

Copyright © 2021 Fred Steven Quintanilla

All rights reserved. The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary has permission to reproduce and disseminate this document in any form by any means for purposes chosen by the Seminary, including, without limitation, preservation or instruction.

REVITALIZING DISCIPLESHIP AT EAST HICKMAN
BAPTIST CHURCH IN LYLES, TENNESSEE,
THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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

by
Fred Steven Quintanilla
December 2021

APPROVAL SHEET

REVITALIZING DISCIPLESHIP AT EAST HICKMAN
BAPTIST CHURCH IN LYLES, TENNESSEE,
THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

Fred Steven Quintanilla

Read and Approved by:

William D. Henard (Faculty Supervisor)

Timothy K. Beougher

Date _____

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE	v
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Context	1
Rationale	3
Purpose	4
Goals	4
Research Methodology	4
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations	6
Conclusion	7
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN SMALL GROUPS	8
Acts 2:42-47	8
Matthew 28:18-20	16
Second Timothy 2:1-2	22
Conclusion	24
3. PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO DISCIPLESHIP IN SMALL GROUPS	26
Sermon-Based Bible Study	27
Regularly Meeting for Fellowship	32
Transparency for Meaningful Prayer	37
Conclusion	41

Chapter	Page
4. DEVELOPING SMALL GROUPS THAT REVITALIZE DISCIPLESHIP	42
Development of the Sermon Series and Curriculum	43
Sermon and Lesson Implementation	45
Small Group Meetings	70
Project Evaluation	72
Conclusion	73
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	74
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	74
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals	75
Strengths of the Project	80
Weaknesses of the Project	82
Proposed Modifications	82
Theological Observations	83
Personal Observations	84
Conclusion	84
 Appendix	
1. THE DISCIPLESHIP ASSESSMENT	85
2. DISCIPLESHIP SERMON SERIES EVALUATION RUBRIC	92
3. SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM RUBRIC	93
4. REVITALIZING DISCIPLESHIP SERMON SERIES	94
5. SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM	113
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143

PREFACE

Working on this project has been a journey of hard work and great joy. I am thankful for the opportunity. Many have helped me along the way. First of all, I thank Jesus my Lord and Savior, who deserves all praise and glory. He is always faithful.

Second, I thank my dear wife, René. Her love and companionship have blessed and encouraged me, and she is the godliest woman that I know. She has supported me in my education for many years, going back to the days when she would type my papers on a manual typewriter. The success of our children is a testament to her dedication as a mother.

Third, I want to thank East Hickman Baptist Church. The love and fellowship I have received there has kept me afloat in ministry. A special thanks to my Associate Pastor, Matt Taylor, who convinced me that I was not too old to start this project.

Fourth, I am thankful to The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, my doctoral supervisor, William Henard, and the professors who teach God's Word faithfully, and who tirelessly prepare God's servants.

Fred Quintanilla

Nashville, Tennessee

December 2021

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Jesus gave His church the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). The early church modeled what a healthy and obedient church should look like. They devoted themselves to prayer, fellowship, and breaking of bread. They did this in small groups as they met “from house to house” (Acts 2:42,46). For this reason, East Hickman Baptist Church needs to become a Great Commission church that faithfully disciples others through small groups.

Context

East Hickman Baptist Church (EHBC) is located in Lyles, Tennessee. It is a rural area located west of Nashville, Tennessee. EHBC is without an ongoing plan for discipleship. In the past, there have been attempts at discipleship with one-on-one training. This method has been successful in a limited manner. Some received discipleship while others did not; many were left out. The manner in which people were disciplined varied from one person to the next. There was no uniformity in what was being taught. A few were well disciplined, but the majority were not disciplined or were not sufficiently disciplined.

Today, the only training and discipleship is through Sunday school and regular training sessions offered at the church. The discontinuation of discipleship has left an empty space that has not been replaced. This lack of discipleship is having a negative impact on the church.

The need for discipleship has been seen in the disunity of the church. There has been no place for meaningful communication. The church has a history of disunity and

there have been splits at the church in the past. The reasons are varied. Some disunity has occurred over doctrinal areas, and moral matters have also been a factor. Other disunity has occurred from hurt feelings. Disunity has negatively affected the growth, morale, and outreach efforts of the church.

Many churches have to deal with disunity, which is often painful and the result of sin. Disunity was a problem in the New Testament church as well. Paul warned the Galatians to beware of disunity and classified it as a sin (Gal 5:19-21). Paul also appealed to the Corinthians that they might have unity in the church (1 Cor 1:10).

The lack of discipleship has negatively impacted the fellowship at EHBC. There have been times of fellowship at the church, but away from the church little interaction between members has taken place. Most members have only fellowshiped during the greeting time during the worship service. The early church set an example of how the church should fellowship: “And all who believed were together and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). Relationships can only develop when people are able to spend time with each other and to share life together. Only by spending time together can real relationships be developed.

The lack of discipleship has negatively impacted the prayer life of EHBC as well. Times of prayer in the worship services have been made available for the congregation, but there has been a lack of prayer among small groups who could have shared each other’s burdens and spent time in prayer for the lost and for the church.

The lack of discipleship has left a need for leadership at EHBC. There has been a need for teachers to be trained and developed. Deacons have also needed to be trained and developed. This lack of leadership has had a negative impact on the ministry of the church. Several committees have operated without a chairman. This lack of leadership has caused some to be overworked as they have served in several places of responsibility.

In addition, the growth rate at EHBC has plateaued. The reasons for this plateau include the size of the facility, population of the church community, and loss of

members from misunderstandings and conflicts. The main reason that the growth rate has plateaued is the lack of discipleship. More quality time in small group discipleship is needed. The Sunday school setting has been insufficient for developing disciples. The lack of discipleship has negatively impacted the amount of evangelism taking place. Members need to learn to share their faith and to faithfully witness. Without discipleship EHBC has lost members as well. Some have not grown in their faith and have been more likely to leave the church from a lack of accountability.

Rationale

EHBC has a vision of being a healthy church that is obeying the Great Commission. The church is not presently able to disciple the members of the church using only the Sunday school hour and occasional training sessions. The formation of small groups to address the lack of discipleship is needed for four reasons.

First, the formation of small groups is needed is to address the need for in-depth Bible study. The early church devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching (Acts 2:42). This steadfast commitment to God's Word is needed in discipleship and is lacking presently at EHBC. Small groups would allow each member to ask questions and allow time to work through the Bible to find answers.

Second, the formation of small groups is needed to promote unity in the church. Small groups would provide an opportunity to fellowship, pray, and spend time together outside of corporate worship. Small groups would provide an opportunity to work through material on building unity in the church.

Third, the formation of small groups is needed to develop teachers and leaders in the church. The small groups would provide an opportunity to grow and mature Christians and to give practical experience in leading a group and in teaching God's Word.

Fourth, the formation of small groups is needed to provide an opportunity for evangelism and outreach. Small groups would provide an opportunity for members to

reach out to those who live nearby and make it easier to invite others to attend. Small groups can be a place where unbelievers might feel comfortable to attend and ask questions. Small groups could lead to evangelistic opportunities and be a way to lead the lost to salvation and bring them to worship services. Evangelism would lead directly to an opportunity to disciple new believers.

The revitalizing of discipleship at EHBC is necessary for the church to become a healthy, growing, and obedient church. Without something new and compelling the church will continue to plateau and eventually decrease.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to revitalize discipleship at East Hickman Baptist Church in Lyles, Tennessee, through small groups.

Goals

Four goals determined the effectiveness of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among the members of East Hickman Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the biblical command for the church to make disciples.
3. The third goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip those who will be members or leaders of small groups.
4. The fourth goal was to create at least three new small groups.

Research Methodology

Four goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among the members of EHBC. The Discipleship Assessment Survey was administered to members of EHBC.¹ This assessment gauged members' understanding of the importance of discipleship, knowledge of biblical content,

¹ See appendix 1. All the research instruments used in his project were performed in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

and the level of discipleship activity taking place. This goal was considered successfully met when the members complete the surveys, and the results were compiled.

The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the biblical command for the church to make disciples. This goal was measured by the Church Council members of EHBC, who used the Discipleship Sermon Series Rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the sermon series.² This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meet or exceed the sufficiency level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it meets the standard.

The third goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum that would equip those who will lead or participate in the small groups. The curriculum focused on how to prepare for a group meeting, how to pray for and with a small group, how to contact the small group members, and how to grow in personal life as a small group leader. This goal was measured by the Church Council, who utilized the Small Group Curriculum Rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.³ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion meet or exceed the sufficient level. If the 90 percent benchmark was not initially met, the material was revised until it meets the standard.

The fourth goal was to create at least three new small groups. This goal was considered successfully met when at least three small groups had been formed and had met for at least three months.

Through this project I hoped to equip the members of EHBC to grow in discipleship through the participation in small groups. Through preaching and teaching

² See appendix 2.

³ See appendix 3.

the relevant passages and starting the small groups, I hoped the members grew spiritually and that EHBC experienced revitalization as the Great Commission was being obeyed.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms were used in the ministry project:

Small groups. The definition of *small groups* is different for different people.

Even the number of individuals in the small group can vary. Jeffery Arnold defines small groups this way: “A small group is an intentional gathering of three to twelve people who commit themselves to work together to become better disciples of Jesus Christ.”⁴ For this project the term was used to describe a small group of six to twelve people who meet together for the purpose of discipleship. This broad definition allowed for different areas of focus that aided in the process of Christian growth.

Disciple. The broad definition of a *disciple* is “someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.”⁵ A Christian disciple is someone who follows Jesus and who has submitted himself to the teachings and the lordship of Jesus. Discipleship is the process of learning as a disciple.

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the assessment was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their knowledge and understanding of discipleship. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents were promised that their answers would remain nameless. Second, the effectiveness of the training was limited by the constancy of attendance. If the participants did not attend all of the training sessions, then it would be difficult to measure how beneficial the training had been. To mitigate this limitation, each week of the teaching sessions were scheduled around their schedules.

⁴ Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992), 9.

⁵ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 629.

Two delimitations were placed on the project. First, the project addressed discipleship that took place in small groups. The project encouraged but did not evaluate the practice of personal Christian growth of each individual. Second, the project was confined to a twenty-week time frame. This gave adequate time to prepare and preach the eight-week sermon series, prepare the eight-week curriculum, and create the small groups.

Conclusion

The early church has given a paradigm of what a healthy church looks like as it fulfills the Great Commission. As they met from house to house, they did the things necessary to make disciples. The following chapters show how small groups are a biblical way for EHBC to revitalize the making of disciples. Chapter 2 sets a theological and biblical foundation by focusing on the paradigm of small groups as observed in the book of Acts. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical, practical, and historical issues of starting and maintaining small groups. Chapter 4 looks at the implementation of the project. Chapter 5 evaluates the project.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS
FOR DISCIPLESHIP IN SMALL GROUPS

The church is instructed in Scripture to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). Chapter 2 will look at several biblical passages to discover the biblical and theological foundation for discipleship. What the Scriptures will show is that discipling requires small group settings where there can be teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42-47). These disciplines are necessary to help believers to grow and mature in their faith, and to prepare them to disciple others (2 Tim 2:1-2).

Acts 2:42-47

An exegesis of Acts 2:42-47 demonstrates the principles that should characterize biblical community in the life of the church.¹ James Boice writes, “These verses tell what developed in the church and how it functioned in those remarkable days after Pentecost. Obviously this description is intended as an example for us and our assemblies.”² John B. Polhill explains, “Luke’s summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have the unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.”³ The early church was grounded in the apostles’ teachings, shared fellowship, the breaking

¹ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 149.

² James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 55.

³ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Holman, 1992), 122.

of bread together, and prayer (v. 42). The community was unified and expanding in a way that showed that the Spirit of God was present and working in their midst.

The context of Acts 2:42-47 is important. Previous verses tell of the small group of believers being together, praying, and waiting for the Holy Spirit (1:12-14). The group replaced Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, with Matthias by casting lots (1:26). Then, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, evidenced by a sound like a rushing wind, and the appearance of tongues of fire which rested on each one (2:1-2). The group began to speak with other tongues and attracted a large crowd (2:4-13). Peter stood boldly and preached the gospel message (2:14-40). Those who heard the gospel were convicted by the Holy Spirit of their need for forgiveness that only Jesus could provide. The group of believers grew from 120 to 3,000. F. F. Bruce writes, “Through the apostolic witness Jesus thus acquired more followers in one day than in the whole of his public ministry.”⁴ Jesus had told his disciples that they would perform greater works than they had seen him do (John 14:12-14). Many others were added to the church in the following days (Acts 2:46).

The numerical report shows that the growth of the church can be observed and is a visible reality. Eckhard J. Schnabel argues that the number 3,000 holds no symbolic significance and therefore should be seen as a reporting of facts.⁵ Luke clearly wants to show the quantitative growth of the church. Acts 2:42-47 follows as a summary of what happened next.

Acts 2:42-47 is the first of Luke’s summary passages.⁶ Luke used these types of passages to separate parts of Acts and to show the church in various stages of its

⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary of the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 73.

⁵ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 167.

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), 268.

progress.⁷ He portrays the life of the early church as harmonious. Darrell L. Bock argues, “Luke uses such summary texts about the community to underscore that this group has bonded together effectively.”⁸ The passage in Luke includes the essentials of life in the early church, including the apostle’s teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer. Luke also includes the effect that these things had on the people of Jerusalem, including a sense of awe (v. 43), and a continued growing of favor among the people and a continuing turning to Jesus to be saved (v. 47). The principles and practices found in Acts 2:42-47 should characterize biblical community in the life of the church.

The Teaching of the Apostles

Biblical community is grounded in the apostles’ teachings. The first essential characteristic of the early church is a fierce dedication to learning. The early church dedicated themselves to the teaching of the apostles. Luke used the word *proskarterein* to describe the tenacity in which the church held on to and sought to learn from the apostles. Richard Longenecker defines *proskarterein* as a common verb that “connotes a steadfast and single-minded fidelity to a certain course of action.”⁹ The early church was hungry for the Word and were taking it in consistently. The phrase also carries the connotation that the new believers practiced what they were being taught.¹⁰

Luke used the Greek word *Didache* to describe the apostles’ teachings. *Didache* is used thirty times in the New Testament and five times in Luke-Acts.¹¹ Fitzmyer argues that this word is distinguished from the word *kerygma*, which refers to

⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *Acts*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 89.

⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 149.

⁹ Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 85.

¹⁰ Schnabel, *Acts*, 177.

¹¹ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

the proclamation of the gospel. It is also distinct from the word *katechesis*, which refers to the teaching of the catechism.¹² He writes that the early church was continually devoted to the teaching from “the words and deeds of Jesus himself (1:1), on his instructions to the apostles (1:2), and on those followers who would become his authentic witnesses (10:41).”¹³ The teachings would have included the Old Testament Scriptures and how they are applied to the Messiahship of Jesus. The apostles’ teaching was authoritative for the early church because it was the teachings that they had received from Jesus and were communicating through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁴ Jesus had previously promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them in all truth (John 16:13), enabling them to teach in the early church.

The Fellowship

Biblical community is grounded in a shared fellowship. The word *koinonia* is widely used by Paul but is only found here in Acts and Luke.¹⁵ Its basic meaning is communion, fellowship, and close relations. The word is so intimate that at times it was used to describe a marriage relationship.¹⁶ In the context of this passage, it refers to the sharing of activities. Luke is showing how Christian fellowship brings a deep connection between believers that is distinct in that it is seen in the sharing of lives together. Fellowship in the early church made it possible for believers to actively help each other to grow in their faith.

The fellowship of the church is described in further detail in verses 44-45, where the church is portrayed as being “together.” Being together means more than the

¹² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 270.

¹³ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 270.

¹⁴ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

¹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 118.

¹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 150.

fact that they were physically together in one location. The Greek phrase used by Luke is *epi to auto*. John B. Polhill argues that this phrase is used to give a strong emphasis on the unity of the church.¹⁷ They were of one mind and one heart, each serving Jesus as Lord.

The fellowship is also seen in the way the early church shared their possessions. (v. 45) The church members practiced the selling of their property and goods and using the proceeds whenever a need arose. This sharing of possessions was modeled by Jesus and his disciples who shared a common purse (John 13:29). This action was not a required sharing of goods; it was a loving and voluntary response to the needs of the community. Bock writes, “That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material needs are also a concern and are being generously provided.”¹⁸

Another word used to describe the fellowship of the church is *homothymadon*, which is translated as being in “one accord.” Polhill writes, “The word translated ‘with one accord’ (*homothymadon*) is commonly used in Acts to express unity of purpose and particularly applies to the ‘one heart and mind (Acts 4:32).’”¹⁹ The early church possessed a unity of purpose. This single purpose centered on fellowship with Jesus Christ and is derived from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

The Breaking of Bread

Biblical community is grounded in the breaking of bread. “The breaking of bread” refers to sharing of a meal together and only appears twice in the New Testament—first in Luke 24:35 and second in Acts 2:42. It reflected a mutual acceptance of those who are sharing the meal. Ajith Fernando writes concerning the sharing of meals: “The

¹⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

¹⁸ Bock, *Acts*, 152.

¹⁹ Polhill, *Acts*, 121.

fellowship is the main thing. The food is secondary, as Jesus tried to show Martha (Luke 10:38-42).”²⁰

Jesus often shared meals with his disciples and taught them during the meal (Mark 14:17-18). He also ate with tax collectors and sinners (Matt 9:9-17), Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42), the Pharisees (Luke 11:37-54), and he even shared a meal with his disciples after the resurrection (John 21:9-14). The frequency that Jesus shares meals with others is significant. It shows that Jesus enjoyed sharing meals with others. Meals were an opportunity to fellowship and interact with others. Jesus often taught others at meals and would challenge others with the truth.

There is some disagreement over the term “breaking of bread” in Acts. Some believe the phrase is referring to the sharing of a meal while others feel it refers to the Lord’s Supper. Polhill argues that the understanding can be seen in the context of the verse: “The key may be to see the terms ‘breaking of bread’ and ‘prayer’ in apposition to ‘fellowship.’ The meaning would then be that they devoted themselves to a fellowship that was expressed in their mutual meals and in their prayer life together.”²¹ Often the two were shared together, the Lord’s Supper being a part of a larger meal as seen in Corinth where the Lord’s Supper was taken along with a regular meal (1 Cor 11:17-34).

The Prayers

Biblical community is grounded in prayer. The act of prayer here refers to sharing in prayers together, either in the Temple or in the homes of the early Christians.²²

²⁰ Ajith Fernando, *Acts*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 135.

²¹ Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

²² Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 271.

The Greek word used by Luke is *proseuchais*. This word appears thirty-six times in the New Testament and twelve times in Luke-Acts.²³

Prayer is seen in Acts as a priority in the church. The disciples prayed while waiting in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (1:14), they prayed about replacing Judas (1:24-25), and now they are praying as part of their worship as a church. Bruce argues that the prayers would have “follow[d] Jewish models, but their content would be enriched because of the Christ event.”²⁴ The new community was dependent upon God. The prayer life of the church showed that there was a dependence upon God for direction. Bock writes concerning the prayer: “It seeks God’s direction and is dependent upon God because God’s family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction.”²⁵

The prayer life of the early church included the community prayers that were held at the Temple. The church added the important prayer of small groups who were meeting in their homes. Polhill states, “The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship.”²⁶ These times of prayer helped bond the church together. The devotion to prayer was continual and steadfast.

Summary

The nature of the early church worship is twofold. The church is still gathering at the Temple for worship, but they are also meeting in their homes (v. 46). Paul uses the phrase *kat oikon* to describe how the new believers were meeting in various homes. The believers were participating in both mass gatherings and in small group gatherings. In the

²³ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

²⁴ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

²⁵ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

²⁶ Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

small group gatherings, they were sharing life together and participating in the disciplines of the Christian life.

The result of the activities that the early church shared together were joy and glad hearts. The praise and worship of God was continual and the community outside the group of believers was being impacted. The result was that people were being saved and added to the church every day (v. 47).

Acts 2:42-47 stresses the solid start enjoyed by the early church. The church faced growing pains. The addition of over 3,000 new converts caused joy but also presented a problem. How would the new converts be disciplined? How could 120 believers disciple 3,000? The answer came in the way the church gathered together in their homes. They gathered for instruction, fellowship, breaking of bread, and for prayer. The church offered immediate follow-up and training for new believers. They met the basic needs of all believers and supplied for their spiritual needs as well. They nurtured new believers and deep relationships were formed.

The application for today is that the church needs to show community to the world around them. The church is about community, not individualism. Ajith Fernando argues, "According to the Bible, the entire Christian life, including spiritual growth, battling sin and Satan, and serving God, are intended to be done in community."²⁷ The early church gathered in small groups to share life together. The church today must continue to gather in small groups to grow and disciple new believers. The church today must offer a way for believers to be taught the Word of God, fellowship together, share meals together, and pray together. David G. Peterson argues that the pattern set in Jerusalem is not meant to simply be replicated in the life of every church, "but there is no

²⁷ Fernando, *Acts*, 125.

suggestion in Acts of a decline from an idealized primitive community.”²⁸ These principles of community and discipleship are needed for the church to thrive.

The early church shows that the presence of God is required to be a church.²⁹ The apostles’ teaching focused on God and His promises that were being fulfilled. The Lord’s Supper reminded the church what God did for them at Calvary. The experience of the people was awe inspired as they could sense the hand of God at work around them. They communed with God in prayer and worship. They could see the hand of God at work in the daily saving of souls. God was present.

Matthew 28:18-20

The Great Commission, found in Matthew 28:18-20, is a command to make disciples.³⁰ Jesus had made disciples during his ministry and now he is asking his follower to do likewise. Craig L. Blomberg argues that the Great Commission represents a “passing of the torch to his disciples.”³¹ There is an urgency to the command to make disciples. Jesus gave the disciples the Great Commission knowing that he would soon ascend to heaven and his disciples would be given the task of reaching the world with the gospel. Along with this task, the disciples were promised that Jesus would be with them as they continued their mission.

The context of the Great Commission is important. The Commission comes at the end of Matthew’s Gospel and in a sense is a culmination of the entire book.

Bloomberg argues that the Great Commission

²⁸ David G. Peterson, *Acts*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009), 165.

²⁹ Schnabel, *Acts*, 185.

³⁰ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 431.

³¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

contains the culmination and combination of all of Matthew's central themes; (1) the move from particularism to universalism in the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom; (2) discipleship and the establishment of the church; (3) Jesus' commands as ultimately incumbent on Christians; and (4) the abiding presence of Jesus as teacher, as divine Son of God, and the risen sovereign Lord of the universe.³²

The Great Commission is the final instructions to the disciples and the church as Jesus prepares to ascend into heaven. It is the climax and conclusion of Matthew's Gospel.

The Great Commission begins with a claim of authority. Jesus states that all authority, both in heaven and on earth, has been given to him (v. 18). This is a claim of divinity, because only God can claim authority over His creation. Matthew's Gospel shows the authority of Jesus in many ways. He has authority over nature (8:26), disease (4:23-24), demons (8:28-34), sin (9:1-7), and death (28:6). Jesus as the Son of God has the divine claim of authority over all things. The statement of all authority is an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14 where the heavenly Son of Man figure appears. The authority that belongs to Jesus allows Him to give the command for His followers to go and make disciples. A. T. Robertson writes, "His authority or power in his earthly life had been great. Now it is boundless and includes earth and heaven."³³ Christians have the authority to represent Jesus in the world and to teach the Word of God. This authority includes the promise that Jesus would always be with his disciples, and that the Holy Spirit would guide their words.

One of the theological concerns throughout Matthew's Gospel is discipleship. Blomberg argues that Matthew paints a more positive picture of the disciples than the other gospels. He sees discipleship as being most important in that the followers of Jesus will make up the church.³⁴ Matthew is the only gospel to use the word *ekklesia* church (Matt 16:18; 18:17).³⁵ Matthew begins to make provisions for the church by defining

³² Blomberg, *Matthew*, 429.

³³ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Gospel according to Matthew, the Gospel according to Mark*, Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 244.

³⁴ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 32.

³⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 33.

steps for church discipline (Matt 18:15-20). This concern for discipleship is most clearly seen in the Great Commission, which instructs the disciples to make disciples of all nations.

Discipleship to Matthew consisted of following Jesus (Matt 9:9-13). In doing so one was able to fulfill the commandments of God and find salvation. For Matthew, discipleship combines grace and demand (8:10-13; 9:14-27). Blomberg argues that Matthew attempts to avoid “the twin heresies of workless faith and works-righteousness.”³⁶

In the Great Commission one finds that the main command of Jesus is to “make disciples.”³⁷ The Greek word used is *matheteusate*. Many have argued that the command *to go* is the main command. Blomberg argues that Matthew “frequently uses ‘go’ as an introductory circumstantial particle that is rightly translated as coordinate to the main verb- here ‘Go and make.’”³⁸ The danger of emphasizing the word “go” is that it can be seen as a missionary appeal to the exclusion of those called to remain local. The command to make disciples is for all Christians, not just those who leave their home for another land. The focus is on the need for all disciples to replicate themselves by making disciples wherever they are.

The scope of the mission is “all nations.” Matthew uses the Greek phrase *panta ta ethne*. Blomberg argues that this phrase can mean all Gentiles or all peoples.³⁹ Matthew’s use of the *ethne* seems to refer to all people, Jews and Gentiles (Matt 24:9,14; 25:32). Matthew is not saying that the Jews are rejected by God and to only go to the Gentiles; rather, he is saying that the disciples were to go to all peoples, Jew and Gentile.

³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 34.

³⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431

³⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

³⁹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431.

To make disciples also implies more than just the first steps of evangelism. After a person makes a profession of faith there is to be a following of Jesus, which includes baptism. Baptism is the rite of immersion in water. Willoughby C. Allen argues that baptism is a rite that presupposes several things not always expressed, including that the person baptized has repented of his sins and the consequent forgiveness of them (Acts 2:38). Baptism also implies belief in Christ. The person baptized expressed this belief and was regarded after baptism as a disciple of Christ.⁴⁰

Baptism is one of the first acts of following Jesus. It identifies the believer as a follower of Jesus and signifies that the believer was declaring allegiance to the power and authority of the Lord Jesus. Baptizing in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is one of the clearest formulas of the Trinity found in Scripture. The singular word for name is coupled with the threefold reference of the Godhead. Both the unity and diversity of the Trinity are seen here. Matthew's Gospel has already shown the doctrine of the Trinity: God the Father (11:27), God the Son (11:27; 16:27), and God the Holy Spirit (12:28).

Teaching is the heart of discipleship (v. 20). The importance of obedience to the commands of Jesus cannot be overstated. Making disciples includes being taught the Bible, then maturing to a point where one is able to teach others. Discipleship is seen as a lifelong discipline, which includes the making of disciples. John Phillips writes, "The call is to evangelism, enlistment, enlightenment, and discipleship."⁴¹

Teaching believers to obey all the commands of Jesus shows that a deep level of commitment is required to be a disciple of Jesus. The word "all" shows the comprehensive nature of the teachings of Christ. His teachings are relevant in every area

⁴⁰ Willoughby C. Allen, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, vol. 26 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 308.

⁴¹ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 548.

of life. A disciple must be willing to commit all his life to Jesus and be willing to obey all the commands of Christ.

Learning to obey all the commands of Jesus demands a lifetime of learning. Discipleship is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Discipleship requires the application of the teachings of Jesus to real life situations. This process cannot be hurried. It requires living life in community with others. The need for guidance, accountability, and encouragement are crucial for growing in the Christian faith. Small groups can provide the long-term relationships required for discipleship.

The Great Commission concludes with a promise from Jesus to his disciples. Jesus promises that he will be with his disciples until the end of the age (v. 20). This promise provides comforting words for a group of disciples who will soon experience the departure of Jesus from their midst. The promise meant that whatever the disciples faced in the days ahead, that they would face it with faith because their Lord and Savior would be with them.

David Livingstone is an excellent example of one who relied upon the promise of God's presence. He spent sixteen years as a missionary in Africa and was often faced with danger. Concerning the promise of Jesus' presence found in the Great Commission, Livingstone was fond of saying, "It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor."⁴² Livingstone lived in a time when a gentleman was recognized as a person who would always keep his word. A gentleman would never break a promise. The promises of Scripture are even more sure. If Jesus promises his presence to his followers, then he can be trusted to always be there.

The promise of Jesus' continuing presence found in the Great Commission is a spiritual promise. Jesus had explained earlier that it was for their benefit that He leaves them (John 13-17). Only then would the Helper come, referring to the Holy Spirit (John

⁴² Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, 550.

16:7). The coming of the Holy Spirit would be advantageous for the disciples. The Holy Spirit brought conviction to the world of sin, righteousness, and judgement (John 16:80). He would also not be confined to one place but could be with every believer in all places, and He would guide the disciples into all truth (John 16:13). The promise of the coming of the Holy Spirit was fulfilled at Pentecost (Acts 2).

Summary

The Gospel of Matthew ends in a triumphant note. Robertson writes, “Matthew closes in a blaze of glory. Christ is conqueror in prospect and in fact.”⁴³ Jesus gives the Great Commission to his followers and declares that the plan for reaching the world is the call to make disciples. Matthew shows how Jesus used this method in his earthly ministry, as he called disciples and then taught them all things. Now he is commissioning them to go and make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them all things that Jesus commanded. David Platt writes, “Matthew’s point in writing this book was not only to show us that Jesus is king; if that were the case, he would have stopped in the middle of chapter 28 after the resurrection. Instead, Matthew ends by telling us how Jesus sent out His disciples to proclaim Jesus as King to the end of the earth, and that’s a story that continues even today.”⁴⁴

The Great Commission is still the command of Christ for all His followers. To claim to follow Christ and not seek to make disciples is inconsistent. A disciple is obedient to his master. Jesus is calling the church to baptize and to teach others and he has promised his presence as believers go in obedience.

⁴³ Robertson, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 246.

⁴⁴ David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 370-71.

Second Timothy 2:1-2

Second Timothy is unique as compared to the other Epistles. Paul is no longer under house arrest but now is in a prison cell as he writes. He feels that his death is near (2 Tim 4:6-8). The focus of the letter is on training and preparing Timothy to continue in Christian ministry. Others had deserted Paul and forsaken Christ (1:15, 4:14-16). The words that Paul shares with Timothy are personal and urgent. In his letter, Paul instructs the young pastor to faithfully take what he has learned and pass it on to others. This is not a new or novel idea, it is discipleship. Taking what one has been taught and teaching it to others. Discipleship is seen in the Old Testament where parents are instructed to train their children in the things of God (Deut 11:19; Prov 22:6). Jesus disciplined his followers and then gave the Great Commission, to go and make disciples. John MacArthur writes, “That process of spiritual reproduction, which began in the early church, is to continue until the Lord’s return.”⁴⁵

The context of 2 Timothy 2:1-2 is important. The verses fall between the description of others who had not been faithful. Paul was calling on Timothy to be faithful in contrast to the Asians who had been disobedient (1:5), and those who were teaching heresy, including Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17). Paul urges Timothy to be faithful in the way that Onesiphorus is faithful. The phrase “as for you,” which Paul uses to begin verse 1, shows that Paul intends for Timothy’s ministry to be different from those who were not faithful.

Paul goes on to use three metaphors to describe the ministry. He compares the need for faithfulness and perseverance to the life of a soldier (2:3-4), an athlete (2:5), and a farmer (2:6). Each illustration shows the need for endurance in the face of challenges. Each metaphor emphasizes a different aspect of faithfulness. Gordon Fee writes, “The three analogies support ‘the appeal to suffering,’ ‘the need for whole-hearted devotion,’

⁴⁵ John MacArthur, *1 & 2 Timothy: Encouragement for Church Leaders* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 87.

and “the expectation of reward.”⁴⁶ Together they present a comprehensive picture of one who is faithfully working to accomplish a task.

Paul encourages Timothy to be “strong.” The Greek word that Paul uses is *endunamou*. The verb is in the present passive imperative form, which carries the implication that he must continue to be strong.⁴⁷ Paul qualifies the source of the strength available to Timothy. It is a strength that comes in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The Christian derives strength that comes from relying upon the Lord and recognizes that true strength comes from God. Archibald Thomas Robertson writes, “Christ is the dynamo for power only when and while we keep in touch with him.”⁴⁸

The word *grace* means the unmerited favor of God. Thomas D. Lea writes that the word *grace* points to God, the source of all good gifts.⁴⁹ Scripture teaches that believers are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9). That same grace empowers believers to live the Christian life and to serve God. Fee writes, “Though it is true that grace is the means by which we are saved and by which we are enabled to walk in God’s will, it is also true that same grace is the sphere in which all of Christian life is lived.”⁵⁰

Paul instructs Timothy to serve as a teacher. Spurgeon argues that this is the “true apostolic succession—one minister brings another to Christ, and then charges that other to train other preachers and teachers to carry on the blessed work of evangelism.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Gordon Fee, *1, 2 Timothy Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 243.

⁴⁷ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1992), 201.

⁴⁸ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 616.

⁴⁹ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 201.

⁵⁰ Fee, *1, 2 Timothy Titus*, 201.

⁵¹ Charles Spurgeon, *2 Timothy, Spurgeon’s Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 48.

Fee differs when he argues that Paul is not as concerned with apostolic succession as he is with the gospel itself.⁵² Paul had a deep concern that the gospel would faithfully be transmitted in a world where heresy was growing. A faithful link in the chain of transmission of the gospel was needed to combat heresy. Paul encouraged young Timothy to be that faithful link.

Timothy was instructed to entrust the teachings to men who are both reliable and qualified to teach others. Robertson writes that the word for *entrust* is from the Greek word *paratheke*, which can be interpreted as *deposit*.⁵³ It carries the idea of handling something that is precious and valuable and placing it somewhere safe from harm. In these verses Paul is describing discipleship. He had disciplined Timothy and now he was calling on Timothy to faithfully disciple others.

Summary

The exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:2 shows that Paul was concerned about the transmission of the gospel to the next generation and beyond. His life was nearing an end, and he was passing the baton to the next generation of Christian ministers. His instructions show that the church today has been given a precious deposit that must be handled correctly. Today's church must find a way to equip reliable and capable leaders to faithfully teach the next generation of believers.

Conclusion

The Bible teaches the necessity of discipleship. Acts 2:42-47 show how the early church was able to disciple new believers by using small groups. The teaching, fellowship, sharing of meals, and prayers that took place in the small groups were essential in the spiritual growth of those being saved. The church today is commanded to

⁵² Fee, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 240.

⁵³ Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, 616.

go and to make disciples. The Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) is only fulfilled by going and making disciples. The discipleship that must take place requires relationships. Small groups can provide a biblical community of faith which will develop disciples who will subsequently become disciple makers. This passing on of the teachings of Christ (2 Tim 2:1-2) is an urgent and necessary task. Scripture clearly states that the church must make disciples and small groups are the way to do it.

CHAPTER 3
PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO DISCIPLESHIP
IN SMALL GROUPS

Christian small groups are called by many names, such as home groups, fellowship groups, or Bible study groups. Regardless of what they are called, they have some common characteristics that are essential to discipleship and Christian growth. Small groups provide a place where God’s Word can be studied and discussed, a place where relationships can develop and mature, and an opportunity for meaningful prayer. Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger write,

Individuals who regularly attend small groups are consistently making more progress in their spiritual development than those who are not. This is especially true in building relationships within their church. They are more likely to take on responsibilities within their church including leadership functions. They read and study the Bible more and have a more consistent prayer life.¹

This chapter will show that small groups are the practical medium for developing healthy biblical community where discipleship can take place, along with the advantages of doing small groups with sermon-based Bible study, regular fellowship, and transparent prayer.

D. Michael Henderson writes, “The primary value in studying the class meeting today is to gain insights and methods for the Church’s central task: making Christian disciples.”² Churches are using small groups in many ways. Henry Cloud and

¹ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 156.

² D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples* (Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 1997), 13.

John Townsend write, “One truth that has emerged from this small group movement is that *there is no one right way to do small groups.*”³

Sermon-Based Bible Study

Bible study is one of the most essential components of discipleship. Small groups have used several teaching methods to successfully encourage the study of the Bible. Some study topical lessons and are based on similar interests, some focus on doctrinal issues and study a systematic theology, and others randomly choose biblical passages that seem relevant to current events, but there is strong support and many advantages to the sermon-based approach to Bible study in small groups.

Jesus set the example in the way he gathered his disciples and constantly taught them the meaning of Scripture. Robert E. Coleman writes that there are “at least sixty-six references to the Old Testament in his dialogues with the disciples in the four Gospels, to say nothing of the more than ninety allusions to it in his speaking with others.”⁴ Jesus often addressed crowds and taught them, and then followed up with the smaller group of his disciples. This model of preaching and teaching to large crowds, followed by further instruction within a small group, shows the effectiveness of sermon-based small groups.

These smaller teaching sessions had many advantages. The disciples were able to ask questions about what they had heard, allowed the opportunity to dig deeper into the meaning of the teaching, and also allowed the opportunity to apply the teachings to their lives. For example, when Jesus taught that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, his disciples were astounded and were able to ask, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt 19:25). Jesus was able to follow

³ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 13, emphasis original.

⁴ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2010), 73.

up on his teachings, which led to even further application. The disciples could look at their own lives and see if they were valuing anything else over their devotion to Jesus. This type of questioning and application flourishes in a small group setting where the members of the group are comfortable to open up and be honest about their questions and concerns. This kind of discussion is lacking in a large group setting.

Jesus often used small group meetings with his disciples as a time to challenge them. He would ask them tough questions and challenge them to give themselves fully in their commitment to God. For example, Jesus led his disciples away from the crowds and asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” (Matt 16:13). After they had responded with several answers Jesus asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15). This question zeroed in on what was most important. This question challenged the group to search their hearts and to seek an answer from God. Peter was the one to respond with the answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16).

An excellent example of how Jesus used both large group preaching and small group discussion is found in the parable of the soils (Matt 13:1-23). After Jesus shared this parable with the crowd, his disciples met with him and asked, “Why do you speak to them in parables?” (Matt 13:10). Jesus was able to give them further instruction about why he taught the way he did (Matt 13:11-17) and follow up with further instruction on the parable itself (Matt 13:18-23). This allowed a format for his disciples to hear the message preached as part of a larger group and then dig deeper into the message by asking questions in a small group setting. Together, the disciples got the best of both methods.

The early church gives an example of the importance of small groups concerning the studying of God’s Word. In Acts 2 the church was involved in two types of gatherings. They met at the Temple and they gathered in small groups at various homes (Acts 2:46). Scripture notes that they were devoted to the disciple’s teachings (Acts 2:42). The study of the message of the disciples and the Scriptures were the focus of these meetings. They

heard the preaching of the disciples and then they met and continued in the study of what had been preached. These small groups were a place where the preached message could be discussed by the new believers. They were able to work out the details of what it meant to follow Christ, and this was facilitated by others in the group who were going through similar circumstances.

Church history also gives an example of sermon-based small group Bible study. The pietist Philipp Jakob Spener used small groups effectively in the 1670-1680s.⁵ He called these groups the *collegia pietatis*. Spener describes the nature of these meetings: “I either repeated in summary fashion the sermon held the previous Sunday or repeated from the New Testament a few verses . . . and then the men discussed these things without contention or disquiet.”⁶

John Wesley took a different approach to small groups. His groups were parachurch gatherings that did not compete with the church. Henderson writes, “The meetings of the Wesleyan societies were carefully scheduled so as not to conflict with any of the services of the Church of England. This widely-acclaimed feature was a calculated symbol of Methodism’s submission and subordinate role to the Church and its supplementary nature.”⁷ The Bible studies in these meetings did not correspond with the sermon that was preached but focused on “Methodist doctrine.”⁸

Today, many options of Bible study are available to small groups. Some are topical, and others are independent from the sermon preached the previous Sunday. Larry Osborne argues that sermon-based Bible study is the best option for small groups: “Sermon-based small groups not only made me a better preacher; they made us a better

⁵ Dale W. Brown, *Understanding Pietism* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing, 1996), 44.

⁶ Brown, *Understanding Pietism*, 44.

⁷ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 83.

⁸ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 83.

church. That's because the lecture lab model makes the Scripture far more accessible, and the task of leading a small group much more manageable.”⁹

Healthy small groups are able to study the Word in a way that differs from listening to a sermon or listening to monologue teaching. People are more engaged in learning when they have the opportunity to interact with the material. Stetzer and Geiger write, “Group discussion involves listening, waiting, learning together, and shepherding the group to understand the author’s original context and the application that flows from it.”¹⁰

One advantage of sermon-based Bible study in small groups is that it helps the congregation focus on the sermon each week. The members will become better listeners, spend more time in the Bible, and understand it better. The awareness that the sermon will be discussed later that week in a small group setting will lead the congregation to listen more attentively, take better notes, and prepare to discuss the content of the sermon.

Another advantage of sermon-based Bible study is that a churchwide focus on Bible study brings unity to the church. Cloud and Townsend write, “Small groups are not an add-on, secondary concern, or fad. What happens in a good small group is part of the very work of the church itself. It is primary and should be seen that way.”¹¹ Instead of several different studies spread through the various church meetings, one passage is being studied by everyone. With each member studying the same text, the church is united in their studies and heads in the same direction. The members are more determined to attend on Sunday morning so that they can prepare for their small groups. The repetition of study allows for deeper learning and application. There is a greater possibility that the members will remember what is being taught.

⁹ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 66.

¹⁰ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 23.

¹¹ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 28.

Another advantage to sermon-based small group Bible study is that it is helpful to the group leader. It enables the leader to prepare for each week and to be assured that the members will come to groups prepared. The leader will not feel pressured to prepare a lesson on his own but will be provided one each week.

The role of the group leader in sermon-based Bible study is very important. Poor leadership can ruin a small group and is often the number one complaint of members. The group leader needs to be a person of the Word himself. He or she must have a desire to learn from the Bible each day and be willing to apply the Word to his life. The leader should have a zeal and excitement about God's Word that is apparent to those in the group. The leader does not need to know everything but must be willing to learn. He must be teachable as he leads. The leader needs to be faithful to the Bible and sound in his theology.

The leader of a small group sermon-based Bible study needs to be a good listener, able to ask clarifying questions, and able to guide discussion. He will need to watch for those who might dominate the group and take up all the time. Some may need to be reminded that some need to share, and others will need to be prodded into participating. The leader's responsibility is to make sure that all members feel as though they are a part of the group and the discussion.

The leader must also be willing to challenge the group when conclusions are drawn that differ from the meaning of the text. Saers warns that the leader must respond when "conclusions are drawn more on the basis of force with which the ideas were suggested or a general democratic consensus than from a rigorous examination of the text."¹²

¹² Orlando Saer, *Iron Sharpens Iron: Leading Bible Oriented Small Groups That Thrive* (Glasgow, Scotland: Bell and Bain, 2010), 13.

Summary

Small groups provide a place where God’s Word can be studied and discussed, which is essential for discipleship. To revitalize discipleship, there needs to be a small group setting where the Bible can be discussed and applied in an open and honest way. There must be a time when questions can be asked and answered together as a group. The sermon-based Bible study is the best option to study God’s Word in a way that will strengthen the church and develop disciples.

While there are many approaches to the study of God’s Word, the sermon-based method of small group Bible study has many advantages. The sermon-based approach would benefit the group leader and group members, allowing them to dig deeper into the Bible. The church as a whole would also benefit. This method has the potential to unify the church, encourage worship attendance, foster more intensive listening to the sermon, and promote deeper study and application of the message. The result would be a church that is developing disciples through the study of God’s Word.

Regularly Meeting for Fellowship

The development of relationships between the members of a small group is related to the time that they spend together in fellowship. Groups need to faithfully meet at regular intervals and be committed to do so. Robert Coleman writes, “Disciples must have devoted Christian friends to follow, and this can only be facilitated by being together over a period of time.”¹³ The need for small groups to be together on a regular basis seems minor, but in many ways, it is key to successful development of fellowship.

Jesus set an example of meeting regularly with his disciples. Jesus called his disciples, and they were with him constantly during his three-year ministry. Coleman writes, “Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the

¹³ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987), 64.

essence of his training program- just letting his disciples follow him.”¹⁴ Scripture records that they did some extraordinary things together, such as preaching and teaching to large crowds, performing miracles, and casting out demons. Many of the things they did together, however, were quite ordinary. They ate together, traveled together, talked with one another, taught together, healed together, and prayed together. The time that Jesus spent with his disciples shows the significance of being together for fellowship so that relationships might grow. The disciples got to know Jesus in a close way as they spent time with him. John writes in his epistle, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1). His relationship with Jesus was a close relationship that developed over years of close fellowship.

The early church also set an example of the importance of meeting regularly for fellowship. The New Testament described the early church as meeting day by day as they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). Bill Search writes, “The earliest form of the church was not only dedicated to large public gatherings. They were also devoted to home fellowship. The word *fellowship* was often used to describe the mutual care that took place in a marriage. This relationship was more than casual acquaintance or association. This was a gathering of people that became a family.”¹⁵ Cloud and Townsend also compare the fellowship found in small groups to a family: “Groups are like a second family for people. Whatever needs their original family or environments did not provide, or whatever they provided that the person did not need, the group restores and repairs. It is a second chance.”¹⁶ This kind of relationship requires time for fellowship.

¹⁴ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 27.

¹⁵ Bill Search, *Simple Small Groups: A User Friendly Guide for Small Group Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 24.

¹⁶ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 67.

Church history shows how meeting regularly for fellowship is important. In 1744, the first Methodist Conference was convened. The Conference laid down rules to govern small groups. Included in the rules were several criteria on the regularity of the meetings. Henderson explains that they were to “meet once a week, at the least, to come punctually at the hour appointed, without some extraordinary reason. To begin (those of us who are present) exactly at the hour, with singing and prayer.”¹⁷

John Wesley believed that small groups were needed to nurture and train Christian disciples. He developed a method that combined small groups where “all sincere Christians, whatever their intelligence or background, could work up the ladder simply by faithful participation, from one level of spiritual maturity to the next.”¹⁸ These class meetings consisted of six to eight people who met weekly. Wesley recognized that the key to the Christian growth of each member was dependent upon attendance in the class meeting. To ensure faithful attendance among the members of the small groups, Wesley began issuing tickets. Henderson writes, “Every class was visited quarterly by Wesley or one of his assistants and every member was interviewed personally. If the minister determined that the member was faithful to class (missed three or less meetings per quarter), he or she was issued a ticket.”¹⁹ These methods seem a little strict and legalistic by today’s standards, but they show the seriousness Wesley placed upon regular attendance to the small groups.

Wesley believed that being at the small group meetings was important. He also believed that each member needed to be involved in the meetings. He encouraged each member to share at the meetings and to respond to the other members. Henderson explains, “As each member spoke in turn and reported the state of his or her religious life, the rest

¹⁷ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 115.

¹⁸ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 11.

¹⁹ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 105.

of the group was to respond appropriately in terms of encouragement, affirmation, suggestions, and support.”²⁰ By encouraging this type of participation, each member was more likely to benefit from the meetings. The created culture was one of acceptance of each member as well as a commitment to the group.

Today, small groups are used by many churches to foster regular fellowship. Fellowship is important in the life of a believer because it helps develop community and relationships. Cloud writes, “My point is that *small groups provide benefits beyond the scope of their context, topic, or material*. While what people learn is very important, the group experience itself changes members’ hearts in subtle ways.”²¹

Fellowship is necessary for disciples to mature, serve, and lead. Donahue writes, “We are created for community—for oneness—so that we can fully express the beauty, power, and image of God. His central focus for his creation is for us to become community that enjoys his presence, demonstrates his love, and serves his purposes in the world, now and forever.”²² By fellowshipping regularly with one another, the small group members are doing what they were created to do.

Most churches today encourage small groups to meet on a regular basis. One way that churches encourage regular attendance is by having groups write and sign a group covenant. The covenant sets the standards and goals of the group, including a commitment to attend the meetings regularly and to arrive on time. Donahue writes, “Covenants are expressions of group values, expectations, or behaviors for which we hold ourselves mutually accountable. Covenants are agreements that create trust and build community.”²³

²⁰ Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings*, 66.

²¹ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 57, emphasis original.

²² Bill Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 15.

²³ Donahue, *Leading Life-Changing Small Groups*, 93.

One advantage of a small group that calls for commitment to regularly fellowship is that it will encourage fellowship during the week, not just during class meetings. As fellowship grows and relationships are strengthened, friendships among the group meetings will lead to other times of fellowship. Cloud writes, “Experiencing relationship in a group gives members a model to relate to their spouses, dates, families, kids, friends, and co-workers. They become more relationally oriented.”²⁴

One advantage of small groups is that they can encourage daily connection. Even in today’s busy environment, friends find a way to spend time together. Members can actively minister to each other in times of need. They can go on vacations or mission trips together, meet socially, and stay in touch through social media.

There are many advantages for using small groups for fellowship and developing relationships. The small group gives people the opportunity to fellowship in a more informal and relaxed environment. Steve Gladden writes, “True fellowship not only connects members to each other but also connects them to Christ.”²⁵ Fellowship is more than food, laughter, and good times.

Summary

Small groups that meet regularly can cultivate Christian fellowship. Fellowship is an essential part of discipleship. Small groups that meet regularly help to foster closer relationships and deeper fellowship. Small groups should operate in a way that promotes attendance and punctuality. The advantage of regular fellowship is that it will make possible the time necessary to develop deeper relationships. The regularity will lead to further fellowship outside of the group. The regular fellowship will lead to Christian maturity and opportunities to minister to others.

²⁴ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 58.

²⁵ Steve Gladden, *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 39.

Transparency for Meaningful Prayer

Small groups create an opportunity for people to be transparent with one another, open up, share what is important, and feel safe enough to ask for prayer concerning the struggles and trials that they are facing in their lives. Search writes, “Most people will be more open (or reveal how closed they are) when they are sharing prayer requests than at any other time.”²⁶

Jesus set an example of transparency in prayer with his disciples. He sought out the prayers of his disciples during the most difficult of trials. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was faced with the reality of the cross. He was struggling with the events which were about to transpire. Luke records that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives with his disciples, as he was accustomed to doing (Luke 22:39). He asked them to pray, went a little further and prayed that if it be the Father’s will, that this cup would be taken away (Luke 22:42). Scripture records that his agony was so great that his sweat became like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The disciples failed to stay awake and pray, but to be included at such a moment, to be allowed to see Jesus in prayer in such a manner, and to be invited to join Jesus in prayer, showed the transparency that Jesus shared with his disciples.

Jesus’ disciples were transparent men who were willing to be open and honest. Coleman writes concerning Jesus’ disciples: “Though often mistaken in their judgements and slow to comprehend spiritual things, they were honest men, willing to confess their need. Their mannerisms may have been awkward, and their abilities limited, but with the exception of the traitor, their hearts were big.”²⁷ These men were willing to be transparent with Jesus.

The transparency that Jesus shared with his disciples led to an opportunity for growth in their prayer life. The disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus

²⁶ Search, *Simple Small Groups*, 59.

²⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 24.

taught them to pray in response to their request. The disciples' ability to acknowledge their need for instructions shows the transparency of their relationship with Jesus. They were not afraid to ask for help. They were willing to be vulnerable and admit that they did not know it all. They were willing to learn from Jesus and to grow in their prayer life.

The early church gives a vivid picture of small groups who were transparent with one another as they prayed. In the book of Acts, the early church quickly began to face trials and persecution. During these difficult times, the church leaned upon one another as they prayed concerning their circumstances. An example is seen when Peter and John were arrested. After being threatened and released, they returned to their companions and reported what had happened. The group prayed together in such a powerful way that the "place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word with boldness" (Acts 4:31). These times of trial and persecution led the believers to be open about their prayer needs. It also allowed them to rejoice when they saw their prayers answered.

Church history shows the importance of transparency in prayer. Wesley encouraged transparency within small groups, which was rare during his time. Henderson writes, "The class meetings provided a forum, available nowhere else in Hanoverian England, for free expression in an accepting environment by people from widely different social backgrounds."²⁸ Wesley encouraged openness and transparency in the small group meetings, including the biblical command to "bear one another's burdens (Gal 6:2)" and "speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15)."²⁹

Today, small groups are being used in such a way as to provide a place for transparency that is impossible during a large gathering. In small groups people can develop relationships that will build trust. The rules of a small group can be helpful to

²⁸ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, 96.

²⁹ Henderson, *John Wesley's Class Meetings*, 14.

make it a safe place. Osborne writes, “Fact is, most Christians don’t know that it’s okay to be honest, to share their problems, to ask for prayer for their own needs rather than Uncle Fred’s battle with cancer. But once they learn it’s okay to be real in their small group—that they won’t be shot or ostracized- people tend to start being real.”³⁰

One important way of making a small group comfortable with transparency is to have a group leader who is transparent. Stetzer and Geiger write, “Being real with your group encourages more transparency throughout the group. How do you train, coach, or resource people on how to be transparent about their own weaknesses and struggles? Be transparent about your own struggles with them.”³¹ When group members witness the leader being transparent it will embolden them to open up as well.

Practically, the small group setting needs to be a comfortable place where people feel safe. Search writes, “We can use words like *authentic, confidential, honest, and safe*, but ultimately what we mean is that we hope people feel comfortable in our group!”³² Physically, the room where the group meets needs to be comfortable. Every effort should be made to ensure that the members experience acceptance and understanding when they offer their honest feelings.

Transparency requires trust and honesty. This kind of transparency can be frightening for many people. When good connections are made, though, in a small group, along with an environment of acceptance, then people will be able to be honest, face reality, and welcome others to do so as well. Gladden writes, “Many people have a fear of intimacy. They don’t want to open up with others and risk the vulnerability that comes with honest and transparent relationships. To combat this problem, one of the strict rules you must drive home to your group leaders and group members is that what is said in the

³⁰ Osborne, *Sticky Churches*, 54-55.

³¹ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 124.

³² Search, *Simple Small Groups*, 49, emphasis original.

group stays in the group.”³³ These kinds of ground rules will help create a safe environment for honest discussion.

Small groups are essential for keeping informed about the prayer needs of others. Saer writes, “In even a relatively small church, it is all too easy for individual needs—and joys—to remain unnoticed. However well-intentioned church members may be about trying to look out for their Christian brothers and sisters, keeping up to date with one another is an uphill struggle.”³⁴ It is difficult to pray for or to pray with a person who one spends little time with and who one does not really know. The advantage of small groups is that the members are able to get to know each another and learn about their struggles and victories. They are able to pray together concerning the real issues in their lives. This ability requires transparency—a willingness to share true prayer needs rather than offering up safe and secondary concerns to save face with the group.

Another advantage of transparency in small groups is that the members will be able to learn how to pray. Small groups offer the opportunity to listen to others as they pray, and the opportunity to actually pray. Saer writes, “Good habits for both personal and public prayer are usually caught more than taught. In a small group, prayer can be effectively modelled by more mature Christians for the benefit of the younger Christians very simply, as shared news and information is turned into humble prayer.”³⁵ This on-the-job training is the best way for disciples to learn how to pray.

Another advantage of transparent prayer in small groups is that it allows for members to experience answered prayer. As the needs and requests of members are answered, members are able to share the joy of answered prayer together. Members will

³³ Gladden, *Small Groups with Purpose*, 150.

³⁴ Saer, *Iron Sharpens Iron*, 18.

³⁵ Saer, *Iron Sharpens Iron*, 19.

be encouraged to pray more and to pray with more faith. The group will develop an attitude of expectancy as they pray.

Summary

Small groups that practice transparency can develop meaningful prayer. The small group setting is the best place for prayer to be modeled and taught. It is the best place for prayer to be practiced and experienced. As group members grow in their transparency, they will be better able to share the real needs in their life. A small group can provide a safe place where transparency can be experienced. Transparency is a requirement for disciples to share real prayer concerns. Small group members who are able to be transparent will learn how to pray and experience the joy of seeing prayers answered.

Conclusion

Small groups are the practical medium for developing healthy biblical community where discipleship can take place. Bible study, fellowship, and prayer are necessary ingredients to discipleship, which must be part of any small group. This chapter has shown that there are advantages to doing small groups in a certain way, with sermon-based Bible study, regular fellowship, and transparent prayer. By focusing on these three areas of discipleship, small groups will be successful in discipling the members of the church. Small groups will unify the church through sermon-based Bible study, help the church grow in biblical understanding and application, grow in their relationships through regular fellowship, and grow in the area of prayer as they develop transparency. Small groups that are focused on these issues will succeed in developing strong disciples.

CHAPTER 4

DEVELOPING SMALL GROUPS THAT REVITALIZE DISCIPLESHIP

As pastor of EHBC, I recognize the importance of leading the church to carrying out the Great Commission to make disciples. The church has been given a clear mission to go and make disciples by baptizing and teaching them to obey the commandments of Christ (Matt 28:18-20). My concern was that a biblical model needed to be developed to revitalize discipleship at EHBC. The lack of discipleship was evident in the way the church was wanting in unity, fellowship, and leadership.

This chapter describes the process of developing a sermon series along with a teaching curriculum to show the biblical mandate to make disciples, and to show that the biblical model of small groups is a model that can be used in the local church to revitalize discipleship. This chapter also looks at the very specific and practical goal of forming at least three small groups that would meet for twelve weeks, putting into practice the things which are necessary to develop disciples.

The project lasted for twenty-two weeks. The tools developed for this project included a Discipleship Assessment Survey, a series of four sermons with evaluation rubrics, and a curriculum of eight lessons with evaluation rubrics. The sermon series and the lesson curriculum were developed during weeks 1-4 of the project, utilizing chapters 2 and 3 of this project. In week 5, the Discipleship Assessment Survey was given to the church and the process of using the evaluation rubrics began. During weeks 5-8, the sermon series was preached on Sunday mornings and the lessons were taught on Wednesday nights. In weeks 9-20, the small groups were launched and continued to meet each week. The project was evaluated during weeks 20-22.

This project was designed to be a biblical and practical way of revitalizing discipleship at EHBC. To successfully make disciples the church must provide a way to help members grow through Bible study, prayer, and fellowship. Jesus modeled small group discipleship making in his ministry. The early church also modeled small groups as a way of making disciples. The teachings of Paul also show the importance that the church continued to place upon making disciples.

This project has been a blessing to EHBC. The members embraced the small group model and EHBC has seen a revitalization in discipleship. There is an excitement and energy as members have dug deep into Bible studies, been engaged in meaningful prayer, and fellowshiped and formed meaningful relationships. The goal of forming at least three small groups was met, with four groups successfully meeting for the twelve weeks. A total of forty-one members are now a part of a small group.

Development of the Sermon Series and Curriculum

The foundation of this project was established from a four-sermon series of biblical messages and an eight-lesson curriculum. These were developed and written during the first four weeks of the project. A Discipleship Assessment was developed to determine the attitudes and actions of the church concerning discipleship.

Weeks 1-4

The Revitalizing Discipleship Sermon Series¹ and Small Group Curriculum² were developed during the first four weeks of the project. Additionally, a Discipleship Sermon Rubric was developed to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance

¹ See appendix 4.

² See appendix 5.

of the sermon series.³ A Small Group Curriculum Rubric was developed to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.

The Revitalizing Discipleship Sermon Series was developed from four Scripture passages that set a biblical and theological foundation for making disciples through small groups. The sermons were developed from the exegesis of Scripture found in chapter 2 of this project. The Small Group Curriculum was designed to give practical guidance on how to develop a small groups ministry. It also provided practical guidance for what was expected of each member, as well as those in leadership roles. The lessons were developed from the research in chapter 3 of this project, along with further research from other sources.

During week 4, the EHBC Council was presented with the sermon series and lesson curriculum for review, along with the evaluation rubrics. The Council consisted of experienced leaders of differing ages. The council included the Chairman of Deacons, the Church Secretary, the Chairperson of the Prayer Committee, the Church Treasurer, and the Sunday School Director.

The response of the Church Council to the sermons and lessons was very positive and surpassed the 90 percent approval goal that was set. The Council decided to meet once a week during weeks 5 through 9 to review the sermons and lessons delivered to the church and to look afresh at upcoming lessons and sermons. One Council member said that she did not think that small groups were biblical before she studied the sermons and saw that it was a biblical model for making disciples. Another member recommended that I stress that baptism is important for discipleship, but baptismal regeneration is not scriptural. These meeting proved to be very encouraging. I was able to see a growing interest in small groups and an excitement to start the groups.

³ See appendix 2.

The Discipleship Assessment Surveys were handed out to the adults of the church during week 3 of the project and were returned during week 4. The survey was designed to assess the churches attitude and present practices concerning discipleship, and focused on eight areas: Bible engagement, obeying God, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and unashamed transparency. The surveys were anonymous so as to encourage honesty. The purpose of the survey was to evaluate the level of commitment to discipleship and making disciples that was present at EHBC.

Sermon and Lesson Implementation

Week 5 marked the beginning of the preaching and teaching part of the project. During weeks 5-8, the Revitalizing Discipleship Sermon Series was preached during the Sunday morning worship, and the Revitalizing Discipleship Curriculum was taught during the Wednesday night worship time.

Week 5

In week 5, the first sermon was delivered. The text of the sermon was Matthew 28:18-20, and the title of the sermon was “The Mission of the Church-Making Disciples.” The sermon presented the Great Commission as a foundational passage for the mission of the church. The sermon began by asking, “What is the mission of the church?” The sermon showed that the clear mission of the church is to make disciples. The biblical mandate to make disciples is a foundational truth that should lead the church to commit to do so and to discover how to do accomplish the mission.

The Great Commission gives the scope of the mission. It commands Christians to reach all nations. Also, the church is given the authority to go and make disciples in the name of Jesus. The Great Commission comes with a promise that Jesus will be with the church as it carries out its mission.

During week 5, the first two lessons were taught. The first lesson was entitled, “How Small Groups Can Revitalize Discipleship at East Hickman Baptist Church,” and focused on Acts 2:41-47. The lesson concentrated on three essential areas to discipleship: fellowship, Bible study, and prayer. Small groups allow relationships to develop and grow as fellowship is shared on a regular basis. Small groups call for a commitment to prepare and to attend each week. This time together is necessary to strengthen relationships and develop a safe place where people can be candid, honest, and transparent with their struggles. The small group time allows members to dig deep in the study of God’s Word. It allows time for questions and discussion. The use of sermon-based Bible studies allows the groups to have unity in their studies.

The small group also helps to develop disciples as they are able to spend time in prayer for one another. The relationships that grow allow transparency in prayer. Transparency is needed if members are going to grow in their prayer life by sharing real needs and struggles.

The second lesson was titled “What Happens in a Small Group?” and focused on 2 Corinthians 3:18. This lesson was designed to give a vision to the church of how a successful small group meeting should function. EHBC consisted of members who were unfamiliar with small groups. Many members told me that they had never even heard of small groups. It was important to explain and show them what would actually happen at a small group. This lesson gave a practical glimpse into a small group meeting and focused on four areas: real relationships, accountability, support and strength, and grieving and healing.

Real relationships. One of the first things that will happen in a small group involves refreshments. This is important because sharing refreshments together will provide a time to catch up, share small talk, and warm up for digging into the Scriptures. Some people are extroverts and do not need a time to warm up to talk with others, but others may be more introverted and for them it is important to have a casual time of

talking with others. Food is often associated with fellowship. There is an intimacy about sharing snacks or a meal together.

A group meeting should include a time for sharing; just a few minutes to allow people to share answered prayers and good news with the group. This is not a time where people are forced to share, but is a time for those who wish to share to be able to in a casual environment, to let others know what is happening in their lives. After the sharing time the group will enter the Bible study time. This is a time when it is important for each member to be prepared. Sermon-based Bible studies help keep the groups united in their studies. This time is an important time to ask questions and hear what others have to say.

The Bible studies will include three types of questions. First will be a question designed to help the group get to know each other quicker. These questions may seem silly or unnecessary, but they help the group grow in their knowledge and understanding of one another; they will help the group grow in their relationships with each other. The second set of questions look at Scripture verses that complement the main text used in the sermon. These cross references will broaden the understanding and context of the study. The third type of questions will deal with the application of the Scripture. They are designed to take the main point of the sermon and to make it relevant to life.

After the Bible study will be a time for prayer. The group may choose to break up into pairs, or to break up into men and women groups. This is a time to share the needs present in each life. Willingness to share will increase as members grow closer together and learn to trust each other. After the time of prayer there should be a time for socializing before members head home.

These different activities in a small group help members grow in their relationship with God and with each other. Many who participate in a small group claim that the members become like a second family. There is a connection that takes place. Henry Cloud and John Townsend write, “For a few minutes every week or so, members

receive the experience of being attached, loved, and in relationship with like-minded people.”⁴

Accountability. *Accountability* is a term often misunderstood. It means to be answerable to someone else. *Accountability* is missing in much of what believers do. The modern church seems to have lost the principle of discipline and accountability. In some churches it is seen as a hopeless cause.

One reason that accountability is shied away from is that it has been misused in the past. Accountability is not a way to punish, shame, or embarrass others. Biblical accountability is a way to help one another in the process of Christian growth. It is grace filled and motivated by love. Accountability is able to take place in a small group when people are open to share their struggles and temptations, as well as their need for support and comfort. Together we can help each other be regular in attendance, be faithful in preparation for the meetings, and help each other with struggles.

Support and strength. Support and strength will be found when a small group is operating the way it should. The small group is a place where members who are weak can find strength and members who are discouraged can find comfort. Paul wrote, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor 12:10).

Regular attendance is important for each member of a group. Also, being “all there” is important. This means giving attention to what is taking place in the group—listening to what each member is saying, looking at the person, and giving them full attention. Just listening to a person is one way to begin to give them strength and comfort. It will help a person to know that they are being heard.

Another way to support and comfort is to validate what the person is feeling. It is helpful for a person to know that someone understands what they are feeling and

⁴ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 71.

experiencing. When a person's feelings are dismissed, they will close up, lose trust, and hide their feelings.

Small groups can also be helpful in enabling a person to assess the reality of their situation. The experiences of members might help others see there is hope. The group can show love, respect, advice, and encouragement when someone feels like giving up.

Jesus instructed Peter to "strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32). Peter had denied that he knew Jesus three times. He had failed in his faithfulness to Jesus but had been restored in his relationship with Jesus and the other disciples. Jesus instructed him to strengthen others who might have failures in the future. Peter's failures made him better equipped to strengthen others. His story of failure and restoration is an encouragement for others, and one person's examples of failures and restoration can help others and strengthen them as well.

Grieving and healing. Small groups are a place where members can grieve and heal after loss. Death, broken relationships, job loss, and loss of health are just a few things which lead to grieving and a need for healing. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt 5:4). Grieving and healing are a part of life, and small groups can be an important part of the healing process.

Small groups can be a place where people are allowed to talk about their loss and how they are feeling about the loss. Loss often comes with a lot of emotions. These emotions need to be talked about, but many people may be reluctant to do so in a large group. A safe small group will provide a space for dealing with emotional loss. It will provide the time needed for an individual to move through the stages of grieving and to learn to deal with grief in a healthy way. There is not just one way to deal with grief and there is no timetable for dealing with grief. Each person needs to be allowed the time and space to deal with grief. A small group is a place where this can take place.

A small group can be a resource for a grieving person, supplying love, stability, acceptance, structure, and a sense of belonging. The small group can help show love to a

grieving person by being with them and praying for them. Ultimately, the small group can help a grieving person turn to God during their time of loss.

The things that would hopefully be the result of a small group include forming real relationships that will grow and persevere, and a sense of accountability developed in the group. Support and strength would be found as the group shows love and concern. Hopefully, a small group would provide a place where members can grieve together and help one another to heal.

Week 6

In week 6, the second sermon was delivered. The text of the sermon was Matthew 4:18-22. The title of the message was “The Method of Jesus for Making Disciples.” The sermon began by asking, “What does it mean to follow Jesus?” The sermon argued that following Jesus is to be a disciple of Jesus and calls for a real commitment. The sermon showed that Jesus made disciples in a small group. The small group setting allowed Jesus to spend time with his disciples and to fellowship with them. Jesus modeled how discipleship is to take place. In a small group setting he was able to teach his disciples. They profited from hearing Jesus preach to the crowds, and then they received even more in-depth teaching in the small group. They were able to ask questions and share their thoughts. They were able to benefit from others in the group as they asked questions and received answers. The small group setting also helped disciples learn about prayer. The disciples were able to watch and listen as Jesus prayed. Jesus not only taught his disciples to pray, but he also modeled prayer for them. The disciples were able to see how Jesus was transparent in his prayer life.

During week 6, lessons 3 and 4 were taught. Lesson 3 was titled “Setting the Ground Rules,” and focused on Jeremiah 31:31-34. This lesson focused on using a group covenant to set the structure of the group and the group meetings. First, a study was provided that showed that God is a covenant God. It also reviewed several covenants that God had made with people. Second, the lesson showed that a covenant is to be taken

seriously. Third, the lesson showed what should be in a small group covenant and how the covenant could make the small group a safer place for candid discussions.

Writing a covenant. God is a covenant God. There are at least five covenants in Scripture where God has promised to fulfill his purpose for creation by establishing His kingdom. God made a covenant with Noah after the flood that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow (Gen 9:11-14). He also made a covenant with Abraham:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen 12:1-3)

God made a covenant with Moses: “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (Exod 19:5-6). God made a covenant with David: “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12-13). God has now entered into a New Covenant that was promised in Jeremiah 31:31 and made possible by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The serious nature of a covenant. Entering into a covenant is very serious. It is a way of making a binding commitment that holds one accountable for what he agrees to. Small groups enter into a covenant relationship which will set the structure of the group. A small group covenant should include an agreement to be regular in attendance, be on time, be prepared, be willing to participate, and pray for the members of the group. The covenant should be agreed upon and signed by each group member.

Cloud and Townsend write that an ideal situation concerning a small group covenant would be to “provide only the minimum amount of structure to protect the group’s functioning.”⁵ If a group consists of members who show up on time, respect one another’s feelings, and are willing to participate, then fewer ground rules will be necessary. If these areas are or become a problem, then the group covenant is a way to address the issue.

The group as a whole will need to work together to establish the ground rules. These rules are meant to provide a safe place where relationships will develop, and discipleship will take place. The rules will generally change as the group learns where problems exist and try to address the problems. For example, if one person in the group begins to dominate the conversation to the point that others cannot participate, then the group may need to develop a rule which assures that all group members have an opportunity to speak.

Making a safe space. Some rules will be needed from the very beginning of a small group. Each group will need to decide when they will meet, selecting a day and time. Finding a time which fits the schedule of every member might be difficult but should be attempted. Decisions will also need to be made concerning childcare. The group may decide that each parent is responsible for their children’s care during the meeting. The group can decide to provide childcare or to rotate the person who will watch the children. The safety of the children should be a priority for each group.

Some ground rules are necessary to make the small group a safe place to share. There needs to be an understanding that what is shared in the small group will be considered confidential. Also, there needs to be an understanding that hateful speech and verbal attacks will not be tolerated. The group will need to decide what precautions are needed because of COVID or other health issues.

⁵ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 137-38.

Lesson 4 was entitled “The Responsibility of Each Member” and was from 1 Peter 1:22. The lesson focused on four responsibilities. First, every member needs to be prepared for the meeting. This duty means spending the time and energy necessary to participate in the group meeting discussions. Second, every member needs to be willing to form growing relationships. Growing relationships requires a commitment to be transparent and willing to share with the group. Third, every member needs to listen. A commitment needs to be made to overcome the barriers that may make it difficult to listen. Fourth, every member has a responsibility to love the members of the group.

Be prepared. Small group meetings can be unpredictable. There can be surprises as they gather and share what is happening in their lives. The class needs to be flexible and expect the unexpected. It helps when each member arrives prepared. This means taking steps to regularly attend and arrive on time for the meeting. It also means doing the study necessary to be part of the discussion that will take place. Having a prepared heart includes spending time in prayer before the class, as well as praying for other members of the group.

Being prepared means arriving with an openness toward God, being ready to learn from the Scripture, and being willing to apply it to one’s life. Each member has the responsibility to model this kind of openness toward others in the group. God often will use others to help a person to grow in Christian faith.

Be known. In large group settings it is difficult to get to know other people. A shallow kind of friendship might develop, but a deeper relationship is hard to nurture during an hour-long worship service. People generally put on their best appearances and seldom share their deepest concerns. Sunday morning worship is just not the appropriate place and time for developing deeper relationships.

Small groups present an opportunity to develop deeper relationships. It begins with a willingness to be known. Just being a part of a small group does not guarantee that

one will be able to know people in a deeper way. It is possible to be in a small group and still remain closed and guarded about one's life. Most people fear judgement, rejection, ridicule, and shame. These fears prevent them from being open with others. This is why it is important to make a small group a safe place where people can feel comfortable opening up about who they are and what they are going through. The level of openness in a group will directly influence the impact made in each member's life for good. Being known and knowing others is a large part of what it means to be loved and to love others.

Be willing to listen. Being in a small group is all about communication. Getting to know someone means really listening to what they are saying. All people desire to be heard and understood. To accomplish this, each member needs to make a concerted effort to listen to what others have to say in the group.

One mistake that takes place in a small group is when one person or one group of people dominate the conversation. If one person selfishly takes all the group's time talking about themselves and their opinions at the neglect of others, then others will be left out.

Listening requires focus. It requires looking at the person talking and hearing what is being said. The mind can easily wonder, especially if one is thinking about what he is going to say next. Group members should be willing to listen and give full attention to others. Some barriers to listening include:

1. **Physical barriers.** Are there distractions in the room? Is there something that is causing you to lose focus? A barking dog, a television set that is left on, outside noise like traffic. These kinds of distractions should be minimized or removed.
2. **Language barriers.** The rate that one listens can be different than the rate that someone talks. Sometimes it is okay to ask a person to slow down when they are talking too fast. Words that are unknown need to be clarified. It is important to ask follow-up questions to see if you have understood what is being said.
3. **Prejudice barriers.** Beware of certain prejudices which may limit willingness to listen. If one's mind is already turned off by the speaker or the topic of conversation, then he will not listen to what they are saying.

Learning to listen is one of the requirements of getting to know someone. Small groups are the appropriate place and appropriate time for this to take place. Group members should make the most of the small group experience by participating in the group discussion, listening while others are talking and sharing when it is their time to speak.

Love one another. Jesus was once asked a question concerning the greatest of the commandments. His response was straight forward and emphatic: love is the answer. “We are to love the Lord with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves” (Matt 22:34-40). Small groups provide an opportunity to learn to love God and to love one another. Showing love to others requires acting on the emotion and putting it into practice. Love is lived out in community with others.

Loving God can be seen in worship and prayer, in obeying the commandments of God, by loving His Word, and through confession and repentance. Loving others can be seen in serving others, by showing empathy toward others, by affirming and supporting others, by forgiving and reconciling with others, and by encouraging others.

Small groups are a place where people can love God and their neighbor. They can walk through life together and grow through discipleship together. Each member has a responsibility to love.

Week 7

In week 7, the third sermon was preached. The text of the sermon was Acts 2:42-47. The title of the sermon was “The Model of the Early Church for Making Disciples.” The sermon began by asking, “What is the church supposed to look like?” The early church described in Acts is a model for churches today, and the principles that characterized the early church should also characterize the church today. The sermon showed that the early church made disciples by meeting in small groups. During these small group meetings, the Word of God was taught. The subject of the studies included

the Scripture as well as the teachings of the apostles. The early church used small groups to foster fellowship and the building of relationships. Prayer was also an important part of these small groups. The small groups allowed disciples to have a transparency in prayer as they shared their needs and praised God for answered prayer.

During week 7, lessons 5 and 6 were taught. Lesson 5 was titled “The Responsibilities of the Host” and was taken from 1 Peter 4:9-10. This lesson showed that being a host is more than having a clean and available place for the group to meet. The host is responsible for making all members feel welcome and safe. They should create a warm and friendly atmosphere. The host is a leadership position and should see himself as a fellow worker with the group leader. And of course, the host is responsible for organizing refreshments.

Being a good host means more than just making sure the house is as clean as it ought to be. Being a good host is making sure the house is prepared for the group meeting, which includes spending as much time preparing spiritually as time cleaning. Most people do not want to come to a dirty house, but it is also important to prepare by spending time in prayer—praying over the home, the group leader, and the group members. The host is a spiritual leader of the group and must prepare to lead spiritually.

Provide a warm and friendly environment. The host must consider some practical concerns. Are there enough chairs for the group and are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough lighting so that members can easily see their Bible and study notes? Is the house free from dog or cat odors that might cause allergic reactions? If there are going to be children that need to be watched, is there a space where they will not interrupt the group? These and other practical issues should be considered by the host.

Being a good host means more than having a spacious house for the group to meet in. The home needs to be a warm and friendly space that is welcoming and inviting. This kind of environment is often set by the attitude of the host. Scripture teaches that there is a spiritual gift of hospitality: “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Pet 4:9-10). The church is made up of individual believers who have been given a gift, or gifts, to be used for the benefit of the entire church. Hospitality is one of those gifts.

Imagine what the world would be like if there was no hospitality—no invitations to dinners, no time spent visiting in other's homes, no having a cold drink in a friend's backyard. The world would be a cold and lonely place without hospitality. Even the hotel industry has learned that it is important to extend hospitality to its guest. The most successful hotels, those with four-star ratings, will go above and beyond to extend hospitality. They will provide snacks and greet guests as they enter the building, learning and using the names of the guest. These hotels have learned that making a guest feel at home will cause the visitors to stay with them again on a return trip.

The early church needed members with the gift of hospitality to support Christians who traveled. Hotels and boarding houses were rare, and if a person could find one, it was probably connected to some kind of vice. Christians would invite other Christians into their homes and care for them. They would give them space and food and drink. They would make them feel at home with no expectation for repayment.

Today, there is still a need for hospitality in the church. Some people are blessed with this gift and will thrive when given the opportunity to be a good host to others. We live in a time when many people hesitate to give up their privacy, even for a short time. The host of a small group needs to be the kind of person who will extend hospitality to the group with open arms. This type of genuine hospitality will make the environment warm and inviting and create a desire for each member to return for the next meeting.

Provide support for the group leader. The host should consider his or herself as a partner with the group leader, which means encouraging and supporting the leader. It means asking if the group leader needs anything in particular for the task of leading the group. It also means giving the group leader feedback on how the group is doing. At times,

the host will hear about needs within the group before the group leader. These needs should be forwarded to the group leader.

The host needs to be a prayer warrior. Prayer needs to precede the meetings, be lifted up during the meetings, and offered after members have left. Prayer is the one thing which will bring victory in spiritual warfare.

Organize refreshments for the group. Refreshments are an important part of fellowship and small group meetings. This may sound shallow and unnecessary to some, but in Scripture, sharing a meal was an intimate time of fellowship. The early church was characterized as sharing food together on a daily basis: “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts” (Acts 2:46). The phrase “breaking bread” could refer to sharing a meal or to taking the Lord’s Supper. It probably referred to both.

Food seems to draw people together. It helps to sweeten fellowship and deepen relationships. Jesus often shared a meal with his disciples. These meals would include conversation and teaching opportunities. It was a time for people to relax and share in a casual manner. Today, refreshments can provide the same sort of positive results. A small group needs to bond together, and sharing a meal or even just a delicious snack will help the process begin.

One of the responsibilities of the host is to organize refreshments. This does not mean that the task will fall on the host to provide the snacks every week. The host needs to assign members of the group to bring refreshments. The best arrangement would be to rotate the job of bringing refreshments so that one person does not have to do it every week.

Refreshments do not need to be expensive or fancy. Often a bag of chips or cookies will be sufficient. As the group continues to grow closer, there should be opportunities to share meals together from time to time. The important thing is the fellowship, not the amount or quality of the refreshments.

In conclusion, the host needs to provide a safe and inviting place for the group to meet. This will be created by the hospitality shown by the host. The host will be an important part of the group leadership team. He or she will be a support and an encouragement for the group leader. The host will be responsible for the snacks enjoyed by the group.

Lesson 6 was titled “The Responsibilities of the Group Leader Part 1” and was based on Proverbs 18:13. This lesson began to lay out what was important for one to be a successful group leader. The group leader is to be a good listener. Listening is important for all the members but especially so for the group leader. The group leader is to set the tone of the group by being candid and transparent before the group. This example will help other members open up and be willing to share. The group leader also has the responsibility to create a safe space. The group leader will limit harmful or destructive comments and enforce the rules that are set in the group covenant.

There are a wide range of discussions among writers about what is important for a small group to be successful, but there is one essential ingredient: having a good group leader is important to having good groups. The next two lessons will review the responsibilities of a group leader.

Listening closely. One of the most important things a leader needs to do is learn to be a good listener. First, they should listen to God. God speaks through His Word and by His Holy Spirit. A group leader should spend time listening to what God is saying to him in his personal quiet time, and in hearing the sermons that will be used in the small group. Listening to God requires an understanding and belief that God desires to speak to you. It is important for the leader to listen to God so that he or she can lead the members to listen to God.

Second is listening to the other members in the small group. Listening is a responsibility for all the members of a small group. It is even more important for the leader of the small group. Proverbs 18:13 says, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it

is his folly and shame.” The temptation in a small group is to answer questions quickly and move on to something else. To overcome this the leader must purposefully slow down and listen. There is time for advice, answers, and instruction after listening.

Listening is more than just hearing and understanding what a person says. Cloud writes, “Listening as a facilitator means to hear the person and to have the person know that you have heard.”⁶ Listening in this manner requires doing or saying something that lets the other person know that he is heard and understood. This can be accomplished verbally by repeating and clarifying what has been said. It can also be a nonverbal act, such as making sure there is eye contact and nodding one’s head.

A group leader needs to model listening for the members. He also needs to make sure there are no interruptions when someone is talking. There should be no talking over others in a group meeting. Respect and patience will be needed to allow others to talk and for them to be heard.

Authentic transparency. In small groups there is a need for balance. John 1:17 says, “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” There needs to be a balance between grace and truth. This means that hard things need to be said at times. People need to be confronted when there is sin, doctrinal error, or unwise choices being made. At the same time, there needs to be forgiveness, understanding, and compassion. This combination results in real growth in Christian maturity.

Authentic transparency is being oneself. It means trusting enough to admit when one is struggling and needs to be encouraged. It means trusting someone to hear what you are saying and to respond in truth and grace. This kind of trust takes time to develop and can be found in a small group.

⁶ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 153.

The group leader will set the tone for the group concerning authentic transparency. If the leader is willing to be transparent, then others will follow. The group leader can help a group develop transparency by modeling transparency. Being willing to share what God is doing in their life and how God is faithfully helping in times of need. If a leader never shares the difficult side of discipleship, then he makes Christianity seem fake and irrelevant for real life. When group leaders share how God is faithfully changing them and helping them during the dark times, then they prove the reality and relevance of Christianity.

Prayer is an area where authentic transparency is essential. A small group leader needs to be a prayer warrior—a person who understands the importance of prayer in the life of a Christian. He should model transparency as he shares prayer requests with the group. This will help group members be able to share their real prayer needs as well.

Leaders and pastors must fight the temptation to appear as if they have it all together in their lives. Pride will make a person reluctant to share that they have struggles and temptations, something that everyone already knows. Public moral failures of some famous Christian leaders might cause other leaders to try to live up to unmeetable expectations. The advantage of being a part of a small group is that an honest transparency can develop, which will help prevent the kinds of moral failures that make the headlines. Christian community is about helping and supporting one another through difficult times when they may become discouraged and desire to quit. Strength is derived from the love of others who will pray and help encourage others in real life struggles.

Developing a safe space. A recent survey of the most important attributes of a small group leader was taken by the members of small groups. Their number one response was, “Makes people feel comfortable sharing in the group.”⁷ Seventy-three

⁷ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 120.

present of respondents made it their first choice. This is important because it shows how important it is for group members to feel safe while they share with others. People are looking for a safe place to be real and authentic, where they can form real and meaningful relationships.

The group leader has the responsibility for making the group a safe place. The psalmist wrote, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8). Cloud argues that the Old Testament understanding of safety is all about carelessness.⁸ It means that you can be yourself, secure in your relationship. It meant that you do not have to put on a fake face. The leader can help make the group a safe place by offering grace to others, pointing members toward God’s grace found in the gospel. They can set the example by being willing to show grace and forgiveness to others.

The leader is responsible for structuring the meetings to be a safe place. The group covenant should shape the ground rules which will set the structure of the group meetings. This helps to ensure that members are not hurtful in their response to others as they share. If a member responds in an angry or hurtful manner to someone, the group leader must intervene and stop the attack. If someone in the group is hurting and the group is not responding to that need, the leader needs to intervene and lead the group to minister to this individual. This type of order and structure will go a long way in helping members feel that the group is a safe place where they can share.

Setting limits is important for a small group. The group leader has the responsibility to limit things which might cause damage or prevent discipleship and growth from taking place. The group leader should think about it as putting up fences against the things that will hurt others in the group. Setting limits can be difficult but it is necessary to provide a safe group meeting. Often it is as simple as a motion for someone to wait instead of interrupting someone else. Other times it may mean making a statement to the

⁸ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 159.

group that they need to be more courteous in their responses to each other. Other times it might mean revisiting the group covenant and adding a provision. Remember that the group covenant can be changed or added to as problems arise.

Time is also an important issue concerning safety. It takes time for the group to learn to trust one another. It takes time to trust the leader, and trust that he or she will respond to an honest statement in a safe way. There will be times when things do not go as they should. When this happens, it is important to learn from failures and to move ahead toward trust and safety.

Safety is important because a small group is a place that will benefit the most when members are able to express their thoughts, feelings, emotions, sins, and hurts. When these types of things are able to be discussed, then members can help one another find love and healing in these areas of their lives. Being in a safe place means that you are more able to be who God intends for you to be.

Week 8

During week 8, the fourth sermon was delivered. The text of the sermon was 2 Timothy 2:1-2, and the title was “The Mandate of the Apostle Paul to Continue Making Disciples.” The sermon showed how Paul, at the end of his life, was adamant about the need for Timothy to continue to make disciples. His prayer was that Timothy would be strong and faithful to continue to pass on the treasure of the gospel to the next generation. This mandate shows that the need for making disciples did not end after the dispersing of the early church. The church continued to make disciples and continued to do so in one-to-one settings and in small group settings.

During week 8, lessons 7 and 8 were taught. Lesson 7 was titled “The Responsibilities of the Group Leader Part 2” and was based on Matthew 22:36-40. The group leader is to set an example by being engaged with Bible study. The group leader does not need to be a biblical scholar with all the answers but should have a hunger and desire to read, study, and share the Word of God. The group leader needs to be able to

facilitate the group meetings, a process that includes regulating discussion so that all members have an opportunity to participate. It also means that the leader will guide the discussion away from harmful or unhelpful topics. The group leader has the responsibility to grow in relationships with the other members. The leader sets the tone for the group and promotes fellowship, love, and relationships.

Bible engagement. Small group leaders need to have a desire for God's Word that is contagious. The personal habits of the leader must include spending time with God through His Word and prayer. Discipleship includes learning and living God's Word. Small group meetings will focus on sermon-based Bible studies, so the leader must be faithful to attend worship services and to prayerfully listen to the sermon. The focus on sermon-based Bible study will help ease the leader's time needed for preparation in some way because the group will have heard and studied the text. The context and exegesis of the text will be supplied through the sermon. A list of study questions will be provided as the basis of the study. The group can spend their time digging deeper into Scripture and applying it to their lives.

The leader does not have to know everything about the Bible. He or she does not have to have all the answers to every question. But the leader should come to the meetings prepared, having studied the lesson and able to guide the discussion in an informed manner. One of the great things about a small group Bible study is that the group can work together to find the answers to any question that may arise.

The attitude of the leader toward the Bible is very important. Is there an excitement about studying the Word? Is there a reverence for the Word, and a realization that the Bible is alive and active and sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12)? Is there a desire to be obedient to the Word and to live it out each day? Is there a desire to be changed by the Word and for God to use His Word to mature others? This kind of attitude will go a long way in helping the group seriously study God's Word.

Facilitator. A good small group leader needs to be a good facilitator. A facilitator is one who leads the discussion that takes place in a group. If one person is talking too much, a facilitator will regain control of the group and make sure that no one person dominates the discussion. If the group does not pray enough, then the facilitator will make sure to provide extra time for prayer. If the group begins to gossip, then the facilitator will put a stop to it and redirect the conversation. Facilitators guide the discussion.

An important aspect of being a facilitator is helping all members to be involved in the discussion. This is important in the meetings as the Bible is being discussed. It requires wisdom to encourage others to participate in the discussion, but not to force someone to do something that they do not want to do. A good facilitator will make sure that every member has ample opportunity to participate and will respect each person's contribution to the discussion.

Clarifying and asking questions are an important role of the facilitator. If the leader of the group feels that he needs more information to clarify what is being said, then the other members of the group likely feel the same way. At times there will be a disconnect in a conversation that becomes apparent. What has been said might not have been understood by the group. Clarifying is seeking the clear meaning of a statement that is ambiguous. This is accomplished by asking questions to obtain the information that will make the meaning clearer.

Clarification is needed when dealing with emotional issues. When a person states that they are experiencing feelings of emotion, then the feelings need to be clarified. What kind of feelings are you experiencing? When did you begin to feel this way? What is causing you to feel this way. Clarifying questions can help a person identify and process emotions.

Clarification is needed when a statement is contradictory or seems to say one thing but imply another. These kinds of statements often point to mixed emotions about an

experience and may need to be thought out. Repeating the statement back to the person might help the person to see the contradiction and lead to more information being shared.

Some clarifying questions are helpful when there are gaps in what is being said. To understand a statement, more information might be needed. People often assume that others can read between the lines and that they should know the background of the story. The reality is that one cannot rely on people reading between the lines. Most of the time people need more information to understand what is being said.

Growing relationships. Jesus was once asked a question about the greatest of the commandments. He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment (Matt 22:37-38). Jesus clearly states that relationships are of primary importance in a Christian’s life.

A growing relationship with Jesus is one of the most important traits for a group leader. It is about loving Jesus and spending time with Jesus. It means obeying Jesus because of love. It means desiring to serve Jesus and to lead others to love and serve Jesus. A person who is growing in their relationship with Christ will influence others to seek God and to grow in their relationship with Christ.

Larry Osborne writes concerning the important traits to look for in a group leader: “The most important trait to look for is spiritual warmth.”⁹ He goes on to explain that spiritual warmth is a warm and growing relationship with God. A person might be biblically sound, knowledgeable, gifted, and have good people skills, but these cannot take the place of a growing relationship with Jesus.

A growing relationship with others is equally important for a group leader. We have already looked at how Jesus responded to the question, “Which is the greatest of the commandments?” The answer Jesus gives includes the importance of loving neighbors.

⁹ Larry Osborne, *Sticky Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 124.

Jesus said, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). Disciples are to grow in their fellowship with God and with other believers. Group leaders especially need to be relationship oriented.

The desire to grow in community will begin in the group leader. The example that is set will define the group. A group leader does not need to be extroverted or charismatic but has to be a person who loves others and desires to develop relationships with others. This type of relational warmth will attract others and set the tone of the group. The condition of the heart is the issue. If the leader’s heart is right, then there will be growing relationships in their life. He or she will love God with their heart and will love their neighbors with their heart.

Lesson 8 was titled “Dealing with Potential Problems” and was taken from Proverbs 11:13. This lesson addressed four potential problems that many small groups have experienced and how to prevent them from happening among small groups. The problems of gossip, cliques, conversation hijackers, and neediness were discussed. Other issues were suggested in the class and discussed.

Gossip. Gossip is an inherent problem in a group where people share their struggles and temptations. Human nature tends toward sinful behavior including how we use our words. James wrote, “If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless” (Jas 1:26). Scripture also says, “Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered” (Prov 11:13). It is clear that gossip is something that God does not approve of, and something that must be discouraged in a small group.

Small groups must fight against gossip from their first meeting. The group should be established as a safe place, a place where members can openly share. One church member recently put it like this, “A safe place is where you don’t have to worry that what you say tonight is going to be on Facebook tomorrow.” The group’s covenant should address gossip and set structures which will ensure that gossip is not allowed.

Prayer requests need to remain prayer requests and should only be shared with others if requested. One way to limit gossip is to share requests without specific names, places, or situations. If prayers requests are not kept confidential, then small groups will never develop a place where transparency is able to occur.

There needs to be accountability concerning gossip within a small group, each member reminding the others about the need for confidentiality. Also, the group leader needs to make sure that the conversation in the group does not center around a person who is not present in the group. It is not appropriate to use group time to gossip about someone else. Also, beware of gossip about the church in general. This type of gossip should be stopped immediately.

Cliques. A clique can be defined as a small group of people, with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them. This is a danger that must be prevented. The problem arises when a group decides that it will close itself to new members. It usually occurs when a group becomes inward focused and comfortable with each other.

A small group should enjoy each other's company, spending time together and growing in their relationships. The problem occurs when the group decides to close itself off to others. The group must constantly be reminded that there is a responsibility to grow the group. Missions and outreach are a part of what a small group is all about. Small groups can be the best way to invite unchurched and lost friends to come and hear God's Word. It is a way to bring people into the church in a manner which may be less threatening for some.

A small group is not to take the place of the church. It is to be part of the work of the church. Small group members are still part of the church as a whole and must remain integrated into the worship and mission of the church. An outward focus is to be reinforced in the group.

Conversation Hijackers. There are two extremes in a small group. Some need to be encouraged to talk more and others will need to be encouraged to listen more. Small groups are a place where it is important to allow everyone to share and be a part of the conversation. Occasionally there will be members who love the spotlight. These are the ones who will dominate the conversation to a point of distraction. Beware of those who want to share about another person's feelings and emotions. Each person should talk about themselves, allowing time for others to share.

Silence is a problem for some. When there is a lull in the discussion, some may try to jump in and speak for the purpose of breaking the silence. The problem is that God often uses the silence. This is a time when members may be processing what has been discussed. They may be dealing with emotions and memories and not ready to continue right away.

A person who talks too much can be a serious problem if left unchecked. There are times when one person may need to talk more because of circumstances of life, but when this happens continually it needs to be dealt with. When a person continues to talk too much no one is helped. The group can become alienated and resentful. Dealing with a conversation hog should be resolved by the group leader along with the group. The structure of the group will help with this issue. The leader might need to interrupt the person and say that we need to hear from another member of the group. The group may address the problem and include something in their covenant concerning the importance of everyone having the opportunity to share. Often, a conversation hog is unaware that what they are doing is a problem. They may see themselves as positively impacting the discussion. They need to be reassured that what they have to say is important while also understanding that others have important things to share as well.

Neediness. Neediness can be defined as being incomplete or lacking. God often uses neediness to help us seek Him and to mature us as believers. In Scripture, God promises to help the needy: "For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who

have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death” (Ps 72:12-13). Neediness can cause problems in a small group. Cloud and Townsend list several other potential problems that may need to be addressed in a small group “Taking up too much group time. . . . Constant crises that never get resolved. . . . Emotional dependency that the group cannot meet. . . . Inability to be comforted. . . . Not taking group advice. . . . Seeing the group as ‘not enough.’”¹⁰

Some of the core issues of neediness include an inability to connect with others. In this case, a group might reach out to the person with support, but the person cannot receive it. There are many reasons this might happen. The person may be afraid to accept support, or he might not know how. Group members ultimately need to connect to each other. Often the relationship is more important than the advice given by the group.

There is a deep-seated loneliness that may require resources beyond what the group has to offer. This person might need to seek professional Christian counseling. However, the group can still provide comfort, support, compassion, and guidance. The group leader will need to evaluate the situation and consult with the pastor about seeking a solution to the problem.

Small Group Meetings

Leading up to weeks 9-20, group leaders and group hosts were chosen. Then the groups were formed. Each group contained a strong nucleus of four which could be built upon. The groups were launched in week 9 and met each week for twelve weeks.

Week 9

Week 9 was a very exciting week for EHBC. The church had been learning about small groups and were ready to put what they had learned into practice. The group leaders and the group hosts had been chosen and trained for their positions. The formation

¹⁰ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 253-54.

of the groups was accomplished in three phases. The first phase was forming a core group which included two couples who enjoyed each other's company and who lived in close proximity to one another. Each group included a group leader and a group host. The second phase was to invite each church member to become involved with one of the groups. The third phase was to invite unchurched friends, neighbors, and coworkers to attend one of the small groups.

Four groups were formed during phase 1 from the members who responded with an interest in participating. Group 1 consisted of two couples in the 20-to-30-year age group. One was appointed group leader and one couple volunteered to be the group host. Group 2 consisted of two couples in the 40-to-50-year age group. This group also appointed a group leader and a group host. Group 3 consisted of two couples in the 60-to-70-year age group. This group also had a group leader and a group host. Group 4 consisted of a group of ladies who had approached me about their desire to form a group. The group consisted of four ladies with one agreeing to be the group leader and another agreeing to be the group host.

The first agenda of the new small groups was to form a Small Group Covenant. This covenant was important to set the boundaries of the group and to lead members to make a commitment to faithfully prepare for and attend each group small group meeting. Each group determined when and where they would meet. They established how the children of the group members would be cared for. They also signed the covenant as a commitment to carry out the responsibilities of a small group member.

Before each Sunday morning worship service, the small group members were supplied with a list of questions that would be discussed in the sermon-based Bible study. The study questions contained four types of questions. One question intended to promote conversation. This question was connected to the subject of the sermon in a general way but was simple and interesting. The second type of question was designed to hear responses to the sermon. It tried to get members to share something they learned from the sermon or

had questions about from the sermon. The third type of question consisted of cross-referencing verses that would support and clarify the sermon, leading to further discussion. The fourth type of question was designed to lead the group to apply the sermon to their lives.

Each group reported that the meetings were enjoyable and helpful. The group leaders followed their training by focusing the meetings on the Bible study. Each group spent time in fellowship with refreshments and finished with a time of prayer, but the majority of the group time was dedicated to the study of God's Word.

Weeks 10-20

During the remainder of the twelve weeks, each group met with only a few missed meetings. The meetings focused on fellowship, Bible study, and building relationships. Each group did things a little different as they began to personalize the meetings around the needs of its members. The testimonies and feedback that I heard during these weeks encouraged me greatly. The joy and excitement over the small groups was evident in the members and in the church as a whole. I realized that the project was making an impact at EHBC and that discipleship was being revitalized.

Project Evaluation

During weeks 21 and 22, the ministry project was evaluated and reviewed. The review included input from group members as well as discussion with group leaders and the Church Council. The effectiveness of the project was determined by evaluating the success of reaching or exceeding the goals that had been set.

In addition, during this time I reviewed the lessons and sermons from the project and developed an outline for chapter 5 of this project. My hope is this project would provide a sustainable method of making disciples at EHBC and that it might be replicable for other churches who desire to revitalize discipleship and to faithfully obey the Great Commission.

Conclusion

This project was intended to revitalize discipleship at EHBC through small groups. A biblical foundation was laid for the church to understand the importance of fulfilling the Great Commission to faithfully make disciples through small groups. As I conducted research, I realized that EHBC had lost its commitment to making disciples as a church. The lack of discipleship had led to problems in unity, a lack of fellowship, a need for Christian growth, and a faltering prayer ministry.

The effort to revitalize discipleship is ongoing but has already made an impact on the church. This project has revitalized discipleship at EHBC. It helped to define the mission of the church and set the direction of the church. The project brought an excitement to the church as the leadership has joined together to support the small groups. The members have discovered the joy and blessing of being a part of a small group focused on consistent fellowship, Bible study, and transparent prayer. The members are excited about seeing their groups grow in number and in Christian maturity. The members have discovered that small groups are a great place to receive support and encouragement. Prayerfully, trusting in God and His power, the work of revitalization will continue as small groups are evaluated and improvements are made.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The evaluation of this project is an examination of its purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. Additionally, possible modifications will be examined that might improve the effectiveness of the project. Finally, theological and personal observations will be included.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to revitalize discipleship through small groups at East Hickman Baptist Church in Lyles, Tennessee. This purpose was appropriate because EHBC had plateaued in the area of discipleship. There was a need for a project that would bring energy and excitement to EHBC for obeying the Great Commission.

During my ministry at EHBC we had tried to develop a discipleship ministry that paired mature believers with new believers in one-on-one discipleship. The ministry lasted for several years but began to fail as interest waned. There was little or no organized discipleship taking place at EHBC. As the pastor, I was concerned that the church was failing to provide a means of in-depth Bible study, a place for fellowship and growing relationships among the members, a means of training and developing teachers and leaders, and a way to encourage evangelism and outreach.

The church was doing well in many areas but seemed to have become cold and apathetic toward discipleship. I believed that this project could bring a new energy and excitement to EHBC as the church learned that small groups were biblical, theologically sound, and could be fun and fulfilling in their personal spiritual development.

God's timing was seen in the planning, development, and execution of this project. The Covid-19 pandemic affected EHBC in similar ways to other churches. The church was completely shut down for two months except for social media. As the church began to open up, attendance was down by around 50 percent, although many were still worshipping from home by watching services online. When the time came for the project to begin, people were just beginning to return to services and were open to the idea of meeting in smaller groups. The church's excitement was a surprise and a blessing to me as the pastor. There seemed to be a desire for human contact from the people who had isolated themselves. By the time the small groups began to meet, attendance was back to 75 percent of pre-pandemic attendance. By the end of the twelve-week small group meetings, attendance was back to what it was prior to the COVID outbreak and looked likely to continue growing.

The project also helped the church in many ways that are difficult to quantify. The morale of the members seemed to be very high. A palpable excitement among small group members was noticeable to all, even those not involved in the small groups. There was a refreshing absence of bickering as the church began to experience unity. Fellowship among members was growing and relationships were developing as the members spent more time together outside the walls of the church. A renewed excitement over God's Word was evident during the Sunday morning worship time. Members were noticeably listening and taking notes during the preaching of the Word. There was an increase in prayer and an increase of transparency where people were sharing real needs and struggles. There was also a growing interest in reaching those who are unchurched and in seeing the small groups grow.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Four goals were chosen as the means of accomplishing the purpose of this project and to measure its success. The goals were designed to ensure that the need for the project was understood by the project participants, that a theological and biblical

foundation for the project would be established, and that the practical aspects of being a small group member or leader were understood. The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among the members of EHBC. The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the biblical command for the church to make disciples. The third goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip those who would be members and leaders of small groups. The fourth goal was to create at least three new small groups.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess the current discipleship practices among the members of EHBC. The Discipleship Assessment Survey (DAS) was administered among the adults of EHBC during week 4 of the project. The DAS was developed by Lifeway and was designed to measure discipleship in eight areas: biblical engagement, obeying God, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, building relationships, and unashamed transparency. Participants were asked to answer according to their degree of agreement or disagreement with thirty-one statements on the DAS. Nine statements asked for the participant to answer with the number of times that they did a certain thing. Forty responses were included in the DAS evenly divided between the eight areas being assessed. A Likert scale of “1” to “5” was used to assign a point value to each response. The higher points were given to the responses that showed a greater degree of discipleship practices.

The highest score possible for the DAS was 200. The average score of those who participated was 159, the lowest being 119 and the highest being 185. I discovered four things as I reviewed the DAS results. First, the participants scored well in most areas. The responses showed that participants desired to be discipled and to be disciple makers. Most participants were involved with discipling practices. The highest scores were in the area of exercising faith, biblical engagement, and seeking God. The lowest areas included

unashamed transparency, serving God and others, and sharing Christ. In the middle were the areas of building relationships and obeying God.

Second, I discovered that the areas that were lacking the most could be improved through the use of small groups. The areas of building relationships, unashamed transparency, and serving God and others would be immediately impacted by participating in a small group. The other areas would be strengthened as well. The DAS showed that there was a need for discipleship to be revitalized at EHBC.

Third, there were areas which had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. The area of sharing Christ in particular scored low, in part because the church had suspended visitation and outreach programs that included going out in the community and sharing the gospel. The isolation required for Covid prevention had made it difficult for participants to witness or invite others to church services. Some scored high in this area, but for many it was their lowest score. Small groups would provide an opportunity to improve EHBC outreach.

Fourth, I discovered that there was a real interest in discipleship which gave me hope that EHBC would respond well to small groups. This goal was considered successfully met when the members completed the surveys, and the results were compiled.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a four-week sermon series on the biblical command for the church to make disciples. This goal was designed to achieve the purpose of this project. The sermons were to lay a biblical and theological foundation for the project through an exegesis of Scripture. The first sermon focused on the Great Commission and showed that the mission of the church and all believers is to make disciples. The second through fourth sermons considered the disciple making ministries of Jesus, the early church, and the apostle Paul. The focus was on the use of small groups for making disciples.

The sermons were developed using the material from the research previously completed in chapters 2 and 3. When the sermons were completed, a copy was sent to each of the Church Council members along with the Discipleship Sermon Series Evaluation Rubric (DSSER).

The sermons were evaluated in three areas: biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance. A total of seven statements were given to gauge the effectiveness of the sermons. Each statement marked with an “exemplary” or “sufficient” carried a score of 10; each statement marked “requires attention” or “insufficient” carried a score of 0. Goal 2 would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. The results of the DSSER showed a 100 percent score, each evaluation showing a sufficient or exemplary response. The 100 percent score on the DSSER meant that goal 2 was successfully met.

The Church Council and I met each week before and after the sermons were delivered and discussed them in detail. The meetings with the Church Council proved helpful in developing the sermons. Many of the suggestions I received helped to focus the sermon and to answer questions in the sermon which had not been adequately addressed. Additionally, the comments and discussions were encouraging to me as a pastor.

The four weeks that the sermons were delivered were fruitful in four ways. First, the biblical foundation for small groups was established. The comments I received showed that the church members were getting excited about the idea of being able to obey the Great Commission by forming and participating in small groups. Many relayed to me that before the sermons they were unsure if small groups were biblical or necessary. After the sermons they commented on how they could see that small groups were biblical, the best way to make disciples, and that EHBC needed to move forward with the project. Second, many decisions were made during the four-week sermon series. Two people were saved and made professions of faith, were baptized, and became church members. In addition, several made recommitments to the Lord Jesus. Third, many members made

commitments to participate in a small group, Fourth, there was a sense of unity and purpose in the church. The members seemed excited and ready to begin the project.

Goal 3

The third goal was to develop an eight-session curriculum to equip those who will lead or participate in the small groups. The curriculum focused on practical issues concerning being a part of a small group or a small group leader. The curriculum was developed using the material from the research previously completed in chapters 2 and 3. When the curriculum was completed, a copy was sent to each of the Church Council members along with the Small Group Curriculum Rubric (SGCR).

The curriculum was evaluated in four areas: biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. Eight statements were given to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum. Each statement marked with an “exemplary” or “sufficient” carried a score of 10; each statement marked “requires attention” or “insufficient” carried a score of 0. Goal 3 would be considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level. The results of the SGCR showed a 100 percent score, each evaluation showing a sufficient or exemplary response. The 100 percent score on the DSSER meant that goal 2 was successfully met.

The eight lessons were taught over a four-week period, with two lessons given each week. Each lesson contained several discussion questions to encourage participation. The curriculum was well accepted and answered most of the questions from the participants. There was time for questions and discussion that proved helpful. By the conclusion of the curriculum, participants were well informed about what was expected of them as small group members, group leaders, or group hosts.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to create at least three new small groups who would meet for at least three months. The formation of the groups was a matter of much prayer. The groups were formed around a core group of two couples and their family members. One person in the core group would be the small group leader while the other couple would be the small group hosts. Four core groups were formed that consisted of couples that were close in age and lived in the same vicinity. The couples were chosen from the participants who had attended the services when the sermon series was delivered and had attended the eight-lesson curriculum. The other members were encouraged to join one of the four groups. A total of 42 participated in the small groups. This number represented over 40 percent of the Sunday morning attendance of EHBC. The small groups met from week 9 through week 20, meeting the three-month goal. This goal was considered successfully met when at least three small groups had been formed and had met for at least three months.

Strengths of the Project

In my analysis of the four goals, I identified four primary strengths of the project. First, the DAS enabled me to develop a picture of the attitudes and actions of EHBC concerning discipleship. Without the DAS I would not have known the areas of discipleship in which the church was strong, and which areas needed to improve. The results of the DA showed that the church had a desire to be disciplined and to make disciples. Additionally, it showed that the church needed a structured plan on how to accomplish the task of discipleship and to be obedient to the Great Commission. The DAS helped participants exam their lives and see the areas that needed to be improved and led them to seek a way to grow in discipleship. The DAS showed that there was a need for small groups to be formed to revitalize discipleship at EHBC.

Second, the Revitalizing Discipleship Sermon Series drew a strong emphasis on the mission of the church to make disciples. The sermon on the Great Commission

showed that Jesus had given the church its mission: to go and make disciples. It also gave a biblical and theological foundation for using small groups as the means for discipling others. Jesus used small groups for making disciples and the early church did as well. These examples showed and set a pattern for today's church to follow. The sermons were enhanced by the input of the Church Council.

Third, the eight-session Small Group Curriculum (SGC) proved to be practical in addressing the expectations and responsibilities of the group members, group hosts, and group leaders. The curriculum showed the importance of meeting regularly with a small group for in-depth Bible study, Christian fellowship, developing relationships, and to be transparent in prayer.

The SGC helped participants understand what would take place in the meetings and see how the meetings could help them grow as disciples. The result was excitement among participants to be a part of a small group and an eagerness to start the groups. The discussion during the classes added to the positive results.

Additionally, the SGC proved to be a strength in the way it prepared those who would be leaders of the small groups. The group leaders and the group hosts were well prepared when the small groups began to meet.

Fourth, the sermon-based Bible studies proved to be a strength of the project and improved Bible study at EHBC in five ways. First, the small group members were more faithful in their attendance during Sunday morning services. There seemed to be an excitement to see what the sermon was about and to hear the sermon. Second, the viewership of the sermon broadcast over the internet increased. Members who were helping in the nursery or serving in Children's Church were able to watch the services later in the week. Third, the members listened more intensively to the sermon. I could see that more people were taking notes during the sermon. Fourth, the sermon-based Bible study helped the unity of the church. The small group members were doing the same studies and were able to discuss them with one another. Fifth, the Bible studies helped the

members dig deeper into God's Word. This result came from discussing the sermon with others and from searching for answers to questions that were raised.

Weaknesses of the Project

I identified two weaknesses in the project. One weakness of the project was the failure to reach out to those outside of the church. The project was designed to have three phases. Phase 1 was to form core groups that included a group leader and a group host. Phase 2 was to assign the church members to a group. Phase 3 was to reach out to the unchurched and lost in the community and invite them to join a small group. The first phase was accomplished quickly, but phase 2 took several weeks. The three months expired before the third phase could be fully implemented. There were individuals who reached out to friends and acquaintances, but the success of reaching the community was limited. The project should have provided the training and emphasis on reaching out to the community from the beginning.

A second weakness was the failure of one group to meet consistently. This group consisted of younger members with small children and busy schedules. There was a reluctance in this group to sign a group covenant, and this lack of commitment, along with the busy schedules, resulted in several missed meetings. The project should have provided a better plan for those who have busy schedules and described how to be creative concerning when to meet each week. The project should have emphasized the necessity of a group covenant and the commitment to meet regularly.

Proposed Modifications

The modifications I propose for the project address the two weaknesses of the project. First, given the opportunity to repeat this project, I would include more in the curriculum about the importance of reaching the lost and unchurched. I would begin earlier to encourage the groups to invite their friends and acquaintances and to actively reach out

into the community. I would encourage each group to perform a ministry project during the three-month period. These issues could be addressed in the curriculum.

Second, I would include training in the curriculum concerning working around busy schedules in a creative way. More emphasis would be placed on the commitment required in discipleship and the importance that regularly meetings play in growing as a disciple.

Theological Observations

My desire for this project was to equip the local church to create and maintain a biblically and theologically sound way to be obedient to the Great Commission. The Great Commission was the theological foundation for this project, and the sermons were designed to show that making disciples is the mission of the church and that using small groups to accomplish the mission was theologically and biblically sound.

Christians follow the example set by Jesus Christ. Jesus used small groups for making disciples. All four gospels record that Jesus called disciples who followed Him and were taught to grow in their faith and to make other disciples. Small groups were the method Jesus used to prepare His disciples for the task which awaited them after His ascension.

The early church also set an example for the modern church that included using small groups to make disciples. The tremendous growth of the early church necessitated a way to train and disciple the many new believers. The church met from house to house, and fellowship, prayer, and Scripture learning took place.

The love of God is seen in His desire to see all nations reached with the gospel of Jesus Christ. God has provided a plan for reaching the world with the message of hope, forgiveness, and salvation from sin. God's plan provides a way to train and mature those born again into His kingdom. The modern church has the opportunity to reach the world for Jesus and to disciple those who are saved.

Personal Observations

The development and implementation of this project revitalized within me a desire to grow in discipleship and to be a disciple maker. I have been blessed personally from being a part of a small group. The time I spent being disciplined led to Christian growth, lasting relationships, and a sense of calling to preach the gospel and disciple others. This ministry project was an exciting journey that has been a true blessing.

At the outset of this ministry project, I had a concern for the lack of excitement at EHBC for discipleship. I prayed that God would help me as a pastor find a way for the church to be revitalized in the area of discipleship. There were some sleepless nights as I worried that EHBC might not accept the direction it needed to go. I was blessed to discover that the church accepted and embraced the ministry project. I have been revitalized as well as a result of the small group and look forward to continuing the small group ministry.

Conclusion

The project participants and I have been challenged, encouraged, and blessed by this journey into small group ministry. The project was something new for EHBC. Many had not heard of small groups ministries. Therefore, the church had some initial hesitation. The sermons were essential for the success of this project. They allowed the church to see that small groups were biblical. The lessons were essential in a practical way, helping the church understand what happens in a small group and how small groups could help them to grow in their Christian walk and fulfill the Great Commission.

The time devoted to this ministry project has proven to be a successful beginning to revitalizing discipleship at EHBC. It remains to be seen if the small groups will be utilized to its fullest potential, but I am encouraged by the immediate impact made on EHBC. People's lives have been changed as they learned to dig deeper into God's Word, experienced transparency in prayer, and grew in fellowship with other believers. Relationships have been strengthened over the course of this project. I have hope that this project will continue to lead EHBC to be a faithful Great Commission church.

APPENDIX 1

THE DISCIPLESHIP ASSESSMENT

Source: reproduced with permission from Lifeway Christian Resources. The font of the TDA remains as issued under copyright by Lifeway.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to determine attitudes and actions of discipleship. This research is being conducted by Fred Quintanilla for purposes of project research. In this research, you will circle the correct response. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

Each of the following statements contains a group of choices; select the one that best describes you. While responding, keep your focus on your current attitudes and behavior.

Discipleship Assessment Survey

1. During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
2. If I go several days without reading my Bible, I find myself unfilled.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
3. I expect my Christian friends to challenge me if I make unwise choices.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

4. With reference to my values and priorities, I can honestly say that I try to put God first in my life.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
5. When I sing at church, my thoughts are usually focused right on God.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
6. While interacting with others on a normal daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
7. I know what spiritual gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given me.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
8. I have been personally discipled through a relational small group/discipleship group process.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
9. I believe that God has a purpose for all events in my life, regardless of whether I perceive each event as being good or bad.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
10. Reading and studying the Bible has not made a significant change in the way I live my life.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

11. I have developed a significant relationship with people at my church.
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

12. When I realize that I have a choice between “my way” and “God’s way”, I usually choose my way.
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

13. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for prayer of any kind? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.
 - Every Day
 - A Few Times a Week
 - A Few Times a Month
 - Once a Month
 - Rarely/Never

14. I intentionally spend time building relationships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

15. I regularly use my gifts and talents to serve/help people in need who are not part of my church.
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

16. I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith (apart from Sunday School/Small Groups).
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

17. When things happen that I can’t explain, I typically doubt that God is involved.
 - Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

18. Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
19. I openly share difficulties I am experiencing when I talk with Christian friends.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
20. When I come to realize some aspect of my life is not right in God's eyes, I make the necessary changes.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
21. Many people who know me are not aware that I'm a Christian.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
22. I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
23. It is important for me to be mentored in order to grow in my faith.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree
24. I often express praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and what He has done.
Strongly agree
Somewhat agree
Neither Agree or Disagree
Somewhat Disagree
Strongly Disagree

25. About how often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.
- Every Day
 - A Few Times a Week
 - A Few Times a Month
 - Once a Month
 - Rarely/Never
26. I intentionally try to get to know people I meet at church.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
27. When I realize my attitude does not please God, I take steps to try and fix it.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
28. About how often, if at all, do you personally confess your sins and wrongdoings to God and ask for forgiveness? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.
- Every Day
 - A Few Times a Week
 - A Few Times a Month
 - Once a Month
 - Rarely/ Never
29. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.
- Every Day
 - A Few Times a Week
 - A Few Times a Month
 - Once a Month
 - Rarely/Never
30. In the past six months, about how many times have you personally invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?
- 10 or More Times
 - 6-9 Times
 - 3-5 Times
 - 1-2 Times
 - Zero

31. I am currently involved in ministries or projects that serve people in the community not affiliated with our church.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
32. I believe it is my personal responsibility to pour my life into other people in order to make disciples.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
33. I express praise and gratitude to God even in difficult circumstances.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
34. About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more-in-depth than just reading it)? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.
- Every Day
 - A Few Times a Week
 - A Few Times a Month
 - Once a Month
 - Rarely/Never
35. I hesitate to share with Christian friends about my own doubts and spiritual struggles.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
36. In the past six months, about how many times have you personally made a decision to obey or follow God with an awareness that choosing His way might be costly to you in some way?
- 10 or More Times
 - 6-9 Times
 - 3-5 Times
 - 1-2 Times
 - Zero
37. In the typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend worship service at your church?
- 10 or More Times
 - 6-9 Times
 - 3-5 Times
 - 1-2 Times
 - Zero

38. In the past six months, about how many times have you personally shared with someone how to become a Christian?
- 10 or More Times
 - 6-9 Times
 - 3-5 Times
 - 1-2 Times
 - Zero
39. I currently have regular responsibilities at church serving (other than committees) in ministries like greeter, teacher, musician, etc.?
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
40. Participation in a local church is a necessity (not optional) for any believer who desires to be truly obedient to God.
- Strongly agree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Somewhat Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Discipleship Survey Key:

Bible Engagement 2, 10, 18, 25, 34
Obeying God 4, 12, 20, 27, 36, 40
Serving God and Others 7, 15, 22, 31, 39
Sharing Christ 6, 14, 21, 29, 30
Exercising Faith 1, 9, 17, 24, 33
Seeking God 5, 13, 28, 37
Building Relationships 8, 16, 23, 32
Unashamed Transparency 3, 11, 19, 26, 35

APPENDIX 2

DISCIPLESHIP SERMON SERIES
EVALUATION RUBRIC

Discipleship Sermon Series Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The sermon exemplified solid expository principles.					
The sermon's "big idea" was clear.					
The sermon was biblically sound.					
The sermon included proper and appropriate illustrations.					
The sermon properly applied the text to the lives of the hearers.					
The sermon was clear.					
The sermon was relevant to the hearers.					

APPENDIX 3

SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM RUBRIC

Small Group Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1= insufficient 2=requires attention 3= sufficient 4=exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The lesson is clearly relevant to the issue of biblical small groups.					
The lesson clearly defines and applies some aspect of the gospel.					
The material is biblically and theologically sound.					
The thesis of the lesson is clearly stated.					
The points of the lesson clearly support the thesis.					
The lesson contains points of practical application.					
The lesson is sufficiently thorough in its coverage of the material.					
Overall, the lesson is clearly presented.					

APPENDIX 4

REVITALIZING DISCIPLESHIP SERMON SERIES

Sermon 1. The Mission of the Church- Making Disciples. Matthew 28:18-20

Sermon 2. The Method of Jesus For Making Disciples. Matthew. 4:18-22

Sermon 3. The Model of the Early Church for Making Disciples. Acts 2:42-47

Sermon 4. The Mandate of the Apostle Paul to Continue Making Disciples. 2 Timothy 2:1-2

Sermon 1. The Mission of the Church- Making Disciples Matthew 28:18-20

Introduction

What is the mission of the Church? If you took a survey you might get several answers. Some might answer, “To glorify God and enjoy Him forever”, from the Apostle’s Creed. Someone else might answer, “To love God and to love your neighbor”, the greatest of the commandments. Kevin DeYoung argues in his book, “*What is the Mission of the Church*”, that if you define mission as living a faithful Christian life there are dozens of ways to answer the question. But the word mission implies two things. We are sent and we are given a task to accomplish. For an example, the Fire Chief defines the mission of the fire department when they respond to a fire. He defines the objectives of putting out the fire and protecting lives and property. He assigns the members of the fire crew to certain tasks that will allow them to accomplish the mission. Another example is the military. The commanding officer will define the mission. He will instruct the members of the military unit of the objectives of defeating the enemy and gaining control of a target area. It is important to understand what our mission is as a church if we are

going to accomplish the mission. The Church finds its mission in Matthew 28:18-20. The Church has been sent into the world to witness to Jesus Christ by proclaiming the Gospel message, and to make disciples of all nations.

The context

The context of the Great Commission is important. The Commission comes at the end of Matthew's Gospel and in a sense is a culmination of the entire book. Matthews Gospel focuses on,

1. The gospel is for all people.
2. The need for discipleship in establishing the Church.
3. Obeying the commands of Christ.
4. The abiding presence of Jesus Christ.

The Great Commission is the final instructions to the disciples and the church as Jesus prepares to ascend into heaven. It is the climax and conclusion of Matthew's Gospel.

I. The purpose of the mission- make disciples.

As a church we have been given a clear mission by our Lord Jesus Christ. We have been instructed to make disciples. The mission implies more than just the first steps of evangelism. After a person makes a profession of faith there is to be a following of Jesus, which includes baptism. Baptism is the rite of immersion in water. Willoughby C. Allen argues that baptism is a rite that presupposes several things not always expressed, including that the person baptized has repented of his sins and the consequent forgiveness of them (Acts 2:38). Baptism also implies belief in Christ. The person baptized expressed this belief and was regarded after baptism as a disciple of Christ.¹

Teaching is the heart of discipleship (v. 20). The importance of obedience to the commands of Jesus cannot be overstated. Making disciples includes being taught the Bible, then maturing to a point where one is able to teach others. Discipleship is seen as a

¹ Willoughby C. Allen, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, vol. 26 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901), 308.

lifelong discipline, which includes the making of disciples. John Phillips writes, “The call is to evangelism, enlistment, enlightenment, and discipleship.”²

Teaching believers to obey all the commands of Jesus shows that a deep level of commitment is required to be a disciple of Jesus. The word “all” shows the comprehensive nature of the teachings of Christ. His teachings are relevant in every area of life. A disciple must be willing to commit all his life to Jesus and be willing to obey all the commands of Christ.

Learning to obey all the commands of Jesus demands a lifetime of learning. Discipleship is not a sprint; it is a marathon. Discipleship requires the application of the teachings of Jesus to real life situations. This process cannot be hurried. It requires living life in community with others. The need for guidance, accountability, and encouragement are crucial for growing in the Christian faith. Small groups can provide the long-term relationships required for discipleship.

II. The scope of the mission- all nations.

The scope of the mission is “all nations.” Matthew uses the Greek phrase *panta ta ethne*. Matthew’s use of the *ethne* seems to refer to all people, Jews and Gentiles (Matt 24:9,14; 25:32). Matthew is not saying that the Jews are rejected by God and to only go to the Gentiles; rather, he is saying that the disciples were to go to all peoples, Jew and Gentile. We must not be guilty of a selective outreach for Jesus. All people need to hear the gospel and have an opportunity to give their lives to Jesus.

The Plan of God from the beginning was to see believers from all nations. In Genesis we read, “Abraham will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through you”. (Gen. 18:18) We see the final accomplishment in heaven as recorded in the book of Revelation, “After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe,

² John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 548.

people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.” (Rev. 7:9) We as a church need to have a bigger vision, a vision which is consistent with our mission. A vision to see Jesus glorified and worshipped by all nations.

III. The authority for the mission- the Son of God.

The Great Commission begins with a claim of authority. Jesus states that all authority, both in heaven and on earth, has been given to him (v. 18). This is a claim of divinity, because only God can claim authority over His creation. Do we believe this? We need to be convinced of the full authority of Jesus Christ. We are obeying the Great Commission in the authority of Jesus.

Matthew’s Gospel shows the authority of Jesus in many ways. He has authority over,

1. nature (8:26) Jesus calmed the seas.
2. disease (4:23-24) Jesus healed all kinds of sickness and disease.
3. demons (8:28-34) Jesus cast out demons.
4. sin (9:1-7) Jesus forgave sin.
5. death (28:6) Jesus rose from the dead.

Jesus as the Son of God has the divine claim of authority over all things. The statement of all authority is an allusion to Daniel 7:13-14 where the heavenly Son of Man figure appears. The authority that belongs to Jesus allows Him to give the command for His followers to go and make disciples. A. T. Robertson writes, “His authority or power in his earthly life had been great. Now it is boundless and includes earth and heaven.”³

Christians have the authority to represent Jesus in the world and to teach the Word of God. This authority includes the promise that Jesus would always be with his disciples, and that the Holy Spirit would guide their words. Our response as a church to obey the commands of Jesus and to operate with the authority that we have been given by Jesus.

³ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Gospel According to Matthew, the Gospel According to Mark*, Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman, 1930), 244.

IV. The promise for the mission- the presence of Jesus

The Great Commission concludes with a promise from Jesus to his disciples. Jesus promises that he will be with his disciples until the end of the age (v. 20). This promise provides comforting words for a group of disciples who will soon experience the departure of Jesus from their midst. The promise meant that whatever the disciples faced in the days ahead, that they would face it with faith because their Lord and Savior would be with them.

David Livingstone is an excellent example of one who relied upon the promise of God's presence. He spent sixteen years as a missionary in Africa and was often faced with danger. Concerning the promise of Jesus' presence found in the Great Commission, Livingstone was fond of saying, "It is the word of a gentleman of the most sacred and strictest honor."⁴ Livingstone lived in a time when a gentleman was recognized as a person who would always keep his word. A gentleman would never break a promise. The promises of Scripture are even more sure. If Jesus promises his presence to his followers, then he can be trusted to always be there.

The conclusion

The Great Commission is still the command of Christ for all His followers. To claim to follow Christ and not seek to make disciples is not possible. A disciple is obedient to his master. Jesus is calling the church to baptize and to teach others and he has promised his presence as believers go in obedience. We are to be disciples and actively making disciples.

⁴ Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew*, 550.

Sermon 2. The Method of Jesus For Making Disciples. Matthew 4:18-22

Introduction

What does it mean to follow Jesus? To be a disciple of Jesus? It means more than just going to church. It means more than just believing in him. To the first disciples it meant leaving everything behind and leaving to be with Jesus. Leaving behind the fishing nets, the boat, the family members, the tax collector's booth, the familiar for the unknown. Have you left something behind to follow Jesus?

Being a disciple meant giving your life to Jesus as you trusted in him completely each day. Being willing to obey completely and to go where he tells you to go and to do what he tells you to do. It does not sound like what we call discipleship today. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote about "cheap grace". Cheap grace is forgiveness without repentance and following Christ without discipleship (*The Cost of Discipleship*).

Context

Jesus begins his ministry by gathering a small group of followers that he called his disciples. These men would be with Jesus constantly, learning from observation as well as from personal teaching. They would also be given hands-on experience as Jesus gave them tasks to perform. The context shows how important these disciples were to Jesus. They were the ones who would carry on his mission after his death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

I. Jesus made disciples by gathering a small group and spending time with them.

A disciple is one that is called by Jesus to follow him. The word literally means a learner or student. Jesus called his disciples, and they were with him constantly during his three-year ministry. Coleman writes, "Having called his men, Jesus made a practice of being with them. This was the essence of his training program- just letting his disciples follow him."⁵ Scripture records that they did some extraordinary things together, such as

⁵ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 2010), 27.

preaching and teaching to large crowds, performing miracles, and casting out demons. Many of the things they did together, however,, were quite ordinary. They ate together, traveled together, talked with one another, taught together, healed together, and prayed together. The time that Jesus spent with his disciples shows the significance of being together for fellowship so that relationships might grow. The disciples got to know Jesus in a close way as they spent time with him. John writes in his epistle, “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life” (1 John 1:1). His relationship with Jesus was a close relationship that developed over years of close fellowship.

Jesus often used small group meetings with his disciples as a time to challenge them. He would ask them tough questions and challenge them to give themselves fully in their commitment to God. For example, Jesus led his disciples away from the crowds and asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” (Matt 16:13). After they had responded with several answers Jesus asked, “But who do you say that I am?” (Matt 16:15). This question zeroed in on what was most important. This question challenged the group to search their hearts and to seek an answer from God. Peter was the one to respond with the answer: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16).

II. Jesus made disciples by teaching them.

Jesus set the example in the way he gathered his disciples and constantly taught them the meaning of Scripture. Robert E. Coleman writes that there are “at least sixty-six references to the Old Testament in his dialogues with the disciples in the four Gospels, to say nothing of the more than ninety allusions to it in his speaking with others.”⁶ Jesus often addressed crowds and taught them, and then followed up with the smaller group of his disciples. This model of preaching and teaching to large crowds,

⁶ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 73.

followed by further instruction within a small group, shows the effectiveness of sermon-based small groups.

These smaller teaching sessions had many advantages. The disciples were able to ask questions about what they had heard, allowed the opportunity to dig deeper into the meaning of the teaching, and also allowed the opportunity to apply the teachings to their lives. For example, when Jesus taught that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, his disciples were astounded and were able to ask, “Who then can be saved?” (Matt 19:25). Jesus was able to follow up on his teachings, which led to even further application. The disciples could look at their own lives and see if they were valuing anything else over their devotion to Jesus. This type of questioning and application flourishes in a small group setting where the members of the group are comfortable to open up and be honest about their questions and concerns. This kind of discussion is lacking in a large group setting.

III. Jesus made disciples by modeling prayer for them.

Jesus set an example of transparency in prayer with his disciples. He sought out the prayers of his disciples during the most difficult of trials. In the garden of Gethsemane Jesus was faced with the reality of the cross. He was struggling with the events which were about to transpire. Luke records that Jesus went to the Mount of Olives with his disciples, as he was accustomed to doing (Luke 22:39). He asked them to pray, went a little further and prayed that if it be the Father’s will, that this cup would be taken away (Luke 22:42). Scripture records that his agony was so great that his sweat became like great drops of blood (Luke 22:44). The disciples failed to stay awake and pray, but to be included at such a moment, to be allowed to see Jesus in prayer in such a manner, and to be invited to join Jesus in prayer, showed the transparency that Jesus shared with his disciples.

Jesus’ disciples were transparent men who were willing to be open and honest. Coleman writes concerning Jesus’ disciples: “Though often mistaken in their judgements

and slow to comprehend spiritual things, they were honest men, willing to confess their need. Their mannerisms may have been awkward, and their abilities limited, but with the exception of the traitor, their hearts were big.”⁷ These men were willing to be transparent with Jesus.

The transparency that Jesus shared with his disciples led to an opportunity for growth in their prayer life. The disciples asked Jesus, “Teach us to pray” (Luke 11:1). Jesus taught them to pray in response to their request. The disciples’ ability to acknowledge their need for instructions shows the transparency of their relationship with Jesus. They were not afraid to ask for help. They were willing to be vulnerable and admit that they did not know it all. They were willing to learn from Jesus and to grow in their prayer life.

Conclusion

Jesus called his disciples and was with them for his three-year ministry. He spent time with them, he taught them, he prayed with them. He prepared them for the ministries that they would have after he departed.

The disciples responded to the call and followed Jesus. They were willing to leave all behind and to give their lives to Jesus. They obeyed his commands and loved him. They learned from his life and from his teachings.

Today the call to discipleship is just as relevant. We need to be willing to be a disciple of Jesus. This includes being a part of a community of faith and sharing with a group of other believers, willing to learn together, fellowship together, and pray together.

⁷ Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 24.

Sermon 3. The Model of the Early Church for Making Disciples. Acts 2:42-47

Introduction

What is the Church supposed to look like? If you could describe the ideal church, what would that look like? Nice buildings, many people, many programs, unity, and love among the people. What we find at the conclusion of Acts chapter two is a picture of the early church at a time when things were picture perfect, a model for us today as we look at a snapshot of the what the church can be. James Boice writes, “These verses tell what developed in the church and how it functioned in those remarkable days after Pentecost. Obviously, this description is intended as an example for us and our assemblies.”⁸ The question we need to ask is, “Can the local church today be a godly, exciting place where the Lord’s presence is sensed and where you see His hand at work? Can the church today actually have the characteristics of the early church? I believe that we can as we follow the model of how they made disciples and seek God’s presence, power, and grace.

Context

The context of Acts 2:42-47 is important. Previous verses tell of the small group of believers being together, praying, and waiting for the Holy Spirit (1:12-14). The group replaced Judas, who had betrayed Jesus and committed suicide, with Matthias by casting lots (1:26). Then, on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came, evidenced by a sound like a rushing wind, and the appearance of tongues of fire which rested on each one (2:1-2). The group began to speak with other tongues and attracted a large crowd (2:4-13). Peter stood boldly and preached the gospel message (2:14-40). Those who heard the gospel were convicted by the Holy Spirit of their need for forgiveness that only Jesus could provide. The group of believers grew from 120 to 3,000. Many others were added to the church in the following days (Acts 2:46). How do you handle such a large group of new believers?

⁸ James Montgomery Boice, *Acts: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 55.

I. The early church made disciples by meeting in small groups.

The nature of the early church worship is twofold. The church is still gathering at the Temple for worship, but they are also meeting in their homes (v. 46). Paul uses the phrase *kat oikon* to describe how the new believers were meeting in various homes. The believers were participating in both mass gatherings and in small group gatherings. In the small group gatherings, they were sharing life together and participating in the disciplines of the Christian life.

The result of the activities that the early church shared together were joy and glad hearts. The praise and worship of God was continual and the community outside the group of believers was being impacted. The result was that people were being saved and added to the church every day (v. 47).

II. The early church made disciples by teaching God's Word.

The first essential characteristic of the early church is a fierce dedication to learning. The early church dedicated themselves to the teaching of the apostles. Luke used the word *proskarterein* to describe the tenacity in which the church held on to and sought to learn from the apostles. The early church was hungry for the word and were taking it in consistently.

Luke used the Greek word *Didache* to describe the apostles' teachings. The early church was continually devoted to the teaching from "the words and deeds of Jesus himself (1:1), on his instructions to the apostles (1:2), and on those followers who would become his authentic witnesses (10:41)."⁹ The teachings would have included the Old Testament Scriptures and how they are applied to the Messiahship of Jesus. The apostles' teaching was authoritative for the early church because it was the teachings that they had

⁹ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 31 (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), 270.

received from Jesus and were communicating through the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰ Jesus had previously promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would guide them in all truth (John 16:13), enabling them to teach in the early church.

III. The early church made disciples by sharing fellowship.

Biblical community is grounded in a shared fellowship. Paul gives us four descriptions of the fellowship of the early church. The first description is seen in the word *koinonia*. This word is widely used by Paul but is only found here in Acts and Luke.¹¹ Its basic meaning is communion, fellowship, and close relations. The word is so intimate that at times it was used to describe a marriage relationship.¹² In the context of this passage, it refers to the sharing of activities. Luke is showing how Christian fellowship brings a deep connection between believers that is distinct in that it is seen in the sharing of lives together. Fellowship in the early church made it possible for believers to actively help each other to grow in their faith.

The second description of the fellowship of the church is described in verses 44-45. There the church is portrayed as being “together.” Being together means more than the fact that they were physically together in one location. The Greek phrase used by Luke is *epi to auto*. John B. Polhill argues that this phrase is used to give a strong emphasis on the unity of the church.¹³ They were of one mind and one heart, each serving Jesus as Lord.

The third description of fellowship is seen in the way the early church shared their possessions. (v. 45) The church members practiced the selling of their property and

¹⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, New International Commentary of the New Testament, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 73.

¹¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: Holman, 1992), 118.

¹² Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 150.

¹³ Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

goods and using the proceeds whenever a need arose. This sharing of possessions was modeled by Jesus and his disciples who shared a common purse (John 13:29). This action was not a required sharing of goods; it was a loving and voluntary response to the needs of the community. Bock writes, “That a community is really functioning with appropriate love and compassion is evident when material needs are also a concern and are being generously provided.”¹⁴

The fourth description of the fellowship of the early church is found in the Greek word *homothymadon*, which is translated as being in “one accord.” Polhill writes, “The word translated ‘with one accord’ (*homothymadon*) is commonly used in Acts to express unity of purpose and particularly applies to the ‘one heart and mind (Acts 4:32).’”¹⁵ The early church possessed a unity of purpose. This single purpose centered on fellowship with Jesus Christ and is derived from the gift of the Holy Spirit.

IV. The early church made disciples by praying together.

Biblical community is grounded in prayer. The act of prayer here refers to sharing in prayers together, either in the Temple or in the homes of the early Christians.¹⁶ The Greek word used by Luke is *proseuchais*. This word appears thirty-six times in the New Testament and twelve times in Luke-Acts.¹⁷

Prayer is seen in Acts as a priority in the church. The disciples prayed while waiting in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit (1:14), they prayed about replacing Judas (1:24-25), and now they are praying as part of their worship as a church. Bruce argues that the prayers would have “follow[d] Jewish models, but their content would be enriched

¹⁴ Bock, *Acts*, 152.

¹⁵ Polhill, *Acts*, 121.

¹⁶ Fitzmyer, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 271.

¹⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

because of the Christ event.”¹⁸ The new community was dependent upon God. The prayer life of the church showed that there was a dependence upon God for direction. Bock writes concerning the prayer: “It seeks God’s direction and is dependent upon God because God’s family of people do not work by feelings or intuition but by actively submitting themselves to the Lord’s direction.”¹⁹

The prayer life of the early church included the community prayers that were held at the Temple. The church added the important prayer of small groups who were meeting in their homes. Polhill states, “The reference, however, is probably much broader and involves primarily their sharing in prayer together in their private house worship.”²⁰ These times of prayer helped bond the church together. The devotion to prayer was continual and steadfast.

Conclusion

Acts 2:42-47 stresses the solid start enjoyed by the early church. The church faced growing pains. The addition of over 3,000 new converts caused joy but also presented a problem. How would the new converts be disciplined? How could 120 believers’ disciple 3,000? The answer came in the way the church gathered together in their homes. They gathered for instruction, fellowship, breaking of bread, and for prayer. The church offered immediate follow-up and training for new believers. They met the basic needs of all believers and supplied for their spiritual needs as well. They nurtured new believers and deep relationships were formed.

The early church models for us today what the church should look like. We need to be gathering together in large groups for worship, and in small groups for times of deep Bible study, fellowship, and prayer. This is how the early church made disciples.

¹⁸ Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, 73.

¹⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 151.

²⁰ Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

Sermon 4. The Mandate of the Apostle Paul to Continue Making Disciples. 2

Timothy 2:1-2

Introduction

Alexander and Jeanette Toczko, an elderly couple from California had been married for 75 years. Recently they passed away in each other's arms within the same day of each other, professing their love for each other until the very end. They both had fallen ill, and their last wish was that they might be together as they faced death. Their daughter Aimee documented what happen and how their dying wish had been granted. On June 29th the family gathered together for the couples 75th wedding anniversary. The family brough balloons and flowers to cheer them up. Shortly after the party, Alexander took his last breath while in his wife's arms. She whispered to him that she would join him soon. The next day she also passed away. There last requests had been granted.

Paul is on death row. He knows that his days are number. He also had a last request. He wrote Second Timothy to relay his request to his young friend, and his request reveals what was most important in the life of the Apostle. His last request was that Timothy would be faithful to pass on the Christian faith to others, who might in return pass it on. The urgency and importance of discipleship is seen in Paul's last request.

Context

Paul is no longer under house arrest but now is in a prison cell as he writes. He feels that his death is near (2 Tim 4:6-8). The focus of the letter is on training and preparing Timothy to continue in Christian ministry. Others had deserted Paul and forsaken Christ (1:15, 4:14-16). The words that Paul shares with Timothy are personal and urgent. In his letter, Paul instructs the young pastor to faithfully take what he has learned and pass it on to others. This is not a new or novel idea, it is discipleship. Taking what one has been taught and teaching it to others. Discipleship is seen in the Old Testament where parents are instructed to train their children in the things of God (Deut.

11:19; Prov 22:6). Jesus disciplined his followers and then gave the Great Commission, to go and make disciples.

The context of 2 Timothy 2:1-2 is important. The verses fall between the description of others who had not been faithful. Paul was calling on Timothy to be faithful in contrast to the Asians who had been disobedient (1:5), and those who were teaching heresy, including Hymenaeus and Philetus (2:17). Paul urges Timothy to be faithful in the way that Onesiphorus is faithful. The phrase “as for you,” which Paul uses to begin verse 1, shows that Paul intends for Timothy’s ministry to be different from those who were not faithful.

I. Paul prays that Timothy might have strength and grace.

Paul goes on to use three metaphors to describe the ministry. He compares the need for faithfulness and perseverance to the life of a soldier (2:3-4), an athlete (2:5), and a farmer (2:6). Each illustration shows the need for endurance in the face of challenges. Each metaphor emphasizes a different aspect of faithfulness. Gordon Fee writes, “The three analogies support ‘the appeal to suffering,’ ‘the need for whole-hearted devotion,’ and ‘the expectation of reward.’”²¹ Together they present a comprehensive picture of one who is faithfully working to accomplish a task.

Paul encourages Timothy to be “strong.” The Greek word that Paul uses is *endunamou*. The verb is in the present passive imperative form, which carries the implication that he must continue to be strong.²² Paul qualifies the source of the strength available to Timothy. It is a strength that comes in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The Christian derives strength that comes from relying upon the Lord and recognizes that true

²¹ Gordon Fee, *1, 2 Timothy Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 243.

²² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary, vol. 34 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 201.

strength comes from God. Archibald Thomas Robertson writes, “Christ is the dynamo for power only when and while we keep in touch with him.”²³

Paul understood that Timothy would need strength to face what was to come in his young life. He would need strength to face the difficulties which laid ahead. He needed strength to fight against the discouragements which would come. He also needed strength to make disciples in obedience to the commands of Jesus. We also need the strength of God to face the difficulties which lay ahead and to accomplish the task which God has for us as individuals and as a church.

The word *grace* means the unmerited favor of God. Thomas D. Lea writes that the word *grace* points to God, the source of all good gifts.²⁴ Scripture teaches that believers are saved by grace (Eph 2:8-9). That same grace empowers believers to live the Christian life and to serve God. Gordon Fee writes, “Though it is true that grace is the means by which we are saved and by which we are enabled to walk in God’s will, it is also true that same grace is the sphere in which all of Christian life is lived.”²⁵

In Christ we receive grace and strength from the His work on the cross. We receive grace and strength from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we receive grace and strength from the presence of Jesus Christ daily in our lives.

II. Paul instructs Timothy to be a faithful teacher.

Paul instructs Timothy to serve as a teacher. Spurgeon argues that this is the “true apostolic succession—one minister brings another to Christ, and then charges that other to train other preachers and teachers to carry on the blessed work of evangelism.”²⁶

²³ Archibald Thomas Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman, 1931), 616.

²⁴ Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 201.

²⁵ Fee, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 201.

²⁶ Charles Spurgeon, *2 Timothy, Spurgeon’s Commentaries* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014), 48.

Fee differs when he argues that Paul is not as concerned with apostolic succession as he is with the gospel itself.²⁷ Paul had a deep concern that the gospel would faithfully be transmitted in a world where heresy was growing. A faithful link in the chain of transmission of the gospel was needed to combat heresy. Paul encouraged young Timothy to be that faithful link.

Paul states several things in these verses which fifty years ago would not need clarification. Today however there are a few things which need to be said. First of all, the instruction to teach implies that there is a definable body of truth that can be known and taught to others. In today's world there are many who deny that there is a universal truth. There is a view that each person finds their own truth. The Bible teaches that there is truth, and that truth is found in Jesus Christ. Paul declares repeatedly that there is a body of teachings which have been passed down from the apostles and which are to be passed down to the next generation. This is what is required in making a disciple. The teaching of Scripture are to be faithfully passed to others who in turn can pass them along to someone else.

III. Paul sees discipleship as essential to pass on the gospel to the next generation.

Timothy was instructed to entrust the teachings to men who are both reliable and qualified to teach others. A. T. Robertson writes that the word for *entrust* is from the Greek word *paratheke*, which can be interpreted as *deposit*.²⁸ It carries the idea of handling something that is precious and valuable and placing it somewhere safe from harm. In these verses Paul is describing discipleship. He had disciplined Timothy and now he was calling on Timothy to faithfully disciple others.

²⁷ Fee, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 240.

²⁸ Robertson, *The Epistles of Paul*, 616.

Conclusion

The exegesis of 2 Timothy 2:2 shows that Paul was concerned about the transmission of the gospel to the next generation. His life was nearing an end, and he was passing the baton to the next generation of Christian ministers. His instructions show that the church today has been given a precious deposit that must be handled correctly. Today's church must find a way to equip reliable and capable leaders to faithfully teach the next generation of believers.

APPENDIX 5
SMALL GROUP CURRICULUM

Lesson 1. How Small Groups Can Revitalize Discipleship at East Hickman Baptist Church.

Lesson 2. What Happens in a Small Group?

Lesson 3. Setting the Ground Rules.

Lesson 4. The Responsibilities of Each Member.

Lesson 5 The Responsibilities of the Host.

Lesson 6. The Responsibilities of the Group Leader. Part 1

Lesson 7. The Responsibilities of the Group Leader. Part 2

Lesson 8. Pitfalls of Small Groups.

Lesson 1. How Small Groups Can Revitalize Discipleship at East Hickman Baptist Church. Acts 2:41-47

The disciples were commissioned to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20), teaching them to obey everything Jesus commanded. Jesus did not tell them how to do it he showed them by modeling it for them. They relied on His example of discipling to be sufficient for them. Soon after Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples found themselves with the task of discipling a group of new believers that numbered over three thousand. Acts 2:41-47 shows us a snapshot of what life was like in an early Christian community:

I. Fellowship that leads to community

Acts 2:42 tells us that the first century communities were also devoted to what most translations call “the fellowship.” The word used here for “fellowship” is the Greek word *koinonia*. *Koinonia* has a special place in Scripture because it is a simple word expressing a powerful concept. It is used in several places in the New Testament:

Koinonia with the Spirit (Phil 2:1). Koinonia in the Gospel (Phil 1:5). Koinonia with the Son (1 Cor 1:9). Koinonia with one another (1 John 1:7).

This word for “fellowship” or “community” means that a group of people are gathered together under a common idea or goal. What people share in common affects their relationships with each other. Small groups will be made up of unique individuals who are different in many ways but have gathered together for a common purpose: a passion for Jesus Christ and for carrying out what He commissioned us to do.

Just like the first disciples, small groups can foster fellowship and create a biblical community. Small groups care for one another, encourage each other, serve together, eat together, mourn together, pray together, rejoice together, and learn together because they are all devoted to the same God. It is Christ who binds biblical community together.

Question 1. How can being a part of a small group help me to develop relationships with others? Strengthen my relationship with God?

Question 2. What is required to develop biblical community and how is it different than the fellowship found in secular groups?

II. Sermon based Bible studies to teach God’s Word.

The early church we read about in Acts 2 did not have the New Testament like we do today. The people were meeting in their homes and were devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching. It is important to understand what the apostles had been teaching. The passage immediately preceding Acts 2:41 is a sample of the kinds of things the apostles preached. In this passage, Peter stands up among the disciples and delivers a powerful sermon that affirms Jesus’ deity, demonstrates how Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy, proclaims that He rose from the dead, exposes the people’s need for repentance, and focuses on the saving power of Christ. He spoke about the Jesus that they saw with words that were written about Him thousands of years earlier. He took Scripture and rightly explained it. Who Jesus was, what He taught, and what He accomplished at the cross were central to the teachings of the apostles.

When we hear that the followers of Jesus in Acts 2 were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, it can be rightly assumed that the message they were interacting with was very much similar to the content of Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Furthermore, when we hear that they were devoting themselves to it, it means that they were doing more than talking about how good Peter's sermon was. They were discussing it with each other and helping one another apply what it to their lives, changing them into faithful followers of Christ.

We can take a lesson from these early believers. We can also receive teaching in a large worship service and then follow up in smaller groups of people to discuss it, to apply it, and to find the support to live it out. We can devote ourselves to a faithful expositor's teaching because we know it is from the Word of God.

Question 1. How can learning the Bible in a small group benefit me differently than learning in a large worship service?

Question 2. Why is it important to study sermon-based Bible studies as a church?

III. Transparency in prayer.

Prayer is important in the life of a Christian because there is a need to live in constant fellowship with the Father. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on our behalf, we have the privilege of constant access to God (Eph 2:18).

Just like the believers in Acts 2, devotion to prayer is essential for us today. In a small group, close relationships can develop which will allow the members to be transparent in praying for one another's needs and personal struggles. Also, prayer in a small group will provide an opportunity to praise God and spend time in celebration of answered prayer. Small group settings provide a safe place where real prayer requests can be shared and where people can offer support and comfort as they pray together.

Question 1. Why is it hard to ask for personal prayer requests in a large church gathering?

Question 2. What kind of environment would be necessary for you to share your struggles in a small group?

Lesson 2. What Happens in a Small Group? 2 Corinthians 3:18

I. Real relationships.

One of the first things that will happen in a small group will involve refreshments. Why is this important. Sharing refreshments together will provide a time to catch up, share small talk, and warm up for digging into the Scriptures. Some people are extroverts and do not need a time to warm up to talk with others. Many are more introverted and for them it is important to have a casual time of talking with others. Food is often associated with fellowship. There is an intimacy about sharing snacks or a meal together.

A group meeting should include a time for sharing. Just a few minutes to allow people to share answered prayers and good news with the group. This is not a time where people are forced to share, it is a time for those who wish to share to be able to in a casual environment, to let others know what is happening in their lives.

After the sharing time the group will enter the Bible study time. This is a time when it is important for each member to be prepared. Sermon-based Bible studies will help keep the groups united in their studies. This time is an important time to ask questions and to hear what others have to say.

The Bible studies will include three types of questions. First, there will be a question designed to help the group get to know each other quicker. These questions may seem silly or unnecessary, but they will help the group grow in their knowledge and understanding of one another. They will help the group grow in their relationships with each other. The second set of questions will look at Scripture verses that complement the main text that was used in the sermon. These cross references will broaden the understanding and the context of the study. The third type of questions will deal with the application of the Scripture. They will be designed to take the main point of the sermon and to make it relevant to life.

After the Bible study will be a time for prayer. The group may choose to break up into pairs, or to break up into men and women groups. This is a time to share the needs

that are present in each life. The willingness to share will increase as the members grow closer together and learn to trust each other. After the time of prayer there should be a time for socializing before the members head home.

These different activities in a small group will help the members grow in their relationships, their relationship with God, and with each other. Many people who participate in a small group claim that the members become like a second family to them. There is a connection that takes place, Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend write, “For a few minutes every week or so, members receive the experience of being attached, loved, and in relationship with like-minded people.”¹

Question 1. Why does the Bible place such a major emphasis on relationships?

Question 2. How is a Christian relationship comparable to “Iron sharpening iron” (Pro 27:17)?

II. Accountability

Accountability is a term that is often misunderstood. It means to be answerable to someone else. Accountability is missing in much of what we do as believers. The modern church seems to have lost the principle of discipline and accountability. In some churches it is seen as a hopeless cause.

One reason that accountability is shied away from is that it has been misused in the past. Accountability is not a way to punish, shame or embarrass others. Biblical accountability is a way to help one another in the process of Christian growth. It is grace filled and motivated by love.

Accountability is able to take place in a small group when people are open to share their struggles and temptations, as well as their need for support and comfort. Together we can help each other be regular in attendance, to be faithful in our preparation for the meetings, and to help each other with their struggles.

¹ Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 71.

- I. When you hear the word “accountability” what do you think of?
2. How does accountability play a role in discipleship?

III. Support and strength.

Support and strength will be found when a small group is operating the way that it should. The small group is a place where members who are weak can find strength and members who are discouraged can find comfort. Paul wrote, “For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10)

Regular attendance is important for each member of a group. Also, being “all there” is important. This means giving your attention to what is taking place in the group. It means listening to what each member is saying, looking at the person and giving them your full attention. Just listening to a person is one way to begin to give them strength and comfort. It will help a person to know that they are being heard.

Another way to support and to comfort is to validate what the person is feeling. It is helpful for a person to know that someone understands what they are feeling and experiencing. When a person’s feelings are dismissed, they will close up, lose trust, and hide their feelings.

Small groups can be helpful in enabling a person to assess the reality of their situation. The experiences of the members might help others see there is hope. The group can show love, respect, advice, encouragement when someone feels like giving up.

Jesus instructed Peter to, “Strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:32). Peter had denied that he knew Jesus three times. He had failed in his faithfulness to Jesus but had been restored in his relationship with Jesus and the other disciples. Jesus instructed him to strengthen others who might have failures in the future. Peter’s failures made him better equipped to strengthen others. His story of failure and restoration is an encouragement for others, and our examples of failures and restoration can help others and strengthen them as well.

1. Why is it so hard to admit it when we are weak?
2. As believers, how can being weak make us strong?

IV. Grieving and healing

Small groups are a place where members can grieve and heal after loss. Death, broken relationships, job loss, and loss of health are just a few of the things which lead to grieving and a need for healing. Jesus said, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt 5:4). Grieving and healing are a part of life, and small groups can be an important part of the healing process.

Small groups can be a place where people are allowed to talk about their loss and how they are feeling about the loss. Often loss comes with a lot of emotions. These emotions need to be talked about, but many people may be reluctant to do so in a large group. A safe small group will provide a space for dealing with emotional loss. It will provide the time that is needed for an individual to move through the stages of grieving and to learn to deal with grief in a healthy way. There is not just one way to deal with grief and there is no timetable for dealing with grief. Each person needs to be allowed the time and space to deal with their grief. A small group is a place where this can take place.

A small group can be a resource for a grieving person, supplying love, stability, acceptance, structure, and a sense of belonging. The small group can help show love to a grieving person by being with them and praying for them. Ultimately the small group can help a grieving person to turn to God during their time of loss.

Question 1. How is grieving the same for all people?

Question 2. How is it different for Christians?

Lesson 3. Setting the Ground Rules. Jeremiah 31:31-34

Structure is important to ensure that small groups run smoothly. The leader of the group will need to help the group decide on certain parameters to supply structure to the group.

I. Writing a covenant.

God is a covenant God. There are at least five covenants in Scripture where God has promised to fulfill his purpose for creation by establishing His kingdom. God made a covenant with Noah after the flood that he would never again send a flood to destroy the earth. The sign of the covenant was the rainbow (Gen 9:11-14). He also made a covenant with Abraham, “Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). God made a covenant with Moses, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (Exo 19:5-6). God made a covenant with David, “When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (2 Sam 7:12-13). God has now entered into a New Covenant that was promised in Jeremiah 31:31 and made possible by the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Entering into a covenant is very serious. It is a way of making a binding commitment that holds you accountable for what you agree to. Small groups enter into a covenant relationship which will set the structure of the group.

A small group covenant should include an agreement to be regular in attendance, to be on time, to be prepared, to be willing to participate, and to pray for the members of the group. The covenant should be agreed upon and signed by each group member.

Question 1. What are some covenants that you have been a part of?

Question 2. What are some things you feel should be included in a small group covenant?

II. Less is better.

Drs. Cloud and Townsend write that an ideal situation concerning a small group covenant would be to, “provide only the minimum amount of structure to protect the group’s functioning.”² If a group consists of members who show up on time, respect one another’s feelings, and are willing to participate then fewer ground rules will be necessary. If these areas are or become a problem, then the group covenant is a way to address the issue.

The group as a whole will need to work together to establish the ground rules. These rules are meant to provide a safe place where relationships will develop, and discipleship will take place. The rules will generally change as the group learns where problems exist and try to address the problems. For example, if one person in the group begins to dominate the conversation to the point that others cannot participate, then the group may need to develop a rule which assures that all the group members have an opportunity to speak.

Question 1. When are rules helpful and when are they hurtful?

Question 2. What specific issues do you feel need to be decided before you become part of a small group?

III. Making a safe space.

There are some rules that will be needed from the very beginning of a small group. Each group will need to decide when they will meet, selecting a day and time.

² Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 137-38.

Finding a time which fits the schedule of every member might be difficult but should be attempted.

Decisions will need to be made concerning childcare. The group may decide that each parent is responsible for their children's care during the meeting. The group can decide to provide childcare or to rotate the person who will watch the children. The safety of the children should be a priority for each group.

Some ground rules are necessary to make the small group a safe place to share. There needs to be an understanding that what is shared in the small group will be considered confidential. Also there needs to be an understanding that hateful speech and verbal attacks will not be tolerated. The group will need to decide what precautions are needed because of COVID or other health issues.

Question 1. What rules would help you to feel safer to open up about real struggles in your life?

Question 2. In social media today there is a lot of toxic and hateful speech. How do we prevent that kind of speech from being a part of a small group?

Lesson 4. The Responsibilities of Each Member. 1 Peter 1:22

I. Be prepared.

Small group meetings can be unpredictable. There can be surprises as you gather and share what is happening in your life. The class needs to be flexible and expect the unexpected. It helps when each member arrives prepared. This means taking the steps to regularly attend and to arrive on time for the meeting. It also means doing the study necessary to be part of the discussion that will take place. Having a prepared heart includes spending time in prayer before the class, as well as praying for the other members of the group.

Being prepared means arriving with an openness toward God, being ready to learn from the Scripture, and being willing to apply it to your life. Each member has the responsibility to model this kind of openness toward others in the group. God often will use others to help us to grow in our Christian faith.

Question 1. How do you respond to unexpected things that arise in your life?

Question 2. What steps could you take to be prepared for a small group meeting?

II. Be known.

In large group settings it is very difficult to get to know other people. There is a shallow kind of friendship which might develop, but a deeper relationship is hard to nurture during an hour-long worship service. People generally put on their best appearances and seldom share their deepest concerns. Sunday morning worship is just not the appropriate place and time for developing deeper relationships.

Small groups present an opportunity to develop deeper relationships. It begins with a willingness to be known. Just being a part of a small group does not guarantee that you will be able to know people in a deeper way. It is possible to be in a small group and still remain closed and guarded about your life. Most people fear judgement, rejection, ridicule, and shame. These fears prevent them from being open with others. This is why it is important to make a small group a safe place where people can feel comfortable

opening up about who they are and what they are going through. The level of openness in a group will directly influence the impact that is made in each member's life for good. Being known and knowing others is a large part of what it means to be loved and to love others.

Question 1. What is the relationship between knowing someone and a willingness to be known?

Question 2. Why are people often hesitant to be open about themselves?

III. Be willing to listen.

Being in a small group is all about communication. To get to know someone means to really listen to what they are saying. All people desire to be heard and understood. To accomplish this, each member needs to make a concerted effort to listen to what others have to say in the group.

One mistake that takes place in a small group is when one person or one group of people dominate the conversation. If one person is selfishly taking all the group's time talking about themselves and their opinions at the neglect of others, someone will be left out.

Listening requires focus. It requires you to look at the person that is talking and to hear what is being said. The mind can easily wonder, especially if you are thinking about what you are going to say next. Be willing to listen and give your full attention to others.

Some barriers to listening include...

1. Physical barriers. Are there distractions in the room? Is there something that is causing you to lose focus? A barking dog, a television set that is left on, outside noise like traffic. These kinds of distractions should be minimized or removed.

2. Language barriers. The rate that we listen can be different than the rate that someone talks. Sometimes it is okay to ask a person to slow down when they are talking too fast. Words that are unknown need to be clarified. It is important to ask follow-up questions to see if you have understood what is being said.

3. Prejudice barriers. Beware of certain prejudices which may limit your willingness to listen. If your mind is already turned off by the speaker or the topic of conversation, you will not listen to what they are saying.

Learning to listen is one of the requirements of getting to know someone. Small groups are the appropriate place and the appropriate time for this to take place. Make the most of the small group experience by participating in the group discussion. Listening while others are talking and sharing when it is your time to speak.

Question 1. What makes a person a good listener?

Question 2. How can a person improve their listening skills?

IV. Love one another.

Jesus was once asked a question concerning the greatest of the commandments. His response was straight forward and emphatic. Love is the answer. We are to love the Lord with all our heart and love our neighbor as ourselves (Matt 22:34-40). Small groups provide an opportunity to learn to love God and to love one another. Showing love to others requires acting on the emotion and putting it into practice. Love is lived out in community with others.

Loving God can be seen in worship and prayer, in obeying the commandments of God, by loving His Word, and through confession and repentance. Loving others can be seen in serving others, by showing empathy toward others, by affirming and supporting others, by forgiving and reconciling with others, and by encouraging others.

Small groups are a place where people can love God and their neighbor. They can walk through life together and grow through discipleship together. Each member has a responsibility to love.

Question 1. What are some other ways we can show our love for God?

Question 2. What are some other ways we can show our love for our neighbor?

Lesson 5. The Responsibilities of the Host. 1 Peter 4:9-10

Being a good host means more than just making sure the house is as clean as it ought to be. Being a good host is making sure the house is prepared for the group meeting. This includes spending as much time preparing spiritually as you do cleaning. Most people do not want to come to a dirty house, but it is also important to prepare by spending time in prayer, praying over your home, the group leader, and the group members. The host is a spiritual leader of the group and must prepare to lead them spiritually.

I. Provide a warm and friendly environment.

There are some practical concerns that the host must consider. Are there enough chairs for the group and are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough lighting so that the members can easily see their Bible and study notes? Is the house free from dog or cat odors that might cause allergic reactions? If there are going to be children that need to be watched, is there a space where they will not interrupt the group? These and other practical issues should be considered by the host.

Being a good host means more than having a spacious house for the group to meet in. The home needs to be a warm and friendly space that is welcoming and inviting. This kind of environment is often set by the attitude of the host. Scripture teaches that there is a spiritual gift of hospitality, “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace” (1 Pet 4:9-10). The church is made up of individual believers who have been given a gift, or gifts, to be used for the benefit of the entire church. Hospitality is one of those gifts.

Imagine what the world would be like if there was no hospitality. No invitations to dinners, no time spent visiting in other's homes, no having a cold drink in the back yard of a friend. The world would be a cold and lonely place without hospitality. Even the hotel industry has learned that it is important to extend hospitality to its guest. The most

successful hotels, those with four-star ratings, will go above and beyond to extend hospitality. They will provide snacks, greet the guests as they enter the building, learning and using the names of the guest. These hotels have learned that making a guest feel at home will cause the visitors to stay with them again on a return trip.

The early church needed members with the gift of hospitality to support Christians who traveled. It was a time when hotels and boarding houses were rare, and if you could find one it was probably connected to some kind of vice. Christians would invite other Christians into their homes and care for them. They would give them space and food and drink. They would make them feel at home with no expectation for repayment.

Today there is still a need for hospitality in the church. Some people are just blessed with this gift and will thrive when given the opportunity to be a good host to others. We live in a time when many people hesitate to give up their privacy, even for a short time. The host of a small group needs to be the kind of person who will extend hospitality to the group with open arms. This type of genuine hospitality will make the environment warm and inviting and create a desire for each member to return for the next meeting.

Question 1. What are some of the things which make you feel welcome when you enter a room?

Question 2. What is important to you when it comes to the place where you meet with a small group?

II. Provide support for the group leader.

The host should consider his or herself as a partner with the group leader. This means encouraging and supporting the leader. It means asking if there is anything in particular that the group leader needs for the task of leading the group. It also means giving the group leader feedback on how the group is doing. At times, the host will hear

about needs within the group before the group leader. These needs should be forwarded to the group leader.

The host needs to be a prayer warrior. Prayer needs to precede the meetings, be lifted up during the meetings, and should be offered after the members have left. Prayer is the one thing which will bring victory in spiritual warfare.

Question 1. How can the host be an encourager for the leader of a small group?

Question 2. What are some specific things you can pray for the small group that you are hosting?

III. Organize refreshments for the group.

Refreshments are an important part of fellowship and small group meetings. This may sound shallow and unnecessary to some, but we find in Scripture that sharing a meal was an intimate time of fellowship. The early church was characterized as sharing food together on a daily basis, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, ...” (Acts 2:46) The phrase, “breaking bread” could refer to sharing a meal or to taking the Lord’s Supper. It probably referred to both.

Food just seems to draw people together. It helps to sweeten fellowship and deepen relationships. Jesus often shared a meal with his disciples. These meals would include conversation and teaching opportunities. It was a time for people to relax and share in a casual manner. Today refreshments can provide the same sort of positive results. A small group needs to bond together and sharing a meal, or even just a delicious snack, will help the process begin.

One of the responsibilities of the host is to organize refreshments. This does not mean that the task will fall on the host to provide the snacks every week. The host needs to assign the members of the group to bring the refreshments. The best arrangement would be to rotate the job of bringing refreshments so that one person does not have to do it every week.

The refreshments do not need to be expensive or fancy. Often a bag of chips or cookies will be sufficient. As the group continues to grow closer, there should be opportunities to share meals together from time to time. The important thing is the fellowship, not the amount or quality of the refreshments.

Question 1. How does food help people to connect?

Question 2. Why is it important for a small group to have refreshments?

In conclusion, the host needs to provide a safe and inviting place for the group to meet. This will be created by the hospitality that is shown by the host. The host will be an important part of the leadership team of the group. He or she will be a support and an encouragement for the group leader. The host will be responsible for the snacks that will be enjoyed by the group.

Lesson 6. The Responsibilities of a Group Leader. Part 1 Proverbs 18:13

There are a wide range of discussions among writers about what is important for a small group to be successful, but there was one essential ingredient. Having a good group leader is important to having good groups. In the next two lessons we will review the responsibilities of a group leader.

I. Listening closely

One of the most important things that a leader needs to do is learn to be a good listener. First, listen to God. God speaks to us through His Word and by His Holy Spirit. A group leader should spend time listening to what God is saying to him in his personal quiet time, and in hearing the sermons that will be used in the small group. Listening to God requires an understanding and belief that God desires to speak to you. It is important for the leader to listen to God so that he or she can lead the members to listen to God.

Second, listen to the other members in the small group. We have already seen that listening is a responsibility for the members of a small group. It is even more important for the leader of the small group. Scripture says, “If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame“ (Pro 18:13). The temptation in a small group is to answer questions quickly and move on to something else. To overcome this the leader must purposefully slow down and listen. There is time for advice, answers, and instruction after you have listened.

Listening is more than just hearing and understanding what a person says. Henry Cloud writes, “Listening as a facilitator means to hear the person and to have the person know that you have heard.”³ Listening in this manner requires you to do or say something that lets the other person know that you have heard them and understand what they are saying. This can be accomplished verbally by repeating and clarifying what has

³ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 153.

been said. It can also be a nonverbal act, such as making sure there is eye contact and nodding your head.

As group leader you need to model listening for the members. You also need to make sure there are no interruptions when someone is talking. There should be no talking over others in a group meeting. Respect and patience will be needed to allow others to talk and for them to be heard.

Question 1. Why is it so important that the leader of a small group be a good listener?

Question 2. How can a group leader help every member hear what is being said in the group discussion?

II. Authentic transparency

In small groups there is a need for balance. Scripture says, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). There needs to be a balance between grace and truth. This means at times the hard things need to be said. People need to be confronted when there is sin, doctrinal error, or unwise choices being made. At the same time there needs to be forgiveness, understanding, and compassion. This combination results in real growth in Christian maturity.

Authentic transparency is being yourself. It means trusting enough to admit when you are struggling and need to be encouraged. It means trusting someone to hear what you are saying and to respond in truth and grace. This kind of trust takes time to develop and can be found in a small group.

The group leader will set the tone for the group concerning authentic transparency. If the leader is willing to be transparent, others will follow. How can you help a group develop transparency? The answer is for the group leader to model transparency. Being willing to share what God is doing in their life and how God is faithfully helping you in your times of need. If we never share the difficult side of discipleship, then we make Christianity seem fake and irrelevant for real life. When we share how God is faithfully

changing us and helping us during the dark times, we prove the reality and relevance of Christianity.

Prayer is an area where authentic transparency is essential. A small group leader needs to be a prayer warrior, a person who understands the importance of prayer in the life of a Christian. He or she should model transparency as they share their prayer requests with the group. This will help the members of the group to be able to share their real prayer needs as well.

Leaders and pastors must fight the temptation to appear as if they always have it all together in their lives. Pride will make a person reluctant to share that they have struggles and temptations, something that everyone already knows. The public moral failures of some famous Christian leaders might cause other leaders to try to live up to unmeetable expectations. The advantage of being a part of a small group is that an honest transparency can develop which will help prevent the kinds of moral failures which make the headlines. Christian community is about helping and supporting one another through the difficult times when you may become discouraged and desire to quit. Strength is derived from the love of others who will pray with you and help to encourage you in real life struggles.

Question 1. Why is it difficult for Christian leaders to be transparent about their life?

Question 2. How can a group leader model transparency for others?

III. Developing a safe space.

A recent survey of the most important attributes of a small group leader was taken by the members of small groups. Their number one response was, “Makes people feel comfortable sharing in the group.”⁴ Seventy-three percent of the respondents made it their first choice. Why is this important? It shows how important it is for the members of

⁴ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 120.

the group to feel safe while they share with others. People are looking for a safe place to be real and authentic, where they can form real and meaningful relationships.

The group leader has the responsibility for making the group a safe place. The psalmist wrote, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O LORD, make me dwell in safety” (Psa. 4:8). Henry Cloud argues that the Old Testament understanding of safety is all about carelessness⁵. It means that you can be yourself, secure in your relationship. It meant that you do not have to put on a fake face.

The leader can help make the group a safe place by offering grace to others, pointing the members toward God’s grace found in the Gospel. They can set the example by being willing to show grace and forgiveness to others.

The leader is responsible for structuring the meetings to be a safe place. The group covenant should shape the ground rules which will set the structure of the group meetings. This helps to make sure that members are not hurtful in their response to others as they share. If a member responds in an angry or hurtful manner to someone, the group leader must intervene and stop the attack. If someone in the group is hurting and the group is not responding to that need, the leader needs to intervene and lead the group to minister to this individual. This type of order and structure will go a long way in helping the members to feel that the group is a safe place where they can share.

Setting limits is important for a small group. The group leader has the responsibility to limit the things which might cause damage or prevent discipleship and growth from taking place. Think about it as putting up fences against the things that will hurt others in the group. Setting limits can be difficult but it is necessary to provide a safe group meeting. Often it is as simple as a motion for someone to wait instead of interrupting someone else. Other times it may mean making a statement to the group that we need to be more courteous in our responses to each other. Other times it might mean

⁵ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 159.

revisiting the group covenant and adding a provision. Remember that the group covenant can be changed or added to as problems arise.

Time is also an important issue concerning safety. It takes time for the group to learn to trust one another. It takes time to trust the leader, and trust that he or she will respond to an honest statement in a safe way. There will be times when things do not go as they should. When this happens, it is important to learn from failures and to move ahead toward trust and safety.

Safety is important because a small group is a place that will benefit the most when the members are able to express their thoughts, feelings, emotions, sins, and hurts. When these types of things are able to be discussed the members can help one another to find love and healing in these areas of their lives. Being in a safe place means that you are more able to be who God intends for you to be.

Question 1. How can the group leader make the members of a small group feel safe?

Question 2. How can a group leader confront a member over sin or bad theology in a way that will not destroy the safety of the group?

Lesson 7. The Responsibilities of a Group Leader. Part 2 Matthew 22:36-40

I. Bible Engagement

Small group leaders need to have a desire for God's Word that is contagious. The personal habits of the leader must include spending time with God through His Word and prayer. Discipleship includes learning and living God's Word. Small group meetings will focus on sermon-based Bible studies, so the leader must be faithful to attend the Church worship services and to prayerfully listen to the sermon. The focus on sermon-based Bible study will help ease the leader's time needed for preparation in some way, The group will have heard and studied the text. The context and exegesis of the text will be supplied through the sermon. A list of study question will be provided as the basis of the study. The group can spend their time digging deeper into the Scripture and applying it to their lives.

The leader does not have to know everything about the Bible. He or she does not have to have all the answers to every question. But the leader should come to the meetings prepared, having studied the lesson and able to guide the discussion in an informed manner. One of the great things about a small group Bible study is that the group can work together to find the answers to any question that may arise.

The attitude of the leader toward the Bible is very important. Is there an excitement about studying the Word? Is there a reverence for the Word, a realization that the Bible is alive and active and sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb. 4:12)? Is there a desire to be obedient to the Word and to live it out each day? Is there a desire to be changed by the Word and for God to use His Word to mature others? This kind of attitude will go a long way in helping the group seriously study God's Word.

Question 1. How can a group leader maintain an excitement for God's Word in his or her personal life?

Question 2. Why is a sermon-based Bible study important in small groups?

II. Facilitator

A good small group leader needs to be a good facilitator. A facilitator is one who leads the discussion that takes place in a group. If one person is talking too much, a facilitator will regain control of the group and make sure that no one person dominates the discussion. If the group does not pray enough, the facilitator will make sure to provide extra time for prayer. If the group begins to gossip, the facilitator will put a stop to it and redirect the conversation. Facilitators guide the discussion.

An important aspect of being a facilitator is helping all the members to be involved in the discussion. This is important in the meetings as the Bible is being discussed. It requires wisdom to encourage others to participate in the discussion, but not to force someone to do something that they do not want to do. A good facilitator will make sure that every member has ample opportunity to participate and will respect each person's contribution to the discussion.

Clarifying and asking questions are an important role of the facilitator. If the leader of the group feels that he needs more information to clarify what is being said, the other members of the group likely feel the same way. At times there will be a disconnect in a conversation that becomes apparent. What has been said might not have been understood by the group. Clarifying is seeking the clear meaning of a statement that is ambiguous. This is accomplished by asking questions to obtain the information that will make the meaning clearer.

Clarification is needed when dealing with emotional issues. When a person states that they are experiencing feelings of emotion, the feelings need to be clarified. What kind of feelings are you experiencing? When did you begin to feel this way? What is causing you to feel this way. These clarifying questions can help a person identify and process their emotions.

Clarification is needed when a statement is contradictory or seems to say one thing but imply another. These kinds of statements often point to mixed emotions about

an experience and may need to be thought out. Repeating the statement back to the person might help the person to see the contradiction and lead to more information being shared.

Some clarifying questions are helpful when there are gaps in what is being said. To understand a statement, you might need more information. Often people assume that others can read between the lines and that they should know the background of the story. The reality is that you cannot rely on people reading between the lines. Most of the time people need more information to understand what is being said.

Question 1. When is it important for a group leader to ask a clarifying question?

Question 2. What is the role of a facilitator?

III. Growing relationships

Jesus was once asked a question about the greatest of the commandments. He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment (Matt.22:37-38). Jesus clearly states that relationships are of primary importance in a Christians life.

A growing relationship with Jesus is one of the most important traits for a group leader. It is about loving Jesus. It is about spending time with Jesus. It means obeying Jesus because of love. It means that you desire to serve Jesus and to lead others to love and serve Jesus. A person who is growing in their relationship with Christ will influence others to seek God and to grow in their relationship with Christ.

Larry Osbourne writes concerning the important traits to look for in a group leader, “The most important trait to look for is spiritual warmth.”⁶ He goes on to explain that spiritual warmth is a warm and growing relationship with God. A person might be biblically sound, knowledgeable, gifted, and have good people skills, but these cannot take the place of a growing relationship with Jesus.

⁶ Larry Osbourne, *Sticky Churches* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 124.

A growing relationship with others is equally important for a group leader. We have already looked at how Jesus responded to the question, “Which is the greatest of the commandments?” The answer that Jesus gives includes the importance of loving our neighbors. Jesus said, “And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 22:39) Disciples are to grow in their fellowship with God and with other believers. Group leaders especially need to be relationship oriented.

The desire to grow in community will begin in the group leader. The example that is set will define the group. A group leader does not need to be extroverted or charismatic but has to be a person who loves others and desires to develop relationships with others. This type of relational warmth will attract others and set the tone of the group. The condition of the heart is the issue. If the leader’s heart is right, there will be growing relationships in their life. He or she will love God with their heart and will love their neighbors with their heart.

Question 1. Why is it important for a group leader to exhibit spiritual warmth?

Question 2. What is the connection between being a person with a growing relationship with God and your neighbor and being a good small group leader?

Lesson 8. Dealing with Potential Problems. Proverbs 11:13

I. Gossip.

Gossip is an inherent problem in a group where people are sharing their struggles and temptations. Human nature tends toward sinful behavior including how we use our words. James wrote, "If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless" (James 1:26). Scripture also says, "Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets, but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered" (Pro.11:13). It is clear that gossip is something that God does not approve of, and something that must be discouraged in a small group.

Small groups must fight against gossip from their first meeting. The group should be established as a safe place, a place where members can openly share. One church member recently put it like this, "A safe place is where you don't have to worry that what you say tonight is going to be on Facebook tomorrow." The group's covenant should address gossip and set structures which will ensure that gossip is not allowed.

Prayer requests need to remain prayer requests and should only be shared with others if requested. One way to limit gossip is to share requests without specific names, places, or situations. If prayers requests are not kept confidential, small groups will never develop a place where transparency is able to occur.

There needs to be accountability concerning gossip within a small group. Each member reminding the others about the need for confidentiality. Also, the group leader needs to make sure that the conversation in the group does not center around a person who is not present in the group. It is not appropriate to use the group time to gossip about someone else. Also, beware of gossip about the church in general. This type of gossip should be stopped immediately.

Question 1. Why does gossip spread so fast once it begins?

Question 2. Why is Scripture so hard against the sin of gossip?

II. Cliques.

A clique can be defined as a small group of people, with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them. This is a danger that must be prevented. The problem arises when a group decides that it will close itself to new members. It usually occurs when a group becomes inward focused and comfortable with each other.

A small group should enjoy each other's company, spending time together and growing in their relationships. The problem occurs when the group decides to close itself off to others. The group must constantly be reminded that there is a responsibility to grow the group. Missions and outreach are a part of what a small group is all about. Small groups can be the best way to invite your unchurched and lost friends to come and hear God's Word. It is a way to bring people into the church in a manner which may be less threatening for some.

A small group is not to take the place of the church. It is to be a part of the work of the church. The small group members are still a part of the church as a whole and must remain integrated into the worship and mission of the church. An outward focus is to be reinforced in the group.

Question 1. How might a small group move toward being a clique without realizing it?

Question 2. How can a small group remain open to new members?

III. Conversation Hijackers

There are two extremes in a small group. There are some who need to be encouraged to talk more and there are those who will need to be encouraged to listen more. Small groups are a place where it is important to allow everyone to share and be a part of the conversation. Occasionally there will be members who love the spotlight. These are the ones who will dominate the conversation to a point of distraction. Beware of those who want to share about another person's feelings and emotions. Each person should talk about themselves, allowing time for others to share.

Silence is a problem for some. When there is a lull in the discussion, some may try to jump in and speak for the purpose of breaking the silence. The problem is that God often uses the silence. This is a time when members may be processing what has been discussed. They may be dealing with emotions and memories, not ready to continue right away.

A person who talks too much can be a serious problem if left unchecked. There are times when one person may need to talk more because of circumstances of life, but when this happens continually it needs to be dealt with. When a person continues to talk too much no one is helped. The group can become alienated and resentful.

Dealing with a conversation hog should be resolved by the group leader along with the group. The structure of the group will help with this issue. The leader might need to interrupt the person and say that we need to hear from another member of the group. The group may address the problem and include something in their covenant concerning the importance of everyone having the opportunity to share. Often a conversation hog is unaware that what they are doing is a problem. They may see themselves as positively impacting the discussion. They need to be reassured that what they have to say is important while also understanding that others have important things to share as well.

Question 1. Why is silence difficult for so many people today?

Question 2. How can a group ensure that everyone takes part in the discussion?

IV. Neediness.

Neediness can be defined as being incomplete or lacking. God often uses our neediness to help us to seek Him and to mature us as believers. In Scripture, God promises to help the needy, “For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death” (Psa. 72:12-13).

Neediness can cause problems in a small group. Drs. Cloud and Townsend list several potential problems that may need to be addressed in a small group.⁷

- Taking up too much group time.
- Constant crises that never get resolved.
- Emotional dependency that the group cannot meet.
- Inability to be comforted.
- Not taking group advice.
- Seeing the group as “not enough”.

Some of the core issues of neediness include an inability to connect with others. In this case a group might reach out to the person with support, but the person cannot receive it. There are many reasons this might happen. The person may be afraid to accept the support, or he might not know how. What group members ultimately need is to connect to each other. Often the relationship is more important than the advice that is given by the group.

There is a deep-seated loneliness that may require resources beyond what the group has to offer. This person might need to seek professional Christian counseling. But the group can still provide comfort, support, compassion, and guidance. The group leader will need to evaluate the situation and consult with the pastor about seeking a solution to the problem.

Question 1. How can neediness be a good thing in the life of a Christian?

Question 2. How can neediness be harmful to a small group?

⁷ Cloud and Townsend, *Making Small Groups Work*, 257-58.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Allen, Willoughby C. *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*. A Critical and Exegetical Commentary, vol. 26. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1901.
- Arnold, Jeffrey. *The Big Book on Small Groups*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1992.
- Barrett, C. K. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*. The International Critical Commentary. London: T & T Clark, 2004.
- Blomberg, Craig L. *Matthew*. The New American Commentary, vol. 22. Nashville: B & H, 1992.
- Bock, Darrell L. *Acts*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Acts: An Expositional Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997.
- Boren, Scott M. *MissioRelate: Becoming a Church of Missional Small Groups*. Houston: Tough Publications, 2012.
- Brown, Dale W. *Understanding Pietism*. Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1996.
- Bruce, F. F. *The Book of Acts*. New International Commentary of the New Testament. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988.
- Cloud, Henry, and John Townsend. *Making Small Groups Work: What Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.
- Coleman, Robert E. *The Master Plan of Discipleship*. Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987.
- _____. *The Master Plan of Evangelism*. Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993.
- Donahue, Bill, and Russ Robinson. *Building a Church of Small Groups: A Place Where Nobody Stands Alone*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001.
- Elwell, Walter A., ed. *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988.
- Fee, Gordon, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. Understanding the Bible Commentary Series. Grand Rapids: Bakers, 1988.
- Fernando, Ajith. *Acts*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998.

- Fitzmyer, Joseph A. *The Acts of the Apostles*. The Anchor Bible, vol. 31. New York: Yale University Press, 1998.
- Gladden, Steve. *Small Groups with Purpose: How to Create Healthy Communities*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011.
- Henderson, D. Michael. *John Wesley's Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples*. Wilmore, KY: Rafiki Books, 1997.
- Hendricks, Howard, and William Hendricks. *Iron Sharpens Iron*. Chicago: Moody, 1995.
- Henry, Matthew. *Matthew to John. Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996.
- House, Brad. *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011.
- Howerton, Rick. *A Different Kind of Tribe: Embracing the New Small Group Dynamic*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2012.
- Lea, Thomas D., and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr. *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*. New American Commentary, vol. 34. Nashville: Holman, 1992.
- Longenecker, Richard N. *Acts. The Expositor's Bible Commentary with The New International Version*. Edited by Frank Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- MacArthur, John. *1 & 2 Timothy: Encouragement for Church Leaders*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Marshall, Howard I. *Acts*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 5. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008.
- Osborne, Larry. *Sticky Church*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008.
- Peterson, David G. *Acts*. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2009.
- Phillips, John. *Exploring the Gospel of Matthew: An Expository Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999.
- Platt, David. *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*. Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary. Nashville: B & H, 2013
- Polhill, John B. *Acts*. New American Commentary, vol. 26. Nashville: Holman, 1992.
- Putman, Jim. *Real-Life Discipleship: Building Churches That Make Disciples*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010.
- Robertson, Archibald Thomas. *The Epistles of Paul*. Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 4. Nashville: Broadman, 1931.
- _____. *The Gospel According to Matthew, The Gospel According to Mark*. Word Pictures in The New Testament, vol. 1. Nashville: Broadman, 1930.

- Saer, Orlando. *Iron Sharpens Iron: Leading Bible Oriented Small Groups That Thrive*. Glasgow, Scotland: Bell and Bain, 2010.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Acts*. Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 5. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012.
- Search, Bill. *Simple Small Groups: A User-Friendly Guide for Small Group Leaders*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008.
- Spurgeon, Charles. *2 Timothy*. *Spurgeon's Commentaries*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014.
- Stetzer, Ed, and Eric Geiger. *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups*. Nashville: B & H, 2014.
- Witherington, Ben, III. *Acts: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998.

ABSTRACT

REVITALIZING DISCIPLESHIP AT EAST HICKMAN BAPTIST CHURCH IN LYLES, TENNESSEE, THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

Fred Steven Quintanilla, DMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. William D. Henard

This project seeks to revitalize discipleship at East Hickman Baptist Church in Lyles, Tennessee, through small groups. Chapter 1 presents the ministry context of East Hickman Baptist Church and presents the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of Scripture (Acts 2:42-47) to provide the principles that should characterize biblical community in the life of the church. Chapter 3 shows how small groups are the practical medium for the developing healthy biblical community devoted to the Word of God, Christian fellowship, and meaningful prayer. Chapter 4 describes the project, recounting the content and methodology of the curriculum and sermon series, and the launching of the small groups. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, this project seeks to equip East Hickman Baptist Church to make disciples and to glorify God.

VITA

Fred Steven Quintanilla

EDUCATION

BA, Belmont University, 1996

MDiv, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008

MINISTERIAL

Pastor, Rayon City Baptist Church, Old Hickory, Tennessee, 2001-2006

Pastor, East Hickman Baptist Church, Lyles, Tennessee, 2012-