

ABSTRACT

4C STRATEGY FOR DISCIPLESHIP:

EFFECTIVE DISCIPLESHIP MODEL FOR THE ASSEMBLY OF GOD

CHURCH BENGALI SECTION

by

Sudip Das

The state of West Bengal, India received the gospel of Jesus Christ in the early 16th Century. With the coming of the East India Company came the European missionaries who preached the gospel to the people who inhabited the land. Nearly after four hundred years the Christian population stands insignificant. The discipleship patterns and paradigms followed in the churches played a significant role in this context. This dissertation addresses the challenge of discipleship among the Bengali community specifically in the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section. This paper is pre-intervention research to show that without discipleship every effort to reach people to get involved in the process, or replicating discipleship is ineffective. The current discipleship practices are not structured and vulnerable enough to create a conducive environment for spiritual growth.

The research addresses the challenge of discipleship in the Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali section to know the obstacles to discipleship and the possible ways to resolve the current challenges. The project focused on developing essential basics to develop a model of discipleship for believers in the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali section.

The model of discipleship was based on a study and analysis of the First Epistle to the Corinthians and the Apostle Paul's interactions with the Corinthian Church. It delves into the cultural impact of Corinth on the spiritual development of the church, as highlighted by Apostle Paul in his teaching to the Corinthians believers. Moreover, it explores the influence of Corinthian culture on the church and its ramifications, as well as examines various sociological challenges within the Church that led to disunity among believers.

The research yields great insight into the obstacles to discipleship and effective practices for the future. One of the most common barriers to discipleship was lack of time, though believers have a desire to grow spiritually. Through the study, participants began to think about discipleship in terms of their relationship with God and a community of faith. Conversely, the most impactful approach for fostering discipleship is through an unwavering commitment to Christ and getting them to experience discipleship in an ambiance of fruitful nurturing through mentoring.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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Dissertation Coach

Date

Director, Doctor of Ministry Program

Date

Dean of the Beeson Center

Date

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CHURCH BENGALI SECTION**

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by

Sudip Das

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CHAPTER 1 - THE NATURE OF THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter sets the stage for the need for a holistic approach to discipleship within the Bengali Section of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata. This chapter provides a road map for the journey of this project. This chapter expresses the researcher's passion for resolving a vexing conundrum. Included in the overview of the research project are the research design, purpose statement, research questions, participants, and how results are collected and analyzed. This chapter sets the tone for the rest of the project presented in this paper.

Personal Journey

I was born into a Christian family. I became a follower of Jesus at a youth camp in 1994. I was invited by my classmates from the school where I was studying. After making my commitment to Jesus to follow him, I attended youth group regularly and became involved in assisting my youth pastor with planning youth events for the church. In 1996, at a youth camp, I felt the Lord calling me to serve him in the full-time ministry. I sought the Lord and was sure of his calling upon my life. I pursued a Bachelor of Theology. After graduation, I was appointed as a pastor to a church in a small town named Durgapur, which is about 220 kilometers from Kolkata. The church had twenty members, as the church had split a couple of months before my arrival as pastor. I had the opportunity to pastor the church for about two years and saw the congregation grow to 80 people. At the time I had the opportunity to pursue a Master of Divinity from Southern Asia Bible College, Bangalore. Right after completing the degree, I joined the staff of the Buntain Theological College and taught various subjects over the years. I was ordained by the Assemblies of God of North India in the year 2010. I gained greater insight into Bengali culture while

working in Bangladesh for an NGO, as Bangladesh and West Bengal share a common culture and history dating back to Pre-Independence India. It shares the same language and culture and was part of the same province under British administration.

After serving in Bangladesh for seven years, I was appointed as a pastor of The Assembly of God Church Thakurpukur, a suburb of Kolkata. A split had taken place in the church and as a result, AGNI appointed me pastor of the church. The church stabilized and progressed within a year.

I was invited to become the pastor of the Bengali Section of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata, due to an unforeseen and unfortunate event – a split. I accepted the responsibility and continued in this role to date. Before my arrival, this church had suffered due to trouble with leadership and was in a shattered state.

I have had the opportunity to pastor three churches after they had split due to leadership turmoil or disunity among congregants.

In the year 2016, I was elected to the office of the district treasurer of the Eastern District Council of the Assemblies of God of North India. Being in the position of District Treasurer, I came into close contact with the Assemblies of God churches in our district in the state of West Bengal. Many of these churches are situated in rural areas, while the others are in urban areas including towns and cities. During my term as the Executive Member of the council, I was able to travel to different churches. One thing that always bothered me was church splits that affect the growth of the church. Why do churches split? How are we disciplining believers that are unable to comprehend the urgency of the call that is placed upon us, as a church?

Churches that had been in existence for forty years had thirty official members and at times ten people in attendance for Sunday worship service. The questions of sluggish church growth and the causes of splits in the church lingered in my mind,

and I was determined to search for the reasons behind these. The gospel reached the shores of Bengal through the European missionaries 400 years ago in the 16th Century. Comparatively, looking at the history of Christianity in other parts of the country, it seems they have grown over the years while Churches in Bengal have been slow to grow and have experienced leadership turmoil and the occasional split.

Thus, research and investigation are required to recognize the reason for such sluggish growth in Christianity in the state and pattern of discipleship within the church that enriches a disciple's life to make disciples.

Statement of the Problem

West Bengal is a state in eastern India, with over 100 million inhabitants. It is India's thirteenth largest state and fourth largest populated state with 19 districts, 909 towns, and 40,203 villages. It is known for its past as an East India Company trading post. With the coming of the East India Company came the European missionaries who preached the gospel to the pagans who inhabited the land. West Bengal received the gospel through the missionaries who came to serve the soldiers in the East India Company, nearly 400 years ago. However, statistically, Christians are an insignificant number in the state.

Most researchers have addressed the issues of conversion from Hinduism to Christianity, Dalit and tribal Christianity in India, Christian missions in India, philosophical dialogues among Hindu Christians, etc. In the available literature, there is a noticeable absence of discussion regarding paradigms of discipleship or strategies for disciplining believers in West Bengal.

While many have claimed the percentage of Christians has grown over the decades, and that may be true, the growth has not been uniform throughout the country. There are pockets within a vast country like India that haven't seen significant

growth in the percentage of Christians. Although most of the Christians live in the South, there are also some of the Northeastern states that are greatly influenced by Christianity. Christianity has emerged as the major religion in three Northeastern states—Nagaland (87.93%), Meghalaya (74.59%) and Mizoram (89%) (Census 2011).

The religious census of 2011 provides good insight into the Christian population in West Bengal. The census states 0.72% of the Christian population in the state. Several churches and denominations in West Bengal have worked through the centuries without any extraordinary success or significant growth.

Tony Joseph, in his article dissecting the question “Why Christianity failed in India”, points to the failure of the Christian missions despite the claims from Hindu right wings that “Christianity is posing a growing and serious demographic threat to Hinduism by converting large numbers of Hindus through aggressive proselytizing.” Joseph elucidates that Christianity in India was 2.6% in 1971 to 2.3% in 2001; the number is on the way down. He compares that with the spread of Hinduism in the West to put the numerical perspective straight. Joseph writes:

The first Hindu probably landed in London only about 200 years ago, not 2,000 years ago. So, what would you expect the Hindu population of the city to be today? Half a percent? One percent? Two percent? The actual figure is over five percent, more than twice as big as the presence of Christians in India. London is just a city, one might say, so let’s look at the figure for the whole of the UK. Then you come up with 1.3 percent. If you add those who identify themselves as Sikhs (thus bowing to the wishes of the Hindutva right wing to treat all Indian-origin religions as essentially one group), then the number goes up to 1.9 percent, quite comparable to the percentage of Christians in India.

And mind you, the Hindu figures for the UK are on the way up, not down. And the UK is no exception. Here are some other figures—New Zealand: 2 percent, Canada: 1.6 percent, Australia: 1.28 per cent, Malaysia: 6.3 percent, and Indonesia: 1.69 percent. This is without even considering our immediate neighbors such as Sri Lanka or Bhutan, or countries such as Fiji or Mauritius, where the figures are, of course, much higher. So, the accurate and insightful question to ask is not why Christianity is expanding in India, but why it is NOT expanding.

Viewed through the prism of pastoral experience and a leadership vantage, a conspicuous divergence emerges between the existing discipleship model as enacted within the confines of the Assemblies of God Church, Kolkata's Bengali section. This disconnection has spurred my endeavor to pursue and understand the nature of the problem further and propose a new model that is Bible-based and contextually meaningful. In *The Great Omission*, Dallas Willard says the Church has focused on making converts instead of disciples (141). It seems that the churches were busy adding several members to their list but unfortunately neglected the discipleship process to make other disciples. As Bill Hull observes, “Denominations that change their methods and cast off unproductive tradition will flourish and experience God’s power, while those who insist on the status quo will die a slow, unpleasant death” (22).

Regrettably, Churches have frequently focused on week-to-week activities, while others have adopted a program-centric approach but sadly missed out on helping believers to develop into a lifelong disciple of Jesus that will challenge growth in their relationship with Jesus. Thus, the main concern is finding a model that

is strong biblically and that is also appropriate for the believers in The Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the research was to identify a holistic strategy for discipleship from the Apostle Paul's work with the Corinthians to the leadership of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section.

Research Questions

To find the patterns of discipleship that are used in the Assembly of God churches and to propose a biblical approach model of discipleship, the research was guided by the following three questions:

Research Question #1

What is the current practice or pattern for disciplining believers in the church?

Research Question #2

What do you identify as an obstacle to disciplining believers?

Research Question #3

What kind of discipleship model can we draw from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians?

Rationale for the Project

The primary rationale for a project of this nature should be based on Scripture. Dallas Willard in his book, *The Great Omission* elaborated on the lack of Bible-based discipleship in these words:

Discipleship on the theological right has come to mean preparation for soul winning, under the direction of parachurch efforts that had discipleship farmed out to them because the local church wasn't doing it. On the left, discipleship has come to mean some form of social activity or social service, from serving

soup lines to political protest to...whatever. The term 'discipleship' has currently been ruined so far as any solid psychological and biblical content is concerned. (53)

The first reason for a project like this is found in the statement made by Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel of Matthew. The key passage in understanding discipleship is the Great Commission: "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20, NIV). Jesus charged his disciples to make disciples and laid down the future growth strategy for the expansion of the church. The command of Jesus to his disciples was not a matter of choice but an imperative. Unlike many who argue and claim that discipleship is not for everyone, by arguing that the Greek word *mathetes*, translated as "disciple", does not appear in the Bible after Acts 21, the church does not need to focus on disciple-making (Hull 27). However, the best meaning of discipleship is interpreted in the book of Acts. The twelve disciples initially chosen by Jesus transformed their world by making disciples. Wilkins writes:

by the times of the early church, as recorded in Acts, the term disciple was synonymous with the term true believer in Jesus. Luke speaks of the multitude of "believers" in Acts and the multitude or congregation of "disciples", in Acts 6:2. In Luke's writing, the expressions "those who believe" and "the disciples: signify the same group of people (Acts 6:7; 9:26; 11:26;14:21-22). Acts clarify for us that the common word for a believer in the early church was disciple. Disciple was also the earliest synonym for Christians. (Loc. 25)

Therefore, engagement in the process of discipleship is Jesus' fundamental commission to the church (Matt. 28:18-20), and the entire New Testament bears

witness to this vocation. All followers of Christ through all generations and in history are called disciples and are called to make disciples. All Jesus' followers should and must become disciple makers and work along with God as his co-workers to extend and expand the church. This call and purpose are the main reasons for this project.

The second reason for this study is to know the reason behind the minimal growth of the Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali Section to implement an organized discipleship program.

Third, this project is important to help the Assemblies of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section to be aware of the unfinished tasks—to reach out to the people and to challenge the congregation to be involved in the disciple-making process. Moreover, one result of this project will be an in-depth discipleship course that is focused on Missio Dei of the church.

Fourth, this project will help describe the essentials of discipleship to help Bengali Christians grow in their faith.

Fifth, not much work has been dedicated to the formation of discipleship within the church relevant to its existing context in the Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali Section.

Definition of Key Terms

AGK – The Assembly of God Church Kolkata

AGKB – The Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section.

Bengal – the eastern part of India with the city of Kolkata as its capital.

Bengali Section – The Assembly of God Church Kolkata is made up of eight different vernacular sections, they worship in their mother tongue. Bengali is one of the languages and is also the state language.

Culture – encompasses social behavior, norms, patterns, practices, and customs.

Disciple – “Disciple” is a term mentioned here in the sense of distinguishing between being a “Christian” because of lineage and being a committed follower of Christ. In India the term “Christian” carries a negative connotation based on culture and history—one who is known for loose morals, consuming alcohol, and eating beef. So, disciple here means a person who is committed to following Christ and living a life of obedience.

Eastern District Council of The Assemblies of God of North India – the overarching organizational body under which the Assemblies of God Church Kolkata operates, acting as an umbrella organization.

Holistic Strategy – the overall strategy for reaching the Bengali community with the gospel of Jesus and making disciples who follow Jesus.

NIV – New International Version.

Delimitations

This project focuses on the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section and developing essential basics to develop a model of discipleship for the believers. The study was confined to the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata as the researcher serves as the pastor of the congregation.

The project investigates the book of Corinthians and the Apostle Paul’s work with believers of the Corinthian Church. It studies the cultural influence of the city of Corinth on the church and the spiritual formation addressed by Apostle Paul to the Corinthian believers. It aims to examine Corinthian culture, how it impacted the church, and how different sociological issues within the church caused disunity within the congregation. It will attempt to identify key principles suggested by apostle Paul

for making disciples and will recommend them to the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section as approaches to disciplining believers.

Review of Relevant Literature

This project consulted theological and biblical literature to gain perspectives on the focus of the dissertation: discipleship. Discipleship is a lifelong process. It is not primarily of what we do but an outgrowth of who we are. Every Christian has been called to embrace this call to discipleship.

Scripture

The very strength of this project is based on the Great Commission issued by Jesus, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). Before Jesus gave this directive to his disciples. He called them and spent three years teaching and training them. He taught them about the demands that would be placed on the disciples as followers when He states, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). Again, he reminds his disciples, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:60). He cautions his disciples to consider the cost of discipleship (Mark 8:34).

While to another He said, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Jesus taught his disciples about the Kingdom that his father had established, a kingdom where justice and love conquered injustice and hatred. Jesus also taught his disciples how they were to live to achieve the fullness of life and happiness that is God's will for all people. Later, the apostles understood the high calling of discipleship and wrote in their epistles and encouraged fellow disciples.

Books

The researcher presents relevant literature which is believed to be useful in gaining insight into the social and cultural context of the Corinthian church.

Discipleship was studied in the context of the Epistle to the Corinthian Church to understand the journey of a disciple from a seeker from a pagan background to a committed follower of Christ. The Corinthian scholarship was key to understanding the cultural and social context in which it was written—a church in a pagan world. The works of Ben Witherington, Kenneth E. Bailey, Gordon D. Fee, and Anthony C Thistleton guided the context and socio-cultural base for the research, though the researcher has used many other sources to gain the same. The writings of George Barna, Bill Hull, and Allan Hirsch consider biblical discipleship the pathway to becoming Christlike.

Research Methodology

Type of Research

This project constitutes a pre-intervention analysis seeking to understand the underlying reasons for the limited impact of the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church on the city of Kolkata. This project relied on mixed methods to find out have the believers of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section have undergone in the past and how they can be better disciples for the future growth of the church.

The questionnaire and focus group allowed the participants to express their views on discipleship, mentioning some of the discipleship programs they were engaged in to build their spiritual lives as believers. The questionnaire helped to assess the obstacles to the discipleship program of the churches. The focus group

helped the believers to express their honest opinions and share their journey of becoming disciples.

Participants

The participants in the research project were believers from the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section. The researcher followed a participatory style approach, “which required the community under study to be the primary actor in defining the project’s problem, data collection, methods of analysis, and how and where to use the findings” (Sensing 58). The participants were chosen from among the Bengali section, as the project has to do with the impact of discipleship of the believers on the rate of church growth in the Bengali Section. The participants are members and adherents of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section and have been part of the church for a considerable period. These participants are mature believers who have completed various spiritual formation courses and are actively involved in various ministries within the church. They fall within the age range of twenty years and above, including men, women, elders, and young people from within the congregation.

Instrumentation

The researcher employed three separate methods to gather information for the study and ensured healthy data collection. Initially, participants were provided with a discipleship assessment questionnaire through the Google survey form to gather insight into their personal discipleship journeys. This was followed by a focus group discussion to delve deeper into the participants’ responses to the questionnaire. Additionally, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the elders of the church to obtain more detailed and candid information.

Data Collection

The main means of data collection involved a questionnaire and focus group followed by a semi-structured interview with participants. As a qualitative project, this meant that the collection “systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (Sensing 57). It also approached the project with a semi-structured interview to gain views on the subject matter under discussion.

As Patton states, “We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe” (qtd. in Sensing 104). The collection of data was done over two months with questionnaires filled out followed by focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews that were set up in advance with the believers at a place and time mutually agreed upon. All responses from the questionnaire, focus, and semi-structured interviews were recorded and kept safely.

Data Analysis

The research data, specifically the questionnaire and interview manuscript, was reviewed multiple times to notice trends, similarities, and patterns in the descriptions of health and process for each believer. Reflection on these responses helped in building the case. The transcript from the focus group and interviews were read and examined, named, and organized to find common themes and ideas. Suggestions were noted and analyzed. The comprehensive results were synthesized with findings from the literature review and contextual observations.

Generalizability

This project was specifically focused on the Assemblies of God church Kolkata Bengali Section and the discipleship model followed to equip the believers of the Assemblies of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section. However, these guidelines

and the strategies mentioned could be used universally and would be helpful for every local church in any part of the world to make Christ-followers as it lays down the basics of a discipleship model.

Project Overview

Chapter 2 of this research focuses on the biblical and theological foundation, context, and sociological background of the Corinthian church, the review of multiple literatures and experienced practitioners in the field of discipleship in cross-cultural context.

Chapter 3 presents the research design, methods of research, and data analysis methodology.

Chapter 4 shows the results of the research and analysis of the collected data through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 5 offers the interpretation of the research findings as well as observations and suggestions for improving the discipleship program for the AG churches in Bengal.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

In this chapter, the researcher reviews literature relevant to the study of the process of discipleship. The research in this chapter is categorized into three sections. The first section explores the Biblical foundation for discipleship, and the second section addresses the theological foundation for discipleship. The third and final section, we will review the relevant issues faced by the Corinthian church with similar situations faced by the Bengali church in West Bengal. The third section will be more topical and a review of literature rather than an expository commentary on Corinthians.

Biblical Foundations

Discipleship in the Bible

Bill Hull candidly speaks about the crisis of discipleship very explicitly when he states, “The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product” (21). The question is what kind of disciples are we producing? Are we able to move a person from just being a believer to becoming a committed Christ follower? What kind of product is the church producing? The result, as commanded by Jesus, is called a disciple.

The four gospels are the shape and content of the Christian life as understood and experienced by the individual gospel writers. The world of the disciples who were with Jesus was very different from the world of other disciples of their time. As Keener observes, “Making disciples was the sort of thing rabbis would do, but Jesus’ followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves” (125). David Bosch points out that the rabbis of Jesus’ times also had disciples. Bosch notes that though

the disciples were attached to a teacher and on the surface, it seemed very little different, in substance, however, the two types are fundamentally different. Bosch analyzes the salient features of the two different types of disciples, those of Jesus and the rabbinic disciples. In the Judaism of Jesus' time, it was the prerogative of the student to choose his teacher but in the case of Jesus, he called out to his disciples to follow him. The choice was of Jesus and not the disciples. Second, the student or disciple chooses a particular teacher for their knowledge of the Torah. Torah was central to the teacher and disciple's relationship. However, Jesus altered this relationship. Jesus wanted his disciples to sacrifice everything not for the law [Torah] but for him (Bosch 37).

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word disciple is never mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament. The word was popularised during the time of Jesus. Though the word may not have appeared, the concept of discipleship is all through the Bible. There is one Hebrew term used in the Old Testament to describe the concept of discipleship in Judaism. Wilkins points out that discipleship terminology is relatively absent from the Old Testament. The only Hebrew word is "talmîdh", which is similar to the Greek term "mathētēs" (Wilkins 45). However, "talmîdh" is used only once in the Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 25:8 and indicates a pupil in contrast to a teacher (Marriner Loc. 746). K.H. Rengstorf on the other hand points out the absence of "discipleship" terminology in the Old Testament, concluding that there is a corresponding absence of the concept of discipleship as well. He argues that "mathetes" does not appear in the established LXX tradition. He is of the view that God has chosen the whole people to learn his will and serve him. He explains for such mentioning that the religion of Israel is a religion of revelation. Human speakers are the agents by which God proclaims

himself and his will. They are stewards passing God's word to his covenantal community. There is no place for the authority of a great personality or a master-disciple relationship. He further argues that a master-disciple relationship is absent.

He argues that individual relations in the Old Testament, for example between Moses and Joshua differ from the relations found in the Greek and Hellenistic world. Joshua is the servant of Moses who succeeds him only by divine proclamation and thus enjoys full authority in his own right. He notes that the link between Elijah and Elisha, the prophets and their attendants, and Jeremiah and Baruch were not teacher-disciple relationships as is typically thought. Rather Joshua, Elisha, and Baruch who followed the prophets were servants of those with whom they had a relationship. He argued that the Old Testament prophets had no disciples; seers were organized into guilds, and they served as assistants to the prophet. It was charismatic endowment rather than devotion to the prophet. Therefore, the individual is chosen only so that they may perform special tasks on behalf of the whole. It is thus inappropriate to use the word 'disciple' to differentiate a special group from the whole (Rengstorf, *TDNT* 497).

On the other hand, some argue contrary to Rengstorf's conclusion regarding the presence of examples of discipleship in the Old Testament. Martin Hengel was one of the first to affirm the existence of master-discipleship relations in the Old Testament. Hengel notes how Josephus describes Elisha as a disciple of Elijah. Josephus used the Greek word frequently used for the disciple in the New Testament (16). Richard Calenberg points out the failure on the part of Rengstorf to acknowledge the usage of תלמיד which would appear to negate his conclusions (Marriner 42). Calenberg notes several Old Testament pairs prescribed evidence of a pattern of

discipleship. In particular, he viewed the relationship between Elisha and Elijah as the definite master-disciple model in the Old Testament (Marriner 51-63).

Michael J Wilkins counters Rengstorf's claims stating that he overstated and overlooked the form *limmudh* which is derived from *lamadh*. Even as he overstates the absence of terminology, he overlooks the evidence that is to be found. He inadequately defines the relationship between the terminology and concept of discipleship, he inordinately overstates the absence of discipleship. He draws his conclusion from the Old Testament concept based on the absence of one particular word *talmidh*. Even though traditional Jewish "disciple" terminology is only marginally, recent educational and sociological studies have suggested forms of master-disciple relations in existence in the Old Testament. Therefore, Wilkins suggests, that the Old Testament background must focus first on the relevant terminology, but then the focus must shift to other relevant evidence for the concept of disciples (Wilkins, 43-44).

Moreover, Michael J. Wilkins thinks that the root of biblical discipleship is apparent and visible in God's calling. This calling is expressed in the divine initiative of God redeeming the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage and their response to be a community belonging to God and entering a covenant relationship. It was a community where everyone enjoyed equal status without partiality and prejudice.

Hanson elucidates the lessons of this newfound community:

Israel's birth experiences its essential lesson: within this community, every individual was equally precious to God, regardless of social standing, and thus to be protected from exploitation and oppression by structures intrinsic to the covenant between God and people. (23)

Thus, the God-deliverance of a slave people inaugurated a new order of life for Israel and a special relationship with God. In the Old Testament, God is the father of Israel in the context of God forgiving and redeeming Israel.

Today, as followers of Jesus, we have been saved and set free, entering into a new life through water baptism and being called into a unique bond with God the Father. The same God who was considered the Father of Israel and shared a close relationship with them is now our Father through Jesus Christ. Discipleship is a process that helps us to continue in this relationship with the Father.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT:

The impetus for the biblical foundation for this project is rooted in the words of Jesus to His church, “go and make disciples” (Matt. 28:19). Jesus masterfully worked with the initial twelve disciples, calling them from their mundane way of life to change them into fearless leaders who would lay the foundation of the early church in the first century. He called, encouraged, instructed, and rebuked them according to situations they faced. His invitation to his disciples were plain and simple, “to seek the kingdom and his righteousness” (Matt. 6:33). Seeking the kingdom and his righteousness is to become the top priority for his disciples. As Malan Nel points out, “that we are struggling to be a blessing to the world because we are confused (even equated) confrontational evangelism and (with) discipling? And now we are not doing anymore of the two!” (Nel). He further asks, “are we willing to be serious enough about the cost of discipleship, so much so that we do what the priority for disciples is – seeking the “kingdom and his righteousness” (Nel).

Jesus emphasised discipleship, yet less resources are used by the church to escalate and intensify discipleship curriculum. So often it is observed that people try to distinguish between church and discipleship. They segregate into two different

segments. A. Boyd Luter observes, “Many Christian workers view discipleship as an activity that is to take place apart from the local church and that has little relationship to the church’s major purpose” (Boyd). However, the church should become the place for discipleship, where unprepared believers are turned into disciples to go into the world as a light into darkness. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes, “Discipleship without Jesus Christ is choosing one’s own path” (17).

Jesus called certain people to be His disciples and to follow Him. The narrative described the disciples leaving everything and following him (“οἱ δὲ εὐθέως ἀφέντες τὰ δίκτυα ἠκολούθησαν αὐτῷ - Matt 4:2”) (Aland 10). According to Allen, the word “follow” is the Greek word “ἀκολουθέο” which means, “I follow, accompany, obey to come, or go behind someone; comply with” (Allen 288). The disciple is a student who follows or learns from a teacher. In other words, the word “disciple” denotes intentionally following to be able to learn.

The concept of discipleship or disciple-making is not a new nor exclusively Christian. In the second and fourth centuries, the written text to oral performance in the Greco-Roman rhetorical school produced oral variants of written sayings of famous teachers through disciples. It is observed that rabbinic communities of third-fourth century Galilee and other contemporary philosophical or religious communities were grounded in close discipleship to elucidate an acclaimed text (Jaffee 529-30). This is what Jesus did with his disciples; he moved with them and taught them scripture with the practical demonstration of the parables for them to understand. Jesus passed on the written scripture [Torah] to his disciples orally, which was again reproduced by the disciples in the forms of gospel and letters in the New Testament.

DISCIPLESHIP IN THE GOSPELS

Discipleship has been an important topic of discussion among church planters, biblical scholars, and mission practitioners. Discipleship - disciple-making, and discipling believers has been a great focus in recent times.

The four gospels bear witness to Jesus calling his disciples. He called people from different social, professional, and economic backgrounds to follow Him, making it their life's priority to seek the kingdom and his righteousness. Not only did Jesus call his disciples but also set high standards for them to follow. Being a disciple is the most basic aspect of Christian life.

A disciple when called, agrees to follow Jesus and no other master (Wilkins 23). As the gospel writer Mathew points out in Jesus' words, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money" (Matt. 6:24).

When Jesus called his disciples, they left their vocation and followed him. It is witnessed in Matthew 4:18-22 that Peter, Andrew, and John left their fishing net and followed the invitation to become his disciple. Though Jesus had many disciples, the twelve had a special importance. In three years, he mentored and poured his life and teaching into them. Not only did he call and mentor them, but he also empowered and sent them into the world. The narrator of the gospel of Luke recounts that Jesus sent his disciples into the world (Luke 10:17-20).

MATTHEW – PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM

Matthew's understanding of discipleship is explained in the term "proclamation". Proclaiming the kingdom of God. The requirement of the follower to be a worker for the kingdom of God. It is found in the mandate of Jesus. Matthew summarizes the words and deeds of Jesus and presents Jesus' mandate that his

disciples increasingly share in Jesus's mission (Schackenburg 92-93). Turner notes that "Jesus's compassion for needy Israel is expressed by the metaphor of the harvest. Israel's situation is likened to a bountiful harvest without sufficient workers" (Turner, 263). The ministry of the disciples is vitally needed at this crucial time, and they should pray so that God will send even more workers into the field. Mathew's harvest imagery (3:8-10, 12; 6:26; 13:30, 39; 21:34; 25:24, 26; cf. 20:1-16) shows the importance of the worker's need for the harvest. The discussion on the scarcity of laborers for the plentiful harvest leads into Matthew chapter 10's mission focus, where Jesus sends out his disciples, accompanied by warnings of challenges they may face.

According to Craig Blomberg, Matthew draws a positive picture of the disciples. He further says that "requirements for disciples and the constitution of the community of Jesus' followers that became the church dominate Matthew's gospel and stresses discipleship as following Jesus so as to obey the sum total of God's commandments as interpreted by and fulfilled in Christ" (Blomberg 165-67).

On the other hand, Carter takes a different approach based on Matthew 4:18-22 and argues that Mathew's gospel creates a vision of discipleship that embraces a fixed feeling toward society and detaching from social ties on one hand but also participating in socioeconomic structures, and their use on the other. He looks at the Matthean discipleship as a "voluntary marginal" living a liminal existence (Carter 58-62).

Matthew presents Jesus' authoritative summons to the disciples to "follow" him and the disciples respond to his authoritative call with immediate consent. With this call to proclaim the gospel and "make disciples" of the nations, disciples are called not only to follow but also to count the cost of discipleship would involve. (Keener, "Matthew's Missiology" 15).

Matthean discipleship is rooted on God's initiative and not on man's volunteering for the kingdom work. Matthew's gospel brings out the call of the disciples as a "transitional existence" toward the final eschatological goal, the one who calls has the authority and power to judge the destiny of the follower.

MARK – RENOUNCE AND TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

One of the most intense areas of discussion in the gospel of Mark has been the role of discipleship. Along with Jesus, the twelve disciples play a central role in the narrative of the gospel of Mark. They are present in the narrative from the calling of the four disciples (Mark 1:16-20) to Peter's denial of Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest (Mark 14:66-72). Even after their ignominious departure from the story, the disciples remain crucial characters in Mark's narrative discourse (Aernie 23).

Though Mark primarily narrates the "good news" about Jesus but also sheds light upon what it means to be His disciples. The Gospel of Mark is an invitation to follow Jesus, as Mark uses phrases such as "Come follow me" (1:17), "follow me" (2:14), "and he followed him on the way" (10:52). Jonas D. Christal states that most of "the Markan scholars agrees that 10:22-23 belongs to a large section that deals with the theme of discipleship" (Christal 7). Mark in the beginning of his gospel narrative introduces the disciples in a positive way as they respond to Jesus' call and leave everything behind and follow him (1:16-20; 2:13-14) (Aernie 24). However, this portrayal of the disciples does not last long as the disciples are later presented as failing to understand Jesus' messiahship and inauguration of the Kingdom God in Jesus. Mark brings out a contrast, on one side the disciples show exemplary signs of renunciation and determination while on the other hand they exhibit signs of misunderstanding and fear. Mark presents the disciples as they are. Mark presents attachment to earthly wealth as a hindrance to responding appropriately to the

kingdom (9:47; 10:15; 10:23). R. Alan Culpepper mentions that the conditions for entering the kingdom of God require a disciple of a radical decision and receptivity (Culpepper 334 - 338). Mark presents the disciples as individuals who renounce worldly riches to embrace Jesus' mission, willingly carrying their cross. Donahue and Harrington point out that in the context of Mark's gospel, the disciples are called to adopt the itinerant lifestyle of Jesus. The particular of this lifestyle is sketched in Jesus' missionary discourses directed to the twelve in Mark 6: 7-13 (Danahue 307). He further affirms, "Those who follow Jesus should voluntarily cultivate a simple lifestyle in the service of the apostolic mission and not allow concern for earthly possessions to prevent them from carrying out their mission" (Danahue 307). It is said that one of the best ways to determine the ethos and self-understanding of a religious community or a movement is to analyze its attitude to natural ties. For religious movement family ties frequently constitute a major idiom of commitment (Barton 57).

Leif E. Vaage looks at discipleship and the proper way to follow Jesus is a form of "domestic asceticism" (741). He argues mentioning four discrete but interconnected features: Firstly, that following Jesus in the gospel of Mark "seems to be intentional. It is not easy but a costly choice". Secondly, that the "disciples are anti-(conventional) family as they leave behind their family to follow Jesus. The disciples are choosing a significant social cost and breaking ties with ordinary family life". Thirdly, none of the "twelve succeeds as a disciple". Fourthly, in contrast to the disciples, "some minor characters in the narrative all of whom find favor with Jesus, are successful and exemplary" (Vaage 741). Marvin Meyer points out the eminent theme in the gospel of Mark is linked to bearing the cross—taking up the cross and following Jesus. The cross serves as the dominant theme, and the life of the disciple is lived with the reality of the cross (Meyer 231). Richard Hicks observes that a strong

emphasis of discipleship is in Mark 8:27-10:52 and the story of the rich man (10:17-22) continues the theme of discipleship. He voiced that in the story, while Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, an unnamed character interrupts him, asking, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” and the discourse moves quickly from a conversation about law (10:18-20), including the interlocutor’s claim to perfect obedience, to an invitation to discipleship (10:21) (Hicks 180).

Therefore, it could be said the gospel of Mark presents the disciples as the ones who responded to the immediate call of Jesus to join him in his mission and took up their cross to follow him for the rest of their lives.

LUKE – JOURNEY WITH A DEFINITE PURPOSE

The gospel of Luke is unique in its presentation of the disciples. He has not only narrated the story of Jesus but has highlighted and expanded on certain aspects of disciples which the other writers have not. Richard Longenecker agrees with the fact that Luke’s gospel is unique. He states, “Luke’s treatment of discipleship is unique, with a number of distinctive features – not only in his gospel but also in acts, which together comprise about thirty percent of the New Testament” (Longenecker 50)

George E. Rice in his raises two questions relating to the call of the first disciples to ministry in Luke 5:1-11. Firstly, this pericope in Luke is placed in a different chronological order from that which is recorded parallel in Matthew and Mark. Secondly, he points out that Luke’s account is much expanded over that given in the other two synoptic gospels. Luke used the term “apostles” to refer to the disciples several time within the gospel (Luke 6:13; 9:10; 11:49; 17:5; 22:14; 24:10) (Rice 51). It is important to notice that Luke overemphasized the term “apostle”. The term “apostle” appears six times in Luke’s gospel compared to once in the other gospels and twenty-nine to thirty times in the book of Acts (Longenecker 59).

Longenecker states that the reason for such overemphasis and positive treatment of the disciples is probably explained by the fact that Luke sees the Twelve as being prepared for their roles as leaders of the church in Acts (Longenecker 56). According to Longenecker, Luke seems to view the disciples as modeling essential characteristics for Christian discipleship (56). As Charles Talbert sums up, “This is one way to say that the life of Jesus is the norm for the lives of his followers” (102).

Though Luke uses Mark as his source, he shows the disciples in a much more positive light obscuring their failures. However, Luke does not dilute the call for commitment to follow Jesus. It’s as if Luke intensifies the demands for following Jesus with a radical treatment of the “cost of discipleship” (Matt. 10:37-38; Luke 14:25-33). To intensify claims on the cost of discipleship, Luke mentions that builders need to carefully consider the cost of a building before beginning construction.

On the other hand, Lukan discipleship does not only include the Twelve; he brings to light the participation of women as Jesus’ disciples. Amy-Jill Levine and Marianne Blickenstaff point out that Luke makes the women followers of Jesus more visible than the other gospels (De Boer 141).

Allen Black tabulated the instance of the number of times Luke refers to women in his gospel. He observes Luke has taken twelve references to women from Mark and seven parallels in Mathew alone (Osborn 448). He points out a special feature of Luke's narrative of pairing women with men. It was not uncommon but prevalent in Luke. Luke’s second volume also supports this emphasis. In the book of Acts, Luke mentions five such pairing of women with men (Acts 5:1-11; 16:1; 18:2-3; 26; 24:24) and pairing siblings (Acts 25.13). But it could be seen that references to women are not as prominent in Acts as they are in the Gospel.

Leonard J. Swindler in his book *Jesus was a Feminist* notes:

Of Luke's forty-two passages dealing with women or the "feminine", as noted above, three are common to all four evangelists and nine more are common to all three Synoptics, Luke, Matthew, and Mark; another five are common to just Luke and Matthew, and two are reported by only Luke and Mark. Luke has far and away the largest number of unique women passages, twenty-three, whereas Matthew has ten specials to him, the fourth gospel three, and Mark none. Thus, both based on sheer quantity and the very large number of women passages special to Luke, it is clear that Luke exhibits the greatest stress on women by far, followed by Matthew, much farther back by Mark, and least of all by the Fourth Gospel. (137)

However, the researcher is of the opinion that Luke used much of the reference to women in his two-volume work to emphasize the role of women in the ministry of Jesus. That they are no less in comparison to their male counterpart. Also, Luke probably wanted to elevate the status of women. Leonard Swidler mentions that Jesus has never treated women inferior in any of the four gospels (163). The religious men of that Jewish culture thought just the opposite. Though the condition of women was bleak in Palestine, the writer of the gospel of Luke upheld the value and place of women in the gospel by giving them equal status by making them more visible than the other writers.

Dennis M. Sweetland elucidates discipleship in terms of a journey. He states that though Luke did not invent the journey motif, he found it in his Markan source and expanded upon it. He is of the opinion that when Jesus said to individual "follow me" (5:27; 9:59), he is inviting them to become personally attached to him as he journeys toward his goal.

One of the pericopes that stands out on Jesus' teaching on discipleship is in Luke 9:57-62, in which Jesus invites an individual to follow him. Luke has edited this story in order to show a radical calling to discipleship. In his call to the first, Jesus indicates to follow him one must be willing to sacrifice personal security. To the second, he draws attention to the relationship between his mission and that of his disciples. To the third, Jesus draws attention to the urgency and priority of the kingdom work.

Luke pictures Jesus as a traveler with a definite purpose to point them toward the Father, and this motif is also seen in the book of Acts. Luke represents Jesus' ultimate journey is toward God. In this journey toward his goals, Jesus invites individuals - men and women to attach themselves to him and take part in his mission.

JOHN – ASSIGNED TO MISSION

In the decade past there was relatively little interest in discipleship as a Johannine theological concept. John portrays discipleship as a personal relationship between Jesus and his disciples. In the last few decades, discipleship as a concept in the gospel of John has never been considered, and sometimes only aspects of discipleship have been addressed (Merwe 339). Recently, there has been an evolution to unravel interest in Johannine discipleship as a source of inspiration for spiritual growth. The word μαθητής is more extensively used by John than any of the other gospel writers. John has uses the word seventy-eight times in the fourth gospel in comparison to Matthew in which it occurs seventy-three times, Mark forty-six times, and Luke thirty-seven times. The disciples play an important role in the gospel narrative. The mission with which Jesus was sent by the father is an important factor to determine how the disciples fit in the fourth gospel narrative.

Merwe argues that the father sending the son from the “world above” to the “world below” occurs throughout the fourth gospel. He stresses the fact that as the Father sent the son, the Son sent the disciples into the world. Merwe states that it is an “important theological aspect concerning Jesus’ mission, which is important for the understanding of where discipleship fits into God’s revelatory-salvic plan, is that Jesus came from the “above” into the “below” to live for a while among us” (342). However, Andreas J. Köstenberger is of the opinion “that apostle John makes clear that Jesus’ mission, though pre-eminent, was not to stand alone; it was to be continued in the mission of his followers.” He observes that the mission of the disciples is virtually never mentioned other than with reference to the mission of Jesus. He argues that the disciple’s mission in the fourth gospel as described by John is in terms of “harvesting” (Köstenberger 141). Few scholars have attempted to highlight the theme of discipleship in John 17. Likewise in an article “John 17: Jesus Assigns His Mission to His Disciples”, Van der Merwe approaches the chapter from the perspective of Jesus’ mission and discipleships. He provides, “a hermeneutical, structural, theological and historical discussion of chapter 17 from the perspective of Jesus’ mission and discipleship” (Merwe 115).

On the other hand, Rekha Chennattu examines Johannine discipleship in the light of the covenant relationship based on the Old Testament covenant relationship. She observes the narrative of Jesus’ calling of the first disciples in John 1:35-51 and suggests that “the evangelist uses the occasion of the call stories to present a paradigm of discipleship as covenant relationship” (Chennattu et al. 113).

Discipleship in the rest of the New Testament:

Discipleship is a way of thinking and speaking about the nature of Christian life. Each of the disciples of Jesus emphasized discipleship through their teachings

and epistles written to churches. Some of the disciples' epistles were written in the form of dogma; some were written for instruction relating to Christian living and some were correctional in nature. All the epistles and writings of the New Testament helped in shaping the spiritual life of a disciple.

The book of Acts stresses the mission of the apostles after the day of Pentecost and narrates the history of the expansion of the newfound faith of the disciples to the rest of the Mediterranean world. Charles Talbert presents a series of correspondence that draws a similarity between what Jesus does and says in Luke and what the disciples do and say in the book of Acts (46). The book of Acts narrates the history of the disciples' "actions" and accomplishments post-resurrection.

Other Pauline Letters:

The Apostle Paul is one of the figures in the pages of New Testament that cannot be overlooked. He is the author of thirteen letters included in the New Testament. No study of the New Testament or the early church should neglect Paul and his writings. To fully understand the Pauline understanding of discipleship, we need to understand the man himself. Paul, who was the persecutor of the Christian transformed to be the very voice of the faith, demands an introspection.

The Apostle Paul articulated his faith and instructed believers of different churches through his writings. From his writing, we can understand the world of the first-generation Christians and their beliefs. The Apostle Paul is one of the greatest theologians of all times.

As Dunn observes:

It is rather that Paul's theology inevitably provides an indispensable foundation and serves as a still flowing fountainhead for the continuing stream of Christian theologizing. So that even those who have wanted to critique

Paul's theology or to build their own theologies on a different basis have found it necessary to interact with Paul and where possible to draw support from his writings. (4)

Michael Knowles demonstrates that discipleship can be summarized in the Pauline expression "in Christ". He explains discipleship is not upon merely gaining correct understanding or adopting correct behavior. It more fully involves "being renewed" to gradual conformity to the image of God by continuously following him (Longenecker 201). Jeffrey Weima mentions that discipleship in 1 Thessalonians is enfolded in "how one must walk to please God" (Longenecker 98). It is the theme of holiness when the apostle speaks about how one ought to live as a disciple of Christ. The theme of discipleship comes to expression in First Corinthians' correspondence in many ways, which will be explored in a detailed manner later in this project. In First Corinthians, discipleship is a call to imitate. Apostles Paul calls his converts to a life of imitation of Christ, as he does. In the book of Romans apostles Paul invites believers to discipleship by serving others. Phillip Long in a blog named *Main themes in Romans* talks about how apostle Paul describes the life of a disciple who is 'in Christ' as "one who is in Christ does not pursue his own honor but seeks to serve others" (Long).

Non-Pauline Letters:

Discipleship is the core of the New Testament. The notion and impression of discipleship is spread across the various authors and their writing in the New Testament. Discipleship is directly or obscurely addressed in their writings.

For instance, in the Epistles of James, disciples are encouraged to become perfect in God through Christ. He wants his hearers to strive for perfection. He outlines the different challenges faced by a disciple and how to overcome them.

Outward behavior is the outflow of inner conviction and change. In the Epistle to Hebrews, the author urges the disciples to understand the role of suffering to discipline and train as Jesus' disciples. The author encourages the disciples to fix their eyes upon Jesus, who "endured the cross, scorning its shame", so that they will not "grow weary and lose heart" (Heb. 12:2-3). The Epistle of John encourages the disciples to walk in the light (1 John 1:1 -2:6) and walk in love (2 & 3 John). The Epistle to First Peter was written to a distressed church to encourage and instruct the church. The Petrine epistles are not theological treatises as they do not directly address the theological dangers within the church. The epistles focus on how a disciple of Jesus is called to live out their faith (Boring 44-45).

Theological Foundation

When we ask the question: "What is theology?" The word's etymology offers helpful insight. The word theology comes from the Greek word "theos" which means God and "logos" which means word. In other words, it's a conversation about God. Theology helps us to develop a life of faith and build an understanding of what we do. As J. J. Mueller states, "Theology is communal; it belongs to the life of faith in the ongoing Christian community, stemming from the revelation of Jesus two thousand years ago" (1). It is the foundation upon which worship and spiritual habits are formed and stand.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance for a disciple to understand who God is and what He wants us to do. Disciples grow in their faith journey when there is a proper understanding of God and His mission in the world.

Theology covers a varied area within its scope. However, for this project, investigated three theological perceptions that help us to understand the theological foundation for discipleship.

Firstly, The Lordship of Christ is important for a disciple to understand. A disciple surrenders to the Lordship of Christ as the Lord and Savior of his/her life. Submission to Christ means hearing and responding to his call. This call was to conform themselves to Christ's patterns and lifestyle, subjecting our will to his will, obeying, and letting the word of God transform us. Being a disciple of Jesus means to stay close to him and learn from him. As apostle Paul wrote to the Galatian church and reminded them "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). We submit to the Lordship of Christ until the character of Jesus is formed in us. Jesus reminded the disciples of the importance of remaining in him in John 15:4, "Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (NIV).

God is the gardener who intervenes in the life of the branches to bring about growth and fruit-bearing. The gardener plays a vital role in overseeing and directing the process of growth, which is to bear fruit. The longer we remain, the stronger and more mature we become to produce greater fruit. Paul Pettit, talking about the full impact of the gospel on a person, states, "The more we explore what God has said, done, and promised, the bigger the good news get! The kingdom story we find ourselves in encompasses of all reality" (36). The longer we remain in Christ the plan of God for a disciple unfolds. The sermon on the mount in Matthew 5-7 challenges the disciple for life in the Kingdom under his Lordship. It was an invitation to the disciples to live out the way Jesus lived and responded to people. Jesus spoke to people who were already his disciples and thereby, part of the kingdom of God. The hearer and the disciples were called out to a lifestyle that was counterculture to their world.

The Beatitudes depict the essential character of the disciples in the kingdom of God (Matt. 5:13-16). The disciples are called to live a different lifestyle, being part of the kingdom of God. They are called to be the salt and light to the world. As John Stott and Dale Larsen explain, being a disciple as “a disciple of the kingdom who does not live like a disciple of the kingdom (5:3-12) is worth as much as tasteless salt or invisible light” (32).

Frequent reference and emphasis on the kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching is the most memorable aspect of Jesus’ ministry. What did so much emphasis on the Kingdom of God in Jesus’ preaching mean for the disciples? James Dunn gives an apt answer to this question stating:

To those ‘caught’ by this message it meant at least two things: a readiness to acknowledge the importance of the rule of God as a factor in daily living and as a fact of enormous power; and the recognition that Jesus’ ministry provided a window into that rule and a means of relating more directly and positively to it. But this is only the beginning of the answer. (13)

This means a disciple is expected to accept the Lordship of Christ, celebrate the reign of God, and help the disciple not only to conform to rules and regulations but to transform life from the very inner being.

Secondly, the Church is the community in which a disciple grows into mature believers. As we examine the book of Acts, we recognize the value of the local church in making disciples. The early church did not coin the term ‘disciple-making’. However, at every twist and turn, we read about believers having been turned into resilient Christ-followers.

J.T. English sharing his personal growth as a disciple stresses the importance of the local church, the community of believers:

My discipleship felt aimless because my discipleship was churchless. Up until this point, most of my development and growth happened outside the church. I was hoping the church would be the place I could take the next step toward learning the story of Scripture, the basics of the faith, and basic spiritual discipleship. Surely the local church was the place I could find these things.

(46)

However, to his dismay, he found that the church was not making disciples but pointing him to the seminary. Discipleship is not formed in a seminary, but in a deeper relationship with Christ, within the body of Christ.

This body of Christ consists of believers who have entered the body through salvation by putting their faith in Christ and into a new relationship with others in the body, calling each other ‘brother and sister’. The book of Acts records that the early believers met at the temple and each other’s homes every day (Acts 2:46). They chose to meet on a regular basis as a statement of identification to a community. They learned the practices and culture of the community together. The book of Acts records that the early believers prayed, worshiped, learned, and broke bread together. This was community, where they met each other’s needs, and no needs were unmet. As Steven D. Bruns rightfully writes about discipleship in the early church community:

Discipleship was always within the life of the church. It was together that Christians encouraged one another through persecution and in the mundaneness of normal life. Christians were different, and they were intentionally different. Their spiritual lives as faithful disciples brought them into tension with the culture around them. They lived as members of the Roman Empire, obeying its laws and participating in its civil life so long as

that life did not conflict with their Christian identity. They were expatriates of the kingdom of God in the empire of Rome.

When people became Christians, their lives became oriented around life in Christ together. The church and its members became the centre of the convert's world, and their faith became the measure by which they lived.

There was no protest against the prevailing laws of the empire that were in conflict with the gospel message. The Christians simply did not do what was legal but against the gospel. They understood that their status as a new people held them to a higher standard of living in the world.

This group identification held the early Christians together and encouraged them to continue in the faith. No one was ever alone in the faith or on an exclusively personal journey. Every Christian together was a part of the kingdom of God and the new, redeemed creation. By intentionally being unique and different, by intentionally creating a new people in the world, Christians reminded themselves that they were not only purchased at a great price; they also endured and supported one another at a great price — because no one else would do it. (Burns)

It could be said that the church, the community of the called once was a community where they were shaped, nurtured into strong, courageous, and mature disciples. There is a bonding that takes place among the believers that flows out of the trinitarian fellowship and bonding of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

Thirdly, the mission of God is to make disciples of all nations. The word mission is like a catchphrase in the Christian environment. The word 'mission' is associated with God's mission in the world or *missio dei*. Jesus' command to his disciples to go into all the world and make disciples of all nations is the prime purpose

for the existence of the church. Our mission is not only to get saved and become a regular attendee to church services but to take part in the mission of God. The vision of the church is to make disciples, who can make other disciples, to fulfill the mission of God. Leslie Newbigin in his book, *The Open Secret*, talks about the Christian mission as an open secret. It is open in the sense that the gospel is proclaimed to all without any boundaries, but it is a secret in that “it is manifest only to the eyes of faith” (35). The idea is that the message of the gospel is available to everyone, but understanding it requires faith. As a result, the mission cannot be relegated as a side task of the church, but it is the central calling and purpose of the church, yet it’s not something the church controls. It’s ultimately God’s mission. Newbigin urges the church to remember its core purpose and reemphasize its missionary character “to bring all things to their true end in the glory of the triune God” (34). On the other hand, Christopher J.H. Wright advises against viewing the Great Commission as a task to be completed with a deadline, something to be finished and checked off a list. Instead, he emphasizes:

its command to disciples to make disciples, it is a self-replicating mandate that we will never “complete” – not in the sense that we can never reach all the nations (we can and we should), but in the sense that the making of disciples, and the discipling of those who have formerly been evangelized, are tasks that go on through multiple lives and generations. (Wright 285)

However, there are two different views presented by John Stott on the misconception and polarity between the ecumenical and evangelical understanding of the word mission. The older and traditional views look at missionaries and evangelists involved in missions through the verbal proclamation of the gospel. The opposite extreme opinion held by the ecumenical is the view that God is at work through the

historical process, that the purpose of God's mission, of the *missio Dei*, is the establishment of shalom in the sense of social (Stott 12). The best practice of mission would be that of the mission of God through the church to the world through the disciples.

In their book, *Missional Discipleship: Partners in God's redemptive mission*, Mark A. Maddix and Jay Richard Akkerman stress the importance of missional discipleship. They mention the different approaches to discipleships over the decades which may include aspects of catechesis, spiritual formation, Christian nurturing, and mentoring but underline the fact that it also includes compassionate service and missional engagement. They interpret the role of missional disciple:

as someone who is engaged in God's mission in the world. Missional disciples are on a journey, becoming more like Christ, investing their lives in others, and embodying lives of love for others. This view puts the church in a new light and sparks a movement dedicated to engaging every context, particularly local cultures, with a mission-shaped heart. A missional disciple is a follower of the life and teachings of Jesus and is committed to being a witness. (Maddix and Akkerman 16)

The basis of missional discipleship is rooted in the Holy Trinity. The doctrine of the trinity—that God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—is fundamental to all Christian belief. As P.V. Joseph observes, “The trinity is arguably the most central and foundational of all the doctrines of the Christian faith”. He further indicates, “The resurgence and development of the trinitarian doctrine in the twentieth century is not only confined to Christian theology and traditional interpretation but has been implicating the wider sphere of the church and social life” (Joseph 10). Therefore, we cannot think of understanding the process of discipleship without looking at it from

the concept of the Trinity. The ministry of a disciple may be best understood in the words of Dr. Steven Seamands, says “Through faith in Christ through baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), we enter into the life of the Trinity and are graciously included as partners” (12). He further elucidates that “the ministry into which we have entered is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son to the Father through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world” (Seamands 12).

The best passage to understand the sending of the disciples into the world is embedded in John 20:21, “Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (NIV). Though most of us acknowledge the coming of Jesus as the Father sending the Son to the world, we have missed the close connection of the Holy Trinity involved in the mission of God. The imperative of Jesus to the disciples of going into the world is about the mission but it is also about the Holy Trinity: “baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). Therefore, a disciple is called to take part in this redemptive purpose of God and be actively involved in the mission of God.

DISCIPLESHIP IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

Approaches and Interpretation of First Corinthians

Over the centuries the letter to the Corinthians has been of great interest among scholars. It has drawn interest because it gives the reader a glimpse into the world and culture of the New Testament church. Moreover, it helps us to understand the practical issues that the church wrestled with in the first century. As a result, the letter has invited a variety of approaches, hermeneutical techniques, and theories.

David G. Horrell and Edward Adams in *Christianity in Corinth: The Quest for the Pauline Church* quote F.C. Baur. F.C. Baur is a well-known scholar from the

Tubingen school. His essay forms a landmark in the modern critical study of the division in the church at Corinth and of the early Christianity in general. Baur constructed the theory of division at Corinth as important not only as an argument concerning the nature of the problem at Corinth but his view on the twofold division at Corinth formed the basis for a much wider theory about early Christian history (Adams 13-14). Though the rhetorical dimension of 1 Corinthians 1–4 was initially recognized as the beginning of the twentieth century, it was overshadowed by other approaches.

In 1990 three major studies by Stephen Pogoloff, Duane Litfin, and Michael Bullmore approach Corinthians in light of Greco-Roman rhetoric and argue that rhetoric played a part in the problem of Corinthians (Dutch 23).

William Ramsay approaches the epistle from a historical point of view. Though in his commentary he does touch on doctrinal and theological themes but those were done for the sake of historical facts underlying them (Ramsay 9).

The Catholic Scholar Raymond F. Collins in his introduction to First Corinthians compares the letter to other letters in antiquity and how it may be treated as an oral communication in written form, a kind of “speech act” (Page 18).

In his commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, Anthony C. Thiselton gives the reader a reading of recent scholarly opinion on the historical reconstruction of Pauline mission to Corinth. According to Thiselton, 1 Corinthians addresses a church in an environment that was pluralistic and acquiescent to “local” construction as opposed to the “trans-contextual” rationality as viewed by many (16-17).

Understanding the Corinthian world

As we investigate the pages of the New Testament, we can unearth the stress that the authors of the New Testament have placed on discipleship. The Apostle Paul was able to establish fully functioning churches in numerous cities such as Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thessalonica, and Bera. Paul ministered and left behind a church in a few months. This suggests that Paul shared, preached the gospel, disciple them, and integrated the believers into a church. This has been Apostle Paul's usual method for church planting.

Reading into Corinthians is not an easy task as we are engaged with the text of scripture. Much work has been done on the historical-critical methods and historical reconstruction of Pauline letters and mostly on Corinthians to ascertain the hermeneutical practices and how to interpret the text to its true context.

Corinth the City:

Both the epistles to the Corinthians are ascribed to Pauline authorship, and today all the NT interpreters and scholars concur. Paul is acknowledged as the sole author of both the letters written to the Corinthians church. It was written somewhat around 55 A.D toward the close of Paul's three-year residency in Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:5-9 and Acts 20:31).

Corinth was a thriving city during Apostle Paul's time, and it was one of the major cities of Greece both commercially and politically. The city was characterized by typical Greek culture. Its people were interested in Greek philosophy and placed a high premium on wisdom. As Gordon Fee highlights, "The city's various sociological, economic, and religious factors that make up the environment of the city of Corinth have a profound influence on one's understanding of Paul's letters to the church there. Corinth came into conflict with Rome and was destroyed by the Roman

consul Lucius Mummius in 146 B.C. The site lay dormant for one hundred years until it was re-established in 44 A.D. by Julius Caesar as a Roman colony” (1). Fee further notes, “The Romans brought with them not only their law but also their religion and culture. Corinth was the metropolitan city of those days. The Roman world had been thoroughly Hellenized. Historically it was a Greek state, but people from all around the Mediterranean flooded the city. They had the presence of the mystery cult from Egypt and the Jews with their belief in monotheism and synagogue as their place of worship” (Fee 2). Since the city sheltered people from different neighboring regions, cities, and countries, the religious expression of Corinth was as diverse as its population. It was a pluralistic society harboring different religions and mystery cults.

The Corinthian church consisted of a mixed congregation, though predominantly, it was Gentile crowds that accepted the gospel and were inducted into the fellowship of the church. As Fee observes:

The picture that emerges is one of a predominantly Gentile community, the majority of whom were at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, although there were two or three wealthy families. As former pagans they brought to the Christian faith a Hellenistic worldview and attitude toward ethical behavior. Although they were the Christian church in Corinth, an inordinate amount of Corinth was yet in them, emerging in a number of attitudes and behaviors that required radical surgery without killing the patient. (4)

They not only came into the church but along with them they also brought their former cultural patterns and behaviors. Reading through the Corinthian letters reveals that the apostle Paul had a rough time with them, and the mutual relationship was worsening and fading. Paul’s authority seems to be challenged by the Corinthians.

Paul came into criticism and his apostleship was challenged because of his labors as a tent maker, which apparently was a job belonging to the lower class. Perkins quoted Christine M Thomas in an article named “Placing the Dead: Funerary Practice and Social Stratification in the Early Roman Period at Corinth and Ephesos.” Thomas states “The educated elite considered the slave-like conditions of labourers demeaning; tombstone inscriptions refer to an artisan’s trade with pride” (qtd. in Perkins 4).

Religious Activities:

Corinth was a religious city with numerous temples and places of worship. It had prominent temples dedicated to individual deities. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1, Paul deals with one of the most important issues of the church at Corinth. It was Paul who first brought the gospel to the Corinthians, and years later they were still battling immaturity and childishness. As William Baker points out, “The Corinthian community was young, confused, adrift in the sea of its own culture, embattled by its immature members, with much to learn from its spiritual father” (3). Paul points out their immaturity in 1 Corinthians 3:1 -2, “Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready” (NIV).

Religion was part and parcel of the Corinthian lifestyle. Religious practice was not only individualistic in nature, it was part of their civic life. As Harold S. Sogner points out, “the worship of the gods was a pervasive and prominent feature of social and civic life” (363). Songer further notes, “ Marriages, funerals, banquets, and public festivals were preceded by the sacrificing of animals or foodstuff which were calculated to bring the protection and the favor of the gods. What remained after the

sacrifice was often consumed in a banquet, either in the home or in rooms reserved for that purpose in the temple of the god. On other occasions, part or all the remaining food was sold in the stores or given to friends” (Songer 363). As result, apostle Paul dedicates a chapter to the discussion on food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians. It was the religious-cultural context that confused and drifted the Corinthians from the teaching of their spiritual fathers and elders. Being a young church, they were torn apart between Corinthian culture and societal practices driven by the pagan worshiper. They were unable to decide where to draw the line.

CORINTHIANS AND THEIR ISSUES

The letters to the Corinthians were addressed to a group of new believers who were immature and influenced by the culture of society and were confused with the standard called for. The church consisted of people from varied strata of social and economic diversity which at times posed problems when they did things together (Baker 3). These were believers who were not clear about the key Christian principles to live by. Dallas Willard states, “Disciples of Jesus are people who do not just profess certain views as their own but apply their growing understanding of life in the kingdom of heavens to every aspect of their life on earth” (9) Very often Christians in our day have difficulty in putting together the faith in which we believe and the work that we are supposed to be doing. The Corinthian Christians wrestled with this as they lived in a society that was somewhat like a metro city in our modern world.

The message of the letters to 1 Corinthians addresses the issues faced by then believers in the Corinthians church. They were new believers and were being disciplined as they grew through different challenges posed to them from daily lives. Their faith was challenged on issues they had never thought of previously. As disciples of Jesus, it is not only important to follow Him wholeheartedly but also to

live Him out in society. The Christian life is not lived out in isolation but among people. The letter to Corinthians is a classic example of how obedience is shaped by discipleship. Paul instructs and chastises the believers to maturity and responsible behavior, where their confession matches their actions. The believers at Corinth were so influenced by cultural norms that they started following and practicing them while confessing the Christian faith. However, the letter to Corinthians brings out some of the instruction from apostle Paul that could be emulated in the present day to be a follower of Jesus. The first epistle to the Corinthians serves as a model on how to approach the complexities of Christian living (Rosner 1).

Douglas A. Campbell outlines the reason for the mess in the Corinthian church. In his words the church had four main difficulties:

a basic failure in relating to one another in love; a dramatic failure of the local church leaders to act considerately in the face of their competition for status and influence; arrogant theological reasoning that denied the importance of the body (which we might call “Christian intellectualism”); and tensions arising from the pressures that Paul’s teaching about sex placed on his converts. Each of these problems would have been bad enough, but when they were all present together, the combination was toxic. (Campbell)

In his book, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* Ben Witherington points out three sources and reasons for such wide diversity in the Corinthian church. He writes, “The diversity of socioeconomic level and religious and ethnic backgrounds among Corinthians Christians was undoubtedly an underlying cause of several of the issues and problems that Paul addresses in 1 and 2 Corinthians” (Witherington Loc 174).

Division in the Church

Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (Matt. 16:18). The Greek word used to denote church in Mathew 16:18 is “ecclesia” which means “calling out” and originally referred to a gathering of a civil assembly. When Jesus said, “my church” he referred to an assembly called out by him. The Apostle Paul exhorts the Ephesians church on their call to be a “fellow citizens in God’s people” (Eph. 2:19-20), and it’s a call to “become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Unfortunately, this was not the case with the Corinthians church. The letter to Corinthians was penned by apostle Paul from Ephesus around A.D. 50, though it seems a former letter was written to the Corinthians church which perhaps was destroyed or lost (1 Cor. 5:9). While Paul was in Ephesus three men from the Corinthian church visited him and expressed the problems of the church and brought a letter from the church. It becomes clear from the simple reading of the text in 1 Corinthians 1-4, that the division was caused by disagreement arising out of the rhetorical analysis of the congregants.

There were a few issues that caused disagreements among the congregants at Corinth. Firstly, it was a mixed group of ethnic people. It was made up of persons who came from a completely pagan background, half-Jewish pagans, and Jews. There were a lot of economically poor converts, but there were also a lot of high-status and wealthy people, together with their families (Campbell). Secondly, the factionalizing took place because the people took after different personalities who preached at Corinth. It seems that the church was highly influenced by travelling preachers who preached with eloquent words. They were gospel preachers who used human wisdom to persuade people to follow Christ. As Richard Oster remarks “Paul’s thrust is to contrast the importance of human wisdom to persuade people to embrace a crucified

Christ with divine power which proves the veracity of the testimony of God proclaimed in the message and preaching of Paul” (75). Thirdly, it seems that church was divided on the subject of “immorality”. Fourthly, the new believers were confused on the question related to the food offered to idols. Fifthly, it was a church confused about the question of marriage, sex, and celibacy. Sixthly, it was wrestling with the question of resurrection.

Each of the issues discussed leaves us with a principle of discipleship to live out our lives for the master.

Issue # 1 Hero Worship

Human leaders in the church are called and ordained by God to equip the believers for the work of ministry and service unto God (Eph. 4:12). But they also present a danger, if not careful in their ministry, and fail to point others to Jesus. It is easy for sincere and new believers to idolize them and unconsciously move into hero worship. As a result, their loyalty to the leader is above their loyalty to Christ. This is precisely what occurred at Corinthian Church. The Corinthian church started idolizing the leaders and preachers who visited the church. They were moved by the eloquent language and dramatics of the preachers and chose their favorites among them.

However, Gordon Fee believes “that there is some form of internal division in the church is evident from three texts: 1:10-12; 3:4-5 and 11:18-19. That this division is at least along socioeconomic lines is indicated by Paul’s response in 11:17-34 but whether it is also spiritual/theological lines is moot” (5). Further, Fee notes that the quarreling over the leaders was not to put their allegiance to their favorite one but it was “decidedly over against Paul” (49).

George T. Montague is of the opposite view than that posed by Fee. He observes, “The divisions are not over doctrine but over personalities (Montague 37)”.

L. L. Welborn is also of the same opinion as Montague; the issue in 1 Corinthians is, “It is a power struggle, not a theological controversy (Welborn 7)”. Most of the scholars and commentators come to an agreement on the issue of internal strife in the Corinthian church was due to the allegiance of the congregant to the leader of their choice, but that the division may be rooted in the social situation cannot be overruled. The researcher is of the opinion that although the letter was written to the whole church, Paul did mention the names of the different parties who were followers of individual leaders and put their allegiance to them. There could have been multiple reasons for such division within the Corinthian church such as socioeconomic difference, question relating to the gender issues, marriage etc. As B.J. Oropeza observes “a number of factors may contribute to their factions, not the least of which is that the members are relatively new converts” (9).

Likewise, apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of the folly of hero worship when he asks a question, “Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Cor. 1:13, NIV). The initial sectarianism at Corinth was ordered around a party named after their heroes, such as Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and one more pious than the others named after Christ—the Christ party. Somewhat like what we have in denominationalism today such as Lutherans, Anglicans, Baptists, Assemblies of God, Methodists, and Presbyterians. The names may have changed but the results are the same. In the present day, we see disunity among members of the church based on ego clashes and trying to achieve a position. The Corinthians boasted about knowledge and wisdom.

In *Counterfeit Gods*, Tim Keller explores the danger of idols for Christians. He notes, “The way forward, out of despair, is to discern the idols of our hearts and our culture. But that will not be enough. The only way to free ourselves from the

destructive influence of counterfeit gods is to turn back to the true one ” (Keller loc 75). The Apostle Paul corrected the views of the believers who were impressed with the eloquent speech and wisdom of the leaders by stating that God will destroy the wisdom of the wise (1 Cor. 1:19). Paul urged the Corinthian church to focus on Christ instead of spiritual leaders. Therefore, Paul refocused their attention to what truly matters—“the cross of Christ” (1:17). He reminds them that they were baptized in the name of Jesus. He challenges them to strive for agreement by saying the same thing. They are to be restored to a condition they originally had when united in the same mindset and opinion (Oropeza 17). Paul draws their attention to the very fact that gospel is about “Christ crucified”, not vague human wisdom. No human wisdom can fathom the mystery of God sending his son to die for the sins of the world. As Garland point out, “human wisdom and the wisdom of the cross are irreconcilable” (55).

The people of Corinth were in general terms a thrusting, ambitious, and competitive people. While comparing one leader with the other, they were striving among themselves by putting each other down. The people in the church were putting on the same attitude and value system that dominated Corinthian culture. Anthony C. Thiselton suggests, “Comparison of a competitive nature also to readily lead to ‘putting down’ others and to boasting or bragging about one’s own achievements” (10).

Issue # 2 Immorality

In 1 Corinthians 5-6, Paul shifts his attention to the evil that was reported among them was addressed. Though the issue was reported, it was not mentioned who it was reported by. However, Richard B. Hays writes, “reports that have reached him (Paul), presumably either through ‘Chloe’s people’ (1 Cor. 1:11) or through

Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor. 16:17)” (80). With his opening sentence (1 Cor. 5:1) Paul is aware of the situation, a case of incest that is being tolerated if not actually condoned among the church believers. Gordon Fee is of the opinion that this section had to do with challenging Paul’s apostolic authority. He states, “what seems to be at stake in the next three sections (5:1-13; 6:1-11; 6:12-20) is the crisis of authority that was large part of what lay behind the preceding long argument (1:10-4:21), and especially the authority of Paul vis-à-vis the “arrogant” who were responsible for leading the church in its new directions both theologically/behaviorally and over against Paul” (Fee 212). Although the Corinthian church has numerous problems, their most serious and pressing fault is tolerating the immoral man in their midst. As Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner state, “Paul is so disturbed not by the Corinthians’ actions, but by their inaction, which he finds utterly reprehensible” (199). This is the only epistle in which apostle Paul so vehemently opposes his opponents. He is calling the church to excommunicate the immoral person from among them. Only in the matter of immoral lifestyle that Paul is asking the community of believers to act and judge the immoral person. It seems that the believers from the community was going outside the community to get a verdict and justice. Therefore, Paul urges believers to pass judgement instead of taking the matter outside the community, as it will bring shame and dishonor to the name of Christ. He writes in 6:4, “Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judge even men of little account in the church” (NIV). It is apparent when he use the word “such matters” he is referring to the issue of incestuous person discussed in the previous chapter. Gordon Fee sheds light on the basis of such behavior within the church. He argues that “from the rhetoric (6:9-10) that begins the second part of the explosion that follows, we learn that what the Judeo-Christian culture considered to

be sexual immortality had been part of the Corinthians' previous lifestyle; on the basis of a variety of passages throughout (5:9;6:12;7:2;10:8 cf. 2 Cor 12:21), we may deduce that many had carried that lifestyle into their new existence in Christ" (214). Whatever the case may be, Paul's argument was candid that the Corinthians should not be tolerating sin among them. Tolerating sin could spoil and corrupt the entire church and make the new believers confused. Church discipline is difficult and painful, but it preserves the purity and wholeness of the church.

Issue # 3 – Individual Liberty

Apostles Paul introduces yet another one of the Corinthians believers' questions in chapter 8. He introduces this new subject in 1 Corinthians 8:1—"Now about food sacrificed to idols"—followed by his arguments. To the Western world, this issue of food offered to idols may not be of much concern as it is in many Asian countries. Paul raises the question concerning taking part of the food offered to idols in 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 and then shifts his focus of discussion to his personal liberty and once again returns to the question of food offered to idols in 9:24-11:1. Paul's monotheism drives him to oppose religious syncretism in an indirect manner to convince those who have not yet been persuaded.

David E Garland notes, "To circumvent all contact with idolatry demanded of Christians an uncompromising devotion that unbelievers failed to comprehend and tended to criticize as antisocial behaviors, if not subversive fanaticism" (347). The pressure has not changed for Christians in India and other Asian countries where food is offered to one god or the other and shared with friends and neighbors in the community.

David E. Garland sums up the view of Robertson and Plummer, Conzelmann, and Barrett with regard to the issue that Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 8-10. Garland

points out the three different types of situations: (i) eating food sacrificed to an idol at the temple of an idol (8:7-13; 10:1-22); (ii) eating food of unknown history that is bought in the marketplace (10:23-27); (iii) eating food in the private homes of unbelievers (10:28-31) (Garland 347).

Horsley observes that sacrifice and banqueting were an integral part of community life. Social connections were established through the participation of banquets held in the temples, particularly for anyone wanting to have favor from the socio-economic superiors (Horsley 67).

James Dunn is of the opinion that 1 Corinthians 8-10 deals with the problems of social dimensions. He argues that it is the consciences of the strong believers against the consciences of the weak. The action was caused by the members of the new Christian community who ate food offered to idols whose consciences were strong. By doing so it encouraged other believers whose consciences were weak to act against their consciences by eating such food causing self-destruction—whether by denying their faith or by putting themselves back into partnership with or under control of demons (Dunn 58). Though much of the meat available and sold in the market was brought from the temple sacrifices. Apostle Paul stressed the consciousness of the person consuming such meat offered at the temple. Briefly, it may seem that Paul is approving but he lays down the ground rule for such matters: Firstly, meat purchased from the market to eat without raising a question of conscience (10:25). Secondly, if food is placed in front of an individual visiting a friend, eat whatever is put before without raising questions of conscience (10:27) until it's been mentioned that it has been offered in sacrifice.

Craig Keener points out that chapters 8-10 talk about the table of other gods but provide hints of the coming contrast with the Lord's table in 11:17-34 (72-73).

The Christians at Corinthians were not that they compromised on the existence and knowledge of the only one true God but their knowledge about the only true God compelled them to deny the existence of evil and demonic forces. They bragged of their knowledge and understanding of the powerlessness of the idols in different shrines in Corinth. However, Paul was aware of the common Jewish tradition of recognizing spiritual forces behind idol worship. Paul notes that not all people possess the knowledge of mature thinkers. As Dan Nighswander points out Paul disagreed with the Corinthians when the Corinthians claimed that all of them possess knowledge. Paul's reply to their claim was simply, "Not everyone". Nighswander states, "Either their circle of us did not include everyone in the assembly or their sensitivity to some of the members was inadequate, Paul points out that there are some in the congregations who do not possess this particular piece of knowledge, and he insists that their concerns must be considered when discerning the ethics of eating" (122).

Therefore, he urged the mature thinker possessing knowledge (spiritual highness) to refrain from partaking in food offered to idols. Paul instructed them that their behaviors and personal liberty should not become hindrances for the weak believers. Charles Swindoll points out that, "The heart of the problem is a failure of knowledgeable believers to look out not only for their interests but also for the interests of others" (129). Paul was quick to give his personal example of his liberty in Christ, a principle which he had mentioned earlier in 6:12, writing, "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial". He set forth a principle that, for the sake of others, one should not make use of one's liberty.

Issue # 4 Issues related to Worship

In Chapters 11-14, Paul addresses multiple issues that existed within the church at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 11:1, Paul exhorts the Corinthian believers to hold on to the teachings they had received from him. The issues dealt with within this chapter have been debatable and highly charged issues, which could ignite fiery disagreement between Christians and denominations. However, for the purpose of this project, we would bring out practical applications.

Worship:

Paul deals first with the conduct of man and woman in the context of worship (1 Cor. 11:2-16) and then with the very unsatisfactory conduct of the common meal and the Lord's table (1 Cor. 11:17-34). The passage may appear to contain male chauvinism when Paul writes, "the head of the woman is man". M.T. Pardosi observes that 1 Corinthians 11:3-6 and 14:34, 35 are two controversial passages in the New Testament. He further states that some interpreters are of the opinion that they are statements of Paul's erroneous views about women having subordinate roles to men. Is this what Paul thought of women or what did he mean by the statement he made regarding "headship"? He addresses this issue in an honor-shame cultural background which was of critical importance in ancient cultures. In 11: 2-16, the issue of male and female behaviors that reflect honor or shame is treated, or is the text talking about mutual submission or male dominion? Padgett suggests that there are two types of submission in the scripture: firstly, a political and military which is external and involuntary; secondly, interpersonal which is voluntary and is motivated by the internal desire of the one submitting to place the needs of the other before his or her own needs (Padgett 58). This is the type of submission that Jesus modeled and taught his disciples to emulate. Many may argue "headship" and "submission" of

women based on Ephesians 5:21-33. However, to better understand what Paul was trying to communicate we need to look at his address briefly to the Ephesians. In Ephesians 5, Paul draws an analogy between husband and wife with Christ and the Church. Paul exhorts husbands to love their wives sacrificially and not for the purpose of ruling or governing over them. Ephesians 5:21 makes the purpose clear when Paul says, "Submit yourselves one to another, out of reverence for Christ", which has always been a central and essential understanding in Pauline's writings (Padgett 60). Many have raised the question of women covering heads as a mandatory based on 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 in Indian churches and many Asian countries. However, Walker is of the opinion that 1 Corinthians 11.2-16 is an interpolation. He observes that there is evidence of some alteration of the text. He suggests that the proposed interpolation consist of verses 2-16. It is possible that verse 2 should have directly followed verse 17, which would provide a smooth connection between what precedes and what follows (Walker 98). David Prior observes that men's and women's dress in the first century Greece was apparently very similar, except for the women's head covering. Women covering their heads was a very normal practice. The only women who did not wear them were the "high-class" mistresses of influential Corinthians, and the sacred prostitutes from the local temple of Aphrodite did not wear a veil. There was no special "dressing-up" for attending fellowship or for attending church worship. The women who attended the service came as usual with their heads covered. David Prior points out that women who attended worship at times out of excitement during the worship threw back their head covering and allowed their hair to fall loose. This gave a wrong message to the people gathered for worship as if a denial of the submission in the Lord of married women to their husbands (Prior 165-66). The head covering is a pattern of relationship that Paul draws about subordination and

submission of the Son to the Father. Likewise, the wives are supposed to submit to the husband out of respect. The husband and woman both are interdependent in Christ.

Therefore, it was Paul's appeal to the Corinthians believers, especially to the women to dress modestly when coming together for a time of corporate worship so that no one would be distracted. His intentions were clear that men and women both created in the image of God share equal status before him.

Lord's Supper

In Chapter 11:17-34, Paul focuses on the issue of the Lord's supper. Though Paul may have recommended the Corinthians to pass on and follow certain traditions set up by Paul, he commends them, "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you" (1 Cor. 11:2). But concerning the Lord's supper he has a different opinion, "in the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meeting does more harm than good" (1 Cor. 11:17). The Lord's supper was done in the context of fellowship. In the ancient days fellowship meals were part of the Jewish and Gentile settings both in the religious and secular sceneries. The issue that Paul addresses is the division that was experienced in such settings (Nighswander 188). Here Paul is not mentioning the division he talked about in 1:10-16 which involved division based on loyalty to individual personalities. Paul addresses a behavioral pattern among the Corinthian believers, which has been reported to him. Paul describes what happens when they come together for the Lord's supper in verses 20-22, "So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry, and another gets drunk." Paul points out that when the believers met together as an assembly to celebrate the Lord's supper some ate excess while others went hungry, humiliating those who had nothing. This

behavior was a matter of concern as it was divisive in nature. This socioeconomic division within the assembly violates the message of Christ. Preben Vang highlights the reason for such disparity among the believers. He observes that “A Christian patron would gather with friends of his (or her) own rank in the triclinium while slaves and clients would gather in the atrium. Here they would eat standing or, at best, seated tightly together while the patron and prominent friends were reclining within view in the adjacent room. Beyond being socioeconomically motivated, these divisions probably followed ethnic/racial lines as well” (Vang 152).

He further observes that “Paul’s point is not “that food had run out but that the rich were humiliating the poor (11:22) by eating the superior food in the triclinium with the poor watching from the atrium” (Vang 153). The humility and selflessness that were expressed by Jesus during the Last Supper with his disciples were directly contrary to the behaviors and attitudes portrayed by the Corinthians believers during the fellowship meals.

Paul roots his solution in the tradition set by Jesus, when he writes, “For I have received from the Lord what I also passed on to you” (v. 23). He reminds the Corinthians that whoever partakes of the meal in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Therefore, Paul urges the Corinthians to wait for each other before partaking in such a community meal. Paul reminds the believers that the purpose of coming together as a community is to proclaim the message of the gospel and not to satisfy one’s own desires (Vang 155).

Spiritual Gifts

Now Paul turns his attention to addressing another issue related to the assembly of believers coming together for worship. Paul’s addresses the issue because it seems there were few who were ignorant about the gifts of the Spirit. Richard Hays

observes that some of the believers have placed undue emphasis on the gift of speaking in tongues and disrupting the order of service and an unintelligible utterance dominating the church meeting (206). Once again Paul states, “Now about spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant” (1 Cor. 12:1). Paul is not addressing something new, but he is adding to the information and knowledge they already have on spiritual gifts. Some in the Corinthian assembly believe the gift of tongue precedes all other gifts and an abuse of the charisma of tongues. Paul contrasts their former life as a pagan with that of the life lived in the spirit. Gordon Fee is of the view that though it may seem that the Corinthians have been asking questions about the Spirit’s gifting but the concluding argument in chapter 14, indicates that Paul’s answer is intended to be primarily more corrective than instructional or informative (Fee 568). It could be concluded from 1 Corinthians verse 4, “There are different kinds of gifts, but the same spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord” that there were differences of opinion on the greatness and usage of the gifts. There was a certain sense of greatness among the people who possessed the gifts and looked down upon others with a different gift. There was a sense of superiority about the gifts they possessed. Once again Paul brings the analogy of the physical body to make a point on the unity of the body. If there exists no difference in opinion, it was pointless of Paul to bring such an analogy here.

Paul reminds them each person has a particular gift from God, but it comes from the same Spirit and is a precious gift of God’s grace. Therefore, Paul prescribed an “excellent way”, the way of love. Hays points out, “The purpose of chapter 13 is to portray love as the *sine qua non* of the Christian life and to insist that love must govern the exercise of all the gifts of the Spirit” (221). Carson is of the opinion that “chapter 13 does not fit well into the context, because the logic from the end of

chapter 12 to the beginning of chapter 14 (omitting chap. 13) develops criteria for ranking spiritual gifts, whereas the emphasis within chapter 13 depreciates spiritual gifts in favor of love; and then the sudden introduction of faith and hope in 13:13 introduces themes irrelevant to the flow of the argument in chapter 12 and 14” (Carson Loc 62). However, the researcher is of the opinion that chapter 13 is a bridge between chapter 12 and 14, as apostle Paul starts chapter 14 with “follow the way of love.” Paul looks at the gifts from an eschatological point, that the gifts were given for the edification of the church while we awaits the return of the Lord which would be consummated while love remains.

Hays is of the view that “the common use of this text in weddings has linked it in the minds of many with flowers and kisses and frilly wedding dresses. Such images are far removed from Paul's original concerns. He did not write about agape in order to rhapsodize about marriage; he was writing about the need for mutual concern and consideration within the community of the church, with special reference to the use of spiritual gifts in worship” (Hays 231). In chapter 14, Paul addresses the problem of Corinthian worship in more specific terms to those who consider speaking in tongues surpassing all other gifts and placing inordinate emphasis on the ability to speak in tongues. Paul’s most pressing concern was discipline and order in the worship service. He gives the Corinthians church an instruction to maintain order, he reminds them in 1 Corinthians 14:33, “For God is not a God of disorder but of peace” and commends them to do things in an orderly fashion in 14.40.

Resurrection of the Dead

“What is there after death?” is a question that has been the quest of man for centuries. Philosophers and thinkers of modern minds have wrestled with this question and have tried to answer the question. In chapter 15, Paul addresses the same

issue of after death. Once again Paul reminds them of the tradition that they were accustomed to when he reminded the people of the gospel they have heard from Paul (1 Cor. 15:1-2). This tradition that Paul has received he has been faithful in passing them to the Corinthians (15:3). He reminds them of the centrality of their faith—the resurrection of Jesus, without the resurrection their faith would be in vain (15:3-4). However, now it seems some have moved away from the gospel that Paul has preached. It becomes clear from Paul's statement in verse 12, “But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?” Paul reminds the Corinthians that the very faith becomes vain if Christ is not resurrected and so is their preaching. In Perkins's view Paul was elevating the discussion to a theological plane. What does the gospel of Christ's death and resurrection imply about the final destiny of believers? (Perkins 172). B.J. Oropeza points out five disadvantages if Christ had not been raised from the dead. Firstly, he points out that the proclamation of the gospel becomes vain. Secondly, the Corinthians believed in the proclamation and if Christ was not risen then their faith in the proclamation becomes vain. Thirdly, the apostles turn out to be false witness concerning God. Fourthly, the Corinthians are still enslaved to their sins. Finally, those who have fallen sleep in Christ have perished since there is no future hope of resurrection.

Robert B. Hughes is of the opinion that in this chapter Paul was laboring to show how closely the resurrection of the believers and of Christ were tied together. Hughes states, “Resurrection was a unity and an all-or-nothing package, Christ's resurrection could not be an exception” (74).

PAUL'S RESPONSES TO THE ISSUES

Reading of 1 Corinthian addresses different issues that the apostle Paul had to deal with. It could be wise to say that all these issues stem from the Corinthians believers' unaccepting behavior towards Paul's apostleship and leadership. In the very beginning of the epistle, Paul establishes his credentials and apostolic authority as the Corinthians were not accepting his apostolic authority. Joseph A. Fitzmyer brings this truth of Paul's authority when he writes "The surface problem of this first section is the scandal of preacher-factions in the Corinthian church, but underlying that scandal is Paul's attempt to reestablish his authority and proper relation with the Corinthian community in view of the opposition to him that has grown up there" (137). He further mentions, "Before Paul could answer the questions in the letter, he had to overcome the false appraisals and reestablish his apostolic authority as the founder and spiritual father of the whole church at Corinth" (Fitzmyer 138). So too is the opinion of Gordon Fee; he proposes that the historical situation in Corinth was primarily one of conflict between the church and its founder (Fee Loc. 80).

From Corinthians, Paul's response can be summed up in three manners – Unity, Love and Hope.

Unity

In a divisive age, it is easy to get caught up in our many differences. From political views to our eating habits, choice of clothes to affiliation to an influential personality. There is no escaping from differences. The same indifference we have seen and witnessed in the Christian community. The difference arises due to clashes between different personalities and priorities. The same seems to have taken place at Corinth. There is quarreling among the believers based on the personality and rhetoric

of visiting preachers at Corinth. One of the prominent themes that emerges is the importance of Christian unity.

This theme is addressed at the very beginning of the letter in 1 Corinthians 1. 10, “I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought”. The Apostle Paul often addresses and highlights the disunity and factionalism among the Corinthians in different passages in the epistle.

Richard Horsley elucidates four interrelated oppositions and what apostle Paul is planning to reestablish. Firstly, the division Paul sees among the Corinthians versus the unity he would like to see established. Secondly, Corinthians boasts of their favorite “guru” verses his concern for the cohesion of the community under its common Lord (1:12, 31; 3:4, 5-7, 21-23; 4:1-7). Thirdly, their attachment to wisdom verses the message of the crucified Christ (1:17, 18-25; 2:1-5, 6-9). Fourthly, their excitement over the exalted spiritual status that seems closely related to their possession of wisdom verses the low status of the members and leaders of the moment (Horsley 42). Paul’s response to such factionalism, disagreement, and disunity among the members of the community is to invite them to unity through the message of the cross. This message of the cross is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to the Greeks because the apostle Paul preached Christ crucified. This proclamation of the message of the cross—Christ crucified—is the wisdom of God. Gordon Fee holds that the long discussion on wisdom and the cross is not a digression but a real issue. The church at Corinth was at stake and so was the gospel because the wisdom the Corinthians were pursuing was stripping the gospel of its power and at the same time their very pursuit of it has led to division in the church (Fee 121). Paul addresses the

Corinthians as not spiritual but the very opposite of it; they are “fleshly” not driven by the Spirit of the Lord. Paul rightfully reemphasizes the words of Jesus in his high priestly prayer in John 17:21, “That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me, and I am in you”. Paul wants the Corinthians to understand these ones and unity among the persons of the Trinity. Paul’s appeal to the Corinthians is that they may enjoy the same ones of mind among them.

Love

William Barclay calls 1 Corinthians 13, “the hymn of love”. In chapter 12, Paul addresses the Corinthian's high level of competition they hold with one another about the spiritual gifts and whose gifts are greater and better than the others to create some sort of spiritual superiority. The Corinthians were wondering whose gifts were more important and spiritual.

Paul understood their intention and questioned them in chapter 13, telling them that should love one another. Paul uses reverse logic; instead of answering their questions on the greatest gifts, he confronts them with a question. The purpose of chapter 13 is debated among scholars, specifically, why would Paul talk about love in the middle of his talk on spiritual gifts. This passage is not to be read at weddings in order to discuss how couples should treat and love one another, but with proper contextual analysis, we understand that this passage is the continuation of the issues Paul has been discussing with the Corinthians on their gifts and how love should be at the center of their action and not self-interest. For a believer being and actions are tied together in Christ. Love is the way to experience heaven on earth. Paul’s picture of the Corinthians community of believers is the opposite of the cultural ethos they are surrounded with that of envy, pride, and self-centeredness of the Corinthian believers.

For Paul love is the greatest gift, as he calls it the “more excellent way” (1 Cor. 12:31b). While writing to the Ephesians church apostle Paul encourages them to be rooted in love. Ephesians 3:17-19 reads, “so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” It has been Paul’s prayer for all believers to be rooted in love. He invites the Corinthians church to show the same love that Christ has for his people.

Hope

Paul finished answering various issues the Corinthians had sent him. He addressed various issues that have surfaced among the Corinthian believers from chapter 7 onward. However, many scholars have denied the existence of such issues due to disunity among the believers at Corinthians. However, the researcher of the opposite opinion—most of the views present among the Corinthians are due to disagreement and disunity among each other. In chapter 15, the apostle Paul takes up a new topic: the hope of resurrection. According to Joseph A. Fitzmyer, this is one of the most serious problems that Paul addresses in this letter, and the instruction that he gives about this eschatological topic is the most important in the whole letter. As he has done in the case of other problems, he relates this one to a broader issue, which is basic to the topic that is its relation to the fundamental Christian belief, its kerygma, and the gospel (Fitzmyer 540). Paul begins by appealing to the message his audience has already accepted and believed. Paul reminds them that if they do not believe then their faith is in vain. Keener elucidates that Paul reinforcing the point of Christ’s resurrection with a list of eyewitnesses and their acceptance of the kerygma invited

acceptance of the Jewish salvation-historical framework of which it was a part (122). Paul reminds the Corinthians though they face many problems and issues they need to put their mind fixed on the eternal promises of God. The Apostle Paul put his confidence in the promises of Jesus and questioned those who doubted it.

Paul's response could be expounded in many ways depending on the researcher and the way he looks at Apostle Paul's dealing with the Corinthian's issues. However, in this research, we would keep these three responses of Paul to charter the rest of the paper. Paul was correct in his approach toward the Corinthians. Apostle Paul disciplines the Corinthians through his corrective nature.

Bengal – AG Church and Its Context

History of Bengal's interaction with the Gospel.

The history of Christianity in Bengal is a vast study of the docking of the Christian faith to undivided Bengal. The detailed study on the history of Christianity in Bengal is outside the preview of this project and does not dwell upon the cultural and social development or missionary movements. The present study centers on the salient events of the spread of the gospel and discipleship among the Bengali people as well as the interaction of the gospel with the culture and people of Bengal through the history. However, we may refer to different missionary activities pertaining to this project.

The gospel reached the Indian subcontinent in the first century A.D. It is said that Saint Thomas the apostle introduced the Christian faith to India in 52. A.D. and converted a group of people of the Malabar coast of Kerala in South India by 58 A.D. In his book, *An Introduction of Indian Church History*, C.B. Firth states that, "it was one of the early eastward movements that first brought Christianity to India.

According to tradition it was brought in the first century by one of the twelve apostles, St. Thomas. This has been the constant tradition of the Syrian Christians of Malabar, and it has been widely believed in the West also that this apostle's sphere of work was in India" (3). Though the Christian faith was introduced by saint Thomas in 52 A.D., it did not make much impact on the rest of the country, as his work was mostly confined to the southern part of India. It could be stated from the Syrian Christian tradition about the activities of St. Thomas that he landed north of Cochin and have preached to Jewish colony settled there and to have made converts among them and among neighbors. He travelled southwards planting many other churches (Philip 15-16).

John C. Marshman in his book, *John Clark. Outline of the history of Bengal, compiled for the use of youths in India* published in 1865, gives a description of Bengal. He writes:

Bengal is that division of India in which the Bengalee language is spoken and written. It has the sea on the south; on the north and the east it is bounded by mountains and forest; the countries on the west are inhabited by a number of wild hill tribes, who have never become Hindoos. It is supposed to contain about the history of thirty million of inhabitants. The early history of Bengal is very obscure. (Marshman 1)

The British made Calcutta (presently Kolkata) the capital of its empire. Despite all the challenges Kolkata was and remained the capital of India till 1912 and served as one of the most important cities for the British regime. Historians differ in their views about the origin of Calcutta.

Though the English put there foot on the soil of Bengal in the late sixteenth century as an East India Company, propagation of the gospel by the missionaries took

a century. Christianity has been present in Bengal since the sixteenth century. Bengal encountered Christianity with the coming of the Portuguese in the sixteenth Century A.D. when they were allowed to settle, open customs houses and built churches in Bengal with the permission of Mughal emperor Akbar in 1537 (Farid 72). Following the footsteps of the Portuguese many others came to those places for settlement. For next two centuries missionary work was mainly carried on by the Roman Catholics, and they were intolerant of non-Catholic missions. The First protestant missionary to Bengal was John Zachariah Kiernander, a Swedish national, who came to Calcutta (now Kolkata) in 1758 from the Danish mission field of Tranquebar, South India (Thomas 45). However, the propagation of the gospel did not take place during the seventeenth and eighteenth century due to mainly three reasons. Firstly, the European interest was primarily commercial, and they discouraged missionary activities and even they were hostile to them. As renowned historian Subrata Dasgupta writes:

This was scarcely a propitious time for the missionary work in India. The official policy of the East India Company was to oppose all evangelical efforts – not because of an enlightened attitude to ‘other religions or cultures but out of a purely pragmatic, self-interested desire to not create unrest amongst the natives, which might undermine British control and authority. (69)

The missionaries were discouraged from any sharing of the gospel to the natives for self-interest and control.

Secondly, the attitude and lifestyle of the European companies’ officials created more contempt among the Bengalis for their religions, as they viewed the company officials as outsiders and named Christianity as “Feringhi religion”, which means an outcast religion of inferior quality. The first encounter of the gospel with the Bengalis was not helpful as it left a bad taste with the Bengali culture.

Thirdly, the English officers considered Bengalis as barbarians of an “inferior race” and undervalued their culture and lifestyle. (Majumdar 12-13).

However, the real missionary and evangelical work started with coming of William Carey on 11th November 1793 followed by many other missionaries from other denominations and Christian missionary societies. Historian Dasgupta observes, “Christianity, thus did not have much of a track record in Bengal when Carey arrived in 1793” (71).

An eminent historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar notes:

The earliest Protestant missions in Bengal, those of Kiernander in Calcutta (1758-86) and the Moravian Brethren in Serampore (1777-91) were evidently unsuccessful. Modern missionary work in Bengal really started in November, 1793, with the arrival of William Carey in Calcutta, but for at least the following two decades the general outlook for Christian missions remained gloomy indeed. Carey and his brethren of the Baptist Mission were at first not allowed to preach the gospel in the company’s territory, and that is why they had to set up their headquarters in Danish settlement of Serampore (1799). Lord Wellesley, however, adopted a more sympathetic attitude towards the missionaries and allowed them to travel and preach freely throughout the country. The Charter Acts of 1813 finally removed all restrictions on missionary activities in India and provided for the maintenance and support of a church establishment in British India. (48)

He further points out that for the next two decades missionaries of various denominations appeared on the field. He states that the primary objective of the missionary’s society was religious conversion (Majumdar 48).

Though the missionaries were given freedom to preach the gospel, it was hard to get converts. Dasgupta shares, “for seven years, Carey failed to make a single conversion and even the first convert proved to be a disappointment, for he simply disappeared” (Dasgupta et al 71). The missionaries tried their best to gain converts. They began to preach the gospel openly to the Indians and to distribute Bibles and tracts. Majumdar and Dasgupta are of the opinion that the proselytizing work was not very successful. They both agree that those who embraced Christianity were mainly from the low-caste who were fade-up with the casteism among Hindus.

The missionaries adapted alternative methods of preaching the gospel and inculcating the young Indians with Christian doctrines. The missionaries ultimate focus was the conversion of the natives and bringing them under the Christian banner. Though they gained converts they were not disciplined in a systematic process. However, the progressive section of the Bengali community welcomed the social reforms brought in by the missionaries. Since the missionaries were gaining converts and gradually extending their activities to the remotest parts which caused an alarm among the Hindu society, particularly among the educated and high-caste people.

As a result, the missionaries introduced ancillary methods of English education with the objective and intention of introducing Christian faith and disciplining the young Bengalis.

Macleod Wylie a British first judge of the high court for small causes recounts the impact of the missionaries’ endeavor to influence young minds of Bengal through the Christian education. He recounts his observance in his book *Bengal as a Mission Field* in these words:

Far, very far be it from me to say this, with any feeling of indifference to the great Gospel ordinance of preaching, in its ordinary and popular sense. climate

rather, that the Christian education of the young, is in this country, the most effective means, in many instances,(though not in all,) of preaching the Gospel; I am sure that those who diligently pursue this means usefulness, are ordinarily the most laborious missionaries, and actually do more than others, in the other branch of labour, possibly can do in this climate; I see incontestable proofs before me and around me, that God raises up, and qualifies men with special fitness for the work of evangelizing the rising generation, - men who are not equally fitted for any other kind of labour; I see in this city of Calcutta much more fruit from this means of usefulness, on individuals and on society at large... (Wylie 159)

On the same notes as Wylie, Reverend James Long from Christian Missionary Society who came to India in 1840 points out that “schools and colleges were established to teach various branches of literature and science as the subject of instruction and an essential part of the system should be, to imbue the minds of the youths with a knowledge of the doctrines and duties of Christianity’ (Long 459).

Matthew Atmore Sherring and Edward Storrow in their book *The History of Protestant Mission in India* point out the impression of Christian education as “the most important, and perhaps the largest, numerical results achieved by missions in Calcutta have, it must be acknowledged, been obtained by the agency of Christian education rather than direct preaching of the Gospel” (Sherring and Storrow 108). They also mention one of the special features of this education system was that “the education given was thoroughly and avowedly Christian. The Bible is regularly read; many of the class-books are saturated with Christian ideas and principles” (Sherring and Storrow 116).

C.B. Firth comments on the influence of the Christian education among the Bengali youth as “the influence exercised by the early English schools, combining a new kind of education with definite Christian teaching, was great and from time to time lead to baptisms, each of which stirred up public excitement and for the time being well-nigh emptied the school” (185).

It could be concluded that the early Bengali Christians were disciplined more through the education system than any traditional methods practiced within the church. Mostly, the missionaries used lecture methods and discussions to impart Christian values like freedom, the spirit of knowledge and education of males and females, Christian beliefs, and doctrines to the converts.

Church Context & Background:

Historical Context

For better understanding of the context of the Bengali church, we need to understand the context in which it came into existence. The Assembly of God church, Kolkata is a part and fellowship body of the World Assemblies of God that has been in existence for almost 60 years. For better understating of the Assembly of God Kolkata Bengali section we need to understand the arrival of the Assemblies of God into Kolkata, West Bengal.

The church was planted by a Canadian missionary evangelist Rev. (Dr) Mark Buntain and his wife Mrs. Huldah Buntain. Mark and Huldah arrived in Kolkata on 6 October 1954. They came and built upon the foundation laid by many preachers and evangelist who had come to Kolkata and ministered to the people. It is said that the first Pentecostal missionaries who arrived in Kolkata were Alfred and Lillian Garr, recipients of the baptism in the Holy Spirit at the Azuza Street Revival. In 1907 they came to Kolkata, and God opened opportunities for them to preach and teach about

the baptism of the Holy Spirit to people. One Indian family named Rai Bahadur Chandra who were Christians and converts of Alexander Duff hearing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, became interested in the experience and attended the meeting. After their experience they constructed a chapel named “House of Prayer and Good News” near Beniapur. They had services in two languages English and Bengali (George 149-51). Later, Maynard Ketcham got involved in the work followed by many other Assemblies of God missionaries. Ketcham were the first Assemblies of God missionaries in charge of the Bengali section. Thereafter, the English church was shifted to a better location and separate the two works. The Bengali work remained in the “House of Prayer and Good News”. It was during this time that bro. Ketcham invited Mark Buntain to come and take over the work (Oberg, PE-NEWS). At this point of time all the Assemblies of God work in Bengal were operating in rented houses and premises. They bought a piece of land at Royd street for constructing a church in 1958. The church building was ready in a matter of months, and the congregation had its first service on Christmas day, 1959. As the church grew in number, they moved to a new facility in the very heart of the city named Park Street. In the early days, the property housed a school for under privilege children till junior high, a hospital for the poor and needy, an administrative building for self-sustaining program, and a new church building for worship.

However, the Bengali section of the church was founded by Rev. Binod Bihari Das under the then founding pastor Rev. Daniel Mark Buntain. Previously the Bengali speaking congregant joined the English or the Hindi speaking congregation for worship. The Bengali speaking audience approached Rev. Mark Buntain the founder and senior pastor to open a Bengali speaking congregation for the locals to worship in regional language.

Therefore, the Bengali church was started to cater to the Bengali speaking community in the city. It came to existence in the year 1970. The Bengali church has been in existence for last sixty years. At the beginning the church, apart from regular service, used to have other departments to cater to different age groups. The women ministry was called “Mohila Samit”, and all the women in the church met on Friday evenings. The youth meetings were called “Christer Rajdhot” (Ambassador for Christ), and this ministry cater to the age group between 12 to 30 years. They used to have a midweek Bible study on Wednesdays. After the death of Rev. B.B. Das, Rev. Chayan Pandey took over the responsibility of the church and pastor it for next twenty years followed by Rev. Shukdev Patro who pastored the church for next fifteen years.

Present Context

After the homegoing of Mark Buntain in 1989, the church has experienced two strategic leadership transitions. Firstly, Rev. Mark Buntain’s wife Mrs. Huldah Buntain served as the senior pastor and chairman followed by Rev. Dr. John Higgings. In the year 2008, the board appointed Rev. Dr. Ivan Morris Satyavrata as the senior pastor and chairman. He is the first national to pastor the church. During his tenure, he faithfully stewarded the legacy of the founder’s vision of the past and sustained the vast work of ministries and spearheaded new initiatives to prepare the church for the future. In 2022 Rev. Dr. Ivan Morris Satyavrata was succeeded by Rev. Patrick Joseph as the Senior Pastor of the church. The Assembly of God church, Kolkata currently meets every weekend in sixteen different services in eight different languages (English, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Nepali, Telegu, Oriya, Hindi]. We need to be mindful that though each section is part of the Assembly of God church Kolkata, each section has its own starting. Each section came to existence with the passage of time under the broader umbrella of the Assembly of God church Kolkata.

The total strength of the church is about eight thousand people. The church has a tagline, “The church with the Open Arms”, and its goal is to reach out to the city of joy with the open arms of Jesus. Bengali Section is part of the larger body of Christ under the umbrella of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata and fulfilling the vision of its founding pastor to reach the Bengali speaking community.

Understanding Holistic Discipleship

Historical Understanding of Holistic Strategy for Discipleship

Holistic approaches with good strategy have often succeeded where everything else has failed. Over decades, faith-based social services have made a greater impact on the faith and lives of individuals. Holistic mission in simple terms could be defined as “to love the whole person the way Jesus did” (Sider 11). There has been a difference of opinion in the context of holistic mission and strategy even within the evangelical church. On one side churches are more inclined to do social work than spreading the good news, while on the other churches spread the Good News but turn a blind eye to the needs that encircle them. A holistic mission balances both—on one hand sharing the good news of a savior and on the other attending to the needs of the people or community. It is a balance of the word we preach and the action that follows.

Moreover, it should be stated that Christian ministry is holistic in nature, and it is aimed at ministering to the physical, emotional, mental, vocational, and financial needs of others. In Mark 1:38 -39 “Jesus replied, ‘Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.’ So, he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.” In the New Testament, ministry is service to God and to others in His name. Jesus provides the patterns for holistic ministry. He came, not to receive service but to give (Matt.

20:28. Mark 10:45). Therefore, holistic ministry is done by meeting people with love and humility on Christ's behalf (Matt. 20:26; John 2:5, 9; Gal. 1:10).

Therefore, it could be said that the holistic nature of the ministry is grounded in the very mission of God in the world. One could raise a question? How does the gospel address the human condition in an age that is so perplexed, complex, and extreme? The answer is simple because the gospel is transcultural. Therefore, it is transformative, strong, and holistic and it challenges the status quo where every it is proclaimed. Hence, discipleship should be understood in the context of holistic approach. For decades discipleship has been focused vertically—our relationship with God. We have overlooked or have given less emphasis on the effects of horizontal relationships with others. Discipleship should have both the aspect of vertical and horizontal relationships.

Thus, discipleship should be a method of training that is total and integrated surrender of every single area of life to Jesus' lordship. In Luke 10:27, when Jesus talks of obedience, he defines it as loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind. Hence, following Christ as a disciple is total and holistic.

Models of Holistic Ministry and Discipleship

Over the years Christian thinkers and practitioners of mission have tried to shape and model holistic ministry. The basic idea behind holistic discipleship is that discipleship should be well-rounded. Moses O. Biney presents a concept of discipleship within the framework of a journey in the context of diversity and transnationalism. Here, discipleship as a journey makes one focus less on the student or teacher and more on the interactions and encounters that influence the beliefs and actions of both the disciple and the teacher. For Biney, discipleship becomes not only a moral and spiritual quest but a socialization process. Chad Lynn mentions that

holistic discipleship should be imparted to others while living the holistic Christian lifestyle (23). Richard Foster looks at holistic discipleship from the framework of emulating Christ in life, the goal of Christian discipleship is that Christ be formed in us (28). He interprets holistic discipleship as being formed, conformed, and transformed into the image of Christ. He explains that God work first through the ordinary experience of our life to form the character of Christ in us. How does this transformation take place? Firstly, through formal means of grace through various spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, confession, celebration, and the like. Secondly, instrumental means of grace like baptism and the Lord's Supper are essential for the spiritual formation of a disciple (Foster 28-31).

James G. Samra in his article, "A Biblical View of Discipleship," agrees with both Moses Biney and Richard Foster and shares the same frame of perspective on discipleship looking into it as a process of becoming like Christ" as well as a journey of a lifetime (222 - 225). Samra further explains that "discipleship then is a journey that is taken with Jesus, a journey in which one suffers before arriving in glory" (225). Therefore, it could be concluded that following Jesus as a disciple is a lifelong journey. A journey that is adventurous in nature.

Discipleship is presented in the gospel of John within the framework of abiding in Christ; the emphasis is that the essential requirement for a true disciple is belief in the Lordship and person of Christ. To abide in Jesus means not only to trust in Jesus and have confidence in him but also requires a full acceptance of what he claims to be (Ryder 97).

Discipleship is also exhibited within the framework of social responsibilities. Discipleship is a call to become intervene, intervening where the need is and reaching out with the grace and love of Jesus to bring about a transformation and change.

Ronald Rolheiser defines Christian discipleship as “an invitation to become the lamb of God, a purifier who helps take tensions out of our families, communities, friendships circles, churches and workplaces by holding and transforming it” (183). The true model of discipleship is not how eloquently we speak and share the gospel. The question is whether we are moved with compassion to do something for the oppressive and the hurting. Throughout the gospels, Jesus is moved with compassion; as disciples of Jesus are we moved with compassion like he was? Developing the true character of Jesus is true discipleship.

Most believers agree with the mandate Jesus gave to go and make disciples. Unfortunately, most of them leave it up to the clergy to make disciples and evangelize. Making disciples is essential as it produces not only disciples but also helps the ministry with mature Christ-centered and God-fearing leaders to lead the church. Russell L. Huizing writes “that all believers are under the direct command of Jesus to make disciples and it is through this faithful model of disciple-making process new leaders are developed” (334).

Therefore, it is of most importance for every church to build a discipleship model to equip the believers into a mature Christian to make other disciples. David Watson and Paul Watson, in their book, *Contagious Disciple Making*, define discipleship: “a disciple is one who embraces and obeys all the teachings of Christ and endeavors by word and deed to make more disciples” (47). Watson and Watson further state that a disciple as he totally commits and obeys the Lord Jesus Christ makes other contagious disciple-makers. They present six core values to this process of making contagious disciples – prayer, engaging with the lost communities, finding person of peace, getting connected with a discovery group, baptism, becoming part of a faith-based community, and mentoring emerging leaders.(Watson and Watson 5).

Jay Richard Akkerman, Mark A. Maddix, Alan Hirsch, Deborah Hirsch, and Christopher Beard are all of the opinion that one cannot be a true disciple without being involved in evangelism and mission. They observe that the church over decades has looked at discipleship that encompasses of Sunday service, small groups, Bible study and engaging in community services but has neglected the missional aspect of a disciple. Mission and evangelism were left for the missionaries to accomplish. Talking within Indian context, it could be said that the missionaries did their best to evangelize the downtrodden and uplifting the poor. The people who were evangelized instead of “going into the world” came into the four walls of the mission compounds. New believers switched to what is commonly known as mission compound mentality. Mission compound mentality literally means Christians shutting themselves within the four walls of the mission compound (campus) of a missionary probably a foreign missionary, surrounding themselves with a few submissive mission dependents. Once people believed in Christ, they moved into the campus where the missionaries were staying or the missionaries’ bought lands for the resettlement of the newly converts to assist the newfound believers from being outcasted and oppressed from the society. They formed a culture and association of their own within the four walls of the campus. As a result, people were converted to Christianity but not to Christ. Discipleship did not become part of their life and it was not patterned to something to live by. As Alan Hirsch writes:

You simply cannot be a disciple without being a missionary—a sent one. For too long discipleship has been limited to issues relating to our own personal morality and worked out in the context of the four walls of the church with its privatized religion. In doing this, we have severely neglected our biblical mandate to go and make disciples. (29)

Therefore, the spiritual formation of a disciple should become a key to the success of mission. Christopher Beard sheds light on this aspect of missional discipleship, when he pens that “the missional church movement has emerged as a voice calling the church’s inherent missionary nature and identity and as a part discipleship play a vital role” (175).

Pursuing a Holistic Strategy for AGK

In the context of this project, the Assembly of God church Bengali section which has been in existence since 1950 and made quite a significant impact among the Bengali Christians for five decades is on a declining stage. Therefore, the researcher undertook this project to revitalize the church discipleship program for future growth of the church. As J. T. English points out, “the local church has a discipleship disease. And without the proper diagnosis and treatment plan, we will do more harm than good” (7). Thus, it is the desire of the researcher to diagnosis, analyze and recommend a future course of action toward the proper discipleship program of the church.

C. S. Lewis rightly identifies the mission of the Church: “The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose” (Lewis,199). Lewis rightly understands that the main purpose of the church was to draw all people unto Christ and make them like Christ.

We need to pursue a holistic strategy for AGK Bengali for discipleship that will move believers to fulfill the mission of God in Bengal. Brenda B Colijn in her article, “A Biblical and Contemporary Model of Ministry,” writes that every church consciously or unconsciously operates with a model of ministry. Developing an

intentional model of ministry will enable congregants to ask crucial questions about its existence and purpose. This will enable the congregation to sharpen the focus of its ministry, increase its ministry effectiveness, and integrate its members more fully into its life and witness.” (Colijn 1). She further suggests that “the fundamental condition for effective ministry is a commitment to a life of discipleship on the part of individual members and the church as a whole” (Colijn 5). Because of the development of communication technology, influences from godless sources, and the effects of a pluralistic cultural environment on us, discipleship has been a difficult process in the twentieth century. As a result, many Christians no longer understand the meaning of discipleship, and for many, discipleship simply means going to church on Sunday. There appears to be a general lack of comprehension among many who claim Jesus as Savior as to the implications of following him as Lord, is a good way to express this viewpoint. Mostly churches around the world are interested in numbers: how many attend on Sundays. Looking into the New Testament, we witness the apostles rebuke their audience for their immaturity and urge them to grow up. John Stott remarks on the lack of discipleship as “growth without depth” (Stott 38-39).

Therefore, discipleship for the AGK Bengali should encompass a holistic approach to discipleship. When we talk about “holistic Discipleship”, we state to define discipleship as invigorating and salubrious in nature. “Holistic” refers to the the totality of life rather than limiting it to certain spiritual areas and “discipleship” refers to the process of knowing and abiding in Christ. Combining the two terms Jay Moon defines holistic Discipleship, “ as a process whereby Jesus-followers center their lives on the kingdom of God and obey Christ’s commands by integrating the words and deeds of Jesus in the development of their community. Holistic

discipleship reminds us that words and deeds are crucial for Christian witness and discipleship, and that God's is concerned about the intimate needs of man. This encourages us to move from a traditional thinking of disciple making to a wider perspective of holistic discipleship which recognizes the need to address the whole person"(Moon).

The researcher proposes a 4C model of discipleship for the AGK—Commitment, Communication, Connectedness, and Community. The 4C model will help to form a discipleship plan for the AGK Bengali for the future growth and development of the believers to transform them into mature disciples.

Commitment

Discipleship is an invitation to commit oneself to learning and growing. So often we confuse ourselves between being saved and becoming a disciple. We will never be able to fully comprehend what it means to be a disciple until we distinguish between being saved and being a disciple. Being saved through faith in Jesus is a one-time act while being a disciple is a lifelong process.

J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "For in the gospel discipleship is not the result of the satisfaction of curiosity, nor is it even the result of a conviction that Jesus Christ is truth, and His word is true, although those are prerequisites. One becomes a disciple in the Biblical sense only when one is totally and completely committed to the person of Jesus Christ and His word" (14).

As Pentecost points out, "Discipleship is frequently equated with salvation and often erroneously made a condition for becoming a Christian. Thus, many are confused about their relationship to Jesus Christ" (8). This is often so true in Bengal as most of the people come to the saving knowledge of Jesus from a Bengali Hindu background equating salvation experience to being a disciple. Greg Ogden in his book

Transforming Discipleship mentions a two-tiered understanding of discipleship in the church for super Christians and not ordinary believers. This has led to low estate discipleship in the church. Ogden points out the difference people have in their minds about so easily identifying oneself as a Christian but rather hesitating to identify as a disciple. Ogden states the reason for the primary difference:

The primary difference, I believe, is the angle from which we approach both labels. In many people's minds, being a Christian is about what Christ has done for us; whereas a disciple is about what we are doing for Christ.

Christian is a noun; disciple is a verb. To be a Christian is passive; to be a disciple is active. To be a Christian means "I get in on the benefits plan"; to be a disciple means "I have to pay a price. (49)

As Pentecost notes, "there is a vast difference between being saved and being a disciple. Not all men who are saved are disciples although all who are disciples are saved" (10). The vast difference between the two is the level of commitment one has for Jesus. One can be a Christian without being a disciple. Being a disciple is a lifelong process and an unwavering commitment to the person of Jesus Christ and His word. Jesus called his disciples to commit themselves to a cause of the kingdom of God. In the gospel, we read the story of three would-be followers of Christ in Luke 9:57-62. The first said, "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head" (vv. 57-58). A second replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God" (vv. 59-60). A third man said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family." Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (vv. 61-62). All three would-

be followers of Jesus failed because they were scared to commit themselves to the call of Jesus. They failed to understand that commitment is a spiritual matter of the heart. The heart plays an important role in making the decision to commit to something. The scriptures help us to understand this in Romans 10:10, “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” It is the heart that helps us to make the decisions to commit. It is the place where love is stored (1 Pet. 1:22), forgiveness takes place (Matt. 18:35), scripture is stored (Ps. 119:11), and we are called to guard our hearts (Prov. 4:23).

In their book *Lead Like Jesus*, Ken Blanchard, Phil Hodges, and Phyllis Hendry have done wonderful work on the subject of leadership. They have divided the book into four sections—heart, head, hand, and habits. They point out that the heart is the starting point for all the other domains of leadership. Likewise, the commitment to the process of discipleship starts inside, at the very core of the heart. The Corinthians church lacked their commitment to unity in the church. As a result, Paul appeals to the Corinthians believers to commit themselves to the unity of their minds and thoughts. But the question that may arise is, “What unity should we have as a disciple of Jesus?” When we read through the New Testament and Pauline letters, we come across a couple of them that we are exhorted to commit ourselves to. We are encouraged to commit to having “unity of Faith” (Eph. 4:5) and are called to “speak the same thing” (1 Cor. 1:10). The Apostle Paul not only exhorts the Corinthians believers to commit to one mind and thoughts but to speak the same thing. In the letter to the Philippians Paul urges the church at Philippi to have the same mind as it was in Christ (Phil. 2:2). Paul tells his audience to have the same mind and spirit in the context of being humble. Humility always brings unity when we think of others above us (Phil. 2:4). This attitude was missing among the Corinthians believers; they

were self-focused and boastful. Unity among believers has always dominated the Pauline letters. Therefore, as disciples of Jesus, we are called to commit to the unity among us. In John 17, we read in the high priestly prayer of Jesus these words, “ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you (John 17:21).

Communication

Ours is an age of communication, and it is essential for the development of faith, ideas, and ideals. Our God is a communicating God. Through the ages, he has communicated with his creation. Scripture points out that God communicated to his people in the Old Testament using multiple means of expression so that his people would understand Him. One of the dominant expressions “word of Yahweh” or “word of the Lord” is a predominant expression of divine communication in the Old Testament. In the epistle to the Romans, Paul states that since the creation of the world God has revealed himself to men, so that men may be without excuse (Rom. 1:20). He communicated through his creation to humanity. He spoke through the prophets to communicate His will for the people of Israel (Heb. 1:3). However, the culmination of his communication to humanity was revealed through the person of Jesus Christ his son (Heb. 1:2). The writer of the gospel of Mark records, “Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God (Mark 1:14). Jesus came to communicate the good news of the kingdom of God to the people. Jesus communicated and proclaimed the good news using different methods in a particular cultural setting. Dr. Mark Robert gives a proper summation of God’s communication to his people in these words:

The fact is that God has chosen to make himself and his will known in the languages, beliefs, practices, and values of particular cultures. This is true of God’s self-revelation in Scripture, which comes through the writings of

dozens of people representing several cultures and spanning many centuries. It is also true of God's ultimate revelation in Jesus, the Word of God Incarnate, who came at a particular time in a particular place to a particular people speaking a particular language—through whom God intended to save the whole world. (Roberts)

The gospel truth is the most powerful truth ever communicated to man. Dana Allin points out that a “healthy approach to discipleship is ensuring that it is gospel centred. A gospel-centred approach is one that anchors any plan or motivation for spiritual growth to the joy people find in their identity in Christ” (18). It is for this reason that anyone who so desire to communicate this truth should be committed to the person of Jesus Christ and His word. Communicating the message of Jesus Christ is a privilege and a challenge as diverse age groups are influenced by different factors. In 1 Corinthians 2:2, “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified”. Here Paul reminded the Corinthians that his only aim was to know Christ.

Similarly in Acts 17:2-3, As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead. “This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,” he said.” The Apostle Paul communicated the message of Christ where ever he visited.

When Paul and companions reached Thessalonica he preached the same gospel, Christ crucified. Again when we read 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, “Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold

firmly to the word, I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,”. Paul specifically tells us that he preached Christ’s sacrificial death, burial and resurrection to the Corinthians. Christ’s death and resurrection have been the centrality of apostle Paul’s message. He took every opportunity to communicate this message to his audience and persuaded them to follow Christ.

Communication is both ways vertical and horizontal. As a disciple, Jesus is our role model. Jesus not only communicated God’s kingdom to people but he himself communicated with God. James O. Connell in his article “Sharing Belief” points out that there are three central truths that we convey while we share the gospel—a) God who is the source of existence, b) the role of Jesus Christ, and c) the Church as a community in which the Holy Spirit is at work to diffuse the love of God (Connell 530).

When we read the Bible, we witness God’s communication with us. The creator of the universe is in communication with his people. Communication has been central to the relationship between God and man. The vertical message reminds a disciple of the power of the gospel in redeeming fallen humanity. In 1 Corinthians 1:17-18, apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian Church about his call to proclaim the good news: “Christ did not send me to baptize but *to proclaim the gospel*, and not with eloquent wisdom so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power. For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:17-18; emphasis mine). In these verses, Paul reminds the Corinthians about the singularity of the message that he has

preached to them. He makes it a point to clarify his first calling in life is to preach the gospel, and he is not ashamed of this gospel that he preaches (Rom. 10:16). He preaches the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation and redemption to humanity.

As disciples we need to understand and recognize that Christ saved us to communicate this gospel. The word gospel has been used more often in the New Testament than any other words (Bowen 11). But the question is what is this gospel? In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul aptly explains the two important aspects of the gospel—Christ died for our sins and Christ resurrected according to the scriptures. He writes, “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that *Christ died for our sins* according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that *he was raised* on the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3-4; emphasis mine). Paul reiterates the gospel message he has preached to the Corinthians. This message reveals that Christ has accomplished the only work that could be accomplished to save us from our sins. Dermot A. Lane states, in her article “The Cross of Christ”, “a resurrection-centered Christology which bypasses the cross has very little to say to the pain and agony, the tragedy and failure, the suffering and dying, which are a common dimension of universal human experience” (233).

The communication of this gospel is not only vertical but horizontal. The gospel binds us into a community with similar faith. This fellowship is of a mutual bond that Christians share with Christ, which binds each other into unity and an eternal relationship of love.

Connectedness

Connectedness plays a vital role in reaching out to people, especially to unchurched and non-believers. We may take the liberty of using the term “connected”

in today's world. However, the New Testament church used a different term for being connected. The New Testament used the term "fellowship" which in Greek is *koinonia*. The authors of the New Testaments expressed the essence of Christian faith in this one word *koinonia*. Connectedness, for this project, connotes the same meaning as relationship through fellowship.

It plays an important role in Indian context and mainly in Bengal where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds co-exist in solidarity. Relating to the others in the locality helps to open the door for communicating the gospel to them. Connecting with other people in the locality builds relationships over time, which helps each other to share their life together. Thom S. Rainer observes, "Relationships are important, and many churches do a good job of emphasizing the need for their members to connect with the unchurched" (84). In his book, "*Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*", Rainer's research team interviewed 353 unchurched people, 100 pastors of effective evangelistic churches from different denominations of effectively, and 350 long-term Christians. They concluded that two major factors prompted people to join a church: individual needs and a relationship with someone who was active in a church. Over half of the formerly unchurched gave a positive response to the factor of relationship playing an important part (Rainer 76-77). Rainer states the importance of relationship, "we could recall hundreds of stories in which the formerly unchurched told us of the importance of relationship in their coming to Christ and to the church" (78).

Relating to others builds relationships which in return opens the door to share our faith to unchurched and bring them into discipleship. Connectedness prioritizes one-on-one interaction with others to build a meaningful relationship. Gone is the era of standing at a street corner and distributing gospel literature, especially in an Indian

context with a Hindu majoritarian government barring Christians from free evangelism. The way forward to win people and introduce people to Christ is getting connected with them where they are instead of expecting them to walk into church on a Sunday morning. We need to think out of the box and touch lives. Rick Richardson in his book *Reimagining Evangelism* writes, “If our spirituality doesn’t connect us to something much bigger than ourselves and doesn’t influence us toward becoming other-centered, Jesus would probably confront it. Most of the spirituality that fills our culture is self-centered” (105). Therefore, every disciple of Christ should try and make every opportunity count to connect with unbelievers. Apostle Paul calls the Ephesians believers to live wisely, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16). Connectedness is not only about winning against the unbelievers but also about staying connected with believers. So often, we are indifferent to people from within the faith. We are so busy with our schedules that we hardly have time to stop and connect with others within the church. David A. de Silva draws a vivid picture of the believers in the modern-day church within the context of fellowship:

The truth is, while we ourselves might go to church and even like the people at church, many of us might still think that how we live the Christian life really is something between us and God (or between us and Christ). While we will go to church, we may go with our personal boundaries raised fairly high, enjoying friendly interactions while keeping one another at arm’s length—and keeping our faith or our life choices safe from other Christians poking their noses too close into our business. We’re glad to interact pleasantly on the way into and out from worship, in and around the refreshments, and at potluck dinners. We might even be glad to interact pleasantly for an additional hour in a Sunday

school or Bible study group. But, in general, we really may not want the conversations to get too close to home and we exercise all sorts of diversionary tactics if we feel something is getting too personal. We may be reluctant to share the struggles that we're facing in our faith journey or just in our lives and relationships, because we don't want to be judged on any basis beyond the façade, we project to manage impressions. And we may be so involved in our own lives and schedules, in which we have left so little room for others, that we become profoundly uncomfortable when someone presents a genuine need and asks for help. (3-4)

In the New Testament meals had two aspects to them, social and spiritual. one of the salient features of fellowship meals is their ability to create bonding among participants. As Lanuwabang Jamir observes, the communal aspect of the meal was observed whenever people come together and fellowshiped or to connect with each other. Thus, meal culture opened door for the participants to connect and strengthen their relationship with each other (Jamir).

Community

We so often have heard that no believer is an island. Human beings by nature are social animals. T.S. Eliot posed the question concisely in his poem "Choruses from the Rock", "what life have you if you have not together?" Eliot pointed to the truth verified by social scientists and psychologists that life can be well lived and shared in a community rather than in isolation. Eliot gives the answer in the following lines of his poem, "There is no life that is not in community. And no community not lived in praise of God" (Eliot 101). In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, James K.A. Smith rightly points out that, "God's design for human flourishing cannot be satisfied in isolation. As dependent, social creatures, we are created for community" (201). The

Bible mentions a rich pageant of life in a community. Disciples are called to live in a community marked by rich fellowship and affection for others. In the Old Testament, God called Israel into a community to share life in common as the called-out people.

In the book of Exodus chapter 6: 2-8, God also said to Moses,

“I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself fully known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they resided as foreigners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’”

God delivered the Israelites to make them unite under one banner as a nation and faith community, worshiping the one true God. Paul D. Hanson mentions that “the biblical notion of community therefore finds its final unity and focus in worship of the one true God” (5). God’s deliverance of a slave people inaugurates a new order of life for the people of Israel a notion of a new community. The Old Testament provides a perspective on the life that Israel should live in its present and future, including its worship, prayer and spirituality, as well as its practices, attitudes and ethics before God.

John Goldingay insinuates that Israelites were called to a life in relationship to God, a life in a community and a life as a self; it involved living with God, with other people, and with oneself. Broadly, it involved worship and prayer, ethics, and spirituality (Goldingay 16).

In the pages of the New Testament, we witness Jesus grow up in a community and work in a community performing his miracles and teaching people. Suzanne Watts Henderson is of the opinion that Jesus cannot be understood apart from the community formed by those who come after Jesus both in his lifetime and beyond. She concludes that the four gospels forge clear lines of connection between Christ and the community (Henderson 9). In the book *The Community of Jesus* Andreas J. Köstenberger in his chapter “The Church According to the Gospel” states, “In the Gospels, Jesus begins to form the church as his messianic community that has roots in God’s historic covenant people. And he instructs that nascent community in many ways that apply later to the fully orb-ed NT church” (35). In the book of Acts, the early believers lived in a community with mutual love and care for each other. The book of Acts gives a picture of the nature and essence of the believers in a community life. In Acts 2, we read of the communal life the first believers lived:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

They shared and lived life together. What we witness is that the Christian faith is communal and deeply relational. The triune God is relational, and as a result, we are wired for community. The early church lived out life together in a community called the church. The early church community was intentional in its approach. Where they choose to share daily worship, social-action, decision-making and common meals with others. As a disciple we are called to make commitment to form intentional communities where we engage in the social work in the neighborhood, fasting together, engage in service project or sharing a meal. Together these practices would constitute the formation of a community on making the kind of people, who are salt and light to the world.

Therefore, discipleship is the key to the spiritual and numerical growth of the Bengali section. It could be stated that neglecting the aspect of discipleship would make the church look more like a worldly society than the people of the kingdom of God. The 4C model will help and assist the believers in the AG church Bengali section toward a robust commitment to communicate the gospel to their connections to build a community of believers. Discipleship occurs when a disciple teaches, helps, guides, and leads someone to Christ and he's able to lead another to Christ. This process includes a commitment to Christ, disciples are Spirit-filled people who bear fruits. This is a process of growing in Christ. Followed by the communication of the gospel, which we commonly call sharing our testimony. Communicating the gospel to others, the book of Acts is a good example before us of how the first disciples communicated the gospel to others (Acts 2:14-41; 4:1-4). The disciples of the early church communicated verbally and at times demonstrated the power of the gospel through signs and wonders. Third, the disciples need to be connected to the people around in their surroundings to share their message. Fourth, the disciples should

always work toward building a community of believers, where they come together to strengthen each other spiritually through worship, encouragement through the word and parting and remembering the Lord's death. When the church adopted this basic and primary understanding of the Christian life the AG Bengali section would make an impact in the city of Kolkata.



Figure 2.1 Infographic of 4C Model

Summary of Literature Review

The summary that emerges from the literature review on the principles of discipleship from the study of first Corinthians is that there is a dissonance between the way we live and our understanding of discipleship. The disciples are called to have Jesus as their role model—a role model that they need to follow, imitate, and transform themselves into his likeness. The Corinthians wavered because they focused their eyes on the messenger than the message. There is a thin line that always exist between hero worship and holy emulation. Paul reminded the Corinthians about their lack of total submission to God in these words:

Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Cor 1:13 – 17)

Paul reminds them that he did not come to preach on his own strength but that of God. So, Christ needed to be exalted and not the messenger.

In this letter to the Church at Corinth, Paul covers several issues existing in the church related to both life and doctrine: division and quarrel due to hero worship, lawsuits among believers, sexual immorality, marriage and singleness, freedom in Christ, the significance of the spiritual gifts, order in worship, the significance of the Lord's supper and concluded with a profound teaching on the resurrection. Paul's emphasis on Christian behavior in the local church is the thread that connects these subjects. Paul expects that the believers at the Corinthian church would live according to Christian ideals. Paul reminds the believers at Corinth that they have been bought with a price and therefore they should glorify God in their body (1 Cor. 6.20).

Disciples are called to holy living. The Corinthians were more influenced by their surroundings and that made them falter in their conviction to live holy. The Corinthian culture influenced the Corinthian church so much so that it was hard to distinguish between the called-out people of God to those of the world. They were involved in different kinds of sexual activities. The Corinthians were a community of believers who did everything that is ritualistic in nature but the evidence of that was missing in them—the holiness of a Christ follower. Holiness was missing in their day-

to-day life. “Holiness in the life of Jesus is found not only in the great miracles that he formed, but also in the lesser happenings of his life” (Orr 160). Jesus walked in holiness in his everyday life. Disciples are not only learners, but they transmute that learning into everyday living. Being saved is being justified and a one-time act, but living a victorious Christian life is a process accomplished through holiness. As L. Santos in his book *Holy Life* states, “those who have been justified by faith naturally authenticate this work by their righteous and holy living” (Santos 155). The Apostle Paul reminds us, “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess. 4:7-8). Here Paul connects the giving of the Holy Spirit to living a holy life. What does it mean to live a Holy life? Jerry Bridges gives this answer in the following words, “To live a holy life, then is to live in conformity to the moral precepts of the Bible and in contrast to the sinful ways of the world” (3). It is a life characterized by putting out the old self and putting on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness (Eph. 4:24).

The discipleship model in Corinthians is that disciples exist in a community of believers with cultural diversities. While we cohabit in a culturally diverse community we move in the framework of personal liberty, while constraining our likes and dislikes while it would not hurt the other person. Paul did not write his epistles in a cultural vacuum but within a cultural setting.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter describes the purpose of this project and the methodology used to gather related information to corresponding research questions. The role of the researcher in his ministerial setting is briefly described to give context to the purpose of the study. Then the participants of the study are clearly described along with the precise criteria for choosing them as well as the instrumentation employed and the process of data analysis.

Nature and Purpose of the Project

The purpose of the research was to identify a holistic strategy for discipleship for the Bengali section from the apostle Paul's work with the Corinthians to the leadership of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata. The Assembly of God church Bengali section has been in existence for the last sixty years. The Bengali section is one of the language groups that worship under the umbrella of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata, along with seven other language groups.

The researcher undertook this project to ascertain the reason for slow growth in the section. The congregation has been around hundred to hundred twenty on average for the last forty years. The hope is to see a transformation in the discipleship practices within the Assembly of God Church Bengali section. Therefore, this project was undertaken to identify a holistic strategy for discipleship from the apostles' Paul work with the Corinthians to the leadership of the Assembly of God church Kolkata.

Research Questions

Research Question #1

What are the obstacles for discipling believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?

The purpose of this question was to ascertain the obstacles to discipleship in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church, Kolkata. In order to collect data for this question, the researcher designed an open-ended questionnaire (Appendix C) and a focus group (Appendix F). The focus group was designed to get a deeper understanding and perspective on the obstacles that hindered the growth of the Bengali section.

Research Question #2

What were the existing pattern and practices for discipling believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?

The purpose of this question was to establish past practices and patterns of discipleship. The information compiled for this question formed a baseline for the pattern and practices of discipleship implemented in the past to disciple the believers in the Bengali section of The Assembly of God church, Kolkata. The researcher adopted and designed a semi-structure interview for the participants (Appendix G). This allowed the participants the freedom to disclose the history of the church as well as patterns and practices followed in the past to disciple the believers of the Bengali section of The Assembly of God church, Kolkata.

Research Question #3.

What kind of discipleship model can we draw from the first letter to the Corinthians?

To answer this research question, findings from the three instruments were compared and analyzed along with research from the literature review for this project.

Ministry Context(s)

My role as the researcher was unique in the context of this project because of my ministerial setting. I serve as the associate pastor at the Assembly of God church in Kolkata, giving leadership to the Bengali section of the church. I joined the pastoral staff seven years ago, a capacity I continue to serve to the present day.

I was compelled in my heart to undertake this research. Firstly, I have a unique role to play as part of the pastoral team and specifically as the pastor of the Bengali section. I am the fourth pastor to this unique congregation at the Assembly of God church Kolkata. The Bengali section has been in existence for the last sixty years with an average attendee of hundred to hundred twenty. As a pastor of the congregation, this gives me an opportunity to dig deep into the history as well as to know the different approaches to discipleship and evangelism introduced by the church over the years. A proper study has never been done on the history of the Bengali section as it is part of the larger body, somewhere among the larger body its history is lost.

Secondly, it is important to consider discipleship and evangelism among the Bengalis because of its demographic reality. It is the third-largest ethnic group in the world. The majority of Bengali speaking population resides in Bangladesh (98%) and the Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, Assam Barak Valley, the union territory of Andaman and Nicobar Island (Wikipedia). It is estimated that there are 1.4 million Bengali Christians in the world. West Bengal houses 0.72% of Christians of the total population of 97.69 million of its own population (findeasy.in). Bengali Christians number about 0.125 million in the urban agglomeration of Kolkata according to the 2011 census conducted by the government of India (<https://www.census2011.co.in/>).

Kolkata is a multi-religious city with mutual respect for the other religion. It is often referred to as the “City of Joy” due to the harmonious nature of the people. This city has the potential to induct and embrace people of different faiths and culture. In common parlance, a Bengali must be a Hindu. Then who are these Bengali Christians?

A Bengali who has converted or believed in Jesus as Lord and savior by public confession through water baptism is called a Bengali Christian. The columnist Patrick SL Ghose defines the Bengali Christians “as one who can speak in English but are equally comfortable in Bangla, worship a single God originating in the middle east within the confines of usually majestic colonial architecture, seem to get very envied preferential admission to those much aspired for English medium educational institutions, and eat food that straddles many cultures” (Ghose). We may borrow the expression ‘Hindu-Christian’ used by Brahmabandhav Upadhyay for better understanding of Bengali Christians. Upadhyay uses this expression to mean someone who is culturally Hindu but a Christian by faith (Tennent 11). So Bengali Christians follow the cultural norms of the Bengali traditions while being adherent follower of Christian faith. In the past decades to accomplish this purpose of being a Bengali Christians, they used a western first names and a Bengali surname, which well encapsulated the concept of being Bengali by culture and Christian by faith for people’s understanding. It is hard to define who is a Bengali Christian as there has not been any specific history or sociological research done on Bengali Christians.

Thirdly, there is the inquisitive mind to know the reason behind the slow growth of the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata and their impact in society. In his book *The Curiosity Drive: Our Need for Inquisitive Thinking* Philip Stokoe encapsulates this in his words: “What is happening to us can only derive

from what we already know, but every explanation is available for modification in the light of experience” (19).

Participants

Criteria for Selection

The participants were chosen from among the Bengali section, as the project has to do with the impact of discipleship of the believers on the rate of church growth in the Bengali section.

Firstly, the participants were originally from the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata, who have been long-standing members of the church.

Secondly, participants were chosen from those who have been in the church for a substantial year of more than ten years.

Thirdly, most of the participants in the research were within the age bracket of thirty years and above, as half of the world population is in the working age bracket between 25 to 65 (ourworldindata.org). So, they could give a qualified view of the discipleship programs that were practiced in the church.

Fourthly, they were mature believers who are actively engaged in the activities and programs of the church. They were members of the Bengali section who served on the church ministry team such as worship, ushering, media, and elders of the church. So, they were able to give proper feedback to past practices and obstacles to discipleship programs.

Fifthly, they had a minimum educational qualification of going through junior college.

Description of Participants

The participants in the research were congregants who were mature and engaged in some form of ministry in the church. They are all from the Bengali-speaking community and have attended the church for the last ten years and above. There were married couples, unmarried individuals, both male and female, senior citizens, and youths who participated in the project. Most of them are professionals apart from a few, who are housewives. They have been in the faith for the last fifteen to twenty years and have a basic understanding of Christian life and discipleship. The participants were of age ranging from late thirties to senior citizens. Some of them have attended other churches before becoming part of the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata. I have a pastoral relationship with them as I am the current pastor of the congregation.

Ethical Considerations

Potential participants were invited to consider partaking in this project through a consent letter. The invitation letter informed them about the nature of the project along with the abstract of the project. A copy of the invitation letter is attached as Appendix B.

In order to protect the confidentiality of the participant the following steps were taken. First, the consent form gave the participants of this project written assurance that their confidentiality would be maintained. No names of individuals, specific job descriptions, or any other distinguishing characteristic of individual participants are reported in the study. Second, the participants were informed that the data collected would be used for scholarly purposes only and none of the data would be used otherwise. Third, all information collected in the form of data was kept under password-protected electronic format. Any hard copy data was kept in a locked almirah in the researcher's office with the key in the sole possession of the researcher.

Instrumentation

Three researcher-designed instruments were used to collect data for this project. The research was designed to move from the obstacles to discipling the believer, to patterns and practices that were designed and followed in the past, to finally applying the adapted information to formulate key elements in the discipleship program that would mobilize the Bengali section of The Assembly of God church, Kolkata to growth.

First, a standard questionnaire was designed to gather information regarding Research Question 1. The participants were formally invited to take part in the project and a consent form was duly signed by the participants. The questionnaire used open-ended questions for the participants. The questionnaire was called the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire. It was a researcher-designed questionnaire with ten questions that helped evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, and relational practices of the participants in the context of discipleship in AGK Bengali. The Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire was administered as an online instrument, using an online application called Google Forms, which made it accessible and convenient for the participants to respond quickly. This online application also was useful for the researcher to collect data systematically in an organized electronic format.

Secondly, a focus group was created to answer Research Question 2. The focus group consisted of people from the Assembly of God church Bengali section. The participants were divided into two focus groups as this would provide richer data from the synergy of the group than if individuals were interviewed separately. Responses from other people may modify or remind the details of an event to the other person. Since no one volunteered to conduct the focus group, the researcher who

also serves as the pastor to the congregation served as the moderator to conduct the focus group discussion.

Thirdly, a semi-structured interview was conducted to answer research Question 2. The participants were visited by the researcher at the convenient time proposed by them for their availability. A set of predetermined questions in sequence was asked to receive the responses of the participants. Sensing describes semi-structured interviews as something between highly structured and unstructured interviews. He further suggests that “specified themes, issues and questions with a predetermined sequence are described in the protocol, but you are free to pursue matters as situations dictate” (Sensing 107).

After the interview was concluded, keywords, common themes, subjects, ideas, and practices were noted and reported.

Expert Review

I designed the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire to collect specific data to measure Research Questions 1 and 2. Based on an understanding of the literature review from the study of the epistle to 1 Corinthians, several of the questions were formatted. The Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire, focus groups question, and semi-structured interview question was emailed to an expert for review and feedback. All the instruments were submitted via email to Dr. Ellen Marmon.

All the instruments were emailed to Dr. Ellen Marmon along with an Expert Review Letter (Appendix A) that included descriptive details of the project which included the problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and definition of key terms attached also were the three researcher-designed instruments and the evaluation forms for expert review.

Reliability & Validity of Project Design

The researcher adhered to a phenomenological research framework to ensure the effectiveness and appropriateness of the study. Creswell describes phenomenological research as “the common meaning for several individuals of their live experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (76). It reduces individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of a universal essence.

Thus, a heterogeneous group from among the Assembly of God church Bengali section was invited to take part in this project. They were formally invited through a letter asking them to consider taking part in this project. Once the consent of the participants was received, the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire (DAQ) was given to them for their response. The data was then analyzed to find common themes and redundancies as the participants described in the questionnaires.

This was followed by a focus group consisting of twenty-three people divided into two groups consisting of twelve members in one group and the other having eleven. The use of a focus group as an instrument in this project allowed for multiple perspectives on the same aspect of obstacles to discipleship in the church in order to obtain more thorough results. Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter and Ajay Bailey describe focus groups:

A focus group discussion is an interactive discussion between six to eight pre-selected participants, led by a trained moderator and focusing on a specific set of issues. The aim is to gain a broad range of views on the research topic over a period of 60-90 minutes, and to create an environment where participants feel comfortable to express their views. The name of the method actually highlights its key characteristics: focus on specific issues, with a predetermined group of people, conducting an interactive discussion. A well-conducted focus

group discussion can uncover unique perspectives on the study issues due to the group environment in which data is collected. The group element means that you can identify a range of issues, but you can also understand the way in which these issues are discussed in the group (136).

Since the project's first research question investigated the obstacles to the question of discipleship in the Assembly of God church Bengali section, the questionnaire and focus group provided the best option for the validity and reliability as these methods allow for the in-depth exploration of the perspectives of numerous participants.

After the completion of the focus groups, the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview with the participants. The interview gave a background of the experiences of the participants and detailed their stories.

Seidman writes about the purpose of interviews, stating, "The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of the experience" (9).

Finally, the collected data was synthesized with the contextual observation regarding the obstacles to discipleship allowed for the creation of key elements and comprehensive holistic strategy for discipleship in the Assembly of God church Bengali section was drawn that would be effective to make disciple.

Data Collection

The researcher engaged in qualitative research to ascertain the outcome of the project. Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as:

research that enables you to conduct in-depth studies about a broad array of topics..... qualitative research most of all involves studying the meaning of

people's lives, as experienced under real-world conditions. It differs because of its priority devoted to representing the views and perspectives of a study's participants. It embraces the contextual conditions and driven by a desire to explain social behaviors and thinking, through existing or emerging concepts. (3-11)

Sensing writes that qualitative research "systematically seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabits these settings. Qualitative research is grounded in the social world of experience and seeks to make sense of lived experience" (57). He further states, "qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data critical for the design, evaluation, and ongoing health of institutions like churches" (Sensing 58).

Sharan B. Merriam sheds light on the focus of qualitative research, writing, "qualitative research is interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their world and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (5).

The researcher undertook qualitative research as it has to do with the participants from a particular context, understanding the obstacles to making disciples from their experiences with different discipleship programs, and charting a strategy for discipleship program that would be effective. As Sensing states, "the researcher becomes a co-participant with the community in the process of gathering and interpreting data to enable a new and transformative mode of action" (63).

The researcher undertook a preintervention project. This project describes and measures a situation, and although it does develop a strategic plan to address the situation, the project does not entail the measurement of post-intervention.

The first qualitative research instrument implied by the researcher is the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire (DAQ). The participants were sent an invitation letter asking them to consider taking part in the projects. Once the consent was received from the individuals, the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire (DAQ) was sent to them to obtain their responses.

The second research tool used by the researcher was a focus group. Participants were invited through a letter to consider taking part in the project. The group was divided into two groups. Their responses were recorded and later transcribed in a digital format. The data was analyzed for key themes and commonalities.

The third research tool used by the researchers was a semi-structured interview. The participants were asked an open-ended question. Their responses were recorded and were then transcribed and manually examined to identify commonalities, differences, and anomalies.

Data Analysis

The researcher used qualitative methods to gather data for this project. The raw data received by way of the three-instrument implied by the researcher for gathering information mainly in the form of questionnaires, focus groups, and interviews was sorted based on themes. The data was read and re-read multiple times to identify patterns and themes. Sensing mentions, “Data theme analysis involves sorting, organizing, and indexing of the material that enables you to locate internally consistent patterns that often fit within existing knowledge” (198).

The transcripts from the focus group and interviews were read and examined, named, and organized to find common themes, ideas, suggestions etc.. The

comprehensive results were synthesized with findings from the literature review and contextual observations.

CHAPTER 4

EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT

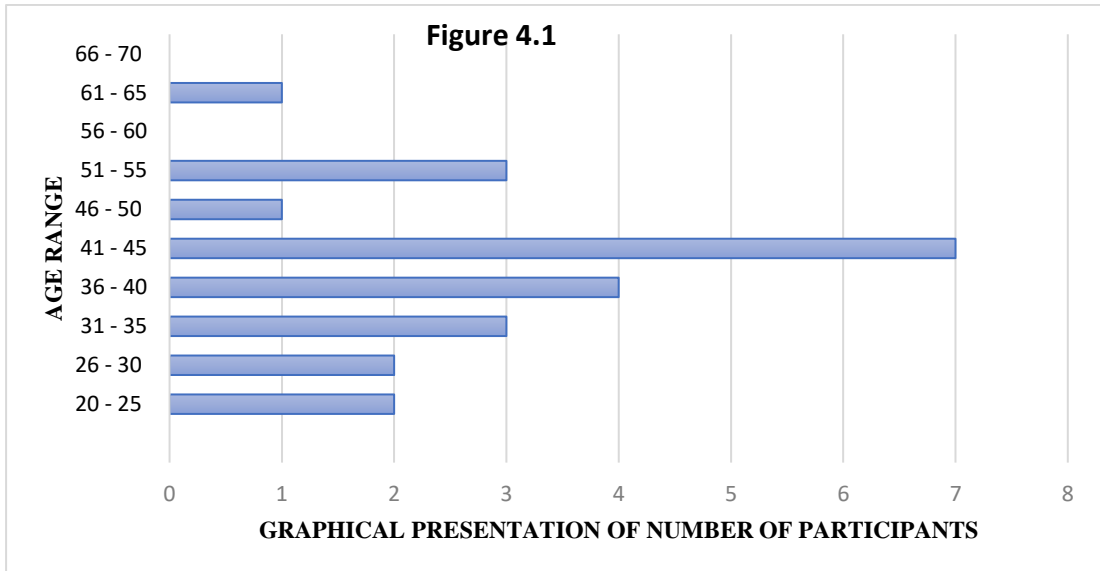
Overview of the Chapter

This chapter provides a report and analysis of the qualitative data collected for this project from the online questionnaire, focus groups, and interviews. Data is organized and reported according to the project's three research questions. Under each research question responses are further organized. Select quotes from respondents are included to highlight noteworthy themes and attitudes. Finally, the chapter concludes with the major findings gathered from the data collected.

Participants

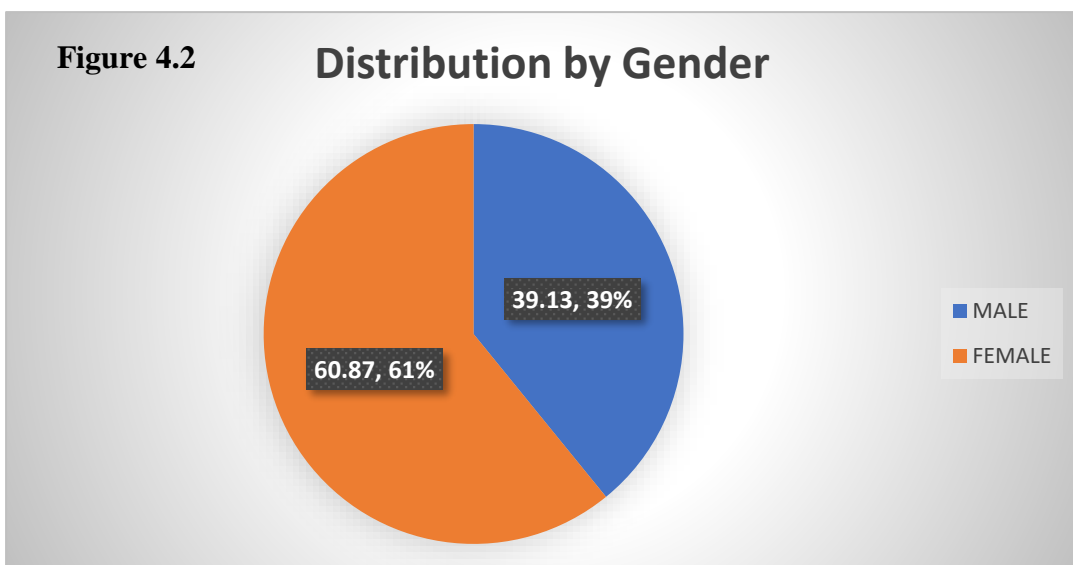
The participants in this project were all regular attendees to the Assembly of God church Bengali section for more than ten years in the church. The participants fell within the age group of twenty years and above. They all were or had been involved with some kind of ministry in the Bengali Section. The participants were individually selected by the pastoral staff of the church. The participants were then sent formal invitations (Appendix B) to take part in the project. On accepting the invitation, they were asked to participate in the Google survey and focus group. A semi-structured interview was conducted with individual participants to answer Research Question 2. Participants were invited to choose a convenient time and place, ensuring their comfort and participation. The researcher followed a semi-structured interview approach, using a predetermined set of questions as a guide. This allowed for flexibility in exploring themes and insights that emerged during conversation, while ensuring consistent data collection across participants.

A total of twenty-three individuals participated in the online Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire (DQA) administered through Google Forms. The demographic makeup of these participants is represented in Figure 4.1.



The participants were between the age group of 20-65 years old, with over 86.96% below the age group of fifty years old. All of the participants in the Google online survey fell within the age range of 20-65 years.

Over 60% of the respondents were female, and 39.13% of respondents were male (Figure 4.2).



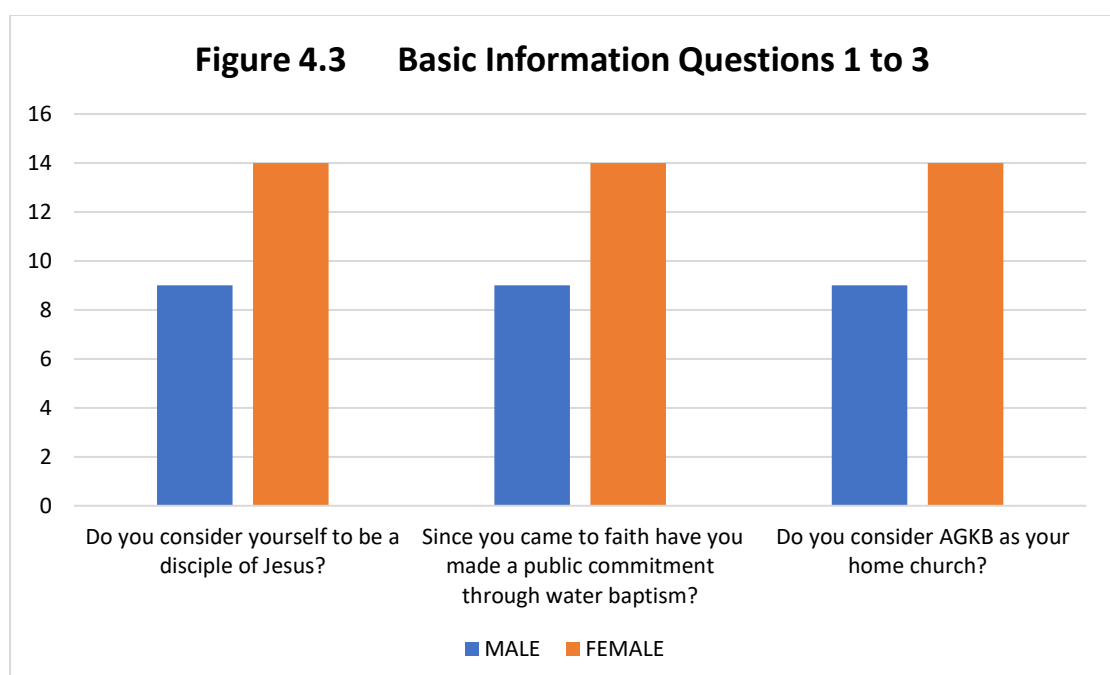
Most of the participants consistently attended the service; nonetheless, only one female participant indicated attending the church three times in a month in her response.

Nearly all participants professed to be followers of Jesus and declared their commitment through public confession and water Baptism. They unanimously consider AGKBS as their home church for fellowship and spiritual development.

Research Question #1: *What are the obstacles for disciplining believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?*

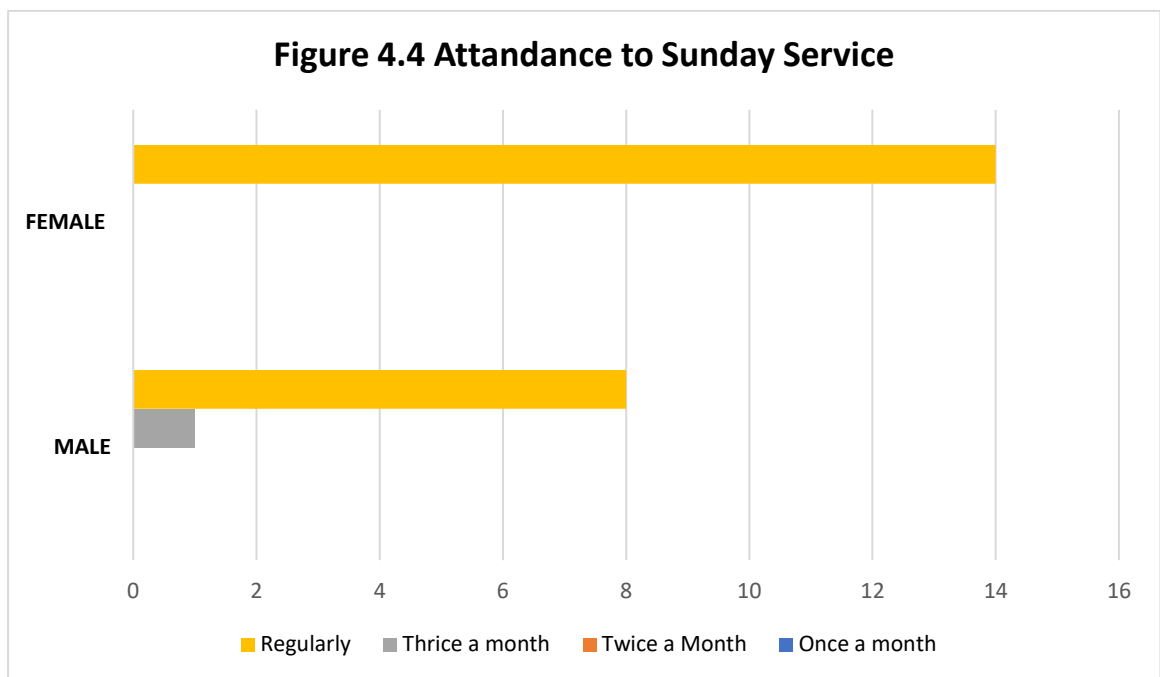
The tool used for collecting the answer to this research question was the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire (DAQ) administered through a Google survey form and a focus group. All twenty-three participants engaged in both the Google survey and participated in the focus group, providing valuable insight through their participation.

The initial five questions in the survey assessed participants' knowledge level, and personal attitudes and collected information about the participant's faith, beliefs, and commitments.

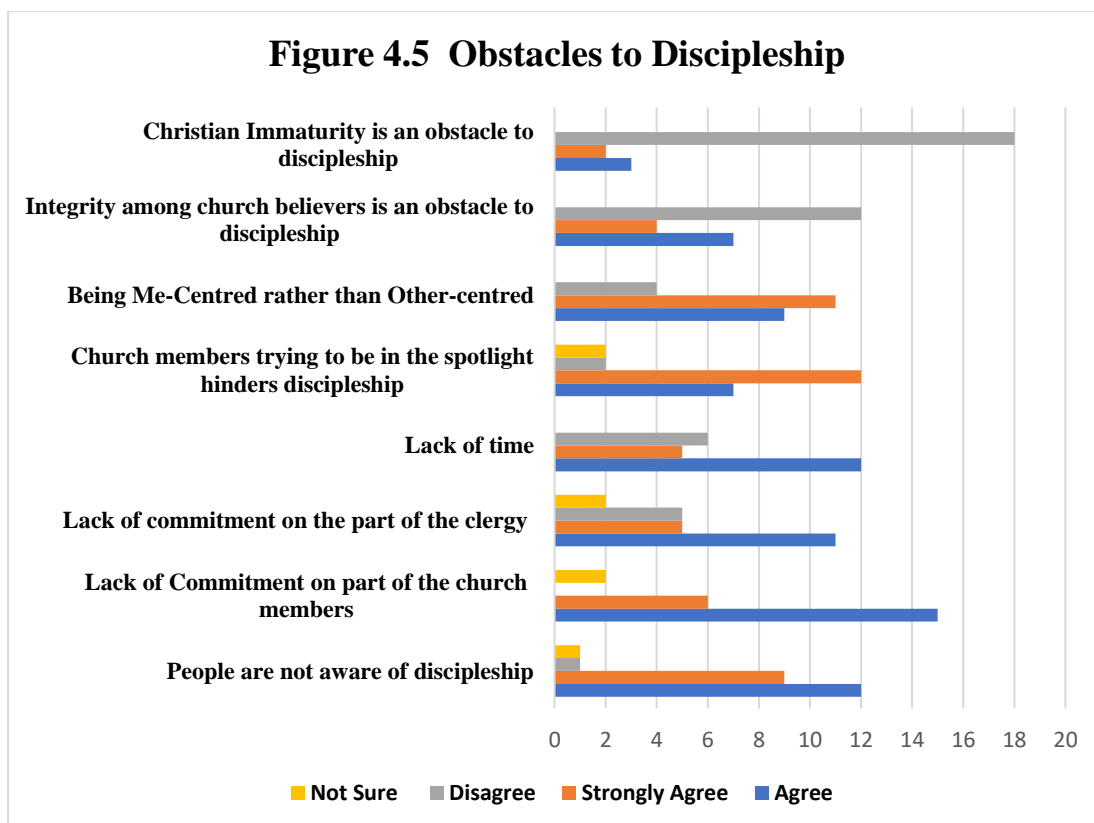


All participants considered themselves to be disciples of Jesus and had made a public confession of their faith by taking water baptism. They all were part of the AGKB and considered it to be their home church (Figure 4.3).

Almost all participants demonstrated regularity to Sunday service by attending consistently. Only one participant deviated, attending only three times a month (Figure 4.4).



Through question number one to nine from the Google survey, the researcher collected information directly tied to Research Question One.



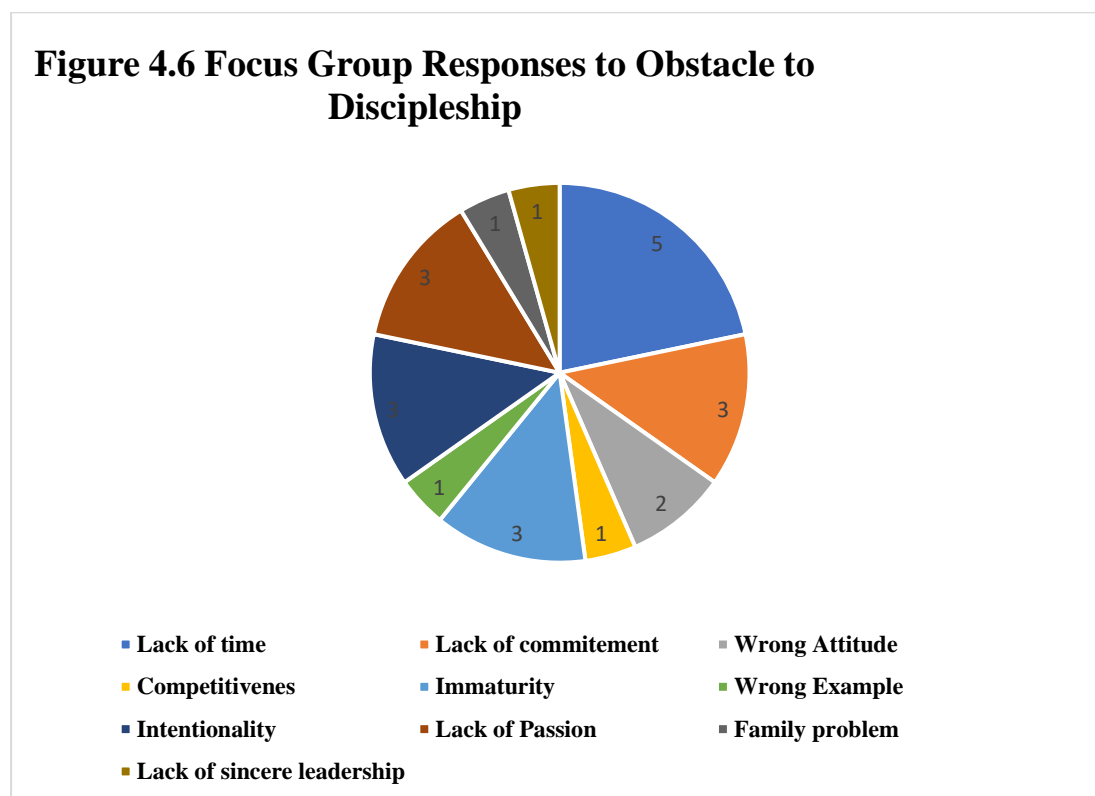
Confirmation of the Claim of Research Question One

Over half (52.17%) of participants felt that lack of awareness and lack of time are major hurdles to discipleship, and 65.21% agreed that lack of commitment on the part of the congregant is a barrier to discipleship. Appropriately 47.82% acknowledged that the clergy's lack of commitment presents an obstacle to discipleship. A strong majority expressed firm agreement that attention-seeking behaviors of the congregant can be major obstacles to discipleship. While 78.26% of the participants expressed disagreement with the notion that Christian maturity poses an obstacle to discipleship. This is the basis for the first research question about what obstacles are faced by AGKB.

Obstacles to Discipleship

The focus groups integrated questions mirroring those found in the Google survey form to authenticate and underline responses related to research question one. Focus groups questions seven to nine were directed to participants to gain an

understanding of the obstacles hindering discipleship in AGKB, as well as the personal challenges individuals encounter to their path toward discipleship.



The focus group participants were encouraged to share their reflections, personal observations, and insights regarding obstacles hindering their growth as disciples of Jesus, both as a community of faith and as individuals.

Lack of Time / Lack of Commitment

According to the feedback from the participants, five participants mentioned “lack of time” as the primary obstacle to discipleship within the community. Three participants stated “Lack of commitment” to be one of the major reasons for discipleship. The participant's response from the focus groups generated attention and elicited the following replies:

CR: “Time has been a constraining factor in discipleship. As most of us come from different professions, as it takes time and prolonged commitment.....

Sunday is the only off day we have....Hmmm.... we get only one day off in a

week to do our personal stuff you know..... and three hours we are in the church and then we have to do household chores, so most of us I guess find it difficult to join discipleship courses which are usually takes place after the church..... I find it very difficult to join and hang out after church.”

AD: “Commitment is one of the obstacles...in my view for being disciplined. Since it takes a prolonged commitment and giving time for attending discipleship courses, Bible study, or spiritual growth class that we have in our church.”

SPAL: “While observing negative behaviors from leaders can be disheartening..... but I guess ultimately, our commitment to discipleship determines our personal growth. It’s important to remember that leaders are individuals on their journey, and we each hold the power to choose our path towards Christ.”

MS: “As we all come from diverse backgrounds and many of us have familial responsibilities, our family situations can often hinder our full commitment to discipleship. I face challenges in dedicating myself to any discipleship programs due to caring for an ailing mother at home and I’m certain others encounter similar obstacles...”

Competitiveness / Immaturity

Three of the participants from the focus group shared that “immaturity” and one participant remarked that “competitiveness” was an obstacle to discipleship. One of the focus group participants stated that, “Sometimes our spirit of competition and immature behaviors toward handling conflicts within the church serves as an obstacle to discipleship within the fellowship” (NW).

Wrong Attitude / Wrong Example

The other elements that served as an obstacle to discipleship as mentioned above were “wrong attitude” and “wrong examples”. Two of the participants from the focus group thought that the “wrong attitude” acts as a barrier to discipleship. Only one of the participants from the focus group stated that “wrong examples” are a barrier to discipleship. One of the participants commented on the wrong intention of unresolved conflict among the members of the community of faith as a hindrance to discipleship. He commented:

My opinion may differ a bit from others... I guess differences and unresolved conflicts within the church community ...I mean among believers... can create unintentional barriers to participation in the discipleship program. This can be especially true when encountering individuals we have personal issues with.

(CD)

Lack of Intentionality / Lack of Passion

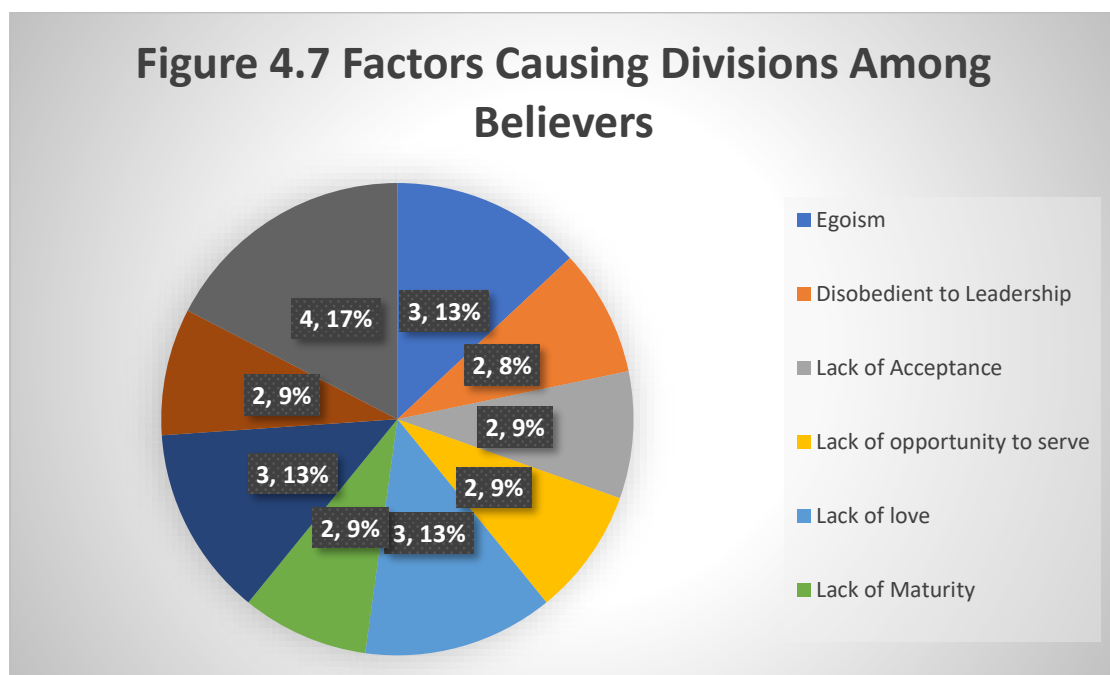
As can be seen above (Figure 4.6) “lack of intentionality” and “lack of passion” have been emphasized by few participants. Three participants in the focus group remarked “lack of intentionality” and an equal number of participants believed that “lack of passion” are obstacles to discipleship. One of the participants remarked:

I don't believe it solely hinges on the time constraints or the conduct of elders or leaders.... Instead, I think it revolves around the deliberate practice of discipleship. Discipleship should be intentional in nature; it should be practiced in daily life. What I mean is, if we aren't intentional about being disciples, we won't prioritize it or dedicate the necessary time and commitment to foster growth. (NS)

While another participant from focus group two commented:

To me I will say lack of passion can manifest as lack of time and commitment. Passion is often the fuel that ignites commitment and motivates us to prioritize things that matters. The lack of a strong desire to become a disciple I guess serves as a barrier to engaging in discipleship. (DM)

Focus group question eight revealed the factors that bring division among the community of believers called to discipleship. The response of the participants to this question is seen in Figure 4.7.



Various obstacles stop believers from being true disciples of Jesus (Figure 4.7). The data collected for Research Question One establishes the basis for the obstacles for discipleship to take place in a faith community.

Research Question #2: *What were the existing patterns and practices for disciplining believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?*

The tools used for collecting data for this research question were semi-structured interviews correlated with the answer to Google survey question eight. This

was done to validate the answers received from two different sources to collaborate and compare the outcome and make every effort to have an authenticated result.

The semi-structured interviews (Int) were conducted with four participants who were part of the church from its inception and currently serve as elders of the church. The semi-structured interviews had open-ended questions and gave insight into the patterns and practices of disciplining believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata.

One of the interviewees, Int1, has been associated with the church for the past forty years and has seen three leadership transitions during his membership with the AGKB. Initially, the church gathering took place at Royd Street before relocating to the new campus at Park Street in 2015. According to Int1, in the initial years, the average Sunday attendance of the church ranged between 160 to 170 people. Those days the church received one or two newcomers every Sunday. According to him, two key factors played a significant role in the church's growth. Firstly, the youth group was the main reason for the newcomers. The youth group used to go out on Saturdays for literature distribution and actively invited individuals with whom they interacted. The youth group also invited their friends for youth service, and ultimately, they became part of the church. He related a memorable experience, stating, "I remember inviting a friend from a catholic background who was born into a catholic family but unfamiliar with the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Initially, I invited him to the youth group, later attended church service, and eventually, his entire family accepted Christ and became regular attendees to our church".

There was a similar response from Int2 stating:

My earliest memories of AG Kolkata involve attending church as a child to the Sunday school with my friends from our locality. Those days the church

offered pick-up services ferrying people of all age groups children, young people, and adults who were interested and willing to come to church. So, I happened to come with the other children from our locality to attend Sunday school. My friends invited me because drawn in by the promise of exciting gifts for whoever brought the most friends or people to church, from the pastor. Thereafter I got married and attended the church my husband used to attend. But I never enjoyed the service because their worship style was so different, basically very traditional. The service felt very limiting, lacking the emotional expression and contemporary songs I look forward to. So, I shared with my husband why don't we go and attend the service in AG Kolkata Bengali section. When we attended the service, my husband happened to like it, their worship was electrifying and vibrant. The message was very encouraging, and we started becoming regulars at the church. In 1971 we became official members of the church and now we are almost fifty-three years in this church.

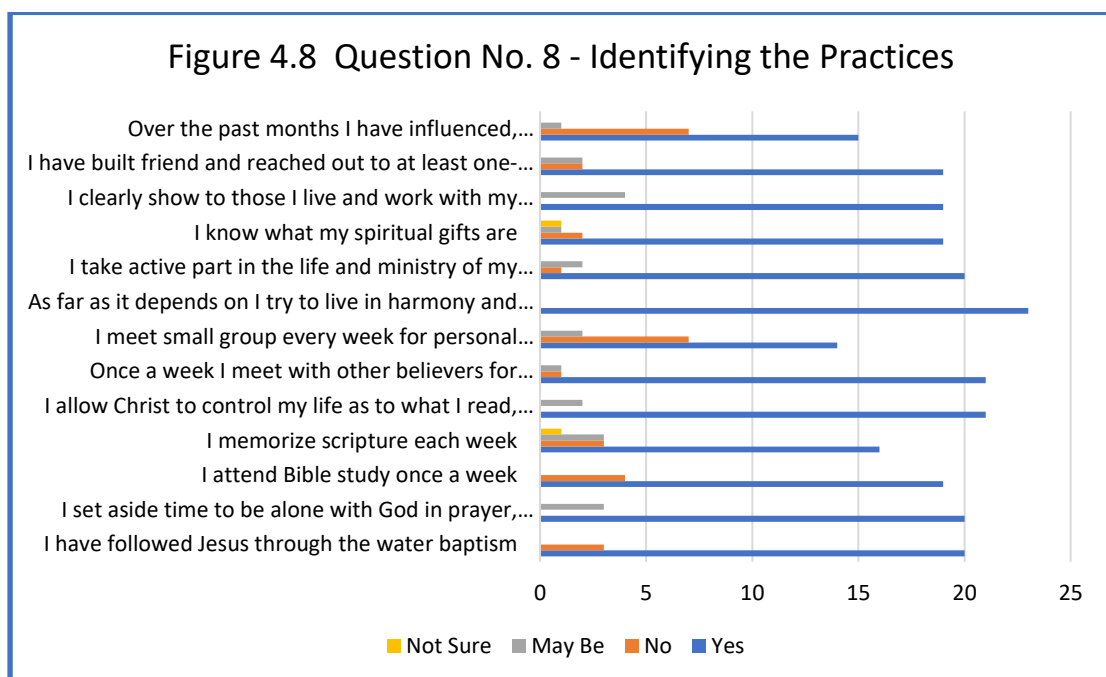
Similarly, Int4 shared:

My parents were members of this church from 1986. I came to church with my parents after I was born in 1988. They used to take me to Sunday school in my childhood and since then I have been part of this church. Those days we used to have a couple of departments in the church, such as youth, women's ministry, men's ministry etc. We used to have Sunday school for the whole church, from age 5 to adults. Sunday school age range was from 5 years to 12 years, after that, they were promoted to youth. So, I have gone through all the departments from childhood to being an adult. At present I serve as the elder of the church.

The purpose of asking the interviewee open-ended questions was to learn something about their prominent memory and personal experiences. Of significance here is the experience of the interviewee saying that they grew in their faith and are being disciplined through the ministry of this faith community. Most of the senior members of the AGKB mentioned and acknowledged that they were disciplined through the following ministry of the church:

- A. Sunday School
- B. Bible Study
- C. Youth Ministry
- D. Sunday Worship Service
- E. Mentoring

In addition, by asking the semi-structured questions to the interviewees, the online Google survey question eight was specifically asked to learn about discipleship environments, patterns, and practices that helped people grow as disciples. The following results were obtained from the Google online survey (Figure 4.8).



Most of the people were involved in the following practices that helped them grow spiritually:

Life Together in Unity and Love

All the participants agreed that they try to live in harmony and unity with other believers. One of the participants from the focus group commented:

I came from a Hindu family, and I did not know anyone from the church. I was told about the church by a person who came to buy old furniture. When I first came to the church almost ten years back, I did not feel out place because people were so welcoming, they came up to me and spoke to me and invited me back, they took my phone number and during the week they called up to know How I am doing and asked if I have any prayer request. They prayed with me over the phone. (CD)

Other participants mentioned, “Unity is what best describe us as a community or church; we have always helped each other in times of need and stood with each other.” Another stated, “in our existence as a church for last 55 years we never had a split in the church, whatever problem we may be having internally we always attended and solved it.”

Twenty-One participants agreed that once a week they meet with other believers for worship and allow Christ to control their lives. While twenty participants replied positively that they have followed the Lord in water baptism and set aside time to be alone with God.

Preparation

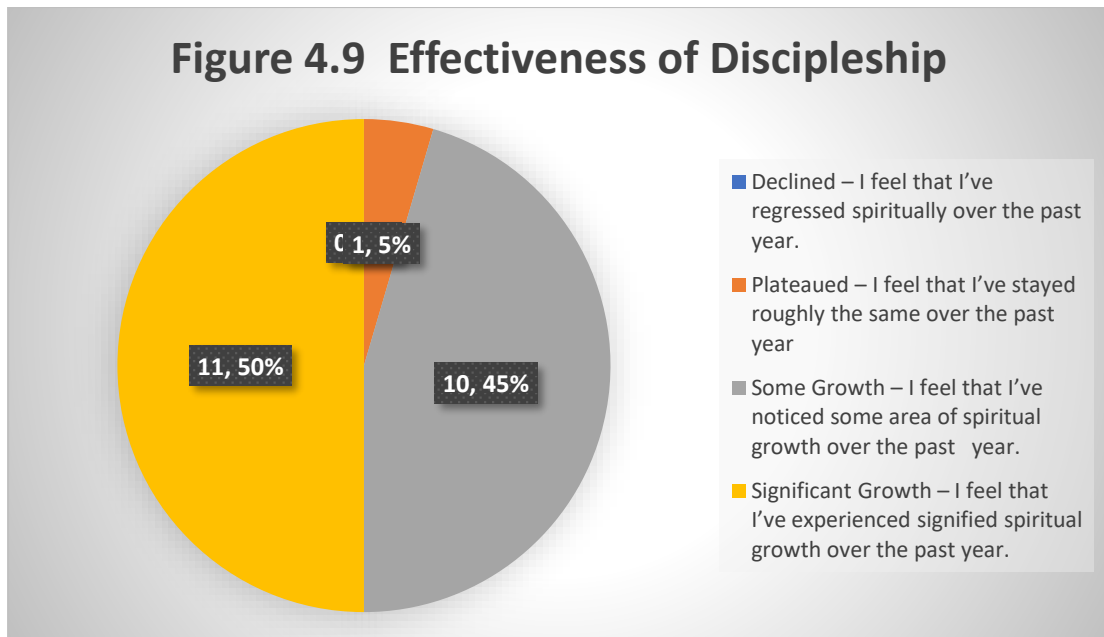
Many participants echoed the theme of preparation. Sixteen participants stated that they memorize Bible verses every week. Nineteen of the participants stated that they attend Bible study each week for personal growth. The theme of preparation also

echoed through the interviews. One of the interviews (Int4) stated, “I was disciplined through the Bible study we had every Wednesday.” Twenty participants responded that they set aside time for personal devotion and prayer every day.

Serving

Serving was another theme that surfaced in the data analysis. Nineteen Participants responded “yes” to the statements “I have built friends and reached out to at least one-non-Christian friend”, “I clearly show to those I live and work with my commitment to Christ through my words and deeds”, and “I know what my spiritual gifts are”. Twenty participants stated that they take an active part in the life and ministry of the church. The theme of serving surfaced multiple times in both the survey and focus groups. One of the participants from focus group one stated, “I joined the church eleven years back and I come from a Hindu family. What I like in this church is that people are willing to serve the Lord with their talents and abilities.”

The results revealed that 15 – 20 participants took part in most of the activities and practices of the church that helped them in shaping their lives as disciples of Jesus. Survey question number ten was designed to elicit feedback from the participants regarding the effectiveness of AGKB in shaping their lives as disciple of Jesus. The response received is presented in the diagram below:

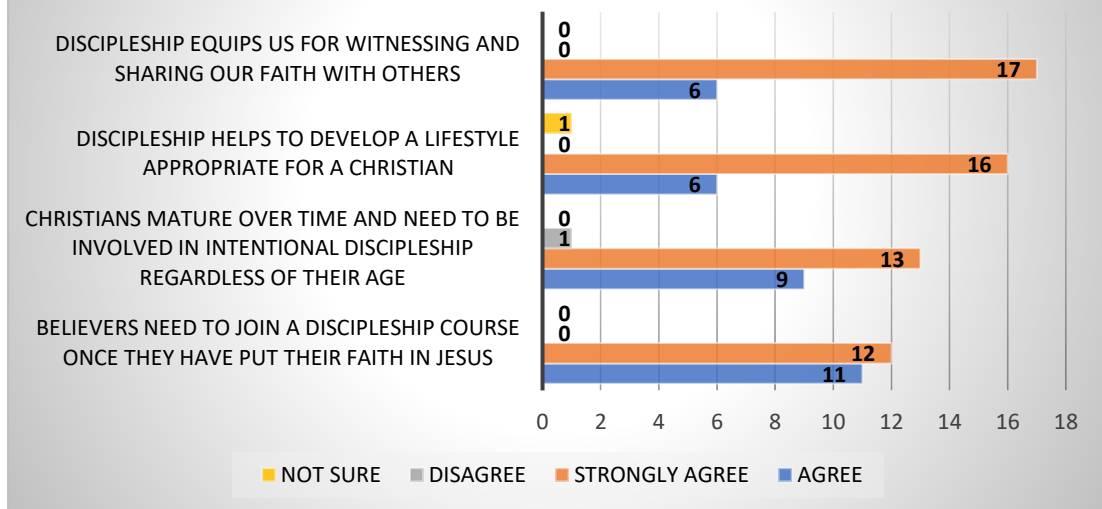


Eleven of the participants responded that they have had some significant growth in their spiritual life while the other ten participants remarked that they have had some growth in their spiritual life. While interestingly, only one participant responded negatively stating that there was no spiritual benefit.

Research Question #3: *What kind of discipleship model can we draw from the first letter to the Corinthians?*

The first epistle to Corinthians offers insights into various aspects of discipleship that can contribute to the formulation of a discipleship model. The third research question was designed to identify a discipleship model that will help the participants grow in their discipleship journey. Several questions were asked based on the researcher’s study of the literature review on Google survey, focus groups, and semi-structured interviews to get a more refined understanding of what model of discipleship could help the participant's spiritual growth. The Disciples Assessment Survey on the online Google survey question number seven asked the question, “How important is discipleship in a believer’s life?”.

Figure 4.10 The Importance of Discipleship in a Believer's Life



The largest percentage of the participants agreed that “Discipleship equips us for witnessing and sharing our faith with others”. The second highest percentage of respondents suggested that ‘Discipleship helps to develop a lifestyle appropriate for a Christian. Some of the participants viewed Christians as mature over time and needed to be involved in intentional discipleship. However, a significant number of the participants agreed that believers need to join discipleship courses once they have put their faith in Jesus. From the responses of the participants, it was found that all agreed to the fact that discipleship is an important part of Christian life. Based on the responses, it was important to formulate and understand what type of discipleship model would work for AGKB.

The key elements that make up a discipleship model were verbalized by the participants in the two focus groups. Particularly the focus group question no 11, “What are some of the possible means by which a discipleship program could become more effective in the church?”, was asked to the participants to understand the model of discipleship. The vocal responses of the participants for certain essentials helped us evaluate the elements that impacted a discipleship model.

The response includes the following:

In the first focus group, Participant 5 commented:

There was a time we used to have care groups which were unfortunately phased out a couple of years back due to various reasons. But I think the care group was very successful in disciplining people in the church. Where they could unburden and learn together to become spiritually mature.

Participant 7 stated:

Disciplining through care group should be systematic and not at the whims of the care group leaders. So, we can all grow together, one of the problems previously was that every care group followed their curriculum and as a result, there was no uniformity. Discipleship should be systematic. It should be based on the foundation of scripture and prayer.

Participant 8 from focus group 1, remarked:

Discipleship should be more relational in nature for people to feel comfortable and not only hardcore theological teaching but there should be more interaction among the participants. It should be about living life together, doing life together, building a life together.

Participant 4 mentioned, “I would say a discipleship program that becomes effective has a holistic approach...helping us to mature biblically, there is mentoring involved and help us to reproduce.” Additionally, Participant 8 pointed out, “Discipleship model should help us to mature, unlike the Corinthian church where we read about the members of the Corinthian church were divided based on varieties of issues.”

In the second focus group, Participant 5 commented, “I feel communication helps in building discipleship. When we can communicate with each other freely and

respectfully I think that we can grow together, but if there is a barrier in communication then there is the disintegration of what we are trying to achieve.” And Participant 3 remarked, “Connecting is important in discipleship, if we are not connected, we will not be able to communicate openly or freely.”

The focus group question number 12,” What can each one of us do to make an effective discipleship program?” was asked to ascertain their engagement toward help in building a Christ-centered discipleship program.

From the second focus group, Participant 3 remarked: “We should have the desire to grow spiritually and also encourage others within the church to take out time to join the discipleship courses offered in the church.” Participant 2 stated, “We need to be involved and share the pros and cons of our discipleship in order to develop a better and holistic discipleship program. We should continually upgrade the program with change in time.”

Based on the comprehensive analysis of data through the Google survey form, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews, a recurring theme emerges, suggesting a comprehensive model for nurturing believers. This model centers on maturing individuals through the guidance of scripture, mentoring them to transition into disciple-makers, modeling the qualities of a mentor, and fostering intentional and supportive relationships within the community.

Summary of Major Findings

Several major findings became clear from the data analysis of all three research instruments. The major findings are listed below:

1. Unwavering devotion to Christ is the basis for Discipleship.
2. Discipleship is experienced through the adaptation of strategies that prioritize effective time management and fostering connections.

3. The Power of Mentorship—A close Mentee-mentor relationship fosters a robust foundation toward the formation of discipleship development.
4. A Structured and methodical approach to discipleship is a valuable framework for nurturing spiritual growth and discipleship.
5. Ambiance fosters communicative discipleship.
6. Being intentional and desirable is essential for spiritual growth and development.

CHAPTER 5

LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

Overview of the Chapter

This chapter addresses the major findings gained from the research project. This project's purpose arose from the noticeable absence of discussion regarding paradigms of discipleship or strategies for disciplining believers.

This chapter summarizes the findings of the project's learning report. It presents six main discoveries drawn from personal observations, the literature review, and theological and biblical insights. These findings are then applied to understand their implications and impact on the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church.

The chapter also discusses the challenges faced during the project, proposes changes for programs, suggests improvements for instrumentation, and addresses concerns about generalizing the project's results. A key aspect is the recommendation for future research based on the project's outcomes.

Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflection on how the project has personally influenced the researcher and how it will shape their future ministry. Overall, the research aims to establish a framework for developing a model that enables people and believers to engage more faithfully and effectively in the practice of discipleship.

Major Findings

First Finding: Unwavering devotion to Christ is the basis for Discipleship.

Remaining steadfastly committed to something is not always easy, but the journey of unwavering dedication is truly valuable and worthwhile. Unwavering devotion is the force that drives us in our spiritual life and transforms us. It requires dedication, patience, and resilience to cultivate that unwavering devotion.

I have observed, in the Bengali section of The Assembly of God church Kolkata, congregants come from diverse social backgrounds and varying levels of faith toward Christ. The church was unable to make a difference in its discipleship approaches and impact the lives of people attending service over the years due to the reasons outlined below:

Firstly, many members are passive and uninvolved, leaving the responsibility of the church's growth primarily to the pastor's shoulder. Since its inception fifty-five years ago, the congregation has held its pastor in high regard, sometimes even idolizing them for the pastor's involvement in their life and their family life. Occasionally, certain members become emotionally and relationally attached to the past leader, leading them to disengage and feel less connected to the present pastor.

Secondly, congregants have been known to compare different pastoral leadership styles, sometimes idolizing them in the process. It was observed that many congregants confess to being believers in Christ but turn out to be very passive and disengaged from the community life of the church. They have never participated in any discipleship programs or any church-related activities. Their attendance is limited to special occasions like Christmas, Good Friday, and Easter.

Thirdly, their lack of commitment toward discipleship. Most of them have expressed their lack of time to commit to discipleship. It was evident from the Google survey form and focus group discussion that lack of time was one of the reasons for the believers not to commit themselves to discipleship. This was very evident from the focus group responses received from the participants. The top three hindrances to discipleship that surfaced from the focus group discussion were "lack of time", "lack of commitment", and "immaturity". I have observed that the female attendees were more in attendance in Sunday service than men, which was evident from the

Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire which indicated that female participants were more regular attendees to Sunday church service than men.

In my literature review, the Epistle to the First Corinthians makes a clear call to disown hero worship and have ultimate devotion to Christ. In the Corinthian church, believers fell into the trap of idolizing their leaders, unknowingly slipping into hero worship. Consequently, their loyalty to these leaders exceeds their loyalty to Christ. Members began idolizing visiting preachers, drawn to their eloquent speeches and appealing presentations. They even picked favorites among these speakers, losing sight of their ultimate devotion to Christ. The Corinthians believers' pride in their favorite preacher led them down the path of idolization, above the appropriate level of admiration and respect. The Apostle Paul develops this idea in several different ways in the first four chapters of the epistle to deal with this root problem of pride that led them to idolize their favorites. At the beginning of 1 Corinthians 1, Paul reminds the Corinthians believers that they were chosen by God (v.2) and had received grace and spiritual gifts in Christ Jesus (v 4-7). Despite having received grace, they were experiencing conflicts among themselves and were placing too much importance on human leaders and worldly wisdom instead of focusing their commitment to God.

They took great pride in who baptized them rather than understanding that baptism was just a means rather end. John B. PolHill in an article named, "1 Corinthians: A Church Divided" remarks, "Paul reminded them that what counts is not the baptizer but baptism into the body of Christ, not the rite but the gospel that leads to the baptismal waters" (10).

Moreover, in my interaction with the people through Google forms, focus groups, and interviews, I found that the issue of "unity among believers" emerged as a key topic. It became evident that maintaining unity is crucial for fostering a healthy

church environment and for effectively guiding and disciplining individuals within the community of faith.

In addition, this project's biblical and theological framework pointed to an emphasis on the unwavering commitment to the Lordship of Christ. It was pointed out and emphasized that the church is a community where a disciple grows into a mature believer. The Corinthians believers acted like children, arguing over their favorite leader instead of focusing on their spiritual development. In 1 Corinthians 3;1- 3, Paul calls them 'infants in Christ' and indicates that they are of worldly concern. This wavering and unsteady behavior of the Corinthians believers hindered them from growing in their spiritual lives.

The biblical example needs to be the most important precedent for believers as disciples of Christ to maintain that unity and unwavering faith in Christ. The finding from the epistle to First Corinthians will help the Assembly of God church in Kolkata to craft a discipleship approach that will:

Firstly, be laser-focused on the Lordship of Christ. It will be the effort to help the believers to make Jesus the central point of their life's journey. Paul's counsel to the Philippians church serves as a gentle reminder to stay spiritually focused:

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3.12-14)

In the middle of verse 13, apostle Paul writes, "But one thing I do", emphasizing his focus on the things ahead and leaving the past behind.

Secondly, challenge the believers to move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity through regular involvement and engagement in church ministries. Just as infants start with milk before moving to solid food, so also believers should move from the basics of faith to a deeper understanding of scripture. This involves studying scripture and seeking to understand its deeper truths. This will be made possible through regular Bible study and spiritual growth classes.

Thirdly, helping the believers to grow in unity and mutual respect within the faith community. The Apostle Paul suggests that the Corinthian believers should focus on Christ rather than human leaders and wisdom. He urges believers to prioritize love for one another above all else, seeking to build up one another rather than tearing each other down (1 Cor. 8:1; 13:1-13).

Therefore, to be a disciple of Jesus is to be truly devoted to Christ and his words. It is a life-long process and a commitment that is necessary for all believers, striving to become Christlike in word and action.

Second Finding: Discipleship is experienced through the adaptation of strategies that prioritize effective time management and fostering connections.

For many years, the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church has linked discipleship with attending Sunday school and Bible study. However, while attending church activities is important, it is crucial to remember that it does not equate to true discipleship. Firstly, I have observed for the last couple of years that I have been a pastor to this congregation, that most of the people who attend church on Sunday morning come to add to the numbers and slip out of the pew as soon the service comes to an end and remain unrecognizable to others or do not take part in fellowship with other members. They are more comfortable this way as they could remain anonymous but could satisfy their feelings of being Christian. Though attending

Sunday service and with this low level of commitment and exposure to God's word and fellowship may slightly impact their life it is not the true characteristic of a true follower and disciple of Christ. Secondly, I have observed that some of the families in the past have come to accept the Christian faith for the benefits that were offered by the church. Though they have accepted the Christian faith their heart was not offered to Christ. As a result, what has happened is that their children did not see the genuineness of their faith and commitment toward Jesus. They equally turned out to be of shallow faith and commitment. This cycle continued within the community until new seekers were added and turned into faithful believers in Jesus without any demands for social benefits. As a result, true and genuine discipleship was not experienced among the believers for decades.

Thirdly, Bible study and Sunday school were used to impart Bible knowledge. The believers were well versed with the Bible and Bible backgrounds but unfortunately, they failed to apply its teachings to their daily lives. It is only possible to experience discipleship when we apply the truth of scripture to our daily lives.

Discipleship needs to be experienced personally as we continue to grow in our walk with Jesus without any expectation of favored returns. To experience discipleship in the modern day where people are time-bound is a challenging process. A survey conducted by Carey Nieuwhof in an article, "10 Reasons Church Attendance is Declining (even for committed Christians)", states that reasons behind church attendance decline are varied and multi-layered, but few main culprits include shifting cultural values, busier schedules, generational changes, lack of engagement, and scandal-plagued institutions". Lack of time was also a dominating factor in the Google survey conducted with the participants. Nearly, 21.73% of the participants viewed "lack of time" as a major reason for the lack of discipleship in the community.

Discipleship can be experienced when we prioritize time and connect with other believers.

This was evident in the Discipleship Assessment questionnaire that was administered through the Google survey forms, focus groups, and the interview conducted. All the interviewees mentioned the impact of Bible study and Sunday school in their personal lives. But this has not transpired into their daily experience; it was confined to gaining knowledge about the scripture and the life of Jesus. When gaining knowledge from the scripture is transformed into daily living, discipleship is experienced in a person's life. The participants in the Google survey forms have articulated that they have identified the practices that have helped them to experience some sort of discipleship (Figure 4.8). Most of them outlined the practices that helped them—"set aside time to be alone with god and prayer"; "attend weekly Bible study", "allow Christ to control their lives", and "actively involved in ministry".

In the literature review, the believers in Corinth—"the household of Chloe"—reach out to the Apostle Paul, seeking his intervention and guidance to address matters within their church community. While instructing the believers at Corinth on matters concerning division, worldly wealth, and status, Paul mentions that the church had followed the Corinthian culture which polluted them and urged them to "follow him". Once again, Paul sets an example for the believers at Corinth while he instructs them about food offered to idols stating, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). In 1 Corinthians, Paul outlines various ways in which discipleship may be experienced: by following the example of Christ (11:1); by focusing on personal maturity (3:1-3, 13:11), and living out spiritual gifts (12:4-11).

There is a similarity between Kolkata and Corinth. Kolkata is a metropolitan city; busyness rules and drives the lives of people. It is known for its fast-paced

lifestyle. The city is a hub for education and culture, commerce, and economic growth. Likewise, during the time of Paul Corinth was a metropolitan city with its large metropolis, filled with people from different backgrounds. It was famous for the idol worship of different gods and goddesses. Corinth was famous for the worship of Apollo and Aphrodite just as Kolkata is well known for the worship of Durga puja (worship of goddesses Durga). The congregation at Corinth consisted of mixed cultures: Jews and Gentiles. Equally, the congregation of the Assembly of God church Bengali section is made up of people from different walks of life as well as people born into Christian families to people from another religious background who accepted Jesus and are part of the faith community.

Discipleship is best experienced when we prioritize our time and socially connect with people. Connecting with other believers helps us in our walk with the Lord. When we share our struggles, challenges, and victories we come to know that we are not the only ones who are going through the motions. We learn that there are others too who have been or are on the same boat as we are. Connecting helps us to live life together. It sets a model for us to follow when we hear from others about their victories.

Francis Chan and Mark Beuving in their book *Multiply – Disciples Making Disciple* remark, “But making disciples is far more than a program. It is the mission of our lives. It defines us. A disciple is a disciple maker” (31). Discipleship is not only faithfully learning and following but also becoming a model for others to imitate. Believers become disciples to disciple others.

When the believers of the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata personally experience discipleship, they will deepen their faith and develop unwavering trust in Christ. This will empower them to passionately reach out to

others and share the good news of Jesus. As they experience discipleship, they'll support one another in their journey to become more like Christ.

Third Finding: The Power of Mentorship - A close Mentee-mentor relationship fosters a robust foundation toward the formation of discipleship development.

Mentoring plays an important role in discipleship. Mentoring from a Christian perspective is much greater than teaching life skills. Mentoring discipleship carries greater responsibilities because its impact lasts for eternity. Jesus is the model of a mentor: he chose his disciples, spent time with them, taught as they journeyed together and illustrated his teaching through very ordinary and simple things around them.

The literature reviewed in this project touched on mentorship. Apostle Paul shared a relationship with the churches he founded and mentored their believers to leadership positions. Similarly, Paul played the role of a mentor to the Corinthians. The church that he founded (Acts 18:1-17) had already developed deep divisions among its members, a situation that required immediate action. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul addresses several issues related to both life and doctrine, divisions and quarrels, marriage and sexual immorality, freedom in Christ, order in worship, the proper use of spiritual gifts, the significance of the Lord's supper, and the resurrection. While he addresses these issues to the Corinthians, Paul mentors them using his personal experiences and struggles, other times referring them back to the Torah. Paul was able to speak to them because there was a relationship between him and the Corinthian church. Regi Campbell, the author of *Mentor like Jesus*, writes, "Traditionally, the mentoring relationship is almost always initiated by the mentoree. He has something he wants...a felt need...for guidance, wisdom, advice, or help" (120). The House of Chloe approaches Paul who had been in Ephesus on his third

missionary journey when he received a disturbing report of division and quarreling within the Corinthian church.

The biblical and theological observations for this project also support the concept of mentoring. It is worth reminding how Bill Hull candidly speaks about the crisis of discipleship, “The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product” (21). The question is what kind of disciples are we producing? We can only produce better disciples when we mentor them. Mentoring is not so much about learning to do something, but it is about showing someone how to be something (Campbell 72).

Mentoring happens when there’s a connection where people can talk openly to each other. Mentoring happens as a natural outgrowth of that relationship. A close mentee-mentor relationship fosters a robust foundation for the formation of discipleship development. In one sense Paul was mentored by Barnabas; Barnabas brought Paul to the rest of the apostles (Acts 9:27-31) and shared how he has seen the Lord, how the Lord had spoken to him, and he boldly preached at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Barnabas later made room for Paul to lead the way. Years later Paul poured his life into Timothy (1 Tim. 4:5-6) and mentored him to do the work of God. Though Timothy’s ministry would not be exactly like Paul’s, he learned from his mentor. Paul’s mentorship with Timothy involved the personal relationship that developed between them. Paul’s relationship with Timothy is consistently described as one of a father-son. One of Paul’s primary references for his father-son relationship is in 1 Corinthians 4:17. There he tells the congregation, “**F**or this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church” (NIV). Paul recognized the importance of equipping a successor to carry on the gospel message after his life and ministry were over.

At times communication can hinder mentoring and discipleship formation. When we mentor someone into a disciple, we pass on the living truth that we have experienced. Apostle Paul communicated the same to Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim. 2:2, NIV).

The interviews with the elders certainly confirmed this reality, that most of the discipleship for the church took place through the pastor visiting and spending time with the family. One of the focus group participants confirmed the importance of communication to mentor disciples: “I feel communication helps in building discipleship. When we can communicate with each other freely and respectfully I think that we can grow together, but if there is a barrier in communication then there is the disintegration of what we are trying to achieve.”

Hence, mentorship plays a vital role in nurturing disciples within the faith community, as disciples mentored can later become a mentor to disciple others. This approach would help believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata to become spiritual guides and invest their lives in younger believers within the congregation. It would also help to change the mindset that only the pastor is for mentoring and growing the church.

Fourth Finding: A Structured and methodical approach to discipleship is a valuable framework for nurturing spiritual growth and discipleship.

Bill Hull in his book *Jesus Christ, Disciple Maker* remarks, “We are constantly on a stretch if not on a strain, to devise new methods, new plans, new organizations to advance the Church and secure enlargement and efficiency for the Gospel” (35). We are constantly working on creating new methods to make discipleship available to everyone. Doing what Jesus did is the answer to our question

and the solution to our problem of disciple-making. Not only did Jesus have disciples but so did the Pharisees and the religious teachers of those days. The world of the disciples was very different because they were young men who were cause-oriented and followed who inspired them. If they were good, they would be accepted into the rabbinical school under a rabbi, and if not so they would return to their vocation of shepherd, fisherman, etc. Hull states, “The rabbinical tradition was very strict. Students had very little freedom, and when they graduated, they would go on to a career as teachers. Many started their academies or bands of followers. The followers were bound to their teacher’s interpretation of Scripture for life and were expected to multiply the traditions” (13-14). They had a methodical approach to learning scripture under an experienced teacher.

The world of the disciples who were with Jesus was very different from the disciples of their times. As Keener observes, “making disciples was the sort of thing rabbis would do, but Jesus’ followers are to make disciples for Jesus, not for themselves” (125).

Disciples are well-groomed and mature when they are trained methodically. In the gospel, we come across the method Jesus applied to turn his untrained disciples into mature disciples. Jesus looked for his disciples because men were his methods (Luke 6:13). He spent time with them and used everyday opportunities to train and minister to others. Jesus imparted and delegated the responsibility to preach the gospel to the end of the earth to his disciples (Matt. 28:19-20). The Apostle Paul adopted the same goal and methodology that Jesus modeled and implemented. Paul’s version of the great commission can be understood in his statement to the Colossians, “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end, I

strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:28-29). Following Jesus’ method, Paul invested in individuals to make disciples. Paul’s investment could be seen in his relationship with Timothy, urging him to pass on the truth to other faithful disciples, who will be able to teach others as well (2 Tim. 2:2).

In the literature review, I have come across a pattern or a method that the apostle Paul is best known for teaching and building strong relationships. However, in the Corinthian church, some may not have had a strong relationship with Paul, but he had a great impact and influence on the church. Paul’s method in interacting with the Corinthian church was strong teaching and a lifestyle devoted to Christ. In his letter to the Corinthian church, he dealt with different issues in varied ways through his teachings and personal experiences and urged the Corinthian believers to imitate him as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). In his book *Transforming Discipleship*, Greg Ogden observes twenty percent of the people are actively engaged in serving, while the remaining eighty percent are the recipient of that service. He indicates the reason for such less engagement of people is that “churches do not have the methods in place to engage these (people) who could be drawn in” (Ogden 25).

The participants from the focus group confirm the systematic and methodical approach to discipleship, one of the participants stated, “discipling through care group should be systematic and not at the whims of the care group leaders. So, we can all grow together, one of the problems previously was that every care group followed their curriculum and as a result, there was no uniformity. Discipleship should be systematic. It should be based on the foundation of scripture and prayer.” Discipleship best happens when it is done and performed in a systematic and organized manner for the benefit of the faith community. A Structured and methodical approach to discipleship is a valuable framework for nurturing spiritual growth and discipleship.

In his book *John Wesley's Teachings* Thomas C. Oden remarks about the systematic approach John Wesley took toward the formation of Christian life as a disciple. He states, "But few undertook to nurture actual communities in which the ethical life could be systematically cultivated and practiced" (Oden 28).

Therefore, the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata should adopt a methodical approach to discipleship. Instead of teaching randomly from different passages of the Bible, they should focus on one book or epistle at a time, studying it systematically, looking at the themes, and bringing out practical lessons that can deepen the faith of the believers and apply the principles learned to experience a deeper level of discipleship. This way we can grow together in our faith in a structured and meaningful way. This approach could be put into practice through the church's care groups, nurturing stronger connections and unity among members. It will help the church grow together as a cohesive body, sharing in spiritual growth.

Fifth Finding: Ambiance Fosters Communicative Discipleship.

Discipleship is the process in which believers help one another to become better followers of Christ. Ambiance plays a vital role in the formation of a disciple. Jesus spent time with his disciples under different circumstances, sharing moments of teaching and companionship. Small groups were Jesus' method for discipleship training. Though he taught and preached to the masses, he spent private time with the disciples explaining the inner meanings of his parables. Jesus devoted himself primarily to the task of developing these selected men called apostles. His goal was to equip this small group of disciples to continue the work of preaching and making disciples after he had returned to the Father.

By mentioning ambiance, I'm referring to a setting where relationships are nurtured, and friendships are extended. It is an environment where people feel

welcomed without fear of judgment and receive acceptance. Until this atmosphere is created experiencing true discipleship can be challenging. In their book, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community*, Tim Chester and Steve Timmis argue, “We need a culture of daily and mutual discipleship. Structures and programs cannot create it. It requires the sharing of lives with the gospel intentionality” (119).

During an interview, Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger were asked to shed some light on the connection between relationships and spiritual growth and how research has supported this argument. They remarked:

people who are involved in a spiritual community exhibit a much higher commitment to practicing spiritual disciplines than those who are not. A person actively involved in a group or spiritual community is 2.5 times more likely to read the bible verses than someone who isn't, and more than 4 times more likely to study scripture than someone who is not in a group. (Stetzer and Geiger)

It's worth mentioning again that in their book, *Missional Discipleship: Partners in God's Redemptive Mission*, Mark A. Maddix and Jay Richard Akkerman stress the importance of missional discipleship. They mention the different approaches to discipleships over the decades which may include aspects of catechesis, spiritual formation, Christian nurturing, and mentoring but underline the fact that it also includes compassionate service and missional engagement. They interpret the role of a missional disciple “as someone who is engaged in God's mission in the world. Missional disciples are on a journey, becoming more like Christ, investing their lives in others, and embodying lives of love for others. This view puts the church in a new light and sparks a movement dedicated to engaging every context,

particularly local cultures, with a mission-shaped heart. A missional disciple is a follower of the life and teachings of Jesus and is committed to being a witness” (Akkerman and Maddix 16). Discipleship formation thrives best in small groups, where the deepest relational needs are met, and faith is put into action. They are transformed into missional disciples.

One of the participants from the focus group mentioned the importance of care groups or disciplining through small groups in these words, “There was a time we used to have care groups which were unfortunately phased out a couple of years back due to various reasons. But I think the care group was very successful in disciplining people in the church. Where they could unburden and learn together to become spiritually mature”. I must confess that the work of the discipleship moved into action is best understood in the words of Dr. Steven Seamands, “Through faith in Christ through baptism into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (Matthew 28:19), we enter into the life of the Trinity and are graciously included as partners” (12). He further elucidates that “the ministry into which we have entered is the ministry of Jesus Christ, the Son to the Father through the Holy Spirit, for the sake of the church and the world” (12).

In my literature review, the concept of “household” was featured in the Epistle to Corinthians. A household is all the members of the family, including servants and slaves. When believers gathered, it was not always within the confines of a formal place of worship. At times they met in people’s houses. In the Epistle to the Corinthians, we encounter references to such gatherings, notably the “household of Chloe” (1 Cor. 1:11) and the “household of Stephanas” (1 Cor. 16:15). These households consisted of believers who not only supported the work of the gospel with their finance but opened their homes for Church gatherings. It was a place where

followers of Jesus worshiped together, received instructions for godly living, and broke bread together. It was a small community of believers where disciples were formed. Nowadays, we might refer to these as life groups, care groups, etc.

The early church met at people's houses to have fellowship and found it as the best avenue for growth, today it may not be the same. The Bible emphasizes the role of the household in the community of faith. Scripture emphasizes the role of community in the formation of a disciple. Small Groups are sub-communities within a community that can become a powerful instrument in the formation of a disciple.

Therefore, discipleship in small groups plays a vital role in the formation of a disciple. As Harrington and Absalom write, "We are reminded that we don't do discipleship flying solo—we will always be connected to other people so that we can both imitate and be imitated as we go through life, pointing people to maturity in Christ" (28). In an article entitled "Discipleship in Community", the author Joshua P. Smith argues that discipleship is best done in the ambiance of a community. He writes, "Discipleship is an activity that does not rest in the hands of a select few leaders, but one which depends upon the very life and daily interaction of the Christian community, where each of its members commits themselves to the Lord and to each other with gospel intentionality." On a very similar line of thought Tod E. Bolsinger comments, "Real godly change- real sanctification – requires a people to live together in covenantal relationships" (22).

During the focus group discussions and the interviews, the impact of the care group was shared by one of the participants. He stated "There was a time we used to have care groups which were unfortunately phased out a couple of years back due to various reasons. But I think the care group was very successful in disciplining people

in the church. Where they could unburden and learn together to become spiritually mature”

A small group environment is a place where a person feels safe and connected as they pursue to grow together to become an effective disciple-maker.

Based on the history of the Bengali section, it's evident that small groups have proven to be a valuable avenue for fostering discipleship. Although it was discontinued at some point, there's now a recognized need to reintroduce them. This would provide believers with the opportunity to gather in smaller settings, where they can share their lives and witness transformative experiences together.

Sixth Finding: Being intentional and desirable is essential for spiritual growth and development.

Jesus was an intentional disciple-maker. For three years he invested himself in the lives of the twelve disciples he chose, who would eventually take up the work he had begun. He gave them a call, a command, and a commission. The invitation that Jesus extended to his first disciples continues to be the same for us. It was an invitation to intentional discipleship characterized by developing a life of being with him, shaped by him, and ultimately sent on a mission for him. Being an intentional disciple means actively and purposefully following the teachings and examples of Jesus. It involves making a conscious effort to live out Christ in a day-to-day life. It is not only the responsibility of the church of the church to proactively help the believers to grow in Christ-like maturity by modeling and teaching humble obedience to what God has commanded but it is also the responsibility of every believer to be intentional in becoming Christ-like.

I have observed that most of the believers have not committed themselves to intentional discipleship in the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali section.

Believers have accepted Christ as their savior and stopped there and have not taken the pain to walk with him and to abide in him to grow into mature believers.

The survey and the focus group confirm the importance of intentionality of a disciple. One of the participants of the focus group stated:

I don't believe it solely hinges on the time constraints or the conduct of elders or leaders.... Instead, I think it revolves around the deliberate practice of discipleship. Discipleship should be intentional in nature; it should be practiced in daily life. What I mean is, if we aren't intentional about being disciples, we won't prioritize it or dedicate the necessary time and commitment to foster growth.

God invites us not only to follow him but to focus on what he wants us to become. Jesus' invitation to his first disciple Andrew was "Come and you will see" (John 1:39). Later he told Philip, "Follow me" (John 1:43). In the gospel of Luke, we read Jesus challenged his disciples to take up their cross daily and follow him (Luke 9:23). These were words of command to his disciples to pursue him. The disciples were intentional about pursuing him and his purpose to fulfill their destiny.

In my research, intentional discipleship was highlighted through the biblical foundation. I highlighted how Jesus demonstrated intentionality in guiding his disciples. For instance, in the gospel of Matthew, the disciples made a conscious decision to accept the invitation of Jesus to follow him by leaving their profession. Similarly, in the gospel of Mark, the disciples deliberately chose to renounce their former life and take up the cross (Mark 8:34-35). In Luke, they embarked on their journey with a clear sense of purpose, and in the gospel of John, they were determined to fulfill the mission entrusted to them by their master. These examples illustrate how

intentional choice played a vital role in the disciples' commitment to their spiritual journey.

In his article, "Intentional Holistic Disciple-making", Rev. Canon Mark Oxbrow defines intentional discipleship as:

Intentional discipleship is the process whereby every day, moment by moment, we seek to live a 'Jesus-shaped life' that speaks, often without words, to those around us of the holiness, love, and grace of God. For this discipleship to be **holistic** requires that every aspect of our lives is 'Jesus-shaped', not just our church life and our personal devotions but also our work life, our life in the community, how we choose to spend our leisure time, and the choices we make about friendships, money, the care of creation – the whole of life. Disciples of Jesus are far more likely to make disciples if the quality of their lives speaks as loudly about God as their words.

Intentional disciples structured their lives to prioritize discipleship and strive toward spiritual maturity. They deliberately cultivate spiritual habits in their daily lives to facilitate growth and deepen their faith. In the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church Kolkata, the focus would be on promoting intentional discipleship and disciple-maker through preaching and teaching. This approach would familiarize believers with the idea of being intentional about their faith journey, shaping their actions and decisions around the principles of discipleship.

Ministry Implications of the Findings

The Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali section will utilize this project findings to critically evaluate and conduct a thorough assessment of its current discipleship programs and activities. The aim is to identify areas of improvement to enhance the discipleship experience for believers and promote spiritual growth.

Additionally, the project outcome will be shared with the participants to raise awareness about the importance of discipleship within the faith community and to encourage the believer to actively engage in disciple-making efforts.

Furthermore, the project will be circulated among the eight language sections of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata to facilitate the identification of common experiences and the adoption of necessary steps and changes to enhance believers' discipleship experiences.

Based on the above six findings in the light of the project, there are four key implications that would impact the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata, these findings will ultimately help the believers in four areas:

a. Maturity

The project's findings will help the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata to formulate and develop a discipleship program that will help the believer toward spiritual maturity. Christian maturity is the ever-present goal for a believer in Christ. Discipleship is all about embodying the entirety of Christ's character in our lives. Spiritual maturity is not instantaneous or final, that is the reason the writer of the Epistle to Hebrews writes in 6:1, "Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity...". In other words, the writer of Hebrews makes a statement that we should keep progressing toward maturity. Paul's words in Colossians 1:28-29 are a call to every believer toward that maturity. John Stott in his sermon entitled "A Call to Christian Maturity" makes mention of what it means to be mature in Christ. He states that Christian maturity means to be united in Christ, as the vine is in the branches and the limbs are in the body. To be in Christ is to be organically united with Christ and have a mature relationship with Christ. This would be the endeavor of the Bengali section

of the Assembly of God to present its each member as mature believers before Christ.

b. Mentoring

The outcomes of the project will aid the Bengali section in mentoring its members to embody the character of Christ. It will also help mentor the faith community, aiming to pair older believers with new or younger ones, guiding them toward achieving their spiritual maturity. This will help the believers in assisting others to grow in Christ-likeness by teaching them how to apply scriptural truth daily and in practical ways. Mentoring will help the members to sharpen their faith and grow alongside their mentees. As the book of Proverbs 27:17 says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another”. Chelsea Kight in her article entitled “What is Christian Mentoring, and How Do I do it?” states, “God uses the mentoring relationship to strengthen the faith of everyone involved.” She further adds, “Once mentoring becomes a regular part of your life, your own walk with God will become more dynamic and exciting. Why? Because this is part of God’s plan for how you grow” (Kight). Thomas Oden highlights John Wesley’s contribution as a coach or mentor who emphasized personal accountability in a systematic manner (Oden 28).

Therefore, the Bengali section will promote mentoring among its members because not only the person being mentored grow in their faith but the person doing the mentoring deepens their spiritual journey.

c. Modeling – Setting an Example

The outcome of this project will help the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church to set an example of discipleship for others within the faith community. As it is observed in the survey and focus group discussion, many of the believers were unable to commit to discipleship due to lack of time, lack of commitment, and

immaturity. This project will be an eye-opener for the leadership and as well as for the believers to adopt changes to become an ideal model for discipleship by committing themselves to discipleship through regular spiritual practices. Discipleship is a continuous process shaping and modeling our lives after Jesus. As Thomson Marjorie emphasizes the continuation of this spiritual journey of modeling our lives after Jesus in these words:

God's Spirit is continually challenging, changing, and maturing us. Although we may be able to point to a single and decisive conversion experience, remaining faithful involves a journey of continual conversion. It can never be said in our lifetime that we have "arrived". The spiritual life invites a process of transformation in the life of a believer. It is a process of growing in gratitude, trust, obedience, humility, compassion, service, and joy. As we deepen our relationship with God, we begin to choose God's ways and purposes as our own. It should be clear that Christian spirituality begins with God, depends on God, and ends in God (8).

Modeling our lives after Jesus is contagious when new believers or believers who are passive in their spiritual journey in the Bengali section witness the vibrancy of our faith and the transformation of an individual into the image of Christ. They too will be motivated to experience the same transformation.

d. Meaningful Relationship – Building a Community of Faith

This project will help the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Kolkata to build meaningful relationships among its members keeping in mind the bond of Christian love and mutual respect. It was evident from the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire and the focus group discussions that there exists a spirit of competitiveness among the members. As it was discussed previously Christian life is

not only vertical but horizontal as well. As believers in Christ, we are called into a community life, living in love and harmony with each other. The findings of this project will help the church to build an ambiance of acceptance and forgiveness. In his book *Desiring the Kingdom* James K.A. Smith rightly points out that, “God’s design for human flourishing cannot be satisfied in isolation. As dependent, social creatures, we are created for the community” (201). Therefore, the Bengali section would endeavor to build a community of faith through the reintroduction of the care group where disciples are formed through prayer, genuine relationship, accountability, and care.

Overall, this project has given us insight into the challenges facing the discipleship in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata. By implementing the 4C strategy—commitment, communication, connectedness, and community—I believe we can achieve our goal of guiding individuals towards maturity in their faith. Through mentoring, modeling, and fostering meaningful relationships within our faith community, we hope to see positive outcomes in the discipleship journey.

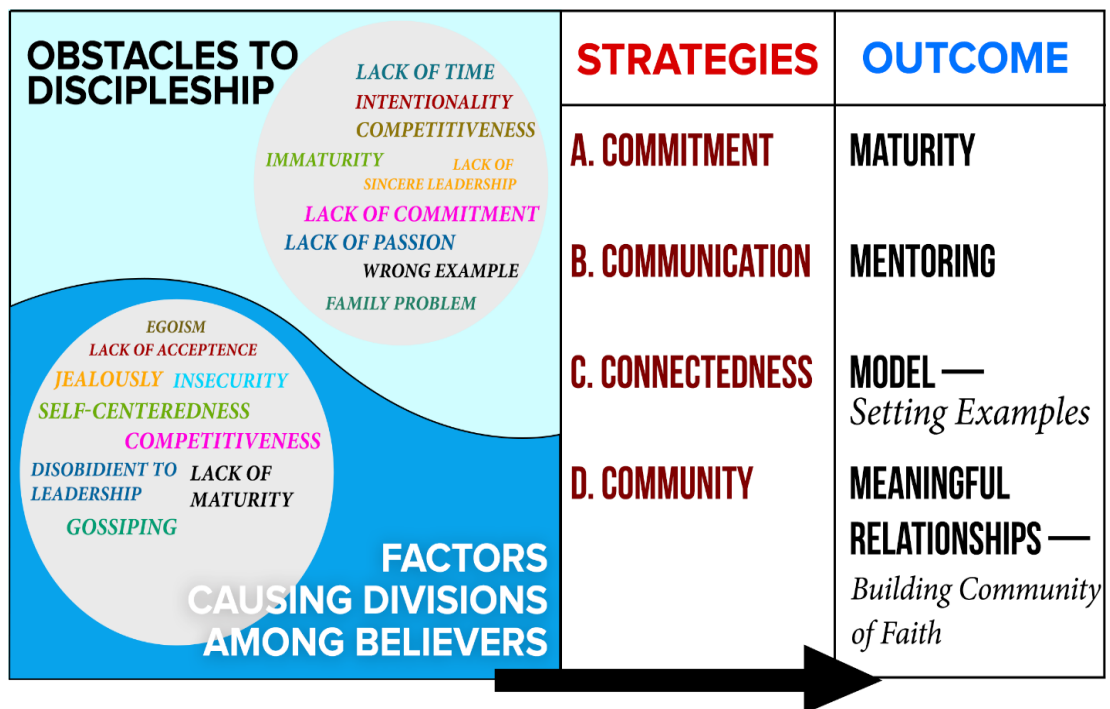


Figure 5.1 Infographic of Moving from Obstacles to Maturity

Limitations of the Study

There are several limitations of this study. It is important to note that the number of participants in this study was minimal. More participants for both the survey and the interviews would enhance the validity of the research results. Ideally, the research might have been more substantial if it could have been conducted with more Bengali-speaking churches to gain knowledge of the discipleship activities practiced in other churches. Additionally, it was difficult to get people for the interviews as most of the people were unable due to their prior engagements and workplace pressure. The denominational distinctive is helpful for comparison purposes or comparison with other churches within the city would also have helped with the generalization of this study. Moreover, while this is not a post-intervention study, it could have enhanced the research if participants were tasked with reading the First Epistle to Corinthians. Additionally, if the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire included questions based on the themes found in the epistles, it would

have further enriched the study. Lastly, being the pastor of the congregation I had to do the interviews, and as a result, some participants may have restrained from sharing more detailed information of the history and present observations of the community.

In considering the few limitations in terms of generalization of this study, although this study focused on the Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church in Kolkata which is a Bengali-speaking church, its findings could be beneficial to other Bengali-speaking churches. The obstacles to discipleship identified in this project are likely common struggles faced by many churches in the city. Therefore, implementing the 4C strategy in those ministry contexts could lead to similar outcomes of maturity, mentoring, modeling, and meaningful relationships.

Unexpected Observations

There were several unexpected observations for me during this project. Firstly, the participants were eager to participate in the program; despite their busy schedules and the demanding season of Christmas, they were willing to make the necessary sacrifices to be part of the program.

Secondly, the participants expressed their desire for personal spiritual growth despite their busy schedules and showed interest in their faith journey.

Thirdly, to my surprise, many of them mentioned in the focus group discussion that the Assembly of God church Bengali section is known for the preaching of the pastor in the community of faith and among the eight-language section of the Assembly of God church Kolkata.

Fourthly, once again to my surprise, one of the participants in the focus group mentioned that she felt like leaving the church because of her differences with the pastor.

Fifthly, many of the interviewers equated discipleship with Sunday school and Bible study as discipleship.

Sixthly, many of the participants emphasized their displeasure over the phasing out of the care groups and anticipating the reintroduction of the same.

The overall experience of the participants was good and exciting as this was the first time many of them had been part of a research work and few of them shared their excitement about knowing the outcome of the project.

Recommendations

The nature of this project was that of pre-intervention. There are several future directions for this study. There is much work that could be done researching deeper into analysis as it pertains to identifying discipleship environments and patterns offered by churches and then determining which patterns is the most fruitful of all those patterns offered by a particular church.

Additionally, if this research could encompass various churches from other denominations within the city, that would aid in obtaining a more comprehensive understanding of discipleship patterns and contribute collectively to addressing them. Ideally, it would be beneficial to involve pastors in the study and conduct interviews to gather their insight and expertise on the obstacles to discipleship and how to resolve them.

Ideally, it would be recommended that the participants in the projects are asked to read the Epistle to First Corinthians, which would help them to see disciples' barriers in the light of the Epistle and share deeper inputs for constructing discipleship materials and programs.

Finally, this project could be used as a groundwork for conducting extensive and analytical research in the future, facilitating a deeper understanding of discipleship patterns among the Bengali-speaking churches.

However, regarding the recommendations to instill effective discipleship in the current context of the Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali section we will be taking the following steps:

Step 1: Internally

Create an Accountable Discipleship Group

Often, individuals embark on a discipleship journey with great enthusiasm, yet over time, this enthusiasm may wane. Establishing a discipleship accountability group can provide mutual support on the spiritual path toward emulating Christ. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastics states:

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

(4:9-12, NIV)

By embracing accountability, individuals will endeavor to lead with integrity, humility, and a dedication to serving others, ultimately aiming to honor God in their discipleship roles. This will lead the believers toward maturity and becoming mentors to future mentees.

Reintroducing Care Group

Forming an accountability group is just the beginning; it's crucial to establish an environment where members can genuinely connect and support one another. To

facilitate this, we will be reinstating care groups within the Kolkata Bengali section of the Assembly of God Church. These groups will provide a nurturing atmosphere for open communication, meaningful connections, and relationship-building among believers. By encouraging participation in care groups, we aim to support individuals in their spiritual journeys and empower them to grow as followers of Christ.

Step 2: Externally

This discipleship model, designed to overcome barriers to discipleship, holds potential not only for the immediate Bengali sections but also for the broader reach of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata and other Assemblies of God churches in West Bengal.

Firstly, initiating discussions with Rev. Patrick Joseph, the senior pastor of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata, would be prudent. Proposing that all associate pastors under his guidance introduce accountable discipleship groups and prioritize the establishment of care groups in their respective sections could greatly contribute to the spiritual growth and holistic development of the church.

Secondly, the Assembly of God Church Kolkata is part of a large body and is under the umbrella of the Eastern District Council of the Assemblies of God of North India. Considering the expansive network of the Eastern District Council of the Assemblies of God of North India, which encompasses 185 churches across West Bengal, suggests an opportunity to extend this model. Presenting this discipleship approach to the District Superintendent could prompt widespread adoption among pastors within the district. By recognizing and addressing barriers to discipleship, implementing effective strategies, and nurturing believers toward maturity, this initiative has the potential to cultivate future mentors who will in turn facilitate the growth of discipleship within the church community.

Postscript

How has it changed me?

This journey for me has been a long time coming and enriching at the same time. From the time I started this journey in April 2019 to where I presently stand five years later, it has been an incredible journey. More than academic or intellectual pursuit this doctoral program formed me to be a better human being and introspect my own life in the light of scripture. I have allowed scripture to transform me, and I have become more reflective. During the COVID-19, online classes initially posed an emotional challenge. However, the organization of classes by the Asbury D.Min fundamentally altered my perception of online learning. Their approach facilitated participation from students worldwide, fostering an environment for learning and interaction on a virtual platform. Overall, the Asbury program was a transformative experience that equipped me for the next chapter of my journey in ministry.

Firstly, the doctoral program helped me become more disciplined in reading scripture by dedicating more time to reflection. Before, I'd spend time with God, but it often felt rushed or focused on sermon preparation. Through the program, I not only read scripture but also took time to reflect on it and evaluate myself in the light of its teachings.

Secondly, juggling pastoral duties, family commitments, and doctoral studies taught me the importance of time management. I learned how to balance multiple responsibilities and allocate time effectively to each one. In my opinion, creating my rule of life in 2019 was one of the most impactful things I've done in the past ten years. Regularly reviewing and praying over my rule of life has made me more effective both personally and as a pastor. It's not only benefited me, but it has also allowed me to mentor congregation members and younger leaders, guiding them in

crafting their own rules of life. Learning the value of time management has also helped me respect others; time by ensuring I keep appointments and meetings punctually.

Thirdly, I've come to understand the power of saying no. I've realized my limitations and accepted that I cannot do everything I want to. This has helped me stay focused and dedicated by avoiding distractions that pull me away from my goal.

Fourthly, I started with the ambitious goal of working with ten different churches in our district, interviewing pastors about their approach to discipleship. However, due to time constrain I had to scale back to one church—the one I happen to pastor. Throughout the project, I encountered numerous challenges. Every time I tried to progress; it seemed like something was standing in my way. In 2022, while working on my third chapter, I suffered an immense loss when my mother passed away. This was a major setback for me. Then, in 2023, my daughter fell seriously ill and needed surgery. These challenges made me question whether I was truly meant to pursue my Doctor of Ministry degree.

Despite these setbacks, I persevered with the D.Min program. This journey of D.Min shaped me personally and helped me to make adjustments to my present ministerial approach to the believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church in Kolkata.

Fifthly, though I underwent adverse situations and difficult times I learned the importance of resilience and holding onto my faith. Pursuing this journey, I have realized that God's grace is a constant source of support, even in the toughest times. In the past, tough situations would overwhelm me with fear and confusion. However, this journey has taught me the value of persistence and perseverance, enabling me to endure and keep going, no matter how rough things get.

Sixthly, I also discovered a notable number of people within our church community who were faithful to church and had deeply personal experiences with God. The survey and interviews conducted as a part of my research project were extremely valuable. They helped me to get a better understanding of the challenges to discipleship within our church community. It was fascinating to probe into the history of our church and see it through the eyes of our founding members. I'm grateful for the support and acceptance I received from them as we boarded a journey toward a brighter future for our church together.

It's been incredibly rewarding to hear from participants how encouraged they've felt and how they've committed to being more involved in discipleship. This experience has served as a humble reminder that many individuals within our congregation are eager to grow spiritually and become more like Christ, despite the busyness of their lives.

How will my ministry change?

Over the past five years, I have undergone significant personal growth, and I have noticed a transformation in how I approach ministry. When I began this journey half a decade ago, I was relying mainly on my talents and skills, going through the motions each day. However, the Asbury program has been instrumental in establishing a strong spiritual foundation for my ministry. It's shifted my perspective, reminding me that ministry isn't about me; it's about serving a higher purpose.

Firstly, I committed myself to reflect on scripture and apply to myself, and stop looking for sermon preparation. Allowing the scripture to speak to me personally and shape me to become what God wants me to be. Be more disciplined in my approach to scripture and prayer life.

Secondly, I am dedicated to enhancing my service to people by utilizing the expertise, knowledge, and values gained from the programs. Lessons on disciples based on the First Corinthians, the rule of life, and leadership principles are a few important lessons I desire to share with my friends in ministry and congregation. By applying these principles, I aim to improve my ministry outreach to the community, encouraging individuals to delve deeper into the study of scripture and engage in personal reflections.

Thirdly, I pledge to focus on my personal growth by reading and resources on self-discipline and discipleship. Recognizing that every leader must also be a follower, I understand the importance of learning to follow before I can effectively lead others. I am committed to investing time and resources into my development to build the foundation laid in my life through the Asbury doctoral program. I desire my lifelong pursuit to be like the Apostle Paul who said, "I want to know Christ" (Phil. 3.10) and make Him known.

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A. LETTER FOR EXPERT REVIEW

Sudip Das
Doctoral Candidate
Asbury Theological Seminary
Wilmore, Kentucky 40390

May 29, 2023.

Local Address:
A-14 SatyanPark
Thakurpukur, Joka
Kolkata – 700104.

Dear _____,

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary, and I am currently working on my dissertation project. As part of the research process, I am using three researcher-designed instruments to collect data. I have attached the following documents - a discipleship assessment questionnaire assessment Survey, focus group questions, and a semi-structured interview for collecting qualitative data.

I am in need of expert reviews for the three instruments, and I am inviting you to serve as one of my reviewers. I have included a copy of the following:

1. Problem statement
2. Purpose statement
3. Research questions
4. Definition of terms
5. Attached are three researcher-designed instruments
6. Attached are Evaluation forms for expert review.

Please kindly assess the three instruments using the evaluation forms included. Share freely any comments that you consider would be useful to improve the data collection. Please kindly request you to email me back your response.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sudip Das

Problem Statement

The Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section has been in existence for the last sixty years sharing and serving the Bengali-speaking community. The census conducted by the government of India shows an insignificant growth of Christianity among the Bengali community compared to other states. The Assembly of God church Bengali section on average attendance has been hundred to hundred fifty, despite being the state language.

However, the presence of a good discipleship program can be a boost to the faith of the believers to reach out to the Bengali-speaking community with new energy and confidence. This could move the Bengali section to holistic discipleship for the future growth of the church.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the research was to identify a holistic strategy for discipleship from the Apostle Paul's work with the Corinthians to the leadership of the Assembly of God Church Kolkata Bengali Section.

Research Questions

The key research questions considered to assess the effectiveness of this discipleship are as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the obstacles for disciplining believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?

Research Question 2

What were the patterns and practices for disciplining believers in the Bengali section of the Assembly of God church, Kolkata?

Research Question 3

What kind of discipleship model can we draw from the first letter to the Corinthians?

Definition of Key Terms

The Assembly of God Church: This is the name of the local church in Kolkata, India where the researcher serves on the pastoral team and his primary responsibility is to lead the Bengali section.

AGKB – The Assembly of God Church Bengali Section.

West Bengal – situated in the eastern part of India with the city of Kolkata as its capital.

Bengali Section – The Assembly of God church Kolkata is made up of eight different vernacular sections, they worship in their own mother tongue. Bengali is one of the languages and also the state language.

Disciple – “Disciple” is a term mentioned here to distinguish between being a “Christian” because of lineage and being a committed follower of Christ. In the Indian context, “Christian” is a popular term in society based on culture and history which have a negative connotation of a person known for losing morals, drinking, and eating beef. So, a disciple here is a person who is committed to following Christ and living a life of obedience.

Holistic Strategy – overall strategy for reaching out to the Bengali community with the gospel of Jesus and making a disciple who follows Jesus.

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APPENDIX B: LETTER OF CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear _____

I, Sudip Das, a doctoral student at Asbury Theological Seminary, would like to invite you to consider participating in the research I am conducting for my D.Min dissertation project. Before you decide to participate, it would be important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what your participation would involve.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this research is to study is to gain insights into the discipleship perspective and experiences of individuals who have been attending The Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali section for a significant period. By understanding your perspective and experience, we aim to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance of discipleship in the Bengali section and its effectiveness for the future growth of the Bengali church.

Procedures: If you agree to participate, you will be asked to:

- Filling the Discipleship Assessment Questionnaire via an internet -based Google form. This survey entails the completion of an electronic questionnaire, with an estimated time requirement of approximately twenty minutes. The questionnaire comprises a set of ten declarative statements, prompting respondents to select one of the predetermined response options. The statements featured in the survey pertain to the ongoing personal development progression of the participant as a disciple.

- Participate in an in-depth, semi-structured interview aimed at delving into your experimental narratives as a disciple within the Bengali section of The Assembly of God church Kolkata.
- A focus group discussion would be scheduled after the Sunday church service, with a preceding notification period of fourteen days prior to the scheduled date. This interactive session is anticipated to extend for approximately ninety minutes.

Risk and Benefits: No identifiable risks have been identified in relation to participation in this survey or engagement with the online survey. Nonetheless, Your voluntary provision of subjective insights concerning your engagement in personal journey as a disciple holds the potential to assist our church in the appraisal of our ministry's efficacy in discipling others. Furthermore, this endeavor has the prospective capacity to inform the formulation of adept discipleship program for the future.

Confidentiality: Your identity and any personal information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. All data collected will be stored securely and only accessible to me for the purpose of the project. Any information shared in the research findings will be presented in a way that does not reveal your identity. Your information will be confidentially maintained by storing all data in a password protected electronic format. The information gathered will be destroyed six months from the date of the completion of this study.

Contact Information: The results of this study will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with the Asbury seminary representative and the results may be published in the doctoral project. If you have any further queries about this project, please contact me at danny.das@asburyseminary.edu. This research has

been reviewed according to Asbury Theological Seminary IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to decline to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Your decision will not affect your relationship with The Assembly of God church Kolkata Bengali section.

Consent: By signing this form, you indicate that you have read and understood the information provided and voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Participant's Name: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX C: DISCIPLESHIP ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: _____

Gender: Male Female

1. Do you consider yourself to be a disciple of Jesus?
 - Yes
 - No
2. Since you came to faith have you made a public commitment through water baptism?
 - Yes
 - No
3. Do you consider AGKB as your home church?
 - Yes
 - No
4. I attend Sunday service:
 - Once a month
 - Twice a month
 - Thrice a month
 - Regularly
 - I do not attend.
5. I am involved in apart from Sunday service in:
 - Bible Study
 - Weekly Prayer
 - Zoom meetings.
 - Serving in the ministry
 - I am not involved beyond Sunday Service
 - Others [Please Specify] _____
6. How successful has the AGKB been with teaching and disciplining you in the following respects.
 Please use the following scale to respond: Kindly tick the box you think your response would be.
 1 – Not at all Successful; 2- Somewhat successful; 3- Very Successful

Srl. No	Questions	[1]	[2]	[3]
a.	Helping me to understand the basics of Christian Faith			
b.	How can I honor Jesus with my daily choices			

c.	Encouraging me for reading and studying the Bible			
d.	Helping me develop good habits and disciplines in my prayer life			
e.	Helping to use my gifts and talents in work and service in a wider community			
f.	Inspiring me too live for Christ daily in my community			

7. How do you view the importance of discipleship in a believer's life. Kindly use a tick [✓] mark for your appropriate response.

Srl. No	Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
a.	Believers need to join a discipleship course once they have put their faith in Jesus				
b.	Christians mature over time and need to be involved in intentional discipleship regardless of their age.				
c.	Discipleship helps to develop a lifestyle appropriate for a Christian				
d.	Discipleship equips us for witnessing and				

	sharing our faith with others				
--	----------------------------------	--	--	--	--

8. Please identify which practices you are currently involved in. Kindly use a tick [✓] mark for your appropriate response.

Srl. No	Questions	Yes	No	May Be	Not Sure
a.	I have followed Jesus through the water baptism				
b.	I set aside time to be alone with God in prayer, reading scripture and meditation daily				
c.	I attend Bible study once a week				
d.	I memorize scripture each week				
e.	I allow Christ to control my life as to what I read, watch, and think about				
f.	Once a week I meet with other believers for worship teaching, ministry, prayer, and fellowship				
g.	I meet small group every week for personal encouragement, up-building, and support				
h.	As far as it depends on I try to live in harmony and unity with other believers				
i.	I take active part in the life and ministry of my church				
j.	I know what my spiritual gifts are				
k.	I clearly show to those I live and work with my commitment to Christ through my words and deeds				
L.	I have built friend and reached out to at least one-non-Christian friends				
m.	Over the past months I have influenced, encouraged and mentored one person to follow Jesus				

9. To what extent to you agree or disagree that the following pose obstacles to discipleship. Kindly use a tick [✓] mark for your appropriate response.

Srl. No	Questions	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree	Not Sure
a.	Disunity in the church are main obstacles for discipleship				
b.	Church leadership is the obstacles to discipleship				
c.	People are not aware of discipleship is the obstacle for discipleship				
d.	Lack of Commitment on part of the church members is an obstacle for discipleship in the church				
e	Lack of commitment on part of the clergy is an obstacle for discipleship				
f	Lack of time is an obstacle for discipleship				
e	Church members trying to be in the spotlight hinders discipleship				

f.	Being Me-Centered rather than Other- centered				
G	Integrity among church believers is an obstacle to discipleship				
i	Christian maturity is an obstacle to discipleship				

10. Which statement best captures your growth as a disciple over the last 12 months?

- Declined – I feel that I’ve regressed spiritually over the past year.
- Plateaued – I feel that I’ve stayed roughly the same over the past year.
- Some Growth – I feel that I’ve noticed some area of spiritual growth over the past year.
- Significant Growth – I feel that I’ve experienced signified spiritual growth over the past year.

**APPENDIX D: EVALUATION FORM FOR EXPERT REVIEW
ON THE DISCIPLESHIP ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

Question No.	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestions
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
6 [a]					
6 [b]					
6 [c]					
6 [d]					
6 [e]					
6 [f]					
6 [g]					
7					
7 [a]					
7 [b]					
7 [c]					
7 [d]					
8					
8 [a]					

8 [b]					
8 [c]					
8 [d]					
8 [e]					
8 [f]					
8 [g]					
8 [h]					
8 [i]					
8 [j]					
8 [k]					
8 [l]					
8 [m]					
9					
9 [a]					
9 [b]					
9 [c]					
9 [d]					
9 [e]					
9 [f]					
10.					

Recommendations (Questions that are not asked that need to be added):

- 1.
- 2.

3.

Review completed by:

Signature:

Date completed:

APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How did you decided to attend the Assembly of God Church Bengali Section for the first time?
2. What are we known for among the eight-language sections or in the faith community?
3. On a scale of 1 to 5. One being the lowest and five being the highest. How would you rate our discipleship activities?
4. Who comes to our church? Who do we reach effectively based on factors such as ethnicity, age, gender, life stage, and spiritual maturity?
5. What spiritual gifts, passions and abilities are prominent in our church?
6. What unifies us as believers in the AGKB?
7. What are some of the discipleship challenges or obstacles we face?
8. What are the factors that cause divisions among us as believers?
9. Maturing in our discipleship is very important. What are some obstacles that you have seen personally or generally that prevent maturity for followers of Christ, for groups, or communities of faith?
10. Have you ever considered leaving our church? Why?
11. What are some of the possible means by which a discipleship program could become more effective in the church?
12. What can each one of us do to make an effective discipleship program?
13. Which ministry has had the biggest impact on our people?
14. What strategies or innovations have proved to be defining moments in our church?
15. How have you seen prayers answered through our worship, discipleship, Sunday services, and connecting strategies?
16. How much of our communication media do you use?

**APPENDIX F: EVALUATION FORM FOR EXPERT REVIEW
ON FOCUS GROUP**

Question No.	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestions
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					
16.					

Recommendations (Questions that are not asked that need to be added):

- 1.
- 2.

3.

Review completed by:

Signature:

Date completed:

APPENDIX G: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you come to this church? Anyone invited you or did you just walk in?
2. How long have you been a believer?
3. How long have you been coming to this church?
4. When you came to this church who was the Pastor and tell us about the activities of the church during that tenure?
5. Have you attended any discipleship program in the church? Or when you first became a Christian what sort of learning, teaching, mentoring or disciplining did you receive, from your church?
6. How long was that discipleship program? for few weeks, months years....
7. What are some of the topics dealt in the discipleship program?
8. What was your personal experience of the discipleship program? How did it benefit your spiritual life?
9. How did this program bring about a change in the life of the church?
10. Have you ever disciplined anyone? if yes how? If no, why?
11. In your early discipleship was there an emphasis on equipping you to live your life as a Christian, applying God's word in your life?
12. Do you set aside time alone with God?
13. How often do you read the Bible?
14. Do you meet other Christian to have fellowship?
15. What has God revealed to you about His purpose for our church?
16. What adjustment does our church need to make to more closely align ourselves with God's purposes?
17. What are your hope and dreams for our church?

**APPENDIX H: EVALUATION FORM FOR EXPERT REVIEW OF
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Question No.	Needed	Not Needed	Clear	Unclear	Suggestions
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					
6.					
7.					
8.					
9.					
10.					
11.					
12.					
13.					
14.					
15.					
16.					
17.					

Recommendations (Questions that are not asked that need to be added):

1.

2.

3.

Review completed by:

Signature:

Date completed:

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