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Best Practices for Transformational Discipleship in North Dakota Assembly of God Churches

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BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL

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BY

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ABSTRACT

The researcher constructed this project to discover best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church. The researcher provided the theological and biblical framework for transformational discipleship from Romans 12, exploring current literature on discipleship models and discipleship practices in the Assemblies of God denomination.

The researcher created the project instrument from two sources: literature identifying recommendations of best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church and participants' views regarding discipleship. The researcher then traveled to the North Dakota Network District Sectional meeting. Questionnaires were distributed and face-to-face interviews were conducted. The data was then analyzed and coded for prevailing discipleship tendencies.

The researcher identified two findings for best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church: (a) church leadership's responsibility for equipping the local church with discipleship small groups, materials, and training, and (b) spiritual discipline as important to transformational discipleship in the local church.

CHAPTER ONE: BEST PRACTICES FOR TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

The problem this project addressed was the lack of best practices for transformational discipleship in North Dakota Assembly of God churches.

In response to the problem, the researcher (a) examined transformational discipleship themes in passages like Romans 12, (b) explored current literature on discipleship models and the history of discipleship in the Assemblies of God denomination, (c) conducted a qualitative case study on participants' views regarding discipleship, and (d) identified recommendations of best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church.

Transformational Discipleship

According to Drushal and Flora, a disturbing statistic is that 4000 to 7000 churches close their doors every year.[1] One primary responsibility of church leadership is to develop spiritual disciples inward, transformation of salvation outward, and duplicating the Great Commission, demonstrating Jesus' final assignment pre-ascending into heaven. C.S. Lewis claimed, "The church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs."[2] The spiritual formation climate of most twenty-first-century churches has evolved from the focus of this final instruction of Jesus to

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[1] Mary Ellen Drushal and Jerry R. Flora, "Exemplary Christian Leadership: Beyond Mastery to Joy," *Epiphany International* 14, no. 1 (2008): 40-41.

[2] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 199.

make disciples, the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20),[3] to their selfish, financial and political gains. Bass and Rigglio believe that "transformational discipleship begins with transformational leadership. This form of leadership is based on change. It involves a leader who can appropriately identify a need for change, create a vision, and use the vision as a means of guiding the group through the change process. Transformational leaders inspire and execute change, showing dedication and commitment to the group members.[4]

David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyon have indicated that ninety-five million individuals in America do not attend church, forty percent of whom have a negative impression of Christianity.[5] The researcher observed that church leaders faced attendance barriers, decreased church attendance and a negative impression of Christianity to developing disciples. Transformational leadership development is key and indispensable for transformational discipleship.

It is important to consider church leaders who have replaced church discipleship with church business and who micromanage the senior pastor. Transformational discipleship focuses on change. Transformational discipleship will model, develop, equip, and journey with church leaders to rediscover Jesus' designed mission for the church. An example of this discipleship model is adopted by Jesus, who took

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[3] Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible, King James Super Giant Print Reference Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1998).

[4] Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio, *Transformational Leadership* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers New York, NY, 2006), 9.

[5] David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *Unchristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks about Christianity… and Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 24.

inexperienced people and made them leaders of His mission. The design entails teaching the values, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that please God.

Transformational discipleship is influenced by leadership performance when logical decisions are made for organizational and spiritual formational changes. The transformational leadership role identifies organizational behavior and motivates a transformational disciple's performance. The context and framework of leadership within the church will determine a structure for how leadership skills and cognitive abilities influence the productive behavior of the leadership.

Leadership styles and theories are popular. Leadership styles over the past twenty years have changed due to the increasing complexity of cultural, social, and work environments. Therefore, church organizational structures are placing a greater emphasis on transformational discipleship to shine a brighter light on leadership.

There is no immediate fix for transformational discipleship, and it is evident the contributions to leadership theories, practices, and leadership training goals are to provide traditional leaders with the skills to demonstrate transformational discipleship. Several theorists have indicated ideas about transformational discipleship behavior and leadership theories that have developed substantially. Transformational discipleship will reestablish leaders' ethical values. It will ask church leaders to trade selfishness in the advancement of effective leadership behaviors, strengths, qualifications, and cognitive skills for redefining quality leadership, which will incorporate leaders' behavior.

The researcher once heard that a leader is supposed to walk a few steps ahead of those who are following. This can happen when transformational leaders examine the strength of their transformational disciples and the natural attributes of their leaders, who

may have had transformational capable skills, transformational leadership behavior, and

desire transformational performance development.

More often than not the effective leadership presence is founded on the particular

expertise and leadership strengths that help the discipleship process. Models of leadership

development take time and they establish relationships and power, according to Berger.[6]

Leighton Ford states:

> There is a power that comes through spiritual gifts and there is a power that
> comes through spiritual positioning. The two work in unison. Submission gives us
> spiritual positioning under the leadership of Christ. Submission is power because
> it places us in a position in which we can receive from others.[7]

In the theory-based submission approach, the servant leader does not focus on

selfishness. Northouse suggests, "This spiritual orientation provides the perspective of a

higher purpose to leaders and their disciples. It reminds leaders of responsibilities to

others and their obligation to contribute. The purpose of Servant Leadership is to serve

others rather than their own advancements."[8]

In *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders,* Johnson and Dreitcer

balance the practical tools needed to encourage disciples in a deeper life of prayer,

courage, faith, Scripture, and action. "When the Holy Scriptures serve as more than a

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[6] Joseph. B. Berger, "Leadership: A Concise Conceptual Overview" (University of Massachusetts-Amherst Center for International Education Faculty Publications: 2014) 7.

[7] Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values and Empowering Change* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 148.

[8] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2006), 245.

source for sermons, fires of awakening begin to burn."[9] And the result is transforming church leaders into disciples.

When breaking new ground for transformational discipleship, spiritual leadership is a vital element for practice toward 'transforming church disciples.' Therefore, a spiritual dialogue must begin among the lay members, church leaders, pastors, and the body of Christ that allows all involved to grow in greater depth. "Teach, me thy way, Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Ps. 27:11). This path must be taught through faith in God and the willingness for one to become a social agent of transformation.

Several contingency theories discussed in the context of the advancement of leadership development concur that there is no quick fix to learning about the development of leadership behavior. The investment of time, training, and contribution of theory practices leads to the higher performance of transformational disciples. According to Aniol, "If the mission of churches is to make disciples, then what will this look like? Very simple, a disciple will observe all that Christ commanded. In other words, a disciple of Jesus Christ will be characterized by a certain collection of behaviors."[10] The populations studied included leaders as well as staff and other followers in servant leadership while carrying out their day-to-day tasks. Further outcomes support the findings that transformational discipleship is a direct function of a head's achievement and indirect functions of a leader's transformational behavior.

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[9] Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 160.

[10] Scott Aniol, "Practice Makes Perfect: Corporate Worship and the Formation of Spiritual Virtue," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 1 (2017): 94.

Delimitations and Assumptions

The research was focused on the churches within the Assemblies of God denomination and was limited to those within 100 miles of Bismarck, North Dakota. The research was limited to research participants who were pastors.

Three assumptions frame this research and must be noted. First, it is assumed that the local pastors of Assembly of God churches have positively impacted society.

A second assumption is that lead pastors as participants need the church to serve as transformational disciples.

Third, it is assumed that the church, through transformational discipleship, is based on a Scripture-centric and Christ-centric worldview. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). This radical transformation can impact society and provide excellent guidance that will lead toward the Kingdom of God.

Research Setting

The setting for the research took place in the American Midwest and was centered in Bismarck, North Dakota. The percentage of people who identify as religious or highly religious in Bismarck is higher than the national average at 66 percent. The most prominent groups of Christians in Bismarck are Catholics (25.6%) and Lutheran (25.6%), with smaller representations of Methodist (4.1%), Pentecostal (3.5%), Presbyterian (2.4 %), and Baptist (2.4%).[11] There is no data on the number of Christians in Bismarck who

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[11] "Conservatives Who Are in The Midwest; Religion in America: U.S. Religious Data, Demographics and Statistics," Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, last modified 2019, https://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/region/midwest/political-ideology/conservative/.

identify as evangelical; however, the Pew Research Center reports that in the American

Midwest, roughly 39 percent of all people consider themselves to be evangelical

Protestant and 19 percent of people identify as mainline Protestant.[12]

The participants included both males and females from different socioeconomic

classes and ethnicities. The Pew Research data showed that there is a large percentage of

conservative Christians in the American Midwest with most believing in biblical

inerrancy, the supremacy of Scripture, and the coming return of the Messiah. Connolly

adds, "Even mainline denominations tend to be more conservative in this region than in

other parts of the United States."[13]

Research Value

The Importance of the Problem to the Researcher

The researcher was motivated to research this topic for personal and professional

reasons. On a personal level, the researcher was troubled by the lack of innovation,

particularly as it relates to transformational discipleship and leadership development in

American society. While in many ways the local church is seen as promising and

wonderful, there is also a downside. On the one hand, technology has enabled people to

communicate with others from all over the world. Families who live apart can stay in

touch much easier, thanks to advancements in technology. Technological advancements

in medicine have helped to prolong life and saved countless people from premature or

painful deaths. People are now able to meet and form relationships with individuals from

all over the world, thereby expanding their compassion and acceptance of diversity.

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[12] "Conservatives Who Are in the Midwest.

[13] William E. Connolly, *Christianity, American Style* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 14-15.

Education has benefited immensely from technology which provides many options for studying and learning. On the other hand, technology has in many ways replaced human - to-human interactions resulting in communities becoming more fragmented and interpersonal relationships more difficult. This researcher feels that the church will play a key role in helping society cope with these challenges, heal their relationships, and use technology judiciously.

From a professional perspective, as a pastor, the researcher stands in awe of the increased ease and effectiveness provided by technology in researching sermons, communicating with parishioners, networking with mission groups and organizations, and planning services. While using some form of technology regularly to help in completing tasks, one can also observe the downside of technology: many parishioners who are disengaged from their families, addicted to video games and online pornography, and have extramarital relationships via the internet and social networking sites. It is the pastor's job to help his parishioners overcome these limitations and sinful acts. It is the strong conviction of this researcher that transformational leadership is the key to pastoring the congregation and helping people overcome addictions and other harmful behaviors that separate them from Christ and their families.

The Importance of the Problem to the Church

The church is not a stagnant entity; rather, it is a living, breathing, evolving, and ever-changing organism that must meet the needs and challenges of the people in the society where it operates. The church must remain committed to preaching and living out Scripture and dedicated to helping society at large adapt to change in a godly and biblical manner. For the church to fulfill its call and biblical purpose, it is vital to understand the

challenges of society and provide a positive, Christ-like example to the world. The Church plays a key role in helping society deal with the pressures and realities of the twenty-first-century global environment and guiding people towards a deeper union with Christ.

The Importance of the Problem to Society at Large

Society and Christians depend on the church to help overcome the hardships, challenges, obstacles, and brokenness of the world. The church is viewed by society as a beacon of hope and guiding light. Even people who do not regularly attend sometimes rely on the church to help them through hardships. Society needs a church that is aware of the complexities of twenty-first-century society and can appropriately guide the world towards turning to God and His plan for creation. Without the church, society is lost and unable to meet the basic needs of its people.

The Importance of the Problem to Clergy

Clergy serve a special purpose and role in the church and society at large. The Bible makes it very clear that pastors play a special and sacred role in bringing people to Christ. To fulfill this commandment from God, clergy members have to understand themselves and their flocks. They must know what societal factors shape society's worldview, ethics, values, and behaviors. In order to lead their parishioners and society at large to Christ, clergy must be aware of how they can serve as agents of change and transformation in the present globalized and technology-driven context.

CHAPTER TWO: BIBLICAL FRAMEWORK FOR DISCIPLESHIP

The problem this project addressed was the lack of best practices for transformational discipleship in North Dakota Assembly of God churches. In response to this problem, the researcher examined transformational discipleship themes in passages like Romans 12. From the Apostle Paul, much can be learned about discipleship practices, the identifications of spiritual gifts and the role of the church in the discipleship process. Transformational discipleship is defined as the process of a disciple's inward change to Salvation; produces an outward, duplication into the image of Jesus.

The twenty-first century Church has become focused on making Christians rather than making disciples. The Church's role in transforming discipleship demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit and reflects purpose, obedience and God's will. In Romans 12:8, the Apostle Paul encouraged those who had gifts of leadership to sit up, take note and, as Boa says, "lead with diligence."[14] According to Wren, true leaders in the church do not lead for their benefit, to receive praise, be in charge. Instead, they lead to glorify God and base their leadership on Scripture. They do not lead as tyrants but as mentors who can delegate tasks to followers without manipulation or concern.[15] Leadership in biblical perspective begins with inward transformation and leads to outward commitment. In Romans 12:8, the Apostle Paul writes, "Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness [sic]." This passage encourages leaders to respond to truth, motivation and encouragement, and to demonstrate their God-given faith through words of counsel. Transformational discipleship reflects these principles and commitments in actions and

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[14] Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 308.

[15] Thomas Wren, *Leader's Companion: Insights on Leadership through the Ages* (New York: Free Press, 1995), 207.

deeds towards all people and shows the love that Christ has for His Church.

According to Irving and Strauss, "For the body to work properly, it needs all its diverse parts. In the same way, the diversity of gifts in the church enables it to fulfill its multifaceted mission in the world. Similar teaching appears in Roman 12:4-8."[16] These verses also illustrate those duties, as men and women in Christ, to dispense our gifts and talents cheerfully and liberally with charity for the glory of God. The passage tells those not to act like authoritarian leaders, but instead, to gently lead and persuade a group to accomplish a common goal to fulfill the services of God by delegating tasks but with the absence of self-gain, coercion, and manipulation. Romans 12:8 demonstrates the acts of compassion that illustrate one's abilities to sympathize with followers mentally, physically, emotionally and financially through generosity. Hybels asserts, "A key insight into leadership practices is ensuring that the right people with the right gifts and talents are in the right positions."[17] The transformational process involves both being a disciple and becoming a disciple, taking God's Word seriously and deploying one's spiritual gifts of exhortation, giving, leadership and mercy for effective leadership from a biblical perspective.

Transformational Discipleship Practices - Romans 12:3-8

At its core, transformational leadership is about working well with people. This valuing of people involves building trust, fostering collaboration and inspiring people in such a way that they see and appreciate the gifts they bring to the organization as their

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[16] Justin A, Irving, *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 105.

[17] Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 27.

leaders value and appreciate them."[18] Romans 12:8 tells those who have the gifts of leadership that they must sit up, take note, and "lead with diligence."[19] Therefore, the researcher contextually outlines content in the practice of discipleship and highlights the ability to discern God's gifts, lead purposefully in a group setting, and communicate appropriate goals to motivate others to work together to fulfill set goals in the service of God.

The theological and biblical approaches that Jesus used to teach His disciples exemplified spiritual transformation in the mission of the Church: to equip, transform, and journey with spiritual leaders to develop disciples. Too often, most twenty-first-century churches have followed Jesus's final instructions to the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) regarding political, financial, and personal gains. Much of the ecclesiastical leadership has followed these patterns by attempting to adapt non-ecclesiastical leadership models to a religious context.[20]

The researcher asserts that transformational leadership practices are vital and indispensable for transformational discipleship. Paul had the same model, a ministry of spiritual replication. He makes this clear in his last letter, known to us as 2 Timothy, in which he instructs his assistant Timothy to carry on the task of leadership after he is gone."[21] The researcher factored in the effectiveness of spiritual discipleship and outlined the role of the Church in the practices of disciples. According to Van Dierendonck and

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[18] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 91.

[19] Boa, *Conformed to His Image,* 308.

[20] Drushal and Flora, "Exemplary Christian Leadership, 40-41.

[21] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 22.

Patterson, "Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of every individual within his or her institution."[22] Such an instance is the application of the servant leadership theory.

Sanders suggests that spiritual leadership has a supernatural source. Sanders states, "Spiritual leadership requires spirit-filled people. Other qualities are important; to be Spirit-filled is indispensable."[23] Jesus' leadership came from the Holy Spirit: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18). The Holy Spirit guides transformational disciples in the practice of their spiritual discipleship, ethical behaviors, and decision-making. "The Holy Spirit does not take control of anyone against his or her will."[24] According to Acts 1:8, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."

The early transformational leaders of the church were sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Because they had surrendered their wills to the Spirit's control, they were delighted to obey His prompting and guidance.

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[22] Dirk Van Dierendonck and Kathleen Patterson, *Servant Leadership: Developments in Theory and Research* (New York, NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 19.

[23] J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*: *A Commitment to Excellence for Every Believer,* 2nd rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Publications, 1994), 77.

[24] Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 78.

The nature and behavior of effective transformational leaders also exhibit causal effectiveness that demonstrates transformative and transactional discipleship. McCloskey and Louwsma say, "Far too many of our contemporary leaders are dedicated to personal ascendancy at the expense of public trust."[25] Therefore, the transformational leadership frame of reference development suggests that the effectiveness in managerial roles carries higher weight for transformation direction and is merely a point of contact in the structure described in the plethora of leadership theories and models. It is the leader's style and the theory of his or her behavior. Leadership is not merely concerned with "what is, but with what should be." This concept of individual, behavioral and contingent leading develops leadership character."[26]

The Apostle Paul demonstrates one quality of an excellent leader—the ability to delegate tasks to followers without manipulating them.[27] Paul exemplified and identified that for leadership to accomplish this critical, highly-demanding task, transformational disciples must experience an inward transformation that leads to an outward commitment to leading and serving others. In Romans 12:8, Paul writes that a godly leader is "he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness." In this passage, Paul recognizes that disciples want to respond positively to leaders who are truthful, motivated, encouraging and provide words of counsel as witnessed through their God-given faith. Romans 12:8 emphasizes humankind's capacity to dispense resources or materials cheerfully and

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[25] Mark McCloskey and Jim Louwsma, *The Art of Virtue-Based Transformational Leadership* (Kearney, MO: WordSmith Publishing), 7.

[26] Berger, "Leadership," 12.

[27] Wren, *Leader's Companion,* 207.

liberally with charity for the glory of God. The verse persuades disciples to accomplish a common goal to fulfill the services of God by delegating tasks in the absence of self-gain, coercion and manipulation.

Jiaxin and Jun noted that when followers share a favorable perception of their leader, they are more likely to forge a high-quality relationship with them.[28] Although this may be true, another population that was studied includes the adverse effects of neuroticism on leaders and their subjects in a church environment. When disciples are goal-oriented, then emotional intelligence has a direct effect on the transformational behaviors and conceptual theories in the advancement of this core argument.

In today's world leadership theories and models confuse many disciples regarding a concise conceptual, behavioral overview of transformational leadership development. Leaders' ethical values are traded for their selfish pleasures. Leadership *behavior* influences leadership results. "Transformational leaders create and clearly communicate agendas for moral, ethical, and spiritual change that lift people out of their everyday concerns."[29] Over time it has also become clear that there are numerous contingencies, relationships, structures and powers that impact leaders' ability to facilitate goal accomplishment.[30] "This Leadership commitment is about prioritizing follower focus and empowering followers for service of the team's mission."[31] A useful takeaway for examining the strength of transformational leaders and discipleship behavior

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[28] Referenced in Wren, *Leader's Companion,* 77.

[29] McCloskey and Louwsma, *The Art of Virtue-Based Transformational Leadership,* 10.

[30] Berger, "Leadership*,"* 2.

[31] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 11.

development is that critical issues in leadership, including charisma, integrity, influences and values can be valuable developmental tools in a transformational disciple's toolbox.

According to Northouse, "Transformational leaders are recognized as change agents who are good role models, who can create and articulate a clear vision for an organization, who empower followers to achieve at higher standards, who act in ways that make others want to trust them, and who give meaning to organizational life."[32] Transformational leadership, personality, intelligence and emotional intelligence focus on organizational culture as well the overall recognition of the needs for implementing discipleship behavior, development, charisma, practical implications and statements of new theories.

A theoretical approach to Paul's identity for leadership/discipleship establishes a leader's behavioral strengths among his or her disciples, subordinates and organizational leadership. It must include charm and developmental tools which create the opportunity for charisma to be taught when discipleship practices are given priority. Berger's models of leadership development take time and establish relationships and power. This concept of individual, behavioral, and contingent leadership develops character and strength in leaders.[33] "With an emphasis on creating a place for individuality, managers have less need to micromanage when a spirit of freedom within boundaries is emphasized."[34]

Identifying the strength of transformational leaders and their discipleship behavior establishes a component of the leadership structure that illustrates that transformational

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[32] Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice,* 157.

[33] Berger, "Leadership," 2.

[34] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 114.

leadership investments must be made to produce maximum effects. It also shows that evaluated feedback is popular in organizational leadership. Wofford suggests, "Transforming Christian leaders use many techniques to encourage creative thinking among their followers. They hold up for review visions of a future that stimulate people to think about old issues in fresh, new ways."[35]

The result of a study on leadership skills presented additional validity to organizational strength and growth that occurs when capable leaders demonstrate social judgment. Romans 12:8 demonstrates the role that leader/disciples have in the transformational discipleship process and the act of compassion that illustrates one's abilities to mentally, physically, emotionally, and financially sympathize with followers through generosity. A good leader of God can ensure that the "right people with the right gifts and talents are in the right positions."[36] Transformational practices require leaders to take God's Word seriously and deploy one's spiritual gifts of exhortation, giving, leadership and mercy for the capable leadership of God's people.

Another practice of transformational discipleship is found in Ephesians. Paul writes:

> He gave gifts to men for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ fitted and held together by that which every joint supply, according to the proper working of each part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Eph. 4:8; 12; 15-16).

This passage testifies to the importance of leaders recognizing and accepting the diversity of giftedness. Leaders in the church must honor the words of Paul and humbly

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[35] Jerry C. Wofford, *Transforming Christian Leadership, 10 Exemplary Church Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 146.

[36] Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 27.

accept that each person is blessed with their God-given talents and gifts. "Yet, when Paul needed someone to provide gentle love and encouragement, Timothy seems to have been the preferred choice."[37] One of a leader's main tasks is to recognize disciples' strengths and talents and find ways to maximize them for the glory of God. Transformational leaders will use their disciples' diversity to bring the church closer to the Kingdom of God.

Paul also explains that effective transformational leaders will seek to obtain an exceedingly high and developed level of moral maturity. In 1 Corinthians 3:16-17, Paul writes, "Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? […] The temple of God is holy, and that is what you are…and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to you" (NASB). Transformational leaders must provide a living, breathing example of what it means to be a holy temple of God that belongs to Christ. While God loves and accepts us regardless of our flaws and shortcomings, a righteous leader who can transform their disciples works hard to improve their moral standing and to encourage them to live a life that is pleasing to the eyes of God. Costa explains that "an ethical orientation is of substantial value because it exercises the very skills of discernment and judgment that managers need to unravel the deepening paradox of competition and success."[38]

In the Epistles, it is further explained that quality transformational leaders seek conciliation rather than conflict within their disciples. Transformational leaders of God try to avoid conflict when possible without compromising the values and teachings of

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[37] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 41.

[38] John Dalla Costa, *The Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership is Good Business* (Reading, MA: Perseus Books, 1998), 11.

Scripture. In Ephesians 4:31-32a, Paul writes, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Moreover, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other…" Of course, it is hard for broken humans to live out these wise words and forgive rather than condemn. This is one more reason that transformational leaders in the church must set the example and show their disciples what it means to forgive unconditionally just like God the Father has forgiven us. This process takes place as one journeys toward spiritual perfection. Spirituality focuses on one's inner, outer, private and public practices, "that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). Spirituality, once reserved for monks, has become a typical conversation and practice in the body of Christ. Spirituality not only encompasses the attitudes of the heart and the practice of spiritual disciplines but also includes all the ways we live before God. Transformational leaders too must embrace authentic, heartfelt spirituality and reflect that in their disciple leadership. Empowering the leadership and disciple transformation allows one to develop and incorporate a basic model that aligns transformational leadership practices with the core vision of the organization.

A balance of practical tools is needed to empower a transformational disciple and encourage prayer, courage, faith, Scripture, and action. "When the Holy Scriptures serve as more than a source for sermons, fires of awakening begin to burn."[39] Furthermore, transformational discipleship, empowerment, ethics, spiritual attributes and spirituality must work together in the transformational leader's organization, life, and ministry. The old saying, 'do what I say and not what I do,' will continue to stagnate leadership,

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[39] Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary*, 160.

religious organizations, Christian spirituality attributes and Christian growth. Sadly, integrity, character and moral standards are not always displayed with authenticity. Therefore, practical empowerment tools, workshops and transformational leadership training are needed to demonstrate effective results.

Transformational leaders and disciples must recognize that renewal is God's action and the beginning of the process of obtaining spiritual attributes. The message of our faith is that God loves us individually and consistently. God extends forgiveness, grace and mercy through Jesus Christ. Spiritual attributes pull the transformational leaders and discipleship members into gratitude. This feeling of appreciation and thankfulness is a gift from God. The deeper the relationship with God, the more the disciples were aware of God's presence in their lives. According to Bryant, Paul's admonitions in Romans 12:1-8 are to be interpreted in this context, for now faith's path of obedience is clear (cf.1:5-6).[40]

Identifying Spiritual Gifts of Transformational Disciples

Matthew 28:19 says, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost." Jesus is continuously instructing His disciples on His vision for society and how Christians ought to act in the world, showing that they are different from worldly people because they belong to God. In Romans 12:3-8, for Paul to be in Christ means one is a recipient of spiritual gifts and these gifts are a contribution to the body of Christ. Paul's essential point is that the

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[40] Robert A. Bryant, "Romans 12:1-8." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible Theology* 58, no. 3 (July 2004): 287

assessment of spiritual gifts is to be done with a measure of humility. Consequently, Jesus was a transformational leader who showed through example how to live a righteous, pure and holy life with sober judgment. His worldview, actions and teachings were radically different from the status quo of the day. He did not allow the world and its worldliness to supersede God's plan for creation. Jesus often corrects erroneous interpretations of Scripture, judgment, and false premises that society teaches. For instance, in Matthew 5:43-45, Jesus explains:

> Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.

In this passage, Jesus completely undermines the society's teachings and, instead, insists that His disciples do what sometimes seems to be utterly impossible—namely, love their enemies. This revolutionary commandment goes beyond the former stance of an eye for an eye and demonstrates an unwavering, selfless love of others.

Repeatedly Jesus recognized, identified and explained God's vision for humankind, and it even contradicts the teachings of the religious leaders of the time. When He argued with religious people, He always relied on Scripture to support His claims. He would read from the Hebrew Bible and then tell parables that reflected these teachings. Throughout His short life, Jesus remained fully committed to the teachings of Scripture and mimicked the perfect Christian lifestyle that was not beholden to the norms, values, or behaviors of society. "Here, again, sober self-assessment is essential. Leaders who recognize their own gifts and limitations will build a team around them to fill in the

gaps."[41] It is this perfect example of Christian love and values that the Church, and transformational disciples, must share with the world. This understanding of the spiritual gifts of discipleship forms the basis of this research. This stance is a hard cross to bear and not easy to follow, but Jesus warned of the hardships of leading a Christian life. In John 15:19, Jesus proclaims, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."

Paul states: "Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant" (1 Cor. 12:1). Identifying spiritual gifts of transformational discipleship is critical for a functioning church and unity with the diversity of callings and gifts--the spiritual gifts of evangelism, teaching, wisdom, prophesy, administration, faith, giving, encouragement, showing mercy and others (see 1 Pet. 4:11, Rom. 12:6-8, 1 Cor. 12:8-10, 28-30). According to Irving and Strauss, Paul knows that the flourishing of these gifts will enable the church to be united, efficient, and effective in the world.[42] Jesus teaches that disciples are not to be of the world or are beholden to societal pressures, values and worldviews. Instead, Christian disciples must be committed to the teachings of Christ and the values promoted in Scripture, even if they are shunned or rejected by the world for their commitment to righteousness and goodness. These fundamentals effectively implement the ability of disciples through the diversity of spiritual gifts.

The Church's Role for Practicing Transformational Discipleship

Discipleship is an essential aspect of transformational discipleship. To lead well one first must be a good disciple. The connection between discipleship and leadership

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[42] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 103.

provides the Church with guidelines on the roles and social interactions between small groups and a variety of opportunities for transformational discipleship practices. The transformational process from disciple to leader establishes a moral change. Moral leadership is not the mere preaching, uttering of pieties or insistence of social conformity. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God" (Rom. 12:2). Instead, the role of moral leadership emerges from, and always returns to, one's fundamental wants and needs.[43] A key component of local church leadership is to transform disciples into the image of Jesus. Transformational leaders set out to empower disciples and nurture them in change.[44] Jesus demonstrated a formation model and His role of teaching His disciples by telling them to whom they belong and commanding them to perform specific tasks according to their abilities. And He said, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19).

Kouzes and Posner reflect the idea that leaders play a very special role in the art of celebration because they are enormously visible to others in the organization and serve as role models.[45] It has been said that the role of a genuinely transformational leader uses a "pull" rather than a "push" style of influence. When he was a general, President Dwight Eisenhower pictured this leadership by placing a long piece of string on the table.[46] This

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[43] Wren, *Leader's Companion,* 483.

[44] Northouse, *Theory and Practice,* 142.

[45] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1987), 264.

[46] Ford, *Transforming Leadership,* 208.

shepherding mindset collates the relation to the small church leader and its transformational disciples.

As the body of Christ, the Church not only plays a pivotal role in the discipleship and mentoring of society, but it also has a responsibility to do so with compassion, grace and earnest dedication to people and the Word of God. The Church must take on an apostolic responsibility and, by its very nature and the commandment, serve as an apostolic community that exists expressly to announce and share the gospel with all people to make them disciples of Jesus Christ. As previously noted, the Great Commission spells out the function and role of the disciple as an apostolic messenger. The way to do this is not to use a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, the disciple must meet society where it is and announce the good news of Christ in various ways depending on the cultural and societal needs of its audience.

Theologian and ethics professor, H. Richard Niebuhr maintains that the church "should discharge its apostolic responsibility by envisaging the needs of men in their societies as well as in their isolation before God."[47] Jesus gave His disciples a beacon of hope and provided answers to humankind's most fundamental questions. Niebuhr noted:

> As the Apostolic Church it is the function of the Christian community to proclaim to the great human societies, with all the persuasiveness and imagination at its disposal, with all the skill it has in becoming all things to all men, that the role of transformational disciples, and heart of all things, the first and last Being, is utter goodness, complete love.[48]

It is this role that Christian disciples are to fulfill in this world for the glory of God the Father.

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[47] H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society," in *The Gospel, the World and the Church,* ed. Kenneth Scott Latourette (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1946), chapter 5.

[48] Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society."

A disciple must love others because in 1 John 4:8, the Bible says, "God is love." This overarching parameter of discipleship and one of the roles of the disciples to society is to convince not only individuals but leaders and society at large that goodness still exists. Discipleship is anchored in the methodology of Jesus Christ. Satan did not defeat it but instead, Christ rose with glory and triumph from the grave with the resurrection. Luke 24:6-7 explains the resurrection of Christ stating, "He is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee. The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." Individuals often believe in the Good News, but its role and relevance to society and nations are not illuminated adequately and thoroughly. Behaviors change when we become transformed disciples. George Barna affirms, "The strength and influence of the church is wholly dependent upon its commitment to the true discipleship. Producing transformed lives and seeing those lives reproduce in the others, is a core challenge to believers and the local church."[49] As the church produces transformed lives, those individuals seek to have an impact on society.

Part of the disciple's obligation to society is to engage in what is often viewed as polemic and uncomfortable work—namely, encouraging people and leaders to repent. Niebuhr proclaims that "the good news about the glory of divine goodness is neither rightly proclaimed nor rightly heard if not combined with the bad news about the great justice which prevails in God's world."[50] It is not enough to just proclaim the Good News without also educating society and its leaders and people on the bad news which entails

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[49] George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook Press, 2001), 24.

[50] Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society."

the fallen state of humans and everyone's responsibility to turn towards Christ and confess their sins.

In addition to its apostolic discipleship role disciples must also carry out their pastoral obligations to society. They must care for the weak, provide economic sanctions to the poor, fight for the oppressed and stand up for justice against society and its institutions, governments and organizations which are prone to self-serving interests that negatively impact the most vulnerable among us. "The Church cannot be responsible to God for men without becoming responsible for their societies. As the interdependence of humans increased in an industrial and technological civilization, the responsibility for dealing with the great networks of interrelationship increases. If the individual sheep are to be protected, the flock must be guarded."[51]

Gangel suggests that the transformational disciple's role in society involves being a social pioneer who promotes a societal standard and foundation based on biblical principles and Scripture. It must direct society and promote institutions, agencies, policies, and agendas that reflect the teachings of Christ. Christianity by nature is an eschatological faith that anxiously anticipates the coming Kingdom of God where wrongs will be made right and the world will turn towards Christ.[52] It is the disciple's responsibility to prepare the world for the Parousia, or second coming. Scripture tells humankind that the Kingdom of God is near. According to Mark 1:15, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel." In Luke 17:20, Jesus proclaims that the Kingdom of God is "in your midst." In other words, the

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[51] Niebuhr, "The Responsibility of the Church for Society."

[52] Kenneth O. Gangel, *So You Want to Be a Leader* (Camp Hill, PA: Christian Publications, 1989), 92.

Kingdom of God is soon to come and the disciples are responsible for being social pioneers readying the flock for the second coming. The Church must guide the people and those in discipleship positions are tasked with this lofty command. Transformational leaders bear a heavy burden but must embrace it with an eager willingness that is only possible through a relinquished childlike trust in God.

Transformational leadership, performance, intelligence, and emotional behavior tend to focus on the local church culture as well as the motivation of disciples and their society. At its core, any philosophy of Christian leadership must be Christ-centered. McCloskey and Louwsma suggest that "a critical component of results is measuring outcomes. A leader can't improve unless he pays attention to outcomes. If outcomes don't match what the leader expects he has an opportunity to diagnose the problem."[53] Previously written leadership theories and statements challenge the views of local church leadership, performance and the disciple's behavior. These findings potentially shape the way that organizational demands and difficulties probe the leadership to investigate more of the performance-oriented leadership perspective.

Performance goals and skill-based approaches qualify transformational leaders to provide organizational leadership behavioral patterns where the variables regulate followers' and disciples' reputations. They must demonstrate an innate desire for initiative and transformative self-drive; these desires are far greater than those of society's perceptions of leaders' exchange status. This transformation challenges the leadership forces, organizational leaders' behavior, and disciples to view performance through a lens to create change. "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the

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[53] McCloskey and Louwsma, *The Art of Virtue-Based Transformational Leaders*, 120.

oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind" (1 Pet. 5:2). The outcome of support for finding the transformational leader's direct and indirect functions of achievement should reveal a leader of transformational behavior. Transformational leadership is a daunting endeavor that requires hard work, multiple tools (such as conceptual knowledge, practical skills and value-based integrity) and collective efforts.[54] "Finding the right people for your team is one of the most important roles you will engage as a leader."[55]

The leadership framework, an examination of transformational leaders' strengths and qualifications and an evaluation of cognitive leadership skills all promote a holistic view of the training, changing, influencing, motivating, and permitting disciples an opportunity to complete organizational tasks.

McCloskey and Louwsma propose, "While, contrary to popular terminology, transformational leaders don't "empower" anyone, they do release the energy, strength and gifting others already possess."[56] Transformational leaders are proactive; they do not wait for problems to arise before exploring, discussing, and deciding how to resolve these issues. On the other hand, the qualifications of a leadership challenge platform are centered on authentic leadership, focusing on how leadership behavior influences discipleship results. Thus, it is essential to challenge leaders and disciples to learn new and innovative ways to have a better understanding of each other so they may become more authentic leaders. "Healthy collaboration begins with humility. In order to

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[54] Berger, "Leadership," 1.

[55] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 187.

[56] McCloskey and Louwsma, *The Art of Value-Based Transformational Leadership,* 11.

collaborate with others effectively, there needs to be an authentic belief that you do not have all the answers and that other people bring value to the table that complements you and the value you bring."[57]

Evaluating cognitive leadership skills and integrated leadership must allow integrated thinkers to develop a clear vision for collaborating in performance. Therefore, a leader's cognitive psyche creates the opportunity to inspire humankind with the influence and motivation to accomplish a common goal which translates to influence and motivation. Leaders often trade their ethical values in pursuit of their selfish pleasures. Their cognitive leadership abilities, behaviors and capabilities play a significant role in assessment. The leadership framework exists in different perspectives when defining leadership duties and disciples' feedback. Examining the strengths of leadership behavior entails influencing, motivating and supporting disciples as opposed to directing.

Evaluating cognitive leadership skills is the driving role for commanding disciples to view organizational performance individually. Input from subordinates must play a vital role in the integration process. "Transforming Christian leadership is built on spiritual maturity and the emulation of our Lord. Christians cannot become great leaders unless they open their lives to the leadership of the Holy Spirit through an abiding relationship with Christ."[58] The disciples' and transformational leadership's roles are to identify organizational behavior culture as well as the motivation of disciples' behavior and the leadership of their subordinates.

Breaking New Ground for Discipleship

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[57] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 71.

[58] Wofford, *Transforming Christian Leadership,* 206.

It is important to remember the Church's role in practicing transformational discipleship, a discipleship lesson from the sermon on the mount. The crowds following and listening to Jesus were at various stages of discipleship from the inner circle to the peripheral sign-seekers (Matt. 4:24, 5;1, 7:28). The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 records Jesus' teachings on numerous timeless social issues and spiritual practices. Jesus provided a meaningful sermon that identifies three teachings about discipleship.

First, disciples participate in reconciliation: "Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gifts" (Matt. 5:24). Second, disciples engage in forgiveness: "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you" (Matt. 6:14). The third is that disciples avoid judgment: "Judge not, that ye be not judged" (Matt. 7:1).

The role of the Church is to build disciples that follow the Sermon on the Mount. This task can be accomplished when church leadership considers "changing [how] people live" as a priority. The declining numbers of churches present cause for the Church to reevaluate its role on which Jesus founded the Church. To change, one must have an encounter with God in pursuit of His devices, role and vision. It appears that Church leadership has lost interaction with discipleship, evangelism, and fellowship. "Effective leadership flows from commitment to the right things. As followers of Christ the single most important commitment of our lives is to God. Any true (and eternal) success we experience as leaders will flow from that commitment."[59]

Therefore, Church leadership should enhance their disciples' roles by developing high-quality leader-member exchange relationships. The leadership must include a

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[59] Kenneth Boa, *Handbook to Leadership* (Norcross, GA: Trinity House Publishers, 2007)*,* 27.

recognition of integration and identify the need for organizational leaders' exemplary behavior and the disciples' identification with the leader. Implementing these three leadership roles can build a transformational leader's reputation, foster good behavior and create lasting relationships within the organizational discipleship.

Conclusion

Scripture provides a framework for transformational discipleship. The framework for discipleship addressed practices, spiritual gifts and the church's role in the process. The researcher sought to discover the best practices of transformational discipleship. Identifying the key to transformational discipleship is faith in the process which allows one to practice spiritual gifts within the role of the church. The framework, in general, provided the desired concepts to maximize transformational disciples' growth to avoid poor performance pitfalls.

Transformational discipleship beginning stages are after forgiveness of one sin, and conversion into a new life as a Christian. The researcher believes the second stage of transformational discipleship relies on the change agents, which is church leaders and leadership identifying one's spiritual gifts, and talents empowering the transformational disciple to practice one's spiritual gifts in unison with the church's mission.

CHAPTER THREE: TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP,
EMPOWERMENT AND SPIRITUAL FORMATION PRACTICES

The researcher narrowed the focus of transformational discipleship into two data streams empowerment and spiritual formation practices. The purpose was in many of these churches focus has been given to faith conversion, attention, and monetary contributions.

The foundation of the church is to transform disciples and lives. This task can be accomplished when church leadership considers how 'changing people's lives' becomes a priority. The declining number of churches should cause the church leadership to reevaluate its mission in which Jesus founded the church. Church leaders must first become change agents before managing the affairs of the ministry.

Transformational Discipleship

To transform, one must have an encounter with God in pursuit of His purposes and visions. Also, a major concern is that church leadership has lost interactions with discipleship, evangelism and fellowship: the practices of transformational discipleship. Again, church leadership and discipleship should be open to whatever way God chooses. A disciple is transformed by God; one must trust the Holy Spirit to press that disciple's inner man, the soul. This is a relative change and should be distinguished from sanctification which Dunning consistently defines as "a real change…. Thus, justification

is the gateway into the Christian life proper, which is centered in the general concept of sanctification."[60]

Bonhoeffer suggests that obedience places disciples in a position where faith becomes possible. Bonhoeffer says before the call to obedience, "there is an inability to live life without faith. It may even be a good and admirable life, but it is a faithless life."[61] The call of Jesus is a real imposition requiring a tangible and transformational step in response. Carson asserts:

> In the light of all this it is perhaps surprising that the Bible does not tell us *how* to overcome these difficulties in concrete, prescriptive terms. There are, however, good reasons for this. In the first place, the Biblical documents reflect the culture and understanding of their own times.[62]

This is not the end but rather the beginning of the transformational practice. Note the phrase used by Dunning in the above quotation: "justification is the gateway into the Christian life proper" – the beginning of our life in Christ, a life that is centered in sanctification.

According to Romans 11:16 there is a promise inherent in the commands to "be holy, be perfect, love God with every part of your being, love people, be transformed into the image of Christ!" These commands in and of themselves are impossible. But God is not a God of the impossible, so if Christians are commanded to 'Be!' and to 'Love!' then there is a promise from God that we will be able to do so.

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[60] H. Ray Dunning, *Reflecting the Divine Image: Christian Ethics in Wesleyan Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 58.

[61] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Touchstone: 1995) 42.

[62] Marion Carson, "Conversation on a Train: Reflections on the Bible and Christian Discipleship," *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 15, no. 1 (2014): 64.

Discipleship in a Ministry Context

A leader is far more than a label; leaders influence pastors lay members and disciples in a ministry context. Leadership is about taking actions to create sustained and positive transformation within disciples. Great leaders align their values and vision with those of their disciples and help operationalize them for the future. To demonstrate these practices is to passionately communicate a shared vision and purpose of that for which the ministry and organization stand. Leaders cultivate committed pastors, lay members, disciples, and employees who also strive to lead. Modeling relates not only to a leader's personal integrity, responsibility and investment but also to the task of leadership training itself, reproducing yourself in others.[63] Nehemiah modeled leadership. Nehemiah met this challenge by adjusting strategy and encouraging the worker. He divided his workforce between building the wall and defending the builders.[64]

Nehemiah modeled submission. Submission gives us spiritual positioning under the leadership of Christ. Submission is power because it places us in a position in which we can receive from others.[65]

According to Blackaby and Blackaby, "Perhaps the greatest Christian influence on leadership theory has been in the area of servant leadership. For example, Jesus has become the model not only for Christian leaders but also for secular leaders."[66]

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[63] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective,* 21.

[64] McCloskey and Louwsma, *The Art of Virtue-Based Transformational Leadership,* 121.

[65] Ford, *Transforming Leadership*, 148.

[66] Henry T. and Richard Blackaby. *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People on to God's Agenda.* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2011. 144.

Johnson and Dreitcer offer a balance of practical tools needed to encourage prayer, courage, faith, Scripture and action. These authors move away from the idea of discipleship counting on strategic leadership towards servant leadership, listening to God and understanding God's acts of authenticity. "When the Holy Scripture serves as more than a source for sermons, fires of awakening begin to burn."[67]

The researcher offers the idea that God has called church leaders to be transparent to His will and the holiness in His Word. The Scriptures which demonstrate that servant leadership influences the ministry includes the following verses: "Abraham was a servant leader: He led his men into battle to rescue Lot, refused any personal gain and was generous to others (Gen. 14:21-24)."[68]

Boaz used his position and wealth to serve Ruth because of her loyalty to her mother-in-law. At this point, there is no evidence that he entertained any ideas that he would personally gain from serving her in this way. Only later did he discover that his servanthood would benefit him as well (Ruth 4:8-12).

The qualifications of leaders that are demonstrated by his or her performance and behavior can be considered either effective or ineffective. Many studies have taken multivariate approaches, examining the relationship of leaders' characteristics to a variety of criteria including measures of leadership performance.

Nobody in a family is weaker or more vulnerable than a little child, yet the greatest people in God's kingdom are those who view themselves as children. The people

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[67] Johnson and Dreitcer. *Beyond the Ordinary*, 160.

[68] Boa, *Handbook to Leadership*, 667.

know they are weak and vulnerable before God. In God's kingdom, every great leader perceives himself or herself that way.

The results of these traits establish a leadership behavior pattern which encourages disciples and followers to emulate both the organizational leadership and its leaders. Ministry leaders' ethical values are traded for their selfish pleasures and authentic leadership behavior is challenging. Sometimes the challenges in front of leaders can cloud their views of the larger problems unfolding around them.

Great historical Christian leaders are people who have to reproduce great change. People like Martin Luther, John Wesley and Hudson Taylor recognized the crisis and opportunity of their time and led people to face the challenge.[69]

To discern best practices, the relationship between positions of power and transformational leadership can create a command change that occurs by inspiring leaders and followers and pursuing a change-oriented objective. Berger's theories of leadership recognized that a leader's behavior is more important than merely focusing on his or her characteristics.[70]

Therefore, this last image in the context of the dignity of serving reflects the submission to someone who is controlled by someone else with no freedom and no independence. There is dignity in being a servant.[71]

The researcher suggests that disciples want to lead but must earn that right through the process of servanthood. Berger points to the example of Jesus. "Jesus

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[69] Wofford, *Transforming Christian Leadership*, 90.

[70] Berger, "Leadership," 18.

[71] Berger, "Leadership," 18.

demonstrated the upside-down values of God's kingdom: The greatest is the lowliest

servant. When He had finished washing the disciples' feet, he demonstrated an example

of what His disciples should practice. Servant leadership follows this radical, no-holds-

barred direction."[72]

Disciples, followers and leadership might meld together. Leadership means

coordinating the energy and motivation of a group to accomplish a purpose. This seems

mundane when viewed in the context of Christian leadership.[73] Burns' theories of

leadership recognized that vigorous interaction between transforming leaders and their

follower is itself a powerful causal force for change.[74]

Discipline Before Discipleship

Sanders speaks about the importance of discipline. "Discipline is yet another

responsibility of the leader, a duty often unwelcome. The self-discipline that is the central

characteristic of a leader will eventually be applied consciously or unconsciously to those

around him or her."[75] Herrington et al commented about the struggle pastors have with

discipline:

> Pastors have been trained to preach and shepherd a congregation, but few have
> been exposed to the discipline of leadership. The beginning is the leadership's
> capacity for discipline to generate and sustain creative tension. Creative tension
> occurs when a compelling vision of the future and a clear picture of current reality
> are held in continuous juxtaposition.[76]

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[72] Berger, "Leadership," 18.

[73] Berger, "Leadership," 18.

[74] James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2004), 25.

[75] Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 126.

[76] Herrington, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change Workbook* 100.

Richard J. Foster explained, "The classical disciplines of the spiritual life call disciples to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm."[77] Foster divides these disciplines into three parts: inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting and studying; outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission and service; and corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.[78]

According to the Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary:

> Discipline is usually referenced in the Bible as the aspects of instruction and correction that are sometimes punitive. Receiving discipline with humility and wisdom is satisfying. In the Old Testament, the word *discipline* comes from a form of the Hebrew word *yasar*, 'to instruct, rebuke and warn.' Discipline in the New Testament comes from a form of the word *paideuo*, 'instruct, correct.'[79]

The apostle Paul provides examples: "We deal not in the letter but in the Spirit. The Letter of the Law leads to the death of the soul; the Spirit of God alone can give life to the soul" (2 Cor. 3:6 JUB).

The single most important discipleship commitment is to God. Any true (and eternal) success experience as leaders will flow from that commitment.

As this researcher climbs the stair steps of leadership, he does not stand alone but stands with the leaders that have disciplined and conditioned themselves to change the course of history. What makes this phenomenon or vision possible is the passion, integrity, courage, faith and discipline necessary to be called a leader.

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[77] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 1978), 10.

[78] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 10.

[79] *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary,* s.v. "Discipleship" (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003).

Empowering Disciples

Discipleship is to focus on preparing the leadership of the church for leading disciples through motivation, communication and conflict management. This allows disciples in church leadership positions to grow and be prepared to respond to conflict. Again, society has overwhelmed disciples with an array of leadership approaches, styles, traits and theories. The dynamics affecting discipleship require a biblical solution.

Despite the modest growth in church attendance during the past few years, the image of Christianity has diminished precipitously. Lewis says if the church is not drawing people to Christ "all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose." [80] Despite the tangible influences of the twenty-first-century unchurched attendees, the plan of salvation has not changed and discipleship training is vitally important. Moreover, 78% of Americans identify themselves as Christians, 67% of Americans believe that their purpose in life is to "enjoy blessings and gain the maximum benefit from their options and temptations."[81]

The researcher assumed that is due to untrained disciples who have not experienced salvation or recognized their callings as followers of Christ.

Irving and Strauss suggest:

Followers need to understand that their leaders actually believe that what the organization does matter. When followers see a congruence between espoused and lived values, and when follower believe it is a real and authentic conviction on the part of the leader, this provided a leadership model that followers want to emulate.[82]

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[80] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 199.

[81] George Barna*, Grow Your Church from the Outside* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2002), 16.

[82] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 32.

Bill Hull explained, "The contemporary gospel has given permission to the largest portion of the church to simply sign off on the basic facts of the gospel, get their sins forgiven, acquire assurance of entry into heaven, and then do a few religious duties until Christ returns."[83]

This thinking misleads the unchurched person into believing that salvation is not important in the transformational process of spiritual discipleship. For example, in his letter to the Galatians Paul wrote, "until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19). Irving and Strauss suggest contemporary theory and research build on these biblical perspectives by providing additional insight into the importance of leaders supporting and resourcing followers.[84] Brown states, "A closely related derivative of *disciple* is the word *discipleship*, which simply means the state of being a disciple."[85]

The empowering purpose of discipleship involves the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting, serving, and giving. According to Johnson and Dreitcer, balanced practical tools are needed to encourage disciples toward a deeper life of prayer, courage, faith, Scriptures, and action. Thus, transforming church leaders into disciples happens "when the Holy Scriptures serve as more than a source for sermons [causing] fires of awakening…to burn."[86]

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[83] Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2010), 12.

[84] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 186.

[85] Mark Richard Brown, "By This They Will Know: Discipleship Principles to Transform the Church" (D.Min Thesis, Liberty University: Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA, 2012), 6.

[86] Johnson and Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary,* 160.

According to Dilmore, "As Christ's disciples we are called to make disciples, to inspire and encourage others to follow Jesus and to live according to his teachings."[87]

The scholars discovered the empowering strength of the church is disciples, leaders and the practice tendencies of its disciples, who possess certain capabilities and skills, leadership behavior and performance development. Rima posited that just as our values will dictate our actions and behaviors. A strong connection with our sense of calling is what will give a degree of purpose and overall direction to our actions.[88] Irving set the stage for this contemporary inquiry into an understanding of leadership that begins with a "natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first."[89]

Disciples must demonstrate service to earn the right to lead and must earn that right through the process of servanthood. Gangel suggests it is necessary "to further integrate how disciples, followers, and leadership might meld together. Leadership means coordinating the energy and motivation of a group to accomplish a purpose. This seems mundane when viewed in the context of Christian leadership."[90]

The foundation of empowering discipleship is serving others.

> This task can be accomplished when Christian leadership considers how to become change agents, with changing people's lives as the primary goal. Christian leaders cannot be ignorant of the one message central to all their activities. They must be interested not only in Bible study and in reading things

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[87] Pamela Dilmore, "Being and Making Disciples of Jesus Christ." The Living Pulpit: Serving the Gospel's Servants (February 2014), https://www.pulpit.org/2014/02/being-and-making-disciples-of-jesus-christ/.

[88] Samuel D. Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out: The Art of Self-Leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2000 55.

[89] Irving, "*A Model for Effective Servant Leadership Practice*: A Biblically-Consistent Research-Based Approach to Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in* Leadership 3, no. 2 (2011), 118.

[90] Gangel, *So You Want to Be a Leader*, 17.

others have learned; they must become independent investigators of the Word of God.[91]

Neil Cole contended, "Healthy, growing disciples can merge naturally as leaders, right where they are."[92] Another aspect is disciples engaging growth initiatives through church leadership and leadership training.

Christian Schwarz's study identified "empowering leadership" as one of eight key characteristics of growing churches. Schwarz's study indicated that leaders of growing churches "do not use lay workers as 'help' in attaining their goals and fulling their own vision. Rather they invert the pyramid of authority so that the leader assist Christians to attain the spiritual potential God has for them."[93]

Self-Empowerment

According to Kouzes and Posner, "Public ceremonies and rituals are the ingredients that crystallize personal commitment. They help to bond people together and let them know that they are not alone."[94] Being fully committed to Jesus and His mission is the motivating factor for disciples. Rima claims that simply identifying your values and understanding your calling is not sufficient to realize your full leadership potential for God's glory; it takes something more.[95]

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[91] Gangel, *So You Want to Be a Leader*, 13.

[92] Neil Cole, *Organic Leadership: Leading Naturally Right Where You Are* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009) 15.

[93] Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 22.

[94] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 263.

[95] Rima, *Leading from the Inside Out*, 93.

Michael Wilkins suggests, "At the inauguration of his kingdom mission, Jesus establishes a new pattern [discipleship], because he is the one who takes the initiative to seek out and call these brothers to enter into a relationship with him."[96]

One premise of discipleship is that humankind cannot call him or herself to accomplish this kingdom assignment without the discipline of unending prayer. When opportunity knocks, prayer unlocks the door.

Prayer is the foundation of the earth, heaven, church and change agent to transform disciples and lives. This task of praying can be accomplished as part of the mission of church leadership and change the lives of humankind. Prayer is a priority. For example, the declining numbers of churches should cause the organizational structure to reevaluate its mission in which Jesus founded the church. However, to change or become a change agent, one must have an encounter with God in pursuit of His devices and visions.

Practices of Discipleship

The practice of discipleship is a process of developing a new transformed life through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior.

There are many practices and components of discipleship. A few practices of discipleship streamline to the empowering and transformational process revealed in biblical truths and spiritual development. This contemporary godly character trait leads to an understanding of leadership that begins with a desire to serve.

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[96] Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew*, The NIV Application Commentary Series, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 180.

A vital component of the practices of discipleship is the servant's heart, to "obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eye service, as men pleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God" (Col. 3:22). The practices of discipleship will view leaders' values and character requirements from a holistic perspective.

The discipleship practices of developing a new transformed life through a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior is best exemplified when a situation occurs in the spiritual developmental process of leadership and demonstrates the disciple's ability to perform with a godly character under stress. According to Irving and Strauss, "Assurance of support and loyalty in the face of hardship and trials, to know their leader has their back is one of the best resources a leader can provide for followers."[97]

Transformation, believing God and having a hunger to know more about who God is through serving and reading His Word creates the opportunity, in faith, to come together and pray for one's community and the world around him or her.

Servanthood and transformational leadership are change agents for disciples and play important roles in discipleship. The process of change is hard without submission, a renewal process and denying oneself.

Irving and Strauss contend, "At its core, transformational is about working well with people. This valuing of people involves building trust, fostering collaboration, and inspiring people in such a way that they see and appreciate the gifts they bring to the organization as their leaders' value and appreciate them."[98] The transformation process

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[97] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 185.

[98] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 91.

must be encountered prior to effective servanthood. God calls one to change through serving but one must answer the call through change agents. Someone once said that the hardest person to change is the leader. Trust must be developed in the renewal process. The element of discipleship is lightening the load to build on the servanthood component. The empowering approach to transformational discipleship requires renewal, change and removing distractions and unforeseen circumstances.

Characteristics of Empowered Disciples

The researcher now understands that well-empowered discipleship characteristics result in well-empowered disciples. The significance and practices of discipleship overlap in many areas, one of which is the characteristic of disciples which identifies the important boundaries of discipleship. Jesus demonstrated the practices of discipleship and commanded His church to duplicate this model. The apostle Paul understood being a follower and disciple, saying, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Becoming imitators of Christ is the foundational approach to empowering disciples. John Maxwell said, "The stronger the relationship and connection between individuals, the more likely the followers will want to help the leader.[99]

Empowering models of discipleship take time, focusing on the follower's changes and strong prayer life. Many leaders, including the researcher, gravitate toward the tenets of servant leadership because of power and perceived compatibility with the Christian worldview.

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[99] John C. Maxwell, *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 116.

Spiritual Formation Praxis

To maintain a balance of theory and practice, the term *praxis* has reemerged on the present scene. A spiritual dialogue begins between disciples and unbelievers, allowing all involved to grow deeper. "Teach me thy way, Lord, and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies" (Ps 27:11). This path must be taught through faith in God and one's desire to become a social agent of spiritual disciples. The Holy Spirit guides leaders in the praxises of their spiritual discipleship, ethical behaviors and decision making. "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

> A praxis approach to spiritual formation bridges the theory, practices and the supernatural component of discipleship, the "God part." Beyond the gift of discipleship, beyond the skills and talents required, beyond the decades of experience, is there anything more that leaders need.[100]

"One of the jobs of leaders is to help people with the spiritual gifts of giving get into the game and understand that they are responsible to God for the 'much they have been given.'"[101] The framework of spiritual formation structures discipleship skills and cognitive abilities to influence the productive behavior of the leadership. "The early leaders of the church were sensitive to the leading of the Spirit. Because they had surrendered their own wills to the Spirit's control, they were delighted to obey His prompting and guidance."[102]

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[101] Hybels, *Courageous Leadership,* 111.

[102] Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, 79.

"Part of the reason Jesus disciples turned the world upside down is that they had been commissioned by the world's greatest leader with the clearest, must exciting goal ever set: world redemption through the ministry of the church."[103] The spiritual praxis of disciples is influenced by Spirit-led leadership, performance and when logical decisions are made for spiritual formational changes. Also, the transformational leadership role identifies behavior and motivation of spiritual nature disciple's performance.

The spiritual formation of discipleship styles has changed over the past twenty years due to the increasing complexity of cultural, social and work environments. Therefore, many organizational practices are placing a greater emphasis on spiritual formation, building an effort to shine a brighter light on discipleship.

Loritts contends, "Leadership is fueled by a compelling sense of mission. What inspires us to act is an irresistible picture of either what should be done or that could be done. We then focus our attention on making it happen."[104]

Northouse wrote, "Supportive leadership refers to being friendly and approachable as a leader and includes attending to the well-being and human needs of subordinates.[105] This perception of the empowering spiritual formational praxis of discipleship must regain its purpose, mission and image of Christ.

To accomplish the church's mission, four primary discipleship concepts are suggested: love God, prepare for Christ's return, evangelize the lost and equip believers. A personal relationship with the true living Lord Jesus is necessary to accomplish the

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[103] Hybels, *Courageous Leadership,* 90.

[104] Crawford W. Loritts, *Leadership as an Identity: The Four Traits of Those Who Wield Lasting Influence* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 115.

[105] Northouse, *Leadership,* 91.

church's mission. The leader can then function as a tool to empower the spiritual nature

of disciples, enjoy the demonstration of the Holy Spirit as fulfilled in Scripture and

respond to God's promises faithfully recorded in the Holy Scriptures.

Within an ethical leadership mindset, explaining the text well helps today's

disciples to understand the implications of the truth. "Application exhorts and encourages

Christian duty and is the present-day response called for by a given text(s). The word

response is used intentionally because too often application only suggests action.

According to Bass, "The differential effects of task-related and person related clusters of

leadership styles suggest that two central needs are a response-allocation analysis to sort

out conceptually the different styles from each out and more factorial analysis to see the

empirical communication among the styles."[106] Having reviewed these passages that

connect discipleship and personal development, the plan of action that this researcher

might take in the future in the development of personal ethical formation within the

leadership context is based on these three scriptural teachings of the Sermon on Mount.

Summary

According to Patterson, "Transformational Leadership shows leaders focused on

the organization, and is insufficient to explain behavior that is altruistic in nature, or

follower focused.[107] The role of transformational leadership identifies the organizational

behavior framework. Examining leadership strengths provides motivation for

subordinates' performance. The context and framework of leadership is a cognitive

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[106] Bernard M. Bass, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research and Managerial Applications* (New York, NY: Free Press, 1990), 901.

[107] Van Dierendonck and Patterson, *Servant Leadership,* 19.

structure that determines how leadership skills and abilities can influence leadership and productive behavior.

Society has overwhelmed us with leadership styles, traits and theories. However, transformative leadership brings self-gratification as a trade-off for quality leadership. Present standard leadership variables correlate behavior control in leadership development, leadership challenges and in evaluating cognitive leadership. A continuous trend between transactional leadership and transactional leaders tends to lack certain behavior skills that are necessary to advance organizational leadership.

A continuous trend between transactional and transformative leadership establishes a greater leadership framework. When followers share a favorable perception of their leader's visible image, a high-quality relationship is more likely to facilitate the followers' personal identification.

The glue which ties these three theories together is that the leader's ethical values are traded for their selfish pleasures. The leadership framework is structured in a way that demonstrates effective leadership; cognitive behavior influences organizational leadership and how the collective cultural identity of group members can influence and advance organizational leadership through behaviors that effective leaders exhibit to their subordinates.

Conclusion

The researcher addressed the problem by reviewing transformational leadership literature that applied to developing disciples. Transformational leadership literature can be applied to the discipleship process. One theme from the literature was empowerment. The researcher believes that transformational disciples empowerment maintains a

kingdom mindset and regains the understanding of the first word in the Great

Commission is: Go! Another theme from the literature was spiritual formation. The

spiritual growth, development of spiritual gifts and spiritual maturity are byproducts of

responsibility, and engagement.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY
REGARDING TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP

The researcher designed this project to evaluate best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church. The researcher chose churches from North Dakota Assembly of God churches located within a close geographic distance. While there was a total of sixty-three denominational churches in North Dakota, the research purposefully selected. Ten pastors, from ten of those churches participated in the study.

The researcher conducted a qualitative case study to collect data and information. The research content provided the clearest path to determine the best transformational discipleship practices considered for future research.

Research Methods

Qualitative Research

The researcher asserted that qualitative research was essential to accumulate competent data, pick up on themes and examine the opinions from participants. Each participant inquiry was sufficient for testing objective theory, methodological vocabularies and analyzing the best-practices data. Patton wrote, "Qualitative inquiry … is a part of multiple practices in which words in methodological and philosophical vocabularies acquire different meanings in their use or particular acts of speaking about the meaning of practice."[108]

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[108] Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Method*, 3rd. ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, 2002), 76.

The researcher believes qualitative research is about the process of exploring the holistic views of best-practices and addressing the details from the participants' responses. Creswell wrote, "We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study."[109]

Case Study

The researcher conducted a case study to investigate the best practices in transformational discipleship in the local church. Patton explains a case study: "The case study approach to qualitative analysis constituted a specific way of collecting and analyzing data; in that sense it represented an analysis process."[110]

A case study is a good approach to qualitative research. It is "a type of qualitative research in which in-depth data are gathered relative to a single individual, program or event for the purpose of learning more about an unknown or poorly understood situation."

Research Instruments and Data Collection

Questionnaire

For one of the researcher's instruments, a questionnaire (Appendix B) was developed and distributed. According to Patton, "Providing content for a series of questions can help the interviewer hone in on relevant responses. A helpful content provided cues about the level at which a response is expected."[111]

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[109] John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008), 48.

[110] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation*, 447.

[111] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation,* 367.

The researcher constructed a questionnaire to collect objective variables for examining the perspectives on the best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church (Appendix B). The questionnaire was designed to analyze three themes transformational discipleship, spiritual formation, and discipleship practices.

The questionnaire included five open-ended questions seeking the participants' thoughts on the definition of discipleship and discipleship in the local church. The questionnaire also collected demographic information. In November 2021 the researcher distributed the questionnaire to participants in-person. The participants completed the questions prior to, face-to-face interviews. The questionnaire was completed at the time of the interview.

Interviews

The researcher also used interviews as a research instrument. Patton explains that interviews can find out "things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observational data are more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-reported data. The fact is that we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions."[112] The researcher conducted semi-structured face-to-face interviews with ten senior pastors who were directly involved with the practices of discipleship and transformational leadership in the local church.

The participants completed an informed consent form (Appendix D) and received the interview questions before the interview. Sensing wrote, "The main purpose of the interview is to obtain a special kind of information."[113] The researcher used two topics for

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[112] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation,* 340.

[113] Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Project for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2011), 104.

the interview questions: (a) discipleship practices in the local church and (b) the importance of transformational discipleship. The researcher limited the number of face-to-face interview questions to five to respect the social distancing guidelines. The interview guide can be found in Appendix C.

According to Sensing, "An interview guide lists the questions or topics that the interviewer desires to explore. It ensures that the basic information is obtained from each person … and the interviewer is free to probe and explore for more depth."[114] The researcher analyzed the participants' data in conjunction with evaluating the best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church. A simple Excel spreadsheet using open coding divided the data into themes and commonalities. Leedy and Ormrod define open coding as dividing the data "into segments and then scrutinizing for commonalities that reflect general categories of themes. After meaningful categories are identified, the data are further examined for properties, attributes that characterize each category."[115]

Data Analysis

The questionnaire data, responses to open-ended questions, were analyzed. The researcher examined all of the responses for each question looking for themes, common responses and articulated the responses.

The interview data was analyzed from the participant's responses to the questions. The process included reading through the participant's responses and highlighting key phrases. The researcher examined all of the responses for each question

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[114] Sensing, *Qualitative Research: Multi-Methods,* 107.

[115] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* ,10th ed. (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2013), 297.

looking for themes and common responses. The findings were analyzed and articulated in a summary format.

Participants

The researcher purposefully selected ten active credentialed Assembly of God senior pastors that serve in the North Dakota Ministry Network. The researcher prayerfully and purposefully selected each participant according to years as current senior pastor, gender, and ethnicity. The researcher desired to have a diversity of participants. Table 4.1 shows that the pastors had served in ministry for 1 to 20+ years. Table 4.2 shows that the pastors were all males. The researcher attempted to contact five female participants; however, they were to participate. Table 4.3 shows the ethnicities represented.

The ten senior pastor participants were well known within the North Dakota Ministry Network. Beyond the years served, gender and ethnicity, the researcher believed the participants could contribute to the discussion of discipleship practices for two reasons. First, participants met the criteria of being senior pastors in Assembly of God churches in the North Dakota district. Second, participants had already been discussing concepts to effectively disciple individuals.

The researcher conducted face-to-face interviews during the 2020 North Dakota District Sectional Training with ten active credentialed senior pastors. After meeting with and consulting with the same ten participants, the researcher handed out the paper questionnaires validating the responses.

This process focused the researcher on providing a parameter, overlapping data and gathering field work analysis data for this project. The purpose of demographic data

was for the evaluation of purposeful sampling, understanding of socioeconomic groups and increasing the effectiveness from the participants. Patton explains, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth."[116]

Table 4.1: Years at Current Senior Pastorate

1-10 years	10-20 years	20+ years
7 participants	2 participants	1 Participant

Table 4.2: Gender

Male	Female
10 participants	0 participants (2 declined)

Table 4.3: Ethnicity

Native American	Caucasian American	African American	Hispanic American
1 participant	5 participants	3 participants	1 participant

Conclusion

To address the problem, the researcher conducted field research with pastors regarding the best practices of transformational discipleship. A questionnaire collected data on discipleship. Interviews gathered information on discipleship and spiritual formation. The researcher acknowledged that ten pastors was a small sample size but believed the participants were able to provide a picture of the state of discipleship in the North Dakota Assembly of God churches.

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[116] Patton, *Qualitative Research & Evaluation,* 46.

CHAPTER FIVE: EXAMINING THE CHURCHES

The researcher constructed this project to discover the best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church, collecting data and information through interviews with senior pastors.

A coding system was designed using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to see patterns in the open-ended questionnaire questions and face-to-face interview responses.

Demographic Data

The researcher invited ten senior pastors to share their thoughts on best practices for transformational discipleship in the local church. The senior pastors consisted of ten males, ranging in age from thirty to sixty.

The participants were active senior pastors who had served for a variety of tenures, the majority having served for ten to twenty years. The entire group had obtained a high school or college education. Four participants had doctoral degrees, three had earned master's degrees, one had achieved a bachelor's degree, and one participant had a high school diploma (Table 5.1). For confidentiality, research participants have been given initials that are pseudonyms not to their actual name.

Table 5.1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years as Christian	Years as Senior Pastor	Denomination	Education
JD	M	40s	Caucasian	29	1	Pentecostal	Masters
CJ	M	50s	African American	22	10	Pentecostal	Doctorate
CD	M	60s	Hispanic	35	20	Pentecostal	Masters
JR	M	40s	Caucasian	23	9	Pentecostal	Masters
IW	M	40s	Caucasian	11	2	Pentecostal	Masters
TW	M	40s	Caucasian	19	3	Pentecostal	Masters
JS	M	60s	Caucasian	49	30	Pentecostal	Doctorate
IJ	M	50s	African American	33	17	Pentecostal	Doctorate
JJ	M	30s	Native American	10	6	Pentecostal	High School
FB	M	50s	African American	20	9	Pentecostal	Doctorate

Questionnaire Data

Question 1: How can the local church best make lasting change that will lead to transformational discipleship?

Responding to this question, the participants either focused on the individual's responsibility or the role of the church. Five of the participants provided responses that focused on the individual's responsibility to grow in his relationship with God. CJ said spiritual disciplines in the local church lead to results that produce lasting change in transformational discipleship. JS, TW, FB, and JR commented on the idea of seeking the Lord Jesus asking for forgiveness, understanding the saving grace of God's love, redemption, being filled with the Holy Spirit and repentance. Five of the participants provided responses that focused on the church's responsibility to be a community. CD responded that the local church must first demonstrate the power of love. Love is the transformer which leads to discipleship and the nature of love develops the transformation and lasting change. JJ and IJ indicated that the local church should initiate

a challenge to congregants to follow Jesus, pressing toward the higher calling of His love and growing into the image of Jesus Christ. JD and IW described the local church as a community of believers in Jesus Christ fashioned in love, yielding lasting change when the local church embraces the Lord and makes the church His bride. Jesus' words to the church are truth, Spirit and life; transforming the church, expelling that which is natural and bringing the church to its divine nature.

The participants of this study suggested that a local church can make lasting change if two elements were in place. The first element was the responsibility of the individual to respond to the invitation to become a disciple. The second element was the role and responsibility of the church to invite individuals to engage in the discipleship process

Question 2: How would you define discipleship?

When asked about their definition of discipleship, all ten participants described discipleship as being converted into the likeness of Jesus Christ. Some of them described discipleship as a process; CD said it was a "process of being a follower of Jesus Christ" and JJ described it as "growing into the image of Jesus." JR said discipleship was "spending time seeking God through Christian practices" and JS said it was "sharing their faith to non-Christians." Others described discipleship as modeling the teachings of Jesus. While others described discipleship as engagement in spiritual acts:

> "process of being a follower of Jesus Christ" (IJ)
> "modeling the teaching, preaching, the act of baptizing" (TW)
> "unique patter of following the model, and teachings of Jesus" (FB)
> "growing into the image of Jesus" (JD)
> "spending time seeking God through Christian practices" (IW)

"spiritual growth of a Christian, providing a supportive environment and developing spiritual gifts" (CJ)

"sharing one's faith to non-Christians" (CD)

Discipleship may be defined slightly differently by the participants but all agreed on the goal. The goal of discipleship is to become like Christ. The local church is an important part of the discipleship process. Discipleship takes place when the church provided a supportive biblical environment in which one can develop spiritual practices and use their spiritual gifts.

Question 3: How would you describe the current state
of discipleship in the local church?"

FB claimed, "The current state of discipleship can be improved if the church's priorities regarding the responsibility of making disciples of Jesus were essential. JS, IW, and CD commented that the current state of discipleship in the local church was moderately good. The leaders' disciplines of praying, fasting and listening to God for direction can help discipleship grow. Also added to the list was the practice of inviting friends and families to participate in small discipleship groups. JJ and JD responded that the state of the local church moves forward by the power of the Holy Spirit. God is saving, transforming and healing lives. He is yesterday, today and evermore. IJ and CJ felt that the current state of discipleship in the local church is very low and changes are required to redirect the congregants to shift from church programs to modeling the last commandment of Jesus Christ to "go and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). TW and JR commented that the current state of the local church was healthy: maintaining unity, encouraging small groups, inviting local church discipleship mentorship classes and shifting the focus from making Christians to developing disciples.

Overall, the participants of this study suggested the current state of discipleship in the local church ranged from very low to moderately good. Local churches need to shift from making Christians to developing disciples. Ultimately, the local church can move forward by relying on the power of the Holy Spirit to bring about growth.

Question 4: How can discipleship practices impact your personal life?

Five participants (CD, JS, JJ, TW and JR) responded that discipleship practices impacted their personal lives using the disciplines of worship, prayer, Bible study and being accountable to a Christian colleague. Their responses included phrases such as:

"loving their neighbors as themselves" (CD)

"in weakness, God has made them strong through the power of the Holy Spirit" (JS)

"sought the mind of the Lord Jesus through daily devotional time" (JJ)

"growing in the faith with Jesus demonstrating the image of Jesus" (TW)

"impartation from the Holy Spirit" (JR)

FB and IW responded with these common highlights:

"I am closer to God more than ever" (FB)

"I enjoy sharing the good news of the gospel of Christ" (IW)

"God can accept imperfections and uncommitted to the teachings of Jesus helping humankind through love" (JD)

"discipleship practices impacted his personal life through confessing. and professing the Lord Jesus Christ as his personal Savior"

Discipleship practices are important and have an impact on a person. Discipleship practices (e.g. Bible study, worship, prayer) have a positive impact on one's relationship with God by increasing the connection. Another positive impact is an increased desire to help others.

Question 5: How can discipleship contribute to the local church?

IW's response was, "being a Christian and not just doing Christian activities." JS responded, "God's love and faith will open the hearts of disciples and their change will make a contribution in the local church." JD acknowledges "submitting to the teachings of the biblical gospels and allowing the Holy Spirit full control of their lives is key." IJ responded, "Begin with leading a discipleship small group with family members and enter into an open conversation of Jesus Christ and becoming accountable to Bible study." CD responded, "Discipleship will contribute to the local church if leadership offers a discipleship curriculum with practical discipleship handouts." JR responded, "Discipleship can contribute to the local church through congregational accountability and small group relationships." Five participants (CJ, JS, TW, JJ, FB and JD) responded with these common highlights:

> "belief that God is compassionate" (CJ)
>
> "showing love" (TW)
>
> "establishing a morning discipleship class" (JJ)
>
> "developing a weekly corporate prayer conference call" (FB)
>
> "inviting people who are non-Christians to Christian fellowship" (JD)

Discipleship positively contributes to the local church. One contribution is that the church becomes a group of individuals who are submitted to the teaching of the Bible and surrendered to the Holy Spirit. A second contribution is congregational accountability and small group discipleship training.

Interview Data

The researcher scheduled individual interviews with the same ten-participants who completed the questionnaire. The researcher's goal was to further discuss best

practices of transformational discipleship. Interviews were conducted face to face for

fifteen to thirty minutes, using an interview guide.

Question 1: What does transformational discipleship mean to you?

All the participants spoke about the role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the

change agent. TW responded that "the transforming power of the Holy Spirit unfolding

His presence within her or his soul" comprises transformational discipleship. JS

responded, "Transformational discipleship is the change agent which is given by the

power of the Holy Spirit. The followers of Jesus Christ must experience and have this

power to become effective in duplicating the model of discipleship within the

transformation process. The Holy Spirit is to be received when one surrenders." IJ

responded, "What transformational discipleship means to me is understanding the process

of discipleship allowing the Holy Spirit to have full range over my life and a committed

relationship which includes praise, worship and daily devotion with Jesus Christ. The

Holy Spirit graces us with gifts and the discipline to engage in spiritual disciplines." JJ

responded, "Transformational discipleship is a process of change. That change process is

a group effort to bring disciples to a spiritual state of activating their God-given gifts and

talents." FB responded, "The power of the Holy Spirit was not only for the apostles of

Jesus Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit is for as many as will receive His transforming

agent." CJ responded, "Transformational discipleship is a Christian developing a growth

process through faith, prayer, fasting, Bible study and spiritually maturing into the

likeness of Jesus Christ." JD responded, "Go and make disciples by simply sharing the

death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ." CD responded, "Transformational

discipleship is a way of life duplicating change after becoming a Christian disciple." JR

responded that it is "reinforcing the teaching of God's Holy Word; allowing a change that can only take place through the Holy Spirit." IW responded, "Transformational discipleship is a continual growth of being a born-again Christian; developing the God-given gifts in mobilizing others to follow Jesus."

Transformational discipleship is a process of change. That change process includes an individual developing the gifts God has given them and becoming more Christ-like. The process also involves the role of the Holy Spirit as a change agent who transforms the individual from the inside out.

Question 2: Why is it important to help others to
grow spiritually into disciples of Jesus?

TW responded, "Spiritual growth is important because the Holy Spirit's free movement in your discipleship process is the maturity agent. Four participants (CJ, JS, IJ and JJ) responded with these common highlights:

"the idea of helping others to grow spiritually into disciples" (CJ)

"God is dwelling among us through the Holy Spirit" (JS)

"most congregants/members don't want the process of discipleship, but rather ricochet in their access to discipleship" (IJ)

"it's important to mature through the Word and the Holy Spirit" (JJ)

"discipleship is the mandate of the "Great Commission" Jesus expressed when He said, "go and make disciples" (FB)

JR and TW responded that spiritual disciplines help produce growth into disciples of Jesus Christ. His Word to us are Spirit and life, transforming us by exchanging that which is natural for that which is divine. Three participants (JD, CD and IW) responded with these common highlights:

"to help disciples make the paradigm shift into the will of God" (JD)

"to help disciples conform into the process and fullness of God's love" (CD)

"to equip disciples for the purpose and destiny of God" (IW)

"to keep disciples from becoming dormant, stagnant and losing interest in discipleship process" (JS)

TW, JS and IJ responded that the idea of helping others to grow spiritually into disciples of Jesus is the essence of spiritual growth. Without spiritual growth, the body of Christ will not grow into the fullness of the calling God mandated. JJ and FB responded that God is still dwelling amongst us through His Spirit and it is important to help others mature in spiritual disciplines.

Helping others grow spiritually is not only important, it is a mandate from God. In the Great Commission, Jesus commands the disciples to "go and make disciples." In the same way, believers in Christ are also commanded to make disciples.

<div align="center">

*Question 3: What are two or three barriers that keep
the church from developing disciples?*

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IW responded, "Spiritual formation and spiritual leadership have hindered the local church from developing disciples." IJ responded that "lack of missions, visions and purposes are major factor that keep the church from developing disciples." JJ and FB responded, "God can never bless us or his church being hard-hearted, critical or unforgiving. The local church has been paralyzed with imposters that emulate disciples. Church members are bound by deception, modern-day conditions, excuses, mental issues that have smothered the idea of developing disciples and have lost the revelation of the Spirit of God. Three participants (CD, JD, and JS) responded with these common highlights:

"the local church supports the institutional church through church programs and attendance" (CD)

"the local church board micromanage the senior pastors' vision and mandate of the "Great Commission Jesus expressed when he said "go and make" disciples" (JD)

"the local church unwilling to be led by the Holy Spirit" (JS)

"the local church unwilling to participate in outreach, missions, and spiritual growth" (IW)

TW, JR, and CL responded that the church has maximized the concept of making Christians and lacked developing disciples with no demonstration of spiritual fruit or gifts of the Spirit of God. Non or poorly developed disciples are consequences of burnout of church pastors and members as well as the absence of spiritual formation and teaching or preaching the Word of God by senior pastors.

The church experiences multiple barriers to developing discipleship. One barrier is that the local church has focused more on Christian faith conversion than developing disciples. A second barrier is an individual's unwillingness to change. A third barrier is that the local church board micromanages the senior pastors' vision to make disciples.

Question 4: What is working in your church regarding developing disciples?

CJ responded that quarterly discipleship training, accountability and prayer partners in the local church have been successful regarding developing disciples. JR and TW agreed that small discipleship groups are effective with an evangelism development accountability following the model of Jesus when He identified discipleship traits from those around him. CD responded weekly discipleship training with small group leaders has produced transformational disciples in his local church. JD responded consistency, refocusing all church programs, new membership classes and repetition of six-week Sunday morning preaching series centered on the theme of discipleship have contributed to development in their church as well as providing discipleship handouts in the weekly

church bulletin with weekly homework questions for discipleship engagement. JS responded he believed discipleship is the key for his church regarding the development of disciples. A relationship with Jesus Christ is merely the beginning of the life of a born-again Christian believer. Christians must mature spiritually through serving, evangelism, outreach and aligning within his or her purpose that Jesus created to advance the Kingdom of God. FB responded that the Lord has provided the Christian believer with weapons that are mighty through God. What works for the church regarding developing disciples is the Holy Spirit's transforming power from the blood of Jesus. Three participants (IW, IJ, and JJ) responded with these highlights:

"allowing the reign of God and the demonstration of the Holy Spirit to fulfill His purpose in the local church" (IW)

"recapturing and evaluating the spiritual fruit of the local church members and reinforcing that spiritual fruit according to Jesus' discipleship model" (IJ)

"modeling and demonstration of a Spirit-filled lifestyle of Jesus Christ" (JJ)

Discipleship works best when it involves other people. Small groups allow for accountability in the discipleship process. Discipleship also works when there are structured activities, like prayer partners or new members class. In addition, discipleship works when it is reinforced in Sunday sermons.

Question 5: Overall, how would you describe the
best practices of transformational discipleship?

IW responded immediately that Christian believers must work in unity to advance the Kingdom of God in his or her spheres of influence. IJ responded that the best practices of transformational discipleship are the foundation for advancing the Kingdom of God and the fabric of that foundation is praying, giving, sharing and loving humankind. The Holy Spirit actively and casually transforms through the Word of God. JJ and FB responded and agreed that God wants Christian believers to demonstrate the

mind of Jesus Christ in acts of love through the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ. JS responded that the best practices for transformational discipleship are to practice following the model of Jesus Christ in Christian love and submitting to the authority of Jesus through equipping yourself spiritually, physically, academically and educationally. JD responded that transformational discipleship is the original design of God's divine plan for the Christian believer. CD responded the best practices of transformational discipleship are not for super Christians. Transformation discipleship is a process of an inward change of an outward display of following Jesus. TW responded that to live a Christian life transforms the believer into the patterns of modeling Kingdom living through the Word of God's transforming agent, the Holy Spirit. JR and CJ responded that transformational discipleship is a born-again Christian living in this world as an ambassador of Jesus Christ practicing prayer, studying the Word of God in small discipleship groups, creating and demonstrating the Holy Spirit in his or her daily walk. Overall, the best practices for transformational discipleship are serving the Lord with consistency and commitment.

Best practices of discipleship emphasize the Holy Spirit, Bible and submission. The Holy Spirit plays an active role in the discipleship process. Through studying the Word of God one learns how to follow the model of Jesus Christ in Christian love. By submitting to the authority of Jesus one can be equipped spiritually, physically academically and educationally to help expand the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCOVERING BEST PRACTICES

The research yielded some expected and unexpected findings based on the data presented in the previous chapter. Best practices for transformational discipleship are dependent on transformational leadership. The researcher's findings will be deductions from the questions and interview questionnaire.

Findings

Transformational Discipleship Practices

The participants indicated transformational discipleship practices consisted of an inward personal relationship with Jesus Christ and outward demonstration of His love. The biblical and theological approaches that Jesus used to teach His twelve disciples illustrated spiritual transformation in the mission of the church and journeying with spiritual leaders to develop, to transform, to equip and to develop disciples.

When asked what transformational discipleship meant to them, the majority of participants responded regarding the role of the Holy Spirit and the responsibility of the Holy Spirit as a change agent. CJ explained that the process of transformational discipleship is a Christian's growth process through faith, prayer, fasting, Bible study and spiritual maturity into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

The Church's Role for Practicing Transformational Discipleship

Another finding was regarding the church's role in practicing transformational discipleship. Several of the participants made it clear that it is a "pull" rather than a

"push" style of influence. JD explained that the Great Commission spells out this function and church role of the disciple as an apostolic messenger.

Kouzes and Posner explained the idea that leaders play a very special role in the art of celebration because they are enormously visible to others in the organization and serve as role models.[117] IW strongly agreed, responding that the church's role for practicing transformational discipleship must take on an apostolic responsibility as the body of Christ and play a vital role in the discipleship process in mentoring of non-Christians using the Word of God.

"Most church members have a set of assumptions about how the congregation should function. It was at this point that we learned that spiritual and relational vitality can be misplaced."[118]

FB's unexpected response supported no consistency in small discipleship groups or discipleship training in the local church. TW said equipping the local church with discipleship material and church leadership accountability are essential in the local church for practicing transformational discipleship. JD explained that discipleship small groups create a close church community, practicing spiritual disciplines, Bible reading and engagement.

Exploring Discipleship Concepts

Another finding was the open-ended question on the questionnaires regarding how discipleship practices impact one's personal life. This question evoked the maximum

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[117] Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 264.

[118] Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 10.

diverse responses. CD made it clear the discipline of worship is primary. JS added loving

their neighbors as themselves. JJ responded discipleship has impacted his personal life; in

his weakness God has made him strong through prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit.

FB and IW responded that sharing the good news of the gospel of Christ in the local

church is important.

Another realization the researcher believed is that this data is due to untrained

disciples in the church leadership. "Many things stand in the way of empowerment. In

some churches it is a fear of delegation because 'no one else will do it right.' Others have

a culture in which the paid staff is expected to do all the work."[119]

Best Practices

The purpose of this project was to address the lack of best practices for

transformational discipleship in the local church. The researcher believes best practices in

the local church are accomplished when the pastor and congregants practice spiritual

disciplines of love and prayer. The questions this project constructed helped the

researcher discover the following best practices.

Church Leadership Responsibility

Transformational discipleship is the responsibility of the church leadership. The

biblical review supported the view that clergy serve a significant role and purpose in the

church, humankind and society.

This is not to say church leadership accepts full responsibility. To accomplish this

biblical command, church leadership must understand their flocks and themselves. CD

mentioned that James 3:1 informs pastors, "Not many of you should become teachers, my

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[119] Herring, Bonem, and Furr, *Leading Congregational Change*, 71.

brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." Also, he acknowledged the church leadership's responsibility to influence transformational discipleship factors by imitating a challenge to the followers of the flock to press toward the higher calling in Christ Jesus by transferring some responsibility to church congregants which will help equip and change them to the image of Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Church leadership adhering to best practices of transformational discipleship need to take responsibility in prayer and stewardship. For example, prayer provides a deeper spiritual relationship with God and stewardship is the contribution to God's love.

Spiritual Discipline

Each participant made it clear that spiritual disciplines in the local church must be taught through one's desire to become a spiritual disciple and must demonstrate spiritual discipline and faith in God. The Holy Spirit guides church leadership to practice spiritual disciplines and decision making. FB said the power of the Holy Spirit was not only for the apostles of Jesus Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit is for as many as will receive his transforming power. IJ cared deeply about a spiritual discipline dialogue between leadership, congregants and unbelievers, allowing all involved to grow deeper in prayer, fasting, monetary contributions and studying the Word of God. JS confirmed the church cannot grow with spiritual disciplines alone; and the church does not need leadership for self-benefit, to be in charge, receive praise or act as tyrants. Wren explained, "They do not lead as tyrants, but as mentors who can delegate tasks to followers without manipulation or concern."[120]

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[120] Wren, *Leader's Companion*, 207.

The framework of spiritual formation structures spiritual discipline and cognitive abilities to influence the productive behavior of leadership and discipleship skills

Church leadership adhering to best practices of transformational discipleship can assist individuals in practicing spiritual disciplines of love and fellowship. For example, love sustains the personal relationship and traits of Jesus Christ and fellowship is the act of empowering the lifestyle of God.

Rediscovering Discipleship

Transformational discipleship involves rediscovering discipleship. Each of the participants in this study conversed about the seriousness of rediscovering discipleship. JJ responded that the senior pastor must first partake in rediscovering discipleship in his or her personal life and the local church must demonstrate the power of love. Love is the transforming agent which leads to rediscovering discipleship and the nurture of that love develops disciples.

According to Romans 11:16, there is a promise inherent in the commands to "be holy, be perfect, love God with every part of your being, love people, be transformed into the image of Christ!" IJ said to model these practices a leader is to communicate a shared purpose, mission and vision for which the organization and ministry stand. According to Irving and Strauss, "Leaders cultivate committed pastors, lay members, disciples and employees who also strive to lead. Modeling relates not only to a leader's personal integrity, responsibility and investment but also to the task of leadership training itself, reproducing yourself in others."[121]

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[121] Irving and Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective*, 21.

TW said that rediscovering discipleship will work in the local church if discipleship training becomes a priority and involves equipping the followers of Jesus Christ to submit to Him and devote themselves to building the Kingdom of God. The researcher was confident to say the participants seemed to agree the process and potential obstacles of rediscovering discipleship were largely their responsibility.

Church leadership adhering to best practices of transformational discipleship can help individuals rediscover discipleship. For example, rediscovering discipleship must be simple, extensive, executed with tremendous patience and compassion.

Strengths of the Project

The researcher identified two strengths of the research project. The first strength was the questionnaire response rate of 100 percent returned. It is because more questionnaires completed gave the researcher more data to compare.

The second strength was the semi-structured interview. Interview responses provide a different type of response as compared to questionnaires. According to Creswell, one advantage of "interviews is that it allows participants to provide historical information"[122] The second advantage of interviews is that it, allows the researcher to maintain "control over the line of questioning."[123]

Weaknesses of the Project

The researcher identified two weaknesses of the research project. The first weakness was that there were no female participants. The researcher contacted seven female leaders and received four returned phone calls declining the request; three sent

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[122] Creswell, *Research Design,* 179.

[123] Creswell, *Research Design,* 179.

regret email messages. The reason for declining was COVID-19. The researcher felt that females represented a majority in the local churches and was curious to gain insight from their leadership views. Having only one gender represented may skew the responses as a masculine view and a snapshot perspective of the best practices of transformational discipleship in the local church.

The second weakness was the small sample size of 10 participants. The researcher contended   large samples can lead to a specific picture related the best practices to transformational discipleship in the local church.

Conclusion

The researcher findings this project address was the best practices of transformational discipleship in the local church the importance of spiritual disciplines and exploring discipleship concepts. First spiritual disciplines provide a framework to discipleship growth. Second exploring discipleship concepts address the methods accomplishing the transformational discipleship process.

CHAPTER SEVEN: PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

The research addressed personal reflections on academics and spiritual formation. First academic was important for the successful completion of the research short-term goal. The second spiritual formation was self-development and for practical transformational-experiences.

Academic

The researcher entered the Doctor of Ministry program to pursue academic credibility and develop transformational leadership tools in a ministry context.

For the past eight years, the researcher had been on a non-stop academic path completing a Bachelor of Science degree and a master's degree. This project has helped the researcher develop academically and prepare spiritually for future potential leadership remedies.

The researcher had written many sermons and papers on isolated topics and fields of study. This academic thesis project asked the researcher to collaborate past academic experience and ministry context to produce a thesis.

The researcher identified time management and establishing academic priorities as critical in the successful completion of the thesis project. Also, the combination of editing, pastoral duties and computer issues were major challenges. In those challenges the researcher embraced his ministry calling seeking divine guidance through prayer, listening to music, golfing, and reading.

This project helped the researcher academically, in practical ministry and personal engagement. The researcher learned to engage in subjective feedback, process research material and remain focused during challenging distractions. The ways the researcher learned to focus were to schedule breaks every three hours, turn off the cell phone, not respond to emails, as well as early morning studying in the church library.

The researcher believes an academic advantage to this project was the convenience to study Romans 12:1-21 on an academic and scholarly level. Also, regardless of the leadership lack of academic ability, the early church followers were transformed by the renewing of their minds. Unlike many distinctions in Romans 12, academic leadership is not a requirement for one's faith to demonstrate the gift of evangelism and follow Christ. The researcher contends this passage goes deeper to persuade a group to accomplish a common goal to fulfill the services of God by delegating tasks, without self-gain, coercion and manipulation.

Spiritual Formation

This thesis project has contributed to the researcher's maturity as a husband, pastor, sibling, father and student. In addition, the process of spiritual formation was the framework for this growth. The researcher believes spiritual formation is not a stagnant entity; rather it is a living, evolving and everchanging process.

The researcher contends that spiritual formation is significant after conversion, repentance, and acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Christ transforms the believer into a new creature and the spiritual formation practice begins. Spiritual formation will not be effective without spiritual leadership throughout the church. Malphurs explains, "Effective, healthy church ministry will not happen without spiritual

transformation or formation. Spiritual formation must take place throughout the church-ministry process, whether it's church planting or church revitalization. This must undergird the entire process."[124]

The researcher believes the pursuit of spiritual formation must take place in a church or ministry setting with biblical principles. This path must be taught through faith in God and the willingness for him or her to become a social agent of transformation. The spiritual formation climate of most twenty-first-century churches has made a paradigm shift from the final instructions of Jesus in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:16-20) to one's political, financial and selfish personal gain.

This thesis project changed the researcher's Christian perspective regarding natural leadership and spiritual leadership. In Acts 8:29, Phillip departed from Samaria to find a new convert in the desert; this indication acknowledges the early church leaders were sensitive to spiritual formation and submitted and surrendered their will to spiritual formation.

The challenge in this project was the framework of spiritual formation, breaking old church traditional habits and submitting to practices of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation is a fundamental element after transformation and before spiritual development. In achieving spiritual formation, one will experience the Spirit of God aligning, exercising and revealing His image into the character of His likeness.

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[124] Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 117.

The value of the project was spiritual formation. The researcher believes spiritual formation is an outward result of an inward change. This change will allow those in the church and church leadership to develop and prepare to respond to conflict.

Finally, this project examined the researcher's spiritual formational relationship with senior pastors and the framework of their spiritual development in collaborating effective spiritual leadership to organize spiritual formation empowerment models for the local church. The researcher observed spiritual formation must be practiced and begin with the consistency of spiritual disciplines within church leadership. The effective church leader practices spiritual disciplines through mediation, prayer, solitude and Bible study. The researcher believes personal devotional engagement in Bible reading, personal retreats and self-care initiates the transformational process and sustains the spiritual formation process. Additionally, the transformational development process coordinates God's Church with His mission, shifting church leaders from program-driven, attendance-focused and monetary business to answering His call to spiritual formation at all risks and costs. Therefore, the researcher's specific outcomes examine spiritual formation as the infrastructure to humankind and church change. Also, the spiritual attributes are the spiritual practices that pull the church leaders into a deeper awareness and thankfulness. This feeling of appreciation is a gift from God. The deeper the spiritual relationship with God, the more awareness of God's image is manifest in the life of the Christian believer.

Ministry

The researcher selected a thesis project within his ministry context, designing the framework of this thesis project from personal experience. The researcher asserts that

society has overwhelmed ecclesiastical leadership with leadership theories, traits and styles. For example, for the past fifty years the researcher observed ecclesiastical leadership has mastered and increased Christian conversion and faith-based church membership.

On the other hand, many ecclesiastical leaders have not designed, equipped or developed a continuous trend to promote discipleship in the local church. The researcher has constructed this thesis project in a way that demonstrates effective ecclesiastical leadership in the context of focusing on local church discipleship. Also, the role and structure of transformational discipleship is the glue which ties Christians and discipleship together.

The spiritual compass of this thesis project reminded the researcher of his calling and final command Jesus left His disciples. There are no quick changes within ecclesiastical leadership. Change challenges leaders to contribute to transformational discipleship and its practices and it is the hope of this researcher that this thesis will contribute to leadership theories, training, and practices.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANTS' INFORMATION DATA SHEET

Gender: ___Male ___Female

Age: ___20s ___30s ___40s ___50s ___60s ___70s ___80s

Church Role: _____

How long have you been in that role? _____

Educational Background: ____HS ____College ___Masters ___Doctorate

____Other_____

How long have you been a Christian? _____

APPENDIX B: QUESTIONNAIRE

Each senior pastor participant wrote short responses based on the following five questions:

1. How can the local church best make lasting change that will lead to transformational discipleship?

2. How would you define discipleship?

3. How would you describe the current state of discipleship in the local church?

4. How can discipleship practices impact your personal life?

5. How can discipleship make a contribution in the local church?

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Each senior pastor participant wrote short responses based on the following five questions:

1. What does transformational discipleship mean to you?

2. Why is it important to help others to grow spiritually into disciples of Jesus?

3. What are two or three barriers that keep the church from developing disciples?

4. What is working in your church regarding developing disciples?

5. Overall, how would you describe the best practices of transformational discipleship?

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview.

APPENDIX D: MINISTRY INFORM CONSENT FORM

Dear participant,

My name is Jack D. Jones III and I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Bethel Seminary. For my final project, I am conducting research on basic practices for transformational discipleship. Because you have been identified as a key leader of a participating church, I would like to invite you to participate in a qualitative interview.

Research: Best Practices for Transformational Discipleship

The following information is provided for you to decide if you would like to participate in the present study. You should be aware that you are free to decide not to participate in the study or to withdraw at any time. This research is being conducted in connection with requirements for a doctoral program.

Procedure: The researcher will interview the key leaders of the selected churches to gain better understanding of the data. His goal is to determine best practices for transformational discipleship. There is no compensation for participating in this study, nor is there any known risk.

Confidentially: The confidentially of all respondents will be of the utmost priority and responses will only be viewed by the researcher and academic advisors. Churches in the study will be identified by pseudonyms to further protect confidentiality.

The research project has been reviewed and approved by a Thesis Advisor. If you have any questions about the research, please contact either the researcher (Jack D. Jones III,5) or the thesis advisor (Dr. Katie Friesen Smith,).

Any participant will be able to read a summary of the results of his church, and the completed dissertation can be made available after completion.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. If you would like a summary copy of this study, please submit your email contact at the end of the interview. You may withdraw from this project at any time without prejudice should you choose to do so.

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