasis on in-person learning	3
Sought to create a collaborative learning environment/group interaction to utilize trainees to assist in training one another via reflection, discussion, etc.	2
Emphasized use of story-telling as a medium to communicate content effectively	2

Only three agency trainers specifically spoke of Jesus' model of disciple making as presented in Robert Coleman's book *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Three additional trainers spoke specifically of the three aspects of Jesus' way of disciple making as indispensable in developing missional disciples that engage in enduring missional action.

Those steps are 1) modeling the kind of missional life that the discipler wants to see replicated; 2) as a trainer, doing mission/ministry/life with trainees, providing concrete experience and opportunity to actively engage in ministry alongside the trainer; 3) sending disciples out to do ministry without the trainer, to give them an opportunity to put into practice what they have learned, followed by a debriefing and reflection time with their trainer to better understand what went well, what did not, and how to correct and adjust mistakes that were made. The seventh trainer recognized the value of this biblical model of in-person training, but the trainer shifted away from it in order to reach more trainees via online formats. This trainer recognized the downside losing the opportunity to do more mentoring, modeling, and coaching and is trying to find ways to make up for that lack without losing the strength of the digital platform to teach and train more people, more quickly.

Obstacles that impede trainees in becoming missional disciples were also connected to biblical warnings by many trainers. The four biblical themes of obstacles highlighted in the MFT were cited by trainers.

Table 4.14

MFT Biblical obstacles trainers identified as barriers to missional expression	
Fear	1
Ignorance/lack of training	4
Selfishness	1
Time management	2

In addition, the following table of trainer-identified hindrances were identified in the interview process and also corresponded to direct biblical teachings or examples.

Table 4.15

Other biblical obstacles to missional expression noted by trainers	No.
Wrong attitudes, desires and/or expectations on the part of trainees, lack of missional impulse	1
Too much control by established leaders, lack of power sharing, not providing opportunities for trainees to grow into leadership	4
Inflexibility of trainees and/or trainers; idolizing forms	5
Trainee lacking support, resources, coaching, mentoring and/or feeling isolated and/or discouraged, which leads to quitting/failure to persevere	6
Lack of accountability, either due to lack of structures of accountability or unwillingness of the trainee to be held accountable	2
Pridefulness of trainee (which may express itself through trainee impatience or lack of desire/willingness to work with others to create missional community/expressions	3
Sins/temptations that entangle the trainee	2
Brokenness of the trainee that sabotages growth in discipleship/missional expression	4
Lack of trainee ability/training/desire to deal with interpersonal conflicts in a healthy way	1
Trainee lacking intimacy with Christ (which leads to succumbing to pressure/temptations) and a hindering of witness	2
Rebellion against authority by train	1

Finally, trainees themselves highlighted biblical concepts that they felt both helped them to engage more faithfully in missional action, and what obstacles hindered them in such.

Table 4.16

Essential biblical elements to missional expression identified by trainees	No.
Realizing that building relationships was the key to discipleship	8
Deepening knowledge of the Bible Narrative especially being able to see people and the world through via God's perspective	12
Developing a habit of prayer/spiritual disciplines, creating intimacy with God and concern for others	7
Field training and skill training to overcome ignorance/inability	11

Time management	1
Mentoring/coaching is essential to discipleship	1
Necessity of community/team	2
Intentionality	2
Training experience, itself, produced some internal quality or characteristic in the lives of the trainees that motivated and sustained them in conducting ongoing missional action.	9

Related to trainee-identified obstacles that correspond to biblical warnings or stories, the following chart details themes brought up in survey answers, as well as noting how many respondents saw these as problems. While some obstacles highlighted by trainees match closely what the researcher identified early on in this study, and several were identified by trainers, trainees particularly focused on obstacles related to lacking training, either in terms of content or process (ways/means of learning being ineffective), blaming these for negatively impacting missional expression in their lives. Lacking intimacy with Christ was the other key obstacle reported by trainees.

Table 4.17

Biblical obstacles that trainees identified as barriers to missional expression	No.
Fear	1
Ignorance/lack of training (including lack of seeing one's place/gifts/role in mission)	16
Time management	2

Too much control by established leaders, lack of power sharing, not providing opportunities or sufficient resources/support for trainees to grow into leadership	2
Trainee lacking support, resources, coaching, mentoring and/or feeling isolated and/or discouraged, which leads to quitting/failure to persevere Lack of accountability, either due to lack of structures of accountability	9
Sins/temptations that entangle the trainee	2

Brokenness that sabotages growth in discipleship/missional expression	2
Trainee lacking intimacy with Christ due to lack of understanding/training in listening	7

Summary of Major Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements/best practices essential to creating a learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies in order to enhance the enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees). It was important to the researcher to ensure that these fundamental elements and best practices were also biblically and theologically well-founded and that they have contributed to the effective multiplication of disciples that engage in enduring missional action, both historically and currently. Finally, as a part of the process of identifying fundamental and essential elements of a missional discipleship learning experience, it was deemed useful by the researcher to also identify the most common barriers that impede missional disciple formation.

Several major findings became clear from examination of the data of the research tools employed for this study:

1. There is a “common core” of fundamental missional discipleship themes and principles that appear across biblical, historical, and missional literature, in trainer interviews, and in trainees self-reported “most significant” elements of their discipleship experience.
2. Agency trainers do not see pre-recorded, on-demand, web-based forms of training in the same light as their trainees, perceiving these forms to be significantly more important to the modern missional discipleship process than do those they are training, who perceived collaborative, in-person, live, small group formats, and live,

- in-person mentoring and coaching, along with learning by doing, to be most effective for absorbing training that sustained missional action in their lives.
3. Based upon the biblical and literary review conducted by the researcher, it became clear after analysis of curricula, interviews with trainers, and surveying trainees, that there were key essential elements of missional discipleship missing from training experiences of a significant percentage of US-based mission sending agencies.
 4. The data reported by trainees suggests that while some forms of training seem to be more effective, that training and discipling are taking place at all makes a huge impact in the lives of trainees, producing a very significant increase in missional activity on the part of trainees.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The purpose of this study was to identify fundamental elements/best practices essential to creating a learning/discipling experience for US based mission sending agencies in order to enhance the enduring practice of missional action in the personal life contexts of participants (trainees). It was important to the researcher to ensure that these fundamental elements and best practices were also biblically and theologically well-founded and that they have contributed to the effective multiplication of disciples that engage in enduring missional action, both historically and currently.

In this chapter, the four major findings of the research project will be detailed. Each major finding will be correlated to three lenses of reference. The first lens will provide context to the researcher's personal observations about prior to the study, throughout the course of the investigation, and immediately following the study. The second lens will address how and to what degree the literary review of chapter two corroborates the findings. The third lens will examine connections between the findings and the biblical and theological framework of the project. Following the major findings section, ministry implications of the study, limitations of the research study, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further study are explored. Finally, the chapter closes with a postscript from the author.

Major Findings

First Finding – A Common Core Uncovered

There is a “common core” of fundamental missional discipleship themes and principles that appear across biblical, historical, and missional literature, in trainer interviews, and in trainees self-reported “most significant” elements of their discipleship experience.

Personal Observations

Something that became clear to me early in my walk with Christ and service toward others was that the whole counsel of God is important. I have become convinced over the years that everything in the Bible has value, especially those elements or verses that seem to have no relevance whatsoever to our modern context. It would only make sense that the same God who is sending us on His Mission would also expect us to follow the map and blueprint for Mission that He took painstaking efforts to lay out for us in His Word. What I have also observed in the Scriptures is that there are revealed there, both vital content, truth, and principles and also significant processes, which by careful observation we might better learn how to communicate and disseminate that content to others.

Further, I have long observed that there is a difference between someone who has informational knowledge and someone who truly knows God. I have observed over the course of serving in churches, local communities, and in foreign mission fields that it is not enough to share useful practical information with disciples. It is not enough that they be well-educated in proper theological principles nor enough even to train and teach using all the right models and processes. While it is good and important to be well-educated and well trained, there is more that is required to become an effective missional

disciple. One must love God and walk with Him. As was noted in the second major finding section above, even the best trainer and the best training cannot produce good fruit if the soil is bad. A key element of the “common core” of missional discipleship themes is that one seeking to be on a mission with God must first learn to walk with God in right relationship. Once right relationship with God is pursued, God then calls His people to walk in right relationship with others: to love your neighbor as yourself. Out of such love of God flows a sensitivity and leading that is essential to disciples being able to rightly follow God and respond to Him obediently. Out of a genuine love for others flows all manner of other necessary components needed to fulfill God’s divine mission. For example, a love of others leads the missionary to seek to really listen to and understand the culture and concerns of others, to ‘walk a mile in their shoes,’ as it were. It leads the disciple to want to share the gospel and to desire to rectify injustices and to expose and tear down systems that oppress. It leads trainees to swallow their pride and overcome fears to leave their comfort zones and sacrifice to see others come to know Christ. Common core missional themes and principles flow from God through His Word to His people creating a love for Him and others. This love motivates and equips disciples to engage a hurting and broken people and world that God wants to redeem.

Two final observations on commonality that emerge is the significance of community and the significance of the Creation to God. God is not merely interested in redeeming individuals. He is interested in redeeming whole families, communities, and peoples as well as His created order. Many of the essential elements that revealed themselves in the literary and biblical review were connected to the necessity and value of the community, be it the faith community or the neighborhood and people among

whom the missional disciple lives, and also included elements associated with the redemption of the physical spaces where those peoples live.

Literature Review

The Scriptures are vital to the missional disciple at three levels. First, the Word of God is necessary for creating the awareness of sentness and shaping the missional intent of disciples/trainees. Second, it is foundational for shaping the disciple/trainee and equipping them to fulfill the Mission of God. Third, it plays the critical role of informing the structuring of the community by which transformation and missional action are both sustained and moved forward. As Moltmann writes:

The identity of the church lies within the triune God's mission. Its very nature is inherently missionary. In the way the church has been understood historically, this is a reality that has often been missed, because for much of the history of Western Christianity, mission was viewed as an activity that the church did—Mission is at the heart of God's own life and is constitutive of the church's identity. (964)

The goal of God, in the beginning, was to enjoy fellowship and intimacy (companionship) and community with and among people. God's goal was that humanity would receive love from Him and return it, and in so doing that people would also learn to receive love and give love to one another. God intended from the beginning to create a family that He could share life with. This was Eden, before the Fall, and this will be the new earth united to the new heaven of Revelation. Loving God and loving others—the primary relational missionary task—becomes the wellspring of missional action, as well as the benchmark that directs and defines it. The idea of The Mission of God without attachment to this goal/end is meaningless. It takes on meaning only in relation to the

goal of God—the vision and dream of God for humanity's future. The mission of God is the means by which He accomplishes His end. If believers do not keep this focus firmly before them, the temptation will be to redefine "mission" as any number of other things. But any work on the church's part which does not lead people into greater relationships with God and others, regardless of what it may be and what other good it may seem to accomplish, cannot properly be identified as the Mission of God.

Relationships provide the fertile ground in which missional discipleship is planted and grows. Incarnational and authentic living are essential to fulfilling the Mission of God. As noted, closely associated to authentic living is the concept of simple neighborliness—building relationships with one's neighbors. Neighborliness and neighborhood are closely connected to the call/mission of God (Holt 1023). Scandrette notes:

The problem is, we find it easier to think of our neighborly obligations in far off places, rather than focused on those who live next door. Committed, accountable and interdependent relationships are the enduring context where transformation takes place, but the fracturing and fragmentation of our society requires us to be more intentional and conscious about sharing life together. (2122)

Forging a greater connection between mission and the daily task of loving neighbors is a task worthy of our time (Holt 343). Holt goes one step further to connect the *Missio Dei* not only to building right relationships with neighbors but also to building a right relationship with one's *neighborhood* as well. "A spirituality that does not nurture our connection with the daily places of life fails to reflect the life-transforming nature of the Christian faith" (Holt 333). "Nurturing" is investing in the neighborhood's present and

future well-being and in building toward its potential. Holt's concept does not have to do with nurturing individual relationships with neighbors—though this too is important to the concept of missional stewardship—so much as encouraging an environment of interaction, interdependence, cooperation, safety and security, one where respect, justice, and compassion mark the nature of and form the foundation for daily relationships. In other words, nurturing is creating a culture where life thrives. “The discipline of nurturing neighborhoods is gospel work. This is what 'loving the neighbor' is about” (Holt 2284).

Biblical Connections

As was mentioned above, the biblical narrative contains both content and processes that have been revealed by God Himself to direct His people in their Mission from Him. It is important examine both the content of what Jesus taught and also how He taught it. Jesus asks questions, uses story-telling, and uses scandalous verbiage (shock value) to communicate His message. Jesus uses need-meeting ministry (feeding of the five thousand), small group discipleship, mentoring and coaching, public outdoor preaching, and casting out of demons to communicate His message. It is vital for the missional trainer to base both the teaching material and the training processes on the biblical narrative.

Genesis 1 reveals biblical and theological evidence of God's loving attention toward the world and humanity. In this initial chapter of the Bible is the source of the God's love for and value of relationships in general. God reveals Himself as Trinity when He speaks of forming humankind in “Our Image” (Gen. 1.26). Relationships are vital to God because He is, by nature, relational. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were working

together from the beginning. In His joy and the love that flourished within those relationships, God desired to share His own joy and love with an even larger family. So it is natural to see imbedded within the common core of God's Mission a plan and purpose to redeem all relationships and bring them back into harmony with Himself and with one another.

As noted above, God not only loved the people He created, He loved all of His creation. Therefore, he sought to redeem the entire fallen order. "For God so loved the *world* that He gave His only begotten Son" (John 3.16a, emphasis mine). God sent Jesus not just to redeem the entire world—the spaces and places those people called home. Therefore, any common core of discipleship essential themes and elements must include a redemptive focus on God's relationship with humanity and Creation and a focus on God's love for neighbors and the neighborhoods they live in.

Second Finding – Online Training not a Panacea

Agency trainers do not see pre-recorded, on-demand, web-based forms of training in the same light as their trainees, perceiving these forms to be significantly more important to the modern missional discipleship process than do those they are training, who perceived collaborative, in-person, live, small group formats and live, in-person mentoring and coaching, along with learning by doing, to be most effective for absorbing training that sustained missional action in their lives.

Personal Observations

Six of seven trainers interviewed emphasized the importance of online, web-based programs for modern learning experiences and missional discipleship training. One trainer stated that his team spent nearly a year investigating how to best make use of adult

interactive online training. They then spent still more time transitioning the core elements of their discipleship materials into a digital format that could be easily accessible to trainees. They invested much effort because they felt that it was so important to do so in light of the current internet-based culture in America. All seven trainers interviewed spoke of the importance of creating a program format that a tech savvy generation of new disciples could easily relate to and intuitively grasp and that also could be accessed anywhere and anytime via a mobile device. Another trainer cited a primary strength of such a format for training as “permanency of the training.” When the interviewer asked him to explain, the trainer shared that while he could give a lecture or have a discussion with a disciple in a coaching, modeling or mentoring scenario, that moment could easily be lost to the trainee’s memory and never recovered again. However, something recorded in a digital format could be revisited over and over again by trainees, enhancing the ability of the training to have a longer lasting impact that could last far beyond even the life of the trainer. Further, it could later be accessed by any number of potential disciples, giving the opportunity to exponentially increase the probability that missional training would find its way into more hearts and be expressed by more hands than would be possible for a single human teacher. Another trainer, even one that was decidedly less sold on the medium of online training, admitted that the format allowed the creation of a “universal training program which allows a continuity of vision among [trainees] and a common knowledge base upon which to build the organization’s mission.”

Listening to the above arguments made by trainers, as well as having personally experienced the difference between pre-field training experiences that utilize high quality, digital presentations with video instruction versus pre-field training that relies

more on written materials that trainees need to slog through on their own, I could appreciate the conviction that trainers had for shifting their discipling process into a more interactive and more easily accessible format. This personal observation was reinforced by survey participants' rating of written materials as only producing missional impact in less than 5% of the trainees. I also could sympathize with another trainer that suggested that it seemed more beneficial to have a professional presenter offering lessons on a recorded training session rather than have less effective trainers on the mission field attempting to teach the training curriculum in-person. I have personally observed good training materials ruined by terrible presenters. When another trainer highlighted how online, pre-recorded instruction could also circumvent a significant barrier to discipleship, time constraints on the parts of trainees, I was nearly sold. His argument was that due to the increasingly busy lifestyles of Westerners, having an on-demand, digital format that could be accessed at any time by a trainee, scheduling issues disappeared. Trainees could access the material at their convenience and not have to work around the leader's schedule or others' schedules.

However, in spite of the many plusses clearly evident in such a medium, nagging doubts remained in my mind. I reflected back on my own doctoral training experience. I noted the many positives of having elements of our coursework online, in a form that could be easily searched and referenced whenever I wanted. But I also recalled vividly the benefit of learning the most from my back-and-forth interaction with professors. I learned just as much, if not more, from such interactions with my fellow students and colleagues. As we hashed through together the material we had just been learning, I found that insights and connections flowed freely as our group mates shared their

experiences and perspectives on the material. This collaborative reflection and interaction was a rich experience. I would say as a learner and person this impacted me significantly more than cycling through online training, even high quality presentations. There is simply something different that happens when a group of people come together and openly share and discuss a topic at hand. I have seen this process in my current place of employment as well. Problems at our local office were difficult for our supervisor to solve. So, she enlisted a team of us to come up with solutions. As we gathered, one idea of a potential solution would be seized on by others who offered their own suggestions and insights. By the time we had finished, the final product we had created for dealing with the concern at hand was far superior to one that any single one of us could have come up with on our own. Our mutual discussion and collaboration caused ideas to flourish and expand in ways we never imagined. It was both surprising and yet not surprising that survey respondents overwhelmingly identified live, small group collaborative training environments as the most beneficial to life impact and the realization of seeing missional action endure in their personal lives. Over 61% of respondents identified this mode of learning as having a significant impact on them that actually transformed their behaviors and equipped them to engage in enduring missional action. Further, the second highest number of respondents (37.1%) identified live, real-time mentoring and coaching as a medium they believed to have helped them sustain missional action in their lives. This was a stark contrast to 14.5% that stated they felt that web-based, on-demand individualized training empowered them to do so. Interestingly, I also observed that the third most important medium of training that survey respondents cited as assisting them with learning, implementing and sustaining missional action in

their lives was field training, identified in the survey as “learning by doing” (35.5%). It struck me that these three mediums highlighted by trainees—live, small group, interactive and collaborative learning, having a live mentor who models missional values and action while teaching and training, and learning by engaging in active participation (field training) with coaching at each step of the way—when linked together into a coherent training experience, look remarkably like Jesus’ practice of disciple making in the gospels.

Literature Review

The concept that collaborative interaction produces synergistic learning, something that does not occur with solo learning formats, has been well documented in studies over the last two decades. “Knowledge sharing, learning, and the creative generation of synergies in knowledge are socially determined. Relationships are a key” (Salmons & Wilson xxix). Likewise, in the small group, collaborative interactions, the component that undergirded the creation of positive synergy was relationship. “Cultivating community requires an extremely high level of relationship” (Escobar 82). While a leading professor of psychology at Harvard feels that virtual relationships can grow beyond superficiality and truly become deep and supportive (Ben-Shahar, *Psychology Today*), the nature of on-demand, video driven instruction sacrifices even the possibility of online relationships developing into supportive, even collaborative connections, for the convenience of engaging training on the participant’s schedule. It is model that primarily values an engagement with information rather than valuing an engagement with others.

One trainer I interviewed bemoaned the fact that in the push to become more relevant and easily accessible in their training process their organization had lost sight of the value of personal modeling and mentoring. The key connection between the effectiveness of collaborative small groups meeting together and leaders serving as personal mentors and models is that both highlight the value of relationships. This is something that individualistic, on-demand video instruction and web-based learning can imitate but not re-create.

Modern psychology research has confirmed the power of role modeling to enhance understanding and endurance of behavior practice. Role models "act as behavioral models of the possible and they can act as inspirations...Role models influence aspiration and goals by increasing associated expectancy and value that role aspirants attach to goals" (Morgenroth et al. 13). Paul commands the Corinthian believers to follow him as he followed Christ. In other words, Paul commands them to emulate his lifestyle and missional action, goals, and values. It has been said by many that values and many behaviors are caught rather than taught. This is a reference back to the power of modeling. This is difficult, if not impossible, to capture in a virtual climate. Emulation of a model is empowered all the more when an individual is surrounded by a like-minded community that shares the same values and practices: "assimilation toward an upward target is facilitated by a shared group membership" (Collins 52). Relationship building is key to missional formation. It is key because God created human beings for relationship. As Alan Hirsch puts it, "Our deepest longings are to be in relationship with God and others" (3005). When relational intimacy is not taken seriously as a building block of

spiritual and missional formation, the formation process is arrested, growth is stunted, and fulfillment of the Mission of God impeded.

Biblical Connections

It is my concern that creation of on-demand, easy access formats, while convenient, may short-circuit the missional discipleship formation of trainees raised up under it particularly if valuing an engagement with information is sacrificed for the value of engaging with people. God did not call humans to love information but to love their neighbors. While gaining new insights and understanding can certainly assist disciples in that process, information gathering cannot replace actually gathering with others. As noted in the biblical review, humans were created to be in connection. God made human beings to fully thrive when in right relationship with others. A healthy family atmosphere is the way God created all of humanity to learn (cf. Gen. 18.19; Deut. 4.9; 6.7; 11.19). This principle is grounded in the Created order. Further, the Bible is full of references to how an individual learns to live out their mission, both in understanding and practice, by witnessing the role model of those in community with them. It is no coincidence that so many trainers interviewed specifically referenced Robert Coleman's work on Jesus' model of discipleship as a key to their strategy for impacting their trainees' lives. Of course, Jesus' model involved personally sharing life with a small group of people, developing relationships with them, modeling ministry and mission in-person, doing life and mission with them, and coaching and guiding them from a first-person position in real-time.

There may be ways to use technology to approximate collaborative, small group dynamics. For example, if live, real-time interaction online which allows actual

discussion and interaction is combined with other on-demand video instruction features, synergy might be able to be captured. Coaching is also possible to conduct via live Zoom calls as a follow-up to training that disciples have studied through and have questions about. Several trainers I interviewed spoke of using internet meetings to coach disciples around the world. However, the issue of modeling is another matter. It's difficult to "follow me as I follow Christ" in a three dimensional world when the one leading is merely a two-dimensional image. Finally, there is simply something about sharing a meal together that deepens relationship and fosters communication that is useful for disciple formation, and that is simply not possible to do virtually.

Third Finding – Missing Pieces

Based upon the biblical and literary review conducted by the researcher, it became clear after analysis of curricula, interviews with trainers, and surveying trainees, that there were key essential elements of missional discipleship missing from training experiences of a significant percentage of US-based mission sending agencies.

Personal Observations

There are a handful of discipleship content themes that eventually came out in trainer interviews, as if an afterthought. These were typically only addressed by trainers after the researcher asked them what their mission sending agencies were doing related to such themes. Likewise, these themes failed to receive attention in the vast majority of formal agency training curricula examined by the researcher. Yet, these were themes that the researcher found to be significant, if not central, to the biblical narrative. These included addressing brokenness in the personal lives of disciples, spiritual warfare as a central component of Jesus' mission from God, and the biblical concerns regarding social

justice and environmental care, often highlighted by the prophets. The researcher noted that trainees self-reported decidedly less commitment to acting on such concerns when compared to other themes that were explicitly detailed by trainers and curricula (e.g., evangelism, prayer, Bible study, and other traditional evangelical foci).

As one who is currently involved in hospice ministry as a chaplain and bereavement counselor, I have become keenly aware of the debilitating effect that grief undealt with and brokenness can have on people. When I came across Walter Brueggemann's idea that "loss grieved permits newness, loss denied creates dysfunction and eventually produces violence" during my literary review for this project, I kept coming back to his concept (87). I could not help but believe that he was onto something essential to the missional discipleship process that was being missed by American churches: the role of the Body of Christ in healing brokenness in disciples needed to help them to more fully live into the Mission of God.

I also had quite personal experiences in various ministry settings, both in America and overseas, aiding new disciples to escape demonic entrapments that they had invited into their lives through occult practices prior to becoming believers. As I wrestled with how to biblically help such disciples that were trying to grow and trying to be faithful to God, I came to read and understand Jesus' teachings and ministry to the demonized in a whole new way. I came to appreciate how prominent a role spiritual warfare and setting captives free from demonic oppression played in Jesus' ministry. Yet I looked around and saw almost no teaching, and even less action, relating to this biblical model of mission. That tension only increased with my doctoral course work, and review of literature, examination of mission agency curricula, interviews with trainers, and observation of

survey responses. I observed that there is an ongoing and profound disconnect between Jesus' model of mission and the American church's expression of mission, both in teaching and action, with regards to this area of supernatural ministry.

Finally, growing up in evangelical circles, I have become acutely aware of another blind spot in my appreciation of holistic biblical mission. Growing up under evangelism and holiness focused mentors, I came to realize that I had a deep appreciation for and understanding of God's love of individuals, and even families and peoples. But I had no appreciation for the places in which those people lived. When I read that "God so loved the world," I assumed it meant only the people of the world and not the world itself. But in reading missional literature, and growing alongside others from outside my cultural milieu over the last few years, I have come to see there is another substantial disconnect in what otherwise might be considered "biblically based mission sending agencies" including churches that I still attend.

The three areas highlighted: dealing with hurt and brokenness, understanding how to set captives free via spiritual warfare, and the significance of the place and space to God, from local neighborhoods to the physical totality of the Created Order, are crucial to the fulfillment of God's Mission. Yet, only two trainers even mentioned dealing with brokenness and spiritual warfare in their interviews with me, and no one identified caring for Creation as central to the *Missio Dei* (although one trainer did focus heavily on blessing neighborhoods and places where disciples live). Only half of training curricula addressed anything related to assisting disciples with brokenness. Four brought up spiritual warfare, but only one offered training related to it. Two addressed neighborhood and creation redemption as part of God's Mission.

Literature Review

Missional literature reviewed for this study was disturbingly silent on the first two of these biblically significant themes. I came across no references to spiritual warfare or dealing with demons as a part of Jesus' Mission in spite of extensive scriptural witness to such. Also, only a handful of missional authors briefly addressed the topic of how the people of God are called to deal with pain, suffering, brokenness, and grief as part of God's redemptive mission to the world.

N.T. Wright was one of those. Speaking of the significance of relationships to missional discipleship, he argues, "Not only the fostering of relationships, but also the *restoration* of relationships must occupy a premium position for those who are striving to build missional disciples" (1785). Inevitably, relationships come with misunderstanding, conflict, mistakes, failures, damaged trust, and hurt feelings. Even Paul the Apostle was not immune to relational difficulty (cf. Acts 15.35-39). Therefore, if missional understanding, value, and action is to be not only fostered but to endure among disciples, setbacks, failures, and relational conflicts that threaten to derail that process must also be seriously addressed and overcome.

Another key to growth into missional discipleship that takes place through the vehicle of personal and communal relationships is found in "bearing one another's burdens," particularly with reference to the overcoming of grief related to loss. Significant losses in life often cause people to "get stuck" emotionally, relationally, and spiritually. This can hinder or even prevent them from being able to move forward in all aspects of life. "Unmourned loss and hurt is a barrier that prevents access to our deepest self" (Grassman, Soul Injury seminar). Not only does unmourned loss hinder the

disciple's ability to become all that God intended, powerful emotions of fear, anxiety and anger that flow from unmourned loss can emotionally cripple those who are seeking to love God and love neighbor. One cannot love one's neighbor, as God's mission requires, while at the same time hating oneself. Nor can disciples love God and others when they close their hearts to protect themselves from the pain of further hurt, loss, and disappointment. Honestly addressing the pain of loss and healing through hurt and loss by genuinely mourning and grieving is critical to the missional disciple's walk, both personally and corporately. As a community of faith, disciples are called to bear one another's burdens by creating a safe atmosphere that allows people to mourn and grieve fully. By contrast, in general Western society, there is an active attempt to ignore if not an outright rejecting of the power of brokenness to affect the human spirit and impact daily life. This rejection of brokenness usually leads to creation of a false self where people are putting up masks for others to see instead of living authentically (Escobar 42). Pain is something actively avoided by most (Escobar 110). Barbara Brown Taylor adds:

Feeling pain is something else that can be handled in a variety of ways. I can try to avoid pain. I can deny pain. I can numb it and I can fight it. Or, I can decide to engage pain when it comes to me, giving it my full attention so that it can teach me what I need to know about the Really Real (156).

It is the calling of missional disciples to help others around them to “engage pain” so as to embrace the “Really Real” and thus empower others to move beyond what threatens to ensnare and hold them and move towards redemption and healing in Christ.

Missional disciples need to incorporate a theology of redemptive suffering into a larger understanding of God. This helps to make sense of what people may experience

(Hirsch 3453). Through such a process of embracing pain and creating a safe community where expression of pain, loss, and grief is possible, hearts are healed, fear and anger are overcome, and people are freed to be able to more fully love God, themselves, and their neighbors. This in turn empowers missional disciples to more fully incarnate the life of Jesus, which leads to the ability to more completely fulfill the Mission of God.

Walter Brueggemann's asserts that "loss grieved permits newness, loss denied creates dysfunction and eventually produces violence" (87). If true, this has profound implications for the call of the missional disciple in our society today. If accurate, this may also explain the level of dysfunction in our society that we see today, especially the dysfunction that seems to be erupting into violence more and more frequently.

Since structures of society, and even the people within them, want to avoid addressing loss, grief, suffering and pain, God's agents are in a unique position to address the deep sense of loss that many are feeling. In fact, the church not only has the opportunity to provide an atmosphere for healing, restore dignity, provide place and belonging to those who have experienced pain and loss, but it is called to do so (Escobar 42; Taylor 171). It is worth investigating more deeply how God's people might meet that pressing need and bring "newness" of life to swaths of society. But again, this aspect of healing and freeing the oppressed which was so important to Jesus' Mission is dependent upon the discipleship process with which new agents of God's Mission embrace the centrality of the whole counsel of God.

The theme of God's desire to redeem Creation holistically is thoroughly addressed in missional literature. Perhaps since this is the case, that teaching will trickle

down into mission sending agencies' agendas and training and soon make its way into the hearts and minds of disciples as a result.

Biblical Connections

The most relevant biblical injunction connecting to the call of God's disciples to address pain and brokenness in the world is Paul's command, "Bear one another's burdens, and in this way fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6.2). Paul also speaks of how God, "comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us" (2 Cor. 1.4). Most importantly, Jesus was regularly moved by compassion to heal those who were broken and hurting, including those that were harassed by spiritual demons. In Mark's gospel Jesus has compassion upon a man referred to as "the Gerasene demoniac" (5.19). Rather than allow the man to continue to suffer, Jesus commanded the evil spirits to come out of him (5.8). By doing this, He set the man free of torment and suffering.

With respect to dealing with demons and the devil, the gospels contain both Jesus' teaching about them (Luke 10.17-20) and his model of how to deal with them (Mark 9.14-29). John writes in his first letter that "the reason Jesus came was to destroy the devil's works" (1 John 3.8). "Mark's gospel portrays Jesus as a prolific exorcist. Indeed, we know of no other figure in antiquity for whom exorcism was so important. Matthew (12.28-29) and Luke (11.20-21) suggest that exorcism was of central significance in understanding him" (Twelftree). In light of Jesus' emphasis on personal spiritual warfare, His sending out of His disciples to "cast out demons" was an integral part of their mission (Mark 6.7). There is a continuity of this emphasis which flowed into the mission of the early church (Acts 13.4-12; 16.18). However, no current missional literature, virtually no

agency curricula examined, and very few of the trainers interviewed felt that this was a theme worth addressing with disciples whose primary aim is to walk in Jesus' footsteps and do the works that He did. If freeing the captive from the grip of evil spirits was central to Jesus' mission and ministry, and He commissioned His disciples to do the same, ought we not as well?

It is not necessary to revisit the biblical points that were made earlier, with respect to the theme of governing and stewarding the earth, other than to say that this command predated the Mission of Jesus to redeem fallen humanity and Creation. If properly caring for the earth was so important to the Father that He made it His second command to humanity, should it not also hold a prominent place in the hearts of missional disciples today?

Fourth Finding – Training is Good

The data reported by trainees suggests that while some forms of training seem to be more effective, the mere fact that training and discipling are taking place at all makes a huge impact in the lives of trainees, producing a very significant increase in missional activity on the part of trainees.

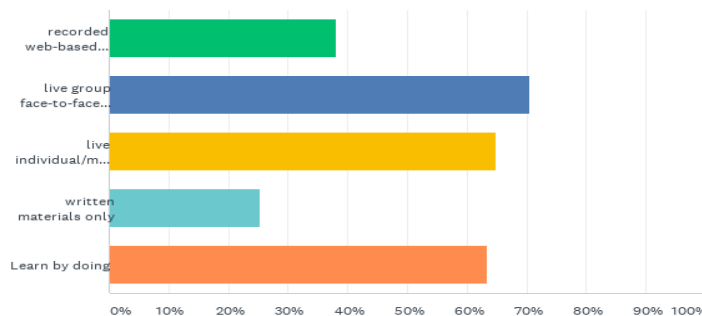
Personal Observations

This finding was both an exciting revelation to me and also somewhat shocking. My personal observation across three decades of ministry is that some individuals simply are not good teachers, preachers, presenters, or disciplers. I have also recognized that some curricula simply do not cover the ground that others do. Further, it was clearly seen in survey results during this study that not all training mediums/processes are created equally when it comes to inspiring and equipping sustained missional action. Yet, the

population of folks who participated in missional training and a discipleship experience with the agencies who participated in this study were profoundly impacted by that training, regardless of what form it took. The training mediums employed by the agencies investigated by the researcher covered the spectrum, as seen in the diagram below.

Figure 5.1 Types of Training offered by Mission Sending Agencies

Q40 My training/discipling experience was (check all that apply)



Yet, across the board, trainees self-reported that their regular involvement in sustained missional action increased after receiving training. In fact, those who stated that they engaged in missional action daily following training went up by 300%, and those who formerly engaged in missional action only a few times a year or never, decreased by 500%. I must add a caveat to these observations. It is also true that the content of all of the curricula reviewed by the researcher adhered closely to the “common core” of essential missional discipleship themes that I identified in this study. Further, it is my observation that a willing disciple can learn something even from a teacher or from material that is not as effective or thorough as some are. Does the impact in the trainee’s life toward missional expression then lie more with the learner than with the teacher or way of teaching? And, of course, we likewise cannot forget the role of the Holy Spirit, who was sent to disciples to “teach all things” (John 14.26). Does the Holy Spirit make up for the lack in any given trainer or program? Based upon initial observations, the

answer would appear to be yes. This researcher believes wholeheartedly that curriculum, training materials, and learning experiences need to be constantly refined and prayerfully re-evaluated to seek improvement and hopefully achieve greater effectiveness. In addition, not merely training materials need to be constantly refined, trainers also should constantly be building upon knowledge, skills, and ability to connect trainees meaningfully to the curriculum being taught. Perhaps even more important than either of the above is the heart of the learner, which also needs to be refined, moment by moment, remaining open and teachable.

Literature Review

The key to acting in ways that move toward fulfilling the Mission of God is to imitate the One who set the standard for doing such: The Son of God, Himself. Therefore, becoming "like Jesus" is of paramount importance to all those who long to act as true agents of God's Mission. The initial key to incarnational living is one's connection with the Spirit. Baptism into the Spirit initiates the process of empowerment that allows human individuals to become more like Jesus. But after this initial encounter with the Spirit of God, there must also be cooperation with God in allowing Him to redemptively reshape the individual agent's character, vision, purpose, desires, actions, thoughts, relationships, and interactions in the world. Theologians over the years have often labeled this reshaping, sanctification. Some call the process discipleship. Still others refer to it as growing in grace. Regardless of what it is called, the process of becoming more like Jesus is critical to the fulfilling of the Mission of God. In the economy of God, the end never justifies the means. Rather the means is the end. "God is far more interested in *who you are* than in *what you do*. We are human beings, not human doings" (Baker 147). The

Mission of God is about redemption and transformation. Neither takes place without the initiation of God via the work of His Holy Spirit. Likewise, neither takes place without the responsive cooperation of the human agent being changed.

The foundation for redeeming and transforming human beings into agents of God's Mission, as well as creating and sustaining the community through which the Mission of God is fulfilled, is cooperation with God and remaining in the presence of God. "Rather than mission being about the aggrandizement of any community or interest group, its true nature is understood in terms of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, which brings the transforming love of God into the life of the world. Our calling is to discern where and how the Holy Spirit is working – and to join in" (Ross 90). The significance of the role of the Holy Spirit in the fulfilling of the Mission of God cannot be overstressed. Without the power and presence of God manifested via the Holy Spirit, God's Mission cannot be carried forward. As Van Gelder and Zscheile write:

The Holy Spirit is the Christian's way of talking about God's power and presence in the here and now. In this sense, the Spirit is the primary actor in God's mission today. From the beginning of creation, the Spirit of God acts to bring forth the world, to form people into community, and to call them into the adventure of God's mission. (1146)

Biblical Connections

Jesus did not begin publicly fulfilling the Mission of God until receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus commanded His disciples to "wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about" (Acts 1.4, 5) before they began to fulfill the Mission of God in His stead. The Mission of God was never intended to be

fulfilled without God, but it was intended to be fulfilled with Him, walking and working alongside Him, relying upon both His guidance and His empowerment. Even Jesus said, "The Son does nothing except what He sees the Father doing," (John 5.19). At the end of His life, Jesus pulled His disciples aside to remind them that, "apart from Me you can do nothing," (John 15.5b). Later he says, "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you to be My witnesses" (Acts 1.8). Jesus relied upon the Spirit of God to empower Him to fulfill God's Mission when He walked the earth (cf. Matt. 3.16). He taught His disciples that they would have to do the same. The role of the Spirit is to empower and enliven the Body of Christ to fulfill the Mission of God, which most certainly includes "making disciples of all peoples" (Matt. 28.19). Therefore, believers can assume that the Spirit is enlivening and empowering all genuine efforts to make missional disciples. Further, believers can also assume that the Spirit is empowering those disciples to enter with Him into God's Mission, enabling them to grow and be transformed and to act missionally, in spite of the weakness or incompleteness of their leaders and training available. Just as Pentecost allowed the Incarnation of God that was initiated in the coming of Christ to be generally possible for the rest of God's people, the presence of God's Spirit still transforms willing lives today. It is perhaps an appropriate parallel to realize that whereas Israel had instruction and accountability, the members of the newly created Body of Christ at Pentecost had power to truly change and respond to the call of God in ways Israel never did. God empowered this new community with His very Spirit to support and uphold the kind of culture that facilitates real transformation needed to fulfill His Mission. In turn, those transformed individuals and community can

now reveal God's character to the rest of the world in ways that would not have otherwise been possible.

Further, Isaiah confidently declares to us that God's word will not return void, but it will accomplish everything that God purposed for it and sent it out to do (55.11). God's word has a transformative power inherent within it. Therefore, any mission agency curricula that attempts present God's purely and faithfully, even though it may lack effective media or lack even effective teachers to communicate it, will yet be empowered by God, Himself, to accomplish His purposes. This is another reality that may explain how such a significant level of transformation could be seen in the lives of those who received missional training.

Likewise, fruitfulness is dependent upon the soil that receives the seed. As Jesus shares with the crowds, the sower can scatter good seed, but it will produce different effects based upon the soil into which it falls. Good soil will produce fruit 30, 60, and 100 fold (Mark 4.20). It may be deduced from this parable that even the best of training programs and the best of trainers will see fruit multiply only to the degree that they are sowing into hearts that are willing to receive God's word and cooperate with His Spirit. Clearly, those who participated in this study proved to be those who were willing and cooperative.

For mission trainers and disciplers, it is an encouraging thought that God will take their best efforts, meager and flawed as they may be, and work a transformative miracle in the lives of those under them, sometimes it seems, even in spite of them. It is important for believers always to faithfully do their part, but also important to recognize that God will always do His part, even when believers fall short.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The goal from the outset of this project was to more thoroughly investigate the possibility that there are clearly identifiable foundational elements and best practices of discipleship that can be identified, understood and utilized to more faithfully aid in the spiritual formation of missional disciples. Ultimately, it was the goal to improve my own ability to effectively inspire and equip missional disciples and to perhaps contribute to this process for the larger Body of Christ as a whole. I had hoped that this study might reveal universally recognizable principles that have proven to be both biblical and fruitful in forming missional disciples, a “common core” of both content and processes/means of training and discipling, that could be used as a reference for mission sending agencies in the future (and especially by the primary mission sending agency of God’s choosing, the local church). I was not disappointed. By cross-referencing biblical and theological materials related to God’s mission with contemporary missional literature, I was able to initially come up with a clustering of the most common themes of both content and processes that seemed to emerge. When I saw many of these same themes come to the surface again in interviews with mission trainers and disciplers from both American and Europe, then also saw them identified by trainees, I felt that I had achieved some preliminary success in moving toward my goals. The ministry implications of having an identifiable common core of essential elements and best practices will certainly guide my personal creation of missional discipleship training and learning experiences for my future disciples, and I hope will provide a starting point for others wishing to do the same. I perceive that this initial core list might also provide encouragement and challenge to current trainers and disciplers, allowing them an opportunity to evaluate their current

training over against what is here. I hope that such a construct might encourage trainers and confirm them in what they are already doing, and also perhaps alert them to what they might need to emphasize more. It is also my hope that others might pick up where this study leaves off and add to or refine the elements from my iteration of common core table.

Another ministry implication of this study includes a potential call to more closely evaluate the most readily available cultural forms and mediums of discipleship. I certainly sensed among mission leaders and trainers excitement over the possibilities of engaging new disciples using online and web-based tools but also the tension associated with perceiving that such tools cannot, by their very nature, match what seems to be Jesus' model of multiplying disciples. There is a societal pressure driving a shift to new forms of training as a result of how many people now live their lives in and through online connections. Mobile devices coupled with an increasingly busy lifestyle make pre-recorded, on-demand training a natural option for trainers of any discipline, including the Body of Christ. However, while seeing many very positive benefits to such a medium of training (easy accessibility, nearly unlimited expansion of audience, permanency of the training material that is also easy to reference via search methods, etc.), some trainers are already questioning to what degree a virtual environment can support fruitful missional formation in disciples when a core value of God and His mission is the in-person building of intimate relationships with others. It was my observation that trainers have every right to be concerned, especially in light of how trainees responded to what training mediums they felt were the most effective in aiding them in producing sustained missional action. Trainees self-reported that web-based, on-demand training one of the least effective

mediums of actualizing real life transformation. However, a vast majority of trainees identified in-person, live teaching, accompanied by modeling and active participation in missional action (field training) within a collaborative small group, followed up by reflection/debriefing with a coach, as the having the most impact in seeing sustained missional action in their lives. Not coincidentally, these elements form the core of Jesus' model of disciple making. While we likely will not be able to escape the hunger for on-demand, web-based training, an implication of this study is that trainers like myself will need to work hard to find ways to mitigate the shortcomings of such a medium. Perhaps we can by getting creative with supplying live group training events, even if they are online, and also finding ways to connect distance learners to real-life missional models and mentors in their local area.

A third ministry implication of the major findings is to highlight potential areas of expansion for American-based missional training experiences that biblical mandates and models call for. The common core table that emerged from this study highlights areas of content that are significant from a biblical perspective. Yet, they receive little if any attention in actual training curricula. Missional literature confirmed the centrality of God's concern for places and spaces. This includes stewardship of His Creation and the importance of ministering not just to neighbors but also to the neighborhood in which those neighbors live. Even where current literature is catching up to God's missional goals in this area, training programs and trainers do not seem to value this as much as God does. In a similar fashion, ministering to areas of brokenness, pain, and loss in people's lives is a core element of Jesus' biblical mission. While this theme showed up more frequently in interviews with trainers, and even appeared in two of the formal

curricula evaluated, it was still underrepresented in formal training programs. It was also sparingly broached in missional literature. Finally, the area of exorcism and spiritual warfare that was also a central theme of Jesus' mission was entirely absent from all missional literature reviewed. It was incorporated intentionally into only one training curriculum of the twelve examined by the researcher (although three others did mention the concept in passing). Likewise, six of seven trainers interviewed either expressed reticence to even discuss this theme in terms of training, were oblivious to the fact that it was a core component of Jesus' mission, or simply had not considered it an important thing to train missional disciples in. I had the opportunity to challenge ministry trainers to consider the importance of these three content elements to a well-rounded missional discipleship training experience. Several received that challenge well and indicated that they would investigate this blind spot in their training more thoroughly. One stated that he would add it to their training resources as soon as possible, saying that, as an organization they believe this is a core concept of Jesus' mission. He added that he did not know why it remained unaddressed in their materials. It is my conviction that should these three content elements be formally and intentionally added to every missional discipleship learning experience, such training would help to facilitate more fruitful missional expression among trainees.

The final ministry implication of the major findings was a comforting reminder to me that this missional training and discipling journey that we take with our trainees is not totally dependent upon us. I of course desire to offer to our disciples the most well-rounded and thoroughly biblical training we can achieve. We also wish to ensure that we, as trainers and sending agencies, are presenting and teaching in ways and via mediums

that will be most effective in aiding spiritual formation and character and behavioral transformation among our disciples. But we are also reminded that the Holy Spirit is truly the One that makes the most difference in this process. He is the one tasked by God to be the teacher. He is the one even more concerned than we are about transforming hearts, lives, and actions in people to empower them to pursue God's Mission. He is the One that assists in connecting head knowledge with heart desires and real-time implementation among our disciples. We can coach them, but He equips them. He takes our efforts, as meager and mistake-prone and incomplete as they may be, and weaves something miraculous and beautiful in the lives of those we are working with. As survey respondents reported, that they were able to experience any form of missional training radically impacted their ability, desire, and commitment to engaging in sustained missional action. The enduring implication of this reality for me was that God is still able to accomplish what He desires to accomplish, regardless of the medium. Even if we, as trainers or program creators do not have everything right, we need to keep moving forward and continue to offer to God and others the best that we have at the moment. As long as we do this, He will pick up the slack and continue to bring about transformation in His power and by His means. As always, a radical sensitivity to God's leading, a radical dependence upon His guidance and power, and a humble attitude of gratitude are the best ways for any of us, as disciple makers, to move forward in His Mission.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study for generalizing results to the larger Body of Christ, worldwide lies in the limitations of this investigation bounded to Western and particularly American agencies, trainers, and trainees. The focus of this study was to seek to identify

a common core of discipleship themes for the purpose of more effectively training up American church members in missional discipleship. So, this limitation is not debilitating. However, for the study to be beneficial to local churches of other parts of the world, more research specific to those areas would need to be pursued. Second, the small sample size may hinder generalizability of the major findings. While the researcher attempted to involve a wider group in the investigation, lack of participation hindered examination of a larger sample size.

Unexpected Observations

There were some unexpected findings along the way as I conducted this project.

1. I was pleasantly surprised to see the strongest positive response from survey participants related to their missional expression was perceived to be collaborative group reflections and discussion, especially considering the extensive effort on the part of mission agencies to create thorough and professional web-based training programs.
2. I was unpleasantly surprised that so few STM agencies were interested in digging into whether their training experiences were actually producing the desired effect in their participants. They were the least likely group to participate in this research by a lot (80% participation rate vs. 42%).
3. I was shocked that so few mission agencies addressed spiritual warfare themes of Jesus' mission in any shape or form. Even LTMs that work extensively in areas of the world where their target audiences actively worship demons failed to include formal training for their missionaries in this area.

4. I was surprised by how many mission trainers specifically referenced Robert Coleman's work *The Master Plan of Evangelism* as influencing their conceptual strategy regarding how to effectively make disciples. I should not have been, but I was surprised when surveys also showed that trainees believed the elements of Jesus' disciple making model, as expressed by Coleman, were also the ways they most effectively grasped and implemented missional principles.
5. I was dubious, at first, of the wisdom of one agency's open source, sandbox approach to missional training. The fact that they had no formal plan for walking trainees through a formal process and pathway seemed to me like it would be ineffective. However, as I studied their approach and the effect on trainees, who have every resource available to them to learn at their pace, I was intrigued by both the psychological effectiveness and actual effectiveness of their model at creating willing disciples who pursue missional training and engage regularly in missional expression.
6. It was a surprise revelation to me that survey participants' missional transformation was so profound following training, seemingly regardless of the medium. As one who was aiming, with this study, to get a better grasp on "doing missional training the right way" this was a pleasant reminder that the Holy Spirit always has the last say and is much more important to the transformational process than I am.
7. A final unexpected observation was seeing how many mission trainers and curricula were centered on a conceptual model of mission that often imbedded the idea that trainees were on a journey. Trainees could look at this model and

quickly ascertain where they were in the discipleship journey, understanding both the expectation that they would continue moving through the process to higher levels of maturity, and grasping what that looked like and how to move forward. I perceive that many local churches lack this kind of model, and that their disciples would greatly benefit from it.

Recommendations

Some recommendations for future research have been noted above. I would love to continue to gather more data from trainees, trainers, and organizational materials both here in America and around the world to get a better grasp on what common core elements continue to prove to be universal rather than culturally bound. I would also love to gather more data to allow more generalizability to the findings of the study. I hope that others might build upon what has been started here.

In terms of recommendations for changes in practice, first and foremost, I would like to see the missing core elements of biblical mission reinstated into the training experiences of American mission sending agencies. I would also recommend forming a collaborative group of serious mission trainers to do further investigation together into the limits of web-based, on-demand training and also look more deeply into if and how elements of Jesus' model of discipleship can be adapted to make online and virtual training mediums as effective as they can possibly be. I would also suggest that where online mediums are found to be unable to replicate Jesus' model, that other means to do so would be identified and implemented by agencies to make up for the inherent weaknesses of that medium. Finally, I believe that a serious effort needs to be made to evaluate why dealing with the demonic was such an integral and central part of Jesus'

mission and also investigate the reasons behind why it is not for us in an American/Western context. This may be my next project, as I believe missional trainers are not properly preparing their disciples to address the full scope of Jesus' mission in their current forms of discipleship.

Postscript

This has been a wild ride and, at times, an overwhelming one. Looking back, I believe that, due to its sheer scope, the process seemed more intimidating than it really was. I am glad this portion of my journey is nearly over, but I am also excited about what I have seen and learned along the way. I do believe that what I was able to observe, and hopefully will help others see, can be a building block that inspires and equips more missional discipleship and more effective training and transformation. Through this process, I have also noted a disturbing hole in missional literature and training that I may yet have a chance to fill. I praise God for the opportunity and for sustaining me in the journey.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Letters of Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM: Mission Trainer

Semi-Structured Interview- INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

The purpose of the research study being conducted by doctoral student, Todd Wilson, is to identify best practices in training American church members to be effective agents of God's Mission in their daily lives and life contexts. Should you choose to participate, your input in this study will serve an important role in helping to identify these practices for future mission and discipleship trainers. As someone who has conducted training exercises for mission project participants, your input will be significant.

Dear Colleague,

This is an invitation to participate in a research study being conducted by doctoral student, Todd Wilson, from Asbury Theological Seminary. You have been invited because you have been identified by your mission agency as one responsible for conducting training for mission participants and therefore identified as someone who would likely have valuable insights for this project.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a recorded video-conference interview with the researcher, Todd Wilson. This interview will contain seven questions related to what and how you conduct training for mission participants and what you, personally, have found to be most or least effective during the training process. You will also be asked to identify what, in the learning/discipling experience, you believe to be most significant in helping your trainees consistently engage in missional activity both in and out of the mission experience. The interview will be fluid, therefore no exact time-frame can be guaranteed, but the researcher anticipates that the interview will take 30 minutes or less to complete.

I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. The data will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person. Even if quotes are used, their source will not be expressly identified without your express approval or unless you specifically request that they be associated be with you. The video conference recording will be stored in a secure location and destroyed after the data has been collated. Again, participant identities will never be disclosed from the collated interview data, unless express written permission is given by you.

There will be no compensation provided for anyone's participation in this study. Participation is voluntary and may be refused at any time. If you decide at any time you do not want to continue participation in the study, you may opt out whenever you wish, even during the interview itself. Please feel free to ask the researcher questions at any time regarding anything related to this study. Further questions may be referred to Todd Wilson, at the email address below.

As a researcher, I would like to thank you in advance for considering to be a partner with us in investigating further the best practices involved in training disciples and mission participants for the glory of God. I believe this study will ultimately help form even more effective practices for mission and discipleship trainers around the country, in turn, helping to equip and inspire more Americans to work alongside God to fulfill His Mission.

Sincerely,

Todd Wilson (tntwilson4@hotmail.com)

Signature

Date Signed

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Mission Participant SURVEY

INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Questionnaire

The purpose of the research study being conducted by Todd Wilson is to identify best practices in training American church members to be effective agents of God's Mission in their daily lives and life contexts. Should you choose to participate, your input in this study will serve an important role in helping to identify these practices for future mission and discipleship trainers. As someone who has participated in mission projects, your input will be significant.

Dear Friend,

You are being invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Doctoral student, Todd Wilson, from Asbury Theological Seminary. You have been invited because you have been identified by a mission agency trainer as someone who would likely have valuable insights for this project, based upon your participation in their mission project or program.

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a brief online survey containing questions related to your mission training/discipleship experience (average completion time is 10 minutes). There is no compensation being offered to anyone for participation in this study. It is being conducted on a strictly voluntary basis. Should you choose to participate in this project by filling out the survey, I want to assure you that your responses will be kept confidential. You will not be asked to provide your name on the survey. The information requested from you will be limited to age bracket, gender, and questions related to your mission project training. The data will be collected using a code and all of the questionnaires will be collated to give a

blended view, rather than identify any one person. As a researcher, I will have no personal data about you, other than what you choose to share on the survey. I will not have any of your contact information, since your mission agency will send my survey link to you directly. If you wish to contact me directly with comments or questions, please feel free to do so at the email address provided below, but please know that neither I, nor anyone potentially associated with this research project, will ever contact you directly. Only the agency with which you participated in mission will contact you. All data received from your survey answers will be stored on a fingerprint encoded, secure laptop so that only I may access it. Likewise, while being collated and analyzed, all survey data will be accessible only to me. Once the research project is completed, collected survey data will be securely deleted using a program purchased for this purpose to further ensure your anonymity. If you desire to participate in this study, you may simply click on the survey link provided in the email sent to you by your mission agency. If you do not wish to participate, simply delete the email with the survey link. Your mission sending agency will not be informed of whether you did or did not participate in the survey, nor will individualized data be shared directly with anyone in your agency, unless you specifically approve or request this.

Before you are able to answer any questions on the survey, you will be asked to confirm your consent on the opening survey page. Participation is entirely up to you, and no one will be upset if you choose not to participate, nor will there be a problem if you change your mind at a later date and choose not to participate even after you have given your consent. By starting the survey via the link provided and checking the box

confirming your consent, you agree that that this study has been adequately explained to you, and that you have voluntarily opted to participate in this study via the survey.

As a researcher, I would like to thank you in advance for considering to be a partner with us in investigating further the best practices involved in training disciples and mission participants for the glory of God. I believe this study will ultimately help form even more effective practices for mission and discipleship trainers around the country, in turn, helping to equip and inspire more Americans to work alongside God to fulfill His Mission.

Sincerely,

Todd Wilson (tntwilson4@hotmail.com)

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/Missionalaction>

INITIAL ORGANIZATIONAL LETTER OF REQUEST

Gathering volunteer organizations for curriculum study and sending survey links to Mission
Sending Agencies and their constituents

Greetings!

My name is Todd Wilson. I am a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary currently studying in the Activating Missional Communities program. I am now engaged in a research dissertation in which I am seeking to identify the best practices for inspiring and equipping average American church members to become missionaries in their own neighborhoods. Due to my particular emphasis, your mission agency seemed like a natural point of reference for my study. Your organization has been recommended as one of the top groups in the country in terms of equipping believers to engage in ongoing missional action, and as such, I feel that your experience and input could offer valuable insights for the purposes of this study.

As a short-term mission team leader, former local church discipler, and long-term missionary church planter myself, I recognize the power that ministries such as yours have to create long-term impact in the lives of average church members. I would greatly appreciate your help in undertaking this research project! So how can you help further the investigation into best practices for training disciples to be more effective in mission?

First, I am doing a study of current mission discipling and training curriculums, comparing them to biblical mandates for mission. I would greatly appreciate it if you could send me a current e-copy or hard copy of your mission or disciple making

participant training program. Next, I would love to interview your primary agency trainer, to draw on his or her knowledge of what content and teaching practices they have found most effective in stirring missional action on the part of trainees. Finally, I would like to survey at least ten of the participants/trainees that have come through your program, to see how their training with your agency has impacted their daily lives and missional action back home. In order to do this, I would forward your agency an invitation/consent letter and an email link to a SurveyMonkey questionnaire which you could then pass on to your trainees to fill out. I will not need any of their contact information, ever, since I will be asking you to connect with them. They would simply need to acknowledge their consent on the opening page of the Survey before they would be able to proceed with the survey questions. Once the study is completed, I will, of course, be happy to share my conclusions with you for how to better raise up disciples to act as missionaries in their personal neighborhoods and daily situations.

I am excited about this project and feel that I have already garnered some important biblical insights that I will incorporate into my future training times. If you are interested, please simply respond in the affirmative by contacting me via email or phone. My contact information is listed below. I hope and pray that your agency will consent to work with me to better equip the people of God as we work together with Him to fulfill His Mission.

Sincerely,

Todd Wilson
(260) 445-0376
tntwilson4@hotmail.com

APPENDIX B

Instrumentation

Instrument #1

Missional Framework Tool (MFT)

Used for document study of training programs and curriculums:

Organization _____ date _____

EMPASIS ON RELATIONSHIP GOALS	EMPHASIS ON STEWARDSHIP GOAL	EMPHASIS ON REDEMPTIVE GOAL
daily connection with HS	value of the Narrative (scripture)	Inviting others into Kingdom/Evangelism
knowing God intimately	Narrative's impact on identity	Discipling/Mentoring others
becoming like Jesus via time spent	Narrative's impact on life structure: attitudes/values/actions/words/habits	Freeing Captives: authority prayer
necessity of growth	Narrative's impact on community structure	Freeing oppressed: community action
community necessary for growth	Exegesis/Contextualization of scripture	
role of accountability	Exegesis/Contextualization of community	
modeling/mentoring	personal incarnation of witness: neighborliness, authenticity	
preparing trainee via healing, forgiveness, burden bearing	community incarnation of witness: peace, order, justice, beautification	
creating organizational culture	Leadership development	EMPHASIS: OVERCOMING OBSTACLES
right relationship with others	APEST model of leadership	Fear – overcome via obedience in faith and HS boldness
right relationship with creation	Use of Spiritual Disciplines	Ignorance – overcome by training
right relationship with local community	Using spiritual gifts/unique personality/abilities/experiences	Selfishness – overcome by sacrifice Time management – overcome via organization and planning

Instrument #2

Semi-Structured Interviews with Mission Trainers

For the following questions, the term "missional action" or "acting missionally" refers to...continuing what Jesus came to do, because God has sent us to do it, for the same reasons that Jesus had for doing: connecting people meaningfully and genuinely to God in a way that brings reconciliation with Him, with others, and with Creation. Therefore, missional action is very broadly defined as doing anything in word, deed or attitude, as our response to God's action in our lives, that aids people to connect to God more deeply, meaningfully and genuinely in a way that brings reconciliation and right relationship between God, others, and God's Creation.

- 1) Why do you use the program you do (is it a system you have inherited? designed from scratch? existed but you modified it? Explain more. [RQ#2, #3](#))
- 2) Do you feel comfortable with training the program (in other words, have you trained others using this process long enough that you feel competent as a trainer)? [This question is given to determine if the trainer has sufficient experience to use the program effectively enough to see the effect in participants lives. In other words, to determine if lack of change in missional activity is due to the trainer rather than the training.] [RQ#2](#)
- 3) What are the strengths you think really help develop missional action in participants lives? [RQ#1&3](#)
- 4) What are the weaknesses of your training/where would you like to improve it, especially with regards to equipping and inspiring participants to continue to act missionally *after* the training experience? [RQ#2](#)
- 5) Identify, in your opinion, the most important elements of your training *content* that you feel are absolutely essential to equipping participants to do missional action. why did you pick these? [RQ#1&3](#)
- 6) Identify the most important elements of your training *process* that you feel are absolutely essential to equipping participants to do missional action. Why did you pick these? [RQ#1&3](#)
- 7) What missional action did you observe trainees engage in? Have you observed a continuation of this kind of action after the program? [RQ#1&3](#)

8) What have participants reported to you are the most significant elements of your overall learning experience that equipped them for missional action? [RQ#1&3](#)

9) Are there any elements that participants have shared with you that they wish had been a part of the learning experience? [RQ#1&3](#)

10) Where trainees fail to continue in missional action, what do you perceive to be the reasons behind their failure? [RQ#2](#)

- interview will be semi-structured: there will be pre-determined questions in a predetermined order, but with expanded prompts (such as "explain more")**
- written consent to record interview will be secured before the interview**
- a write up of full transcripts of each interview will be created for research and review sake**
- The use of direct quotations in the assessment findings may be used the researcher to present an accurate depiction of what is being evaluated, but such quotes will not be attributed to specific individuals without written consent by those individuals**
- the interview questions have been reviewed and approved by researcher's coach and institutional mentors**

Instrument #3 Questionnaire/Survey for participants

- Survey/Questionnaire will include an agree/disagree box on the cover page to ensure participants understand their agreement with the use of their personal information and confidentiality issues (IRB requirement)

I am M/F

I am age (check one, please)

- 18-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-89
- 90+

I have a church that I attend at least twice a month (Y/N)

I received discipling/training (check all that apply) RQ#2

- before my ministry/mission experience
- during my mission experience
- debrief/re-entry training/instruction before coming off the mission experience

My training experience was (check all that apply) RQ#2,#3

- recorded web-based lecture and/or written instructional/informational material
- live face-to-face in a group (on-line or in person)
- live face-to-face individual/mentor(on-line or in person)
- written materials only
- Learn by doing

Which type of training did you find most helpful to you related to engaging more in missional action? (pick the one that you found most helpful, please) RQ#3

- recorded web-based lecture and/or written instructional/informational material
- live face-to-face in a group (on-line or in person)
- live face-to-face individual/mentor(on-line or in person)
- written materials only
- Learn by doing

For the following questions, the term "missional action" or "acting missionally" refers to: continuing what Jesus came to do, because God has sent us to do it, for the same reasons that Jesus had for doing: connecting people meaningfully and genuinely to God in a way that brings reconciliation. Therefore, missional action is very broadly defined as doing anything in word, deed or attitude, as our response to God's action in our lives, that aids people to connect to God more deeply, meaningfully and genuinely in a way that brings reconciliation and right relationship between God, others and the Creation around them)

The Missional Practices Scale Plus (MPS+)

Questions 1-30, Dr. Scott Nelson 2015

questions related to mission training experience added by researcher

Answered by Mission training participants

Please read each statement below and indicate how well the statement describes you IN GENERAL (i.e. how you are most of the time) by choosing one of the alternatives from the five-point scale. 1 = Does NOT describe me at all 2 = describes me a little, 3 = describes me a moderate amount, 4 = describes me a lot, 5 = describes me a great deal

1. I intentionally try to show others who God is by the way that I live my life.
2. I allow the Holy Spirit's guidance to shape how I live.
3. I focus on making a positive impact in the specific places where I feel God has sent me.
4. I help bring healing to the brokenness in the lives of people around me.
5. I intentionally work together with other Christians in my area to make our world a better place.
6. I go out of my way to care for the poor or needy.
7. I am involved in global social justice issues.
8. I regularly spend my free time interacting with people who are not Christians.

9. I find ways to tell others about what God has done for the world.
10. I try to have spiritual conversations with people who do not share my faith.
11. I share my life with a group of Christians that supports me in my endeavors to make a positive impact in this world.
12. I actively listen for what God is asking me to do when I am learning from the Bible.
13. I am involved in local social justice issues.
14. I make sure the things that I am doing on a daily basis are in line with what God wants to have happen in this world.
15. I interact regularly with other Christians who challenge and encourage me.
16. I intentionally try to help others around me move closer to God no matter where they are in life.
17. I look for ways that God is at work in the world around me.
18. I constantly ask God to transform things that are unjust, sinful, oppressive, or dehumanizing.
19. I intentionally develop relationships with people on the “fringes” of society.
20. I regularly evaluate how I am living my life by comparing it to Jesus’ life.
21. I study the Bible to learn more about how I can make a positive impact in the world.
22. I spend significant amounts of my time trying to make the world around me a better place.
23. I determine how I can do good works in every area of my life.
24. I often try to figure out what God cares about and then care about those things myself.
25. I study my local community to better understand how to communicate the Good News within it.

26. When I study the Bible, I specifically ask what the passage can teach me about God's purposes.
27. I intentionally make time for my neighbors.
28. I spend time asking God what he wants to do through me.
29. I have specific things I do to protect the environment.
30. I think about how the local culture would be changed (or not) if it lived by God's values.

Looking back, what do you think could have helped you to engage in missional action more effectively, if it had been present in your initial training? RQ #2

Rate yourself on engaging in missional action before your training and mission experience. [4-0; daily did something missional before the training, weekly did something missional before the training monthly did something missional before the training, did something missional every few months before the training, never did anything missional before the training,] RQ#2,#3

Rate yourself on engaging in missional action after your training and mission experience. [4-0; daily did something missional before the training, weekly did something missional before the training monthly did something missional before the training, did something missional every few months after the training, never did anything missional before the training,] RQ#2,#3

In your opinion, what is the one thing you have learned or experienced that you believe has helped you more than anything else to engage more in missional action than you did before your training? RQ#3

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