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Disciple-making: Key Ingredients for Building God's Kingdom

Sid Emory
Bethel University

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SID EMORY

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I want to thank God who has given me blessing upon blessing throughout my life. He has placed the people in my life who have given me the desire to understand what a life lived in His grace looks like. He gave me a mother who showed me that it was possible to love everyone regardless of circumstance. He gave me a father who showed me how to care for the people around me. He gave me children who are a blessing everyday and show me how the Father must love me. He gave me a wife created to be everything that I needed in my life to live loved and able to love. He made her into an amazing person that has always pointed me back to my Heavenly Father to learn how to be a better man.

CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

ABSTRACT

The first century Church was founded in response to the disciple-making processes of Jesus. His disciples were transformed by following Jesus in a way that obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom became the central themes of their lives.

This study addressed the need to understand the disciple-making process found in Scripture in a way that will yield the results that are found in the Book of Acts primarily those found in Acts 2:42-47.

Christian churches of every denomination, tradition, model, and size have been called to make disciples. The Scripture, literature, interviews, and surveys researched in this project were designed to discover transferrable suggestions that could focus all believers on the results of following the plans of God to build his kingdom using the process of disciple-making.

The results of the project revealed that the key to building the kingdom of God is found in the practices and plans of the ultimate disciple maker, Jesus. It recommends having the correct mindset in of making disciples a part of everyday life, creating a deeper understanding of the worship of God, living relationally connected to other people in a process of becoming more like Christ, and focusing on God first in everyday life.

CHAPTER ONE: THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND DISCIPLE-MAKING

Statement of the Problem

The problem addressed in this project was the need for churches implementing discipleship models to understand the disciple-making process which created the faith community found in Acts 2:42-47. In response to this problem the researcher explored the examples of disciple-making and relational community in biblical faith communities, reviewed relevant literature dealing with church models that emphasize communal discipleship in one-on-one or one-on-few groups for kingdom expansion, researched practices of disciple-making through the forming of Christian community in modern examples that are attempting to hold tightly to examples in the New Testament, and developed transferable practices that will help churches experience kingdom expansion that are consistent with examples that are found in Acts 2:42-47.

Delimitations of the Problem

The research generated an extensive amount of data that supplied theories, statistics, models, and proposed solutions to the difficult process of disciple-making. The literature on disciple-making that occurs within a church setting was abundant. Recent literature that dealt with the education and relationships between disciples outside of the church building was less abundant but was the focus of the researcher. There were three delimitations to the research.

First, the researcher focused on the biblical mandate for God's people to make disciples. Specific attention was given to the interpersonal relationships and disciple-

making methods of Jesus and Paul with their disciples. Success was measured by discovering similarities in the resulting faith communities.

Second, the researcher focused on the difficulty of disciple-making in the contemporary context. The research explored different views of the definition of disciple-making and was limited to definitions by ministry leaders and subject matter experts. The researcher examined the difficulties of disciple-making from different theological perspectives and ministry models.

Third, the scope of the primary research was limited to the house-church movement with specific attention to how house-church networks make disciples.

Assumptions

The first assumption of this research was the inerrancy of Scripture. In the pages of the Bible, the examples and commands of God are given to point humankind to Him and His supreme authority.

The second assumption of this research was that most contemporary Christians do not have a proper understanding of the purpose and practice of disciple-making. This assumption was made because of the well-documented decline of a Christian social influence in the United States. For disciple-making to be effective an understanding of biblical disciple-making is required.

The third assumption was that effective disciple-making was the goal of the house-church networks and the disciple-making subject matter experts who were interviewed.

Subproblems

The research began with determining the biblical definition of disciple-making. This examination was of instances where God specifically required obedience, brought

about transformation in the lives of those affected, created or had communal relationships to further the plans of God, increased the understanding of the people, demonstrated the worthiness of God to be worshipped, and expanded the kingdom of God to the world around them. Data included scholarly observations and insights recorded in commentaries, journals, articles, and Scripture. The data was used to develop an in-depth understanding of the methods of disciple-making found in the Old and New Testaments.

The researcher found literature sources which concentrated on disciple-making to understand how others have interpreted disciple-making in Scripture and the application of scriptural methods in the modern Church. The research focused on how church leaders understand the standards of biblical disciple-making and how best to adhere to them. Scholarly and non-scholarly observations by practitioners in the house-church movement were used to understand the formation of modern disciple-making processes and goals. The researcher also examined research about the effectiveness of the modern Church in its disciple-making processes. Data was considered from various perspectives and was considered acceptable when it pertained to the results of modern disciple-making processes.

Research was done to determine how modern church leaders understand and apply disciple-making in their context. Emphasis was given to house-churches that desired to simplify their ministry focus around disciple-making methods they found in Scripture. Surveys and interviews of church leaders were conducted to investigate their definition, understanding, and methods of disciple-making. The data was used to supply the researcher with data that would identify similarities and differences in their definitions. Data was gathered from traditional church leaders, house-church leaders, and

disciple-making subject matter experts. Data was evaluated to develop the researcher's definition of disciple-making.

The goal of this research was to better understand disciple-making in a way this research could be useful to faith communities who wish to focus on disciple-making to reach those far from God that would result in a faith community like the one found in Acts 2:42-47. The data was compiled to develop a greater understanding for the application of Scripture in the lives of believers in faith communities as they make disciples. Data was considered reliable when it showed potential to provide transferrable knowledge and practical disciple-making steps for Christians.

<p style="text-align:center">Setting of the Project</p>

The researcher undertook comprehensive research to consider the understanding many Christian church leaders have about disciple-making. This understanding helped the researcher analyze the beliefs of the leaders to discover how their understanding of the importance of disciple-making could affect the success of their ministries.

Due to the researcher's experience with leading small groups, college groups, and planting a house-church, the researcher hoped to understand how the intimate relationships found in these types of faith communities may be a major key to the successful disciple-making process. The researcher decided to focus on house-churches and their disciple-making processes. House-churches usually focus on smaller groups who live their lives more like a close family than a modern church congregation.

The house-church networks chosen expressed a desire to understand how making disciples can be achieved not just as a by-product of their gathering as a faith community but as an intentional core practice of their everyday lives. They are similar to the first

century Church in the way they embrace the practices of community and disciple-making.

Both networks seek high commitment levels from their members to live faithful lives to God. They believe living closely in relational community and making disciples must be a part of every member's responsibility. Both networks approach many aspects of the house-church growth differently, but the desire for community and the making of disciples involve many of the same processes.

Primary Setting

The We Are Church house-church network is located in San Francisco. Francis Chan began the first house-church in the network five years ago. Through face-to-face interviews in San Francisco with Francis Chan, the church elders, and house-pastors at We Are Church, the researcher was able to study the methods and values of the We Are Church network. Research focused on the disciple-making processes that are used at We Are Church.

We Are Church, at the time of the research, had 17 house-churches in San Francisco. Each house-church had two pastors, one lead pastor and a pastor-in-training. Most of the house-churches had six or seven families actively involved. The total network had approximately 145 people in house-churches.

The elders at We Are Church meet weekly with the house-church pastors that are assigned to them to disciple and encourage them. The house-church pastors meet consistently with individuals in their house-church to disciple them.

The disciple-making process at We Are Church is centralized in the individual house-churches and focuses on Bible study, mentoring, communal worship, evangelism in the surrounding community, and community work projects.

Secondary Setting

The Crowded House Network is in Central Florida. This house-church network was chosen because it is a network that could provide a look at the development of many of the practices and growth of a smaller house-church network. The researcher interviewed the founder, Jeremy Penn, and Julie Mount, a board member and house-church pastor. Data was gathered through face-to-face interviews and online surveys. Careful consideration was given to the differences in the social context of Central Florida as compared to the larger city of San Francisco. The researcher attempted not to compare the personalities of the church members because there were drastic differences in the social make-up of both churches.

Since The Crowded House Network was founded in 2017, it is in its infancy as compared to We Are Church. Many of the decisions concerning the core values and the make-up of the leadership were just beginning to be made. Observing this formation process was useful to the researcher to understand better the difficulty of leading new members in moving from the traditional church model, which many of their leadership and members had previously experienced, to the house-church model.

The Crowded House Network is made up of three house-churches. Jeremy Penn is involved in all three. As the network has grown, he has begun to move to the background of two of the house-churches.

The Importance of the Project

The Importance of the Project to the Researcher

The researcher desired to understand disciple-making without traditional church methods better. Having been a part of small groups, mentoring groups, traditional churches, and house-churches the researcher has experienced successful disciple-making

and unsuccessful attempts at disciple-making in several ministry models. By examining the disciple-making processes of Jesus, the Apostle Paul, and the leaders of the first century Church, the researcher hoped to understand how the first century Church, despite religious persecution grew and if being incarnational with the world around them could help the modern Church experience similar results like those in Acts 2:42-47.

The researcher desires to see people experience joy in life that only a relationship with Christ brings. He believes this is experienced as the Church follows the commands of Jesus to make disciples.

The Importance of the Project to the Intermediate Ministry Context

After recently being the pastor of a 242-year-old rural church in South Carolina, the researcher discovered the difficulty of leading people in a traditional church to embrace disciple-making. The church struggled to accept this focus over the traditional ministry practices of the church. After many failed attempts to encourage the church to embrace disciple-making, the researcher established a disciple-making group in his home. The researcher realized the Church needs disciple-makers and those who contribute to the conversation with other church leaders as they struggle with disciple-making in their faith communities. After four years at the church, the researcher decided to resign from the church and focus his time on disciple-making in his home.

The researcher believes the Christians of the first century Church lived incarnational among people in a way that attracted others to the promises of salvation more effectively than what unbelievers see today in the lives of modern Christians. This belief attracted the researcher to this project and gave him the desire to question his motivations for vocational church ministry.

The researcher hopes to see people come to faith in Jesus and begin to make disciples in a more incarnational way of living as he attempts to do so as well.

The Importance of the Project to the Church at Large

While each faith community is different, the researcher has focused on discovering biblical disciple-making principles that can be transferred to any church. Identifying skills that will benefit believers and faith communities as they attempt to make disciples is a goal of the researcher.

The Church was founded by Jesus to be the His body and take on the responsibility he undertook while He walked on earth. His earthly ministry began with calling His disciples, living with them as their teacher, and sending them to the world to make disciples by sharing the message of the gospel. The result of His disciple-making and His resurrection was what is found in Acts 2:42-47. The Church would benefit from a reexamination of its beginning and should question its understanding of the most basic tenants of the Christian faith as found in Scripture. This reexamination should begin with the disciple-making practices of Jesus.

Since the first century, the Church has undergone many challenges. Each challenge has been met by great leaders who strove to stay faithful to the examples of Scripture. Today the Church in the United States has its own challenges. Many believe it has become something very different than what is seen in Scripture. The answer to the challenges of today must come from the same examples that allowed the first century Church to make it out of Judea and into the rest of the world. God's plan for the redemption of His creation has taken many forms but has always had aspects which remained the same. It is with great hope the researcher is trusting God to take his efforts

to understand disciple-making and be a part of seeing the growth of His kingdom from the efforts of this project.

Data and Methodology

Nature of the Research

The research for this project was primarily qualitative, using field research to gather data for case studies of two house-church networks. Action research methodology was used because data analysis begins "almost immediately, at which point the researcher develops categories to clarify the data." [1] The researcher found in the process of research the "process of moving back and forth between data collection and data analysis" created a deeper understanding of the topic. [2]

The quantitative research method was used to verify other research data concerning church leaders' understanding of disciple-making. The researcher surveyed several online groups with which the researcher is familiar. The groups included an online house-church discussion group representing various denominations, an online group made up of reformed pastors representing various denominations, and an online group of Southern Baptist pastors. The quantitative research was not meant to be a primary resource for the project but instead to be a guiding resource that would help the researcher stay grounded in the real-world lives of modern church leaders.

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[1] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design*, 10th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2012), 147.

[2] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 147.

Primary Data

Primary data was gathered using face-to-face and online interviews. Field notes were created during onsite visits with key leaders and members at the We Are Church network in California and at The Crowded House Network in Central Florida. Interviews were conducted to gather data from house-church pastors and elders in the overall network. Research was done to identify disciple-making processes that were common in both house-church networks. The research included the following steps: observation, analysis, and interpretation.[3]

Secondary Data

Secondary data included biblical, theological, and contemporary literature relevant to disciple-making, relational community, and integrating the examples of first-century church life into the modern Church. Sources that referenced the house-church model were used, but most resources spoke to the need for disciple-making in all church models. Historical resources were used to discover life in the first century after the founding of the Church to better understand the social structures of the period.

Many resources dealt with the difficulty of ministry in the modern church context while proposing examples and observations of the attempts to always increase understanding of the commands found in Scripture.

Project Overview

The researcher believes Acts 2:42-47 describes a faith community that was the result of the disciple-making processes of Jesus. The moving of the Holy Spirit

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[3] Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Quality Research Papers: For Students of Religion and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2008), 176–177.

empowered the Apostles to fulfill their calling, but the preparation Jesus undertook laid the groundwork for the Holy Spirit. The Church that resulted was led by disciple-makers who followed the examples they had seen and been taught. The Apostle Paul continued and changed the process to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, but the aspects of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom stayed at the forefront of his efforts. It was with this in mind that the researcher undertook the task of understanding biblical disciple-making.

The first step in the research process was to examine Scripture and theological sources to determine if the communal aspects found in the first century Church could be found in other places in Scripture. This included an analysis of the disciple-making processes found in the Old Testament that were similar to the processes of Jesus and Paul. The researcher believed this would help identify a pattern used by God and would lead to a better understanding of how this pattern led to the kinship recorded in Acts 2:42-47.

The second step was to review literature related to disciple-making in the early Church. The researcher then compared and contrasted literature about disciple-making in the modern Church.

The third step was to develop case studies of two house-church networks to gauge their understanding of biblical disciple-making as well as documenting the processes they undergo to develop disciples.

The fourth step was to survey and interview church leaders around the country to gauge the modern church leader's understanding of biblical disciple-making. These

surveys and interviews were further compared to data analyzed by the Barna Research Group in recent disciple-making studies they undertook.

The fifth step was to analyze the data gathered to determine practical recommendations to further the goals of biblical disciple-making in the modern Church.

The researcher carefully considered the real-world implications of the attempt to question beliefs and long-held traditions that are a part of the modern church culture. By gathering consistent findings from the research and providing clear recommendations for increasing the understanding of the definition and process of disciple-making, the researcher hopes to add positive encouragement to the Church.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BIBLICAL BASIS FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING

Acts 2:41-47 is a picture of the kingdom of God manifested in the lives of His

people:

> So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day
> about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the Apostles'
> teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe
> came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the
> Apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And
> they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds
> to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and
> breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous
> hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to
> their number day by day those who were being saved. (Acts 2:41–47)[4]

In verse 41 the word "received" is the Greek word ἀποδέχομαι, which means to

accept or welcome the word being given.[5] Peter preached after the fire of the Holy Spirit

had settled on the Apostles in the house (Acts 2:3). The people received the message, and

3000 new believers were added to their number. Their belief had an immediate result.

In verse 42, the people devoted themselves to four things: the teaching of the

Apostles, to the fellowship of people, to breaking of bread, and to prayers. The people

were obedient to the teaching of the Apostles like the devotion the Apostles had had for

Jesus. The disciples of Jesus made disciples of those who had received the words of

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[4] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, IL: Good News Publishers, 2001).

[5] Walter Bauer and Frederick William Danker, eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 109.

Peter. The education given to the people by the apostles encouraged community and fellowship

The people also were devoted to each other as the Apostles had devoted themselves to each other as disciples of Jesus. They lived their daily lives together. In verse 46, the devotion for the Apostles and each other is seen as they attended the temple together and had meals together in their homes.

Miraculous events occurred in their midst. The English Standard Version translates φόβος as awe. It could be translated panic or fear. The wonders and signs point back to the work of the Holy Spirit as seen in the earlier verses when the Apostles spoke in other tongues. The awe they had did not seem to scare them away but instead drew them closer together.

Verses 44-46 reiterate the transformation that occurred in the lives of the people as shown in verse 42. They sold their possessions to care for those who were in need above their own needs. They formed a community that together focused on fellowship. The Greek word used here is koinonia which means an association, communion, fellowship, or close relationship.

The fellowship and communal lives of the people had a direct correlation to the process of disciple-making of Jesus with His disciples. In John 15 Jesus spoke to His disciples in a clear and instructive fashion. He said:

> This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name,

he may give it to you. These things I command you, so that you will love one another. (John 15:12-17)

In verse 47 the result of the transformation that occurred in the lives of the people was the movement of God to add 3000 new believers to the growing kingdom of God.

This resulting community of new believers would gather in fellowship to hear the Apostle's teaching, care for each other, fellowship together in their homes during meals, and experience the growth of God's Kingdom together. This was the identity of being a member of the Church. It brought praise and worship of God with the recognition of the Holy Spirit in their midst.

Jesus did not use the words fellowship or church but what the Church would become was taught by Jesus. As the Church grew, the original teachings of Jesus remained valid and were taught to the subsequent disciples throughout the New Testament.

 The disciple-making processes of Jesus found in the Gospels, and the work of the Holy Spirit found in the Book of Acts resulted in similar actions. In the Gospels, Jesus' disciples lived lives of friendship, obedience, community, and love as taught by Jesus. In the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit led the Apostles to instruct the people in obedience, education, "family-style" relationships, signs and wonders, a strong commonality among the people, communal worship, the favor of the world around them, and the growth of God's kingdom. These ideals not only came through the leading of the Holy Spirit but also from the rich Jewish heritage that pervaded the society.

For the Jewish people in the early Church, the way of life they demonstrated "was not merely a creed, nor a set of observances, but…it pervaded every relationship, and

dominated every phase of life."[6] Indeed, the commonality of the people, as found in the

Gospels and the Book of Acts, had much to do with Jewish tradition. Philo described a

similar commonality that was a part of the Essene community, which was a movement

that was in existence during the founding of the Church:

> In the first place, then, there is no one who has a house so absolutely his own private property, that it does not in some sense also belong to everyone: for besides that they all dwell together in companies, the house is open to all those of the same notions, who come to them from other quarters.[7]

Both Christians and the Essences had similar Jewish influences.[8] The Talmud and

the Torah teach "a community must provide for all of its members' spiritual and physical

needs."[9]

Similar examples of the lifestyle seen in Acts 2:42-47 are seen throughout

Scripture when the people of God are attuned to the plans of God for the lives of His

people. There is a common thread in Scripture of these standards being key to the plans

of God for His creation. This thread of obedience, transformation, community, education,

worship, and expansion of God's kingdom touches every major event in Scripture. These

are critical aspects in the definition of disciple-making.

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[6] Alfred Edersheim, *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 60.

[7] Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. C. D. Yonge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 690.

[8] Joan Taylor, "Philo of Alexandria on the Essenes: A Case Study on the Use of Classical Sources in Discussions of the Qumran-Essene Hypothesis," ed. David Runia and Gregory Sterling, *The Studia Philonica Annual* XIX (2007): 8.

[9] Jill Jacobs, "The Importance of the Community (Kehilla) in Judaism," *My Jewish Learning*, https://www.myjewishlearning.com/life/Life_Stages/Building_a_Jewish_Home/Home_and_Community/Centrality_of_Community.shtml, (accessed October 2, 2018).

Acts 2:42-47 was the next step of the redemption that came from Christ's death on the cross and the mission Jesus gave His disciples to make other disciples. However, the results in Acts 2:42-47 did not begin in Matthew 28:19 with the Great Commission, they began in Genesis 1 and 2 when God himself established an earthly kingdom, created community between humanity and himself, established His commands on earth, and ultimately established disciple-making to all nations.

Discipleship in the Old Testament

These verses in Acts 2:42-47 are reminiscent of the Garden of Eden before the invasion of Satan. The beginning of the thread of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom was established in the Garden.

In the second chapter of Genesis, the story is found of God creating and placing Adam into the Garden of Eden where he was the centerpiece of His creation. Indeed, God created man with an "everlasting love" in mind (Jer. 31:3). God created another person and added to the relationship between God and Adam. It is at Creation this first sense of community as a part of the redemptive plan of God is seen. It is in community Adam and Eve existed in the presence of God (Gen. 2:15-23).

In this community, God gave commands to be obeyed by His creation. God commanded humanity to have children, to have dominion over all the earth (Gen. 1:28). He commanded Adam and Eve to not eat of the Tree of Knowledge (Gen. 2:17). They would teach these commands to their children and pass this knowledge to all of God's people. Following His commands would allow them to continue in an unfettered relationship between the people and God, the knowledge of the commands, the worship of God face-to-face, and the expansion of the kingdom of God. It is true that Adam and

Eve's sin affected the plans of God, but God has declared, "I will accomplish all of my purpose" (Isa. 46:10). The sins of humankind cannot deter God's plans.

After the flood, God began to draw close to the generations of Abraham. The thread of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom began to take shape for the children of Israel. His plan of ultimate redemption for the sin of humanity progressed out of His original standards from Eden through the lineage of Abraham. "For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him" (Gen. 18:19). Through this family, the redemptive plans of God would ensure "all nations of the earth shall be blessed in him" (Gen. 18:18).

When God rescued the children of Israel out of Egypt, the thread continued to be woven through the lives of God's people. As the people of Israel were gathered at the end of Moses' life, they were given commands from God, separated into tribes (communities), taught how to worship God faithfully, and then finally they were given "the most fundamental expression of the Jewish faith" [10]– the Shema:

> Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Deut. 6:4–9)

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[10] John D. Barry et al., eds., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary PB - Lexham Press* (Bellingham, WA, 2016). Fix all footnotes.

The importance of the Shema cannot be overstated in the worship and understanding of God by the Jewish people.[11] In the Shema, the thread of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom were established in the minds of His people as complete obedience to God. The consistent recitation of the Shema continually placed the preeminence of God before the people of God. Jesus referred to the Shema when asked about the most important commandments (Mark 12:29–30). The thread between the giving of the Shema in the Old Testament and the giving of the Great Commandments in the New Testament was demonstrated by the judges, the kings, the prophets, and the rabbis throughout the history of Israel. The Old Testament foreshadowed what Jesus ultimately would teach His disciples. When Jesus began His earthly ministry in Galilee, He walked into a Jewish world that was ready to understand His call to be disciples. It was a world that understood the meaning of being a disciple because their history and creeds would continue in the teachings of Jesus.

Discipleship in the New Testament

Just as God established discipleship throughout the Old Testament period, Jesus established the Church by the making of His disciples and the command to them to make disciples of all nations.

The starting point for most discussions about making disciples begins with the Great Commission:

> Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to

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[11] F. L. Cross and Elizabeth Livingstone, eds., "The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church" (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1504.

observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matt. 28:16–20)

The Great Commission was given two to three years after Jesus began to lead His disciples and after His resurrection. There was an entire process of discipleship Jesus undertook before His disciples would be ready to lead as Apostles to undertake the command of Matthew 28:19-2.

<div align="center">Jesus Christ – The Ultimate Disciple Maker</div>

In the Gospel of John, Jesus answered the question of two of John the Baptist's disciples, "Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, 'What are you seeking?' And they said to him, 'Rabbi' (which means Teacher), 'where are you staying?'" (John 1:38). His response was "Come, and you will see" (John 1:39). In effect, his meaning was "Come with me, and you can see how I live."[12] Jesus began the disciple-making process, not in a grand announcement to His future disciples concerning His purpose on earth. He gave His disciples time to overcome their fear, to see His love with action, and to know Him.[13] The miracles, the teaching, and the message of salvation came later. He began with "come and live with me." He gave His disciples time to experience obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and God's kingdom to prepare them for the persecution, the responsibility, and the reward of serving. Jesus demonstrated a patience with His disciples that every disciple should be afforded. This idea was outlined by Bill Hull when he wrote, "True disciplemaking is difficult because it entails change, it takes a long time, and it is hard to visualize. It is

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[12] Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 32.

[13] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 36.

teeming with both possibilities and problems." Jesus gave His disciples the time they needed to grow in their understanding of being true disciples.

Those who followed Jesus called Him rabbi, master, and teacher. Jesus taught them while on a boat (Luke 5) and a mountain (Matt. 5). At times, He taught them "on the way" to their next destination (Mark 9:33). His teaching was both structured and unstructured, sometimes in a crowd and sometimes in the privacy of the group.

Jesus taught His disciples by example whether it was touching and healing the unclean leper to teach the value of loving those who were thought to be unworthy (Matt. 8:1-4) or taking time to care for the children to teach a lesson about humility (Luke 18:15-17). Jesus demonstrated the type of love that would perform the humble task of washing His disciples' feet and then commanded them to "love one another" in the same way (John 13:1-20, 31-35).

Hull asserted, "A disciple needs to grow in his or her convictions, to undergo supervised training experiences with critique, and to be taught certain key ministry skills."[14] This growth most often, for the disciples of Jesus, happened in groups when Jesus explained in private what he taught in public. Jesus' disciples often spoke together about the meaning of the Teacher's words. The moments spent together trying to understand the Master moved them further together in the process of becoming disciples.

The "come and see" phase was embryonic in Jesus' disciple-making plan.[15] The disciples who followed Him were challenged and forced to confront their understanding

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[14] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 147.

[15] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 62.

of Messiah. Eventually, they would be faced with the difficult call to "come and die."
Dietrich Bonhoeffer believed, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."[16]
Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take
up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever
loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-26). It would be the ultimate price
most of His disciples would pay. However, to be sure, Jesus did not begin their
discipleship process with those words. He demonstrated, taught, and patiently waited for
His disciples to understand the plan God had for them. Table 1 shows the phases of the
disciple-making process Jesus used with His disciples.

Table 1: Phases of Jesus' Disciple-Making Process

Phase	Aspect	Key Verse
Come and See	Obedience	John 1:38-39
Come and Be Changed	Transformation	John 4:13-14
Come and Love	Community	John 13:1-17:26
Come and Learn	Education	Matthew 5
Come and Know Me	Worship	Matthew 14:33
Go and Tell	Expansion of God's Kingdom	Luke 10:1-20

Come and See – Obedience

The Apostle Paul described Jesus' obedience to church at Philippi:

Having this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though
he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of
men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient
to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

The night before Jesus was crucified, He prayed, "not my will, but yours, be
done" (Luke 22:42). Obedience was a part of Jesus' personality as well as His message.

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[16] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 10th ed. (London, England: The MacMillan
Company, 1968), 89.

God the Father has required obedience of His people from the beginning of humankind. In Genesis 2, God "commanded the man, saying, 'You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.'" Obedience has an opposite and dangerous alternative in disobedience. For Adam, disobedience would bring death not only for him but also for his offspring.

The first disciples of Jesus would receive one simple command to test their willingness to obey:

> The next day again John was standing with two of his disciples, and he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said. "Behold, the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following and said to them, "What are you seeking?" And they said to him," Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" He said to them, "Come and you will see" (John 1:38-39).

The call of Jesus came with a choice. The could obey and follow or stay with John.

Obedience is yielding to another. For the disciples of Jesus, their obedience would be a mark of their love for the Master as they yielded to His commands.

Jesus told His disciples shortly before he would die for His creation's disobedience, "If you love me, you will keep my commands" (John 14:15). This message came with many other commands to obey with the command to "love one another." (John 13:34) As Jesus prepared to demonstrate His obedience to the Father and His love for His creation, He explained the result of obedience to His commands, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23) His disciples would understand that obedience comes from the love of God and not due to obligation or fear.

In Acts 5 the apostles were thrown into prison by the Sadducees. After they had been freed from prison that evening by an angel of the Lord, they continued to preach.

When Peter and the apostles were brought to the High Priest to be questioned concerning

their disobedience, they knew that they could be killed just as Jesus had been. They

responded, "We must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Their desire to be obedient

to God outweighed their fear of death.

Come and Be Changed - Transformation

The transformation of humankind through redemption is the goal of every

disciple-maker. Jesus, who is the source of redemption, offered transformation to those

with whom He interacted. In the meeting of the Samaritan women at the well He said,

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water

that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become

in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life" (John 4:13-14). The transformation he

offered was to remove the thirst of a life apart from God to be replaced with an

abundance of life. The true change from death to life.

Jesus made disciples, but he gave them more than just knowledge, he offered

transformation. A.W. Tozer stressed the danger of discipleship without transformation:

> I warn you - you will not get help from Him in that way for the Lord will not save
> those whom He cannot command! He will not divide His offices. You cannot
> believe on a half-Christ. We take Him for what He is - the anointed Savior and
> Lord who is King of kings and Lord of lords! He would not be who He is if He
> saved us and called us and chose us without the understanding that He can also
> guide and control our lives.[17]

Tozer wrote that saying one is a Christian without surrendering "his whole being

to God" does not demonstrate what is seen in Scripture of the disciples of Christ.

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[17] A. W. Tozer and Gerald B. Smith, *I Call It Heresy and Other Timely Topics From First Peter* (Rockville, MD: Wingspread, 2010), 13.

Jesus led His twelve disciples in every way a disciple should be led, but in the end, one disciple lacked the transformation required to be a true, committed disciple (John 13:27). Knowledge alone is not enough. It must be accompanied by transformation.

Come and Love – Community

"Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (John 13:1). Jesus brought people together to love and be loved. In the extended discourse of John 13:1-17:26, He gave a new command to "love one another" (John 13:34), told of the great works His disciples would do (John 14:12), and promised the coming of the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). In chapter sixteen, Jesus gave His disciples comfort and encouragement to overcome the world. In John 15:1-17, Jesus told His disciples their abiding in Him and each other would draw them closer to Him, to God the Father, and each other. The community demonstrated by Jesus with the Father would be an example of community to His disciples and the world.

The discourse ends with Jesus' high priestly prayer for His disciples and for the disciples to come. Jesus prayed to the Father a prayer that sums up the life He lived on earth. He pointed His life and actions to the Father. Jesus prayed for them as He would send them into the world. Then in John 17:20-21 Jesus prayed for those who would believe because of His disciples' words so there would be a oneness among them just as Jesus had lived with His Father. This oneness would be the mark of being a disciple throughout the rest of the New Testament. The second generation of disciples that came at the founding of the Church would have oneness. The churches Paul, Peter, and the

other apostles founded would be encouraged to have oneness as well. The command for a
community gathered in love with this oneness would be the calling card of the Church.

Come and Learn – Education

In the Gospel of Matthew, some of the earliest teaching by Jesus is recorded and
is commonly called The Sermon on the Mount. "Seeing the crowds, he went up on the
mountain, and when he sat down, his disciples came to him" (Matt. 5:1). His disciples
came close to learn. Luke 6:17 described the audience that day as "a great crowd of
disciples and a great multitude of people." When Jesus taught in this great crowd, His
disciples came close to hear and to learn.

In the sermon, Jesus told those in attendance how to live. He made no claims in
this discourse about His identity nor did He give an explanation of His mission. He
instead, as the writer Bill Hull explained, "presented his men with a mental framework
for their theology."[18]

Jesus understood the timing of the readiness of people to learn. Often, He taught
in parables which confused the people, including His disciples, but would then explain
the meaning in private to His disciples (Matt. 13:10-17, Matt. 13:36, Mark 4:10-12, Mark
4:33-34). In Matthew 13:10-17 Jesus told His disciples that by explaining His parables in
private He wanted to give them an exclusive understanding of their meaning. The Apostle
Paul explained this as well:

> Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what
> is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of
> which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given

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[18] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 152.

to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages
and generations but now revealed to his saints. (Col. 1:24-26)

Jesus used the education of His disciples to reveal to them the mysteries of the

gospel. This revelation was meant for the spread of the gospel through those whom His

disciples would disciple.

Come and Know Me – Worship

To see Jesus's life and actions gave His disciples a greater understanding of the

divine. In Matthew 14, His disciples had been a part of two back-to-back miracles: Jesus

feeding the five thousand and Jesus walking on water. Events like these were a part of

being with Jesus. On many occasions, His disciples were brought to their knees in

worship (Matt. 21:9, Matthew 28:8-9, John 20:28).

Jesus invoked worship from His disciples by declaring His connection to God, "I

am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If

you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know

him and have seen him" (John 14:6-7). He declared to them that he was in God and God

was in him, "Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on

account of the works themselves" (John 14:11). Yet when he spoke to them, he spoke to

them as friends (John 15:15). He made the connection between serving, loving Him, and

being called His friend. This understanding brought about worship.

Jesus taught that "true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for

the Father is seeking such people to worship him" (John 4:23). This teaching was then

declared in Acts 2 when Peter called the people to recognize that God exalted Jesus to the

right hand of God (Acts 2:29-36).

Paul emphasized to the Philippians, "For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (Phil. 3:3).

Jesus gave His disciples the example of worship as well as the reason to worship.

Go and Tell – Expansion of God's Kingdom

The Gospel of Mark recorded Jesus at the beginning of His ministry saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15). In the Gospel of Luke Jesus said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose" (Luke 4:43).

In practical terms, the coming of Jesus declared the beginning of the messianic age.[19] The kingdom of God would be found in and through Jesus (Luke 8:1, Luke 17:21).

In Luke 10, Jesus sent out seventy-two to nearby towns, "Heal the sick in it and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you'" (Luke 10:9). Jesus instructed them to take a sign of the kingdom, the healing, with the announcement of the kingdom.

By the time Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16, His disciples were transformed. They were no longer just fishermen, tax collectors, and zealots. They were Apostles (Luke 6:13). The Greek word for Apostle is ἀπόστολος which means messenger or envoy.[20] The Apostles would be the envoys to the world for the establishment of the Church. They were ready to make disciples themselves.

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[19] Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Plano, TX: Galaxie Software, 2003), 37.

[20] Bauer and Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 122.

The final process Jesus undertook with His disciples was to commission them for the life of making disciples. His commission to them echoed the commands God had given His people throughout history. The thread of community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom are present in the commission.

In the Great Commission, the aspects of Acts 2:42-47 are demonstrated as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Matthew 28:16-20 and Acts 2:42-47 Aspects Comparison

Aspect	Matthew 28:16-20	Act 2:42-47
Obedience	"all that I have commanded you" -v.20	"they devoted themselves" -v.42
Transformation	"make disciples" -v.19	"were being saved" -v.47
Community	"the eleven disciples went" -v.15	"all who believed were together" - v.44
Education	"teaching them" -v.20	"they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching" - v.42
Worship	"they worshipped him" - v.17	"praising God" - v. 47
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" - v.19	"And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" - v.47

What the disciples received as a command from Jesus would continue to be key to the growth of the Church after Acts 2:42-47. The thread would continue through the rest of the New Testament through the leadership of the Apostles and eventually through the leadership of the Apostle Paul.

The Apostle Paul – A Different Kind of Disciple Maker

Another great source to understand how Acts 2:42-47 came to be is an examination of the disciple-making process of the Apostle Paul. His disciples came after the founding of the Church, but the disciple-making process of Paul yielded the same

results found in Acts 2:42-47. The thread of obedience, transformation, community,

education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom continued in Paul's teachings.

Though Paul was taught at the feet of the Pharisee, Gamaliel, he was discipled by

Barnabas (Acts 11:25-26). Barnabas sought out Paul and invited him to minister to the

church at Antioch against the wishes of the brothers in Jerusalem (Acts 9:25-30). After

Antioch, Barnabas and Paul were sent to Cyprus where they began the process of

disciple-making. The time spent with Barnabas laid a groundwork for Paul's ministry.

Paul used the same process Barnabas and he used even after he and Barnabas no longer

traveled together. He most often arrived in a city, found disciples, and stayed in their

midst for a period. He would make disciples, leave some in the city, and often take others

with him to the next destination (Acts 11:26, 15:41, 16:2, 17:1, 17:10).

Paul had a lifetime of church planting and disciple-making as compared to the

brief time Jesus had on earth. The methods Paul used had a basis in the life of Christ, the

founding of the Church, and his life as a Jew. N. T. Wright asserted, "And he [Paul] saw

this as the way of life to which Judaism had been called, but to which, without Messiah,

Judaism had not attained and could not attain."[21] The way Paul planted churches and

made disciples is seen in his letters to the churches that are a large part of the New

Testament. According to Wright:

> Paul articulated, in other words, a way of being human which he saw as the true
> way. In his ethical teaching, in his community development, and above all in his
> theology and practice of new life through dying and rising with Christ, he

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[21] N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?*, Rep. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 136.

zealously articulated, modeled, inculcated, and urged upon his converts a way of life which he saw as being the genuinely human way of life.[22]

Like Jesus, Paul made disciples in a communal setting. F. F Bruce stated, "Paul insisted on the common life in the body of Christ, in which members were interrelated and interdependent, each making a personal contribution to the good of others and the whole."[23] Paul had disciples he took with him, churches he planted, and the letters he wrote. The obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom was directly included or implied in every letter of Paul.

Table 3 shows the teaching of the thread in Paul's letters to both individuals and churches:

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[22] Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said*, 136.

[23] F. F. Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 142.

Table 3: Paul's Letters and the Thread.

Letter: Romans	*Written To: Church at Rome*
Obedience	"obedience of faith for the sake of his name" -v .1:5
Transformation	"but be transformed by the renewal of your mind" – v. 12:2
Community	"Love one another with brotherly affection" - vs. 12:9-13
Education	"Set their minds on the things of the Spirit" - vs. 8:1–11
Worship	"present your bodies…which is your spiritual worship" – v.12.1
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" -v. 10.13
Letter: Galatians	*Written To: Church at Galatia*
Obedience	"Walk by the Spirit" – v. 5:16
Transformation	"were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" – v. 3:27
Community	"bear one another's burdens" vs. 6:1-5
Education	"the one who is taught the word" – v. 6:6
Worship	"our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!'" – v. 4:6
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles" – v. 3:14
Letter: Ephesians	*Written To: Church at Ephesus*
Obedience	"when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of salvation, and believed in him" – v.1:13
Transformation	"even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ" – v. 2:4
Community	"one body and one Spirit" – vs. 4:1 - 16
Education	"walk in wisdom" - vs. 5:15-21
Worship	"to the praise of His glorious grace" - vs. 1:3-14
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"grows into a holy temple in the Lord" – vs. 2:18-22

Letter: Philippians	*Written To: Church at Philippi*
Obedience	"becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" – v. 2:8
Transformation	"transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" - v. 3:21
Community	"count others more than yourself" – vs. 2:1-4
Education	"think on these things" -vs. 4:8-9
Worship	"to the glory and praise of God" – v. 1:11
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"served to advance the gospel" – v. 1:12
Letter: Colossians	*Written To: Church at Colossae*
Obedience	"do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus:" – v. 3:17
Transformation	"dead in your trespasses…made alive together with Him" – v. 2:13
Community	"indeed you were called in one body" – v. 3:15
Education	"set your mind on things above" – v. 3:1-17
Worship	"singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" – v. 3:16
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"open a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ"- vs. 4:2-5
Letter: 1st and 2nd Corinthians	*Written To: Church at Corinth*
Obedience	"you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge" – v. 1:5
Transformation	"are being transformed into the same image" – v. 3:18
Community	"you are the body of Christ" – v. 12:27
Education	"as I teach them everywhere in every church" - v. 4:17
Worship	"falling on his face, he will worship God and declare that God is really among you" – v. 14:25
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel" – v. 9:22-23

Letter: 1st and 2nd Thessalonians	*Written To: Church at Thessalonica*
Obedience	"when you received the word of God…you accepted it" – v. 2:13
Transformation	"this is the will of God, your sanctification" – v. 4:3
Community	"seek to do good to one another" – vs. 1:12-15
Education	"what instructions we gave you" – vs. 4:1-2
Worship	"Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances" – v. 5:16
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"walk properly before outsiders" – v. 4:12
Letter: First and 2nd Timothy	*Written To: Timothy at Ephesus*
Obedience	"being a good servant of Christ Jesus" – v. 4:6
Transformation	"I was a blasphemer…I received mercy" – v. 1:13
Community	"an older man…encourage as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters" – v. 5:1
Education	"come to the knowledge of truth" – v. 2:4
Worship	"pray, lifting up holy hands" – v. 2:8
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"desires all people to be saved" – v. 2:4
Letter: Titus	*Written To: Titus at Crete*
Obedience	"renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives" – v. 2:12
Transformation	"to purify for himself a people" – v. 2:14
Community	"show perfect courtesy toward all people" - vs. 3:1-2
Education	"teach what accords with sound doctrine" – vs. 2:1-6
Worship	"waiting for our blessed hope...the glorious appearing" – vs. 2:11-14
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"bringing salvation for all people" – v. 2:11

Letter: Philemon	Written To: Philemon at Colossae
Obedience	"Confidence of your obedience" – v. 21
Transformation	"he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me" – v. 11
Community	"the church in your house" – vs. 1-2
Education	"Confident in your obedience" – v. 21
Worship	"the hearts of the saints have been refreshed" – v. 4
Expansion of God's Kingdom	"the sharing of your faith" – v. 6

The writings of Paul are taught in Bible studies, preached in sermons, and memorized by many Christians. His teachings point to the core of what it means to be a disciple. As modern Christian churches are formed, they base many of their guiding values on the teachings of Paul. These teaching inform the structure of the church leadership, discipline, and mission of most Christian churches. It can be argued that the instructions given by Paul to those whom He wrote were meant to continue the discipling process for all churches. Paul's commitment to the spread of the gospel embraced the need for making disciples who understood how to encourage others to grow in their understanding of making disciples.

Conclusion

From Creation, Scripture shows that God has desired to walk with humankind. In this relationship, God created community with His creation, education for His creation to understand the relationship with the Creator, recognition of the worthiness of worship of the Creator, and a call to expand the kingdom of the Creator into the sinful world.

Scripture is replete with the concept of community. There has always been a call for the people to gather together around God. When the people of God draw close to Him, the desire to follow His commands, worship Him, and tell the world of Him

becomes central to their lives. This is discipleship seen in all of Scripture. There is no higher purpose for humans than the relationship between God and humankind.

If the modern Church looks to the discipleship processes in Scripture again, it will require a reformation, a great awakening, and a turning to the ways of God.

As Scripture is studied from Creation to Revelation, the thread of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of God's kingdom is always present. It is even seen in Heaven as the redeemed will gather around the throne of God:

> After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." (Rev. 7:9-12)

As believers are gathered together in the community of heaven, the kingdom of God will be complete. The worship by His creation will be shouted.

> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Rev. 21:1-4)

Humankind will once again be with God as the obedient bride who has finally undergone the final transformation to eternal life. It is with this understanding that making disciples can be understood for its importance and centrality to God's eternal plans.

CHAPTER THREE: A REVIEW OF THE MODERN UNDERSTANDING
OF DISCIPLE-MAKING

A Look at the Problem of Poor Disciple-Making

The struggle for the modern church is understanding how to go against the culture to make disciples. According to the Barna Research Group, "Only 1 percent of church leaders say today's churches are doing well at discipling new believers."[24] They also found "only one in five Christians is involved in some sort of discipleship activity."[25]

As culture has continued to move further away from God and His Church, society is embracing other ways of answering the fundamental reasons for human existence outside of a Judeo-Christian worldview. In the culture today, there are many alternatives to church attendance, faith in God, and close familial relationships.

The act of attending church has become less important to society as the busyness of life and the secularization of society has grown in the United States. The landscape for the fields Jesus said were "white for harvest" (John 4:35) may look different than they did in the first century, but the harvest is still needed.

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[24] Barna Group, ed., *The State of Discipleship: A Barna Report Produced in Partnership with The Navigators*, 1st ed. (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2015), 35.

[25] Barna Group, *The State of Discipleship*, 56.

Steve McMullin, in a study he conducted with 16 declining churches across the United States and Canada, found thirty-nine percent of the participants felt the general busyness of life and competing activities kept most people away from the church.[26]

McMullin noted, "The traditional deference to church activities on Sunday has largely disappeared; some people in contemporary society may still think of church when they think of Sunday, but even for many believers, attending church has become one of several options on Sunday mornings."[27]

Barna Research Group has studied the problem of the secularization of society often in recent years. In their 2017 annual trends report, they reported that forty-four percent of Americans are "Post-Christian." Their metrics for being "Post-Christian" came from 15 criteria they compiled (Table 4). To be considered "Post-Christian," the survey participants had to meet nine of the criteria. The criteria were meant to measure their level of Christian identity, belief, and practice.[28]

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[26] Steve McMullin, "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches," *Review of Religious Research* 55, no. 1 (2013): 46.

[27] McMullin, "The Secularization of Sunday: Real or Perceived Competition for Churches," 43.

[28] Barna Group, *Barna Trends 2017: What's New and What's Next at the Intersection of Faith and Culture*, 2017 ed. edition. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2016), 184.

Table 4: Barna's Post-Christian Metric.

1. Do not believe in God
2. Identify as atheist or agnostic
3. Disagree that faith is important in their lives
4. Have not prayed to God in the last year
5. Have never made a commitment to Jesus
6. Disagree the Bible is accurate
7. Have not donated money to a church in the last year
8. Have not attended a Christian church in the last year
9. Agree that Jesus committed sins
10. Do not feel responsible to "share their faith"
11. Have not read the Bible in the last week
12. Have not volunteered at church in the last week
13. Have not attended Sunday school in the last week
14. Have not attended a religious small group in the last week
15. Did not participate in a house-church in the last year

The study also found, while most Americans still identify as Christian, the level of atheism and agnosticism is on the rise.

Dave Kinnaman gives three "arenas" where he feels modern-day churches are failing: relationships, vocation, and wisdom.[29] As each generation is born, the process of making disciples is getting more difficult. Kinnaman believes the two new generations of Americans, the Mosaics and the Busters, feel alienated from the older generations. They have not been taught faith and vocation can mesh. This means that their lives are more compartmentalized than previous generations. Lastly, he believes wisdom has been replaced by information.[30] As education levels increase in society, he believes that churches also lean more on education than true mentoring.

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[29] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 28–30.

[30] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith*, 28–30.

The concept of "religious nones" has taken center stage in the research of the trends in the decline of religious affiliation. The religious nones include atheists, agnostics, and people who do not identify with any religion.

The Pew Research Center found that in 2010 in North America, seventeen percent of the population was "religiously unaffiliated."[31]

Joel Theison and Sarah Wilkins-LaFlamme explained:

Religious nones are the fastest growing "religious" group in much of the modern Western world. In both the United States and Canada, for example, religious nones have steadily risen since the late 1980s and early 1990s: today, nearly one-fifth of Americans and a quarter of Canadians do not identify with any religion.[32]

In recent years, the problem for many in the United States has been what they view as the Church's focus on political issues instead of theological issues. Some point to the political stances of the Christian Right that have become "louder" since the early 1990s. Paul Djupe, Jacob Neiheisel, and Kimberly Conger posited, "As the argument goes, the Christian Right is the most visible manifestation of religion in the United States, and the extreme positions taken by the movement on abortion and especially gay rights made all religion inhospitable for liberals and moderates."[33]

Though the decline of organized religion is obvious, the future is not without hope. Some have taken non-typical approaches to religion. Kelly Bean wrote of her

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[31] Pew Research Center, "Projected Changes in the Global Religiously Unaffiliated Population," http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religiously-unaffiliated/, (accessed October 30, 2018).

[32] Joel Thiessen and Sarah Wilkins-Laflamme, "Becoming a Religious None: Irreligious Socialization and Disaffiliation.," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56, no. 1 (March 2017): 64.

[33] Paul A. Djupe, Jacob R. Neiheisel, and Kimberly H. Conger, "Are the Politics of the Christian Right Linked to State Rates of the Nonreligious? The Importance of Salient Controversy," *Political Research Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2018): 910.

experience of leaving her pastorate and eventually leaving organized religion, "Some

have left faith, some are drifting, and some may be lapping up the luxury of fewer

commitments and taking in the *Sunday Times*."[34] She further shared, "Yet many others

are finding new ways to live out their Christian faith, still adhering to new ways of faith

while finding new, imaginative forms of expression and practice."[35] The lack of religious

affiliation does not always indicate a lack of religious faith.

In Europe, where much of what is occurring in North America has been

happening for some time, Brent Nelson, James Guth, and Brian Highsmith researched

religious influence in Europe with the creation of the European Union:

> Some scholars argue that modernization means that religion's influence will
> continue to decline in all aspects of European society, but others contend that
> religious belief and behavior, while changing significantly, may still shape
> attitudes and behavior in subtle ways. Still other scholars contend that European
> religion is alive and well among immigrant populations and will become
> increasingly important politically as secular Europe copes with burgeoning groups
> motivated by a religious sense it cannot, or does not wish to, understand.[36]

Martin Marty wrote in 1998 about this issue, using the metaphor of boundaries.

He wrote of the decline of the purposes of denominations, the changes in the perception

of people outside of religion, and the changing landscape of what he calls the "spiritual

marketplace." He postulated what he felt would be seen in the new century in a post-

denominational era:

> In the new century, one may expect a continued drama among those who like so
> many around the world, have at least three choices. Some turn tribal and exclusive

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[34] Kelly Bean, *How to Be a Christian Without Going to Church: The Unofficial Guide to Alternative Forms of Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2014), 61.

[35] Bean, *How to Be a Christian without Going to Church*, 61.

[36] Brent F. Nelsen, James L. Guth, and Brian Highsmith, "Does Religion Still Matter? Religion and Public Attitudes toward Integration in Europe," *Politics and Religion* 4, no. 1 (2011): 5.

within their boundaries. Others seek to choose communal life of more open character but still respectful of boundaries. Still others heed the call to pay no attention to boundaries, and then invent new kinds of responses.[37]

Many religions, churches, and denominations have sought to address these issues by adapting to the culture or developing new models or methods for "reaching people." Many recent attempts have centered around missions, relationships, and church planting.

In the forward for the book *The Permanent Revolution* by Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, Darrell Guder contended, "One of the most intriguing pieces of evidence that Western Christendom is over, or is rapidly disintegrating, is the emergence of a broad spectrum of initiatives to plant untraditional, post-denominational congregations in the Western cultures once self-defined as Christian."[38]

There are those who do not see a need to change religious traditions or practices and insist that change is bending to the will of society. Walter Brueggemann wrote:

> There is no one single or normative model of church life. It is dangerous and distorting for the church to opt for an absolutist model that it insists upon in every circumstance. Moreover, we are more prone to engage in such reductionism, if we do not keep alive a conversation concerning competing and conflicting models. Or to put it positively, models of the church must not be dictated by cultural reality, but they must be voiced and practiced in ways that take careful account of the particular time and circumstance into which God's people are called. Every model of the church must be critically contextual.[39]

Pushing society to see conformity to an ideal we call church does not come without dangers. While the intention may be pure, we must remember the making of

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[37] Martin Marty, "Revising the Map of American Religion," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558, no. 1 (1998): 26.

[38] Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), xv.

[39] Walter Brueggemann, "Rethinking Church Models Through Scripture," *Theology Today* 48, no. 2 (1991): 139.

disciples, for Jesus, never came with coercion. There is danger in using Scripture to force

conformity on a society that does not understand the intentions of Scripture. F.F. Bruce

put it this way:

> "In applying the New Testament text to our own situation, we need not treat it as
> the scribes of our Lord's day treated the Old Testament. We should not turn what
> were meant to be guiding lines for worshippers in one situation into laws binding
> for all time."[40]

The hope of pastors, teachers, members, and denominational leaders in the

Western Church has been that the tide would turn - God would speak, and the Church

would transform into the movement it was at its founding. Their attempts have not been

without genuine desire and significant effort.

Francis Chan believes the answer to the decline of Christianity may the need for

another reformation:

> From the very beginning, the Church has always needed pruning. We've always
> needed reformers and reformations to speak with the voice of the prophet, to call
> us back to what we were meant to be. Church history is full of reformations of all
> sizes that have pulled God's people closer to God's intention for His Church.[41]

The pruning which may be needed should begin by admitting there is a problem

that is centered around the understanding of making disciples. Matthew 28:16-20,

considering the continued downturn in church attendance, may require many churches to

re-think their disciple-making processes.

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[40] F.F. Bruce, "Women in the Church: A Biblical Survey," *Christian Brethren Review*, no. 33 (1982): 11.

[41] Francis Chan, *Letters to the Church* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2018), 188.

A Return to Disciple-Making

According to Eric Geiger, a church that is deficient in making disciples is deficient in its reason for existence.[42] His belief is that the Church must return to making disciples in a fashion that will yield results like those found in Acts 2:42-47. The Church can only thrive by following the commands of its founder, Jesus.

Mark Clifton, who is a leading authority in church revitalization, asserted, "Churches in North America are dying from a lack of disciple-making."[43] Clifton, along with many others, is trying to lead a movement to revive dying churches in North America with a focus on discipleship. Clifton believes the dying churches will revive only through biblical disciple-making.

Brian Croft maintained, "A church is revitalized by the power of God through the Spirit of God at work through the word of God by means of a faithful shepherd of God."[44] In North America, this is most often done by a pastor in a pulpit on Sunday mornings. Proclamation is only a small part of the work of the Holy Spirit seen in Scripture. In the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit moved the people of God into action through a change in their hearts. Their lives then reflected the changes in their hearts.

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[42] Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2012), 21.

[43] Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches*, 1st ed. (Nashville, TN: B&H Books, 2016), 7.

[44] Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying & Divided Churches*, Revised ed. (Christian Focus, 2016), 24.

Harry Reeder wrote, "God is working to plant churches in America and overseas, but He is doing great things through the ministry of church revitalization."[45] He added, "The size of a church is not necessarily an indication of its health."[46] Regardless of church size, denomination, or church model, the struggles of the modern churches' relevance to the surrounding culture points to the need for a return to making genuine disciples. The answer must come in the form of disciple-making that was demonstrated by Jesus.

Once the first century Church began, it did not take long before the Book of Acts records the difficulty for the Church to stay true to the commands of Christ. As Paul made disciples, planted churches, and went to prison because of his mission, he wrote letters to many churches calling them to unity among the believers in the Body of Christ because he recognized the difficulty they had in maintaining unity.

Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim have attempted to put the goal of disciple-making in perspective by addressing the roles of church leadership found in Ephesians 4:11: Apostles, prophets, evangelists, and teachers. They call this "the APEST model." They see a need for a "theological (re)imagination and (re)construction" of discipleship by understanding these roles.[47] Their conclusion in their extensive argument for the APEST model is:

> Putting aside the Christendom heritage and how that still biases our organizations, most denominational templates were formed following the model of centralized

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[45] Harry Reeder and David Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame: How God Can Revitalize Your Church*, Revised and Expanded ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J: P & R Publishing, 2008), 24.

[46] Reeder and Swavely, *From Embers to a Flame*, 28.

[47] Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, xxi.

management systems of the industrial era, models that are now rightly considered defunct by most corporations. We believe that it is well past time for us to return to the most primal and effective form: the apostolic movement.[48]

Hirsch and Catchim believe the blueprint of the New Testament is impossible to improve. They approach the process of disciple-making from a similar approach as the Apostle Paul as he wrote in his letters. The recognition of the APEST roles is a way to form a framework that is built on the disciple-making process to create leaders "to equip the saints for the work of ministry" (Eph. 4:12).

Bill Hull explained the importance of this discussion to understand disciple-making, "Enough of the church has accepted a nondiscipleship Christianity to render it ineffective at its primary task—the transformation of individuals and communities into the image of Christ."[49] He further wrote, "Ours is a gospel that calls every person to believe what Jesus believed, live as he lived, love as he loved, serve as he served, and lead as he led." By reigniting the apostolic and disciple-making process of the early church, there may be an opportunity to rediscover what is missing in the efforts of many churches.

Thomas Merton stated in his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, "For the revolutions of men change nothing. The only influence that can really upset the injustice and iniquity of men is the power that breathes in Christian tradition, renewing our

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[48] Hirsch and Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution*, 247.

[49] Bill Hull and Dallas Willard, *Choose the Life: Exploring a Faith That Embraces Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 11.

participation in the Life that is the Light of men."[50] Merton believed, as others do, the

command to make disciples is enough to keep the Church vibrant and alive.

The participation in receiving the "Life," which is Christ, will empower the ability

to give life. This may be the most critical aspect of discipleship. The life Jesus promised

was what transformed the lives of His disciples. Acts 2:42-47 proves the results of

receiving a new life for the people of the early Church.

While much of the discussion in the Church has been about effective and

ineffective church models, denominations, and ministry methods, many have looked to

the blueprint of New Testament Scripture once again to reevaluate the Christian Church.

Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola addressed it this way:

> "So what is Christianity? It is Christ. Nothing more. Nothing less. Christianity is
> not an ideology or a philosophy. Neither is it a new type of morality, social ethics,
> or worldview. Christianity is the "good news" that beauty, truth, and goodness are
> found in a person. And true humanity and community are founded on and
> experienced by connection to that person."[51]

Sweet and Viola's words about Christianity are not a new idea. Paul taught that

the Church, which he called the Body of Christ, does the work of Christ functioning as

Christ to the world. It is not merely a part of life but is a life lived in community with

other believers to demonstrate the good news.

Paul Sparks, Tim Sorrens, and Dwight Frieson have researched small churches

that have regained their place in their communities. They found, "Contrary to all the

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[50] Thomas Merton and Sue Monk Kidd, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Rep. ed. (New York, NY: New Directions, 2007), 147.

[51] Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Manifesto: Restoring the Supremacy and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 174.

clamor about dying churches, the closer we get to the everyday life of people in their neighborhoods, the more we find burgeoning expressions of reconciliation and renewal."[52] The Church must exist in the lives of people and their actions.

Understanding Disciple-Making

Many church leaders struggle to define the term disciple. According to Sylvia Collinson, though there is much literature written about discipleship, very few try to define being a disciple, "Scholars rarely mention its characteristics as a model of teaching. Yet we have seen the concept underlies many practices in the New Testament."[53] The understanding of being a disciple and making disciples is seen in the actions of Jesus and those who followed Him. Just as Acts 2:42-47 gives the modern Church an example to follow, the actions of those who made disciples in Scripture demonstrate not just in words but also in deed the definition of a disciple and how disciples are made.

Opoku Onyinah points out that a disciple is produced as "the end product of the process of discipleship."[54] There is a process and a result. If the definition and the result do not match in most aspects with what is found in Scripture, then the process and the understanding of the desired result must be changed.

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[52] Paul Sparks, Tim Soerens, and Dwight J. Friesen, *The New Parish: How Neighborhood Churches Are Transforming Mission, Discipleship and Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2014), 29.

[53] Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus' Educational Methods for Today's Church*, Rep. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2007), 163.

[54] Opoku Onyinah, *The Meaning of Discipleship*, vol. 106, 2, 2017, 219, http://link.galegroup.com.ezproxy.bethel.edu/apps/doc/A521877305/EAIM?u=clic_bethel&sid=EAIM&xid=95971971.

The Church has historically used many labels for the terms "disciple" and "disciple-making." Hans Kvalbein believes Christians may need to reevaluation the meaning of disciple-making in the early Church because "The biblical concept of discipleship has in our church tradition been replaced by other concepts and other words."[55]

Groups of people customarily designate themselves with names or labels. Labels can mean different things to different people. Paul Trebilco asserted, "The self-designations used by a group have an impact on the group's identity and on how it sees itself."[56] In Scripture, different words are used for the term "disciple." The writers of the Gospels wrote that Jesus used the term disciple when referring to His disciples. This term was also used in the Book of Acts. Outside of the Gospels and Acts, the terms used for disciples are the saints, brothers and sisters, believers (or different forms from the root πίστις), fellowship or community, and the way.[57] The terms "believer," "Christian," and "Jesus-follower" are just a few of the terms used today for the word disciple, but if meaning used today does not reflect what Jesus meant when he used the term disciple, then there is a problem that must be addressed.

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[55] Hans Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples: The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," *Themelios* 13, no. 2 (1988): 49.

[56] Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 160-161, Kindle.

[57] Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*., 8999.

Eric Geiger, Michael Kelly, and Philip Nation used surveys taken from their

research with Lifeway Research, and interviews with twenty-five subject matter experts

about disciple-making. They found:

> Discipleship is a word that is often hijacked and haphazardly tossed around to describe a multitude of things. And because it has become such a nebulous term, people launch complaints about a ministry described as "discipleship" that may not have the slightest resemblance to what is possible in delivering transformation to people. Perhaps the deficiency flows from a faulty understanding of discipleship. If a church or an individual has an inaccurate view of discipleship, the resulting impact is horrifyingly huge.[58]

Understanding the concept of disciple-making must come from the correct

interpretation of Scripture. Understanding the meaning of terms used by disciple-makers

in scripture will aid in understanding the process of biblical disciple-making.

Richard Longenecker explained, "So it is important to interpret the New

Testament presentations of Christian self-understanding and practice in terms of both

their universal qualities and their specific situational features, of both their overlapping

agreements and their differences."[59]

In the Greco-Roman world, the concept of disciple had many different meanings

such as "learners" or "adherents." Paul Trebilco wrote, though Jesus was not the only

individual to use the term disciple in the Aramaic equivalent talmîdayyā' he "redefined

the concept of 'disciples' and gave it a very specific meaning." Jesus gave it His

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[58] Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 17–18.

[59] Longenecker, Richard N., *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 5.

meaning, which Trebilco asserts is one of the reasons it is a problem to misinterpret the meaning of discipleship which many do today.[60]

Luke 10:1-12 tells of the seventy who were sent out. Though the seventy are never called disciples, they have much the same responsibility of the twelve as seen in Matthew 10:5-15. Michael Wilkins asserts that the seventy show "Jesus had many disciples besides the Twelve whom he trained and used in his earthly ministry."[61] Wilkins calls them disciples because they did what disciples were commanded to do in Scripture.

Though Paul did not use the word disciple in his letters, he used the terms believer, saints, and brothers. He wrote explicitly of the fellowship of believers in the Body of Christ much the way Jesus referred to His disciples. According to Paul Trebilco, "He (Paul) uses a range of terms related to the family, such as God as Father, Jesus as Son, Christians as sons and daughters, children of God, and brothers and sisters, and Paul as father and nursing mother. Family metaphors are very important for Paul's theology and understanding of Christian relations, and one aspect of this is the use of ἀδελφοί (brothers)."[62]

The disciples of Jesus were instructed to make other disciples. Though the term used later may not have been the word disciple, Jesus sent his disciples to make disciples.

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[60] Paul Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 9356, Kindle.

[61] Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1992), 2422, Kindle.

[62] Trebilco, *Self-Designations and Group Identity in the New Testament*, 930.

The first discipling process Jesus' disciples undertook was the faith community seen in
Acts 2:42-47.

The Characteristics of Biblical Disciples

Studying the lives of the disciples of Jesus shows the life of a disciple required
following the example of the Master. Bonhoeffer stressed, "The fellowship between Jesus
and His disciples covered every aspect of their daily life."[63] His disciples followed their
rabbi as was the custom in Jewish life. This way of learning was common between rabbis
and their students.[64]

Lee Clamp stated, "But the assembly of people described there [in Acts 2] only
continues the story of Jesus' ministry. Jesus remained in their midst; empowered by the
Holy Spirit, the Christ remained at work in his body, the church."[65] The life of a disciple
in the early Church was the life daily lived in the process of making disciples as
demonstrated by Jesus.

The relationship between disciple (μιμητής) in the Gospels and Acts and the word
imitator (μαθητής) in the Epistles shows a relationship of the disciple to their disciple-
maker.[66] Imitation was a part of being a disciple or student of the rabbi. Jesus said:

> You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord
> and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

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[63] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 284.

[64] Louis Berkhof, *Biblical Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans-Sevensma Co., 1915), 68.

[65] Lee C. Camp, *Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 114.

[66] Victor A. Copan, "Μαθητής and Μιμητής: Exploring an Entangled Relationship," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 17 (2007): 313.

For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. (John 12:13-15)

Jesus gave His disciples an example to follow. Dallas Willard wrote discipleship "means I am with him to learn from him how to be like him."[67] Being like Jesus was the goal of His disciples.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life" (John 8:12). Thomas à Kempis wrote, *"These are the words of Christ; and they teach us how far we must imitate His life and character, if we seek true illumination, and deliverance from all blindness of heart. Let it be our most earnest study, therefore, to dwell upon the life of Jesus Christ."*[68]

Paul told his disciples in Corinth that they should not cause any offense to those around them (1 Cor. 10). Paul then instructed, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Keith Philips paraphrased this verse, "Because your character resembles the Master's, you are worth imitating. The Spirit urges and enables disciples to imitate the Christ who lives in you."[69] This imitation process is empowered by the Holy Spirit.

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[67] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life In God*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1998), 276.

[68] Kempis, Thomas a, *Imitation of Christ*, trans. William Benham (Scotts Valley, CA: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018).

[69] Keith W. Phillips, *The Making of a Disciple* (Old Tappan, N.J: World Impact Press, 1981), 1741, Kindle.

Dustin Ellington believed "Paul's exhortation to imitate himself refers to his relationship to the gospel." [70] Paul stated, "I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings" (1 Cor 9:23).

The call to discipleship was clear for the disciples of Jesus. According to James Boice, Jesus' disciples understood that, "From the beginning, discipleship is involved in what it means to be a Christian."[71] For the early Church, there was no membership but only discipleship. The Apostles shared the words of Jesus and spoke through the moving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit transformed the people. This made them a part of the early Church.

Richard Jacobson wrote, "The way to unlock our calling as a genuine church community is to remain focused on Christ."[72] To be a disciple means to be focused on the words, the examples, and the authority of Jesus just as the first disciples were.

The disciples of Jesus and the early Church found strength from the faith in the teaching of Jesus as they faced persecution. Rodney Stark proposed:

> During his ministry, Jesus seems to have been the leader of a sect movement within Judaism. Indeed, even in the intermediate aftermath of the Crucifixion, there was little to separate the disciples from their fellows Jews. However, on the morning of the third day something happened that turned the Christian sect into a cult movement.[73]

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[70] Dustin W. Ellington, "Imitating Paul's Relationship to the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 33, no. 3 (2011): 304.

[71] James Montgomery Boice, *Christ's Call to Discipleship*, Rep. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2013), 17.

[72] Richard Jacobson, *Unchurching: Christianity Without Churchianity* (Nashville, TN: Unchurching Books, 2016), 186.

[73] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: How the Obscure, Marginal Jesus Movement Became the Dominant Religious Force in the Western World in a Few Centuries* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1997), 44.

The classification of the early Church as a cult by those in Rome and in Judaism meant that in the middle of the founding of the Church, the disciples mentioned in Acts were persecuted. Yet during persecution, Roman occupation, and the difficulty of staying true to Jesus' calling, the early Church still moved forward and grew.

To grow like the early church, churches today must look past ministry struggles and focus on the call to make disciples as the early church did. The modern Church can thrive with the recognition of its true calling.

Joshua Greever claimed, "The Gospel call stories are intended to illustrate Jesus' identity and provide a discipleship theology."[74] Jesus challenged with the calling, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24-25).

For all disciples, the call of Jesus to "come and follow" has a significant meaning. Jesus called His disciples, and the Holy Spirit called the disciples of the early Church through the disciples of Jesus. This is an example of the calling on all believers. Darrell Bock believed that Jesus called His disciples in the first century, in Judea, and then command them to take the His message to all the world because "the call of Jesus through the Twelve invites participation in God's renewed covenantal hope."[75] The world

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[74] Joshua M. Greever et al., eds., "Lexham Bible Dictionary" (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

[75] Darrell L. Bock, *Who Is Jesus?: Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith*, 1 edition. (New York: Howard Books, 2012), 787, Kindle.

that came afterward, both Jewish and Gentile, received the covenantal hope that God the Father promised those who made Him their God.

John Vincent wrote, "Jesus appoints, 'makes,' 'creates,' or 'puts in place' the Twelve, who have both a corporate persona as a twelve-community, and also individual names and nicknames or characteristics."[76] Jesus said that He desired those whom He called. (Mark 3:13) He wanted them as His disciples. The calling of a disciple in Scripture constituted a contract incited by the one who was calling.[77] This example of calling is what Jesus passed on to those whom he called and would later command them to call others in the same way (Matt. 28:16-20).

As Christ commanded His disciples, their obedience to Him was in part a loving recognition of His authority. Bonhoeffer stated, "The call goes forth and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciple is an act of obedience, not a confession of faith in Jesus."[78] Jesus said if His disciples loved Him, they would follow His commands (John 14:15). Jesus also said, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like (Luke 6:47-48):" Dallas Willard asked, "Would a person be excused if he or she took these words to mean that Jesus intends obedience for us? The missing note in evangelical life today is not the first instance of

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[76] John J. Vincent, "Outworkings: Twelve as Christian Community," *The Expository Times* 119, no. 12 (2008): 583.

[77] Vincent, "Outworkings: Twelve as Christian Community," 584.

[78] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 57.

spirituality but rather obedience."[79] Jesus' disciples were not called spiritual, but they were known by their obedience to Him.

The first disciples of the early Church in Acts 2 showed the same obedience to the commands of the Apostles. The idea of obedience continued to be a key marker of a disciple in the early Church throughout the New Testament and beyond. The early church father Clement of Rome encouraged the disciples in Corinth concerning their obedience to the older men in their midst, "For ye did all things without respect of persons, and ye walked after the ordinances of God, submitting yourselves to your rulers and rendering to the older men among you the honour which is their due." [80]

This obedience to Jesus led to the education of His disciples. In the New Testament, disciples were devoted to the teaching of their master, rabbi, or teacher. The name disciple (μαθητής), meaning learner, should be a reminder that the Church from the beginning was the "school" of Jesus.[81] Mike Breen proposed:

> Discipleship isn't a random assortment of facts and propositions and behaviors, discipleship is something that is you to the core and is completely incarnated in you. If it is information, it is information that has worked its way into you and is now part of you, in the same way that John talks about the logos being wrapped up in the person of Jesus: "The Word became flesh." It goes from being information to being knowledge.[82]

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[79] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 44.

[80] Joseph Barber Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1891), 57.

[81] Kvalbein, "Go Therefore and Make Disciples: The Concept of Discipleship in the New Testament," 49.

[82] Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 2nd edition. (3DM Publishing, 2014), 323, Kindle.

Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40). Being a disciple of Jesus, according to Dallas Willard, is a "real-life apprenticeship to Jesus."[83] Willard further wrote, "That is precisely why Jesus told his people, when they saw him for the last time in his familiar visible form, to make disciples, students, apprentices to him from every ethnic group on earth."[84] They had completed their apprenticeships and were ready to lead.

Jesus said, "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). According to Opoku Onyinah in his paper *The Meaning of Discipleship*, "This shows that a disciple is one who is learning and obeying Jesus Christ and is firmly established on the path of becoming like Jesus."[85] Becoming like Jesus is a learned response to the movement of the Holy Spirit and the commands of Jesus. It does not come simply by an acceptance of the offer of salvation.

The way that the disciples of Jesus and much of the early Church learned was in a communal setting. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, the founders of the Crowded House Network in the United Kingdom, maintained:

> The New Testament word for community is koinonia, often translated by the now anemic word "fellowship." Koinonia is linked to the words "common," "sharing," and "participation." We are the community of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14) in community with the Son (1 Cor 1:9)—sharing our lives (1 Thes 2:8), sharing our

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[83] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 280.

[84] Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 280.

[85] Onyinah, *The Meaning of Discipleship*, 106:222.

property (Acts 4:32), sharing in the gospel (Phil 1:5; Phlm 6), and sharing in Christ's suffering and glory (2 Cor 1:6–7; 1 Peter 4:13.).[86]

The early Church had at its core the "one-another-ness" of discipleship.[87] John Stott asserted that the "one-another" verses "describe the reciprocity of Christian fellowship."[88] If koinonia is missing from a faith community, then the "one-another-ness" seen in Scripture will not be present in the faith community.

Relationship is essential to discipleship. John Stott believed, "Christian family or fellowship groups, are indispensable for growth into spiritual maturity."[89] The idea of a personal quiet time or a personal relationship with Christ as it has come to mean in the modern Church did not exist in the early Church.

Rodney Stark claimed, "The basis for successful conversionist movements is growth through social networks, through a structure of direct and intimate interpersonal attachments."[90] Growing relationships with each other was meant to cause the Body to grow in relationship with each other and with God.

Dustin Ellington believes that Paul in his letters "calls them (believers) to embrace this relationship to the gospel, so that Christ's death for others, both its pattern and power, shapes the way these believers carry out their life together as a

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[86] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 42.

[87] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 73.

[88] John Stott, *The Living Church: Convictions of a Lifelong Pastor*, First Edition. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Books, 2007), 1050, Kindle.

[89] Stott, *The Living Church*, 932.

[90] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 20.

congregation."[91] In the koinonia of the faith community, the people become more like Jesus together not separately.

As disciples grow in their relationships with each other, they should begin to serve each other and those around them. Mission was important to the early Church. The koinonia of the faith community affected the world around them. Stark wrote, "Most new religious movements fail because they quickly become closed or semi-closed networks. That is, they fail to keep forming and sustaining attachments to outsiders and thereby lose the capacity to grow."[92]

Lesslie Newbigin stated, "They (disciples of Jesus) will share in his mission as they share in his passion, as they follow him in challenging and unmasking the powers of evil. There is no other way to be with him. At the heart of mission is simply the desire to be with him and to give him the service of our lives."[93]

Whether it is the sending of the twelve, the seventy, or the eleven gathered in Matthew 28:16, Jesus sent His disciples out to the world. In the New Testament, being sent (ἀπέστειλεν) was a part of the discipling process. This concept of being sent is intricately connected to the word apostle or messenger (ἀπόστολος). Being sent on the mission of disciple-making is core to the movement of a believer in Christ to becoming a disciple of Christ.

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[91] Ellington, "Imitating Paul's Relationship to the Gospel: 1 Corinthians 8.1-11.1," 304.

[92] Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*, 20.

[93] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 127.

A Definition of Disciple-Making

Michael Wilkins defined a disciple as:

One who has come to Jesus for eternal life, has claimed Jesus as Savior and God, and has embarked upon the life of following Jesus. Disciple is the primary term used in the Gospels to refer to Jesus' followers and is a common referent for those known in the early church as believers, Christians, brothers/sisters, those of the Way, or saints, although each term focuses upon different aspects of the individual's relationship with Jesus and others of the faith.[94]

This definition points not only to the gift of eternal life but to a transformation in the life of those who claim Jesus as Savior. It states that regardless of what a disciple is called the life they live is distinctive.

Francis Chan claimed, "That's the whole point of being a disciple of Jesus: we imitate him, carry on his ministry and become like him in the process."[95] Becoming a disciple of Jesus requires following His example, being strong in persecution, being called by the Master, living in obedience to the Master, being taught as students, living in fellowship with other believers, and being on the mission the Master gave.

The Modern House-Church Movement and Disciple-Making

When a faith community focuses on obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom, a faith community like the one found in Acts 2:42-47 can exist in any church model. The house-church movement attempts to rediscover these aspects.

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[94] Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 513.

[95] Francis Chan, David Platt, and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 16.

Wolfgang Simson calls the house-church movement a "re-incarnation of the church."[96] He described the house-church as "a way of living the Christian life communally in ordinary homes through supernatural power. It is the way redeemed people live locally; the organic way disciples follow Jesus together in everyday life.[97] Simson offered that we do not experience Christ only in "sacred rooms."[98]

Many suggest the emperor Constantine may have brought about the rise of Christianity. He brought the Church out of hiding. Rodney Stark suggested though that:

> For far too long, historians have accepted the claim that the conversion of the Emperor Constantine caused the triumph of Christianity. To the contrary, he destroyed its most attractive and dynamic aspects, turning a high-intensity, grassroots movement into an arrogant institution controlled by an elite who often managed to be both brutal and lax.[99]

Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey affirmed, "House-churches played an essential role in the rapid growth and ultimate triumph of Christianity, and it is safe to say that the first three centuries belonged to the house-church movement."[100]

No matter the position taken on the actions of Constantine, it is clear the early Church survived its first three centuries of existence despite persecution and other difficulties internally.

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[96] Wolfgang Simson and George Barna, *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna Books, 2009), xiii.

[97] Simson and Barna, *The House Church Book*, 31.

[98] Simson and Barna, *The House Church Book*, 32.

[99] Rodney Stark, *For the Glory of God: How Monotheism Led to Reformations, Science, Witch-Hunts, and the End of Slavery* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2003), 33.

[100] Harley Atkinson and Joel Comiskey, "Lessons from the Early House Church for Today's Cell Groups," *Christian Education Journal* 11, no. 1 (2014): 76.

Those drawn to the modern house-church movement most often are drawn to the ideal "New Testament Church" or a return to more a simplistic, "pure" model of the Church. Simplicity, for some, gives more opportunity to focus on the essentials. Allan Effa in his article about finding new inventive places to worship maintained, "If the church is going to recapture its original dynamism and make inroads into our culture, it needs to radically simplify and strip away all that is non-essential to be followers of Jesus."[101] In Effa's thinking, churches can meet anywhere people can beneficially interact and if a location does not disrupt the desire to gather then all the better.[102]

Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung posited that being the Church requires five steps: "pray, meet, make, gather, and multiply."[103] In their experience, the house-church model has brought them closer to what they believe Jesus and the early Church used.

This idea of following the model of the early Church is not a new idea but has found a new expression in the modern house-church movement. House-churches, pub churches, coffee house communities, and many other styles of faith communities are growing in popularity. Various locations and styles help when "particular aim is leveled at church buildings and any attempt to localize God in physical places that divide the world into secular and sacred space."[104] The goal is not to alienate people but to ensure

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[101] Allan Effa, "Pub Congregations, Coffee House Communities, Tall-Steeple Churches, and Sacred Space: The Missional Church Movement and Architecture," *Missiology* 43, no. 4 (2015): 374.

[102] Effa, "Pub Congregations, Coffee House Communities, Tall-Steeple Churches, and Sacred Space: The Missional Church Movement and Architecture," 379.

[103] Larry Kreider, *Starting a House Church* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2007), 86.

[104] Effa, "Pub Congregations, Coffee House Communities, Tall-Steeple Churches, and Sacred Space: The Missional Church Movement and Architecture," 375.

that existing and potential disciples find the faith community that resembles the New Testament Church.

House-churches have become attractive to many who want to start new faith communities without the need for money, church buildings, large numbers of staff members or volunteers, and any equipment like pews, pulpits, or organs.[105] Robert Fitts points out in his experiences house-churches have had "No frills. No ceremony. No ritual. No symbolism. It is simply a time for the people of God to come together with Jesus in their midst."[106]

In North America, the house-church movement has been growing. In 2009, Barna Research reported on a dozen nationwide surveys that were conducted, each with a sample size of 1,000 adults drawn from the 48 continental states, that thirteen percent of adults surveyed had attended a house-church at least once in the previous year.[107]

J.D. Payne wrote in his book *Missional House-Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel,* house-churches tend to be more organic and less institutional.[108] He contended, "The simplicity, community, and high level of participation that is required in this expression of church is appealing to many."[109]

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[105] Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House: A Return to Simplicity* (Salem, OR: Preparing the Way Publishers, 2001), 17.

[106] Fitts, *The Church in the House: A Return to Simplicity*, 39.

[107] Barna Group, "How Many People Really Attend a House Church?," https://www.barna.com/research/how-many-people-really-attend-a-house-church-barna-study-finds-it-depends-on-the-definition/, (accessed April 15, 2018).

[108] Jervis David Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO.: Paternoster Publishing, 2008), 38.

[109] Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel*, 43.

Learning from the House-Church Movement

The argument of this thesis is not whether the house-church model is the best

model for the Church but that the house-church movement may demonstrate a helpful

example of the results of a return to disciple-making in all faith communities regardless

of denomination, church model, or church size. Other aspects of the house-church model

beyond disciple-making such as simplicity, lower cost for ministry, and the incarnational

aspects are important to all faith communities. Much may be learned by examining the

disciple-making goals and the results of modern house-churches.

Goal 1 – Obedience

Francis Chan believes the Church is not called to simply gather learners but

instead, "The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them.

Jesus's call to make disciples includes teaching people to be obedient followers of Jesus,

but the teaching isn't the end goal."[110] The obedience a disciple demonstrates is not

meant to be to the Church but to Christ. Jesus' disciples and many disciples who came

after demonstrated their obedience to the message of Christ even to death. Christian

obedience requires a commitment level that may be beyond those who are not committed

to Christ. Obedience to Christ is not a commitment to the law but a commitment to the

Maker of the law. Rolland Allen explained:

> If we establish and enforce law as law, whether the principle on which it is based
> is understood and accepted or not, we make morality to consist in outward
> obedience to an external law, we present the Church as the guardian of a system

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[110] Chan, Platt, and Beuving, *Multiply*, 44.

of divine laws, we present the Bible as 'a supernatural act of Parliament', we present the way of salvation as the way of obedience to these divine laws.[111]

House-churches, as they move into neighborhoods, find that those far from God may bristle against the call for obedience through repentance, so the laws and commands of God may be difficult to understand in the early stages of disciple-making. Obedience to God must come as a result of the Holy Spirit and not the demands of man. As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out, "Let it be agreed that our obedience to God's command, our good works, do not entitle us to make claims on God by which others are excluded."[112] Obedience comes as the seeker becomes a disciple.

House-churches, in their desire for biblical disciple-making, look to an authenticity of obedience. The house-churches which are a part of We Are Church, continue to work through the difficulty of obedience:

> Obedience often grates against our natural desires, but if we obey only when it feels natural, then Jesus is not truly Lord of our lives. What often results from obedience, however, is unexpected blessing. Now that I am starting to experience true unity with my brothers and sisters, I don't want to ever live without it.[113]

Goal 2 – Transformation

Hugh Halter and Matt Smay have studied and led what they call "incarnational communities." They believe the effectiveness of these communities is not found in the number of salvations, but in the changed lives they observe:

> As opposed to counting confessions of faith or tracking church attendance to know if we're making an impact, in the incarnational process, we celebrate every

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[111] Roland Allen, *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church and the Causes Which Hinder It*, Revised ed. edition. (Cambridge, U.K.: Lutterworth Press, 2006), 92.

[112] Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 75.

[113] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 79.

moment of transformation. We watch relationships move deeper into the community, we look for greater openness in conversations, we relish good evenings of fun and deep dialogue. We note people's change in behavior and their wide-open hearts while we talk through the scriptures. We celebrate their personal participation in how we live and whom we help.[114]

Transformation happened to everyone Jesus touched both physically and socially. His encounters with others caused a crisis of understanding that led many to transformation. The same should be said for those who encounter Jesus today through His Church.

Francis Chan outlined what is taught at We Are Church:

Think of a few of the people in your church. Picture their faces. Now think about the lengths to which Jesus went to bring those specific people to Himself. Think of the whippings He endured so that they could be forgiven. Imagine the way He thought of each of those people as He hung on the cross. No sacrifice was too great; there was nothing He would hold back. He did everything necessary to redeem and heal and transform those specific people.[115]

At We Are Church, the number of members matters less than the results of disciple-making. In the understanding of what Jesus taught His disciples are found examples for the renewal of the heart of humankind.

The house-church movement like any movement can become overwhelmed with growth or expansion, but obedience to Scripture reveals the true nature of success which is transformation.

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[114] Hugh Halter and Matt Smay, *The Tangible Kingdom: Creating Incarnational Community*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 79.

[115] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 75.

Goal 3 - Community

Though the house-church movement is not the typical model of the Church in North America, house-churches have been a significant part of church movements around the world. The Chinese Church, for example, due to the persecution of Christianity, has had a house-church model that is not only outside of traditional church buildings but is localized in smaller groups. The Chinese Church is often cited in discussions about house-churches because of the growth they have experienced in the face of terrible persecution.

In 2017, a report by Freedom House estimated the Protestant population in China as 58 million people.[116] Many believe the key to the Chinese Church's growth is that much of what is taught aligns with the Chinese understanding of family, community, and their society.

Tim Chester and Steve Timmis argued:

In much of the world the question "Who am I?" is answered communally. According to a Xhosa proverb, "A person is a person through persons." Singaporean, Malaysian, Hong Kong, Cambodian, Australian, and mainland Chinese all proclaim the tong xiang or "familyness" that binds them together.[117]

Chester and Timmis' explained that in many societies outside of the Western culture the wider society plays a more significant role in the identity of faith communities. The koinonia of the faith community is vital to the lives of the members. They further stated:

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[116] Sarah Cook, *The Battle for China's Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping* (New York, NY: Freedom House, 2017), 42.

[117] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 38.

For most Westerners, however, this starting point feels increasingly strange. We see ourselves less in terms of role identities such as positions held or group affiliations and more in terms of dispositional identities such as character traits or behavioral tendencies. "Who am I?" is becoming a question for which I am encouraged to find, or create, an answer for myself.[118]

Many of the modern Western church models work against the koinonia found in Acts 2:42-57 as they grow only inside of the church building. If the model does not include a communal aspect, then individuals can become less concerned about koinonia and more concerned about the inner workings of their church.

Yalin Xin wrote about the Word of Life house-church movement in China and described the koinonia found there. The ideals of koinonia are found and enhanced in Chinese culture. He concluded:

> Therefore, in the experience of the WOL community, there has been, on the one hand, the continuity of employing traditional Chinese cultural forms in ministry, and on the other hand, the introduction of the biblical concept of koinonia into the new community of faith, which significantly enriches the family and community in the traditional Chinese sense. As such, the WOL movement demonstrates a continuous effort of transformation of the Chinese culture by the power of the gospel.[119]

What has happened in China and other countries where a society that has a communal mindset which helps the growth of the Church validates the communal mindset which was also a part of the early Church. This mindset is not a natural part of North American society. Disciple-making requires challenging the individualized

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[118] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 39.

[119] Yalin Xin, "Inner Dynamics of the Chinese House Church Movement: The Case of the Word of Life Community," *Mission Studies: Journal of the International Association for Mission Studies* 25, no. 2 (October 2008): 176.

American spirit which has been the call for contextualization. However, as Tim Keller

wrote:

> Contextualization is not – as is often argued – "giving people what they want to hear." It is rather giving people the Bible's answers, which they may not at all want to hear, to questions about life that people in their particular time and place are asking in language and forms they can comprehend, and through arguments with force they can feel, even if they reject them.[120]

> Contextualization in this way does happen well in close, more intimate

relationships. Frank Viola proposed, "For this reason, the home church meeting is highly

conducive to the realization of God's ultimate purpose. A purpose that is centered upon

'being built together' as living stones to create a house for the Lord" (Eph. 2:19–22).[121]

> Rosaria Butterfield described her own experiences as a house-church leader:

> Our post-Christian neighbors need to hear and see and taste and feel authentic Christianity, hospitality spreading from every Christian home that includes neighbors in prayer, food, friendship, childcare, dog walking, and all the daily matters upon which friendships are built.[122]

> For many non-practicing Christians, the idea of disciple-making may seem

foreign. Barna Research Group found that fifty-three percent of non-practicing

Christians, when asked about their preferred method of discipleship, felt it should be "on

your own." Only seventeen percent felt it should occur "with a group" and thirteen

percent felt it should occur "one-on-one with another person."[123]

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[120] Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 89.

[121] Frank Viola, *Reimagining Church : Pursuing the Dream of Organic Christianity*, 1st ed. (Colorado Springs, CO : David C. Cook, 2008), 1041, Kindle.

[122] Rosaria Butterfield, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key: Practicing Radically Ordinary Hospitality in Our Post-Christian World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018), 1405, Kindle.

[123] Barna Group, *The State of Discipleship*, 50.

J.D. Payne wrote, "House-church members emphasize genuine community, and surface level friendships are unusual. House-churches see the value of genuine fellowship and make nurturing relationships a normal part of church membership."[124] The process of building a deeper relationship with someone pushes people to understand and empathize with others. This understanding can lead to a commonality between individuals as relationships deepen.

The early Church experienced disciple-making in a group context. The house-church movement attempts to demonstrate genuine community as it is seen in Scripture. Tim Chester asserted, "We have got to allow the gospel to define our identity rather than the prevailing secular and socially fragmented story that our society tells. In Christ, we have been restored to what we were originally made to be: men and women who live in community and are characterized by sincere brotherly love."[125] This identity points back to the Garden of Eden where community began. It is meant to mirror the relationship of Adam and Eve with God. The relationships when "two or three are gathered" in the name of Christ provide a communal relationship between God and man (Matt. 18:20).

Goal 4 – Education

As humankind attempts to understand God, it becomes increasingly obvious that education in Scripture is required. In the modern Church, the effort to teach the instructions of God often happens between God and a group of people through one or more individuals who are used as conduits to the people.

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[124] Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel*, 41.

[125] Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*, 1st ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 53.

John Yoder, the Mennonite theologian, taught:

It is a basic novelty in the discussion of hermeneutics to say that a text is best understood in a congregation. This means that the tools of literary analysis do not suffice; that the Spirit is an interpreter of what a text is about only when Christians are gathered in readiness to hear it speak to their current needs and concerns.[126]

Yoder, a leading Anabaptist thinker, believed learning in community influenced the community's ability to struggle successfully with understanding Scripture together.

The letters of Paul were written to small gatherings of people. Paul often directed the recipients to share the letters with others. Just as churches in the New Testament met as a faith community to study what Paul had written, house-churches take the commands of the Shema to heart in its instruction to the membership to write the Word of God on their hearts, to teach it to their children, to speak of it at home and along the way, and to keep it before them. Tim Chester stated, "Bible interpretation is not just about me and my Bible. It is about God's word to his people, a people with responsibility to the outside world."[127]

Education within the house-church is the most difficult challenge in the movement. While many may view allowing biblical interpretation by uneducated laypeople as dangerous, the potential for the growth of discipling laypeople requires a rethinking of theological education. With all believers called to make disciples, education must be treated as more important to the everyday Christian and not just important to the Christian ministry leader.

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[126] John Howard Yoder, "Hermeneutics of the Anabaptists," *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* 41, no. 4 (October 1967): 301.

[127] Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 158.

Wolfgang Simson wrote:

Jesus takes beggars and turns them into princes. He gets hold of six foul-mouthed fishermen, a despised tax-gatherer and five other nobodies, and transforms them into the elite of Heavenly Jerusalem. The bottom line of this process is the empowerment of exponentially more people to do the work of God. It is to find, nurture, and release talented and supernaturally gifted people into their God-given calling in order to bring out God's best in them, and to do this systematically and strategically.[128]

Whether a disciple pursues a seminary education or is trained by a knowledgeable disciple-maker the goal is not to just educate, but the goal is transformation. Jesus disciples were seminary educated, but they were also drastically transformed.

One of the ways Jim Putnam has addressed the continuing challenge of teaching a deeper understanding of theology to all believers in the Real-Life ministry in Idaho is the idea of "spiritual parents." He outlined their approach, "Spiritual parents are intentional, strategic, reproduction minded, self-feeding, mission-minded, team-minded, and dependable. They are not just biblically knowledgeable; they are also filled with the Spirit, so they have a loving attitude and encourage others."[129]

The early Church was built on the disciple-making of Jesus. The men and women that were the first disciples were not educated. They led the Church by the power of the Spirit and the teachings of Christ. House-churches tend to focus on this fact.

Each house-church deals with this issue in different ways. Many who have started house-churches and house-church networks are seminary trained. Some house-church networks engage their elders and house-church pastors in in-depth Bible study and

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[128] Wolfgang Simson, *Houses That Change the World: The Return of the House Churches*, 1st English ed. (Carlisle, UK; Waynesboro, Ga: OM Publishing, 2001), 111.

[129] Jim Putman, *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2010), 139.

mentoring relationships to help them grow in applying biblical principles to their lives and their own teaching.

Wansuk Ma believes that "the long development of Christendom as an institution has impacted the content, process, and methods of formal theological education and broader theological formation."[130] This has caused a perceived weakness in small churches and house-churches in the post-Christendom era. He further proposed, "There are several key components from the pre-Christendom era, including the life of Jesus and the early church, which can serve us in the shaping of theological education in the new era and context."[131]

Dallas Willard pointed to a practical theology. He stated:

"Theology" is a stuffy word, but it should be an everyday one. That's what practical theology does. It makes theology a practical part of life. A theology is only a way of thinking about and understanding—or misunderstanding—God. Practical theology studies the manner in which our actions interact with God to accomplish his ends in human life.[132]

The house-church movement attempts to bring education out of the classroom and the sanctuary into the home and the community.

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[130] Wonsuk Ma, "Life in Theological Education and Missional Formation: A Reflection for a New Christian Era," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 33, no. 1 (2016): 5.

[131] Ma, "Life in Theological Education and Missional Formation: A Reflection for a New Christian Era," 5.

[132] Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*, Rep. ed. (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1999), 15.

Goal 5 – Worship

Bill Hull wrote, "Praising God requires a release of the heart. The noblest act of any disciple is to worship and praise the Lord of the universe. A Spirit-filled person is one with a song in his or her heart for God (Eph. 5:19)."[133]

House-churches tend to be more intimate because fewer people are gathered in each church. They often worship differently than non-house-churches. Modern forms of worship are difficult in the house-church setting. This has caused many in the house-church movement to question the modern definition of worship.

The difficulty to express worship outside of the use of instruments and singers has pushed some in the house-church movement back to the larger gathering. All churches at one time or another struggle with the method of worship. The method of musical or non-musical worship is not the point though. It is the focus of worship that shows the intent of the worshiper.

Francis Chan shared what has been done at We Are Church:

What is a tremendous, unspeakable honor may feel insufficient for those who are used to being god of their own blogs and Twitter accounts. It feels insignificant to those who have erected their own shrines on Facebook and Instagram, filled with beautiful pictures of themselves. Herein lies the danger of clamoring for attention: we don't realize that true joy comes from the opposite. Joy comes as we stand among those Jesus has redeemed and get lost in a sea of worship, becoming fully a part of something sacred.[134]

The focus of the worshipper must move away from themselves to the joy received when the focus of worship become God only.

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[133] Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 134.

[134] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 40.

The struggle for genuine worship is real in every faith community. The pull of distractions can quickly disengage the most ardent worshipper of God. Realizing worship is more than singing has helped house-churches grow in their understanding of worship.

Francis Chan explained, "We want to be people who are committed to worshipping God, people who can't get enough of Him, not people who worship only when it is convenient or when the right people are leading. It must be the object of our worship that makes worshipping exciting to us."[135]

Seeing God as the focus of worship instead of the focus being on the quality of worship moves worship from the stage to the people in the crowd.

J.D. Payne wrote:

Whenever house-churches gather for corporate worship, there is a high level of participation from the members of the congregation. It is common to hear members reference 1 Corinthians 14:26:" How is it then, brothers? Whenever you come together, each one has a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, another language, or an interpretation. All things must be done for edification." According to some house-church leaders, the principle found here it that everyone has an active role in the corporate gathering.[136]

Worship in the house-church has become often more about prayer, praising God verbally, reading Scripture, as well as singing.

The house-church attempts to experience worship in all aspects of life. Recognizing that worship is more than what happens on Sunday or during a house-church meeting brings about the understanding that church is not just about Sunday. Paul Sparks, Tim Sorrens, and Dwight Frieson expressed it this way, "The life of worship is more than

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[135] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 175.

[136] Payne, *Missional House Churches: Reaching Our Communities with the Gospel*, 40.

what we do at your Sunday gathering; it encompasses the whole of your collective life together."[137]

Goal 6 – The Expansion of God's Kingdom

At the center of the house-church movement, like all true faith communities, is the desire for the expansion of God's kingdom. For house-churches, Mathew 28:16-20 must be lived out by the faith community in their homes, their neighborhoods, and in the community around their homes. Most house-churches see their mission field as their own neighborhoods.

Michael Frost believes, "Incarnational mission means moving into the lives of those to whom we believe we've been sent."[138] While churches in North America have become less like the neighborhoods they inhabit, the people outside look at them and wonder if God knows they are outside.

Wolfgang Simson believes the problem house-churches are attempting to address is performing the mission of the Church. He wrote;

> At the heart of both traditional and contemporary missions is the congregational understanding of church. From this static center we reach out to others in proximity of the church building, trying to get them to come to church – and we call it evangelism. If we reach out abroad or across significant social and ethnolinguistic barriers, we call it missions. If the house-church, however, is the center of our missionary understanding, the static church can stop identifying and sending mobile specialist – the missionaries – and instead send itself by simply acting apostolically as a whole. [139]

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[137] Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen, *The New Parish*, 85.

[138] Michael Frost, *The Road to Missional: Journey to the Center of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 123.

[139] Wolfgang Simson, *The House Church Book: Rediscover the Dynamic, Organic, Relational, Viral Community Jesus Started* (Carol Stream, IL: Barna Books, 2009), 119.

It is in this mission that house-church members attempt to live the mission every day. It is significant that Jesus sent His disciples into all the world. Larry Kreider and Floyd McClung wrote of the potential for house-churches to work with all churches to see this mission carried out. They wrote,

> We envision the Body of Christ working together in organized yet informal ways across a city or a region. In some instance, community churches and mega-churches may commission some of their leaders to start house-churches and give them the oversite needed to help them grow. We believe mega-churches will increasingly "adopt" house-churches into their communities and help them network together.[140]

Conclusion

The review of literature and research related to disciple-making suggests issues that challenge most faith communities. While the Christian Church's value is not recognized by society, it still has value and a specific mission to accomplish.

The Church indeed has gone through many reformations. The research indicated that a return to biblical disciple-making is in line with the goals of Scripture.

The difficulty of making disciples can be partly understood by the struggle to know what to call disciple-making. Christians use names like spiritual formation, becoming more like Christ, spiritual growth, or spiritual maturity. While these terms may be a part of disciple-making, there is a gap in the understanding of churches of how to make real disciples.

Observing the house-church movement is helpful because of the first century Church traits that are key to the goals of the overall house-church movement. The house-church movement should not be treated as the answer to the decline of church attendance.

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[140] Kreider, *Starting a House Church*, 174.

The movement should be examined for its simple examples of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom.

Churches can no longer allow "sacred cows" of tradition, familiarity, or popular methods to stand in the way of fulfilling Mathew 28:16-20 in a way that produces disciples like those found in Acts 2:42-47.

During the project, the researcher attempted to develop his own definition of disciple-making. This definition was meant to help the researcher identify the aspects of disciple-making that would shape the framework of the project. This is the definition the researcher developed:

> Disciple-making is a process undertaken in obedience to an understanding of the plans of God for the reconciliation of His human creation to himself and each other in all existence through the transformation from citizens of a fallen world to citizens of His kingdom.

The researcher has formulated this definition realizing that understanding the goal of God through Christ would transform the Church to what the Church was at its beginning. These principles transcend any church model, any church leader, and any church tradition. Jesus did educate His disciples, but he also lived an important example that would be later described to the Church as the Body of Christ. This body, as Jesus had commanded his disciples, would continue the work that they had been taught and observed him doing. This is what being a disciple is at its core: being like the Master.

CHAPTER FOUR: DETAILS OF THE PROJECT PROCESS

Project Overview

Multiple steps were taken to research and analyze the data to develop an in-depth understanding of modern house-churches and their processes of disciple-making. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to gather a broader understanding of the definition of disciple-making. Interviews, surveys, and site-visits were important parts of the research. This provided the researcher with the knowledge to ask the right type of questions during the research.

Step One: The Qualitative Research Approach

This project followed two steps in the qualitative method: "focus on phenomena occurring in natural settings" and "capturing and studying the complexity of those phenomena."[141] Careful attention was given to the ways every data source gave God a central focus. The researcher believed this is the factor that would best demonstrate the bias of the subjects.

The researcher allowed the research to reveal common themes through the different data sources. This required the researcher to look for themes without forcing a bias on the data. During the scriptural research, the researcher did not undertake the task of directly analyzing the purposes of God's work throughout human history knowing God's thoughts and ways are not the ways of humankind (Isaiah 55:6). The researcher

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[141] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 139.

instead analyzed the results of God working out His plans in the lives of His people. By focusing on the results in Scripture, the researcher attempted to remove any theological and personal bias.

Theological and historical literature was researched to understand the lives of the believers in the early church. This allowed the researcher to better identify the common patterns found in the modern house-church networks that were considered to compare and contrast them to the first century Church. Removing bias was more difficult in the review of the applicable literature. This required the researcher to compare the opinions expressed in literature to the results found in Scripture.

The action research method was used to research the everyday lives of the people in the case studies and in Scripture to better identify the disciple-making patterns found in their lives.

Action research was selected as a method by the researcher due to the understanding of this definition:

> The idea of action research refers to the theoretical framework and organizing principles that guide practice, as well as its procedures, which is why it comes under the broad heading of "practice-based research." Action research is not a thing in itself; the term always implies a process of people interacting together and learning with and from one another in order to understand their practices and situations, and to take purposeful action to improve them.[142]

The researcher used scholarly resources that provided information about the history of life in Judea during the time of the founding of the early Church as well as resources that provided data about the language used by the people of the time both

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[142] Jean McNiff, *Action Research: Principles and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Abingdon, UK; New York, NY: Routledge Publishing, 2013), 25.

Jewish and non-Jewish. This allowed the researcher to discover insights into the actions and social reasoning of people in the first century.

Step Two: The House-Church Cases

The researcher conducted two case studies. The first case study was with the We Are Church network in San Francisco. The action research conducted there was to participate in a four-day intensive that was hosted by the network. The researcher conducted interviews and participated in discussions with the members concerning the scriptural and theological value of the network. During the four days, the researcher also participated in two house-church meetings, a central gathering of all the house-churches in the network, and a missional project in the neighborhood of one of the house-churches. This participation allowed the researcher to observe the primary communal activities of the network. The researcher developed a plan for the case study (Appendix A) to guide the data gathering and analysis phases of the case study.

The second case study was with The Crowded House Network in Central Florida. This case study was executed differently than the case study for We Are Church because the Crowded House Network is a relatively new network. This network was selected for that reason. The researcher used the case study plan (Appendix A) to better understand the development of the churches' disciple-making processes.

Step Three: The Quantitative Research

Quantitative research "tries to measure variables in some numerical way."[143] Quantitative research was performed by the researcher to better practically demonstrate

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[143] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research*, 95.

the proposed lack of an understanding of the definition of disciple-making by church

leaders. Data was gathered from church leaders not involved with house-churches as well

as data from church leaders involved in the house-church movement.

A survey was used to ask three questions:

1. What is your definition of disciple-making?

2. On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?

3. What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are
   most important to the "success" of a church?

The answers were analyzed and coded to discover categories in order to develop a

basic understanding of how much importance modern church leaders put on disciple-

making. The researcher studied data from reports generated by the Barna Research Group

in their *The State of Discipleship* report, their *Translating the Great Commission* report,

and their *Barna Trends 2017* report. The Barna results helped the researcher understand

the need to question what modern church leaders define as disciple-making. The

researcher's surveys assisted the researcher in creating recommendations to help church

leaders better understand disciple-making process.

Step Four: The Qualitative Data Analysis

Using the case study plans created by the researcher, analysis of the data from the

case studies followed the method described by Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod. The first

step was the organization of the details about the case. A timeline of the site visit was

created to help the researcher recall the research in a structured pattern.

The second step was to categorize the data to help find what steps of the disciple-

making process were observed in the site visit. Data concerning the results of disciple-

making was gathered and categorized using the coding method used in the quantitative data analysis in order to provide a comparison of the data.

Step three was the interpretation of single instances which allowed for the comparison and contrast of the case studies. This data was useful to identify the differences in results based on the social and theological factors involved in each house-church network.

Step four was the identification of patterns. The data was evaluated to identify themes and patterns that helped compare the results of the processes of the networks.

Step five was the synthesis and generalizations step. This proved the final analysis to determine the findings of the case studies.

Step Five: The Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative research data was compiled and coded to create categories using a method to identify similarities of the answers to the first question: "What is your definition of disciple-making?" The codes used were the six key aspects of disciple-making as identified by the researcher.

The second survey question was, "On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?" This data was gathered, and the answers were charted to give a scale of importance of disciple-making to those surveyed.

The third survey question was, "What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the "success" of a church?" These answers were coded to discover if what is in reality an aspect of disciple-making is often called something else by the participant. The data from this question was used to form a list of other expressions that are used by church leaders and other believers but not necessarily

thought of as disciple-making. The answers helped the researcher form a more complete

understanding of how many church leaders view disciple-making.

Explanation of Codes

As the project progressed, the researcher discovered six aspects that are integral

aspects of disciple-making. These aspects were identified and used to evaluate every data

source: Scripture, literature, case studies, interviews, and surveys.

Table 5: Aspects of Disciple-Making

Aspect	Definition
Obedience	Following the call and command of Jesus
Transformation	Changing from one state to another
Community	Being the Body of Christ
Education	Mentoring, study, and learning
Worship	Praise and reverence
Expansion of God's Kingdom	Leading someone to salvation. Teaching to make disciples.

Initially, the list did not include obedience and transformation. During the case

studies and the analysis of the survey results, the researcher began to reexamine the list.

While community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom were seen in

the literary resources, as the case studies progressed, obedience and transformation

became more obvious as important aspects of disciple-making. The researcher then

reexamined both Old Testament and New Testament passages that caused him to

question why those two aspects were not a part of the original list. Upon reflection, the

researcher realized that in his world of education and church leadership, the purposes of

community education, worship, and even the expansion of God's Kingdom are treated as

what believers must do to be a part of a faith community. As the researcher reexamined

the literature resources, surveys, and case studies, he realized that many of the questions

that he had been asking had more to do with the how of disciple-making and not the why.

It is often easier to discover the processes and methods but forget the reason that the

processes and methods exist. However, what the researcher realized in the course of the

project is that obedience and transformation are what create the desire for the other four

aspects. If research only involved case studies and instructions to determine how

disciple-making occurs then the reason for the answers that substantiate the success or

failure of the processes could simply indicate that another process should be attempted.

This would be erroneous and would lead to failure upon failure because the reason must

point back to something greater than raw data. The researcher realized that obedience

and transformation came through the work of the Godhead in the lives of those who were

being discipled. This turned the research to attempting to discover why having a proper

understanding of a definition for disciple-making that focused on how the Godhead

transforms individuals was critical.

CHAPTER FIVE: HOUSE-CHURCH DISCIPLE-MAKING
ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Overview of the Case Studies

This project examined the disciple-making practices and results in two house-church networks. The case studies were designed to examine the similarities in their purposes, compare their similarities, and contrast their differences. The final goal of the case studies was to discover their effectiveness in developing a community like the one found in Acts 2:42-47.

The research processes for the two case studies were different from each other. The amount of data available for We Are Church was greater because of the writings of Francis Chan, especially his books *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* and *Letters to the Church*. Both books addressed the processes that brought Chan to start We Are Church. The researcher was also able to take part in a four-day intensive at We Are Church which was designed to share the goals and methods of the network.

The Crowded House Network case study was simpler in many ways because the researcher had greater access to the founder, Jeremy Penn, and because the network is still in its infancy. Goals for the network are in place, but processes are still being formulated.

Coding the data allowed the process of site visits, email interviews, and face-to-face interviews to evolve as the research progressed. By continually evaluating the data

gathered, the researcher made changes along the way to ask better questions and discover more profound truths.

We Are Church

In his book *Letters to the Church*, Francis Chan tells of the journey he took from being a mega-church pastor to the founding of We Are Church in 2013. Leaving Cornerstone Church, that he and his wife founded in 1994, happened after he began to question if the idea of success that he and elders of Cornerstone Church had for the church was "somehow inadequate."[144] This eventually led Chan and his family to leave Cornerstone to spend time in India, Thailand, and China. In the researcher's interview with Chan, he admitted that the process was not as simple as taking time to work out the struggle that he was having concerning what God desired for he and his family to do after leaving Cornerstone. He admitted that it was heart-wrenching. After several months out of the country, the Chan family felt that God wanted them back in the United States to plant churches. Their decision to move to San Francisco specifically, Chan stated, had little to do with choosing San Francisco as it had to do with the fact that his brother had an apartment where they could live. Chan believes God used that simple circumstance to place his family in San Francisco.

During the first year of living in San Francisco, Chan and his family did not plant a church. They started feeding the homeless and going door to door praying for people.[145] It was several months after arriving in San Francisco that he gathered twenty people in his home to start We Are Church.

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[144] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 13.

[145] Chan, *Letters to the Church*, 19.

We Are Church has twenty house-churches spread throughout San Francisco. The church has six elders. Each elder mentors three or four house-church pastors as well as pastoring their own house-church.

Each house-church has a pastor who mentors a pastor-in-training to equip him to start a house-church in his home. An average of ten members are in each house-church. Most of the house-churches meet twice a week with one day devoted to church time and the other devoted to worship or ministry time in the community. The primary pastor and pastor-in-training also mentor members of their house-church. In We Are Church men mentor men and women mentor women.

Twice a month the house-churches gather together outdoors in Youngblood-Coleman Park in San Francisco for a combined service. They meet rain or shine. Their meeting place is an open-air amphitheater in the park.

Onsite Visit to We Are Church

In February 2018, the researcher traveled to San Francisco to take part in a four-day intensive given by We Are Church. The intensive was led by Sean Brakey and Rob Zabala who are elders and house-church pastors at We Are Church. The purpose of the intensive was to give a complete understanding of how the We Are Church network functions as a church network along with providing education about the goals and justifications of their house-church model.

The researcher was housed in the home of Ryan and Beatrice Takasugi which is one of the house-churches in the network. Ryan is the primary house-church pastor for their house-church. During the stay in the Takasugi home, the researcher was able to interact with members of the house-church and participate in their worship night in the living room of the Takasugi home.

Ryan and Beatrice have two children. As well as leading the house-church, Ryan has a full-time job with Google and Beatrice is a stay-at-home mom. Their house-church, as of February 2018, had eight members who were mostly from their neighborhood. The age range of the members were from early 20s to mid-sixties.

The worship night happened on a Tuesday evening. The evening began with the members arriving and talking together in the kitchen. There were eight of the house-church members in attendance. When the meeting began, there was a time of discussion where the members spoke about the previous week and discussed their prayer requests. The discussion was informal but in-depth concerning the needs expressed. A time of prayer followed where several people in the group prayed for each other. After prayer, there a time of singing to a video with subtitles that was displayed on the television. After singing several songs, the room became quiet and several of the members spoke to God audibly with others voicing agreement. After a period, Ryan closed out the evening with prayer.

At 6:30 on Sunday morning, the researcher and the others in the group that were a part of the intensive joined a group of house-church pastors at the office where We Are Church borrows space from a house-church elder. There were thirteen house-church pastors in attendance. There was a second meeting happening at the same time at another location with a similar number of house-church pastors. This Sunday morning meeting happens every Sunday. The intensive members sat in chairs apart from the house-church pastors and observed their time together. The meeting was led by Francis Chan who began the meeting with a welcome and discussion with the pastors about their house-churches. The discussion time allowed the pastors to voice needs and some voiced

concerns for their members. The discussion time led to a teaching time. Chan taught on worship and how the spiritual gifts of the members of each house-church contributed to the worship that took place each week. He stressed the importance of each member using their spiritual gifts as a part of the body of each church. This time led into an hour and a half prayer time where the group of men prayed aloud, some sang, and some gathered around each other to pray for specific needs.

Sunday evening was when the entire network gathered at a local church for a service together. The regular practice has been to gather in a local park on Sunday morning twice a month rain or shine. The researcher was told that "during this short season" the network was meeting every Sunday evening. This weekly meeting had not been done since the founding of the network. The elders felt there was a "season of instruction" that was needed for the members to "get on the same page" about some of the goals of the network. The service was attended by one hundred fifty people. It resembled a service much like would be seen in most contemporary worship services with music led by a singer, someone playing guitar, and someone playing a djembe, a traditional African drum. After the music, Chan went to the front of the group and preached a sermon.

Over the next two days, the intensive group gathered for the teaching portion of the intensive, Sean and Rob were the primary teachers. Francis taught and took questions briefly on the second afternoon. It was during this time that the researcher was able to ask him specific questions.

The first morning of the teaching time for the intensive was on Monday and was a discussion focused on biblical commands to the Church and traditions that are optional for the Church. Table 6 shows the list that was created during the discussion.

Table 6: Commands and Traditions

Commands (Not Optional)	*Traditions (Optional)*
Make Disciples	Dressing Up For "Church"
Love Each Other	Meeting Location
Love God Completely	Excellent Sunday Service
Deny Yourself – Take Up Your Cross Daily	Excellent Programs
Sing to The Lord	Age-Based Ministry
Everyone Using Their Gifts	Worship Style with Worship Leaders
Preach/Proclaim the Gospel	Long Monologue Sermon
Teach the Word of God	10% Tithe
Meditate on The Word	How Tithe is Taken
Radical Generosity	Flow of Gathering
Rejoice/Thankful Always	Prayer Before Meals
Pray Without Ceasing	Paid Staff
Trust/Faith in Jesus	Altar Calls
Baptism	Who Can Baptize
Lord's Supper	Frequency of Communion
Submit to Authority	Membership
Appoint Elders	Programs
Be Devoted To One Another	Seminary Education
Gather Together Regularly	

The purpose of the list, as explained by Sean, was not to avoid or teach against traditions but instead to focus on biblical commands. We Are Church believes that any church model can emulate the disciple-making processes found in Scripture if they place a higher importance on the commands of Scripture than the traditions of churches.

Sean continued to teach their goals for the house-churches. He outlined a list of ten goals that the elders had developed to guide the house-church pastors. Table 7 shows the list of practices given by Sean during the intensive.

Table 7: We Are Church Practices

Practice	Purpose
Shared Daily Bible Reading Plan	People reading together and gathering together will be able to have a conversation together.
Meet in Homes	Provide a family-style dynamic
Everyone Is Discipled	The biblical command of Christ to the Church
Everyone Disciples	The example of Jesus
Multiplication of Leaders	Not over leading
Everyone Using Spiritual Gifts	Pursuing everyone to contribute
Yearly Multiplication of Churches	Expanding the kingdom in the city
Simple Gathering	Placing the focus on God
Living Like Family	Sharing possessions. "Knowing and being known"
Assume Missions	Missions happens in each neighborhood

According to the We Are Church website, the list of practices has been shortened since the intensive the researcher attended in February 2018. The list is now: Devotion to Scripture, We Meet in Homes, Everyone Discipled and Discipling, Everyone Exercising their Gifts, Regular Multiplication of Churches, and Simple Gatherings.[146]

These practices led to creating the Five Values of We Are Church.[147] Table 8 shows the values.

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[146] We Are Church, "Practices," http://wearechurch.com/structure-1/, (accessed January 6, 2019).

[147] We Are Church, "Values," http://wearechurch.com/values-1/, (accessed December 10, 2018).

Table 8: The Five Values of We Are Church

Value	Description
Devoted Worshippers	Daily prayer, Bible reading individually and with others. Regular celebration of the Lord's Supper
Loving Families	Loving each other deeply and with sacrifice. To be known by our love.
Equipped Disciple-Makers	Fully like Christ to lead others, make disciples, and plant churches.
Spirit-Filled Missionaries	People of supernatural character focused on sharing the gospel with neighbors and coworkers
Suffering Sojourners	Willing to walk into suffering for the sake of the gospel

Aspects of Disciple-Making at We Are Church

The researcher interviewed Sean Brakey and Rob Zabala about the disciple-making practices of We Are Church. Interviews were face-to-face as well as via email. The responses were coded to the aspects of disciple-making researched in the project: obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and the expansion of God's kingdom.

Obedience

We Are Church asks for a high commitment level of each member to the mission of the church. Though they have no formal process of church membership, they do expect the members to uphold the commitments, values, and practices of We Are Church. The members must desire to follow Jesus at the level described in Scripture to be a part of We Are Church. House-church pastors and their wives stay involved in the lives of each member of their house-church to mentor them in understanding biblical principles. Their goal is to help each member stay on track to being obedient followers of Christ.

Transformation

Everyone at We Are Church is encouraged to understand their spiritual gifts and to use them as a part of the body of the church. Rob Zabala, who is an elder and house-church pastor, four years ago was in federal prison due to gang activity of which he had been a part since he was in his teens. Rob is now in his forties. Transformation for Rob began in prison but continued in a men's "discipleship home" called The Way in San Francisco after prison. The Way is a ministry partner of We Are Church. We Are Church has many members that have been a part of the male and female programs at The Way.

When Rob arrived at The Way to live, he was paired with a mentor who lived in the same room with him for the next year that he would be a part of the program. Rob is an example of the transformation process that happens with We Are Church members. Like Rob, when new members become a part of a We are Church house-church the house-church pastor and his wife mentor them. While interviewing Rob, the researcher discovered that many house-church pastors would let new members live with them. Many of the stories Rob told in the interview were of men, women, and couples who lived with their house-church pastors for as long as a year. During the time they are mentored to help in the process of transformation.

Community

Each house-church member grows in their understanding of being a disciple as they are a part of the family style community that happens in each house-church. Rob stressed during the intensive that many people pick others to like and not to like when they are a part of a faith community. We Are Church stresses love and commitment to those who may be different from themselves.

The disciple-making process at We Are Church requires that disciples learn to disciple. This process happens inside the house-church and outside with people that are not a part of the house-church. Disciple-making becomes a part of each member's life. They may be discipling a person where they work or someone they know in their neighborhood. The process that they undertake to disciple is one-on-one. It involves having a relationship that is focused on Bible study, prayer, and friendship. This builds community with those inside of We Are Church and those who are outside of the faith community.

Education

Many pastors and members at We Are Church are not seminary trained, but all have been discipled and equipped to teach the Scripture to others. Part of the mentoring process is Bible study and understanding how Scripture applies to everyday life. This education process mirrors the process of Jesus and His disciples. We Are Church believes that a fully devoted disciple obeys all that Jesus commanded. This obedience begins with the study of the commands in Scripture.

Worship

Worship at We Are Church is a growing process for each house-church. As the elders have worked together to understand spiritual gifts, they have tried to help members apply their gifts as a part of worship. Since one of their values is to be devoted worshipers each house-church develops its own unique way of worship during their "worship times," but We Are Church has focused on Bible study, daily prayer, and the Lord's Supper as ways to worship as well.

Expansion of the Kingdom of God

We Are Church has no formal "missions" program. This does not mean that they do not act as missionaries but instead develop disciples who know being a missionary locally and outside of the local city is a part of being a disciple.

Sean and Rob both mentioned during their interviews that most of the house-churches set aside time each week, often on Sundays when they meet, to spend the afternoon together serving others in the city. Examples include feeding the homeless, walking through part of the city asking people on the street if they need prayer, and helping neighbors with work in their homes or yards. All of these involve building relationships but also sharing the gospel as they care for others in tangible ways.

The Crowded House Network

Jeremy Penn was a pastor at a mega-church in Florida which desired to take a church of ten thousand members and make it a church network of one thousand house-churches of ten members. The mega-church started the house-church project because the leadership recognized that though they had grown in number the church was no longer making disciples.

During his three years on staff at the mega-church, Jeremy and his family started a house-church in their home. Their house-church was made up of ten to fifteen young adults in their twenties. As the mega-church was moving forward with a plan to create more house-churches, a large majority of the church membership began to voice opposition to the house-church idea. They felt the church leadership was leading the church in the wrong direction and the ten-thousand-member church experienced a sharp decline in attendance and financial giving. This led to the house-church project being abandoned and Jeremy losing his staff position.

In the wake of losing his job, Jeremy was approached by several people from the mega-church who wished to continue the house-church. This led to the founding of The Crowded House Network in January 2017.

There are three house-churches in the network with an average of ten adults in each church. The age range of their membership is five months to forty-five years old. The congregation is split between people who had stopped attending church and people who had never attended church.

The house-churches meet regularly for meals, worship, and Bible study. Twice a month on the first and third Sunday the house-churches come together to "sing songs of praise, offer prayers for one another, proclaim the good news, and partake of the Eucharist."[148]

The pastors lead the churches and have full-time secular jobs. Originally the plan was to have full-time pastors and meet once a month for a central gathering. The elders saw greater value in their pastors leading the churches but being connected to the secular work world to understand the difficulty of being a Christian in the work world.

When new people become a part of a house-church, one or more of the five elders will meet with them to explain the history of the network, key practices, and the liturgy of the church. The network has seven practices that are its core values. Table 9 shows these practices.

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[148] "Looking Forward," *The Crowded House Network*, http://thecrowdedhouse.net/looking-forward/, (accessed December 15, 2018).

Table 9: Seven Key Practices of the Crowded House Network

Practice	Purpose
Proclamation of The Word	The Good News cannot be contained
Reconciliation Between Each Other and the World	The church must be sent and enter into spaces of pain and fear
Extending the Lord's Table into All Spaces	Sharing meals and friendship around many tables in homes and in the community
Being Present with the Least of These	Entering into the spaces and lives of those who are different than us
Caring for Children	Children are a part of every gathering and are a priority in teaching
Recognizing and Empowering the Gifts of All People for Service	Everyone understands their spiritual gifts and using them for the kingdom of God
Living the Sermon on the Mount as Our Primary Social Ethic	Living as Jesus taught by word and example

Aspects of Disciple-Making at The Crowded House Network

Initially, the researcher met with Jeremy Penn on a video chat to begin the research about The Crowded House Network. The researcher later met face-to-face in Florida with Jeremy and Julie Mount, who is a church pastor and elder, to interview them to discover how the network approaches making disciples.

Obedience

The house-churches in the network have a commitment to vulnerability and confession to one another. Each member is accountable to each other. Because of Jeremy's Anabaptist background the church questions hierarchy and works to keep everyone involved in each other's daily lives. Elders are accountable to the other members while providing leadership.

Their commitment to vulnerability leads them to ask each other difficult questions such as how they treat co-workers or how they are dealing with areas of personal

weakness. This leads them to help each other study God's Word to discover His commands for obedience.

Transformation

The network does not use the word discipleship, but they teach that being a disciple means to become like Christ. They seek to practice being like Christ in "third-places" in their community. They believe that God will transform the world through them as they love those who are often cast aside by society. With many of the members in the church coming from de-churched backgrounds, they have sought to encourage their members to think of transformation not through church attendance but through a change in their daily lives.

Each house-church seeks opportunities to be like the early Church outside of any church building or their own homes through serving the community and occupying "third places." They teach that transformation will also occur in their lives as they seek to be like Christ to others.

Community

Crowded House stresses hospitality and treating their homes as missional outposts in their communities. Hospitality does not always equate to entertaining a guest. It often means that families invite people that are not like them into their homes to build a deeper relationship. Jeremy and his wife, Crystal, found that opening their home to others has transformed their lives. Instead of treating their home like a "sanctuary of safety" they began to open their home to others as often as they could. Jeremy expressed it this way:

> As we began to open our house to friends and strangers every Tuesday night the rhythms and patterns of our day, and eventually entire life, began to change. From daily schedules to the placement of furniture, our lives started to be filtered

through the lens of other people. We began to ask ourselves, "How can we best organize our lives and resources to create spaces of welcome and inclusion in our home?"[149]

Education

Jeremy is the primary teacher for The Crowded House. Those who may one day lead house-churches attend six month or one-year leadership ministry cohorts. Jeremy teaches theology, ministry practices, and spiritual disciplines. Jeremy also does pastoral counseling with members of the network.

Discipleship is centered around community. Jeremy described it as spending a lot to time together while loving God and loving others. They use spiritual gifts assessments, house-church pastor cohorts, and once-a-month meetings with people whom they have hand selected to develop theologically as house-church leaders to educate their members.

Worship

When the network began, a monthly gathering was where "worship services" happened, but Jeremy and Julie agree that they have begun to experience transformation in their way of leading the network. They teach that worship happens with the focus of their lives. Worship happens as they take the gospel into everyday conversations with the intent of giving time and love to people who are not yet believers.

The network does worship in the homes with prayer, Bible study, and singing but worship to them happens best with their whole lives lived telling others about God.

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[149] "Hospitality as Mission," *The Crowded House Network*, http://thecrowdedhouse.net/hospitality-as-mission/, (accessed January 12, 2019).

Expansion of the Kingdom of God

Incarnational mission is described by Jeremy as "being present as a member of Christ's body in a 'secular' space for an extended period of time." Evangelism, they believe, happens in the "third places" where they build relationships with people who are not a part of their house-church. Their goals are to create an alternative to the worldly kingdom for the people they encounter.

Expansion of God's kingdom requires people to take the kingdom to the world. The Crowded House Network has a goal to have ten house-churches by 2020. They plan to not just invade homes with the kingdom but also the communities around them.

Case Study Analysis

As the case studies were happening the researcher saw the patterns of community, education, worship, and kingdom expansion in the house-churches. While researching Scripture and literary sources, it was at the forefront of the researcher's mind to analyze processes, opinions, and biblical commands. It was on further examination, study, and after face-to-face conversations that the researcher began to realize that obedience and transformation were happening because they happen when people focus on God as their Lord and Savior. The process of following the commands of God leads to a desire for obedience and transformation.

As the researcher met people who were a part of both networks, it became obvious that the key to what they are doing was not the church model, the worship styles, or any other surface aspect. Both networks had people who are living their lives for others and trying each day to know God together with those they live within their churches and in their local communities.

Both networks require a high commitment level to God. Though they approach disciple-making using different processes, they both see disciple-making as their most important activity as faith communities.

We Are Church is several years ahead of The Crowded House Network in the number of members and experience. They have a forward momentum that The Crowded House network has not yet achieved. They have had time to discover through trial and error what has been effective to reach their city and what has not worked.

We Are Church members tend to have come from lower income backgrounds. Many have been a part of gangs, had drug problems, or have been in prison. Many of the members of We Are Church came through The Way ministry before deciding to live permanently in San Francisco and join We Are Church.

The Crowded House Network is beginning to build life processes with its members around their seven key practices. The network is poised to begin to grow at a faster rate than it previously has due to the elders and Jeremy Penn growing in their experience and the house-churches developing closer familial relationships.

The Crowded House Network members tend to be younger than the We Are Church members and come from middle-class backgrounds. Many of them left organized religion behind and joined one of the house-churches because they sensed something different from what they had previously experienced.

Both networks have added two monthly meetings instead of a single monthly meeting. They both agree that their house-churches are still the core of their identity because of the familial relationships that are needed to continue the mentoring processes.

The two monthly meetings for both are not as structured as would be found in traditional church models.

For both networks, the importance of each member using his or her spiritual gifts is a central tenant. These gifts are a main part of their weekly gathering. If a person has a word of prophecy, they are encouraged to share what they believe God has spoken to them. Members are encouraged to sing during worship time spontaneously. The use of spiritual gifts has not been a part of the previous worship experiences of many in the gatherings. The house-church pastors work to stay true to scriptural guidelines while their deep personal relationships with each house-church member allow them to lead their members to understand the purpose of spiritual gifts. The small size of each house-church contributes to the nurturing relationships between the members.

House-churches, in general, tend to question the methods and motivations of traditional churches. Both networks are less concerned with what anyone in any other church is doing wrong, but they are aware that many of their members have come from bad experiences with organized religion. This fits well with the desire to stay true to biblical commands while concentrating less on church size, optional church practices, and church traditions. Both networks focus on Bible study throughout the week paired with active mentoring relationships. Each member has multiple close relationships with others in the house-church.

Living as missionaries in their communities with those with which they work with, live near, and regularly encounter in their daily lives is how both networks are most similar. Mission is implied in every aspect of life. Having a rhythm of life that embraces

demonstrating and sharing the gospel is meant to be as normal to each member as going to the grocery store.

Survey Results and Analysis

The researcher was interested in what church leaders understood about making disciples. Initially, the researcher used professionally generated surveys performed by the Barna Research Group to research this question. After discussions with many church leaders during the project, the researcher decided to conduct several small surveys to gather data about the understanding of disciple-making among his peers.

The Traditional Church Leader Survey

The researcher undertook two surveys. The first survey was called the Traditional Church Leader Research Survey. The survey was distributed to three online groups of which the researcher is a member: the Church Answers online group, the South Carolina Baptist Church Pastors Facebook group, and the Baptist Review Facebook group. These groups contain traditional church pastors of mostly Baptist churches. The respondents from the Church Answers group were made up of pastors across the country who are leaders in non-house-churches. The South Carolina Baptist Pastors group respondents were church leaders across South Carolina where the researcher is a resident. The Baptist Review group respondents were pastors of non-house-churches who also considered themselves part of the reformed theology tradition.

The survey (Appendix B) contained twelve questions and was answered by twenty-seven respondents. The main survey results were coded based on the key words in the answers to the question: "What is your definition of disciple-making?" The results of the question are shown in Table 10.

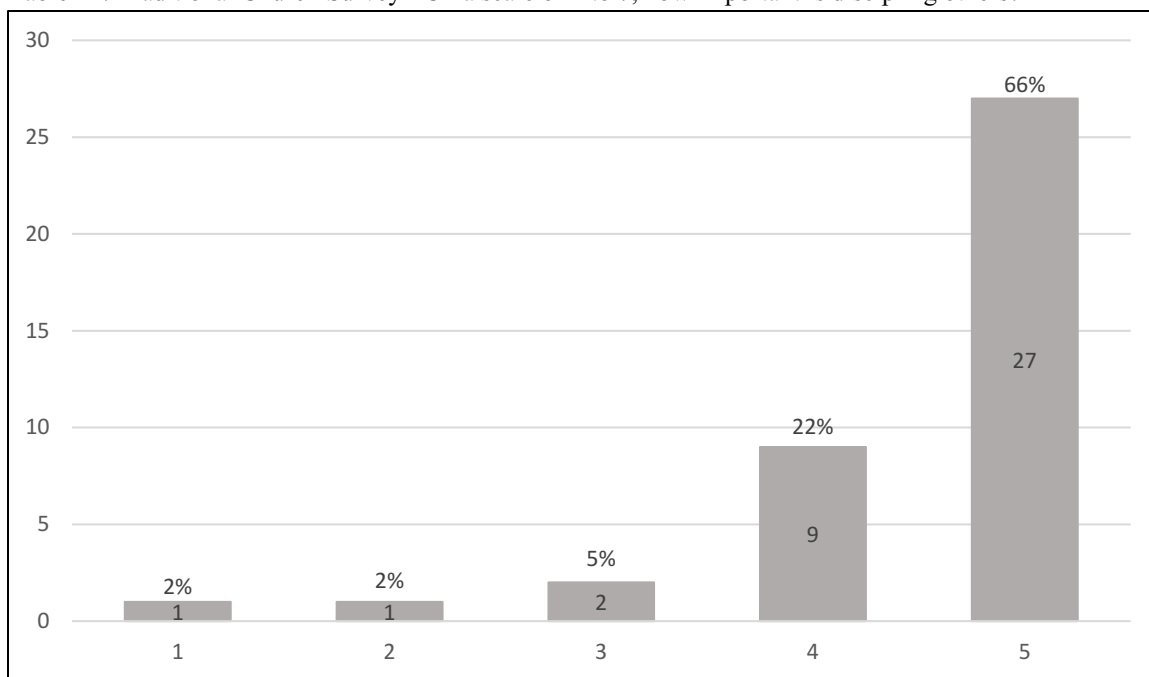Table 10: Traditional Church Leader Survey - What is your definition of disciple-making?
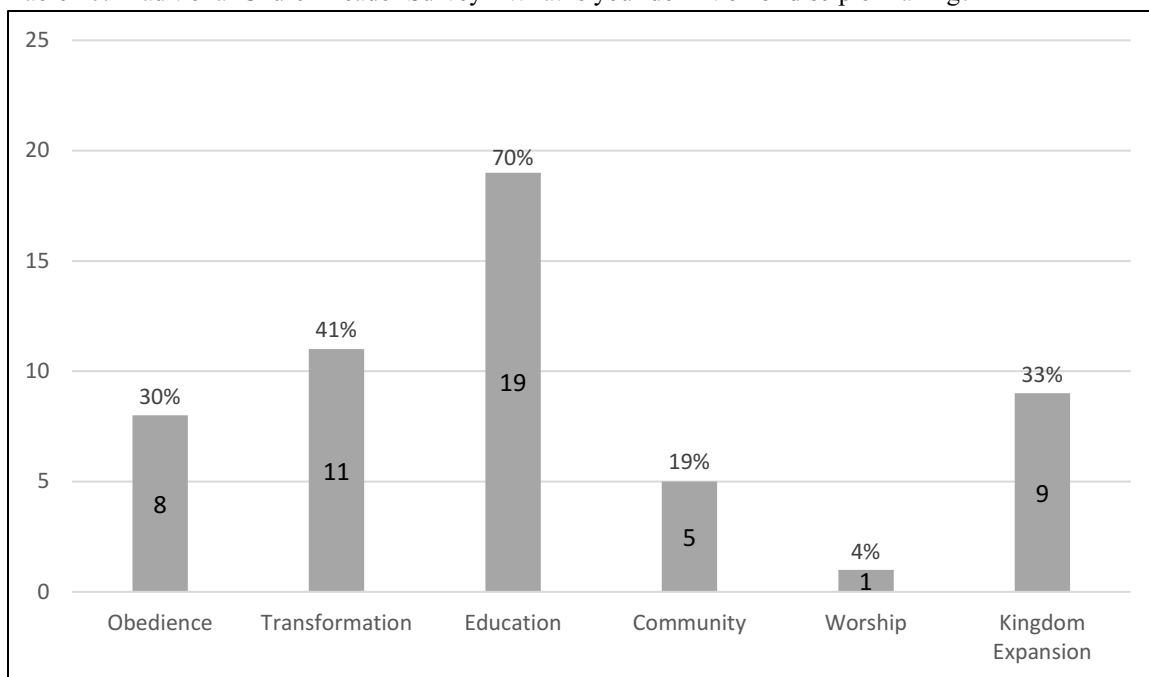
Education was the aspect most cited when describing disciple-making. Community and worship were the least mentioned. The education referred to by most of the respondents focused on teaching others to be "more like Christ." The teaching was primarily one-on-one in the definitions given which is reflected in the fewer mentions about community by the respondents.

The second important question of the survey was: "On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?" This question showed how important disciple-making is to the participants. (Table 11)

Table 11: Traditional Church Survey - On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?

The responses to the importance of disciple-making were high, but nine percent of the respondents felt it was not of high importance.

The third question of the survey for the traditional church leaders was: "What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the 'success' of a church?" The third question had two purposes: to determine what, other than disciple-making, was important to church leaders and to determine if they used other terms to describe what in practice is a part of disciple-making but not thought to be so. (Table 12)

Table 12: Traditional Church Leader Survey -
What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the 'success' of a church?
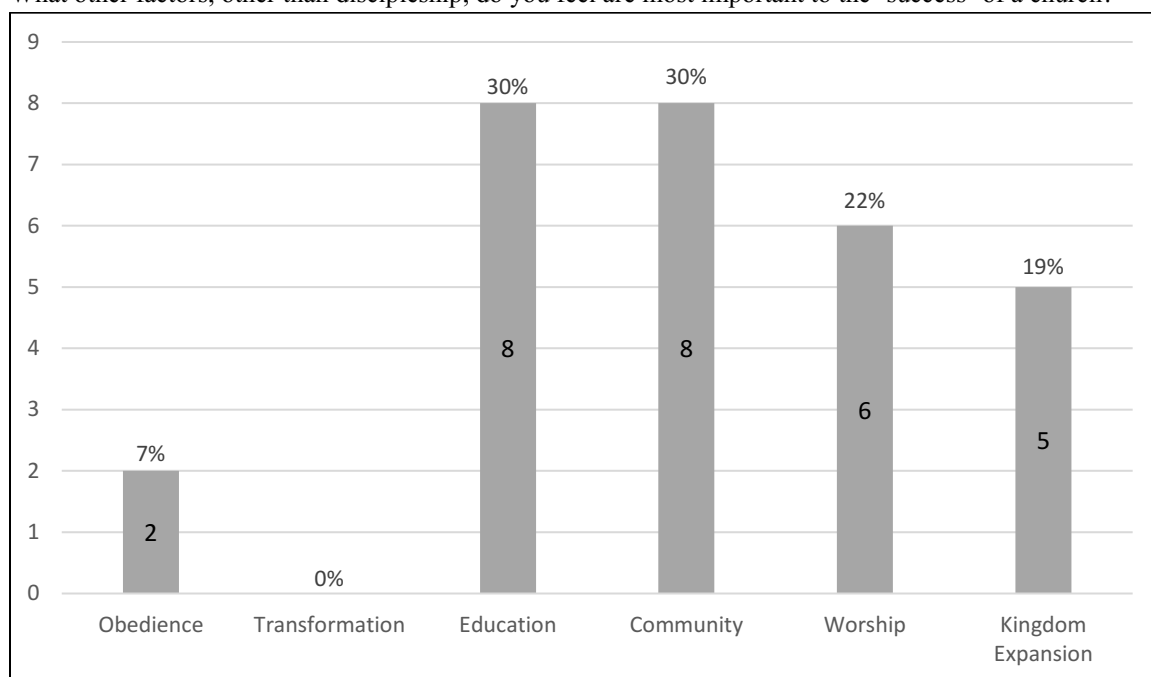
Community and education were the most mentioned factors for the traditional

church leaders. Interestingly transformation, which was the second highest rated aspect

in the first question concerning the description of disciple-making, was not mentioned in

the answers to the second question.

The researcher also analyzed the data from the third question to find other words

that were used in that answers that had similar meanings to the six aspects of obedience,

transformation, education, community, worship the expansion of God's kingdom. The

data is shown in Table 13.

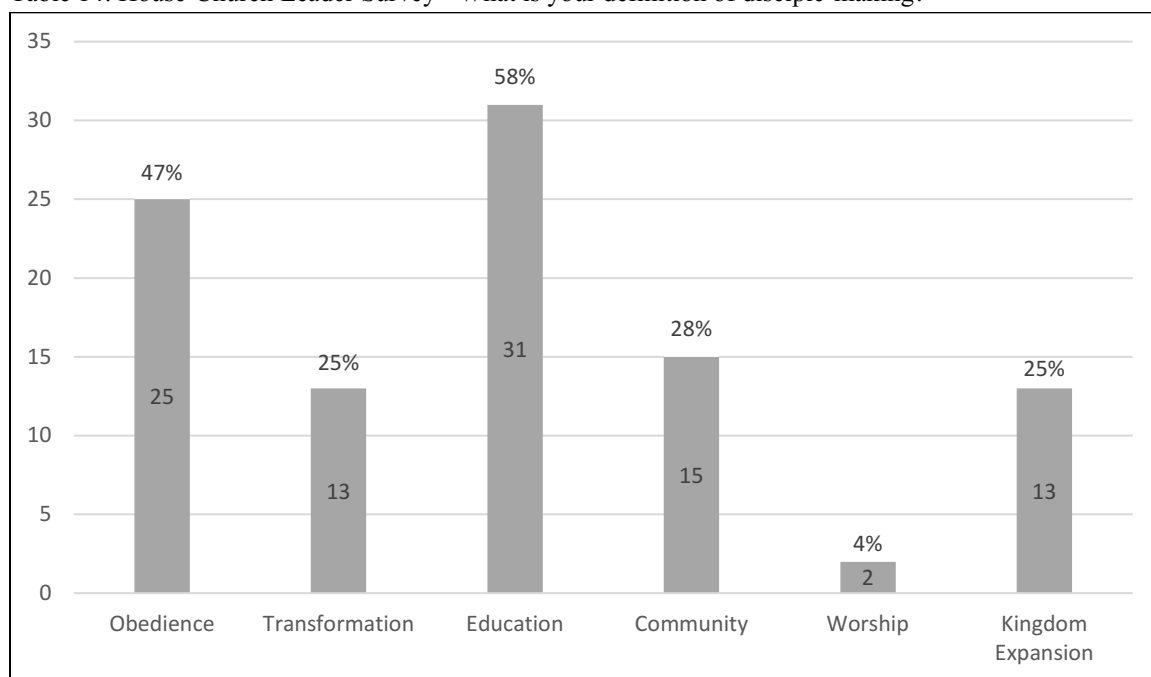Table 13: Traditional Church Leader Survey - Other Terms

Other Terms	Responses
Evangelism	8
Mission	4
Service	4
Prayer	3
Financial Giving	1
Spiritual Gifts	1

The House-Church Leader Survey

The second survey was called the House-Church Leader Research Survey. The survey was distributed to members of two online groups of which the researcher is a member: the Church Intensive Alumni Google group and the Letters to the Church Facebook discussion group. The Church Intensive Alumni group contains people who have attended the We Are Church intensive in San Francisco. Members of this group have started or have shown interest in starting house-churches around the world. The Letters to the Church discussion group are people who have read and are discussing the *Letters to the Church* which was written by Francis Chan.

The survey (Appendix B) had sixteen questions and fifty-three respondents. The question results where coded based on key words in the responses to the question: "What is your definition of disciple-making?" (Table 14)

Table 14: House-Church Leader Survey - What is your definition of disciple-making?

The respondents to this survey also described education most often in their responses which is the same as the responses on the traditional church leaders survey. The percentages of the answers are spread more evenly across the other aspects as compared to the traditional church leader survey.

The second question of the survey was: "On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?" This question showed how important disciple-making was to the participants. (Table 15)

Table 15: House-Church Leader Survey - On a scale of 1 to 7, how important is discipling others?
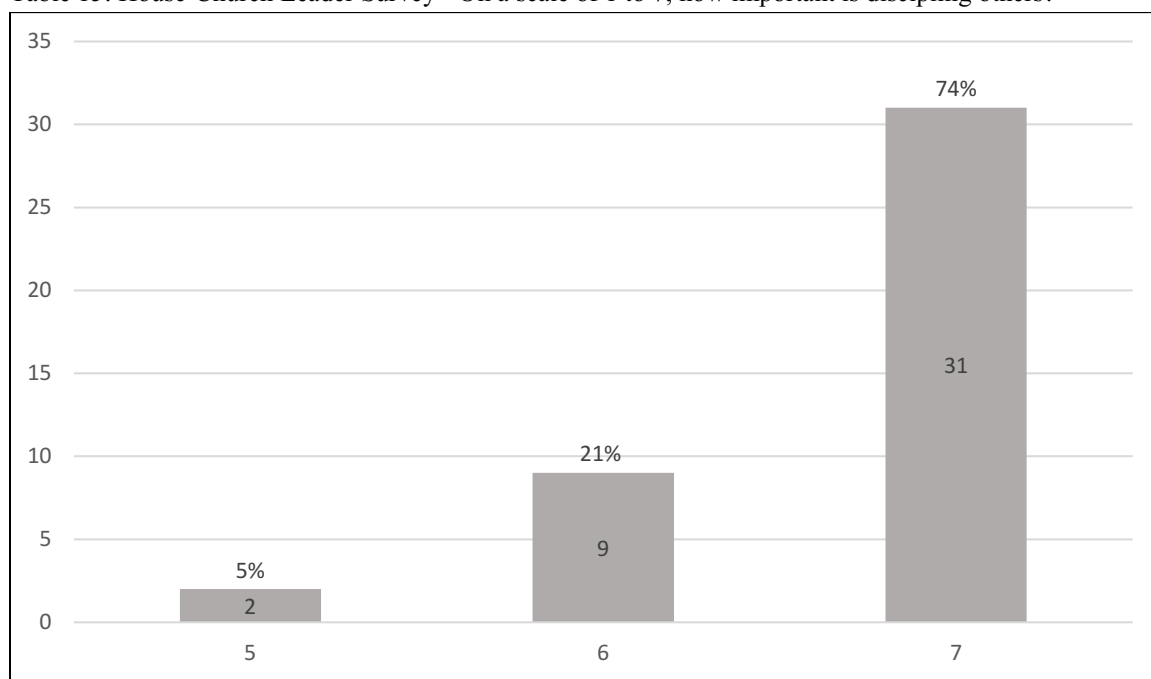
The house-church leaders felt disciple-making was of high importance. This finding was in line with the findings of the case studies.

The third question of the survey was: "What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the "success" of a church?" (Table 16)

Table 16: House-Church Leader Survey -
What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the "success" of a church?
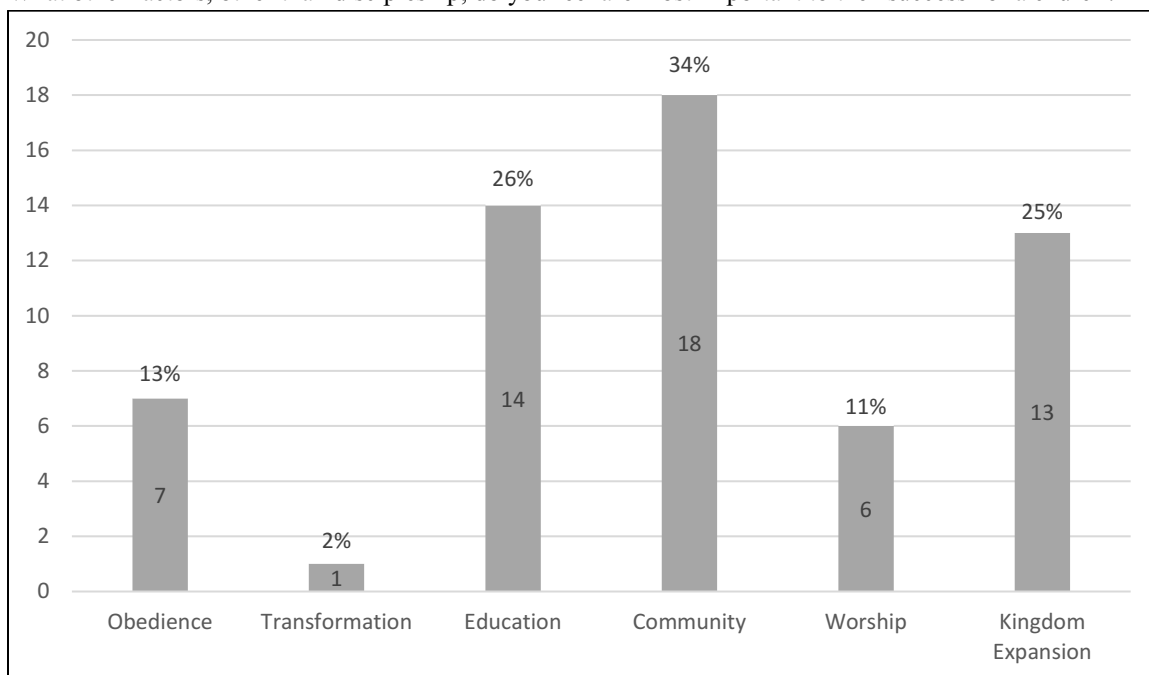
The responses of the house-church leaders to the third question included several responses like the following: "Everything that I might list here is included in discipleship (knowledge and application of the word, love, community, etc.)." The answers included many other terms that house-church leaders felt were of importance to the "success" of the mission of the Church.

Table 17: House-Church Leader Survey - Other Terms

Other Terms	Responses
Love	14
Prayer	9
Spiritual Gifts	6
Service	6
Mission	5
Evangelism	5
Financial Giving	3
Outreach	2
Communion	2
Leadership	1

These answers differed drastically from the answers given by the traditional

church leaders. While several keywords are on both "Other Terms" lists, the answers from the house-church leaders seem to indicate a greater saturation of non-physical aspects of the disciple-making process in their understanding of disciple-making.

The Final Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative research showed that the house-church leaders who were interviewed or participated in the surveys voiced a similarly strong commitment to love others as a core tenant of ministry. The term "making disciples" for them most often covered all aspects of being a believer and not a term that described a process of becoming a stronger believer.

It is unfair to conclude, based on this research, that traditional churches have less concern or give less attention to the six aspects identified by the researcher as disciple-making. The difference seen in the quantitative data does show traditional church leaders and house-church leaders may approach disciple-making differently than house-church leaders.

Communal relationships ranked high with house-church leaders. During the case study interviews, this was identified as being important because it seemed important in Scripture to them. The overwhelming caveat given for the community aspect was that it had to be "about something" and not a time to just gather as friends. This communal aspect also was a part of what is often called evangelism or outreach by many church leaders in the traditional church research.

In the interviews with both house-church networks, the importance of understanding spiritual gifts was seen. Both networks voiced the belief that all members of their faith communities must use whatever gifting they had and that no one should be excluded from using their gift. This approach did encourage their members to have a high

commitment level to their house-churches. The high commitment aided in the understanding of using their gifts as well as the overall effectiveness of the house-churches in their communities.

This high commitment level was voiced as not being to the Church but to the mission of the Church by both networks. This high commitment level was also seen in the house-church leader survey result. In both the case studies and the surveys, the push-back on church programs was mentioned often. The use of the word "program" was always challenged by those interviewed. The feeling was that programs take away from the overall mission of the church by focusing on limited aspects like just doing evangelism or just doing foreign missions.

While the project did occur for a year, the long-term effectiveness of the house-churches is still unknown. The house-church movement is still small in the United States, but the researcher feels that there is much to be learned by their example. Their desire to align biblical commands with their lifestyles is important. It points to a need to reexamine the goals of the modern Church and learn to use the resources that God has provided in a way that places Him above every desire and motivation of all church leaders.

CHAPTER SIX: EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to identify principles of disciple-making found in Scripture, scholarly opinions, and real-world faith communities. Through understanding these principles, the researcher desired to discover transferable practices that would help faith communities experience the kingdom of God like the early Church in Acts 2:42-47.

As the researcher proceeded through the project, he realized that the understanding of disciple-making is a life-long pursuit. It is not merely accomplished by having a sufficient definition but is accomplished by the Holy Spirit working through His people throughout their entire lives. This processes never ends. It is hindered by the sin that exists in the flesh of the disciple and the world around them. It is with these thoughts in mind that the researcher attempted to focus his filters on Scripture as he examined each resource.

Weaknesses of the Project Design and Implementation

The first weakness that the researcher observed was the need for more time. Time to discover more data to compare to Scripture and time to process the data would have helped the researcher better understand the desire of God for His people. The lengthy process of the project provided just enough time to grasp the concepts in comparison to the depth of God's plans.

The second weakness was the difficulty to think outside of the world of which the researcher has been a part. To question the methods of the traditional church is to attack

the efforts of those who have given their lives to the same quest. Any lack of true humility could wreck an interview or sway the evaluation of any resource. The researcher may have begun the project with a desire to question the methods of modern churches, but it became clear that an answer must come not in what is wrong with the modern Church but instead what could assist the modern Church. Recognizing the researcher could not expect to transform the Church through his efforts required the researcher to simply allow God to work through His efforts without bias to gain an understanding that would help the Church.

The third weakness was the availability of opinions about disciple-making. If a researcher follows the efforts of anyone other than Christ and does not evaluate the opinions of others through the teaching of Scripture the project would join the long list of biased efforts to argue or persuade others to think like the speaker of the idea.

The final weakness that the researcher discovered was the need to interview other ministry leaders. The primary effort of the researcher turned to two house-churches. If time and resources had allowed more interviews of traditional church and house-church leaders would have been helpful to research more real-world examples of the difficulty of making disciples.

Strengths of the Project Design and Implementation

The researcher approached the project with an open mind. During the project, the researcher attempted to be objective. This did cause the researcher to question every realization and to look to Scripture for the interpretation of every answer found.

The worthiness of examining the topic of disciple-making was a major strength as the researcher spent months researching. If fatigue set in during the process, the

researcher would concentrate on the worthiness of discovering the desires that God has for His Church. This encouraged the researcher many times.

Knowing the results of the project could help faith communities of all types caused the researcher to keep a balanced approach when formulating transferable principles. God works through many people, churches, denominations, and despite the sin that affects every person. Having this in mind, the researcher attempted to keep the results simple which he believes makes them more transferrable.

Discussion of Recommendations

The process of disciple-making is rooted in the mindset of those who are making disciples. This is where the battle to overcome the flesh begins. The first set of recommendations deals with having the correct mindset.

Having the Correct Mindset

This recommendation has much to do with obedience and transformation. Obedience to the commands of Christ brings about transformation. The researcher observed the difficulty of the early Church in Scripture to have the humility to be like Christ. In literature, the researcher observed that it appeared difficult for many writers to write without some level of frustration for those with whom they disagree. During the interviews and surveys, the researcher observed at times a lack of grace for those in other church models. In the researcher's mind, he often would struggle with anger with the opinions of those whom he disagreed. The need to have humility and a mind influenced not by human emotions but instead by godly desires is extremely important.

This mindset can be difficult for leaders of all types. Pride is a part of the human sin nature that from the beginning has been a part of every failure of humankind. Those

who are surrounded by others who work to stay focused on the humility demonstrated by Christ will find the struggle shared is less difficult.

Paul wrote in the letter to the Philippians:

> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:3-8)

Transformation by the Spirit of God empowers believers to be like Christ. It is a choice to obey the commands of Christ. It is not obedience to the Church but obedience to the commands of Christ that makes it possible to make disciples. Having a mindset like Christ requires understanding His purposes.

Humans tend to mimic the actions and reactions of the people around them. Just as a community of people who are engaged in sinful actions can influence others, a community of people that set a standard of following Christ as disciples can influence people as well. Creating a new "normal" is important to change the actions and mindset of others. Being obedient to Christ alone is difficult for a person but when two or more intertwine their lives to live like Christ great strength is found.

A New Modern Standard for Worship

Worship of God with whom we do not physically see is difficult. For those found in Scripture who did see God in various physical manifestations, it was difficult as well. The Gospel of Matthew records Jesus quoting God the Father as recorded in the Book of Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matt. 15:8-9). While

the worship of God is demanded and suitable, the act of disingenuous worship is not without negative consequences.

Faith communities must deal with the purposes of worship as well as the methods. Bible study can create understanding, but the desire cannot be taught. The difficulty of worship is the capacity of humans to understand and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit.

To approach worship with fear of expression is dangerous and must be addressed by every faith community. The focus of worship must be on God and not people. Many resources in the project addressed the concern of focus on individuals rather than a focus on the worship of God. Faith communities must realize that the body of Christ must embrace worship and take part together without fear.

People Living Connected to Each Other

American society stresses individuality. It has become unacceptable to many to question this idea. For the Church, individuality is less important than faith lived in community. All faith communities must follow the example of the early Church to live relationally with others. For many believers, learning to treat others as family will be contrary to every social norm, but doing this in the context of making disciples means that people will not just receive instruction but will be led to transformation as they are helped to live their lives focused on the will of God in every aspect of their life.

For those who are open to experiencing transformation into the image of Christ, they will find freedom which God can provide through the support and encouragement of His people.

Focusing on God First

While this recommendation may appear obvious, it is difficult to focus on God above everything else in a church. The aspects of obedience, transformation, community, education, worship, and expansion of the kingdom of God will require all disciples to turn their attention to God first rather than any other aspect of the modern Church. For some, this will change what "going to church" means. It will require accepting the words of Scripture over anything else that they have learned about the life lived as a Christian as a modern church member. Some pastors may change their entire life to a different model of "doing church." Focusing on the commands and the purposes of God's relationship with His creation will require each church leader to question every tradition, preference, and motivation they encounter.

The key to being a disciple and making disciples is not found in a church but is found in obedience to its creator, Jesus. When churches teach their members to focus on Christ more than their church it should cause every person to draw closer to God in the way they observe His disciples in Scripture.

When church members are challenged to live like the early Church in their daily lives, there will be a drastic change. When the Church of Christ follows the commands of Christ, transformation will not only occur within its walls; transformation will occur in the world around it.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FURTHER STEPS TO UNDERSTAND DISCIPLE-MAKING

Jesus was very clear in His commands to His disciples. If modern followers of Jesus would embrace His commands as his early disciples did then similar results would occur. This is not a simple prescription for transformation. It requires dying to self-interest to love others more than self in the way that Jesus demonstrated.

The researcher was challenged by the study of Scripture and interviews with house-church members. In the two house-church networks the researcher sensed a desire to think less about being a church and more about drawing closer to Jesus. This has challenged the researcher to worry less about what he will do as a pastor and more about what he should do as a disciple of Jesus.

Much of the researcher's life in ministry has always had some aspect of inviting people into his home to make them a part of his family. During the project, the researcher believes he has come to better understand why this has always been so rewarding for his family. The simplicity of sitting around the dining room table talking, laughing, and praying has a way of drawing people together with the Holy Spirit.

As each aspect of disciple-making was researched, it became clear that the life of a disciple-maker is filled with reorienting his or her life around others. It challenges the introvert to lay down social anxiety while it challenges the extravert to slow down to focus on others. It is transformational in its requirements to be an obedient disciple-maker and to expose one's inner self to others which is frightening for most. It cannot be accomplished with one's own strength.

When the researcher began this project, he hoped that he would be able to encourage churches to completely rethink their methods because the modern North American Church is in decline. It seems that everyone who understands this wants to see some transformation in the Church at large so many write books or become leaders in their denomination or start blogs or express their frustration on social media. Much of this the researcher has done as well. As the project has ended, the researcher realizes that he does not need to be another voice in the battle to transform the Church to "what it should be." Instead, he must be a disciple-maker who first is concerned with the lives around him. He has realized that if he makes disciples of those just outside his front door, he may be more effective for the expansion of the kingdom that he has ever been.

Opportunities for Future Research

It is obvious that disciple-making is a lifelong pursuit. Some may retire from the ministry or the pastorate, but there is no retirement from being a disciple or making disciples. This means that there will always be a need for growth and further understanding.

The aspect of worship seems to be a struggle for many church leaders. Study of Scripture should continue to better understand worship in the Old Testament and how worship happened in the early Church in the New Testament. As His disciples worshipped at the feet of Jesus, they recognized His humanity and His existence as a part of the Trinity. Every disciple must attempt to understand Jesus and His mission as God on earth. A disciple could potentially spend a lifetime working to understand worship.

Further research of the practices of churches of all types who are focusing on disciple-making in a post-Christian world is needed. A common problem of all Christian denominations and church models is the struggle for relevance in the world around them.

Research is needed more than ever in how to show the relevance of the Church in everyday life apart from what is called church in the minds of non-Christians.

The Researcher and the Future

As a member of a traditional church, the researcher does desire to see disciple-making happen in his church. Since the researcher has a desire to make disciples who focus on the commands of Jesus, the researcher feels somewhat like a missionary in a foreign country desiring to take Jesus to a culture that is different from his own. Learning to integrate the practices of a disciple-maker that disciples like Jesus may seem foreign to others. The researcher believes that helping his church create a culture of disciple-making that is successful and reproducible will help other churches in his community begin to return to making disciples.

For most of his life, the researcher has questioned how he could participate in full-time ministry. This has led the researcher to seminary for a master's degree and now a doctoral degree. From the beginning of his educational endeavors, the researcher has always said that if the process did not change him, then the process was a waste of time. This project is a culmination of many years of learning which now seems to be just beginning in some ways. The researcher has been blessed to have two simultaneous careers: one in ministry and one in information technology. Throughout this project, the researcher has discovered that being a disciple-maker requires him to be a part of both worlds: sacred and secular.

Going forward the researcher will continue to open his home to those he meets to serve in many ways as a house-church for some and a place of discipling for others. He believes that the path to discipleship does not lead away from the traditional church but is

a part of it. Where God is working in the lives of people, drawing them close to himself,

the researcher wants to be a part of the process.

APPENDIX A:

Case Study Plan

Case Study Plan

Case Study Interview Questions

1. What do I want to know?
2. How has their house Church process helped in the disciple-making movement?
3. Have they been in a different church model?
4. How many years have they been in ministry in the Church context?
5. What have you seen to be the result of the disciple-making efforts of We Are Church?
6. Try to describe the disciple-making process at your church in 4-5 steps?
7. How do extra-biblical materials fit into the disciple-making process of We are Church?
8. Briefly describe the disciple-making practices of your church.
9. Definition of disciple-making
10. Discipleship effectiveness in their own lives
11. Discipleship effectiveness in their churches

House Church Leader Questionnaire

1. What is your name?
2. How many House Churches are in your network?
3. How many adults are typically a part of each House Church?
4. With which denomination(s) are you affiliated?
5. Does your church use the term assimilation? If not, then what do you call the process of adding new people to your church?
6. What is your church's process for assimilating people?
7. What are the characteristics of someone who has been fully assimilated into the life of your church?
8. Who is responsible for assimilating newcomers?
9. What evangelistic efforts does your church undertake?
10. How would you describe the people that your church is attracting?
11. How do you present the gospel to newcomers?
12. Describe the process of becoming a member of your church.
13. What are the requirements for becoming a member of your church?
14. What is your church's process for making disciples?
15. How does your church help members become mature and grow in their faith?
16. How do you know if they are progressing in their faith?
17. What do you do when they aren't progressing?
18. What does a fully devoted disciple look like?
19. What is your church's definition of disciple-making?
20. How does your church develop leaders?
21. How does your church send people out for missions?
22. How important is discipling others in your ministry?
    Ranked from Least Important (0) to Extremely Important (7). - Importance of Discipleship

23. What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are important to the "success" of a church?

APPENDIX B

Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Traditional Church Research Survey

1. What is your name?
2. What is your year of birth?
3. What is your ZIP code?
4. Are you a: (choose one)
   - Senior Pastor
   - Youth Pastor
   - Small Groups Pastor
   - Other _____
5. What is the size of your church?
   - 0-100
   - 101 - 300
   - 301 - 500
   - 502 - 1000
   - 1001 - 2000
   - 2000 or more
6. How long has your Church existed? (choose one)
   - 1 month - 1 year
   - 2 - 4 years
   - 5 - 10 years
   - 10 - 20 years
   - Greater than 20 years (Please enter number) _____
7. With which denomination(s) are you affiliated?
8. How would you describe Discipleship?
9. How important is discipling others in your ministry? Ranked from Least Important (0) to Extremely Important (7).
10. What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are most important to the "success" of a church?

House-Church Research Survey

1. What is your name?
2. What is your year of birth?
3. What is your ZIP code?

4. Are you a part of a: (choose one)
   - o Traditional Church (Non-House Church)
   - o House Church
   - o Transitioning from a Traditional Church to a House Church
   - o Other _____

5. Did you start or were you a part of starting your House Church?
   - o Yes
   - o No

6. How long has your House Church existed? (choose one)
   - o 1 Week to 3 months
   - o 3 Months to 1 year
   - o Longer than 1 year

7. How many adults are a part of your House Church? (choose one)
   - o 1 to 10
   - o 10 to 20
   - o More than 20

8. How long before you plan to officially "Launch" your House Church? (choose one)
   - o 1 week to 2 months
   - o 2 months or more
   - o We are easing into it to see what God is doing
   - o Already Launched - Time-frame _____

9. Are you hoping to start a House Church in the next 3 months to a year? (choose one)
   - o Definitely yes
   - o Probably yes
   - o Might or might not
   - o Probably not
   - o Definitely not

10. With which denomination(s) are you affiliated?
11. How would you describe Discipleship?
12. Why are you or did you start/join a House Church?
13. How important is discipling others in your ministry?
    Ranked from Least Important (0) to Extremely Important (7).
14. What other factors, other than discipleship, do you feel are important to the "success" of a church?

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