

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

Christocentric Discipleship at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to
the Faculty of the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity
in Candidacy for the Degree of
Doctor of Ministry

by

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THE DOCTOR OF MINISTRY THESIS PROJECT ABSTRACT

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Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola and many other churches worldwide do not currently conduct Christocentric discipleship. Discipleship, in general, is not being achieved as well. A significant disconnect between the gospel and discipleship exists today. There is ignorance regarding the gospel and its message and how believers are to fulfill the Great Commission. The disconnect is a result of the type of gospel preached and implemented. This study aims to discover a means and method to correct the ignorance of the gospel that results in improper or lack of discipleship, thus creating converts to Christianity and not disciples of Christ. Discipleship must be centered on Christ and surrounded by His actions and teachings. The study method will provide a Christocentric view of discipleship, the gospel, the command to make disciples, and the associated requirements and expectations of being a disciple. The study will follow a five-week guided group discussion led by the researcher, who will present thought-provoking questions to guide the group to a logical conclusion. The goal is to develop a local solution the week following the five-week guided group, using local congregation members, to correct the lack of Christocentric discipleship at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola and further the kingdom of God.

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
FBCoT	<i>Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola</i>
NCO	<i>Non-Commissioned Officer</i>
ZKJVC	<i>Zondervan King James Version Commentary: New Testament</i>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

One does not need to study discipleship to understand that it is not occurring in every church. While some churches do an excellent job of discipleship, many do not. There are many reasons for the lack of discipleship; however, this paper will focus on the membership of Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola. The topics presented at length are ignorance about several different aspects of discipleship, its relation to evangelism, the strategy used by Jesus for discipleship, and its continued use in the early church. The ministry context presented will further narrow the scope of the study, followed by the problem, purpose, and thesis.

An overwhelming level of ignorance is present in the church today regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ, His kingdom, and how it is shared. Today, many in the church cannot provide a solid definition of the gospel outside of “Christ died for our sins.” There are several different versions of the gospel preached and taught today. Most of what people think of the gospel today is only a part of the complete gospel. Many have reduced the gospel to its simplest form, removing major components that affirm discipleship. The lack of understanding of Jesus' gospel has created a misunderstanding of the commitment required by Christ and the associated costs.

The various redacted gospels do not teach the costs of following Christ. These same redacted gospels do not promote spiritual growth or development. This writer believes spiritual growth occurs during difficult times or in paying the costs associated with following Christ. One's faith is built and developed through complete reliance on God alone. Many Christians believe that spiritual growth occurs naturally and is needed only for those who wish to be super-

spiritual, based upon the gospel they hear preached. The result is that discipleship must be optional; however, Jesus never once referred to it in that manner.

Discipleship, or following Jesus, will result in evangelism. Evangelism will naturally come forth when discipleship is Christocentric in manner. According to Matthew 28:19-20, evangelism should occur with discipleship. Discipleship and evangelism are connected in that they are both relational and deal with other people. There is a very close and intricate relationship in the triune Godhead, and since man is created in His image, they are relational beings. Discipleship is conducted through relationships: one's relationship with God and one's relationship with other believers. In these relationships, people learn to follow and obey the teachings of Jesus by the example of the more mature believer.

Following Jesus requires action; there are things that the believer must do while following Christ. An understanding of the complete gospel addresses these things. While discipleship is not a list of do's and don'ts, it is a relationship, and every relationship has boundaries. Participating in the Great Commission is one of the most crucial action requirements of following Jesus. The main point of that commission is to make disciples, followed by teaching them to observe all things Jesus taught or obedience to Jesus. Older, more mature believers are to lead by the example that Jesus presented to His followers, those new in the faith, or those who have matured to teach someone else.

Strategy is required to overcome obstacles. One approach to overcoming the ignorance of the gospel in a group is using a person of peace to become effective in a group or community; a person of peace is a person who can be used to gain influence in a group of people. Intentionality with words and actions is an additional means to overcome barriers. The use of words must be more than merely intentional; words must be part of a functional language. Christians need to

utilize words that are known and understood by everyone. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul speaks of those who wish to speak in an unknown tongue in the church as those who wish to make themselves seem significant or more religious. The same is true when believers use words non-believers do not know or understand. Language changes culture. Therefore, the words used through language must be deliberate in definition, use, and understood by all parties.

However, one must never forget that without God, nothing would happen. One must always consider the work of the Holy Spirit in the matter of the gospel and discipleship. Prayer for God to work through His Spirit in the body of Christ is imperative. The ministry context will deal with men in a local church and their desire to grow in the Lord and invest in others via discipleship. This writer believes that when presented with the complete gospel truth and how Jesus conducted discipleship, those who have sincerely placed their faith and trust in Him will follow Jesus. In following Jesus, they will make disciples who make disciples. Included are sections containing definitions used in this thesis, delimitations, and limitations of the research project.

Ministry Context

Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola (FBCoT) has the smallest congregation since its founding in 1982. The last few pastors preceding this writer have not worked out well for the congregation. The church has a history of vibrant children's and youth ministry in the community. However, this writer believes the lack of Christocentric discipleship conducted with the young people has resulted in many leaving the church. While the reason why young people leave the church is not the focus of this research, discipleship plays a role. To exacerbate the issue, the same individuals do most of the work when a congregation shrinks and remain in positions of influence. Fewer new ideas are presented or injected, along with the required

personnel to continue vibrant ministries. People become burned out, and the ministry ceases to exist.

FBCoT went without a pastor for fourteen months before this writer arrived to fill the pastoral position. The senior deacon is the most influential leader. He has spent his time maintaining the congregation, filling the pulpit, and seeking a new pastor with the assistance of two other men. The people are hungry for leadership and direction. This writer believes this hunger for leadership may result from previous leaders and pastors. The congregation desires to know the next steps the church needs to take to continue serving God in this new generation, and they rely on their rich history to provide the faith to move forward. There is an openness to try new things and return to old forsaken things. However, there is a lack of trust in this writer due to the leadership styles of the previous pastors. During the few months this writer has been the pastor of FBCoT, the members have followed with excitement and an expectation for God to do something, yet they are reserved.

An example of this would be returning to multiple services for the week. Upon this writer's arrival, FBCoT only had Sunday services and an Adult Sunday School program; children were not attending Sunday school as there was no class for them. The Sunday school program is weak at best, with an average attendance of fifteen and an average attendance in morning worship in the thirties. The congregation expressed interest in a mid-week service as they did in the past and started such a service two weeks after this writer's arrival. Four weeks after arrival, this writer's wife and college-age daughter offered a children's Sunday school class. This class targeted the children of some returning visitors and returning members.

The congregation is tied to the history of their church. The church is located in a small town of approximately 4,200 people. Tuscola is similar to many other small rural towns in

central Illinois; the population is shrinking (see Table 1.1). However, the population by age group is well-balanced, and the education level is above average (see Table 1.2). Negative population growth plays into the issue of discipleship as the younger generation is looking for a way out.

Figure 1.1: Population Growth (Negative)

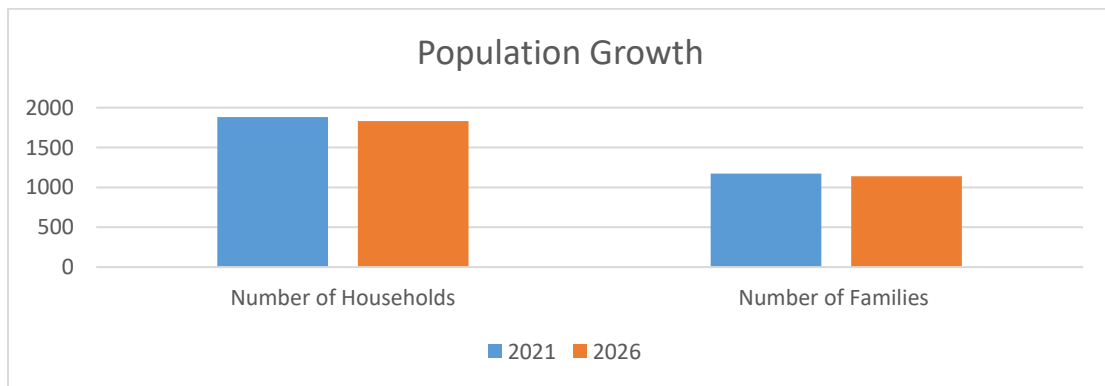
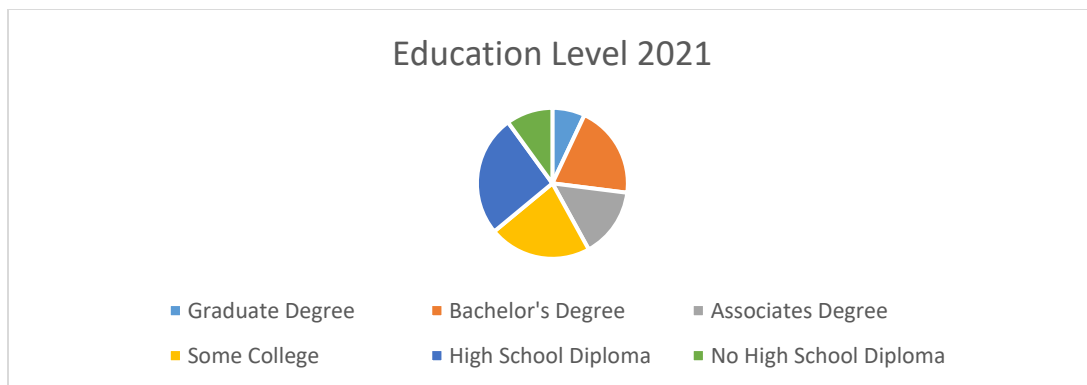


Figure 1.2: Education Level Breakdown of Tuscola in 2021



FBCoT has a reputation for loving teenagers and children. In the past, they have had as many as fifty children in their mid-week children's program. They possess a genuine love for the Lord and a desire to see people coming to and serving Christ. However, the number of people required to facilitate the children's and youth ministry in the past resulted in a lack of people to attend a mid-week Bible study or prayer time. This writer believes that prayer is essential not

only for the individual but also for the church. Further adding to the issue, the former pastor did not participate in children's or youth ministries and rarely attended mid-week services.

The community is very close and welcomes new people; however, FBCoT has not done much community outreach in the last several years. This writer personally visited businesses in the community; most have heard of the church and mentioned the programs for teenagers and children. However, this writer has not found anyone in town who had previously been invited to visit or attend FBCoT. One hundred percent of the active members live in the town of Tuscola. They desire their pastor to live in Tuscola and be part of the community. The people of Tuscola possess small-town values; they are a tight-knit community and view those who do not live in town as outsiders. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the pastor of FBCoT lives within Tuscola. They value close and personal relationships, resulting in many new young families seeking Tuscola as a place to raise a family.

The congregation is unsure how its members should involve themselves beyond the church walls. They are good at serving in the church's ministry and caring for one another. However, they have yet to learn how to reach the community for Christ beyond that aspect. The reduced number of active church members, and the age of some, have resulted in a dilemma. They lack the people to do the past ministries and have no idea how to gain people to help in the work without using those ministries as a draw.

Discipleship, while not a foreign concept, is not understood by the majority outside of a knowledge transfer. However, some newer members have no fundamental concept of what discipleship is. Much of the congregation has come to believe that the only requirements of a member are regular church attendance and giving. Attendance has come to be a once-a-week event. The lack of fellowship has resulted in reduced or superficial relationships. The basis of

discipleship is relationships, and successful relationships are never superficial or rigid.

Historically, the church has not conducted intentional discipleship outside the Sunday school program or children's ministry. This writer has been the new pastor of this flock since February 2022. The regular activities that connect this writer to the congregation are serving and leading this group of believers through teaching, preaching, and serving them.

Resources are always limited in man's view but not in God's. The financial resources required for discipleship and this research are minimal. The two most significant resources are people and facilities. In the case of FBCoT, they own the building outright. The facilities comprise three acres of property and a building with eight classrooms, a fellowship hall, a kitchen, and other areas. The average attendance was around ten when this writer arrived in February 2022. However, some members have been watching the services online and have returned now that FBCoT has a pastor. Also, there have been visitors weekly, most of whom have returned, and some have joined. Two additional required resources are time and influence. Time is necessary for discipleship to develop. Discipleship is a relationship, and relationships take time. For discipleship to occur, the discipler must possess some influence over the disciple. However, this writer believes the Holy Spirit is the best source of influence and will inspire believers to grow in Christ.

Problem Presented

The problem is that FBCoT is underdeveloped in its understanding, knowledge, and application of Christocentric discipleship. The real issue is that the leadership was never disciplined or trained in Christocentric discipleship over the last several decades and thus followed an incomplete gospel. Christocentric discipleship is centered on Christ Himself and modeled by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1, where he instructs fellow believers to follow him

as he follows Christ. The Christocentric approach refers to “the decisive answer to every one of man's questions, his religious and moral questions, in particular, is given by Jesus Christ, or rather is Jesus Christ himself.”¹ Therefore, discipleship, or the lack thereof, is a systemic problem at FBCoT and many other solid Bible-believing churches.

Many FBCoT members cannot define Christocentric discipleship, and most cannot even correctly define discipleship. Also, a lack of knowledge exists in explaining the complete gospel of Jesus or what constitutes that gospel. Many can give the plan of salvation or the “ABCs” of the gospel, but not the entire gospel. Confusion exists between discipleship and confrontation evangelism, where decision-making is the central aspect of the gospel.² The lack of understanding of the complete gospel has led to an improper understanding of discipleship. This misconception of the gospel has become a multi-generational issue, resulting in the common belief that most Christians today believe discipleship and spiritual growth are optional.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to develop a method and implement a strategy for Christocentric discipleship at FBCoT. The need exists for a plan and strategy for Christocentric discipleship to become a way of life for the believers at FBCoT. Once a process is discovered and developed, the next order of business is to implement that plan. The desire is to educate the believers at FBCoT in the entirety of the gospel and guide them in assisting the researcher in developing a feasible plan for Christocentric discipleship—resulting in more people coming to know Christ as their Savior and replicating themselves in others in their community.

¹ Stephen J. Pope, “Christocentric Exemplarism and the Imitation of Jesus,” *New Blackfriars* 101, no. 1093 (August 2018): 302, 10:111/nbfr.1241.

² Malan Nel, “Discipleship: Seeking the ‘Kingdom and His Righteousness,’” *Hervormde Teologies Studies* 73, no. 4 (2017): 2, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v73i4.4609>.

The goal is to have all believers recognize their role in the Great Commission and accomplish it through their daily walk with Christ. Malan Nel notes, “A more authentic way of being a Christian is a life of discipleship.”³ By adequately understanding the relational aspect of Christocentric discipleship and acting on that knowledge, believers will experience a closer walk with Christ and fellow believers as they learn and grow together. Dallas Willard wrote that the goal should be to “bring all those in attendance to understand clearly what it means to be a disciple of Jesus and to be solidly committed to discipleship in their whole life.”⁴ Following Christ's example allowed the Apostles to change the world. If believers today follow that same example and implement it to its fullest, they can turn the world upside down again.

Basic Assumptions

This researcher acknowledges the assumption that the participants will answer truthfully on the questionnaires and during the interviews and speak freely in the focus group sessions. The researcher will conduct one-on-one interviews. This researcher believes the focus group will be a fair match to the remainder of the congregation and a general sample of the surrounding community. The assumption is that when the researcher prayerfully introduces the participants to Christocentric discipleship, the working of the Holy Spirit will compel them to participate. This writer will not need to persuade the participants to conduct discipleship; they will do so with gladness, seeing it as part of their walk with Christ.

³ Nel, “Discipleship,” 3.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 10th anniversary ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2012), 244.

Definitions

This project concerns itself primarily with Christocentric discipleship at FBCoT. Key terms or phrases used in this project include action required, Christocentric, cheap grace, convert/conversion, cost, discipleship, evangelism, gospel, kingdom of God, language, a person of peace, plan of salvation, and spiritual disciplines. Other terms significant to this research thesis will also be defined.

Action Required. Action is required to be a follower of Christ. Christianity is not a sit-in-the-pew religion, or at least as God designed it. The use of the word “follow” indicates movement. Following Christ “requires a faith that gets your legs moving, your mind and heart engaged in learning and obeying.”⁵ Mike Breen writes, “Faith always comes to the surface and always produces action.”⁶

Christocentric. The simple definition of this word is Christ as the center. Christ contains the meaning of the “Anointed One” or the Hebraic term “Messiah;” thus, the focus of discipleship must center on the “Anointed One” or the one promised from God the Father. For this research, Christocentric means doing things as Christ did, following His example, and making Him the focal point around which one revolves their life. The Christocentric method is the union of God and humanity in the person of Jesus Christ that is prescriptive over everything.⁷ Matthew Bates, an assistant professor of Theology at Quincy University, says it this way, “we should not miss the Jesus-centered rather than the self-centered starting point; the gospel does

⁵ Bill Hull and Brandon Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2020), 14-15.

⁶ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People like Jesus Did*, 3rd ed. (Pawley’s Island, SC: 3DM Publishing, 2017), 84.

⁷ Alexander J. D Irving, “The Person of Jesus Christ as the Normative Basis for the Doctrine of Creation: Re-envisioning T. F. Torrance’s Christocentric Doctrine of Creation,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 88, no. 4 (October 2017): 366, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/27725472-08804005>.

pertain to Jesus's death 'in behalf of our sins' or 'for the sake of our sins.'"⁸ The gospel is not about man but rather about Jesus. Dr. Harris B. Bechtol is an adjunct professor at Sam Houston State University and has an M. Div. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He alludes to Paul's Christocentric epistemology revolving around Christ's power and wisdom from the prominent place of "God-become-human-and-savior" as the center of knowledge.⁹

Cheap Grace. This term illustrates how some have altered the gospel, resulting in little to no change in the person's life. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran Pastor, and theologian, said, "Cheap grace means the justification of sin without the justification of the sinner."¹⁰ The thought that God's grace will cover one's sins should not mean that one can sin whenever they please, knowing God will forgive. The Scripture is clear that those who are closely following Christ will not have the desire to sin. One must remember the high price paid for their sin—the death of God's Son.

Convert/Conversion. Convert is the person, and conversion is the action. Bill Hull, a current leader in the discipleship movement, defines conversion this way, "conversion is 'theological slang' for when a person decides to become a Christian."¹¹ Breen, the founder of 3M ministries, writes, "our zeal to fulfill the Great Commission has often led to the great omission – we've made converts without making disciples fully trained and equipped in all Jesus taught."¹² For this research, "conversion" will be used interchangeably with a "profession of faith." A profession of faith does not mean that a person has become a disciple of Christ, only that they

⁸ Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 38.

⁹ Harris B. Bechtol, "Paul and Kierkegaard: A Christocentric Epistemology," *The Heythrop Journal* 55, no. 5 (October 2011): 930, <http://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/j.1468-2265.2011.00713.x>.

¹⁰ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 2018), 43.

¹¹ Bill Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship: You Can't Have One without the Other* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 20.

¹² Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 114.

have accepted the plan of salvation defined later. The term believer or disciple will be used for those who have accepted and are following Christ.

Cost. When this writer writes of cost, he is not referring to only the financial aspect. He refers to losing time, energy, and physical and mental pain acceptance. Following Christ, acting as He acted, is not easy. While the gospel speaks of forgiveness of sin and eternal life, it is more than forgiveness, where one will go after they die or how they get into heaven.¹³ The gospel is a call to self-denial, a focus on giving oneself for the sake of others.¹⁴ Greg Ogden is the former director of the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary and associate professor of Lay Equipping and Discipleship. Ogden says, “to deny yourself means to deny your self-lordship.”¹⁵

Discipleship. “Discipleship,” “disciple-making,” and “discipling” are all used interchangeably to refer to the same process of becoming a committed follower of Jesus. Disciple refers to the one learning the process, and discipler refers to the one providing the example. Breen says, “Jesus defines a disciple as someone who can produce good fruit.”¹⁶ Andrew Hollingsworth defines it this way, “Christian discipleship can be understood as the activity of being formed and moulded into the image of Jesus through understanding his person and teachings.”¹⁷ Ogden writes, “We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling.”¹⁸ This

¹³ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 39.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, rev. and expanded ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Connect, 2018), 14.

¹⁶ Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders* (Pawley’s Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2012), 42.

¹⁷ Andrew Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” *Churchman* 159, no. 2 (Summer 2019): 159.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIiGW7190722000157&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁸ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 7.

writer's goal is to achieve the definition given by Hull in *Conversion & Discipleship*:

“Discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus and others and how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it. As a result, the disciple becomes the kind of person who naturally does what Jesus did.”¹⁹

Evangelism. Evangelism springs from the effects of discipleship. If believers do not commit to discipleship, evangelism will be ineffective and create converts, not disciples. If believers do not conduct evangelism, multiplication will not occur, which is crippled when discipleship is lacking.²⁰ However, evangelism is far greater than presenting the plan of salvation and pressing one to make a profession of faith. Evangelism presents the gospel of Jesus Christ, including the call to follow Him. John Dickson, who holds a doctorate in ancient history, was a Fellow of Macquarie's department of Ancient History and adjunct faculty at the University of Sidney in the department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies. He believes most evangelistic opportunities occur in passing and in daily conversations.²¹ When people observe the correct behavior of a Christ follower coupled with sharing Christ, it will confront the non-believer with the reality of Jesus.²²

Gospel. The heart of the gospel brings one to knowing, following, and obeying Jesus.²³

The English word “gospel” originates from the Greek word *euangelion*, or “Good News.”²⁴

¹⁹ Hull, *Conversion*, 20.

²⁰ Joung Sik Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults: Through the Threefold Lenses of Scripture,” *Adult Education Theory, and House Church Model* (December 2010): 258, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI8W160930000393&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

²¹ John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission: Promoting the Gospel with More than Our Lips* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 109.

²³ Hull, *Conversion*, 40.

²⁴ Bill Hull and Ben Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel: What Jesus Preached - We Must Follow* (n.p.: HIM Publications, 2018), 105.

While the gospel is simple, it is profound and deeper than ever imagined. Tim Keller defines the gospel this way, “The gospel has been described as a pool in which a toddler can wade and yet an elephant can swim. It is both simple enough to tell a child and profound enough for the greatest minds to explore.”²⁵ Dickson defines the gospel as “the announcement that God has revealed his kingdom and opened it up to sinners through the birth, teachings, miracles, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, who will one day return to overthrow evil and consummate his kingdom for eternity.”²⁶ This author would add why this is good news. One cannot explain the why without the creation story and the fall. This writer will use Bates's eight-part gospel outline: “Jesus the king: (1) preexisted with the Father, (2) took on human flesh, fulfilling God's promises to David, (3) died for sins in accordance with the Scriptures, (4) was buried, (5) was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, (6) appeared to many, (7) is seated at the right hand of God as Lord, and (8) will come again as judge.”²⁷

Kingdom of God. Most people conceptualize a kingdom in terms of geography or location. People will think of the kingdom of God as a particular space or property set apart for worship.²⁸ N. T. Wright wrote, “The kingdom of God, historically and theologically considered, is a slogan whose basic meaning is the hope that Israel's God is going to rule Israel.”²⁹ Nel is a senior research fellow in Practical Theology and former Director of the Centre of Contextual Ministry, Faculty of Theology at the University of Pretoria. Nel believes blessedness is inherent

²⁵ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 105.

²⁶ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 22.

²⁷ Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 52.

²⁸ Hull, *Conversion*, 52.

²⁹ N. T. Wright, *New Testament and the People of God* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1992), 302.

in the kingdom, and the kingdom is future and now in the Gospel of Matthew.³⁰ This writer will use the term related to the realm “where God is obeyed.” Obedience to God can be in a geographical area or the heart of an individual. Todd Hunter notes, “The kingdom of God is best thought of as the rule and reign of God.”³¹

Language. Language is what people use to communicate. Utilizing the exact words in a conversation can result in a different language between the two parties.³² Breen writes, “We need to approach culture-making with serious intentionality, allowing a shared language and vocabulary to create the culture God is calling us to shape.”³³ Therefore, a common understanding of all terms must exist to ensure the culture changes in the same direction. Most churches have a form of “Christian-ese,” a language that consists of words outside of the secular world.³⁴ Having served as a U.S. military linguist, this writer knows well that one needs to understand and use words properly to ensure they are understood. The believer must recall the needed vocabulary to present the gospel clearly and concisely.

Person of Peace. With Discovery Groups, all one needs to do is look for persons of peace (people God has already prepared to be open to oneself and the mission He has put on one's heart) and ask, “Would you like to discover more about God?”³⁵ One should evangelize people prepared in advance by God through persons of peace, as articulated in the Gospel of Luke, chapters 9 and 10, to see people receive Christ.³⁶

³⁰ Nel, “Discipleship,” 5.

³¹ Todd D. Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief: Following Jesus for the Sake of Others* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 35.

³² Hull, *Conversion*, 28.

³³ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 111.

³⁴ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 66.

³⁵ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 119.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 54.

Plan of Salvation. This writer will refer to the plan of salvation synonymously with the sinner's prayer, simple gospel, or cheap grace. An example is "The Four Spiritual Laws," published in 1957 by Bill Bright. Bright reduced the gospel to a simple presentation designed to lead someone to the point of decision.³⁷ The simplified gospel presents the truth; however, it is nothing more than a plan of salvation, not the gospel. It leaves out the call to follow Christ and the need for repentance. Why is this so important? When the end goal of the gospel is a profession of faith, everything after conversion becomes optional.³⁸ Due to the associated costs, many will not follow Christ, resulting in converts and not disciples, making following Christ optional. People who follow the plan of salvation resulting in a profession of faith "assent to a statement of facts but do not commit to the costly road of discipleship."³⁹ Bates suggests a movement in Christendom where salvation is by knowledge exists, a belief that Jesus died for one's sins, and their agreement with that fact and that nothing else is required.⁴⁰

Spiritual Disciplines. To follow Christ, one must do what He did, and practice will be required as Christians are still human. Therefore, using spiritual disciplines can help the believer become more like Christ. Believers who want to be faithful followers of Jesus must practice the disciplines of Jesus.⁴¹ People learn not to master spiritual life but to spend time with the Master through spiritual practices.⁴² Biblical disciplines include personal daily devotional prayer and Bible reading habits, stewardship of time and resources, and community concern. However, one

³⁷ Hull, *Conversion*, 31.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁴⁰ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 3.

⁴¹ Rod Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University Press, 2016), 2, MyWSB.

⁴² Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 179.

must remember that “spiritual” is not automatically good, and “spiritual” only means nonphysical.⁴³ Therefore, one must ensure that the Holy Spirit guides that discipline.

Limitations

The number of those willing to participate from the active congregation at FBCoT is a limitation of this research. The current total number of men who are active members is eight. The researcher will rely on the honesty of those involved when self-reporting. However, observation of behavioral changes will take place. The most significant restriction will be time. Discipleship is a lifelong process; most scholars agree it takes twelve to eighteen months to learn and implement discipleship. The maximum time available for this project is less than sixteen weeks.

One cannot rush the Holy Spirit or control where and when God will work.⁴⁴ The Holy Spirit will need to guide each participant; as this writer will present information and attempt to provide an example, it will require the Holy Spirit to move them from knowledge to practice. The danger of right belief is possible in this format. However, this author will stress that it is not only the belief but the action; belief without action is unbelief. Therefore, the results may not be completely accurate as the time allotted is at least one-quarter of the time expected for discipleship.

Accessibility is an additional limit. As the new pastor, this researcher will have access to the group, but only to the extent they will allow. This writer must remember what Will Mancini and Cory Hartman wrote, “The typical honeymoon surge in attendance is not the fruit of a new Pastor's strong disciple-making leadership, but a rather personality-driven novelty.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 17.

⁴⁴ Robby Gallaty, *Rediscovering Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 189.

⁴⁵ Will Mancini and Cory Hartman, *Future Church: Seven Laws of Real Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 86.

Delimitations

The delimitations for this research will be the topic of discipleship, specifically, what the men of FBCoT believe about discipleship, how accomplished, and whether those ideas can be changed. When those ideas have changed about discipleship, does it cause discipleship to occur? The study's parameters will be limited to active members of FBCoT. The definition of active membership includes attending a minimum of one service a week and participating outside regular service times.

Thesis Statement

A desire to know Jesus is present among the believers at FBCoT; however, some are ignorant of their responsibilities and what said responsibilities require. Providing the correct theology and skills to implement said theology in everyday life will result in the spiritual growth of the entire body. If FBCoT develops and implements this discipleship ministry, then they will grow in the understanding, knowledge, and application aspects of Christocentric discipleship.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter two includes a literature review that expands on the information discussed in the thesis project proposal. It illustrates some of the common themes found in the literature by various scholars. The major themes are ignorance as it relates to the gospel and what is involved with fulfilling the gospel in the life of the individual believer; discipleship regarding how it is different and yet connected to evangelism and the responsibilities of the believer; strategy or the way to implement discipleship; and the Holy Spirit's involvement in the entire process.

Literature Review

This section reviews the current literature regarding ignorance among believers concerning the gospel, the cost and commitment associated with the gospel, the Great Commission, what and where is the kingdom of God, and the kingdom's citizens. What is the relationship between discipleship and evangelism, according to current scholars? Following Jesus, disciples are to provide an example through obedience and the disciplines of the faith. What is a proper way to strategize to correct the ignorance, and finally, the Holy Spirit's role in the entire process?

Ignorance

The most significant issue with discipleship is that many believers are ignorant of their beliefs. However, this ignorance of true Christianity extends to the unbelievers as well. Most people either have an incomplete or incorrect view of the good news of Jesus Christ, thus

preventing them from aligning with God.⁴⁶ This ignorance is partly due to the preacher presenting an incomplete gospel and part to the believer. The result is that believers do not fully comprehend the gospel and the expectations of every believer. There needs to be more understanding of the cost, commitment, and action required in discipleship. An unbalanced view of the Great Commission is apparent in the lack of discipleship in the church. Nel writes that discipleship may have become unpopular for “the wrong association with confrontational evangelism and secondly for the inconvenience of the radical nature of discipleship.”⁴⁷

Professing Christians say they follow what Jesus preached, yet they cannot explain anything about the kingdom of God.⁴⁸ The lack of understanding has presented several different problems. David A. McGee, Assistant Professor at Liberty University and an Adjunct Professor at Cedarville University, writes, “all believers experience an incomplete spiritual formation and discipleship process that nevertheless incorporates the realities of the concept of *simul justus et peccator*.”⁴⁹ Bill Hull co-founded T-Net International and the Bonhoeffer Project, both disciple-making institutions, and is a Professor in the Doctoral Program at the Talbot School of Theology. Hull writes, “Many cheap grace Christians do not even understand what they have been called to because no one has ever shown them what it is or trained them.”⁵⁰ Cheap grace has resulted in church members not comprehending that God's grace saves them and empowers them to follow

⁴⁶ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 51.

⁴⁷ Nel, “Discipleship,” 1.

⁴⁸ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 157.

⁴⁹ David A. McGee, “An Evaluation of Incomplete Spiritual Formation and Discipleship,” *The Journal of Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary* (2020): 80, <http://www.mabtsne.edu/sites/all/themes/midamerica/uploads/An%20Evaluation%20of%20Incomplete%20Spiritual%20Formation%20and%20Discipleship%20eVersion%202.pdf>.

⁵⁰ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 13.

Christ daily.⁵¹ Dickson writes, “There is one Lord to whom all people belong and owe their allegiance.”⁵² The issue of misunderstanding the gospel is not new.

During Jesus’ time, most people misunderstood His gospel.⁵³ The precedent literature addresses some of the reasons for the ignorance among believers today. Again, the age-old issue of disobedience is due to hostility toward God.⁵⁴ Therefore many preachers have changed the gospel to make it more palatable and easier to believe. The lack of understanding has perpetuated the making converts of Jesus, not disciples. When people fail to understand their role in God's plan, they cannot instruct anyone on their role or how to fulfill it.

Gospel

The gospel in the West has been transforming. Michael D. Langford, Professor of Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry at Seattle Pacific University, writes: "Wider cultural and philosophical movements—rationalism, progressivism, romanticism, individualism, consumerism—have influenced American religiosity in such a way that religious observation has not decreased, but rather has undergone a transformation toward increasing moralism, experientialism, and self-determination."⁵⁵ He goes on to explain some possible reasons for the transformation. The first possible reason is that God created everything, watching over everyone. Second, God desires people to be good, found in most, if not all, of the world's religions. Third, finding happiness is the purpose of life, along with positive self-esteem, and these pursuits can be aided by faith. Fourth, God does not care to be involved in man's life, except when humanity

⁵¹ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 47.

⁵² Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 38.

⁵³ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, repackaged ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2020), 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵ Michael D. Langford, “Spirit Driven Discipleship,” *Theology Today* 71, no. 2 (October 2014): 325, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0040573614542309>.

asks for help via prayer. The final transformation is the belief that all it takes to go to heaven is to be a good person.⁵⁶

There is a significant flaw in the gospel as it has transformed. Why would anyone want to listen to or follow a gospel where one can gain entrance into heaven and not affect one's morality or behavior, and the collective group does nothing to improve anything in this life?⁵⁷ Todd Hunter, founder of Society for Kingdom Living and adjunct professor at George Fox University, Fuller Seminary, Western Seminary, and Wheaton College, writes that the story presented in Christianity today is “the forgiveness of sin in the sole plotline.”⁵⁸ It is all about going to heaven or hell, future events. Hunter continues that this storyline “rarely produces actual followers of Jesus,” at best, it produces forgiven people.⁵⁹ He further writes, “God's story cannot be reduced merely to the forgiveness of sins.”⁶⁰

The argument is that Christians can live however they like and are guaranteed heaven regardless of their conduct or contribution to society. Still, non-believers go to hell even though they live a better or more correct life and contribute more to the community.⁶¹ Hull admits that he has previously preached the gospel message of grace. He means he preached that God had forgiven all past, present, and future sins when Jesus died on the cross. Due to that, one can go to heaven, and nothing can change that; one is secure in salvation due to the grace of God. While this is true, it does not consider that believers are to be known by their fruit, according to Matthew 7:20.

⁵⁶ Langford, “Spirit Driven Discipleship,” 325.

⁵⁷ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 2.

⁵⁸ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 26.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁶¹ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 2.

The real issue is that when a version of the gospel removes the necessity of discipleship, it is no longer the gospel.⁶² This new evangelicalism does not encourage or require discipleship.⁶³ Incorrect theology allows a conversion experience with an optional discipleship experience. Bad theology at the gospel level will allow this to occur. The theology of grace was defective in a significant way.⁶⁴ Hunter presents it this way: “‘I am Saved’ means ‘I am going to heaven when I die.’” However, the gospel is more than an entrance into heaven; it is an invitation to follow Christ and live under His rule, beginning here and now on earth.⁶⁵

Based on his experience, Dickson determined that the reduced gospel deals with two doctrines with no connection to the story of Jesus. The two doctrines are (1) that all are sinners and (2) that God offers acceptance through faith alone; good works are not required.⁶⁶ However, the gospel is more than a rescue mission from hell; it is a reality mission on how to live.⁶⁷ This writer agrees with Dickson on this point. Many believers think the gospel is about getting people saved when it is about making disciples or citizens of God’s kingdom.

Andrew Hollingsworth is Editor-in-Chief at Trinityhaus Center for Christian Thought and Adjunct Professor of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Both Hollingsworth and Hull believe proper doctrine is foundational to Christian education. An incorrect understanding of the gospel can occur when there is a deficiency in one's ideology.⁶⁸

⁶² Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 15.

⁶³ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 21.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁵ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 27.

⁶⁶ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 21.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁶⁸ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 21.

“The Reformation created a doctrine that emerged from that movement, that doctrine separated salvation from behavior.”⁶⁹

What were some of the causes in America that allowed this change to occur? Television, and currently social media, affect doctrine and the gospel. Going back to 1947, when Billy Graham first televised, his persuasive and powerful message became the gospel of America.⁷⁰ In 1957, Bill Bright published “The Four spiritual laws;” this gospel pamphlet reduced the gospel into four simple points and became popular in America.⁷¹ The purpose and intent of this simple gospel were to allow it to be easily remembered and shared, culminating in bringing someone to the point of decision. The problem with this simple gospel is that it is a plan of salvation, not the gospel. The simple plan of salvation has led many to recite the sinner's prayer but not to follow Jesus.⁷²

The shift to an individual's decision made the gospel about the individual, not God's plan.⁷³ The plan of salvation creates a consumer mentality, something to acquire and then place on a shelf, not an entrance into a working kingdom. Bates defines the gospel as “the transformative story of how Jesus, who preexisted as the Son of God, came to be enthroned as the universal King.”⁷⁴ Hull writes, “The gospel we preach determines the disciples we produce.”⁷⁵ The result of evangelism via the plan of salvation without a connection to

⁶⁹ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 1.

⁷⁰ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 30.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 34.

⁷⁴ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 47.

⁷⁵ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 31.

discipleship has created converts, not disciples of Christ. Healthy disciples are only a product of discipleship.⁷⁶

The primary issue with the gospel that preaches only forgiveness is that it leaves out repentance and does not invite or encourage a personal relationship with Christ.⁷⁷ Bates expresses that a stern warning has been added to the gospel message commonly presented using the Romans Road. One must refrain from believing that salvation is earned through good works under any condition.⁷⁸ The gospel of sin management presents a real need for the church to preach the entire gospel. It is the power of the gospel, not the relevance of the gospel, that produces real church growth.⁷⁹ The church needs to reexamine the gospel they preach and practices to ensure the culture has not reshaped it.⁸⁰ Being a disciple of Jesus, learning from Him, and submitting to His leading and teaching is the norm rather than the exception.⁸¹ The heart of the gospel brings people to know, follow, and obey Jesus.⁸² Bates writes, “The changeless foundation of the church can never be moved; it is the shoddily built ‘gospel’ and ‘faith’ substructure that is in need of renovation.”⁸³

Cost and Commitment

The precedent literature shows a cost associated with being a disciple of Jesus Christ. The experience of inner growth is not cheaply attained, nor is it necessarily what one would expect.

⁷⁶ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 31.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁸ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 21.

⁷⁹ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 113.

⁸⁰ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 23.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁸³ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, ix.

Ogden views Mark 8:34-35 as “if anyone would follow me – and hope you will because I can give life abundantly – this is what you are in for.”⁸⁴ The cross provides an example that discipleship will not be without suffering. Being a follower of Christ does not make life easier, but it will transform one into God's goodwill.⁸⁵ Christ will be with the follower as they go through life, becoming more like Christ simultaneously.

Jesus taught the crowds about the associated costs because He wanted all to be aware of and consider them.⁸⁶ Jesus, Himself stated that discipleship is costly. Breen says, “The truth about discipleship is that it is never hip and never in style because it is the call to come and die.”⁸⁷ Luke 9:23 points to the fact that cross-bearing must be daily.⁸⁸ There is a daily cost to following Christ. Jesus told His disciples that the suffering and rejection He endured would soon come to them; therefore, they must prepare themselves.⁸⁹ Believers today need to understand the level of commitment required to be a disciple of Jesus. Jesus’ disciples are committed to Him but must also be committed to His teachings.⁹⁰

Action Required

A disconnect exists within the gospel that requires a commitment and cost to a call into action on the believer's part. Practicing spiritual disciplines may seem spiritual; however, doing them is not the same as reflecting upon God, or performing them will not automatically bring

⁸⁴ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 14.

⁸⁵ Langford, “Spirit Driven Discipleship,” 327.

⁸⁶ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 83.

⁸⁷ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 11.

⁸⁸ Paul A. Tanner, “The Cost of Discipleship: Losings One's life for Jesus' Sake,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 56, no. 1 (March 2013): 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 46–47.

⁹⁰ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 157.

about maturity in one's life.⁹¹ Faith without action is not faith, just as one living without or apart from Christ is not a Christian.⁹² Many believe that once they have accepted Christ and are on their way to heaven, there is nothing further for them to do. People are good at justifying their lack of action; they will claim, "I am not outgoing," however, God's Word must be followed, just as Jesus is to be followed. Hunter writes that believing in Jesus "has little to do with mental assent or intellectual effort."⁹³ Belief in Christ means that Christians act and live as if they trust that His announcement of the kingdom's presence is authentic.⁹⁴

Christ called His disciples into action, not just correct knowledge. Hunter notes, "The kind of belief Jesus calls for shows up best in actions and attitude, not merely in our brains."⁹⁵ Hull adds, "The Middle Eastern or Hebraic way of understanding belief always connects it to action."⁹⁶ Belief without action is unbelief. Discipleship requires faith that gets one moving and engages one's heart and mind in learning to obey.⁹⁷ Christians must understand that belief is more than an intelligent agreement; an active response is necessary.⁹⁸ People that believe in Christ take part in His work.⁹⁹ It is through one's worship of God that one will take action. One can serve others; through their relationship with God using God's attitude toward servitude that goes beyond one's natural ability.¹⁰⁰ Eugene Peterson writes, "Making disciples is one of the

⁹¹ McGee, "An Evaluation of Incomplete Spiritual Formation and Discipleship," 83.

⁹² Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 19.

⁹³ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 36.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁹⁶ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 44.

⁹⁷ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 14-15.

⁹⁸ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 45.

⁹⁹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 60.

greatest tasks that Christ has called the church to do until he returns.”¹⁰¹ Discipleship does not happen; it requires intentional action.

Great Commission

The church was never designed to complete the Christian community; instead, it is to be a community that fulfills the Great Commission by making disciples.¹⁰² There are things about the Great Commission that are misunderstood or misrepresented. First, today's church lacks the power to fulfill that command. Matthew 28:18 states that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, and He has all authority in heaven and on earth - now!¹⁰³ A second misconception is the way the Great Commission is fulfilled. In the original text, the participles “go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” derive their direction from the leading verb, “make disciples,” or as it might be translated, “make learners of Christ.”¹⁰⁴ Hunter adds, “The grand scheme is often called the Great Commission, which is a charge to make apprentices of Jesus who live immersed and in the Trinitarian reality and who, as God's friends, do so for the sake of others.”¹⁰⁵

God intends the church to prioritize developing disciples of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission. The future of the church is dependent upon discipleship training.¹⁰⁶ Believers can accomplish the Great Commission by seeing it as a lifestyle utilizing God’s resources.¹⁰⁷ The

¹⁰¹ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 15.

¹⁰² Winfield Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples,” *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, accessed March 27, 2021, <http://gcdiscipleship.com/article-feed/2012/06/04/how-jesus-made-disciples>.

¹⁰³ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 52.

¹⁰⁴ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 11.

¹⁰⁵ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 8.

¹⁰⁶ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 241.

¹⁰⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 13.

core of the Great Commission is to make disciples.¹⁰⁸ The misunderstanding of the Great Commission that separates discipleship from evangelism results in improper stress of one over the other when, in reality, they are two sides of the same coin.¹⁰⁹ When creating fellow disciples is ignored, the continuation of the gospel will diminish. Just like Ronald Reagan said,

Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States, where men were free.¹¹⁰

The same can be said for Christianity; although God will not allow it to become extinct throughout the world, it can diminish in the areas where the church is located. Disciples of Jesus must pass the torch of discipleship on to the next generation.

Kingdom

To understand God's kingdom, one must see what the King says about His kingdom. Jesus frequently spoke of the kingdom being at hand, and the apostles used terms like the restoration of creation, new creation, and a new heaven and a new earth.¹¹¹ Bates writes that Jesus's message makes it explicit that Jesus' fundamental task was to preach the kingdom of God as the gospel.¹¹² Jesus had to correct false assumptions about His kingdom. In the Lord's Prayer, Jesus shows how He corrected incorrect means of approaching the kingdom of God; this allowed

¹⁰⁸ Park, "Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults," 242.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 255.

¹¹⁰ Lawrence W. Reed, "Ronald Reagan at 110: Twenty of His Best Quotes on Freedom, Government, and America," FEE Stories, <https://fee.org/articles/ronald-reagan-at-110-twenty-of-his-best-quotes-on-freedom-government-and-america/>.

¹¹¹ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 52.

¹¹² Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 48.

His disciples to understand the kingdom better.¹¹³ The preaching of Jesus and the early church captured the complete gospel.¹¹⁴ The gospel was first announced by John the Baptist in Matthew 3:2, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”¹¹⁵ Jesus preached the gospel in Mark 1:15: “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!” The gospel is the announcement that the King who will sit on God's throne is Jesus, the promised Messiah.¹¹⁶ Bates interprets the historical view of the kingdom as “God's sovereign reign.”¹¹⁷

The word pilgrim can help explain the believer's role on earth concerning the kingdom. The term pilgrim gives the impression of someone on a journey somewhere; in the case of Christianity, the journey is becoming like Christ.¹¹⁸ Believers should not be at home in this world; they should yearn to reach their final destination, the abode of God.¹¹⁹ Hunter writes, “The kingdom of God is best thought of as the rule and reign of God. It is the expression of His will.”¹²⁰ Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, told the disciples to seek the kingdom of God first.¹²¹ However, there is a requirement; one must realize they need God, followed by living a life worthy of a citizen of His kingdom.¹²²

¹¹³ Steven L. Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (2019): 81, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739891318820334>.

¹¹⁴ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 38.

¹¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the King James Version of the Bible.

¹¹⁶ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 38.

¹¹⁷ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 49.

¹¹⁸ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 11.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

¹²⁰ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 35.

¹²¹ Nel, “Discipleship,” 3.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 2, 5.

God's design for believers is to do intentional, biblical discipleship.¹²³ Mike Breen and Rod Dempsey, a professor of Educational Ministries at Liberty University and an Associate Pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, agree that discipleship teaches how to live in the kingdom of God now for the glory of God.¹²⁴ Bates adds, "We must recover Jesus's kingship as a central, nonnegotiable constituent of the gospel."¹²⁵

Thus, a question arises: how does one enter God's kingdom? Jesus is the only way to enter the kingdom, and He has invited everyone to follow Him there. Hull writes, "The kingdom is the realm of God's effective will, where his will is done, and it has arrived."¹²⁶ People tend to believe that the kingdom of God is only reachable in some religious regions or places of worship. When one thinks of a kingdom, most think in terms of geography. They envision a landscape or location. Thus, when believers think of God's kingdom, they think of churches, holy places, and places of worship. Christians believe God is most likely to work in the areas they deem as being in His kingdom.¹²⁷ This misunderstanding of the kingdom has led many to refrain from engaging others in kingdom conversations, let alone explaining the kingdom.

Discipleship versus Converts

Regarding the difference between disciples and converts, are they the same? It is not a question of language but expectations. A disciple is a learner, and it implies action and obedience. In contrast, convert (Christian) refers to a status or a position. Most people believe a Christian's primary requirement is to agree with Christian doctrine or creed. Therefore, a

¹²³ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 11.

¹²⁴ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 19; Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 1.

¹²⁵ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 67.

¹²⁶ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 39.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

Christian is to believe something. In comparison, there is an expectation that a disciple does something.¹²⁸ The history of the modern word discipleship as a current term is derived from the Greek verb *matheteuo*, referring to the growth process by every follower of Jesus living in an intimate relationship with Jesus, and “the ultimate goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus.”¹²⁹

Many have made a profession of faith; however, few possess evidence of being a mature Christian.¹³⁰ The argument is valid, so why does this happen? One reason is that discipleship has been made optional; the church makes converts, not disciples of Christ. Hunter notes, “Christianity is most often seen as having to do with forgiveness and heaven – not a lifestyle of reorienting life to God’s story as a Christ-follower.”¹³¹ This section will address the differences between converts and disciples. The Great Commission in Matthew 28 deals with making disciples rather than winning converts. Winfield Bevins notes, “When Jesus said, ‘make disciples,’ the disciples understood it to mean more than simply getting someone to believe in Jesus, and they interpreted it to mean that they should make out of others what Jesus made out of them.”¹³²

There is a misunderstanding of the gospel; praying the sinner’s prayer does not reflect Jesus’ teaching.¹³³ Many today believe that simply believing in Jesus and praying are the only requirements. Hull and Cook argue, “The simple prayer of a person at an altar or over coffee

¹²⁸ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 43.

¹²⁹ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults, 242.

¹³⁰ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 10.

¹³¹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 44.

¹³² Winfield Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way,” gcdisciplineship.com, accessed March 23, 2021, <http://gcdisciplineship.com/article-feed/2015/09/14/4-lessons-from-st-patrick-for-making-disciples-the-irish-way>.

¹³³ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 80.

with a friend touches this wondrous salvation project but in no way grasps its massive impact.”¹³⁴ Hull addresses this in greater detail in *Conversion & Discipleship*.¹³⁵ Some might say that without discipleship, there is no Christianity. Discipleship is the process by which a Christian conforms to the image of Christ.¹³⁶

In Christianity, salvation begins as a relationship with Christ, and discipleship is learning to become like Him by working and learning from Him. Ogden defines discipleship as “one who [is] respond[ing] in faith and obedience to the gracious call to follow Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self while allowing Christ to come alive in us.”¹³⁷ However, discipleship must not become a tradition but an authentic way of life. Tradition maintained for the sake of history is not how Christians live. Given enough time, many converts will never accomplish what a few disciples can do.¹³⁸ Jesus taught one gospel, and that gospel included repentance and discipleship.¹³⁹ Many tend to separate conversion and discipleship utterly; however, they are two sides of the same coin.¹⁴⁰ The difference between a disciple and a convert will become evident in the professing believer's actions. Hull records that someone once asked George Whitefield how many people converted during a specific period, and he reportedly answered, “I do not know. We should know more in six months.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁴ Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 11.

¹³⁵ “I am convinced that by reducing the complete gospel story of God's work from Genesis to Revelation to a packaged three or four points with a prayer, we have diminished our understanding of salvation and what it means to be a follower of Christ. This shift from gospel culture to salvation culture has weakened the church, diminished the lives of Christians, and made disciple-making difficult. What we should see as the starting line, our conversion to Christ, has become the finish line” Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 28.

¹³⁶ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 156.

¹³⁷ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 10.

¹³⁸ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 25.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁴⁰ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 19.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

Discipleship Optional?

To understand why the question of optional discipleship even exists, one needs to review some of the histories that led to discipleship being optional in the minds of believers. Luther's followers separated grace from behavior and responsibility.¹⁴² Therefore, they could separate discipleship from salvation, thus allowing a distinction between serious and nominal Christians.¹⁴³

As addressed earlier, Billy Graham's role in the American mind regarding discipleship was that the televised Crusades did not present a lifestyle of repentance and discipleship.¹⁴⁴ The American mind only remembers what it sees, especially on television or the internet. This writer knows that Billy Graham was heavily involved with discipleship, and his foundation continues to promote discipleship today. However, that is not what was broadcast or portrayed in the media. Hunter suggests, "We must help them see following Jesus in the kingdom as the greatest opportunity ever given to humanity."¹⁴⁵

When following Jesus became an option in the gospel, it became a death sentence for discipleship.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, many believers today see discipleship as an option. Gratefully, not everyone has the same opinion. Some call for a return to authentic discipleship of following Christ. Hull and Sobels write, "Everyone who is called to salvation is called to discipleship - no exceptions, no excuses."¹⁴⁷ Hull, Hollingsworth, and Joung Sik Park, a Lecturer at Anyang

¹⁴² Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 30.

¹⁴³ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 30.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁴⁵ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 43.

¹⁴⁶ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 79.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

University, agree that every believer is to live out their salvation through discipleship, not only the highly committed or those called to ministry.¹⁴⁸

Jesus Himself taught that discipleship was not optional.¹⁴⁹ Throughout the Gospels, there is a link between belief and discipleship. Discipleship was not optional for Jesus.¹⁵⁰ The fatal flaw is when believers separate conversion from discipleship, thus making discipleship optional.¹⁵¹ There is a false belief; as long as one believes the correct religious facts, they are saved, and the following Jesus part is optional for fanatics only.¹⁵² The separation of discipleship from salvation has led people who profess Christ but do not follow Him.¹⁵³

Discipleship

Discipleship is more than leading individuals to believe correctly about Jesus; it encompasses the complete person. It is a process that reshapes people into the image of Jesus. Hollingsworth writes, “A Christian disciple is an apprentice of Jesus who is being formed into his, Jesus’s, likeness.”¹⁵⁴ Discipleship is not a series of Bible studies or books. While the correct doctrine is essential, doctrine without actions is terrible theology. Obedience to the Word of God is critical for discipleship. Therefore, discipleship training must be more than content; it should

¹⁴⁸ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 243; Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 156.

¹⁴⁹ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 30.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

¹⁵¹ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 24.

¹⁵² Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 18, 30.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 151.

provoke reflective thoughts about who God is and how to please and serve Him, resulting in life changes.¹⁵⁵

Discipleship training should empower believers to mature so they no longer need to rely on their leaders for every spiritual decision.¹⁵⁶ Another objective is to evangelize the world. However, a more extensive and better-trained army of mature disciples will produce a better outcome. Evangelism must be a part of discipleship, as a disciple is not a disciple until they replicate themselves.¹⁵⁷

A significant problem in North American discipleship is that it is not multi-dimensional.¹⁵⁸ The North American church is over-programmed and under-disciplined, resulting in the misunderstanding that programs and knowledge are discipleship.¹⁵⁹ Coleman writes, “Christian discipleship has often been squeezed into this world’s mold so that prosperity and success are more cherished than radical obedience.”¹⁶⁰ Historic discipleship from the Celtic period understood the complex nature of the faith, and they sought to combine faith and growth on various levels.¹⁶¹ Even Jesus’ disciples, when they began to follow Him, were initially immature; they followed Him before they fully believed who He was.¹⁶²

Training disciples as Jesus did is vital; we must equip them to handle what life throws their way. They need the whole armor of God. Mass carnage will occur when they are disciplined without proper training to use the weapons at their disposal adequately, yet the church is

¹⁵⁵ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 253.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁵⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 47.

¹⁵⁸ Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for making disciples the Irish way.”

¹⁵⁹ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 14.

¹⁶⁰ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 100.

¹⁶¹ Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

¹⁶² Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 244.

surprised when people get injured and quit, never returning to the battle.¹⁶³ Discipleship is a training ground for spiritual growth and a regenerative ground to heal the wounded and refresh the weary.¹⁶⁴ The process of training and recuperating in discipleship occurs throughout life.

Discipleship and Evangelism

Discipleship, when done correctly, is evangelism; as such, it should not be divorced from evangelism unless one wants to cripple discipleship.¹⁶⁵ The Celtic way of discipleship was successful due to their commitment to creating disciples of Jesus and not just converts to a new religion.¹⁶⁶ Jesus intentionally evangelized, as a means of discipleship, in the presence of His disciples and later explained what He did and why. He used real-life situations to explain complex theological issues. Joel Comiskey adds, “Christ knew that theoretical information separated from practical experience would have little lasting value.”¹⁶⁷ However, there must be a balance; too heavy on evangelism will create an issue with biblical knowledge and spiritual growth, but too heavy on discipleship will create an intellectual group that will not grow in number.¹⁶⁸

Dickson recounted an experience when he attended an evangelism course. He found that evangelism courses create a specialized compartment of faith called “evangelism.”¹⁶⁹ In these courses, he found they created a sense of performance, complete with all the anxiety of providing

¹⁶³ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 12.

¹⁶⁴ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 12.

¹⁶⁵ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 243.

¹⁶⁶ Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

¹⁶⁷ Joel Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church: New Testament Insights for the 21st Century Church* (Moreno Valley, CA: CCS Publishing, 2012), 77, MyWSB.

¹⁶⁸ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 13.

¹⁶⁹ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 18.

a perfect performance.¹⁷⁰ However, when a church is balanced correctly, discipleship will include evangelism, allowing people to disciple naturally.¹⁷¹ There are indicators that even some disciple-making leaders writing discipleship curricula have separated evangelism from discipleship.¹⁷²

Relationship

Christianity is all about relationships, relationships with God, fellow believers, and the world around them. Breen writes, “Our outward relationships are not to be occasional outreach projects or evangelism programs.”¹⁷³ Christians are to live a mission, evangelism, and service lifestyle because “Jesus was intimately involved in the lives of His disciples as they followed Him. His training method was spending time with His disciples.”¹⁷⁴ A relationship is required not only in discipleship but in development as well.¹⁷⁵

Discipleship happens when the mentor and disciple spend time together.¹⁷⁶ To disciple as Jesus did, leaders must invest their lives in those who will reproduce other disciples.¹⁷⁷ Breen states that one “cannot skip accountability and still say we are disciples of Christ.”¹⁷⁸ Bonhoeffer said, “We can only achieve perfect liberty and enjoy fellowship with Jesus when His command,

¹⁷⁰ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 19.

¹⁷¹ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2020), 186.

¹⁷² Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 133.

¹⁷³ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 118.

¹⁷⁴ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples.”

¹⁷⁵ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 68.

¹⁷⁶ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples.”

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 84.

His call to absolute discipleship, is appreciated in its entirety.”¹⁷⁹ One must not forget that it is the relationship, though unassuming, that is, the power of discipleship outside the Holy Spirit.¹⁸⁰ Dempsey adds, “Lots of believers wonder why they cannot win people to Christ, and it is because they do not win them as a true friend first.”¹⁸¹

Every believer is supposed to have an intimate relationship with Christ, resulting in them following His teachings.¹⁸² Jesus taught that His disciples are to replicate Himself in others. Since individuals are different, there will be a difference in how one accomplishes discipleship with others. The relationship will guide and direct the path.¹⁸³ When one excludes God from relationships, they become oppressive. However, their interactions will change when one sees others as God’s anointed.¹⁸⁴ One should view others in the same light as God in proper relationships.

Following

Some have referred to discipleship as following Christ. Therefore, teaching Christians to believe in and commit to the gospel is best summarized by Jesus in two simple words: Follow me.¹⁸⁵ In John 12:26, Jesus, speaking to His disciples, informed them that those who serve Him must also follow Him, and God will honor those who do. Jesus offers a relationship with Himself and provides a vision to follow.¹⁸⁶ The word disciple means a learner or follower of someone or

¹⁷⁹ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 37.

¹⁸⁰ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 61.

¹⁸¹ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 56.

¹⁸² Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 243.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 256.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

¹⁸⁵ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 43.

¹⁸⁶ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 141.

something.¹⁸⁷ Because Christ modeled a disciple-centered approach to leadership, His example should be followed. Through their unique relationship, Jesus followed God the Father, and He concurrently called people to follow and learn from Him. While following Jesus may begin with a simple commitment, He clarifies that a more profound commitment, even absolute surrender, is required.¹⁸⁸ Christianity – following Jesus – is not lived; it is expressed not within the church building walls but in the routines of daily life.¹⁸⁹

Example

While the word “example” is closely related to “follow,” there is a difference. Follow implies someone is heeding the example set by someone else. St. Patrick followed Jesus’ pattern of setting an example and preaching; this resulted in St. Patrick converting Ireland to Christ.¹⁹⁰ Disciples need to see how mature Christians live out their faith in Christ.¹⁹¹ Memorizing or knowing Scripture was not Jesus’ primary emphasis; instead, it was on understanding, meditating, and faithfully applying the Scripture in one’s life. Jesus, at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, admonished His disciples not only to hear His words and apply them.¹⁹² Jesus’ disciples must imitate their master in all aspects of life to allow others to see Jesus through them.¹⁹³ Ephesians 5:1 informs the reader that they are to follow God. Jesus is the believer’s

¹⁸⁷ Dale L. Lemke, “A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership,” *Christian Education Journal* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 271, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAI GFE171023000686&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁸⁸ Tanner, “The Cost of Discipleship,” 53.

¹⁸⁹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 67.

¹⁹⁰ Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

¹⁹¹ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 257.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 245.

¹⁹³ Hollingsworth, “Hans-Georg Gadamer and a Hermeneutics of Discipleship,” 162.

perfect example to follow; the lifestyle of Jesus was thoroughly consistent.¹⁹⁴ One must remember to make disciples of Jesus and not of themselves.¹⁹⁵

Obedience

Jesus sought to create a lifestyle of consecrated obedience in His disciples.¹⁹⁶ Therefore in making disciples from salvation to physical death, obedience stems from the outworking of faith.¹⁹⁷ A reason for obeying God is that it will change people; how one follows is essential. Obedience for compliance without a desire to please God and become more like Him is fruitless.¹⁹⁸ How does one define obedience? One could express it as “the strength to stand and the willingness to leap, and the sense to know when to do which.”¹⁹⁹

Faithfulness through obedience is how God determines success in His kingdom.²⁰⁰ Obedience requires faith, and both are based on history.²⁰¹ This thought is further substantiated throughout Scripture as it is full of examples where people are reminded of their obedience in faith and how God always rewards obedience. Obedience is a non-negotiable essential regarding someone’s salvation.²⁰² Salvation necessitates total transformation into Christlikeness through obedient discipleship.²⁰³

¹⁹⁴ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 91.

¹⁹⁵ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 161.

¹⁹⁶ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples.”

¹⁹⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 132.

¹⁹⁸ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 23; Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit,” 84.

¹⁹⁹ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 165.

²⁰⁰ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 15.

²⁰¹ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 160.

²⁰² Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 14.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 206.

Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are essential, as participating in them helps one become Christocentric.²⁰⁴ Practical ways to assist spiritual growth include daily personal devotional prayer habits, Bible reading, and proper use of all resources. Bonhoeffer taught his seminarians to pray the Psalms Christologically in an intercessory manner and meditate upon the Word of God daily.²⁰⁵ Resources can be time, money, and skills used in ministry.²⁰⁶ Dempsey summarizes the thought of disciplines, “Those who would be the *disciples* of Jesus must practice the *disciplines* of Jesus. If we want to live as Jesus lived, we must do as Jesus did.”²⁰⁷

Strategy

A strategy needs to be developed to overcome any obstacle or issue. Breen writes, “You will need to be strategic with your time if you are going to build a discipling culture that will bear long-term fruit.”²⁰⁸ How to overcome the deficiencies in discipleship needs to be understood and developed. The current literature shows that using a person of peace to spark evangelism and discipleship is imperative. Everything attempted must be done intentionally and using the same language or vocabulary. Breen also writes, “Every church should be able to answer two questions: First, what is our plan for making disciples? Second, does our plan work?”²⁰⁹ Once those questions are answered, a strategy can be developed.

²⁰⁴ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 15.

²⁰⁵ Jean-Pierre Fortin, “Scriptural Spirituality as Postmodern Theology: Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Transformational Interpretation of the Psalms,” *Theology Today* 75, no. 3 (October 2022): 361, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1177/0040573618791742>.

²⁰⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 132.

²⁰⁷ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 26.

²⁰⁸ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 56.

²⁰⁹ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 10.

Person of Peace

Breen defines a person of peace as “one who is prepared to hear the message of the kingdom and the King.”²¹⁰ The person of peace is essentially a “point person” through whom one can make new connections.²¹¹ St. Patrick used a person of peace strategy. He would focus on leadership, knowing that if the king converted, the people would also follow the king, allowing St. Patrick to educate their sons in the ways of the Lord.²¹² The Apostle Paul consistently used receptive people during his missionary journeys.²¹³ Paul would seek out homeowners to disciple to provide a location for believers to meet and grow.²¹⁴ Paul followed Jesus’ example, using a household willing to commit to His message.²¹⁵ The early church continued this method as they learned from Jesus. The early church targeted people seeking truth and concentrated their energy there.²¹⁶

Paul had to develop a two-fold strategy for evangelism and the believer's discipleship and leadership development.²¹⁷ Today, the same need exists; one must plan to reach the lost and develop them. As believers have received the gospel, they are now to share it.²¹⁸ Believers must

²¹⁰ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 116.

²¹¹ “The Person of Peace,” EvangelismCoach.org, January 27, 2020, accessed April 2, 2022, <https://www.evangelismcoach.org/the-person-of-peace/#:~:text=The%20person%20of%20peace%20is%20essentially%20a%20E2%80%9Cpoint,for%20spiritual%20conversations.%20Noticing%20the%20Person%20of%20Peace.>

²¹² Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

²¹³ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 46.

²¹⁴ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church*, 107.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 81.

²¹⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 45.

²¹⁷ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church*, 107.

²¹⁸ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 12.

never forget, “The world is growing at an exponential rate, and any system or structure that is not based upon an exponential strategy is destined to fail.”²¹⁹

Intentionality

Breen notes, “Discipleship is an intentional pursuit.”²²⁰ Intentionality is essential if one wants to be successful. Haphazardness will not suffice. How can the Great Commission be fulfilled if Christians do not intentionally connect with fellow believers to grow and intentionally connect with others who do not know Christ?²²¹ Jesus intentionally taught His disciples through informal or non-formal settings while using mentoring relationships.²²² When one accomplishes things without understanding the purpose, the efforts will be meaningless; therefore, intentionality must be explained and understood.²²³

Discipleship is intentionally learning to live and love others like Jesus. Hunter states, “We simply cannot live without intention.”²²⁴ Intentional discipleship with other believers provides an opportunity to learn more about Jesus and offers the chance to experience the presence and power of Jesus.²²⁵ Having a strategy and intentionality does not mean that success will come fast. It takes time; many come to believe in Jesus, over some time, through intentional

²¹⁹ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 152.

²²⁰ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 17.

²²¹ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 9.

²²² Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 244.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

²²⁴ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 88.

²²⁵ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 67.

discipleship.²²⁶ It takes intentionality to select, train, and empower leaders who will, in turn, reproduce themselves in others.²²⁷

Steven Porter writes, “Jesus intentionally chose the right place (among the best teachers of his day), the right activities (listening, asking for clarification, understanding and articulating his views), for the right reason.”²²⁸ For Jesus, discipleship did not stop because it was not the time for intentional discipleship. He disciplined people when the time was right, not based on a specific schedule. Relying on a schedule is detrimental to the discipleship process. Jesus selected faithful, willing, and able men with a passion and a desire for God to be His disciples.²²⁹ Unfortunately, few churches have an intentional discipleship program with an end goal.²³⁰ Discipleship can be like raising spiritual children to adulthood; it takes patience and deliberate training.²³¹

Language

Language is essential to communication and community. When intentionally creating a culture, godly language and vocabulary are crucial in creating a godly culture.²³² Communication will affect how concepts will be received if the terms used do not mean the same to all parties involved. The saying “language creates culture” is true. Hull notes, “One problem in the current discussion of discipleship is that while we are using the same words, we do not all agree on the

²²⁶ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 65.

²²⁷ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples.”

²²⁸ Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit,” 86.

²²⁹ Bevins, “How Jesus Made Disciples.”

²³⁰ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 10.

²³¹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 124.

²³² Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 111.

meaning of those words.”²³³ According to Dickson, Christians use the term “gospel” to mean everything or nothing.²³⁴ Unless the terms are defined, the discussion will be as helpful as the conversations at the tower of Babel.²³⁵ Breen presents that most churches have developed their language using their own words and meanings called “Church-ese.”²³⁶ There is a definite need to craft a common language for the renewed interest in discipleship.²³⁷ When a common language is used in context, it will change the culture; for example, discussing discipleship and defining the terms will create an expectation and interest in discipleship.

Community

A community provides a sense of belonging and protection and is “always at the core of discipleship.”²³⁸ The heart of every human cries out for a sense of community.²³⁹ God's intention has been for believers to exist in a community from the beginning; this is a reflection of the very triune nature of God.²⁴⁰ People live in families, tribes, nations, or different community levels. Within these communities, one can understand their responsibility and accountability for each other.²⁴¹

The Celtic Christians would live, work and eat with the people in a community to reach them with the gospel.²⁴² Modern-day missionaries and church planters follow the same process.

²³³ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 22.

²³⁴ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 112.

²³⁵ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 22.

²³⁶ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 66.

²³⁷ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 20.

²³⁸ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 103.

²³⁹ Dempsey, *Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups*, 23.

²⁴⁰ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church*, 167.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

²⁴² Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

Jesus created a small community with the Twelve, and these Twelve men discovered that a society with accountability is a difficult place to hide one's fleshly desires.²⁴³ If Jesus had trouble in His small community, what makes one think their community would be perfect? Just because people participate in the community does not mean they are being disciplined. It is not enough to connect with people, but rather connect those who connect with Jesus to each other and learn together.²⁴⁴

A community provides a haven for people to share a means and a purpose for relationships. In this community, one can learn from the experiences of others, even those who have passed long before.²⁴⁵ The church needs to be a place of belonging to enjoy familial relationships.²⁴⁶ Isolation is a threat to discipleship, and the church has an opportunity to offer a loving community to combat this loneliness.²⁴⁷ J. T. English writes, "Community is not discipleship, but discipleship cannot happen without community."²⁴⁸ Being part of and active in a community is essential. English is the lead pastor of Storyline Fellowship and received his master's from Dallas Theological Seminary and a doctorate in systematic theology from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary; he writes,

Disciples who are in community but are not learning run the risk of loving their neighbor but not God. Disciples who are learning but who are not in community run the risk of loving God but not their neighbor. Disciples who are both learning and in a community can be people who love God and their neighbor.²⁴⁹

²⁴³ Comiskey, *Biblical Foundations for the Cell-based Church*, 76.

²⁴⁴ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 83.

²⁴⁵ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*.

²⁴⁶ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 83.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

While salvation is personal, it is not private; it must be shared. When people come to faith in Christ, they join the family of God, where there are not only children.²⁵⁰ Believers are to associate with fellow believers. They say there are no “lone ranger” Christians. The Christian community is spiritually interwoven through constant interpersonal association.²⁵¹

Evangelistic Effort

Evangelism is best accomplished in relationships, and relationships are best found in communities where people are willing to share their experiences. Celtic Christians typically evangelized by using small teams of people who established a church through relationship building in the community while sharing the gospel in everyday life.²⁵² People are involved before they have strong faith, some even before accepting Christ as their Savior. Therefore, strong faith is not a requirement for evangelism, only a strong desire to share what Christ has done for them up to that point in time.²⁵³ Dickson presents the difference between proclaiming the gospel and promoting the gospel. Proclaiming the gospel is referred to as evangelism or announcing the great news; promoting the gospel is the activity that draws others to Christ.²⁵⁴

Holy Spirit Involvement

It is important to remember that the Holy Spirit is involved in every aspect of salvation and spiritual growth. McGee writes, “The Holy Spirit simultaneously regenerates, indwells, baptizes, and transforms new believers to become the set-apart persons God originally designed

²⁵⁰ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 169.

²⁵¹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 60.

²⁵² Bevins, “4 Lessons from St. Patrick for Making Disciples the Irish Way.”

²⁵³ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 252.

²⁵⁴ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 23.

for them.”²⁵⁵ Every believer is indwelt with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit is the primary force in spiritual growth and discipleship.²⁵⁶ Langford adds, “The role of the Holy Spirit is to accomplish salvation through Christ and make that work real to the believer.”²⁵⁷ Ogden says, “the Spirit of Truth will teach and guide into all truth.”²⁵⁸

The Holy Spirit's attribute of omnipresence allows Him to convict humanity everywhere and draw them to Christ.²⁵⁹ The Holy Spirit will assist the believer and empower them to prioritize their lives to live in the kingdom of God.²⁶⁰ God knew in eternity past that humanity could never accomplish His mission without His power; therefore, He gave believers the third part of the Trinity to assist them.²⁶¹ Through the Spirit, Jesus fulfills His promise, “I am with you always.”²⁶² Part of that assistance is that He teaches the believer and works through them by guiding them.²⁶³ According to Willard, spiritual formation is not a passive process but requires a conjunction of work between the Holy Spirit and the believer.²⁶⁴ Dale Lemke adds, “Since ministry leaders are called to an equipping ministry, it is important to acknowledge that this equipping work involves intentional attention to the assets and work of the Spirit in the lives of all believers and not just the leader.”²⁶⁵

²⁵⁵ McGee, “An Evaluation of Incomplete Spiritual Formation and Discipleship,” 79.

²⁵⁶ Nel, “Discipleship,” 6.

²⁵⁷ Langford, “Spirit Driven Discipleship,” 326.

²⁵⁸ Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 115.

²⁵⁹ James Gilchrist Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2018), 3, MyWSB.

²⁶⁰ Nel, “Discipleship,” 16.

²⁶¹ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship*, 103.

²⁶² Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 114.

²⁶³ Lemke, “A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership,” 272.

²⁶⁴ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 23.

²⁶⁵ Lemke, “A Philosophy of Disciple-Centered Leadership,” 270.

Conclusion

This literature review provides ample proof of a lack of understanding or ignorance of the gospel and the things associated with the complete gospel story. The difference between disciples and converts is a major issue based on the lack of knowledge of the Christocentric gospel. The lack of understanding that discipleship and evangelism are two sides of the same coin is apparent. Strategy is necessary and needs to be planned out based on the situation. The community is essential not just for discipleship but for evangelism as well. Last but certainly not least, one must never forget that God is the one who aids in the entire Christian experience, from salvation through spiritual growth.

Theological Foundations

There is a scriptural requirement for discipleship. First, there is a command to make disciples, and along with the command, Jesus Himself disciplined the Apostles. Christ instructed and modeled the gospel to them. Scripture shows that Jesus called for action in obedience to follow Him. Jesus taught the disciples the cost of following Him. However, the gospel has changed to make it easier, so some scriptural requirements are left out. The gospel is Christ-centered and not man-centered; therefore, discipleship must be Christocentric.

The Gospel

To understand discipleship, one must understand the gospel as understood and taught by Jesus, the apostles, and believers today. This writer can assure that the valid gospel message preached by Jesus and affirmed by the apostles is the one that should be taught today. Scot McKnight adds, “The gospels are about Jesus, they tell the story of Jesus, and everything in them

is about Jesus.”²⁶⁶ Jesus preached the kingdom gospel in the Gospels. The gospel accounts provide us with the words of Jesus and the message He preached. Any gospel proclamation that does not have a Christocentric ethic is not the gospel.²⁶⁷ Missim Leon and Hizky Shoham write, “Christocentric bias is the subservient action of a group committed to the conscious act of full commitment based on a worldview.”²⁶⁸ N.T. Wright wrote, regarding the gospel, “we are not the center of the universe. God is not circling around us. We are circling around Him.”²⁶⁹ The epistles provide believers with the gospel presented by the apostles, and today numerous books and articles present different forms of the gospel. Unfortunately, today's gospel does not always match the gospel presented by Jesus or the Apostles.

In Mark 1:14-15, Jesus came preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. The Lord came claiming to be the rightful sovereign demanding all who heard Him submit and surrender to His dominion over them.²⁷⁰ He proclaimed in Mark 1:15, “The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God is at hand.” The kingdom of God is that spiritual kingdom in which the citizens are followers of Jesus Christ, the kingdom in which God rules by His Son through His Word. Jesus commanded those who heard Him, saying, “Repent ye, and believe the gospel.” God requires repentance and faith from everyone.²⁷¹ Robert Picirilli states, “repentance is essential to

²⁶⁶ Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 98.

²⁶⁷ Mookgo S. Kgatle, “Globalization of Missions: An Exegesis on the Great Commission (Mt 28:18-20),” *In die skrifling* 52, no. 1 (2018): 5. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v52i1.2346>.

²⁶⁸ Nissim Leon and Hizky Shoham, “Belonging without Commitment: The Christocentric View and the Traditionist Perspective on Modern Religion,” *Culture and Religion* 19, no. 2 (March 2018). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14755610.2018.1444657>.

²⁶⁹ N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's plan & Paul's Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 23.

²⁷⁰ D. Fortner, *Discovering Christ in the Gospel of Mark* (Danville, KY: Don Fortner, 2008), 35, LOGOS.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 35.

salvation” thereby, it is essential to the gospel.²⁷² It is impossible to have one without the other. To be a disciple means to repent, believe the gospel, and thereby enter God’s kingdom.²⁷³ A disciple would include being a kingdom citizen and proving or showing allegiance to the king – Jesus. Jesus declares His time has come to fulfill the ultimate promise of redemption, the fulfillment of the Messiah, the King of God's kingdom.

William Lane writes, “The brief parable of the fig tree recorded in Mark 13:28 echoes Jesus’ proclamation that the kingdom has come near.”²⁷⁴ Jesus proclaims that only through repentance can one participate with joy in the kingdom. Jesus calls men to make a radical decision. Jesus proclaims the kingdom to convey a summons. One must submit to the summons of God or choose this world and its riches and honor. The decision is important and does not allow for a postponement.²⁷⁵ Bechtol believes the Christian achieves eternal happiness through understanding the essential truth that Jesus the God-man is the source.²⁷⁶

The epistles, especially Paul’s writings, present the same gospel but are seen differently. Wright, a research professor of the New Testament and early Christianity at the University of St. Andrews, believes Paul saw Jesus as the Messiah fulfilling the gospel. That gospel is that God has “a single plan all along through which he intended to rescue the world and the human race and that this single plan was centered upon the call of Israel,” and Jesus the Messiah fulfilled that plan.²⁷⁷ One must remember that Jesus preached to Jews, and Paul preached to both the Jews and

²⁷² Robert E. Picirilli, *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 2013), 24.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁷⁴ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1974), 58, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁷⁶ Bechtol, “Paul and Kierkegaard,” 940.

²⁷⁷ Wright, *Justification*, 35.

Gentiles. The Gentiles did not possess the background to understand the implications of Jesus as King in the same manner as the Jews. The most familiar passage to explain Paul's gospel presentation is 1 Corinthians 15. McKnight writes that in the first two verses of this chapter, "Paul connects himself to the Corinthians utilizing the gospel."²⁷⁸ Paul begins by reminding the readers of the gospel he preached to them. Then he explains what he preached: Christ died, was buried, rose again, and appeared to the Apostles. These are the bare bones of the gospel. The Christocentric mission is to seek and save what was lost. Dickson points out how one cannot seek the lost unless one orients themselves toward those outside the faith.²⁷⁹ Pointing those outside the faith to "Christological monotheism-the lordship of the one true God through His Messiah" is essential to convey to the lost.²⁸⁰

One must remember that Corinth is not a Jewish city and therefore did not have the historical background to see the entire picture of God's plan. McKnight points out the centrality of Christ in the gospel presented to the church at Corinth.²⁸¹ One must remember that the gospel is always about Christ; He is the center. McKnight states that the gospel and the plan of salvation are different.²⁸² The gospel is God's story, and how humanity can actively participate in that story. That story involves how God in eternity past made a plan to reconcile fallen man back to Him through the use of the nation of Israel, culminating in Jesus providing the required payment for sin and then ruling His kingdom. The plan of salvation is a method of teaching correct doctrine, agreeing with it, and saying a prayer with no change required; it is part of the gospel but incomplete. McKnight writes, "It is customary in America to refer to the 'gospel plan of

²⁷⁸ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 48.

²⁷⁹ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 53.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁸¹ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 94.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

salvation,' by which we mean how an individual gets saved, what God has done for us, and how we are to respond if we want to be saved."²⁸³

The Command

Jesus Christ gave His followers the command to make disciples. The command is found in all four Gospels and the book of Acts. This author will focus on Matthew 28:18-20. Warren W. Wiersbe, pastor, Bible teacher, and former director of Back to the Bible, points out that Jesus' command in Matthew 28:19-20 was from the Son of God. The latter possessed all authority in heaven and earth and passed that authority to His followers.²⁸⁴

The Father gave this authority to the Son, and the Father is exempt from His Son's authority according to 1 Corinthians 15:27-28. As the mediatorial King, God mediates His authority through the Son. This well-defined exercise of power is given by Jesus, resulting from His humility in Philippians 2:5-11. It marks a turning point in redemptive history, for Messiah's "kingdom" has dawned in new power.²⁸⁵ This use of kingdom language is vital to the context of the gospel. Jesus is the Messiah, the rightful heir to the eternal throne of David.

Jesus has full authority and uses this authority to command His disciples to go and make disciples. Because of Jesus' authority, His followers may be confident that their Lord is in sovereign control of "everything in heaven and on earth."²⁸⁶ The command extends to the entire earth, all people groups. Every kind of missionary work is legitimized in this passage, allowing

²⁸³ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 94.

²⁸⁴ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1992), 101, Logos.

²⁸⁵ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 732, ProQuest Ebook Central.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 733.

work to be done among the Gentiles to teach them to become disciples of Christ.²⁸⁷ D. A. Carson, former pastor, and New Testament Professor, now Emeritus Professor of New Testament, points out, “In Greek, ‘go’—like ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’—is a participle, and only the verb ‘make disciples’ is imperative.”²⁸⁸

Picirilli was a professor of Greek New Testament at Welch College and General Editor for the Randal House Bible commentary series. He presents that in Matthew 28:19-20, there is only one imperative verb: “teach” or “make disciples;” this is essential to understanding the Great Commission.²⁸⁹ Matthew's Gospel ends with a command that the disciples continue Jesus' mission by teaching others the same He did. The phrase “to obey,” according to Mookgo Kgatle, “refers to a lifestyle of learning, remembering, and practicing all the teaching commands of Jesus and the Holy Spirit through the New Testament.”²⁹⁰ The disciples were to proclaim His kingdom to include His death, burial, resurrection, and future return.

Discipleship

Today, many in the church believe the Great Commission is about evangelizing the world. However, according to Park, the church that God intends should prioritize raising mature disciples of Christ to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ; thus, the future of the church and world evangelization depends on discipleship training.²⁹¹ However, many versions of the gospel and various methods exist to tell others of that good news. Wiersbe states, “Evangelism alone is not the commission; after people are won, they should be baptized, suggesting a local church

²⁸⁷ Kgatle, “Globalization of Missions,” 1.

²⁸⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 733.

²⁸⁹ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 39.

²⁹⁰ Kgatle, “Globalization of Missions,” 4.

²⁹¹ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 241.

fellowship. However, people are not to make converts to a particular faith and practice, thereby baptizing them into church membership.”²⁹² They should also be taught, which suggests teaching and preaching God’s Word. All things found in Matthew 18:20 refer to the disciple being a learner, a learner of what Jesus taught and exemplified. What Jesus taught is the kingdom.²⁹³ According to the Zondervan King James Commentary: New Testament (ZKJVC), in Matthew 28:18, “missions is not a human endeavor; it takes place under the anointing and empowerment of God Himself.”²⁹⁴ The goal is to make disciples through the power of God, or as this writer will refer to, the Holy Spirit. Romans 1:16 shows that “the gospel” is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.

In Matthew's presentation of the Great Commission, “Jesus gave only one imperative command: make disciples (mathēteúsate, the aorist active imperative of mathēteúō, to disciple or teach a student).”²⁹⁵ One fulfills the Great Commission only when one reaches others and makes other disciples of Christ. However, how the believer sees the gospel will determine the gospel taught to the disciple or convert. The proper translation of “Go” is “as you go.”²⁹⁶ While Jesus was very intentional in His acts, He taught His disciples in everyday life. Jesus followed the example of the Shema found in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. He taught them as they did life together. Jesus’ objective was never to gain followers but to draw people who were all in and committed to His process.²⁹⁷ Wright notes that “God made humans for a purpose: not simply for themselves,

²⁹² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 5.

²⁹³ Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the New Testament*, 101.

²⁹⁴ Edward E. Hinson, ed., *Zondervan King James Version Commentary: New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 82.

²⁹⁵ Spiros Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew* (n.p.: AMG Publishers, 2003), 516, Logos.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 78.

not simply so that they could be in a relationship with him, but so that through them, as his image-bearers, he could bring his wise, glad, fruitful order to the world.”²⁹⁸ That process is the entire gospel story, from beginning to end. Bates provides an excellent outline of the gospel. Jesus, the king, preexisted with the Father, who took on human flesh, died for sins, was buried, raised again on the third day, appeared to many, is seated at the right hand of God, and will come again as judge.²⁹⁹

According to Park, “Disciple, in Greek usage, denoted ‘an indissoluble personal relationship between disciple and teacher (*didaskalos*) in which the disciple imitates or emulates the teacher.’”³⁰⁰ Disciples are made through personal relationships where both parties work together, and the novice learns from the master. According to Spiros Zodhiates, a Greek-American Bible scholar, the gospel of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ must be preached first, according to 1 Corinthians 15:12.³⁰¹ The Great Commission should remain connected with the Lord's resurrection and His authority in heaven and earth. The Lord Jesus Christ is unique because “all authority” presupposes His divine nature.³⁰² The divine nature proves His place in the Godhead and His rightful place as the King. The Gospel of Matthew begins with the kingship theme, is developed throughout the book, and concludes with Jesus being the King of Israel.³⁰³ Richard Thomas France, New Testament scholar, Anglican cleric,

²⁹⁸ Wright, *Justification*, 23-24.

²⁹⁹ Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone*, 52.

³⁰⁰ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 242.

³⁰¹ Zodhiates, *Exegetical Commentary on Matthew*, 517.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 148, ProQuest Ebook Central.

and former Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, writes that a distinctive feature of Matthew's gospel is the emergence of the universal kingship of the Son of Man.³⁰⁴

The definition of the gospel is "good news." Dickson writes, "The gospel is not only theology...it is news of events."³⁰⁵ Hull and Sobels add, "For Jesus' audience, the Good News was that God's kingdom was at hand – it had arrived here on earth!"³⁰⁶ Paul presented the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15, and McKnight points out that for the Corinthians, the gospel concerned the death, burial, resurrection, and His appearance after His resurrection.³⁰⁷ However, McKnight continues, "for Paul, the word gospel is connected to the story of Israel/Bible in his Roman context. Most importantly, the word gospel in the first century was an announcement; to announce that YHWH is king is to announce that Caesar is not."³⁰⁸

Cost

In Matthew 16:24-25, one can see that Christ taught His disciples to follow Him, and there would be a cost. J. G. Butler says, "To serve Christ requires selflessness, as serving Christ involves a denial of self."³⁰⁹ The word "cross" presents the thought of suffering in one's service to Christ. The phrase "follow me" focuses on the subject of the service.³¹⁰

In Luke 9:23-27, Jesus provides the terms for discipleship. Those terms include denying oneself, taking up the cross, and following Him. Picirilli writes of Luke 9:23 that the tenses of the verbs deny, take up, and daily matter. Deny and take up are in the aorist tense and look at the

³⁰⁴ Ibid., 175.

³⁰⁵ Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 121.

³⁰⁶ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 37.

³⁰⁷ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 49.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 58.

³⁰⁹ J. G. Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor* (Clinton, IA: LBC Publications, 2008), 284, LOGOS.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 284.

action as a whole, suggesting a settled decision. However, daily suggests the continuous reoccurrence of that decision.³¹¹ According to the ZKJVC regarding Luke 9:23, “to follow Jesus requires self-denial, complete dedication, and willing obedience.”³¹²

Jesus’ call to discipleship demands a high cost in Luke 14:25-33, and the ultimate goal of discipleship is to become like Jesus.³¹³ Wiersbe explains that in Luke 14:26-33, Jesus shows His disciples that they must consider the cost.³¹⁴ The repetition of “cannot be my disciple” in verses 26, 27, and 33 shows there are things that followers of Christ must do, or as this writer states, there must be action to one's faith.³¹⁵ Picirilli points out that in Luke 14:26, hate has the practical meaning of rejecting a person or their claim.³¹⁶ He explains that removing a person's claim removes a place of preeminence a person has from one’s life.³¹⁷ Jesus is the only one to be preeminent in the believer’s life. Jesus stated that the only way to discipleship is through absolute abandonment of everything.³¹⁸

Action Required

Belief without action is disbelief. The most crucial action is obedience. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus requires obedience; one example is John 15:14-15. The ZKJVC says of this passage, “With the emphasis that Jesus put on obedience, one might think He described the servile obedience of a servant or slave, but voluntary obedience inspired by shared purpose point

³¹¹ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 19.

³¹² Hinson, *Zondervan King James Version*, 191.

³¹³ Park, “Rethinking Discipleship Training of Adults,” 242.

³¹⁴ Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines*, 182.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 18.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 7.

to a different status: friends.”³¹⁹ Willard states, “Salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred scriptures.”³²⁰ John 14:15 states that if one loves Christ, one will obey Him.

Faith requires action. The book of James speaks to the fact of faith and works. James 2:20-25 is an example of works not saving the believer, but faith produces works, or as this writer suggests, faith produces action. Alexander Ross writes, “Can you not get this into your head, James says to this man, that faith without works is an utterly barren thing, producing no harvest of virtue in the life? He then gives two illustrations from the O. T. of the great truth that it is by good works that the presence and the reality of a living faith are demonstrated.”³²¹

Wiersbe says works prove faith or that one’s faith lived out will demonstrate their faith to those around them. He uses Ephesians 2:8-9 to prove that works do not save but rather faith. Ephesians 2:10 shows, however, that true faith will result in works.³²² New Testament scholar, Douglas Moo, explains the context of James 1:19-2:26 as the theological climax of James’ plea for a “pure religion” that vindicates itself in action.³²³ James says faith amounts to no more than a verbal profession, but faith apart from works is dead and, therefore, useless.³²⁴ When believers understand the correct relationship between faith and works, it will bring joy in serving others.

Obey Jesus

In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says that the only ones who can enter heaven are those who do the will of the Father (paraphrased). Picirilli sees this passage as a “requirement for entering

³¹⁹ Hinson, *Zondervan King James Version*, 306.

³²⁰ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 14.

³²¹ Alexander Ross, *The Epistles of James and John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1954), 53.

³²² Wiersbe, *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines*, 542.

³²³ Douglas J. Moo, *James: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 132, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

enteral life,” especially compared to Luke 6:46-49.³²⁵ Jesus taught that if one does not manifest the character of Jesus, one cannot claim to be His disciple.³²⁶ Jesus regarded “obedience to God’s will and mission as part of God’s work.”³²⁷ Obedience matters, and this is not a New Testament precept. First Samuel 15:22 says, “And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.” Willard writes, “Life in Christ has to do with obedience to his teaching. If we do not start there, we may as well forget about any distinctively Christian spirituality.”³²⁸

Implied in the Gospel of John is the concept of obedience as seen in three basic phrases, “doing the will of God,” “finishing the work the Father gave...” and “obey my commands.”³²⁹ “Obedience implies the existence of a relationship.”³³⁰ John 13:15 says Jesus gave the disciples an example to follow, and they obeyed His example through their close relationship with Him. Jesus modeled relational obedience to the disciples with the relationship Jesus had with the Father. It is that Father-Son relationship that involves honor and obedience.³³¹ In John 17:4, Jesus relays that His obedience has resulted in the glorification of the Father.

Bonhoeffer states that Christian acts of obedience require grace to avoid legalism, yet grace requires actual acts of obedience to avoid cheap grace.³³² Grace is costly because it forces

³²⁵ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 27.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ Dirk van der Merwe, “The Concept and Activity of ‘Obedience’ in the Gospel of John,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43, no. 1 (2022): 5. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve/v43i1.2367>.

³²⁸ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 45.

³²⁹ van der Merwe, “The Concept and Activity of ‘Obedience’ in the Gospel of John,” 3.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³³² Jae Yang, “Faith and Obedience in Bonhoeffer and the Communicatio Idiomatum,” *Dialog* 60 (2021): 228, <https://doi.org/10.1111/dial.12631>.

people to follow Jesus Christ in a discipleship relationship. According to Willard, “There is absolutely nothing in what Jesus himself or his early followers taught that suggests you can decide just to enjoy forgiveness at Jesus's expense and have nothing more to do with him.”³³³

Follow Jesus

In Matthew 4:19, Jesus says, “Follow Me.” According to Butler, this precept involved three essential parts: submission to Christ by following, separation from others to Christ, and the Savior.³³⁴ Picirilli defines a disciple as “one who lays aside every other influence for giving direction to his life and pledges allegiance to Jesus, one who follows where Jesus leads, who enrolls in the school of Jesus and proceeds to learn from Him and put His teachings into practice.”³³⁵ People are ill-informed and believe that following Christ is simple and easy. Followers of Jesus need to be taught that they are now cross-bearers, servants, and slaves of Christ.³³⁶ To follow Christ, one must know where He is going and what He is doing and emulate Him. According to Picirilli, “In the New Testament, following is the true mark of the disciple, with learning self-evidently included.”³³⁷ Jesus’ call to repentance is included in His call to follow.

In Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, and 19:21, Jesus calls, “follow me,” and in each of these cases, the call requires physical movement.³³⁸ Therefore, following Jesus has a physical

³³³ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 77.

³³⁴ Butler, *Analytical Bible Expositor*, 62.

³³⁵ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 37.

³³⁶ S. Joubert, “Invited into the Markan Paradox,” *HTS Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 3 (2019): 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v75i3.5399>.

³³⁷ Picirilli, *Discipleship*, 36.

³³⁸ Roedolf Botha, “The Transformative Power Embedded in Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου and Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι in Matthew as Gospel Embodiment in Contemporary Ecclesial Discipleship,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021): 6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i4.6616>.

requirement. Roedolf Botha notes that in "Matthew 10:34-39, Jesus admonished his followers to stay faithful and keep following despite the difficult circumstances."³³⁹ Jesus will ask His followers to follow Him everywhere, even in places they do not like or enjoy, as exemplified by where He took the disciples. It is through those travels that Jesus taught them. Botha further writes, "Discipleship cannot work without a 'follow me' strategy with some bodily movement implied."³⁴⁰

The call of Jesus to "follow me" is recorded no less than eighteen times in the Gospel of Mark.³⁴¹ In Mark, following Jesus is not about self-promotion or status-seeking but rather about self-sacrifice and humiliation. In Mark 10:35-40, Jesus instructs His disciples to take up the role of slaves.³⁴²

Theoretical Foundations

The theory is that when believers fully understand the gospel and the implications of the Great Commission, they will make disciples who make disciples. Along those lines, there must be an intentional approach to implementing the relational aspect of discipleship and the connection between evangelism and discipleship. Ignorance is a problem for believers today. Believers are ignorant of the requirement to follow Jesus and what that entails. Jesus commanded His disciples and all believers of all ages to follow Him. Many are ignorant about the kingdom, its location, whether physical or spiritual, current or future or any combination of the previous. They are unaware of the costs associated with following Jesus. The fact that Jesus requires action by the believer is unthought-of by most. Many have been taught that no further action is required

³³⁹ Botha, "The Transformative Power...", 4.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 6.

³⁴¹ Joubert, "Invited into the Markan," 6.

³⁴² Ibid., 6.

outside of the work of God's grace. Based on their previous teaching, some believe that doing any good deeds is a sign of works salvation and should never be done. The question for this researcher is not only what to do but how to accomplish the goal of Christocentric discipleship at FBCoT.

Approach

The how to make disciples is just as important as the why. What is the goal or objective? The objective will determine the approach. Transformed lives are the objective. The approach needs to be intentional to reach the objective. The only way to make disciples is to use a means that will be followed through and implemented. Constant action is required; theories are not action. One must not suffer from paralysis by analysis. One need not worry about making mistakes but rather spend time in prayer and allow the Holy Spirit to do the work. Dabbs suggests listening intentionally, praying about how God wants things, resting in God's work, and resisting doubt. Stick with the plan, work it out, and allow it to develop.³⁴³ Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew focussed on transforming people for the mission.³⁴⁴ Transforming discipleship is a Christ-connected way of life.³⁴⁵

Christocentric discipleship results in transformation; therefore, we can confidently contend that those churches where no transformation occurs are deficient in discipleship.³⁴⁶ Why is that the case? Could current discipleship methods be fragmented and create ill-equipped

³⁴³ Matt Dabbs, "The Best Approach Is the One You Will Use," (December 2021), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/the-best-approach-is-the-one-you-will-use/>.

³⁴⁴ Desmond Henry, "Beyond Post-Christendom Discipleship of the Evangelical Church in the United Kingdom: A Study of Hte Gospel of Matthew in the Transformissional and Holistic Perspective," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, no. 1 (2021): 1, accessed November 21, 2022, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/scholarly-journals/beyond-post-christendom-discipleship-evangelical/docview/2543472665/se-2>.

³⁴⁵ World Council of Churches, "The Arusha Call to Discipleship," *International Review of Missions* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 543, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/irom.12249>.

³⁴⁶ Eric Geiger, Micheal Kelly, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 12.

disciples to fulfill the great commission?³⁴⁷ Jesus' call required His disciples to continue committing to follow him.³⁴⁸ Believers are to be Christocentric. Jesus never told the disciples to make disciples of themselves but rather disciples of Jesus.³⁴⁹ Jesus is to be the central focus of discipleship, not any one method or any institution.³⁵⁰ However, one must remember that the Holy Spirit causes believers to have new holy desires they did not have previously.³⁵¹

People need purpose. Knowing and understanding their purpose makes them more confident in their faith and spiritual growth.³⁵² Confidently following Jesus draws others to Christ when one lives a Christocentric life.³⁵³ Resulting in evangelism, which in its truest sense has been entrusted to the disciples of all ages.³⁵⁴ Bill Hull suggests that Jesus did not employ the mistaken habit of the modern-day church of "quick-pitching people into commitments."³⁵⁵ The modern-day push for a quick commitment comes from the Roman model. "The Roman model for reaching people says: 1) present the Christian message; 2) invite them to decide to believe in Christ and become Christians; and 3) if they decide positively, welcome them into the church and its fellowship."³⁵⁶ "In contrast, the Celtic model for reaching people says 1) you first

³⁴⁷ Desmond Henry, "Beyond Post-Christendom Discipleship of the Evangelical Church in the United Kingdom: A Study of Hte Gospel of Matthew in the Transformissional and Holistic Perspective," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 42, no. 1 (2021): 1, accessed November 21, 2022, <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/scholarly-journals/beyond-post-christendom-discipleship-evangelical/docview/2543472665/se-2>.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 3.

³⁵² Henry, "Beyond Post-Christendom Discipleship," 8.

³⁵³ Hollis Haff, "Cultivating Quality Relationships," (October 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://thebonhofferproject.com/weeklycolumn/relationships>.

³⁵⁴ World Council of Churches, "The Arusha Call to Discipleship," *International Review of Missions* 107, no. 2 (December 2018): 545, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/irom.12249>.

³⁵⁵ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 33.

³⁵⁶ Winfield Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples: What Movements Can Teach Us about Discipleship* (n.p.: Exponential.org, 2019), 27.

establish community with people, or bring them into the fellowship of your community of faith; 2) within the fellowship, you engage in conversation, ministry, prayer, and worship; and 3) in time, as they discover that they now believe, you invite them to baptism and discipleship."³⁵⁷

Today researchers continue to develop and implement new programs and methods; some focus on training leaders,³⁵⁸ and others focus on curriculum.³⁵⁹

ROADBLOCKS/OBSTACLES

Many pitfalls can appear when living a Christocentric discipleship life. One must ensure their view of discipleship is correct. An incorrect view will multiply when one possesses an improper view of discipleship and makes disciples.³⁶⁰ Curtis Erskine writes of six roadblocks to discipleship. The six roadblocks to Jesus-style disciple-making are (1) not understanding why and how we are to be disciples of Jesus; (2) Moralistic Deism/Being a good moral person; (3) Easy Believeism; (4) submission; (5) Abandoning All; (6) Actually Making Disciples of Jesus.³⁶¹ Vick Green believes five myths will stall discipleship. Myth number one is the engagement myth is that activity equates to transformation. The second is the expertise myth that ministry excellence equates to excellent ministry. The third myth is the equipping myth which teaching equates to training. The fourth myth is the empowerment myth: filling spots equates to empowering people. In the final myth, the execution myth, church impact equates to ministry

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Paul Chapman, "Equipping Members in Basic Discipleship Principles and Practices at Christian Community Discipleship Church in Prince George's County, Maryland.," Order No. 28264175, Regent University, 2020, accessed November 21, 2022, PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 6.

³⁵⁹ Thomas Wayne Keinath, "The Barnabas Discipleship Method and Model: A Quest for True and Effective New Testament Discipleship," Order No. 3023274, Regent University, 2001, accessed November 21, 2022, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, 2.

³⁶⁰ Eric Geiger, Micheal Kelly, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 18.

³⁶¹ Curtis Erskine, "Six Roadblocks to Jesus-style Disciple Making," (September 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/six-roadblocks-to-jesus-style-disciple-making/>.

ownership.³⁶² Support is essential at all levels of discipleship. However, to build a Christocentric discipleship culture, one must have the senior pastor's support, be on the same page, start with a small group of people, and be tenacious.³⁶³ While the church is becoming more Christocentric in discipleship, the church will become more process than program-oriented, from a membership culture with privileges to a discipleship culture with responsibilities.³⁶⁴

Group Size

The size of the discipleship group will depend on the size and needs of the local congregation. Group sizes can be between two and twenty, each with pros and cons. One-on-one discipleship is beneficial as it is customizable in confidentiality, content, and relation.³⁶⁵ However, Bryan Hurlbutt states, "in terms of efficiency, the one-to-one approach is lacking."³⁶⁶ Hurlbutt prefers the small group method, as discipling small groups increases the multiplication rate.³⁶⁷ Robby Gallaty and Rick Green of the Replicate Ministry promote a small group they call "Discipleship Groups," consisting of three to six people for a closed four-week group.³⁶⁸ Jesus used a small group format when He "handcrafted disciples a small batch at a time."³⁶⁹ While

³⁶² Vick Green, "How Did We Get Here" The 5 Ministry Myths That Are Stalling Your Disciple-Making Movement," (June 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/how-did-we-get-here-the-5-ministry-myths-that-are-stalling-your-disciple-making-movement/>.

³⁶³ Dane Allphin, "Four Steps to a Disciplemaking Culture," (July 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/four-steps-to-a-disciplemaking-culture/>.

³⁶⁴ Yau Man Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 18 (2) (2021): 192, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739891320959084>.

³⁶⁵ Steve McCoy, "Discipling One-To-One," (May 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/disciple-making-at-a-table-for-two/>.

³⁶⁶ Bryan F. Hurlbutt, *Cohort: Forming a Legion of Disciples in the Local Church* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, n.d.), 21.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁶⁸ Robby Gallaty and Rick Green, "Replicate.org," accessed November 21, 2022, <http://Replicate.org>.

³⁶⁹ David Young, *King Jesus: And the Beauty of Obedience-based Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 93.

small groups can increase the number of people being disciplined, they must be clearly defined and maintain their purpose.³⁷⁰

One of those definitions should be meeting weekly to ensure that relationships continue to grow in the group.³⁷¹ Joel Comiskey agrees that meeting weekly is imperative. He writes, "Groups that meet weekly experience more health and growth than those that meet every other week."³⁷² He also writes, "Changing the frequency that a small group meets from weekly to bi-weekly or monthly to encourage more attendees weakens the quality of the group and community."³⁷³ Another possible rule is that Cells should not meet in the church facilities. People grow where they feel most comfortable. Meeting in homes allows new people to feel more at ease. "The best setting for discipleship occurs in the home's warm atmosphere."³⁷⁴

The purpose of small groups, no matter the size, is to serve the needs of the church and the community.³⁷⁵ Small groups are ideal for those who "want to learn to follow Jesus in our life together."³⁷⁶ Bevins points out that John Wesley taught that Christocentric discipleship is for all believers, and it was during the weekly class meetings that discipleship occurred through prayer, instruction, and fellowship.³⁷⁷ However, one must not forget that "the church is not an end in

³⁷⁰ Freedy Noble, "A Quality Cell Definition Includes Weekly Cells," (November 2022), accessed November 22, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/2022/11/22/a-quality-cell-definition-includes-weekly-cells/>.

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Joel Comiskey, "Weekly Enhances Quality," (November 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/2022/11/21/weekly-enhances-quality/>.

³⁷³ Joel Comiskey, "Weekly Cell Groups," (November 2022), accessed November 20, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/2022/11/20/weekly-cell-groups/>.

³⁷⁴ Robert Lay, "Cells Outside the Box," (November 2022), accessed November 27, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/2022/11/27/cells-outside-the-box/>.

³⁷⁵ Robert Lewis and Rob Wilkins, *The Church of Irresistible Influence* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 82.

³⁷⁶ Jeremy M. Rios, "Spiritual (Mal)Formation," *TheoLogica: An International Journ for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 4, no. 1 (September 2020): 186, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14428/thl.v4i1.22213>.

³⁷⁷ Winfield Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples: What Movements Can Teach Us about Discipleship* (n.p.: Exponential.org, 2019), 52-58.

itself; the church points beyond itself to fulfill the mission of God by making disciples."³⁷⁸ No matter the group size, there is "a danger in emphasizing 'learning' in discipleship" as it can give "the wrong impression that commitment to Jesus is merely about acquiring information."³⁷⁹ "Jesus did not merely ask us to teach everything He commanded. He asked us to teach people to obey everything He commanded, and the difference is mammoth."³⁸⁰

Discipleship/Church Growth

Bambang Budijanto, in his research in Indonesia, found that church growth is a by-product of discipleship; this growth is both numerically and spiritually.³⁸¹ The question is what is measured and what is causing the change. Spader writes, "We measure what we value. We do not measure what we do not value."³⁸² What matters most? "Bodies, bucks, baptisms and buildings" or spiritual growth as seen by transformed lives?³⁸³ This writer affirms that transforming lives is the goal. While "some churches focus on evangelism at the expense of discipleship by seeking to win converts instead of making disciples – despite the fact that the goal of evangelism is disciple-making."³⁸⁴ The result is that the church has "experienced

³⁷⁸ Winfield Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples: What Movements Can Teach Us about Discipleship* (n.p.: Exponential.org, 2019), 12.

³⁷⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), 204.

³⁸⁰ Eric Geiger, Micheal Kelly, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2012), 18.

³⁸¹ Bambang Budijanto, "The Correlation between Church Growth and Discipleship: Evidence from Indonesia," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 44, no. 3 (August 2020): 236, 240, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lsdar&AN=ATLAIiGW7200824000439&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

³⁸² Dann Spader, *Disciple Making Metrics: How to Measure Your Effectiveness at Developing Disciple-makers* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, 2020), 6.

³⁸³ Ibid.

³⁸⁴ Winfield Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples: What Movements Can Teach Us about Discipleship* (n.p.: Exponential.org, 2019), 14.

enormous statistical growth without corresponding growth in discipleship.³⁸⁵ Thus, they have missed the objective of transforming lives.

Intentional

Jesus began His ministry by intentionally making His top priority recruiting and training disciples. Intentionality is essential to accomplish any goal; discipleship is no different. One must be intentional in discipling others as it will be the difference between helping people and making disciples.³⁸⁶ Attempting to produce disciples without a clear and compelling end will fail.³⁸⁷ Jesus' top priority was recruiting and training disciples; Christians must follow His lead.³⁸⁸ Erskine writes, "Disciple-making is intentionally helping people to come to faith in Jesus and to form their lives around Jesus."³⁸⁹ Churches, therefore, must have a philosophy where spiritual growth is at the center of their ministry.³⁹⁰ One would do well to remember that "church members can be mass-produced, but disciples cannot."³⁹¹

Relationships

Why should one participate in relational discipleship? The answer is Jesus commanded and exemplified it to all believers.³⁹² "Intentional relationships are actively engaged and do not

³⁸⁵ John R. W. Stott, "Make Disciples, Not Just Converts: Evangelism without Discipleship Dispenses Cheap Grace," *Christianity Today* 43, no. 12 (October 1999): 28.

³⁸⁶ Curt Erskine, "Intentionality," (April 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/intentionality-2/>.

³⁸⁷ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 119.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 162.

³⁸⁹ Erskine, "Intentionality."

³⁹⁰ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 31.

³⁹¹ David Young, *King Jesus: And the Beauty of Obedience-based Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 93.

³⁹² Curt Erskine, *Recreated to Be like God: Making Disciples in the Image of Jesus* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, 2022), 14.

happen casually or by happenstance."³⁹³ However, intentionality is more than an outward declaration of one's intentions. Dr. Klaus Issler says, "Deep character formation requires that we attend to the core of our self—the heart—and cooperate with God's good work within."³⁹⁴ Everyone must actively participate in their spiritual formation.³⁹⁵

"Disciple-making needs to have an intentional target." The target or goal needs to be a disciple with a Christ-like character who will make other disciples.³⁹⁶ Intentional discipleship is walking with someone to encourage, equip, and challenge them to grow toward maturity in Christ and follow Jesus in every aspect of their life.³⁹⁷ ³⁹⁸ Discipleship is like an obstacle course; it takes intentional, close relationships to overcome life's obstacles while learning to rely on Jesus.³⁹⁹ One can have a relationship in which they conduct Bible studies together and not be meaningful; likewise, one can have a meaningful relationship and not be spiritual and true discipleship requires both.⁴⁰⁰ The intent should be to make disciples of Jesus, not to build the church; "church members can be mass-produced, but disciples cannot."⁴⁰¹

³⁹³ Chris Knight, "Intentional Relationships," (June 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/intentional-relationships/>.

³⁹⁴ Klaus Dieter Issler, *Living into the Life of Jesus: The Formation of Christian Character* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsityPress, 2012), 298.

³⁹⁵ Jeremy M. Rios, "Spiritual (Mal)Formation," *TheoLogica: An Internatinonal Journal for Philosophy of Religion and Philosophical Theology* 4, no. 1 (September 2020): 185, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.14428/thl.v4i1.22213>.

³⁹⁶ Ken Adams, "Intentional Disciples Making," (September 2021), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://impactdisciples.com/intentional-disciple-making/>.

³⁹⁷ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 12.

³⁹⁸ Santha Yinger, "Intentionality Matters in Relationships," (February 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://rdn1.com/?s=intentionality+matters+in+relationships>.

³⁹⁹ Bill Mowry, "A Disciplemaking Pathway Is Not a Greatest Hits Collection," (April 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/a-disciplemaking-pathway-is-not-a-greatest-hits-collection/>.

⁴⁰⁰ Yinger, "Intentionality Matters in Relationships."

⁴⁰¹ David Young, *King Jesus: And the Beauty of Obedience-based Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020).

One way to build relationships is to share a meal; it is an environment conducive to sharing. A shared meal in the homes of the early believers would function as a small group in today's terminology or functionality.⁴⁰² Acts 2:46 shows the daily intent to meet in the temple and each other's homes.⁴⁰³ Eating together has always been a great way to develop intentional relationships.

Leadership

Many have said everything rises and falls on leadership, and this author agrees. Therefore, leaders must prioritize intentionality if they expect others to do the same. Leadership should make specific plans to instill spiritual transformation in others.⁴⁰⁴ "The very nature of any training assumes intentionality, a training plan, and action steps."⁴⁰⁵ Jesus used the phrase "Follow me" in John 1:43 and ordained His disciples for intentional service in Mark 3:14.⁴⁰⁶ "The best leaders and disciple-makers are also the best learners and followers."⁴⁰⁷ This writer knows the best leaders have a history of being great followers. One must be an intentional follower of Christ and their relationship with Him to be a successful intentional discipler.⁴⁰⁸ Spiritual growth will grow when relationships are intentional, focusing on eternal matters—resulting in deep relationships that live beyond the discipler.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰² Yiner Josue Huaycani Cotrado, "Principles of Discipleship and Church Growth from Acts 2:46-47," *International Review of Missions* 109, no. 2 (November 2020): 337, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/rom.12337>.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2016), 53.

⁴⁰⁵ Rick Thoman, "Leadership Development, Part 1: Churches Don't Have to Go It Alone," *Christian Education Journal* 6, no. 2 (2009): 289.

⁴⁰⁶ Mario Vega, "Finding Time to Disciple," (November 2022), accessed November 24, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/2022/11/24/finding-time-to-disciple/>.

⁴⁰⁷ Blake Whiteman, "Intentional Leadership Begins with Intentionally Abiding," (April 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/blog/intentional-leadership-begins-with-intentionally-abiding/>.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Chris Knight, "Intentional Relationships," (June 2022), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://discipleship.org/intentional-relationships/>.

Education

The church's central mission is discipleship, yet it does not just happen.⁴¹⁰ Jesus was intentional in his disciple-making, yet He did not follow a curriculum or have a set time and location for disciple-making.⁴¹¹ When one studies the life of Christ, one can observe that Jesus was intentional in assisting His disciples to develop a lifestyle of replication.⁴¹² "Theosis is the teaching that God wants everyone re-conformed to the image of Jesus."⁴¹³ When a church focuses on this, people will be transformed to be Christ-like.⁴¹⁴ Jesus intentionally used everyday life experiences to equip His disciples. While the Bible can and should be used in the educational process, "it is not sufficient to merely say "read or study your Bible."⁴¹⁵ Curriculums are valuable tools that have been used throughout history and are helpful in intentionally equipping others.⁴¹⁶ However, discipleship is not a curriculum or program in and of itself. Learning to follow Jesus cannot be done alone; it must be accomplished through intentional relationships.⁴¹⁷ Practical and corporate discipleship is a form of apprenticeship.⁴¹⁸ However, discipleship can be highly impersonal when labeled as a curriculum; some are programs under a different name.⁴¹⁹ Discipleship is a relationship with spiritual and life coping skills. The goal is to make a disciple

⁴¹⁰ Bryan F. Hurlbutt, *Cohort: Forming a Legion of Disciples in the Local Church* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, n.d.), 7, 11.

⁴¹¹ Ken Adams, "Intentional Disciples Making," (September 2021), accessed June 16, 2022, <http://impactdisciples.com/intentional-disciple-making/>.

⁴¹² Dann Spader, *Disciple Making Metrics: How to Measure Your Effectiveness at Developing Disciple-makers* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, 2020), 27.

⁴¹³ Curt Erskine, *Recreated to Be like God: Making Disciples in the Image of Jesus* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, 2022), 4.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Hurlbutt, *Cohort*.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁴¹⁷ Yau Man Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 18 (2) (2021): 196, accessed November 21, 2022, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0739891320959084>.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 191.

⁴¹⁹ Hurlbutt, *Cohort*, 10.

who follows Christ, is changed by Christ, and is committed to the mission of Christ.⁴²⁰ Growth is apparent when a disciple begins to be concerned for those they know who are lost and official when discipling another.⁴²¹

Relational

Discipleship is a relationship. The depth of one's relationships is significant, not the number of relationships. However, one must not forget that the vertical relationship with God affects our horizontal relationship with others; through prayer.⁴²² Richard J. Foster writes, "If we genuinely love people, we desire for them far more than it is within our power to give, and that will cause us to pray."⁴²³ When one lives a Christocentric life, others are drawn to Christ."⁴²⁴ Since few born-again believers model biblical faith, it is difficult for non-believers to understand why they need Christianity.⁴²⁵ Therefore, all believers need to live a Christocentric life.

A Christocentric life involves being a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus.⁴²⁶ To make Christocentric disciples, one must invest in the lives of others.⁴²⁷ Discipling others does not need to wait until one is fully mature; instead, one should start making disciples as soon as one accepts the authority of Jesus.⁴²⁸ Jesus is the best model for discipleship. He spent time with his disciples listening to their needs, addressing their questions, and teaching them as they lived

⁴²⁰ Spader, *Disciple Making Metrics*, 7.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 10, 22.

⁴²² Hollis Haff, "Cultivating Quality Relationships," (October 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://thebonhofferproject.com/weeklycolumn/relationships>.

⁴²³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Disciple: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 25th anniversary ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1998), 40.

⁴²⁴ Haff, "Cultivating Quality Relationships."

⁴²⁵ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 75.

⁴²⁶ Jason Houser, Bobby Harrington, and Chad Harrington, *Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 13.

⁴²⁷ David Young, *King Jesus: And the Beauty of Obedience-based Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2020), 94.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 99.

together from village to village.⁴²⁹ "Biblical discipleship was a lifestyle of relationships filtered through every aspect of life."⁴³⁰ However, discipleship is often a transfer of information in a small group setting. The issue is that disciplers are missing intentional discipleship opportunities between group meetings. Spending time outside the church environment results in a more significant impact on the life of the disciple.⁴³¹

Discipleship is relational; one can accomplish some things in a small group, yet more personal things are best accomplished one-on-one. One can think of a group of friends who enjoy doing things together, yet those break into smaller groups in that group. People tend to run in groups of different sizes and may or may not include the same people. Christ dealt with various sizes of groups. The inner three, Peter, James, and John, received the closest attention, with the Twelve receiving the next level, then the seventy-two, followed by the crowds. The larger the group, the less personal it became. The inner three had a closer, more personal relationship with Jesus than the crowds or the other nine.

Mancini and Hartman write, "The church in North America is dramatically over-programmed and under-discipled."⁴³² This researcher does not want to create another program but a ministry that creates and builds a discipleship culture. Willard said, "Spiritual Formation does not happen in a program at the church. It happens by living your life."⁴³³ Programs will not result in believers living their lives so Christ is visible. The members of FBCoT will develop a Christocentric culture throughout their daily lives. The goal is similar to what Mancini and

⁴²⁹ Jason Houser, Bobby Harrington, and Chad Harrington, *Dedicated: Training Your Children to Trust and Follow Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 29.

⁴³⁰ Andrew Kirk, "Discipleship Starts in the Home," (November 2022), accessed November 23, 2022, <http://joelcomiskeygroup.com/?s=discipleship+starts+in+the+home>.

⁴³¹ Joel Owen, "Relational Discipleship Changed My Life," (September 2022), accessed November 21, 2022, <http://rdn1.com/how-relational-discipleship-changed-my-life>.

⁴³² Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 14.

⁴³³ Dallas Willard, "The Apprentices," [dwillard.org](https://dwillard.org/articles/apprentices-the), accessed April 7, 2022, <https://dwillard.org/articles/apprentices-the>.

Hartman wrote: “make disciples and let converts ‘happen’ rather than intending to make converts and letting disciples ‘happen.’”⁴³⁴ Building relationships takes time, effort, and energy; however, it is the only way to make disciples.

Evangelism and Discipleship

Evangelism and discipleship are two sides of the same coin. Hull asks, "What comes first, evangelism or discipleship—can you have one without the other?"⁴³⁵ When evangelism excludes discipleship, one eventually loses people for discipleship. Discipleship becomes optional when the goal is only getting someone to profess Christ.⁴³⁶ Where Christians intentionally live out their faith, new believers are saved, and disciples are formed to the extent that discipleship and disciple-making become a product of each other.⁴³⁷ Bevins writes, "The goal of evangelism is disciple-making."⁴³⁸ Evangelism is pre-conversion discipleship; conversion is often a process and an event.⁴³⁹ "Evangelism is the beginning of the journey, and discipleship is the process of spiritual growth."⁴⁴⁰ Dallas Willard was one of the first to point out that we have a discipleship problem today because of how the church presents the gospel. "Too often, we teach and share a transactional gospel that does not explicitly necessitate obedience to Jesus and a life of being formed into His image."⁴⁴¹ Becoming like Christ is a core aspect of the gospel and is

⁴³⁴ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 49.

⁴³⁵ Bill Hull and Bobby Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship* (n.p.: Discipleship.org, 2014), 7.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ J. Kafwanka, "Intentional Discipleship and Disciple-making: An Anglican Guide for Christian Life and Formation," *London: Anglican Consultative Council* (2016): 6.

⁴³⁸ Winfield Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples: What Movements Can Teach Us about Discipleship* (n.p.: Exponential.org, 2019), 23.

⁴³⁹ Hull and Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship*, 12, 29.

⁴⁴⁰ Bevins, *Multiplying Disciples*, 51.

⁴⁴¹ Hull and Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship*, 16.

fundamental; it is more than just the cross. Jesus came to proclaim a kingdom and invite us into salvation and discipleship: "this gospel of Jesus requires discipleship."⁴⁴²

Hull and Cook list five different gospel types (Forgiveness Only, Gospel of the Left, Prosperity, Consumer, and Gospel of Right), and McKnight presents a different type (Kingdom Gospel). All six of these types will be presented and discussed in the first session to show which gospel type closely resembles the gospel Jesus preached (see Appendix A). This researcher will guide them to what McKnight calls the kingdom gospel. He writes, "Kingdom is a community made up of four features that shape the entire Story of Israel: God, king, citizens, and land. The king is Jesus, the citizens are those who follow Jesus, and the land is the place where they will embody the kingdom of God."⁴⁴³ The Gospels will be utilized to show how Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom of God.

Hull and Sobels, in their book *The Discipleship Gospel*, quote McKnight, "My plea is that we go back to the New Testament to discover all over again what Jesus' gospel is."⁴⁴⁴ Following Christ's example of explaining, demonstrating, supervising, and making necessary corrections is the action plan. A correct understanding of the gospel is imperative, as what one believes about the gospel is how one will live out that gospel. Hull and Sobel say: "Of all the gospel elements, following Jesus might be the most neglected one in our day."⁴⁴⁵ Following Jesus is part of the gospel. Hull and Sobels say, "We can hear the declarative statements of the gospel, but if we do not repent, believe in the gospel, and follow Jesus, we will not be saved!"⁴⁴⁶ According to Hull and Sobels, "There are four declarative statements: God's kingdom is here,

⁴⁴² Hull and Harrington, *Evangelism or Discipleship*, 19.

⁴⁴³ McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 110.

⁴⁴⁴ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 33.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

Jesus is the Christ, Jesus died for our sins, and Jesus was resurrected on the third day. These four statements form 'the gospel proper.'⁴⁴⁷ They also write, "Three imperative responses critically connected to the declarative statements: repent of sin, believe the gospel, and follow Jesus."⁴⁴⁸

Hull and Sobels define the kingdom of God as "the restoration of God's rule over all things."⁴⁴⁹ Using Colossians 3:15, they state, "As Christ rules in our hearts, God's kingdom reigns over our lives."⁴⁵⁰ Again the kingdom plays a role in the gospel and thus needs to be understood in discipleship. Hull and Sobels further discuss, "God's kingdom advances every time a person hears the gospel and begins following Jesus by faith."⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 43.

⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter three will present the methodology used to intervene in the lack of discipleship at FBCoT. This intervention aims to increase the understanding of Christocentric discipleship, followed by implementing a plan of action for discipleship at FBCoT. The plan is to use a focus group format to facilitate the men of FBCoT to discover why there is a lack of discipleship and develop a plan to overcome the present obstacles. The overarching design is to conduct initial interviews for each participant, followed by a six-week focus group and an exit interview to substantiate any changes. The six-week focus group will consist of five weeks of group discussion and one week of developing an action plan.

Intervention Design

The intervention targets the men in the church, intending that once they understand discipleship, they will disciple their families and others in the congregation. The men of FBCoT desire a spiritually mature congregation. However, these same men have little to no knowledge of Christocentric discipleship or how to achieve it. There has been a lack of discipleship in the congregation for several decades, resulting in a lack of spiritual maturity, especially among the younger members. However, there is a desire for discipleship, as evident from a self-study conducted by the congregation. The intervention is a train-the-trainer type of educational process. The researcher will facilitate a focus group to allow the participants to understand the aspects of discipleship and pass that understanding to others.

Once IRB approves, officially requesting FBCoT permission and recruiting participants will begin. This researcher will personally inform the prospective focus group participants via a letter mailed to each prospective participant (see Appendix B). After delivering the letters, the researcher will reach out personally to each prospective participant to ask if they have any questions or concerns and the best days and times for the group to meet. This researcher will explain the project as a means to develop their personal spiritual growth and provide a way to facilitate others to do the same. He will also explain that it is experimental, and their feedback throughout the process is essential. He will also demonstrate that a by-product of this exercise could result in church growth and unity.

Once the participant agrees to the research group, the researcher provides an initial questionnaire to complete without any assistance from any sources. The questionnaire offers adequate feedback for the researcher to fine-tune the five-week focus group learning sessions. Upon the return of the questionnaires, the researcher will read the answers and develop follow-up questions, asking questions in a private one-on-one interview. Before the interview begins, the researcher and the participant will review, discuss, and sign the confidentiality form (see Appendix C). During this interview, the researcher will ask participants about discipleship-related topics, setting the baseline for the participant's knowledge of Christocentric discipleship and other discipleship-related topics (see Appendix D). The researcher will use his debriefing skills acquired as a Defense Strategic Debriefing to obtain the participants' understanding of Christocentric discipleship.

After interviewing the participants, an initial meeting will occur to agree on the meeting's day, time, and location. Upon settling on the day and time, next would be the start date, paying attention to the fact that this researcher wants a consecutive six-week period. The focus group

will meet weekly for six weeks to discuss a single aspect of discipleship and discover ways to implement or improve them at FBCoT. The topics include: What is Discipleship? What is the Gospel? What did Jesus mean by “Follow Me?” What is required of a Disciple? What is the Kingdom of God? What is the Great Commission? Does Faith require Action? And, What is Evangelism? These topics will develop a complete picture of Christocentric discipleship, thus creating a desire to disciple others out of one’s love for Christ in obedience to Him.

Table 3.1: Proposed Timeline of Events

TBD	Receive permission from IRB to begin. The timeline will need to adjust based on the permission date.
Week 1	Send official permission request (Appendix F)
Week 2	Send recruitment letters (Appendix B) upon permission response (Appendix G)
Week 3	Follow up on recruitment letters not yet responded
Week 4	Set time and date for the initial interview for each participant
Weeks 5-6	Determine the time and date for the Focus Group and Initial interviews (Appendix D)
Weeks 7-12	Six-week Focus Group (Appendix A)
Weeks 13-14	The final interview of participants (Appendix E)
Weeks 14-18	Synthesize Data

The central portion of the plan is to discuss the various aspects of discipleship during a five-week focus group discussion. A sixth week will develop an action plan regarding discipleship at FBCoT. Supporting Scriptures for each week's topic will be provided and discussed. The initial interviews will create baseline knowledge of each participant in the focus group, allowing this researcher to fine-tune the questions for the focus group sessions. The focus group will meet for approximately one hour weekly, discussing related aspects per session. The

outline of the five-week course and an additional week to develop a plan of action is in Appendix A. This outline contains questions and a list of Scriptures for the participants to read. Every aspect encourages group participation to understand and assist in developing a discipleship culture at FBCoT. The researcher will facilitate the discussion through open-ended questions, guiding the participants to discover solutions. Based on the insights gained from the initial interviews, specific participants will be asked particular questions to encourage equal participation. The lack of discipleship has resulted in several other issues in the church. This writer believes many problems will be resolved if they return to the Word and obey Christ's commands.

Table 3.2: Outline of the Six-Week Focus Group Overview

Six-Week Focus Group	
Week One: The Gospel Defined	Common beliefs about the gospel
	Various types of the gospel preached today
	Which type of Gospel is correct?
	Is the "Plan of Salvation" the Gospel?
	Define the Gospel
Week Two: Kingdom of God	Kingdom passages from the Gospels
	Kingdom passages from the New Testament
	Kingdom passages from the Old Testament
	Application of the Kingdom of God today
	Caring about the Kingdom
	Define the Kingdom
Week Two: Great Commission	Read the Great Commission Passages
	Discuss what they are saying in context
Week Three: Discipleship Defined	Common discipleship beliefs
	Christocentric discipleship
	Discipleship is optional.
	Difference between conversion and discipleship.
Week Four: Discipleship Requirements	Cost
	Obedience

	Action
Week Four: Faith and Action	Faith in Action
	Faith has a history
	Jewish thought about Faith
Week Five: "Follow Me"	Describe "follow me."
	Read the passages where Jesus says, "Follow Me."
	Is Following Optional?
	Following in one's strength
	When does a believer start to follow?
	Requirements to following
	Following is an active process
Week Five: Evangelism	Describe evangelism
	Evangelism required?
	Who is responsible for Evangelism?
	Intentional Relationships
Week Six: Develop a Plan of Action	What is required
	What will work at FBCoT

The sessions would be conducted with privacy and confidentiality; the researcher would also record and transcribe them. All recordings and transcripts would be stored on the researcher's laptop in a digital vault. This researcher would encourage personal notetaking by the participants for each session. The outline for each session would allow for additional questions or concerns. The questions would allow the men to generate solutions to the problems. This researcher wants to allow them the opportunity to take complete ownership of the discipleship process at FBCoT so that the church can grow. The goal is to have the men understand the topics, explain the importance of the topic, and share it with others. Stress will be placed on the relational aspect of discipleship of all parties involved.

Each focus group session would open with prayer, asking God to allow everyone present to see what God has for each person to learn and put into practice. Participants will be reminded that everything said and discussed will remain in the group and be recorded for accuracy. The

participants' names will not be used in the research. Numbers will replace their names to evaluate the progress. Next, the researcher will provide an outline for the next session. The researcher may need to steer the conversation to stay on topic. After completing the session, the participants will be thanked for their assistance and closed in prayer. The researcher will remind participants to keep up with their journaling.

This writer believes the entire process, from start to finish, should take 15-16 weeks after initial IRB approval. The intervention would take six weeks for the focus group, with an additional week or two to coordinate and conduct initial interviews and a few weeks to finalize all the material. This writer is looking for a three-fold outcome: increased knowledge, increased spiritual growth as seen by action, sharing knowledge and development with other believers, and encouraging them to grow. Each of these items will be evaluated. The information will come from the differences between the initial and post-interviews and questions about the participants' journals. The growth seen in the focus group will be evaluated by the amount and content of the input provided by each participant. Thus, a triangulation method will be used to gather the data.

FBCoT has not done anything regarding discipleship or spiritual growth that this researcher is aware of in the past outside of routine church services. The simple fact of starting a plan to increase the members of FBCoT in the grace and admonition of the Lord is a huge step in the right direction. This researcher will use individual personal interviews (initial and post), the focus group, personal observation, and participant journals. The researcher will maintain a reflective journal to ensure objectivity and recognize biases.

If any participants wish to drop out, this writer will encourage them to stick it out while attempting to discover the real issue. Is the problem the meeting time or day, intimidation from others, or personal sharing? The researcher would remind them of the goal to facilitate

individuals to see Christ's teaching and requirements for discipleship. The costs Christ asked of His followers, the need for disciples to disciple others, and the importance of discipleship, resulting in a desire to follow Christ and bring others along the way, will be reinforced.

The data to be collected is the increased knowledge, understanding, and application of the topics discussed in the focus groups. Separate data would be contained in the weekly topics' knowledge, learning, and application. The tracking of specific words will show if the participant understands that word. Each week the researcher will have a different set of words. The goal is to observe if the group understands the topic well enough to develop a plan to apply that knowledge. The result will be an effective discipleship ministry allowing FBCoT to flourish.

The words for session one are gospel, to include a correct definition, and the phrase "plan of salvation." Session two words are kingdom, future, present, heaven, and preach. Along with kingdom references, words related to whom the Great Commission was given, why it is essential, what is involved, and how it is accomplished. The researcher seeks how the group understands evangelism concerning the Great Commission and how to apply it to discipleship. Week three is about defining discipleship, tracking words like follow, example, teach, learn, and optional. The discussion for week four is about the requirements. Words tracked are cost, obedience, faith, and action. The final week of learning the topic will be the phrases follow me and evangelism. The keywords are example, follow, evangelist, and sharing.

The success of the research will require a few items. The researcher will need to use the digital audio recorder on his iPhone and transcribe the audio in a Word document. All digital data will be stored in a personal digital vault. Each participant will be provided personal journals, allowing them to take notes and keep a daily reflective journal. The researcher must print out the focus group outline for all participants to include any additional readings. The data will need to

be evaluated using qualitative methods. This researcher will use the software Qualtrics at \$25.00 per month with a predictive analysis feature.

Implementation of the Intervention Design

IRB approval was granted on 11 April 2022. In May of 2022, the researcher made arrangements to secure the use of the facility of which he is the pastor. The researcher personally gave the invitation/recruitment letters to the eight possible participants between August 7th and 21st. The researcher handed out the Initial questionnaires and Informed Consent forms to the six who agreed to participate on 21 August 2022. However, one of the six decided not to join after receiving the questionnaire and consent form.

The five participants returned their initial questionnaires and consent forms to the researcher over the next several weeks. Once returned, the researcher read, scanned, and saved the documents in an encrypted file folder on the researcher's computer. The age statistics of the five participants are as follows: one participant is in his twenties, two participants are in their thirties, one participant is in his fifties, and the final participant is in his sixties. The time each participant has followed Christ, one less than two years, two between five to ten years, and two over forty years. All participants are members of the researcher's church, where he is the pastor.

Initial Questionnaire

The questionnaire contained open and closed questions designed to provide a baseline for future growth. The growth to be evaluated is the knowledge related to the research topic, their spiritual level of maturity, and the action they are taking toward following Christ. The researcher prefaced the questionnaire by instructing the participants to answer the questions honestly and without assistance. The questionnaire begins with a question regarding the length of time they

have been a Christian. The purpose of this question is multi-faceted; to ensure they are a professing Christian, possess a correct understanding of being a Christian, and how long they have been what they define as a Christian. Words have meaning, and how one defines terms depends on how people communicate effectively. The researcher looked for a definitive answer in years; most participants provided that answer. However, one did not and required follow-up questions in a personal interview.

The second question was a closed-ended question dealing with participants' past discipleship. The purpose of this question was to provide the researcher with information on which participants may bring a discipleship program or method into the focus group. The initial questionnaire included an open-ended question asking the participants to define the gospel. The purpose of this question was to gauge the level of understanding regarding the complete gospel. The researcher needed to know what each participant believed the gospel was and which direction to take to correct or change that belief to the entire gospel.

The researcher asked eleven questions relating to discipleship, some open-ended and some closed. This line of questioning aimed to determine how each participant understood discipleship, whether it was a program (church's responsibility) or a personal responsibility. An additional aspect of the discipleship questioning was establishing their level of interest in discipleship and the level of commitment they believed to be involved. One of the most telling questions was a closed-ended question, is discipleship a private or public matter? This researcher thinks discipleship is both. The answers provided allowed the researcher to follow up with them individually to understand their thought process for their response, allowing him to understand the baseline better. Another closed question that allowed additional follow-up was, can any

Christian be a discipler? That question aimed to get the participant to think about who can or should be a discipler.

There were two questions targeted toward evangelism. How often is the participant sharing what they believed to be the gospel? Moreover, how frequently do they discuss what Christ is doing in their lives with others? The design of these questions was to confront the participant about the sharing of their faith. All the participants know the saying, “Belief without action is unbelief.” Those participants who did not share their faith as frequently as they thought necessary wrote, “not often enough.” Two questions dealt with the associated cost and if action is required of a follower of Christ.

The following two questions were open-ended. The first was to define the Great Commission in one’s own words. This question aimed to gauge the knowledge or ignorance of the Great Commission. Once the level of knowledge and sense of the Great Commission was established, the researcher knew where to begin the learning process. Also, this allowed for great follow-up questions for individual participants providing insight for the researcher to understand the thought process behind the answer. The second question was to define the kingdom of God in one's own words. The researcher asked the question to comprehend the concept believed about the kingdom of God by the individual participants. Follow-up questions were tailor-made for each participant to understand further the answers provided by the individual participants.

The next series of questions dealt with the discipleship at FBCoT and what would make it more successful. Again both open and closed questions were asked. The questionnaire asked the participant if, in their opinion, the discipleship process at FBCoT was successful; this was the only closed question in this series. The purpose was to gauge whether participants could recognize a thriving discipleship culture. The researcher asked the participants to describe the

current discipleship process, what would make it more successful, and their role in accomplishing said success.

A series of asked questions regarded general discipleship. The intent was to learn what each participant understood about discipleship, their expectations, the difficulties, and the duration. The question about discipleship being a public or private matter was to cause the participants to think about discipleship as more than just a transfer of knowledge, but that it involves how one lives their life. Two questions asked how often they shared the gospel, using their definition, and how often they shared what God was doing in their life with others. The final two questions dealt with the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in discipleship.

Session One

The first meeting occurred on September 11th at 6:00 PM. Unfortunately, one of the five participants could not attend the first meeting due to an unexpected work-related emergency. The researcher remembered an old military phrase; all plans are good until first contact. Ephesians 6:12 informs believers that the battle is spiritual and not physical. The researcher recorded the session and will privately provide that individual with the information missed. The intent is to guide a topical conversation for each session, allowing the participants to discover the perceived goal of the researcher and allow the researcher to assess their growth in the area of knowledge, spiritual life, and action. However, based on the varied understanding of the gospel in Christianity and this group, this session required a more lecture-styled approach. Upon completion of the lecture, the researcher opened the floor for questions.

The questions aided in assessing what each individual thought about the gospel. Further, the question and comments showed their understanding of the importance of what is taught about the gospel. The participant who missed the first session was provided the information and

allowed to provide their feedback on the topic. They were also provided the informal homework to prepare for session two.

Session Two

The second session met with other obstacles to overcome. The first was a different absent participant who went out of town. However, they were present for the Sunday morning service. The session was held at 6 PM on Sunday. Also, the one participant who decided not to participate showed up. The researcher will not use this individual in the focus group as they never completed the initial questionnaire. Therefore, the researcher will utilize this person as an active observer.

The second session's discussion topic was the kingdom of God and the Great Commission. Due to the complexity of the kingdom of God discussion, that topic used the allotted time. The style for the session was to have the participants read a Scripture passage where the term 'kingdom' was used and have them attempt to discover a truth about the kingdom. The intent was to allow the researcher to assess their understanding of the kingdom and how it applies to the Christian life. The researcher could have concentrated the number of Scriptures for each truth about the kingdom. The time used to allow the participants to understand the glimpses of truth found in each verse was far longer than anticipated.

The researcher felt the participants were more confused at the end than when they started due to the number of Scriptures used and the varied aspects of the term kingdom. Confusion could have been avoided had the researcher grouped like aspects together and limited the number of overall Scriptures. The six-week session plan now requires a change. Evangelism was initially covered in the final week. Week three now covers the Great Commission and evangelism. These two topics are better presented together, and this researcher is grateful for the forced change. He

must never forget that this is a spiritual battle; the goal is to encourage these men to follow Christ with everything they have.

Table 3.3: Updated Outline of the Six-Week Focus Group Overview

Six-Week Focus Group	
Week One: The Gospel Defined	Common beliefs about the gospel
	Various types of the gospel preached today.
	Which type of Gospel is correct?
	Is the “Plan of Salvation” the Gospel?
	Define the Gospel
Week Two: Kingdom of God	Kingdom passages from the Gospels
	Kingdom passages from the New Testament
	Kingdom passages from the Old Testament
	Application of the Kingdom of God today
	Caring about the Kingdom
	Define the Kingdom
Week Three: Great Commission	Read the Great Commission Passages
	Discuss what they are saying in context
Week Three: Evangelism	Describe evangelism
	Evangelism required?
	Who is responsible for Evangelism?
	Intentional Relationships
Week Four: Discipleship Defined	Common discipleship beliefs
	Christocentric discipleship
	Discipleship is optional.
	Difference between conversion and discipleship.
Week Four: Discipleship Requirements	Cost
	Obedience
	Action
Week Five: Faith and Action	Faith in Action
	Faith has a history
	Jewish thought about Faith
Week Five: "Follow Me"	Describe “follow me.”
	Read the passages where Jesus says, “Follow Me.”
	Is Following Optional?

	Following in one's strength
	When does a believer start to follow?
	Requirements to following
	Following is an active process.
Week Six: Develop a Plan of Action	What is required
	What will work at FBCoT

Session Three

The third session occurred on 25 September 2022, and the topics were the Great Commission and evangelism. This session was definitely under attack; only two of the five participants were available. One was out of town and did not return in time to attend the session. One, an Army Reservist, was not released from duty in time to attend, and the third, was in the emergency room with a child while his wife was at home with a 4-day-old child. The researcher personally briefed those who missed the session on what took place.

The first topic of discussion was the Great Commission. All five passages were read: Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:46-49; John 21:20; and Acts 1:7-8. The question was asked, to whom is that command given? The purpose of this was to assess the understanding of the Great Commission. The researcher wanted each participant to recognize that Jesus spoke those words to His disciples immediately before His ascension. The researcher asked why the five passages are different yet related. The goal was to have the participants understand that the passages were written by four authors writing to four different groups of people. However, the same message is conveyed in each; make disciples.

A discussion as to the importance of those passages ensued. These are the last recorded words Jesus spoke to His disciples in each instance. These words were His last will and testament, His final instructions to the disciples. He is telling them they are to continue and live life just as He had, doing things similarly. The researcher explained what he had been taught about the Great Commission and its essential part. The emphasized portion was “go” in this

writer's past. The researcher showed how this was incorrect by using some simple explanations about the Greek language. Go is the first word of Matthew 28:19; however, it is not the main point of the sentence or the imperative verb. "Go" is easy to preach and has been used as a call to missions and evangelism. However, the imperative portion of the sentence is "teach" in the KJV and "make disciples" in almost every other English translation. It was apparent to the researcher that the older, more mature believers had also experienced the "go" being the critical part. FBCoT is a church that adheres to the KJV; no other versions can be used in preaching or teaching according to their constitution. Nevertheless, the researcher read Matthew 28:19 in several different versions of the Bible. The word "teach" in the KJV is translated as "make disciples" in almost all other translations, including the New King James Version.

Shifting the main emphasis from "go" to "make disciples" was eye-opening. This writer explained the "go" as how Christians are to "make disciples." By that, believers are to make disciples of Jesus as they live. The prominence of making disciples of Jesus needs to be the focus of believers. One does not set aside specific times to conduct discipleship at the expense of taking every opportunity. A few participants related evangelism with discipleship, and this was discussed later in the topic of evangelism.

The purpose of pointing out the emphasis of Matthew 28:19-20 as "make disciples" and not "go" was to correct some past beliefs that the action required was only to go and tell. The researcher pointed out that Jesus instructed His disciples to do what He had been doing for the last three-plus years. They were to invest in the lives of others, teaching them how to follow Jesus in every aspect of their lives.

A discussion about evangelism and discipleship was used as a bridge to further develop evangelism and its relation to discipleship. The researcher explained that evangelism is not discipleship. However, it can and should be a part of discipleship. Evangelism was expressed as

more than solely knocking on doors and confronting people with their sins. Jesus did not do evangelism in that manner. He taught using parables and nature as He traveled or lived life. Jesus used the things around Him, where He was, to teach people the truth. Jesus encouraged people to think about spiritual matters.

Participant four brought up the point that people need to be met where they are. He also pointed out that one must be interested in a person's life and what they may be going through before listening. Jesus was interested in the lives of others. The woman at the well from John chapter four is an example. The adage, "Nobody cares about what one knows until they know one cares," is especially true regarding the gospel. The concept of being intentional in sharing the gospel was brought up. Intentional sharing was mentioned because discipleship does not just happen; it takes time, effort, and energy, showing an example of the cost of following Christ. Discipleship is more than just getting someone to make a profession for Christ; it is getting one to follow Christ and become more like Him.

When a person makes a profession for Christ and becomes a follower of Jesus, they are a babe in Christ. Babies cannot take care of themselves; they require a more mature person to assist them so they can grow. The researcher provided an example to show that all believers need to continue to grow and that every stage of life requires a mentor. As a father of eleven children, one can be assured that babies require attention, toddlers require attention, children need attention, teenagers demand attention, and even adult children desire attention. While the level of attention changes as the child develops, it is still essential to their development. The Holy Spirit participates in the believers' spiritual growth; however, someone must mentor or disciple the new believer in the expectations and how to live for Christ. New believers need to follow someone, as that person follows Christ. In the Great Commission, Jesus said to teach them to observe

everything He commanded or showed them. Discipleship is fulfilling the Great Commission by showing people how to live effectively for Christ.

The researcher asked the participants to describe evangelism as a means to establish growth in knowledge of the subject. Some answers were, being charismatic and getting people to accept Jesus, trusting God by doing, and doing things as Jesus did them. This question aimed to discover what the participants thought the process was regarding evangelism. A question was asked if evangelism is required of all believers or just those with the gift of evangelism. The researcher provided the following as a definition of the gift of evangelism—believers who are persuasive with their words, a people person who has never met a stranger. They can talk to anyone about anything and are adept at sharing the gospel in almost any scenario.

The consensus was no; only some believers can be an evangelist. Everyone has different personalities and different strengths and weaknesses. Building on that thought, the researcher provided an example comparing the church to a hospital. A hospital has numerous types of doctors, including emergency room doctors responsible for triaging and stabilizing sick or injured people, allowing them to be followed by a specialty doctor. Hospitals have cardiologists, endocrinologists, obstetricians, or OB doctors. OB doctors deliver babies; that is what they do. They care for expectant mothers carrying a baby and deliver the baby. While delivering babies is their specialty, every medical doctor and most medical professionals must have a basic understanding of delivering a baby. This concept can be used in a spiritual sense. In comparison, the evangelist possesses the skills and specialty to win souls for Christ, yet every believer must have a basic understanding of leading someone to Christ. Only some people can be evangelists, but all Christians need to know how to show a person how to accept Jesus as their Savior.

The next question was, is there more than one way to conduct evangelism? The intent was to allow the participants to think outside the box. The following question was, is there a

difference between being an evangelist and doing evangelism? The researcher led the conversation to discuss the differences between being an evangelist and doing evangelism. The role of the evangelist was previously discussed; however, what constitutes evangelism had not. The following definition of evangelism was given. Evangelism is the act of promoting the gospel.⁴⁵² One can do evangelism without being an evangelist. The writer provided examples of evangelism, such as handing out tracts, speaking about Christ and what He is doing in one's life, and living a holy life.

Regarding the responsibility of evangelism, the researcher asked whether it belongs to the church or the individual believer. The majority found it to belong to the individual; however, the church is responsible for encouraging it and providing opportunities. One participant said that a church that forces evangelism tends to produce Pharisees. The researcher provided this quote. “Evangelism is through intentional discipling relationships.”⁴⁵³ The purpose was to show that, in this researcher’s view, one can begin discipling someone before they commit to following Christ. Believers must maintain and create new relationships with people not following Christ to introduce them to the Savior. Discipleship can be a form of evangelism.

Session Four

Session four was on 2 October 2022, with all five participants present. The session aimed to define general discipleship and how it differs from Christocentric discipleship. Also, is discipleship required or optional, and what are some requirements of being a disciple? The requirements discussed this week were cost and obedience. Action as a requirement will be added to next week's session on “follow me.” The session opened with prayer, and then the researcher asked the participants who would be willing to define discipleship. The purpose was

⁴⁵² Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 23.

⁴⁵³ Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 133.

to check the growth in knowledge, understanding, and application of the topic. To this researcher's amazement, the youngest participant and newest Christian provided an excellent analogy for discipleship. He is a tradesman and used the apprentice, journeyman, and master levels to explain discipleship. He explained that no one is ever finished learning and that, at times, even a master can learn something from an apprentice, and yet the apprentice should always be seeking to learn how to do the job from those more experienced. The entire group agreed with the analogy.

The researcher provided some examples from different authors regarding discipleship. The first was a quote from Hull, "Discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus and others how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it."⁴⁵⁴ That quote intends to show that the discipler and the disciple must answer the call of discipleship; it is intentional. The following quote is from Picirilli, "What is a disciple, then? One who lays aside every other influence for giving direction to his life and pledges allegiance to Jesus, one who follows where Jesus leads, who enrolls in the school of Jesus and proceeds to learn from Him and put His teaching into practice."⁴⁵⁵ The intent was to show the Christocentric view of discipleship, where everything centers on Jesus.

The researcher asked, is it possible to be a Christian and not a disciple of Christ? The group agreed it was possible; one remarked that one might not live as long. The researcher asked a follow-up question, why do you think some people believe or practice that discipleship is optional? Some responses were commitment, sacrifice, personality, and improper training or teaching. The researcher discussed that the gospel presented is the gospel followed, as discussed in week one, thereby reinforcing the importance of the gospel taught. Therefore, how one presents and explains the gospel is essential. A question was posed, how does one get believers

⁴⁵⁴ Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 20.

⁴⁵⁵ Picirilli, *Discipleship: The Expression of Saving Faith*, 37.

to realize they need to be discipled? Educating them was an answer; another answer was by building their faith. One participant suggested building a relationship with them, learning where they are spiritually, and going from there. The researcher expounded on the relationship aspect of discipleship and that fellowship can be meaningful. Fellowship will allow the believer to bring non-believers into the beginnings of following Christ.

A discussion explaining the difference between conversion and discipleship ensued. The researcher used the analogy of the Spanish Inquisition. Spain set out to make everyone follow the Catholic faith. If someone was teaching or believing something different, they were tortured until they submitted and converted. The question was asked, were those who converted by the threat of torture ever honestly believers? The purpose was to allow the participants to understand that people will say they believe things to make their lives more comfortable or to get someone to leave them alone. The researcher provided other examples, too. It was decided that a convert is someone who makes a profession, thus allowing them to fit within a group, whereas a disciple is a follower who learns and obeys. The point was that conversion could refer to a status or position, not a relationship. A significant difference is the motive for obedience. Is the motive to fit in or to follow Christ in obedience?

The conversation about motive and obedience led to the next topic, cost. The researcher asked the question, why do some people think it is too costly to follow Christ? The immediate answer was that people want to keep their vices and perception of the required commitment. The fear of submission to God and bad past experiences with religion were other reasons the group provided. There was an excellent discussion regarding perceptions about commitment and religion/rules that allowed all participants something upon which to think.

The researcher drew the group back to the topic of vices. The purpose was to show the critical role of the Holy Spirit in discipleship. The Holy Spirit is the one who convicts. Believers

need to be reminded that they are not the Holy Spirit and, therefore, one should not try to usurp His role. In a discipleship relationship, the discipler can demonstrate how to follow Christ, and they can discuss what Scripture says about it. However, they should refrain from browbeating new believers about what they must change. Instead, they must allow the Holy Spirit to work in the new believer's life.

The researcher asked why people think being a Christian should be easy and cost-free. Again, the goal was to highlight that the type of gospel presented and taught is critical. A lengthy discussion about standing on the truth of God's Word is imperative, not what society says is true. Scriptures inform us there is a cost to following Christ, and that cost is very seldom related to money. The point was made that whatever the cost of following Christ may be, it is insignificant to the reward. Therefore, one should not allow any cost to inhibit action.

The next topic of discussion was obedience. The researcher used the phrase, "discomfort will end when compliance begins," when dealing with his boys. When a believer is not obeying God, things should become uncomfortable, as God chastises them. Peterson defines obedience as "the strength to stand and the willingness to leap, and the sense to know when to do which."⁴⁵⁶ The intent of using that quote is to show that obedience does not always require movement. Sometimes being still and waiting are forms of obedience. Willard writes, "Life in Christ has to do with obedience to his teaching."⁴⁵⁷ The researcher pointed out that to obey Christ; one must have life in Him and obey His teaching. Emphasis was placed on the critical part of knowing Christ and His teachings. The Christocentric approach to obedience is the only way to effectively disciple others. The session concluded with a lengthy conversation regarding obedience being better than sacrifice and how sacrifice can be equated with cost.

⁴⁵⁶ Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 165.

⁴⁵⁷ Willard, *The Great Omission*, 45.

Session Five

The final session containing the information was held on October 9th at 6:15 PM. All participants were in attendance. The topics for the evening were whether faith requires action and what Jesus meant by asking people to follow Him. The story of Abraham and Isaac going to the mountain to sacrifice Isaac, as God commanded Abraham, was used to show how faith requires action. It is not enough to believe in God but to act accordingly. The point was brought up that Abraham had a history of trusting God. This history with God allowed Abraham to trust God to keep His promise, even if what was asked of him seemed contrary. A discussion in the group started about faith having a history. Two other examples of faith requiring action were David defeating Goliath and Peter walking on water. Christ requires one's faith to have action; however, He does not force the believer into action. He only provides opportunities.

Knowledge is one of many aspects of following Christ or discipleship. While knowledge is essential, and one should learn about Christ, knowledge without action is useless. Luke 14:26-27 states there are things that believers must do to be His disciple. The phrase "faith without action is not faith" was compared to "one cannot live without Christ and be called a Christian." Jesus did not call believers to be spectators but people of action.

In several passages, Jesus called some of His disciples and said, "follow me." Matthew 4:18-20; 8:20-27; 9:9; 19:21-22; and John 1:35-50; 10:26-29; 13:34-38 and 21:19 were the Scriptures that showed Jesus asking others to "follow me." Each passage was read and discussed individually, concerning the context and each situation. One thing the researcher wanted to draw out of the group was that Jesus asked people to follow Him when they had incomplete information. The disciples, except for Judas, had just enough belief to follow and see what and who Jesus was; as they spent time with Jesus, they realized He was the Messiah, the Son of God.

Session Six

Session six occurred on 15 October 2022, and the goal was to develop a plan of action and a method of discipleship that will work and one in which people will want to participate. The researcher provided the different types or styles of discipleship methods. These styles included one-on-one, small, and large-group studies. Small groups were 3-15 people, which were broken down further into groups of 3-8 and 9-15. Large groups consist of more than 15 people. The purpose of explaining the styles/sizes of groups was to provide the various options and allow the group to determine which size would be best for the church.

The researcher presented the different structural types of groups. Some structures explained were open versus closed groups, specific topical studies, book studies, and studies coinciding with the Sunday morning sermon series. Open groups were at a typical Sunday school class, where visitors could join at any point in the study. Closed groups are groups where visitors are discouraged from attending; group members are expected to attend all sessions. Topical studies provide opportunities for learning a particular subject, whereas book studies can be either a book of the Bible or books written by other authors.

Frequency was discussed in that the group size, structure, and purpose will help determine the required frequency. The smaller the group, the easier it is to meet more frequently. The material used in the structure will determine the number of lessons and discussions, which will determine the most beneficial frequency. Along with frequency, allotted time was a consideration. How much time is required, or what amount of time would people be willing to spend in a discipleship group, weekly, bi-weekly, and monthly?

The main goal of providing this information was to encourage the men to think about what is realistic, given the culture of the community. The goal is to develop a plan of action so that most will be willing to participate, considering the purpose of Christocentric discipleship.

What size group is most beneficial, for the believer, for bringing the lost to Christ, and for the overall spiritual development of the church? The next chapter will provide the results of this session.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The outcome of this intervention was not surprising to the researcher. Knowledge does not equate to discipleship. “Education informs, and discipleship transforms.”⁴⁵⁸ Knowledge can answer the what and why of discipleship, but active discipleship answers the how to live it out. Christocentric discipleship occurs when knowledge is applied with faith under the direction of the Holy Spirit out of great love for Christ. Application takes time and requires repetition to become a natural part of life. The various personalities of the participants play a part in the application of new knowledge; some are more outgoing than others, some are timid, and some are more reserved.

While only one of the five participants attended all the sessions, all participants received the same information; however, they missed the interaction between the other participants. Those participants who missed a session received a personal one-on-one session with the researcher to pass along the information and relay the discussion of others in the group. The researcher solicited feedback and questions during the one-on-one sessions.

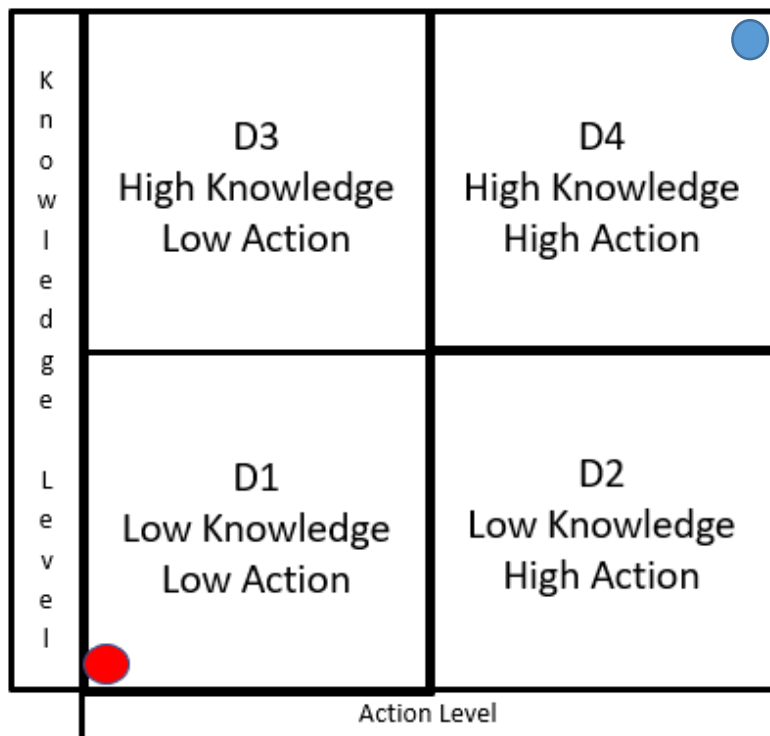
Despite the attempt to keep all things equal, not all participants achieved the same understanding of Christocentric discipleship. It became apparent that the type of gospel each participant held was how they approached the solution to discipleship. In contrast, each participant had various levels of development of the gospel they practiced. The importance of the complete gospel became overwhelmingly apparent. The lack of knowledge of the Scriptures and their meaning in context was also apparent. While discipleship does not equal knowledge, there must be a general level of knowledge or, at a minimum, a desire to learn about Christ and how

⁴⁵⁸ Robert Lay, “Disciple Making Is on the Job Training,” *Joel Comiskey Group* (October 2022).

and why He did things the way He did them. The repeated thought during this focus group was that belief without action is unbelief. Many participants overwhelmingly stated their belief in discipleship, yet only some put any beliefs into practice. Again, this proves the lack of understanding of the gospel concerning the faith.

Below is a chart that shows the focus group results in various areas. The four quadrants in the chart depict an increase in knowledge from the bottom to the top. The increase in action is depicted from left to right. The new believer is annotated at the bottom left-hand corner, with no fundamental knowledge or action, annotated by the red circle on the chart. The fully developed disciple or follower of Christ would be at the upper right-hand corner, with high knowledge and high action, annotated by the blue circle on the chart. One must remember that there will be little movement on the chart for the individuals as discipleship takes time. Discipleship is a lifelong process and will not occur overnight. Disciples can increase in knowledge and not in action. The opposite can also ring true; one can increase in action and not grow in knowledge. However, the goal is to grow in knowledge and action until one becomes like Christ in every aspect of life.

Figure 4.1: Disciple Placement Chart - Generic



The markings are placed after data triangulation comprised of changes between initial and post-questionnaires, personal observations and notes, and participation in the focus group and private conversations. The markings represent a level of knowledge and the level of action taken by each individual. Knowledge is represented by the distance from the bottom of the chart upward, action is the distance from the left side toward the right, and growth is measured by the distance between the first and second circles relating to knowledge and action. Each question from the questionnaires will be scored from zero to nine in action and knowledge. The scored questions will be grouped by topic and averaged. There will be an overall improvement score, as seen in Figure 4.8 on page 110.

The researcher has years of military experience with human intelligence, reading people concerning their motives and analyzing collected data. Due to the smaller focus group size, this

researcher found it easier to analyze the data personally than with computer technology. Each participant will have a unique color to show their growth in knowledge and action for each area of research. Participant one will be represented by the color green, participant two will be blue, participant three will be yellow, participant four will be red, and participant five will be grey.

Results of Christocentric Discipleship – Gospel

The first change presented by the focus group will relate to understanding the Christocentric or complete gospel. The researcher will provide a brief background for each participant regarding their religious background and upbringing, followed by the documentation and the reason for the starting and growth points.

Participant one is a new Christian, saved within the last two years, and has never been disciplined nor attended church until January of 2022. He admits to being ignorant of spiritual things and the Bible. However, he is hungry to learn and grow. In the initial questionnaire, his rudimentary view of the gospel was the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, his post-questionnaire answer changed to living and sharing one's life centered on Christ while developing a relationship with Him. When things are not centered on Christ, one is not fully following.

The level of understanding increased significantly in participant one, based on his questionnaire answers and the researcher's goal. The metric for improvement in action is the number of times they share the gospel and their confidence in doing so. From the initial to the post-questionnaire, the participant increased his gospel sharing from one to two times a month to weekly. However, his confidence is greater as he can share what he has learned in the focus group with others. The researcher adds that there is excitement in participant one about his increased knowledge of the Christocentric gospel and its importance. He possesses a great hunger to learn. Participant one moved from the far bottom left corner to the upper middle

section of the D1 quadrant. Growth occurred in both knowledge and action (see Figure 4.2 below).

Participant two has been a follower of Christ for two-plus years and has never been disciplined. He was raised in a non-religious home with no natural religious influences. He was saved while on a military deployment to a combat zone and has felt the calling to become a chaplain for the United States Army. Participant two is very motivated to learn more about his Christian faith and how to help others grow spiritually. His basic knowledge of the gospel is relatively low and incomplete. In his initial questionnaire, he stated that the gospel is the unwavering Word of God. In a follow-up session, he explained that the gospel never changes, the Bible and the Word of God never change, man does not change the Word, but the Word changes a man. His post-questionnaire answer for the gospel was much more developed; the gospel is living like Jesus and teaching what He taught about following Him. The gospel must be shared with everyone to help them see their need for Jesus.

Participant two grew in knowledge but still has more to learn. His action in sharing the gospel has increased from weekly to almost daily. He has learned new ways to share Christ with co-workers as they conduct work. The increase in his action significantly increased and became more effective. During the discussion about the gospel types, he asked great questions and was hungry to learn the complete gospel. Through conversations with him, the researcher has seen a greater understanding of the gospel than he answered on the post-questionnaire. Participant two moved from the far bottom center of D1 to the upper center of the D1 quadrant. Extreme growth occurred in knowledge, and action remained unchanged (see Figure 4.2 below).

Participant three was saved approximately eight years ago and raised in a semi-Christian home. This writer means he attended different churches semi-regularly during his childhood. He is timid and quiet but greatly desires to learn how to serve God fully. Initially, his understanding

of the gospel was God's Word, shown through everyday life and taught to people through Jesus, the true path, the only means of being saved. After the focus group, it developed to living one's life with Christ at the center, resulting in sharing and showing that Jesus is the Savior of the world. He increased his talking about Christ with others from once a week to more than once a week. However, the significant change is that he now realizes the importance of sharing Christ and that it is not always about pursuing a decision for Christ. While he recognizes his shyness, he no longer uses it as an excuse not to let people know what Christ is doing in his life. Participant three moved from the far left corner bottom of D1 to the upper left center of the D1 quadrant. Extreme growth occurred in knowledge and slight growth in action (see Figure 4.2 below).

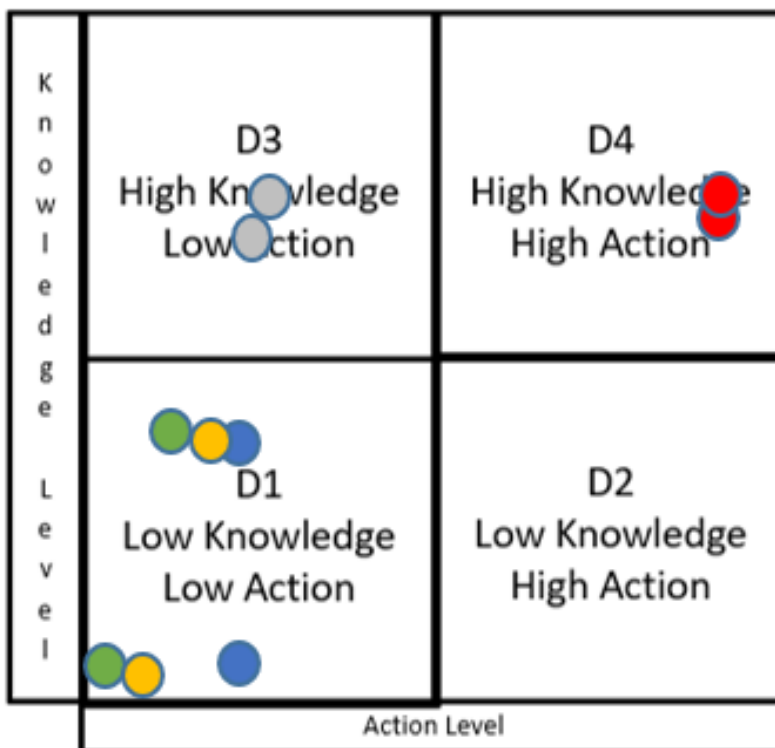
Participant four is a man in his sixties who has been saved for over fifty years. He was disciplined several years ago and attended Bible college for a few years. This participant was selected to be a discipler; his understanding of the gospel is well-developed. However, it is not without flaws; he leans toward a salvation-only gospel due to his spiritual upbringing. During the focus group, he saw the gospel presented differently than he was accustomed to, resulting in a slight shift or expansion in his doctrine. He is a highly active soul-winner who shares the gospel whenever an opportunity arises. The researcher has observed that while this participant is somewhat set in his ways, he is open to adaptations. Participant four started in the upper middle center of D4 and only moved slightly. Slight growth occurred in knowledge, and action remained high (see Figure 4.2 below).

Participant five is a man in his fifties who has been saved for over forty years. He has been disciplined in the past via a church membership class. This participant was also selected to be a discipler due to his leadership role in the church. He possesses extensive knowledge of the Scriptures and doctrine. However, this individual leaned more toward knowledge being discipleship and has embraced the concept that belief without action is unbelief. In his initial

questionnaire, he answered that he does not share the gospel often enough. He did not provide any frequency in a specific period, probably due to embarrassment from the lack of witnessing. His answer in the post-questionnaire was at least once a week or as the opportunity arises. He also commented on a future visitation ministry and his willingness to participate at the end of the questionnaire. During the focus group session on the gospel, he expressed concern over past encounters with children and the salvation-only gospel he presented. The researcher noticed a change in his demeanor, and after private conversations, it is apparent that he realizes the importance of a complete gospel. Participant five moved from the bottom left section of D3 to the center of the D3 quadrant. Growth occurred in knowledge and action (see Figure 4.2 below).

The Figure below shows the increased knowledge and action of correctly understanding the Christocentric gospel.

Figure 4.2: Disciple Placement Chart – Gospel View



Results of Christocentric Discipleship – Discipleship

The second area of change presented was understanding and implementing Christocentric discipleship and discipleship in general. Participant one possessed general knowledge of discipleship, following Jesus, as shown by more mature believers. His initial belief regarding public or private discipleship is that it should be both. People should know one is a Christian; however, some sensitive topics are best shared privately. He grew in his understanding of this area; as one grows in Christ, one can discuss more things candidly to share what Christ has done in one's life. His opinion of the time required for discipleship did not change. He considers it to take a lifetime; one must always be learning. He realized there was a cost with discipleship; however, he did not fully understand what that entailed until the focus group. This participant expected that actions would be required of a follower of Christ, yet he was unaware of those expectations (see the green circles in Figure 4.3 below).

Participant two understood that discipleship relates to how people learn about God and how believers can teach others. Through this process, he has better understood what is involved in discipleship. Discipleship involves knowledge and action, knowing what is expected and then doing it while showing others the same thing. His view of discipleship was private due to his view of Jesus being a teacher and people learning things differently. The initial view was concerned more with knowledge transfer than application and action. His view developed to include public discipleship, publicly living out one's faith, and private, personal knowledge transfer and application. His view that discipleship takes a lifetime remained unchanged. His view of cost expanded from Jesus wanting people to do things they may not want to be willing to die to serve Him. He stated that no matter the cost, it is always less than the reward with Christ during a session. The view that actions are required to follow Christ did not change, as participant two is very action-oriented (see the blue circles in Figure 4.3 below).

The third participant understood what discipleship should be, learning from more mature believers to spread the gospel better. However, his view of the gospel skewed his view of discipleship; knowledge transfer. His view changed to understanding that discipleship is living out one's faith so others can see Jesus and desire to follow Him—recognizing that desire in others, introducing them to Christ, and beginning to disciple them. Regarding the public or private aspect of discipleship, he believed discipleship was a public matter only. The thought process was that one needs to let others know they are a follower of Christ and have answers.

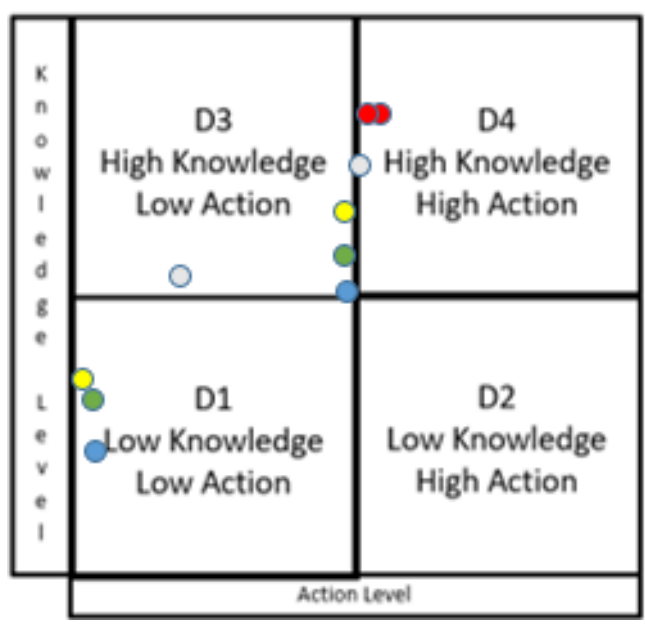
After the focus group, he now sees it as private and public. The personal aspect was added, as he sees the importance of one's private walk with Christ. His position regarding the time required for discipleship did not change significantly. He believes there cannot be a strict timeline for discipleship as everyone grows at a different rate, and it will take a lifetime to complete. He expanded his view of the costs associated with discipleship. Prayer, Scripture reading, and personal study are now a cost. Time doing these activities is now considered to be an associated cost. He developed the thought that action is required to show an appropriate example for others to follow (see the yellow circles in Figure 4.3 below).

Participant four started with an excellent understanding of discipleship, and his view did not significantly change. His understanding of the relationship between one's public and private display of discipleship is well grounded. He considers it is every believer's responsibility to disciple others and to do so until the Lord returns. The Great Commission is his guide for discipleship; however, it has changed slightly with the correct emphasis on making disciples and not winning souls. The process of discipling should result in others coming to Christ. He understands well that costs are associated with being a follower of Christ and has recounted many stories of some of those costs he has experienced. Due to the stress of the “going” part of

the Great Commission, he is very action-oriented and driven to do everything he can for his Savior (see the red circles in Figure 4.3 below).

The final participant, participant five, started with a basic understanding of discipleship as a knowledge transfer; however, this developed to include living out one's faith publicly, proclaiming the good news of Jesus, and showing others how to follow Him. His view became more defined in the private aspect of one-on-one discipleship and publicly following Christ for all to see. The timeline for a disciple to mature to effectively discipling others changed from six months to twelve to eighteen months, depending on the individual and their desire to grow. In the beginning, biblical disciplines were used to describe his view of what discipleship should be. The only change to his view was that action and knowledge are required. It is not enough to know one needs to have biblical disciplines but to do them. The costs associated with discipleship did not significantly change. He still sees persecution, attacks from Satan, time, and resources as possible costs. His change in the actions required to live one's life trusting Jesus for every aspect, knowing He will provide what is needed (see the grey circles in Figure 4.3, below).

Figure 4.3: Disciple placement chart – Understanding



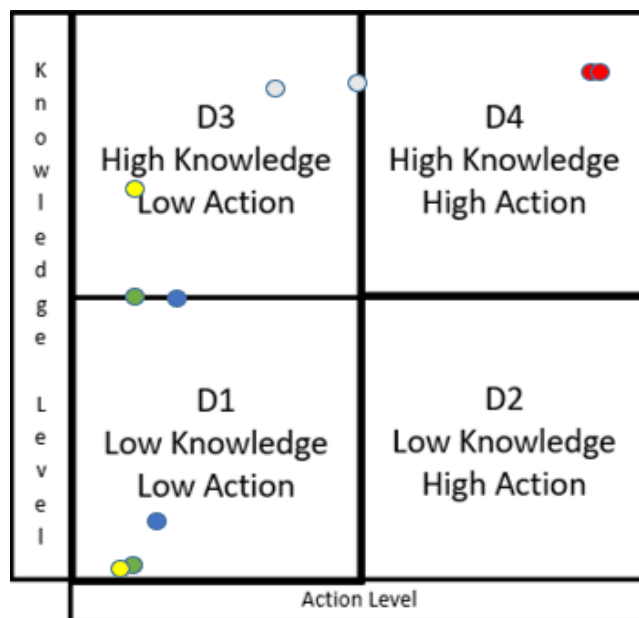
Results of Christocentric Discipleship – Kingdom

The following changes relate to the understanding of the kingdom. Participants one, two, and three all viewed the kingdom as a future event, heaven, in their initial questionnaires.

Participant one's view developed to understand that God's kingdom is both here and now and future, where His followers are. Participant two changed to a current and future place, as well.

The third participant's understanding of the kingdom changed to the location of those surrendered to the Holy Spirit. He sees the kingdom moving from place to place, similar to a tourist in a foreign country. Participant four gave the best answer on the initial questionnaire, the realm the Holy Spirit controls, and his view did not change. The final participant sees the kingdom as a current and future event, current in that God is King of Kings and future in that He will physically rule during the millennial kingdom and beyond. There was not a significant change in the view of this participant. For the growth of each participant, see Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4: Disciple Placement Chart – Kingdom



Results of Christocentric Discipleship - Great Commission

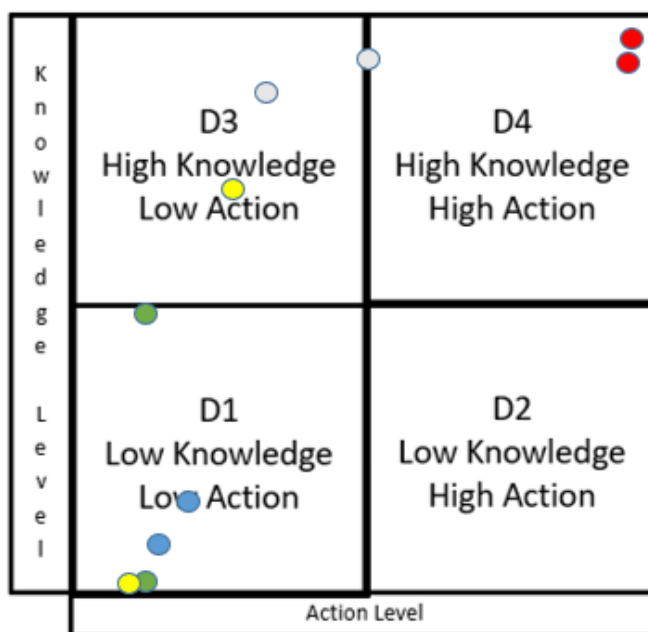
This section presents the changes in the view of the Great Commission. Participants one and two did not realize or make the connection that the Great Commission was the last command that Jesus spoke to His disciples. All the participants were unaware of all five passages considered examples of the Great Commission. Participant one had no idea what the Great Commission was at the beginning; however, after the focus group, he possessed a working knowledge but was still unable to remember where it could be found in the Bible. However, he realizes this is important and is working on it and memorizing other Scripture. As an apprentice, he realized the importance of learning by following the example of others who were more knowledgeable and applied that to discipleship.

Participant two confused the Great Commission with the gospel in the initial questionnaire. Throughout the focus group, he slowly understood that believers teach others about Christ, how to follow Him, and the personal responsibility to do such. The researcher used his military experience to explain that discipleship is similar to being a Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO) in the U.S. Army. Their role is to train themselves out of a job by adequately training their subordinates to replace them, teaching them every aspect of their position. The third participant understood the Great Commission: Jesus desired to have His disciples spread the gospel worldwide. His viewpoint was expanded in that his view of the gospel changed, resulting in the importance of repentance and living one's life as Christ did.

Participant four had a definite view of the importance of go-and-tell in the Great Commission. However, this view was softened a bit by shifting the main point of the Great Commission from the use of the verb, go, to the actual main verb of the sentence, teach. The researcher explained that teaching is the main focus; however, if one never goes and tells, there will be no one to teach.

The final participant could quote Matthew 28:19-20; however, due to the gospel he was taught, he leaned slightly toward the go-and-tell aspect of the Great Commission. Just as participant four, once the main verb, teach, was presented in this passage, a light went off in his head. He realized discipleship would result in evangelism, while evangelism does not equate to discipleship. If one disciples them in every aspect of Christ's life, they will know to take action in duplicating other believers. For the growth of each participant, see Figure 4.5 below.

Figure 4.5: Disciple Placement Chart – Great Commission



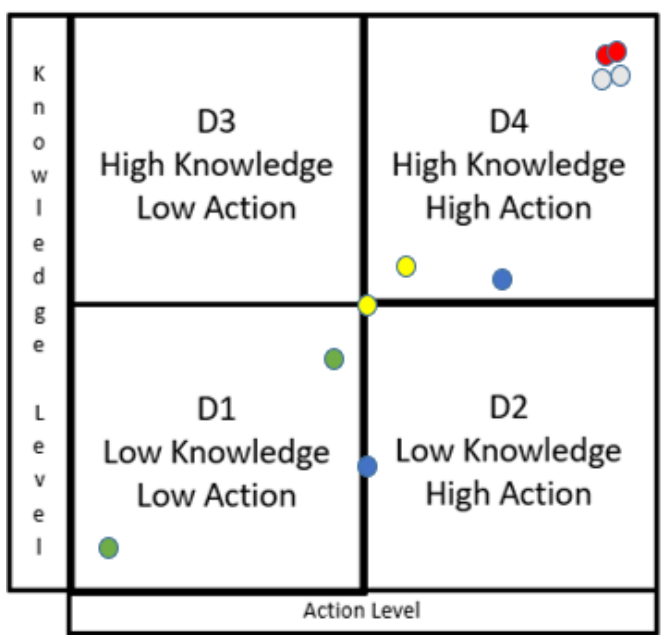
Results of Christocentric Discipleship – Prayer

Prayer is essential to one's relationship with God and critical in effective Christocentric discipleship. Participant one knew prayer was important and yet had to develop a regular practice of prayer. He possessed a limited understanding of what prayer was at the beginning. He now understands the purpose and the importance of daily, continual prayer. He is striving to implement a daily prayer life, something he and his discipuler are working on together. Participant

two grew in his understanding of the importance of prayer, from being important to being essential as breathing. The third participant recognized that prayer was necessary; however, he realized that prayer is essential for one’s daily life and will help one stay true to the entirety of the gospel.

Participant four understands that prayer is a lifeline, a line of communication with his best friend, and a means to provide thanks and ask for petitions. He repeatedly mentioned that he would not do anything without asking God. The final participant possesses a high regard for prayer. He sees it as one's way to communicate with the Father and is essential to building one's relationship with Him and a means for forgiveness of sin. For the growth of each participant, see Figure 4.6 below.

Figure 4.6: Disciple Placement Chart – Prayer

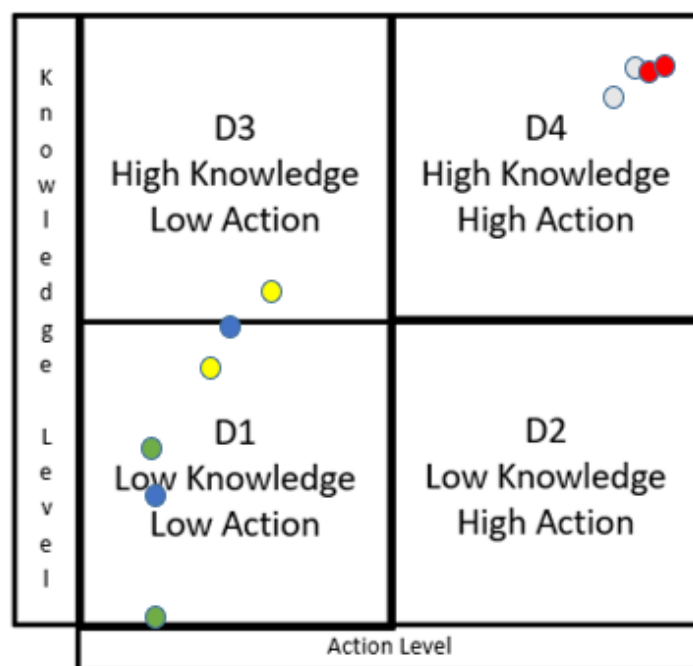


Results of Christocentric Discipleship - Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit plays an essential role in discipleship and growth, and this section will present the changes observed by the researcher in the participants’ lives. Participant one had no

idea how the Holy Spirit related to one's walk with Christ; he learned that the Spirit is the communicator and power supply between the believer and Christ. Participant two was aware of the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit; however, he learned that the role involves guiding and directing believers. The third participant understood that the Holy Spirit was essential and the guide for believers and learned that the Holy Spirit is always available to all believers and is the believer's teacher. Participant four has an excellent grasp of the role of the Holy Spirit. He recognizes that the Holy Spirit is his only guide to show him God's will and his teacher to understand God's Word. The final participant also firmly understands the Holy Spirit and His role as the believer's comforter, guide, and power source. For the growth of each participant, see Figure 4.7 below.

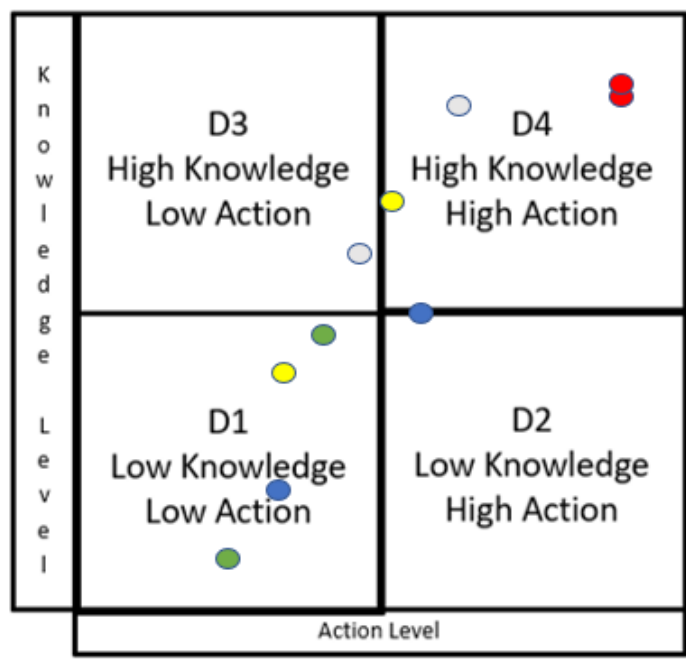
Figure 4.7: Disciple Placement Chart – Holy Spirit



Overall Growth

The researcher was highly pleased with the participants' overall growth, especially in the short six-week period. Participant one's knowledge score increased from 1 to 4.2, and his action score increased from 2.6 to 4.4 in the six weeks. Participant two's beginning knowledge score increased from 2 to 5, and his action score went from 3.9 to 5.8. The third participant increased in knowledge from 4 to 6.5 and action from 3.5 to 5.3. Participant four had minimal change in either knowledge or action. His knowledge score increased from 8 to 8.3, and his action remained at 8.6. The final participant increased in knowledge from 6 to 7.8 and action from 4.6 to 6 (see Figure 4.8 below).

Figure 4.8: Disciple Placement Chart – Overall Growth



Plan of Action

The final session developed a plan of action for FBCoT to implement a discipleship ministry. During that session, all participants agreed to participate in one-on-one discipleship, and they would partner and inform the researcher of the pairs. The participants have found

partners and plan to begin weekly sessions within two weeks. There is excitement from both the newer and more mature believers. The researcher believes that leaders must lead by example; therefore, he will be discipling one of the new believers and overseeing the entire discipleship process at FBCoT.

Post Questionnaire

The design of the post-questionnaire was to determine any growth in multiple areas of discipleship. Areas checked for growth were: understanding the gospel, discipleship, the kingdom, the Great Commission, prayer, and the Holy Spirit. Like the initial questionnaire, each answer was given a point value from 0 to 9 and then averaged by topic.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This researcher concludes that only some people who claim to be a disciple of Christ are faithful followers of Him. Some lack knowledge, some action, and some both. Some believers may perform actions and have yet to learn why they do them. However, some believers know they are responsible for acting on behalf of Christ, yet they lack action. The author of Hebrews writes in chapter 5:11-14 an admonition to the believers for their lack of spiritual maturity. He calls them babes in Christ. This writer has to ask, whose fault is it that they are still babies in Christ? Babies left to themselves will not fully mature; they need a parent to teach them. The same is true in discipleship. Once people have accepted Christ, they need to have a spiritual parent to teach them the practical how to follow Christ.

Being the father of eleven biological children, this writer is well aware that just because something was taught and presented does not guarantee that the child grasps the concept and takes it to heart. Some children do not want to become parents and have children; this is also true spiritually. The reasons for fearing a discipleship relationship with a new believer are as many as a new parent's fears with their first child or the fear of having a child. Some are afraid of taking the discipler role due to the significant eternal aspect of the task. Unfortunately, some are selfish and unwilling to pay the cost required to invest in another person's life. Some lack the understanding of the Holy Spirit's role in discipleship and therefore lack the faith that God will complete the work.

The lack of understanding of the gospel and the requirements to be a follower of Christ prevent people from the expected level of commitment. People will only achieve the level of the

expectation set before them; if the bar is low, they will often never achieve anything more significant. Some believe the cost is too high, and some lack confidence in God's provision; however, most are just scared due to ignorance. Many believers today do not practice Mark 8:34 in that they fail to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow Jesus. The essential item to consider is not simply knowing the what (gospel) and why (Great Commission) but implementing the how of discipleship to serve Jesus Christ. The lack of discipleship has resulted in a lack of knowing how to serve Jesus and others. Following Jesus is more than church attendance, Scripture reading, and prayer. It is living one's life, allowing the Holy Spirit to control every aspect of that life.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The question is, where do we go from here? The answer is to keep pressing forward, as the Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians 3:14 and 17. All believers have a role in discipleship. Everyone needs a spiritual parent, and everyone needs to have a spiritual child. A family lineage only survives when they are fruitful and multiply. The same is true for Christianity. Believers must reproduce spiritually and raise those spiritual children to be spiritual parents. Three aspects of discipleship exist, knowing the “what” (gospel), the “why” (Great Commission), and the “how” (living out one's faith). One must ensure that all three are explained and understood. Sometimes the “what” and “how” are taught, and the important “why” is left out or not understood, resulting in believers who only partially follow Christ because they fail to see the need to reach and teach others. Education, in general, is more than information. Great teachers can make the subject come to life and provide why it needs to be learned for use later in life.

Church leaders need to know and understand where the gaps in discipleship exist in their local congregation. The gaps can be identified by having the people fill out simple questionnaires with questions that identify suspected shortcomings in knowledge, understanding, or desire

regarding discipleship. However, one must remember the group of people and the time they would be willing to commit to filling out questionnaires. This researcher kept the questionnaire to fewer than twenty-five questions to ensure they would be completed and returned. It is impossible to correct what is unknown—understanding the “what” will assist in identifying a plan of action, resulting in answering the “how.” A plan of action tailored to a specific group possesses a better chance of success. All parties must have buy-in to the action plan and understand the importance of the plan and the desired result. Vision casting is a valuable tool to assist in this matter. However, to accomplish this, one must understand the “why,” which is the entirety of the gospel. Remember, the gospel is so much more than the plan of salvation.

The level of understanding of who Jesus is and what He has done plays a significant role in discipleship. When one has a personal relationship with Jesus, and that relationship grows, one will desire to share Him with others. A secondary role in discipleship depends on the type of gospel preached and understood by the individual believer. When only one aspect of the gospel is stressed, the other aspects suffer. The gospel is similar to the ocean, shallow enough for a toddler to play in and deep enough for a blue whale to swim in; it can be inviting and scary simultaneously. Another relevant aspect of the ocean and the gospel, no one has seen the deepest depths of the gospel.

When Christians believe that discipleship is only for the clergy or the super-spiritual, they will not attempt to participate in discipleship as disciples or discipler. Christians who think this way are afraid of the depth of the gospel. They fear what they will need to give up or the cost of following Jesus. They are satisfied with an entrance ticket to heaven, and the thought of being like Jesus here and now is unimaginable. This researcher thinks of Abram. God gave him instructions, and as Abram obeyed, he learned to trust God. Faith is exercised and grown through obedience. Jesus commanded His followers to make disciples, and as one obeys Jesus, it

becomes easier. Obedience is rarely easy initially, but it becomes enjoyable when one discovers the joy in it.

Comparison to Other Research

The research shows the need for all believers to understand the complete gospel, who Christ is, and the requirements He stated about following Him in the Gospels and reiterated in the Epistles. Hunter writes, “Lots of Christians are stuck knowing something of the history and rules of Christianity, but it does not translate into a different kind of life.”⁴⁵⁹ The view or beliefs one has about the gospel are interrelated with all aspects of Christianity. It is the power of the gospel that produces growth in the church.⁴⁶⁰ The gospel is powerful and interconnected with the Great Commission, the kingdom, discipleship, and evangelism. Christ must be the center of it all. One’s understanding of the gospel will affect how the Great Commission is understood, which affects the view of the kingdom of God, which affects discipleship; thus, the amount of power in the believer’s life, then the effectiveness of evangelism is affected. No one wants to surrender time, energy, and money to something that evokes no effectual change. Most would consider that to be a lousy investment.

Those who hold tightly to one aspect of the gospel or another often fall short of the entire gospel. There are many reasons for misunderstanding the entire gospel; however, the main ones are hostility toward God and improper or lack of teaching. While the gospel is simple, it is also complex. When a teacher only emphasizes the superficial parts of the gospel, the depths of the gospel are rarely explained or developed. All gospel ministers must remember to preach the entire counsel of God, not just the parts they like. For this section, the researcher will provide an example using the salvation-only gospel. When one holds to the salvation-only gospel, they are

⁴⁵⁹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 51.

⁴⁶⁰ Mancini and Hartman, *Future Church*, 113.

more concerned about evangelism in the here and now to ensure people are prepared for future kingdom events or heaven in their mindset.

The view one has about evangelism plays a significant role in if and when one may evangelize. The means of how a Christian comes to Christ takes priority. If someone came to Christ through door-to-door evangelism, that would be their emphasis based on their experience. The same applies to those reached by a bus ministry, kids club, youth group, or significant evangelistic events like a crusade or revival. However, one must never forget that God can use anything to reach someone for Christ. The past experiences of believers shape their future unless there is something to cause a change. A correct and complete understanding of the gospel will cause that change. Remember, the Apostle Paul needed to be knocked off a donkey by a bright light.

However, realistically the program that introduced a person to Christ is just a tool. The Holy Spirit reveals the truth, relationships, and sense of community that was the real draw to Christ. Programs or educational material, by themselves, do not make disciples; however, they can be great tools, especially in the life of a new believer. The church needs to go back to how discipleship was accomplished by Jesus, the Apostles, and even St. Patrick, spending time with people and developing them into followers of Jesus. People do not care what someone knows until they know they care, which is only possible by investing time in them.

An improper understanding of the gospel will lead to an incorrect view of the kingdom. The two are intimately connected. When the gospel is forgiveness of sins and a future in heaven, the kingdom of God is only a future-only event.⁴⁶¹ However, the kingdom is here and now, and the gospel provides the power to overcome temptation and the trials in this life. Discipleship is also connected; if the gospel is solely forgiveness of sins and future events, then discipleship is

⁴⁶¹ Hunter, *Christianity Beyond Belief*, 26.

unnecessary as in the future, the believer will be immediately transformed in the image of God when they arrive in heaven. The gospel is a reality mission to live in the here and now.⁴⁶²

Discipleship is a means to teach believers how to live in the kingdom of God by preparing them to handle whatever Satan may throw at them.⁴⁶³

How one enters the kingdom of God depends on the theology one holds. Many Baptists are afraid of talking about the kingdom. If the kingdom of God exists now, then the king must be obeyed and treated as a lord. Lordship theology is a problem for those who hold to a forgiveness-only gospel. The forgiveness-only gospel teaches that Jesus came to forgive sins, and one cannot do anything to obtain salvation except believe in Jesus as Savior. While this is true, it is not the entire gospel. Jesus said, "Follow Me." Following someone requires action, and actions can be considered work. Works are unnecessary in this view of the gospel and, in some circles, even frowned upon, as they may lead one to think they can earn their way to heaven or the kingdom of God. This researcher believes in balance; every aspect of the gospel needs to be given its actual value.

This author will use the analogy of the gospel as an ocean. The ocean can be both shallow and deep; it can be waded in, swam in, and in it, one can drown. The shallow part of the gospel does not change from the profound truths of the gospel; it is the same gospel. However, not every believer can enjoy all parts of the gospel, and not every vessel can traverse every aspect of the ocean. Large sea-going vessels can only reach the shore with a deep port. However, smaller vessels can reach the shore almost anywhere, but they cannot cross an ocean. Large vessels are equipped with smaller lifeboats allowing people to reach safety. The gospel is versatile, and yet it does not change.

⁴⁶² Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission*, 35.

⁴⁶³ Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, 19.

Lessons Learned

This researcher learned the essential fundamental role of the Holy Spirit and prayer in discipleship. While he knew that God is the one who provides all things and prayer is essential, during this exercise, it became more evident than at any other time in his life, including serving in active combat zones. The spiritual battle that ensued during this process was real, and had it not been for daily prayer; it would have been overwhelming. Specific prayers have been a part of this researcher's life for several years, and God has proved Himself real by answering specific prayers about the discipleship process at FBCoT.

Throughout this research, this author has realized that knowledge is understanding the “what” and “why” of things, and discipleship is taking that knowledge and applying it to achieve the “how.” Instructing people what discipleship is and why it must be done does not guarantee they will accomplish it. They need an example, and to see it in action, they need to see it work. Faith without action is not faith. If the leader is unwilling to disciple others, the members will not participate. Discipleship is a bit like faith; it is caught, not taught.

Encouragement goes a long way. This researcher willingly admits he fell short in this area. Daily encouragement needs to be given to disciples, so they continue to remember to pray, read their Bible, and share the gospel. Encouragement is more than being a cheer section. It is spending personal time praying for the disciple, asking God to prove Himself real to them daily, and letting them know. When the disciple fails to do something, the encouragement reminds them that each day is a new beginning.

This researcher learned the importance of presenting the complete gospel package, which has the “what” (gospel), “why” (Great Commission), and “how” (living out one's faith). When one has a skewed view of the “what” (gospel) or the “why” (Great Commission), it directly affects how one lives out one's faith. Discipleship must be authentic, not a tradition. It must

carry on from generation to generation, not as an empty practice, but as a means to live one's life for the glory of God. A sense of belonging or community is "always at the core of discipleship," and discipleship cannot happen without community.⁴⁶⁴ This researcher noticed a sense of community within the focus group. The participants gave suggestions for FBCoT to have more of a community feeling.

Application in Other Settings

This research is easy to replicate. The only thing required is facilitating a group of people willing to see a change and provide a solution to the lack of discipleship in their current situation. It is easy for a leader to develop a plan of action. However, that does not guarantee that people will follow. This researcher believes in having all parties involved participate in the action plan, thereby gaining ownership. When people own something, they take better care of it and become more involved. All parties must ensure they speak the same language, using words in the same manner and meaning. Using the same language will allow for proper communication while discovering the length and breadth of the gospel and how to apply it to one's life. Along with that is correcting any misconceptions regarding the gospel and spiritual disciplines.

Depending on the local situation, different focus groups can be created: men, women, couples, or teens. The groups can be formed in a local church, or a group of churches, schools, or just communities or neighborhoods. Anywhere people possess a goal of living a practical life for Christ can come together and learn the "what" (gospel) and the "why" (Great Commission) and develop a plan to accomplish the goal.

⁴⁶⁴ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 103.

Items Not Addressed

This research did not address certain things as they were not in the scope or were addressed in the requirements before the research began. One item is the salvation of the participants. Personal salvation was addressed as a requirement prior to the research by the researcher and included in the initial questionnaire for a baseline. The level at which the individuals practice the Scripture “following” was not explicitly discussed. This research did not present an in-depth study of the gospel each participant followed before the focus group. The issue of deconstruction among believers was mentioned in passing; however, it was not addressed extensively. This researcher sees a direct correlation between the lack of discipleship and the deconstruction occurring in the church. Both deconstruction and lack of discipleship result from the same lack of understanding.

Future Research

The researcher believes further research is required regarding a possible connection between deconstruction, a lack of discipleship, and the type of gospel preached and discipleship. One of the essential topics would be the effects of the gospel types on a local church. The long-term effect of the different gospel types taught concerning the church’s growth and evangelism. Research regarding which gospel type has positive, numerical, and spiritual growth. Alternatively, a study on which churches have the most program-driven events relating to the gospel types. Moreover, which gospel type is more conducive to building a community?

The topic of deconstruction and the gospel types would be highly relevant, especially in the current landscape of Christianity. This writer believes there is a definite relationship between improper discipleship and the deconstruction movement in the church. The deconstruction movement is either destroying the church or purifying it.

Conclusion

This process has proven that the gospel is simple yet complex. Every aspect of one's Christianity is affected by one's view of the gospel. Discipleship is essential to the Christian faith. It is developed in a community where mature believers can effectively instruct younger believers on living for Christ in every aspect of their lives. Every believer needs to be involved in discipleship regardless of their maturity level. Discipleship is also simple yet complex. Leaders can teach them "what" (gospel) and "why" (Great Commission) as it is simple. Complexity is found in the "how" or application part. Every person is different and has different things to overcome from their past. Overcoming past theological teaching can be difficult, primarily when it has been held for a long time. Developing a workable discipleship ministry is best when all parties participate in developing the action plan. However, the essential aspect of discipleship is prayer and the leading of the Holy Spirit.

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APPENDIX A

OUTLINE OF THE SIX-WEEK COURSE

Week One: The Gospel Defined

1. Facilitate a discussion about common beliefs about the gospel
2. Present the various types of the gospel preached today (theBonhoefferproject.com)
 - a. Forgiveness Only (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 70-76)
 - b. Gospel of the Left (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 76-81)
 - c. Prosperity (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 81-84)
 - d. Consumer (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 84-89)
 - e. Gospel of Right (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 89-93)
3. Which type of Gospel is correct?
 - a. Why?
4. Is the "Plan of Salvation" the Gospel?
 - a. If yes, Why?
 - b. If not, Why?
 - c. What is the "Plan of Salvation" missing?
5. Define the Gospel.
 - a. "I believe the word *gospel* has been hijacked by what we believe about 'personal salvation,' and the gospel itself has been reshaped to facilitate making 'decisions.'" (McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 26)
 - b. "The gospel is a Scripture-based declaration about who Jesus is, what he has done, how he fulfills Scripture prophecies, and how we should respond to Him." (Hull and Sobel, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 106)
 - c. "The gospel is this: the Kingdom of God has come through Jesus of Nazareth. He is Christ, the King, God's one and only Son. He died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and was resurrected on the third day, according to the Scriptures. In His great love and by His amazing grace, God our Father saves everyone who repents of their sin, believes the gospel, and follows Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit. When King Jesus returns on the last day, the great Day of Judgement, everyone following Him will enter God's eternal Kingdom." (Hull and Sobel, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 109)
6. Resources:
 - a. Plan of Salvation (McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 39)
 - b. "The heart of the gospel brings us to knowing, following, and obeying Jesus. (Hull, *Discipleship & Conversion*, 41)

Week Two: What is the Kingdom of God?

1. Read passages regarding the Kingdom of God from the Gospels.
 - a. Matthew 6:33; 19:24; 21:31.
 - b. Mark 1:14; 1:15; 9:1; 9:47; 10:14; 10:23-25; 14:25.

- c. Luke 4:43; 8:1; 9:2; 9:11; 9:60; 9:62; 10:9; 10:11; 12:31; 13:28-29; 16:16; 17:20-21; 19:11; 21:31.
 - d. John 3:5
2. Read passages regarding the Kingdom of God from the rest of the New Testament.
 - a. Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 28:23; 28:31.
 - b. Romans 14:17
 - c. I Corinthians 4:20; 6:9-10; 15:50.
 - d. Galatians 5:21
 - e. Ephesians 5:5
 - f. Colossians 4:11
 - g. 1 Thessalonians 2:12
 - h. 2 Thessalonians 1:5
 - i. James 2:5
 3. Read passages regarding the Kingdom of God from the Old Testament
 - a. Daniel 2:44
 - b. Psalm 45:6
 4. How does the phrase 'Kingdom of God' apply to believers today?
 5. Why should we care about the Kingdom of God?
 6. Define the Kingdom of God.

What is the Great Commission?

1. Read the five passages associated with the Great Commission.
 - a. Matthew 28:18-20
 - b. Mark 16:15-18
 - c. Luke 24:46-49
 - d. John 20:21
 - e. Acts 1:7-8
2. Start a discussion as to what these passages are saying.
 - a. To whom is the command given?
 - b. Why are they all different?
 - c. Who is the recipient of the command?
 - d. Why is it important?
 - e. What is involved?

Week Three: Discipleship Defined

1. Facilitate a discussion about common discipleship beliefs
 - a. Ask each participant to explain discipleship
 - b. Encourage the group to come to a consensus
2. Define Christocentric discipleship
 - a. "Discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus and others how to live his or her life as though Jesus were living it. As a result, the disciple becomes the kind of person who naturally does what Jesus did." (Bill Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 20)

- b. "The Jesus who lives among us demands everything of us. Another word for that is discipleship." (Bill Hull & Brandon Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 4)
 - c. "A disciple is a person who has chosen to position themselves as Jesus' student or follower." Bill Hull & Brandon Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 12)
 - d. "What is a disciple, then? One who lays aside every other influence for giving direction to his life and pledges allegiance to Jesus, one who follows where Jesus leads, who enrolls in the school of Jesus and proceeds to learn from Him and put His teachings into practice." (Robert E. Picirilli, *Discipleship expression of Saving Faith*, 37)
 - e. "Discipleship is not about greatness and success but about faithfulness and fruitfulness." (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 179)
3. Discuss if discipleship is optional.
- a. Ask the group for their thoughts.
 - b. Do Christians think discipleship is optional and only for the super-spiritual?
 - i. If this is true, Why?
 - ii. How can we change this thinking?
 - iii. Resources
 - 1. (Hull, *Discipleship & Conversion*, 17, 28, 30-31)
 - 2. (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 18, 23, 14, 19, 30, 131)
 - 3. (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 6, 7, 20)
 - 4. Proverbs 27:17
 - c. Are Christians afraid of becoming disciples?
 - i. If so, how? Why do you think this is true?
 - ii. If not, why do you think that?
 - iii. How can we change this thought process?
4. Discuss the difference between conversion and discipleship.
- a. Ask the group about the difference between conversion and discipleship. (Hull) If so, what are they?
 - b. Is there a difference between being a Christian and a disciple? (Picirilli) If so, what are they?

Week Four: What is required by Jesus to be a disciple?

1. Cost – Luke 14:26-33; Mark 8:27-31; 9:30-31; Romans 12:1
2. Obedience – I John 2:3-4; 2:9; 3:17
 - a. "Faith in Jesus as the Christ necessitates obedience, and obedience demands discipleship." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 49)
 - b. "God's purpose for the gospel is bringing about in us obedience to Jesus, who is the Christ." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 63)
 - c. "Bad theology and sometimes even out-right heresy abounds with beliefs about obedience. But the Bible clearly teaches that if you don't obey Jesus, you are not following Him." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 77)
3. Action –

- a. "The Middle Eastern or Hebraic way of understanding belief always connects it to action." (Hull, *Discipleship & Conversion*, 44)

Does Faith require action?

1. Does Faith require action?
 - a. Abraham and Isaac
 - b. David and Goliath
 - c. Peter walking on the water
2. Faith has a history McKnight, (*The King Jesus Gospel*, 93)
3. "What is needed, he (Jesus) knew, was not mere knowledge of what Scripture says but actually living out Scripture." (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 156)
4. "In Jewish thought, faithfulness was always about action, about not just being a hearer but also a doer." (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 157)

Week Five: What does Jesus mean by "Follow Me"?

1. How would you describe "follow me?"
2. Read the passages where Jesus says, "Follow Me."
 - a. Matthew 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; 16:24; 19:21.
 - b. Mark 2:14; 8:34; 10:21.
 - c. Luke 5:27; 9:23; 9:59; 9:61; 18:22.
 - d. John 1:43; 10:27; 12:26; 13:36; 21:19; 21:22.
3. "As soon as following Jesus becomes an optional add-on to the gospel, it's a death sentence for disciple-making. If we are deceived into thinking that following Jesus is not essential, then we won't do it." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 79)
4. "Following Jesus in your own strength is not actually following Jesus. It is a work of the flesh. Following Jesus happens only and always in the power of the Spirit." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 84)
5. "People become Christians when they decide to follow Jesus. They may not believe everything the Bible teaches. But if they can get the basic facts and from them reach the point of wanting to be a follower of Jesus, they are on their way." (Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 27)
6. "Following Jesus requires us to live next to those who do not believe or follow our King. It also means we must love them as Christ has modeled it for us. We are not charged with determining and declaring who is in the kingdom and who is out." (Hull, *Conversion & Discipleship*, 41)
7. "Following Jesus is an active process; it involves doing what He says, not just hearing it." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 111)

What is Evangelism?

1. In your own words, describe evangelism.
2. Is evangelism required of all believers or just those who possess the gift of evangelism?
 - a. Why or why not?

3. Is the individual or the church responsible for evangelism?
4. Evangelism is through intentional discipling relationships. (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 133)
5. "For Jesus, discipleship was how He evangelized both the men in whom He invested and the people they reached as a result." (Hull and Sobels, *The Discipleship Gospel*, 134)

Week Six: What does our plan look like?

1. Taking the definitions we have already created and what we have discussed over the last five weeks, let us work together to develop an action plan. I desire discipleship to occur here at FBCoT, and that desire will only happen if you, the men of the church, desire it as well. I will need your buy-in. Discipleship is not a one-person thing. It involves everyone. It will require the support of everyone.
2. Do we want to use a one-on-one method of discipleship?
3. Do we want to use a small group method of discipleship? Separate by sex?
4. Do we want to use a combination of the two?
 - a. Use a small group, but there would be pairs in that group.
 - b. Use a Sunday school class for new believers/new members; to integrate them into Christocentric discipleship.
5. What type of setting would be best for FBCoT?
6. What type of setting would be best for the lost in Tuscola?

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

To:

From: Allan C. Harris II, Doctoral Student at Rawling's School of Divinity, Liberty University

This letter requests your participation in a study of Christocentric Discipleship at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola and to develop ways to improve or implement new procedures at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola. You have been personally selected due to your leadership role at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola and your knowledge of the people who currently attend or attended in the past. This researcher desires to assist Faith Baptist Church in having a robust discipleship program resulting in increased unity of the body, new followers of Christ, and increased membership. However, this project can only be accomplished with input from those in positions of influence with experience in the issue at hand.

This project consists of an eight-week focus group meeting for one hour weekly. Additionally, there would be a one-on-one interview prior to the beginning of the focus group and a one-on-one interview after the focus group. Each interview would take less than two hours. The researcher will meet you at any location where you feel comfortable. The researcher would also ask that each participant keep a journal of things learned during the process. The researcher will provide the journal at no cost to you.

The interviews would be recorded (digital audio) to ensure the researcher correctly remembers the conversation. Notes would be taken during the focus group. All audio and written notes will be secured and not assessable to anyone other than the researcher. All digital files will be maintained in a secure digital vault on the researcher's laptop.

If you would consider assisting this researcher in creating a successful Christocentric discipleship program at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola, please contact him at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]

Allan C. Harris II
Doctoral Candidate
Liberty University

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

Informed Consent to Participate in a Project Study

Liberty University
Rawlings School of Divinity
1971 University Boulevard
Lynchburg, VA 24515

Christocentric Discipleship
Allan C. Harris II


A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Allan C. Harris II, a Doctoral student at Liberty University's Rawlings School of Theology, is studying Christocentric discipleship at Faith Baptist Church. The purpose of your participation is to assist the researcher in understanding why discipleship is misunderstood and conceived as complex. You were selected based on your position in the church.

B. PROCEDURES

If you should agree to participate in this project. In that case, the following will occur: You will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview prior to the study and a post-interview after the study with the researcher. Each of these interviews will be less than one hour of your time. Questions regarding discipleship and your experience with it will be asked. The central portion of the project will be conducted in a focus group consisting of other men from the congregation of Faith Baptist Church. The focus group will meet for one hour a week for six weeks; each week, a different topic will be discussed to solve an issue at Faith Baptist Church regarding some aspect of discipleship. An outline for the six-week class will be provided upon agreement to participate in this project. Each participant will be asked to keep a journal of the things God has shown them regarding discipleship. The journal need not be elaborate; just simple notes will suffice. The researcher will provide the journal.

Data will be collected via written notes by the other members of the focus group and the researcher and audio recordings. The personal interviews will also be recorded in an audio file to

be maintained by the researcher. The researcher will properly destroy all project data collected upon completing his dissertation. None of the information collected will be shared by the researcher other than what is required for the dissertation. No personal information will be divulged.

C. RISKS

The main risks to the participants are: feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed. There is also the matter of inconvenience due to the time and length of the study.

D. CONFIDENTIALITY

The records from this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. All recordings of interviews, notes from the focus groups, and other written material will be given codes and stored separately from participants' names or other personal identifying factors. Project information will be kept in locked files or secure electronic folders. All digital items will be stored in a password-protected external hard drive in a McAfee Secure Vault; each type of digital item will be kept in a separate McAfee Secure Vault. One vault will be for audio recordings, and a separate vault will be for documents/notes. Only the researcher will have access to the files, and only those with an essential need to see names or other identifying information will have access to that particular file. All collected data will be appropriately destroyed two weeks after the study is completed and the dissertation has been successfully defended.

E. BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION

There will be no direct benefit to you from participating in this project. The anticipated benefit of your participation in this study is that each participant will gain a Christocentric discipleship posture and begin assisting others to follow Christ.

F. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your decision on whether or not to participate in this study is voluntary. It will not affect your relationship with the researcher, Liberty University, Rawling's School of Theology, or Faith Baptist Church. If you choose to participate in this study, you can withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

G. QUESTIONS

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Allan C. Harris II by cell phone at [REDACTED]. You can also contact the IRB office via email at irb@liberty.edu with any questions about the rights of project participants or project-related concerns.

CONSENT MEANS YOU ARE MAKING A DECISION WHETHER OR NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY AFTER READING ALL OF THE INFORMATION ABOVE, AND YOU UNDERSTAND THE INFORMATION IN THIS FORM, HAVE HAD ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED, AND HAVE RECEIVED A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR YOU TO KEEP.

Signature _____ Date _____ Research Participant

Signature _____ Date _____ Researcher

APPENDIX D
INITIAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please answer the following questions honestly and with no help or assistance from anyone or anything. (No Google or books to include the Bible) It is perfectly fine to answer with "I don't know" or "No Idea." This is just a baseline of knowledge and experience for the participants in this research group.

1. How long have you been a Christian? (years only)

2. Have you ever been discipled before? Yes / No

3. Explain the gospel in your own words

4. How would you describe the discipleship process at Faith Baptist Church (FBC)?

5. Do you feel the discipleship process is successful? Yes / No

6. What would make discipleship more successful at FBC?

7. How could you make the discipleship process more successful?

8. What do you understand about discipleship?

9. What would you like to know about discipleship?

10. Do you believe discipleship is difficult? Yes / No

11. Why do you think there is a lack of discipleship at FBC?

12. Do you think discipleship is a private matter or public? Private / Public

13. How long should discipleship take, in your opinion?

14. Explain your understanding/view of discipleship.

15. Can any Christian be a discipler? Yes / No

16. How often do you share the gospel, using your definition of gospel? (Number of times in a week/month/year) _____

17. How often do you tell others what Christ is doing in your life? (Number of times in a week/month/year) _____

18. Does following Christ come with a cost? Yes / No

19. Does following Christ require action on the part of the believer? Yes / No

20. In your own words, define the Great Commission.

21. In your own words, define the Kingdom of God.

22. Is the Holy Spirit important in following Christ? Yes / No

23. Is prayer essential in discipleship? Yes / No

APPENDIX E

POST QUESTIONNAIRE

Instructions: Please answer the following questions as best you can. However, lengthy answers are not required; keep them simple as possible. Feel free to add additional comments as necessary, especially if you learned something I failed to ask about on this questionnaire. This questionnaire can be filled out by hand or electronically and emailed back to me.

I want to thank you for participating in this focus group. I know how important time is; however, I believe God will bless our efforts to serve Him by helping others learn to follow Jesus in every aspect of their lives.

- 1. In your opinion, why did the disciples follow Jesus?

- 2. Explain what Jesus meant by "Follow Me."

- 3. How can we "Follow Jesus" today?

- 4. What do you see different about the gospel?

- 5. Explain why the type of gospel presented is essential.

6. How has your view of the gospel changed? (Say if it has not)

7. What have you learned about discipleship?

8. Explain how discipleship is possible at FBCoT.

9. How long should discipleship take, in your opinion?

10. Explain how your understanding/view of discipleship has changed.

11. How often do you share the gospel, using your definition of gospel? Are you sharing the gospel more or less frequently now than when we began, or the same?

12. Do you think discipleship is a private or public matter or both? Private / Public/ Both. (Circle)

13. Briefly explain your position.

14. In your own words, define the Great Commission.

15. What is the most critical part of the Great Commission to you?

16. Define the Kingdom of God.

17. Explain the importance of the Holy Spirit in following Christ.

18. Explain the importance of prayer.

19. Provide an example of what a cost could be by following Jesus.

20. Explain in a few words Faith in action.

21. Can you see an effective discipleship ministry at FBCoT?

22. Are you willing to participate in a discipleship ministry at FBCoT? (Please be honest)

23. What other aspects of discipleship do you wish would have been presented?

24. Any other comments:

APPENDIX F
SCORING SCALE FOR DISCIPLESHIP ACTION

Rate the answer provided in the questionnaires regarding how often they are involved in a discipleship action.

0. Never
1. Rarely
2. Once a year
3. Every six months
4. Bi-monthly
5. Monthly
6. Bi-weekly
7. Weekly
8. Three or more times a week
9. Daily or more

APPENDIX G
SCORING SCALE FOR PRAYER ACTION

Rate the answer provided in the questionnaires regarding how often they pray.

0. Never
1. Rarely
2. Bi-monthly
3. Monthly
4. Bi-weekly
5. Weekly
6. Two to four times per week.
7. Five or more times a week.
8. Daily
9. Several times a day.

APPENDIX H

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 11, 2022

Allan Harris

Jack Davis

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY21-22-940 Christocentric Discipleship at Faith Baptist Church of Tuscola

Dear Allan Harris and Jack Davis,

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

Decision: No Human Subjects Research

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

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

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

Also, although you are welcome to use our recruitment and consent templates, you are not required to do so. **If you choose to use our documents, please replace the word *research* with the word *project* throughout both documents.**

If you have any questions about this determination or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your application's status, please email us at irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research

Research Ethics Office