

LIKE TREES PLANTED



Growing Mature Followers of Jesus
in a Post-Christian Ecosystem

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LIKE TREES PLANTED:
GROWING MATURE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS
IN A POST-CHRISTIAN ECOSYSTEM

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By

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ABSTRACT

As the Executive Pastor at Christ Community Church in Columbus, Georgia, I get to interact with a wide variety of Christ-followers from all walks of life. While there is a genuine love for God among them, there is a definite lack of discipleship – but this is not for lack of desire. The people in my church want to grow in discipleship, but they don't know what it means to be a disciple, nor how to engage in a meaningful process of development as disciples. Thus, with this Ministry Project, I set out to create a definition of discipleship for use by the 21st-Century American Church, and with it, a tool to assist individuals and groups in their development as disciples of Jesus.

To accomplish this goal, I studied the Biblical and classical Christian bases for discipleship found in six selected works from the New Testament and Christian history. I then supplemented this research with input from contemporary writers on discipleship and by conducting interviews with current pastors. Using this research, I developed a preliminary definition of discipleship and hosted a multi-week study group around this definition with members from my church. This group experience led to a final definition of discipleship and the beginnings of a tool to help individuals and groups grow in discipleship.

In the end, I was able to create an engaging infographic which presents my final definition of discipleship, introduces the essential elements of discipleship, and provides brief explanations and Scriptures for each. This tool will be useful to individuals, those in discipling mentorships and in small groups to help them observe, track, and advance their development as disciples of Jesus.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

CONTEXT

I have been serving as an Associate Pastor at Christ Community Church in Columbus, Georgia for the past two years. Our congregation has a membership of about 1500, and an average weekly attendance of about 950. We are part of the Free Methodist Church-USA – one of only a few in the entire State of Georgia. Our church was planted in Columbus 22 years ago by a former United Methodist pastor named Keith Cowart, and his wife, Pam. Together, they were led by the Holy Spirit to establish a church that was authentic, diverse, spiritually vital, and Kingdom-minded. Christ Community Church has lived into this God-given identity over the past 22 years. Today, we are a diverse congregation, located in the center of Columbus/Muscogee County, a region with a population around 250,000. While many other churches have moved out to the suburbs over the past two decades, we have intentionally rooted ourselves in the center of the city. We maintain our Kingdom-focus, collaborating with a variety of churches, ministries, and civic groups to spread the Gospel and reach the neediest in our town with practical, spiritually-rich, and life-transforming resources.

On our staff, I share pastoral leadership responsibilities with two other Associates and our church's Lead Pastor. This includes preaching and teaching, pastoral care, hospital and home-bound visitation, ministry oversight, pastoral counseling, weddings, funerals, and more. One specific area of ministry that has been entrusted to my oversight and leadership is that of church-wide discipleship. Our church does not currently have a church-wide discipleship plan, so part of what is expected of me is to give primary leadership to the creation and implementation of one. While this feels like a daunting task, I am also very excited about the role. I feel energized for it! I feel that through the experiences and training of my life up to this point, God has been preparing me for significant leadership in the area of Christian discipleship.

Defining, explaining, and facilitating discipleship really has been the primary focus of the past twenty years of my life: from the study and implementation of my undergraduate, masters, and doctoral-level course work; to my professional work in church and para-church ministries over the past two decades; to my personal discipleship

blog and podcast; to my personal friendships and the way I am seeking to lead my family. My life's work to this point could all be summed up with one word: discipleship!

PROBLEM

Unfortunately, in the American Deep South where I live and serve, "Christianity" in many people's minds can be synonymous with church membership or regular church attendance – or, with just being an overall "good" person. The meaning of "good" in this context is highly subjective and rooted far more in the realm of secular humanism than classical Christianity. Thus, the idea of Biblical discipleship is foreign to those who think this way. Many experts have even determined that our country has reached a point, socially and spiritually, that can be described as "post-Christian."

When friends and church members find out that I have been tasked with developing a church-wide discipleship strategy for our congregation, the most common responses I hear are, "Yes, that's a real need right now," and, "Oh, there's a big gap there," and, "I'm glad to hear that – we need it!" This sentiment extends beyond our own local church. I have consistently heard in recent years from other ministry friends and lay Christians who are serious about their faith that the discipleship strategies in their churches are anemic-to-nonexistent. At least part of the problem is that we, in American churches, no longer know what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. We have collectively lost or forgotten what the process of discipleship looks like, and lack a road map for how to apply that process in the context of the early 21st-Century in America.

If I were to survey 1000 devoted Christians on the definition of a disciple, I believe I would receive 1000 different answers. And if I asked 1000 devoted Christians to explain the process of discipleship, I think I would get 1000 different explanations! Or worse, I might get 1000 confused looks, silence, and shrugs. Many of our churches have not articulated a vision of what a disciple of Jesus looks like, nor clarified a measurable path for what the process of growing in discipleship can and should be.

There is a famine of discipleship in our day, and I want to combat that with this Doctor of Ministry Research Project. Local churches, and specifically laity, need to reclaim the lost art of discipleship: taking up the mantle of the Great Commission laid out by Jesus as His plan for world evangelism to go and make disciples. Disciple-making

today has been outsourced to the pastor and the missionary. But Jesus' directive was for *all* Christians to be disciple-makers. He provides the empowerment to do so through His Spirit; it is the responsibility of church leadership (clergy and elders) to provide the equipping for the Body. So, to be more specific, there is a famine in our day of *equipping* the Body of Christ – which is primarily made up of laity – to be intentional and effective disciple-makers in the world.

We now return to the root of the problem: our people, on the whole, do not know what a disciple is, nor do they know what the journey of discipleship is supposed to look like. How then can we expect them to be disciple-makers? They neither know what they are trying to make, nor how to do it! And context is critical. While a Biblical and orthodox Christian definition of disciple and process for discipleship will transcend places and ages, each individual follower of Jesus is confined to a particular location and time. Thus, one's current context impacts the "how" of disciple-making in any given location and generation.

PURPOSE

My purpose in this project is to determine and articulate a simple, memorable vision of what a disciple of Jesus looks like, and to clarify, test, and evaluate a measurable process of discipleship for Christ-followers living in the unique context of post-Christian America in the early 21st-Century.

KEY TERMS

Church (with an upper-case "C") – all Christians everywhere, in every location and timeframe

church (with a lower-case "c") / *local church* – the gathering of a particular group of Christians within a single location during a particular timeframe

*Disciple*¹ – a follower of Jesus

Discipleship – the process of growing and maturing as a follower of Jesus

¹ The first objective of this project (explained in the following section) will be to determine a clear definition for *disciple* and *discipleship* from Biblical and classical Christian orthodoxy, stated in contemporary language for lay use and practice. Thus, I will refrain from providing a fuller definition here.

Domain of Ministry – wherever an individual Christian or a particular group of Christians currently finds themselves, whether due to divine providence, or life circumstances, or both; the particular location and people with whom an individual Christian or a particular group of Christians has connection and/or influence

Great Commission – as defined by Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20, to “go into all the world, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you”

Lay / Laity – the membership of the Church that is not the ordained clergy

Post-Christian – this word is used as a social descriptor of culture and society in the United States in the 21st-Century – it means that the culture of the U.S. used to be largely influenced by and formulated upon generally orthodox Christian ideals, but no longer; American culture has transitioned from having a Christian worldview as central and foundational to having secular humanism as its baseline social, political, economic, and religious worldview

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

These are some of the questions that I hope my project will help to answer upon its completion:

- *What is a disciple of Jesus?*
- *What does effective discipleship look like in America in the 21st-Century, an era that many sociologists are describing as “post-Christian”?*
- *What does it mean to be a follower of Jesus in such an environment, and how can a person tell if they are succeeding in their journey of discipleship with Jesus?*

This Ministry Project will attempt to address these questions by implementing the following seven Project Objectives:

- (1) determine clear definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship* from Biblical and classical Christian orthodoxy, stated in contemporary language for lay use and practice;

- (2) research current American churches that demonstrate intentional effectiveness in facilitating the discipleship journeys of their members;
- (3) determine the most common aspects of the process of Christian discipleship identified in the Bible, Church history, and contemporary American churches;
- (4) utilize the definitions (from objective 1) and research (from objectives 2 and 3) to create a simple, measurable, reproducible tool for church-wide discipleship that equips laity in the understanding and advancement of their journeys of discipleship with Jesus;
- (5) run a test version of this discipleship tool in my local church;
- (6) conduct evaluations with the users of this test discipleship tool; and
- (7) produce a report of the initial outcomes of using this test discipleship tool for making disciples in our church.

METHODOLOGY

(1) Determine Clear Definitions for *Disciple* and *Discipleship*.

In my first year of seminary, I was sitting in a class on “Discipleship and Spiritual Formation” with a room full of professional Christ-followers. Our professor turned to the board and wrote the question, “What is a disciple?”, then turned to await the response of the class. The room was at first silent, then abuzz with a wide range of disparate answers. Both of these responses were telling. Here was a room full of Christian ministers, pursuing degrees of higher education in theology and pastoral leadership, and none of us could articulate a clear, simple, memorable definition of a disciple.

First, we were silent. The question surprised us. None of us could call to mind an immediate response. Discipleship isn’t something we were thinking about – not just in that particular moment, but in general, which is sad given our Lord’s Great Commission and our shared callings into full-time ministry. After several tense seconds of silence, a handful of students ventured a short guess in a questioning tone, not with confidence or certainty: “A follower of Jesus?” “A student of Christ?” Our silence and unsure first guesses revealed our true collective answer: *we don’t know*. No one has ever told us, and none of us has ever taken the time to figure it out.

Our discomfort with the silence, plus a few extra seconds to collect our thoughts, finally gave way to a flurry of varied responses. We listed numerous verbs and actions, adjectives and qualities, which covered the gambit of the Christian life. We went on in this manner for several minutes, offering responses and writing them on the board, before our professor raised a hand to stop us. When she did, we had filled up the board with a disconnected smattering of words, phrases, lists, and Scripture references. Our collective answer was now both frustratingly vague and cripplingly overwhelming. Our swirl of words and phrases revealed the same honest answer that our initial silence had: *we don't know*. We thought discipleship was roughly synonymous with “the Christian life,” but we couldn't condense what it means down to a single, memorable, motivational statement of being or purpose. Our professor had us wrestle with that question in our reading, writing, and discussions throughout the remainder of the semester, and some of the outcomes of that course will be utilized in this project. But the experience of that initial lack of response on that first day of class has haunted me throughout the years since.

Thus, the first objective of this Ministry Research Project will be to determine clear definitions for the words *disciple* and *discipleship*. My intention in this is to articulate single-statement definitions of each of these words which are simple, clear, memorable, and motivational:

- *Simple, as in not complex.*
- *Clear, as in not vague or ambiguous.*
- *Memorable, as in not lifeless and forgettable.*
- *Motivational, as in soul-stirring, compelling, and inspiring to response and joy-filled action.*

My strategy for determining these definitions will be to study the concepts of discipleship found in the Bible and among sources from classical Christian orthodoxy. In order to keep the research manageable, my Ministry Project Advisory Committee recommended I narrow my Biblical research to the two Books of Matthew and Acts; and that I select representatives from each of the 500-year eras of time over the past 2,000 years of classical Christian orthodoxy. These will be:

- 0-500: *The Didache* (1st-Century)
- 500-1000: *The Rule of St. Benedict* (6th-Century)

- 1000-1500: *Imitation of Christ* (1418)
- 1500-2000: *The Character of a Methodist* (1742)

I will also survey contemporary churches within the 21st-Century American context which demonstrate effective disciple-making practices today (see Project Objective #2 below). In all of my research – Biblical, historical, and contemporary – I will look for answers to the following groups of questions:

I – Discipleship Definition: What is a disciple? How does the Bible define a disciple? How did Jesus define a disciple? How has the Church throughout the centuries defined a disciple?

II – Discipleship Process: How is a disciple made? How did Jesus explain the process of discipleship? What are the apparent aspects of discipleship demonstrated in the Books of Matthew and Acts? How has the Church throughout the centuries explained the process of discipleship? What were the most commonly noted aspects of discipleship or Christian development throughout Church history?

III – Discipleship Measures: How is a disciple measured? How does the Bible measure a disciple? How did Jesus measure a disciple? How has the Church throughout the centuries measured a disciple? How did all these know when a disciple was made?

(2) Research Current Churches that Demonstrate Effective Discipleship Strategies.

Being in regular circles with church leaders, I occasionally hear anecdotes of churches who are practicing discipleship well. They have developed systems, curricula, and programs for discipleship, and they are consistently producing Great Commission disciples in their churches. This is good news! There *are* churches out there developing disciples effectively – really doing it!

At this point, I need to make a significant distinction. Many churches are practicing discipleship in some form or fashion. Discipleship is happening in churches all across our country. But my hypothesis is that this is often accidental and unintentional. My own church, for instance, is producing some truly healthy, devoted, well-rounded followers of Jesus. However, we currently have no strategic system in

place to help us do this. While disciple-making is occurring – and our great hope is that it will be happening in our people’s lives – we have no purposeful plan for bringing this about. The distinction I want to make, then, is between churches that have a purposeful strategy for producing disciples and those who do not.

Thus the second objective for this Ministry Research Project will be to find out who these former churches are, where they are located, and what they are doing to effectively facilitate the discipleship journeys of their members. Within the scope of this Project, I will limit my research to current American churches:

- *Who and where are these churches?*
- *How did they develop their discipleship strategies?*
- *What are they intentionally doing to disciple their people?*
- *What is their disciple-making strategy? How do they do it?*
- *How do they know when a disciple is made?*
- *What metrics do they use to measure discipleship progress in an individual’s life?*
- *Do they identify any specific aspects of discipleship or Christian development in their strategy?*
- *If so, what are they, and what are the significant markers of each aspect?*

From this research, I plan to create a bank of data on effective disciple-making programs and practices across America in the early 21st-Century. This data will then converge with the discoveries made from Biblical and historical Christian sources to form the foundation for Project Objective #3 of this Ministry Research Project, introduced below.

(3) Determine the Most Common Aspects of Effective Disciple-Making.

The third phase of this Ministry Research Project will be to take the data gleaned from the Bible, from throughout Church history, and from contemporary American churches that are demonstrating intentional effectiveness in making disciples, and determine from them the most common aspects of the process of Christian discipleship. What are the most important markers of each of these aspects? The answers to these questions will then be used to create Project Objective #4 below.

(4) Create a Simple, Measurable, Reproducible Church-Wide Discipleship Tool.

Based on this research of sources from the New Testament, Church history, and contemporary churches, I will have determined:

- (a) definitions for disciple and discipleship that are clear, orthodox, and universal for Biblical Christianity,*
- (b) the most common aspects of the process of discipleship in a Christian's life, and*
- (c) the most effective means for measuring the progress of discipleship in a Christian's life.*

Using these findings, I will produce a simple, shareable tool which churches and individuals can utilize to track their progress along the journey of Christian discipleship. I plan to create a visually-stimulating infographic which demonstrates the most common aspects of the journey of Christian discipleship, along with a few key measurements associated with each aspect. Of course, our followership of Jesus cannot be reduced to a simple checklist of achievements, but I think that many people whose learning styles are visual or whose personalities are goal-oriented will find such a tool engaging and helpful. I further believe that a simple resource like this will be quite empowering to laity who know they are called by Jesus to be disciple-makers, but who don't feel equipped to do so. This research-based discipleship infographic could then be published in both digital and printed formats for distribution to individuals and local churches across the country.² It will provide the foundation for piloting a strategic system of church-wide discipleship in my own local church context – see Project Objective #5 below.

(5) Run a Test Version of this Discipleship Tool in my Local Church.

My fifth Project Objective will be to actually implement a test version of this research-based discipleship tool in my own local context of Christ Community Church in

² My inspiration for this visual representation of the discipleship journey comes from Crown Financial Ministries' "Money Map", which highlights the checkpoints and markers of each stage along one's journey toward financial freedom (Crown Financial Ministries, Inc., "The Crown Money Map", 2016 – see Appendix 1). Whereas Crown's map helps participants track and celebrate their progress along the journey of Christian stewardship and resource management, the infographic I intend to develop will help Christians track and celebrate their journey of discipleship and spiritual growth.

Columbus, Georgia. In order to implement this program, I will recruit some church members and attendees who are eager to grow in their faith, and who would be willing to participate in a short-term group that focuses on Christian discipleship. This group will spend several months journeying together as fellow followers of Jesus, discussing and practicing the discipleship definition, infographic, and the core aspects of disciple-making.

EVALUATION

(6) Conduct Evaluations with the Users of this Test Discipleship Tool.

At the start of the test discipleship group, I will have the participants complete a Pre-Program Survey, which will solicit both quantitative and qualitative feedback. Throughout the pilot program, I will maintain regular contact with the participants to gauge their attitudes about the program and their engagement level in the program. At the conclusion of the initial pilot program, I will conduct a Post-Program Survey with all participants inviting both quantitative and qualitative feedback. I will then compare and contrast the results of the Pre- and Post-Surveys in order to determine some objective, first-hand evaluations of the program from the participants themselves.

(7) Produce a Report of the Initial Outcomes of Using this Test Discipleship Tool for Making Disciples in our Church.

My final Project Objective will be to produce a concluding report of the initial effectiveness of the research-based discipleship tool. I will take the evaluations determined from participant feedback and utilize it to make recommendations for changing and improving the tool in order to make it even more effective in the future.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

The first outcome of this project will be a clear, memorable definition of *disciple* and *discipleship* which my local church can use to educate our laity regarding what it means to be a follower of Jesus. We will freely share this with other churches locally and within our denomination, and if the Lord wills, it could have an even broader impact around the U.S. and the world!

The second outcome will be the research-based discipleship infographic and guide booklet, which I plan to make available for free download from my church's web site and my personal discipleship blog. My intention is to begin using this to help people in my local church context understand the process of discipleship, set and pursue goals in their personal followership of Jesus, and measure their progress toward maturity.

Third, I intend to bring together small, short-term groups for the purpose of journeying together in the process of Christian discipleship. Specifically, I plan to match mature followers of Jesus with new believers in discipling/mentor-type friendships. In this way, the mature followers of Jesus will have regular opportunities for, and practice in disciple-making, and the new believers in our church will have a discipleship mentor/friend during the critical fledgling months of their faith.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BOOK OF MATTHEW

In order to study the concept of discipleship in the Book of Matthew (and later in the Book of Acts), I sought an interlinear version online, which translates the original Greek text directly into English, and which provides all of Strong's numerical citations and cross-referential uses of each specific Greek word (with its corresponding derivatives) throughout the New Testament.³ This is the most comprehensive tool I have found for engaging in Biblical word study, and I have used it all throughout my seminary career. It has been of great benefit to me in my seminary studies, in my personal use in Bible study, and in ministerial use for sermon preparation.

In reading through the Greek-to-English version of the Book of Matthew, I searched for the simple and irreducible principles of discipleship contained therein. What I discovered was that Jesus employed a cyclical method of discipleship with His followers that included three phases: (1) teaching, (2) practicing what was just taught, and (3) discussing what was just practiced. I will call this the "Listen, Do, Discuss" Cycle of Discipleship. In my reading, I found 16 repetitions of this Cycle throughout the Book of Matthew. I have created and included a chart of Matthew that demonstrates this repetitive cycle (Figure 1).

³ BibleHub.com, Interlinear Bible, *Book of Matthew* and *Book of Acts*. Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/matthew/1.htm> from March 12-31, 2019.

Discipleship in the Book of Matthew
The "Listen, Do, Discuss" Cycle of Discipleship

LISTEN Jesus teaches His disciples	DO Jesus leads His disciples in practicing what He has taught them	DISCUSS Jesus leads a discussion around what was just done	
Matt 4:12-22			1
	Matt 4:23-25		
Matt 5:1-7:27			2
	Matt 8:1-9	Matt 8:10-12	
	Matt 8:13-17	Matt 8:18-22	3
Matt 8:23-27	Matt 8:28-9:3		
		Matt 9:4-13	4
Matt 9:14-17	Matt 9:18-34		
		Matt 9:35-38	5
Matt 10:1-42	Matt 11:1		
		Matt 11:2-6	6
Matt 11:7-30	Matt 12:1		
	Matt 12:13-22	Matt 12:2-12	7
		Matt 12:23-50	
Matt 13:1-35			8
		Matt 13:36-43	
Matt 13:44-52	Matt 13:53-58 Matt 14:13-36	Matt 15:1-20	9
	Matt 15:21-31		
Matt 15:32-34	Matt 15:35-39		10
		Matt 16:1-12	
Matt 16:13-28	Matt 17:1-8		11
		Matt 17:9-13	
	Matt 17:14-18	Matt 17:19-21	12
Matt 17:22-26	Matt 17:27		
Matt 18:1-35	Matt 19:1-2		13
		Matt 19:3-12	
Matt 19:13-20:28	Matt 20:29-34		14
Matt 21:1-5	Matt 21:6-14		
		Matt 21:15-17	15
Matt 21:18-26:2 Matt 26:17-18	Matt 26:19-20		
Matt 26:21-35	Matt 26:36-51		16
		Matt 26:52-56	
Matt 28:16-20			

Figure 1

In conjunction with this repetitive discipleship cycle, I found 39 uses of the Greek word for “disciples” in the Book of Matthew. This word is μαθηταὶ (mathētai), and its first appearance comes in Matthew 5:1, which says, “Having seen then the crowds, He went up on the mountain; and having sat down, the disciples of Him came to Him.”⁴ *Strong’s Concordance* defines the word for *disciple*, μαθητής (mathētēs), as “a learner, disciple, or pupil.”⁵ The HELPS Word-Studies resource further explains that the Greek root *math-* refers to the “mental effort needed to think something through,” and that in the context of Matthew, it is “a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle they require; someone catechized with proper instruction from the Bible with its necessary follow-through.”⁶

Prior to Matthew 5, Jesus calls several men to come, follow, and join Him in His divine work and His Kingdom purposes (4:19,21-23). There is significant context in chapters 2-4 which leads up to the moment when Jesus calls His first disciples. First, discipleship is about following a leader (2:6), listening to what He says (2:12,13,19-20), and obeying His instructions (2:12,14,21). Next, we see that a disciple is led (4:1); discipleship is therefore about obedient followership. And lastly, a disciple knows God’s Word (4:1-10), and makes decisions based upon God’s Word. It is in this context of calling, following, listening to and obeying God’s Word that Jesus’ first disciples come to Him upon the mountain in Matthew 5:1. Thus begins Jesus’ discipleship cycle of “Listen, Do, Discuss” that follows throughout Matthew chapters 5-28 (see Figure 1 above).

Within Jesus’ lengthy initial teaching of His disciples in Matthew 5-7 (“The Sermon on the Mount”), Jesus explains that a disciple is one who follows the commands of his master, then teaches those commands to others (5:19). In fact, the Greek transliteration of the phrase within this verse, ποιήση καὶ διδάξῃ (poiēsē kai didaxē) means, “shall keep them and shall teach them.” Thus, keeping Jesus’ commands and teaching them to others are essential aspects of Christian discipleship.

⁴ BibleHub.com, Interlinear Bible, *Matthew 5*. Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/matthew/5.htm> on April 14, 2019.

⁵ *Strong’s Concordance*, “3101. Mathētēs.” Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/3101.htm> on April 14, 2019.

⁶ *Ibid.*

A recurring theme of discipleship throughout Matthew is that of following. In relation to leadership, I will refer to this essential characteristic of discipleship as “followership.” A disciple is called to follow his master. Jesus issues the command Ἀκολουθεῖ μοι (Akolouthei moi), “Follow Me,” four times in Matthew (8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 19:21) and its parallel Δεῦτε ὀπίσω μου (Deute opisō mou), “Come follow after Me”, in Matthew 4:19. *Strong’s Concordance* explains the Greek verb ἀκολουθέω (akoloutheó) to mean “to accompany, attend, or follow.”⁷ *Thayer’s Greek Lexicon* further expounds upon Strong’s definition of ἀκολουθέω: “to cleave steadfastly to one, conform wholly to his example, in living and if need be in dying also.”⁸

Obedience is also a critical aspect of Christian discipleship. Matthew 26:19 demonstrates that discipleship means doing what Jesus says to do. This concept is confirmed elsewhere in the New Testament, most notably in James 1:22 (“Do not be hearers of the Word only, and so deceive yourselves, but be doers of it also.”), and John 14:15-17 (“If you love Me, you will obey My commands”). Disciples listen and obey.

Let us return now to the “Listen, Do, Discuss” Cycle of Discipleship that is repeated throughout Matthew. I will briefly describe the first of these as they appear in succession to demonstrate this cycle. In Matthew 4:18-22, Jesus calls His first disciples to “Come follow after Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” The very next/first thing Jesus does with His new followers/disciples in Matthew 4:23-24 is to go, teach, preach, heal, and deliver. After this initial time of leading and learning by example, we have Matthew 5-7, where Jesus calls His disciples to Himself and He teaches them verbally, in the classroom style of lecture-and-listen. After this session of verbal education, it is back to learning-on-the-go through doing, in Matthew 8:1-9:34. Jesus regularly interjects short verbal teaching throughout these two chapters, but the primary discipleship model we see is that of going (together) and doing (together):

- *healing the man with leprosy (8:1-4);*
- *healing the centurion’s servant (8:5-13);*
- *healing Peter’s mother-in-law (8:14-15);*

⁷ *Strong’s Concordance*, “190. Akoloutheó.” Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/190.htm> on April 15, 2019.

⁸ Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, “190. akoloutheó” (Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 42.

- *delivering many from demon-possession and healing many from sicknesses (8:16-17);*
- *a moment of teaching on discipleship (8:18-22);*
- *the calming of the storm (8:23-27);*
- *delivering two demon-possessed men (8:28-34);*
- *healing the paralytic (9:1-8);*
- *the calling of Matthew to discipleship (8:9-13);*
- *a short teaching about fasting (9:14-17);*
- *the raising of a dead girl and healing of a sick woman (9:18-26);*
- *and the healing of the blind and mute (9:27-34)*

Then in Matthew 9:35-10:42, after setting all these examples for the disciples, and weaving in just small bits of correction and instruction, Jesus sends out His disciples to go and do the things He has just been showing them! Up to this point, their primary education was a calling with an object lesson (4:18-22), an active and participatory orientation to Jesus' overall purpose (4:23-24), a hillside lecture-phase conference (Matt 5-7), an internship of service alongside Jesus (8:1-9:34), and now a sending-forth to do and to preach according to all that Jesus has demonstrated before them thus far (9:35-10:42).

Another essential aspect of discipleship in Matthew, along with calling, following, obeying, and practicing, is being authorized and sent out. Matthew 10:1 says that Jesus “gave to them authority,” and 10:5 says they were “sent forth” by Him. Incidentally, this verb used in 10:5 provides the first twelve disciples with their other name, “apostles.” The word used here is ἀποστέλλω (apostelló), and it means “to send (as a messenger, commission, etc.), send forth, or send away.”⁹ Matthew 10:7-8 then summarizes the commission that Jesus is sending out the apostles (His authorized and “sent ones”) to do: to proclaim the drawing near of the Kingdom of heaven, heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. This is the apostles' commission from Jesus!

⁹ *Strong's Concordance*, “649. apostelló.” Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/649.htm> on April 16, 2019.

A reasonable and relevant question at this point could be, was this just Jesus' commission for His original twelve disciples, who were known as the apostles? Or is this Jesus' commission for all of His followers – all of His disciples – throughout all time? Are these two words interchangeable? In 10:1, they are called “disciples.” In 10:2, they are called “apostles,” but it is the same group that is found in 10:1. Matthew 10:5 says, “these twelve, Jesus ‘apesteilen’ (sent out)...” Then in 10:24-25, Jesus calls them “disciples” again. Thus it would seem, based on the evidence of Jesus' own speech in Matthew 10, that the terms “disciples” and “apostles” are interchangeable, at least as Jesus is addressing the initial twelve disciples. As we see frequently throughout the Book of Matthew, an important component of Christian discipleship is that of being authorized and sent out by Jesus.

Additionally, Jesus gives His disciples special revelation, and cultivates in them a sense of spiritual discernment related to His spoken and taught words. Repeatedly in Matthew, we observe Jesus revealing the mysteries of His parables to His disciples (13:10-11,16-18,36-43; 15:15-20). This would affirm the HELPS Word-Studies resource referenced earlier, which defined a *disciple* as “a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle they require; someone catechized with proper instruction from the Bible with its necessary follow-through.”¹⁰ This aspect of Christian discipleship is heavily emphasized by Jesus in chapters 16-28 of Matthew. In 16:13-20, Jesus wants His disciples to have a right understanding of who He truly is. In 16:17, Jesus even specifies that this true understanding is revealed to the disciples by Father God! In 17:1-2, at the Transfiguration, Jesus reveals His true and complete self to His disciples. In 17:9-13, Jesus explains Scripture/God's Word to His disciples. In 17:16-21, Jesus corrects the disciples' spiritual misunderstandings and malpractices, similar to when He taught them proper spiritual devotion to God regarding prayer, fasting, giving, serving, and more in the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5-6. In 17:24-27 (like in 10:11-20), Jesus teaches and shows His disciples how to live in the corrupted world as His followers. In 18:1-4, Jesus instructs their character, and in 18:5-35, He gives many examples of what that Godly character looks like in everyday life. In 24:1-51, Jesus confides in His disciples; He reveals Himself to them, and He reveals the truth of the

¹⁰ Strong's, “3101. Mathétés.”

Kingdom of heaven to them! Six times in Matthew 16-26, Jesus explains to His disciples what is going to happen to Him, in terms of betrayal, arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection (16:21-28; 17:22-23; 20:17-19; 26:1-2,12,20-35,45-46).

Over and over again in Matthew, Jesus emphasizes the learner-apprentice element of Christian discipleship! His disciples are to listen to, learn from, and act according to His words. Jesus' disciples are to seek to understand His words and to trust in revelation from Him to know what His words mean and how He wants His disciples to act on His words. This learner-apprentice characteristic of discipleship is repeatedly emphasized by Jesus throughout the Book of Matthew, and is critical for our understanding of what it means to be discipled as a follower of Jesus.

With this in mind, we encounter a very interesting phrase in Matthew 13:52, considering our present purposes, where Jesus says, "...because of this, every scribe having been discipled into the kingdom of the heavens is like..." This is a unique and specific conjugation of the verb μαθητεύω (mathēteúō), "to disciple," in the Greek syntax.¹¹ This is the only occurrence of that particular form of μαθητεύω in the entire Bible. The verb is stated in the present perfect tense ("having been discipled"), describing a process that has already been completed in the present. Jesus also clarifies the aim of this particular reference to discipleship for the scribes in question: they have been discipled "into the kingdom of the heavens." This statement demonstrates that Christian discipleship is a process that can be measured and has clear, intentional direction. Matthew 13:52 seems to imply that one's progress "into the Kingdom" as a disciple/follower of Jesus can be observed and assessed.

A similar, yet slightly different form of this verb is used in Matthew 27:57. This verse describes Joseph of Arimathea, "who also himself was discipled to Jesus." The tense here is ἐμαθητεύθη (emathēteuthē), which means, "was discipled." or, "had also become a disciple." Like the unique verb form in 13:52, this one in 27:57 is the only instance of this particular form of the verb μαθητεύω used in the Bible. The implications between these two verses are similar: discipleship is observable and measurable. In order for us to speak about a process happening in the past tense (as in 27:57) or in the present

¹¹ *Strong's Concordance*, "3100. mathēteúō." Accessed online at <https://biblehub.com/greek/3100.htm> on April 17, 2019.

perfect tense (as in 13:52), it has to be something that can be observed to either be completed or moving forward on its way toward its intended goal.

Jesus' final words in Matthew 28:18-20 are a command of perpetuation: He addresses His disciples from the standpoint of having all authority in heaven and on earth, and He issues them "The Great Commission" to go and become disciple-makers themselves. Thus we encounter the final essential element of discipleship in Matthew: disciples are to be about the work of making more disciples. Jesus instructs His followers to repeat the same process by which He has discipled them over the course of the preceding three years – this process which I have dubbed the "Listen, Do, Discuss" Cycle of Discipleship that is repeated all throughout the Book of Matthew.

Discipleship Principles from the Book of Matthew:

- *"Listen, Do, Discuss, Repeat"*
- *A disciple is a learner-apprentice of Jesus, "a follower of Christ who learns the doctrines of Scripture and the lifestyle they require; someone catechized with proper instruction from the Bible with its necessary follow-through."¹²*
- *Discipleship is about responding to Jesus' call, following His leadership, listening to what He says, and obeying His instructions; discipleship is obedient followership of Jesus.*
- *Disciples keep Jesus' commands and teach them to others; disciples are authorized and sent out; disciples make more disciples.*
- *Progress in discipleship is observable and measurable.*

¹² Strong's, "3101. Mathétés."

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

The Book of Acts begins with several of the same themes of discipleship that were highlighted in Matthew: Jesus gathers His disciples and instructs them (Acts 1:2); Jesus appears to disciples after His resurrection for 40 days, giving them many proofs that He was alive and teaching them many things concerning the Kingdom of God (1:3); Jesus commands them to await the promised baptism of the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem (1:4-5) and assures them that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them, and they will be His witnesses throughout the world (1:8). In fact, the Book of Acts seems in many ways to be the disciples' practical outworking of the Great Commission that Jesus had issued to them in Matthew 28:18-20.

Acts 1:14-15 tells us that the followers of Jesus (about 120 of them) devoted themselves in one accord to prayer. In Acts 2, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon Jesus' followers, and 3,000 more people become disciples themselves (2:38-41). Acts 2 ends by telling us the regular practices of the disciples: they all devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread together, and prayer together (2:42); they held all things in common, sharing what they had with any among them who had need (2:44-45); they continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple, breaking bread and sharing food together with gladness and sincerity of heart (2:46); and they praised God who was adding to their number daily those who were being saved (2:47).

Here in Acts 1-2, we begin to see a pattern for discipleship and disciple-making that will unfold throughout the entirety of the Book. This pattern I will call the "Circle In, Circle Out" Cycle, or, the "Gather-Share / Disperse-Share" Cycle of Discipleship. Repeatedly in Acts, we can observe the followers of Jesus gathering together for all kinds of relational and spiritual sharing: fellowship, meals, prayer, fasting, teaching, encouragement, decision-making, and more. But the disciples do not remain perpetually in a state of gathering and sharing amongst themselves. These gatherings are always short-lived, as the disciples – guided by the Holy Spirit – continuously turn their activities outward. Jesus' followers are repeatedly dispersed throughout the Book of Acts – whether by choice or by circumstances – and as they disperse, they carry the Gospel of Jesus with them, sharing it boldly and effectively for the benefit of those outside their circles. And God certainly honors their inward sharing and their outward focus with

blessing, provision, and fruit (Acts 6:1,7; 9:31; 11:21,24; 16:5; 17:4,12; 19:20). In fact, it seems this rhythmic pulsing of “Circle In, Circle Out”¹³ that occurs all throughout Acts is how the Lord refreshes and renews the disciples in close Christian community for the purpose of equipping and energizing them to reach outward to their world with the Gospel of Jesus.

Acts 3:1; 4:32; 16:13,16 affirm that the disciples were faithful in corporate prayer, going regularly to the temple (and other customary meeting places) for prayer. This is “Circling In.” The idea of “Circling In” is that we come together to enrich and encourage one another, to celebrate what the Lord is doing, to seek Him together, and to enjoy the comforts and belonging of sincere Christian fellowship. But we are not meant to stay there, to hoard the blessings of Christian community, or to be stingy with the Gospel.

In many parts of Acts, the disciples faithfully teach the people in the Name (and Nature) of Jesus and proclaim the Word of God (3:11-26; 5:42; 9:20; 13:14-15; 14:1-3,6-7; 15:32-35; 16:4-5,13; 17:1-4,10-11,17; 18:4,19; 19:8-10; and 20:7) – first in the temple and in the synagogues – then in the churches established by the apostles’ missionary journeys – and finally in homes and other meeting places whenever there was hostility or persecution. This is “Circling Out.” The Book of Acts teaches that we are to take our inward-facing circle and turn it to face outward. The idea behind “Circling Out” is that we take the support, love, comfort, belonging, and joy of our inward-facing circle, and we turn ourselves outward to extend the Gospel and the blessings of Christian community to those outside the circle. This is the discipleship rhythm of the Book of Acts: “Circle In, Circle Out,” or stated another way, “Gather-Share / Disperse-Share.”

There are multiple beautiful moments of “Circle In” discipleship in Acts. From Acts 2-4, when the disciples shared everything in common; to 11:23 where Barnabas rejoiced in all the Lord was doing through the disciples, and exhorted them to abide in the Lord and continue in His work; to 11:29 where the disciples gave generously to their

¹³ I am borrowing the phrase “Circle In, Circle Out” from an amazing Christian peer-mentoring organization called Teen Advisors, Inc., which serves students in the local schools of Columbus, Georgia. They use the phrase “Circle In, Circle Out” to summarize their method of reaching students in public schools with the life-changing principles of the Bible. First, they “Circle In” by gathering for Bible studies, worship gatherings, discipleship groups, and fun events (all outside of school hours and off school property). Then they “Circle Out” by going to hundreds of local school classrooms to provide peer-counseling to thousands of students on all kinds of relevant topics informed by the Biblical principles they learned while “circling in.” Learn more about this innovative and effective ministry to students and schools at www.TeenAdvisors.org.

brothers in need who were in another city experiencing a famine; to 13:2-4 when they prayed and fasted together for the Lord's direction; and more! Another powerful moment of "Circle In" discipleship occurs in Acts 18:24-28. Apollos was a gifted and persuasive teacher in the synagogue, but he only knew of and taught the baptism of John. Priscila and Aquila took Apollos aside and more accurately expounded to him the way of God through Jesus the Messiah. The disciples then accepted Apollos, and he became a powerful teacher of the Gospel of Jesus from the Scriptures!

Faithful "Circling In" led the disciples to "Circle Out" more effectively. Diligent Bible study and fervent prayer were consistently practiced by the disciples in Acts. In 8:35,40, for example, we observe how Philip is able to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus effectively from the Word of God, indicating a dedication to the study of and knowledge of the Bible. Likewise Saul (Paul), in Acts 9:20,22,27-29 speaks boldly in the Name of Jesus, proclaiming from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah. Acts 10:9; 12:5; 13:2-4; 14:23; 16:25; 20:36-37; 21:5-6 show how the disciples were faithful in both personal and corporate prayer with fasting. As students of the Bible who were connected to God in prayer, the disciples were able to proclaim the grace of God through Jesus to both Jews and Greeks – church folks and non-church folks – alike (14:1). Such diligence in their shared "Circle In" devotional lives enabled their moments of "Circle Out" discipleship to be incredibly effective!

As in Matthew, one of the key themes of discipleship in Acts is obedience. Repeatedly in Acts, the Lord would send or give directions to the disciples of Jesus for His Kingdom purposes, and they would obey Him (8:26-27,29-30; 9:10-19; 10:19-21; 11:12; 13:2-4; 16:6-10; 18:9-11; 23:11). The directions given by the Holy Spirit for the disciples to obey most often fell into one of three categories:

- (1) *Physical Healings and Spiritual Deliverance:* 3:1-10; 5:12-16; 6:8; 8:6-7; 9:33-41; 14:8-10,20; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 28:7-9.
- (2) *Proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus:* 3:11-26; 4:8-20,31,33; 6:4,10; 7:1-53; 8:4-5; 11:20; 14:21; 15:32-35;16:40; 20:2,7-11.
- (3) *Baptizing in the Names of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit:* 2:38-41; 8:14-17,36-37; 9:17-19; 10:47-48; 16:13-15,27-34; 18:8; 19:1-5.

Discipleship Principles from the Book of Acts:

- “Circle In, Circle Out” or “Gather-Share / Disperse-Share”
- *Disciples are devoted to each other in Christ-centered community, sharing regularly in prayer and fasting, Biblical teaching, praise and thanksgiving, meal-sharing and fellowship, resource-sharing and encouragement, and the sacraments of Eucharist and baptism.*
- *Disciples are guided by the Holy Spirit, and they obey His leadership.*
- *Disciples boldly, generously, and regularly share the message of Jesus, in word and deed, with those outside their Christ-centered communities.*
- *Discipleship bears fruit and expands God's Kingdom on earth.*

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE *DIDACHE*

The *Didache* was an early manual for Jewish Christian morality, practice, sacrament, and organization that dates from the late first century.¹⁴ *Didache*, which is Greek for “Teaching,” derives its name from the opening line of the writing which identifies itself as “The Lord's teaching to the heathen by the Twelve Apostles.”¹⁵ The *Didache* reads like a New Testament Epistle written in the style and form of the Old Testament Proverbs. It is organized into 16 chapters ranging in length from 3-14 verses per chapter. In terms of discipleship, the short, proverbial style of *The Didache* lends itself to nicely to catechetical application. Students (or disciples) would have been taught the simple call-and-response (or short question-and-answer) layout of the verses within *The Didache*, enabling them to learn and memorize the Apostles’ core teachings on Christian life and practice. Catechisms have been in use by churches for centuries as a way to teach converts the essential doctrines of the Christian faith. This is a method of discipleship that is intended to hone the mind – to equip the disciple of Jesus with knowledge about Christian faith and how to apply it to life, home, work, and decisions.

The topics covered within the *Didache* are wide-ranging and mostly practical. It covers everything from prayer to alms-giving, the Eucharist to baptism, welcoming foreigners to listening to the taught Word of God. Instructions are provided on the

¹⁴ F.L. Cross, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, 3rd Revised Edition* (Oxford University Press, 2005), 482.

¹⁵ *The Didache*. Accessed online at <http://www.thedidache.com/> on April 20, 2019.

practices of inward piety and devotion as well as the outward practices of service and generosity. As a methodology, the most salient lesson from the *Didache* for this project's purposes is that of teaching converts through a catechism: a set curriculum of content designed to equip new Christians for their lives in the church and world as followers of Jesus.

Discipleship Principles from the *Didache*:

- *Disciples need to be taught; knowledge of Christian doctrine is important.*
- *This knowledge is for the purpose of application and sharing. Disciples are not taught just so they can know; they are taught so they can do – so they can apply the knowledge to their own lives and share it with others.*
- *Disciples grow best in an environment of loving accountability.*

DISCIPLESHIP IN *THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT*

The Rule of St. Benedict is a guidebook that was written for monks living together in monasteries under the leadership of an abbot in the early 6th-Century.¹⁶ It was written in 516 by Benedict of Nursia, who established twelve communities for monks in Italy in his lifetime.¹⁷ Benedict's *Rule* is a mostly practical guidebook, which provided structure, order, standards, and instructions for the monks in their communal and spiritual lives together. While most Christians today do not live together in monastic communities, the guidance found in Benedict's *Rule* provides valuable insights for understanding the life of a disciple of Jesus. Indeed, Benedict's guidebook has had widespread and lasting impact over the past 15 centuries of Western Christianity.

The opening paragraph of The Prologue to *The Rule of St. Benedict* references obedience three times, saying that we may “return... to Christ the Lord... by the labour of obedience,” that we may not withdraw from Him “by the idleness of disobedience,” but that we would renounce our own wills and instead take up “the bright and all-

¹⁶ Charles Herbermann, ed., “Rule of St. Benedict,” *Catholic Encyclopedia* (Robert Appleton, 1913), <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02436a.htm>.

¹⁷ Arthur G. Holder, *Christian Spirituality: The Classics* (Taylor & Francis, 2009), 70.

conquering weapons of obedience.”¹⁸ The third paragraph of The Prologue quotes four different verses of Scripture, all of which admonish the importance of listening to the voice of, or the words of, the Lord. The Prologue goes on to explain that God calls His followers into lives of obedience out of His own “fatherly affection” for us. It then offers this invitation: “Let our loins then be girt with faith and the observance of good works, and let us, gospel-led, pursue His paths, that we may be worthy to see Him Who has called us unto His own kingdom.” The Prologue then quotes the parable Jesus used to close His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:24, “He who hears these My words and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock...” Throughout *The Rule of St. Benedict*, we consistently see this simple theme that is built up in The Prologue: hear and do.

The Rule of St. Benedict accentuates the root word for disciple and discipleship, which is *discipline*. The lives of the monks and their abbot were neatly and meticulously structured. Each aspect of their lives was regimented and disciplined: daily lives; weekly, seasonal, and annual rhythms; corporate and individual disciplines, schedules, responsibilities, and more. Chapter IV provides a listing of 71 practical do’s and don’t’s for life in Christian community. Chapter V is entitled, “Concerning Obedience.” Chapter VII makes reference to Philippians 2:8, “He became obedient unto death.” Christ’s faithful obedience is exalted as the pinnacle of His character, and as the prime example for Benedictine monks to follow. Nearly all the remaining 70 chapters of Benedict concern the logistics, standards, and practices for the monks living, working, serving, and worshipping together in the monastery.

Discipleship Principles from *The Rule of St. Benedict*:

- “*Hear and Do*”; *disciples listen and obey.*
- *Discipleship requires structure and discipline.*
- *Discipleship is a communal journey, not merely an individualistic one.*
- *The community provides structure, encouragement, practice, and evaluation for growth.*

¹⁸ W.K. Lowther Clarke, trans., *The Rule of Saint Benedict* (London: S.P.C.K., 1931), 1.

DISCIPLESHIP IN *THE IMITATION OF CHRIST*

The Imitation of Christ was written by Thomas à Kempis, a Catholic priest, in the early 15th-Century.¹⁹ *Imitation* is a devotional classic and a handbook for the Christian life. It reads similar to a modern daily devotional, like *My Utmost for His Highest* or *Jesus Calling*; the entries in *Imitation* are short, pithy, and powerful. Ranging from one to three pages in length, à Kempis covers a wide range of topics in his 84-entry book, including personal devotional practices, the pursuit and practice of virtues, the rooting out of sin and temptation, participation in the Body of Christ, and selfless service to those beyond the Body.

The sum of all these devotional entries is an exhortation for the reader to endeavor – by prayer, practice, and participation in the community of faith – to learn to live and love like Jesus. I once heard a conference speaker attribute a quote to à Kempis from *Imitation* that I have not found therein: the speaker cited à Kempis as having said, “Choose one thing to learn from Christ each year, and soon you will be like Him.” While I could not find this quotation, à Kempis does say something similar, but using the opposite tack: “If every year we would root out one vice, we should soon become perfect men.”²⁰ The sentiment in both the erroneous quote and the real one is the same: if we, as followers of Jesus, would faithfully seek to imitate Christ in our daily lives, then over time, we would become like Him! This is the approach of à Kempis to Christian discipleship.

Discipleship Principles from *The Imitation of Christ*:

- *Employ daily devotional practices to increase virtues and root out vices for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus over time.*
- *Participate in the Body of Christ in your pursuit of Christlikeness; pursue Christlikeness together with other Christians.*
- *Individual and communal growth in Christlikeness requires selfless service to those outside the Body of Christ.*
- *Growth in Christlikeness is observable and measurable.*

¹⁹ John H. Van Engen, *Devotio Moderna* (Paulist Press, 1988), 7.

²⁰ Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Moody, 1958), 26.

DISCIPLESHIP IN *THE CHARACTER OF A METHODIST*

John Wesley published a pamphlet entitled *The Character of a Methodist* in 1747 to clarify for active participants, curious onlookers, and derisive detractors what was meant by this new term “methodist” that was being used to describe him and his offshoot of Anglican Christianity. In *Character*, Wesley explains that he does not want methodists²¹ to be distinguished by what they do or don’t do, say or don’t say. He does not want methodists to be marked by the opinions they hold, nor by any particular practices or customs. Instead, Wesley writes that a Methodist is one who has experienced salvation as “holiness of heart and life.”²² He goes on to explain that “a methodist is one, who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto him: one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul...”²³

A methodist, Wesley says, is marked by joy in the Lord. He is filled with hope and with thanksgiving. He is content and grateful in all circumstances. He casts all his cares upon God, and afterward rests completely in the Lord. He prays without ceasing: “this is true prayer, the lifting up the heart to God... his heart is ever lifted up to God, and at all times and in all places.”²⁴ A methodist, according to Wesley, loves his brother and sister, loves his neighbor as himself, loves “every man as his own soul,” and loves his enemies. The heart of a true methodist has been purified by God. Such a person has been “crucified to the world, and the world crucified to him; being dead to all that is in the world, both to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life.”²⁵ Having been purified by God, “the one design of his life [is] not to do his own will, but the will

²¹ Throughout this section and elsewhere in the paper, I will begin the word “methodist(s)” with a lower-case “m” because John Wesley himself did so throughout *The Character of a Methodist*. Wesley did not seek to start a new Christian denomination, but to reform some aspects of the Anglican Church, for which he served as a faithful priest throughout his life, and to extend the message and effects of the Gospel to those outside the Church. The organized “M”ethodist denomination did not begin until 1795, four years after Wesley’s death, but the beginnings of a break from the Church of England had taken place about a decade before, when Wesley ordained preachers to serve the American Colonies who were at war with England and could not be ordained for ministry by the politically-embroiled Anglican Church. Ref. Moses Lewis Scudder, *American Methodism* (HardPress Publishing, 2013), 29.

²² John Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist* (1747), 5. Accessed online at <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N20188.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext> on May 21, 2019.

²³ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

of him that sent him.” Thus, he obeys the commands of God with joy, with an obedience to God that flows not out of guilt or duty, but out of his love for God.

A methodist does everything for the glory of God: work, leisure, business, rest, eat, pray – all is done as unto the Lord. A methodist does good to all his neighbors – “as he has time” – both to supply their physical needs as he can, and to support their spiritual needs as he is gifted by God’s Spirit to do so.²⁶ In conclusion, Wesley says, a true methodist is simply distinguished by “the common, fundamental principles of Christianity,” or what Wesley calls “plain, old Christianity.... He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word.”²⁷

While *Character* was an encouraging and valuable reminder regarding the heart of the disciple of Jesus – and I would not want to dismiss it as anything less – this particular piece by Wesley did not provide me with the resources and methodologies that I know from previous education to be evident in his discipleship systems. For instance, the way Wesley organized his societies, classes, and bands, or the logistics of how he instructed people to engage in works of piety and works of mercy. But these more practical aspects of early Methodism will be considered further as we move into a review of more contemporary works on discipleship.

Discipleship Principles from *The Character of a Methodist*:

- *Devotion of heart, mind, will, and action to the glory of God; “holiness of heart and life.”*
- *This devotion flows out of a heart of love for God, not duty. It is the disciple’s joyful response to unearned grace, not a frenzied need to earn or maintain God’s grace.*
- *Such devotion will overflow into joyful and generous love for brother, neighbor, stranger, and even enemy, in serving both their practical/physical needs and their spiritual needs.*

²⁶ Ibid., 11.

²⁷ Ibid., 11-12.

Upon completion of Wesley's *Character of a Methodist*, and following further discussions with my faculty advisors for this dissertation (Dr. Matt Friedeman and Dr. Becky Luman), I was reminded of two essential aspects of John Wesley's discipleship practices that are not apparent in *Character*. Thus, I sought out Wesley's writings on the "means of grace" in order to supplement my findings from *Character*. For Wesley and the early methodists, meeting together regularly with other followers of Jesus for the purposes of rooting out vices and encouraging Christian virtues was non-negotiable.²⁸ That is why he organized his converts into societies, classes, and bands.

Second, it was in these methodist societies, classes, and bands that individuals were shepherded, pastored, and (to use a non-spiritual word) tracked in terms of their growth in grace and discipleship. If a person missed a meeting, someone from the group followed up with them to see how they were doing. If a person were to drift back into a sinful habit, the leader or the members of their class or band were responsible for reaching out to them to encourage them back into the fold.²⁹ Consequently, the life, behavior, activity, and engagement in discipleship of every methodist was observed, tracked, measured, and followed-up-on by their fellow group members and leaders. This accountability and follow-up were not done for legalistic purposes, but were rather done in love, in order to help the believers to "keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21). Wesley referred to this corporate practice of grace-guided accountability as "watching over one another in love."³⁰

Therefore, in order to present a more comprehensive view of Wesley with regard to personal and corporate discipleship, I needed to include the following two elements from his teachings upon the means of grace in my list of Discipleship Principles from *Character* above:

- *Followers of Jesus must meet together regularly for sharing deep life together in accountability, encouragement, and prayer.*

²⁸ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," *The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (Baker Books, 2002), 11:433.

²⁹ Frederick A. Norwood, ed., *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America. With Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, 1979), 147.

³⁰ John Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (Baker Books, 2002), 9:262.

- *These followers’ growth in grace and discipleship is observed, tracked, measured, and followed-up-on – in love – by their fellow group members and their leaders.*

Before we dive into a review of modern literature on the subject of discipleship, let us summarize and synthesize the six Biblical and historical resources we have considered thus far (see Figure 2):

Discipleship Themes in Biblical & Classical Literature:

Matthew	Acts	Didache	Benedict	à Kempis	Wesley
"Listen, Do, Discuss, Repeat"	"Circle In, Circle Out" or "Gather-Share / Disperse-Share"	disciples need to be taught	"Hear and Do"	discipleship means becoming more like Jesus over time	disciples devote heart, mind, will, and action to the glory of God
disciple is learner/student of Jesus	disciples are guided/led by the Holy Spirit		disciples listen and obey		discipleship is a joyful response to unearned grace
disciples learn, practice, and discuss discipleship together	disciples are devoted to each other in Christ-centered community		discipleship is a communal journey	disciples pursue Christlikeness together with other Christians	disciples meet together regularly to share deep life in accountability, encouragement, and prayer
discipleship is obedient followership	disciples obey the Spirit's guidance & leadership	knowledge of Christian doctrine is important	discipleship requires structure and discipline	daily devotional practices are used to increase virtues and root out vices	devotion flows from love for God, not duty
disciples make more disciples	disciples share the message of Jesus with those outside their fellowship	knowledge is for application and sharing		growth in Christlikeness requires selfless service to those outside the Body of Christ	love for God overflows into joyful & generous love for others, serving both physical & spiritual needs
progress in discipleship is observable and measurable	discipleship bears fruit and expands God's Kingdom on earth	accountability is lovingly provided to help the disciple grow	the community provides structure & evaluation for growth	growth in Christlikeness is observable and measurable	growing in grace is observed, tracked, measured, and followed-up-on in love

Figure 2

REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE ON DISCIPLESHIP

Much literature exists in the world of Christian publishing today on the subject of discipleship. Many of these resources have something valuable to say on the subject, but for my purposes, I wanted to narrow my research to those resources which touch on one or both of the following primary objectives:

- (1) *resources that provide clear, memorable, and measurable definitions for disciple and discipleship, and*
- (2) *resources that describe real-world examples of churches, programs, and people who are demonstrating measurable success in assisting Christians with the practical process of progressing forward in their journeys of discipleship.*

While conceptual and theoretical approaches have their place, I really wanted to go hyper-practical in my research – to find out who out there is actually *doing* discipleship training for Christians in a meaningful, impactful, and successful way – and to determine *how* they are actually doing it. The Center for Bible Engagement conducted an extensive 15-year study that concluded in February of 2010. One of their objectives was to attempt to quantify an answer to the question, “What does it mean to grow towards spiritual maturity?”³¹ According to researcher George Barna, few in the Christian community can provide a coherent answer. Barna writes, “People aspire to be spiritually mature, but they do not know what it means. Pastors want to guide others on the path to spiritual wholeness, but they are often not clearly defining the goals or the outcomes of that process.”³² Barna’s conclusion that a shallow spirituality follows a visionless growth process, echoes the problem I described in the Introductory chapter of this dissertation. Likewise, researcher David Kinnaman observes, “America has a spiritual depth problem partly because the faith community does not have a robust definition of its spiritual

³¹ “How Do Frequent Church Attenders Define Spiritual Maturity?”, September 2009. Center for Bible Engagement, The Good News Broadcasting Association, Inc., 1996-2010, www.c4be.org.

³² “Many Churchgoers and Faith Leaders Struggle to Define Spiritual Maturity,” May 11, 2009. The Barna Group, Ltd, 2009. Accessed online at <https://www.barna.com/research/many-churchgoers-and-faith-leaders-struggle-to-define-spiritual-maturity/> on June 14, 2019.

goals.”³³ So, what is *discipleship*, according to contemporary researchers, theologians, and practitioners?

Many of the resources I discovered focused on the role of *following* in discipleship. Pastor Jim Putman defines a disciple based on Jesus’ call of Simon and Andrew in Matthew 4:19, “Come follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” Putman separates this call into three distinct phrases to explain the process of discipleship: “Come follow Me,” “and I will make you,” “fishers of men.”³⁴ Putman’s definition makes the process of discipleship clear, memorable, and measurable: a disciple is a person who responds to Jesus’ call, follows Jesus, is being re-made by Jesus, and is doing the things Jesus does. Missiologist and pastor David Platt also defines a disciple in simple terms around Matthew 4:19, saying, “A disciple is someone who follows Jesus.”³⁵ Platt then clarifies what a true follower of Jesus looks like: “to follow Jesus is to live with urgent obedience to His mission. ‘Follow me,’ Jesus says, ‘and I will make you fishers of men.’ A proper understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus inevitably leads to making disciples of Jesus.”³⁶ Researcher and writer Eric Geiger defines a disciple as “someone who has chosen to follow Jesus.... Disciples of Jesus are those learning to base their identities on Jesus Himself.”³⁷

Professor of Theology at Lipscomb University, Lee Camp agrees with Putman, Platt, and Geiger in their focus on following Jesus: “Jesus of Nazareth always comes asking disciples to follow him – not merely ‘accept him,’ not merely ‘believe in him,’ not merely ‘worship him,’ but to follow him: one either follows Christ, or one does not. There is no compartmentalization of the faith...”³⁸ Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary, Scot McKnight further accentuates the role of following Jesus in Christian discipleship:

³³ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving the Church... and Rethinking Faith* (Baker Books, 2011), 11.

³⁴ Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (NavPress, 2010), 26-33.

³⁵ David Platt, *The 4 Marks of a True Disciple* (Verge Network, 2017), 2. Accessed online at <https://my.vergenetwork.org/the-4-marks-of-a-true-disciple-david-platt/>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷ Eric Geiger, *Disciples Path, The Beginning: First Steps for New Disciples* (LifeWay, 2014), 5.

³⁸ Lee Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World* (Brazos Press, 2008), 74.

Those who aren't following Jesus aren't his followers. It's that simple. Followers follow, and those who don't follow aren't followers. To follow Jesus means to follow Jesus into a society where justice rules, where love shapes everything. To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it.³⁹

Building upon this central concept of following Jesus, Pastors Francis Chan and Mark Beuving explain that following Jesus leads to imitating Jesus, and that imitation (just as à Kempis wrote) will lead to one becoming like Jesus:

The word disciple refers to a student or apprentice. Disciples in Jesus' day would follow their rabbi (which means teacher) wherever he went, learning from the rabbi's teaching and being trained to do as the rabbi did. Basically, a disciple is a follower, but only if we take the term follower literally. Becoming a disciple of Jesus is as simple as obeying His call to follow. When Jesus called His first disciples, they may not have understood where Jesus would take them or the impact it would have on their lives, but they knew what it meant to follow. They took Jesus' call literally and began going everywhere He went and doing everything He did. It's impossible to be a disciple or a follower of someone and not end up like that person. Jesus said, 'A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher' (Luke 6:40). That's the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate Him, carry on His ministry, and become like Him in the process.⁴⁰

Discipleship expert, Jo Saxton echoes Chan and Beuving, adding, "When Jesus did discipleship, the model was the rabbi with the disciple. The rabbi wasn't just about teaching them information, but they wanted to imitate their life. They wanted to be who the rabbi was.... You can't be what you can't see."⁴¹

³⁹ Scot McKnight, *One Life: Jesus Calls, We Follow* (Zondervan, 2010), 70.

⁴⁰ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (David C. Cook, 2012), 16.

⁴¹ Jo Saxton, *The Three Critical Elements of Effective Disciplemaking* (Verge Network, 2017) 2-3, 6. Accessed online at <http://my.vergenetwork.org/ebook-the-3-critical-elements-of-effective-disciplemaking-jo-saxton/>.

Thus, much of contemporary literature on discipleship focuses on following Jesus with the intent to imitate Him, which will result in becoming like Him in character, speech, and action. Researchers Arnold Cole and Pamela Ovwigho put it well in the final report following their eight-year study of the spiritual lives of more than 100,000 Christians around the world. They defined *spiritual growth* as “becoming less of the person I was before I committed my life to following Jesus and more like Christ in my thoughts, words, and deeds.”⁴² Sounding quite Wesleyan in his verbiage, church historian Charles James Stranks explains Christian discipleship as the process by which we “discover the plain way of holiness and walk therein.”⁴³ Stranks further explains the follow / imitate / become-like-Jesus process of discipleship in this way: “the spiritually formed life is an ordered life of devotion, in which the vision of God and the grace of God lead us into the fullest service of our fellowmen.”

To the central idea of following Jesus, The Eastbourne Consultation Joint Statement on Discipleship adds the role of the Body of Christ in an individual’s discipleship journey: “We define Christian discipleship as a process that takes place within accountable relationships over a period of time for the purpose of bringing believers to spiritual maturity in Christ.”⁴⁴ The Eastbourne Statement further specifies several distinguishing characteristics of a person who is becoming like Jesus: “The life of a disciple is marked by submission to Christ, ongoing transformation, personal holiness, compassionate service, and the fruit of the Spirit.”⁴⁵

As I searched through contemporary literature on discipleship, narrowing my review to those resources which either provided clear definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship*, or which demonstrated measurable paths or processes for helping Christians progress in their discipleship journeys, I discovered four recurrent themes: (1)Holiness; (2)Devotion; (3)Community; and (4)Co-Mission. The more resources I studied, the more I realized that these four themes matched the major themes from my review of Biblical and classical literature on discipleship (see Figure 2 above). Let us now compare and

⁴² Arnold Cole and Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, “Bible Engagement as the Key to Spiritual Growth: A Research Synthesis,” August 2012, Center for Bible Engagement, www.c4be.org, 2.

⁴³ John Richardson, *The Friend: A Religious and Literary Journal, Volume 61* (Society of Friends, 1888), 363.

⁴⁴ The Eastbourne Consultation Joint Statement on Discipleship, September 24, 1999, Eastbourne, England, www.theintentionaldisciple.com/gpage2.html.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

synthesize the contributions of contemporary literature around these four major themes of discipleship.

FOUR RECURRENT THEMES OF DISCIPLESHIP: (1) HOLINESS

The first recurrent theme of discipleship that emerged from my research was that of holiness, sanctification, and becoming like Christ in heart, mind, will, and character. This is the inward formation of Christlikeness within the life of the disciple. As followers of Jesus who are filled with His Spirit, we are on a journey. It is the journey of redemption, of complete salvation, a real and total rescue, whereby all that we are is being completely redeemed and saved, through and through (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). There are two categories of things that are happening in the life of a disciple during this sanctification process. I will state them in multiple ways, but all these statements are essentially saying the same thing about sanctification:

- *The power of sin is waning, and the power of holiness is growing.*
- *The sin nature is dying off, and the spirit of adoption is being more fully realized.*
- *The bondage to sin is being broken, and our freedom in Christ is growing in strength.*

Romans 6:11-14 says it this way:

So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus. Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. Instead, give yourselves completely to God, for you were dead, but now you have new life. So use your whole body as an instrument to do what is right for the glory of God. Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace.

We once had only a sin nature. But now, because of Jesus and the decision to put our faith in Him alone for salvation, we have been given a new nature – one that is being renewed in the knowledge and the image of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Colossians 3:10).

There is another short, simple, verse that captures this sanctification process that is going on within the life of the believer. It is John 3:30, and I want to state it here in multiple translations in order to communicate the full weight of this amazing little verse regarding the process of sanctification in the life of a Christian:

- *“He must become greater; I must become less.” (NIV)*
- *“He must increase, but I must decrease.” (ESV)*
- *“He must grow, and I must diminish.” (WYC)*
- *“He must become increasingly more, and I must become decreasingly less.” (NLT)*
- *“He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so.” (AMP)*

Sanctification is the cooperative working between a disciple of Jesus and the Holy Spirit within him/her, where the power of sin diminishes unto death, and the power of the Spirit flourishes into abundant life. It is hard work, but it is what we were made for. And the promise of Jesus is that He will help us do it (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). Maturing in holiness as a follower of Jesus takes a significant investment of time, energy, and resources. Jesus described it this way in Luke 9:23: “If any of you wants to be My disciple,” (My student, My pupil, someone who learns and grows under My leadership and instruction) “you must deny yourself” (actively participate in the death of your fleshly desires) “take up your cross” (that symbol of torturous, Roman, execution-style death) “daily” (our flesh, our sinful inclinations, must be crucified not just one time, but every single day) “and follow Me.” That is not an easy call! But it is the best call. It is the call that ends our slavery to sin, and liberates us to abundant life in Jesus.

Professor, theologian, and pastor Michael J. Wilkins explains that “discipleship and discipling mean living a fully human life in the world in union with Jesus Christ and growing in conformity to his image.”⁴⁶ Maturing in holiness while “living a fully human life” in the world will include the often unromantic side of world-detoxification. We go through withdrawals from the pet-sins and addictions that have been our comforts, our stability, our “control” before surrendering all to Christ. For some, it is the withdrawals that result from the chemical dependence upon substances. For others, it is the emotional

⁴⁶ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Zondervan: 1992), 42.

and mental withdrawals from other false comforts, such as dependence upon wealth, or entertainment, or the opinions of man, or the pursuit of power or prestige.

It is a crucial phase in spiritual development, this laying down of idols. Our hands so long to reach back for them when the calling of discipleship feels difficult – or boring. To press in toward Christ through this stage is to emerge a spiritual young adult. It is also to leave behind the thinking that all following Christ means is *not* doing certain things. This is one of worst tragedies of those who never pass beyond this stage: their faith is all wrapped up in what they can't or shouldn't do. That's what "following Jesus" looks like to them (and in them): a list of rules, accompanied by a list of expected consequences or rewards for either disobeying or following those rules.

On the contrary, as the disciple cooperates with the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit within his/her life, God is making him/her holy like Jesus. As St. Teresa lyricized, Jesus "our Star" can transform us into "light and ecstasy" in just the same way that He can transform a simple loaf of bread into a sacrifice worthy of the altar of God!⁴⁷ It is He who is able to make a patch of earth, a day of the week, an individual person – even an entire nation of people – holy, through His transforming Presence with them, work among them, and words to them and about them. As the Wesley brothers wrote, "Scatter the last remains of sin, And seal me Thine abode; O, make me glorious all within, A temple built by God. My inward holiness Thou art, For faith hath made Thee mine: With all Thy fulness fill my heart, Till all I am is Thine!"⁴⁸ The call of God from the very beginning has been to "come out from", to be "set apart", to be "holy, as He is holy" (2 Corinthians 6:17; Romans 1:1; 1 Peter 1:16).

This theme of holiness – of the sanctification process, of Christlikeness, of becoming like Jesus in character, word, and deed – is the first in understanding the journey of Christian discipleship. Author and teacher Patrick Morley, writing on the discipling role in fatherhood, asserts, "Discipleship is not about behavior modification; it is about heart transformation. The job of a dad, then, is to disciple his children's hearts

⁴⁷ St. Therese of Lisieux, *Poems of St. Teresa, Carmelite of Lisieux*, known as the 'Little Flower of Jesus,' S.L. Emery, trans., (Angel Guardian Press, 1907), 36.

⁴⁸ John and Charles Wesley, "Christ Our Sanctification," *Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley, Volume 1*, G. Osborn, ed., (R. Needham, Printer, Paternoster-Row, 1868), 284.

toward loving God and serving people.”⁴⁹ Christian philosopher Dallas Willard, during an interview at a church leadership conference in 2010 explained, “our goal is transforming disciples inwardly, in such a way that doing the words and deeds of Christ is not the focus but the natural outcome or side effect.”⁵⁰ It is in following Jesus, learning from Jesus, and being with Jesus that we come to imitate Him, such that the “natural outcome or side effect” will be that we become like Him.

FOUR RECURRENT THEMES OF DISCIPLESHIP: (2) DEVOTION

The second theme I discovered in my research of contemporary literature on discipleship was a theme I will call “devotion.” Allow me to differentiate this theme from the one that preceded it. I used the word “holiness” to encapsulate the Spirit-led process of sanctification that results in the disciple becoming like Christ. I am here using the word “devotion” to refer to all the activities that a disciple *practices*, with the enabling help of the Spirit, in order to develop and maintain relational and communicative intimacy with Christ. In terms of discipleship, the work of holiness is taking place in the disciple’s heart, mind, and will, while the work of devotion is taking place in the disciple’s rhythms, habits, and practices. Holiness and devotion are separate and distinct aspects of the discipleship journey. Yet they fuel each other beautifully, and it is unhealthy to try to have one without the other. The rhythms, habits, and practices to which I am referring within this category of devotion would include such activities as Bible engagement, prayer, solitude, meditation, fasting, worship, giving, and more. These activities are in various resources referred to as “spiritual disciplines,” “means of grace,” “works of piety,” “devotional practices,” and other monikers.

Throughout my reading, the practice of regular engagement with the Bible stood out as the top determining factor in the success of a disciple’s journey. Researchers Cole and Ovwigho found that “engaging the Bible four or more days a week is the single most powerful predictor of spiritual growth.”⁵¹ In a secondary report, Cole and Ovwigho wrote, “As our research has demonstrated, those who read the Bible at least four times a

⁴⁹ Patrick Morley, *Man Alive: Transforming Your Seven Primal Needs into a Powerful Spiritual Life* (Multnomah, 2012), 32.

⁵⁰ Dallas Willard, interviewed by John Ortberg at the Catalyst West Conference on June 6, 2010.

⁵¹ Cole and Ovwigho, “Bible Engagement as the Key to Spiritual Growth,” 2.

week are less likely to engage in behaviors such as gambling, pornography, getting drunk, and sex outside marriage.”⁵² It appears that there is a demonstrable connection between the disciple’s devotional life with God (through Bible reading) and the disciple’s life of holiness (through observable behaviors). Indeed, the forces of evil can do very little with a person who dwells in constant conversation with God through prayer and Scripture meditation. Lifelong missionary evangelist E. Stanley Jones saw this connection as well, describing the devotional time in Scripture and prayer as a “time exposure to God.” It was, he said, like a photographic plate which, when exposed to God, progressively bore the image of Christ in keeping with the length of exposure.⁵³

Cole and Ovwigho also found a clear connection between Bible engagement and faith-sharing, demonstrating a link between one’s devotional practices and their co-missional⁵⁴ practices: “The more the respondent reads the Bible, the more witnessing he or she does. 59.7% of those who shared their faith with more than 10 people in the past year read the Bible daily.”⁵⁵ Chan and Beuving pastorally affirm the connection between Bible engagement and becoming active agents in God’s Kingdom, stating, “We study the Bible to learn about who God is, who we are, and what God is doing in our world. The Bible compels us to join God in what He is doing in and around us. Studying the Bible is important, but the goal is never knowledge for the sake of knowledge.”⁵⁶

Cole and Ovwigho’s findings were similar to those from two other independent research initiatives within the same timeframe. The first was completed by the Willow Creek Association in 2007. Researchers Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson explain that one key insight discovered through Willow Creek’s 2007 REVEAL Study was that “personal Bible study / reflection is the most powerful catalyst of spiritual growth. This is true across the spiritual continuum and cannot be overemphasized.”⁵⁷ Willow Creek conducted their study over a four-year period, polling over 1500 churches representing

⁵² Cole and Ovwigho, “Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4,” December 2009, Center for Bible Engagement, www.c4be.org, 3.

⁵³ John S. Barnett, *Discipline Yourself for Godliness* (BFM Books, 2010), 50.

⁵⁴ Here, I am referring to the fourth recurrent theme of discipleship, which I have called “co-mission,” and which will be further explained later in this chapter.

⁵⁵ “Bible Literacy & Spiritual Growth: Survey Results,” November 2006, Center for Bible Engagement, www.c4be.org, ii.

⁵⁶ Chan and Beuving, 14.

⁵⁷ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Zondervan, 2016), 144.

more than 400,000 attendees. The researchers mapped the spiritual journeys of these attendees, placing them along a continuum of spiritual maturity based upon certain observable behaviors, and found that, “When it comes to spiritual growth, nothing beats the Bible.... of all the personal spiritual practices – prayer, confession, tithing, journaling, solitude, serving, or worship, we find that one stands out.... Scripture reflection – more than any other practice – moves people forward in their love for God and love for others.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Hawkins and Parkinson explain that part of their research was to statistically compare the responses of those who took the REVEAL Survey, and in the process, they discovered the following:

of all the personal spiritual practices, we find that reflection on Scripture is much more influential than any other practice by a significant margin. In fact, for the most advanced segments [along their continuum of spiritual maturity] – Close to Christ and Christ-Centered – it’s twice as catalytic as any other factor on the list. This means it has twice the power of any other spiritual practice to accelerate growth in spiritually mature people.⁵⁹

Willow Creek concluded from their multi-year, multi-church study that “engaging the Bible is the most powerful predictor of [spiritual] growth.”⁶⁰ A third independent survey conducted by Lifeway Research in 2012 reached similar conclusions.⁶¹

Prayer was the second most common sub-theme I discovered within this larger discipleship category of practices I am calling “devotion.” Sister Margaret Magdalen reminded readers that Jesus Himself was a man of deep prayer and regular solitude⁶²: “And in the morning, a great while before day, He rose and went out to a lonely place, and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35). The Gospel writers tell us that Jesus went apart to pray before crucial decisions (Luke 6:12) and before major experiences (Luke 9:28; Mt. 26:36). Jesus sought solitude when He knew there were going to be heavy demands upon Him (Mark 1:35) and after important events (Matthew 14:23; Mark 6:46). Father Henri

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 170.

⁶¹ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (B&H Books, 2012), 83.

⁶² Margaret Magdalen, *Jesus, Man of Prayer* (Intervarsity Press, 1987), 39.

Nouwen wrote that “through [solitude] we prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen”.⁶³ The secret, then, to cultivating our intimacy with God – according to the Gospels, Magdalen, and Nouwen, among many others – is prayerful solitude: time spent alone with the Father, talking with Him and listening to Him. Professor of Discipleship at Wesley Biblical Seminary, Matt Friedeman summarized the merging of the devotional practices of solitude, Bible engagement, meditation, and prayer in this way:

The two foundational spiritual exercises for the cultivation of the inner life are prayer and Bible study. If I were to graph my spiritual history, it would undoubtedly show that the peaks always occurred when the disciplines of daily prayer and Bible study/meditation were both being practiced regularly. The valleys would indicate their inconsistency or absence. To develop our souls, we must pray. To develop our souls, we must read and be formed by Scripture.⁶⁴

The lowly, uneducated, 17th-Century monk, Brother Lawrence developed a reputation as a deeply spiritual man, much sought-after by his more prestigious brothers for his integrity, wisdom, and intimacy with Christ. Lawrence had a method that he dedicated himself to during all those years of doing tedious, manual labor – cooking and cleaning and scrubbing dishes – and later, mending shoes. While he worked, Lawrence constantly thought about the love of God and the character of God. He worked in constant prayer – both prayers of talking to God and prayers of silently listening for God in his work. Lawrence’s practice matched the Jewish proverb, “The disciple’s spiritual life is not fragmented from ‘the rest’ of his life. Having a segmented ‘quiet time’ with God would be like spending just a special portion of your day with air to breathe.” After his death, Lawrence’s method became known as “Practicing the Presence of God”, and a book of the same name was compiled about his method.⁶⁵ This book is one of the most important contributions on spiritual development from the 17th-Century – and it came

⁶³ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Making All Things New: An Invitation to the Spiritual Life* (Harper Collins, 1981), 81.

⁶⁴ Dr. Matt Friedeman, “Lecture 3: Daily Devotions,” delivered as part of the course “DS 500A-Personal Discipleship and Formation” at Wesley Biblical Seminary in October 2012.

⁶⁵ Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Martino Fine Books, 2016).

from a simple, uneducated, hard-working dish-washer and sandal repairman in a monastery in Paris.

John Cassian, Richard Foster, and others wrote about the practice of Christian meditation as a form of re-ordering one's mind and soul, as in Romans 12:1, where Paul admonishes readers to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind.... then you will be able to test and approve the will of God." When we focus or "center down" our attention on God, the broken and fragmented areas of our souls begin to come into order.⁶⁶ It is there in the quiet place, alone with Jesus, that we allow Him the space in our lives to give us His peace, and to "transform" us (John 14:27; Romans 12:1-2). This transformation of the mind especially occurs when we engage in the principle form of meditation, the *meditatio Scripturarum*, or the mediation upon Scripture.⁶⁷ Jesus' Spirit "renews" our minds as we give Him the space and time to "wash me in the water of Your Word". (Ephesians 5:26-27) Saint John Cassian (c. 360-435) affirmed the transforming power of *meditatio Scripturarum* by comparing our minds to a great mill wheel, and our thoughts as the rushing torrent of water. Cassian said that the mind "cannot be free from the flow of thoughts," but we can direct the flow of our thoughts to the character of God by meditating regularly upon the Holy Scriptures.⁶⁸

I distinguished before that "holiness" refers to those aspects of discipleship that the Spirit is doing in us (with our submissive cooperation) to become more like Christ, while "devotion" refers to that category of activities that we practice (with the Spirit's enabling help) in order to grow closer to Christ. With that I mind, I found faithful action to be a recurrent requisite within this category of devotional practices. The resources I found consistently revealed that disciples must take action – they must *do*, or *practice* the habits that will allow them to grow closer to Jesus. In his classic *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster explained, "The grace of God is unearned and unearnable, but if we ever expect to grow in grace, we must pay the price of a consciously chosen course

⁶⁶ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (Harper Collins, 1988), 30.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁸ John Cassian, *Conferences of John Cassian* (Chapter XVIII), Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Accessed online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/cassian/conferences.ii.ii.xviii.html> on September 3, 2012.

of action which involves both individual and corporate disciplines.”⁶⁹ Professor and pastor George Buttrick wrote that “Prayer is friendship with God. Friendship is not formal, but neither is it formless: it has its cultivation, its behavior, its obligations – even its disciplines.”⁷⁰ Friedeman, reflecting on the life of E. Stanley Jones, explained, “Jones set apart time – a significant item on the daily schedule where one's focus turns wholeheartedly to communion with the Creator. [Jones] notes in his autobiography that one of the best things he ever did in college was establish a daily, two hour prayer habit. It served him well throughout a long, fruitful missionary career.”⁷¹ As Martin Luther famously quipped to his friend Viet Dietrich in 1530, “I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.”⁷²

It is critical, though, that disciples not place their hope and faith in the practices themselves, but in the Savior with whom they seek to commune through the practices. As Foster said, “The path does not produce the change; it places us where change can occur. A farmer is helpless to grow grain; but what he can do is provide the right conditions in which grain can grow. He cultivates the ground, plants the seed, waters the plants, and then the forces of nature take over and up comes the grain.”⁷³ It is in the practice, in the consistent act of doing, the faithful taking of action (all with the Spirit's enabling help) that the disciple takes steps in the direction toward Christ, trusting that He will meet the disciple and receive him/her and encourage him/her forward.

Something in our hearts must change, and that is the Spirit's doing. The Spirit sanctifies us, renewing our minds and transforming us into Christlike holiness. But we have an important role to play in the process of our own sanctification. We must actually *do* something. We must take action. We must *practice* our devotion to Jesus. Even secular philosophers and psychologists understand this truth: Aristotle taught that virtuous behavior makes one virtuous – that when we repeatedly choose to do what is right, despite our inclinations to do the opposite (or to do nothing at all), our virtue

⁶⁹ Foster, *Celebration*, 8.

⁷⁰ Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds., *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (HarperOne, 2005), 125.

⁷¹ Friedeman, “Lecture 3.”

⁷² Timothy J. Wengert, ed., *The Pastoral Luther: Essays on Martin Luther's Practical Theology* (Fortress Press, 2017), 172.

⁷³ Foster, *Celebration*, 4.

grows, and we are better prepared for the next similar circumstance.⁷⁴ Psychologist David Brandt popularized the expression “fake it till you make it” in the 1990s, noting that acting confident in the face of insecurity actually produces confidence in people.⁷⁵

Some Christians would say they don’t have the time or energy to engage in the spiritual disciplines. I myself have relented to do them from time to time in the past. Often, we simply don’t *feel* like doing them. But we as creatures are tied to our bodies and actions. The findings of the research on discipleship (and even in secular philosophy and psychology) reveal that we cannot wait until we feel like doing something to actually do it. What if the inclination never comes? No, resource after resource demonstrates the reverse is true: we must do the thing we know is right and best, leaning on the Spirit’s strength to enable us to act, whether we feel like doing it or not.

FOUR RECURRENT THEMES OF DISCIPLESHIP: (3) COMMUNITY

The third recurrent theme of discipleship I discovered was that of community. John Wesley admonished the people under his care: “Watch over one another in love, that you may help each other work out your salvation.”⁷⁶ Christianity is a social religion, not a solitary one, as Wesley declared: “I mean not only that it cannot subsist so well, but that it cannot subsist at all without society; without living and conversing with other men.”⁷⁷ The command to follow Jesus requires that we take a daily journey in the company of other disciples. It demands that we be lifelong learners and that we commit to constant growth in spiritual maturity with other fellow journeyers. Discipleship is a call to me, but it is a journey of *we*. Professor of Evangelism Robert Coleman wrote about the crucial role Christian community plays in the life and effectiveness of Christian disciples, stating, “Effective disciplers live in incarnational community,” and

⁷⁴ Robert C. Bartlett, *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (University of Chicago Press, 2012), 168.

⁷⁵ Robert J. Kriegel and Dr. David Brandt, *Sacred Cows Make the Best Burgers: Paradigm-Busting Strategies for Developing Change-Ready People and Organizations* (Warner Books, 1996), 202.

⁷⁶ Rupert E. Davies, ed., *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design* (Abingdon Press, 1989), 69.

⁷⁷ Howard A. Snyder, *The Radical Wesley: The Patterns and Practices of a Movement Maker* (Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 148.

“Effective disciplemakers engage in the ministry of presence.”⁷⁸ Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together*, his quintessential work on Christian community, “Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous the situation.”⁷⁹

A mentor early in John Wesley’s ministry told him in 1729, “Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven? Remember that you cannot serve him alone. You must therefore find companions or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”⁸⁰ Wesley followed this advice for the next sixty years, always avoiding solitary religion. All throughout England and America in the 18th-Century, Wesley established a system of worshipping communities called “societies,” smaller Bible study and fellowship groups called “classes,” and even smaller environments for serious discipleship called “bands.” These were the groups to which each methodist belonged, and were the methodists’ primary sources for fellowship, discipline, and spiritual growth.⁸¹ While societies could have membership numbering in the hundreds, classes were specifically limited to no more than twelve members, and bands had no more than six.⁸² This limit was established in order to provide for greater personalized care and discipleship among the leaders and members involved.

Thousands of years before Wesley, Jethro encouraged Moses to organize his “church” (of several million Hebrews) into groups of no more than ten. Each group reported up to a person with a higher level of maturity and authority; multiple tiers ultimately reported to Moses to be the final (human) authority. (Exodus 18:13-26) Through societies, classes, bands, select societies, and penitent groups, John Wesley provided the methodist communities throughout England and America with constant communal opportunities for conversion, growth in grace, accountability, and co-mission. Professor of Wesley Studies, Howard Snyder wrote, “When Wesley spoke of ‘social

⁷⁸ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (audio book), (Martino Fine Books, 2019).

⁷⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (Harper & Row, 1954), 112.

⁸⁰ Snyder, 148.

⁸¹ Ted Vial, “Methodist Early Developments”, www.patheos.com, 2011.

⁸² Leslie R. Marston, *From Age to Age A Living Witness: A Historical Interpretation of Free Methodism’s First Century* (Light and Life Press, 1960), 82.

holiness’ and ‘social Christianity,’ he was pointing to New Testament *koinonia*. Christian fellowship meant, not merely corporate worship, but watching over one another in love, advising, exhorting, admonishing, and praying with the brothers and sisters.”⁸³

Small groups were the cornerstone of John Wesley’s strategy for both personal and corporate spiritual growth, and Wesley demonstrated that growing the Church in discipleship could not be the work of just a select, ordained few. Wesley prioritized an equal representation of both clergy and laity in all the councils of the Church, recognizing that lay leadership within the Church was critical for the expansion of the Gospel, both in width and in depth.⁸⁴ Churches today affirm this attitude with such mantras as “every member is a minister.” A 21st-Century American application of Wesley’s structure of small group discipleship is Seedbed’s “New Room Bands.” Seedbed’s CEO, J.D. Walt explains, “A New Room band is a group of 3-5 people who read together, pray together, and meet together to help one another grow into the fullness of Jesus Christ in this life.”⁸⁵

Wesley knew, as we do today, that in order for the Church to grow and the Kingdom of God to expand, there must be committed leadership of both clergy and laity, working both in and out of the church. The responsibility for spreading the Gospel and discipling converts cannot rest solely on the shoulders of our ordained ministers. The laity must embrace their role as evangelists and disciplers inside their homes, within their communities, and at their places of work and recreation.⁸⁶ It also takes much more than two or three ordained ministers to effectively nurture the Body of Christ within the Church. With the guidance and help of clergy, the laity must lean on each other, bear one another’s burdens, sharpen each other, and spur one another on towards love and good deeds. This is critical if the American Church in the 21st-Century is going to be a healthy, maturing Body that reproduces disciples effectively.

The need for community in the process of Christian discipleship is revealed in all of the “one another” language that is found throughout the New Testament: love one another; forgive one another; regard each other more highly than yourselves; teach and

⁸³ Snyder, 148.

⁸⁴ Donald N. Bastian, *Belonging!: Adventures in Church Membership* (Light and Life Communications, 1978), 124-127.

⁸⁵ Seedbed’s CEO, J.D. Walt, explained the concept of “New Room Bands” during his speech delivered at the New Room Conference in Franklin, TN on September 19, 2018.

⁸⁶ Marston, 79-83.

correct one another; encourage each other; pray for each other; bear one another's burdens; serve one another; submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Professor of Biblical Studies, Howard Macy confirms, "This list just scratches the surface, but it is enough to remind us that we need the community of faith to grow up in Christ."⁸⁷ Macy goes on to explain:

One of the most important ways the community helps us is by embodying Christ's continuing presence on earth. When my brothers and sisters love and accept me, I feel Christ's love, too. When I confess my sin and they forgive me, I know that God forgives me, too. When they pray for my brokenness, I know that they are sharing in the healing work of Jesus. In our dog-eat-dog, enemies-with-their-teeth-bared world, when we feel the crush of hostility and of our own failures, to have our Christian community surround us with compassion and encouragement lightens our loads, strengthens us, and gives us the courage to keep on trying.⁸⁸

Eric Geiger explains that disciples of Jesus are "called to live authentically and interdependently with one another in Biblical community," and that the first generation of disciples were "knit together by the Holy Spirit dwelling within them and hearts ablaze and fixed on Jesus, their world (and the world) was turned upside down because of the depth of their community."⁸⁹ Discipleship evangelist Bill Hull ties one's personal discipleship directly to the Christian community, saying, "a disciple has decided to submit to at least one other person... to become like that person as that person is like Christ."⁹⁰

When I think about discipleship and following Jesus, I can wrongly superimpose my inborn sense of American individualism on the process, thinking about discipleship only in terms of one's individual relationship with the Savior. However, Macy, Geiger, Hull, and others help me realize the integral role that the Body of Christ plays in the

⁸⁷ Howard Macy, "Community: God's Design for Growth." Accessed online at https://bcbible.org/hp_wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Community-God's-Design-For-Growth.pdf on August 29, 2019.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Eric Geiger, *Disciples Path, The Life: Living the Spiritual Disciplines* (LifeWay, 2015), 36-40.

⁹⁰ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Pastor: Leading Others on the Journey of Faith* (Baker Books, 2007), 205.

discipleship process. I would certainly not be the disciple of Jesus I am today were it not for the investments of numerous mentors and co-journeymen who helped show me the way. I have been discipled more by what I have observed in others than I have from being taught in discipleship classes and programs. Programs have definitely played a meaningful role in my spiritual development – just not as much as relational coaching, mentoring, and example-setting. I can remember our basketball coach in middle school – a great Christian man – respond with calmness and grace when we lost a critical game, or when an irate parent blew up at him, or when a referee made a terrible call. I can remember in high school overhearing my friend’s dad – a spiritual parent of mine – correcting one of his children in a way that both challenged his child to do and be better as well as affirming his child’s value and his love for his child. As a young adult, I can remember an older friend in the faith who owned his own home and got engaged. When his fiancé’s lease came up 6 weeks before their wedding date, this man moved out of his own house so that she could go ahead and move in, but without them “living together” before they married! All of these examples (and many more like them) combined with the programmatic things I learned at church to produce in me a workable faith that I had not only studied, but had also watched modeled before me in the real lives of real disciples living for Jesus. Thinking back, the people who had the greatest practical influence in my spiritual growth were those who were willing to know me, spend time with me, listen to my questions, and respond with both personal stories (talking with me), and through demonstration (allowing their lives to be observable). These people were not prideful or showy in their spirituality, but they did not hide it either. While they did not broadcast their spiritual activities, they did allow them to be visible and observable. Using myself as a test-subject, I can unequivocally affirm the vital role that the community of faith has played in my journey of Christian discipleship!

FOUR RECURRENT THEMES OF DISCIPLESHIP: (4) CO-MISSION

The fourth recurrent theme of discipleship I discovered throughout my reading and research was one that I have decided to call “co-mission.” This is an intentional play on words, a purposeful dissection of the word “commission” in order to accentuate how Jesus’ disciples are literally on mission *with* Him. Being on mission with Jesus is an essential aspect of being a disciple of Jesus. Thomas à Kempis warned, “Truly when the day of judgment comes we shall not be examined as to what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how we lived.”⁹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared, “The church is only the church when it exists for others. The church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life – not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live in Christ, to exist for others.”⁹²

For John Wesley, one’s social ethic was simply an extension of their individual and spiritual ethic. Wesley’s call to methodists was to the “wedding of piety and mercy” in their lives. Professor of Spiritual Formation and Wesley Studies, Steve Harper writes, the ability to take two ideas which seem like opposites on the surface, and put them together to form a stronger unity than existed when they were kept separate.... Their wedding of piety and mercy forged a more effective instrument in God’s hand than they could ever have been if they had opted for one form of spirituality to the exclusion of the other.... Holiness of heart and life remain the twin peaks of vital spirituality.⁹³

So often in church world, evangelism and social action are pitted against each other, as if the two were diametrically opposed. This evangelism vs. social action debate is to the orthopraxy side of Christianity as the faith vs. works debate is to the orthodoxy side. Following in Wesley’s footsteps, Salvation Army General Frederick Couatts closed the potential gap between the interior life of holiness and the exterior participation in Christ’s mission when he wrote, “Genuine holiness will find its expression in unrewarded

⁹¹ à Kempis, *Imitation*, 16.

⁹² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (Touchstone, 1997), 282.

⁹³ Steve Harper, *Devotional Life in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Upper Room Books, 1995),

service to the last, the least, and the lost.”⁹⁴ Similarly, monk, priest, and theologian Thomas Merton taught, “Disciples must maintain that delicate balance between the inner and the outer life – contemplation and action. Meditation has no point unless it is firmly rooted in life.”⁹⁵ Just as faith and works are inseparable, so are evangelism and social action. Each should inspire the other. Each should strive to see the other occur in the life of the disciple. And both should work together in tandem for the holistic transformation of the individual, the community, and the world. Oswald Chambers said it this way:

The ‘show business,’ which is so incorporated into our view of Christian work today, has caused us to drift far from Our Lord's conception of discipleship. It is instilled in us to think that we have to do exceptional things for God; we have not. We have to be exceptional in ordinary things, to be holy in mean streets, among mean people, surrounded by sordid sinners. That is not learned in five minutes.⁹⁶

The Great Commission, from which comes the title of “co-mission” I selected for this theme of discipleship, says, “Go into all the world, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20). Jesus’ commission for His disciples was (and continues to be) that they reproduce – that they go and make more disciples. Chan and Beuving champion this view of discipleship, writing, “Teaching others about Christ is essential to being one of Jesus’s disciples. As we teach others to love and obey Jesus, we are fulfilling His command to make disciples.”⁹⁷ Missionary Andrew Murray linked true discipleship to bearing fruit, saying that it is difficult to identify as a disciple someone whose life is not in some way helping produce more disciples.⁹⁸

The disciple’s life, formed in the image of Christ’s holiness, cultivated through devotional practices, all within the supportive, challenging, and cooperative environment

⁹⁴ Frederick Coutts, *The Splendour of Holiness* (Salvationist Publishing Supplies Ltd, 1934).

⁹⁵ William Henry Shannon, *Thomas Merton's Dark Path: The Inner Experience of a Contemplative* (Macmillan, 1981), 178.

⁹⁶ Oswald Chambers, *So Send I You / Workmen Of God: Recognizing and Answering God's Call to Service* (Discovery House, 2015), 210.

⁹⁷ Chan and Beuving, 14.

⁹⁸ Andrew Murray, “True Disciples,” *The True Vine: Meditations for a Month on John 15:1-16*. Accessed online at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/murray/true_vine on January 19, 2013.

of Christ-centered community, is meant to be lived outwards, for the influence and benefit of others. The fruit of discipleship should be the expansion of God's Kingdom purposes upon the earth. Bishop Keith Cowart preached, "The Church was never meant to be an oasis where people come to take an occasional drink; it is a river that moves out, carrying life-giving water to desert places."⁹⁹ This echoes the famous statement by the former Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, who observed, "The Church is the only society that exists for the benefit of those who are not its members."¹⁰⁰ Cowart went on to explain the role of serving others in the process of discipleship: "We are most full of life, not when we are clinging to what we have, but when we are releasing what we have for the benefit of others."¹⁰¹ Theologian Calvin Samuel, lecturing on the subject of holiness in Paul's Letters, explained, "Paul holds that holiness has more to do with active selfless love for others than it does personal sinlessness."¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Keith Cowart, "Wherever the River Flows," sermon delivered at Christ Community Church in Columbus, Georgia on October 21, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ *New World Encyclopedia*, "William Temple," May 27, 2014. Accessed online at https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/William_Temple on August 29, 2019.

¹⁰¹ Cowart, sermon.

¹⁰² Calvin Samuel, Chamberlain Holiness Lecture Series, delivered at Wesley Biblical Seminary in October 2012.

CHAPTER THREE: MINISTRY DESIGN

INTERVIEWS WITH DISCIPLING CHURCHES

The initial step in the “Ministry Design” phase of my project was to interview a sampling of American churches that have a reputation for producing Christian disciples. I already knew of several myself, and so I began my interviews with them. My final question in each interview was for suggestions of other discipling churches the interviewees might know of for me to contact. In this way, through personal recommendations, I was able to interview a total of ten churches in various locations across the United States. Here are the names of my ten interviewees, along with their positions, church names, locations, and average weekly attendance:

1. *Matt Friedeman, Lead/Planting Pastor of DaySpring Church in Clinton, MS – 300.*
2. *Derrick Shields, Lead Pastor of Christ Community Church in Columbus, GA – 950.*
3. *Matthew Pharis, Lead Pastor of Puckett UMC in Puckett, MS – 100.*
4. *Kellan Peterson, Lead Pastor of Sola Church in Bothell, WA – 40.*
5. *Leanne Burris, Lead/Planting Pastor of The Bridge UMC in D'Iberville, MS – 100.*
6. *Barry Male, Senior Pastor of Madison UMC in Madison, MS – 715.*
7. *Tim Jack, Executive Pastor of Crossroads Bible Church in Bellevue, WA – 2000.*
8. *Mark Danzey, Senior Associate Pastor of Mount Pisgah UMC in Johns Creek, GA – 1,400.*
9. *Robert Ward, Associate Pastor of CrossPointe Church in Columbus, GA – 900.*
10. *Elijah Friedeman, Lead/Planting Pastor of Foundry Church in Flowood, MS – 60.*

I asked each church interviewee the following questions:

1. *How does your church disciple your people?*
2. *Do you have a name for your discipleship program?*

3. *Does your church have a definition for what a disciple is? (Yes/No)*

4. *If yes, where/how is this definition written, shared, or discussed in your church?*

5. *What other churches do you know of that are doing discipleship well?*

Together with these personal interviews, I also discovered a number of books on church-wide discipleship programs written by contemporary American church pastors. Within the scope of their books, they answered the same kinds of questions regarding their churches that I was asking the pastors I had connected with in my personal interviews. Thus, I was able to factor their answers in along with my summation and integration of the ten interviews I personally conducted, giving me relevant input from more than 20 contemporary American churches who are actively and intentionally fulfilling Jesus' call to develop disciples in their contexts.

One of the most important discoveries I made from the churches considered within the course of my interview phase is that words matter. Words have weight, and repeated words create a common vocabulary. As Jim Putman wrote,

We often have church teams sit together, and then we ask each person to write his or her definition of a disciple without talking to the other teammates. In all our years of doing this, we have encountered only two churches in which the entire staff defined discipleship using the same terms. Even though many agree that the mission of the church is to make disciples, they don't agree on what a disciple is, and they don't use the same language.¹⁰³

Within a local church, when statements on discipleship are clarified among the body, stated consistently by its leaders, and repeated regularly by its members, these statements have an impact on the discipleship quality of that local church. For instance, every Sunday morning at DaySpring Church, as a part of the weekly service of worship, Pastor Matt Friedeman leads his congregation in reciting the mission of DaySpring, along with the "six characteristics of a DaySpringer" (these six characteristics are how they measure discipleship in their church). Through this weekly ritual, the congregation

¹⁰³ Putman, *Real-Life*, 26.

remembers who they are, what their shared sense of identity and purpose is, and what it means to “be a DaySpringer.”

Likewise at my home church of Christ Community, we have defined a disciple of Jesus according to five key words with memorable sub-phrases:

Worship – passionate lovers of God

Grow – ever-maturing followers of Jesus

Connect – deeply devoted brothers and sisters

Serve – generous stewards of God’s gifts

Live – empowered witnesses in our world

These five words are published on the church’s web site, highlighted in the weekly bulletin, explained in the new member classes, and more. The idea is that if a person is engaging in these five words on a regular basis, and therefore *becoming*¹⁰⁴ the five sub-phrases of those words more and more in their lives, then they are growing as a disciple of Jesus!

Pastor Mark Danzey of Mt. Pisgah UMC says their church regularly teaches that there are five behaviors that are consistent with Christian disciples:

- 1. A personal relationship that is strengthened through daily spiritual disciplines.*
- 2. Being in a small group that meets for growth, support, and accountability.*
- 3. Serving in your area of gifting to grow the Kingdom of God.*
- 4. A life of stewardship in the areas of time, talent, resources, relationship, and truth.*
- 5. Sharing the gospel and reproducing disciplemakers.*

Pastor Kellan Peterson at Sola Church has defined a disciple for his people as “a mature believer who is pursuing personal righteousness, genuine faith, and raising up other disciples.” Pastor Barry Male of Madison UMC said his church regularly recites the five Methodist commitments people make in becoming a member, and in so doing, they

¹⁰⁴ *Becoming* is a critical word at Christ Community Church. We teach that if a person is *becoming* a more “passionate lover of God,” an “ever-maturing follower of Jesus,” a more “deeply devoted brother or sister,” a more “generous steward of God’s gifts,” and a more “empowered witness in our world,” then such a person is definitely growing as a disciple of Jesus!

affirm together that “this is what a disciple does: prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.” Pastor Barry added that he regularly teaches on the specifics for each of those five discipleship activities.

A second common theme that emerged from the churches under consideration in my interview phase was the importance of groups. Every interviewee mentioned a groups component to their discipleship strategy. For example, Pastor Leanne Burris at The Bridge UMC described their emphasis on getting every member involved in a group, where the Wesleyan mantra of “how is it with your soul” is central. Pastor Robert Ward of CrossPointe Church said they encourage everyone to be part of a Christian community, to submit oneself to Biblical teaching and leadership, to other believers who will love and encourage them, and to serve in, through, and with the local church faithfully. Ward said, “we tell our people: don't hide in your house or some coffee shop with a systematic theology book! Instead, study the Bible together, pray for one another, and seek each other's growth.” The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama, has developed a groups-based culture of disciple-making within their congregation. They have even developed a “Disciple-Making Institute” for their people, a relational program aimed at helping laity master and own the process of making disciples in their own families, communities, and businesses.¹⁰⁵

A third key discovery I made from the churches considered during this interview phase was the importance of active practice and service. While teaching was certainly a common thread among every person I interviewed, a distinction among the churches that excel at discipleship is their commitment to providing regular opportunities for their congregations to put their teachings about discipleship into practice. Pastor Matthew Pharis at Puckett UMC was a stand-out in this area, leading his church in a weekly “Wednesday Night Service,” where groups gather at the church, discuss a need in the community they feel God is leading them to address, and then they go out and serve that local need together as part of their group time! Afterwards, the groups return to the church for sharing and testimonies.

¹⁰⁵ Institute for Disciple-Making, The Church at Brook Hills in Birmingham, Alabama. Accessed online at <http://www.brookhills.org/idm/> on April 8, 2013.

Authors Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson highlight the importance of service and action in their book titled *The Externally Focused Church*:

- *They are inwardly strong but outwardly focused.*
- *They integrate good deeds and good news into the life of the church.*
- *They value impact and influence in the community more than attendance.*
- *They seek to be salt, light, and leaven in the community.*
- *They see themselves as the “soul” of the community.*
- *They would be greatly missed by the community if they left.*¹⁰⁶

Reading Rusaw and Swanson, I found myself wondering, would my church be “greatly missed by the community” if it was not there? Why or why not? When discipleship is actively practiced, and church members are engaged in external service to their neighbors, there is far greater Kingdom-impact to their community.

The thesis of Brandon Hatmaker’s *Barefoot Church* is that the Church’s real identity (in God’s eyes) is not tied to buildings, programs, worship styles, methodologies – not even to theology itself – but to its heartfelt and active expression of love, in the Spirit of Christ, toward the world that He cares for so deeply.¹⁰⁷ The Church exists for mission! When the Church joins with God in His work of redeeming creation, that is when She is behaving most fully as His Bride – as His “help-mate” (Gen 2:18), His co-worker (1 Cor 3:9). What the local church family does together within the walls of the church building must constantly overflow into the community outside of the building, bringing hope, justice, mercy, and renewal to their neighbors. If the Church is to be the continual incarnation of Jesus into the world as He intended, then She must shed her attachment to consumption and entertainment and embrace her role as self-sacrificial servant. Both Jesus in the Gospels and Hatmaker in *Barefoot Church* suggest that the Church’s first extension of itself must be “to the least of these:” the poor, the marginalized, the abused, and the forgotten (Matt 25:31-46; Luke 14:13-14; Luke 18:20-22). Hatmaker’s *Barefoot Church* model emulates that of John Wesley and the early Methodists in many ways. First, Wesley took the Gospel outside of the church building to reach the common man. He would go to factories early in the mornings so that he

¹⁰⁶ Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Group Publishing, 2004), 12.

¹⁰⁷ Brandon Hatmaker, *Barefoot Church* (Zondervan, 2011), 111-117.

could teach the incoming shift-workers. Wesley held outdoor gatherings in the town squares so that all those who either were not welcomed by the church or felt unwelcome in church could experience the Gospel.¹⁰⁸ Hatmaker's model of discipleship is also similar to Wesley's in its emphasis on the practical discipleship of the laity. As Wesley's congregations around England and America grew, he and other clergy equipped hundreds of lay leaders to be the primary discipleship engine for tens of thousands of new and maturing believers!¹⁰⁹

As much of the research cited in Hatmaker's book demonstrates, the Church today suffers from an anemia of both mission and discipleship. Chuck Colson's famous quote about the Church being "3000 miles wide and an inch deep" is all too true. The Church today is hungry for the "how-to's" of discipleship. Enough theory. Enough talk. The Church needs empowerment! She needs equipping! She must be apprenticed. The Church needs people who will take the tools of discipleship, put them in Her hands, and say, "Now watch me, and do what I do." This was the system the Apostles put into place in the 1st-Century. Wesley revived it in the 18th-Century. Hatmaker, Platt, Chan, Pharis, and others are re-trodding the path now for us in the 21st-Century. We follow in their footsteps through active practice and service to our local communities.

DEFINITION OF DISCIPLESHIP

The next step in my Ministry Project was to extract the recurrent themes of Christian discipleship from my research and interview phases in order to articulate a clear, motivational, memorable, and measurable definition for *disciple* and *discipleship* for use by the American Church in the 21st-Century. Jesus called people to become His disciples. He then commanded His disciples to make disciples. So, what is a disciple of Jesus? What does one look like? How does one know if s/he is becoming a disciple, and how does one go about making a disciple, particularly in the context of post-Christian, 21st-Century America? This is so basic a starting point, that almost everybody misses it – including pastors, conference leaders, youth workers, Sunday school teachers, and more. Yet, consider the words of the Cheshire Cat in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*:

¹⁰⁸ Marston, *From Age to Age*, 82-88.

¹⁰⁹ Bastian, *Belonging!*, 122-125.

One day, Alice came to a fork in the road and saw a Cheshire Cat in a tree. “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” asked Alice. “That depends a good deal on where you want to go,” said the Cat. “I don't much care where,” said Alice. “Then it doesn't matter which way you go,” said the Cat.¹¹⁰

The destination determines the direction of our journey. It is difficult to know how to get where are going if we are unclear about where we are headed! Said another way, we must know what we attempting to make before we set out to make it, whether it be in someone else's life, or in our own. Thus, I will describe the definitions of *disciple* and *discipleship* that I have crafted, based on my research into Biblical, classical, and contemporary resources and the interviews I conducted. To begin, let us establish some foundations: firstly, in the generic sense of the term, a *disciple* is simply a learner. Learning, for an ancient Hebrew, would have included both the acquisition of new information *and* the practice of it. As we demonstrated in our review of Biblical literature, Jesus' disciples learned from Him by a combination of both listening and practicing. The culture of 21st-Century America differs greatly from that of the ancient Hebrews: the modern American ear hears “learning” and typically imagines a classroom with teaching that results in a test of knowledge, “as if holiness were a matter of just acquiring the knowledge I need to follow Christ as I ought,” responds Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith.¹¹¹ For the Hebrew, learning meant practicing; discipleship meant apprenticing under the guidance of a master.

Discipleship, though, is not only learning through practice. Biblical, Christian discipleship hinges upon *who* you are learning from, *what* you are learning, and *how* you are learning it. So a Christian disciple is one who is learning to live and love like Jesus. Discipleship, then, is the process through which a disciple is being formed. Or said in the

¹¹⁰ Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Open Books Electronic Edition, 2007), 71-72.

¹¹¹ James K. A. Smith, “Why the Form of Worship Matters: A Conversation with James K. A. Smith,” *The Gospel Coalition*, March 21, 2013; by Trevin Wax. Accessed online at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/trevin-wax/why-the-form-of-worship-matters-a-conversation-with-james-k-a-smith/> on February 9, 2019.

first person, discipleship is the process through which I am learning, through practice, to become a person who lives and loves like Jesus.

With that simple groundwork established, here is my definition for a *disciple* of Jesus, based on research through Biblical, classical, and contemporary resources and interviews, stated in modern language for the 21st-Century American Church:

A disciple is a person who is learning to live and love like Jesus through obedient practice in holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission.

Jesus' own obedient life of love was marked by four distinct aspects: holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission. As His followers, Jesus' disciples will be progressively learning through obedient practice to live and love like Him in these same four ways, which leads into my definition for *discipleship*:

Discipleship is the relational process of learning and growing in our followership of Jesus together with other disciples.

I decided to include the word *relational* in this definition to accentuate the interpersonal nature of the discipleship process. Discipleship is not an individual pursuit, but rather something that fellow followers of Jesus engage in together. In the context of the Bible, discipleship implied both a master and, typically, a *group* of disciples under the leadership of that master. Since the establishment of the Church in the mid-1st-Century, discipleship has been the work of the entire Christian community in pursuit of Jesus *together*: mature followers of Jesus *discipling* new converts of Christ in an environment of relational, practicing, Christian community.

I also elected in my definition of *discipleship* not to say, “the process through which one *becomes* a disciple,” which I have heard numerous times throughout my life from a myriad of sources. My discovery through Matthew, Acts, and classical Christian literature is that one becomes a disciple of Jesus immediately upon responding to his call to discipleship. Thus, becoming a disciple is not the end goal of the discipleship process, but the beginning. If one has become a follower of Jesus, then s/he is already His

disciple! The relational journey before the individual now, of growing and maturing as a disciple of Jesus together with other followers of Jesus, is known as *discipleship*.

UNPACKING THESE DEFINITIONS

Having articulated definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship* that are clear, orthodox, and universal for Biblical Christianity, and having determined the four core aspects of the process of discipleship in a Christian's life, I wanted to create a simple, measurable, reproducible church-wide discipleship tool which churches and individuals could utilize to track their progress along the journey of Christian discipleship. My vision for this was to create a visually-stimulating infographic, which could be shared in either print or digital format, which would demonstrate the four core aspects of discipleship, along with a few key measurements associated with each aspect.

My inspiration for such an infographic came from Crown Financial Ministry's "Money Map," a literal fold-out map that accompanies their book on achieving financial freedom and depicts the journey of Christian stewardship from start to finish. It is a visually-appealing and spiritually-stimulating piece that puts all of the principles of Crown Financial Ministries onto a single, printed page. It summarizes the entire Christian financial journey from being in debt and living month-to-month to overcoming debt and living fully in financial freedom. The Crown Money Map provides clear, measurable markers to completing each stage of the journey. As I began to envision my own "road map" for the journey of Christian discipleship, I tried to think of what analogy would best fit: maybe a hiking trip or mountain climb? Considering the journey of Christian discipleship as a lifelong pursuit, I thought about depicting it as maybe a long road trip or something more like a marathon race...

Before long, though, I realized that the discipleship journey is not like the journey to financial freedom. It is not quite like a hike or mountain ascent or car-trip or marathon race. These are all linear depictions of growth. Larry Osborne rightly observed "why most of our discipleship models don't work very well: most of our discipleship programs are very linear. Unfortunately, most spiritual growth is not."¹¹² One does not complete a particular stage in the discipleship journey and then move on to the next one like paying

¹¹² Larry Osborne, *Sticky Church* (Zondervan, 2008), 41.

off a debt or saving up three months' living expenses in an emergency fund. No, the discipleship journey is more holistic.

If discipleship is not linear, then I began to wonder if it maybe swirls or revolves somehow... After all, we never stop reading the Bible; we never stop sharing our faith; we never grow beyond community or prayer or character formation. I began to think of discipleship in analogies of cycles and circles. Maybe the journey of discipleship could be depicted like a ferris wheel or merry-go-round... or maybe some kind of upward spiral, like an inverted tornado or cyclone? But none of these images adequately captured the discipleship journey for me. While discipleship is certainly not linear, it is not quite circular or cyclical either. All of my pictorial analogies were falling through!

Again, the definition I had crafted was this: *a disciple is a person who is learning to live and love like Jesus through obedient practice in holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission.* After much thought and prayer, reading and research, I finally determined that discipleship cannot be depicted in terms of either a linear or cyclical journey. Discipleship is as much about *being* as it is *doing*, about *living* as it is *acting*. And that it when I realized that a great analogy had been right there under my nose all along!

All throughout my years in seminary, I had been regularly blogging on the topic of discipleship on a site I had created for that purpose called "LikeTreesPlanted.com." That three-word phrase is an allusion to two Old Testament Scriptures: Psalm 1:3, which describes those who delight in God's Word as being "like trees planted," and Jeremiah 17:8, which describes those who trust in the Lord as being "like trees planted." Both of those Scriptures go on to describe a hearty and flourishing tree with deep roots, a strong trunk, green leaves, and a steady yield of fruit. I finally had it! This was the image I needed in order to visually express the journey of Christian discipleship: a strong, flourishing, fruit-bearing tree (see Figure 3).

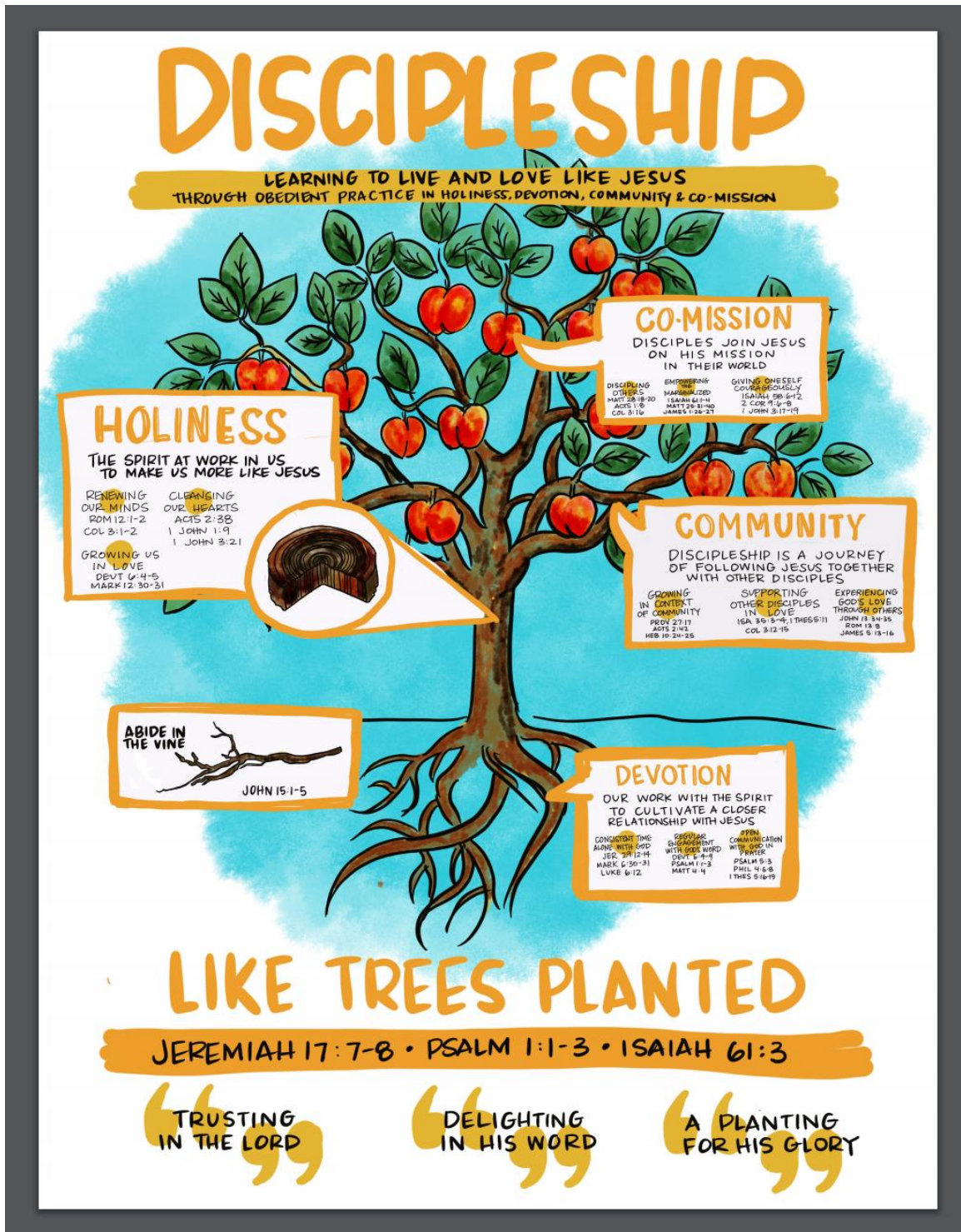


Figure 3

The tree's trunk (with a zoomed-in cross-section of the rings within the trunk) represents the first core aspect of discipleship from the life of Jesus: HOLINESS.

Holiness is the sanctifying work of the Spirit within the life of the disciple, to which the disciple must submit and with which the disciple must cooperate. This Spirit-led sanctifying process within the life of the disciple produces Christlikeness, making him/her more like Jesus:

- *cleansing our hearts (Acts 2:38; 1 John 1:9; 1 John 3:21)*
- *renewing our minds (Rom 12:1-2; Col 3:1-2)*
- *growing in us a love for God and people that exceeds the love for anything else (Deut 6:4-5; Mark 12:30-31)*

The tree's roots represent the second core aspect of discipleship from the life of Jesus: DEVOTION. Devotion is the work of the disciple – enabled by the Spirit and done in cooperation with the Spirit – to cultivate and foster a close, communicative, and bonded relationship with Father God:

- *consistent time alone with God (Jer 29:12-14; Mark 6:30-31; Luke 6:12)*
- *regular engagement with God's Word (Deut 6:6-9; Psalm 1:1-3; Matt 4:4)*
- *open, ongoing communication with God in prayer (Psalm 5:3; Phil 4:6-8; 1 Thes 5:16-18)*

The tree's branches and leaves represent the third core aspect of discipleship from the life of Jesus: COMMUNITY. Discipleship is the relational process of learning and growing in our followership of Jesus together with other disciples:

- *learning and maturing in an environment of Christ-centered community (Prov 27:17; Acts 2:42; Heb 10:24-25)*
- *supporting other disciples in love (Isa 35:3-4; Col 3:12-15; 1 Thes 5:11)*
- *experiencing God's love through other disciples (John 13:34-35; Rom 13:8; James 5:13-16)*

Finally, the tree's fruit and seeds represent the fourth core aspect of discipleship from the life of Jesus: CO-MISSION. Jesus was on mission with God during His human life on earth, and Jesus invites His followers to join with Him in His ongoing mission on the earth. As discussed in chapter two, I fashioned the word *co-mission* to be an intentional dissection of the word *commission*, alluding to The Great Commission from Matthew 28:18-20. As Americans living in the post-Christian, 21st-Century West, we can misunderstand the way Jesus “sends” His disciples “out” to make disciples using the

word “Go!,” – as if Jesus is remaining behind somewhere, and we are to proceed ahead without Him to accomplish His mission on earth. The word *co-mission* accentuates how we “Go!” on Jesus’ mission together with Jesus! To borrow a military analogy, Jesus is not like the base commander saying, “Go! Accomplish our mission!” but more like the field commander saying, “Go! [with Me!] and let’s accomplish My mission together!” Disciples are joining together with Jesus in His Kingdom-expanding mission in their world:

- *helping others along in their journeys of discipleship (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; Col 3:16)*
- *empowering the marginalized and vulnerable (Isa 61:1-4; Matt 25:31-40; James 1:26-27)*
- *giving courageously of one’s time, talents, and treasures (Isa 58:6-12; 2 Cor 9:6-8; 1 John 3:17-19)*

The infographic also depicts a dead branch laying off to the side of the tree in order to demonstrate the disciple’s call to “abide in Jesus,” for apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. (John 15:1-5)

RUN A TEST VERSION OF THIS DISCIPLESHIP TOOL IN MY LOCAL CHURCH

The content of this research-based discipleship infographic then provided the foundation for piloting a strategic system of church-wide discipleship in my own local church context of Christ Community Church in Columbus, Georgia. In order to implement this program, I recruited 18 members and attendees of my church who expressed an eagerness to grow in their faith, and who were willing to participate in a short-term group that focused on Christian discipleship. I also recruited a lay friend named Jon White, who on several occasions in recent years had shared with me his own desire to be engaged in the discipleship of others. Jon became my co-leader and co-host for the discipleship group. As a group, we spent two months journeying together as fellow followers of Jesus, discussing and practicing the definitions of *disciple* and *discipleship*, along with the four core aspects of disciple-making: holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission.

MEETING FORMAT

Our group met together for 90 minutes each Wednesday evening during the summer months of 2019. Each weekly gathering began with a meal and a time of getting to know each other better and building trust with one another through introductions, using the Question Jar,¹¹³ having a brief check-in from the past week, and praying for one another. We would then move into a discussion of our discipleship content for that week. I would introduce this time with a brief teaching, usually five minutes or less, in order to devote the greatest amount of time to sharing and discussion.

I facilitated this time of discussion each week using a few thoughtful questions around the week's topic. Then we would simply talk together as a group. The bulk of our meeting time was spent in sharing and discussion, usually around one particular aspect of Christian discipleship: what the Bible says about it; how we have experienced it in our own lives; and how the Holy Spirit may be challenging us to practice it personally and corporately in the days and weeks to come. This time of discussion together as a group each week was amazing! In chapter four, I will share a number of insights, observations, discoveries, and recommendations regarding discipleship that emerged from the group during this precious weekly time of discussion. I would then conclude our time of discussion each week with a brief summary of what we had covered so far, what topics were still to come, and by providing any practical announcements the group may need to be informed of for the coming weeks. I would then pass around our group's homework for the coming week, give a few brief instructions, pray to close, and dismiss.

WEEKLY CONTENT, DISCUSSION, AND DISCOVERIES

I designed the content of the weekly meetings so that the definitions of *disciple* and *discipleship*, along with the four core aspects of discipleship, would emerge progressively throughout the summer and would be discovered gradually through practice and discussion, rather than declaring them all upfront or by rote learning through lecture.

¹¹³ The Question Jar is a resource for group introductions and trust-building that I developed years ago as a youth minister. To date, my Question Jar contains over 200 unique questions that help people share interesting aspects of their lives with others. Questions range from the funny and silly to the poignant and purposeful. Some questions are spiritual in nature, while others help people share about their growing-up years, their favorite things, their desires for their future, and much more.

This process was both difficult and exciting for me: difficult, as I was quite eager from the beginning to just tell the group everything I had been learning about discipleship from all my reading and research; and exciting, because I got to watch the group members gradually discover and embrace the definitions and core aspects of discipleship for themselves throughout the course of the summer!

At the start of our first meeting, after we shared a small meal together, I passed out Pre-Survey forms and asked everyone to complete them and turn them in, leaving a time of quiet for the group to do this. I wanted to capture their impressions and experiences of their own discipleship journeys as early as possible upon coming into the group, before they could be influenced by the questions, content, and goals of the group. The results of both the Pre-Survey and the Post-Survey will be provided in the Appendices, and a summary and comparison of the Pre- and Post-Surveys will be discussed in chapter four.

During our initial meeting, I allowed extra time at the beginning for introductions and connecting. I wanted this group to be able to go deep with each other quickly, so I tried to foster an atmosphere of trust and sharing from the beginning. After this introductory time among the group members, I presented the questions that had been inspiring me for years: What is a disciple? What is discipleship? And what could/should discipleship look like for Christians living in 21st-Century, post-Christian America? I shared with them my haunting experience from that early seminary class where none of us seminarians could answer those questions. I shared how I desired for our group to define these words for ourselves throughout the course of our summer together. Then I posed the following questions to begin our time of group discussion for that introductory week: What has been your experience of Christian discipleship? How would you define the word *disciple* and *discipleship*? Has anyone ever provided definitions of these words for you?

We went on in that first meeting to discuss as a group all kinds of initial thoughts about the meanings of *disciple* and *discipleship*. I shared that one of the goals of the group would be to create definitions for these words together that would be short, clear, memorable, and measurable. Throughout the summer, we would be determining

together: What is a disciple? What does the process of discipleship look like? How do you know if you're becoming a disciple? And how can we measure that?

Committed to Discipleship				
CCC Study Group Led by Nick Cash & Jon White				
Group Syllabus Summer-2019				
Group Meeting 1 of 6 - Wed, May 29				
Thu	May 30	Matthew 1-3	GroupMe post 1 of 2	WEEK 1
Fri	May 31	Matthew 4-6		
Sat	June 1	Matthew 7-9	GroupMe post 2 of 2	
Sun	June 2	Matthew 10-12		
Mon	June 3	Matthew 13-15		
Tue	June 4	Matthew 16-18		
Group Meeting 2 of 6 - Wed, June 5				
Thu	June 6	Matthew 19-21	GroupMe post 1 of 4	WEEK 2
Fri	June 7	Matthew 22-24		
Sat	June 8	Matthew 25-27	GroupMe post 2 of 4	
Sun	June 9	Matthew 28; Acts 1		
Mon	June 10	Acts 2-4		
Tue	June 11	Acts 5-7		
Wed	June 12	Acts 8-10	GroupMe post 3 of 4	WEEK 3
Thu	June 13	Acts 11-13		
Fri	June 14	Acts 14-16	GroupMe post 4 of 4	
Sat	June 15	Acts 17-19		
Sun	June 16	Acts 20-22		
Mon	June 17	Acts 23-25		
Tue	June 18	Acts 26-28		
Group Meeting 3 of 6 - Wed, June 19				
Thu	June 20	Devotional Life 1	GroupMe post 1 of 2	WEEK 4
Fri	June 21	Devotional Life 2		
Sat	June 22	Devotional Life 3	GroupMe post 2 of 2	
Sun	June 23	Devotional Life 4		
Mon	June 24	Devotional Life 5		
Tue	June 25	Devotional Life 6		
Group Meeting 4 of 6 - Wed, June 26				
Thu	June 27	Communal Life 1	GroupMe post 1 of 2	WEEK 5
Fri	June 28	Communal Life 2		
Sat	June 29	Communal Life 3	GroupMe post 2 of 2	
Sun	June 30	Communal Life 4		
Mon	July 1	Communal Life 5		
Tue	July 2	Communal Life 6		
Group Meeting 5 of 6 - Wed, July 3				
Thu	July 4	Co-missional Life 1	GroupMe post 1 of 2	WEEK 6
Fri	July 5	Co-missional Life 2		
Sat	July 6	Co-missional Life 3	GroupMe post 2 of 2	
Sun	July 7	Co-missional Life 4		
Mon	July 8	Co-missional Life 5		
Tue	July 9	Co-missional Life 6		
Group Meeting 6 of 6 - Wed, July 10				

Together, our Group will discover the Biblical foundations of Christian discipleship, and practice together what it means to be an active follower of Jesus today.

The format will be mostly discussion-based and experiential, with limited moments of teaching. We will be reading portions of Scripture together, discussing them, then practicing what they say about discipleship in experiential ways.

Between our Wednesday meetings together, we will do daily readings and prayer on our own, using the attached Study Guide. We will each also post two short contributions per week to our GroupMe group, sharing observations, questions, and ideas with each other between meetings.

Group Members are encouraged to keep their "radar" up regarding the practical and/or spiritual needs of people around them, and to bring these needs to the Group. Part of the experiential nature of this Group will be to actively go and serve others with the love of Christ during and between group meetings.

Figure 4

After that, I passed out copies of the Daily Reading Plan (Figure 4) and our Weekly Discipleship Charts (see Appendix 3). These described each person's homework for the days between meetings. During that coming week, before our second meeting together, the goal was for everyone to read the first 18 chapters of the Gospel of Matthew, and to record their observations on the chart I provided them using the following instructions:

As you read each day in Matthew, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

1-What does this passage of Scripture say about being a follower of Jesus?

2-What does the process of following Jesus look like in this passage?

3-What appear to be the essential components of discipleship in this passage?

4-What themes or rhythms are emerging from chapter to chapter that tell you something about Christian discipleship?

The first aspect of the group's homework between meetings was thoughtful reading and recording of their observations in the Discipleship Chart provided. The second aspect was group interaction throughout the week between meetings. To facilitate this, I utilized the social media app "GroupMe" and created a group on the app by adding the phone numbers of everyone in the group. The day after our initial meeting together in person, I sent out an invitation to each group member via text message to their cell phone number, asking them to join our GroupMe text-chain. Then I asked each person to post one short observation in the GroupMe text-chain semi-weekly. In this way, I hoped to foster a shared sense of corporate discipleship among the group, even while we were reading and charting our observations individually throughout the week. This had mixed success, as I will explain in detail in chapter four.

During our second meeting, we shared a small meal together and connected relationally around the table while we ate. Following our dinner, I gave a brief word of welcome, and invited everyone to remind one another of their names and to respond to a question from the Question Jar. I then reminded everyone of the goals for this group:

- 1-to discover the essential elements of Christian discipleship together from God's Word;
- 2-to create definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship* for ourselves as a group; and
- 3-to discuss and practice the elements and definitions of discipleship in our everyday lives.

Following this time of welcome, introductions, and goals review, I invited feedback from the group following our first week of attempting to interact between meetings using the GroupMe app.¹¹⁴ I then led us into a discussion of our Week 1 Discipleship Charts based upon our separate readings of Matthew 1-18 over the past week. To assist in our group discussion, I set up a large whiteboard on an easel and provided markers for writing. I then used the four questions listed on the Week 1 Discipleship Chart to invite group sharing and discussion of their observations of discipleship from Matthew 1-18. After a rich time of insightful discussion, I reviewed our upcoming schedule of group meetings and practical announcements. Then I reviewed our daily reading plan and discipleship charts for the coming week and reminded everyone of our semi-weekly GroupMe postings. We prayed to conclude our time together and dismissed.

Our second week of reading assignments had everyone finishing the Gospel of Matthew, chapters 19-28, and beginning the Book of Acts, chapters 1-7. The questions on their Week 2 Discipleship Charts were the same as they had been for Week 1. Due to a scheduling conflict on the church's calendar, we ended up cancelling the next Wednesday evening meeting together, but I remained in communication with the group using the GroupMe app. We carried right on into our third week of reading assignments, which had everyone finishing the Book of Acts, chapters 8-28, and recording their answers to the same four questions as Weeks 1 and 2 on their Week 3 Discipleship Charts.

When the group reconvened on the fourth week, we had a lot of ground to cover! While some people had been sharing short insights with one another using the GroupMe app over the last two weeks, not everyone was using GroupMe faithfully, and our last discussion together in person had been around Matthew 1-18. That meant that during our fourth meeting, we had the remainder of Matthew (chapters 19-28) and all of the Book of

¹¹⁴ I will summarize the effectiveness of this app for our group in chapter four.

Acts (chapters 1-28) to discuss! We ate a short meal together and connected organically around the table. Then I gave a brief welcome, opened in prayer, and passed around the Question Jar. We spent the majority of our time that week discussing our discipleship insights from Matthew 19-28 and Acts 1-28 together. Our priority that week was around the third and fourth questions from the Weekly Discipleship Charts: “3-What appear to be the essential components of discipleship in [these chapters]? 4-What themes or rhythms are emerging from chapter to chapter that tell [us] something about Christian discipleship?” The group came ready to share with their charts loaded with observations, notes, and insights, and together we filled up two whole whiteboards with our thoughts and impressions that evening!

By now, the group was really connecting well at a relational level. Trust had formed, and people were sharing openly, not only about their observations of discipleship from Matthew and Acts, but also the implications of our corporate insights on their personal, everyday lives. By weighting our group times heavily in favor of discussion over lecture, we were truly making group discoveries and applications together that would have been hard to come by through lecture alone.

The content of the Daily Reading Plan (Figure 4) and our Weekly Discipleship Charts (see Appendix 3) shifted significantly for the second half of our summer discipleship group. While the first half of our summer assignments had us reading all the way through the Books of Matthew and Acts and chronicling our observations of Christian discipleship throughout those two Books, the second half had us reading shorter selected passages throughout the Old and New Testaments of the Bible and recording our observations of Christian discipleship from them within the context of broader themes. The fourth week of daily reading had us looking into selected passages around the theme of “devotion” within Christian discipleship. In the fifth week, we studied and recorded our observations from selected passages on the theme of “community,” and in the sixth and final week of reading assignments, we studied Scriptures based on the theme of “co-mission.”

In each of the meetings that followed these three weeks of reading assignments, we gathered for a short meal as we had done before and connected relationally over dinner. Then we had a brief welcome and review, an opening prayer, and continued to

get to know each other better by responding to questions from the Question Jar. I would then introduce the broader theme on which the previous week's reading assignments had focused (first devotion, then community, and finally co-mission) by giving a short teaching (5-7 minutes) on that week's theme. Then we would give the bulk of our meeting time to having open discussion and sharing from our Weekly Discipleship Charts, using the three questions listed at the top of the chart to guide our discussion of that particular theme of discipleship from that week's assigned Scriptures:

- 1-What do these Scriptures say about the disciple's (devotional, communal, or co-missional) life?*
- 2-What appear to be the essential components of the disciple's (devotional, communal, or co-missional) life in these verses?*
- 3-What themes or rhythms are emerging from these verses that tell us something about discipleship?*

Again, each week, we filled up a whiteboard with our observations, thoughts, impressions, and practical applications of that week's discipleship theme (see an example of this in Figure 5 below, which is a photo of the whiteboard following our Week 5 discussion of the discipleship theme of "community"). At the conclusion of each week's discussion, I led the group in considering the essential elements of discipleship we were discovering together. Then, we added these elements to our group's definitions of *disciple* and *discipleship*. We concluded each week with a review of our remaining schedule, the upcoming week's daily reading assignments and Discipleship Chart, and a closing prayer together.

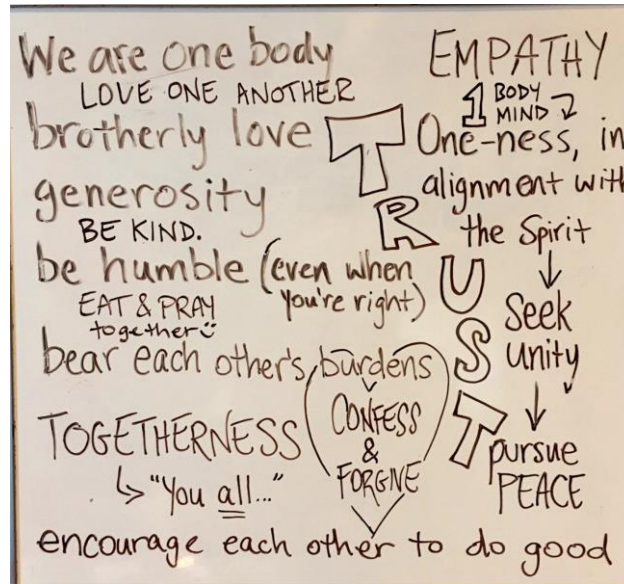


Figure 5

In our final two meetings together, I issued an invitation that any in the group who would like to continue in an intentional process of discipleship together to let me know after the meeting. Specifically, I invited the group to consider two options: first, if they would like to be discipled together with two or three others over the next few months; second, if anyone in the group may be feeling stirred to become a discipler for two or three others, and I would help make the connections to facilitate these small discipleship groups in the coming weeks.

Towards the conclusion of our final meeting, I passed out Post-Surveys and left time for everyone to complete theirs and turn them in. I then opened the floor for a time of feedback from the group about our summer together, the reflections of which will be expressed in chapter four. As our final act together as a group, I invited everyone to stand, grasp hands together in a circle, and encouraged anyone who would like to pray for the group and our continuing journeys of discipleship together to do so. Several around the circle prayed, then we dismissed – and many hung around connecting, embracing, and sharing numbers and email addresses with one another.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT SUMMARY

By the middle of our summer discipleship group, we had created definitions for *disciple* and *discipleship* that were similar to the definitions that I had originally created following my initial research into Biblical, classical, and contemporary resources – but with two seismic additions. The original draft of my post-research definition of a *disciple* was this: *A disciple is a person who is learning to live and love like Jesus through practice in devotion, community, and co-mission.* Going into the summer study group, my original working definition of *disciple* did not include the concept of *obedience*, and it only included three essential aspects of discipleship: *devotion, community, and co-mission.* It was actually from our early group discussions together of the Books of Matthew and Acts that the essential concepts of *obedience* and *holiness* emerged. In fact, these were such significant themes to our study group, I realized I needed to go back and do additional research on these themes, include them in my research chapter, add them to my final definition of *disciple*, and include them in the final draft of my discipleship infographic. Thus, in this my final version of the dissertation, even after all my extensive research, the summer discipleship group led me to include these two essential discoveries! It was this group that helped me reach the final version for my definition of *disciple* for this ministry project:

A disciple is a person who is learning to live and love like Jesus through obedient practice in holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission.

SUMMARY AND COMPARISON OF THE PRE- AND POST-SURVEYS

As mentioned in chapter three, I had all the participants of the discipleship group complete two identical surveys: one at the very start of our first meeting; the second at the very end of our final meeting. The comparative results between the Pre- and Post-Surveys were quite fascinating. While some quantitative measurements went up, others stayed stagnant or even decreased. However, the qualitative responses revealed a much deeper understanding of the elements of discipleship from the participants, along with what I believe to be a higher standard for self-evaluation from them regarding the activities of discipleship. I believe the participants' increased understanding of some of these subjects may have led them to evaluate themselves a bit more critically by the end of the group as compared to the beginning. For instance, the amount of minutes the participants reported spending in prayer each week actually dropped from an average of 102 on the Pre-Survey to 87 on the Post-Survey. Conversely, the descriptive words and content of their prayers reported on the Post-Survey demonstrated growth and depth when contrasted with those on the Pre-Surveys. While I would not have guessed the average time spent in prayer by the group would decrease, I could have predicted the increase in the quality of the participants' prayer lives, based on the personal sharing and discussions from the group week by week.

Weekly time alone with God was about equal between the two surveys: 122 minutes per week on the Pre-Survey; 125 on the Post-Survey. Weekly Bible engagement increased from an average of 65 minutes to 73 minutes per week. This represents an 11% increase from Pre- to Post-Survey. A notable difference between the Pre- and Post-Surveys in this category was that on the Pre-Survey, three participants responded that they spent "0," "very few," and "not enough" minutes engaging with the Bible each week. On the Post-Survey, the lowest three responses were "20," "30," and "30" minutes spent per week in Bible engagement. While the surveys were anonymous, and I could not compare individual results between the surveys, this observation tells me that the three participants who were engaging with their Bibles the least at the start of the group were spending at least 20-30 minutes or more in God's Word each week by the end of the group – that is an exciting outcome! Additionally, the responses on the Post-Survey

showed that the participants were engaging with the Bible in more and different kinds of ways than they were before joining the group. The increased Biblical engagement of the group was also plainly visible through their responses to the qualitative question of “What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that Bible engagement has had on your life lately?” On the Pre-Survey, the participants listed a combined 26 descriptors, with several respondents providing fewer than the three words requested. On the Post-Survey, the same group of respondents listed a combined 36 descriptors! Clearly, the group’s increased weekly engagement with God’s Word was impacting their lives in qualitative ways.

Participation in Christ-centered community with other disciples increased from an average of 7 to 8.9 times per month. The group’s responses as to what actually occurs at these gatherings was not markedly different between the two surveys, nor were their qualitative descriptors much different between Pre- and Post-Survey. But the frequency of participation at those gatherings increased by more than 21% per month. That means 21% more “growth, strengthening, understanding, connection, joy, encouragement, accountability, discipleship” (etc.) was happening in the monthly lives of the participants.

The group’s average participation in co-missional activities increased from 5 to 5.6 times per month, an increase of about 11%. While this percentage increase is notable on its own, I think the real revelation of what happened in the group’s participation in co-missional activities becomes visible through a comparison of their individual responses. Again, since the surveys were anonymous, I was not able to compare each individual’s Pre- and Post-Survey responses. But as a whole, there were clear quantitative and qualitative improvements in this area within the group. For instance, on the Post-Survey, under the question “What usually happens at these activities?,” I noticed more routine and daily-type activities being noted as co-missional than on the Pre-Survey – activities like “encouraging and praying for others,” “speaking to people,” and “relationship building.” What this tells me is that the participants were not necessarily doing *more* co-missional activities than before, but that they were making more of their everyday lives co-missional than they were before – and for this project, that is huge! In our discipleship group, we talked a lot about not necessarily needing to add new activities to one’s life as a disciple of Jesus – unless something is completely absent, like Bible-

reading or gathering with other disciples for instance. Particularly in the area of co-mission, it is not required that everyone start doing a bunch of new activities, but that they surrender their *current* life activities to the Holy Spirit and the mission of God in the world. Thus, every interaction, every conversation with another person becomes an opportunity to join with Jesus in the expansion of His Kingdom purposes in the world! I think that both the 11% increase in monthly co-missional activity and the types of activities listed by the participants were evidence of significant growth in this particular area by the group.

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

Reflecting back over the Ministry Project, there are a number of elements that I think made it successful, which I would certainly repeat again. One of the most beneficial aspects of this Ministry Project was getting to co-lead the summer discipleship group with a friend and lay leader in our church named Jon White. Jon and I were able to practice the *community* aspect of discipleship together starting weeks before the group actually began. Jon and I met multiple times in the lead-up to the group's first meeting to create our plan for leading the group, for facilitating group discussions, and for helping the participants make discipleship discoveries for themselves together. Jon and I continued to connect in person and over the phone throughout the summer to prepare for each weekly gathering. Not only was Jon a blessing to have in partnership in regards to planning and preparation, but also during the meetings themselves. As discussed before, the intent of this group was not to teach discipleship, but to guide the participants to make discoveries on their own and together regarding Biblical discipleship and its application to our lives today. Jon was invaluable to this process, as he understood from the beginning the role of guide and embraced it fully. Jon and I were a good team: we led together well, and we were even able to cover for each other when one or the other of us had to miss a meeting due to travel.

Another positive aspect of the project was the constant focus on outcomes. Every week, Jon and I reminded the participants of the group's purpose and goals: to discover the Biblical foundations of Christian discipleship, and to practice together what it means

to be an active follower of Jesus today. By restating our purpose each and every week, it helped the participants to stay focused, the discussions to maintain momentum week to week, and the group to have a sense of measurable progress together throughout the summer.

A third element of our weekly group meetings that proved invaluable was the presence of food. Far more than a nice addition, food proved to be an important ice-breaker and relationship-builder, helping form connections and build trust organically at the start of each weekly gathering. The group itself modeled the discipleship value of *community* each week with assistance from food! By devoting the first 30 minutes of each meeting to sharing a light meal together, we relaxed the atmosphere, created hospitable space for the participants to connect relationally, and removed the awkward stigma of arriving late. If someone walked in 20 minutes late, it was not to a disruption of the group's discipleship discussion; instead, it was to a warm welcome from friends to pull up a seat to join in with the meal-in-progress.

Also in my reflections back over the Ministry Project, I can see several clear areas for improvement. For one, the use of social media app, GroupMe, to facilitate this particular group's connections between meetings had mixed success. Some participants used the app consistently, a few only used it once, and several never used it at all. Altogether, this resulted in an unreliable point of connection for us between meetings. I have used GroupMe to facilitate communication and connections for other groups in the past with much higher rates of participation. This leads me to conclude that the app itself is helpful, but only among people who are geared towards using social media for group connection. I had several in our summer discipleship group who rarely used social media, and for these participants, apps like GroupMe were a foreign concept. I took time during our first meeting to introduce the group to the app, but in hindsight, I think it would have been more effective to simply setup a group-chat for our group using the normal texting feature on everyone's phones.

Another area for improvement would be the overall length of the study group. Looking back, six meetings was not enough for us to make discipleship discoveries together *and* be able to practice them *and* be able to discuss together the outcomes of that practice. By week six, I felt we had just arrived at a complete definition for discipleship

together and had limited time to practice the elements of that definition along the way. The place we reached was an excellent one, but it was incomplete. We had defined discipleship together, we had individually practiced the elements of discipleship on our own along the way, but what we were lacking in the end was the opportunity to practice those discipleship elements together and discuss them afterwards. I think this group would have done much better to meet for eight or ten weeks, in order to give additional time to put our discipleship discoveries into greater practice, and to provide adequate time to debrief our discipleship “practice weeks” together as a group.

In the end, I was not successful in creating a new discipleship program for our church. But in the end, I'm not sure that what our church really needs is another program or class or course on discipleship. As Dr. Friedman has often said, “if you make disciples by sitting in a classroom and talking, don't be surprised if they make disciples by sitting in a classroom and talking.” We already have a robust offering of excellent classes and quality groups designed to help people grow and develop in their relationships with Jesus.

So rather than add yet another course or program to the already crowded field of class-based discipleship approaches, I was instead able to create a set of clear, irreducible principles to help guide all of the various ministries of our church toward greater discipleship outcomes with our people. From our Children's and Youth Ministries to our Missions and Outreach Ministries to our Community Groups, Service, and Worship Ministries, this fresh, contemporary definition of discipleship with its corresponding infographic will be able to guide all our Ministry Directors to integrate clear, observable, and measurable discipleship principles into all of the activities of our church. In the end, I believe this will be much further-reaching and produce much greater discipleship fruit in our entire congregation, as opposed to a recurring course or group that may only reach 15-20 people every few months.

There is also tremendous value in the flexibility of use with this definition and infographic. An individual seeking to grow in Christ can use these as a guide on their own discipleship journeys. Discipleship mentors can utilize these with the people they are discipling to monitor and inspire growth. Small groups can use these to help track and encourage their growth in discipleship, like John Wesley did with the creation of his

Methodist bands. Unlike a program curriculum, this definition and infographic are portable, flexible, and adaptable to a variety of uses.

The real crux of the definition is the phrase “obedient practice,” which is gleaned from such instructions from Jesus as, “If you love Me, you will obey My commands,” and “make disciples of all peoples... teaching them to obey all I have taught you,” among many others (John 14:15, Matthew 28:19-20, et al.). Jesus taught as He went. His disciples learned from Jesus not through lecture and sitting in classrooms, but by doing – by practicing. Jesus called people, equipped them, then sent them out to do (to practice) the very things He called and equipped them to do.

Jesus' model for disciple-making must be the same for us today. Classroom instruction has value, but that value is lost if it remains stuck in the realm of the classroom. Discipleship is a laboratory course! We learn to live and love like Jesus by practicing the things Jesus said and did. Primarily, these fall into four distinct categories: holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission. If we only learn about these things intellectually in the sterile environment of the classroom, we will be weak, anemic, and ineffectual disciples. But if we get hands-on – really practicing and engaging in the activities of holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission – then we will become a virile, dynamic, and multiplying force for God's Kingdom, against which even the gates of hell will not be able to withstand!

USEFULNESS FOR THE LOCAL CHURCH

From the beginning of this project, I set out to determine clear, measurable definitions of disciple and discipleship, to create a tool based upon these definitions which could be potentially usable by all American churches today, and to run a test program of the use of this tool with a group at my church. These were ambitious goals, but ones I felt were desperately needed, and ones that I felt a passion for addressing. In the end, I believe we have arrived at an excellent definition for Christian discipleship. It is clear, purposeful, and measurable. It is true to Biblical and traditional Christianity, while also being composed in language that 21st-Century, post-Christian Americans can understand (with just a bit of further explanation – see below). If I may be so bold, I would put our definition right up there among any other, in terms of its ability to resource

and strengthen the church today for developing disciples in their congregations and communities.

Furthermore, I believe the “Like Trees Planted” discipleship infographic that we have developed is a valuable visual tool for summarizing the discipleship process in the life of a Christ-follower. This infographic paints a clear picture based on the analogy of the tree from Psalm 1, Jeremiah 17, and Isaiah 61. It provides the overall definition for discipleship while adding a bit of further explanation around the four recurrent themes of discipleship: holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission. I believe this discipleship infographic tool, with its supporting research, could easily form the basis for a sermon series, a book, a small group curriculum, or a web/app-based discipleship program for implementation nation-wide.

My evaluation of the group experience, though, would be a bit different. I had hoped to create a “turn-key” group discipleship program that churches could plug-and-play and would work for their population and context, anywhere in the country. However, my own group experience has led me to think otherwise. I do not know that any two discipleship groups would be the same, even within our own church, and that is because discipleship is such a highly relational process. The leader(s) of the group, and the makeup of the group participants themselves will in large part affect the approach of the group in developing disciples. To be clear, our group was fantastic! I enjoyed every minute we shared together, and I think our time of discussion, discovery, and practice was demonstrably fruitful. Furthermore, the attitude of the group toward the topic was outstanding, and the commitment of the participants to the group was high. My concern, though, is that what we created together in terms of a group experience may not be easily replicable, and that would hinder its ability to be implemented more broadly.

Therefore, what I am offering here is a complete and cohesive definition of discipleship, presented in a visual format for ease of understanding, along with a way to implement it within a group of disciples for individual and corporate growth. I would say our group was an overall success. The differences between the Pre-and Post-Surveys demonstrate this success, along with the anecdotal evidence from the group participants week by week. Simply put, the group participants really enjoyed the group, and they demonstrated clear signs of growth along the way. They expressed their enjoyment of

the group to me each week, and their attitudes toward the content and their engagement in the weekly discussions confirmed this as well.

However, I would not prescribe our particular group format to all churches everywhere. If I were writing this project into a group curriculum to share with churches, I would make several key improvements (discussed in the “Strengths and Weaknesses” section above), and I would also encourage a strategically organic approach to managing and leading the group. In order for any group of Christians to take ownership of their own discipleship with Jesus, there must be time, space, and flexibility provided to allow room for individual and group discoveries. These take time and trust to develop, and locking people into a particular system could constrict both the time and space needed to develop trust and foster group discoveries.

If I were turning this into a replicable curriculum, I would highlight certain group qualities and practices more than prescribe a formulaic approach to group discipleship. For example, I would recommend the emphasis of group discussion and discovery together over the more traditional teaching and lecture method. I would strongly advise the use of food in discipleship. I truly think starting the weekly gathering with a meal was essential to building trust as a group, and this directly correlated to the ground we were then able to cover during our discipleship discussions together. Finally, the flexibility of each individual to grow at their own pace within the context of the group was vital. Slow growth and fast growth are both still growth. A person growing from zero to ten minutes of Bible engagement per week is to be celebrated as much as a person growing from 60 to 90 minutes per week. And as fellow disciples of Jesus, these two individuals have much to learn from each other. These discipleship groups should be places where both new believers and life-long Christians feel welcome, their experiences and input valued, and their growth in the Lord celebrated.

What I do believe and hope could be useful for the Church across localities is the “Like Trees Planted” discipleship infographic and supporting material. I believe this tool could be used in a variety of settings to promote and enhance discipleship in and through the local Church:

- *by pastors in a sermon series on discipleship*
- *by small groups as a discipleship curriculum*

- *by discipleship mentors in one-to-one or one-to-a-few discipleship relationships with new or developing Christians*
- *by parents in the discipleship of their own families at home*
- *by retreat organizers as the curriculum for a weekend retreat on discipleship*

NEXT STEPS FOR THE “LIKE TREES PLANTED” DISCIPLESHIP TOOL

The most obvious place to further develop the ideas of this ministry project for use by the Body of Christ would be through a sermon series or a book. I think it could also be developed into a small group curriculum or as the source material for a Discipleship Retreat. However, the next place I would personally like to take this work is toward creating a discipleship app. I realize that one of the weaknesses to the discipleship group I ran was the mixed success of the GroupMe app – but that was more a reflection of the group’s interest in communicating over social media than it was of the discipleship content, or indeed of smart-device usage in general. On the contrary, the state and direction of 21st-Century American culture is device-based interface for all of the major functions of life. From shopping to banking, from communication to personal health management, from photos to videos to file storage and more, the typical American’s life is happening more and more on their devices. To bring the discipleship process to people’s phones would be to meet them where they are. Ironically, in order to go incarnational, I believe we have to also go digital. Let me explain:

According to Pew Research, 96% of Americans currently own a cell phone, and American ownership of smart phones is currently at 81%, up from 35% in 2011. Aside from phones, Pew finds that 75% of Americans own a computer, about half of all Americans own a tablet-style device, and about half own a digital e-reader device.¹¹⁵ Cisco reports that “currently in the U.S. there are approximately eight networked devices

¹¹⁵ Pew Research Center, Internet & Technology, “Mobile Fact Sheet,” June 12, 2019. Accessed online at <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/fact-sheet/mobile/> on November 18, 2019.

per person, a number expected to climb to 13.6 a person by 2022.”¹¹⁶ As increasingly more of American life will become device-dependent, it will become increasingly essential that the Church develop an influential presence online. It appears that smart devices are the next great mission field for Christian discipleship!

At the time of this writing, I could only find two discipleship apps available for use on smart devices, and neither of these offers the functionality and interfacing that I have in mind for a personal and group discipleship app. There are apps for almost everything in life, but there is a giant void for apps to help guide individuals and groups along the journey of Christian discipleship. The time is ripe for this sort of resource. We have completed the research and developed the material necessary to create an app- and web-based discipleship tool. What is needed now is the capital, the time, and a Spirit-enabled app-developer to bring this vision into existence.

The discipleship app would be called “Like Trees Planted” and would be based upon a digital and interactive version of the discipleship infographic. The whole infographic itself would be the app’s home screen, and each element of the infographic would be interactive. For example, after logging in, the user could touch the “DEVOTION” box on the infographic, and it would zoom in to the elements contained within this category: “Consistent time alone with God,” “Regular engagement with God’s Word,” and “Open communication with God in prayer”. (See Figure 6) From there, the user could touch on each specific aspect of DEVOTION, and enter a window that would help them track their progress in that particular area, list helpful suggestions for ways to grow in that area, and find links to other resources on that topic. The app would have statistical reporting capabilities in order to keep the user informed of their activity and track their progress over time.

While these sorts of functionalities would be valuable for personal use, the app would also have a discipleship mentoring feature to assist in one-on-one and one-with-a-few discipleship. Users could not only track their own discipleship progress, but also opt to share their progress with a discipleship mentor. Each area of discipleship on the app would also have a section for suggestions on how to practice that particular aspect of

¹¹⁶ Cisco, Visual Networking Index (VNI) Forecast Highlights Tool. Accessed online at https://www.cisco.com/c/m/en_us/solutions/service-provider/vni-forecast-highlights.html on November 18, 2019.

discipleship more deeply within the user's life. For those in discipling relationships, there would be suggestions for how a discipleship mentor could engage their mentees in deeper practice and discussions of the elements of discipleship. Each area of discipleship would also contain links to further resources to assist growth in each area, bringing the best of digital Christian discipleship resources together in one place, including articles, interviews, videos, podcasts, and more.

POTENTIAL DISCIPLESHIP APP INTERFACE

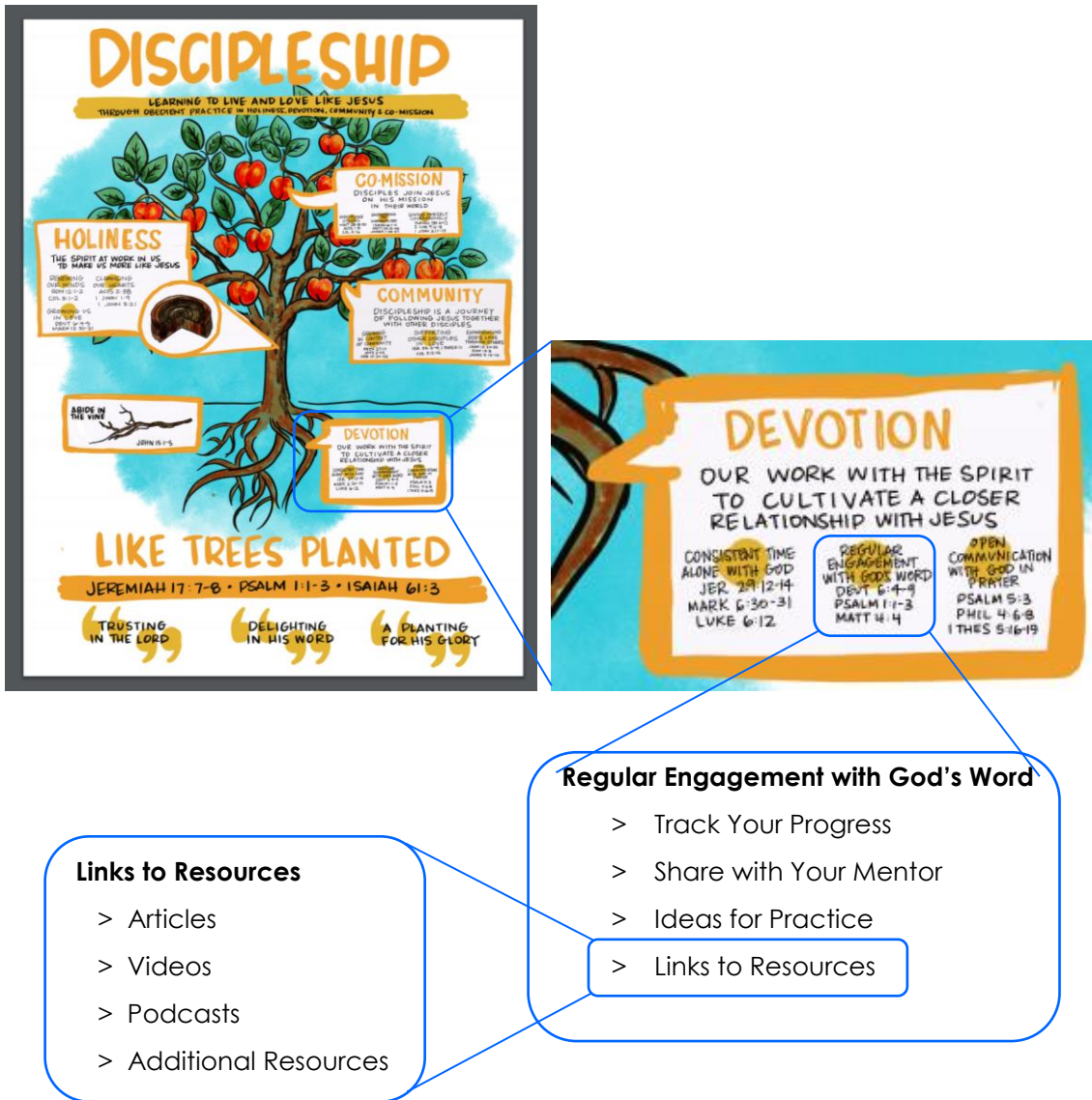


Figure 6

THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN DISCIPLESHIP

Dr. Matt Friedeman taught me years ago that “If you want an apple orchard, the best time to plant was 20 years ago; the next best time is now.” The muscles of discipleship have atrophied in America in recent decades due to lack of use. The best time to rehabilitate America’s atrophied discipleship muscles was 20 years ago, but the next best time is now. Now is the time to begin developing those muscles again, and like bodily muscles, it is going to take consistent practice over time to strengthen them. In 2011, David Kinnaman predicted, “As people begin to realize that the concepts and practices of spiritual maturity have been underdeveloped, the Christian community is likely to enter a time of renewed emphasis on discipleship.”¹¹⁷

Wes and Joy Griffin define a disciple of Jesus as “someone who is living out the decision to follow Christ in everyday life. He or she is a person who knows Christ inwardly and is committed outwardly to living in love and obedience to Him.”¹¹⁸ Practice will be the key to spiritual growth among American Christians in the coming decades: individual practice combined with shared group practice and discussions. James Clear in an article titled, “Stop Thinking and Start Doing: The Power of Practicing More,” identified three elements to practice that make it superior to mere learning: “1. Passive learning can be a crutch that supports inaction. 2. Practice is learning, but learning is not practice. 3. Practice focuses your energy on the process.”¹¹⁹

Consider Clear’s words in relation to the spiritual disciplines: we learn to pray, how? Primarily, by praying. Reading books on prayer and attending seminars on prayer and wishing we prayed more are all great things. But none of them can take the place of actual prayer. None of them can replicate the lessons learned through the regular practice of prayer. We learn to engage in Christ-centered community not primarily by listening to sermons on community or reading articles about community, but by giving ourselves week-in and week-out to the discipline of Christian community. We join in Christ’s worldwide mission of redemption neither by liking a missionary’s post online, nor by lamenting to a friend that modern-day slavery is a blight on humanity. We learn to be co-

¹¹⁷ Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 129.

¹¹⁸ Wes and Joy Griffin, *Christian to the Core: Growing Disciples* (International Leadership Institute, 2014), 47.

¹¹⁹ James Clear, “Stop Thinking and Start Doing: The Power of Practicing More.” Accessed online at <https://jamesclear.com/learning-vs-practicing> on August 11, 2019.

missional with Jesus by practicing co-missional activities with Jesus in our own lives. Dallas Willard described such experiential discipleship in this way:

A disciple is someone who is learning by practice to do the things Jesus said. A disciple is one who is learning how to live their life like Jesus would if their life was His to live. How would Jesus do your job if He had your job to do? How would He love your spouse if He was married to them? How would He interact with your neighbors if He lived in your house? Discipleship is the process of learning to live your life like He would.¹²⁰

Humankind has always learned best by doing, by practice. The essence of a person's life is the sum of their regular practices and habits. As Thomas Sterner wrote,

The state of your life right now is a result of the habits and beliefs that you have been practicing each day. When you realize this and begin to direct your focus toward practicing better habits day-in and day-out, continual progress will be the logical outcome. It is not the things we learn nor the dreams we envision that determines our results, but rather the habits that we practice each day.¹²¹

People like James Clear, Dallas Willard, and Thomas Sterner differentiate between “active practice” and “passive learning.”

My discipleship group for this ministry project helped me to discover that “active practice” for the follower of Jesus is *obedient* practice: a set of regular habits in the way and character of Jesus that form a life of discipleship. Pastors Francis Chan and Mark Beuving define discipleship in this way: “Being a disciple of Jesus Christ means that we learn from Him, fellowship with Him, and obey everything He commands us.”¹²² Eric Geiger explains, “there’s a big difference between students and disciples. Both groups are interested in learning from a teacher. However, students learn for the sake of information; they learn in order to pass a test or achieve a degree. Disciples, on the other

¹²⁰ Willard, interview.

¹²¹ Thomas M. Sterner, *The Practicing Mind: Developing Focus and Discipline in Your Life – Master Any Skill or Challenge by Learning to Love the Process* (New World Library, 2012), 2.

¹²² Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 14.

hand, learn for the sake of obedience. They learn in order to take action.”¹²³ The future of American discipleship, for better or for worse, will be determined by the level of active, *obedient* practice that Christ-followers in our nation have in their lives. In 1980, Eugene Peterson applied a derisive quote from Friedrich Nietzsche’s 1886 work *Beyond Good and Evil* to define Christian discipleship. Peterson said that Nietzsche’s derogatory summation that Christian is nothing but “a long obedience in the same direction” is accurate, explaining, “a disciple is a life-long learner: not an academic acquiring information about God, but a craftsman acquiring skills in the faith.”¹²⁴ Along similar lines, Thomas Sterner rightly concluded,

When we practice something, we are involved in the deliberate repetition of a process with the intention of reaching a specific goal. The words deliberate and intention are key here because they define the difference between actively practicing something and passively learning it... Progress is a natural result of staying focused on the process of doing anything.¹²⁵

In order for this obedient practice at the individual level to be most effective, it will have to occur within a social-spiritual ecosystem that fosters growth through loving accountability. Thus, the third recurrent element of discipleship, *community*, is essential for the future of American discipleship. This could (and should) take many forms, from short-term discipleship groups to long-term discipling mentorships to small groups of committed Christian friends who “band” together like the 18th-Century Methodists to “watch over each other’s souls in love.” Thrall and McNicol explain, “community drives formation – either positively or negatively.... We count on connections with other people for our own emotional stability and growth. Healthy spiritual formation happens only in a communal context.”¹²⁶

Also in order for discipleship to thrive in the American Church in the coming decades, it is going to take a courageous and consistent call from clergy and other

¹²³ Eric Geiger, *Disciples Path, The Way: Discovering Christ’s Path of Discipleship* (LifeWay, 2015), 41.

¹²⁴ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (IVP Books, 2000), 13.

¹²⁵ Sterner, *The Practicing Mind*, 68.

¹²⁶ Bill Thrall and Bruce McNicol, “Communities of Grace,” *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, Alan Andrews, ed., (NavPress, 2010), 61-83.

Christian leaders to the people in the pews. We can no longer settle for feel-good messages that tickle people's ears and encourage them to stay comfortable where they are in their current state of spiritual atrophy. Kinnaman writes,

Most people in America, when they are exposed to the Christian faith, are not being transformed. They take one step into the door, and the journey ends. They are not being allowed, encouraged, or equipped to love or to think like Christ. Yet in many ways a focus on spiritual formation fits what a new generation is really seeking. Transformation is a process, a journey, not a one-time decision.¹²⁷

The Great Commission of our Lord is to go and make disciples, not converts. And the most important number in the Church today – the most critical statistic – is not the number of attendees attracted, or members enrolled, or even converts baptized. The most vital barometer of the health, strength, and longevity of the Church is only this: the number of disciples made. To convert to Christianity is to willfully decide to dedicate the balance of one's life to living and loving like Jesus. True conversion results in a life of discipleship. Richard Foster said it well: "Perhaps the greatest malady in the Church today is converts to Christ who are not disciples of Christ – a clear contradiction in terms."¹²⁸

One of the things I have been proudest of as a 16-year member of my home church of Christ Community is our long-term devotion to equipping and sending. Even more than church-planting and even more than missionary-supporting, God has placed at the very heart of Christ Community this identity of being a center for equipping the entire congregation to be active ministers and missionaries in their own contexts, and mobilizing them for ministry wherever they go – this cyclical, weekly rhythm of gathering together for coaching, training, and discipleship – and then dispersing throughout the area to serve our neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces as representatives of Jesus Christ.

In order for Christian discipleship to thrive in America, it must equip lay people for the everyday work of producing fruit, fruit which contains the seeds of future

¹²⁷ David Kinnaman, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity... and Why It Matters* (Baker Books, 2012), 145.

¹²⁸ Foster and Smith, *Devotional Classics*, 18.

disciples. Returning now to our overarching analogy of the tree, if a peach tree produces no peaches, then it supplies no seeds to the ground for reproduction. If there is no reproduction, then the life of the tree ends at its death. Imagine an entire peach orchard that produces no peaches for 30 years. The whole orchard may be beautiful. It may have a healthy root system that produces sturdy limbs and lush foliage. It may cool the person resting beneath its shade in the summer. It may dazzle the viewer in autumn with exquisite color. But with no fruit upon the branches and no seeds upon the ground, the whole orchard will die off in a single generation, leaving no lasting impact on the world around it. Such it is with Christian discipleship. Our lives as followers of Jesus are incomplete without fruit-production. Our faith will die off in a single generation if we settle for just having Bible studies and potluck dinners. Robert Coleman, in his epic work, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, stated unequivocally, “The fruit of discipleship is disciplemakers, not just disciples.”¹²⁹ Paula Fuller agrees, writing,

When we live with an illusion that we don’t have to be engaged in God’s mission to grow to maturity, we believe that we can get everything we need for our spiritual development from our personal relationship with God and other Christians.... Jesus never gave the idea that we could walk in fellowship with Him and not be engaged with Him in mission.... If we want to walk with Jesus and have fellowship with Him, we must go with Him, and He is bringing the good news of the kingdom to those who are outside.¹³⁰

Our devotion to Christ’s mission and purpose, though, cannot come with a compromise of our Christian character. There must be that balance of holiness with mission. After all, we are commissioned by Christ to be on co-mission with Christ. Jesus did not check His holiness at the door when He was reaching out to those engaged in lives of sin. Jesus loved the sinner without becoming a sinner Himself. Empowered by His Spirit, we who are on co-mission with Him can do the same. As followers of Jesus, we should look, act, smell, think, BE different from the culture in which we live. We are to step out of the normal flow of our society and demonstrate something

¹²⁹ Coleman, *Master Plan* (audio book).

¹³⁰ Paula Fuller, “Participating in God’s Mission,” *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, Alan Andrews, ed., (NavPress, 2010), 195-221.

markedly different. In past centuries, this “stepping out” took on many different forms, but in 21st-Century America for example, it includes taking that terrific counter-cultural step away from consumerism and towards material simplicity. Being an intensely practical person, I am really driven by “how-to” lists like the one Richard Foster includes in *Celebration of Discipline* towards the end of his chapter on Simplicity. I certainly do not believe any aspect of our faith is formulaic (if we insert the correct variables in right order, then we will achieve the desired outcome), and neither does Foster, who warns against any unnatural attachment to any particular methodology in our spiritual disciplines, which brings us dangerously close to works-righteousness and deadly legalism.¹³¹ What I am arguing, as Foster argued, is that there *are* certain practices we can take up and others we can lay down which will have a predictable outcome on our souls and upon the people around us whose lives we touch. And this requires an uncompromising commitment to holiness. Bill Hull wrote, “the heart of being a disciple involves living in intimate union and daily contact with Christ.”¹³² And in his devotional classic, Jim Petersen explained, “Godly character is essential to our effectiveness... because our ministry is essentially incarnational.... People need to see the gospel lived out in us if they are going to understand what it really is that we have to offer. If the character quality is not there, the best knowledge and skills become meaningless.”¹³³

Finally, in order for Christian discipleship to thrive in America in the coming decades, it must be rooted in the character, words, and actions of our Lord Jesus Christ, revealed to us through the Holy Bible. As Bill Hull wrote,

There is no other path to Christian spiritual formation than through meaningful interaction with the Word of God.... Spiritual formation begins within, and its primary tool is to take a God-given desire to change and work to reform a person’s mind with God’s thoughts. A renewed mind fueled by a Holy Spirit-

¹³¹ Foster, *Celebration*, 89.

¹³² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (NavPress, 2006), 8.

¹³³ Jim Petersen, *Lifestyle Discipleship: The Challenge of Following Jesus in Today’s World* (NavPress, 1993), 190-191.

birthed desire creates new actions, which become habits, and habits make our character.¹³⁴

The research from the Center for Bible Engagement (CBE) reflects Hull's comments. The CBE concluded among its findings that, "sadly for most people, reading God's Word, which is the only way we can be sure that we are hearing from God, is of low importance to a majority of people who claim to be His followers."¹³⁵ The CBE research goes on to conclude,

It is the fundamental belief of this research team that God speaks to us directly only through the Bible. That is to say, the only sure way of knowing the voice we hear is that of the Lord Jesus Christ is through His written Word. Whatever any other source may say, it must be in agreement with Scripture (Acts 17:11). That requires a consistent study and a thorough knowledge of what God says in the Bible.¹³⁶

IN CONCLUSION

And so, we will conclude by returning now to the fundamental questions upon which this entire project has been built: What is a disciple? When is a disciple made? And how can we know? According to Jesus' words in Matthew 28:19, a disciple is made when s/he has been taught to obey the commands of Jesus. Discipleship is learning through obedient action, within the fellowship of other disciples, to live and love like Jesus. Thus, in order for Christian discipleship to thrive and multiply in the coming decades in America, it is going to require the current followers of Jesus in our nation to take up the mantle of discipleship for themselves. We must cooperate with the Holy Spirit at work within us. We must learn together to live and love like Jesus through obedient followership of Him. We must devote ourselves in equal measure to the practices of holiness, devotion, community, and co-mission with Jesus.

¹³⁴ Bill Hull, "Spiritual Transformation from the Inside Out," *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, Alan Andrews, ed., (NavPress, 2010), 107-138.

¹³⁵ "Bible Literacy & Spiritual Growth: Survey Results," November 2006, Center for Bible Engagement, www.c4be.org, iv.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, v.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer has taught us well, that the cost of discipleship is great. But I submit to you that the cost of nondiscipleship is far, far, far greater.... Nondiscipleship costs abiding peace, a life penetrated through by love, faith that sees everything in the light of God's overriding governance for good, hopefulness that stands firm in the most discouraging of circumstances, power to do what is right and withstand the forces of evil. In short, it costs exactly that abundance of life Jesus said He came to bring.¹³⁷

–Dallas Willard

¹³⁷ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (HarperOne, 1999), 17-18.

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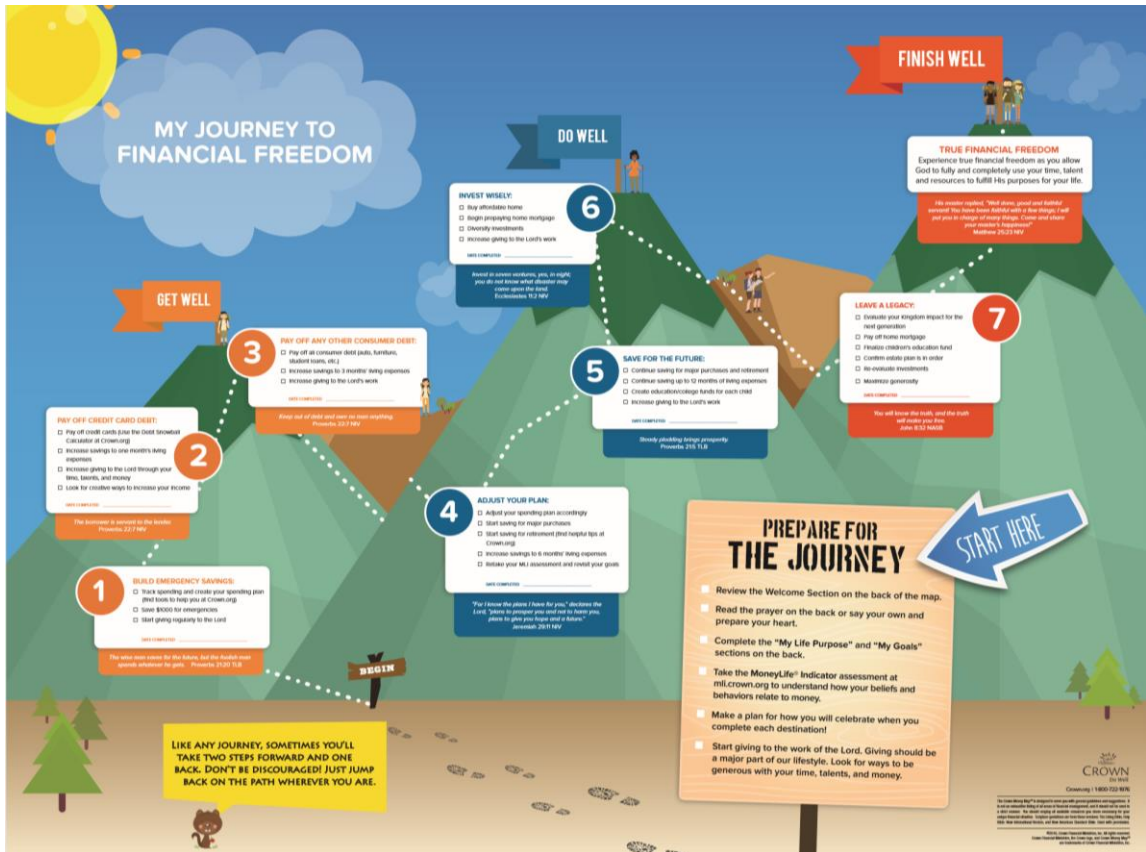
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APPENDIX 1: CROWN FINANCIAL MINISTRY'S "MONEY MAP"¹³⁸

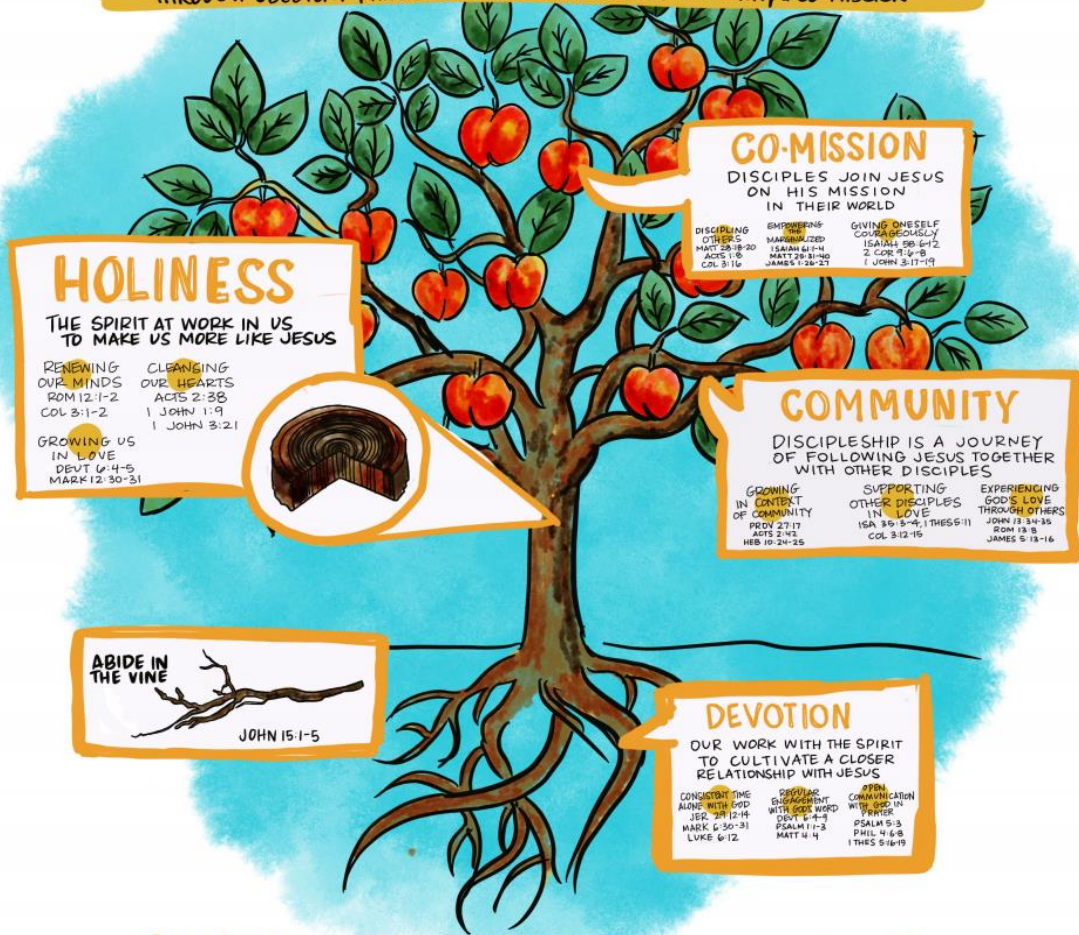


¹³⁸ Crown Financial Ministries, Inc. "The Crown Money Map," 2016.

APPENDIX 2: "LIKE TREES PLANTED" DISCIPLESHIP INFOGRAPHIC
 CREATED BY RAVEN HENDERSON¹³⁹

DISCIPLESHIP

LEARNING TO LIVE AND LOVE LIKE JESUS
 THROUGH OBEDIENT PRACTICE IN HOLINESS, DEVOTION, COMMUNITY & CO-MISSION



HOLINESS
 THE SPIRIT AT WORK IN US
 TO MAKE US MORE LIKE JESUS

RENEWING OUR MINDS
 ROM 12:1-2
 COL 3:1-2

CLEANSING OUR HEARTS
 ACTS 2:38
 1 JOHN 1:9
 1 JOHN 3:21

GROWING US IN LOVE
 DEUT 6:4-5
 MARK 12:30-31

CO-MISSION
 DISCIPLES JOIN JESUS
 ON HIS MISSION
 IN THEIR WORLD

DISCIPLING OTHERS
 MATT 28:18-20
 ACTS 1:8
 COL 3:16

EMPOWERING UNREACHABLES
 ISAIAH 61:1-4
 MATT 23:34-36
 JAMES 1:25-27

GIVING ONESELF COURAGEOUSLY
 ISAIAH 50:6-12
 2 COR 11:16-19
 1 JOHN 3:17-19

COMMUNITY
 DISCIPLESHIP IS A JOURNEY
 OF FOLLOWING JESUS TOGETHER
 WITH OTHER DISCIPLES

GROWING IN CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY
 PREY 2:17
 ACTS 2:42
 HEB 10:24-25

SUPPORTING OTHER DISCIPLES IN LOVE
 ISA 50:5-7
 COL 3:12-15

EXPERIENCING GOD'S LOVE THROUGH OTHERS
 JOHN 13:34-35
 ROM 13:8
 JAMES 5:13-16

ABIDE IN THE VINE

JOHN 15:1-5

DEVOTION
 OUR WORK WITH THE SPIRIT
 TO CULTIVATE A CLOSER
 RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

CONSISTENT TIME ALONE WITH GOD
 JER 29:12-14
 MARK 6:30-31
 LUKE 6:12

DEEPENED ENGAGEMENT WITH GOD'S WORD
 PSALM 119:3
 MATT 4:4

OPEN COMMUNICATION WITH GOD IN PRAYER
 PSALM 5:3
 PHIL 4:6-8
 1 THESS 5:16-19

LIKE TREES PLANTED

JEREMIAH 17:7-8 • PSALM 1:1-3 • ISAIAH 61:3

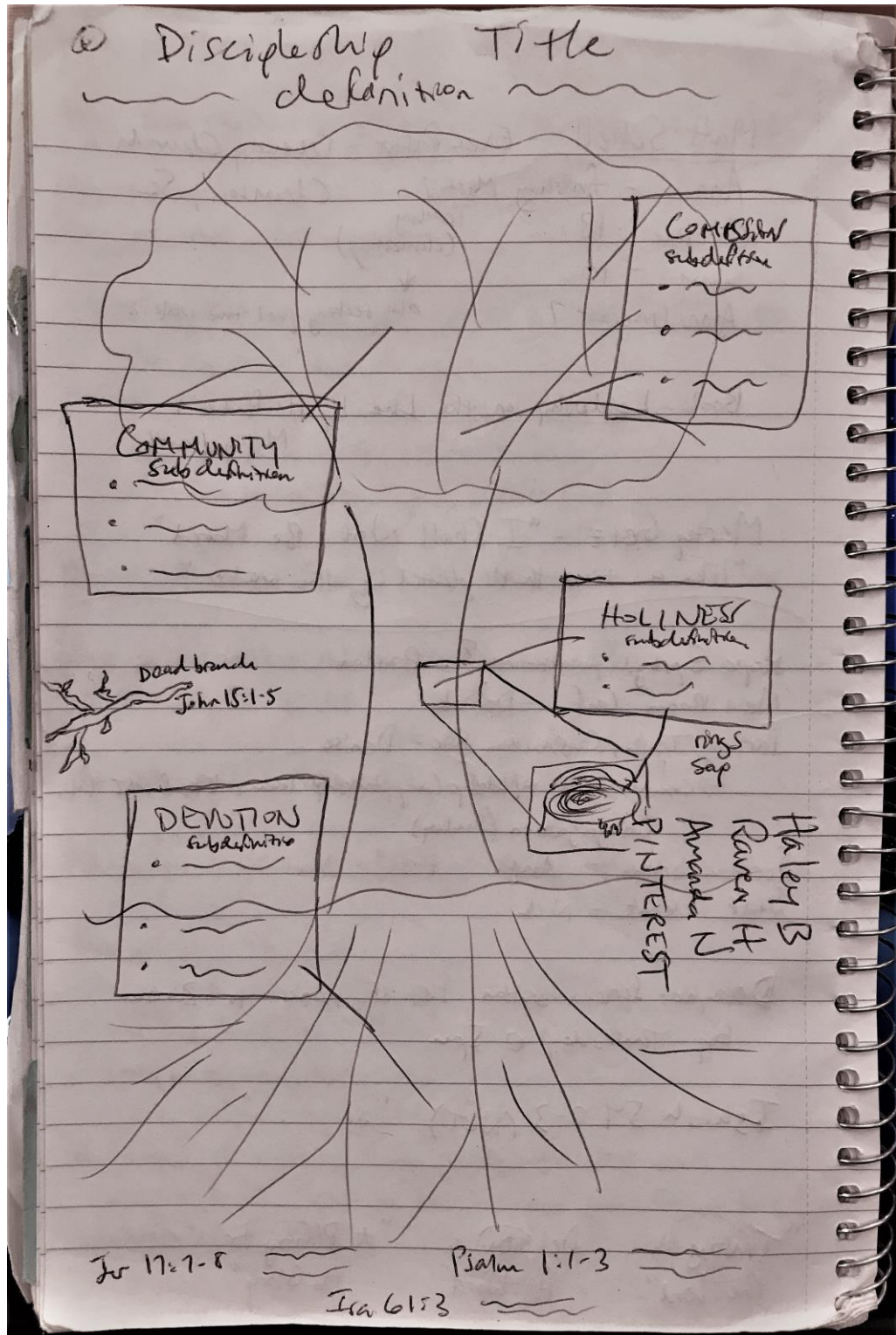
TRUSTING IN THE LORD

DELIGHTING IN HIS WORD

A PLANTING FOR HIS GLORY

¹³⁹ Raven Henderson, Artful Devo: Draw from the Word. Learn more at <https://www.skillshare.com/user/raven?via=project-details>.

My First-Draft / Sketch of the Discipleship Infographic



APPENDIX 3: WEEKLY DISCIPLESHIP CHARTS

Week 1: Discipleship in Matthew 1-18

As you read each day in Matthew, then Acts, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What does this passage of Scripture say about being a follower of Jesus?
- 2-What does the process of following Jesus look like in this passage?
- 3-What appear to be the essential components of discipleship in this passage?
- 4-What themes or rhythms are emerging from chapter to chapter that tell me something about Christian discipleship?

Scripture Reference:	1-What this passage says about following Jesus:	2-What the process of following Jesus looks like:	3-Essential components of discipleship:	4-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:

Week 2: Discipleship in Matthew 19-28, then Acts 1-7

As you read each day in Matthew, then Acts, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What does this passage of Scripture say about being a follower of Jesus?
- 2-What does the process of following Jesus look like in this passage?
- 3-What appear to be the essential components of discipleship in this passage?
- 4-What themes or rhythms are emerging from chapter to chapter that tell me something about Christian discipleship?

Scripture Reference:	1-What this passage says about following Jesus:	2-What the process of following Jesus looks like:	3-Essential components of discipleship:	4-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:

Week 3: Discipleship in Acts 8-28

As you read each day in Matthew, then Acts, ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What does this passage of Scripture say about being a follower of Jesus?
- 2-What does the process of following Jesus look like in this passage?
- 3-What appear to be the essential components of discipleship in this passage?
- 4-What themes or rhythms are emerging from chapter to chapter that tell me something about Christian discipleship?

Scripture Reference:	1-What this passage says about following Jesus:	2-What the process of following Jesus looks like:	3-Essential components of discipleship:	4-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:

Week 4: The Disciple's Devotional Life

As you read through each day's Scripture(s), ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What do these Scriptures say about the disciple's devotional life?
- 2-What appear to be the essential components of the disciple's devotional life in these verses?
- 3-What themes or rhythms are emerging from these verses that tell me something about discipleship?

Date & Scripture(s):	1-What these Scriptures say about the disciple's devotional life:	2-Essential components of the disciple's devotional life:	3-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:
Thu, June 20 <i>Deuteronomy 6:4-9</i> <i>Mark 12:28-34</i>			
Fri, June 21 <i>Deuteronomy 10:12-22</i> <i>1 John 5:1-5</i>			
Sat, June 22 <i>John 15:1-17</i> <i>Galatians 2:20</i>			
Sun, June 23 <i>1 Samuel 3:1-10</i> <i>Philippians 3:7-14</i>			
Mon, June 24 <i>Mark 1:32-39</i> <i>Mark 6:30-32</i>			
Tue, June 25 <i>Matthew 6:5-24</i> <i>Isaiah 26:8</i>			

Week 5: The Disciple's Communal Life

As you read through each day's Scripture(s), ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What do these Scriptures say about the disciple's communal life?
- 2-What appear to be the essential components of the disciple's communal life in these verses?
- 3-What themes or rhythms are emerging from these verses that tell me something about discipleship?

Date & Scripture(s):	1-What these Scriptures say about the disciple's communal life:	2-Essential components of the disciple's communal life:	3-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:
Thu, June 27 <i>Hebrews 10:24-25</i> <i>Acts 2:42-47</i>			
Fri, June 28 <i>John 13:34-35</i> <i>1 John 4:7-12</i>			
Sat, June 29 <i>James 5:13-16</i> <i>Galatians 6:1-2,10</i> <i>Ephesians 4:32</i>			
Sun, June 30 <i>1 Corinthians 12:12-27</i> <i>Ephesians 4:1-6</i>			
Mon, July 1 <i>Colossians 3:12-17</i> <i>1 Thessalonians 4:9-10</i> <i>1 Peter 3:8-9</i>			
Tue, July 2 <i>Romans 12:9-18</i> <i>Romans 13:8</i>			

Week 6: The Disciple's Co-missional Life

As you read through each day's Scripture(s), ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the following things to you:

- 1-What do these Scriptures say about the disciple's co-missional life?
- 2-What appear to be the essential components of the disciple's co-missional life in these verses?
- 3-What themes or rhythms are emerging from these verses that tell me something about discipleship?

Date & Scripture(s):	1-What these Scriptures say about the disciple's co-missional life:	2-Essential components of the disciple's co-missional life:	3-Themes or Rhythms of discipleship emerging:
Thu, July 4 <i>Matthew 9:35-38</i> <i>Matthew 10:1,5</i> <i>Matthew 28:18-20</i> <i>Acts 1:8</i>			
Fri, July 5 <i>Ephesians 2:10</i> <i>John 15:14-16</i> <i>James 1:22-27</i>			
Sat, July 6 <i>John 17:1-23</i>			
Sun, July 7 <i>Matthew 5:14-16</i> <i>1 Peter 2:9-12</i>			
Mon, July 8 <i>Isaiah 61:1-3</i> <i>Philippians 2:12-16</i>			
Tue, July 9 <i>1 Corinthians 3:9</i> <i>Isaiah 58:6-12</i>			

APPENDIX 4: PRE-PROJECT SURVEY & RESULTS

Discipleship Survey 1

I. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Time Alone With God

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend alone with God?

2. What do you usually do during your time alone with God?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that spending time alone with God has had on your life lately?

Prayer

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend in prayer?

2. What kinds of things do you usually pray about?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that prayer has had on your life lately?

Bible Engagement

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend engaging with the Bible?

2. In what ways do you usually engage with the Bible?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that Bible engagement has had on your life lately?

2. What usually happens at these gatherings?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these gatherings have had on your life lately?

III. CO-MISSIONAL LIFE

Expanding God's Kingdom

1. How many times per month do you usually participate in an activity that expands God's Kingdom on earth?

2. What usually happens at these activities?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these activities have had on your life lately?

II. COMMUNAL LIFE

Christ-Centered Community

1. How many times per month do you usually gather with others in Christ-centered community?

Discipleship Pre-Survey Results

I. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Time Alone With God

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend alone with God?

Responses: 30-60 240 90 30 90 120 180 70
60 49 180 40 360 150

Average: 122

2. What do you usually do during your time alone with God?

Responses: pray +11 read chp of Bible w/Study Bible notes
talk w/God +2 read Bible +7 listen +3
Bible study/devotional/video +2 meditate
use Jesus Calling create read +1
listen to praise music draw thankful list
listen to worship music sing write/journal +2
put on instrumental music lay/kneel think
sit still & listen in the quiet praise God
watch nature walk/run wonder

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that spending time alone with God has had on your life lately?

Responses: refueled loved feeling assured joy
 I feel His Presence rested wanted safe
 grateful reminding of His faithfulness faith
 clarifying belonging peace-giving clearing
 beloved consistency peace +1 refocus
 foundational peaceful restored tethered
 serenity centering comforting connection
 quiet calming stronger freedom
 lifeline dreaming frustrating unfocused
 prepared for the day Holy Spirit realignment
 unworthy helps me long for more of Him
 at times frustrating more relying on His trust

Prayer

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend in prayer?

Responses: 60-120 180 210 50
 *I don't honestly really stop talking to God
 30-60 140 30 10
 *concentrated prayer = 30; continual prayer = ??
 60-100 120 120 150
 *hard to say: I do lots of short prayers during the day
 Average: 102*

2. What kinds of things do you usually pray about?

Responses: my daughter being others-minded my loneliness
 reminding myself of all that has been done
 my career/job +2 praise to God everything +3
 my family's restoration God please help
 thanksgiving +1 placing my will in God's hands
 for others wisdom +1 situations shared by others
 for God's will what to say parenting/patience
 my day how to feel my anxiety attacks
 to know God's nearness & voice safety
 how to think send me a spouse sin/temptations
 life to guide me & others current events
 future open loved-ones' hearts to Christ
 family +6 health/healing +7 my niece
 friends +3 finances open/close doors
 give peace & willingness to follow miracles
 strength church guidance patience
 that I would be more closely aligned w/God
 thanking God for blessings understanding

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that prayer has had on your life lately?

Responses: acceptance not sure focus refreshing
 direction empowering value-giving helpful +1
 scattered peace/trust connecting necessary
 surrender available God is faithful
 anxious radical reliant perplexed
 peace-bringing comfort +1 calming +1
 a place to give my thoughts & emotions to Jesus
 prayers are not being answered at times frustrating
 peace +1 feeling God's love & Presence
 encouragement encouraging steadying
 love discipline

Bible Engagement

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend engaging with the Bible?

Responses: 15-20 90 30 *very few
 60-120 60 60 *not enough
 65-70 90 0
 80-100 30 150

Average: 65*

2. In what ways do you usually engage with the Bible?

Responses: put on instrumental music read the Bible +5
 read along w/devotionals +4 read & meditate +1
 read a chapter, then read notes in Study Bible
 pray along with reading +2 listen to audio Bible
 discuss Bible reading with others +1
 read & journal listen to Scripture songs
 Scripture memory +1 during the church service
 reading & praying for understanding
 looking up answers to problems Bible study +1
 none

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that Bible engagement has had on your life lately?

Responses: clarity exciting reaffirming fun
 transformative direction encouraging
 stress-relieving love comfort
 mind-blowing peace-making guidance +1
 growth new revelation complexity
 reminder of God's love reminder inspirational
 understanding visionary none faith-building
 more needed anchor

II. COMMUNAL LIFE

Christ-Centered Community

1. How many times per month do you usually gather with others in Christ-centered community?

Responses: 3-5 14-17 4 10 4-6 4 3-4
*everyday at work 5+ 16-20 4
5 or more times 4-6 4-5 4

Average: 7*

2. What usually happens at these gatherings?

Responses: prayer +8 socialize catching up on life +1
just walking w/each other laughter have fun
talk about God do life share life
Bible study +2 meal instruction
read/discuss Scripture conversation worship +2
sharing +1 fellowship +3 singing
growing/deepening relationships reading
speak truth eating junk food fun
discipleship connection community group
discussion listening connectedness

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these gatherings have had on your life lately?

Responses: joy +1 feeling included & wanted
happy to be sharing my life w/others who want to share
their lives w/me
joyful feelings of belonging +1 productive
love encouragement personal
constructive loved strengthening authentic
fun +1 beloved purposeful friendship +1
challenged life-giving +1 a new Goddaughter!
renewal edifying loving accountability
refreshing helpful freedom growing
sisters together security support
involved with each other closer relaxed
fulfilling calm awesome fruitful

III. CO-MISSIONAL LIFE

Expanding God's Kingdom

1. How many times per month do you usually participate in an activity that expands God's Kingdom on earth?

Responses: 1-3 28 3 *not much, just in my home
1 1 0 *not quite sure
4-5 4 0 *right now none
4 *I feel that my daily life as a mother and wife is that
*new to this *seldom

Average: 5*

2. What usually happens at these activities?

Responses: none +4 teaching children hosting
*this is a place for improvement praying
*I'm not assertive; I have a hard time expressing it verbally
listening serving serving other people meals
sharing +1 giving +1 gathering learning
talking teaching love feeding teaching
showing love leading discipling
eating humble pie I receive focus in my life
spend time with young people leading worship
spend time with the unsaved

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these activities have had on your life lately?

Responses: none +3 challenging +1 happy when I do it
humbling faith-building (thumbs-up emoji)
compassion faithfulness awesome
exhausting patience-testing fruitful
astounding comfort fulfilling
focus sanity refreshing sharpening
thrilling purposeful

APPENDIX 5: POST-PROJECT SURVEY & RESULTS

Discipleship Survey 2

I. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Time Alone With God

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend alone with God?
2. What do you usually do during your time alone with God?
3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that spending time alone with God has had on your life lately?

Prayer

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend in prayer?
2. What kinds of things do you usually pray about?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that prayer has had on your life lately?

Bible Engagement

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend engaging with the Bible?
2. In what ways do you usually engage with the Bible?
3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that Bible engagement has had on your life lately?

2. What usually happens at these gatherings?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these gatherings have had on your life lately?

III. CO-MISSIONAL LIFE

Expanding God's Kingdom

1. How many times per month do you usually participate in an activity that expands God's Kingdom on earth?
2. What usually happens at these activities?

II. COMMUNAL LIFE

Christ-Centered Community

1. How many times per month do you usually gather with others in Christ-centered community?

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these activities have had on your life lately?

Discipleship Post-Survey Results

I. DEVOTIONAL LIFE

Time Alone With God

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend alone with God?

Responses: 120+ 170 210 50 60 105-210
 60-120 35 300-360 60 30
 150 90 180 140

Average: 125

2. What do you usually do during your time alone with God?

Responses: pray +10 walk talk & meditate on God's goodness
 read Bible +5 run sit & be quiet read a book
 hike Right Now Media driving
 exercise worship music study Scripture
 listen +1 read devotional +1 confess
 read try to stay focused praise
 listen to devo intercede pray for my friends
 give thanks +1 ask God for forgiveness
 thankful list ask God to bless my family

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that spending time alone with God has had on your life lately?

Responses: quieter spirit Bible reading increased
 He has led me to read certain chapters when I ask Him
 what does He want to say to me. He directs me.
 sensitivity to need of prayer feel Him more
 more courage bolstering listening more intently
 strengthening calm purpose peace +3
 sustenance quietness patience hope
 safety tolerance purpose not sure
 refreshment refreshing goodness connection
 refining centering recalibrating beneficial
 comfort come closer deeper action

Prayer

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend in prayer?

Responses: 120+ 140 30 120 30 60 60 70
 120 140 150 40 30 105
 Average: 87

2. What kinds of things do you usually pray about?

Responses: family concerns work +1 needs of others
 those who are having a hard time events
 job - things go well personal growth
 my walk with God do prayers for FB friends
 focus my spiritual growth strength
 thankfulness for each day all throughout the day
 God's Presence (my recognition of it!) calm
 wisdom ask God for abundance anxiety
 church family ask God to save my family everything +2
 family +6 ask God to order my family's steps
 friends +4 about life & the universe
 that we may hear from You needs for my family
 forgiveness for myself and others sick, shut-ins, lost
 health +1 needs of others +1 finances
 situations for others decisions roommate
 temptations better attitude giving thanks
 safety for friends people in church
 government leaders

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that prayer has had on your life lately?

Responses: becoming to slow it down alert relief
 I feel that God is hearing and is answering my prayers
 do more than before at ease grounding
 connecting (to God & others) calming
 fulfilling sometimes freedom accepting
 hope sometimes loneliness peace
 reliance perspective connection +1
 patience awesome joy faith-building
 conversation sanity intimacy with God
 good no response fellowship

Bible Engagement

1. How many minutes per week do you usually spend engaging with the Bible?

Responses: 60+ 60 210 75 30 40 70-140
 70 20 30 90 70-105 70
 30 105-140

Average: 73

2. In what ways do you usually engage with the Bible?

Responses: reading +6 Bible app +1 discipleship class
 I ask God for a Scripture and wait for Him to relay it then
 write it down in my journal
 meditating on a verse memorize
 devotionals +1 study +2 seeking His will
 discuss with others Right Now Media app
 looking up Scriptures visual Scripture images
 write down Scripture listen to Scripture songs
 putting it directly into my life
 find a topic & look up verses relating to that topic

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact that Bible engagement has had on your life lately?

Responses: growing recalibrate more knowledge
 learned a lot that I didn't know before growth +1
 peace +1 increased joy conviction learning
 focus life-giving faithful guiding
 encouragement life-sustaining blessed
 letting go of hurt/anger directing thought
 forgiven longing for more anchoring
 relativity reminds hope instruction
 reinforces waiting ideal reengages
 life-changing understanding more clarity

II. COMMUNAL LIFE

Christ-Centered Community

1. How many times per month do you usually gather with others in Christ-centered community?

Responses: 4-5 12 4-6 4-5 20 4 4-5 4
22-25 8 24 8+ 4 4-8 2

Average: 8.9

2. What usually happens at these gatherings?

Responses: review lesson confession discipleship +1
check in on how life is going discussion +1
encouragement share life prayer +6
accountability talking praise
openness/honesty sharing worship +1
Bible study +3 yoga +1 conversation +1
sometimes politics eat / food +2
read Scripture +1 fellowship
deep discussion about personal life
discuss Scripture +2

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these gatherings have had on your life lately?

Responses: enlightening peace +1 growing deepening
I learned more on how to be an effective disciple
understanding of Scripture excitement of sisterhood
what the disciples did & how they lived & loved together
accepting that I'm an adult now strength to speak
understanding of the Father & Son being One; oneness
encouraging +1 understanding more
accountability fun times keeps me going
growth life outside self valuable
joy stronger bonds enjoyable
community learning meet a few new people
transformation connection connecting
strengthening knowledge calm
clarity information comfort
debates better mood

III. CO-MISSIONAL LIFE

Expanding God's Kingdom

1. How many times per month do you usually participate in an activity that expands God's Kingdom on earth?

Responses: none +1 I don't know that I do this!
none at the moment not usually
hard to say - a bunch
10 1 4-5 10-11 2+ 1-2 4
3 5-6 30-31

Average: 5.6

2. What usually happens at these activities?

Responses: no response +3 speak to people teaching
encouraging/praying for others outreach prayer
teaching Godly principles pray for people
engaging in relationship building getting to know others
Bible study greeting and welcoming people
mentoring sharing share God's love
prayer community of growth discipling
leading Scripture reading leading
listening serving +1 service +1 praise
help worship +2 work

3. What three words would you use to describe the effect or impact these activities have had on your life lately?

Responses: no response +4 powerful encouraged
makes me nervous; sometimes good
humbling increase in knowledge of His goodness
inspired joyful +1 welcomeness
motivating I love it life happens try
purposeful nice to do... people need Jesus
fulfilling memories growth
intention challenging

APPENDIX 6: EXCERPT FROM THE CENTER FOR BIBLE ENGAGEMENT'S
"EXECUTIVE SUMMARY" OF THEIR "BIBLE LITERACY & SPIRITUAL
GROWTH SURVEY RESULTS"¹⁴⁰

The data reveals many predictors, which could be influenced by various strategies. In particular, frequent and consistent Bible reading is associated with reading the Bible while growing up, not having difficulty understanding the Bible, journaling, following a Bible reading plan, using a study excerpt guide or aid, reading in the morning, having an accountability partner and having a spiritual mentor.

The following bullets summarize these findings:

- If the family of the respondent read the Bible while growing up, the respondent is significantly more likely to read the Bible at least once a week and to read the Bible all the way through.
- For each additional Bible owned, respondents were 35% more likely to read the Bible daily than not at all.
- People who find the Bible difficult to understand read the Bible less than those who do not find it difficult to understand and are less likely to have read it completely. Only one-quarter of those who find the Bible difficult to understand read it daily, compared to more than half of other respondents.
- Respondents who use a journal are significantly more likely to read the Bible at least four times a week, compared to those who do not use a journal. • Following a Bible reading plan was significantly more common among people who read the Bible five to seven times a week than those who read less frequently. Seven out of ten respondents who use a Bible reading plan read the Bible daily, compared to only a little more than one-third of those who do not follow a plan.
- Those respondents who read the Bible more often are significantly more likely to use Bible study guides.

¹⁴⁰ "Bible Literacy & Spiritual Growth: Survey Results," November 2006, Center for Bible Engagement, www.c4be.org, ii-iii.

- Those that prefer to read the Bible in the morning are significantly more likely to read the Bible five to seven times per week, compared to people who prefer to read in the evening.
- Participants who prefer group study read the Bible less often than those who like both group and personal study.
- Respondents who make reading the Bible a high priority in their life are significantly more likely to read the Bible seven times a week.
- There is a highly significant relationship between attending Sunday School and how often the respondent reads the Bible. Those respondents who attend Sunday School are more likely to read the Bible daily.
- Participants in group Bible study are far more likely to read their Bible on a daily basis (56.1%), compared to those do not participate (41.1%).
- Having an accountability partner is associated with more days and more time spent reading the Bible.
- Respondents with a spiritual mentor read the Bible significantly more than their counterparts without a mentor.

APPENDIX 7: DS520 DISCIPLE'S PATH BOOKMARK & EXPLANATION



7 Ways to **Grow** as Christ's Disciple

1 Growth Groups

Growth happens best in community. Our weekly Growth Groups provide a small community of disciples with whom to grow and share life.

2 Discipleship Coaches

Growth accelerates with the help of a coach. Our Discipleship Coaches are eager to journey with you in your growth as a disciple of Jesus!

3 Daily TAWG

Growth requires daily nourishment. Our Growth Groups and Discipleship Coaches will help provide you with a framework to develop a daily habit of spending time alone with God (TAWG) in worship, Bible study, and listening prayer.



4 Community Gatherings

Growth is encouraged when we unite together as a church family. Our weekly Community Gatherings are the times that our entire church community gathers to worship, learn, pray, celebrate, mourn, and share in the life of our church together.

5 Circle OUT

Growth demands an upward and an outward focus. Our church "circle" intentionally faces outward, serving our local neighborhoods, schools, hospitals, prisons, and others with the grace and love we have received from Jesus.

6 Bloom Where You're Planted

Growth happens right where you are: school, work, home, at play... Don't relegate your faith to Growth Groups and Community Gatherings. Our periodic "Bloom" events are designed to help you become the disciple Jesus is calling you to be, right where He has you planted in life, right now!



7 Discipling Others Training

Growth multiplies through reproduction. As we grow as Christ's disciples, He enables us to disciple others, helping them to grow deep in Him, too! Our "Discipling Others" Program trains Growth Group Leaders, Discipleship Coaches, and Marketplace Ministers.

Growing Together
as Christ's Disciples.



*INDIVIDUAL DISCIPLESHIP PATH,
FACILITATED BY THE LOCAL CHURCH*

A Process-Design Project

Submitted to Dr. Becky Luman
Assistant Professor of Formation and Instruction
Wesley Biblical Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Course
The Discipling Church
DS 520

Nick Cash
B.S. Shorter University, 2002
March 23, 2013

7 Ways to Grow as Christ's Disciple

For my individual discipleship path project, I decided to pretend that I was the Discipleship Pastor back at my home church in Columbus: Christ Community Church. There is no such position at my home church, but this course has really made me re-evaluate the priority we should be placing on the discipleship of our members. Our church also does not have any type of individual discipleship program for its members to follow, and so this project gave me the opportunity to think through what I would create if I were given the opportunity to do so. The books and discussions from this course so far have been so challenging, encouraging - and frankly, fun! This is the most I think I have ever enjoyed a post-graduate course! I could see myself actually modifying and using this sort of a resource in the future!

As far as programs and resources we already have available at our church, everything on the bookmark I designed is a completely original creation for this project. The only aspect of the bookmark that is pre-existing is my church's name and logo. I added the tagline "Growing Together as Christ's Disciples" to demonstrate what would be the church's emphasis on discipleship as its primary objective. I also came up with the "7 Ways to Grow as Christ's Disciple" based on the concepts I have gleaned from reading *SoulShift*, *Real-Life Discipleship*, and *Sticky Church*. These three books have been invaluable resources to me this semester, and I have just eaten them up! The pages are all dog-eared, there are tons of notes and underlined sections... These 'text books' will be permanent references for my life, ministry, and any church or discipleship involvement the Lord may direct me to in the future!

I created my individual discipleship path with my home church family in mind. I imagined, "What if they were to hire me in as a discipleship consultant to create a program through which they could help walk their current members and future converts?" I boiled my ideas down to what I consider to be the seven core activities that our church could do to nurture the spiritual maturation of their members and attendees. I also added a short summary of each step in the discipleship path, and began each summary with a simple, direct statement about the nature of growth.

1-Growth Groups | “*Growth happens best in community.*”

“Growth Groups” is a term I borrowed from Larry Osborne’s *Sticky Church*. I think what we call our small groups or Bible study ministry matters, as it communicates the heart and objective of the group. I think the term “Growth Groups” could even be applied in a church “Sunday School” setting. The reason the group exists is to join and foster growth, together.

With disciple-making as the principle objective of the church, we would have as our goal to have every member and attendee actively participating in a Growth Group and connected with a Discipleship Coach (see #2 below). The Growth Groups would meet weekly, at a time and location to be determined by the group, for the expressed purposes of growing together and sharing life together.

Together, the Growth Group would dig into God’s Word together, engage in group prayer together, share meals and special occasions together, celebrate together, mourn together, and provide encouragement, accountability, and support for each other. The Growth Groups would represent the heart and soul of the church; that is why they are listed first on the discipleship path. The rest of the church’s programming would exist to support and strengthen the Growth Groups. They would represent a microcosm of what the whole larger church should look like: a community of believers committed together to uphold each other, sharpen one another, and journey together toward Christ-likeness.

2-Discipleship Coaches | “*Growth accelerates with the help of a coach.*”

The concept of Discipleship Coaches is one I am borrowing from Jim Putman’s *Real-Life Discipleship*. I loved Putman’s analogy of the wrestling coach: a person who is dedicated to help you practice and improve your skills, proficiency, and confidence as a wrestler. It really does translate into the Christian life! Coaching is an inherent aspect in the process of discipleship! To be a disciple is to be a student of someone or something. The mistake is to think that because we are disciples of Jesus that we need no other mentor to show us the way, since Jesus is our Mentor. While that is true to a degree, the

whole system of growth described in Scripture points to person-to-person, life-on-life growth and maturation methods: parent-to-child, teacher-to-student, pastor-to-people.

While our Staff Members would be expected to actively engage in coaching others, the majority of our Discipleship Coaches would be lay volunteers from within the body of the church. Disciple-making would be a Member-driven, Staff-supported activity of the church, rather than being Staff-driven and Member-supported. Empowerment of the people to disciple each other would be a major aspect of our Discipleship Coaching program.

3-Daily TAWG | “*Growth requires daily nourishment.*”

TAWG is an acronym of my own invention to describe the purpose of a ‘daily quiet time’ or ‘devotional habit’ for exactly what it is: T.ime A.lone W.ith G.od. I like terminology that is clear, simple, and requires little explanation for people to understand. I think the terms ‘quiet time’ and ‘personal devotions’ can be misleading, vague, and confusing without a lot of explanation to follow them up. ‘Time Alone With God’, on the other hand, is both descriptive and instructive.

What one does during their daily TAWG would be facilitated by their Discipleship Coach and Growth Group. Discipleship Coaches would be taught to provide instruction, guidance, encouragement, and loving accountability for their disciples in the area of having a Daily TAWG. Daily TAWG would be the place where the members individually interact with God in worship, Bible study, and prayer. Growth Groups would be encouraged to integrate sharing from the member’s Daily TAWGs into the weekly group discussions.

4-Community Gatherings | “*Growth is encouraged when we unite together as a church family.*”

‘Community Gatherings’ would be the name for the main weekly assembly of the whole church body together for worship, prayer, celebration, sacrament, and more. Most churches call this time their weekly ‘worship service’, but again, I am afraid that the

church's traditional names for some programs are not at all descriptive of the purpose or experience of what the program is actually intended to achieve. With a church who is shifting their priority to disciple-making, and centering that priority around the Growth Groups, the weekly worship service takes a secondary priority. It, like every other step in the discipleship path, exists to support, encourage, and strengthen the Growth Groups. Thus the weekly time of worship would be the time when all the Growth Groups gather together in a larger community setting. Hence the name 'Community Gatherings'.

This name also lends itself well to less-conventional forms of weekly 'big church' worship services. Anytime the entire church body gathers would be considered a Community Gathering, and many of the same elements would be present. Thus, whether you are having a potluck dinner, or a church-wide picnic, or a Christmas concert, or Easter drama - the entire church would be engaging together in worship, prayer, sharing with one another, breaking bread together, being taught or challenged by a message (short or long) from God's Word... So, anytime all the Growth Groups congregate, whether that be on Sunday morning in the sanctuary or Thursday evening at the local park, it would be strategically planned to be a Community Gathering.

5-Circle OUT | *"Growth demands an upward and an outward focus."*

Nothing grows smaller. Inward-focused lifeforms diminish in size and die. Yet the image that comes to my mind when I think about most churches is that of an inward-facing circle - a group of people holding hands, and facing in toward one another. It is difficult for any member to reach out to others outside of the circle when we are all holding hands and facing in.

The idea behind 'Circle Out' is that we maintain our circle, we maintain our support, we continue to hold onto each other as a connected group - but we do so by turning our circle inside out. Instead of holding hands and facing inward, our connected circle faces outward. We are still there for each other, still one, still committed and beside each other - but our focus is intentionally outward.

When Jesus came to town, the community improved. The lame walked, the deaf heard, the blind saw, the poor were fed, the weak were strengthened, the dead were given

new life. If we, the church, are now supposed to be Jesus' hands and feet, then our community should be a stronger, better, healthier, more alive place because of our presence there! I firmly believe that core to the discipleship process is banding with other believers to bring positive change to the community in which you live. Of course, this Circle OUT concept can extend beyond the local community to reach out to a region, state, or international location as well.

6-Bloom Where You're Planted | “*Growth happens right where you are.*”

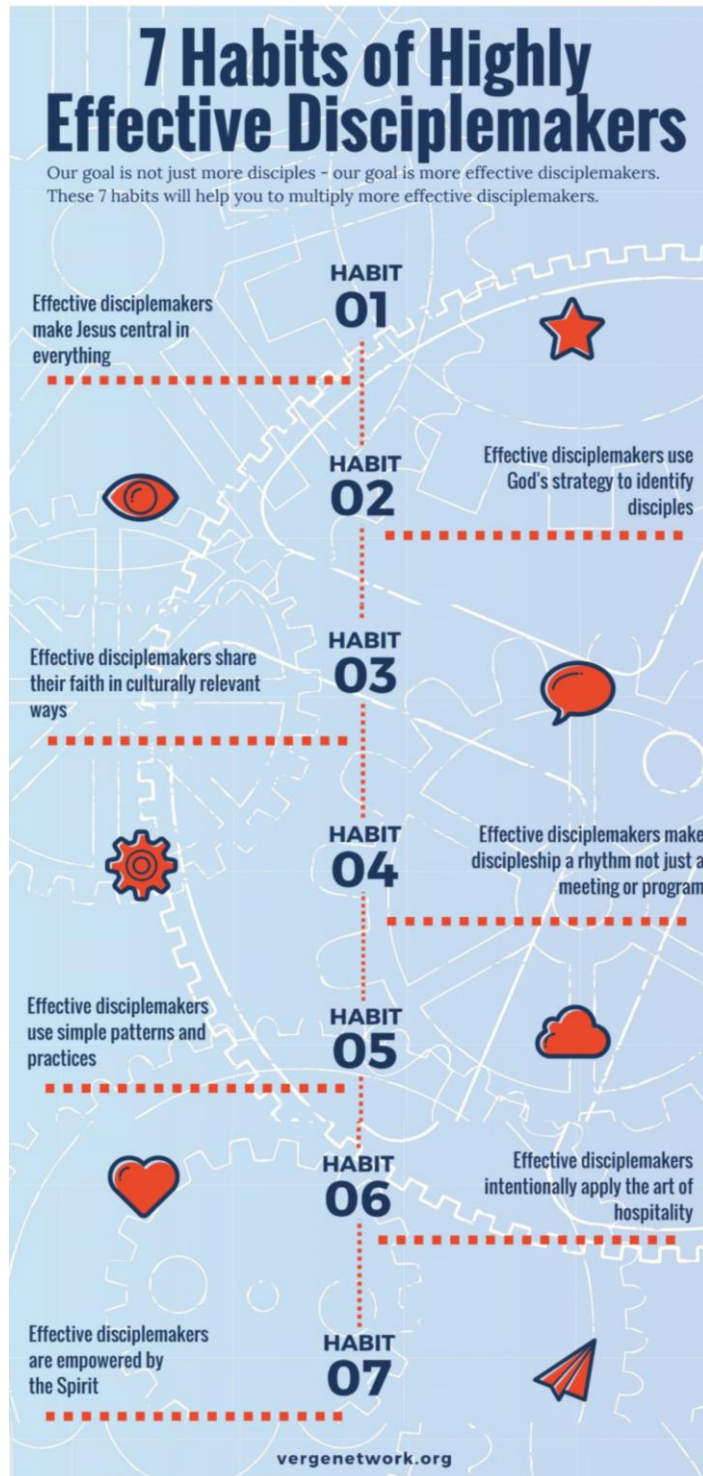
I think one of the great tragedies of modern Christianity is the misconception that only the church staff can be disciple-makers. If I were creating a church-wide discipleship program, I would definitely want one of the major aspects of it to be the empowerment of the laity to be disciple-makers right where God has them planted, right now: at school, at work, at play, in their neighborhoods, at the ball fields.

We would host periodic “Bloom” events that would be half support group, half idea-sharing group, half empowerment group (that's right – three halves!) for lay people to share together strategies for disciple-making outside of the church walls and apart from Sunday mornings. I would rather the church be a missions-sending agency that sends people back into their homes, workplaces, and schools to be missionaries every week, right where they are, than one that calls them to *leave* their homes, workplaces, and schools to go learn how to be ‘professional’ disciple-makers!

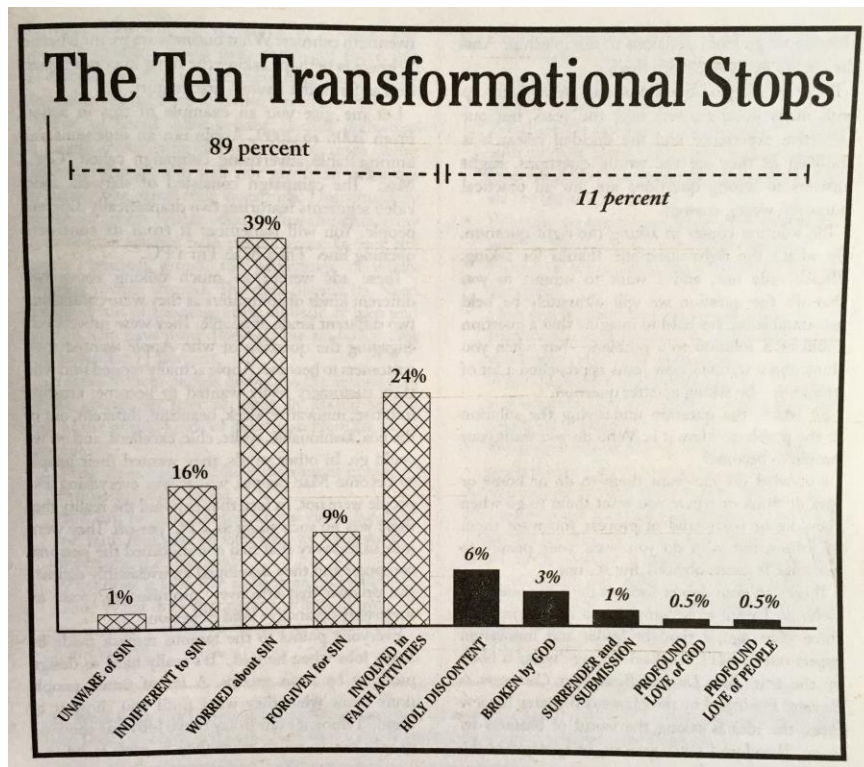
7-Discipling Others Training | “*Growth multiplies through reproduction.*”

The seventh component to our church-wide discipleship program would be the training up of lay leaders to be Growth Group leaders and hosts and Discipleship Coaches. Earlier I mentioned that I would want our disciple-making to be Member-driven and Staff-supported. In order for that strategy to succeed, it requires a large number - and a continually-increasing number at that - of lay volunteers who are training up to be the discipling leaders within the body.

APPENDIX 8: THE VERGE NETWORK'S
SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY-EFFECTIVE DISCIPLE-MAKERS INFOGRAPHIC¹⁴¹

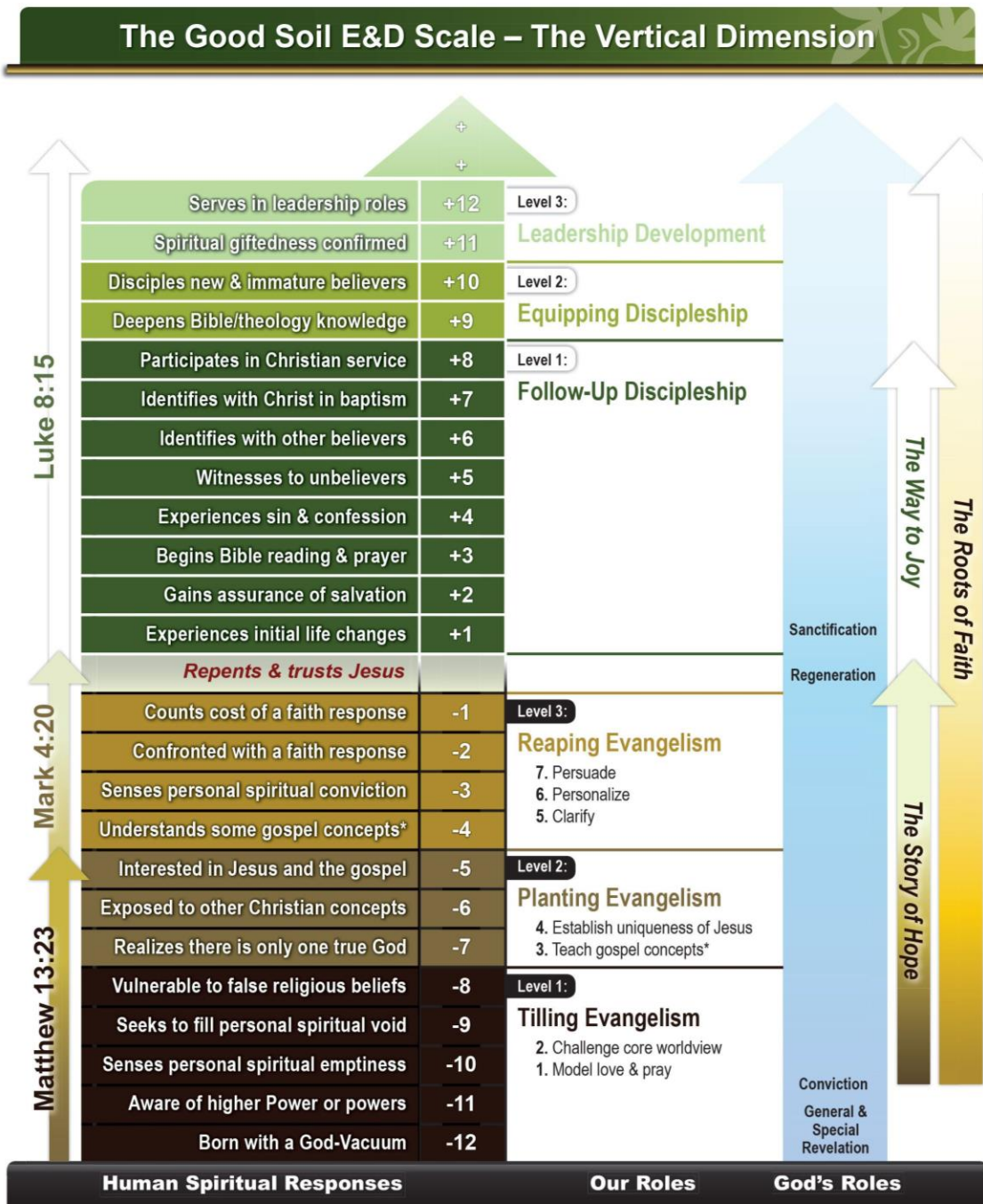


¹⁴¹ The Verge Network, Seven Habits of Highly-Effective Disciple-Makers Infographic, 2017. Accessed online at www.vergenetwork.org.



¹⁴² George Barna, *Maximum Faith: Live Like Jesus, Experience Genuine Transformation* (Metaformation, 2011).

¹⁴³ Nico Simpson, Claripics: Clarifying Through Pictures, "Journey to Wholeness" (10 Stops Illustration), 2012. Accessed online at <http://www.claripics.com/>.



The original concept for this scale was created by Viggo Sogaard and later revised by James F. Engel and called the Engel Scale.

*Basic gospel concepts =

God, man, sin, death (as divine judgment), **Christ, cross** (including resurrection), **faith**, & (spiritual, eternal) **life**.

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¹⁴⁴ The Engel Scale, Good Soil Evangelism & Discipleship, 2014. Accessed online at www.GoodSoil.com.

APPENDIX 11: WILLOW CREEK'S REVEAL STUDY
 STAGES OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT¹⁴⁵

The Spiritual Continuum - 4 Stages

Exploring Christianity	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ Centered
<p>I may or may not believe in God and I am not sure about Christ. My faith is not as significant as I want it to be and leaves me searching for more.</p> <p>Those who are exploring Christianity are considering talking intentional steps towards spiritual growth and have lower levels of agreement with most basic belief statements, such as "I believe salvation comes only through Jesus Christ."</p>	<p>I believe in Jesus, and I'm working on what it means to follow Him.</p> <p>These believers are growing in Christ through church experiences and are also starting to incorporate personal spiritual practices into their daily routine.</p>	<p>I am a follower of Christ and depend on him daily for guidance.</p> <p>These believers demonstrate higher levels of personal spiritual practices than those who are growing in Christ. Serving the church is an important expression of their faith.</p>	<p>I seek to reflect the character of Christ in every aspect of my life.</p> <p>These people have fully surrendered their lives to Christ, demonstrated by their regular application of personal spiritual practices. They seek God's guidance in every area of their lives.</p>

Attitudes / Behaviors expressed in these stages:

Exploring Christianity	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ Centered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> God is not a part of their daily lives They do not consider the Bible to be relevant They look for guidance in understanding spiritual matters They seek other's opinions on spiritual questions God's help is only needed in their times of crisis They do not serve in the church 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are discovering the value of faith in everyday life They seek to apply spiritual truths into their lives They are willing to participate in Sunday Morning Bible study Some of them serve in the church They periodically read the Bible or Christian books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Bible provides daily direction for their lives Prayer is a regular part of their lives They have surrendered most to Christ Relationships with other believers increase in importance to them Understand & practice biblical stewardship & tithing They serve regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are more devoted to God than anything else in their lives For them, prayer is a constant conversation with God Service to others is a way of life They are ready to share their faith with others They take spiritual responsibilities for others through mentoring relationships They are leaders in the ministries of the church

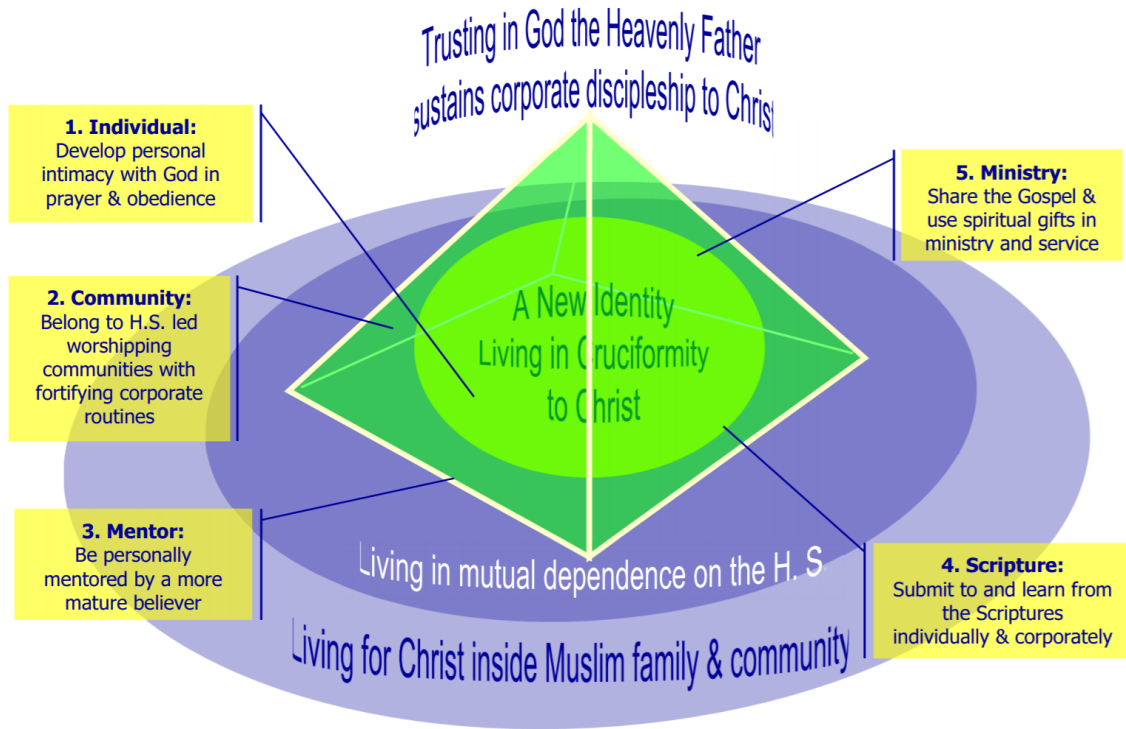
Next Steps to help you move to along the continuum:

Exploring Christianity	Growing in Christ	Close to Christ	Christ Centered
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular Sunday worship attendance Attend / participate in Ministry offered by NSBC: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fuel (Youth) - CO2 (College) - Mothers Of Preschoolers - Adult Bible Fellowship - Ladies Ministry - Men's Fraternity, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Church membership Join Bible Study class Daily devotional reading/prayer time Giving financially Volunteering in ministry (First Impressions, Extended Care, Children's Ministry, Choir, etc.) Support NSBC mission causes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Join a Growth Group Seek service opportunities outside the church Further development of personal spiritual practices (solitude, daily Bible study, scripture memory, tithing, etc.) Serve as a leader in NSBC ministries (children's, youth, ladies, and men's) Participate in NSBC Mission causes Serve on a Ministry Team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bible Study Teacher/Director Growth Group Leader Adult Bible Fellowship facilitator Ministry Team leader Initiate Mission Causes

Adapted from, *Reveal—Where Are You?* by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, 2007, Willow Creek Resources.

¹⁴⁵ Adapted from Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal – Where Are You?* (Willow Creek Resources, 2007).

APPENDIX 12: THE LIVING PYRAMID MODEL FOR
RELATIONAL COMMUNAL DISCIPLING BY DON LITTLE¹⁴⁶



¹⁴⁶ Don Little, *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities: Scripture, History and Seasoned Practices* (IVP, 2015), chapter 8.