

ABSTRACT

GROWING A MEGACHURCH STAFF'S DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING

by

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The megachurch model has grown substantially over the last 30 years having a massive effect on the religious landscape in the United States. The megachurch platform is unique, effective, and a fruitful way to reach many with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pastors and leaders of megachurches have displayed a tremendous capacity in gathering people together, but discipling people into committed followers of Jesus has been a challenge.

Strengthening the discipleship understanding and practices of megachurch staff members is a critical step toward fostering a discipleship movement in the megachurch context. The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars.

By administering pre- and post-test surveys as well as a focus group and three semi-structured interviews, the combined data evaluated the effectiveness of the intervention to grow the discipleship understanding of a megachurch staff. The findings suggest that measurable growth in discipleship is possible through intentional discipleship training; growth in discipleship is linked to increased awareness of spiritual disciplines and setting spiritual goals; learning a biblical model of discipleship is valuable for spiritual growth; and that the group learning process is a crucial part of growth in discipleship.

Growing a Megachurch Staff's Discipleship Understanding

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

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May 2022

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my wife, Valerie. The sacrifices you have made could never be overstated. My children Norah and Ava (now we have to buy a dog). My parents, Doug and Sharon Mayer for their love and support. My Grandparents, Joe and Millie Wooton who intentionally lived as followers of Jesus with a clarity that a little boy could see. Rev. Robert and Felecia Freeman, who modeled the ministry of discipleship for me. Rev. Shane Bishop's mentorship in megachurch ministry. Brian and Lisa Safarian for hearing from God and supporting me and my family. The Padgetts for giving me a place to spend time with God and to study. Roni McDaniels and Ryan Gillam for being incredible assistants. My statistician Dave Merrill for teaching me math. To the First Church staff, something special happened during our times together. I am thankful for God's presence and your participation. Thank you to my coach Dr. Aaron Kauffman, the ATS DMIN team, and my Legacy Group. Finally, during this DMIN journey countless people have come up to me and said, "Pastor, I am praying for you." Those prayers have lifted me and my family. May God bless you all.

CHAPTER 1

NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Megachurches have displayed a tremendous capacity in gathering people together, but they have been less successful at discipling people into committed followers of Jesus. This chapter sets the stage for a project exploring how megachurches can develop a discipling culture. A key principle for a megachurch congregation to grow in discipleship is to start with discipling the church staff. The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars. I provided a rationale for the project evolving from personal experience supported by research. Included in the overview of the research project are the research design, purpose statement, research questions, participants, and the collected and analyzed results. To add support for this type of project, themes of the literature review and contextual factors are identified. Further discussion of the anticipated project results establishes the significance for and impact on the practice of ministry.

Personal Introduction

“I can’t do it on my own.” That is what Reverend Robert Freeman, a pastor I respect, told me eighteen-years ago when I was first thinking about the dreams for my ministry. Rev. Freeman and I were having a casual conversation when he mentioned a personal benchmark in his ministry maturity; when he realized he could not reach everyone on his own. When he told me those words of wisdom, I nodded my head in agreement, thinking I understood his insight. I did not.

My ministry dream was to be a part of a worldwide movement of God and I was at the center of that overinflated dream. I saw myself as the lead pastor of a megachurch leading the charge in a Holy Spirit overflow that transformed the lives of millions. I thought my preaching and my leadership would be the crux of that movement. Mind you, I did not know how to preach and had no leadership experience; I did have confidence for no apparent reason.

Years went by and the closest I came to a megachurch was attending one on Sunday mornings while in college and seminary. A few more years went by and the closest I came to leading millions was pastoring two churches that averaged seventy people in attendance. Not quite my dream realized. My preaching had few and far between moments of adequacy. I was not in a significant leadership position. I started to question myself, my motives, and God's call on my life. However, I was excelling and seeing spiritual fruit in one aspect of ministry; discipleship. When I engaged in small discipleship groups, people took steps in their transformation. Not only was I doing well at discipling, I loved most aspects of it. It gave me energy, it made me feel alive, it made me feel like I was making a difference. This should not have shocked me, because the most formational point of my young life was my discipleship experience.

I grew up without a father, causing my emotional formation to fall terribly behind as a teenager. The summer before my senior year of high school, I gave my life to Christ and started a discipleship relationship with a pastor. It changed my life. God brought healing to my emotional wounds, I found purpose through the discipleship process, and I gained a foundation to help me understand myself. Discipleship helped me make connections about God and life that resulted in me becoming a better person. That

discipleship experience was showing fruit in my ministry, but in my eyes, it was not resulting in anything close to my ministry dream.

In May of 2015, I received a call from my District Superintendent that I had been appointed as the Associate pastor of First Church, a top twenty-five fastest growing United Methodist megachurch in the Midwest. First Church was averaging 2,000 in attendance and had a nineteen-year, consecutive growth streak. First Church had two appointed Elders; the Sr. pastor, and the Associate pastor whom I would be replacing. Between full and part-time staff, First Church employed about sixty people.

The first eighteen months of the appointment were incredibly difficult; I had to adjust to an established church culture. I did not have the skills to work, lead, or preach in a megachurch organization. The learning curve was steep.

Through the support of my wife, the Sr. pastor's mentoring, hard work, and opportunities to develop, I have grown. I have cultivated the skills and experience to be a pastor in a megachurch context. What about discipling small groups of people? I still disciple, but my heart burns to equip a megachurch to have a discipleship culture. As I put my personal ministry puzzle together, I see something that has taken me back to a conversation fifteen-years ago; I cannot do ministry on my own. In the megachurch setting, it takes a vast amount of people to be effective. It cannot be done by one preacher with a big dream. It has to be done with the help of others.

I may acquire the skills to preach well, I may help equip people in small group discipling, but I want to help move a megachurch to a discipleship culture. This process begins with helping a megachurch staff understand what it means to be a disciple of Jesus

Christ. I need to educate a church staff on the concepts of discipleship, help equip them to disciple others, and bring staff unification around discipleship.

The need for discipleship in the megachurch is overwhelming, and my heart burns with passion to help; I know I can't do ministry on my own. I need to be a part of a church staff that is passionate about the transformation that discipleship brings. I need to be a part of a church staff that burns with the hunger of seeing God transform people. I want to solve the ministry puzzle of how to help a megachurch church staff increase their understanding and practice of discipleship.

Statement of the Problem

The megachurch model is typically defined as a church with more than 2,000 members with “A willingness to draw upon aspects of popular culture and modern consumerism as delivered by way of charismatic pastors and housed in familiar comfort-inducing settings” (Wade 664). The megachurch model has grown substantially over the last 30 years with a massive effect on the religious landscape in the US (*Hartford Institute for Religion Research*; Grossman). One out of every ten Americans attend a Protestant megachurch on the weekends and a new megachurch emerges on average every one to three days in America (Grossman; Wilson 62). A few reasons for megachurches' growth are cultural factors drawing people to larger gatherings, attendees sharing experiences by word of mouth, and economic factors like megachurches affording better programs and services than smaller churches (Chaves 344; Hunt 1; Johnson 112).

With more people in the seats came financial growth; with financial growth, the opportunity to serve more people; with more people, came the need to hire more church

staff. Some staff spots are taken by theologically trained pastors. However, the majority of megachurch staff is not theologically trained (*Hartford Institute for Religion Research*). Megachurch pastors are now seeing hollow results from the megachurch model and are trying to find ways to change their massive number of attendees into disciples of Jesus Christ (Brierley; Hailes; Rowell). If a church staff, who are the people with their boots on the ground, have a high-level commitment to discipleship, it can benefit a congregation in terms of: an increase in discipleship class participation, growth in church attendance, call and development of pastors, and more laity that desire to teach discipleship (Dingwell 80). The challenge is how t an almost entirely theologically untrained megachurch staff increase in their understanding of discipleship?

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior, among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars.

Research Questions

The following questions will guide the research and learning based on the problem detailed in the aforementioned section.

Research Question #1

Before the four teaching sessions on discipleship, what were First Church staff members' knowledge, attitude and behaviors regarding discipleship?

Research Question #2

After the four teaching sessions on discipleship, what were First Church staff members' knowledge, attitude and behaviors regarding discipleship?

Research Question #3

What did the participants identify as the most significant part of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to their growth in discipleship?

Rationale for the Project

This project is important biblically because discipleship is the central task Jesus gives to the church. Christ gave the Great Commission to the church to go out and make disciples of all the nations. In the New Testament, five passages could be referred to as the Great Commission (Matt. 28.18-20; Mark 16.14-18; Luke 24.44-49; John 20.19-23; Acts 1.4-8). The Matthew account is the most well-known:

And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’ (Matt. 28.18-20)

Understanding the meaning and implication of the Commission is crucial to accomplishing the mission God has given the church (Tucker 90). Jesus’ own strategy for discipling “all nations” was to send and empower his small band of disciples to go and make other disciples. This is why a megachurch should focus its attention on discipling its staff. Focusing on a few makes it possible to reach the many for Christ. The potentiality of a megachurch taking the Great Commission seriously could create an incredible movement for God’s kingdom.

This project is important because a healthy ecclesiology will gather people not just to impart spiritual goods and services, but to transform them into a sign and foretaste of the kingdom of God. The megachurch uses a ministry strategy called the attractional model. The attractional model is a ministry paradigm where the greatest and highest

purpose of the church is to evangelize unbelievers and to get people through the doors of the church; an undertow of this assumption is that growing numbers are an indication of God's favor on the ministry (Challies; Wilson 64). The attractional model encourages megachurch staffs to produce numbers, but not tend to the spiritual wellbeing of the church community. Discipleship training will help a megachurch staff nurture a healthy congregation.

This project is also important because megachurches are hugely influential in the US. Developing a discipleship culture in megachurches has the potential to impact the entire Church in America. Megachurches have risen to prominence in cities and communities around the country. The number of megachurches increased from 350 in 1990, to over 600 in 2000. Now, nearly 1650 megachurches can be found in the US (*Hartford Institute for Religion Research*). The megachurch platform is a unique way to reach many with the gospel, but gathering people for a gospel message is not enough. An invitation to follow Jesus is required, along with an intentional plan in place for helping people live that out in daily life. Staff trained in discipleship formation and strategy will be able to formulate, run, and execute a discipleship ministry plan.

Finally, churches should take this project seriously because tending to the spiritual formation of church staff is the first step toward impacting the larger congregation.

Spiritual formation is vital for any Christian because it brings them towards wholeness, as

M. Robert Mulholland Jr. explains:

Only God can liberate us from our bondage, heal our brokenness, cleanse us from our uncleanness and bring life out of our deadness. We cannot do it by ourselves. Thus, spiritual formation is the experience of being shaped by God toward wholeness. (20)

Having the opportunity to learn about discipleship will help megachurch staff members tend to their relationship with God and have an impact on the larger congregation.

Definition of Key Terms

Megachurch is considered a congregation with a minimum average weekly attendance of 2000 or more people in its worship services; counting all the people in all of its worship locations.

Discipleship is a relationship centered on Jesus Christ, that incorporates spiritual disciplines and allows for mentorship, feedback, and accountability from other Christians. Discipling involves elements of Christian education, spiritual formation, and Christian counseling, as well as the skill of coaching. Intrinsic to being disciplined is the commitment to pass on what a person has learned to another.

Teachings on discipleship refers to researcher-led, participatory instructional sessions that explored aspects of biblical and historic discipleship, spiritual disciplines, spiritual formation, missiology, and spiritual goal setting with staff members of First Church.

Seminars are four ninety-minute meetings that participants attended for the teachings on discipleship.

Growth includes the enhanced knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding discipleship experienced by participants in the staff seminars.

Knowledge is the ability of participants to identify their unknown and known personal understanding about discipleship.

Attitudes is the ability of participants to identify their old and new thoughts, feelings, and point of view regarding discipleship.

Behaviors is the ability of participants to identify their old and new practices regarding discipleship.

Delimitations

For this project, I selected to work with the First Church staff who are considered a part of the ministry staff at First Church. My delimitations are both strategic and pragmatic. Strategically, the ministry staff had the most capacity to influence congregational culture because of the contact they have with parishioners. The ministry staff interfaces with laity in need of direct ministry by teaching and communicating with them, as well as recruits, trains, and works alongside volunteers. The ministry staff trains volunteers to lead Sunday school classes, Bible studies, connect groups, children's events, student events, special needs ministry, local outreach ministries, hospital visitations and congregational care, evangelistic events, and more. Pragmatically, I limited the participants to the ministry staff to keep the number of participants to a reasonable scope.

First Church employees, who work in the administration department, are not considered part of the ministry staff. First Church employs others who are not involved in the execution of strategy and programming; nursery workers, custodians, etc. This study did not include these staff members because they did not regularly train, teach, or communicate with people in the congregation.

Review of Relevant Literature

This section presents the relevant literature that was useful in researching how the First Church staff could increase in their understanding of discipleship. This project consulted different types of literature to gain insights; biblical, theological, discipleship, spiritual formation, adult learning theory, leading organizations for change, and goal theory. This review of literature is divided into sections based on the contents of this project. The following is a review of literature.

Biblical and Theological Literature

Having a biblical and theological foundation for discipleship was vital for First Church staff members. For biblical and theological literature, I relied on varying commentaries, dictionaries, and authors to set the groundwork for understanding discipleship. For historical study during the first century, I researched *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geographical, Political History, Social, Cultural and Religious Life and Institutions*. Noteworthy commentaries were from *The International Commentary on the New Testament*; and others, from authors John R. W. Stott, and British scholar Donald Guthrie. I gained additional insights from Protestant scholar Millard J. Erickson's classic work *Christian Theology*. I consulted one of the most notable writers on discipleship in the twentieth century, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For a more recent take on biblical discipleship, I explored Mike Breen's *Creating a Discipleship Culture*.

Spiritual Discipline Literature

Spiritual disciplines are crucial to a disciple's relationship with God. In Christian theology, although varying across traditions, spiritual disciplines are a means of grace—

how God sustains and empowers a Christian. To have a basic understanding about the importance of spiritual disciplines in the life of a disciple was vital for the First Church staff. Over the last forty years, American theologian Richard Foster has been a thought leader in spiritual disciplines in contemporary times. I reviewed his classic work *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Marjorie J. Thompson is a scholar, author, teacher, and speaker in the area of Christian spirituality. I reviewed Thompson's *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. I also reviewed books from American Christian theologian and expert in spiritual formation Dallas Willard.

Spiritual Formation and Christian Education Literature

Understanding the image a disciple is being formed into, as well as the systemic problems with educating disciples, was vital for the First Church staff. I spent time with English Scholar and Anglican bishop, N.T. Wright's book *After you Believe: Why Christian Character Matters*. I explored *Desiring the Kingdom* by scholar, James K. A. Smith. Smith is noted for his theological critique on the church and culture. Wright and Smith criticize Christian education in churches and Christian higher education institutions. I also consulted journal and dissertations that speak to spiritual formation and Christian education.

Adult Learning Theory and Discipleship Literature

I spent four sessions teaching the First Church staff about discipleship, thus a crucial part of my project was understanding how adults learn. The researcher spent time researching the works of seminal authors in andragogy, as developed by Dr. Malcolm S. Knowles, and transformative learning theory, as developed by Dr. Jack Mezirow. I

reviewed work from scholar, former Harvard professor and prolific author of Adult education, Dr. Stephen Brookfield. I found leading Christian thinkers who show where adult learning theory, Christian education, faith formation and discipleship intersect: Dr. Christopher Beard, Dr. Julie Gorman, Dr. Ellen Marmon, Dr. Rhonda McEwen, Dr. Kathleen M. Young. These authors were crucial to the researcher's pedagogy.

Leading Change Literature

Since I intended to bring change to the knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of First Church staff, literature on leading change in organizations was vital for this project. A seminal author on leading change is John P. Kotter. Kotter is a professor in leadership at Harvard Business School, and has been a thought leader in business, leadership, and change theory. Kotter is commonly known for his eight steps for leading change in organizations. I also studied the work of Dr. Kenneth W. Thomas, Professor of Management, regarding intrinsic motivations for employees that lead to change.

Goal Setting Literature

I concluded that goal setting was important for organizational and spiritual change in an individual. I studied seminal authors in goal setting theory, Dr. Edwin A. Locke and Dr. Gary P. Latham. Locke and Latham are internationally known for research on goal setting. Their research on goal setting theory was recently ranked first in importance among 73 management theories (Locke). I studied works from experts of business strategy and management Dr. Donald N. Sull, Dr. Charles Spinosa and Dutch management scholar and psychoanalyst Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, to help motivate employees to achieve challenging goals.

Research Methodology

This project relied on quantitative and qualitative research mix methods design to evaluate the degree in which First Church staff members grew in their knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship as a result of their participation in a researcher-designed intervention, consisting of four 90-minute seminars on the topic of discipleship. Given the research questions that guided my study, the best way to gather data for this project was through Web-based surveys, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews with First Church staff.

An online survey provided a quantitative measure of the participants' changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a result of their participation in the discipleship seminars. After the seminars, a Focus Group and several Interviews gleaned qualitative data regarding changes in those same areas. I then analyzed the quantitative and qualitative data to uncover the most significant changes the participants experienced as a result of the intervention.

Type of Research

This project was categorized as an intervention with a mixed methods design. I applied a combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methodology to assist in gathering how the participants were changing in their knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a result of their participation in the discipleship seminars. Surveys, focus groups, and interviews yielded comprehensive and the most representative information.

Participants

I used purposive sampling to choose participants because they met the criteria and have the attributes that were essential to this project (Sensing 83). This purposive

sampling of participants met three criteria. First, the participants met the criteria of working on a megachurch staff. Second, the staff members worked directly with volunteer leaders of ministry departments. Finally, the staff members taught, equipped, and communicated regularly with laity. The participant criteria increased the probability of creating discipleship change in a megachurch. These attributes and the use of purposive sampling were essential to the purpose of the research project.

Participants included 10 First Church staff members with the above research criteria. They ranged in age from 19-64, eight were women, two were male participants, and all represented a range of levels of employment, from full-time to part-time. Only one participant had any formal theological training. All First Church ministry staff members were eligible, I invited ten by personal conversation and email to participate in the study. All ten that responded became participants in the research project.

The staff members participating have worked for First Church from one to fourteen years. There are six director level staff and four lower-level staff. All staff members had their first significant experience working in ministry at First Church. The staff cover the following ministries in the church: Congregational Care, Adult Discipleship, Children Ministry, Student Ministry, Outreach Ministry, and Special Needs Ministry.

Instrumentation

The researcher-designed Discipleship Pre-test Survey (DPR) collected quantitative data on participants' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors before the discipleship teaching sessions. The researcher-designed Discipleship Post-test Survey (DPO) collected quantitative data on participants' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors

after the discipleship teaching sessions. All participants participated in both the DPR and DPO.

The Discipleship Focus Group (DFG) collected qualitative data from the participants. A research assistant led the focus group which met after the teaching sessions. The DFG allowed me to discover themes and patterns from participants' experience of the teaching sessions and what they identified as the most significant part of the discipleship experience in a group setting.

The Discipleship Semi-Structured Interviews (DW) collected qualitative data from individual participants. A researcher-assistant conducted the DW. The DW allowed me to discover themes and patterns from individual participants' experience of the teaching sessions and what they identified as the most significant part of the discipleship experience.

Data Collection

I administered the DPR and the DPO using a researcher-designed, Web-based survey to collect quantitative data. The DPR surveys were received and collected before the first session of the teachings (RQ#1). After the last teaching session, the DPO surveys were sent out and collected to measure changes (RQ#2). Both the DPR and DPO were used for all participants. After completion of the final session, I selected the first five participants to respond to the DFG invitation. The DFG's purpose was to collect qualitative data in a group setting (RQ#3). The research assistant conducted three DW in order that I could evaluate the program's effect on the participants in a one-on-one setting (RQ#3). The first three participants to respond to the DW invitation were selected.

Data Analysis

This Ministry Transformation Project is intervention research and incorporated mixed methods research design. The DPR and DPO provided quantitative data while the DFG and DW provided qualitative data. The DPR and DPO were comparatively analyzed using both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (RQ#1, RQ#2). The DFG and DW provided qualitative data organized to generate categories, themes, and patterns (RQ#3). The DPR, DPO, DFG, and DW enabled me to gather quantitative and qualitative data that built theory, generated research for the research questions, and aligned with measuring changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior, among First Church staff members from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship.

I discuss the findings of the study in Chapter 4 and presents conclusions in Chapter 5.

Generalizability

The application of mixed methods that used both qualitative and quantitative data strengthened internal validity and some level of generalizability of the findings. The qualitative component of this study generally hindered the generalizability of the research. The homogeneous purposeful sample, the small number of participants in the study, their similar geographic concentration, the uniqueness of a megachurch setting and various positions on staff did not allow me to make broad generalizations. However, strenuous effort ensured consistency in the research process, consequently increasing internal validity. The definitiveness of the homogeneous sampling group did provide generalizability among megachurch staffs who fit the criteria outlined for the sampling group.

Although the study was delimited to megachurch staff in a Midwestern area, any megachurch within a North American context could potentially benefit from the findings of this study. This study is likely applicable to large churches and any ministry staff that seeks to create or enhance a discipleship culture throughout the congregation. The call to discipleship applies to all ages, languages, and cultures, making this project at least partially transferrable to other ministry settings as well.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 reviews the various literature pertaining to theological, biblical, spiritual formation and leadership frameworks for helping church staff grow in their discipleship. Chapter 3 presents an examination and explanation of the project design, methods of research, and data analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the data collected in the study. Finally, in Chapter 5 I discuss my conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

In this literature review, I lay the groundwork for my field research. I explore biblical and theological foundations with a view toward an understanding of the defining characteristics of the discipleship experience. I evaluate discipleship models, spiritual formation, adult learning theory, leading organizations for change, and goal theory, for their potential to enrich and enhance discipleship for church staff. I seek to identify key contextual and cultural factors that shape a learning organization that may promote discipleship.

Biblical Foundations

This following will explore biblical components of discipleship. It will survey discipleship in the Hebrew scriptures through terminology, the prophets, and the role of wisdom. The following will view discipleship through the lens of the Gospels, the book of Acts, and the relationship of Paul and Timothy.

Discipleship in the Hebrew Scriptures

This section explores the idea of discipleship in the Hebrew scriptures. Although the term “disciple” is scarce, much of the New Testament idea of discipleship is built on the foundation of the Hebrew Scripture’s culture, prophets, and teachings.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the word “disciple” is not used often. Conceptual variations that figuratively and literally mean a person’s way of life are prominent in the Hebrew scriptures (Brand et al. 1658). Significant Hebrew words that convey the lifestyle of discipleship are *yāsar*, “to instruct,” and *lāmad*, “to teach,” as they both strongly imply

a change in behavior as a result of instruction (Byrley). The Hebrew word “torah” originally meant “instruction” or “direction” and, as the concept developed, the word took on the meaning of “law” (Klippenstein and Hodkins).

When the word “disciple” primarily functions in a formation and teaching relationship, it is exclusively used three times, all in the book of Isaiah. The first usage is in Isaiah 8:16, “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples (NRSV).” Based on the first mention of the term “disciple,” a disciple is clearly two things: they are taught by someone or something, and he/she is a follower of their teacher (D. Smith 4).

As to why the word “disciple” would be used so sparingly in the Hebrew scriptures, one reason may be that the people of Israel were encultured to be learners. Looking back to Genesis, God commands Abraham to pass on what he has learned to every generation, “No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice. . .” (Gen. 18:19). God made clear to the people of Israel that they were God’s, should live as God’s, and had a responsibility to represent God in the world.

“As the law of God was revealed, the people began to understand that they were required to learn what was essential in order to actively follow Jehovah, the holy God. God’s plan for humankind from the beginning of creation was for the men and women to be devoted to him as their source of life and purpose” (Whittaker 78). From the beginning, the Hebrew community knew they were chosen by God to fulfill his revealed will (Cho 30).

The Concept of Teacher-Disciple Relationship in the Hebrew Scriptures

Now, a survey for teaching and learning relationships builds on the groundwork of the Hebrew scriptures' discipleship discussion.

Prophets

The prophets have an important role in the Hebrew scriptures. Scholar Edward J. Young says that a prophet was one who spoke a message from God, "Upon the basis of the Old Testament usage, (the prophet) was a speaker who declared the word that God had given him" (*My Servants, the Prophets* 60). The prophets were also a divinely appointed accountability mechanism for kings and priests, "While a king is a human representation of authority placed over the people, the role of the priests enabled the people of God to come before God. The link between these two groups of people is the prophets. The prophets are the mouthpieces of God, informing His people if they were fulfilling their commitment to God" (Lam Beng 35). The prophets were God's representative to hold kings and those with power accountable.

A key prophetic Teacher-Disciple relationship in the Hebrew scriptures is seen with Elijah and Elisha. Elijah and Elisha shared a teaching and learning relationship that passed on God's mission from one generation to the next. Elisha called Elijah as "father," establishing an intimate discipleship relationship between the two (Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World* 59). After following Elijah, Elisha eventually takes over Elijah's role as prophet of the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 2).

A band of prophets can be found in 1 and 2 Kings. They are called the "sons of the prophets" who were from the Northern Kingdom and primarily associated with Elijah. Scholars disputed if they should be considered disciples of Elijah and Elisha. The sons of the prophets were assistants to Elijah and Elisha and their role was to make

known God's will during a time of national crisis (Lam Beng 36). Early church historian Josephus believed that a discipleship relationship existed between the band of prophets and Elisha (Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World* 58) Scholar E. Young agrees that a discipleship relationship could be used to describe their relationship with Elijah and Elisha:

Though the word "son" is not intended to express actual sonship, but rather a close connection such as might be termed discipleship. The prophets were sons in the sense that they stood in a close intimate relationship with the master prophets, Elijah and Elisha." (*My Servants, the Prophets* 93)

Wilkins would agree that the "sons of the prophets" shared a relationship, but notes that the use of the word "discipleship" should be cautioned. For Wilkins, the band of prophets already were called and prophesying before their relationship with Elisha. "One must not imply that discipleship means that these 'sons' were in training to become prophets. It appears that some of them had been prophets for quite some time; they were far from novices (*Discipleship in the Ancient World* 61)." For Wilkins, the band of prophets accepted Elisha's authority and influence, but a father and son discipleship metaphor may go beyond the meaning originally intended. The Elijah-Elisha relationship and the "sons of the prophets" had a form of teacher-discipleship relationship among the prophets in the Hebrew scriptures.

The Role of Wisdom and Discipleship

Passing wisdom from one generation to the next is important in the Hebrew scriptures and connects with the concept of discipleship, even though the term is not used. James Crenshaw explains the general goal of wisdom in antiquity:

The goal of wisdom was the formation of character and to make sense of life's anomalies. Instruction, which took place initially in a family setting, focused on

individuals rather than society in general. Mothers and fathers strove to shape moral character in their children by offering them the benefit of their accumulated insights. Their advice was traditional, conservative, and, for the most part, positive.” (Crenshaw introduction)

Wisdom was how one applied God’s teaching to daily life. Wisdom was passed down from one generation to the next, indicating discipleship characteristics.

Wisdom training was both a part of the ancient culture and formalized in some settings. From this viewpoint, wisdom for Wilkins, “requires master-disciple relationships for its acquisition and use, but the types of relationships vary in form and function” (*Discipleship in the Ancient World* 91). For instance, wisdom training could be found within families, in informal father and son relationships, training elders for making judicial decisions at the city gate, and with wisdom training for advisers in courts (Wilkins, *Discipleship in the Ancient World* 91). These relationships can be viewed in the Hebrew scriptures, “There are evidences of wise people in the Old Testament and these wise people needed to train the younger generation to ensure continuity. Such relationships can be described as one between disciple maker and his disciple; they existed in different forms and had different functions . . . The relationships were needed to pass down the teaching of the Torah and its application and thus, a learning relationship existed” (Lam Beng 38). Wisdom training has many similarities to discipleship.

In the Hebrew scriptures, discipleship relationships and characteristics are present. They are seen in the relationship of Elijah and Elisha and the “sons of the prophets.” Discipleship can also be seen in the role of wisdom training and its desire to pass on wisdom to the next generation in families and formalized training. Discipleship

characteristics and relationships are in the Hebrew scriptures regardless of the lack of terminology.

Discipleship in the New Testament

The following is a survey on discipleship in the New Testament, including a study of the word “disciple,” discipleship in the Gospels and Acts, Paul and Timothy as a biblical example of discipleship, and biblical models of discipleship.

The Greek word for disciples is *mathetes* and generally means “learner” (Mounce 385). In the New Testament, “disciple” becomes almost a technical term for the followers of Jesus (Brand et al. 425; Mounce 385).” The relationship of Rabbi and disciple, in rabbinic Judaism in New Testament times, was one of devotion:

In rabbinic Judaism the term “disciple” referred to one who was committed to the interpretations of Scripture and religious tradition given him by the master or rabbi. Through a process of learning which would include a set meeting time and such pedagogical methods as question and answer, instruction, repetition, and memorization, the disciple would become increasingly devoted to the master and the master’s teachings. In time, the disciple would likewise pass on the traditions to others. (Brand et al. 425)

Discipleship in the New Testament was a relationship of closeness between teacher and disciple.

The idea of being a disciple is not a term exclusively used for Jesus’ followers in the New Testament. John the Baptist, Moses, and the Pharisees are all mentioned as having disciples (John 1:35; John 9:28; Matt. 22:16). The overall discipleship process involved a teacher with committed students who went through a period of formation; this was integrated into the New Testament Jewish culture. Discipleship formation reached beyond a student watching and learning; it was an invitation into practice. New

Testament disciples are those who actively practice what they are taught by following, learning, and watching their teacher (Brand et al. 425; D. Smith 5).

Discipleship in the Gospels and Acts

The following is a review of discipleship in the Gospels and the book of Acts. It begins with a brief word study of “disciple,” and then discipleship as particularly portrayed by the relationships of Jesus and his disciples and the beginning of the early church.

The first-time that disciple is used in the New Testament is in the Gospel of Matthew. It is used in preface of Jesus’ teaching, the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:1, “When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him.” Jesus having his disciples around him is a common biblical feature of the Gospels.

In the Gospels and Acts, the word “disciple” is used in broad and specific ways to refer to Jesus’ followers. In the Gospels and Acts, “disciple” is often used to refer to the twelve specifically selected persons who were appointed as apostles (Matt. 10:1-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:12-16; Acts 1:13, 26). Disciples also referred to a larger group of followers that included men and women of a variety of backgrounds (Brand et al. 425; Freedman 208; Lexham Bible Dictionary). Finally, the book of Acts uses the term “disciple” to refer generally to all those who believe in the risen Christ (Brand et al. 426).

The Gospel of Matthew records the calling of Jesus’ first disciples. Matthew writes,

As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.’ Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21 As he went from there, he saw two other brothers,

James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. (Matt. 4:18-22)

In the Gospel of Mark, at the beginning of his public ministry, Jesus chose twelve men to be his close companions and disciples, calling them to be with him (Mark 3:14) and to follow him. In the Gospel of John, some ask to become Jesus' disciples (John 1:35-42), moving forward Jesus takes the initiative. Jesus' form of discipleship in the Gospels is rooted by invitation. Typically, disciples in antiquity selected their own teachers, but Jesus invited his disciples to "follow Me" (Luke 5:27) (Brand et al. 425; Pickett 29).

In the Gospels, the call to follow Jesus is an example of responding to his message: repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Taylor 23). Jesus initiates the invitation and apart from Jesus' call, no recognizable motive is seen for one to become a disciple (Freedman 208). Those who hear and respond to Jesus' call become his disciples (Wilkins, *Following the Master* ch. 11). The call was gracious, enabling the disciples to respond.

Discipleship is an important feature of the book of Acts. "Any intelligent reading of the book of Acts must embrace the idea of discipleship as its backdrop (Cho 8)." Acts gives a well-ordered account of how the early Church began to fulfill the Great Commission, through the power of the Spirit, while showing the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ carried on through his disciples.

The word disciple occurs in multiple places in the New Testament and specifically in Acts. Disciple occurs about two-hundred and seventy times in the New Testament while the noun form occurs at least twenty-eight times in the book of Acts.

Frequency and continuity of word occurrences in the New Testament can show the importance of a term, such as discipleship (Cho 9). The book of Acts records the continuity of Jesus ministry and mission through the power of the Holy Spirit and the work of his disciples. Wilkins says:

The small band of disciples around Jesus during the darkest moments exploded to thousands in Jerusalem within days of Pentecost and soon became countless throughout the Roman world. The disciples were now empowered by the Holy Spirit to proclaim boldly in the remotest parts of the earth the Gospel message that Jesus had inaugurated in Israel. And these disciples were now joined together to form the church, the body of their risen Master, Jesus Christ. Jesus called individuals to discipleship, yet responding to that call brought disciples into a community of faith. Luke is the only evangelist to extend his story from the time of Jesus' earthly ministry to the time of his ascended ministry. As Luke continues his story from the Gospel to the book of Acts, he allows us to see the crucial necessity of the community for discipleship. Jesus no longer was with his disciples physically, yet he promised to be with them always (Mt 28:20). Through the Spirit, the community would now provide the fellowship, encouragement, edification, and mutuality necessary for following the Master in the new era. (*Following the Master* ch. 13)

While Jesus was on earth, the Holy Spirit empowered him to preach, heal, cast out demons, and perform miraculous signs (Acts 10:38). Jesus told the disciples that when the Spirit came, they would be empowered to be effective witnesses for him. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

The book of Acts accents the Spirit's role in the disciples' empowerment and witness for Christ. The Spirit empowered the disciples to be more than they could be by their own abilities. Scholar J. Oswald Sanders said, "It seems strange that although the twelve apostles had enjoyed three years of concentrated individual instruction under the peerless Teacher, their lives were characterized more by weakness and failure than by power and success. Pentecost changed all that; they were filled with the Spirit" (190).

After Pentecost in the book of Acts, the disciples were changed and empowered in their lives, ministry, and witness for Jesus Christ.

In Acts, the empowerment the Spirit saw the disciples expand the church and reach into the concerns of the world; Sanders says:

There is a tendency to think of the ministry of the Spirit only in connection with spiritual activities. But a study of the book of Acts reveals that He was involved in the social and racial problems His disciples faced, as well as in their ecclesiastical and economic concerns. Jesus required the anointing of the Spirit and power, not only for vocal ministry but also for going about doing good. (193)

Scholar Max Turner adds that the Spirit's empowerment went beyond the disciples' ministry and expansion of the church, but was about the mission of serving the world: "the Spirit is an empowering to serve the church as much as it is to serve its mission to outsiders, even if Luke's account of the expansion of Christianity inevitably gives more space to the latter" (qtd. in Palma ch. 10). The empowerment of the Spirit for the disciples is meant to both expand the church and serve the world.

Discipleship is an important feature in the book of Acts as seen through the continuity of the word "disciple," and the embodiment of Jesus' ministry through the power of the Spirit in the disciples. The Spirit's arrival allowed the disciples to be everything necessary to carry on Jesus' ministry and mission and showed how the early church began to fulfill the Great Commission.

Jesus' endgame for the discipleship process in the Gospels and Acts was by directing his disciples to go and make disciples of the nations, to teach them what Jesus had taught them (Barry et al.). The invitation process thus starts all over, with the disciples casting out the invitation to others to become followers of Christ.

Paul and Timothy as a Biblical Example of Discipleship

The following explores the discipleship relationship between the Apostle Paul and Timothy. Their relationship shows important and timeless components inherent to discipleship: closeness of relationship, the importance of discipling and choosing whom to disciple, passing on orthodoxy from one generation to the next, how to carry God's mission with integrity, and reliance on the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament model of discipleship can be seen through the relationship of the Apostle Paul and Timothy. When Paul speaks of Timothy in the epistles, he does so repeatedly with a sense of a spiritual father/son connection (Phil. 2: 19-24, 1 Tim. 1:2, 2 Tim. 2:1). The New International Commentary indicates that Paul's use of the repetition of themes was a common teaching method (Towner 263). This repetition indicates there was a clear closeness of relationship between Paul and Timothy; of which discipleship was at the core.

Timothy, whom Paul loves, is the future of the church; whoever Timothy picks to be the generation of leaders after him is invaluable. Paul intentionally brings clarity about Timothy to the original readers in order for Timothy to carry on Paul's ministry and do so in a faithful manner (Towner 264). In 2 Timothy, Paul affirms the transition of his ministry to Timothy, for the churches:

You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus; and what you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well. Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No one serving in the army gets entangled in everyday affairs; the soldier's aim is to please the enlisting officer. And in the case of an athlete, no one is crowned without competing according to the rules. It is the farmer who does the work who ought to have the first share of the crops. Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things. (2 Tim. 2: 1-7)

In vs. 2, Paul mentions that Timothy has heard Paul teach; this idea is reiterated in chapter 1 as well. The practice of Timothy listening to Paul teaching appears important

especially regarding transferring the faith to others. 2 Timothy 1:13 speaks about a “standard of sound teaching.” The wording mimics the idea of striking coins in ancient times. A pattern would be engraved on a hard metal and then used to transfer the pattern to a softer metal or coin, implying conformity to apostolic standards (Davis). This idea is that there was no need for anyone to invent new standards. The teachings that Jesus Christ passed down through the apostles, should be passed down until Christ returns.

Paul is affirming that his teachings are the teachings Timothy should live by and teach, alone. Timothy needs to find trustworthy people who will allow him to transfer the apostolic pattern to be imprinted on their life, as well as a willingness to pass that pattern onto others. Paul gives Timothy two criteria for picking people to pass on the faith to: trustworthiness and people who will pass it on to others (2 Tim 2:2). Thus, people are disciples if they embrace the apostolic teachings and lifestyle, and produce others who embrace it as well. The biblical rationale is that a characteristic of a disciple is if they produce new disciples.

The soldier metaphor is used to help a disciple understand how to frame family and recreation when serving God (2 Tim. 2:3-4). At first reading, Paul may seem to be demeaning or discouraging disciples to involve themselves with any aspect of ordinary or “civilian” life. Donald Guthrie believes that nothing is wrong with the civilian affairs that Paul speaks about, as long as they do not entangle the soldier; balance for a disciple is necessary and good (122). The thrust of the verse is that soldiers/disciples must remember that they have been enlisted, whether they are with family or at recreation. This appears to be a grace-filled and realistic way of looking at discipleship while holding to one’s responsibilities.

Paul speaks to Timothy about the rules for athletes (2 Tim. 2:5). In antiquity, the Olympic games had rules both before and during the games (Lea and Hayne 204). Athletes had to state an oath that they completed the required ten months of training before the games to qualify to play and thus ensure a high standard of competition (Guthrie 123; Lea and Hayne 204). Paul is impressing the importance of personal integrity in discipleship upon Timothy. If Timothy lacked self-discipline, his life and ministry would be disqualified. Timothy must stay faithful and trustworthy to hold the Gospel message. It will take diligence for disciples to keep their integrity, like an athlete training for competition to win a prize.

Paul gives another metaphor on being a good disciple by telling Timothy that a farmer “*ought* to have the first share of crops” (2 Tim. 2:6). Tension appears to exist where the farmer could not necessarily choose to have the first share. Contextually, the farmer in the metaphor likely was a tenant farmer who leased the land (Spencer 62). The previous athletic metaphor has an individualistic tone, a “shared crop” is a reminder of the communal element of God’s work for a disciple. Timothy will not be able to do God’s work on his own. A disciple is always a part of a community with a shared purpose.

Paul encourages Timothy to “think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in all things (2 Tim. 2:7).” If Timothy brings what Paul says to prayer, Paul believes that the Lord will reveal truth to Timothy. This shows that Paul believes that his teachings are not of his own; they derive from God (Stott 28). A disciple always must rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Paul reminded Timothy of important biblical components of discipleship.

Timothy needs: to know that what Paul taught is absolutely true; to find people who are strictly open to apostolic interpretation and are willing to pass down the message to others; to carry the mission with integrity; and to rely on the Holy Spirit. The discipleship components Paul shared with Timothy are vital for a New Testament biblical discipleship.

A Biblical Model of Discipleship

Numerous scholars have attempted to articulate a biblical model of discipleship. The following explores important overall aspects of discipleship found in the biblical text. A model of discipleship revolves around three elements: discipleship is relational, discipleship is a way of life, and discipleship is about knowing God.

Discipleship is relational. The discipleship process is centered in a vertical relationship with God that is in touch with the horizontal connections that God is working in and through surrounding people; discipleship is relational. In biblical discipleship, the teacher-disciple relationship was one that involved closeness of relationship. Jesus portrayed a closeness with his disciples (Breen 87; Köstenberger 108). When the teacher and disciple accept their roles with one another, it becomes the starting point for a relationship that will eventually transcend boundaries of time and space (Köstenberger 108). The biblical model of discipleship is one of a relationship that involves closeness.

This connection of close relationships and passing on of education was ingrained in the first-century Jewish community, and started in the family. The Jewish community during Jesus' time, from its public institutions to the individual families, developed into an educated and centered society with an emphasis on the education of children (Safrai

and Stern 946). The study of the Torah was not only done to learn proper conduct and actions for children, it was an act of worship which brought the student closer to God (Cordeiro 170; Safrai and Stern 945). A way of life passed on through family relationships and was a part of the Jewish first-century culture.

A word to describe closeness of relationship between teacher and disciple would be “imitation.” In the first century’s biblical world, a disciple actively imitated both the life and teaching of the master. This idea of imitation was understood as a standard practice between teacher and student:

Learning by itself did not make a pupil, and he did not grasp the full significance of his teacher’s learning in all its nuances except through close association with his rich and profound mind. The disciples accompanied their sage as he went to teach, when he sat in the law court, when he was engaged in the performance of meritorious deeds such as helping the poor, redeeming slaves, collecting doweries for poor brides, burying the dead, etc. The pupil took his turn in preparing the common meal and catering for the general needs of the group. He performed personal services for his teacher, observed his conduct and was a respectful, loving, humble companion. Some laws could not be studied theoretically or merely discussed, but could only be learned by serving the teacher. (Safrai and Stern 694)

The relationship between teacher and students was inherently close. The disciple would have had to study both the teachings and the lifestyle of the rabbi. To follow a rabbi meant living with the rabbi, sharing meals with him, praying with him, and taking part in the rabbi’s daily life (Breen 32; Sri). The rabbi’s entire life was meant to be a guide for the disciple. The rabbi’s practices and lifestyle should reflect a study of God’s Word. Further, the disciples would not only study the text of Scripture, they would also study the text seen in the life of their rabbi (Breen 32; Sri). The teacher-student relationship was based on a close relationship.

Discipleship is a way of life. Discipleship is a call to devotion to Christ and his commands, a new way of life. Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes discipleship in this way:

Follow me, run behind me! That is all. To follow in his steps is something which is void of all content. It gives us no intelligible program for a way of life, no goal or ideal to strive after. It is not a cause which human calculations might deem worthy of our devotion, even the devotion ourselves. . .Discipleship means adherence to Christ, and, because, Christ is the object of that adherence, it must take the form of discipleship. (59)

For Bonhoeffer, the core of discipleship is following Jesus Christ in a new way of life. This adherence to a new way of life was not blind or inconsequential for Bonhoeffer. It is leaving behind one's desire for worldly gains, to be a whole-hearted devoted follower of Christ (177). It was a shift from loving the world, to loving the people in the world with God's love. For Bonhoeffer, it is a change in how one views the people in the world; a change in relationships (98, 258).

In the first century, being a disciple was not about regurgitating material or ascending to mastery of a rabbi's ideas or discourse. The goal of discipleship was for the student to discover and embody a new way of life through watching his Rabbi—the way he prayed, studied, taught, served, and lived out his everyday relationship with God (Barna 17; Breen 140; Sri). Discipleship change was beyond mastering rabbinic thought, it occurred when the student began to live the same way as the Rabbi.

Jesus was serious about his disciples following his way of life. He assumes the role of teacher who instructs his students both through words and actions, protects them from harm, and provides for their needs (Köstenberger 112). Jesus' model of the discipleship relationship in the first century has a dynamic of give and take. Jesus invites the disciples to "Come, follow me," while challenging them to be more. Discipleship

author Mike Breen calls this the invitation and challenge methodology of Jesus' discipleship:

Time and time again in the Gospels, we see Jesus functioning as a classic horse-whisperer, inviting his followers into an intimate relationship with him while also initiating a direct challenge to behaviors he knew were either wrong or unhealthy. He drew his disciples closer, loved them, but also gave them the opportunity to accept the responsibilities of discipleship. (18)

Jesus takes on this role masterfully, while having a set of expectations for his disciples. The disciples do their part of the role by being faithful followers, including the performance of menial tasks and continuing their master's teachings (Köstenberger 112). By Jesus and his disciples both fulfilling the parts of their roles, a discipleship dynamic occurs through their close relationship, resulting in a new way of life.

Discipleship is about knowing God. Knowing God is an essential component for a biblical model of discipleship. Often, people confuse knowing God and knowing about God. Knowing about God has more to do with religious thinking and inclinations. Scholar Jon Mark Ruthven believes that traditional human religion avoids what Scripture emphasizes: communicating directly and intimately with God (215). The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians:

Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death. (3:7-10)

The Apostle Paul wrote not of knowing about God, but actually knowing God. Paul conveys that he knew God in an intimate and experiential way. The way that Paul

writes about his knowledge of God is vastly different from a traditional religious understanding of knowing about God (Fenlason 28). A person can have intellectual knowledge about God, practice religion and morality without knowing God. Scholar J. I. Packer believes that a little knowledge of God is worth more than a great deal of knowledge about God (26). Paul shows for a disciple that knowing God goes beyond intellectual knowledge.

This is not to say that knowledge of the Scriptures, theology, doctrines, and church history is unbeneficial for a disciple. However, it can come in the way of God when it is not centered on knowing and loving God. Jesus takes up a similar point with the Pharisees in the Gospel of John.

And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form, and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent. You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life. (5:37-40)

The Pharisees were devout in their efforts to know about God. They read, studied, and memorized the scriptures with zeal, yet they did not know God. The extremity of their failed effort is shown by their inability to recognize Jesus as the Messiah.

The biblical idea of knowing God in an intimate and experiential way can be seen in the Hebrew Scriptures as well: “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13). The Lord thought well of David and considered him “a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14). The Psalms exemplify that people were longing to know God, “As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?” (Ps. 42 1-2). The Hebrew Scriptures share the importance of knowing God.

Knowing God is a foundational component of biblical discipleship. It is a move from religion into intimate and experiential knowledge of God. A disciple will come to know God.

Theological Foundations

This section begins with examining what theologians have to say about discipleship. The section then moves to seven theological beliefs that are central to being a disciple. Being a disciple is inherently practical, that is why the seven theological beliefs of this project are the foundation for the conclusion of the chapter's survey of missional theology and disciples reaching the world through mission.

Theologian's thoughts on discipleship. John Wesley, English clergy and leader of the Methodist revival, formed people in discipleship through group bands. Bishop Rueben Job offers an interpretation of John Wesley's general rules for believers; do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. Job believes these rules are what Wesley intended for a faithful way of living as disciples of Jesus Christ (intro).

Bill Hull defines discipleship as "the intentional training of people with accountability on the basis of loving relationships" (32). Hull marks three important characteristics of discipleship: being intentional, accountable, and the need for loving relationships. Hull also considers disciple-making as the heart of local-church ministry (9).

Where Hull places an emphasis on current disciples, Ron Bennett adds the concept of evangelism to discipleship. Evangelism and discipleship must be seen as integral (ch. 2). in which At the Eastbourne Consultation on Discipleship in 1999, where

leaders attended from more than fifty-four countries and representing nearly ninety organizations, Bennett defined discipleship as follows:

While there are valid differences of perspective on what constitutes discipleship, 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. Biblical examples suggest that discipleship is both relational and intentional, both position and process . . . We will pursue the process of discipleship, just as purposefully as the proclamation of the Gospel. Evangelism and discipleship must be seen as integral. (ch. 2)

For Bennett, evangelism and discipleship are inherently woven together. Walter A. Henrichsen would vehemently disagree with Hull's lack of evangelism in his discipleship definition. For Henrichsen, evangelism is paramount to discipleship, "Being a disciple begins with a proper relationship to Jesus Christ and having on your heart what is on His. Making disciples begins with evangelism . . . the objective in the Christian life is to populate heaven and depopulate hell" (ch. 5).

George Barna acknowledges the importance of evangelism, but warns that there is more to discipleship than conversion. Discipleship, for Barna, is about a lifelong journey of transformation with Jesus:

What would happen for God's kingdom if we did not consider our job complete when people confess their sins and say a prayer inviting Jesus to be their redeemer, but would use their new commitments to Christ as a launching pad for a lifelong quest to become individuals who are completely sold out—emotionally, intellectually, physically, spiritually—to the Son of God (2)

Barna appears to be warning about the danger of overemphasis on a one-time evangelism moment as opposed to a lifelong commitment. Discipleship should be "reproducing spiritually mature zealots for Christ" (18). Conversion should be the starting point of a transformed life that comes from walking with Jesus through a discipleship relationship.

John Koessler agrees that transformation is part of discipleship, and adds that consistent transformation is necessary for disciples' witness to the world. Koessler writes, "Discipleship is not primarily a matter of what we do. It is an outgrowth of what we are. Yet if this is true, it is reasonable for others to expect to see proof of the reality of our commitment to Christ reflected in the way we live" (12). Practicality of discipleship is important to Koessler, "Discipleship is faith expressed in practice . . . At its heart, it is a living relationship with the Christ we love, serve and seek to imitate" (24).

Foundational theological beliefs for a disciple. Every disciple should have a clear understanding of who God declares himself to be, and one must also understand oneself (Henrichsen ch. 4). In this section, foundational theological beliefs are shared that are important to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The first theological belief for a disciple in this project is that humanity was created to be in relationship with God. When Adam and Eve sinned, it unleashed depravity into humankind's nature and separation from God occurred (Gen. 3: 8-24). God had a plan that would reconcile humanity with God (Rom. 5:12-21): salvation by means of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. Leading Christians to the likeness of Jesus Christ, back to the image of God, is a radical change in status for humanity (Alexander, et al. 564). Peace and life follow those who strive to live as God desires, while disorder surrounds those who walk in their sinful nature (Gal. 5:16-23). Humanity has the opportunity to be in restored relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

The second theological belief that this project is built on is the idea that all disciples should understand and believe that Jesus is both Christ and Lord (Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9). Bill Hull and Ben Sobels write:

The title 'Christ' invokes the weight of the entire Old Testament, indeed all Scripture. In fact, it's one word that encapsulates all of the Bible's teachings about God's promised savior and everything that the Bible reveals about Jesus. Knowing this gives us insight into two truths. First, when we trace the meaning of the word 'Christ' back to its origins, it takes us back to the Old Testament Hebrew word for 'Messiah.' 'Christ' comes from the Greek New Testament word that translates the Hebraic Old Testament word for 'Messiah.' Both terms literally mean 'the anointed one.'

Of vital importance is the need for a disciple to accept and live under the realization that Jesus is the Christ, God's anointed one. The Gospel of Luke states, "To you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord" (2:11). When people declare that Jesus is the Christ, they are declaring an understanding that all that is written in Scripture is about Jesus and that he has come to fulfill all Scripture (van Fossen 7).

"Lord" is a commonly used word in the Bible that conveys respect and honor. In Jesus' time, the Aramaic word *mari* "my Lord" was coming into use as a title of respect for those in authority (Achtmeier 619). The usage of "Lord" was also on the rise in the eastern part of the Roman Empire for the emperor (620). A disciple must recognize Christ as Savior, but that is merely the beginning. Making Christ lord means disciples give themselves over to God and make decisions based on what Jesus would do for love of God and love of neighbor.

The third theological belief for this project is in order for people to become disciples of Jesus, they must repent of their sin. Repentance is essential for transformation and is a fundamental discipline by which a disciple grows (Conner ch. 4; Foster and Helmers 5; Wynkoop ch. 10). Repentance starts with an acknowledgment of one's wrongdoings and is tied to a person's salvation. The writer of 1 John says, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our

sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1.8-9). Repentance implies that one has discovered that there needs to be a change from what is current to what is now understood to be correct (Van Fossen 8).

The fourth theological belief this project is built on is that a disciple must embrace the process of following Christ. Following Christ involves disciples laying down their lives for Christ, as Christ laid down his life. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me” (8:34). When disciples deny their selfishness, they end up embracing their essential dependence on God (Thompson 96).

The fifth theological belief for this project is the work of the Holy Spirit. The presence of God’s movement is defined by the effective power of the Spirit (Kärkkäinen “Pneumatology” 29; C. Wright 226-27). Being a disciple of Jesus is not a self-effort religion; rather, it is one of power and ability through the Holy Spirit (Barth 140). When a disciple is in an ongoing relationship with the Holy Spirit, one finds it difficult to rest on a religious experience from the past (Cymbala and Schuchmann 41). Philippians states: “For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (2.13). The Spirit is the only one who can produce what a disciple needs: self-discipline, love, and boldness of faith.

Listening to discipleship teachings are important for a disciple’s growth, but by themselves they will not produce transformation. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” Jesus’ physical presence was

important to laying the ground work for the disciples, but they needed the Spirit to produce transformation (Barth 139; Cymbala and Schuchmann 23).

The Apostle Peter listened to the teachings of Christ for three years. He was with Jesus in public and in private, and yet when Peter was confronted with pledging allegiance to Jesus during the crucifixion, all the teachings Peter heard did nothing for him. Even though Peter was trained by the best discipleship teacher, he needed help from the Holy Spirit (Cymbala and Schuchmann 23; Wynkoop ch. 13). After Pentecost, Peter and the disciples went from lives characterized by weakness to power (Sanders 190). The Holy Spirit is crucial in helping transform a disciple.

The sixth theological belief is the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit becomes evidence that a disciple is living a life in God, through Christ. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15.5). A person who is in a daily relationship with God will demonstrate the fruit of God’s Spirit: “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal. 5.22-23).” The fruit of the Spirit is the multifaceted character of one person, Jesus Christ (Ogden 120). Love is seen throughout every part of the fruit. If God is love, what comes from God is love, and those who know God will produce lives full of God’s love. The clearest evidence disciples are living for God is if they are full of love (Ogden 135; Wesley 179). The fruit of the Spirit is evidence that a disciple is living a life in Christ.

The seventh theological belief that this project is built upon is the Kingdom of God. George Eldon Ladd defines the Kingdom of God as “the rule of God. It is God’s reign, the divine sovereignty in action” (11). Jesus said, “But strive first for the kingdom

of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt. 6.33). WhThose who become disciples of Jesus enter into a life that is ruled by God (Van Fossen 11).

Called believers of Jesus Christ conduct themselves in ways that show the values and power of God's kingdom. Disciples of Jesus are to live out the realm of righteousness and the ethical values that pertain to the kingdom; this is the kingdom of God in the present (Erickson 1163; Ladd 86-87). When disciples live out God's kingdom, they show the reign of God by his values and empowerment.

Missional Theology

Being a disciple is inherently practical, that is why the seven theological beliefs build a foundation for missional theology.

Missional theology is practical theology exploring theological curriculum, the missionary nature of God and God's public movement (Conner ch. 2; Okesson 4-5). Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (28:19-20), Jesus sends out his followers into the world to make disciples. Missional theology invites disciples to embrace the context in which they have been sent.

For disciples to find ways to analyze and understand their culture is crucial.

American sociologist James Davison Hunter describes culture as follows:

The essence of culture is found in the hearts and minds of individuals—in what are typically called 'values.' Values are, simply, moral preferences; inclinations toward or conscious attachment to what is good and right and true. Culture is manifested in the ways these values guide actual decisions we individuals make about how to live—that is, how we spend our time; how we work; how we play; whom we marry, and how and why; how we raise our children; whom or what we

worship; and so on. By this view, a culture is made up of the accumulation of values held by the majority of people and the choices made on the basis of those values. (6)

Faithful disciples need to understand the biblical text, yet they must grasp their cultural context; when they do, they foster a state necessary for mission (Conner ch. 2; Hunter 3; Vanhoozer, Anderson, and Sleasman 8).

When theology and culture fail to meet for the disciple, danger presents itself. For Hunter, the divide is historically complicated:

The actual legacy of Christian is ambivalent, to say the least. Willful negligence of moral and spiritual obligations, the abuse of power, and corruption through self-aggrandizement result in the exploitation of other human beings and the destruction of the resources of the social and natural environment. At the same time, there is a record of extraordinary good; of service to all and in honor of God. The ambivalence is what it is. There is much for Christians to be inspired by and much of which repent. (4)

Complication and complexity appear to be distinguishing characteristics when theology and culture fail to meet for disciples.

Missiologist Dr. Greg Okesson says that Hunter has identified a missiological restricted theology (ch. 1). The separation of theology and culture has caused compartmentalization with how a disciple sees the world; hindering missional movement while inviting indoctrination as opposed to transformation. The divide can be characterized by Figure 2.1 below (ch.2).

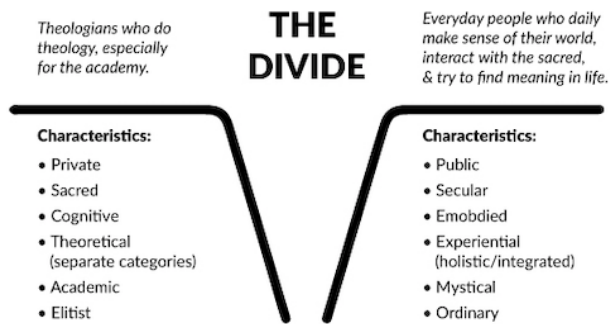


Figure 2.1 The Divide

The result of such dichotomized thinking is an equally dichotomized Christian life for the disciple, thereby developing cultural barriers (C. Wright 11; Howell and Paris 33; N. Wright 29). Disciples who connect biblical study with their cultural context help bridge the divide.

For this project, for disciples to have theological beliefs, that are biblically centered in theory and practice, is vital. Disciples of Jesus Christ demonstrate lives that have an elementary understanding and acceptance of soteriology, embrace selflessness, are empowered by the Holy Spirit, are full of the fruit of the Spirit, and seek the kingdom of God while they serve in their cultural context in a missionally wise manner.

Spiritual Disciplines and Spiritual Formation

This project requires that participants understand that disciples of Jesus Christ are to be spiritually developed by habits of devotion to God through the practice of the spiritual disciplines on a daily basis. Willard was asked at a conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, “Why are the spiritual disciplines so important to the church . . .?” He replied:

Because they are the only method of spiritual growth . . . Churches expect so many other things like attendance, giving, service, etc. They emphasize these things and then wonder why the membership is so spiritually weak. To bring spiritually strong life back to the church we need to have the members practicing the disciplines. (“Leadership and Spirituality”)

In order for lives of the participants to be changed, they must have a clear understanding of spiritual formation and the practices used by a disciple.

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are the life flow for a disciple of Jesus Christ. Spiritual disciplines transform a disciple and put them in a place to receive all that God desires to pour into their life. First Church Staff learning about spiritual disciplines are critical for the purpose of this project. This section begins with seminal authors’ thoughts on spiritual disciplines, and conclude with spiritual disciplines that are most necessary for this project.

Over the last forty-years, Foster has been a thought leader in spiritual disciplines in contemporary times. Foster believes that spiritual disciplines place a person in position so they can receive grace (7). Thompson, scholar, author, teacher, and speaker in the area of Christian spirituality believes certain practices that help disciples attend to the work of grace are often called spiritual disciplines (9). Willard, seminal author, philosopher, and theologian, believes that spiritual disciplines are a necessity for people of faith, and that revolutionary results occur through their practice (Willard, “Spirit of Disciplines” preface).

Spiritual disciplines take time, and disrupt a person’s worldly routines. The primary spiritual problem for the American Christian is that the current time in history desires instant satisfaction (Foster, *Celebration* 1). The disciplines do not produce instant

satisfaction; often, they make a disciple uncomfortable by pushing against their innately woven worldly routines. A disciple does not accidentally grow into a mature Christian; intentionality of the disciplines is nonnegotiable (Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines* 4; Foster, *Celebration* 1; Thompson 10). Disciples must put in a routine that connects them to God. Spending unrushed time alone with God releases a fountain of refreshment in the core of a person's being (Cordeiro 52). Uncomfortable routines, like giving up time for the spiritual realm and stillness are required for inner transformation.

These routines are how a disciple begins to live in a holy way, preparing them to live for God (Thompson introduction; Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines* 4). Staying in a routine of spiritual disciplines is worth the rewards that come with it, leading to transformation and joy. The routine will reconstruct a person into the image of Jesus Christ (Foster, *Celebration* 8). Living in an excellent way is an art, and when embraced, it prepares them in all dimensions of their being (Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines* 4). For Thompson, spiritual disciplines are practices that help disciples consciously to develop the spiritual dimension of their life (10). Embracing uncomfortable routines create transformation in a disciple; this is the work of being a disciple of Christ.

Foster considers finding unrushed time for God easy. Foster believes this is the simplicity that God wants from us in this life; putting God's kingdom first is an invitation to simplicity (*Celebration* 86). When a person seeks God's kingdom first, all priorities in life go in proper order. When a disciple gets away from seeking God's righteousness, complications arise; sin always leads to complications (Cordeiro 32; Foster, *Celebration* 86). The disciplines are paths out of the complexity and confusion that the world brings.

They help raise a Christian above the gray skies to a place of clarity, where what is truly important is seen.

Spiritual disciplines begin inside a person and they must become an inward spiritual reality first (Foster, *Celebration* 3; Thompson Foreword). Perfection of the disciplines themselves has little to do with changing a person. The attitude of the heart is what makes spiritual disciplines create transformation (Thompson 18, 39). Disciples can pick up their Bible, read it, and gain nothing. Disciples who seek God for transformation when reading their Bible will gain much. When the spiritual reality is connected to the discipline, disciples experience God, and they are changed.

Spiritual disciplines can be difficult to embody for a disciple because of the frantic rhythms of worldly society, but are essential for transformation. Foster and Willard agree that contemporary society distracts a person from practicing the spiritual disciplines (Foster, *Celebration* 80; Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines* 220). Foster is adamant about how the condition of society is at odds with the practice of spiritual disciplines when he states:

Because we lack a divine center our need for security has led us into an insane attachment to things. We really must understand that the lust for affluence in contemporary society is psychotic. It is psychotic because it has completely lost touch with reality. We crave things we neither need nor enjoy. (*Celebration* 80)

Willard would agree with Foster's general assessment, but would point Foster to how spiritual practice creates the inner transformation necessary in helping contemporary society:

The gospel of Christ . . . comes to create a new person pervaded by the positive realities of faith, hope, and love—toward God primarily and therefore toward all men and women and creatures. From this positive transformation of the self, justice, peace, and prosperity can result as God's rule is fulfilled in human life. ("The Spirit of the Disciplines", 221)

Although spiritual disciplines are difficult because of society's frantic rhythm, they are essential in changing disciples to be transforming agents in the world for God's kingdom.

Spiritual Disciplines for a Megachurch Staff

Little literature is available on best spiritual disciplines for a megachurch staff.

What has been established is that a megachurch is a fast-paced ministry environment, set with expectations of numerical growth that emphasizes staff members' ability to perform in their respective areas of responsibility. The following are the spiritual disciplines that are most pertinent for this project, given the expectations of a megachurch culture, in no particular order of importance.

Silence. At its core, the spiritual discipline of silence is listening for God (Foster "Celebration" 98, Willard "Spirit of Disciplines" 164). Silence is an indispensable condition for genuine life transformation (Thompson 173, Willard "Spirit of Disciplines" 164). Silence is when a disciple closes off the sounds of the world. Those sounds can be of one's own voice, music, or other noises (Willard "Spirit of Disciplines" 163-64). When a disciple prayerfully enters into the discipline of silence, it provides the most promising environment for hearing God speak (Thompson 36).

Solitude. The spiritual discipline of solitude is one of being alone with God for periods of time (Willard "Renovation of the Heart" 155). A difference exists between solitude and loneliness or isolation. The purpose of the discipline of solitude is to meet the person of Jesus Christ (Foster "Celebration" 96, Willard "Spirit of Disciplines" 160). Although physical distance from people and long times away are central characteristics of this discipline, it can be placed into more frequent life rhythms. Daily sleep is considered a form a solitude and sabbath (Willard, "Renovation of the Heart" 175). A disciple

taking a lunch hour by themselves or having someone watch their children for an afternoon creates space for a weekly rhythmic time of solitude (Thompson 49). The discipline can work in a weekly rhythm because solitude is a state of mind and heart that gives the disciple an eternal perspective (Foster “Celebration” 96, Willard “Spirit of Disciplines” 161).

Spiritual Direction. The spiritual discipline of spiritual direction is the relationship of a teacher and learner in the area of practicing the spiritual life (Thompson 114). Spiritual direction is an expression of divine guidance through the help of other disciples (Foster “Celebration” 185, Thompson 34). Spiritual directors offer advice, words of wisdom, parables, personal testimonies, and simple silence as means of spiritual guidance (Thompson 115). Spiritual direction is also seen through preaching, small groups, and studying the Bible when done in a prayerful state (Foster “Celebration” 187). The discipline of spiritual direction is crucial for the church, evangelism, and the Great Commission (Willard “Spirit of Disciplines” 246).

Willard warns that without spiritual direction, a church’s leadership can lose their spiritual course:

The leader’s task is to equip saints until they are like Christ (Eph. 4:12), and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job. It is so easy for the leader today to get caught up in illusory goals, pursuing the marks of success which come from our training as Christian leaders or which are simply imposed by the world. It is big, Big, always BIG, and BIGGER STILL! That is the contemporary imperative. Thus we fail to take seriously the nurture and training of those, however few, who stand constantly by us. (“Spirit of Disciplines”, 247)

Spiritual direction is a spiritual discipline that keeps disciples from illusionary goals and keeps them focused on God’s desires for God’s Church.

Study. The spiritual discipline of study is when a disciple strives to see the Word of God at work in the lives of others, in the church, in history, and in nature (Willard “Spirit of Disciplines” 177). For Foster, the principal task of study is to give a disciple a new perception into the reality of a given situation, encounter, book, major crisis, etc. (“Celebration” 64). For Willard, study is meditating on what comes into a disciple’s life through the lens of the Scriptures and prayer (“Spirit of Disciplines” 177). Thompson refers to study as spiritual reading, a meditative approach to the written word requiring unhurried time and an open heart (Thompson 19).

Prayer. Prayer is a spiritual discipline where a disciple is conversing with and listening for and to God (Thompson 32, Willard “Spirit of Disciplines” 184). Foster believes that prayer is the most central of all spiritual disciplines because it allows the disciple to be in perpetual communion with God (“Celebration” 33). Willard warns that prayer used solely as a discipline is useless, unless it is intent on co-laboring with God to advance God’s Kingdom (Willard “Spirit of Disciplines” 184). A disciple never arrives in the spiritual discipline of prayer, they are always learning how to pray (Bloom 25, Foster “Celebration” 33).

Fasting. In a time of consumerism, and due to the character of contemporary culture, fasting is a critical spiritual discipline for a disciple (Foster “Celebration” 47, Thompson 82). Throughout the Scriptures, fasting refers to abstaining from food for spiritual purposes (Foster “Celebration” 48, Thompson 82). Fasting allows for a greater measure of God’s power to be released for a disciple who is on mission for God’s Kingdom. Thompson writes about the ancient practice of fasting and the release of God’s power for a disciple through fasting:

In ancient Jewish tradition, fasting had two primary purposes. The first was to express personal or national repentance for sin. The second purpose of a fast was to prepare inwardly for receiving the necessary strength and grace to complete a mission of faithful service in God's name . . . These examples suggest that the combination of prayer and fasting invites a greater measure of God's power to be released through us than might be possible through prayer alone. (82)

For Willard, fasting is when a disciple stops partaking of natural food, to learn how to happily feast on God (Willard "Spirit of the Disciplines" 167). Fasting is a revealing practice on a disciple's dependence on the material world while allowing for an inward cleansing (Thompson 83, 92). Fasting is a necessarily spiritual discipline for a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Worship. The spiritual discipline of worship is done alone, as well as in union with God's people (Willard "Spirit of the Disciplines" 177). For Thompson, worship is about gathering in Christian community and being led into the presence of the living God (54, 56). Foster believes that worship is to experience true reality and to touch life ("Celebration" 158). For Willard, worship is to see God as worthy, and ascribe God great worth ("Spirit of Disciplines" 117). Foster believes that worship is a human response to God's initiation to restore and maintain fellowship with his children (Foster "Celebration" 158). Thompson views worship more as a giving act that has to do with a disciple offering their will, strength, and gifts in gratitude to God for what God has done (54).

Spiritual disciplines are essential for disciples to grow in their faith. A megachurch is a ministry environment with unique challenges for a disciple's spiritual growth. A megachurch's fast paced nature, numerical and performance expectations may be at odds with spiritual disciplines. Seminal authors have established that no spiritual

growth is possible without the incorporation of spiritual disciplines in a disciple's daily life.

Spiritual Formation

Whereas spiritual disciplines are the tools used in forming a disciple, spiritual formation names the process of transformation.

Spiritual formation is the process of being transformed into the image of Christ, for the sake of others (Mulholland 12). This involves loving God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving one another as Christ has loved people. For this project, understanding spiritual formation is important because it is intrinsically linked to developing the disciples' character. As the disciples' character changes into the image of Christ, they will do the right thing, at the right time, with the right motive (Foster "Life" 154). In turn, this affects all the disciples' relationships.

Character transformation is an essential part of spiritual formation. For Willard, spiritual formation is the process by which the human spirit is formed by habits that result in godly character ("Spirit of Disciplines" 20). If a disciple's character is not transforming into a godlier image, spiritual formation is not occurring. Spiritual formation is a Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self so that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself (Miller ch. 15). For Willard, character is not easy to develop and is formed by habits ("Spirit of Disciplines" 20). Character is beyond surface level, but is formed through habits that are action oriented ("Spirit of Disciplines" 20).

N.T. Wright views character as a process that transforms, shapes, and allows the individual to be true to the redeemed self (7). For Wright, when a disciple practices habits

that further character, they will become truly human. To N.T. Wright, a New Testament perspective of human flourishing has to do with being citizens in God's kingdom, being human and developing virtue (17). N. Wright uses Aristotle's ideas about a person becoming virtuous by doing virtuous deeds and, through a process, flourishes in their humanity as individuals (32). Further, a Christian ethic is formed not by rules but by qualities like purity of heart, love, and mercy (106). Thus, for Wright, having better character means one is becoming more human. N. Wright argues that a disciple should shape their life towards the final goal of redemption (67). For Wright, understanding the end goal, makes the disciple's journey clearer.

J. Smith would disagree with N.T. Wright that a disciple's aim should be mainly towards redemption. For Smith, spiritual formation is about directing a disciple's loves. Smith argues that, when thinking about spiritual formation, humans are creatures of desire, always seeking to love something (25). For Smith, this is an internal aim that every person possesses and also helps shape the individual. The internal aim is shaped by liturgy; habits, and forming practices that disciples participate in (25). Smith argues that liturgies go beyond the four walls that contain a Sunday Worship service into the secular realm (23).

Where Wright focuses more on an external gaze towards ultimate redemption for spiritual formation, Smith believes people should pay more attention to the present world. J. Smith's point is that people are shaped by what they see and interact with constantly. Interacting with these liturgies shape, mold, and build upon a disciple's existing desires (25). Liturgies are more than acts a disciple does: they are directly connected to like whom a disciple is becoming.

Spiritual formation is the process of the disciple being transformed into the image of Christ to help others. Seminal authors believe that spiritual formation is a Spirit-driven process for the disciple. Spiritual formation involves forming habits that are not easily developed with an aim towards eternity and internal realities resulting in godly character in disciples that will be shown in their relationships.

Spiritual Formation and Christian Education

Understanding how spiritual formation and Christian education intersect is important for this project for four primary reasons. First, Christian education has previously formed every staff member to varying degrees. Although many of the employees in this project are not theologically educated, the pastors who have trained and overseen the staff are theologically educated. Those pastors have been formed in an educational model that focused on cognition rather than one that engages the whole person. Second, this project involves staff members with formal theological training. Third, a noteworthy shift is occurring in Christian education, in the academy and in the Church, to better Christian discipleship. Finally, for the researcher to understand how Christian education has formed the staff was important in order to effectively teach spiritual formation in the teaching sessions.

J. Smith has issues with how a Christian worldview is formed through Christian education. Smith considers the current pedagogy of Christian education to be like dropping Christian ideas into minds as if they are receptacles (18). For Smith, this type of pedagogy comes from weak anthropology and compartmentalizes the human being (17). Thus, for Smith, the results of the current Christian educational process incapacitates Christian imagination making it formidable to be a disciple of Jesus.

J. Smith believes Christian institutions are ignoring a basic anthropological understanding: humans are by nature lovers, and what humans love they become (16). Smith argues that secular liturgies have done a better job at understanding and directing our love and desire than the Church (71). Smith believes that those in marketing better comprehend that humans want to have fun, have sex, pursue material possessions, and gain notoriety; but Christian education does not address the human's natural loves (71).

Alan and Debra Hirsch would agree with J. Smith about secular influences on the church. The Hirschs believe the church is in a historical change, and that consumerism in America has been evangelizing Christian education:

[There are] dangerous, subterranean energies that seem to pervade our culture. In our day, one is left wondering if it is us who are actually being evangelized by the prevailing mass culture rather than the other way around. (109)

Both J. Smith and the Hirschs agree that the Christian worldview seems to be stuck on denying the realities of the culture. Smith sees secular liturgies, being practices of the broader culture, as having a stronger formative impact on Christians than Christian education does, because it typically aims only at the head level and ignores a disciple's embodied life, or loves. The Hirschs believe that Christians are being evangelized by the broader culture.

The Hirschs and J. Smith point to a transition moment for the Church and Christian education that is coming. American Christian theologian and ethicist Stanley J. Grenz believes that the church has already been experiencing a transition moment from the modern era to the postmodern era (10). Grenz believes that the historical change poses a grave challenge to the church regarding Christian education and its mission to the next generation (10).

For Christian universities, J. Smith proposes that graduates have been trained to pursue their vocations from a Christian perspective and boldly asks, “What if a Christian perspective turns out to be a way of domesticating the radicality of the gospel?” (218). His perspective begs to ask the question of whether or not these institutions are making disciples. Smith suggests that Christian universities should create intentional communities that engage in full-bodied Christian practices, which would, in turn, give fertile soil for the Christian imagination (226).

For Dr. Ellen Marmon, Professor of Christian Discipleship, part of the shift in the academy occurs by revisiting biblical and theological foundations with cross-cultural ministry as an essential element of theological education (71). Other Christian Educators would argue with J. Smith that there has been an upswelling for teaching beyond the conversation experience within Christian Institutions for some time:

Even those whose purpose is not ‘conversion within Christ’ are calling for more impact from their efforts. We are witnessing a popular demand for "character formation" even in the public-school system. We are concerned about the absence of values and the heartlessness of human beings. As people who want to influence through education, we are searching for something to stem the tide. (Gorman 24)

The authors convey a need and desire for discipleship to be done differently in the academy.

N.T. Wright takes aim at how the Church has educated Christians. For Wright, it is the churches’ lack of discipleship commitment beyond a conversion experience (3).

For Neil Cole, the lack of commitment to discipleship has to do with the prevailing attractional model of church:

There is a vast difference between an attractional and a missional posture of church. The difference is not in the organization but in the release and flow of God’s kingdom. With the attractional form, the flow is always coming into the church, which is rooted and bound to a geographical location. In a sense, the

attractional expression of church is like a lake, waiting to receive from other tributaries. The missional church, like a river, is always flowing outward. One is centrifugal, the other centripetal. (47)

To Cole, the attractional model does not equip the disciple to be at their best in the world, it equips the disciple to be at their best in the church. The attractional model creates an inverted spiritual formation process. For N. Wright, this is propositional Christianity, giving no substantive direction and leaves a void regarding transformation (3). The solution for Christian education and the church, for N. Wright, is character formation (7).

For J. Smith, the Church overemphasis on weekly worship service is a problem and disciples need more to overcome weekly secular liturgies. Smith believes the church needs to create liturgies that paint broad strokes of the Christian experience by practicing for the Kingdom (155). One way to bring a disciple to more liturgical rhythms is by reclaiming Christian time through the liturgical calendar. For J. Smith, the secular calendar promotes the mall mentality and exasperates the disciple's spiritual breathing (153-56). The liturgical calendar helps breath the relaxing rhythms of worship (153-56). That the Church must make sure that corporate worship does not place sole emphasis on merely spoken content is also important. For J. Smith, worship should have elements that cause the worshiper to move and engage: singing, baptism, greeting one another, and communion all encompass essential aspects of practicing the Kingdom (139).

For Tish Harrison Warren, everyday liturgies that may seem to compete with a disciple's attention towards God, can be viewed differently. Disciples need to understand that in work or play, no task is too small to glorify God.

Christ's ordinary years are part of our redemption story. Because of the incarnation and those long, unrecorded years of Jesus' life, our small, normal lives matter. If

Christ was a carpenter, all of us who are in Christ find that our work is sanctified and made holy. If Christ spent time in obscurity, then there is infinite worth found in obscurity. If Christ spent most of his life in quotidian ways, then all of life is brought under his lordship. There is no task too small or too routine to reflect God's glory and worth. (22)

Disciples engaged in everyday secular liturgies can find consecration when brought under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

N. Wright believes to break the compartmentalization of Christian education virtue needs to be shown through the Royal Priesthood of the Church (82). Virtue happens in the lives of disciples when they put themselves in activities that Wright calls the virtuous circle: Scripture, stories, examples, community, and practices (258). The life of worship is a corporate form of virtue expression, thus reinforcing the virtues. All activities within the virtuous circle take slow effect, but produce second-nature habits for individuals and the church community (82).

Spiritual formation and Christian education intersect in important ways for disciples of Jesus Christ. Understating the issues around compartmentalization in Christian education, for the purpose of unlocking biblical teaching into the life of a disciple, is necessary.

Adult Learning

Adult learning has been an evolving field with changing definitions over the last century. Adult learning is modernly viewed as a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values (Merriam and Brockett 7). In order to understand how to grow and teach a disciple, particularly regarding the project's teaching sessions,

adult learning and its subcategories are a determining feature of this project; including andragogy and transformational learning.

Adult Learning and Spiritual Formation

How participants were taught during the teaching sessions directly related to the change in their knowledge attitude and behavior towards discipleship. Understanding where adult learning and spiritual formation converge was important for this project. The following section shows the importance of taking the student's experience into account when forming a teaching method.

Adult learning is a crucial part of spiritual formation. Dr. Christopher Beard, professor and contributor to the Christian Education Journal, believes adult learning theory and principles are important elements of spiritual formation (248). Whenever adult learning is incorporated and synthesized into spiritual formation, learning occurs. Data has shown a direct correlation between how a person is taught using adult learning principles and the influence of their spiritual formation (248).

The way a student is taught, pedagogy, is important when teaching disciples. Any preacher or teacher may have a vast amount of knowledge and a capability for regurgitating that knowledge; but their teaching method is crucial for the development of their students. A Christian education study conducted in 2012 initially discovered a dualistic curriculum and instructional pedagogy occurring in a theological institution, as shown in Figure 2.2 (Coley 415).

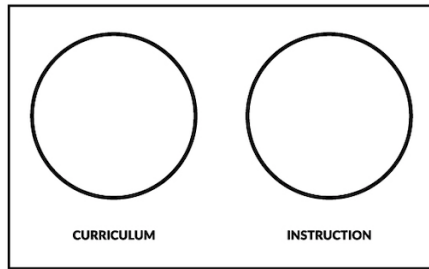


Figure 2.2 Dualistic curriculum and instruction.

Researcher and Professor of Christian Education, Dr. Kenneth S. Coley, invited pastor/professor participants to work with a concentric model that held that delivery of instruction and curriculum were closely related as shown in Figure 2.3 (Coley 416).

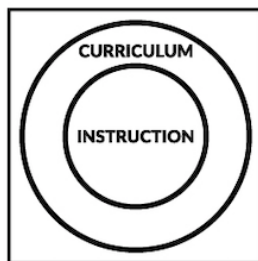


Figure 2.3 Concentric model and instruction.

In this model, the experiences of the learners/disciples during instructional episodes are not just vehicles for content, but constitute significant objectives in and of themselves,

This reimagining of their (pastors/professors) philosophy challenged them to consider what values and attitudes they were communicating to their own learners . . . the modeling of creative and current methodologies was put in a larger frame: this writer challenged each educator to ask himself/herself this question: ‘As a minister, what am I communicating (the what) to my disciples (the who) by my selection of the teaching/preaching techniques I choose to employ (Coley 417)?’

Coley invited the Christian educators into the artform of teaching. Results showed more significant quantitative and qualitative engagement in teaching (423). The predominate reason for change was that the student's development became the main goal, as opposed to delivery of content (423-24). The results of the study showed that instruction should take into account the students' experience. Having students retain and learn, is a strenuous skill and practice that leads to spiritual formation for both teacher and disciple.

Participants in this project saw their development as the main goal, not solely recipients of the content being delivered. The student's experience was taken into account when forming a teaching method.

Andragogy

Andragogy is a theory of adult learning and is helpful to this project because of the teaching of adults in the four teaching sessions. Implementing concepts from andragogy increased the chances of changing the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of First Church staff members.

Andragogy is considered more as a framework for teaching adults, rather than a lens for explaining learning (Taylor and Cranton 16). Jack Mezirow defines andragogy as "an organized and sustained effort to assist adults to learn in a way that enhances their capability to function as self-directed learners" (ch. 7).

Dr. Malcom Knowles, adult educator and seminal author on andragogy, created six assumptions underlying the method and practice of andragogy.

Knowles' Six Assumptions (57-63):

1. "The need to know. Adults need to know 'why' they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it" (57).

2. “The learner’s self-concept” (58). As adults mature, their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality, toward being a self-directed human being.
3. “The role of learners’ experience” (59). As adults mature, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning.
4. “Readiness to learn” (60). As adults mature, their readiness to learn becomes oriented more towards the developmental tasks of their social roles.
5. “Orientation to learning” (61). As adults mature, their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application; their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance/life/problem-centeredness.
6. “Motivation” (63). While adults are responsive to some external motivators, the most potent motivators are internal pressures.

Andragogy and Teaching Sessions

The four teaching sessions are crucial to this project. The way in which the teacher leads, interacts, and facilitates during the sessions will put the participants in a position to learn. Knowles’ six assumptions underlying andragogy are incorporated and practiced during the teaching sessions.

First for Knowles, the adults need to know “why” they need to learn something before undertaking it (57). Before learning begins, there has to be adequate answers on why the student should undertake and put effort into learning. This is a process of deconstruction and of invitation for the learner that creates a partnership in the learning experience. In order for the teaching session to go well, the teacher needs to give validity to “why” the project is important to the participants.

Knowles’ second assumption is, as individuals mature, their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality, toward being a self-directed human being

(58). Full participation in the teaching sessions is needed in order for this assumption to be achieved. Mezirow characterizes this environment as follows:

Free, full adult participation in critical discourse and resulting action clearly requires freedom, democratic participation, equality, reciprocity, and prior education through which one has learned to assess evidence effectively, make and understand stand relevant arguments, develop critical judgment, and engage in critical reflection. Such participation also implies a reasonable minimal level of safety, mental and physical health, shelter, and employment opportunity, as well as acceptance of others with different perspectives and social cooperation. Values such as freedom, democracy, justice, equality, and social cooperation may be cherished so universally at least partly because they represent the essential conditions under which human beings can make sense or meaning of their experiences. (ch.7)

To achieve this assumption, the teacher needs to be open to various perspectives, invite conversation and prepare for critical engagement.

Knowles' third assumption is, as individuals mature, they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning (59). In the teaching sessions, the teacher needs to think of the students as having knowledge and experience to bring to the sessions. This calls for a teaching style that invites experiential techniques. Knowles suggests group discussions, problem-solving activities, case-methods, and stimulation exercises (59). Knowles highlights the importance of the teacher accepting the students' experience or risk them feeling rejected and thus unable to learn (60).

This third assumption invites spiritual formation to take place relationally, with a teacher engaging the learners in their own context (Beard 254). The teacher needs to keep in mind a physical teaching setting that is familiar to the learner. In the context of this project, the discipleship teachings were held in areas that the staff do ministry. This is an incarnational teaching model which allows the teacher to engage the learner's background, experience, and perspective (254). Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch write

about the importance of Christian leader's integration into the settings of those whom they serve for the Holy Spirit to transform individuals and cultures (41). For the sake of learning and transformation, a setting that nurtures the teacher/learner relationship, and is contextual for the student, should be considered.

Knowles' fourth assumption is, as individuals mature, their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles (60). There is a social/communal dynamic that needs to be understood by the teacher for the sake of the learner. The teacher will need to understand whom they are teaching, the communal role the participant currently fills, how their role relates to one another, and the role they wish to fulfill in the future. Knowles' fourth assumption aids the discipleship teaching sessions because by nature discipleship is communal and collaborative. Discipleship is an act that takes place in collaborative community and all acts of service and love within that collaborative community are part of the disciple's purpose (Beard 254). The teacher, who understands the social role of the student, will help the adult learn.

Knowles' fifth assumption is, as people mature, their orientation toward learning shifts from subject-centeredness to one of performance/life/problem-centeredness (61). The idea is, adults are motivated to learn something to the extent that it will help them in their life or to perform a task. For Knowles, working within real-time scenarios creates knowledge to apply for the learner (61). The teacher will need to have opportunities for the participants to discuss real-time scenarios they are processing.

This is congruent with the biblical discipleship idea of learning when life demands it, functioning within time's daily ebbs and flows. Australian theologian

Michael Frost and Missional church movement thought leader Alan Hirsch described it this way:

Like Jesus' first followers discovered, learning occurs when we need to draw on information because a situation demands it. This isn't to say that there shouldn't be formal teaching times, but these formal occasions will allow the teaching to be related to the missional experience gained by the church itself. (45)

For this project, I prepared content that was clearly applicable to the participants' life and ministry tasks in real-time. This was done in two ways. First, by sending an email asking the participants three questions; "What is a current ministry problem you are having trouble solving?"; "What do you feel God is teaching you about your life right now (that you feel comfortable sharing)?"; and "What is one skill you would like to improve in your life or ministry?" The teacher looked over the questions, research answers, and integrated them into the teaching sessions. Second, the teacher opened up a time for participants to answer the questions and discuss in the teaching sessions. This process allowed for real-time applicable content that assisted participants in their life and/or ministry.

Knowles' sixth and final assumption regarding andragogy is, "While adults are responsive to some external motivators . . . the most potent motivators are internal pressures . . . the desires for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life . . . (62)." The teacher needs to articulate how this is going to increase the participants' life satisfaction. More than that, the teacher needs to facilitate the sessions in a way that develops meaningful relationships. This necessitates incarnational living, a key characteristic of discipleship in which people develop meaningful relationships with those they are discipling (Beard 255; Hirsch 151)." Through meaningful relationships,

the teachers can understand the internal pressures the student feels and thus speak to the learner's inward motivations.

Kathleen M. Young, M.A. in Education and contributor Christian education journal, sums up how relationship equates to good teaching in the use of andragogy and Christian education:

Good teaching rests neither in accumulating a shelfful of knowledge nor in developing a repertoire of skills. In the end, good teaching lies in a willingness to attend and care for what happens to our students, ourselves, and the space between us. Good teaching is a certain kind of stance. It is a stance of receptivity, of attunement, of listening. (84)

Relationships are important for the learner to grow. They will help with participants' life satisfaction while showing a vital characteristic of discipleship.

Allowing Knowles' six assumptions to guide the teaching sessions will put the participants in the position to learn. Implementing concepts from andragogy should increase the chances of changing the knowledge, attitudes and behaviors of First Church staff members.

Transformational Learning

Megachurches do not make it a consistent expectation that their staff members will be mature disciples whose primary task is to make other mature disciples. Due to the megachurch model, a consumeristic model of church focuses on delivering religious goods and services rather than guiding people into a life of service and sacrifice for the kingdom of God. Transformational learning is needed for this project to help participants learn by reflecting on their discipleship assumptions.

Transformative learning theory was originally developed by Professor Jack Mezirow and is:

Based on the notion that we interpret our experiences in our own way, and that how we see the world is a result of our perceptions of our experiences. Transformative learning is a process of examining, questioning, and revising those perceptions. (Taylor and Cranton 5)

Transformational learning is based on insights that change within adults, and is the result of a learning process that is knowable (C. Young 322). Transformational learning provides a description of the dynamics adults use to negotiate meanings, purpose, and values critically (Mezirow ch. 1). Without critical analysis, adults will passively accept the values of society and their personal roles. Transformational learning describes how people name their current reality and empowers them to move into something new (ch. 1). Participants moving into a new reality of discipleship is important for this study.

Transformational Learning Perspective

Transformational learning is distinct because a learner will discover new meaning to interpret both new and past experiences. Mezirow's transformational process occurs when people look through their life with a new perspective. Normally, when people learn something, they attribute what they have learned in the past to the new experience. Transformational learning involves a reinterpretation of old and new experiences from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to old experiences (ch. 1). Someone has gone through transformative learning when they look at old experiences with new expectation, giving new meaning and expectations to the past.

Mezirow outlines the steps of perspective transformation (ch. 6).

1. "A disorienting dilemma."
2. "Self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame."
3. "A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions."

4. "Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation formation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change."
5. "Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions."
6. "Planning of a course of action."
7. "Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans."
8. "Provisional trying of new roles."
9. "Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships."
10. "A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective."

Rhonda McEwen, innovator in global theological education, believes from a Christian faith perspective that Mezirow's Ten Phases describe "an intentional effort at reframing our minds, hearts, and actions so that they are in closer alignment with the ethical principles and practices of God's kingdom" (347). Mezirow's steps will be taken into account in the discipleship sessions by taking a critical overall look at the megachurch model. Participants were taught about the megachurch model, and then were able to speak to what they liked or did not like about the model, ask questions of the teacher, reflect upon how the model did or did not make disciples, explore new options for making more/better disciples, develop a plan of implementation, researched tools for carrying out said plan, and were invited to live into their new perspective of discipleship. This was an intentional effort by the teacher to reframe the hearts, minds, and actions of the participants in closer alignment with the ethical principles and practices of God's kingdom.

For Mezirow, a part of the completed transformation process through learning experiences is feeling a newness of perspective. Unfortunately, the new feeling will not likely last. The image of what lies ahead becomes idealized and creates the appearance of a new life and a fresh start (ch. 6). One who negotiates a new future, and is in a euphoric state, then will see the new set of obstacles as euphoria dissipates. Building in an understanding of the importance of continual transformation in the teaching sessions will help euphoric ebbs and flows for the participant.

Transformational Learning and Discipleship

Transformational learning is an important concept for this project; particularly in how it informs the teaching sessions. However, questioning if transformational learning and discipleship can intersect is fair criticism. The following shows that they indeed do connect, and that reflective learning is a key point of said connection.

A major critique to Mezirow's earliest work was that it placed too much emphasis on being a cognitive and rational process, leaving little room for emotions or spirituality (Poe 41). In the last twenty-five years, many experts have seen the wide applications of transformative learning theory, beyond its initial cognitive territory, into cultural, sociological, and spiritual contexts (McLaughlin 333). Logan C. Jones, pastoral care educator, describes how transformative learning intersects with the soul:

The affective dimension of transformative learning acknowledges that while transformative learning has a rational component, (there are) other facets of equal importance. These other facets include recognizing the process of grief when any change occurs, being aware of soul as a metaphor for the deep learning called for by emotions and symbols, and, finally, understanding that authenticity in transformative learning involves the emergence of the Self. (7)

Although recent scholars have made claims on how transformational learning theory connects to discipleship, that was not its original intent. One of the most notable

critiques from theologians is that transformational learning theory's basis is in humanism and lacks the critical role of the Holy Spirit in transformation. However, some theologians claim that elements of transformational learning theory can be adopted to align with and strengthen the discipleship process.

With roots in humanism and constructivism, the objectives of transformational learning theory (TLT) may not simply be appropriated as is for the purpose of discipleship. However, with a biblically grounded definition of discipleship and the discipleship process, along with a healthy dependence on the Holy Spirit, we can discern and adopt those elements of TLT that align with, support and strengthen the discipleship process. (Poe 42)

Transformational learning theory and discipleship do intersect and can strengthen the process of a person being made into a disciple of Christ.

For transformational learning to occur in discipleship, a process must take place where assessment and reassessment of assumptions occur. This process is called reflective learning. Reflective learning happens when once-believed assumptions are found distorted, inauthentic, or otherwise not valid (Mezirow ch.1). In the process of reflective learning, the opportunity for transformative learning occurs. A person will desire to make new meaning, and form new constructs of the world. Reflective learning's goal becomes one of either confirmation or transformation of ways of interpreting experience (Mezirow ch.1).

This type of reflective learning has happened in Scripture with God's people.

Marmon describes it like this:

What Mezirow identifies as a learning theory both the Hebrew people and the early Christians experienced as reality. What did it mean to worship the one true God? Looking at life through the lens of God's character altered attitudes about women, slaves, and outsiders. Following the example of Christ meant putting others before self, refraining from court battles between believers, and understanding that circumcision was not required to be a Christ follower. Each of these dilemmas

triggered good questions, thoughtful reflection, ongoing conversation, and ultimately a new way of living in faith communities (“Transformative Learning Theory” 426)”

The new way of living was transformation, and could be seen qualitatively in the Scriptures because change occurred in the hearts of God’s people. While adults go through the transformative process, progression can be accessed. Adult development is viewed as an adult progressively enhances capability to validate prior learning through reflective discourse and acts upon resulting insight (Mezirow ch.1).

Adults’ transformation is seen by how they are able to articulate and reflect upon learning, and live into the new meaning. If so, development is transformation happening in the adult learner. For growth to occur in a disciple, reflective learning is necessary. The participants showed reflective learning during the focus group and semi-structured interviews.

Mezirow and the Religious Context

This research had to take into account potential barriers in learning for participants. Mezirow was concerned about how well transformational learning can occur in a religious context. One barrier in the religious context that transformational learners must overcome has to do with holding onto embedded religious ideas (ch. 6).

Often religious people will be apprehensive to let go of settled issues in their minds and stay in a pre-critical stage of learning (Mezirow ch. 6). Holding onto embedded religious ideas keeps the person at bay from learning and often will be unable to see the possibility of a learning opportunity. A sign of a person who is in the pre-critical stage is that they think concretely, not questioning the social, political, historical, or technological contexts of what they read (ch. 6). Jack L. Seymour, Margaret Ann

Crain, and Joseph V. Crockett, all Christian adult learning professors, would agree with Mezirow. However, they would put the blame on a disciple's lack of trust in God (82).

Mezirow believes religious learners can move to a critical process of learning (ch.6). When a religious person moves beyond the barrier, they can interweave and expand upon their religious beliefs and adopt a critical learning posture associated with a literature culture (ch. 6). Religious learners then have objectivity when religious thought and study are brought up that help them stand at a distance to observe and ask questions. For religious learners who have adopted a critical posture, doubt is not an obstacle for them; it is essential to discovering truth (ch. 6). Their tradition and/or belief system is open-minded, ready for new understanding.

Other scholars would disagree with Mezirow about thoughts in the religious context being a barrier to learning. A study by Elisabeth J. Tisdale on religion in adult higher education supports the importance of spirituality as "one of the ways people construct knowledge and meaning" (5). David Fontana believes that religious context has had a major impact on learning, flourishing historically, "Religion has been one of the major formative influences upon human thought and behavior throughout the centuries" (1). According to Catherine F. Musgrave, Carol Easley Allen, and Gregory J. Allen., "Taken together or separately, religiosity and spirituality provide a framework for making sense of the world and coping with life" (557). For these authors, the religious context can lead to further learning.

This research necessitated taking into account potential barriers in learning for the participants. Mezirow has concerns about how well transformational learning can occur in a religious context due to embedded religious ideas. Other scholars would disagree.

The religious context appears to have both barriers and opportunities for the growth of a disciple.

Transformational Learning Environments and Christian Education

In transformational learning, a safe learning environment for students helps produce elements for growth. Creating the right teaching environment was essential to the research of this project. This section shows important characteristics of a safe learning environment conducive to creating growth for disciples.

In transformational learning, the validity of new learning hinges upon rational discourse while grounded in the nature of human communication, and being open to other points of view (Mezirow ch.r 1). This means that communal elements are vital for transformational learning to occur. Part of that responsibility is the learner's; the teacher is responsible for creating an environment that fosters learning.

McEwen says the following about the Christian educator's responsibility for creating a safe environment for transformational learning:

The Christian educator has a particular responsibility to foster transformative thinking and acting by cultivating the conditions where transformative learning can best take place. These include a nurturing and supportive learning community, grounded in trusting relationships, where thought-provoking questions are encouraged within the context of dialogical inquiry. Moreover, it is often through authentic dialogue with trusted others that learners are free to reframe their meaning perspectives so that they are congruent with the values, beliefs, and practices of God's kingdom. Indeed, Christian education is transformative in its scope in that it is concerned with helping others transform their assumptions about life so that these are in closer alignment with the principles and practices of God's kingdom. (353)

Creating safe learning environments and strong relationships with students, and between students, becomes crucial for spiritual development and the mission of God's kingdom. Dr. Julie Gorman, professor of Christian formation at Fuller Theological

Seminary, believes Christian community is how God has designed people to discover their Christian identity:

The development of communal formation in the classroom offers many targets for the transformation of the learner: in perspective; in relating to others; in seeing how one is uniquely designed to be God's gift to the covenantal community; in learning to value the needs and contributions of others; in learning to think theologically about togetherness in learning; and in living the classroom experience 'as a body.' Shaping of the person by the gospel will always have roots and residual in the corporateness of our identity as the people of God. (26)

For the Christian educator to create these types of learning conditions involves transformational leadership. Transformational leadership emphasizes the negotiation of change in a complex and uncertain world; it is a process that involves a continual investigation and reappraisal of assumptions (Brookfield ch. 9). Educators must continually evaluate the environments for transformational learning to progress. This invites Christian educators into their own loop of transformational learning.

Being a transformative learner means that a person gains the ability to critically access the world around them. This involves the process of scanning, imaginative insight, and interpretation (Mezirow ch. 6). This engages the Christian educator into an important aspect of teaching; remembering what it feels like to be a student.

Brookfield recommends that teachers regularly engage in a new learning experience. A new learning experience, for the educator, becomes a visceral experience and develops emotional intelligence while reminding the teacher about the affective components of learning (ch. 9). For the educator who has forgotten what it is like to experience the anxiety of learning something new, they themselves should try to learn something novice for the first time. The educator will then develop empathy for the student's new learning experience.

Gorman critiques and cautions Christian educators to not forget the power of the Holy Spirit through community in transformational learning:

The Spirit is the key player in the believing learner being confronted with a desire for transformation because of realizing limitation, failure, lack of self-sufficiency, and awareness of conflict between the spiritual and the worldly. But the Spirit is also the embodiment of the Presence which opens up the potential to go beyond the limits. . . This means that such education does not focus primarily on learner, teacher, or subject matter but consistently points to the God who was in Christ Jesus and who transforms teachers and learners as they pursue understanding and living out their faith in mutual struggles and vulnerabilities. (39)

To Gorman, community, with the power of the Holy Spirit is critical to transformation. Community is a conduit for people to understand their strengths and limitations; it is critical to gaining a self-understanding of their experience and defining self-identity. Community becomes an opportunity for the student to take responsibility of their learning. Within transformation learning theory, adults understanding their experiences is significant. Only when something has meaning and consequence can a person take deliberate control of their learning (Mezirow ch. 1). People only learn when they see how it affects them, or gives them meaning. Without understating their experience, adults will be unable to learn, and consequently transformation will not occur.

A safe learning environment that helps produce transformation can be characterized as communal, incarnational, nurturing, supportive, empathetic, mutual, and thought-provoking. A safe learning environment is important for transformational learning and essential to the research of this project. If the participant felt safe, critical elements for transformational learning were more likely to occur.

Leading Change

This project involved leading employees through change. The project invited change by asking participants to reflect on discipleship self-assumptions. It also invited change to megachurch dynamics, where numeric production was not the organization's primary purpose. This section shows that effective change is difficult, but possible with the correct understating of employee motivations and leadership. Research on leading change was necessary for this project.

Kotter is a professor in Leadership at Harvard Business School, and has been a thought leader in business, leadership, and change theory. Kotter is commonly known for his eight steps for leading change in an organization. Kotter's eight-step change model is shown in Figure 2.4:

(a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating a guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (d) communicating the change vision, (e) empowering the employees to carry out the vision, (f) generating short-term wins, (g) consolidating gains and producing more change, and (h) anchoring new progress and approaches to culture (22).

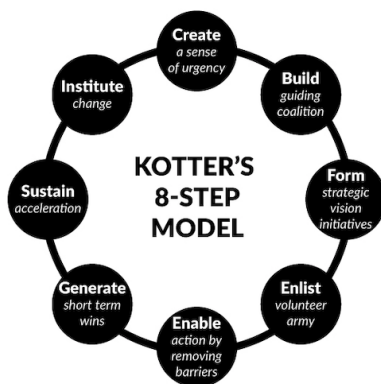


Figure 2.4 Kotter's 8-step model.

Kotter believed that 70-90 percent of an organization's success or failure in effecting transformational change was attributed to the organization's leadership (26). Kotter's model is based on his study that change efforts often fail due to common mistakes committed by organizational leaders during the process: (a) allowing complacency, (b) failing to create a powerful guiding coalition, (c) underestimating the power of vision, (d) failing to properly communicate the vision, (e) allowing obstacles to remain, blocking the vision, (f) not celebrating or not determining short-term wins, (g) declaring progress and gains too soon, and (h) neglecting to secure changes into the culture (qtd. in Baird 17).

Change in organizations does not occur easily or often. Research shows that organizational change efforts succeed a mere 9 percent of the time (Arussy 4). When leading employees through change, helping them to understand the benefits that change has to offer them is vital. It is important because change will require employees to make short-term sacrifices (Kotter 9). Sacrifice without a future payoff will not motivate an employee. Typically, people will not be willing to sacrifice, even if they are unhappy with the status quo, unless they think the potential benefits of change are attractive (9).

Dr. Kenneth W. Thomas, Professor of Management, says that employees have four intrinsic senses they need to be met by their employer; choice, competence, meaningfulness, and progress, as shown in Figure 2.5 (48).



Figure 2.5 Intrinsic motivation model.

If these senses are met, the employee has the possibility of self-managing; while the employer may develop long-term employees. For Thomas, intrinsic motivations are a vital internal makeup of an employee and a key to managing. Dr. Clark Christian Barrett connects Thomas' ideas on intrinsic motivation with a twentieth century shift in the workplace:

Thomas' model is an attempt to do away with the industrial-age paradigm of command and control in the workplace that was instituted in the early 1900s . . . Thomas suggests that an egalitarian, collegial atmosphere must be fostered where leadership and coaching are the order of the day . . . In the new environment, intrinsic motivation and getting internal rewards through self-management are desirable. (38)

A critique of the model is that a number of Thomas' studies have not been with employees. Most of the early work that Thomas and his contemporaries have done was developed with the military in mind (Barrett 39). Regardless, Thomas is respected in his field for motivating employees.

For managing employees, Thomas first thinks they must have a sense of choice when working in an organization. Choice is when a person can select tasks that make

sense to them while performing them in a way that seems appropriate (50). The feeling of choice creates autonomy for the employee where they feel ownership and space to make decisions.

Second, Thomas believes a sense of competence is vital for an employee. A person must feel like they are performing in a skillful way, regarding the activity they have chosen (48). When competency occurs, the employee walks away with a sense that they did good, high-quality work (50).

Thomas also believes that employee must feel a sense of progress. Progress is the accomplishment that a person feels in achieving the purpose of their work (49). Progress creates a sense of completion and satisfaction to the time and energy put in. A sense of progress also helps the employee feel as if their work is moving forward and that something is being accomplished (50).

Finally, for Thomas, employees must have a sense of meaning when working in an organization. Meaningfulness is when an employee feels that they are pursuing a worthy cause (50). The amount of time and energy put into a project or a task needs to be balanced out with a feeling of purpose. When a person feels their effort leads to a larger picture and a valuable mission, they find meaningfulness (50).

A transformative effort in an organization also needs vision; it is the catalyst for change in an organization. Without visions, transforming efforts can turn into confusing, time-consuming, and incompatible projects (Kotter 7). That vision is anchored in the Senior Leader. Kotter believes that the person in charge of the change must have a concise pitch that elicit interest from their constituents. If the person driving change

cannot get both understanding and interest within 5 minutes, it is likely a sign that things are not going well (8).

For author and researcher George Barna, the Senior Pastor has to be the driving force for discipleship change in an organization. The primary role of the Senior Pastor is to provide vision, motivation, and ensure resources are available to carry on ministry (116). He or she must spend time, effort, and energy to push a church forward towards spiritual growth. After the Senior Pastor brings leadership, advocates for the vision will emerge, and they can help carry the leadership (116). These advocates can motivate and carry the vision to other areas of the church.

Research indicates that churches who are not doing well in discipleship almost always trace back to the Senior Pastor's leadership (Barna 117). For this project, the Senior Pastor made discipleship change his number one organizational priority, while the lead researcher's project occurred. The Senior Pastor allowed the lead researcher to give vision to discipleship for the church, preach on discipleship and conduct this research project with church staff. It was crucial for the Senior Pastor to take the responsibility for discipleship change. Insufficient leadership equates for 54 percent of the reason why senior leaders believe that change does not occur (Arussy 11). If an organization does not have the right leader, plan, and vision, employees are unlikely to buy into change. Employees need to believe that transformation is possible in order for them to help change occur (Kotter 9).

Effective change in an organization is difficult, but possible with the correct understanding of employee motivations and leadership. Research on leading change has

allowed the researcher to understand how staff are motivated, equipping the researcher to lead skillfully, and enhance discipleship within the First Church staff.

Goal Theory

For long-term growth to occur for a disciple and organization, goal setting is necessary for this project. This section of the literature review shows research on goal theory, helping employees achieve goals, complex goals, and employee development, and set spiritual goals for disciples.

Seminal authors in the theory of Goal Setting, Locke and Latham believe that intrinsic motivation reaches out to a person's biological level of existence. For Locke and Latham, the core of goal-directed action is biology (101). Life is a conditional process; it requires that people take action in order to survive. A goal, and one performance of that goal, cannot be the primary motivating factor; it must be biological. Given the nature of life, it seems obvious that goal-directed choice and actions are at the core of human motivation (101).

Thomas, Professor of Management, prefers the ideas of tasks as opposed to goals. Thomas believes that the key to creating an environment for employees to self-manage revolves around tasks (48). When given a task, a worker finds the possibility for meaning; with meaning comes a strong emotional charge (48). The emotional charges, that accompany a task, will give the employee a better ability to self-manage while creating competent and long-term employees (50).

For Locke and Latham, people pursue what they value, and goals by their nature have value (98). Achieving goals is important because it adds value to a person both internally and externally. A person can receive a better job, better pay, education, and the

respect that comes with achieving goals, with both internal and external rewards. Locke and Latham believe that the primary reason people pursue goals is for a sense of satisfaction. Satisfaction is the motivating factor for why people will work toward difficult and less often achieved goals (98). The greater sense of satisfaction is in direct connection to the external and internal benefits.

Helping Employees Achieve Goals

Communicating with employees is a factor in achieving goals related to change. For Kotter, in order for employees to embrace change, they must be communicated with consistently and credibly. Without credible communication, employees will never be captivated with the possibility of change (9). Communication is an essential factor of achieving goals during change.

Using words as motivation have importance when communicating with employees, but Locke and Latham think words fail greatly compared to goal setting. The results of an experiment conducted in England showed that employees who were given a specific goal to complete everyday showed significantly greater improvement than those who were told to do their best (93). The implication is that employees need direction, specific jobs to do, and marked out goals for best production.

Money is undoubtedly a motivating factor when working with employees to achieve goals. Monetary gains can make life easier and bring security for a person and their family. However, goals have been proven to provide greater productivity for organizations than monetary incentives (Locke and Latham 97). Earning more money can be a strong motivating factor, but it still falls short to goal motivation for Locke and Latham.

During organizational change, big-picture goals take time to be met as well as satisfactory rewards for employees. During the in-between time, there are dangers of losing employees' buy-in and subsequent organizational momentum. A strategy that will help employees stay on course with change is by using short-term wins (Kotter 11). Organizations need to find small goals for employees and departments to achieve in the short term. Once each small goal is met, there should be celebration and acknowledgment about completion of the goal. The celebration and acknowledgment of small goals will help employees see progress being made towards change as well as help with short term rewards.

Complex Goals and Employee Development

Readying employees for complex goals are of significant importance for leaders. Several methods can help employees achieve challenging goals, even when said goals exceed their ability. Situations exist where goals, that move the organization forward, exceed the ability of the employee or group of employees. If a task is too complex for an employee, a primed learning goal will be more effective than a performance goal (Locke and Latham 100). In those scenarios, performance goals alone will inhibit employees significantly, and they will most likely be unable to meet expectations.

When a performance goal is out of reach for employees, the best procedure to take is to assign specific, challenging learning goals (Locke and Latham 100). The pressure that comes from performance goals does not allow time for ill-equipped employees to think through various options, whereas learning goals encourage the exploration of different ways to achieve. This often leads to a person outperforming their ability (100).

In the Church organizational world, Barna would call this a developmental approach to a discipleship philosophy. This is a work regimen instituted by leaders that is not busy work, but developmental (107). When a developmental approach becomes a philosophy, people become attracted and committed to a process. A developmental philosophy attracts a wide swath of people, who feel like they can contribute regardless of their skill or experience level; thus, growth from a wide variety of people occur, bring growth to the church (,107).

Creating methods of longevity for the completion of challenging goals is vital. For the duration of complex goal to be achieved, senior leaders and managers need to understand their responsibility to keep employees focused. Manfred F.R. Kets de Vries, Dutch management scholar and psychoanalyst, says that the organizational-chart leaders are the ones to motivate employees to achieve challenging goals,

The issues of leadership and motivation are more important than ever . . . it will be up to leaders to recognize the importance of these issues in order to exploit the strengths of their organizations the right way. It could be said that leaders are in the business of energy management. Their primary tasks is to find the most effective way of directing the prevailing energy in their organizations toward a common goal. (111)

Kets de Vries believes it is the task of leadership to take responsibility for the overall goal and the motivation of employees toward achieving it.

Locke and Latham would push against Kets de Vries' idea, and believe that there is a danger when goals are given in a hierarchical form. When goals are set and directed by high organizational-chart leaders, motivational factors in employees are reduced significantly when it comes to the longevity of goal completion (Lock and Latham 100). Instead, participatory goal setting, where all employees are brought into the goal setting process, has long-term effectiveness (100). Employees take ownership for the goal,

because in part, it is their idea. Then the employees will carry the goal with longevity, as long as rationale for pursuing the goal is communicated (100).

Sull and Spinosa, experts of business strategy and management, have researched the difficulty in executing complex goals in organizations. Sull and Spinosa show organizations can grow through organizational-chart methods, but execution can diminish because departments become siloed (79-80). They believe the cause of a disjointed organization is a poorly crafted commitment throughout an organization (79-80). Their answer to solve the problem is promise-based management:

Promises are the fundamental units of interaction . . . They coordinate organizational activity and stoke the passions of employees, customers, suppliers, and other stakeholders. While they hold an organization together, they are as fragile as they are crucial. Individuals' divergent worldviews and objectives tug constantly at the filaments of promises, and unexpected contingencies can tear precarious agreements. Leaders must therefore weave and manage their webs of promises with great care – encouraging iterative conversation to make sure commitments are fulfilled reliably. If they do, they can enhance coordination and cooperation among colleagues, build the agility required to seize new business opportunities, and tap employees' entrepreneurial energies. If they don't, they will lose out to rivals who do. (86)

In order for goals to be achieved, promises must be made and kept throughout an organization. If promise-based management is kept, it will increase organizational coordination, collaboration, agility, and employee engagement, putting the organization in position to achieve their goals (Sull and Spinosa 80-81).

Helping employees to achieve complex goals is a significant responsibility for managers and senior Leaders.

Spiritual Goals

For this project, encouraging employees to set spiritual goals was important. Most born-again adults do not set spiritual goals, develop standards to measure growth, or

establish accountability for their growth (Barna 36). Without these measurements, it would be impossible to track growth or name what successful discipleship looks like for a person. This section speaks to the importance of spiritual goals for the participants, the spiritual goals for this project, and a framework for measuring spiritual goals.

The importance of spiritual goals. Laura Nash and Scotty McLennan believe Christians are searching to connect “Sunday and Monday living” and that “career maturity has not brought spiritual maturity, so a radical disconnect exists between Sunday services and Monday activities” (6). Professor of Religious Studies and Leonard Doohan notes regarding spiritual goals that: “Christian spirituality aims to integrate the unique message of Jesus with the best of all human values and produces a living synthesis of divine call and human response as they can be found in mature adult personalities” (107-08). A study has found that as a person gains a sense of being closer to God, satisfaction in life increases (Scott, Agresti, and Fitchett).

Spiritual goals for this project. This project encouraged participants to choose one of six spiritual goals in the teaching sessions.

1. Disciples Know God: begin a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ.
2. Disciples Love God: practice a new spiritual discipline.
3. Disciples, Disciple: disciple another person or a small group.
4. Disciples Understand Themselves: understand one’s personal motivation.
5. Disciples are Learners: set a professional learning goal if a professional performance goal is out of reach.
6. Disciples are Relational: grow relationally with another employee.

Measuring spiritual goals. Spiritual goals are innately qualitative, but they can be measured quantitatively. The framework used for this project to establish quantitative goals was S.M.A.R.T. (Doran 36). This is where goals are to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-sensitive. Participants took the following steps to achieve a spiritual goal: state precisely what spiritual goal they intended to accomplish; tell one other person about their spiritual goal to hold them accountable; set a spiritual goal that could not be reached with one's own strength and ability; make a daily commitment to one's spiritual goals; break the spiritual goal up into manageable segments; and set the achievement of a spiritual goal in a time frame that can be accomplished. Participants used this framework to personally measure their spiritual goal.

A practical way to help an employee to grow in their discipleship is to suggest they set spiritual goals. If an employee incorporates spiritual goals with an instrument of measurement, it will help them grow in their discipleship. For this project, encouraging employees to set spiritual goals was important.

Research Design Literature

This project is an intervention that adopted a mixed-methods approach. The crux of the project was an intervention to measure the changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars. This study utilized mixed methods for research and data collection. Mixed-methods research allows collected data to be compared or related to provide an in-depth and generalized interpretation (Creswell 269).

For this type of project, Sensing provides detailed guidance in research design including the clear objectives, tasks to be carried out, representative sampling, types of data to be collected, ethical issues related to informed consent of participants, tools and protocols for data gathering, and the methods and procedures for analyzing data gathered (50-78). Sensing believes that multi-method research that gathers the most relevant data is appropriate for the kind of intervention research this project undertook (52). The multi-method approach “allows various perspectives to engage in a critical dialogue that leads to several sets of rich data,” which makes for “deeper understandings” (54). The quantitative and qualitative methods used included: surveys, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group.

I used identical pre- and post-intervention surveys to collect, analyze, and assess important quantitative data relating to changes in the participants’ knowledge, attitude, and behavior in their understanding of discipleship. “Surveys provide a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or tests for associations among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population” (Creswell 147). For the focus group and interviews, the process for determining how one gauges their own understanding of discipleship and their growth from the teaching sessions required a qualitative methodology. “Qualitative researches are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam and Brockett 5).

After completing the discipleship teaching sessions, a trained research assistant conducted a focus group to gain qualitative data. The synergy of a focus group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately

(Sensing 120). Through group interaction, data and insights were generated that related to particular themes imposed by the researcher assistant and enriched by the group's discussion. Another research assistant conducted three semi-structured interviews to facilitate a fuller explanation of the possible reasons for the effectiveness of the intervention. Semi-structured interviews provided methodological support for the interviewees. Semi-structured interview questions enabled the flow of thoughts, providing necessary data to analyze.

For this project, having multiple data-collection tools provides a complex view, "enabling a thicker interpretation" for an intervention (Sensing 72). Qualitative inquirers use triangulation among different data sources to enhance the accuracy of a study (Creswell 259). Combining both quantitative and qualitative data created a broader knowledge base to engage in evaluating the findings. This research sought to determine the effectiveness of the intervention from varied viewpoints; mixed methods design better validated the conclusion.

Summary of Literature

Scarce literature has been written about megachurch staff and increasing their growth in discipleship. This chapter has brought together biblical and theological foundations, biblical models of discipleship, spiritual disciplines and formation with research on teaching adults, understanding and leading employees. This was done in hope that this research project will help to create a bridge between these areas of study and practice.

Biblical and theological foundations for discipleship provide a rich understanding for this project. Generally, a disciple is a learner, taught by someone or something and a

follower of their teacher. The overall discipleship process involved a teacher with committed students who went through a period of formation; this was integrated into the New Testament Jewish culture. From a New Testament perspective, a disciple is a follower of Jesus Christ. This project's teaching sessions incorporated curriculum to help the participants understand that a follower of Jesus Christ is a person who knows and loves God.

A biblical example of discipleship can be seen through the relationship of the Apostle Paul and Timothy. When Paul speaks of Timothy in the epistles, he does so repeatedly with a sense of a spiritual father/son connection. This repetition indicates that there was clear closeness of relationship between Paul and Timothy; discipleship was at the center of said relationship. Paul gives Timothy two criteria for picking people to pass on the faith to: trustworthiness and people who will pass it on to others. A disciple is someone who embraces the apostolic teachings and lifestyle, and produces others who embrace it as well. The project's teaching sessions incorporated the idea that a disciple makes other disciples.

A model of discipleship revolves around three elements: discipleship is relational, discipleship is a way of life, and discipleship is about knowing God. The discipleship process is centered in a vertical relationship with God that is in touch with the horizontal connections that God is working in, and through surrounding people; discipleship is relational. Discipleship is a call to devotion to Christ and his commands; a new way of life. Discipleship is a way of life that attempts to completely connect a person to God, themselves, and others. Finally, knowing God is a foundational component of biblical discipleship. It is a move from religion, into intimate and experiential knowledge of God.

This project's teaching sessions incorporated a holistic approach to being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

This project is also concerned with literature discussing spiritual disciplines and spiritual formation. Spiritual disciplines are the life flow for a disciple of Jesus Christ, preparing them to live for God through every season of life. Understanding spiritual formation is important because it is intrinsically linked to developing a disciple's character. As a disciple's character grows, they become instinctual on how to follow God in all their relationships. This project's teaching sessions taught about spiritual disciplines and the importance of spiritual formation.

The literature also revealed many other insights that are foundational for teaching, leading, understanding, and motivating employees. Teaching is both an art and a science, thus Christian education along with Adult Learning and its subcategories of Andragogy and Transformational Learning are vital for research. The literature showed that whenever Adult Learning concepts are incorporated and synthesized into spiritual formation, learning occurs. This project's teaching sessions viewed the participants' development as the main goal, not solely the content being delivered. The participant's experiences and questions formed content by asking if the participants had questions about their life, ministry, and if they desired to grow in a specific professional skill. Knowles' six assumptions guided the teaching sessions, while a critical look at the megachurch model used Mezirow's ten steps of transformation. The lead researcher intentionally used a safe learning environment to build community and foster learning during the teaching sessions.

Research on Leading Change showed that effective change is difficult but possible with the correct understating of leadership and employee motivations. Goal theory literature showed that goals create meaning for employees that give them a strong emotional charge, allow them to self-manage, and enhance their desire to stay with an employer. The literature showed that helping employees achieve goals takes communication from senior personnel, specific tasks assigned, short-term goals to achieve long-term goals, learning goals when performance goals are out of reach, and the importance of spiritual goals. The project's teaching sessions encouraged participants to choose a spiritual goal and equipped the participants with a quantitative measuring tool for achieving said spiritual goal.

The literature review brought together biblical and theological foundations, biblical models of discipleship, spiritual disciplines and formation with research on teaching adults, understanding and leading employees. This was done in hope that this research project will help to create a bridge between these areas of study and practice with a megachurch staff.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the research methodology used in this project focused on fostering a discipleship culture in the megachurch context. After a brief review of the nature and purpose of the project, the project's research questions are presented along with the instrumentation used to address each question. The ministry context of the project is then presented, followed by specifics on the participants in the studies, the instrumentation employed, ethical considerations, expert review, the reliability and validity of the project, and the process of data analysis.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The topic of this dissertation project is: "Growing a Megachurch Staff's Discipleship Understanding." This project is important to the practice of ministry because of its potential of disciple making in the megachurch. A megachurch typically has abundant resources, skilled staff, efficient organizational systems, and a platform that draws the intention of man. The spiritual formation in most megachurches is packaged in professional preaching, programming, tithing, and participating in small groups. If those metaphoric boxes can be checked, laity become a products of the organization. This, at its very best, is merely the cusp of discipleship.

Bolstering the discipleship understanding and practices of megachurch staff members is a critical step toward fostering a discipleship movement in the megachurch context. Thus, the nature of this project was to enhance the understanding of discipleship for staff in a megachurch. The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in

knowledge, attitude, and behavior among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars.

Research Questions

The following three research questions were answered by using four instruments: pre-test and post-test surveys, a focus group, and semi-structured interviews.

Research Question #1. Before the four-session teaching on discipleship, what were First Church staff members' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship?

This research question provided baseline quantitative data regarding the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of discipleship within the First Church staff. The researcher-designed survey used a 4-point Likert scale and asked if the participant strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with a statement.

Knowledge questions surveyed participants on the following: historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship, Pauline priorities when it comes to discipleship, spiritual disciplines, discipleship relationships, Jesus' major teaching elements regarding discipleship, and participants' confidence in their knowledge of discipleship. Attitude questions surveyed the participants about these: personal discipleship beliefs, their desire to see more discipleship on staff, their desire to disciple others, the Holy Spirit's transformational power at work in their life, their receptiveness to being disciplined, and the importance of spiritual goals. Behavior questions surveyed the participants on the following topics: frequency using spiritual disciplines, their personal discipleship behaviors, their practice of leading other people in discipleship, and their practice of spiritual goals.

In order to collect data for RQ#1, the researcher-designed tool used was a Web-Based survey named “Discipleship Pre-test” (DPR) through SurveyMonkey. The DPR addressed 31 questions (Appendix A). Question 1 asked if the participant was 18 years of age or older to acquire consent. Questions 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 30, and 31 addressed knowledge; Questions 4, 7, 8, 12, 15, 20, 21, 24, 28, and 29 addressed attitudes; Questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 22, 23, 25, and 27 addressed behaviors. First Church staff members were given ten days to complete the DPR, before the first discipleship seminar.

Research Question #2. After the four-session teaching on discipleship, what were First Church staff members’ knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship?

The question was investigated to measure quantitative changes regarding discipleship within the First Church staff. In order to collect data for RQ#2, the researcher-designed tool used was a Web-Based survey named “Discipleship Post-test” (DPO) through SurveyMonkey. There were 31 questions addressed in the DPO (Appendix B). These were the exact same questions used in the DPR. Question 1 asked if the participant was 18 years of age or older to acquire consent. Questions 10, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 19, 26, 30, and 31 addressed knowledge; Questions 4, 7, 8, 12, 15, 20, 21, 24, 28, and 29 addressed attitudes; Questions 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 14, 22, 23, 25, and 27 addressed behaviors. First Church staff members were given ten days to complete the DPO immediately after the final discipleship seminar.

Research Question #3. What did the participants identify as the most significant part of the four-teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to their growth in discipleship?

This question was researched to gain qualitative insights into the growth and transformative effects of the discipleship teachings in the First Church staff. The two tools used to research this question: a focus group and semi-structured interviews.

The first researcher-designed instrument was a focus group called “Discipleship Focus Group” (DFG). Participants who completed all four sessions of discipleship teachings, were invited to attend a group discussion about their growth in discipleship after the seminars through an email. The first five participants who elected to be a part of the focus group were selected. The DFG was held at First Church, and a person whom the researcher had trained led the focus group meeting. The research assistant recorded the discussion on audio, facilitated the group, and wrote down field observations. Another trained research assistant made observations and took notes. The focus group conversation provided in-depth responses about the four-session discipleship teachings that were not possible to acquire through the discipleship surveys.

The DFG questions elicited data for the purpose of showing how participants were impacted by the discipleship teachings and to probe for qualitative growth in their discipleship. The first question, DFG1, was informal with the purpose of setting the stage and creating synergy within the group. DFG6 was an example of inviting the participants to share the most significant parts of the four teaching sessions that contributed to their growth in discipleship.

DFG1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being, “Why didn’t I sign up for a voluntary root canal?” and 10 being, “Move over Peter and John, I’m ready to change the

world!” How would you rate the discipleship sessions you just experienced? Explain your number.

DFG6. What would you identify as the most significant part of the four-session discipleship experience towards your growth in discipleship, and what was least helpful?

The moderator used three probes: "Would you give an example?" "Would you explain further?" and "I don't understand." The DFG questions are in Appendix C.

The second tool was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview entitled Discipleship Interview (DW). The DW was held at First Church, and a person whom I trained held the interviews. The interviewer audio recorded the discussion. Sensing states, “Interviews allow people to describe their situations and put words to their interior lives, personal feelings, opinions, and experiences that otherwise are not available to the researcher by observation” (103). The DW provided opportunities for the participants to give their individual views on the significance of the discipleship teachings (DW4) and how they incorporated the teachings in their life (DW5).

DW4. What would you identify as the most significant part of the four-session discipleship experience towards your growth in discipleship? What was the least significant?

DW5. Was there anything that you learned from the discipleship teachings, that you want to incorporate into your spiritual walk?

The interviewer was given the DW protocol to guide the semi-structured interview. The DW questions and protocol are in Appendix D.

Ministry Context

The following demographic data came from *Gloo*, a data tool designed to help churches understand their local context. The ministry context for this project was First

Church. First Church is located in a suburban area, within fifteen miles of a major Midwest U.S. city. Eight towns within a five-mile radius of First Church have a population of 90,000. The average household income is \$73,000. First Church staff participants in the project made between \$15,000-\$50,000 annually, excluding benefits, from their employment at First Church.

The five-mile area around First Church's main campus is considered a generational mix: three percent Gen Z (ages seven-twenty-two), eighteen percent Millennials (ages twenty-three to thirty-eight), twenty-four percent Gen X (ages thirty-nine to fifty-four), thirty five percent Boomers (ages fifty-five to seventy-two), and eleven percent Silent (ages seventy-three to ninety-four). The ethnicity of the population within five miles of the main campus is sixty-five percent Caucasian, twenty-five percent African American; the remaining ten percent identify as Hispanic, Asian, or Greek. The ethnicity within the congregation of First Church is about ninety percent Caucasian and ten percent identifying as another ethnicity. This may indicate a problem with reaching the larger community in discipleship; however, for this project, the First Church staff participants were over ninety percent Caucasian.

In a five-mile radius of the main campus, the highest religious affiliations are seventy-eight percent Protestant and sixteen percent Catholic. Only three percent of the area identify with a religion outside of the Christian faith. First Church is located within twenty miles of a U.S. military base; the congregation consists of a number of active and retired military members. The relational household status over the five-mile radius is thirty-eight percent married, twenty-eight percent single, and nine percent identifying as a

single parent household. The majority of the participants were married while three were single, none identified as a single parent household.

First Church primarily attracts people who are a part of a traditional, nuclear family. There is significant investment of time, money, and energy into the children and student departments of the church. Unmarried couples, single, gay couples, and divorced people attend and join the church, but they do not make up the majority of the church. Political views vary in the congregation; there are a mix of Democrats and Republicans. Over the last three years, about 10% of congregants on the progressive end of the theological spectrum left due to the church's orthodox view on human sexuality.

People on the church staff had differing political views, but these were not often discussed in depth. Even though disagreement due to politics is known, staff members treat one another equally and work remarkably well together. This is partly due to the Church's leadership stressing that First Church staff focus on the mission of the church. All staff members sign a staff covenant that intends to help keep unity, personal, and corporate integrity, and give a process that works through conflict in a healthy manner. The work place at First Church has a high degree of professionalism and excellence within it.

First Church has had over two-decades of average weekly attendance growth. Numerical ministry growth is an expectation within the church and staff culture. It is the accepted belief that if a church is not growing, it is an indication of an unhealthy church. Part of the church's attendance growth over the last decade came through their satellite campus strategy.

First Church has three satellite campuses within fifteen miles of the main campus. Each campus averages sixty-five attendees, weekly. One campus is located in an old grange building, another in a renovated Family Dollar; the final campus is located in a strip mall. Each campus is considered a video venue that plays a recorded sermon from the main campus every Sunday. Two of the satellite campuses are led by a bi-vocational married couple. The third campus is led by a full-time staff member. Other than sharing a sermon and a few staff members from the main campus, the satellite campuses work largely independent.

Participants

The participants for the study were chosen to match the purpose and research questions associated with this project. The selection was for the most part purposive, but had a random element used to obtain samples from the focus group and interviews. Participants for this ministry transformation project were the staff from First Church that spent the most time working with and leading laity.

Criteria for Selection

The participants invited in this study were among the staff at First Church. This purposive sampling of participants met three criteria. First, the participants met the criteria of working on a megachurch staff. Second, the staff members worked directly with volunteer leaders. Finally, the staff members taught, equipped, and communicated regularly with laity. These attributes were vital to the research because the participants were aware of the dynamics of working in a megachurch and could provide rich data to answer the research questions. Sensing states, “Purposive samples select people who

have awareness of the situation and meet the criteria and attributes that are essential to your research (83).” The participants met all criteria for this project.

To gain permission to work with the First Church staff, I met with the Sr. Pastor and made him aware of the project’s goal, processes, and commitment to confidentiality. I received the Sr. Pastor’s permission to go through with the project. The Executive Director was also contacted and gave me permission to work with the staff.

First Church staff members were recruited via email to participate in the study by me. The first ten staff that elected to be a part of the study were selected. After permission was gained, I sent an email to participants alerting them that they were a part of the study, what the study would entail, how they met the criteria for selection, confidentiality parameters, and an Informed Consent form.

One limitation of this study was that I am a pastor and Sr. Staff member in the First Church organization, and thus was seen as a spiritual authority and supervisor to participants.

Description of Participants

The staff invited were employees who most interacted and ministered to laity. They were considered the ministry staff of First Church. The lead investigator invited women and men, of varying ages, education, and ministry experiences. This group invited worked the most with volunteers, equipping them to lead in ministry. Finally, the number invited were limited for the purpose of a realistic sized group for research.

The following is the demographic description of the total sampling of persons involved in this research project:

Female 80%

Male	20%
Ages 18-34	40%
Ages 35-54	50 %
Ages 55-74	10%

Ethical Considerations

The power dynamics of my role as a pastor, supervisor, and organizational place as a Sr. Staff member could have made it problematic for a staff member to decline participation in the study for fear of displeasing me or hurting their job status. I kept this in mind when inviting staff members to be a part of this study. The consent form, which state clearly that participation is voluntary, showed that the First Church staff could cease to participate at any time without any negative consequences.

If the staff member agreed to participate, the investigator sent them a consent form (Appendix E). All persons who participated in the project gave their informed consent by signing the Consent Form, and by agreeing to its terms. They handed over the completed consent forms to I before any surveys were accessible online, before any of the discipleship teachings, and before the focus group or interviews were held.

Upon receipt of the signed consent form, I date-stamped and secured the document in a locked file box in my locked office. Throughout the length of the project, I was in possession of the only key to the secure locked file box. I secured all hard copies of the instruments, including interview logs, copies of online surveys, field notes, the focus group video, interview audio, and transcripts in the locked file box; the researcher had the key to the locked file box. Furthermore, a password-protected MacBook Air,

which contained all electronic recordings and findings, was stored in a secure, encrypted folder with a complex password known only by me.

Throughout the project confidentiality was a priority. Participants were made aware of the strict confidentiality measures in the consent form, the online surveys, at the beginning of interviews, and at the outset of the focus group. Again, all recorded participant responses were coded so that the data remained confidential.

Informed Consent was received by participants in the web-based Discipleship Surveys by way of asking applicants to read the Informed Consent and by answering “yes” to the question, “Do you agree to the above terms and are you 18 years old or older?” Confidentiality for the web-based Discipleship Surveys was ensured by using privacy protocols of the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, which are laid out at www.surveymonkey.com/mp/policy/privacy-policy/

Further, all survey responses were held strictly confidential and data from this research was reported only in the aggregate. The information was coded by SurveyMonkey, remained confidential, and was only accessible by using a login and strong password on the site. In addition, all data was secured via password to the account, which was also known only by the lead researcher. Data downloaded from the website was secured in an encrypted folder on the researcher’s password-protected laptop. Any data printed on hard copies was secured in the researcher’s locked file box.

The Discipleship Interviews and Discipleship Focus Group were led by a trained research assistant. The participants in the Discipleship Interviews were given a written copy of the Discipleship Interview Informed Consent form to read, sign, and date before the Discipleship Interview (template in Appendix F). Confidentiality for the Discipleship

Interview was obtained by an assurance in the informed consent form that the participant's answers were confidential and only accessible to the research team. For the Discipleship Interviews, each participant was identified using a four-letter code beginning with the letters "DI" for interview and a number between one and three.

In order to protect confidentiality, the study had no names, or any other distinguishing characteristics of individual participants. If referencing a particular participant was needed, he/she has been referred to using a pseudonym known only to the researcher. Raw data including transcripts of interviews and focus groups will never be shared or disseminated.

The investigator shared significant findings from his research in a colloquium with D.Min. cohort colleagues and ATS faculty on Asbury's Kentucky campus. Only research findings were shared; no raw data, including audio files, interviews notes, etc., were ever dispersed.

Within twelve months after completion of the dissertation and its final approval, electronic recorded data was deleted. Data saved on Google Drive was permanently deleted, and all hard copies of data were shredded.

Instrumentation

Four researcher-designed instruments collected data in this study. The first and second were identical surveys using quantitative methods. The third was a researcher-designed Discipleship focus group also using a qualitative method. The final researcher-designed instrument was a semi-structured Discipleship Interview using a qualitative method.

Surveys

Creswell states: “Survey design provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or tests for associations among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population” (147). I created two Web-based online surveys that were identical in format to compare quantitative growth (RQ#1 and RQ#2) and helped establish information and trends for all three research questions. The first web-based online survey was called “Discipleship Pre-test” (Appendix A “DPR”). The second, identical, web-based online survey was called “Discipleship Post-test” (Appendix B “DPO”).

The thirty-one questions of the DPR gave a discipleship base line of knowledge, attitude, and behaviors of the participants in the study (RQ#1). The questions were on a strength-based scale asking the participants to gauge their feelings to statements with four options: strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree. The DPR was given before the teaching sessions. The identical survey, DPO, was given after the teaching sessions to measure growth in the First Church staff members’ knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship (RQ#2).

Focus Group

The next tool was a researcher-designed focus group entitled Discipleship Focus Group (Appendix C DFG). The DFG allowed the researcher to collect qualitative data for RQ#3 and helped establish information and trends for all three research questions. During a focus group, “[t]he group responds to a series of questions that allows the researcher to quickly gather data from several points of view” (Sensing 120). The DFG

conversation provided group responses and synergy about the four-session discipleship teachings that were not possible to acquire through the discipleship surveys.

The focus group was led by a research assistant that I trained. I also trained another research assistant, that observed and took notes. The DFG was conducted after the four teaching sessions and helped identify the most significant part of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to the First Church staff growth in their discipleship (RQ#3).

Interviews

The final tool was a researcher-designed semi-structured interview entitled Discipleship Interview (Appendix D DW). In semi-structured interviews, specific themes and questions with a predetermined sequence are described while the interviewer is free to pursue responses, narrowed down by the projects' problem and purpose statement (Sensing 107). The DW allowed the researcher to collect qualitative data for RQ#3 and helped establish information and trends for all three research questions. These individual conversations provided in-depth responses that were not possible to acquire through surveys or the focus group.

The DW was held at First Church, and a person whom the researcher had trained held the interview. The DW provided an opportunity for participants to give their views on the discipleship teachings and measure for qualitative discipleship growth. The DW was conducted after the four teaching sessions and helped identify the most significant part of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to the First Church staff growth in their discipleship (RQ#3).

Expert Review

Three expert reviewers evaluated and fine-tuned the researcher-designed instruments. An email explaining the study, its rationale, purpose, and research questions were sent along with the instruments for each research question to each reviewer. The primary concerns by two of the experts were the number of questions and personal nature of a few of the questions in the instruments.

The most significant change in the instruments was through my work with Dr. Ellen Marmon. Originally, the researcher was going to lead the focus group. Through Dr. Marmon's guidance, I determined that a focus group would be best lead by a research assistant in order to prevent power dynamics that may have affected the data. Dr. Marmon also expressed concern that there were too few questions regarding knowledge and behavior in the online survey. This reviewer also critiqued the overuse of some questions in the focus group and interview instruments.

The comments of the three reviewers helped with wording, combining and eliminating some questions.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

Consistency of instrumentation design and procedures ensured the reliability of measurement, while finding correspondence among data and the subjects being measured supported the validity of the findings.

The use of the Discipleship Pre-test and Discipleship Post-test survey for the entire sample of participants was the best way to gather and measure quantitative data for the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship with the First Church Staff. Both the pre-test and post-test needed to be completed in a seven-day time

frame and was easily accessible through a website link given through email. This gave participants sufficient time to think about their responses.

Respondents to the survey were encouraged to ask me questions on any item that was unclear to them. Those questions were clarified to all participants in case of a common misunderstanding. The survey had a standardized format given through a reliable service. All completed surveys were returned on time. The entire procedure was consistent with both the pre-test and post-test.

A Likert scale for the Discipleship Survey provided respondents with a broader range to express their subjective understanding or feelings about a construct and, consequently, provided more precision in measuring change of distribution (Fowler 96). Some questions were asked more than once using different phrasing to reveal patterns of association among participants.

The Discipleship Focus Group allowed participants to reflect upon, report on, and discuss discipleship in the church staff in a confidential manner with other staff members. The framework for the focus groups was derived from the study of pertinent literature in order to give general structure for the questions. The use of a focus group allowed for multiple perspectives on the same aspect of discipleship in order to obtain more thorough results. Sensing says the following about focus groups:

Through group interaction, data and insights are generated that are related to a particular theme imposed by a researcher and enriched by the group's interactive discussion. The synergy of the group will often provide richer data than if each person in the group had been interviewed separately. (120)

The focus group provided validity and reliability as this method allowed for in-depth exploration of discipleship perspectives among First Church Staff.

The qualitative Discipleship Interview enabled deeper research within a smaller sample of the larger group to investigate discipleship understanding and allow participants to expand on their answers. I trained a research assistant to lead the interviews. The research assistant learned about the best practices for semi-structured interviews. The three interviews were held on one day for consistency's sake. The research assistant followed the same semi-structured interview protocol and used the same audio recording method for data collection. During the DI, all the questions were asked in the same way each time, and the researcher assistant was intentional not to make any comments to indicate approval or disapproval of answers to the questions.

I carefully designed and selected questions for the survey, focus group, and interviews to gain a baseline discipleship understanding for the participants and measure growth after the discipleship seminars. The content in the discipleship seminars matched the purpose of the research and to measure the independent variables of this study appropriately. Three expert reviewers validated the research process. The reviewers marked the wording of most questions as clear. On those questions that were marked unclear, I considered their comments and made changes. Their input helped adjust questions to make the instruments clearer and more on point with the intended goal of the project. With the adjusted instruments, the research proceeded with the utmost confidence.

The findings of the four instruments were additionally trustworthy and generalized, because there was a mixed-method approach of a quantitative Discipleship Survey and a qualitative Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interview.

Data Collection

This project relied on quantitative and qualitative research mixed methods design to evaluate the degree in which First Church staff members grew in their knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship as a result of their participation in a researcher-designed intervention consisting of four 90-minute seminars on the topic of discipleship.

This project engaged in quantitative research. Quantitative research “is an interrelated set of constructs (or variables) formed into propositions, or hypotheses, that specify the relationship among variables . . . it helps to explain (or predict) phenomena that occur in the world” (Creswell 52). The quantitative instruments employed were identical Discipleship Pre-test and Discipleship Post-test surveys to provide a measure of the participants’ changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a result of their participation in the discipleship seminars.

- 1) Seven days before the Discipleship Pre-test and Post-test surveys needed to be completed, all participants received an email from the lead researcher which invited them to do an identical 31-question discipleship survey through an email link. The Discipleship Pre-test was open two weeks before the first discipleship seminar. The Discipleship Post-test link was sent the same day the discipleship seminar concluded and remained open for seven days.
- 2) Three days after each survey was sent, a reminder email to fill out the online survey was sent to the participants.
- 3) One day before the surveys closed, a reminder email to fill out the survey was sent.
- 4) One day after the surveys closed, a thank you email was sent.

This project engaged in qualitative research. Sensing states that qualitative research, “produces culturally specific and contextually rich data critical for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches (58).” Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln describe qualitative research:

Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them . . . Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials—case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interviews; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational historical, interactional, and visual texts—that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Accordingly, researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices hoping always to get a better understanding of the subject matter at hand. (3)

After the seminars, one of the qualitative instruments used was a Discipleship Focus Group. I sent out an email and invited the First Church staff that participated in all four discipleship seminars as focus group participants. The first five participants to accept the invitation received a response thanking them for their willingness to participate and were provided details about the Discipleship Focus Group time and location. Responses that arrived after the fifth response received a reply indicating that the focus group was now closed. The focus group questions were sent to the selected group one week before the focus group met. A reminder email was sent one day before the Discipleship Focus Group.

The focus group was led by a trained research assistant while another trained research assistant observed the group and took notes. The lead researcher was not present during the focus group.

- (1) The focus group leader was trained by the lead researcher to facilitate the discussion using the Discipleship Focus Group instrument.
- (2) The lead researcher set up a secure room at First Church before the participants arrived.
- (3) The research assistant started on time, began with a thank-you, introductions, and instructions about the conversation. The other research assistant pushed the record button on the audio recorder.
- (4) The focus group leader guided the participants by asking the DFG questions (Appendix C).
- (5) The other assistant researcher observed and took notes about the conversation and the group dynamics.
- (6) After the final question, the discussion was completed and the group was thanked for their participation.

The second qualitative research instrument used was a semi-structured Discipleship Interview. The lead researcher sent out an email and invited the First Church staff that participated in all four discipleship seminars as interview participants. The first three participants to accept the invitation received a response thanking them for their willingness to participate and were provided details about their interview time and location. Responses that arrived after the third acceptance received a reply indicating that the interviews spots were filled. One week before the interview, a reminder email was sent out to the interview participants. One day before the interview, a reminder email was sent out to the interview participants. One day after the interview, a thank you email was sent out.

Discipleship Interviews were conducted by a research assistant that the lead researcher trained. The lead researcher was not present during any of the interviews.

- (1) The lead researcher secured a room at First Church that was secure for the interviews.
- (2) At the outset of the interview, the interviewer asked the participants to fill out an Informed Consent form.
- (3) The interviewer pressed start on the audio recorder.
- (4) The interviewer led the interview, guided by asking the DW questions (Appendix D).
- (5) After the final question, the interview was completed and the First Church Staff member was thanked for their participation.

The qualitative interviews and focus group were done to create a mixed-methods study, which helped with more in-depth answers from the quantitative research done in the Discipleship Pre-test and Post-test surveys. In contrasting surveys with interviews, Sensing states “face-to-face interviews increase participation, your ability to clarify, and the probability of gathering additional information” (115). In addition, the qualitative research methods of interviews and a focus group allowed me to strengthen the research. As Creswell says regarding mixed methods design, “collecting diverse types of data best provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either quantitative or qualitative data alone” (17).

Data Analysis

This Ministry Transformation Project is intervention research and incorporated mixed methods research design. The data analysis of this project followed a blended

approach drawing upon ideas and models from Creswell and Sensing. The lead researcher found themes and patterns from the data by coding, categorizing, and interpreting the information in order to arrive at a narrative summary explaining the discoveries of this project.

The quantitative data was collected with identical Discipleship Pre-test and Post-test surveys sent to ten First Church Staff members. The online service SurveyMonkey provided the quantitative data from the Discipleship Pre-test and Post-test surveys. The data was collected and analyzed in Microsoft Excel 2019. Analyzation by Excel calculated the descriptive statistics, most notably the mean and standard deviation of each question. Each question was individually analyzed to determine the statistical significance of the responses, mean, and standard deviation.

The transcript of the Discipleship Focus Group, along with the research assistant's observation notes, were examined to identify common words and themes. These data points were categorized in a way that described their content and connected with the project's research questions. The categorized data points were numerically labeled under each of their headings (for example, the heading "Discipleship Knowledge" would then contain DK1, DK2, DK3, etc.).

The semi-structured Discipleship Interview provided qualitative data which was recorded. Notes were created during the interview and from the recordings. I read through the notes of the interviews and listened repeatedly to certain sections of the interviews to provide clarity of answers. After repeated readings and clarifications, I created codes for certain themes that reoccurred in the interview and coded them

appropriately. A Word document was used with each coded theme along with related interview responses for each theme.

A comprehensive list was then created from the data collected from the DPR, DPO, DFG, and DW and manually examined for similarities and differences. Notes were made on findings from the interactions. The themes and patterns that were discovered in the data led to several significant categories. The categories were named, and a description of each category was crafted using evidence from the data.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

The megachurch model has had a major impact on the U.S. church. The majority of the staff in megachurches have not been well trained in their discipleship. With the megachurch's attendance surge, employees were hired based on their ability to run programming while ministry fruitfulness was defined by numerical growth. Lost in the growth melee was the megachurch staff's discipleship. The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior, among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars.

This chapter attempts to answer the three research questions for this project. It describes the demographics of the participants of the study. This chapter shares the quantitative data collected from the pre- and post-test Discipleship Surveys and the qualitative data collected from the Discipleship Focus Group, and Discipleship Interviews. Finally, this chapter identifies four major findings gathered from the data.

Participants

Ten participants were invited to the study in November of 2021. All ten First Church Staff accepted the invitation. Both the pre- and post- Discipleship Surveys were then sent out to ten members of the First Church staff. All ten participants completed the discipleship teachings. Of that number, all ten participants completed both the pre- and post-tests. Of that group, five volunteered to take part in the Discipleship Focus Group.

Three participants volunteered to be a part of a Discipleship Interview. One participant was a part of both the Discipleship Focus Group and the Discipleship Interview.

The demographic profile of all participants by age, gender, employment status and theological training is represented in Figure 4.1. The ten participants were between the ages of 18-65. Seven of the participants had been on the First Church staff five years or less. Three participants had been on staff for five years or more. The most recently hired employee had been on staff one-year, while the most experienced had been on staff for twelve years. There were eight females and two males. Only one participant had been theologically trained. Four of the participants were part-time employees while the other six worked full-time at First Church.

The demographic profile of those who took part in the Discipleship Survey, Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interview are shown in Figure 4.2. The demographic profile of participants by relative experience level are represented in Figure 4.3. The experience level chart (Figure 4.3) is scaled from 0 to 100 to give First Church staff a relative experience level. Experience was determined by four factors; age, time on staff, employment status (part/full-time), and theological training. The experience level chart shows that nine out of the ten First Church participants had a relatively low experience level even though they did the most training and leading of laity at First Church. The experience level chart may later aid in revealing why there appeared to be areas of low discipleship understanding among the First Church staff.

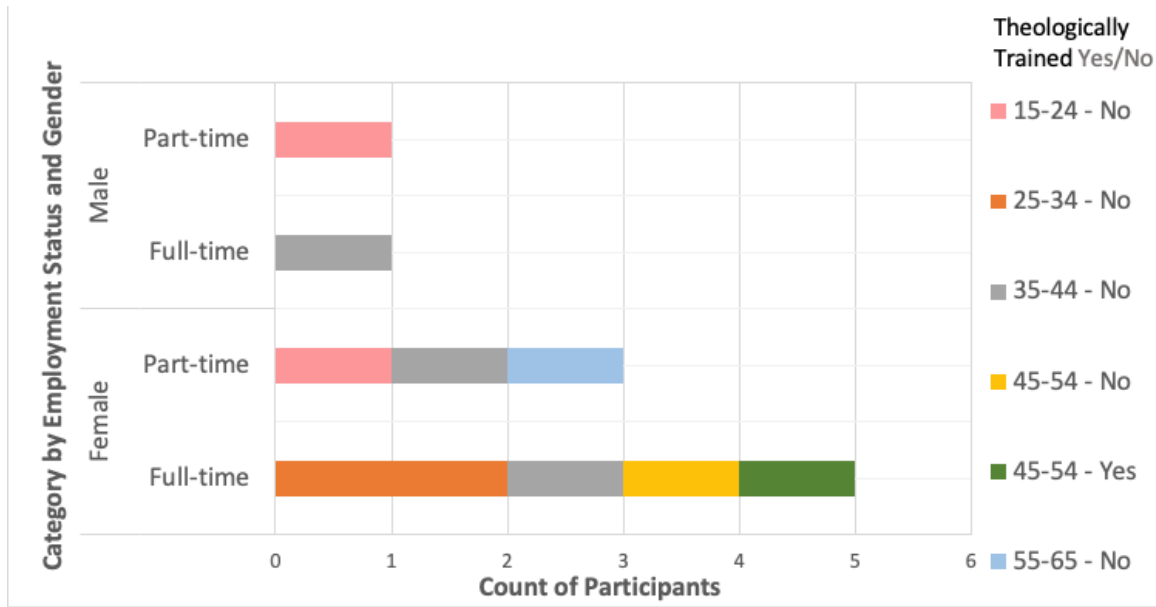


Figure 4.1 Demographics of participants by employment status and gender.

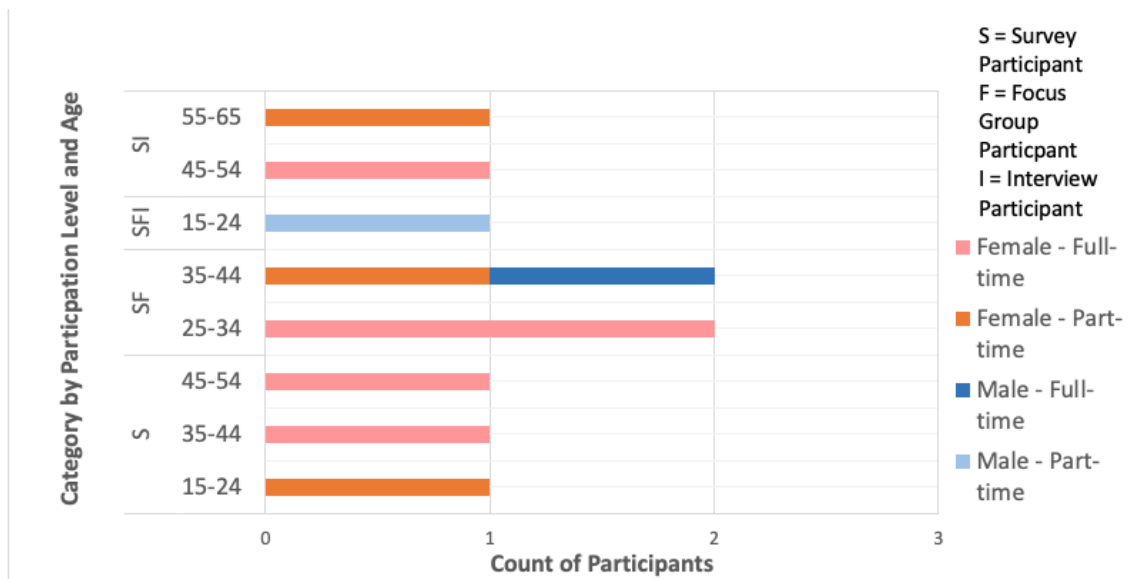


Figure 4.2 Demographics of survey, focus group, and interview by participation level and age.

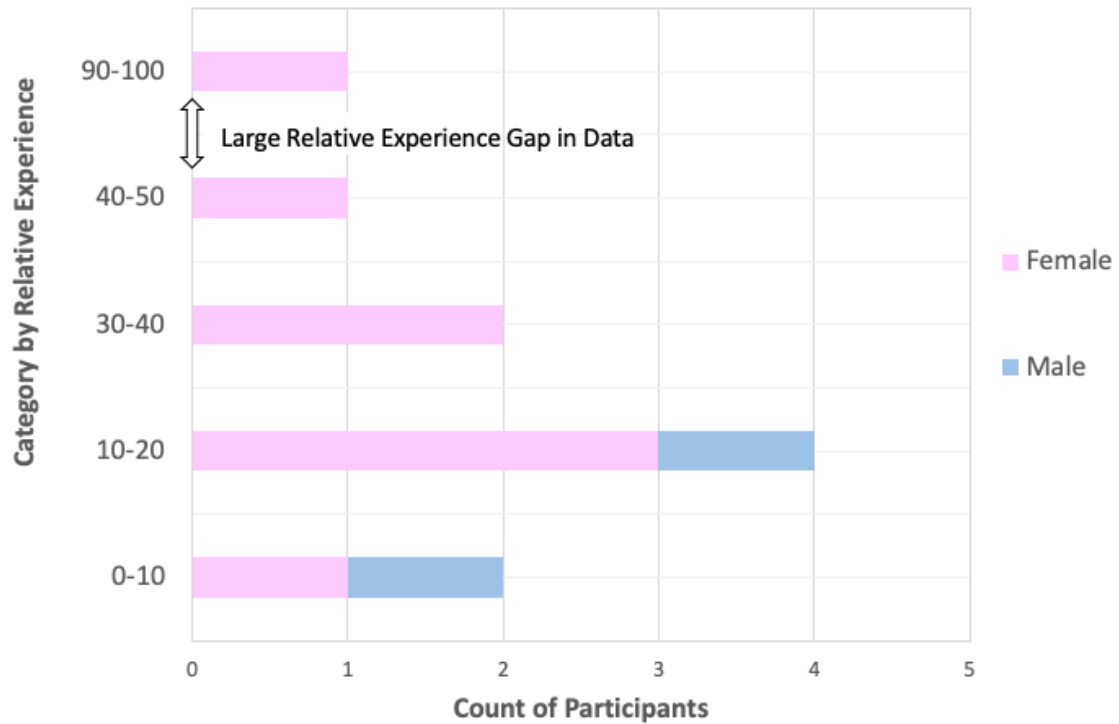


Figure 4.3 Demographics of participants by relative experience level.

Research Question #1: Description of Evidence

Before the four teaching sessions on discipleship, what were First Church staff members' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship?

Discipleship Pre-test Survey

The tool used for collecting the answer to Research Question #1 was the pre-test survey administered through Survey Monkey. The pre-test survey yielded observable data regarding the participants' knowledge, attitudes, and behavior regarding discipleship. Measuring the mean response of participants (N=10) in this survey was accomplished by assigning numerical values to the responses of "Strongly Agree" = +2, "Agree" = +1, "Disagree" = -1, and "Strongly Disagree" = -2. As such, a zero response

serves as a neutral benchmark reflecting neither agreement nor disagreement with a given statement.

Spiritual disciplines were the weakest surveyed area for the First Church megachurch staff. The pre-test survey showed that participants did not feel as if they spent enough time with God. Figure 4.4 is ordered left-to-right from the Discipleship Survey pre-test that showed the statements with the greatest levels of disagreement to those with the greatest levels of agreement for the First Church megachurch staff participants. The Discipleship pre-test showed the statement demonstrating the highest level of disagreement for the participants was statement 27 (“I spend enough time in my spiritual disciplines.”). Statement 27 was a behavioral statement regarding discipleship. Engagement and understanding spiritual disciplines were a need for the First Church staff that will also later be addressed with qualitative data.

Old Testament knowledge and attitudes were low among participants. The next statements reflecting disagreement regarding discipleship was statement 10 (“I am familiar with historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship.”). Statement 10 was knowledge based. The participants having a low knowledge of Old Testament patterns of discipleship is not that surprising with the lack of explicit discipleship language in the Old Testament, as noted in the literature review. Some may be surprised that a megachurch staff has a low knowledge of discipleship concepts in the Old Testament.

The First Church staff exhibited a lack of enthusiasm towards one-on-one discipleship in the pre-test. The third statement reflecting the most disagreement regarding discipleship was statement 20 (“I believe discipleship best happens in one-on-

one settings.”). Statement 20 was attitude-based towards discipleship. The pre-test’s low attitude towards one-on-one discipleship could be concerning if it indicates that the low attitude equates with a lack of discipling by the staff. The alarm may be raised when bringing in data from statement 24, “I believe discipleship best happens in connect groups.” Statement 24 had the seventh most disagreement. The participants’ response to statement 8 does not bring any clarity, “I believe discipleship best happens when listening to a sermon or teaching.” Statement 8 is the fourth statement with the most disagreement. The pretest data begs the question, where does the First Church staff believe discipleship best occurs? Or, perhaps, does the First Church megachurch staff know where discipleship best occurs?

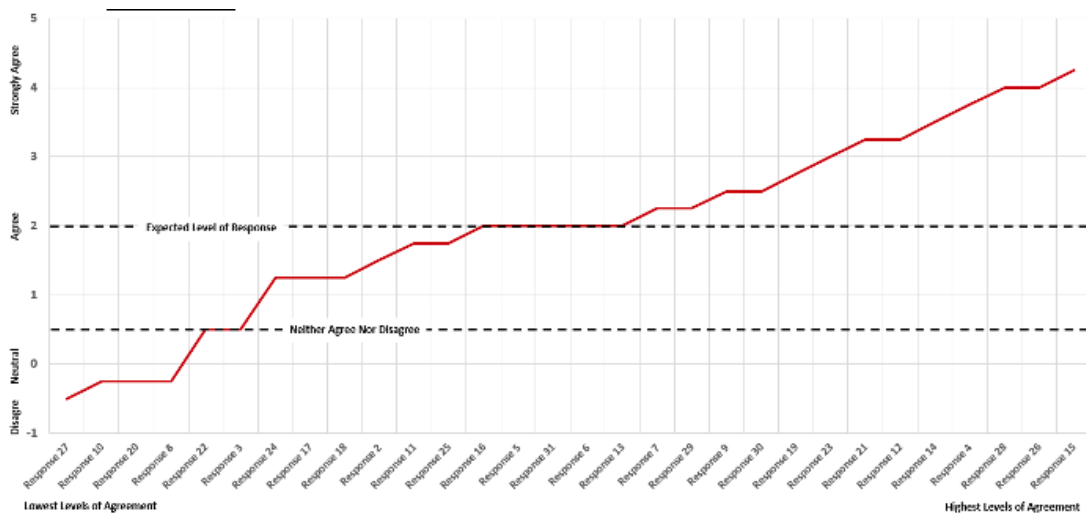


Figure 4.4 Mean response of participants pre-test. |

The pre-test survey indicated that the First Church staff strongly believed that the Holy Spirit was working in their lives. The discipleship pre-test showed the statement with the greatest level of agreement for the First Church staff was statement 15

“I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in my life, changing me.”). Statement 15 was an attitude-based statement about discipleship. Contrasting this piece of data with spiritual disciplines being the weakest area surveyed among participants is interesting. Spiritual disciplines are a way for the Holy Spirit to transform a person into the image of Christ. The First Church staff showed strong agreement towards a belief the Holy Spirit is at work in their lives, yet do not believe that they are doing what they should to allow the Spirit’s work to take place. In effect, the First Church staff admitted to stifling the Spirit’s work in their lives by having inadequate spiritual disciplines.

Pre-test data showed that the First Church staff believed discipleship was vital for them as church staff members. Statements 26 (“I have a clear understanding about how I am a disciple of Jesus as an employee on a church staff.”) and 28 (“I think discipleship is important for church staff.”) were the next two statements agreed with by the participants. Statement 26 was knowledge-based while 28 gauged the First Church staff’s attitude towards discipleship. Statement 4 also showed a high degree of agreement, “I believe I am a disciple of Jesus.” Statement 4 was attitude-based. The behavior-based statement with the greatest agreement during the pre-test was statement 14 (“I regularly encourage people to be in relationship with others who will help them grow as disciples of Jesus.”). Participants believed discipleship was important for them as a church staff.

Discipleship Focus Group

Qualitative data collected from the Discipleship Focus Group provided some answers to Research Question #1.. Five participated in the Discipleship Focus Group and a research assistant served as the group facilitator. By analyzing the data, I was able to identify some base line knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors toward discipleship.

Knowledge before the teaching sessions. With regard to knowledge, at least some First Church staff members demonstrated a lack of awareness in some fundamental elements of discipleship Before the teaching sessions, DG04 did not know that in a discipleship relationship, Jesus is the primary agent doing the discipling. Instead, DG04 saw the mentor as the primary discipler in the relationship.

- “I choose (the spiritual goal) . . . ‘Beginning in discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ’ . . . I don’t think I’ve ever thought about it that way . . . (I’m) being disciplined by Jesus himself. . . I think that’s really cool.”

DG04 also did not understand what fasting was before the teaching sessions.

- “I learned what fasting really means . . . now that inspires me to make it a spiritual discipline to begin fasting . . . I think that that was really important to me because knowing something doesn’t mean, you understand it.”

DG03 did not understand how some of the spiritual disciplines connected her with God before the teaching sessions.

- “I didn’t realize how to (connect) with some of these spiritual disciplines. I knew they existed . . . and I knew that’s how people connect, but I never really put two and two together.

The fundamental lack of discipleship knowledge may be related to the lack of experience among participants and/or not having a theological education. Later qualitative evidence may suggest simply that the First Church staff has never been trained as disciples.

Attitudes before the teachings sessions. Staff had a negative attitude regarding the word “discipleship.” The participants who worked with children on the First Church staff found the word “discipleship” off-putting. DG02’s attitude towards the word “discipleship” was low before the teachings,

- “I’ve always cringed at the word (discipleship). It is such a churchy word. . . I don’t know if it is because we work with kids over here . . . it’s not something that we use in general conversation with children necessarily, even with families . . . to hear it used in a basic conversation. I’ve always just kind of been a little bit of a put off because even though we do it. We of course never assign anything that formal to it.”

DG03 agreed with DG02’s attitude towards the word “discipleship.”

- “So . . . I agree with you. I don’t think I’ve actually thought that either. We know we’re discipling them, but we lean in as this is a relationship with them. We’re helping them grow in their faith. We don’t necessarily use the word ‘disciple’ all the time.”

This data is conflicting. On one hand, both staff members are clearly passionate about helping children become disciples of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, the word “discipleship” causes some degree of discomfort among the participants. Perhaps, this too points towards the lack of basic understanding about discipleship among the First Church staff, or, they are not accustomed to the terminology.

Behaviors before the teachings sessions. There was some evidence of a desire for staff to grow in their relationships with other staff members. DG05 indicated that there was a lack of personal relationship building between staff members, before the sessions. DG05 stated,

- “I loved . . . having those times where we had those group conversations and questions. . . it was fun getting to know certain questions that you probably would have never asked. Like how did you get started at First Church and having a conversation with DG04, realizing we never talked about that . . . the different questions got us to engage a little bit more and dig a little bit deeper with people.”

Later qualitative data helped confirm this theme, particularly around the idea of group learning. Relationships were built stronger through the discipleship experience while learning was shared between participants.

These comments from participants in the Discipleship Focus Group gave some qualitative baseline understanding regarding discipleship before the teaching sessions. The data showed an uneven knowledge of discipleship, some resistance to the term (but not the concept), and limited personal relationships among staff members.

Discipleship Interviews

Data collected from the Discipleship Interviews provides a few answers to Research Question #1. A research assistant conducted three semi-structured interviews. By analyzing the data, the researcher was able to identify some base line knowledge and attitudes towards discipleship.

Knowledge before the teaching sessions. Low knowledge regarding spiritual disciplines among participants showed in the interviews. Before the teaching sessions, some of the First Church staff were unaware of certain aspects of spiritual disciplines.

- DW02 “There were a few spiritual disciplines (in the teaching sessions) that I didn't even think about.”
- DW03 “As a person who lives alone, I have plenty of silence and solitude, but I never thought about it from a perspective as a spiritual discipline. To spend silence specifically, to listen for God.”

This emerges as an ongoing theme for this chapter of the research project. The staff of First Church were not well trained in spiritual disciplines.

Attitudes before the teaching sessions. The Discipleship Interviews revealed a mixed perception among staff about the importance of discipleship at First Church.

DW01 believed, before the teaching sessions, that the staff at First Church did not place importance on discipleship.

- “I think we have many staff that have never thought about the word discipleship, to be quite honest with you. The fact that we're even talking about discipleship just really excites me.”

DW03 was asked by the interviewer her feelings toward discipleship before the teaching sessions. DW03 found discipleship paramount for her and any person to grow in their faith.

- “I think discipleship is all important for people to grow in their faith. For me, discipleship is not just relevant. It's paramount.”

DW02 felt excitement to learn more about discipleship before the first teaching sessions because it is a main focus of his ministry.

- “(I felt) excitement. I would go with that for sure. Discipleship is like my biggest focus . . . because if your spiritual groundings solid your foundation is weak and then you're going to have a tough time with everything else . . . discipleship is a main focus (for me).”

Behaviors before the teaching sessions. The Discipleship Interviews revealed a perception that First Church's leadership treats staff discipleship with low importance. When the interviewer asked DW02 if he believed the teachings would help other megachurch staffs, the participant began to reveal his view regarding the behaviors of First Church leadership and their effort towards discipleship training for the staff. DW02 held a sentiment that the church staff mostly had to figure out discipleship on their own.

- “Our church doesn't do that a whole lot of discipleship with our staff . . . We don't have a whole lot of focused discipleship, for staff specifically. It's kind of like, you guys got to go do this on your own. Bringing us together was really incredibly important, I think. So, we can have that time in community, study and get into the word.”

The overall qualitative interview data becomes particularly confounding when comparing it to the second and third most agreeable statements in the pre-test, statements

26 (“I have a clear understanding about how I am a disciple of Jesus as an employee on a church staff.”) and 28 (“I think discipleship is important for church staff.”). For some on staff, it appears that individually they believed to take their personal discipleship seriously, but assessed that their colleagues and church leadership did not. Does this reveal a staff that lacks communication regarding one’s own passion about discipleship? Is it evidence of a siloed and/or competitive staff ministry model that hinders strong personal relationships between staff? Is it simply more evidence that the megachurch model places a low importance on discipleship?

Some participants had low knowledge regarding spiritual disciplines, a mixed perception about the importance of discipleship among colleagues, and a belief that leadership did not take discipleship training seriously. The comments from participants in the Discipleship Interviews gave a degree of qualitative baseline understanding regarding discipleship before the teaching sessions.

Response to Research Question #1

The Discipleship Pre-test, Discipleship Interviews and Discipleship Focus Group revealed disjointedness regarding the First Church staff members’ knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship. On the one hand, the staff appears to have had a conviction and a great passion towards their own discipleship and discipling other people. On the other hand, generally, the staff had a lack of understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines, a low knowledge of primary discipleship concepts, a mixed perception about one-another’s discipleship, and a belief that discipleship training was not taken seriously by First Church’s leadership.

Research Question #2: Description of Evidence

After the four teaching sessions on discipleship, what were First Church staff members’ knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship?

Discipleship Post-test Survey

The primary tool used for collecting the answer to Research Question #2 was the post-test survey administered through Survey Monkey. The post-test survey showed noticeable changes in the participants’ knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors regarding discipleship. The Discipleship Post-test survey was identical to the pre-test survey. Measuring the mean response of participants (N=10) the post-test survey scoring was accomplished identically to the pre-test by assigning numerical values to the responses of “Strongly Agree” = +2, “Agree” = +1, “Disagree” = -1, and “Strongly Disagree” = -2. As such, a zero response serves as a neutral benchmark reflecting neither agreement nor disagreement with a given statement.

The responses on Figure 4.5 are ordered left-to-right from those statements that showed the smallest change (pre-test to post-test) on the left-hand side to those on the right-hand side displaying the largest magnitude in change in mean response.

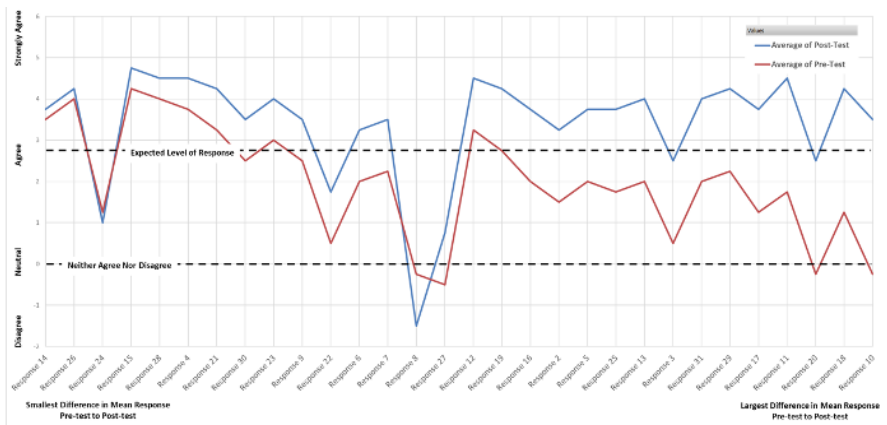


Figure 4.5 Mean response of participants pre-test and post-test.

The mean answers from the participants moved every statement towards displaying growth in the First Church staff's discipleship understanding. The post-test survey indicated increases in knowledge, attitude, and behaviors across 29 of 31 statements. There were responses of agreement across the board during the pre-test for all but four inventory statements. Those statements were 8, 27, 20, and 10, shown as falling below the neutral line and reflecting a mean response of disagreement with the statements. All but two statements in the post-test showed a degree of improvement in the positive (or greater agreement) direction. Statement 24 and statement 8 were the exceptions and the mean response actually declined toward less agreement in the post-test assessment (where the blue line of post-test falls below the red line in pre-test). Also, for the post-test, statement 8 was the only response that fell below the neutral baseline. Statement 8 was "I believe discipleship best happens when listening to a sermon or teaching."

The decline in agreement to this response is understandable given most of the teachings and discussions were regarding discipleship happening best in one-on-one settings. Statement 24 ("I believe discipleship best happens in connect groups") saw a very slight decline in level of agreement, but both the pre-test and post-test mean results were responses of general agreement with the statement. This too is explainable with the teachings' push towards one-on-one discipleship. After the discipleship teachings, the participants showed a higher degree of agreement with the statements, thereby indicating an overall growth in discipleship knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Top 5 Mean Growth Pre- to Post-Test

The responses, on Figure 4.6 below, are those statements that showed the top 5 mean growth from the Discipleship pre-test to the Discipleship post-test among all participants. From the left-hand side to those on the right-hand side, the graph displays the largest magnitude in change in mean response.

The statements are in the following ascending order relative to highest mean growth from the Discipleship pre-test to the Discipleship post-test. “10. I am familiar with historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship.” “18. I have a clear understanding about how biblical discipleship relationships should work.” “20. I believe discipleship best happens in one-on-one settings.” “11. I have a clear understanding about biblical discipleship.” “17. I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines.”

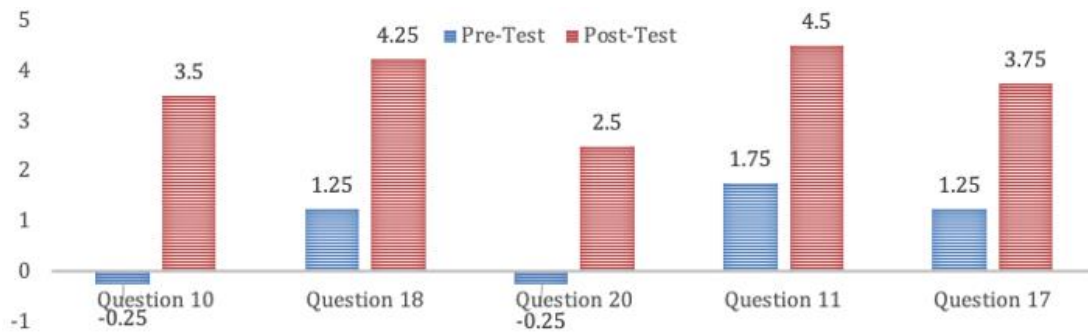


Figure 4.6 Top five mean growth.

The surveys revealed that an impactful part of the teaching for participants was learning discipleship patterns in the Old Testament. Statement 10 of the Discipleship Post-test Survey (figure 4.7) indicated that statement 10 (“I am familiar with historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship.”) was where the most change occurred from the teachings. From the pre-test to post-test, participants went from four “agreeable” responses to nine “agreeable” responses due to the course of instruction. The

surveys indicated a change from a -.25 agreeable mean response pre-test, to a 3.5 agreeable mean response among participants.

This quantitative data regarding statement 10 is interesting because there is no direct qualitative data to corroborate it other than the use of the word “intentionality” by participants in the focus group and interviews. “Intentionality” was mentioned as part of the Old Testament teachings regarding discipleship patterns of intentional learning relationships and intentional family culture.

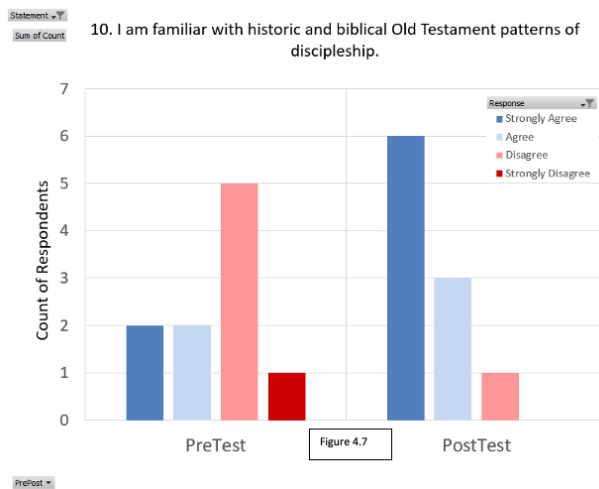


Figure 4.7 Statement 8 pre-test to post-test.

There was a major change in how participants understood their relationships with others from a discipleship point of view. The second biggest change measured by the Discipleship Post-test Survey was statement 18 (“I have a clear understanding about how biblical discipleship relationships should work.”). Figure 4.8 below, shows that from pre-test to post-test, participants went from two “strongly agreeable” responses and four “agreeable” responses to seven “strongly agreeable” responses and three “agreeable”

responses. It should also be noted that the three “disagreeable” responses from statements 18 changed to “agreeable” responses from pre-test to post-test. The surveys indicated a change from a 1.25 agreeable mean response pre-test, to a 4.25 agreeable mean response among participants.

Much qualitative data from participants supports this degree of change as indicated by the surveys. Part of the biblical model of discipleship shared in the discipleship teachings was that “discipleship is relational.” The pre-test survey data showed that the First Church staff strongly agreed that they knew how to be a disciple on staff. Statements 26 stated, “I have a clear understanding about how I am a disciple of Jesus as an employee on a church staff.” Statement 26 was the second highest level of agreement in the pre-test survey. It appears, as a group, the First Church staff believed they knew how to be a disciple on staff, but had a low understanding of how to relationally be a disciple on staff before the teaching sessions.

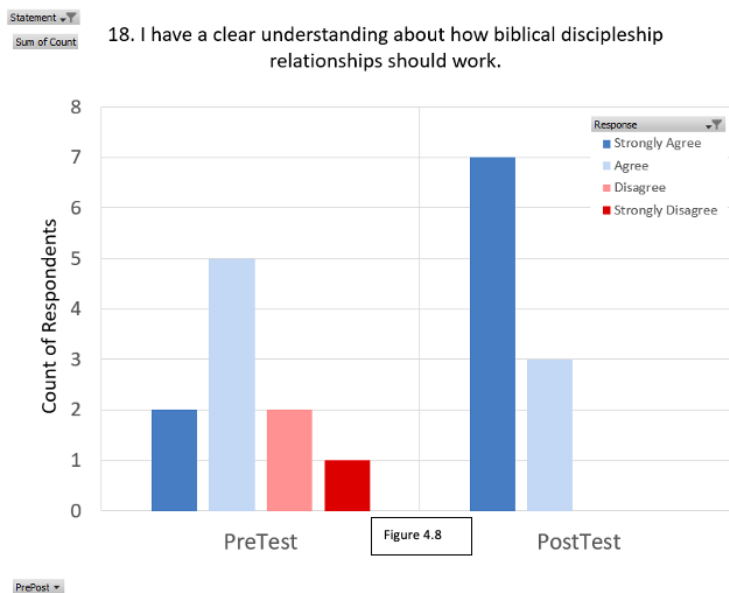


Figure 4.8 Statement 18 pre-test to post-test.

Considerable change was recorded in participants' understanding of spiritual disciplines. Another statement among the top five where the most change occurred as measured by the Discipleship Post-test Survey was statement 17 (“I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines.”). Figure 4.9 below, shows from the pre-test to post-test, participants went from six “agreeable” responses to nine “agreeable” responses. It should also be noted that the two “strongly agreeable” responses in the pre-test grew to seven “strongly agreeable” responses in the post-test. The surveys indicated a change from a 1.25 agreeable mean response pre-test, to a 3.75 agreeable mean response among participants.

Statement 18 has the most supportive qualitative evidence for this part of the survey data. In both the focus group and interviews, participants shared that they learned new spiritual disciplines, received clarification regarding spiritual disciplines and were reminded about the importance of the disciplines. Many of the participants testified to putting spiritual disciplines into practice because of the teaching sessions.

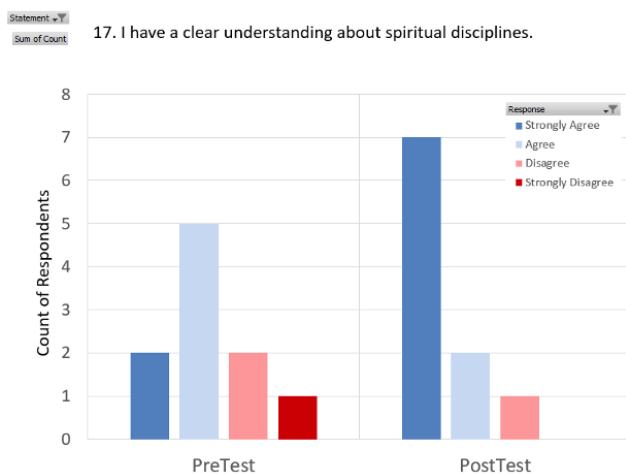


Figure 4.9 Statement 17 pre-test to post-test.

Top Changes in Knowledge, Attitude, and Behavior

The largest changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior from the Discipleship Post-test are displayed below. Figure 4.10 below, shows the change in knowledge among all survey participants for statement 10, with a count of respondents on the left, and the weighted scores on the right. Figure 4.11 displays the change in attitude among all survey participants for statement 20, with a count of respondents on the left side of the graph, and the weighted scores on the right side of the figure. Figure 4.12 shows the change in behavior among all survey participants regarding statement 3, with a count of respondents on the left side of the figure, and the weighted scores on the right side of the figure.

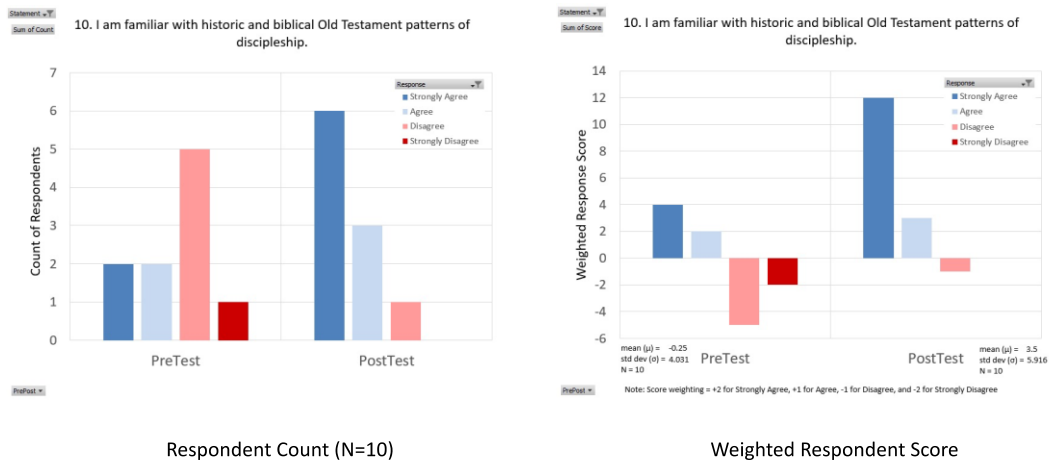


Figure 4.10 Statement 10 pre-test to post-test.

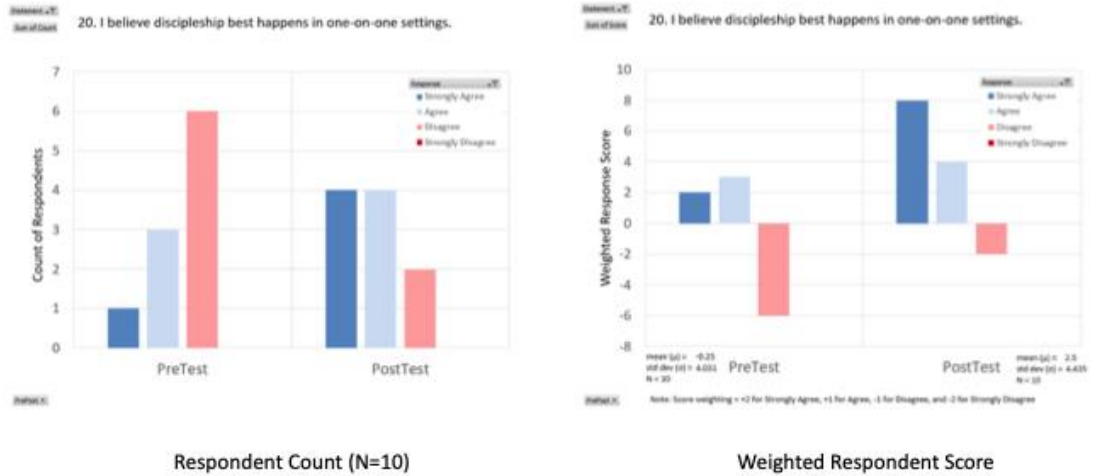


Figure 4.11 Statement 20 pre-test to post-test.

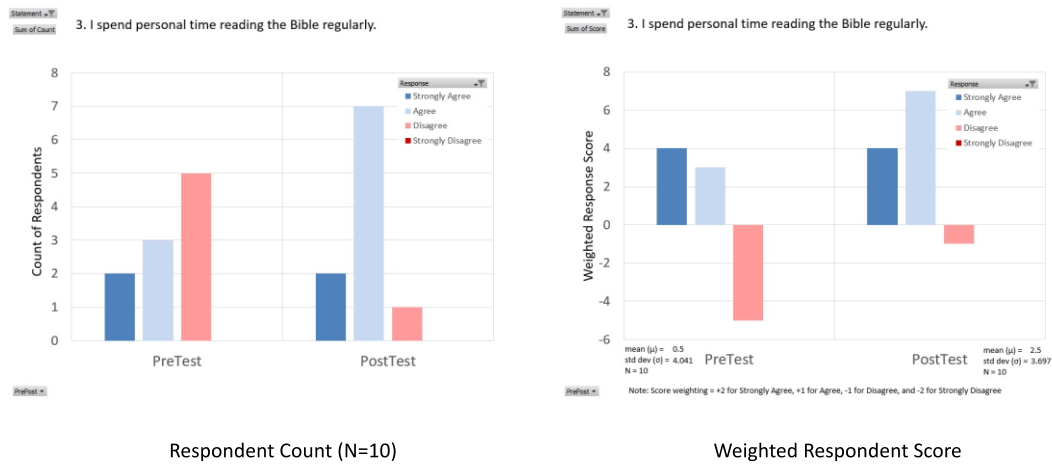


Figure 4.12 Statement 3 pre-test to post-test.

Overall, notable changes transpired in each category of knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors among participants. Changes toward greater agreement with the statements occurred across participant’s knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors following the discipleship teachings, as displayed in Figure 4.13 below. The pre-test to post-test

“attitude” mean response went from 2.375 before the discipleship teachings to 3.225 after the teachings (a thirty-six percent increase in agreement). The pre-test to post-test “behavior” mean response went from 1.675 before the discipleship teachings to 3.025 after the teachings (an eighty-one percent increase in agreement). The pre-test to post-test “knowledge,” the mean response went from 1.925 before the discipleship teachings to 3.975 after the teachings (a one hundred and six percent increase in agreement). Noteworthy change occurred in each category of knowledge, attitude, and behavior among the participants.

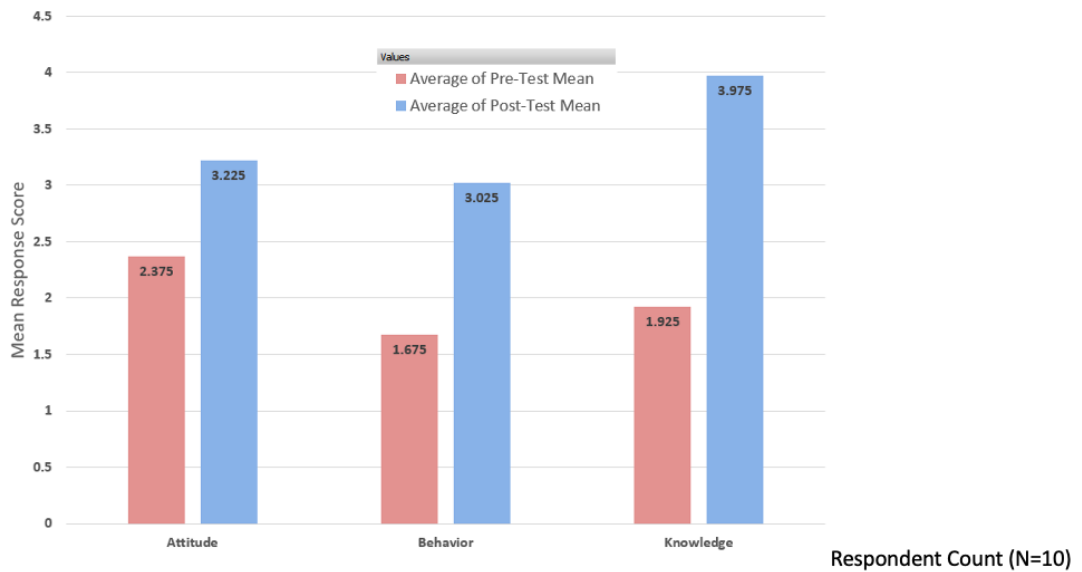


Figure 4.13 Overall change in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors.

Observable change occurred within the First Church staff as a group after the discipleship teaching sessions. Figure 4.14 below, contains two bar graphs that show a weighted response total based on agree/disagree responses. The scale was weighted the same as previous scales in this chapter. On the left is the pre-test survey and on the right

is the post-test survey. The red indicates a disagreeable response and the blue an agreeable response. The pre-test among participants had an agreement mean response of 7.567 and a disagreement mean response of 2.433. Among participants after the four teaching sessions on the discipleship, the post-test showed an agreement mean response of 9.200 (a twenty-two percent change toward more agreement) and a disagreement mean response of .800 (a sixty-seven percent reduction in disagreement). Noticeable change occurred among the First Church staff after the discipleship teaching sessions, evidenced by a much higher degree of agreement with the post-test questions. It is highly likely that the teachings attributed to these changes.

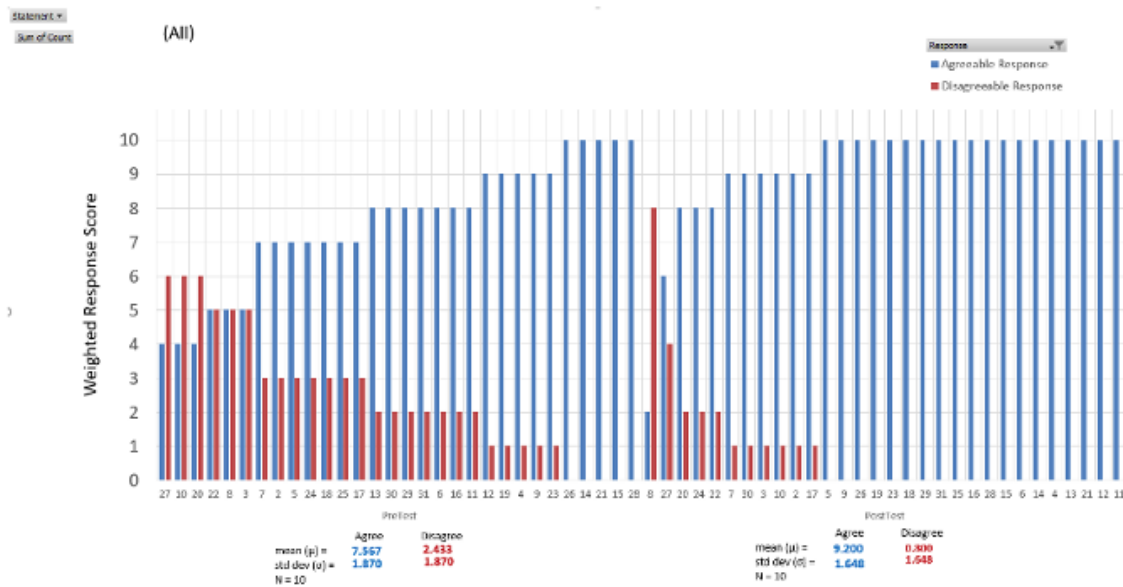


Figure 4.14 Change in participants as a group.

Standard deviation widened after the teaching sessions, but was likely affected by the small sample size. Figure 4.15 below, is a measure of variance (reported as a standard deviation) in responses for a given statement. Similar to the mean responses

presented before, this graph is ordered left-to-right from those responses showing the least change in standard deviation to those responses with the greatest change in standard deviation. A value of zero (bottom of the chart) would demonstrate all participants reporting identical answers. The upper section of Figure 4.15 shows differences in responses that tend to diverge and spread out the differences in response to the statements asked. All surveys like this one are expected to show some level of variance. The mean expected level of variance for this data set is indicated by a dotted reference line.

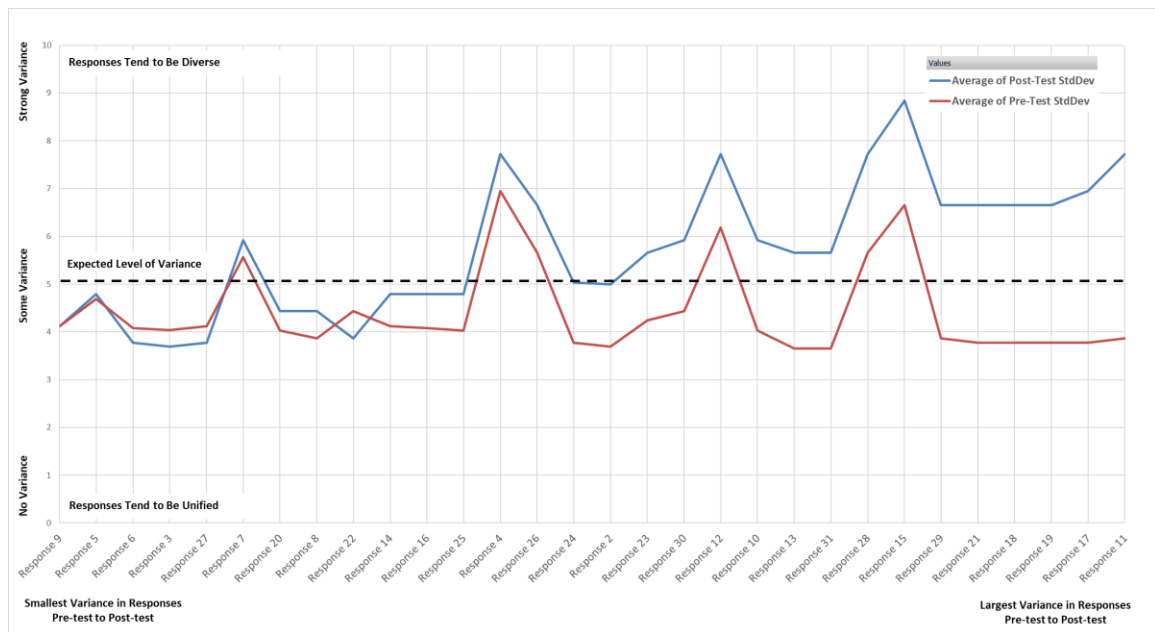


Figure 4.15 Standard deviation of group pre-test to post-test.

It is noteworthy to show a post-test trend toward greater unity in response (smaller standard deviation than in pre-test – blue line below the red line) for responses 6, 3, 27, and 22. All other post-test standard deviations grew larger (blue line above the red line) following instruction and discussion. Also notable is the magnitude of change in

variance for the two, right-most responses (#17 and #11). Response 17 (“I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines.”) and response 11 (“I have a clear understanding about biblical discipleship”) both showed improved levels of agreement on the previous chart, but reflects a wider diversity of response (larger standard deviation) reported in the post-test following instruction and discussion.

Some might be concerned by the pre-test to post-test widening in variance when the intent of instruction and discussion was to bring greater unity in understanding. The variance data could suggest that the changes experienced among participants were not uniform; the teachings had a greater impact on some more than others. This data set (N=10) reflects a small sample size and changes in responses by one or two individuals can easily widen the gap shown here as standard deviation. Such trends may likely be less evident if the population of respondents were larger (e.g., N=100+).

Discipleship Focus Group

During the qualitative Discipleship Focus Group, some made several comments in regard to increased knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that took place in the lives of participants through the teaching sessions on discipleship.

Knowledge. Some of the focus group participants discovered new knowledge.

During the Discipleship Focus Group, participants shared new learning about how to participate with the Holy Spirit in discipleship relationships and the importance of intentionality in discipleship.

One discovery of new knowledge had to do with participants understanding that there is a sensitivity to God’s guidance in establishing discipling relationships. When

asked about new knowledge gained from the teaching sessions, DG04 learned about the importance of prayer when choosing the people he disciples. DG04 stated,

- “The New Testament model for Jesus, what Jesus does before he decides on his disciples. Mike said he prays and he asks God to show him. That stood out to me. I had always thought they would just kind of come to me. I would just get this heavy ping (leading of the Holy Spirit) to follow them. I'd never thought to pray and ask God to show me which ones, which seems obvious, but it was something . . . I never knew.”

DG03 also experienced new knowledge about spiritual sensitivity in establishing discipleship relationships.

- “One of the things that was said is that when you feel the call to disciple someone, God has already been speaking to their heart as well. I think that was really cool to know the way I connect with those in my ministry. It's obviously different from person to person, but I think it's good to know that in their own way, in a way that's right for them, God has also been speaking to them. Even when I'm not getting that response back . . . just trusting God that he is speaking to their hearts . . .”

Through the teaching sessions, DG04 gained new knowledge about being clear on one's intentions when discipling another.

- “I was made aware of how I should act as the discipler. The other day I asked one of our students who I've been working with closely, ‘What can I do better to disciple you?’ And he said, ‘Well, I didn't even know you were trying to disciple me because you never said anything.’”

As stated early in the chapter, basic understanding of discipleship was lacking for some of the First Church staff. The qualitative focus group data shows that at least some of the participants gained new knowledge regarding spiritual sensitivity in establishing discipleship relationships and the importance of intentionality in discipleship relationships.

Attitudes. The qualitative focus group data suggests increased appreciation for relational dimensions of discipleship. The discipleship teachings caused DG03 to

reflect upon her existing relationships. The teaching sessions gave her a better respect for and understanding about said relationships.

- “I feel like I've gained, greater respect and understanding for the relationships that I currently have. Now I can take the time to recognize that those are discipleship relationships and I shouldn't take those (relationships) lightly.”

DG01 found enjoyment discussing discipleship with participants and hearing other staff's discipleship perspectives during the teaching sessions.

- “I actually have really enjoyed the different perspectives and the different discussion that we've all kind of had . . . I think it's good to hear everybody's different perspectives on it (discipleship).”

When asked what was most enjoyable about the discipleship teachings, DG05 stated,

- “It gave us an opportunity to challenge each other and open our eyes to things that maybe we hadn't thought about. Things that our peers have already worked through or experienced or areas that we could potentially improve on ourselves.”

The discipleship teaching sessions stirred a desire for more discipleship teaching, including aspects of group learning, among some of the First Church staff.

After the close of the sessions, participants had a desire for more discipleship teachings.

DG03 stated,

- “I texted Mike after the last meeting and said, ‘Hey, that was really great, but we need more.’”

DG01 desired more group discussion with other participants to share in learning.

- “I would love to hear a lot more, maybe exhaustive thought on these (spiritual disciplines) from everybody else. That's an area where I felt like we missed opportunities. And, learning from each other.”

Qualitative evidence showed that attitudes towards relationships improved through the teaching sessions. Some staff reframed their view of existing relationships,

while others desired more time in a shared learning experience. The discipleship teachings changed attitudes among participants.

Behaviors. Behavioral change in participants was connected to their selection of spiritual goals. DG01 picked a spiritual goal at the close to the teaching sessions. His spiritual goal was “Disciples Love God: practice a new spiritual discipline.” DG01 picked the spiritual discipline of solitude.

- “I pick the spiritual goal of practicing a new spiritual discipline . . . after getting into full time ministry . . . the solitude had kind of fallen off . . . I’ve made more dedicated time just to completely step away from everything, take some time and really just kind of be in total quiet and total silence away from . . . family, friends, kids, all of that stuff. And that was, very good for me. That was very healthy for me to kind of sit back and kind of rest in the Lord.”

DG04 selected two spiritual goals from the teaching sessions, “Disciples Know God: begin a discipleship relationship with Jesus Christ.” and “Disciples are Learners: set a professional learning goal if a professional performance goal is out of reach.”

- “I picked a couple of spiritual goals. These are things I’m looking forward to really growing in. I chose ‘Disciples are Learners’ and ‘Beginning in a Discipleship Relationship with Jesus Christ.’”

The Discipleship Focus group showed that spiritual goals were paramount for behavioral change. Participants used the goals in a way that furthered their discipleship journey with Jesus Christ.

These comments from participants in the Discipleship Focus Group show qualitative increased growth in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the lives of participants through the teaching sessions on discipleship.

Discipleship Interviews

During the three qualitative semi-structured Discipleship Interviews, there were several comments in regard to increased knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors that took place in the lives of participants through the teaching sessions on discipleship.

Knowledge. New knowledge of spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals helped with participants' spiritual formation. DW02 discovered new knowledge through the teachings regarding spiritual formation. He learned new spiritual disciplines and how to achieve a spiritual goal.

- “I took away so many new things, one being the spiritual disciplines. There were a few (spiritual disciplines) that I didn't even think about. And, picking a spiritual goal. (The spiritual goal teaching) was huge for me because I'm a procrastinator.”

DW03 had a high view of discipleship and was well-studied regarding discipleship before the teachings, but she also gained new knowledge through the spiritual goal portion of the teaching sessions.

“Reverend Mike talked about setting spiritual goals in the discipleship and I never thought of it in those terms. So that gave me a shift in perspective and a new way of looking at Discipleship, in terms of setting goals for myself.”

Spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals were newly discerned knowledge for participants in the Discipleship Interview. This new knowledge helped participants in their spiritual formation.

Attitudes. The qualitative interviews suggested participants experienced a substantial change in attitude toward other staff and their views of discipleship.

Early in the interview and before the teaching sessions, DW01 indicated to the interviewer that she believed many of the staff participants had a low discipleship understanding. DW01 was asked by the interviewer, “Do you believe the sessions could

make a difference for other megachurch staffs?” She indicated that the teachings would make a difference, because of change she observed from the staff participants.

- “You could sit in our sessions and look and see that not everybody really understood what discipleship was about. Then watch the ‘aha’ moments as Reverend Mike was speaking to us.”

Before the teaching sessions, DW02 believed he was more invested and passionate than other staff participants about discipleship. Through small and large group discussions, his attitude toward other participants changed. Hearing from other participants was a transforming experience for DW02.

- “It kind of opened my eyes to what (other staff) have to do to disciple their age groups. It was encouraging to hear other ministries being as excited, interested, and invested in discipling their people as much as I am. It was just kind of an eye-opening thing.”

Participant’s attitude toward discipling one-on-one grew through the teaching sessions. During the closing of the interview, DW01 was asked, “Is there anything more you would like to add?” DW01 showed enthusiasm about the spiritual goal she picked, “Disciples, disciple.” She stated,

- “I’m just really excited to be praying about who God would have me to disciple right now.”

The learning environment created a desire for more discipleship teachings among the First Church staff. DW01, DW02, and DW03 all desired for more of the teachings and felt their learning was restrained by the time allotted in the sessions.

- DW01 “I don’t think that we had enough time. I am thankful that Reverend Mike is respectful of other’s time, but I really think that we could spend a lot more time on this and it is my hope that he does.”

- DW02 “I would rate the teachings an eight (out of ten). I would take off a point for just not being able to dive in depth. And I think that that was just a time issue. There were a couple of places where I had a question, or wanted to extend Mike teaching or the discussion groups and we just couldn't get there because we were out of time.
- DW03 “I really enjoyed the teachings. I thought it was very relevant, very good. But, it was not enough. I would love to see this laid out over a period of weeks with more time to understand all the teachings. I know that Rev. Mike had a lot of other information that he had done in his research. I would love to hear some of that and really be able to spend more time in it and just kind of marinate in it.”

DW02 indicated that he felt it was important that the First Church staff came together for the discipleship teachings because of a lack of discipleship training. DW02 said,

- “Our church doesn't do a whole lot (of discipleship) with our staff. We don't have a whole lot of focused discipleship, for staff. It's kind of, ‘You guys got to go do this on your own.’ And, that's the way we translate it to other people. Bringing us together was really incredibly important. So, we can have community, study and get into the word. Definitely it would be helpful for any other megachurch.”

The qualitative interviews suggested that the discipleship teachings helped participants gain a substantial attitude change towards discipleship. Participants left the teachings with a more positive view of one another, towards one-on-one discipleship and a unanimous desire to spend more time growing in their discipleship together.

Behaviors. Participant’s behavior towards one-on-one discipling grew through the teaching sessions. DW01, who was the only theologically educated person of the participants, showed change in her behavior toward discipleship. Before the teaching sessions, she had never sought out someone to individually disciple nor ask God whom she should disciple. The discipleship teaching sessions changed her behavior regarding discipleship.

- “I’m praying about who God has for me to disciple. And that is something that I’ve never done before. I’ve never asked God who he wants me to disciple, who is it? That’s in a place in their life right now that needs someone to walk alongside them in life and hold them accountable and disciple them so that they can then in turn disciple others.”

DW01, the one theologically trained staff participant, never had a one-on-one discipleship relationship before being invited into it by the teaching sessions. This may indicate that theological training does not necessarily result in engagement in discipleship practices. Perhaps, this again suggests a lack of discipleship emphasis for the First Church staff.

DW03 was highly experienced in leading Bible studies and outreach ministries. DW03 desired to be more intentional about finding a discipleship relationship. She selected “Disciples, disciple” as a spiritual goal. DW03 is going to use an existing ministry she already partners with to achieve said goal.

- “I’ve had some informal discipleship relationships and I’m going to start through our ‘Sisters in Christ’ ministry, mentoring a young woman. I’m thinking about that and setting some goals and how to be a little more intentional.”

The interviews revealed that spiritual goals and spiritual disciplines were directly linked to behavioral change. DW02, who works with High School students, selected two spiritual goals. DW02 was beginning to share what he learned from the teaching sessions to a person he is discipling.

- “I chose ‘Disciples are Learners’ and ‘Disciples, disciple.’ I’ve already been discipling a little bit already. It’s a big part of my job. There’s one of my students in particular, who I’ve been working with closely, he came to me a couple of months ago with an issue that he was having, presenting himself like, ‘Hey, I need help with this (issue). I’m asking you for advice.’ I started texting him every couple of days. He would bring me his issues we would talk about and we would go through and we’ve been growing together. And so, I’m now going to take these spiritual goals, these spiritual disciplines, get them all set out for him. We’re going to meet, next Tuesday. We’re going to go over all of this stuff. I’ll credit Reverend Mike cause all of this

work is his and it's incredible. So 'Disciples, disciple.' I'm using all of this stuff to my advantage so I can disciple someone else. Then 'Disciples are learners.' I really want to dig deep into biblical history. . .so my goal is to just very generally study biblical history. I'll probably narrow that down in the coming weeks because I haven't started yet, but I have that learning goal where I want to study biblical history."

DW02 also showed behavior-based change by incorporating two spiritual disciplines that were presented in the teaching sessions.

- "I've already put two (spiritual disciplines) into practice. The first one was solitude. I had a couple of opportunities to go out, to work at the church, or pick up a shift at Chick-fil-a, but I declined everything. I just took an entire day by myself. I spent a lot of time in the word, spent time just relaxing. And, it was really good to have that time to where I could just be just me and God. Spending time without any of the craziness that comes with everything else. I love it. The second (spiritual discipline) I put into practice was fasting. I've done fasting before and it was never really useful . . . (Now) it's important to take it spiritually, not just stop doing this thing, just cause you want to say you did it. I deleted all social media, which I probably spend, in honesty, probably two or three hours a day . . . it's been really refreshing to be able to replace that with time with prayer and worship."

Additionally, DW01 showed a change in behavior by being more intentional about quiet time with God.

- "I grew up having a quiet time for me. I'm going back into that time in my life where it's much more intentional."

The Discipleship Interviews gave evidence of significant behavioral change among participants. Spiritual goals were selected by all three of those interviewed. DW01 sought to disciple someone for the first time. DW02 was going to get more intentional about discipling one-on-one. DW02 was so encouraged by the teachings, he planned on sharing the teachings with someone he is discipling. Significant behavioral change occurred through the discipleship teaching sessions.

These comments from participants in the Discipleship Interview display qualitative increased growth in knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in the lives of participants through the teaching sessions on discipleship.

Response to Research Questions #2

The Discipleship Pre-test, Discipleship Interviews, and Discipleship Focus Group revealed noticeable changes in the First Church staff members' knowledge, attitude, and behaviors regarding discipleship after the four teaching sessions on discipleship.

Quantitative data showed mean growth in agreement regarding every statement from pre- to post-test, appearing to show increased learning among participants. This suggests that the teachings were effective for the staff; though not evenly, as shown by the increased standard deviation in the post-test. Qualitative data collected displays observable change among some of the participants. Perhaps one of the most intriguing parts of the study is that of the learning environment that motivated some of the First Church staff to learn more about discipleship beyond the teaching sessions.

Research Question #3: Description of Evidence

What did the participants identify as the most significant part of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to their growth in discipleship?

Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews

During the qualitative Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews, participants shared some of the most significant parts of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to their growth in discipleship.

The biblical model of discipleship presented in the teaching sessions was vital to learning for the First Church Staff. Focus group participant DG04, indicated the most impactful part of the teachings for him came from the three-fold biblical model of discipleship: discipleship is relational, discipleship is a way of life, and discipleship is about knowing God.

- “It comes down to ‘Knowing God’. . . along with the second part of that, which is ‘A Way of Life.’ It’s not just, ‘Knowing God,’ just because somebody told you to. It’s because you, strive for that . . . I think that those along with ‘Relationships’. . . are the real discipleship model. I think that’s the most important thing.”

During the discipleship interviews, DW01 shared the importance of following Jesus every day. When asked about what was most important to DW01 about the discipleship teachings, she indicated the second part of the biblical model, “way of life”.

- “I go back to making sure that my heart is right with God and making sure that I have abandoned self, to follow Jesus.”

When asked by the interviewer, “of all the things we discussed about discipleship, what to you is the most important?” DI02 responded by saying that it was the biblical model of discipleship.

- “Setting up the Biblical model of discipleship was really important for me. Just, laying down those boundaries of what it looks like; that it’s relational, it’s a way of life and it’s knowing God. I like that Mike ended with ‘Knowing God’ because often when we do announcements on our teams and we always end with the most important point, because that’s the one we want them to remember. I think that knowing God is definitely the most important point in discipleship, but it is a way of life and it is relational. Establishing that biblical model is something I never had before . . . So definitely that biblical model was the most important.”

The three-fold biblical model of discipleship became an agreed upon learning foundation for the megachurch staff. Quantitative data would support this evidence with the fourth highest mean growth from pre- to post-test among participants being “11. I have a clear understanding about biblical discipleship.”

The teachings on spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals had a major impact on the First Church staff. During the Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews, spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals were brought up the most regarding new understanding and changed behaviors as a result of the teaching sessions. When asked during the focus group “What would you identify as the most significant part of the

discipleship experience towards your own personal growth?” DG03 indicated spiritual disciplines as her most significant growth through the teachings. DG03 expressed that she already knew that spiritual disciplines were something that she was not doing well. DG03 stated,

- “I think the spiritual disciplines (were most significant). I know this is what I need to work on. I know this is where I need to grow and it'll be interesting going forward.”

Participant DG05 also identified spiritual disciplines as the most significant part of the teaching sessions.

- “There's a lot of potential in doing the fasting, the silence and the solitude . . . so how to practically work through those, on a regular basis, in your spiritual life. That's what I realized is now something I need to really work on, learn and grow and see how other people do it, but also how to practically apply it in a megachurch staff position.”

During the Discipleship Interview, DI03 indicated that the spiritual discipline teaching was important to her. When asked during the Discipleship Interview, “What would you identify as the most significant part of the four session discipleship experience towards your own growth in discipleship?” DI03 replied,

- “I really loved the session Mike did on spiritual disciplines. My spiritual disciplines tend to revolve around Bible study, prayer and worship, which I do daily. However, Mike called out some I've never practiced and it really intrigued me. Something that I would like to check out and that's the disciplines of silence and solitude. I have plenty of silence and solitude, but I never thought about it from a perspective as a spiritual discipline, to spend silence specifically, to listen for God. And then the solitude in God's presence. I do that through my other disciplines, but I never thought about seeking it out that way intentionally as a discipline. So, that was a new concept for me, both of those . . . I just thought that was really, really cool and, and something new for me personally.”

When asked by the focus group leader what was the most significant part of the discipleship experience, DG04 believed that the spiritual goal part of the teachings was most impactful for him. As stated in the literature review, since spiritual goals are

innately qualitative, I taught how to measure them quantitatively (Appendix G). This aspect of the teaching was particularly impactful for DG04 who struggled with completing goals.

- “I have trouble finding motivation a lot of times. It does not matter what it is. I will find a way to get out of it. So having these spiritual goals and a five-step process to get those done is huge for me. Without that, you could give me a spiritual goal and I'd say, ‘Yeah, I'll pursue it.’ but I would never do it . . . Having the steps and that just helps out tremendously.”

For DW02, the spiritual goal portion of the teachings gave him new knowledge and had a major impact on his life. DW02 indicated he never knew about the concept of spiritual goals before the teachings. The practicality of spiritual goals was particularly impactful new knowledge for him.

- “Having a (spiritual) goal that I can just put up on my wall, take notes on and start to incorporate in my day, that was huge.”

The teachings on spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals helped the First Church staff with their discipleship. Quantitative data gives evidence to this particularly to the growth in knowledge of spiritual disciplines among the staff. The fifth highest mean growth from the Discipleship pre-test to the Discipleship post-test was statement 17, “I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines.”

The discipleship experience created a dynamic and intrinsically motivating learning environment for the First Church megachurch staff. The qualitative data gleaned from the focus group and interviews showed an environment where adults were learning. Participants noted how different the learning environment was from any other

experience while being on the First Church staff. DG01 stated about the teaching sessions,

- “I've been in and around the staff for four years. I've been on staff for two years and this is the first time, I can think of, that we really come together just for the purpose of learning together. And I think that is really, really crucial.”

DG03 believes that the teachings made a difference on the staff and have the capacity to make a holistic difference for the First Church staff professionally and personally. DG03 stated,

- “I think it's made a difference (with us) and I think if we continue to do this as a megachurch staff, it will continue to not just help us grow for our job, but also for us personally.”

During the Discipleship Interviews, DW03 believed that all of the staff participants enjoyed the discipleship experience. DW03 views the First Church staff as always giving to the laity and perceives a need for the staff to be “poured into.” She believed the discipleship experience would be helpful for other megachurch staffs. DW03 also believed that the First Church staff needed more from the teachings. DW03 stated when asked if the teachings had value for a megachurch staff,

- “Yes. Yes. Yes. And let's make it eight weeks and lengthen it out. Yeah, absolutely. I think all of us who were involved in that really, really enjoyed the sessions and really wanted more. We're always giving and sometimes we need to be poured into. And so that was just such an awesome, wonderful experience and to share and listen to everyone else's perspectives because we all hear from God in different ways. As much as I enjoyed the teachings, I enjoyed the sharing and hearing from the rest of the staff.”

An ongoing sentiment found throughout the qualitative data was excitement and encouragement that came from the shared learning environment. The teaching sessions used group learning techniques to further adult learning. DG04 was encouraged that the staff was learning about discipleship together:

- “It was encouraging to see the church staff altogether being disciplined. I think it's incredibly important that we don't let our discipleship fall by the wayside. We disciple others. I'm glad Mike made that a priority. It was really encouraging to see all of us get together and learn about what discipleship means and how we can be better disciples.”

DG05 felt the discipleship teachings were not only important for the staff, but critical to a discipleship culture in the church. He stated regarding the importance of the discipleship training for a megachurch staff,

- “I think it definitely should be something that's visited regularly . . . I think it's to be an ongoing process and ever-growing process . . . If you want to promote discipleship culture in a church, it has to start with the staff. It's a top-down kind of thing. It's not a one and done kind of thing. It's an ongoing process.”

Quantitative data may support the dynamic learning environment in the discipleship teaching session. Quantitative data noted earlier in the chapter regarding RQ#2 showed significant changes occurred within the First Church staff as a group through the discipleship teaching sessions. From pre-test to post-test, a 22 percent change toward more discipleship agreement and a 67 percent reduction in disagreement were recorded among the group of participants. A dynamic learning environment was created during the teaching sessions.

Response to Research Question #3

The qualitative Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews allowed for participants to share some of the most significant parts of the four teaching sessions on discipleship that contributed to their growth in discipleship. Participants learned the biblical model of discipleship presented, along with teachings on spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals, in part due to a dynamic setting for group learning.

Summary of Major Findings

The data resulting from this project yielded significant findings regarding the effectiveness of the Discipleship teaching sessions with the First Church staff. The findings may have relevance for any church staff open to the use of discipleship training. These are the major findings which are discussed in Chapter 5.

1. Measurable change in discipleship knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors can occur through intentional discipleship training with megachurch staff members.
2. Megachurch staff members are likely to grow spiritually through an increased awareness of spiritual disciplines combined with a strategy for setting spiritual goals.
3. Megachurch staff members value learning a biblical model of discipleship.
4. Megachurch staff members identify the group learning process as a crucial part of their growth in discipleship.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

Megachurch staffs have untapped potential as disciple makers for the church in the United States. The majority of megachurch staff members were hired based on their skills and ability to run programming, not their discipleship acumen. This research project sought to increase the discipleship engagement of an almost entirely theologically untrained megachurch staff. The purpose of this research was to measure the changes in knowledge, attitude, and behavior, among First Church staff members resulting from their participation in four teaching sessions about discipleship during four staff seminars.

This chapter identifies four findings from this research project and explains how they correspond to the researcher's personal observations, the literature review, and the biblical and theological framework of the project. Then, ministry implications, limitations of the study, unexpected observations, and recommendations for further study are explored.

Major Findings

1. Measurable growth in discipleship is possible through intentional discipleship training.

The First Church staff went through a researcher-designed four session training process to increase their understanding of discipleship. The participants met for ninety minutes per session, over a four-week period. Sessions one and three started out with two questions that the participants discussed in a small group, then were invited to share their

thoughts with the larger group. Sessions two and four started off with lecture style content that led into discussion times later in the sessions.

Each discipleship session had a time of teaching and discussion leading to a challenge to help the participants grow in their discipleship. At the end of session one, participants were asked to reflect upon what a healthy discipleship megachurch staff culture would look like after learning about patterns of discipleship in the Old Testament. At the end of session two, participants were asked to pray that God would send them volunteers that they could disciple after learning about New Testament discipleship priorities. Session three covered a three-fold biblical model of discipleship and spiritual disciplines for a megachurch staff. At the end of session three, the staff were invited to embrace spiritual disciplines in their lives. Session four covered intrinsic motivations for a disciple as an employee, performance goals vs. learning goals and ended with teaching on how to set and complete spiritual goals through the S.M.A.R.T goal achievement method. Session four ended with a challenge for participants to set and achieve a spiritual goal. The intentionality of said discipleship training with the First Church staff suggests that it is a key component in measurable changes among participants. One might argue that without intentional discipleship training, disciples will not be made.

Prior to the study, it appeared to me that people on the First Church staff had the potential to grow in their discipleship understanding. Some on staff did not want to talk about their faith, others did not know how to articulate their faith, some staff were unsure if they had a relationship with Christ, and there were others on staff who believed that they were experts in discipleship. To me, all of this indicated that one cannot assume

staff come with a uniform understanding or practice of discipleship, but requires intentional training in order to grow.

During the study, the pre-test revealed that spiritual disciplines were the weakest surveyed area for the First Church megachurch staff. The later focus group and interviews appeared to confirm the need for spiritual discipline teachings. Some members of the First Church staff were not active in practicing spiritual disciplines and did not understand or know of many of the disciplines. The collected data also showed that there was a lack of enthusiasm towards one-on-one discipleship and a mixed perception among the staff regarding discipleship.

After the study, the post-test data collected showed measurable increases in participants' discipleship knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors as a group. The focus group and interviews also showed qualitative changes among participants, including considerable change in participants' understanding of spiritual disciplines and how participants understood their relationships with others from a discipleship point of view.

During my literature review, I first discovered the possibility of "intentionality" directly relating to measurable change for the participants. My first finding confirms what seminal authors in spiritual disciplines believe: disciples do not accidentally grow into mature Christians, intentionality is nonnegotiable (Willard, *Spirit of Disciplines* 4; Foster 1; Thompson 10). Teaching the participants about spiritual disciplines was a part of the intentional approach to create measurable change.

For intentional discipleship training, I needed an intentional discipleship teaching method that gave the possibility of creating measurable growth among the participants. The previous primary teaching method for the First Church staff was spoken content

delivered by a Sr. Leader. The strategy of “intentionality” for making measurable change through discipleship training was discovered through the study of adult learning and spiritual formation. My study confirmed research from Dr. Christopher Beard that showed direct correlation between how a person is taught using adult learning principles and the influence of their spiritual formation (248). Research gained from Dr. Kenneth S. Coley’s concentric teaching model was one important method that informed my approach to the teaching sessions. The Coley concentric teaching model allowed for the participants’ development to be the main goal, and not solely the content being delivered (416-17). Part of this teaching method included Mezirow’s work in transformational learning perspective (ch. 6). A person has gone through transformative learning when they look at old experiences with new expectations, giving new meaning and expectations to the past. In teaching session one, I asked the participants to reflect upon what surprised them when coming onto a megachurch staff. At the close of session one, I challenged to combine their own experiences with the new teachings on discipleship and think of a staff environment with discipleship at the center. The teaching methods researched during the literature review helped create measurable changes among the participants through the discipleship teachings.

The literature review’s section on Leading Change gave important insight into “intentionality” for change to occur through discipleship training. Research from John Kotter showed that the majority of an organization’s success or failure in effecting transformational change was attributed to the organization’s leadership (26).

Organizational change started with me as a Sr. Leader taking time for intentional discipleship training with the First Church staff. For change to continue at First Church, it

became the responsibility of the First Church staff to lead from their ministry positions in discipleship. With the qualitative data showing that every participant selected a spiritual goal, at least some discipleship change occurred at First Church as a result of the discipleship teaching sessions. The leadership act, of doing intentional discipleship training, helped facilitate growth in discipleship among the First Church staff.

Intentionality in discipleship was also a theme that emerged in my study of the biblical and theological basis for discipleship. One does not automatically become a disciple after conversion; discipleship requires intentionality. The Hebrew Scriptures clearly teach two things about disciples: they were taught by someone or something, and they were followers of their teacher (D. Smith 4). For the sake of this project, I took the role of teacher and the First Church staff took the role of students. In discipleship, a teacher is needed to guide a student in the ways of following God. The teacher needs to be a person that has wisdom and is the position to pass wisdom on to the participants; which is a characteristic of discipleship in the Hebrew Scriptures (Crenshaw introduction).

Jesus was intentional in whom he chose to be his disciples and in the way he taught them. In New Testament times, the relationship between teacher and students was inherently close. The disciples would not only study the text of scripture, they would also study the text seen in the life of their rabbi (Breen 32; Sri). This closeness is demonstrated by the approximate three-years that Jesus spent with his disciples, sharing their lives together. Jesus intentionally modeled what the disciples were to do, then coached them in it, and finally commissioned them to carry it out. I intentionally shared my own experiences during the sessions in order that the participants could see God's

work in my life while promoting closeness for the purposes of learning and helping the participants in their discipleship.

Finally, a helpful theological clarification is that while intentionality is vital in the discipleship process, only the Spirit can create true transformation in the lives of disciples. Jesus said in the Gospel of John, “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14.26). I personally spent time in prayer and fasting for the participants prior to this study. I also opened and closed every teaching session in prayer asking God to transform the participants. Participating in the discipleship teachings could be important for the First Church staff’s growth, but the Spirit was needed to produce true transformation.

2. Growth in discipleship is linked to increased awareness of spiritual disciplines and setting spiritual goals.

The teaching sessions included instruction on seven spiritual disciplines; silence, solitude, spiritual direction, study, prayer, fasting, and worship. The teaching sessions also included time for participants to learn about spiritual goals and how to achieve spiritual goals. Notably, the First Church staff identified the sessions that focused on increasing awareness of spiritual disciplines and setting spiritual goals as having the biggest impact on their growth in discipleship. During the qualitative Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews, the First Church staff brought up spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals the most regarding new understanding and changed behaviors as a result of the teachings.

Prior to the study, I was unable to confidently evaluate the discipleship understanding levels among the First Church staff. The megachurch workplace setting makes it difficult to have conversations about employee's faith due to its fast-paced nature and focus on numerical achievement. Another factor convoluting a pre-assessment of the participants' discipleship understanding was that they receive copious amounts of biblical teaching. Staff persons are regularly in worship services, listening to sermons, attending weekly chapel services with devotions, and attending routine meetings where biblical teaching is incorporated by Sr. Leaders. If receiving biblical content was an indication of a person's level of spirituality, the First Church staff would have high marks for their discipleship understanding.

As the teaching sessions unfolded, a clear gap became evident between what the participants thought they knew about discipleship and what they actually understood. As previously mentioned, the pre- to post-test data showed a considerable increase in the staff's understating of spiritual disciplines. The qualitative data not only showed that foundational spiritual disciplines were not known among the staff, some were not engaging in spiritual disciplines. As DG03 said during the focus group, "I think the spiritual disciplines [were most significant]. I know this is what I need to work on. I know this is where I need to grow . . ."

After the teaching sessions, I concluded that the spiritual goal teaching had considerable influence on the First Church staff. During an interview, DW03 said: "Reverend Mike talked about setting spiritual goals in discipleship and I never thought of it in those terms. So that gave me a shift in perspective and a new way of looking at Discipleship . . ." In the focus group, DG04 said about the spiritual goal teaching: "I

have trouble finding motivation a lot of times. It does not matter what it is. I will find a way to get out of it. So having these spiritual goals and a five-step process to get those done is huge for me . . . ” I perceive that the spiritual goal part of the teaching was impactful to the participants.

Overall, the teachings’ sessions on spiritual disciplines and strategy regarding spiritual goals seemed to have had the biggest impact on the First Church staff. During the qualitative Discipleship Focus Group and Discipleship Interviews, spiritual disciplines and spiritual goals were brought up the most regarding new understanding and changed behaviors as a result of the teachings.

The spiritual discipline section of the literature review suggested that a disciple needs to spend time with God, but the frantic nature of culture is at odds with the practice of spiritual disciplines (Foster 80; Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* 220). The megachurch setting only adds to that disarray for a disciple. Out of the seven spiritual disciplines taught, all but one of the disciplines were picked to be practiced among participants. The spiritual disciplines selected by participants were silence, solitude, prayer, study, spiritual advisement, and fasting. The one spiritual discipline that was not selected by any participant was worship. Solitude and silence were reported as the two of the most highlighted and rewarding disciplines among the staff; appearing to show the two disciplines’ importance in a megachurch setting.

The compartmentalization of Christian education in literature review by J. Smith, and Nash and McLennan’s was important on the radical disconnect between church and work, and set the foundation for spiritual goal setting. J. Smith was helpful by highlighting that the church may be missing the anthropological understanding that

humans are what they love and their heart aspirations are shaped by the habits they live every day, not just by cognitive input. J. Smith and Nash and McLennan's thoughts marked the possibility that participants lived in two separate worlds, one of faith and the other as an employee; which begged for a spiritual integration through spiritual goal setting. While the First Church staff members received a great deal of biblical teaching that engaged them cognitively, it was not resulting in a uniform understanding or mature life of discipleship.

Others in the literature review showed the importance of goal setting for a disciple's life satisfaction and organizational growth (Barna; Doohan; Locke and Latham; Scott, Agresti, and Fitchett; Thomas). The S.M.A.R.T. goal method by George T. Doran gave participants an intentional, measurable, and timed way for participants to achieve a spiritual goal. All focus group and interview participants had at least one spiritual goal. The research appears to confirm that teaching a megachurch staff spiritual disciplines in combination with a strategy for spiritual goals can help a megachurch staff grow spiritually.

From a biblical and theological perspective, spiritual disciplines are about forming the character of disciples, keeping them in touch with God's leading in their lives, and making them effective witnesses for the gospel in the world. Spiritual disciplines and the spiritual goals of this project helped participants be empowered to live out the Great Commission. Jesus said in the Gospel of Matthew, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (28:19-20). Spiritual disciplines allow disciples to be empowered and transformed by the

Spirit. The presence of God's movement is defined by the effective power of the Spirit (Kärkkäinen 29; C. Wright 226-27). Philippians states "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; For it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (2:12b-13). Spiritual disciplines become a way through which disciples "work out [their] own salvation" and are the means by which they make space for the Spirit to transform and empower them, "God working in them." The Spirit is the only one who can produce what a disciple needs: self-discipline, love, and boldness of faith. The empowerment of the Spirit gives purpose to a disciple: to go out and serve the world.

3. Learning the biblical model of discipleship is valuable for spiritual growth.

A part of the discipleship teaching sessions centered around the First Church staff learning a biblical model of discipleship. This included looking at Old Testament patterns of discipleship, New Testament discipleship, and a three-fold biblical discipleship model that could become everyday discipleship guiderails for the participants in their lives and ministry. To my surprise, given the amount of biblical teaching the staff receive on a regular basis, the staff found this element of the discipleship training to be particularly valuable.

Prior to the study, I was unsure how much the First Church Staff would value learning a biblical model of discipleship. A biblical model of discipleship would not necessarily immediately help the staff create numerical growth. The biblical model also led participants to do more things that they would not be compensated for like practicing a spiritual discipline, discipling another person, spending time with other staff members to grow in their relationship. From an employment point of view, there was no apparent value for the staff.

During the study, the pre-test began to reveal conflicting data regarding the First Church staff's understating of biblical discipleship. The pre-test showed that the participants' Old Testament knowledge and attitudes were low and lacking in enthusiasm towards one-on-one discipleship. However, the data also showed that the First Church staff strongly believed that the Holy Spirit was working in their lives and that discipleship was vital for them as church staff members. The pre-test showed inconsistencies regarding the First Church staff's understanding of biblical discipleship.

This conflicting data also showed up in the qualitative data. Two participants felt uncomfortable with the word "discipleship," yet they were passionate about helping children come to know Jesus Christ. Another participant who indicated discipleship was important to her, perceived that some staff had given no thought to biblical discipleship. Another participant (DW02) believed that church leadership did not take biblical discipleship seriously for the staff, "Our church doesn't do a whole lot of discipleship with our staff . . . It's kind of like, you guys got to go do this on your own." It appeared that individually, staff believed that they should take their personal discipleship seriously, while also assessing that their colleagues and church leadership did not. Overall, the staff appeared to have had an inconsistent understanding of biblical discipleship before the teaching sessions, without realizing it.

The post-test showed that during the teaching sessions, learning occurred regarding biblical discipleship. The most change in the participants' knowledge recorded in the post-test was learning discipleship patterns in the Old Testament. Participants in both the qualitative focus group and interviews named the biblical model of discipleship as one of the most important elements they learned through the teaching sessions. The

three-fold biblical model of discipleship is that discipleship is relational, discipleship is a way of life, and discipleship is about knowing God. A Focus Group participant (DG04) spoke of the model as the most impactful part of the teaching for him, “It comes down to ‘Knowing God’ . . . along with the second part of that, which is ‘A Way of Life.’ It's not just, ‘Knowing God,’ just because somebody told you to. It's because you strive for that . . . I think that those, along with ‘Relationships’ . . . are the real discipleship model. I think that's the most important thing.” It appears that the First Church megachurch staff valued learning about a biblical model of discipleship.

In my literature review, N.T. Wright and Neil Cole’s critique of elements regarding the attractional church model were helpful in creating value for a biblical model of discipleship for the First Church staff. Wright and Cole view an overemphasis on one-time commitment to Christ with no commitment to discipleship in the church. This leaves a convert with no direction in life beyond their one-time commitment. For N. T. Wright, this is propositional Christianity, leaving a void regarding transformation for a disciple (3).

Cole was particularly important by marking the inverted spiritual formation process that occurs through the attractional model. For Cole, the attractional model has created a flow of people coming into the church, whereas a missional church is always flowing outward (47). To Cole, the attractional model does not equip disciples to be at their best spiritually for the sake of reaching out to the world, it equips a person to be their best at church. The attractional model makes the welfare of the church primary instead of one’s own discipleship. The three-fold biblical model of discipleship gave the

First Church staff a direction beyond trying to accrue numbers for an organization. It created substantial value for the participants for their spiritual growth.

The biblical model of discipleship presented in Chapter 2 was vital for creating a biblical framework for the participants. As previously indicated by DW02, it was not believed that the leadership at First Church took discipleship seriously and left the staff to resolve discipleship on their own. The three-fold biblical model of discipleship seemed to become an everyday guiderail for the First Church staff that helped them understand discipleship while incorporating it with their various roles and responsibilities.

First, Discipleship is Relational. This first part of the discipleship model was presented as centering in a vertical relationship with God that is in touch with the horizontal connections that God is working in, and through surrounding people. Jesus said “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22.37-39). The first part of the model was making sure that participants understood that their relationship with God showed with how they interacted with their neighbor.

The next part of the model is, Discipleship is a Way of Life. The biblical discipleship model hones in on a call to devotion to Christ and his commands. The goal of discipleship for a first-century student was to discover and embody a new way of life through watching his Rabbi; the way he prayed, studied, taught, served, and lived out his everyday relationship with God (Barna 17; Breen 140; Sri). This is when the participants were brought into the reality of Jesus being Lord of one’s life and the importance of having a teacher lead them with Christ at the center of the relationship. Importantly,

ministry staff should remember that discipleship is not just about job performance, but about the whole of life.

The final part of the biblical discipleship model is, Discipleship is about Knowing God. This part of the model desired to shift participants from gaining knowledge of God (content) to be in an intimate relationship with God (worship). The Apostle Paul wrote in Philippians, “I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death (3:8, 10).” Knowing God is a foundational component of the biblical discipleship model I presented to participants, it was clear from some focus group and interview comments that the participants valued this focus on intimacy with God

4. The group learning process is a crucial part of growth in discipleship.

Ten participants from the First Church staff spent four discipleship teaching sessions together. During these sessions, participants shared their thoughts and had discussions with their colleagues in small and large group settings. Quantitative and qualitative data suggest that the participant interaction created a dynamic group learning environment that was crucial for discipleship growth among the First Church staff.

“Compartmentalization” was a word frequently used among First Church staff when describing other departments before my project. During my tenure at First Church, I often heard staff say there was a lack of communication and a territorial nature between departments at First Church. It was my concern, before the teaching sessions, that the apparent “compartmentalization” of the staff may hinder the possibility of growing the First Church staff’s discipleship understating.

During the study, the participants represented six different departments: Children, Student, Special Needs, Adult Discipleship, Congregational Care, and Outreach. I observed that the participants were respectful, collegial, and that a dynamic learning environment occurred through shared learning during the teaching sessions. This also appeared to be also true during the focus group and interviews.

The quantitative and qualitative data suggest participants left the teachings with a more positive view of one another and a desire to spend more time growing in their discipleship together. The post-test showed the second biggest change measured was how participants understood their relationships with others, from a discipleship point of view. After the close of the teaching sessions, participants had an inclination for more discipleship teachings. One focus group participant (DG03) stated, “I texted Mike after the last meeting and said, ‘Hey, that was really great, but we need more.’” Another participant (DG01) desired more group discussion with other participants.

The focus group also displayed how some staff reframed their view of existing relationships with others while desiring more time in a shared learning experience. The qualitative interviews suggested that participants left the teachings with a more positive view of one another and a unanimous desire to spend more time growing in their discipleship together. The discipleship teaching sessions stirred a desire for more discipleship teaching, and appear to be crucial to growing the First Church staff’s discipleship understanding.

The research from the literature review on transformational learning was important to creating an environment for group learning. Mezirow indicated that the validity of new learning hinges upon rational discourse while grounded in the nature of

human communication, and being open to other points of view (Chapter 1). This means communal elements are vital for transformational learning to occur. I stayed open to various points of view throughout the teaching sessions and tried to be fair-minded with all ideas presented in order to create an environment for learning. Dr. Julie Gorman's research on transformation through community, with the power of the Holy Spirit, was important to this study. Gorman's research pointed to God transforming teacher and learner as they pursue understanding and lived out faith in mutual struggles and vulnerabilities (39). The participants had the opportunity to share their struggle with the megachurch model and their own discipleship in the teaching sessions.

Reflective learning research from Dr. Ellen Marmon was helpful in creating a learning environment conducive for growth. Marmon identified that reflective learning happened in the community of the Hebrew people and early Christians. By looking through the lens of Scripture and Christs' teachings, the people had to readdress their attitudes among one another (Marmon "*Transformative Learning Theory*" 426). As the participants of this study reflected on biblical discipleship, they had to talk through what a discipleship culture might look like in a megachurch and address if the First Church culture was one that produced disciples. As noted earlier by qualitative data, some participants did not believe First Church leadership made discipleship a high priority.

Part of my teaching method included Mezirow's work in transformational learning perspective (Chapter 6). A person has gone through transformative learning when they look at old experiences with new expectation, giving new meaning and expectations to the past. In teaching session one, the participants reflected upon what surprised them when coming onto a megachurch staff. At the close of session one, the

participants were challenged to combine their own experiences with the new teachings on discipleship and think of a staff environment with discipleship at the center. Creating an environment that fosters transformational learning was my responsibility, but it would only progress as far as the participants' engagement. I am pleased that the First Church staff took group learning as their responsibility as well.

Research and implementing concepts from andragogy likely assisted in group learning for First Church staff members. Knowles' assumptions (57-63), along with research from Dr. Christopher Beard, aided in creating a dynamic environment for shared learning. Knowles' third assumption invites spiritual formation to take place relationally, with a teacher engaging the learner in their own context (Beard 254). In the context of this project, the discipleship teachings sessions were held in areas that the staff do ministry, the children's wing and student lounge.

Knowles' fourth assumption is this: as individuals mature, their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles (60). The fourth assumption needs a teacher to understand whom they are teaching, the communal role the participant currently fills, how their role relates to one another, and the role they wish to fulfill in the future. During the sessions, I made sure to address participants by their social roles. At times, I would refer to them as being staff while naming their responsibility at First Church. At other times, I would talk about how discipleship could help them in their familial roles. Allowing Knowles' assumptions to guide the teaching sessions put the participants in position to learn and helped create a group learning environment.

Part of the biblical framework for creating a group learning environment was for the student to be in position to learn from their teacher. A New Testament disciple is someone who actively practices what they are taught by following, learning, and watching their teacher (Brand et al. 425; D. Smith 5). In order for the participants to be able to learn from my life, I had to show transparency. That happened through sharing my personal critique of the megachurch model and the times when I misunderstood discipleship on my journey. Biblical discipleship formation reaches beyond a student watching and learning, it is an invitation into practice.

After I shared transparently about my critique of the megachurch model and discipleship growth in a teaching session, I invited the participants to share their thoughts. First, the participants had the opportunity to share in a small group setting of two or three, then in the large group. During the large group time, there was open and candid thoughts expressed and dialogue between participants. This showed in quantitative data from DG05 when she stated, "I loved . . . having those times where we had those group conversations and questions . . . the different questions got us to engage a little bit more and dig a little bit deeper with people." The biblical framework of transparency and invitation was important for creating a group dynamic where the First Church staff desired to learn.

Another biblical part of the framework for this project is that discipleship is a call into community. The First Church staff were invited into a communal discipleship time through this ministry project. Jesus' disciples were invited into something beyond a one-on-one relationship with Christ, they were invited into a communal experience. The discipleship community Jesus' disciples were invited into was one that held significant

differences: Zealots, a tax collector, and the competitive need to show who among them was the greatest. Jesus' group that was originally filled with differences formed together into a community called the church. The qualitative data noted the value of being a part of a communal time in discipleship. DG01 "I've been in and around the staff for four years. I've been on staff for two years and this is the first time, I can think of, that we really come together just for the purpose of learning together. And I think that is really, really crucial." DG04 said, "It was encouraging to see the church staff altogether being disciplined . . . It was really encouraging to see all of us get together and learn about what discipleship means and how we can be better disciples." The participants were invited into a communal time together through the discipleship teaching sessions.

One theological belief this project is built on was that a disciple must embrace following Christ. If there were negative feelings between participants as the quantitative data indicated, they were laid down for the sake of learning and growing together as a staff. Following Christ involves disciples laying down their life for Christ, as Christ laid down his life. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Following Christ is also about disciples laying down their lives for one another, "This is my commandment: Love each other in the same way I have loved you. There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends" (John 15.12b-13). Finally, following Christ is "bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4.2). Following Christ is a relational process for disciples where a community is formed and shaped together. If there were any bad feelings between

colleagues it did not show up, or was submitted to Christ for the sake of unity in the teaching sessions.

Perhaps this ties in with another theological belief this project was built on, the fruit of the Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit becomes evidence that a disciple is living a life in God, through Christ. Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15.5). It appeared during the teaching sessions that there was a manifestation of the Spirit as the participants loved one another through mutual respect and listening with open minds. The clearest evidence a disciple is living for God is if they are full of love (Ogden 135; Wesley 179). The fruit of the Spirit appeared to be evident during the teaching sessions, creating a group learning dynamic that was crucial to growing the discipleship understanding of the First Church megachurch staff participants.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

This research project along with its findings provide at least four implications for megachurches. First, megachurches need to make discipleship a central part of their vision and build that into their expectations for staff selection, training, and evaluation. This study showed that regardless of age, years on staff, theological training, and ministry department, megachurch staff may be missing fundamental elements of discipleship training. These are the staff members with their boots on the ground caring for, shepherding, training, teaching laity, and reaching out to the community as representative of Christ and his Church. Megachurch staffs must be selected, trained, and evaluated with discipleship vision at the center.

A second implication for megachurches is that intentionality is required for growth in discipleship. Megachurch staffs will not grow in their discipleship without intentional training times given by leadership. This ministry fruitfulness project showed that with intentional training, a megachurch staff can increase in their discipleship. The quantitative pre-test to post-test and qualitative data showed that considerable change in knowledge attitudes and behaviors occurred among the First Church megachurch staff through the teaching sessions. If another megachurch staff was invited into discipleship training, it is highly likely that discipleship growth could occur. A church culture that leaves discipleship up to each individual staff member will not produce consistent results.

A third implication is that megachurch staffs desire to be a part of a model of ministry that emphasizes more than numerical growth. The fruitfulness of a ministry is vitally linked to the faithful discipleship of those leading the ministry, their own walk with God and others as disciples. Being a disciple of Christ means that one's faith must be uncompartimentalized and shown through their entire life. These discipleship teachings were presented in a way that showed that increased understanding of discipleship adds holistically to an individual. The instruction showed the possibility of helping the First Church staff in their ministry, those they serve, along with the potential to enrich their personal lives. Megachurch staffs deserve a church culture that makes growth as disciples a central part of their vision of success. The First Church megachurch staff were looking for more in ministry than numerical growth; they were looking to grow in their relationship with God and with one another, and to make disciples.

A final implication is that this study could potentially add considerable value to a megachurch congregation and help create a megachurch discipleship culture. Many

megachurches have been formed in an attractional model that emphasizes one-time conversions, not a commitment to discipleship for their congregants. Megachurches need to change their scorecard for what constitutes success from one of numerical growth, based on an attractional model, to one of growth in discipleship which begins with the staff members themselves. If a megachurch increases the discipleship understating of their staff, it is likely to have an impact on a megachurch congregation and thus help in creating a megachurch discipleship culture.

Limitations of the Study

The following are limitations that may have influenced this study with the First Church megachurch staff:

During my study, the world was in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic. My original plan was to conduct the focus group and interviews on the First Church campus grounds. After consulting with Dr. Ellen Marmon, Director of the ATS DMin Program, it was decided that the best course of action would be to use the online platform Zoom for both the focus group and interviews to prevent the possibility of spreading sickness. The online platform used for the qualitative data collection was likely inferior to the dynamics an in-person setting would have produced for this study.

The sample size of participants was a limitation for this study. A total of ten participants were included in the study. Five of those staff participants were a part of the focus group while three participated in the interviews. The data likely would be more reliable with a greater sample size.

The demographics of the participants limited the research. Women made up 80percent of the participants for the teaching sessions while men made up 20 percent.

Three out of the five focus group members were women and two out of the three interviews were done with women. The lack of an even female to male perspective limited this study.

Another limitation was the amount of time allotted for the teaching sessions. Many participants indicated that their learning was restrained due to time. All three participants interviewed expressed their desire for more time in the teaching sessions. Participants in the focus group echoed the same desire. Whether or not more time would have increased the participants' discipleship understanding is unclear, but qualitative data suggests it is a possibility.

A final limitation of this study is that I was considered a supervisor to all ten participants. The power dynamics of my role as a pastor, supervisor, and organizational place as a Sr. Staff member could have made it more difficult for a staff member to feel that they could give their true thoughts or feelings during the teaching sessions or data collection. As a way to help the participants more freely discuss their ideas, the pre- and post-test surveys were anonymous and I trained research assistants to lead the focus group and interviews. Still, participants knew that I would be analyzing the data and integrating them into my research. Although this was voluntary participation, and by all appearances went well, there is no way to say my supervisory role did not limit the study.

Unexpected Observations

I spent several weeks preparing for the teaching sessions and working with the participants regarding this study. The following description may or may not have had an effect on the study, but summarizes unexpected findings and observations.

Staff Engagement

One surprise I had was the willingness and energy the First Church staff took to this project. My expectations were that the staff would engage in the process, but the excitement and connections to their discipleship journey far surpassed anything that I had in mind. The staff were hungry for more emphasis on discipleship. This is surprising because it is clearly not a part of the ethos of the congregation as they experienced it. The hunger may be a sign of the Holy Spirit desiring to do more in the lives of the participants and of the First Church congregation. The staff's engagement was a surprising element for me in the study. This is a hopeful sign for other megachurches that want to adopt a culture of discipleship. Staff in those settings may also hunger for more than numerical growth.

Staff Transparency

As I prepared my content for the teaching sessions, I feared that the content may be intimidating for the First Church staff. I knew that nine of the ten participants had no theological training and there was the possibility that the content would be too advanced. I had concern that participants might not engage in the group learning because they would not want to show that they had fundamental discipleship gaps, or that some may try and overcompensate by hurting the group dynamic. My fears were not realized. As recorded in the qualitative data, they gave many honest comments about learning new aspects of discipleship. Some of these comments came from the most experienced of staff members. The staff's transparency appeared to have helped with a shared learning dynamic in the teaching sessions.

Focus Group and Interviews Data

I had a relatively small number of participants for my project. My teaching sessions had a total of ten participants. Five staff persons participated in the focus group while three participated in the interviews. Before the qualitative data was collected, I had concern if the focus group and interviews would generate enough data for my project. I ended up with more than enough data for the project. As noted in the limitations of the study, reliability decreases with the small number of participants, but overall, I collected rich data.

Recommendations

This project sought to grow a megachurch staff's discipleship understanding. While the project results are encouraging, certain changes may enhance the fruitfulness of this disciple-training project:

1. Those who desire to increase the impact of this project in their ministry context might consider including more church departments in the study. At First Church, I invited what is understood as the Ministry Department to be a part of the study. This was mostly due to their interaction and training with laity on a weekly basis. My study left out the Worship Department, Administration Department, and the Satellite Campus Department. After the teaching sessions, I felt a new closeness to the Ministry Department and noticed that the group seemed to be relating to each other better than before the study. Additionally, when the Ministry Department met with other departments, my participants apparently had grown in their discipleship while other staff missed out on that experience for growth.

2. Another consideration would be to extend the teaching session time. This could be done by adding more time during a teaching session or simply adding teaching

sessions to the study. Participants in my study desired more time to learn from one another and wanted more content from my material. Extended teaching sessions would allow participants to attempt to learn more about discipleship.

3. A third consideration would be to increase the sample size and make it more diverse. First Church is located in the Midwest and is on the smaller size of megachurches in the country; total attendance is less than four-thousand. Many other megachurches have higher weekly attendance, with larger and more diverse staffs. If a megachurch can draw a greater and more diverse sample size, it would be recommended.

4. A final consideration to enhance the fruitfulness of this study is to collect more qualitative data. Several participants, who made it clear to me that this study had an impact on their life, wanted to share more after data collection. Potentially rich data may have been lost in this study. A written data collection tool, like a journal, may help record insights of those who have more to share giving the potential for richer data.

Postscript

Completing this Doctor of Ministry degree has been a blessed three-year journey filled with challenges. The journey was challenging in the obvious ways that a doctoral program would stretch a person: classes that inform and shape a person in ways they want and do not, reading copious amounts of literature while figuring out how to integrate it into the literature review, and sticking rigorously to the discipline of time management in all aspects of my life. The challenges outside of the doctoral program came with leaving a denomination, a worldwide pandemic, and the unexpected loss of my father-in-law.

I am also acutely aware that I have missed out on time with family and friends. I have spent weeks off of work, not for a vacation or to visit with people I love, just simply to work on school. Over the last three years, I have often thought about reaching out to friends and family, and building new relationships, but decided against it to reserve energy. I tried to save my best energy for my immediate family, work, and school. My prayer is that the lost time is recovered with the people I care about and that new relationships emerge in my life.

This time was incredibly rewarding because of the clear growth that I have experienced as a pastor, preacher, and leader. I am more rooted in Christ, more skilled and ready to lead the church into the future. I believe this journey has also helped me form a closer bond with my wife and children. It has made us communicate at higher levels, sacrifice for the mutual good, and kept me around the house more as I worked on school.

Finally, I feel hopeful, thankful and a bit sad. I am hopeful that somehow God uses this research to bless megachurch staffs, congregations, and communities around the country. I am thankful for the many who helped me achieve the completion of this transformation ministry project and doctoral degree. Still, a part of me feels sad that this time is coming to a close. Perhaps, my mixed feelings show how meaningful this season has been.

APPENDIXES

A. Discipleship Pre-test Survey

Welcome to my Survey:

The purpose of this survey is to gauge our current understanding about discipleship. Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers when filling out a survey. Your answers will be kept confidential and no one will know the identity of the person filling out the survey. Thank you for your help!

1. Do you agree to the above terms, and are you 18 years old or older? Yes/No

Survey Questions:

- 4 = Strongly Agree
- 3 = Agree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

Using the scale above, please rate the following statements:

2. I do my best for God in all I do. (Behavior)
3. I spend personal time reading the Bible regularly. (Behavior)
4. I believe that I am a disciple of Jesus. (Attitude)
5. I don't just tell others how to follow Jesus, I show people how to follow Jesus. (Behavior)
6. Every day I ask God to send the Holy Spirit to guide me. (Behavior)
7. I want more discipleship to happen on staff. (Attitude)
8. I believe discipleship best happens when listening to a sermon or teaching. (Attitude)
9. I regularly encourage people to pray about what they need to do next to grow as a disciple of Jesus. (Behavior)
10. I am familiar with historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship. (Knowledge)
11. I have a clear understanding about biblical discipleship. (Knowledge)
12. I desire to disciple others. (Attitude)
13. I know what constitutes discipleship. (Knowledge)
14. I regularly encourage people to be in relationship with others who will help them grow as disciples of Jesus. (Behavior)
15. I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in my life, changing me. (Attitude)
16. I understand Pauline priorities when it comes to discipleship. (Knowledge)
17. I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines. (Knowledge)
18. I have a clear understanding about how biblical discipleship relationships should work. (Knowledge)
19. I have a clear understanding of spiritual goals. (Knowledge)
20. I believe discipleship best happens in one-on-one settings. (Attitude)
21. I like accepting advice and guidance from some Christians. (Attitude)

22. I regularly meet with people, outside of my work responsibilities, to advise them as to how to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. (Behavior)
23. I have been discipled by someone. (Behavior)
24. I believe discipleship best happens in connect groups. (Attitude)
25. I currently have a spiritual goal and a process to achieve said goal. (Behavior)
26. I have a clear understanding about how I am a disciple of Jesus as an employee on a church staff. (Knowledge)
27. I spend enough time in my spiritual disciplines. (Behavior)
28. I think discipleship is important for a church staff. (Attitude)
29. I believe having a spiritual goal is important to my discipleship growth. (Attitude)
30. I understand Jesus' major teaching elements regarding discipleship. (Knowledge)
31. I have a clear understating of discipleship. (Knowledge)

B. Discipleship Post-test Survey

Welcome to my Survey:

The purpose of this survey is to gauge our current understanding about discipleship. Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. There are no “right” or “wrong” answers when filling out a survey. Your answers will be kept confidential and no one will know the identity of the person filling out the survey. Thank you for your help!

1. Do you agree to the above terms, and are you 18 years old or older? Yes/No

Survey Questions:

- 4 = Strongly Agree
- 3 = Agree
- 2 = Disagree
- 1 = Strongly Disagree

Using the scale above, please rate the following statement:

2. I do my best for God in all I do. (Behavior)
3. I spend personal time reading the Bible regularly. (Behavior)
4. I believe that I am a disciple of Jesus. (Attitude)
5. I don't just tell others how to follow Jesus, I show people how to follow Jesus. (Behavior)
6. Every day I ask God to send the Holy Spirit to guide me. (Behavior)
7. I want more discipleship to happen on staff. (Attitude)
8. I believe discipleship best happens when listening to a sermon or teaching. (Attitude)
9. I regularly encourage people to pray about what they need to do next to grow as a disciple of Jesus. (Behavior)
10. I am familiar with historic and biblical Old Testament patterns of discipleship. (Knowledge)
11. I have a clear understanding about biblical discipleship. (Knowledge)
12. I desire to disciple others. (Attitude)
13. I know what constitutes discipleship. (Knowledge)
14. I regularly encourage people to be in relationship with others who will help them grow as disciples of Jesus. (Behavior)
15. I believe the Holy Spirit is at work in my life, changing me. (Attitude)
16. I understand Pauline priorities when it comes to discipleship. (Knowledge)
17. I have a clear understanding about spiritual disciplines. (Knowledge)
18. I have a clear understanding about how biblical discipleship relationships should work. (Knowledge)
19. I have a clear understanding of spiritual goals. (Knowledge)
20. I believe discipleship best happens in one-on-one settings. (Attitude)
21. I like accepting advice and guidance from some Christians. (Attitude)
22. I regularly meet with people, outside of my work responsibilities, to advise them as to how to grow as a disciple of Jesus Christ. (Behavior)

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29. I believe having a spiritual goal is important to my discipleship growth. (Attitude)
30. I understand Jesus' major teaching elements regarding discipleship. (Knowledge)
31. I have a clear understating of discipleship. (Knowledge)

C. Discipleship Focus Group Questions

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being, “Why didn’t I sign up for a voluntary root canal?” and 10 being, “Move over Peter and John, I’m ready to change the world!” How would you rate the discipleship sessions you just experienced? Explain your number.
2. Did you experience God in a personal and new way during the discipleship experience?
3. Before the discipleship teachings, what was your attitude towards discipleship; excitement, trepidation, indifference, curiosity, something else?
4. What about the discipleship experience contributed to your knowledge about discipleship?
5. What did you like best, enjoy most, or what was least enjoyable about the discipleship experience?
6. What would you identify as the most significant part of the four-session discipleship experience towards your growth in discipleship, and what was least helpful?
7. Was there anything that you learned from the discipleship teachings, that you have or want to incorporate in your spiritual walk?
8. How has the discipleship teachings changed your view of discipleship?
9. Have you noticed any difference in how your staff, or the staff, is working together since the discipleship experience?
10. Do you think the discipleship teachings would help megachurch church staffs connect laity with Jesus Christ? If so, how?
11. Of all the things we discussed about discipleship, what to you is the most important?

D. Discipleship Interview Questions

1. Before the discipleship teachings, what was your attitude towards discipleship: excitement, trepidation, indifference, curiosity?
2. Can you describe your sense of concern for people to grow in their faith? Is it the same as it has been? Is it growing? Are you unsure? Share why.
3. How would you rate your overall experience with the discipleship teachings?
4. What would you identify as the most significant part of the four-session discipleship experience towards your growth in discipleship? What was the least significant?
5. Was there anything that you learned from the discipleship teachings, that you want to incorporate into your spiritual walk?
6. Was there anything that you learned from the discipleship teachings, that you want to incorporate into your ministry at church?
7. Can you give me an example of how your faith has helped you make a personal sacrifice to help someone else recently?
8. Do you think the four-session discipleship teaching would be helpful for other megachurch staffs? If so, what parts?
9. Of all the things we discussed about discipleship, what to you is the most important?
10. Is there anything you would like to add?

E. Informed Consent Letter**INFORMED CONSENT LETTER****{GROWING A MEGACHURCH STAFF'S DISCIPLESHIP UNDERSTANDING}**

You are invited to be in a research study being done by Michael Wooton, a doctoral student from Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because:

- 1) You work on a megachurch staff.
- 2) You directly work with and train volunteer leaders.
- 3) You teach and communicate regularly with laity.

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to fill out two surveys, attend four teaching sessions, and may be invited to a focus group, and/or interview. Both surveys will take about 20 minutes and the teaching sessions will be 90 minutes each. If you are a part of the focus group, you can expect about a 90-minute duration. If you are invited to be in an interview, you can expect a 30-60-minute interview. You will be able to participate in this study during work time.

If anyone else is given information about you through this study, they will not know your name. A number or initials will be used instead of your name. There will be an audio recording device used during the focus group and interviews. All personal data accrued through this process will be protected and confidential. Within 12 months of the student's graduation, all personal data will be deleted and destroyed. There will be three research assistants that have been trained and certified by PHRP (Protecting Human Research Participants) for ethical understanding and confidentiality purposes.

Although confidentiality will be encouraged within the study group, it cannot be guaranteed due to the presence of other participants in the study.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact the Asbury Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry department who can be reached at dmin.office@asburyseminary.edu.

You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Michael Wooton at michaelwooton@mychristchurch.com

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. By signing, you agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

Date Signed

F. Discipleship Interview Consent Form

Consent for Participation in Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Rev. Michael Wooton, a DMin student from Asbury Theological Seminary. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about increasing the discipleship understanding of Megachurch staffs. I will be one of approximately 3 people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on staff will be told.
2. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher assistant. The interview will last approximately 30-60 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio recording of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be audio recorded, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects. For research problems or questions regarding subjects, the Institutional Review Board may be contacted at irb@asburyseminary.edu
6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this interview.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature _____ Date _____

My Printed Name _____

Signature of the Investigator _____

For further information, please contact: The Asbury Seminary DMIN Office at dmin.office@asburyseminary.edu

G. Spiritual Goal Setting for Disciples (Based off Doran's S.M.A.R.T. goal setting framework)

1. State precisely what spiritual goal you intend to accomplish.
2. Tell one other person about your spiritual goal to be held accountable.
3. Set a spiritual goal that could not be reached with one's own strength and ability.
4. Make a daily commitment to your spiritual goals.
5. Break your spiritual goal up into manageable segments.
6. Set the achievement of a spiritual goal in a time frame that can be accomplished.

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