

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

**Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth**

A Thesis Project Report Submitted to  
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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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One of the greatest needs for the church today is to equip believers to become biblically informed, fully developed disciples so that they are prepared to carry out the mission of Christ. Without fully understanding mature discipleship practices, believers cannot fulfill the Great Commission to “go, teach and baptize” to make other disciples. The failure to understand and teach these practices has led to complacency, lack of interest, and the inability to become disciples among long-term church laity. This dissertation implemented biblical discipleship teachings and practices in a local church through a Sunday School curriculum and was evaluated through participant surveys and observations. The intervention comprised teaching three-two part biblically based Sunday school lessons for six weeks, one hour each, that covered biblical, spiritual, and missional foundations for discipleship. Quantitative data was collected from pre-, and post-study focus group interviews. The study showed how teaching a theology of discipleship as a biblical mandate supported by both the Old and New Testaments that emphasizes spiritual growth as a priority for a Christian lead to an increase in knowledge and desire to participate in missional practices. It affirms the need for local churches to develop a similar theology of discipleship to be integrated into their Christian education curriculum based on biblical, spiritual, and missional principles for congregants to be equipped with disciples making disciples.

Keywords: biblical, Christian Education, discipleship, missional, spiritual

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## **Abbreviations**

DCC *Deliverance Christ Church*

DMIN *Doctor of Ministry*

GLDHFOC *The Great Lake Diocese of the Holy Fellowship of Churches*

IRB *Institutional Review Board*

LCI *Lighthouse Chapel International*

YWAM DTS *Youth with a Mission Discipleship Training School*

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

Many Christians attend church for years without understanding the biblical nature of discipleship. Although it is the church's role to be actively involved in following the command in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19–20, contemporary research on discipleship reveals a significant deficiency in properly discipling believers.<sup>1</sup> Scholars in recent years have observed the longevity of church attendance among members while lacking the teaching of discipleship theology and core Christian doctrines.<sup>2</sup> Contemporary research on American evangelical churches reveals several concerns that have affected discipleship, such as a decline in biblical literacy among believers and a de-emphasis on discipleship training within churches.<sup>3</sup> These findings present a dark picture of the state of discipleship in America, which warrants a need for the church to develop a biblical curriculum that teaches Christians how to be disciples of Christ.<sup>4</sup> This DMIN action research project examines the current discipleship practices in a local church context to verify the legitimacy of such concerns. It then implements a discipleship theology based on the Scripture's teaching and examples to assess the strength of a biblically based curriculum in producing mature disciples.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum: Applying the Systems Approach Model for Designing Instruction by Dick, Carey, and Carey to the Construction of Church Discipleship Courses," *Christian Education Journal* 12, no. 2 (2015): 397.

<sup>2</sup> Keith L. Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 20–21.

<sup>3</sup> Burggraff, "Developing Discipleship Curriculum," 398.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

This chapter includes the ministry's context, background, setting, problem, and purpose statement. The ministry context includes the church's structure, central beliefs and practices, demographics and cultural settings, services and programs, spiritual culture, and past and present discipleship practices. The problem statement explains the need for a theology of discipleship to be implemented in the church's religious education curriculum for the spiritual growth of its middle-aged and older adult congregants. The purpose discusses implementing a study plan of biblically-based lessons and instruction focusing on holistic discipleship teaching, including Old Testament practices and the examples of Jesus Christ, Paul, and the New Testament. It explains the basic assumptions and definitions for key terms used throughout the paper, overviews the researcher's limitations and delimitations relevant to the project, and concludes with the project's thesis statement.

### **Ministry Context**

The local ministry context for this DMIN action research project is the Deliverance Christ Church (DCC) in Queens County, NY. The church is Christian non-denominational, founded on biblical principles that minister to the whole man, spiritually and physically. The church was born in 2003 from a vision given by God to its founder and current Senior Pastor of a church from which to minister to the incarcerated, homeless, spiritually weak, and those abused and misused by the enemy. The church's leadership team comprises the senior pastor, an elder, an elder church mother, a deacon board, a board of trustees, and two church administrators. The researcher is an elder, senior church administrator, and dean of biblical education at the church. The church leadership has agreed to give their full cooperation and support to participate and provide the necessary resources for this DMIN action project.

## Demographics and Cultural Setting

The church is in a middle-class neighborhood in southeastern Queens County, New York City. As of January 1, 2020, the population estimate for Queens County was 2,331,143.<sup>5</sup> The median household income in 2020 averaged \$72,028, while the United States averaged approximately \$64,994.<sup>6</sup> The racial demographics of the county show that the majority identify as white (47.3%), with the other groups identifying as Hispanic or Latino (28.1%), Asian alone (27.3%), and Black or African American (20.7%).<sup>7</sup> Adults sixty-five years and older reported 17.4 percent, while persons under eighteen at 20 percent.<sup>8</sup> The average for high school graduates or higher for ages twenty-five years or higher is 82.6 percent, while those reported with a bachelor's degree or higher in the same age range is 33.5 percent.<sup>9</sup> These county statistics, on average, broadly reflect the church's membership demographics.

## Major Beliefs and Practices

The church was founded on principles to serve others with a spirit of excellence in restoring love, dignity, respect, hope, healing, restoration, and deliverance where God gets the glory (Ps 31:1; Luke 4:18). The atmosphere of worship is set to inspire participation, personal satisfaction, and total support for the leadership of God's servant and effective service to the vision of God's will. The churches' core beliefs include believing that men wrote the Bible, both

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<sup>5</sup> "Quick Facts: Queens County, New York," United States Census Bureau, accessed on October 25, 2022. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/queenscountynewyork/PST045221>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

the Old and New Testaments, without any error and were inspired by the Holy Spirit given for the salvation of men and is the final authority (2 Tim 3:16-17).

DCC's foundational statement of faith is based on the Holy Trinity doctrine. The church believes in the Holy Trinity, as God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Gen 1:1; John 1:1; 1 John 5:7; Matt 28:19; 1 Tim 3:16). God is the Father and the first person of the Godhead. He is the only God and creator of all things and absolute in His authority. He is infinite, perfect, and exists eternally. Jesus Christ is the second person in the Godhead who is the true God and man, conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin named Mary. According to the Scriptures, Jesus died on the cross and was the complete and final sacrifice for man's sins. He rose bodily from the dead, ascended to heaven, and now sits at God's right hand. Jesus is the Father, High Priest, and Advocate to the Christian. He is the Way, the Truth, and the Light; no one can come to the Father except through Him (Col 2:9; Luke 3:21-22; Phil 2:5-11; John 3:26; 31-32; 14:6). The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Godhead who convicts and regenerates the believing sinner, and indwells, guides, and enables the believer to live godly. He is also called the Comforter and the Spirit of Truth (John 14:17, 26).

The church statement of faith also includes the regular practices of the holy sacraments, such as water baptism and the Lord's Supper. DCC practices water baptism in which one is baptized by complete immersion in the water soon after accepting Christ as their personal Savior. It is a testimony of being dead to sin and resurrection to a new life in Christ Jesus. The Lord's Supper is a memorial service setting forth a sacred and symbolic manner to the death of the Lord Jesus Christ and is practiced once a month. The church holds fast to the conviction that all true believers and only believers of Jesus Christ should share and participate in these practices. DCC

continues to be a place where the broken person can get love, restoration, healing, and deliverance and be able to give back to communities worldwide.

DCC supports and encourages an atmosphere among its members for personal growth by developing and empowering others to come to the knowledge of God while capitalizing on the strength of ethnic diversity and teamwork. The church believes in leaving a legacy of hope and restoration for others in the community.

DCC is part of a fellowship of The Great Lake Diocese of the Holy Fellowship of Churches (GLDHFOC), a church community that practices Christ's teaching in the Ancient Orthodox Faith tradition. The GLDHFOC has approximately eight hundred churches worldwide in its fellowship. DCC's Senior Pastor is a Diocese Bishop who provides and supports pastoral care of roughly three hundred churches internationally in Africa and parts of the Caribbean.

#### Church Services and Programs

The church typically has approximately two to three gatherings on Sundays: Sunday school, morning worship, and afternoon fellowship services. Sunday morning worship consists of the music ministry of praise and worship and the exhortation of the Word of God. Approximately two Sunday afternoons each month are reserved for fellowship with other churches (both incoming and outgoing) services. Prayer meetings and Bible study are held for two hours every Wednesday evening, with an occasional Friday night worship service. The church's education programs consist of weekly Sunday school and Bible study. The Sunday school consists of three teachers with two classes: The Youth Class (ages twenty-six and under) and the Adult Class (twenty-six years and older). Lessons are generally taught each week from a well-known Sunday school curriculum with different themes each quarter. The pastor usually

teaches Bible study, and studies include a variety of topics and themes specific to books of the Bible.

### Pandemic Effects

Since the church's inception in 2003, the worship locations, leadership, and membership have undergone several changes. During its early years, membership was primarily a younger generation of forty years and younger. Since 2013, most of the regular members' ages are primarily between forty-five years and older, with a small number of young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five. The membership consists of about fifty members, with an average of twenty-five to thirty in regular attendance for morning worship.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic took a significant hit on the ministry. While the church building was closed, services were held virtually. The inability to gather physically resulted in a substantial decrease in the ministry tithes and offerings, resulting in the eventual loss of the church building. Attendance initially fell to about half of the pre-pandemic services, and the church's fellowship and worship services decreased significantly. Currently, the church is still recovering from the pandemic's effects. With a few exceptions, most of the services and meetings remain virtual while the church is re-establishing its finances to purchase a permanent building for worship.

The pandemic affected the church's attendance, reducing the number to approximately fifteen to twenty regularly participating in the Sunday morning worship services. However, attendance may be as low as ten consistent individuals. Sunday school attendance generally mirrors morning worship each week. Prayer meetings and Bible study each week average between ten and twelve, though some weeks, attendance is between five and eight.



## Spiritual Culture

The senior pastor's central vision for the church includes outreach, missions, prison ministry, and community food pantries. The goal is to develop a professional and efficient leadership team built by competent and responsible individuals in the church. It was designed to help increase communication and other information within the community and religious sectors. In the earlier years of the church, the leadership team was considerably staffed with trained religious individuals. Due to membership decline and turnover over the past few years, DCC is currently not staffed with qualified ministers and disciples to carry out the mission of the gospel and, least of all, the vision for the church. Maturity and spiritual growth in discipleship are necessary to fulfill the Great Commission of becoming missional disciples, making disciples, participating in God's mission, and compelling others to come to Christ. The church needs to be missionally minded to fulfill the mission of Christ, which is the proliferation of the kingdom of God.<sup>10</sup> It must understand discipleship as biblically and doctrinally sound. However, a lack of emphasis has created membership determined by a monoculturalism comfortability conscious or subconscious shift from the implications of discipleship.<sup>11</sup>

## Past and Present Discipleship Practices

Since its beginning, DCC has relied on traditional discipleship methods such as discipleship classes and mentorship. The class was based on general lessons on baptism, the Lord's Supper, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and was held for about four to

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<sup>10</sup> Jolander Headley, "An Evaluation of a Leadership Development Program's Impact on the Missional Mindedness of Leaders in Trinidad" (DMin diss., Nyack College, Alliance Theological Seminary, 2021), 23. ProQuest Central.

<sup>11</sup> Malan Nel and W. J. Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciple making' and the Role of Faith-Sharing," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019): 2 of 8.

six weeks, once a week for approximately two hours, and then water baptism was scheduled. After baptism, the new convert was given a membership manual with the foundational Scriptures, the church's statement of faith, and the teachings in the discipleship class and membership certificate. The convert was then matched with a mentor from the church. The criteria for mentorship were based on active church members who have attended and served in ministry for a minimum of three years and were the same gender, age, and other characteristics, such as a single mother whom a single mother mentored. Though the relational aspect of discipleship was valid, several elements that caused this practice to be unsuccessful needed to be included. One was that the maturity level of the mentor was based on years in the church and not on the individual's spiritual maturity and understanding of the biblical definition of discipleship. This resulted in problems from an immature mentor-mentee relationship of personal attention as either a friendship with little or no teaching or incompatibility of personalities. In most cases, especially in the last several years, the new converts' church and strong program attendance and consistency decreased as enthusiasm and interest in the church eventually diminished.

Even though the pandemic has caused most church gatherings to be primarily remote, the leadership at DCC continues to encourage discipleship malaise where the attempts rely on the scriptural context for growing disciples through relationships.<sup>12</sup> The current call with solid implications for discipleship is to invite others to join the services. The issue remains that most congregants need an interest in maturing and growing as disciples. In addressing the problem of a lack of discipleship at the church, the researcher engaged in several conversations with the senior pastor to understand the causes and to contemplate solutions. As of this writing, the current practices and state of discipleship at DCC have remained the same.

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<sup>12</sup> Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciple-making,'" 2 of 8.

DCC has become part of a faith community of Christian churches where the concept of discipleship has unintentionally disappeared.<sup>13</sup> The implication of discipleship has been and continues to be preached and taught as a requirement for church membership.<sup>14</sup> As discipleship is mandated and part of the believer's participation in God's mission, DCC must lift a larger missional vision for the congregation to become a discipling community.<sup>15</sup> The congregation must regain this church DNA by integrating healthy discipleship's essential development and facilitation through an intentional biblically based discipleship curriculum.<sup>16</sup>

### **Problem Presented**

In Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission, the resurrected Christ, commanded His followers to spread the gospel to all the world and to make disciples. According to this Scripture, 'disciple making' is the signature mark of faithful disciples of Jesus Christ.<sup>17</sup> The Bible reveals this as part of God's relationship with humankind, which this mandate supports. It addresses all dimensions of life, is deeply grounded in teaching and mentoring, and applies to practically all age levels.<sup>18</sup> The problem is that many of the congregants at DCC are middle-aged and older and have faithfully attended the church for years yet are spiritually deficient in the implications of discipleship. Sunday school and Bible study attendance are generally high, yet participation in the class lessons has been meager. Basic foundational biblical questions concerning salvation, deliverance, and discipleship either return with no response or an incorrect one. Most congregants

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<sup>13</sup> Nel and Schoeman, "Rediscovering 'Disciple-making,'" 2 of 8.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3 of 8.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 5 of 8.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 1 of 8.

<sup>18</sup> William F. Cox Jr., and Robert A. Peck, "Christian Education as Discipleship Formation," *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (August 2018): 243.

show up, but there is no interest in ministry participation in missional and communal activities beyond Sunday morning worship. While there is a strong Sunday school and Bible study program, there is an absence of a consistent biblical curriculum focusing on discipleship. Praising and worshipping God is necessary, but there must be an understanding beyond Jesus dying for the sins of the world and His blessings for His people. Even pre-pandemic, there has been complacency toward spiritual growth and discipleship teaching.

One of the main reasons for the problem is the lack of a religious teaching curriculum at the church that includes biblical theology and apologetics that focuses on discipleship and the missional nature of the triune God, including the Christian's participation. DCC's current Bible lesson curriculum concentrates on God's good works with and through people. However, discipleship is implied as a condition for church membership, along with a Bible and a manual with Scriptures to memorize. Sometimes, new members are matched with mentors who, though they have attended church for years, know less about the Bible than the new ones. The problem has been ongoing for a long time, and this DMIN action research seeks to investigate what can be resolved with a structured biblical curriculum on a theology of discipleship. Further, contemporary discipleship literature shows that many Christian churches share this problem in some form. As a result, there needs to be more spiritual growth and maturity at DCC. The problem, therefore, is that most middle-aged and older congregants at DCC need a biblical understanding of discipleship.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this DMIN action research project is to educate and equip believers for spiritual growth through developing a theology of discipleship curriculum. This objective is accomplished by creating Bible-based lessons focusing on each critical aspect of theology that

forms Trinitarian, missional, and communal discipleship. It also teaches the important role of spiritual formation and the implications of Christian discipleship for the church and the community. The participants will be a selection of regular middle-aged and older adult congregants who will commit to participation for approximately six to eight weeks. The participants will be between ten to fifteen congregants aged forty-five to seventy-five. The participation will be strictly voluntary, understanding that it will be conducted as part of this action research project.

Many congregants have attended the church and served in leadership for years yet are ignorant of fundamental biblical truths. Others display some knowledge learned from Sunday school, Bible study lessons, sermons, or other ministry teachings. Another observation is that all individuals do not understand the same, so the instruction methods must accommodate these differences. Scholars have acknowledged the pedagogy gaps that persist between Christian statements of the educational mission and the daily reality of education practice.<sup>19</sup> This action research will include questionnaires and surveys at the beginning and the end of the study to help measure the participants' initial understanding of biblical discipleship so it can be accurately determined how beneficial lessons are in theory and practice.

### **Basic Assumptions**

The primary basic assumption of this action research is that many congregants believe that discipleship occurs automatically after submitting to Christ, joining a Bible-believing church, and serving in ministry. Discipleship is often presented and implied as a condition of church membership without training or instruction. Over the past several decades, the Western

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<sup>19</sup> David Smith, *On Christian Teaching Practicing Faith in the Classroom* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 7.

church has focused on growing membership by keeping people in the church rather than teaching and developing disciples.<sup>20</sup> American evangelical churches have lost the centrality of the biblical teaching on discipleship formation, leading to Christian indolence.<sup>21</sup> The rapid expansion of evangelical-like movements worldwide has presented challenges to Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Dallas Willard further observes how the churches of the Western world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian in the last several decades.<sup>23</sup> Too often, it is assumed that people understand discipleship, especially if they proclaim to be Christian and have been in church for many years. Churches have learned to neglect the call to make disciples by discovering new ways of calling people to make decisions for Christ as a part of evangelistic ministry.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, a believer does not develop into a fully mature disciple of Christ simply by receiving salvation and attending church services. Good practices of Christian-like endeavors, such as regularly attending services and participating in faith community efforts with the people of God, when teamed with the lack of effort to produce a viable disciple of Jesus, are nowhere found in Scripture.<sup>25</sup> Discipleship can only happen to those genuinely saved through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31; John 5:24). In Acts 2:38-39, the Apostle Peter explains the promise of the Holy Spirit after a person repents and receives salvation. The call for repentance fulfills the expectations of the risen Lord, baptism, which includes the reception of the “Holy Spirit as a

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<sup>20</sup> J.T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), ix.

<sup>21</sup> Burggraaf, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum,” 401.

<sup>22</sup> David Bebbington, George M. Marsden, and Mark A. Noll, *Evangelicals Who They Have Been, Are Now and Could Be*, Edited by David Bebbington, George M. Marsden, and Mark A. Noll (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Fred P. Edie, and Mark A. Lamport, *Nurturing Faith a Practical Theology for Educating Christians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2021), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Nel and Schoeman, “Rediscovering ‘Disciple-making,’” 2 of 8.

<sup>25</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 97.

gift.”<sup>26</sup> The result of the Spirit’s presence produces unparalleled evangelistic success.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, believers can mature into discipleship only by the power of the Spirit.

Once a person receives salvation and the Holy Spirit, mentoring and teaching on discipleship are necessary. The Bible has many examples of mentorship and discipleship in the Old and New Testament, such as the relationship between Moses and Joshua, Jesus, and His disciples. The Apostle Paul and the many men and women He disciplined demonstrated a close connection, and teaching helped each person grow and mature as disciples.<sup>28</sup> Believers must be taught how to be disciples through a teaching curriculum focusing on lessons, biblical models, and practices of discipleship in the Old Testament and the examples exemplified by Jesus and Paul in the New Testament. Dr. Anita Yadala Suneson observes the theological beliefs and practices embodied in a local context as a “lived theology,” which aims to “read enacted faith as theological text” and to “welcome the voices of ordinary women and men,” recognizing them as “agents of constructive theology.”<sup>29</sup> A theology of discipleship will help produce a “lived theology” in the believer’s life, who can then transform the local church community of believers toward a social reality that produces a mature understanding of God’s life.<sup>30</sup> Theologian and Protestant Reformer Martin Luther further emphasizes this understanding that nurturing people

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<sup>26</sup> Carl R. Holladay, *Acts: A Commentary*, First Edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 106.

<sup>27</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Acts: Verse by Verse* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 61.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Chapman, “Equipping Members in Basic Discipleship Principles and Practices at Christian Community Discipleship Church in Prince George’s County, Maryland” (DMin diss., School of Divinity, Regents University, 2020), 6.

<sup>29</sup> Anita Yadala Suneson, “Love for the Neighbour as Lived Theology,” *The Ecumenical Review* 72, no. 5 (2020): 823-824.

<sup>30</sup> John Mark Hicks, Greg McKinzie and Mark E. Powell, *Discipleship in Community: A Theological Vision for the Future* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2020), 21c.

and building them up as the visible church is a way that God brings people to this Spirit-filled re-birth.<sup>31</sup>

Another basic assumption is that many believers hold a negative view of theology. Given its prominent place in church history and its contributions to the church's contemporary life, a discipline of theology should have a positive reputation among Christians, but it does not.<sup>32</sup> Contemporary scholars have addressed how many intelligent, faithful Christians reject the idea of theology and insist they can live faithfully simply by trusting God and believing in the Scriptures. Therefore, a study of theology inhibits more than helps discipleship to Jesus.<sup>33</sup> This DMIN action project seeks to change the negative perception of theology to one understood as a necessary component of the believer's relationship with God.

### **Definitions**

This DMIN action research project addresses the need for a teaching curriculum on a theology of discipleship to be implemented at DCC for the spiritual growth of the congregants. A biblical theology of discipleship includes several broad and specific terms that will be mentioned throughout this action research project. The forthcoming are key theological terms such as biblical theology, Christian education, communal, discipleship, the discipline of theology, ethics, missiology, practical theology (pedagogy), spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation, and the Trinity. These terms are commonly found and used in the literature on a theology of discipleship to help understand the biblical nature of the dimensions and themes that collaborate to

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<sup>31</sup> Timothy Harmon, "Glory to God from Generation to Generation in the Church: Spiritual Disciplines and the Older Adult Disciple" (DMin Thesis., University of Dubuque Theological Seminary, 2018), 4.

<sup>32</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.



understand discipleship as theology in practice that can be taught as part of a curriculum in religious education.

*Biblical Theology.* Biblical theology is commonly defined as the study of God's unfolding story as it progresses from creation to the fall, to redemption in the person and work of Jesus Christ, His return, the final resurrection, and the new heavens and new earth.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Brevard Childs describes the objective of biblical theology as “understanding the various voices within the whole Christian Bible, New and Old Testament alike, as a witness to the one Lord Jesus Christ while pointing to the divine reality of God.”<sup>35</sup>

*Christian Education.* The term Christian or religious education, as used in this research, refers to a series of teaching or lesson plans biblically based on teaching educational instruction.<sup>36</sup> Christian education is the aspect of the person being led to radical transformation, resulting in the continued mission of God through individuals and the faith community to participate in the transformation of the world.<sup>37</sup>

*Communal.* The dimension or aspect of discipleship where the “regeneration of the church” as the church progresses toward the ancient order, the community of God, “will embody the life of God in justice, truth, fidelity, and honesty as it communes with God in daily piety that ultimately brings the transformation of the world” as a social reality.<sup>38</sup> Sound biblical

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020), xxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Dirk G. Van der Merwe, “The use of the Bible in theology: Theology as a ‘lived experience’ of God,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76(4) (2020): 4 of 12.

<sup>36</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 156.

<sup>37</sup> Edie and Lamport. *Nurturing Faith*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 21c.

interpretation is also seen as a communal exercise where the church seeks guidance from the Spirit and discerns God's Word.<sup>39</sup>

*Discipleship.* In Matthew 28:19-20, commonly called the Great Commission, Christ instructs the church to spread the gospel and make disciples. Dr. Andy Burggraff admits how the term is sometimes challenging to define due to its everyday use today as a “catchall for anything from mentorship and a small group discussion to the title of a conference at a sports arena.”<sup>40</sup> Mark Powell adequately defines discipleship as “an invitation to follow God into the world and to participate in His mission of offering life and salvation to all.”<sup>41</sup> An active expression of discipleship occurs when Christians go into the world and proclaim the gospel in words and actions.<sup>42</sup> Malan Nel further defines discipleship as becoming a complete follower of Jesus, including intentionally training people who voluntarily submit to His lordship.<sup>43</sup> Through teaching, training, experiences, and relationships, individuals become disciples who imitate and transform into Jesus Christ.<sup>44</sup> Discipleship can further be defined as reliance on God and participating in His work and timing.<sup>45</sup>

*The Discipline of Theology.* The discipline of theology is the organized practice of theological reasoning that directs a person's thoughts and speech about God.<sup>46</sup> This discipline came into existence in response to the fact that functional theology does not always match the

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<sup>39</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Burggraff, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum,” 399.

<sup>41</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>43</sup> Nel and Schoeman, “Rediscovering ‘Disciple-making,’” 2 of 8.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

reality of God.<sup>47</sup> Theology as a discipline is also used as one of the ways God brings the believer into conformity with His being and plan.<sup>48</sup>

*Ethics.* For this DMIN action research project, ethics is defined as Christian ethics. Christian ethics refer to how Christians are to understand and conduct themselves in a complex and changing world by reading the signs of God’s activity and discerning the divine will for the present and, in doing so, calling on the resources of the historic Christian faith, including the early church leaders, the Scriptures and the history of its interpretation for the church.<sup>49</sup> Christian virtues like love, humility, and generosity are expressed from Christian ethics that flow from the nature of and work of the triune God.<sup>50</sup>

*Missiology/Missional.* Missiology is the study of Christian missions. Missions are the activity of God in partnership with the church that is called to witness to its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and all creation in the kingdom.<sup>51</sup> Gelder explains that this church mission has been ongoing for as long as the church has existed, but the discipline of missiology developed recently.<sup>52</sup> Biblical scholar Dr. Edwin van Dreil explains that the final and fundamental goal of the *missio dei* is to establish God’s kingdom, not the church. “The church should therefore consider itself as existing for the sake of the world,” thus for God’s mission.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce C. Birch, Jacqueline E. Lapsley, Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, and Larry L. Rasmussen, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life a New Conversation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2018), 48.

<sup>50</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Stephen Bevans, “Ecclesiology and Missiology: Reflections on Two Recent Documents from the World Council of Churches.” *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 54, no. 2 (2015): 127-128.

<sup>52</sup> Craig Van Gelder, *Participating in God’s Mission: A Theological Missiology for the Church in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2018), 19.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

*Practical Theology (Pedagogy).* As the word suggests, practical theology is a theology that involves action. It can be described as how the gospel can be interpreted in action, visibly, institutionally, and verbally. It also reflects on contemporary church practices and activities and determines the criteria derived from biblical and theological groundwork.<sup>54</sup> Practical theology is based on a new pedagogy that starts with human experience, reflects on theory, and suggests a strategic way to incorporate learning into daily life versus applying human experience to a theoretical theme.<sup>55</sup> Theology is the practice of the believer of prayer, worship, Scripture reading, and teaching others about the faith. In this sense, every Christian practice theology.<sup>56</sup>

*Spiritual Disciplines.* Spiritual disciplines are the practices found in Scripture that promote spiritual growth among believers in the gospel of Jesus.<sup>57</sup> These scriptural practices include Bible intake and meditation in Psalms 1:2, prayer in Philippians 4:6, worship in Ephesians 5:18-20, witnessing in Matthew 28:19-20, and fellowship in Hebrews 10:24-25.<sup>58</sup> Through regular practices of the spiritual disciplines, believers become the kind of people who experience spiritual growth while listening to each other as God speaks to all.<sup>59</sup>

*Spiritual Formation.* Spiritual formation is the process that occurs sometime after an individual acknowledges God's presence, resulting in a process where the spiritual life increases in its awareness of God and striving to live before Him. It can also be described as the process of

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<sup>54</sup> Van der Merwe, "The Use of the Bible in Theology," 4 of 12.

<sup>55</sup> Hirho Y. Park, "Experience," in sidebar adapted by George Thomas Kurian and Mark A. Lamport, eds., *Encyclopedia of Christian Education*, three vols (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield, 2015), Quoted in Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 131.

<sup>56</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for Christian Life* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 4.

<sup>58</sup> Morgan and Peterson, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 31.

<sup>59</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 18d.

growing in harmony with one's inner sense of meaning and purpose.<sup>60</sup> The Christian is uniquely aware of God through Christ, the Spirit, and the church.<sup>61</sup> C. Stephen Evans provides several essential practices from theologian and philosopher Soren Kierkegaard's view that encourage growing spiritual life (Bible intake, prayer, worship, and communion).<sup>62</sup>

Dr. John H. Coe emphasizes spiritual formation as an ongoing activity in the Holy Spirit in the human spirit matrix.<sup>63</sup> Paul affirms this in his description of the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), what is involved in walking and living by the Spirit (Gal 5:16; 25), having the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), putting to death the deeds of the body by the Spirit and being led by the Spirit (Rom 8:13-14), and being filled with all the fullness of the Spirit in love (Eph 3:17-19).<sup>64</sup>

*The Trinity.* The Trinity is the doctrine held by the church of the almighty God's eternal existence in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>65</sup> Paul describes God's plan to adopt His people as His children through Christ and the Spirit (Gal 4:4-7). The knowledge of God, signified by the Spirit, gives the ability to know God as the Father within the context of the saving actions of Christ and the Spirit.<sup>66</sup> God the Father sent His Son and Spirit into the world to save the world through the Son's redeeming work and the Spirit's transforming power (John

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<sup>60</sup> Dan Boling, "Spiritual Formation and the Work of Older Persons in the Church," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* (2009), 57.

<sup>61</sup> Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof, editors. *Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue: Moral and Spiritual Change in Christian Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 7.

<sup>62</sup> C. Stephen Evans, "Living Before God" A Kierkegaardian View of Spirituality," in *Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue: Moral and Spiritual Change in Christian Perspective* ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 97-102.

<sup>63</sup> John H. Coe, "Spiritual Theology, When Psychology and Theology in the Spirit Service Faith," in *Psychology and Spiritual Formation in Dialogue: Moral and Spiritual Change in Christian Perspective*, ed. Thomas M. Crisp, Steven L. Porter, and Gregg A. Ten Elshof (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Morgan and Peterson, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*, 37.

<sup>66</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 55-56.

3:17; 34). It is a Trinitarian-shaped plot, and because God is triune, it makes sense that His actions in history take place in a Trinitarian pattern corresponding to the order of the eternal relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>67</sup>

### **Limitations**

This DMIN action research project anticipates a few limitations that may impact the study. The project is designed to create a biblical educational curriculum to help the church become more effective in discipleship formation.

The anticipated time for the project is approximately six to eight weeks. As explained earlier in this chapter, the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically impacted the church's regular member attendance. Given that the church's current services are held via a virtual platform, the researcher anticipates the inability to guarantee the regular attendance of all participants for each class. There is also the possibility of technological delays, such as internet connectivity issues and sound, that may occasionally hinder full participation. In any event, the researcher anticipates these issues to delay results by a maximum of a few weeks.

### **Delimitations**

This DMIN action research project focuses on developing spiritual growth through a biblical theology curriculum on discipleship for middle-aged and older adult Christians at a local church in Queens County, NY. Therefore, the conclusions are specific to that age and regional demographic.

The researcher has chosen the target participants to be between the ages of forty-five and seventy-five. Another delimitation is that because the project seeks to compare the intervention

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<sup>67</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 56.

curriculum to the church's current discipleship practices, the invitation will be extended only to members of the church who meet the participation criteria. The researcher anticipates that the study will likely include women primarily because more than half of the older congregants and regular attendees are women. However, men who meet the criteria will be invited to participate. Other delimitations are that a few of the regular attendees are experiencing health challenges preventing regular attendance, and two others that show evidence of learning disabilities will not be included in this project. The research will be conducted and rely on the results and findings of this group within the church.

### **Thesis Statement**

Most people naturally develop a strong sense of contentment or complacency without proper instruction. Christians, unfortunately, are not exempt from this behavior. Education plays an essential role in teaching sound practices. The dominion mandate established at creation legitimizes the academic aspects of education for understanding and thus governing creation (Gen 1:26, 28).<sup>68</sup> The Old and New Testaments of the Bible demonstrate many examples of education, teaching, and mentorship that led to discipleship. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus's teaching methods on the kingdom of God introduced distinctive ethics through His use of stories, visual demonstration, and mentoring.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, the Bible reasonably constitutes biblical education for discipleship (Acts 1:8).<sup>70</sup> The education mission of the church is to be

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<sup>68</sup> Cox and Peck, "*Christian Education*," 247.

<sup>69</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 24.

<sup>70</sup> Cox and Peck, "*Christian Education*," 254.

accomplished in all geographical locations, all sociopolitical environments, developmental stages, and across the spectrum of abilities.<sup>71</sup>

A discipline of missiology in discipleship is vital for all Christian communities for the churches to bear witness to the gospel, especially during cultural change.<sup>72</sup> Missional discipleship is critical to a missional church's work to uplift and empower the marginalized and the underserved.<sup>73</sup> This type of discipleship aligns with the genuine discipleship that society expects of the church. Understanding the theological implications and practices of discipleship is essential to discerning biblical principles.<sup>74</sup> A theology of discipleship supports the church as missional as it recognizes and reflects its roots in the ministry of Jesus, working through the Holy Spirit and teaching believers how to continue His work in history.<sup>75</sup> It is the movement of God in which God in Christ comes to be with His people, which takes shape in the community and the practice of discipleship. Integrating discipleship theology into religious education would lead to understanding this significance and subsequent practice. Teaching theology can help produce the Christian faith that can motivate the intentional design of practice patterns within contexts to tell the same story through professed practices.<sup>76</sup> If a theology of discipleship curriculum effectively equips the believers at DCC, this will lead to missional discipleship within the community.

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<sup>71</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 24.

<sup>72</sup> Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, 15.

<sup>73</sup> Daniel Njuguna, "Transforming Discipleship." *Ecclesial futures*. 2, no. 1 (2022): 60.

<sup>74</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 27.

<sup>75</sup> Bevans, "Ecclesiology and Missiology," 127.

<sup>76</sup> Smith, *On Christian Teaching*, 54.



## CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

All believers are set on a mission at the time of submission to Christ, carried out through a life of discipleship.<sup>1</sup> It is the expectation that the Christian life represents change through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Disciples are imitators of Christ reflected in a life of discipleship built on holy habits drawn from Acts 2:42-47 and committed to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, prayers, worship, and making disciples.<sup>2</sup> Educational activities such as teaching, reading, and understanding God's Word are among the methods for an outcome of discipleship formation.<sup>3</sup> Education is one of many contributing factors that help believers mature in faith, discipleship, and submission to Christ as Lord.<sup>4</sup> It is further essential to understand that the Christian's holiness and life of discipleship cannot be done apart from the transforming power and work of the Holy Spirit. Discipleship is realized and depends on the magnetism and power of the person of Jesus, which is at the heart of the Christian's faith and not through self.<sup>5</sup> The benefits of salvation and redemption become effective in the lives of those who believe and are *sphragio* (sealed) with the promise of the Holy Spirit, which allows discipleship to occur in the Christian (Eph 1:13). This expression is further demonstrated through the discipling of others and by the power of the Spirit where intentional relationships are formed. Christians walk beside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge one another to love and grow toward maturity

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, *Here are Your Gods*, 117.

<sup>2</sup> James Butler, "The 'Long and Winding Road' of Faith: Learning about the Christian Life and Discipleship from Two Methodist Congregations," *Practical Theology* 13, no. 3 (2020): 278.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *Here are Your Gods*, 118.

<sup>5</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 12.

in Christ.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, understanding and practicing through teaching a theology of discipleship is a necessary component of the Christian life.

### Literature Review

The following is a review of literature that covers several application areas for discipleship as theology that can be incorporated into a discipleship education curriculum. The literature reveals a theology of discipleship with several reoccurring foundational themes, such as Trinitarian, communal, missional, and biblical teachings and practices. This review covers participatory and practical aspects of these dimensions in discipleship, the essential role of spiritual formation, and the challenges of contemporary culture to discipleship. This chapter also reviews literature that addresses the church's traditional and modern Christian education practices, including post-Christianity practices and views on discipleship.

### Theology as Discipleship

A complete knowledge of the theological nature of discipleship is necessary to identify with its significance in the life of a Christian. Theology as discipleship is a theme that permeates the literature review. Dr. Ben C. Blackwell and Dr. Randy Hatchett, Professors of Early Christianity at Houston Baptist University, explain how the meaning of theology is connected to its intended purpose.<sup>7</sup> The word derives from the Greek term for God (*theos*).<sup>8</sup> The theology of Thomas Aquinas further exemplifies its true purpose by placing God Himself as the center.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ben C. Blackwell and Randy Lynn Hatchett, *Engaging Theology: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1st Complete American ed. Literally translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, NY: Benziger Bros., 1947), Art. 1.1.7.

Theology connects the believer to understand God's nature and purpose for discipleship. Dr. Keith L. Johnson, Professor of Theology at Wheaton College, further emphasizes the connection between discipleship and theology. Theological learning is sought correctly within the context of discipleship.<sup>10</sup> Learning how to think and speak rightly about God is an act of faith and obedience that involves participation in the mind of Christ and partnership with Christ by the power of His Spirit.<sup>11</sup> The nature of theology deals with doctrine as Christianity's overall message or teaching.<sup>12</sup> Theology is often focused on doctrine employed by the early church and as a belief in practice that speaks to a holistic relationship between God and His creation.<sup>13</sup>

Discipleship as a theological theme has solid roots that begin in the Old Testament in Genesis and is developed throughout the Bible. An apparent concern for discipleship is deeply embedded in the Christian's DNA and helps set the church on its mission.<sup>14</sup> Discipleship has its inception since the beginning of creation. The dominion mandate expresses God's first expectation of Adam and Eve to produce others in His image, marking Christian discipleship's beginning (Gen 1:28b).<sup>15</sup> Man's disobedience led to sinful human nature affecting the world and subsequent culture, and intentional teaching became integral to discipleship. In *Here are Your Gods*, Old Testament Scholar and Dean at All Nation's Christian College, Christopher J. Wright, connects the Old Testament patterns to the New Testament. Christ's words in verse 18 echo Deuteronomy 4:39, where Moses instructs about their God while Christ announces His authority

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 26.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Blackwell and Randy Hatchett, *Engaging Theology*, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>14</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 2.

<sup>15</sup> Cox and Peck, "Christian Education," 247.

over all creation.<sup>16</sup> Jesus presents a charge as the Son of God and Messiah, with the supreme rule He unveiled before His resurrection.<sup>17</sup>

The command for discipleship is linked to the New Testament Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), which details discipleship activities. The Apostle Paul further prescribes a sound theology of discipleship in the New Testament. Brian Wintle, Principal of Union Biblical Seminary, and theologian Ken Gnanakan observe how Paul expresses God's eternal purpose for the church.<sup>18</sup> A renewed man resembles God's original plan and explains His glorious purpose for His people (Eph 4:24).<sup>19</sup>

### Dimensions in Discipleship

The thematic root of discipleship is reflected in the literature review as a theology of discipleship requires participation with God in three dimensions: Trinitarian, missional, and communal. The Cappadocian Fathers, Basil the Great, Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, sought an understanding of the Trinity and how the persons of the Godhead relate to each other by their distinctive properties.<sup>20</sup> The conclusion was that each person of the Godhead could only be understood through how they interact.<sup>21</sup> God invites humans to join this relationship and mission by participating in His life through prayer, service, and membership in a

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<sup>16</sup> Wright, *Here are Your Gods*, 117.

<sup>17</sup> Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*. Edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2020), 606.

<sup>18</sup> Ken Gnanakan and Brian Wintle, *Ephesians: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Carlisle, CA: Langham Publishing, 2020), 14.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Jordan, "All God's People Facing the Same Way: A Theology of Discipleship Shaped by Disciples: An Anglican Perspective," *Journal of Adult Theological Education*, (2015): 158.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

Christian fellowship.<sup>22</sup> The following section reviews recent literature that analyzes the Trinitarian, missional, and communal dimensions as foundational and integral to Christian discipleship.

### **Trinitarian**

Disciples' full participation and experience are with God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit through the Trinity. Human existence and Christian salvation are relational to the Triune God's nature.<sup>23</sup> God relates to mankind because God's nature is Triune; the believer's relationship with Him reflects the same.

Christian discipleship reflects a holistic nature that begins and ends with the religious community of the Triune God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> A renaissance of Trinitarian theology that has taken place since the middle of the twentieth century is a unifying doctrine central to Christian belief and practice.<sup>25</sup> This centrality is apparent for Christians, for God is not a "generic god up in the sky" but a specific, personal God who exists as the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Discipleship is, therefore, defined as participation in the life and mission of the Trinitarian God.<sup>27</sup> The people of God are part of God throughout His Triune nature. The church's purpose is revealed through its participation in the communion of the Trinity, a communion that "belongs to God and does not exist for itself. It is by its very nature

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<sup>22</sup> Jordan, "All God's People Facing the Same Way...", 158.

<sup>23</sup> Blackwell and Hatchett, *Engaging Theology*, 36.

<sup>24</sup> Gnanakan and Wintle, *Ephesians*, 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>26</sup> Blackwell and Hatchett, *Engaging Theology*, 15.

<sup>27</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 3.

missionary, called and sent to witness to its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and all creation in the kingdom.”<sup>28</sup>

Though many authors in this literature review acknowledge the Trinitarian aspect of discipleship, John Mark Hicks and Mark Powell, Deans, and Professors of Theology, link God’s Trinitarian nature as flowing directly from theology. Christian virtues such as love, humility, and generosity flow out of the nature and work of the Trinitarian God.<sup>29</sup> The implication for the Christian life is declared in 1 John 4:11: believers are to love as God loves.<sup>30</sup> Theologian Karl Barth taught the doctrines of the Trinity and Christology as essential to Christian speech about God.<sup>31</sup> God is the subject of theology, a person encountered through faith.<sup>32</sup> He explains the Trinitarian passages of the doctrine of reconciliation. God reveals Himself “here and there, before and after, above and below.”<sup>33</sup> The Christian’s perception of God is that love expressed, received, and shared through the Trinity describes the inner life of God throughout the eternal intra-Trinitarian fellowship.<sup>34</sup>

## **Missional**

The missional aspect of discipleship is one of the ways Christians display participation in the life of God. Discipleship requires walking together with Christ while imitating His life, an

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<sup>28</sup> Bevans, “Ecclesiology and Missiology,” 127.

<sup>29</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 18.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Blackwell and Hatchett. *Engaging Theology*, 33.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Wolf Krötke, John P. Burgess, and George Hunsinger, *Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Theologians for a Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 77.

<sup>34</sup> John R. Franke, Jonathan Leeman, Peter J. Leithart, Christopher J. H. Wright, and Jason S. Sexton, *Four Views on the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 110.

essential component of the Christian mission.<sup>35</sup> It is a participation in the life of God and sharing in His mission in which followers of Jesus Christ partake in this mission.<sup>36</sup> Wright describes how “mission” is how the Bible defines the purpose of the church.<sup>37</sup> He further expounds on how Peter combines the identity and mission of the church in thoroughly scriptural terms in 1 Peter 2:9-12 which draws on Exodus, Isaiah, and Hosea.<sup>38</sup> The combination of texts and passages reminded Christian believers of God’s purposes for participation in His mission.<sup>39</sup> Bible scholar Craig S. Keener also addresses the “echoes” of Old Testament passages regarding Israel, which include some texts that speak of a “people precious to God” (Deut 7:6; 14:2).<sup>40</sup> It suggests how God’s people are rendered as a nation (*ethnos*), people born of God, and implies God’s exceptional nature and expectation for His people.<sup>41</sup>

A crucial aspect of this participation in God’s mission is divine action over human action.<sup>42</sup> Without the foundation of a costly, grace-filled path of discipleship, the church becomes a church-shaped mission instead of a mission-shaped one.<sup>43</sup> All followers of Christ must obey this “self-replicating” instruction to make disciples upon submission to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Matt 28:18-20).<sup>44</sup> The Gospel of John further addresses this missional hermeneutic, which is studied as missional *theosis* of the transformative participation in the life

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<sup>35</sup> Jordan, “All God’s People...,” 156.

<sup>36</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 21d.

<sup>37</sup> Franke, Leeman, Leithart, Wright, and Sexton *Four Views*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Craig S. Keener, *1 Peter: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 34.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Jordan, “All God’s People,” 156.

<sup>44</sup> Wright, *Here are Your Gods*, 118.

of God through the incarnation of Jesus and the belief that He is the Christ and Son of God, resulting in a relationship (John 1:10-14).<sup>45</sup> Grounded in the dynamic Trinitarian life means the Christian witness and mission will look different in different places as God's Spirit enables the church with power and discernment to adapt its mission to address the local needs and concerns of the people.<sup>46</sup>

John R. Franke explains the soteriological aspect of Christianity as the notion that God is a loving missionary demonstrated in His engagement with the world. The church's missional nature is stated by locating the church's origin in the very life of the Trinity and acting out through the life of discipleship.<sup>47</sup> It is the gift of the gospel in God's work, the *missio Dei*, where the Christian mission takes the shape of discerning and joining that which God is already doing.<sup>48</sup>

## **Communal**

The third aspect of discipleship is that participation in discipleship is expressed through the community. Hicks, McKinzie, and Powell emphasize the necessity of a "communal discernment" informed by Scripture and God's Spirit for the spiritual well-being of the church.<sup>49</sup> The church's mission can only be lived out through community through the baptism of faith in Jesus and the company of God's people.<sup>50</sup> It is a "fundamental theological sensibility" and is essential that one cannot be a Christian without living the obedient life of discipleship in a visible

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher W. Skinner, Nijay K. Gupta, Andy Johnson, and Drew J. Strait, eds. *Cruciform Scripture: Cross, Participation, and Mission* (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2021): 139.

<sup>46</sup> Franke, Leeman, Leithart, Wright, and Sexton *Four Views*, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Bevans, "Ecclesiology and Missiology," 129.

<sup>49</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 18e.

<sup>50</sup> Jordan, "All God's People," 155.



community of faith.<sup>51</sup> The communal discourse is echoed where Jesus' words about His church are in focus in His promise to be “in the midst” (ἐν μέσῳ) of His people.<sup>52</sup> Further, the church as the covenant community is the instrument of God's mission (Matt 9:37–38; John 13:20; 15:16; 17:18; Eph 3:8–10).<sup>53</sup>

Bruce C. Birch, Dean and Professor of Biblical Theology at Wesley Theological Seminary, describes the community as a key to understanding the relationship between Scripture and ethics.<sup>54</sup> He argues that humans are not only participants in communities but moral agents.<sup>55</sup> It is the human community that is therefore responsible for presenting canonical witness of Scripture through the covenant with God the Creator, also related in commitment to wholeness (*shalom*) with the land, the non-human inhabitants on Earth, and the cosmos (Gen 1-2; Ps 8, 106).<sup>56</sup> The church's mission encompasses the character of its internal communal life and external activities in the world.<sup>57</sup> Franke refers to the “comprehensive vision” of the church, which is captured in Michael J. Gorman's assertion that the Apostle Paul calls for the communities of God to not “merely believe the gospels but to become the gospel.”<sup>58</sup> The Christian “becomes the gospel” through communal activities and, in doing so, participates in

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<sup>51</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 3.

<sup>52</sup> John K. Goodrich, Mark L. Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ the New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today* Edited by John K. Goodrich, and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2019), 10.

<sup>53</sup> Phillipus J. Buys, “The Roots of Missio Dei in the Reformation, and its Implications for Theological Education,” *In Die Skriflig: Tydskrif Van Die Gereformeerde Teologiese Vereniging* 54, no. 2 (2020): 6 of 9.

<sup>54</sup> Birch, Lapsley, Moe-Lobeda, and Rasmussen, *Bible, and Ethics in the Christian Life*, 15.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 13–14.

<sup>57</sup> Franke, Leeman, Leithart, Wright, and Sexton *Four Views*, 118.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, taken from Michael J. Gorman, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2015), 2.

God's very life and mission.<sup>59</sup> As part of the community of God, Christians have an ethical responsibility to change the world around them. A community's faithfulness to God and others is frequently described as a "way of life."<sup>60</sup> The followers of Jesus were called "people of the Way" before they were called Christians (Acts 9:2), just as Jesus presented Himself as "the Way" (John 14:6).<sup>61</sup>

### Spiritual Formation and Discipleship

Another theme in literature that connects the dimensions of discipleship is the emphasis on spiritual formation. Spiritual discipline is the foundation of spiritual maturity to becoming like Christ, which is necessary for discipleship. Because the identity of God in three persons is so essential to mankind's relationship with Him, the spiritual formation implications are as wide and deep as God Himself.<sup>62</sup>

Johnson explores the historical purpose of theological training that is beneficial to understanding the contextuality of traditional spiritual formation as it relates to the academy and the church.<sup>63</sup> Gordon Oliver considers how all theology is contextual, even the most theoretical and abstract genres.<sup>64</sup> The tradition was to gain knowledge and skills of a Christlike life to serve the church.<sup>65</sup> Spiritual formation and active participation in the life and ministry of the church

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<sup>59</sup> Franke, Leeman, Leithart, Wright, and Sexton *Four Views*, 118.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Blackwell and Hatchett, *Engaging Theology*, 75.

<sup>63</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 27.

<sup>64</sup> Gordon Oliver, "Speaking Christian: A Retrospective Journey in Practical Theology," *Practical Theology* 14, no. 5 (2021): 454.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

were central because they were essential to the pursuit of the knowledge of God.<sup>66</sup> He compares the “physical” mind and body relating to one another to the “theological,” with the “spiritual” mind resulting in bodily obedience following the example of Christ.<sup>67</sup> Dr. Don J. Payne, Academic Dean at Denver Seminary, offers a more distinct approach to spiritual growth through a “clarified doctrine of sanctification” that is “accomplished” and functions in the believer’s maturation.<sup>68</sup> Christian apologetics becomes a natural outcome of discipleship, faith, and spiritual growth.<sup>69</sup> Christian ethics are expressed outwardly in the life of the Christian. Through the Bible, believers are connected to God and community and are revealed outwardly by living a moral life.<sup>70</sup>

Dr. Greg Ogden, Director at Fuller Theological Seminary, details the spiritual disciplines necessary for spiritual maturity for discipleship. God uses the practice of the “spiritual disciplines” in the Christian’s life to keep believers rooted in Christ.<sup>71</sup> The gospel can only shape every aspect of the believer’s life through these disciplines. Dr. Peter Morden gives a sober admission of how holistic life discipleship cannot only discuss prayer, witness, and sacred things.<sup>72</sup> “Unless believers seek to live as whole-life, 24/7, 360-degree followers of Jesus, there will not be a transformative pattern of Christian discipleship.”<sup>73</sup> Dr. Donald C. Whitney further

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<sup>66</sup> Oliver, “Speaking Christian,” 31.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>68</sup> Don J. Payne, *Already Sanctified: A Theology of the Christian Life in Light of God’s Completed Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic 2020), 12.

<sup>69</sup> McGrath, *Narrative Apologetics*, 14.

<sup>70</sup> Birch, Lapsley, Moe-Lobeda, and Rasmussen, *Bible, and Ethics in the Christian Life*, 15.

<sup>71</sup> Greg Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 1.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Morden, *The Message of Discipleship: Authentic Followers of Jesus in Today’s World*, (London, UK, 2018) in Erling Lundeby, “The Message of Discipleship: Authentic Followers of Jesus in Today’s World” *European Journal of Theology* 28, no. 2 (2020): 201.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

explains disciplined spirituality as implied by Jesus, which lies at the heart of discipleship (Matt 11:29; Luke 9:23).<sup>74</sup> This DMIN research action project acknowledges the importance of spiritual maturity in discipleship that can only occur through the spiritual disciplines' daily practices.

### Contemporary Discipleship, Church, and Culture

The last several decades have demonstrated a noticeable decline in church membership and attendance. "It is not hard to argue that the church in the United States is currently facing the most difficult and perplexing changes in its history."<sup>75</sup> The second half of the twentieth century showed cultural trends of institutional disengagement began affecting evangelical churches, and the former growth has declined.<sup>76</sup> Traditionally, the early theologians connected the church's theology to the practical lives of believers, which contributed to the culture to help the church pursue its mission in the world.<sup>77</sup> Modernism introduced secularism with changes in society and culture, influencing the church's interpretation and perception of discipleship. As cultural beings, Westerners become secularized by the contexts in which they grew up and lived.<sup>78</sup> Simultaneously, diverse, and potentially conflicting concerns caused a *modus vivendi* that affected prioritizing ultimate concerns.<sup>79</sup> Decades of research verify that the current approaches

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<sup>74</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, 14.

<sup>76</sup> Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas, *Contextual Theology: Skills and Practices of Liberating Faith* Edited by Sigurd Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas (London, UK: Routledge, 2021), 225.

<sup>77</sup> Johnson, *Theology as Discipleship*, 27.

<sup>78</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Sandra Bohlinger, Ulrika Haake, Christian Helms Jørgensen, Hanna Toiviainen, and Andreas Wallo, *Working and Learning in Times of Uncertainty Challenges to Adult, Professional and Vocational Education*. Edited by Sandra Bohlinger, Ulrika Haake, Christian Helms Jørgensen, Hanna Toiviainen, and Andreas Wallo (Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publisher, 2015), 34.

need to cultivate lifelong followers of Jesus.<sup>80</sup> Christian formation is a primary challenge to the church. Recent sociological research on the changing needs of the church in post-Christian culture suggests replacing it with a focus on equipping saints for ministry.<sup>81</sup> The church's thinking is experiencing a shift from "program to process" and from a "membership culture to a discipleship culture."<sup>82</sup> The church must witness the gospel during cultural changes while remaining contextual, missional, and theologically alert.<sup>83</sup> Such changes are well-informed and reflected in this DMIN action project as relevant and practical discipleship.

### Discipleship and Christian Education

Teaching and instructions on discipleship are themes demonstrated in the Bible. "Academic focus of Christian education should be in service to discipleship, not vice versa."<sup>84</sup> The Scripture supports an inherent connection between discipleship and academics (Matt 15:32-38, 16:9-10; Mark 3:25; John 6:48; 10:26).<sup>85</sup> It is reasonable to infer these biblical accounts as academic and essential to discipleship formation.<sup>86</sup>

Recent studies in religious literature indicate that Christians in the United States need to improve in discipleship fidelity.<sup>87</sup> There is an established need for professional development in church schools to maintain the Christian *ethos* and identity anchored in the church's universal

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<sup>80</sup> Terri Martinson Elton, *Journeying in the Wilderness: Forming Faith in the 21st Century*, Vol.7 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2020), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Harmon, "From Glory to God," 2.

<sup>82</sup> Yau Man Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship: Stories of Apprenticeship to Jesus at an Urban Anglican (Episcopal) Church," *Christian Education Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 192.

<sup>83</sup> Van Gelder, *Participating in God's Mission*, 15.

<sup>84</sup> Cox and Peck, "Christian Education," 243.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 245–246.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

mission.<sup>88</sup> Many Christians find sharing the gospel an “intimidating effort,” with two-thirds of the U.S. Christians surveyed by the Pew Research Center believing that religious pluralism (including non-Christian religions) can lead to eternal life.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, general biblical literacy among Christians is low.<sup>90</sup> While few Christians “intentionally” live like Jesus, most contemporary Christians do not show evidence that understanding and conformity with Christ’s teachings is necessary or essential.<sup>91</sup>

### Adult Discipleship Education

A literature review of recent studies reveals a gap in studies and models that address middle-aged and older adult Christian programs and active discipleship. Much contemporary literature concentrates on developing the younger “future generation” or “church leadership.” While there are several discipleship programs in colleges, universities, seminaries, and institutes, it is rare that Christian education for adults “organically incorporates discipleship within academic and professional programs much less makes discipleship the guiding conceptual framework.”<sup>92</sup> Selected studies in older adult ministry on the perception of theological education were performed in 1993 and determined to be considered necessary, neglected, and needed enhancement.<sup>93</sup> The same study was done in 2018 and resulted in the same finding: theological

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<sup>88</sup> Ros Stuart-Buttle and John Shortt, *Christian Faith, Formation and Education* (Cham, CH: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 135.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> Stuart-Battle and Shortt, *Christian Faith*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 246.

<sup>93</sup> Ronnie Johnson, “Revisiting Theological Education for Older-Adult Ministry 1993–2018,” *Christian Education Journal* 17, no. 2 (2020): 361.

education for older adult ministry was still considered necessary yet neglected and needed enhancement.<sup>94</sup>

Recently, the U.S. Census Bureau's Population Division predicted that if population trends in America continue, by 2035, there will be more adults aged 65 and older than children under 18 for the first time in history.<sup>95</sup> It demonstrates the urgent need for society to address older adults' needs. Church leaders and religious educators should not overlook the continuing need for all areas of society to address the needs and contributions of older adults.<sup>96</sup> Further, this is necessary as recent studies show the importance of religion, spiritual practices, and belief in general to help older adults overcome life challenges.<sup>97</sup>

There is no precedent literature of actual research studies on theological education for older adult ministry.<sup>98</sup> Further research and studies in older-adult ministries need to be conducted within or across denominations, associations of churches, individual churches, and senior groups that would help determine the best way to meet the religious needs of this community.<sup>99</sup> This DMIN research project seeks to address this gap by implementing a theological discipleship curriculum specific to this forgotten of long-time Christian church congregants.

### Post-Christian Discipleship

Although much of the literature in this review advocates for the Triune, missional, and communal holistic nature of the biblical mandate of discipleship, some scholars have noted some

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<sup>94</sup> Johnson, "Revisiting Theological Education for Older-Adult Ministry 1993–2018," 361.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Yuksel Can Oz, Songul Duran, and Kubra Dogan. "The Meaning and Role of Spirituality for Older Adults: A Qualitative Study," *Journal of Religion and Health* 61, no. 2 (2022): 1491.

<sup>98</sup> Johnson, "Revisiting Theological Education," 362.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

modern-day shifts that have challenged traditional perceptions and practices. Recent studies on the current missiological state of evangelical churches indicate the shift to a “post-Christendom” discipleship movement where the church has grappled with how to effectively disciple to the mandate in the Gospel of Matthew.<sup>100</sup> This post-Christendom ideology advocates that while Christianity remains the most significant religious tradition, it is no longer considered a major defining center for beliefs, where religious pluralism takes on a greater significance.<sup>101</sup> Religious pluralism uses an “interfaith or multifaith” apologetics that rejects the missional and communal aspects of discipleship, therefore calling for a Christian apologetic response to turn back to “tradition” and the Scriptural mandate for an active missionally focused discipleship to be implemented in this DMIN action research project.<sup>102</sup>

### Modern-Day Christian Church Discipleship

Although there are no prominent contrasting views against the need for discipleship instruction, the literature reveals how some modern churches have implemented discipleship using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Contemporary movements such as the charismatic Pentecostal and attractional church are known for discipleship practices built primarily through relationships, which take greater precedence over the theological education and training elements of discipleship.

Bruno Reinhardt analyzes the pedagogical system of the charismatic Pentecostal church, where converts are drawn to discipleship through church planting missions for the spiritual

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<sup>100</sup> Desmond Henry and Max F. Swart, “Beyond Post-Christendom Discipleship of the Evangelical Church in the United Kingdom: A Study of the Gospel of Matthew in the Transformational and Holistic Perspective,” *Verbum Et Ecclesia*, 42(1) (2021): 2 of 10.

<sup>101</sup> John W. Morehead, “An Evangelical Journey Down the Rabbit Hole of Pluralism,” *Cultural Encounters* 15, no. 2 (2020): 73.

<sup>102</sup> Morehead, “An Evangelical Journey,” 74.



maturity of Lighthouse Chapel International (LCI), a local Ghanaian Pentecostal-charismatic organization with a transnational reach.<sup>103</sup> LCI's discipleship structures are based upon "highly rationalized organizational principles" that use evangelistic and apostolic methods in its mission to raise lay and full-time leaders with a vital concern for quantitative growth.<sup>104</sup> Discipleship is determined through two basic stances of Pentecostal-charismatic ethics and politics: evangelistic (quantitative) and apostolic (qualitative) for spiritual maturity through participation.<sup>105</sup> The evangelistic stance includes outreach through crusades and Sunday morning services oriented primarily towards visitors, focusing on "church attendance growth."<sup>106</sup> At the same time, the apostolic is qualitatively oriented towards spiritual maturity through weekday teaching services, discipleship courses, prayer, counseling, and Bible reading groups. LCI's methodology emphasizes "church growth through planting" as a tool for discipleship and encouraging spiritual growth.<sup>107</sup> Services and fellowship are beneficial tools for drawing people; however, more than solid quantitative practices are needed to indicate success. A healthy balance between quantitative and qualitative methods should be considered for an effective discipleship outcome. A similarity of LCI's model to this DMIN action project is the utilization of qualitative methods through biblical teaching and practices of spiritual disciplines integrated into the church's religious curriculum.

Dr. Jared C. Wilson challenges church practices of the modern-day attractive church model approach to discipleship and ministry, which derives from the primary purpose of making

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<sup>103</sup> Bruno Reinhardt, "Discipline (and Lenience) Beyond the Self: Discipleship in a Pentecostal-Charismatic Organization," *Social Analysis* 62, no. 3 (2018): 42.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

Christianity appealing, like the evangelistic stance of LCI for quantitative growth. It seeks to show congregants a more practical way of following Jesus by making the church experience appealing and comfortable.<sup>108</sup> Dr. Robert E. Coleman further explains how attractional churches are driven by the need to create influential churches through relational discipleship that focuses mainly on entertainment methodology.<sup>109</sup> It assumes that discipleship will happen through church attendance, resulting in the churches that have sought to retain people who have attended church for years in a more traditional setting by updating the way songs are sung and lessons are taught.<sup>110</sup> This DMIN action project differs from the attractional model as the implementation will strongly emphasize qualitative discipleship using biblical teaching and practices.

Though charismatic and attractive church models seem to have succeeded in drawing people to church, these practices alone do not provide biblical foundations in discipleship development. It is problematic to biblical discipleship due to the skipping of the theological foundation by catering to what is appealing instead of teaching and equipping discipleship based on biblical principles for spiritual growth. This DMIN action research project intends to implement a theology of discipleship for the church that incorporates biblical teachings and practices for the outcome of mature discipleship.

### Contemporary Contextual Discipleship

A review of precedent literature on contemporary discipling indicates the importance of considering the context for effective discipleship models. In *Discipleship Essentials*, Dr. Greg

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<sup>108</sup> Jared C. Wilson, *The Prodigal Church: A Gentile Manifesto against the Status Quo* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 25.

<sup>109</sup> Putman, Jim, Bobby Harrington, and Robert E. Coleman, *DiscipleShift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 23.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

Ogden presents a contemporary model that addresses various associations of discipleship methods such as one-on-one, student mentor, and small group educational settings.<sup>111</sup>

*Discipleship Essentials* is a model specifically designed to implement small reproducible discipleship groups.<sup>112</sup> It consists of twenty-five sessions focusing on deepening knowledge of essential Christian teaching to strengthen the participant's faith while developing trusting and lasting relationships.<sup>113</sup> The tool combines three elements; "The Unchanging Truth of God's Word," "Transparent Relationships," and "Life-Changing Accountability," all designed to create a climate for the Holy Spirit to accelerate growth.<sup>114</sup>

"The Unchanging Truth of God's Word" consists of lessons based on a principle or "core truth" in Scripture that forms a coherent story of the Christian life and message.<sup>115</sup> Developing "Transparent Relationships" during instruction is a crucial aspect of the model as it allows participants to understand God's Word and the message of discipleship in the context of relationships, imitating Jesus' relationship with His early disciples. These relationships facilitate a "biblical axiom" for the Holy Spirit to move as participants open to others and are based on the idea that actual spiritual growth can only occur in a community.<sup>116</sup> Further, the context of "Life-Changing Accountability" takes discipleship to another level, giving participants authority to work together through mutual covenant accountability.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, xiii.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

Ogden's model is beneficial as it is flexible and can be customized to accommodate all age groups and levels of spiritual maturity. There are similarities in this model's methodology to this DMIN action research project as it utilizes foundational or "core truth-based" lessons grounded in biblical principles. As it focuses on context and individual relationships, the model can be helpful to churches and discipleship programs through one-on-one individual discipling or leading a group of three or discipleship groups of up to ten. The emphasis on mentorship is a practical aspect not used in this DMIN project due to the unavailability of mature mentors. The contextuality of this model is like this DMIN project, as it is explicitly designed to be implemented in a small group of no more than twelve participants. One limitation of this model is that it is intended to be practiced in individual and small units, so it may not benefit larger church congregations.

Ogden explains how the model's three elements work together to create a climate for accelerated growth."<sup>118</sup> It is unclear what "accelerated growth" means in this context, especially since discipleship training should consider that spiritual growth varies by individual as all do not learn or comprehend at the same rate and level. This DMIN action research project's methodology includes teaching not for "accelerated growth" but as an intentional and ongoing part of the discipleship journey. Further, recent studies in secular education reveal that modeling is still the most significant learning dynamic through internalization, creating atmospheres affecting values, attitudes, and behavior.<sup>119</sup> The methodology includes lessons that focus on individual biblically-based discipleship lessons, utilizing the models of Christ and emphasizing spiritual growth through practicing the spiritual disciplines. This DMIN action research project

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<sup>118</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, xi.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv.

aims to integrate these principles to demonstrate the importance of context, audience, culture, and environment when implementing a discipleship program for spiritual growth. It also reveals the need to apply the strengths of spiritual teaching to help develop and encourage relationship aspects in a theology of discipleship curriculum that extends to the church's middle-aged and older adult congregants.

The literature in this review illustrates a strong correlation between the Trinity, mission, and the church community in the theology of discipleship. The current state of the church calls for a turn back to the scriptural mandate of teaching and the practice of discipleship. The practice of theology requires further emphasis in Christian education and to cause practical life through relationships for believers to become disciples who make disciples. It informs that there is still a need for the continued restoration of theology in discipleship practices through spiritual formation, which leads to discipleship as participating in the life and mission of the Triune God.

### **Theological Foundations**

The Bible has an inherent connection between discipleship theology and Christian education. The dominion mandate marks the beginning of God's plan for a people who are made in His image to subdue the Earth (Gen 2:8b). The word for Christian in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, 26;28; 1 Pet 4:16) means a follower of Christ, which suggest that believers are to imitate the nature of Christ whom Himself demonstrated the nature of God (John 10:30; 4:9).<sup>120</sup> From this perspective, a theological approach to discipleship in Christian education can be inferred from Jesus' command to His disciples in Matthew 28:18-20. Several biblical orientations in both the Old and the New Testament support the nature and value of theology in discipleship as a

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<sup>120</sup> Cox and Peck, "Christian Education," 248.

priority and are foundational to Christian education.<sup>121</sup> The biblical definition and implication of discipleship in the Old and New Testament is to be an imitator and follower of Christ. Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” and, therefore, was and is the only one uniquely qualified to restore humanity to God (Col 1:15).<sup>122</sup> He lived, rose, and died in place of His creation so that God’s image and relationship can be restored and renewed. The process occurs through an initial, continual, and final gaze at Christ in discipleship.<sup>123</sup> The sanctification in the life of discipleship is the process of believers becoming more like Christ daily.

### Old Testament Theology of Discipleship

While the word disciple is not found in the Old Testament, the concept permeates the canon. As a unique creation of God, human beings were produced in His image and likeness, which involves both a natural and moral likeness (Gen 1:26).<sup>124</sup> By nature, humankind was like God in that he was a personal being possessing self-consciousness, self-determination, and knowledge or intellect.<sup>125</sup> God's command to make human beings in His likeness indicated His desire for man to be like Him, an imitator and a disciple. His first expectation of Adam and Eve was to produce others and thus be in His image (Gen 1:28b), which marked the beginning of Christian discipleship.<sup>126</sup> Subsequently, intentional academic equipping to teach a man how to

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<sup>121</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 248.

<sup>122</sup> Jonathan K. Dodson, and Matt Chandler, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship Revised and Expanded*, 2nd Edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 43.

<sup>123</sup> Dodson and Chandler, *Gospel-Centered*, 43.

<sup>124</sup> Howard F. Vos, *Genesis: Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2019), 19.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 248.

live in the image of God became integral to discipleship because of the sin-contamination of human nature and environmental orderliness.<sup>127</sup>

### **Theological Discourse of Covenant and Discipleship**

The discipleship mandate within the creation story, which was radically impacted by sin resulting in man's expulsion from the Garden, never rescinded humanity's primary function and mission: responsibility and godly stewardship of and creation care.<sup>128</sup> The mandate legitimizes the biblical understanding of the disciples' missional responsibility in the world.

The theological mandate progresses throughout the Old Testament through God's covenant with several individuals. God's commandments to Noah and his sons after the flood are reminiscent of those given to Adam, reaffirming man's dominion over creation (Gen 9:1).<sup>129</sup> Scholars note that while the tone and atmosphere are different, a new progeny was necessary to depopulate Earth with the expectation to be taught to have a fear of God.<sup>130</sup> The progression of the kingdom of God advances the nature of discipleship in God's relationship with Abraham through the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3).<sup>131</sup> His command to Adam and Noah, "Be fruitful and multiply," is echoed again in His promise to Abraham and his descendants, "I will multiply and make you fruitful," where God promises to fulfill among a particular people to display His character and rule.<sup>132</sup> These blessings unfold and progress through the Mosaic covenant and Davidic covenant. The relationship and mandate of discipleship are furthered as God revealed

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<sup>127</sup> Cox and Peck, "Christian Education," 245.

<sup>128</sup> Franke, Leeman, Leithart, Wright, and Sexton, *Four Views*, 66.

<sup>129</sup> Vos, *Genesis*, 44.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

the Law to Moses so His creation may know how to live as disciples and teach what is required of His people.<sup>133</sup> The continuity of a discipleship mandate is further shown in 2 Chronicles 1:12, where the “tent of meeting” was the place at which God had spoken to Moses and the people (Exod 29:42-43), the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham, repeated with Jacob (Israel) (Gen 13:16; 28:14; 22:17;26: and 1 Chr 27:23).<sup>134</sup> This is stated by Solomon in “this people of yours” and is reinforced by God’s words, “my people over whom I have made you king,” which affirmed the people and king as together for God’s purposes (2 Chr 1:10-11, ESV).<sup>135</sup> Scholars note how the book of Kings includes the faithfulness of David and the injunction for Solomon to “walk in my ways” (1 Kgs 3:6, 14), an implication of the mandate of discipleship as imitators and followers of Yahweh.<sup>136</sup>

### **Old Testament Theological Discourse of Holiness and Discipleship**

The nature of theology in equipping for discipleship is reasonable to be further perceived in the mandate when God expresses His expectation of His people to “be holy.”<sup>137</sup> Cox and Peck define the meaning of holy in both the Old and New Testaments; to “be holy” meant to be set apart, unique, and distinct from the non-believers’ lifestyle, which denotes imitating and serving God.<sup>138</sup> In the Old Testament, God was instructing a holiness quality of a disciple (follower, imitator), a people who would be like Him to represent Him on Earth. “Speak to the entire

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<sup>133</sup> Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jay Sklar, John L. Mackay, Gary Millar, and John Olley *ESV Expository Commentary: Vol. III. 1 Samuel - 2 Chronicles* Edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 1536.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 254.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.



assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy’” (Lev 19:2, New International Version). For the Christian, holiness is guaranteed by the grace of God through the atoning and substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. It is a matter of walking with God through discipleship that considers conduct.<sup>139</sup> The echoes of discipleship can be heard in the covenant at Sinai, which were the grounds and instruction of holy and honest living for His people to be like Him.<sup>140</sup> God declared Israel’s holiness before He gave them the covenant or any of the laws.<sup>141</sup> Holiness was meant to affect every area of Israelite life.<sup>142</sup>

### New Testament Theology of Discipleship

The concept of discipleship across the New Testament indicates the centrality of discipleship to the Christian life. It contains a theological discourse of discipleship that is of great significance to the overall message of the New Testament, the process of being called by and conformed to Jesus Christ.<sup>143</sup> Jesus commissions the engagement process through discipleship to His church (Matt 28:18-20).<sup>144</sup> The word *μαθητεύσατε* (disciple) appears more than 260 times in the New Testament, and even where the term is absent, the concept is present.<sup>145</sup> Dallas Willard expresses how the church cannot afford to lose or misunderstand the content of a term so

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<sup>139</sup> David E. Garland, Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Tremper Longman III, *Genesis - Leviticus*. Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 886.

<sup>140</sup> K. A., Mathews, and R. Kent Hughes, *Leviticus Holy God, Holy People*, ESV edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 145.

<sup>141</sup> Garland, Kaiser, and Longman, “Genesis-Leviticus,” 886.

<sup>142</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 254.

<sup>143</sup> Goodrich, and Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ*, 2.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

central to the message of the church.<sup>146</sup> If the understanding and language of discipleship are forfeited to other terms, the church will lose its focus on how believers relate to God.<sup>147</sup>

### **Christological Discourse of Discipleship in Matthew**

Bible scholars note how the Gospel of Matthew contains many teaching expectations for discipleship further enhanced by their covenantal relationships.<sup>148</sup> It is further pointed out that Matthew has the most considerable portion of Jesus' teaching among the canonical Gospels, all suitable for discipleship.<sup>149</sup> Matthew 1:23 affirms that Jesus is "Emmanuel" looking back to God's presence with Israel, which is echoed in Matthew 18:20, where Jesus promises to be in the *ἐν μέσῳ* (midst) of His people. Jesus with mankind, relational, reminds mankind of the person of Jesus at the center of the life of discipleship.<sup>150</sup>

The Gospel of Matthew communicates the inauguration of the kingdom of God in Jesus Christ, the Messiah.<sup>151</sup> The good news of the kingdom of God is the gospel, which is the message of forgiveness of sin through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, which further establishes the basis of healing by removing spiritual and physical sin (Matt 8:17; Isa 53:5-6).<sup>152</sup> In Matthew, a Christological discourse is filled with discipleship implications that reflect on Jesus, also characterized as Torah embodiment and Isaiah's servant of Yahweh (Matt 11:2, 19, 28-30).<sup>153</sup> The missional theme of discipleship in Matthew's Christology points

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<sup>146</sup> Goodrich and Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ*, 2.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>149</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 35.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> Goodrich and Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ*, 9.

<sup>152</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 186.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

towards Christ's view of discipleship, which is shaped towards faith and obedience and envisioned as a mark of faithful followers of Jesus and His teaching.<sup>154</sup> The mission of the Great Commission permeates all of Matthew, as Jesus calls disciples to join Him and “fish for people” (4:19) and to pattern ministry from His mission to Israel (10:1-18).<sup>155</sup> The missional “catching fish” involves making disciples to grow the kingdom of God through the calling to repentance and faith in Jesus' atoning work.<sup>156</sup> Jesus further extends the Old Testament command to become like God and make other disciples, which indicates how the church is to be engaged in the discipleship process.<sup>157</sup> The commission begins with the use of the imperative participle *πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε* (go and make disciples).<sup>158</sup> Jesus never preaches to His close disciples; He teaches them.<sup>159</sup> Scholars note the emphasis on the command “make disciples” as amplified by three participle phrases that tell the disciples how to fulfill their tasks by “going, baptizing, and teaching.”<sup>160</sup> The church is further instructed to “teach them to observe and obey all that I have commanded,” where the term “all” translates as *panta hosa*, a doubled and intensified term meaning “every last thing” that He taught them.<sup>161</sup> To make disciples is to make

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<sup>154</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 186.

<sup>155</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew* (Chicago, IL: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2018), 676.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>158</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

<sup>159</sup> Roedolf Botha, “The Transformative Power Embedded in Δεῦτε Ὁπίσω Μου and Ἀκολουθεῖ Μοι in Matthew as Gospel Embodiment in Contemporary Ecclesial Discipleship,” *Hervormde teologiese studies*, 77, no. 4 (2021), 2 of 8.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

converts and lead them to maturity.<sup>162</sup> It is logical to reason that Jesus' intent for His followers was to make disciples by going into the world and not waiting for the world to come to them.<sup>163</sup>

### **New Testament Theological Discourse of Holiness**

The connotation of holiness in the theology of discipleship progresses from the Old Testament into the New Testament. It is emphasized in Peter's instruction to his readers to follow the Leviticus command, teaching them to come out of the former ignorance, but that "they must be holy because God is holy" (1 Pet 1:14-16; Lev 11:44, 45).<sup>164</sup> Ogden explains the root word holy as related to a term that means divide; therefore, holy comes to mean something unique, separated from the normal.<sup>165</sup> Peter understood God's discipleship mandate as undertaking the commission to His covenant people at Sinai: "You shall be to me... a holy nation" (Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9, ESV).<sup>166</sup> He reminds believers of a new identity as a community founded on Christ, which functions in the discipleship of resident aliens in the world (1 Pet 2:11-3:12).<sup>167</sup> "God's holy people" in Ephesians 1:1, which scholars derive contextually from the Greek word *ἁγίοις* meaning "saints" and refers to those who are marked as belonging to God.<sup>168</sup>

### **A Pauline Theology of Discipleship**

The Apostle Paul was a missionary who wrote letters to the churches to encourage and educate the new converts of Christ in their faith. His letters and teachings reveal his

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<sup>162</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Mathews and Hughes, *Leviticus Holy God*, 146.

<sup>165</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 45.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Keener, *1 Peter*, 23597a.

<sup>168</sup> Gnanakan and Wintle, *Ephesians*, 7.

understanding of the missional nature of being commissioned by God to extend the saving message of the gospel to all nations, thus participating in fulfilling the covenant promise of God given to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through Israel.<sup>169</sup>

The Apostle Paul expounds on the nature of discipleship as a “co-participatory” existence, mutual dwelling with the life of the Triune God through sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection (Gal. 2:20).<sup>170</sup> Bible scholars note this theological aspect as the apostle further explains Jesus’ language of mutual dwelling that describes not only the relationship between the Father and the Son but also the Son and His disciples in John 14:20.<sup>171</sup> To remain walking in Christ becomes an intimate discipleship relationship with God through Christ.<sup>172</sup>

Paul’s theology also establishes a theme of the centrality of discipleship in various dimensions: God in Christ, where salvation history progresses throughout the Bible. Bible scholars reference the diversity in the expression of Paul’s use in Ephesians 1:3-14 being “in Christ” as a repetitive formula used by the apostle as the mystical doctrine of being in Christ or participation in Christ as the nerve center of Pauline theology.<sup>173</sup> The apostle teaches three spiritual blessings in Christ available to those who believe: redemption, adoption, and sealing with the Spirit (Eph 1;7, 11, 13).<sup>174</sup> It begins with redemption made available to the believer through Christ’s substitutionary atoning death, the forgiveness of sin, and the necessary first step

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<sup>169</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ a Pauline Theology* Second edition (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 27.

<sup>170</sup> Goodrich, and Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ*, 67.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory*, taken from Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York, NY: Henry Holt, 1931), 219-26; and E.P. Sanders, *Paul, and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA; Fortress, 1977), 162.

<sup>174</sup> Richard J. Erickson, *Commentary on Ephesians from the Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 9.

towards re-creating a truly holy family. Paul further sums up the purpose in verse 10, “to bring unity in Christ through reconciliation,” which shapes the holistic mission of the church where God’s work is lived out on Earth through discipleship.<sup>175</sup>

### Theoretical Foundations

Contemporary research on discipleship indicates that many Christian churches worldwide face a severe problem that calls for a season of intentional discipleship-making.<sup>176</sup> Over the past several decades, the Western church experienced alarming symptoms of “discipleship disease,” which include people leaving the church, students dropping out of church after high school, attendance dropping, and perhaps the most important, a lack of seriousness among the church about what it means to be a follower of Christ.<sup>177</sup> Discipleship and evangelism have been and continue to be deficient in the church. From the point of view of credibility and ethics, Western Christian theology needs to be thoroughly renewed.<sup>178</sup> Recent reporting on the state of Christianity shows a growing consensus within the worldwide church that discipleship is one of the most critical issues of our times.<sup>179</sup> The so-called culture war of post-modernism continues to impact central areas of the Christian life, practice, and Christian identity and purpose.<sup>180</sup> Some scholars have noted how it has led to a decline of Christianity as a missionary religion eager to

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<sup>175</sup> Gnanakan and Wintle, *Ephesians*, 75.

<sup>176</sup> Siew, “A Case Study in Adult Discipleship,” 189.

<sup>177</sup> English, *Deep Discipleship How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus*,” ix.

<sup>178</sup> Bergmann and Mika Vähäkangas, “Contextual Theology” 225.

<sup>179</sup> Stephen Spencer, “Seminaries and Discipleship: Exploring Future Directions,” *Journal of Anglican Studies* 18, no. 1 (2020), 100.

<sup>180</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

win new adherents.<sup>181</sup> Because the world continues to change, which affects the vocabulary and methods of the contemporary church, it is essential to acknowledge that the church must be prepared on an ongoing basis to respond to those changes.<sup>182</sup> The literature and research on methods, models, and proposals on discipleship are exhaustive and indicative of the grim state of the church, which supports an imperative for much-needed intervention. The forthcoming section will examine some dominant challenges and concerns regarding the current discipleship state and review contemporary intervention models designed to address the problem.

### Challenges to Contemporary Discipleship

Recent studies and surveys reveal several causes of the current decline in church discipleship. At least one cause is the decline in biblical literacy. “The degradation of biblical literacy has increased in recent years to the point that many church attendees have very little knowledge or understanding of Biblical truths.”<sup>183</sup> LifeWay Research, a leading predictor of spiritual maturity among churchgoers, surveyed and found that only sixteen out of one hundred who regularly attended church read the Bible daily, and another 32 percent read the Bible at least once a week.<sup>184</sup> Another sobering result was a survey that only 37 percent of those who attended church regularly felt that reading and studying the Bible significantly impacted daily living.<sup>185</sup> Further, a recent survey conducted by the Barna Group found that one of the six mega themes for

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<sup>181</sup> Stefan Paas, “Post-Christian, Post-Christendom, and Post-Modern Europe: Towards the Interaction of Missiology and the Social Sciences,” *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 28, no. 1 (2011), 3.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Joseph G. Austin, “The Role of Biblical Literacy in Discipling Believers in the Local Church” (Dmin Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2019), iv.

<sup>184</sup> Burggraff, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum,” 400.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

American churches was that the church was becoming less theologically literate.<sup>186</sup>

Examinations of various surveys taken over the last decade or so related to biblical literacy indicate that the problem in America is due to Christians who lack biblical knowledge as a product of churches that marginalize biblical knowledge.<sup>187</sup>

Another cause found in studies is the de-emphasis on discipleship within churches. Church leaders in recent years have acknowledged the claims of lack of discipleship in churches.<sup>188</sup> Noted Bible expositor James Montgomery Boice described this deficiency of discipleship within the church as a “fatal defect in the life of the church.”<sup>189</sup> In recent years, Georg Barna’s research found discipleship meaningless among laypeople.<sup>190</sup>

After extensive research within the last five years, LifeWay Research surveyed four thousand Protestants in North America. It concluded with bold and sobering results showing that discipleship deficiency in most churches was a primary cause of the lack of transformation.<sup>191</sup> Bible scholars find these statistics staggering, raising the question of how a believer can be a true disciple of Christ who makes disciples without the biblical understanding of Christ’s message and instructions.<sup>192</sup> These recent findings demonstrate that the need for discipleship teaching is still present and, therefore, helps to recognize that the necessity for instructing biblical principles on discipleship in religious education is essential for the church.

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<sup>186</sup> Burggraff, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum,” 400.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Burggraff, “Developing Discipleship Curriculum,” 404.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 402.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.



## Contemporary Discipleship Intervention Models

Several models have been developed and implemented over the last few decades designed for different ages and stages of discipleship.<sup>193</sup> The forthcoming section will review five contemporary models and examine some of each model's significant aspects and program implementation.

### **Youth with a Mission Discipleship Training School (YWAM-DTS)**

The YWAM-DTS is a five-month course at one of two campuses that aims to equip students for a lifetime of serving God, which boasts the central theme of “*To know God and make Him known.*”<sup>194</sup> The goal is to encourage believers to gain a tremendous passion for the world to lead a relationship of faith and obedience in God by focusing on His nature and character and learning His ways to understand His purpose and live out faith in the community context.<sup>195</sup>

The DTS program model consists of two phases. The first phase is a lecture that consists of eleven weeks of training and learning, followed by an eight-week international outreach to go, serve, share, and demonstrate God's love to the world.<sup>196</sup> The discipleship programs are bilingual (English and Spanish), and participants are taught personal devotions, worship, intercession, local evangelism, and many other activities.<sup>197</sup> The outreach phase includes student placement into outreach teams and being sent into the field for two months of cross-cultural

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<sup>193</sup> Ralph Lee, “Discipleship in Oriental Orthodox and Evangelical Communities,” *Religions* 12 (2020): 5 of 12.

<sup>194</sup> YWAM International, “Youth With A Mission: The Discipleship Training School.” San Diego/Baja, 2018, accessed on March 30, 2023, <https://www.ywamsandiegobaja.org/discipleshiptrainingschool>.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> The Navigators, “Navigators: Life-to-Life Discipleship,” The Navigators, 2023, accessed on March 30, 2023, <https://www.navigators.org/about>.

evangelistic outreach.<sup>198</sup> Following the outreach phase, the students return to campus for a week of debriefing and reflection and to participate in a formal graduation ceremony.

Some similarities of this model to this DMIN action project are the strong emphasis on developing spiritual disciplines for spiritual growth, teaching relationship with God, and missional, evangelistic, and communal practices in discipleship outcomes. A noticeable difference is its focus on youth, though there are implications that the program can be extended to older adults. While the program has the advantage of being bilingual to reach a broader territory of people, some limitations are that participants would have to commit to living on or near one of the campuses for five months. As tuition-based, participants would also have to be financially secure to attend.

### **The Navigators**

The Navigators is a prominent contemporary Christian discipleship ministry that shares the gospel of Jesus and helps people grow in their relationship with Him through life-to-life discipleship to create a spiritual generation of believers.<sup>199</sup> Since its inception in 1933, The Navigators has upheld the mission, “To know Christ, make Him known, and help others do the same.”<sup>200</sup> The model focuses on developing discipleship person-by-person and encouraging spiritual growth across life stages. The ministry defines discipleship as intentionally helping people learn from and live more like Christ by praying with and spending time with others in His

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<sup>198</sup> Navigators, “Life-to-Life Discipleship,” <https://www.navigators.org>.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

Word.<sup>201</sup> These tools are designed for sharing in Bible study, church groups, and one-on-one discipling.

The discipleship tools include *Discipleship 101*, an E-Book for spiritual mentorship, and the instruction of discipleship practices in *Following Jesus Through Life-to-Life Discipleship* and *Come and Fish with Me*, which follows the examples of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. The *Discipleship 101* E-Book is a manual that answers 101 basic discipleship questions, such as what discipleship should look like in everyday life, the best way to invite someone to follow Jesus, models for praying with, and how to study the Bible with someone.<sup>202</sup> *Following Jesus Through Life-to-Life Discipleship* is the Navigator's primary basis for disciple-making. Under this umbrella, believers are taught to be passionate about inspiring and equipping people to Christ and helping others do the same.<sup>203</sup> The *Life-to-Life Discipleship* element follows how Jesus invested in the lives of the twelve disciples, including intentionally coming alongside another person, praying, and studying the Bible together. *Come and Fish with Me* is a discipleship Bible study series that explores the depths of Jesus' invitation to the disciples who were fishermen and teaches how to apply that same principle to everyday life.<sup>204</sup> Based on the sequences, it considers the "fishing" for people associated with Jesus as a path of discipleship to fit into everyday life to help participants better understand Jesus' invitation for discipleship.

Similarities in these models to this DMIN action research project is that it operates on intentional discipleship methodologies that teach participants examples and expressions of discipleship in the New Testament and the practice of spiritual disciplines of praying and biblical

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<sup>201</sup> Navigators, "Life-to-Life Discipleship," <https://www.navigators.org>.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., <https://www.navigators.org/resource/come-fish-with-me>.

intake. A helpful aspect of this model would be an integration of equipping people on how to “fish” as an understanding of how discipling happens. A difference is that there is no indication of the length of the programs, though each is described as a “series,” while this DMIN project anticipates lasting six to eight weeks.

### **Just Disciple Discipleship Models**

Just Disciple is an umbrella title for several discipleship models dedicated to helping Christians grow and share their faith. It is a product of the ministry of Bethany International, a Christian missions training organization operated by a team of Bible students from Bethany Global University who do research and interview experts to form biblically sound and authoritative content about discipleship, theology, Christian disciplines, and missions.<sup>205</sup> The organization offers several discipleship models that allow ministries to disciple people practically. The three main models used are the “3-Strand Core,” “Corporate and Personal Discipleship,” and the “Great Commission,” all based on the different expressions of ministry and the example demonstrated in the New Testament.<sup>206</sup>

#### **3-Strand Discipleship**

The 3 Strand “Core” model combines “Crowd,” “Cell,” and “Core.”<sup>207</sup> The “Crowd” is based on how Jesus did ministry, often speaking and teaching to large crowds. The “Cell” is based on Jesus’ twelve disciples, calling them in Mark 3:13-19 and His fellowship with the disciples, such as in the Last Supper (Matt 26:20). The “Core” consists of 3-4 people who meet

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<sup>205</sup> Bethany Global University, Bethany International, “Just Disciple,” accessed on March 30, 2023, <https://justdisciple.com/about>.

<sup>206</sup> Bethany, “Just Disciple,” accessed March 30, 2023, <https://justdisciple.com/discipleship-models-2>.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

weekly with a focus on discipleship as modeled by Jesus and His inner circle of James, Peter, and John. It emphasizes Jesus' life with His disciples to demonstrate the essential aspects of the community in discipleship.

Implementation of this model is based on the church or ministry meeting a specific criterion. It is not a blanket model that any church can do, nor is it specific to an age group or demographic. To implement this model, a church or ministry will have to assess if it meets the criteria of already established small groups or has the ability to establish small groups of three to four people who can and are willing to meet weekly.<sup>208</sup> After groups are established, each would be coordinated to partner with people who live by each other to have the core group. Each core group is gender-specific and is recommended to be led by an elder or leader at the church. The model also encourages a sermon series on discipleship to create a culture of growth. This model implementation is like this DMIN action research project as it includes principles based on teachings that followed the New Testament examples of discipleship. The practical aspects differ as it is gender specific to be implemented in small group settings, while this DMIN project is for general church education that is not specific to group size or gender. However, it can be a beneficial feature to be added to a discipleship curriculum.

#### Corporate and Personal Discipleship

This model is like the 3-Strand model because it uses crowd and personal discipleship. It consists of corporate and personal discipleship, which allows it to be broad and flexible. The corporate aspect is recommended for large church congregations and can be implemented during Sunday services and significant group events. Corporate discipleship is essential because it

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<sup>208</sup> Bethany, "Just Disciple," accessed March 30, 2023, <https://justdisciple.com/discipleship-models-2>.

teaches the church to worship, learn, and grow as a body.<sup>209</sup> Personal discipleship focuses on the fact that Jesus did not just preach to crowds but also personally trained His disciples and inner circle.<sup>210</sup>

This model demonstrates the importance of teaching corporately and personally in a discipleship training program. It is flexible as it can be implemented in a church or ministry by creating time for personal discipleship through group Bible studies, reading plans, home group study, and fellowship.<sup>211</sup> It believes that teaching personal discipleship will ultimately result in healthier churches and ministries because members will be better trained and equipped. Some similarities in this model to this DMIN action project are its focus on Jesus' teaching and example of personal and corporate discipleship through the use and practices of the spiritual disciplines. An observed strength in this model is its flexibility in implementation to both large and small congregations, though based on the examples of Jesus, smaller groups or one-on-one would likely produce biblical discipleship.

#### The Great Commission Discipleship

The Great Commission model focuses on discipleship as fulfilling the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20. This model believes that as the Great Commission is fulfilled as a ministry, the church members will grow and become more Christlike. The model follows that discipleship is the means of believers working for God while allowing God to work through them.<sup>212</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Bethany, "Just Disciple," accessed March 30, 2023, <https://justdisciple.com/discipleship-models-2>.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

The model is best implemented in personal discipleship or core groups because it allows people to be trained in a small setting. Therefore, it is most effective when paired with one of the previous models.<sup>213</sup> The Great Commission model can also be implemented in several ways, such as financially supporting missionaries, praying for an unreached group, organizing mission trips, or partnering with local missional organizations. If this model is desired, churches and ministries are encouraged to pray and ask God for direction on how the ministry should be involved. Vital discipleship will ultimately strengthen the ministry as it will cause the people to grow in faith and walk closer to God.<sup>214</sup>

Similarities in this model to this DMIN action research project are that it integrates the principles from the Great Commission to equip congregants to grow spiritually to become more like Christ. Strengths that can be implemented in this DMIN action project are the added missional element for outreach and integration into some of the church's current ministry practices.

### Project Distinctiveness

This DMIN action research project attempts to understand the implementation of past and present discipleship models in the Christian church. The most recent efforts to improve biblical discipleship instruction and practice reveal that each model must be designed to fit the context where it will be implemented to be effective. The topics covered in the literature review demonstrate that effective discipleship programs in the church have been an ongoing effort for decades, regardless of age and cultural demographics. It must also include more literature on discipleship programs implemented for middle-aged and older adult congregants. This project

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<sup>213</sup> Bethany, "Just Disciple," accessed March 30, 2023, <https://justdisciple.com/discipleship-models-2>.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

differs from recent discipleship intervention programs. Its primary focus is implementing a holistic, practical theology to reach this community of long-term church congregants who have become complacent and deficient in discipleship knowledge and practices. A theology of discipleship in this DMIN action project will not be implemented as a college curriculum, one-time seminar discipleship, or one designed specifically for small groups but as part of the regular Sunday school curriculum intended to be added to the church's religious education program.

This DMIN project utilizes lessons based on holistic principles of spiritual formation and maturity through spiritual disciplines and the Old and New Testament examples while equally expressing the nature of discipleship expressed in human activity as Trinitarian, communal, and missional. Most of the models mentioned in this chapter are based primarily on New Testament examples of discipleship. At the same time, this DMIN action project includes teaching in religious education as a theological principle and discipline, emphasizing a transformative pilgrimage of human participation in divine pedagogy.<sup>215</sup> Unlike many recent models, this project is driven by the concept of discipleship not as simply a training course or manual but as a theological principle to be practiced daily. Further, this project will measure participants' general understanding of theology and discipleship to address potential preconceptions or incorrect ideas.

Discipleship instruction must meet people in the language and on a familiar cultural footing because there is no one-size-fits-all solution to this problem.<sup>216</sup> It is also reasonable to acknowledge that there is no single God-ordained way to handle theological instruction and no biblical pattern for laying out information on worksheets.<sup>217</sup> This DMIN action research project

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<sup>215</sup> David M. Benson, "God's Curriculum: Reimagining Education as a Journey Towards Shalom" in *Reimagining Christian Education*, 29.

<sup>216</sup> Edie and Lamport, *Nurturing Faith*, 29.

<sup>217</sup> Smith, *On Christian Teaching*, 11.



has contemplated these points in the discipleship implementation plan process. The project researcher anticipates using but not limited to resources and lessons based on the biblical examples included in the literature review and theological and theoretical sections of this chapter.

### Conclusion

Most modern literature legitimizes the concerns, probable causes, and the need for an appropriate church response. The considerable amount of contemporary literature on various aspects of discipleship indicates it is a significant problem for the Christian church today. Although many discipleship programs have been developed throughout the last several decades, the church must implement contextual and relevant models that result in complete discipleship, as demonstrated in the Bible. The commission is to “make disciples,” not just to talk about Jesus, preach the gospel, or start churches, though it assumes all of these.<sup>218</sup> To make disciples is to lead Christians to maturity to make other disciples. Discipleship is not just about rituals or teaching ideas designed for church services alone but building the church through relationships and reaching out to others.<sup>219</sup> Both Scripture and recent literature support discipleship as taught through learning and practiced in doing

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<sup>218</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

<sup>219</sup> Goodrich, and Strauss, *Following Jesus Christ*, 59.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

The methodology for this DMIN action research project is designed to address the need for a theology of discipleship for spiritual growth to be implemented at a local church congregation. It was developed from the theological and theoretical foundations expressed in Chapter 2 and findings in precedent literature. This chapter explains the research action project methodology implemented within a Sunday school educational curriculum taught at the church. The intervention design includes the project preliminaries, such as permissions and approvals, recruitment and pre-screening interview process, participant criteria, letter of consent, classroom instruction, and the quantitative and qualitative methods used to gather and analyze the data results.

This project aimed to develop a biblically based theology of discipleship that will be included as part of the church's Christian education program designed for the local church that is intentional and ongoing. It sought to integrate faith, teaching, and learning of a discipleship theology to become a "lived theology." The anticipated conclusion is to result in spiritually mature and communally focused disciples.

#### **Intervention Design**

The intervention design method used for this project consisted of the researcher teaching a curriculum on a theology of discipleship based on theological principles of biblical, spiritual, and missional foundations for spiritual growth to lead to missional discipleship to the adult Sunday school class at DCC. The pre-intervention process, which included obtaining the project

preliminaries, such as approvals, permission, research project promotion, interview screenings, and obtaining letters of consent, took place for approximately three weeks. The intervention process lasted for eight weeks, which included surveys, focus group interviews, and six intervention lessons on the theology of discipleship. The method used in the intervention design included Sensing's recommendation for a methodological approach to action research that includes the consideration of the subject involved in the study, data collection, settings, and analysis techniques.<sup>1</sup> It is recommended that the DMIN action research project provide a table of step-by-step tasks and procedures so that other scholars can follow the same plan while enhancing trustworthiness in data collection.<sup>2</sup> This action research project includes an intervention project task list that integrates this protocol into the design by the order in which each task was implemented and completed (see Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research, A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 66.

<sup>2</sup> L.L. Lemon & Hayes, J., "Enhancing Trustworthiness of Qualitative Findings: Using Leximancer for Qualitative Data Analysis Triangulation," *The Qualitative Report*, 25(3) (2020): 608.

Table 1. Intervention Timeline

Pre-Intervention 1-3 Weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obtained approval from IRB and mentor to proceed with intervention.</li> <li>• Met with the senior pastor and church board to discuss the study and receive signed approval by email from the senior pastor (see Appendix A and B). Submitted lessons for study to the senior pastor for review and discussion and implemented changes as necessary (see Appendices N and O).</li> </ul>
Recruitment, Screening, Consent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The study was announced during Sunday school and morning worship (see Appendix E). Recruitment letters were distributed to potential participants by email and U.S. postal mail (see Appendix C). Recruitment letters also included a link to the pre-study survey from Survey Monkey (see Appendices D, F, and G).</li> </ul>
Intervention - 6 to 8 Weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Followed up on candidate responses and held screening interviews (see Appendix F, I).</li> <li>• Finalized the participants notified by phone and text message of acceptance, including the pre-study survey link (see Appendix J)</li> <li>• Informed accepted participants of the pre-study focus group interview.</li> <li>• Delivered physical copies of the consent letter lesson booklet, pre-paid return envelope, pencils, pens, and printed study schedule to all participants by U.S. Postal mail (see Appendix H, N, and O)</li> <li>• Confirmed receipt of all signed letters of consent and completion of pre-study survey.</li> <li>• Pre-study focus group interview was held on Zoom during Sunday school (see Appendix L).</li> </ul>
Class Curriculum
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intervention lessons (see Appendix O) were taught six weeks during Sunday school on Zoom at 10:00 a.m. An additional class was held on Wednesday night, week three.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The post-study focus group interview was held during Sunday school on Zoom for 60 minutes (see Appendix M).</li> <li>• Participants were emailed the Survey Monkey post-study survey link the next day and were asked to complete it within the next two weeks (see Appendix K).</li> </ul>
Post- Intervention 1- 3 Weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confirmed that all data and materials are in the researcher's possession.</li> <li>• Randomly select the \$25 Amazon gift card raffle winners and inform the winner.</li> <li>• Gathered, reviewed, exported, organized, and sorted data from surveys.</li> <li>• Gathered and transcribed data, reviewed, organized, and coded data from interviews, observations, recordings, and notes, and transferred to Excel.</li> <li>• Compared, organized, and synced data from each method in an Excel spreadsheet.</li> <li>• Finalized data on Excel and statistical calculator and concluded data findings for the study.</li> </ul>

### Permission and Approvals

After receiving approval from the IRB, the researcher obtained confirmation from the mentor to proceed with the intervention. Within a week after confirmation from the mentor, the researcher met with the senior pastor and church board at DCC to discuss and provide a letter with the details and explanation of the DMIN action research project, purpose, and goal (see Appendix A). After the meeting, the researcher emailed the senior pastor a form letter of permission to sign and return by email (see Appendix B). The signed letter of permission was received from the senior pastor a few days after the meeting. The researcher submitted the proposed intervention lesson plan to the senior pastor, who reviewed and approved it for use in the intervention. Within the same week of receipt of all permissions and approvals, the researcher began promoting and recruiting participants, as outlined in the forthcoming section.

### Promotion and Recruitment

Promotion and recruitment began approximately one week after receiving permission and approvals from the senior pastor and church board to proceed with the study. The promotion and recruitment aimed to encourage the currently active, older adult church members to participate regardless of Sunday school attendance status. A verbal announcement for the study recruitment was made on Sunday morning during the same week that permission was granted in Sunday school and morning worship and added to the church's online bulletin (see Appendix E). In addition to the verbal announcements, all potential candidates were sent copies of the recruitment materials by email and U.S. postal mail, which included the study details and participant criteria (see Appendix C, D, F, G, and H). The recruitment process lasted approximately two weeks and was enough time for all participants to respond and complete the screening process.

## **Participant Criteria**

The target audience for this DMIN action research study was middle-aged, older adult church members who regularly attend Sunday school and church services at DCC (a minimum of two or more services a month). Because this action research study required active members and the church membership is approximately twenty-five to thirty members (both active and non-active), the researcher chose the most appropriate purposive sampling of participants for this study (ten to fifteen maximum). The criterion for eligible participants was as follows:

- Be 45 years or older.
- Be a self-confessing, born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be a practicing Christian who self-identifies and believes faith to be essential and regularly attends worship services at the church, other than for a special occasion, two or more times a month.

The purpose of this criterion is to obtain a sampling of participants exposed to the current teachings and discipleship practices at DCC and was used in part as a measure for the implementation design in this DMIN action intervention study.

## **Participant Screening**

The purpose of the screening was to provide individuals with more detailed information concerning the study and its requirements to help better understand and confirm participant eligibility. Candidate screening for participants began soon after the researcher received responses to the recruitment. Most meetings were set between the researcher and candidates within a few days of the promotion. The candidate interviews were held by telephone and in person, where individuals were asked a few short pre-screening questions related to the criteria included in the recruitment letter (see Appendix I).

## **Project Participants**

After completing the interview and screening process, the project concluded with eleven participants, which met the anticipated criteria of between ten and fifteen. The size is mainly due to the church membership having approximately ten to fifteen who regularly attend Sunday school and Bible study. After each candidate was screened and finalized, all accepted candidates were sent a letter of consent and a pre-postage paid return envelope with a pre-discipleship study survey link by email and U.S. postal mail (see Appendix H and J). Each of the participants confirmed their acceptance by email or text message. The researcher asked all participants to complete the pre-discipleship survey and return the signed letters of consent by email or in the provided pre-postage paid envelope on or before the scheduled pre-study focus group interview (see Appendix L).

## **Participant Privacy and Disclosures**

All promotional, recruitment, approvals, permission, and participant letters of consent for the study materials contained disclosures informing that all best efforts were to be made to ensure all participant information was handled with care and the highest level of confidentiality while maintaining the project's integrity. Participants were also informed several times verbally during the recruitment process of anonymity, confidentiality where appropriate, voluntary participation, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher received all signed letters of consent from participants in a sealed envelope, and the researcher currently stores all in a confidential file.

The researcher is an elder and Adult Sunday School teacher at DCC who occasionally teaches Bible study classes at the church. The researcher has a long-standing relationship with several members of the church. The familiarity with most participants may imply a bias to

partiality in responses. Hence, the researcher took careful measures, including avoiding and limiting interaction and personal dialogue with participants during the study.

### Class Curriculum

This action research project objective was accomplished by the researcher teaching an intervention curriculum on a theology of discipleship to the Adult Sunday School class at DCC (see schedule overview in Appendix N). The curriculum lessons were divided into three foundational topics for discipleship: *Becoming by Learning*, *Becoming by Growing*, and *Becoming by Doing*. These include three theological themes obtained from the literature review section of this project: *Biblical Foundations*, *Spiritual Foundations*, and *Missional Engagement*, all leading to the formation of accountable discipleship (see Fig. 3.1). The curriculum was taught over six weeks, with approximately two weeks on each lesson topic (see Appendix O). The class curriculum and lesson notes were developed from the thematic topics included in the literature review of this research thesis and Scripture. Each lesson was taught for sixty minutes consecutively every Sunday at 10:00 a.m. during Sunday school. A theology of discipleship curriculum flows through the process of *Becoming like Christ* through "*Becoming by Learning*," "*Becoming by Growing*," and "*Becoming by Doing*" (see Fig. 3.1).



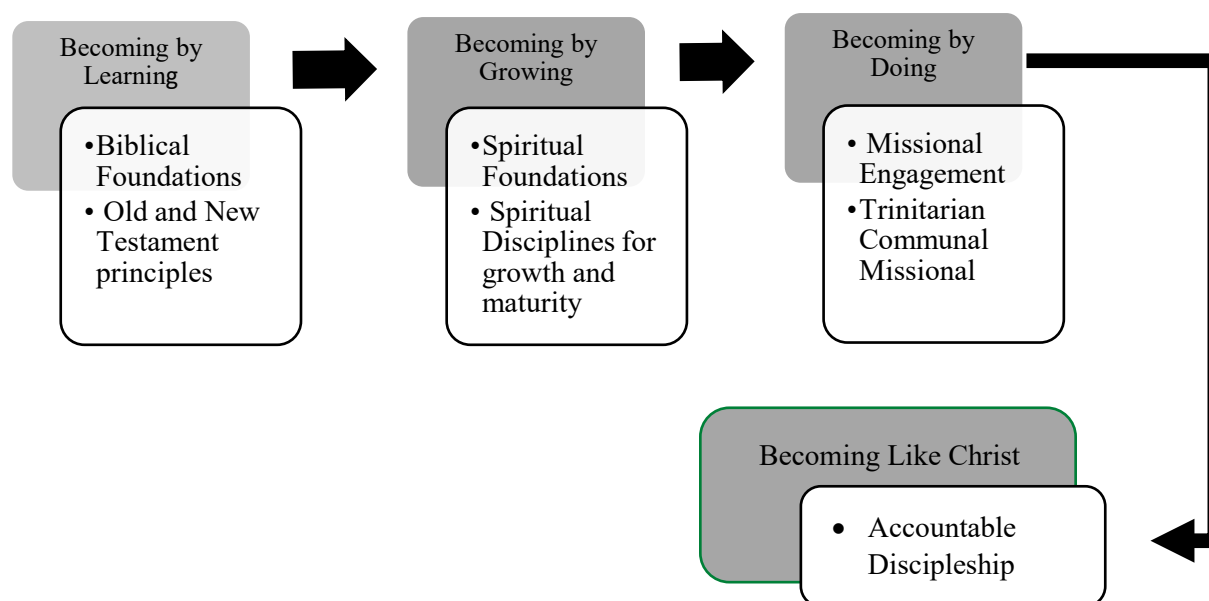


Fig. 3.1. Theology of Discipleship to Becoming Like Christ Curriculum

The lesson curriculum was printed into a booklet and was included in materials distributed to participants in person or by U.S. postal mail after participant confirmation (see Appendix O). The researcher gave all participants a composition notebook, pens, and pencils. All classes were recorded on Zoom and audio recorded on the researcher's password-protected digital recording device from the beginning to the end of each lesson. The purpose of the recorded lessons was to provide an opportunity for participants who may miss a class and to allow the researcher to use the recorded class instruction for notes and observations that may have been missed during the class and further monitor and evaluate the validity of the researcher's conclusions.

The Sunday school intervention lesson consisted of the following:

1. *Lesson One – Becoming by Learning – Biblical Foundations.* This lesson was held for two weeks and paid close attention to participants' general biblical foundational knowledge of discipleship. Week one covered an introductory discussion on biblical discipleship, its definition, and the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament.

Participants were taught the first concept of this DMIN action project: believers are to become disciples by learning as part of building a foundation for biblical discipleship.

The lesson focused on the implications of discipleship in the Old Testament with God's relationship with man and expressed in the Dominion mandate at Creation and further developed through God's covenant with various individuals such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel (Jacob), and David.

Part two of the lesson addressed the New Testament teachings and practices on discipleship that included Jesus' calling of the early disciples, the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), and the implications of His call to them. The group was asked to memorize this Scripture and understand this text as Christ's formal mandate and call for discipleship. It also discussed Jesus' relationship with His disciples, the calling and nature of "go, teach, baptize" in replicating the discipling of others, becoming fishers of men, and what it means for the church today.

2. *Lesson Two - Becoming by Growing – Spiritual Foundations.* This lesson focused on the necessity of becoming a disciple by growing through the development of a spiritual foundation. It addressed the necessity of spiritual maturity in discipleship by introducing participants to spiritual formation and practicing spiritual disciplines such as meditation, prayer, Bible intake, fellowship, and worship, to name a few, daily to obtain maturity in Christ. Unlike the other theological topics, an additional class was held during a Wednesday night Bible Study due to more time being needed for the class to understand ways of practicing some of the spiritual disciplines in everyday life. The next part of the lesson focused on some of the qualities of the early disciples' such as submission and self-denial, and what it meant for discipleship practices for the church today. It also

addressed the Old Testament and New Testament mandate for holiness as a command for God's people to display His character, its implications in Christianity, and how it is necessary for discipleship.

3. *Lesson Three – Becoming by Doing – Participation by Missional Engagement.* This lesson addressed the detailed meaning of Matthew 28:19-20, the Great Commission, and its implications for believers today. It discussed Christ's mandate and the imperatives to "go, teach, and baptize" as the replicating formula in discipleship that will continue for believers today. There was a discussion of how discipleship involves participation in God's mission and an extensive look at the Trinity doctrine and disciples' missional connection. The last part of this lesson focused on a Pauline theology of discipleship, expressing a missional discipleship theology through community and Christians' connection to God through discipleship. It discussed the importance of accountability in biblical discipleship. It reminded the participants that discipleship is relational, not only with Christ, but is to spread abroad to others to fulfill the Great Commission. Discipleship must be practical, which takes place in the community through accountability to others. It also emphasized the importance of the believer's relationship with God, and discipleship cannot occur without the Holy Spirit's power and presence. Believers participate in the Trinity through discipleship. It emphasized how the local church should reflect the missional and communal nature of the Triune God in a series of activities of disciplines such as worship, preaching, praise, and Bible study.<sup>3</sup> It further looked at how, in the Bible, God continually calls and sends people; therefore, church

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<sup>3</sup> Njuguna, "Transforming Discipleship," 60.

members should imitate this behavior and also go into their local community.<sup>4</sup> The class concluded with a discussion that challenged the group to think of ways to begin practicing missional discipleship.

### Data Collection Methods

The data collection for the research used a mixed triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather and measure data to evaluate the intervention's effectiveness and confirm each method's findings. Stringer explains how the study's credibility is enhanced when multiple sources of information are included.<sup>5</sup> Because of the potential impersonal aspect of surveys, the researcher included qualitative methods of classroom observations and interview notes to confirm quantitative data. The researcher collected quantitative data from surveys; meanwhile, the qualitative data was gathered from participant focus group interviews, questionnaires, and the researcher's observation journals. Data analysis and evaluation from each method began one week after the post-study focus group interview, and the researcher verified receipt of all eleven post-study surveys.

The resulting data will measure the before and after effects of the discipleship intervention based on the accuracy of answers reported in terms of percentage by method. Each method will report results by study type (pre-study versus post-study) and by theological category (biblical, spiritual, missional). The results will be evaluated within each study (highest knowledge to lowest) to determine pre-study strength to post-study as a measure of how much the intervention influenced or changed the group's responses or views of discipleships as reported in the data.

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<sup>4</sup> Njuguna, "Transforming Discipleship," 60.

<sup>5</sup> Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2013), 89.

The forthcoming will discuss how each data method was used in this DMIN action research project's implementation design.

### Data Scoring Protocol

The data scoring protocol used in this research for all collection methods was based on variations of the Likert scale data formats. The quantitative relied on the Survey Monkey scoring tool, which gave each answer a value (one to five, one lowest, and five highest) and reported the percentage score based on accuracy. The percentage scoring was based on the accuracy of responses for each question and total survey and reported a breakdown of statistics (mean, median, standard deviation). Each answer was assigned an equivalent percentage score, which the researcher used to assign scores to relevant qualitative data. The researcher anonymously separated and color-coded each question into one of the three theological categories, biblical (green), spiritual (blue), and missional (yellow), to record and measure the group's strength and views in total by study type and then by category.

The scoring of the qualitative data followed the same protocol to maintain consistency in reporting results, where the researcher's responses from participant observations were color-coded by theological category. Then, a value based on the response's accuracy and relevance was assigned, totaled, and averaged by the question, theological category, and then in total by the method.

### **Quantitative Methods**

The quantitative data was taken from two surveys hosted on Survey Monkey from all participants, one before and one after the intervention completion. The pre-study and post-study surveys each consisted of twenty-five questions in the Likert scale format developed from

modified versions of Barna’s State of Discipleship Survey 2015, Lifeways’ Discipleship Assessment 2022 survey, and from the literature review (see Appendices J and K).<sup>6</sup> The questions or statements were given randomly, requiring one answer from five choices (strongly agree to strongly disagree) to complete the survey. Each question was assigned a score between one and five (one lowest and five highest) and then assigned a percentage by the scoring tool on Survey Monkey. The pre-study survey questions were almost identical to the post-study to help the researcher see noticeable response changes. As all participants indicated they were self-professing Christians and believers in Jesus Christ, the specific questions considered that, and survey questions were divided into topics that covered some of the following:

1. *Biblical* – Questions and statements on biblical discipleship as reflected in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, explicitly and indirectly, The Trinity, the Great Commission, and the Authority of the Scripture.
2. *Spiritual* – Questions and statements concerning spiritual formation, spiritual growth, and the regular practice of spiritual disciplines in discipleship.
3. *Missional* – Questions and statements concerning missional and communal practices, along with discipling activities such as witnessing, evangelism, and caring for the needs of others.

## **Qualitative Methods**

This DMIN project included qualitative and quantitative methods for data collection for several reasons. Sensing explains how DMIN projects generally employ qualitative evaluation

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<sup>6</sup> Barna Group, Inc., “The State of Discipleship,” Research Release in Leaders & Pastors, December 1, 2015, accessed November 16, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/new-research-on-the-state-of-discipleship/> and Lifeway Christian Resources, “Discipleship Pathway Assessment.” Lifeway. 2001-2022., accessed November 30, 2022, <https://en/product/discipleship-pathway-assessment>.

methods.<sup>7</sup> Scholars further argued that qualitative research can help answer questions that address how or why things are, especially when understanding process-oriented research results.<sup>8</sup> The qualitative data method was used in this project to help understand how the members at DCC understood discipleship and to confirm and make sense of the quantitative data. A fair amount of qualitative data was gathered from the two focus group interviews, class recordings, and the researcher's classroom journal observations. The focus group interviews comprised questionnaires and open dialogues between the researcher and the participants (see Appendices L and M). Like the surveys, each set of interview questions was almost identical and compared to see any changes in the results from the before and after intervention (see Appendices J and K). This method recorded participant answers and observed characteristics during and after each interaction and was used to enhance the data collected by the surveys and assess any changes that may have occurred during the intervention process. Like in the quantitative survey method, all data gathered from interviews and classroom observation were color-coded according to their appropriate theological themes, assigned a score between one and five, and then the researcher determined the percentage for each by the equivalent score used in the Survey Monkey scoring tool.

### **Implementation of the Intervention Design**

This section outlines the implementation of the intervention design that includes the learning platform and classroom environment and a description of the quantitative and qualitative data collection process used to gather and evaluate data. It covers the implementation

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<sup>7</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Lemon & Hayes, "Enhancing," 604.

process in the order in which tasks and methods were executed and what transpired during the intervention.

Like in any situation, it was necessary to consider that all interventions may not fit in every context; therefore, this DMIN action research project implementation was designed in a way specific to meeting the religious education needs of the members at DCC. The context was essential as it attempted to communicate the gospel in word and deed to execute the lessons in a way that made sense within the local church.<sup>9</sup> Another thought to consider is that discipling people from different cultural contexts requires an understanding and the ability to build on the underlying pedagogical practices.<sup>10</sup>

Sensing discusses the importance of choosing tools to gather data from any of the three angles: "Insider," "Researcher," and "Outsider."<sup>11</sup> He explains how DMIN action research projects are an exercise in contextual theology; therefore, context matters.<sup>12</sup> Given the ministry context and participants in this action research project, the researcher considered the three-angle technique to sufficiently collect data and provide adequate reporting and evaluation of the intervention results. Because of the anonymity aspect of the surveys, an outsider perspective was experienced that provided comfort in the process, as expressed by several individuals during the pre-study focus group interview. Observation notes from participant interviews, focus groups,

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<sup>9</sup> W. Jay Moon and A. Moreau, *Intercultural Discipleship (Encountering Mission): Learning from Global Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 45.

<sup>10</sup> Christine Heather Bird, and Moyra Dale, "Education and Discipling in a Performance-Based or Rote Learning Context" *Missiology* 50, no. 3 (2022): 274.

<sup>11</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 179.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



and classroom observations from insider and outsider angles proved fundamental in supporting and confirming the survey results.<sup>13</sup>

### Learning Platform and Classroom Environment

The study consisted of eleven participants, nine female and two males, who were introduced to and taught a theology of discipleship as expressed through biblical, spiritual, and missional themes. The classes were held for one hour each for six weeks on Zoom, with the average attendance each week of between nine and eleven participants. All participants were fully engaged with the camera and microphone during each classroom lesson and focus group interviews for observation. In addition to the Zoom platform, the researcher audio-recorded all interviews and class lessons on a personally owned device for transcription, which was later downloaded and stored on the researcher's password-protected flash drive.

### Implementation Design Process

The implementation design process for this DMIN action research intervention consisted of (in the order of implementation) a pre-screening interview, pre-discipleship survey, pre-discipleship focus group, intervention lessons, post-discipleship focus group, and post-discipleship survey. Figure 3.2 illustrates the process by order of implementation.

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<sup>13</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 180.

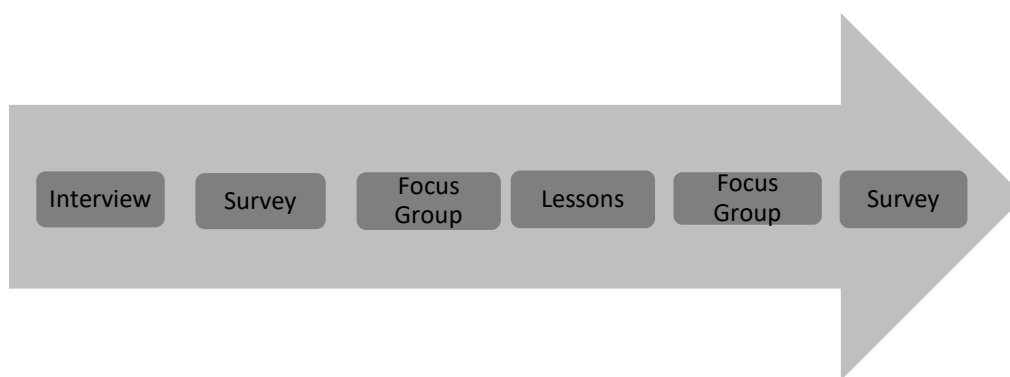


Figure 3.2. Implementation Design Process

### **Pre-Study Interview Screening**

The pre-study interview screening was held by phone and in person with candidates and participants before distributing the pre-study survey and letter of consent. The interviews lasted for approximately fifteen to thirty minutes each, where the researcher provided a brief overview of the study while asking each prospective candidate a few open-ended questions to confirm qualifications and understanding of the project (see Appendix I). One vital question was whether they considered themselves a practicing Christian and why. More than 50 percent of the answers included regular church attendance in Sunday morning services and accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior. The other half answered the same but included regular practice of prayer, studying the Bible, attending church services on Sundays and other services during the week, and visiting the sick. The other part of the interview included confirming membership status at the church and comfortability with completing online surveys, openly speaking, and being recorded, to which all candidates had no objection. The screening interview also allowed participants to ask open-ended questions, which most candidates declined. After each interview, the researcher transcribed and coded the recordings and observations.

The entire screening process lasted approximately one week. The classroom materials and letters of consent were sent by email and U.S. postal mail to each confirmed participant within one week after the last interview, and all signed letters of consent were received about one week before the pre-study focus group interview.

### **Pre-Study Survey**

After the pre-screening interview process was complete and participation was confirmed, the survey link was sent (also included in the consent letter) to participants via text and email (see Appendix J). The researcher's purpose for the survey was to gather an anonymous and general understanding of the participants' pre-study views on discipleship.<sup>14</sup> The survey questions and statements covered topics under the category mentioned previously in the implementation design section of this chapter (biblical, spiritual, and missional). Each category had approximately 8.33 questions (with one or two scoring in two categories) to distribute evenly and for equal and fair results for each category.

Participants were asked to complete the survey before attending the pre-study focus group so the researcher could accurately measure before and after data. Most participants completed the survey within 24 to 48 hours after the pre-screening interview. The researcher observed a pattern of how a few individuals struggled with understanding the perception of the surveys since it received a visible score upon completion and was concerned the grade received would reflect their ability level to participate in the study. The researcher had to reassure these individuals that the score would be used for statistical purposes without impacting their participation.

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<sup>14</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 118.

The researcher reviewed the survey responses and data after the post-study focus group interview to prevent potential bias during the intervention. After the survey was completed, the researcher closed survey access and exported the results to PowerPoint and Excel, then saved to the researcher's password-protected flash drive to await comparison and analysis and later merged with pre-study qualitative results.

### **Pre-Study Focus Group Interview**

The pre-study focus group interview was held one week before classroom intervention on Zoom during Sunday school for approximately one hour (see Appendix L). All eleven participants were in attendance, and the researcher confirmed receipt of all letters of consent. The researcher provided a more detailed introduction to the study, including the goal of demonstrating how a theology of discipleship can help produce mature disciples. Some participants had questions on how the problem of discipleship was identified at the church, which the researcher explained was obtained through general observations in Sunday school and Bible study, as well as conversations with the senior pastor.

Unlike the pre-screening interview, most participants took advantage of the opportunity to speak during open-ended questions. The researcher found this to be a helpful aspect of the process as it encouraged a more informal open dialogue between the researcher and participants. Some topics included general discussion on the meaning of theology, what it means and entails as the study of God and the Bible and the purpose of spiritual growth for a Christian and discipleship. The researcher found this aspect helped provide ideas not initially considered during the project implementation planning stage. It also helped reduce some initial assumptions and potential bias in the project. There was a discussion on defining discipleship, which most

participants agreed was a follower of Christ. However, one participant added how discipleship includes doing the work of a disciple through witnessing and spreading the gospel.

On spiritual growth, more than half of the participants overwhelmingly agreed that a Christian needed to witness effectively and become closer to God. The researcher observed general responses where at least 50 percent of the group felt strongly and answered accurately about spiritual-related topics. The biblical and missional topics were closer to approximately a 30 percent accuracy rate.

The researcher observed some hesitancy to answer among the participants concerning the missional practices of discipleship and how it affected becoming a mature disciple. A smaller percentage (approximately two to three individuals) agreed it was necessary but expressed that it lacked a strong emphasis at the church regarding discipleship. This interaction gave the researcher more insider pre-discipleship study perspective from participants.

The group interview confirmed that the church had been operating in a “membership” model, primarily of the church members paying their dues to support the pastor and keep the organization going.<sup>15</sup> Such operation was apparent, especially in responses to the majority view in favor of church membership activities over missional discipleship activities. Over half of the participants linked complete discipleship as automatic with church membership and regular attendance. It further confirmed the need for a discipleship model where the church is a community of Christians serious about discipleship and living out its mission.<sup>16</sup>

The interview also allowed participants to gain a more comfortable level of the intervention as a regular Sunday school curriculum lesson and less of a study, encouraging an

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<sup>15</sup> Siew, “A Case Study in Adult Discipleship,” 192.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

atmosphere of honesty for more “accurate” responses and comments. The researcher utilized this opportunity to pay close attention to identifying commonly used words and connecting themes, as well as in changes of voice tone and behavior, which was also helpful in confirming the data results. The researcher transcribed the interview recording and journal notes after the interview using the scoring protocol mentioned in the previous section, which was based on accuracy and level of topic relevance that included the same score explained in the previous section.

### **Intervention Lessons**

The lessons began one week after the pre-study focus group interview (see Appendices N and O) during Sunday school. The lessons were designed to teach the group biblical foundations for a theology of discipleship. Each curriculum topic was themed under discipleship for the following purposes: Becoming by Learning-Biblical Foundations, Becoming by Growing-Spiritual Foundations, and Becoming by Doing-Missional Foundations (see Appendix O). As done in the pre-study interview, the researcher took notes from each classroom interaction and observation, which included participants’ answers, expressions, questions, and relevance. Out of the eleven individuals in the group, three to four participants were consistently active during each lesson.

All classes were taught each Sunday morning for one hour during Sunday school each week as scheduled except for one topic, (as mentioned earlier) Spiritual Foundations: Spiritual Disciplines, where the lesson was lengthier and required an additional day to complete, so the pastor gave the researcher a Wednesday night Bible study time slot to complete within that week without interrupting the intervention schedule. The group showed a high enthusiasm towards attendance and participation in all classes. Attendance was nearly 100 percent for more than half of the time, at least two to three times more than Bible study. The researcher followed the same

protocol of transcribing recordings and notes and coded data immediately following each lesson, as done in focus groups and pre-screening interviews.

### **Post-Study Focus Group Interview**

The post-study focus group interview was held one week after the last lesson for approximately one hour during Sunday school. The purpose of this interview was to summarize all lessons and collect post-study data from observations to be measured along with the post-study survey to determine the before-after effect of the intervention. The interview included a summary of all six lessons, questionnaires, and open-ended questions, almost identical to the pre-study focus group interview (see Appendix M). The researcher took notes during class in the same manner used in the pre-study interview and lesson observations. The researcher paid particular attention to see if there were changes in responses from the pre-study as well as differences in the words, questions, and reactions, which was also helpful in ensuring accuracy while measuring the effectiveness of the intervention. The researcher observed how the group still overwhelmingly agreed upon spiritual growth as necessary for discipleship. Still, this time, responses included more details as it leads to missional activities developed through practicing the spiritual disciplines.

The researcher observed more overall confidence in answers as compared to what was demonstrated in the pre-study interview. Another noticeable change in response to pre-study was that most felt Bible study alone was more beneficial to spiritual growth and, in post-study, understood its significance when studying as a group. Almost the entire group now agreed on the definition of a disciple as a follower and one that practices the Great Commission mandate that includes witnessing, teaching, and baptizing others to become disciples. The group also overwhelmingly agreed that discipleship is not necessarily the same as church membership but

includes a relationship with God through the power of the Holy Spirit and participating in the Triune mission of God to spread the gospel and make other disciples. There was a noticeable increase in group dialogue engagement with one another and enthusiasm, especially on missional topics and spiritual disciplines. The answers to questions and participants' overall engagement compared to the pre-study focus group increased by about 40 to 50 percent, especially on missional engagement and ways for the group to begin missional activities at the church and in the community.

### **Post-Study Discipleship Survey**

The post-study discipleship survey was primarily used to see how the answers changed from the pre-discipleship survey. After completing the post-study focus group interview, the post-study survey was made live, and the link was sent by email and text to all eleven participants (see Appendix K).

The survey was completed by all participants within a week and was closed by the researcher after the eleventh survey was completed. As mentioned earlier, the questions on both surveys were almost identical to help the researcher see apparent changes in responses to the pre-study survey as another tool to ensure consistency, accuracy, and effectiveness in reporting the intervention results. The total results from the survey were exported to PowerPoint and Excel and then saved on the researcher's password-protected flash drive to await evaluation comparison and merged with post-study quantitative data for comparison and analysis with pre-study data. The breakdown of the data handling from each method is displayed in the forthcoming section.



### Data Implementation Process

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, this project employed a mixed triangulation method using data gathered from focus group interviews, surveys, questionnaires, and observations to cross-check the accuracy of the results.<sup>17</sup> Sensing's recommendation for using data triangulation to enhance the validity and reliability of research proved to be a logical approach for this action project. The nature of this project warranted the use of triangulation methods such as quantitative surveys and qualitative observations as a means of confirming survey results through individual and focus group interviews, along with the researcher's classroom notes and participant journals. The researcher used scoring based on an assigned percentage of accuracy results for each method to measure the before and after effects of the intervention.

Sensing acknowledges the difficulty of separating the activities of data collection and interpretation and explains interpretation as beginning the first day of gathering data.<sup>18</sup> This DMIN action research project proved this to be true. From the beginning of implementation, the researcher observed how each step and method consistently presented an opportunity that required planning to bring order, structure, and meaning to the quantitative and qualitative data generated during the research process.<sup>19</sup> This task was not complicated because of the small sampling size and the methods' limitations. Using Survey Monkey for survey hosting, recording, scoring, evaluating, and graphing helped simplify the process.

Once the results from each method were downloaded, exported (surveys), and recorded on PowerPoint and Excel, the data was separated accordingly and evaluated based on the pre-study results as measured in comparison to the post-study results as reported in percentages. The

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<sup>17</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 194.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

results will be informed by study type (pre-study, post-study), method type, and theological category. The final evaluation will be determined by measuring and comparing the final totals to see the before and after effects of the intervention.

### **Quantitative Data**

The quantitative data was collected from pre-discipleship and post-discipleship surveys. Each survey response was recorded anonymously, requiring all questions to be answered before moving to the next one. The small size of the sampling did not warrant the use of software such as SPSS to analyze data, so the researcher utilized the Survey Monkey scoring tool, PowerPoint and Excel spreadsheets and formulas, and a statistical calculator.

When preparing for the results analysis, the researcher downloaded separated results by study type (pre-study and post-study) into a PowerPoint and Excel spreadsheet. Each question was reported according to its assigned theological category (biblical, spiritual, or missional) on the spreadsheet, along with the respective numerical score. The researcher used the total percentage allocated to each survey, then separated questions by category using the total average to conclude the results for the theological category. Results were then recorded side by side for evaluation and comparison and merged with respective qualitative data. Figure 3.3a visualizes the quantitative data flow during the collection and recording.

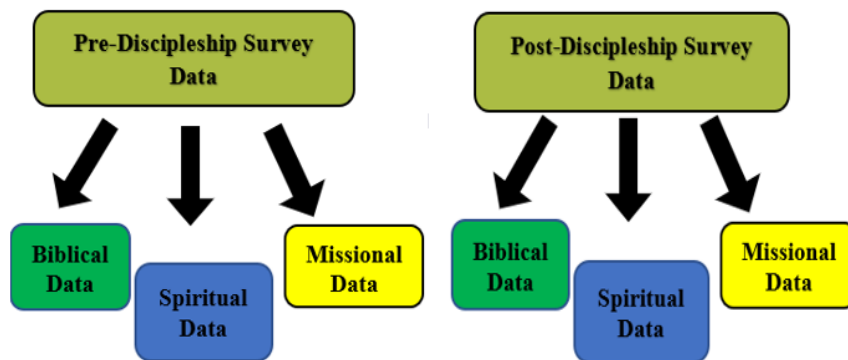


Figure 3.3a. Quantitative Data Distribution

### Qualitative Data

The recorded qualitative data comprised pre-study observations (interviews, focus groups, classroom notes) and post-study observations (post-lesson, post-study focus group). Each response (note or comment) was transferred and entered on an Excel spreadsheet by the appropriate assigned coded theological category along with its respective score and averaged in the same manner as the quantitative data. The data was separated and recorded on the spreadsheet by study type, method, and theological category. The results were then recorded side by side for evaluation and comparison and merged with quantitative data. Figure 3.3b is a visual representation of the flow of the qualitative data during the collection and recording process.

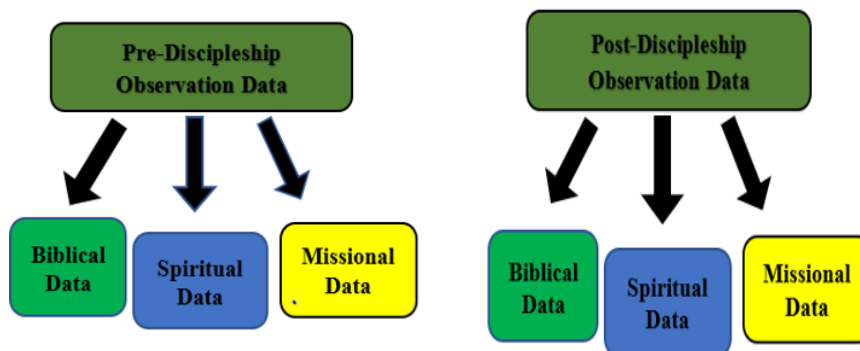


Figure 3.3b. Qualitative Data Distribution

### Qualitative and Quantitative Data Merge

Upon entering all the qualitative and quantitative data into Excel, the researcher prepared a side-by-side analysis that looked for similarities and differences in the reported scores between the qualitative and quantitative data for both pre-study and post-study. Each method's data was transferred to a new Excel spreadsheet, reviewed, analyzed, and compared (by study total, then category), and then merged for the final determination of results. Figures 3.3c and 3.3d visually represent the flow of the pre-study and post-study data merge.

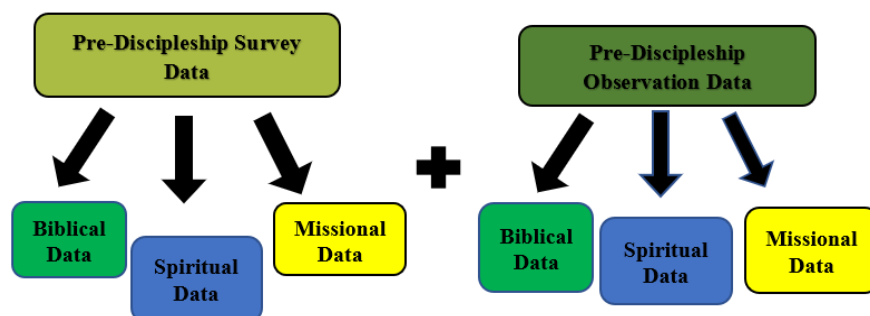


Figure 3.3c. Pre-Discipleship Quantitative Data Merge

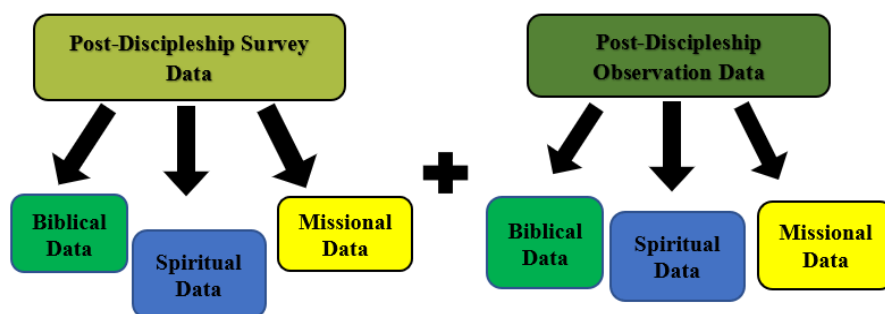


Figure 3.3d. Post-Discipleship Qualitative Data Merge

After each study, totals were finalized, the data was merged by method on an Excel spreadsheet, and the average totals by percentage were confirmed using a statistical calculator.

Once data was merged by study type, the researcher compared the final pre- and post-study totals (before and after) to conclude the intervention results (see Figure 3.3e).

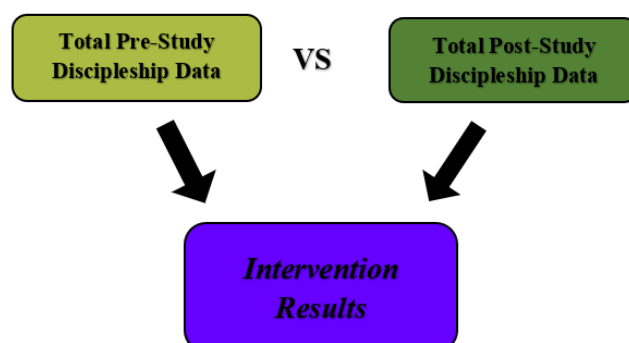


Figure 3.3e. Pre-Study and Post-Study Data Comparison

#### Implementation Design Summary and Conclusions

The implementation design of the intervention occurred as anticipated by the researcher within a total of eight weeks. Each step of the implementation design occurred without significant interruptions, and the researcher was able to make adequate adjustments as necessary to stay on schedule. All classes, except for one, were held each Sunday for one hour during Sunday school as scheduled. The total number of participants (eleven) met the study's criteria, and there were no anticipated delays due to technological concerns or problems.

After confirmation and receipt of all final data results, the researcher performed a random drawing, and a participant was selected as a winner of the \$25 Amazon gift card. The researcher notified the winner by phone and sent the prize within the same week of notification by U.S. postal priority mail.

The forthcoming chapter explains the evaluation of the quantitative and qualitative data from the pre-study and post-study methods. It includes graphs and charts that illustrate the reported data and highlights the changes that occurred before and after to measure the

intervention's influence on the group's understanding and views of discipleship theology for spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter provides a detailed report of the results of implementing a discipleship theology in the church's religious education curriculum for the spiritual growth of its middle-aged and older adult congregants at DCC. It shows how the pre- and post-study results were evaluated by total discipleship knowledge from quantitative and qualitative methods and then in the individual theological categories of discipleship. The level of intervention effectiveness was determined by the comparison and differences between the pre-study (before) and post-study (after) final scores.

The intervention design outline was based on theological principles of establishing a biblical foundation developed and taught through a spiritual foundation, leading to more mature missional disciples. The results are presented in three sections that reflect the intervention design implementation by data collection method (quantitative and qualitative), by study type (pre-discipleship and post-discipleship), theological category (biblical, spiritual, missional), and the comparison of the pre-data results to the post-data results.

The implementation design outline was constructed for the participants based on the members' current needs at DCC. The researcher's role at the church has allowed time to observe the lack of spiritual growth and solid theological knowledge absent from several members. The researcher strongly views biblical theology and believes that a structured, systematic understanding of discipleship theology would likely encourage the spiritual maturity of at least half of the participants.

## Final Data Results Reporting

Approximately one week after the post-study interview and survey were completed, the researcher began organizing and separating the data by method (quantitative and qualitative) and study type (pre-study and post-study). The data review analysis and evaluation process began approximately one week after the intervention ended and lasted for an additional three weeks. The method of reviewing, scoring, coding, and comparison required more time than initially anticipated by the researcher, but this was done to help ensure reliability (see Figure 4.1).

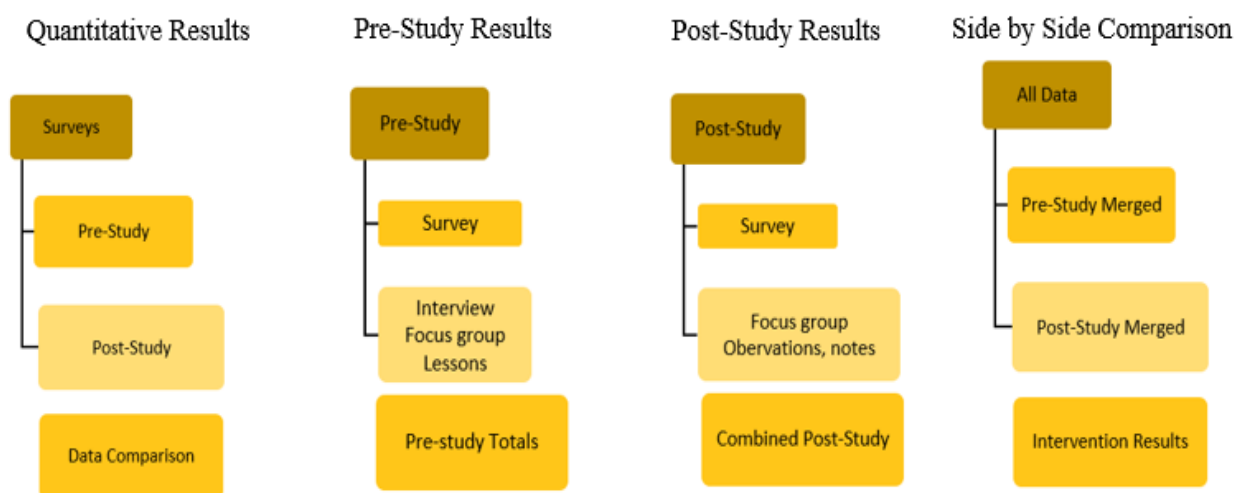


Figure 4.1. Step-by-Step Implementation of Final Data Reporting

While preparing the data to be reported, the researcher carefully analyzed areas of overlap, comparison, and contrast within each method, observing that most areas agreed in support, with a few minor areas of disagreement. Sensing advises at least one way of addressing these issues: organizing data of significant overlap as themes or patterns, the areas of disagreement as slippage, and the “realities” not represented in the findings as silences.<sup>1</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 197.



minor discrepancies were quickly resolved by revisiting and confirming initially reported data from surveys to ensure scores were valid, reviewing the coded data and notes from the classroom and interviews and observations several times, and listening to recordings.

### Preventing the Hawthorne Effect

The data for this DMIN action research project was collected from purposive samples of selective people at the church who met the criteria essential to the research.<sup>2</sup> Sensing notes the necessity of using caution when determining sound sampling. He explains the importance of checking for indications of The Hawthorne Effect, a theory that questions the reliability when the subjects know they are being studied.<sup>3</sup> Given this possibility, the researcher chose criteria that included active church members who regularly attend the church's educational programs such as Bible study and Sunday school and have demonstrated a desire to learn and to grow spiritually and less on the research particulars and outcome. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there appeared to be no evidence of The Hawthorne Effect on the outcome of the study's quantitative and qualitative data results.

### Participant Demographics Data

There was a total of eleven who participated and attended more than half of the classes. Approximately half of the class actively participated in each lesson. The participants comprised nine females and two males, aged forty-five to seventy-three (see Table 2). All participants in the study indicated that they considered themselves self-confessing, practicing Christians, and

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<sup>2</sup> Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 82.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

firm believers in Jesus Christ for approximately ten or more years. All were active DCC members, including nine regular Sunday school and Bible study attendees.

Table 2. Project Participant Demographics

	<b>Total Amount</b>	<b>% of Group</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	9	82
Male	2	2
<b>Age</b>		
45 to 55	6	55
56 to 73	5	45
<b>#of Years a Christian</b>		
10 - 29	7	64
30 or more	4	36
<b>Sunday and Bible School Attendees</b>		
Regular	9	82
Non-regular	2	20

### Final Data Analysis and Results

After the data for each method results were finalized and entered on an Excel spreadsheet, the researcher prepared the data to be merged. The pre-study and post-study quantitative and qualitative results were each transferred to a single Excel spreadsheet for comparison. The researcher cross-checked and confirmed the data results by method category within each study type. Once each data set was complete, the researcher merged all results on a single Excel spreadsheet, concluding with the average accuracy based on the total percentage. The researcher used a statistical calculator to confirm formulas used in Excel and calculated the mean (average), median, and standard deviation for each to provide further clarity and transparency for the data conclusion. The confirmed final numbers were entered side-by-side and compared on the spreadsheet for the researcher to make a tenable conclusion on the intervention

results. The forthcoming section summarizes the final score results, comparison, and analysis by method, study, and theological categories.

### **Total Survey Data Results**

The reported pre-study quantitative survey data correct score ranged between 53 and 91, with a mean score of 77.00 and a standard deviation of 13.7. The post-study correct score ranged from 72 to 100, with a mean score of 86.16 and a standard deviation of 7.97. These results reflect an approximate 9 percent increase or difference between quantitative pre- and post-study discipleship knowledge (see Table 3).

Table 3. Pre-Study vs. Post-Study Survey Scores

	<i>% Correct-Pre</i>	<i>% Correct-Post</i>
Mean	77.00	86.16
Median	83.00	85.00
Highest	91	100
Lowest	53	72

### **Pre-Discipleship Study Results**

The pre-study findings are represented in Figures 4.2a and 4.2b graphs and combined in 4.2c. The results reported an average percentage of accuracy taken from the total participants in each theological category (biblical, spiritual, and missional). The quantitative data was taken from survey responses, and the qualitative was based on the level of correct answers to questions as well as the relevance of statements, comments, and participation during interviews and classroom lessons.

The results indicate that the group's total pre-discipleship survey knowledge in terms of accuracy was an average of about 76 percent. The group's resulting pre-study discipleship

knowledge from the survey reported spiritual as the highest (81%) and was followed by missional (76%), then biblical (71%) as the lowest (see Figure 4.2a).

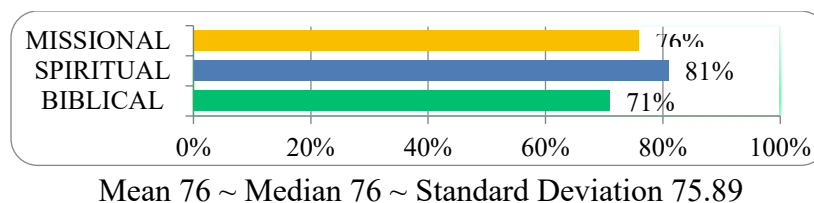


Figure 4.2a. Pre-Discipleship Quantitative Results

The qualitative data was taken from pre-study focus group interview observations, classroom recordings, and journal notes. The results averaged in total approximately 74 percent accuracy (median 75, mean 74) with a slight difference in percent to the quantitative (about 5-8%), still within an acceptable range of error that supports quantitative findings indicative that participants' overall pre-study strength to the ratio of group's pre-study spiritual knowledge as the strongest (79%), followed by missional (75%) with the most considerable difference of approximately 10 percent in biblical (68%). Accordingly, the supporting pre-study quantitative data consistency reflected the qualitative data observations as recorded by the researcher (see Figure 4.2b).

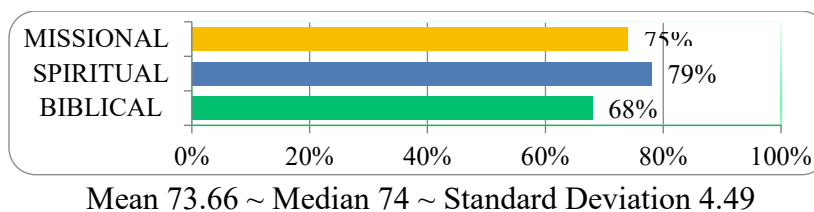


Figure 4.2b. Pre-Discipleship Qualitative Results

The merged quantitative and qualitative data reveals that the participant's overall group pre-study knowledge strength was strongest in spiritual (80%), then missional (74%), and weakest in biblical (70%). The total average score for the group's pre-discipleship knowledge was about 75 percent. The difference between each ranged category scored an average of 4 to 10 percent of the pre-data results (see Figure 4.2c).

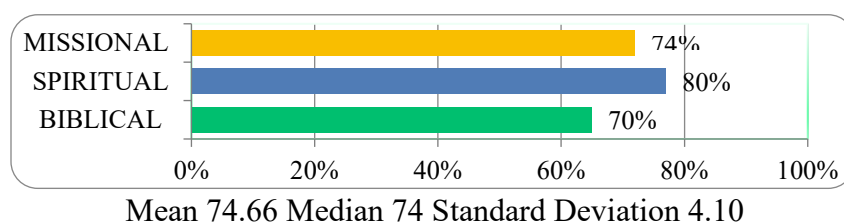


Figure 4.2c. Combined Pre-Discipleship Results

The reported qualitative data was within a small margin of error, close enough to the quantitative data, confirming the pre-discipleship knowledge that the participants were vital in spiritual, missional, and biblical topics. The researcher's notes and observations during the pre-study interview supported the quantitative based on questions and answers. Based on the analysis of both data collections, more than half of the participants had a fair amount of spiritual knowledge of discipleship, followed by missional. Classroom observations further supported the participant's strong view of spirituality that supports this strength. During the pre-study focus interview discussion on spiritual growth, participants were asked to rate the importance of spiritual growth to a Christian on a scale of one to ten. The majority quickly agreed, ten out of ten.

### Post- Discipleship Study Results

The post-study findings are represented in Figures 4.3a and 4.3b and combined in 4.3c. The data was collected, analyzed, and reported in the same manner as the pre-study data.

Where spiritual knowledge scored the highest in the pre-study data, the post-study quantitative data showed a reported increase in missional knowledge, slightly higher (2%) than biblical. Compared to pre-study data findings, missional increased by approximately 14 percent, spiritual increased by 6 percent, and biblical increased by 14 percent. As reflected in quantitative survey results, the total difference between discipleship knowledge from pre- and post-study was about 12 percent (See Figure 4.3a).

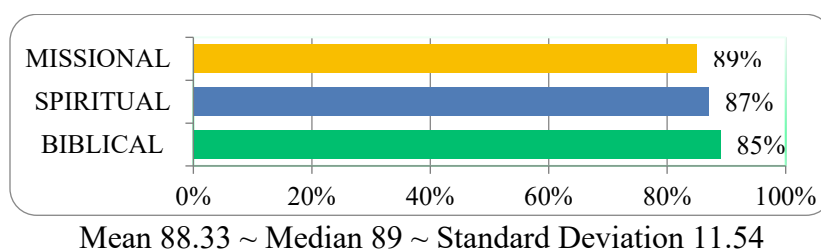


Figure 4.3a. Post-Discipleship Quantitative Results

The comparison of the reported post-study qualitative data to the pre-study data reflected a slightly higher difference or increase in the groups' knowledge. Missional data was also highest, as found in the quantitative data, with an increase of approximately 15 percent, spiritual increase of 11 percent, and biblical increase of 12 percent, compared to the reported pre-study qualitative data (see Figure 4.3b).

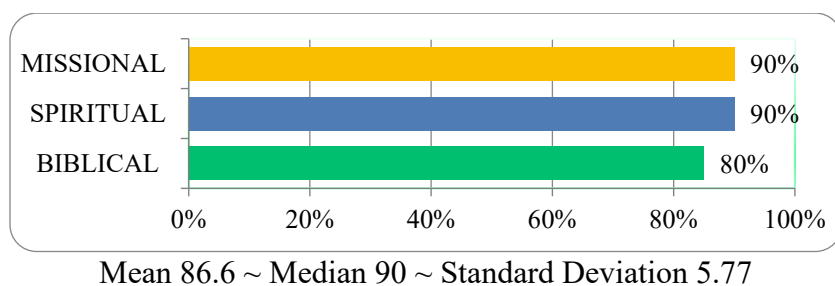


Figure 4.3b. Post-Discipleship Qualitative Results

The average difference between the reported qualitative and the quantitative was approximately 2 to 5 percent, a slight difference that confirms the reliability of the supporting qualitative data. Post-study breakdown by theological category indicates that the group's most substantial post-discipleship knowledge was missional (only by a small percentage), followed by spiritual, then biblical. These total data results show an overall combined quantitative and qualitative data increase by category as missional 13 percent, spiritual 8 percent, and biblical 12 percent (see Figure 4.3c).

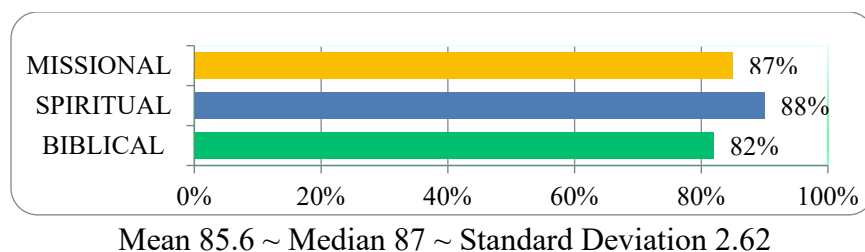
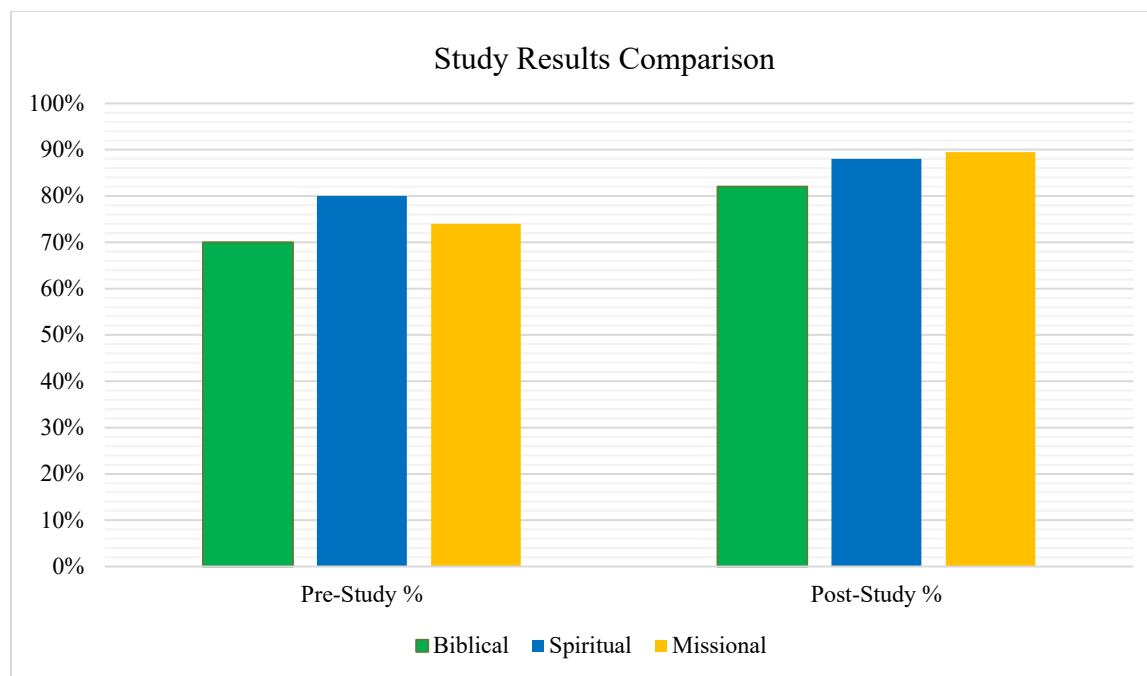


Figure 4.3c. Combined Post-Discipleship Results

### Pre-Study and Post-Study Data Comparison

The chart below is a visual illustration of a side-by-side comparison of the data indicating the differences that represent the results of the intervention (see Figure 4.4).



	<i>% Correct-Pre</i>	<i>% Correct-Post</i>
Mean	74.66	85.66
Median	74.00	87.00

Figure 4.4. Side-by-Side Total Data Comparison

A side-by-side comparison of the total pre-study and post-study data was made for the researcher to display the complete evaluation and show the actual effectiveness of the intervention (see Figure 4.4). Pre-study totals showed a mean of 74.66 and a median of 74.00, with a standard deviation of 5.03. Post-study total resulted in a mean of 85.66, a median of 87.00, and a standard deviation of 3.21. Accordingly, the combined data reflected an average increase of approximately 11 percent (mean) and 13 percent (median).

#### Final Data Conclusions

The reported post-study intervention data showed a total increase in post-intervention discipleship knowledge of approximately 11 to 13 percent. Biblical knowledge increased by 12 percent, spiritual by 8 percent, and missional by 13 percent. The results represent a slight



increase in total discipleship knowledge (11-13%), though the researcher's initial anticipation was to be closer to 40 to 50 percent. The researcher notes that most participants' general attitude and feedback post-discipleship was positive, with a general increase in desire to grow.

The increase was less than anticipated by the researcher, but consideration must be given due to time constraints of only six weeks of intervention lessons. Based on previous interactions and observations with the group, the anticipation was that the total pre-study data would have been reported lower (between 65-70%) with an expected increase of at least 35 to 45 percent. Because of this, the researcher did a careful and thorough review of the qualitative data to ensure that it accurately supported the quantitative data. The results in the pre-discipleship data, which reported spiritual as the highest (most vital), were also unexpected as the researchers anticipated biblical to be highest, which reported lowest.

Where spiritual was reported as highest in the pre-study data, missional was now the highest-ranking category in the post-study data results. The data reported an increase in missional knowledge as the highest category from pre-study of about 13 percent, which may have resulted from the post-study focus group where participants were allowed to think of ways to become more missional. The researcher's observations from the post-study focus group indicate how this exercise of open engagement and discussion on ideas influenced the accuracy of responses, which most likely transferred to the survey. The researcher challenged each participant to commit to regularly attending fellowship services and contributing more by thinking of ways to express missional discipleship. Some commitment suggestions were as follows:

- Commitment to regular fellowship.

- Participating in broader outreach such as community help initiatives such as a neighborhood watch.
- Offering help and checking on a neighbor or family member.
- Evangelizing and inviting family, neighbors, and friends to attend a church service.
- Reaching out to former church members who have not attended church in a long time.
- Be daily reminded of the fact that as a disciple, you are serving God’s people.

### **Post-Study Observations and Evaluation of the Intervention Design**

As reported earlier, this DMIN action research project implementation included triangulation for data collection, defined as “a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources.”<sup>4</sup> Based on the nature of this DMIN action research project, the researcher determined that triangulation would be the most efficient method to record data due to its multiple ways of collecting data through surveys, interviews, and classroom observations, effectively enhancing the validity of the results.<sup>5</sup> This section discusses a few of the researcher’s post-study observations by evaluating some of the methodological strengths and weaknesses in the intervention design.

#### Methodological Strengths

**Lincoln and Guba are credited with finding the trustworthiness criteria in triangulation for judging and evaluating qualitative research.**<sup>6</sup> This DMIN action intervention employed a multi-method triangulation that was a methodological strength in

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<sup>4</sup> Lemon & Hayes, “Enhancing,” 605.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

demonstrating and supporting dependability and reliability in the results. The mixed method research design also considered Mezirow's transformative learning theory, which causes a perspective transformation or a different way of accomplishing a task.<sup>7</sup> The data collection through anonymous quantitative surveys encouraged participants to respond honestly to questions and statements and helped minimize the risk of survey bias. The qualitative data gathered from interviews and classroom observations, notes, and journals were beneficial tools to help confirm the accuracy of the quantitative data. Open-ended questionnaires and open dialogues also allowed easy identification of potential "gaps" in the literature themes and methods used in the intervention. The focus-group interviews allowed participants to be comfortable and gave the researcher additional "insider" angles in the study.

The contemplation of a possible "before-after" effect relationship between each study used before synthesizing the data from each method was another strength of this project's methodology. The pre-study versus post-study data was one of the most transparent ways of determining and measuring data and proved to be a helpful tool that helped the researcher adequately measure general knowledge before and after the intervention. Lemon and Hayes explain that this is done to rely on the dependability and substituting reliability to assert that findings are distinctive to a specific time and place.<sup>8</sup> The consistency of explanations is present across the data.<sup>9</sup> Further, credibility can only exist with dependability, which is the root of quality.<sup>10</sup> Last, confirmability refers to the objectivity of the phenomenon under investigation.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> James A. Lang and David J. Bochman, "Positive Outcomes of a Discipleship Process," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 54.

<sup>8</sup> Lemon & Hayes, "Enhancing," 605.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

It addresses whether the interpretations and findings are from the participants' lived experiences and do not include the researcher's biases.<sup>12</sup> This DMIN action research project trusted the dependability and reliability of the data as followed using the methods specified earlier that safeguarded the data to reflect the same.

This DMIN action research project also included a participative methodological approach to a discipleship theology linked to Christian education to encourage participants to engage in Christian discipleship. Just as Jesus willingly engaged various practices to remain in alignment with His Father's will, believers also utilize the embodied wills to bring their lives into life-giving alignment with the will of the Father.<sup>13</sup> In this context, individuals can explore and commit themselves to working and becoming part of the collective spiritual journey of the Christian church.<sup>14</sup> During the post-study focus group interview, more than half of the participants had begun planning or implementing ways to express missional discipleship. An ongoing Saturday Noon Day prayer initiative was executed two weeks after the intervention, which is still taking place weekly as of this writing. Approximately four participants have scheduled a meeting with a local community outreach organization to see how the church can become actively involved with their food and clothing distribution and homeless and low-income housing.

#### Methodological Weaknesses

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<sup>12</sup> Lemon & Hayes, "Enhancing," 605.

<sup>13</sup> Steven L. Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship that Forms the Christian Character," *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 1 (2019): 80.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Reddie, "Transformative Pedagogy, Black Theology and Participative Forms of Praxis," *Religions Basel, Switzerland* 9, no. 10 (2018):6 of 10.

The researcher observed several weaknesses in the methodological approach that could be improved in the design implementation. Sensing explains maximum variation sampling as the most helpful method for selecting people to participate in your problem who represent a broad range of perspectives to increase the inclusivity of a given project.<sup>15</sup> Since participation was limited to a targeted age range and church membership status, the sampling was limited as it relied upon a minimum variation. The researcher reflects that it would have been more beneficial to expand the participant's age group and extend the invitation to non-members of the church to participate, which would have produced a larger demographic of at least twenty to thirty to help produce broader results.

In comparing the effects of in-person learning to virtual learning, scholars have noted certain limitations that have been apparent in the implementation design of this DMIN research study. Studies have found that in-person presentations had a significantly more positive impact on social responsibility.<sup>16</sup> In this post-COVID society, it is necessary to consider a realistic perspective of the current transitions to online learning. However, some results suggest that changing project deliverables from an in-person to a virtual format may sometimes yield positive engaged learning outcomes.<sup>17</sup> As this DMIN action research project was held entirely on Zoom, the researcher observed some limitations to personal engagement, interactions, and background distractions, which would have likely not occurred in an in-person classroom setting.

Another methodological weakness in the design that was observed during the study was that survey questions were based on the researcher's assumption of the group's pre-existing

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<sup>15</sup> Sensing, *Quantitative Research*, 84.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew J. Zak, Luke F. Bugada, Xiao Yin Ma, and Fei Wen, "Virtual Versus In-Person Presentation as a Project Deliverable Differentially Impacts Student Engaged-Learning Outcomes in a Chemical Engineering Core Course." *Journal of Chemical Education* 98, no. 4 (2021): 1.

<sup>17</sup> Zak, Bugada, Yin Ma, and Wan, "Virtual Versus in-Person Presentation," 1.

knowledge of some of the biblical themes and topics, such as the Creation Mandate, the progression of God's covenant in the Old Testament, the Trinity Doctrine, and the Great Commission. These assumptions resulted in more time searching and explaining additional Scriptures, textbook sources, and online searches. Before preparing the survey questions, more qualitative insight could have been gathered from pre-study discussions with students in focus groups. Future pre-study survey questions should be prepared based on actual results instead of assumptions after pre-study screening interviews.

Although qualitative data helped confirm the study data and findings, it also partially presented a methodological weakness in the design. In-depth interviews provide vibrant information and offer the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, probe additional information, justify previous answers, and establish a connection between several topics.<sup>18</sup> Modern researchers have noted that one of the main problems with qualitative research is that the process is time-consuming, and interpretations are limited.<sup>19</sup> A revised theology of discipleship and related subject matter would utilize broader or variations of qualitative methods such as more in-depth, one-on-one personal interviews instead of relying on group interviews. It would allow additional time to obtain adequate information from individuals personally and provide a more comfortable environment that encourages conversation. Additional research that integrates this method would have to be done to see how effective it would be to yield the expected results. This action research design reflected this methodological weakness, requiring extra time to review, record, and analyze qualitative data. The qualitative method should have considered the additional time required for the study for extra steps of quantifying observational data. Although

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<sup>18</sup> Fernando Almeida, "Strategies To Perform a Mixed Methods Study," *European Journal of Education Studies*, [S.I.], (2018): 378.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

the scoring tool from Survey Monkey helped, the researcher spent an additional week reviewing and analyzing data to ensure the appropriate equivalent scores were recorded and the results would be consistent and reliable. Also, determining the proper relevancy level is where possible unintended bias could affect the results. All DMIN action research study projects that utilize triangular methods that include gathering data through qualitative methods should allot additional time to implement, record, and evaluate to minimize the risk of bias and further confirm the accuracy of the results.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This DMIN action research project aimed to implement a theology of discipleship into a local church's religious education curriculum for spiritual growth. The process was implemented through teaching a Sunday school educational curriculum based on biblical, spiritual, and missional foundations for discipleship. The purpose was to equip the middle-aged and older members at DCC to become spiritually mature through teaching for missional discipleship.

The overall results of the intervention were less substantial than initially anticipated by the researcher. The quantitative surveys and qualitative results revealed a partial lack of biblical knowledge on foundational biblical principles for discipleship, spiritual, and missional. It demonstrates how a theology of discipleship teaching curriculum can positively influence and increase one's knowledge and understanding of biblical discipleship; however, there must be additional time to implement missional practices. It would be the ultimate completion and test of this DMIN action research project's thesis to confidently support a theology of discipleship that leads to spiritual maturity and missional disciples.

The results also revealed that teaching does not always immediately translate to learning, and learning does not always immediately translate to practice. As indicated in the earlier chapters, this DMIN action research project's goal was to develop a theology of ongoing discipleship, which is the researcher's intent. Including an ongoing theology of discipleship in the church's Christian education curriculums can help lead the church towards forming a more mature and missionally focused church, with disciples making disciples.



There is no “real” way to “guarantee” discipleship outcome; however, studying biblical practices and imitating Christ can be the beginning of discipleship. Believers must take discipleship teaching and understand the significance of engaging with others for that engagement to be effective in building relational rapport.<sup>1</sup>

### **Post-Study Implementation Model Comparisons**

Although the results of this study were somewhat positive, the researcher anticipated a higher rate of increased knowledge of at least 40 to 50 percent. These results prompted the researcher to review the implementation methods used in this DMIN action research and compare them to those implemented in recent discipleship literature reviews, studies, and published work. The forthcoming section will examine some of the studies that included methodology, which could be considered for future research to produce more substantial results.

#### Follow the Model of Jesus

In “Discipleship: Follow the Model of Jesus in the Local Church,” Clyde Headley’s research study addressed the commitment necessary to discipleship based on the teachings of some of the early Christian church theologians. He demonstrates a discipleship model based on Jesus Christ’s and His disciples’ modeling in the New Testament. Headley refers to how the Bible depicts believers as “active participants” in discipleship in two ways: actively learning the lifestyle that Jesus taught and demonstrated and consisting of submission to His teaching and the discipling of others.<sup>2</sup> Headley further points out how the idea of disciples growing at their own

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<sup>1</sup> Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit,” 82.

<sup>2</sup> Clyde David Headley, “Discipleship: Following the Model of Jesus in the Local Church” (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2022), 119.

rate and in their own time differs from the biblical record.<sup>3</sup> Jesus, Paul, and the other disciples invested their time ministering to others.<sup>4</sup> When Jesus had modeled the kingdom ministry long enough for His disciples to learn to express the mission they had been observing and practicing, He sent them.<sup>5</sup> Further, Dallas Willard claims that if people are discipled the way Jesus modeled, they will have enough confidence to minister the way Jesus did, including making disciples.<sup>6</sup>

This DMIN active research project did not consider the inclusion of an emphasis on the “active” aspect of discipleship that focuses on the way Jesus modeled. A revised theology of discipleship study should put more focus on Jesus’ model of discipleship as a “practical” model, and that includes an emphasis on learning as an ongoing “active” process from the beginning that is not limited to education but one that is developed and maintained through the practice of discipling others. When people become disciples, they learn what Jesus said and live out what Jesus did, as all disciples actively learn, and a person cannot be a Christian without being a disciple.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, as disciples mature in Christ, they should disciple others.<sup>8</sup>

### Discipleship as a Mentoring Process

Another model that used Jesus as the best example of discipleship approached discipling others through pastoral mentorship. It emphasized discipleship as a one-on-one discipling process through personal mentorship. In this mentorship process, discipleship should follow the

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<sup>3</sup> Headley, “Discipleship,” 119.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Ruthven, “On the Quest for Authentic Christianity: Protestant Tradition and the Mission of Jesus,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (2016): 250.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>7</sup> Headley, “Discipleship,” 121.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

process of mentoring others who are teachable to take place within a small circle of influence.<sup>9</sup> The results reflected in this approach showed the leader or mentor's strengths when utilizing personal discipleship within their own lives, which genuinely influences the congregations they seek to lead.<sup>10</sup>

A comparison of this approach to this DMIN action research project is that although it addressed Jesus' examples and His relationship with the twelve disciples, it did not emphasize mentorship or teaching on a one-on-one basis. A revised theology of discipleship should include a section that covers detailed instruction on the examples of mentorship in the Old Testament, such as Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, to name a few, as well as the New Testament detailed account of Jesus with His disciples.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it should ideally include a few prospective mature disciples available to serve as mentors as needed. The inclusion of this method would require several additional weeks to implement.

### The Immersion Experience

Another recent discipleship curriculum research study is the "Immersion Experience." This biblically based small-group discipleship process is designed to help create the experience of participants soaking in the truths of God as He seeks to transform them.<sup>12</sup> This program is divided into eight modules, with topics that cover twenty-two lessons and subjects taught for twenty-two weeks. The curriculum stresses spiritual growth through teachings and practices of

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel Smith, "A Pastor's Approach to Discipleship and its Effect on the Local Church: A Three-Step Approach to Biblical Discipleship" (DMin diss., Liberty University, 2014), 91.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>11</sup> Jong Hyun Ryu, "Equipping Church Members for Contextualized Discipleship in Osaka-Central Seventh-day Adventist Church" (DMin diss., Conference, Japan, 2014), 14.

<sup>12</sup> Lang and Bochman, "Positive Outcomes," 52.

the spiritual disciplines. The goal is to convert discipleship to God through faith in the resurrected work of Jesus Christ's life and death on the cross, which is transformative.<sup>13</sup>

A comparison to this DMIN action research intervention is that although this project addressed the spiritual disciplines as necessary for spiritual growth and maturity, "The Immersion Experience" consisted of a deeper dive into the spiritual being of a person, dealing with issues and hindrances that can alter their walk with God. It also spent sufficiently more time (twenty-two weeks versus six weeks) to help participants understand and experience the transformation of God through the work of Jesus Christ.

Both studies relied on the use of mixed triangulation to collect data. Unlike this DMIN action research project, "The Immersion Experience" used a method that handled the qualitative data in two parts, one that was based on not only the researcher's observations but also a participant essay question after the survey to describe the experience of a paradigm shift with 80 percent of participants answering positively.<sup>14</sup> The second part used a standard phenomenological, purposeful criterion-based sampling strategy to provide information-rich interview data related to the research questions.<sup>15</sup> This phenomenology was used not to prove causality but to faithfully capture the participants' lived experiences.<sup>16</sup> The respondents express thoughts and opinions through causal statements, and the researcher(s) for the project utilize them to represent their voices authentically.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Lang and Bochman, "Positive Outcomes," 53.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60.

The discipleship process in “The Immersion Experience” is understood as a deep small group experience, not just a curriculum.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, 80 percent of the survey respondents from the study reported having experienced a positive paradigm shift in their beliefs and attitudes.<sup>19</sup> The most significant shifts came in their connection with God and the depth of their relationships with other believers. The results reported that the in-depth interviews with alumni revealed how their participation in “The Immersion Experience” group discipleship process moved them toward emotional, relational, and spiritual health, indicating they were no longer “stuck.”<sup>20</sup> Similarities to this DMIN action project is that it also used mixed methods; however, this DMIN action study could have benefited from a more personal methodological approach with responses from participants such as in an essay and individual post-study interviews.

#### The Know. Be. Live.

Another perspective suggests a new kind of discipleship model that reflects similar theological principles covered in this DMIN research project, which incorporates the concepts of “knowing, being, and living.”<sup>21</sup> It seeks to frame a 360-degree approach to holistic discipleship that considers three significant biblical mandates: the Cultural (Dominion) Mandate, the Great Commandment Mandate, and the Great Commission Mandate.<sup>22</sup> Another aspect of this approach, similar to this DMIN action research project, is that it utilizes theological principles to

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<sup>18</sup> Lang and Bochman, "Positive Outcomes," 71.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>21</sup> John D. Basie, *Know. Be. Live.: A 360 Degree Approach to Discipleship in a Post-Christian Era* (New York, NY: Forefront Books, 2021), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

become the pillar of the believer's spiritual transformation to provide a rock-solid foundation that leads to pedagogical discipleship practices.<sup>23</sup>

### **Post-Study Reflections on Problem**

This DMIN action research project addressed the problem that most middle-aged and older congregants at DCC need a biblical understanding of discipleship. It was apparent to the researcher from an insider and outsider perspective that the church's current discipleship practices were not working. When measuring this DMIN action research intervention to the church's current practices, the approaches were similar as both covered Bible-based lessons for approximately six weeks. A noted difference was in the educational topics for each approach. DCC's current discipleship curriculum covers general teachings on baptism, communion, and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see Chapter 1). At the same time, this DMIN action intervention taught biblically based foundational topics (biblical, spiritual, and missional) for discipleship. The church also used mentors, while this project did not consider mentorship, mainly due to a lack of time, resources, and availability of mature mentors.

The problem was identified based on observations by the researcher, who has been the adult Sunday school teacher at DCC for the past thirteen years, along with several conversations with the senior pastor. The pre-study data results reflected some validity to this observation, though the reported data indicated a higher level of knowledge than the researcher initially expected. The data results supported that, at the very least, the problem was not as distressing. A post-study analysis of the problem alongside post-study intervention methods suggests that the problem is not necessarily a complete lack of understanding as it is an absence of a strong

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<sup>23</sup> Basic, *Know. Be. Live*, 13.

emphasis on becoming disciples who make disciples. Some members call for more profound learning than what is available in Christian basics.<sup>24</sup>

There are also recent studies that express a point of view that sometimes the cause of a lack of spiritual growth among the laity may be because some leaders may need to be fully aware of the dangers of not addressing the members' spiritual growth.<sup>25</sup> As members mature in Christ, they develop His character, enabling them to solve some problems.<sup>26</sup> The problem, therefore, may not necessarily be that the laity needs to be trained in discipleship practices but for the church leadership to begin to emphasize and prioritize biblical discipleship development.

### **Post-Study Reflections on Purpose**

This DMIN action research project aimed to educate and equip believers for spiritual growth through developing a theology of discipleship curriculum. Post-study observations conclude that the implementation partially achieved this purpose. The goal was to utilize education as a foundation for believers through a theological, biblically-based curriculum. Still, results need to adequately measure how much it has impacted spiritual growth. It questions what is considered accurate and sufficient to measure spiritual growth. Some scholars have expressed how more theological work will be needed to develop assessments sensitive to spiritual, character, and moral change anticipated within the religious context.<sup>27</sup> Spiritual growth toward discipleship should be observed and measured over time. The evidence of growth can be realized

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<sup>24</sup> Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship", 204.

<sup>25</sup> Anthony Ray McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship Make It According to the Pattern" (DMIn diss., Liberty University, 2021), 56.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Steven L Porter, Steven J Sandage, David C Wang, and Peter C Hill. "Measuring the Spiritual, Character, and Moral Formation of Seminarians: In Search of a Meta-Theory of Spiritual Change," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*. 12, no. 1 (2019): 5.

in at least one of two ways: realized change that includes increased humility and increased intimacy with God that can be observed through processes that indicate that changes are occurring, such as an increase of God and self-awareness.<sup>28</sup> The anticipated results can be referred to as “bearing fruit” or the process of “walking in the Spirit” or “abiding in the vine.”<sup>29</sup> Not only are both aspects of change (outcomes and processes) part of the Christian picture of formation, but assessing both aspects of change is a preferred approach, given that seminarians might show measurable signs of being in the midst of change even if they realize a change has not yet occurred.<sup>30</sup>

The post-study reflections on the purpose suggest that an educational curriculum alone on a theology of discipleship cannot achieve the purpose of ensuring spiritual growth for missional discipleship but can be considered the beginning or “foundation” accompanied by activities that put learning into measurable practice. When these principles and practices of discipleship training are taught and learned, the disciple becomes sensitive to the “high call” of Christ to go into the world and make disciples.<sup>31</sup>

### **Post-Study Reflections on Thesis**

This DMIN action thesis considered how a theology of discipleship curriculum effectively equips the believers at DCC to lead missional discipleship within the community. The intervention observations show that education is one of the first steps toward equipping believers for missional discipleship. A renewed interest in discipleship and how it may be

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<sup>28</sup> Porter, Sandage, Wang, and Hill, "Measuring the Spiritual Character," 9.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Michelle Evans-Brown, “Policies and Practices of Apprehension and Application in Christian Education” (Th.M. Thesis, Regents University, 2018), 5.



“learned, educated, or developed especially by and among the lay Christians has recently been observed.”<sup>32</sup> It includes learning not limited to thinking and beliefs, nor is Christian learning solely the result of organized Christian education courses as individuals learn everywhere and all the time, values, attitudes, virtues, dispositions, and skills, and not just beliefs and ideas.<sup>33</sup>

A theology of discipleship should include more than just learning since discipleship requires interaction with others to grow and make other disciples. Scholars observe that the potential danger in emphasizing “learning” in discipleship can sometimes give the wrong impression that commitment to Jesus is merely about acquiring information.<sup>34</sup> Teaching others about Jesus is the first element of discipleship.<sup>35</sup> It is noted that a theology of discipleship must include theological learning that translates more to practical rather than theoretical. A revised thesis would include a theology of discipleship for spiritual growth that leads to missional thinking and is expressed through practices in the community.

### **Research Implications**

The DMIN action research implications revealed that a theology of discipleship must be both theological and practical. Discipleship practices begin with teaching theology but must be ongoing to become pedagogical. It is not only suggested but is necessary for spiritual growth in the believer, and it will only be effective if it is reinforced and put into practice. It is not limited to just laity and older long-term church congregants but can be implemented into a curriculum for leadership and new converts. Every effective discipleship program should consider

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<sup>32</sup> Jeff Astley, “Discipleship Learning.” *Rural Theology* 13, no. 1 (2015): 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Siew, “A Case Study in Adult Discipleship,” 204.

<sup>35</sup> Headley, “Following the Model of Jesus,” 96.

discipleship as an ongoing part of the believer's identity and reflected in everyday life. Churches and ministries should include regular practices of the spiritual disciplines not just as a ritual for the believer but as a necessity for spiritual growth in the ongoing discipleship formation process.

The Great Commission mandates that discipleship is not optional for the believer but must be intentional. Learning a theology of discipleship should be accompanied by intentionally equipping believers with the Word of God through accountable relationships empowered by the Holy Spirit to replicate faithful followers of Christ.<sup>36</sup> Every church member should be a "trained disciple," not just a select few, and because each member of the church has unique relationships outside of the church, a discipling relationship should occur with anyone they encounter.<sup>37</sup>

Further implications from this DMIN action research also indicate that teaching discipleship must be accompanied by daily practicing of the discipleship principles. The learning and the growing must equate to doing (i.e., practicing) what Jesus did and taught to the early disciples to fulfill the Great Commission.

### **Research Applications**

This DMIN action research project can be implemented as part of a new discipleship program or integrated into an existing Christian biblical education curriculum such as Sunday school or Bible study. It can be included in an instructional Christian program, Bible college, or a seminary course in biblical discipleship. As mentioned earlier, it should not be limited to just laity but extended to leadership as well. The context would have to be adjusted as necessary because this study was designed to be explicitly implemented in the DCC laity.

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<sup>36</sup> Michael Cauthorne, "Developing an Intentional Disciple Making Strategy for Fathers to Lead Their Families in Spiritual Transformation" (DMin Thesis, Liberty University School of Divinity, 2021), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Headley, "Following the Model of Jesus," 118.

There is nowhere in the Bible that supports church membership alone as synonymous with discipleship. An individual usually turns toward God through the drawing of the Holy Spirit after hearing and receiving the gospel. Discipleship should be taught and presented as a process that begins when a person hears about Jesus and continues until the disciple draws their last breath.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, church leadership can benefit from teaching, preaching, and offering discipleship in its biblical context. It may begin with membership but must actively be sought and practiced by equipping church disciples.

This research contributes to the literature as not merely a discipleship training program for church members, leadership, and youth departments but one designed to teach discipleship as a theological principle, a "theology in practice," for individuals in all levels of church membership, including the laity. These theological foundations of biblical, spiritual, and missional discipleship form a discipleship theology that emphasizes the Triune nature of God, in which the believer participates in His mission with the community through faith. The result of this study indicates that the intervention increases knowledge, though not a large one, yet one that is a beginning. A realistic maturation determination can only be observed over time, not within a six-week limited course.

### **Research Limitations**

This DMIN action research was subject to limitations beyond the researcher's control, as mentioned earlier in Chapter 1. The sampling of the participants was limited to a small size due to the post-COVID-19 drop in the regular attendance of many church members. The researcher

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<sup>38</sup> Headley, "Following the Model of Jesus," 130.

was limited to utilizing the Sunday school class and time slot because of the consistent regular attendance (between ten and fifteen) among the members.

The participant sampling was also limited to non-clergy ministry leadership laity members. It did not include ministry leaders such as pastors, preachers, and teachers at DCC because they could not attend classes during the designated Sunday school time slot for intervention lessons.

The study participants were primarily women because only three of the fourteen respondents were male, and two fully participated. The study demographic may imply that the results are limited to the views of women and church laity only; however, there is nothing to support this conclusion for this intervention methodology as the researcher believes it was broad enough to be implemented to all church congregants and genders.

Another limitation was that the intervention was virtually held on Zoom, which inhibited the researcher's ability to manage a reasonable amount of interaction between participants and prevent unanticipated background noise during class and interview instruction.

### **Further Research**

The results of this DMIN action research project suggest that a theology of discipleship curriculum is just a first step in equipping believers to become spiritually mature disciples who make disciples. Teaching on biblical, spiritual, and missional foundations alone cannot guarantee that believers will become complete disciples. In James 2:14-26, the apostle speaks about faith, but apart from works, faith is dead. True Christian faith is seen through works.<sup>39</sup> Moo explains how James firmly emphasizes the “doing of the Word” as “essential” to valid religion.<sup>40</sup> The

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<sup>39</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Commentary on James: From the Baker Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2019), 16.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

same application must be applied to discipleship, which is the learning to grow to become "practicing" missional disciples. Most of the participants expressed a strong desire to put this teaching into practice. Still, the hesitation comes with committing to consistently carry out discipleship practices without allowing life circumstances to become a hindrance.

Further research is recommended in six months to a year to see where the church is regarding discipleship practices. The researcher recommends a qualitative study with participants that addresses post-discipleship study outcomes through questionnaires and individual interviews to see how knowledge has increased and where they are in missional discipleship practices. Although participants have initiated a weekly corporate prayer hour and are working with a community outreach initiative, an additional study could further benefit a theology of discipleship to see its full impact on the "doing" and "commitment" to discipleship.

God crafted a design for His church to advance the followers of Jesus towards Christian maturity.<sup>41</sup> Countless discipleship methods are available; therefore, considering context helps determine the best outcome. Further research in post-discipleship programs could prove its effectiveness in practice for long-term self-professing active disciples. An ideal model for discipleship includes the church as a community of Christians serious about their discipleship, living out their mission in the world.<sup>42</sup> It will result in a "lived theology" pedagogy that includes service learning and genuine encounters with faith community members.<sup>43</sup>

This DMIN action research study suggests that a six-week curriculum can provide a foundation of a discipleship theology toward producing spiritually mature believers. Still, more

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<sup>41</sup> McKee, "Proven Biblical Discipleship," 151.

<sup>42</sup> Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 192.

<sup>43</sup> Jacqueline A. Bussie, "Teaching to Transform: Theological Reflections on the Gifts and Challenges of Service-Learning" in Charles Marsh, Peter Slade, and Sarah Azaransky (eds), *Lived Theology: New Perspectives on Method, Style, and Pedagogy* (New York, 2016; online edn, Oxford Academic, 17 Nov. 2016), 191.

work is needed to expect a more significant outcome on results. Recent studies consider that when students are allowed to build on their knowledge and experience to connect to the subject being taught, the foundations for transformational learning are laid.<sup>44</sup> Further research is needed to see how these teachings work out in practice. A potential continuation of this project would be an implementation of the missional and evangelism aspect of putting into practice Jesus' model of training of the disciples: selection, association, consecration, impartation (empowerment of the Holy Spirit), demonstration (modeling), delegation (sent out), supervision, (checking), and reproduction (do what He did, and more) would require at least a six-month study time to evaluate its effectiveness fully.<sup>45</sup>

Further study also should be conducted to determine if a lack of spiritual growth directly correlates to a lack of emphasis on biblical discipleship. One course of action would be a study on the history of the spiritual growth of church members and the amount of emphasis on biblical discipleship practices in the church over the last decade. The criteria would be measured in part based on increased church attendance and regular participation in biblical classes, Sunday school, evangelistic initiatives, and outreach to provide a more definitive conclusion on its effectiveness in practice. Positive spiritual, characterological, and moral changes within the community should accompany such outward expression of missional behavior;<sup>46</sup> perhaps a rediscovery of evangelism as essential to missional discipleship (participation in *missio Dei*) as a participation in the coming of the kingdom of God.<sup>47</sup> It would be demonstrated as an expression

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<sup>44</sup> Eeva John, Naomi Nixon & Nick Shepherd, "Life-changing Learning for Christian Discipleship and Ministry: A Practical Exploration," *Practical Theology*, (2018), 300-314.

<sup>45</sup> Siew, "A Case Study in Adult Discipleship," 192.

<sup>46</sup> Porter, Sandage, Wang, and Hill, "Measuring the Spiritual Character," 10.

<sup>47</sup> Frederik Coetzee, Malan Nel and Hannes Knoetze, "Evangelism as an Invitation to Missional Discipleship in the Kingdom of God," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 44, (2023), 1 of 8.

of God's character through the power of the Holy Spirit daily, being infused and renewed in the believer's life.

Another insight to be considered for future research study is that perhaps new discipleship programs are not the answer to the lack of discipleship in the church today.<sup>48</sup> The Scripture is a strong reminder that Jesus Christ never changes (Heb 13:8). Life constantly changes, people change, and preachers change, but Jesus is as faithful and stable as He has been and always will be.<sup>49</sup> As it is true of Jesus, so is the same concerning His Word and teachings. The answer is for the disciples to demonstrate the disciplines and truths taught to them to be incorporated into their daily lives.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Headley, "Following the Model of Jesus," 124.

<sup>49</sup> Michael Pearl, *Understanding The Book of Hebrews: A Word-by-Word Commentary* (Ashland: TN: No Greater Joy Ministries, 2021), 130.

<sup>50</sup> Headley, "Following the Model of Jesus," 124.

## APPENDIX A

**Permission Request**

April 01, 2023

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED],

As a doctoral candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics. The title of my research project is Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth, and the purpose of my research is to demonstrate how a theology of discipleship curriculum can educate and equip believers for spiritual growth.

I request your permission to contact the church and Sunday school members at Deliverance Christian Cathedral International to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to contact me to schedule a 10 to 15-minute pre-screening interview, complete the attached 15-to-20-minute surveys, participate in two focus group interviews, approximately 60 minutes each, and attend classes held on Sundays for one hour for approximately six weeks via Zoom during Sunday school. The entire study should last approximately six to eight weeks. The data gathered from the surveys, interviews, and classroom observations will be used only to measure how effective a religious, educational discipleship curriculum is to middle-aged and older adult church members for spiritual maturity. Participants will be given informed consent information prior to participating. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval and return it to me by email at [REDACTED]. A permission letter document template is attached for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Sheina L. Rivera  
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University



## APPENDIX B

**Permission Response**

[Official Church Letterhead]

April 10, 2023

Sheina L. Rivera  


Dear Sheina L. Rivera,

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth, I have decided to grant you permission to contact our members and invite them to participate in your research study.

Check the following boxes, as applicable:

[[I/We] grant permission for Sheina L. Rivera to contact our members to invite them to participate in [his/her] research study.

Sincerely,  
  


## APPENDIX C

**Recruitment: Letter or Email**

April 10, 2023

Anyone  
123 Some Street  
Any City, Any State 11111

Dear Recipient:

As a doctoral student at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics. The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how a theology of discipleship curriculum can educate and equip believers for spiritual growth, and I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must:

- Be 45 years or older.
- Be a self-confessing, born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be a practicing Christian who believes faith to be essential and regularly attends worship services at the church, other than for a special occasion, two or more times a month.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to do the following:

- Complete two 15-to 20-minute anonymous surveys on your view of discipleship, one before and one after the study.
- Participate in two focus group interviews, one pre-study and one post-study, approximately 60 minutes each.
- Have regular access to a reliable computer, laptop, or smartphone with internet access.
- Make your best effort to attend all classes during the study, which will take place via Zoom during Sunday school for 60 minutes each Sunday for approximately six to eight weeks.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, click here to complete the online survey:

[REDACTED] or you may complete the attached survey and return it to me by placing and sealing it in the provided envelope. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule a brief 10 to 15-minute pre-screening interview.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign and return the consent document before or during the pre-study focus group interview. After you have read the consent form, please click the (survey link) to proceed. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate in the study.

Participants will be entered into a raffle to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Sheina L. Rivera  
DMIN Doctoral Candidate

[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX D

### **Recruitment: Verbal In-Person or Telephone Script**

Hello Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics. The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how a theology of discipleship curriculum can educate and equip believers for spiritual growth, and if you meet my participant criteria and are interested, I would like to invite you to join my study.

Participants must:

- Be 45 years or older.
- Be a self-confessing, born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be a practicing Christian who self-identifies and believes faith to be essential and regularly attends worship services at the church, other than for a special occasion, two or more times a month.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to do the following:

- Complete two 15-minute anonymous surveys on your view of discipleship, one before and one after the study.
- Participate in two focus group interviews, one pre-study and one post-study, approximately 60 minutes each.
- Have regular access to a reliable computer, laptop, or smartphone with internet access.
- Make your best effort to attend all classes during the study, which will take place during Sunday school for 60 minutes each Sunday for approximately six to eight weeks.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

Would you like to participate? (If yes) Excellent. Could I get your email address so I can send you the link to the study, or would you mind completing this survey and returning it to me by placing it in and sealing the provided envelope? Can we set up a time for a brief 10-to-15-minute pre-screening interview? (If no) I understand. Thank you for your time.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign and return the consent document before or during the pre-study focus group interview. After you have read

the consent form, please click [survey link] to proceed with the survey. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate in the study.

Participants' names will be entered into a raffle to receive an Amazon \$25 gift card.

Thank you for your time. Do you have any questions?

## APPENDIX E

### **Recruitment: Verbal Announcement**

Good morning (afternoon) to all,

I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how a theology of discipleship curriculum can educate and equip believers for spiritual growth. To participate, you must be 45 years or older, a self-confessed born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and regularly attend church worship services. Participants will be asked to complete two 10 to 15-minute anonymous surveys concerning their view of discipleship, participate in two focus group interviews, approximately 60 minutes each, have regular access to a reliable computer, laptop, or smartphone with internet access, and make the best effort to attend all classes held via Zoom, which will take place on Sundays for 60 minutes each, for approximately six to eight weeks.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please contact me at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule a brief 10 to 15-minute pre-screening interview. A consent document will be provided on the first page of the survey to be completed before or at the time of the pre-study focus group interview. Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Thank you all for your time.

## APPENDIX F

**Recruitment: Follow-Up**

April 25, 2023

Anyone  
123 Some Street  
Any City, Any State 11111

Dear Recipient:

As a doctoral candidate at the John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics. Last week, an email/letter was sent to you inviting you to participate in a research study. This follow-up email/letter is being sent to remind you to respond by completing the survey if you would like to participate and have not already done so. The deadline for participation is May 00, 2023.

Participants, if willing, will be asked to do the following:

- Complete two 10 to 15-minute anonymous surveys on your view of discipleship, one before and one after the study.
- Participate in two focus group interviews, one pre-study and one post-study, approximately 60 minutes each.
- Have regular access to a reliable computer, laptop, or smartphone with internet access.
- Make your best effort to attend all classes during the study, which will take place during Sunday school for 60 minutes each Sunday for approximately six to eight weeks.

Participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be collected.

To participate, click here: [REDACTED], or you may complete the attached survey and return it to me by placing and sealing it in the provided envelope. You may contact me at [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule a pre-screening interview.

A consent document is provided on the first page of the survey. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign and return the consent document before or during the pre-study focus group interview. After you have read the consent form, please click here: [REDACTED] to proceed

with the study. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to participate in the study.

Participants will be entered into a raffle to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Sheina L. Rivera  
DMIN Doctoral Candidate





## APPENDIX G

### Recruitment: Social Media

#### Facebook

ATTENTION FACEBOOK FRIENDS: I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Ministry Degree in Theology and Apologetics at Liberty University. The purpose of my research is to demonstrate how a theology of discipleship curriculum can educate and equip believers for spiritual growth. To participate, you must be 45 years or older, a self-confessed, born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, and regularly attend the church worship services. Participants will be asked to complete two 10 to 15-minute anonymous surveys on their view of discipleship, participate in two focus group interviews, approximately 60 minutes each, have regular access to a reliable computer, laptop, or smartphone with internet access, and make the best effort to attend all classes held via Zoom, which will take place on Sundays for 60 minutes each, for approximately six to eight weeks.

If you would like to participate and meet the study criteria, please click the link at the end of this post to complete the online survey and direct message or contact me at [REDACTED] [REDACTED] for more information and to schedule a brief 10 to 15-minute pre-screening interview. A consent document is provided as the first page of the survey to be completed before or at the time of the pre-study focus group interview. Please review this page and click the “proceed to survey” button at the end if you agree to participate. Participants will be entered in a raffle to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

To take the survey, click here: [REDACTED]

#### Twitter

Are you a born-again Christian who is at least 45 years of age or older and regularly attends the church? Click here for information about a research study on Christian discipleship.  
[REDACTED]

## APPENDIX H

### Letter of Consent

**Title of the Project:** Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth

**Principal Investigator:** Sheina L. Rivera, Doctoral Candidate at John W. Rawlings School of Divinity at Liberty University.

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must meet the following criteria:

- Be 45 years or older.
- Be a self-confessing, born-again Christian with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Be a practicing Christian who self-identifies and believes faith to be essential and regularly attends worship services at the church, other than for a special occasion, two or more times a month.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

#### What is the study about, and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate how an education curriculum on a theology of discipleship can equip believers for spiritual growth to become complete disciples of Christ. The goal is to accomplish this by using Bible-based lessons focusing on critical aspects of theology that form a Trinitarian, missional, and communal discipleship.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. Complete a pre-study and post-study survey. The pre-study link is in the recruitment letter and attached to this email. Each survey has twenty-five questions and statements that should take no more than 15 to 20 minutes to complete.

2. Participate in two virtual, audio-recorded focus group interviews on Zoom that will last no more than 1 hour approximately one week before the study commences and a post-study debriefing interview one week after the last class.
3. Commit to making the best effort to attend and be on time for all classes for the study that will be held during Sunday school on Zoom from 10 am to 11 am for approximately six to eight weeks. All classes will be audio-recorded for the researcher's observations and evaluation.

#### **How could you or others benefit from this study?**

The benefit that you can expect to receive from participating in this study is to provide you and others with a solid biblical knowledge of discipleship that will help your spiritual growth and maturity to become a complete disciple of Christ not only in words but in deeds, to help the world and culture around, will compel others to come to Christ.

#### **What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. Please note that I am a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm to self or others, I will be required to report it to the appropriate authorities.

#### **How will personal information be protected?**

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses *to the online survey* will be anonymous. Participant responses that are collected in person will be coded and kept anonymous.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members may share what was discussed with persons outside the group.
- The researcher will store all data gathered from the research with strict confidentiality. Electronic data such as emails, correspondence, letters, and survey responses will be stored on the researcher's password-protected flash drive, which will be locked in the researcher's private lockbox. Data received from video and audio recordings of interviews and class lessons will be stored on the researcher's password-protected external hard drive, also to be stored in the researcher's private lockbox. All data will be destroyed after the required retention period of three years after the completion of the study.
- Audio and video recordings from interviews, lessons, and any relevant study interaction will be uploaded from Zoom and the researcher's digital recording device and stored on a password-protected hard drive for three years after study completion, then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Participation will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Deliverance Christian Cathedral International. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

### What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser, OR inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation and not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study. The following paragraph has the researcher's contact by email address/phone number. If you choose to withdraw, data collected from you and focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Sheina L. Rivera. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Jeffrey Shane Mayfield, at [REDACTED].

### If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, whom do you contact?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered, and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.*

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

*I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.*

The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Signature & Date

---

Printed Subject Name

---

Printed LAR Name and Relationship to Subject

---

LAR Signature

Date

## APPENDIX I

**Participant Pre-Screening Interview**

The criterion for participation in this study is included in the recruitment promotion, letter, flyer, and consent. Below are additional questions for screening purposes:

1. Do you consider yourself to be a practicing Christian or a non-practicing Christian?  
  
If yes, please briefly explain.
2. Are you a current and active member of a church? All candidates must actively attend church, meaning they attend at least two worship services monthly.
3. Are you comfortable with completing anonymous online surveys? This study will require completing two.
4. Will you be comfortable speaking in a group setting and being audio recorded?

Open to questions from the potential participant.

## APPENDIX J

**Pre-Study Discipleship Survey****Pre-Discipleship Survey**[EXIT](#)**Pre-Study Theology of Discipleship Survey**

INSTRUCTIONS: These questions are designed to obtain your understanding and perception of discipleship's biblical, spiritual, and practical aspects. By circling the corresponding answer, please select the response that best represents your current view of the statement or question.

All responses will be received and recorded anonymously. If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey, close your internet browser, inform the researcher that you wish to discontinue your participation, and do not submit your study materials. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

If you have any questions or comments about the study or survey, do not hesitate to contact the researcher at 917-602-5124 or email [REDACTED].

\* 1. The concept of discipleship is only found in the New Testament.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 2. The Scripture "Be holy, for I am holy" includes discipleship. (Lev 11:4; 1 Pet 1:15)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 3. The Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 4. The Trinity consists of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 5. I regularly show acts of kindness towards those in need, such as visiting the sick or helping others.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 6. The Bible is the written word of God and is accurate in all it teaches.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 7. I set aside time to seek God.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 8. I repent throughout the day whether or not I am aware of sinning.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 9. I am actively in a Biblical community with other believers.

- Strongly agree



- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 10. I have grown spiritually in the last 12 months.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 11. I diligently seek to strengthen my walk with God through studying the Bible, journaling, and prayer.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 12. I submit myself to the Will of God in every situation, even when I do not understand.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 13. I find opportunities to witness and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with my friends and family the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 14. I read and study the Bible every day.

- Strongly agree

- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 15. I share the Word of God and the faith passed on to me to others.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 16. I am hesitant to let non-Christians know I am a Christian.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 17. I regularly find myself meeting a need without being asked.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 18. Regular prayer and quiet with God time are essential for Christians.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 19. A person is automatically a disciple once she/he/they become saved.

- Strongly agree
- Agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 20. I regularly attend church and worship services. (at least 2x a month)

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 21. The Holy Spirit works with every believer, teaching, convicting, and guiding.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 22. I pray several times a day.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 23. Spiritual growth is necessary for every Christian.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 24. A Christian can grow spiritually without regularly studying the Bible, praying, and fellowship with other believers.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 25. Matt 28:19-20, commonly known as the Great Commission, only applies to the twelve disciples.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

## APPENDIX K

**Post-Study Discipleship Survey**[EXIT](#)**POST-STUDY DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY****Post-Study Theology of Discipleship Survey**

INSTRUCTIONS: Now that you have completed the study, these questions will measure how the study has affected your understanding and perception of biblical, spiritual, and practical aspects of discipleship. By circling the corresponding answer, please select the response that best represents your current view of the statement or question.

All responses will be received and recorded anonymously.

\* 1. The concept of discipleship is only found in the New Testament.

- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 2. Matt 28:19-20, commonly known as the Great Commission, only applied to the twelve disciples.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 3. The Scripture "Be holy, for I am holy" includes discipleship. (Lev 11:4; 1 Pet 1:15).

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 4. The Bible is the inspired, authoritative Word of God.

- Strongly agree
- Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 5. The Trinity consists of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 6. A disciple of Christ regularly shows kindness towards those in need, such as visiting the sick or helping.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 7. The Bible is the written word of God and is accurate in all it teaches.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 8. I set aside time to seek God.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 9. I repent throughout the day whether I am aware of sin.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 10. Disciples must be active in a Biblical community with other believers.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 11. I have grown spiritually in the last 12 months.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 12. I diligently seek to strengthen my walk with God through studying the Bible, journaling, and prayer.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 13. I submit myself to the Will of God in every situation, even when I do not understand.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 14. I find opportunities to witness and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with my friends and family the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

\* 15. I read and study the Bible every day.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 16. I share the Word of God and the faith passed on to me to others.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 17. I am hesitant to let non-Christians know I am a Christian.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 18. I regularly find myself meeting a need without being asked.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 19. Regular prayer and quiet with God time are necessary for Christians.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 20. A person is automatically a disciple once he/he/they becomes saved.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree



Strongly disagree

\* 21. I regularly attend church and worship services. (at least 2x a month).

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 22. The Holy Spirit works with every believer, teaching, convicting, and guiding.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 23. I pray several times a day.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 24. Spiritual growth is necessary for every Christian.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

\* 25. A Christian can grow spiritually without regularly studying the Bible, praying, and fellowship with other believers.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

## APPENDIX L

### **Pre-Study Focus Group Interview**

#### Agenda

1. The researcher will take attendance and confirm that all participants are present.
2. The Researcher will provide a formal introduction, details, and the purpose of the study.
3. The researcher opens the floor to questions from participants concerning the study.
4. Before proceeding, the researcher will confirm receipt of all signed consent letters and survey completion.

Below is a list of questions for discussion with participants:

#### Pre-Study Focus Group Questionnaire

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10) being the highest, how important is Spiritual growth to a Christian?
2. Is being a disciple the same as believing in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world? Please briefly explain your answer.
3. How often do you witness and share the Gospel with others?
4. How often do you pray?
5. Which is more important to you, studying the Bible alone or with a group (Bible study, church group)? Please explain your answer.
6. How often do you check on a neighbor who needs help?

Each participant will be asked to write down their answers and be allowed to respond in order.

## APPENDIX M

### **Post-Study Focus Group Interview**

#### Agenda

1. The researcher will take attendance and confirm that all participants are present.
2. The researcher will provide a post-study overview of lessons.
3. The researcher opens the floor to questions from participants concerning lessons.
4. The researcher will inform participants of a post-study survey to be distributed by email and completed within two weeks following the interview.

Below is a list of questions for discussion with participants:

#### Post-Study Focus Group Questionnaire

1. On a scale of 1 to 10 (10) being the highest, how important is Spiritual growth to a Christian?
2. Is being a disciple the same as believing in Jesus Christ as the Savior of the World? Please briefly explain your answer.
3. How important is witnessing and sharing the Gospel in the life of a disciple?
4. Do you believe that having a solid prayer life is meaningful?
5. Which is more important to you, studying the Bible alone or with a group (Bible study, church group)?
6. Define discipleship in your own words.
7. How can a believer become a more missional disciple?

Each participant will be asked to write down their answers and be allowed to respond in order.

## APPENDIX N

### **Education Intervention Lesson Schedule and Overview**

1. *Week One – Lesson One – Becoming by Learning – Biblical Foundations, Part I.* This class will pay close attention to participants' general biblical and foundation knowledge of discipleship. It will begin with an introductory discussion on discipleship, its definition, and the concept of discipleship in the Old Testament.
2. *Week Two – Lesson One – Becoming by Learning – Biblical Foundations, Part II.* This class will address the New Testament teachings and practices on discipleship. Jesus' calling the discipleship, the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20), and the implications of His call to them.
3. *Week Three – Lesson Two - Becoming by Growing – Spiritual Foundations, Part I.* This class will address spiritual maturity in discipleship by introducing participants to Spiritual formation and the necessity for Christians to practice the spiritual disciplines daily to obtain maturity in Christ. It also looks at some of the early disciples' discipleship marks.
4. *Week Four – Lesson Two – Becoming by Growing - Spiritual Foundations – Part II.* This class will continue the discussion on practicing spiritual disciplines. It will cover the biblical mandate for holiness, what it means to be holy, and how it relates to disciplines.
5. *Week Five – Lesson Three – Becoming by Doing – Participation by Missional Engagement – Part I.* This class will address the meaning of Matt. 28:19-20, the Great Commission, and its implications for believers, including the participation in God's mission, the Trinity doctrine, and the disciples' missional connection.
6. *Week Six – Lesson Three – Becoming by Doing – Participation by Missional Engagement. Part II.* This last class will teach a Pauline theology of discipleship, expressing a missional discipleship theology through community and Christians' connection to God through discipleship. The curriculum will conclude with the implications of accountability discipleship.

## APPENDIX O

**Lesson Curriculum for Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth*****Week One – Lesson One – Becoming by Learning – Biblical Foundations, Part I.***

## Old Testament

Scripture: Genesis 1:26, KJV: *”And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”*

1. What is a disciple? A disciple responds in faith to the call of Jesus Christ to follow Christ. Being a disciple is a lifelong process of dying to self) to become more like Christ while sharing the good news and making others like Him<sup>51</sup> (Matt 5:14-16; 28:18-20; Luke 9:23-24).

A basic discipleship theology plan must be built on the solid foundation of God’s Word.

2. A Christian discipleship expectation for home, church, and school settings are elaborated under seven biblical mandates: Dominion Mandate, populate the earth, self-governance, the First Greatest Commandment, the two parts of the Second Greatest Commandment (love self and love others), and the Great Commission.<sup>52</sup>
3. Old Testament Discipleship Mandate – Gen. 1:26; 1:28b

At creation, God’s first expectation of Adam and Eve to produce others in their image and thus in His image (Genesis 28b) marked the beginning of Christian discipleship.

## Discipleship Mandate through Covenant throughout the Old Testament

Noahic Covenant – Gen 9:1-17

Abrahamic Covenant – Gen 12:1-9

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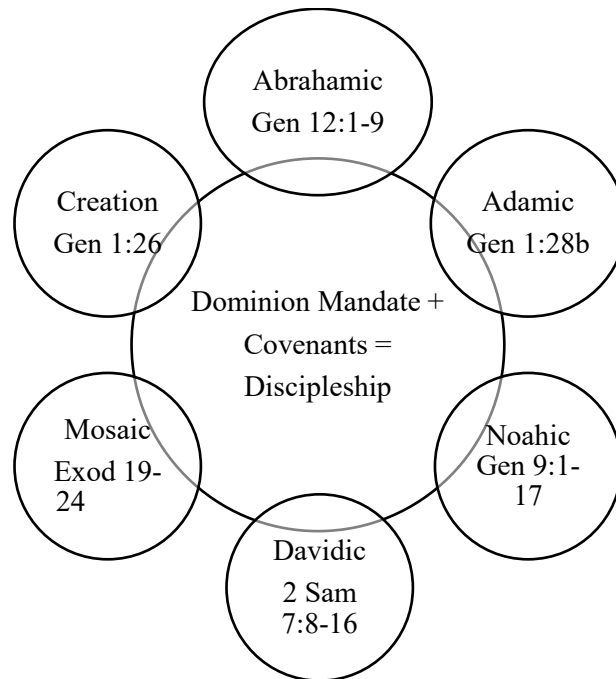
<sup>51</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 10.

<sup>52</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 243.

Mosaic Covenant – Ex 19

Davidic Covenant – 2 Sam 7:8-16; 1 Chron 17:11

### Dominion Mandate of Discipleship in the Old Testament



#### Questions

1. How would you define discipleship?
2. What did God mean when He said, “Make man in our image” (Gen 1:26)?
3. Is the word “disciple” found in the O.T.?
4. Define covenant in the Old Testament.
5. Explain the Mosaic covenant.
6. Explain the Abrahamic covenant.
7. Explain the Noahic covenant.

***Week Two – Lesson One – Becoming by Learning – Biblical Foundations for Discipleship, Part II.***

Scripture verse: If you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name. (1 Peter 4:16)

New Testament

The word Christian in the New Testament (Acts 11:26, 26:28; 1 Pet. 4:16) means follower of Christ, the expression that Christians are to demonstrate the nature of their elder brother Jesus, whom Himself demonstrates the nature of Father God (John 10:30, 14:9).<sup>53</sup>

The Great Commission - New Testament Discipleship Mandate – Matt 28:19-20

**Theological and education connection** - The connection between education and discipleship is made very clear by Jesus' command to His disciples (Matt. 28:18-20, NKJV): "Go therefore and make disciples, teaching them...." They were to do what He did (John 14:12, 15:16, 17:18), both temporally and eternally, which must be discipleship formation.<sup>54</sup>

**“And He said to them, follow me, and I will make you  
*FISHERS OF MEN*”**

Matthew 4:18-20

<sup>18</sup> As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and His brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. <sup>19</sup> "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." <sup>20</sup> At once, they left their nets and followed Him. (NIV)

Questions:

1. What did Jesus ask Peter and Andrew to do?
2. What did Jesus mean when he told them, "I will send you out to fish for men?" What does that mean to the church today?
3. Who was Jesus instructing in Matthew 28:19-20?
4. What do the action words "go, baptizing, and teaching" tell us about disciple-making?<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Cox and Peck, "Christian Education," 248.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 243.

<sup>55</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 4.

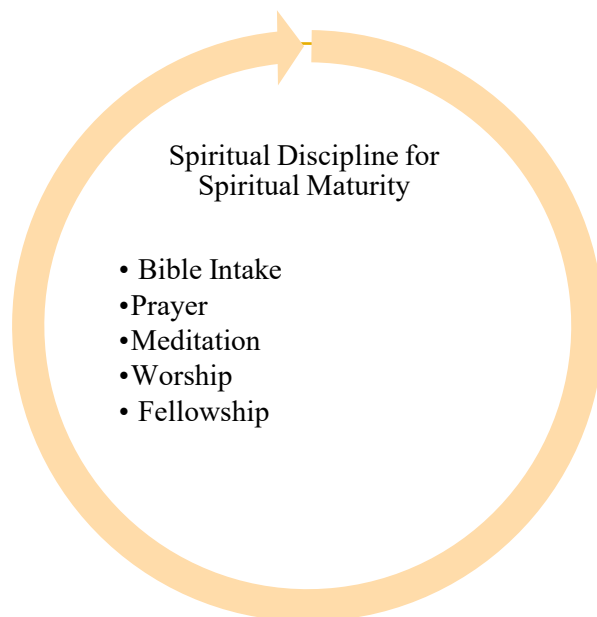
***Week Three – Lesson Two - Becoming by Growing – Spiritual Foundations, Part I.***

Spiritual Disciplines for Spiritual Growth and Maturity

Bible verse; Psalm 1:1-13

Spiritual Disciplines. Spiritual disciplines are scriptural practices that promote a believer's spiritual maturity, some of which are Bible intake and meditation in Psalms 1:2, prayer in Philippians 4:6, worship in Ephesians 5:18-20, witnessing in Matthew 28:19-20, and fellowship in Heb 10:24-25

Part of spiritual maturity is the desire to pass the faith to others.<sup>56</sup>



Spiritual Disciplines to be practiced every day

1. Prayer, Mark 9:29; 1 Thess. 5:17; Gal 5:16-25
2. Bible Study and Reading Micah 4:5; 2 Tim 3:14-15

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<sup>56</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 1.



3. Worship - John 4:24; 10:27; Psalms 95:6 – What is worship? Whether public or private, worship is the activity that will characterize our eternity in heaven so that we can experience some of it now.<sup>57</sup>
4. Meditation on God’s Word – Psalms 19:14; 49:3; 119:15; 78

Some of the Marks of Discipleship for discussion and questions

Self-Denial -Matt 16:24

1. What did Jesus mean when He said, “Deny yourself, talk up your cross, and follow me?”

Complete Dedication - Lk 14:26-27

Total Commitment – Matt 4:18-22

Humility - John 13:4-10 cf. Tim 5:10

2. What is humility? What purpose does humility serve in the life of a disciple?

Love - John 13:35 –

3. What kind of love does discipleship require?

Make Disciples – Matt 28:19-20

4. How important is spiritual formation in the life of a disciple of Christ?

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<sup>57</sup> Ogden, *“Discipleship Essentials,”* 2.

***Week Four – Lesson Two – Becoming by Growing - Spiritual Foundations – Part II.***

Spiritual Foundation – Holiness

**“BE HOLY AS I AM HOLY”**

What is holiness? – Set apart. The root word holy relates to the word “divide,” which means separated from the normal.<sup>58</sup>

What makes God Holy? Holiness is the Nature of God that distinguishes Him from everything else. (turn to Isaiah 6:1)

Because God made us in His image, He mandated us to be Holy.

1 Pet. 1:15 relates to being in a close relationship with God and the nature of discipleship.

The mandate of holiness is “Be Holy.” This mandate is found in the Old (Lev. 19:2) and the “fruit” of that relationship. In both the Old and New Testaments, to “Be Holy” meant to be set apart, unique, and distinct from the non-believers’ lifestyle. To “Be Holy” means imitating and being in service to God.

In the Old Testament, “Holiness is to affect every area of Israelite life.” The New Testament reflects the heart orientation of Jesus by enriching the term “holy” to include righteousness, not just ritual significance. Holiness reflects inner and outward behavior and is the highest label for comprehensively incorporating all other discipleship qualities.<sup>59</sup>

Christ died to present us holy to the Father (Col. 1:22)

Questions

1. What does the Bible mean when it says disciples are to be Holy?
2. How does a sinful lifestyle threaten holiness?
3. How does your view of God affect your view of worshipping Him?

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<sup>58</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 45.

<sup>59</sup> Cox and Peck, “Christian Education,” 254.

***Week Five – Lesson Three – Becoming by Doing – Participation by Missional Engagement – Part I.***

Missional Foundations

Scripture Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus meets them with a charge, justly called the Great Commission. It begins, “All authority has been given to me v18.

What did He mean?

The commission reads, “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you. Matt 28:19-20, the central command is the only imperative and infinitive, “make disciples.”<sup>60</sup>

## “Go, make, baptize, and teach!”

The commission is to make disciples, not to talk about Jesus, preach the gospel, make converts, or start churches, although His commission assumes all of these. To make disciples is to make converts and to lead them to maturity.

All three explain how disciples fulfill their commission. Specifically, Jesus’ followers make disciples by going to the world, not by waiting for the world to come to them.<sup>61</sup>

Second, the apostles make disciples by “baptizing them in or into the name of the triune God. 28:19. Baptism in the name of the Trinity implies the deity of Jesus and the Spirit. The commission was given to baptize, which shows that the apostles are to make disciples by calling converts publicly to identify with Jesus by Baptism into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The church makes disciples third by “teaching them to observe (obey) all I have commanded you.

Discipleship is the believer’s way of participating in the mission of God through the community.

### Making a Theological Commitment to Discipleship

Without a clear understanding of who God is and what God is doing, theological vision is subject to false starts, misplaced emphasis, and a failure to benefit from the riches of Christian thought and practice.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Duguid, Hamilton, and Sklar, *ESV Expository Commentary Matthew-Luke*, 606.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

John 1:1, In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (ESV) The Gospel of John begins with overt assertions that Jesus identified as the Word and was both God and with God, a bold statement that is rephrased and repeated.<sup>63</sup>

*The Trinity.* The Trinity is the doctrine held by the church of the almighty God's eternal existence in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Discipleship begins and ends with the divine community of the Triune God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We define discipleship as participation in the life and mission of the Trinitarian God. Such participation includes a life of worship, spiritual formation, and sharing in God's mission.<sup>64</sup>

If discipleship is participation in the life and mission of the Triune God, then attention must be given to the Christian vision of God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (the Trinity) and what God has done and is doing in the redemption of creation (eschatology).<sup>65</sup>

#### Questions

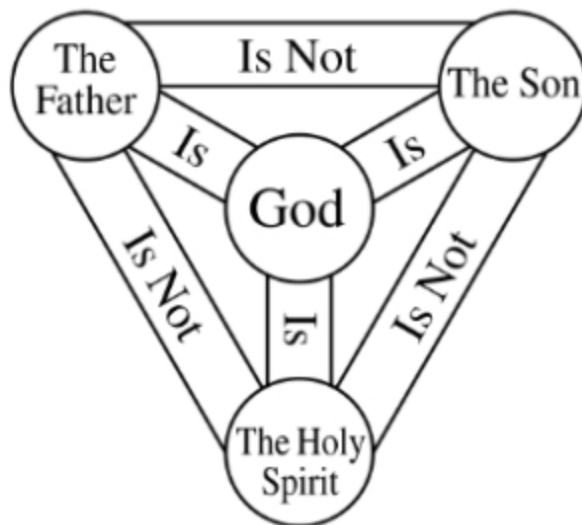
1. What is the Trinity?
2. Where can you find the word "Trinity" in the Bible?
3. What role does the Trinity play in the life of discipleship?
4. What do Jesus' words "go, teach, baptize" tell us about the discipleship process?

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<sup>63</sup> Iain M. Duguid, Jay Sklar, James M. Hamilton, and Brian J. Vickers, *ESV Expository Commentary: Vol. IX. John – Acts*, Edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 26.

<sup>64</sup> Hicks, McKinzie and Powell, *Discipleship in Community*, 9.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.



***Week Six – Lesson Three – Becoming by Doing – Participation by Missional Engagement. Part II***

Discipleship making through the example and teaching of the Apostle Paul

Goal and methodology in his ministry that Jesus model.

Paul's version of the Great Commission is in his mission statement. (Col 1:28-29)

Discipleship is the way we share our faith with others. -

The Bible teaches the message of our faith and how faith is passed down. The way the Lord works is incarnational: life rubs against life. We pass on Christlikeness through intimate modeling.<sup>66</sup>

1 Corinthians 4:16 Paul said I urge you to imitate me, and You become imitators of us and the Lord 1 Thess. 1:6)<sup>67</sup>

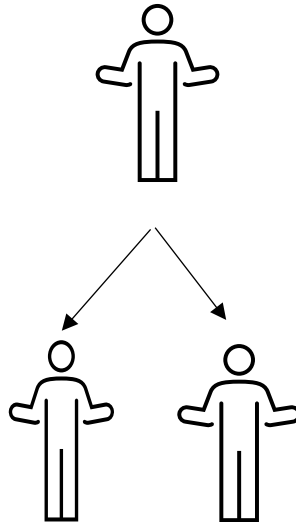
What is discipling? An intentional relationship in which we walk alongside other disciples to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ. The process includes equipping the disciples to make disciples who make disciples.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid. 3.

Discipling process – disciples making disciples.



*Accountability in Discipleship.* The Lordship of Jesus Christ is expressed in the believer through discipleship. Discipleship-making is accountability through relational vulnerability, through an honest, confessional relationship that gives the Holy Spirit permission to remake us.<sup>69</sup> The Holy Spirit continues to work in disciples mutually accountable to one another through mutually agreed standards of “ironing sharpening iron.”<sup>70</sup>

Questions and discussion topics

1. What is the purpose of missional discipleship?
2. In what way were Paul and the N.T. disciples missional?
3. How important is becoming missional to you?
4. What are some things you can personally do to be an active, missional disciple of Christ?

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<sup>69</sup> Ogden, *Discipleship Essentials*, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

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**IRB APPROVAL LETTER****LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.**  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

February 10, 2023

Sheina Rivera  
Jeffrey Mayfield

Re: IRB Application - IRB-FY22-23-1048 Intentional Discipleship: Implementing a Theology of Discipleship for Spiritual Growth

Dear Sheina Rivera and Jeffrey Mayfield,

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 that your study does not meet the definition of 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 project is not considered human subjects research because it 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. 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](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

Sincerely,

**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**Research Ethics Office**