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EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY OF
GRACE CHURCH IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK,
FOR DISCIPLE-MAKING MINISTRY

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EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY OF
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For the glory of God

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BDAG Danker, Frederick W., Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000
- JETS* *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
- K&D Keil, Carl Friedrich, and Franz Delitzsch. *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Translated by James Martin et al. 25 vols. Edinburgh, 1857–1878. Reprint, 10 vols., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996
- LBC London Baptist Confession of 1689
- L&N Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. New York: United Bible Societies, 1989
- NAC New American Commentary
- NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–1976

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PREFACE

This project has been profoundly shaped by the many men and women who have disciplined me during pivotal stages in my Christian life. First, I thank the Lord for my father and mother, who brought me up “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). They were my first and most influential disciplers. Their fervent prayers, Christlike example, unwavering love, and wise counsel helped me see and embrace the beauty of the gospel. I miss them deeply and look forward to the day when we are reunited in the presence of our Savior. I dedicate this project in memory of them.

Second, I praise God for the discipling influence of godly friends. In particular, I thank the Lord for Paul Schlehlein, Jim Ghanayem, Joel Porcher, and Matthew Moran. These dear brothers and partners in ministry have shaped my walk with Christ in countless ways. They have walked with me through the ups and downs of life, patiently loving me and pointing me to Christ. Their friendship has been a life-transforming gift of grace. I am thankful for the many memories we have shared over the years serving the Lord together.

Third, I thank the Lord for my church family. One of the greatest privileges of my life has been serving as a pastor at Community of Grace. Words cannot express how thankful I am for the overwhelming encouragement, love, and support the church has shown to my family and me since our merge in 2020. I pray that this project has helped equip us to become a more faithful, fruitful disciple-making community.

I would also like to thank my project supervisor, Dr. Adam Howell, and editor, Jennifer Stec, for their insightful feedback, helpful suggestions, and timely encouragement throughout this project.

This project would not be possible apart from the love, encouragement, and patience of my dear wife. Over the past eighteen years, she has been my faithful companion, best friend, and loving partner through the many adventures, trials, challenges, and joys of life and ministry. She has consistently modeled what the disciple-making life is all about. There is no one that I would rather be with than with my beloved bride.

I pray that this project will bring glory to God as the members of Community of Grace become equipped for disciple-making ministry.

Micah Colbert

Buffalo, New York

December 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission of Community of Grace Church is to make mature, Christlike disciples who glorify God and impact our community with the gospel. For most of its history, however, the church has done little to actively reach the community or equip its members for disciple-making ministry. By God's grace, the church has been experiencing renewed energy and commitment to fulfill its God-given mission. For this reason, Community of Grace Church is seeking to equip its members to become disciple-makers who intentionally evangelize the lost and help fellow believers mature in their walk with Christ.

Context

Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, started in 1990 when a small group of like-minded believers from the Tonawanda and Amherst areas began meeting for Sunday worship. Most of these families were formerly members of First Baptist Church of Amherst. In the late 1980s, First Baptist of Amherst was a growing, thriving church with about four hundred members. The church had a robust preaching and teaching ministry as well as an active gospel presence in the community. However, due to a moral scandal within the pastoral leadership team, the church began to disintegrate. A cluster of families from that church along with a few other families in the area started meeting weekly for worship. That small group of believers eventually covenanted together to form Community of Grace Church.

The initial core families of Community of Grace were well grounded in the faith as a result of their time at First Baptist of Amherst. They had a deep appreciation for

theological education and doctrinally rich preaching. They also had a strong desire to see their children brought up in a Bible-believing, Bible-preaching church. Therefore, one of the first steps the church took during its early years was to call a pastor who was committed to expository preaching. For more than twenty-five years, the pastor faithfully expounded the Scriptures to the congregation each Sunday.¹ About seven or so years into his ministry, he began to grow in his understanding of Reformed theology. The doctrines of grace and the centrality of the gospel began to shape his preaching and teaching ministry. The sovereignty of God and the sufficiency of the gospel became cherished beliefs that shaped the culture of the church.

Community of Grace grew from a handful of families to approximately seventy-five members by the mid-2000s. In 2008, the church purchased its current building located in Williamsville, New York. From 2008 to 2018, many of the young people who grew up in the church gradually moved away or went to other churches. By 2019, most of the church members were older believers. In the summer of 2020, a local church plant comprised mostly of singles and young couples merged with Community of Grace. I was the pastor of that church plant and became the discipleship and outreach pastor at Community of Grace after the merger. Today, the church is a healthy balance of young and old, with an average attendance of one hundred or more people on a typical Sunday morning.

Prior to the merger in 2020, Community of Grace lacked a compelling vision for disciple-making ministry. The pastor faithfully expounded God's Word every Sunday but did not develop or communicate a cohesive plan for how the church would reach the community or equip its members to build up one another in the faith. He started various

¹ For most of his ministry, the church's first pastor served as the sole elder. In 2017, he invited an additional pastor to join the staff at the church. In that same year, the church ordained its first lay elder. The church's first pastor moved to San Antonio, Texas, in March of 2020. I was asked by the pastor and elder to consider joining the pastoral team of Community of Grace during the summer of 2020. The three of us now serve the church as its pastors.

ministries like small groups or Sunday school classes in the past but did not clearly explain why these ministries were important or how they would help the church make Christlike disciples. Members of the church were not trained to lead or serve in many of these ministries. As a result, many ministry initiatives failed to gain traction as members felt discouraged or unmotivated to participate.

The 2020 merger infused Community of Grace with new life and a healthy eldership. The elders developed a mission statement to unify and reorient the church around its God-given mission. The church also started Sunday morning Bible classes for adults and children as well as weekly small groups that have all gradually grown in attendance. The church also organized three outreach venues to help members reach unbelievers in our community with the gospel. While the elders have been encouraged by the enthusiasm surrounding these ministry initiatives, they also recognize the importance of thoroughly training and equipping the members of the church to grow as disciple-makers so that the church can continue to flourish in its mission.

Rationale

There are clear theological and historical reasons for Community of Grace to equip its members for disciple-making ministry. Theologically, Community of Grace affirms the biblical mandate to make mature, Christlike disciples for God's glory. This disciple-making mission has been entrusted to the church by the risen Christ (Matt 28:18–20) and is in alignment with God's eternal plan to glorify his Son in the midst of a redeemed, transformed people from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 4–5). God has ordained the church to be his primary discipling agent in the world today. God has given the church pastors and teachers to equip his people for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11–12). As the church equips God's people to effectively minister his Word to others, the gospel is advanced and the church is built up in the faith (Eph 4:11–16; Col 1:28–29). Each church and Christian is called to labor with God in his kingdom-

advancing, disciple-making mission.

For most of its history, Community of Grace did not actively train its members to make Christlike disciples. There was not a defined plan or process for discipling members to reach the community or build one another up in the faith. Sadly, the church's formal ministry practices did not align with its theological convictions. The elders recognized the need to equip the members of the church with the knowledge and skills necessary to make Christlike disciples. With this in mind, the elders believed that this ministry project was essential to Community of Grace Church as we lead God's people on mission for God's glory.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, for disciple-making ministry.

Goals

The following three goals were established to determine the completion of this project. The first goal focused on the importance of assessing the church's knowledge about disciple-making ministry. The second and third goals focused on equipping the members of Community of Grace Church for disciple-making ministry.

1. The first goal was to assess the church's knowledge about disciple-making ministry.
2. The second goal was to develop an eight-lesson curriculum to train and equip the members of the church for disciple-making ministry.
3. The third goal was to increase knowledge of disciple-making by teaching the eight-lesson training curriculum to the members of Community of Grace Church.

Definitive research methodology measured the accomplishment of these three goals.²

² All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of these three goals. The first goal was to assess the class participants' knowledge of disciple-making ministry. This goal was measured by administering a Disciple-Making Readiness Survey (DMRS) to class participants. The goal was considered successfully met when fourteen participants completed the DMRS and the data was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of participants' knowledge of disciple-making ministry.

The second goal was to develop an eight-lesson curriculum to train and equip members for disciple-making ministry. This goal was measured by a panel of elders and church leaders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to increase knowledge of disciple-making ministry by teaching the eight-lesson training curriculum to the church. This goal was measured by re-administering the DMRS survey after the training and measuring the change in disciple-making knowledge. The goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-project survey scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Disciple. The term “disciple” historically referred to a student, pupil, or learner.³ In ancient times, a disciple would apprentice under a teacher or rabbi, following them closely to learn their teachings and imitate their lifestyle.⁴ When a person repents

³ Michael J. Wilkins, “Disciples,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 176.

⁴ BDAG, s.v. “μαθητεύω” (p. 609).

and believes the gospel, they become a lifelong follower or student of Jesus (John 10:27). In this project, a disciple refers to a person who responds to the gospel in repentant faith and begins a new life of transformation following Christ.

This project affirms the biblical truth that all true believers are disciples. Mark Dever notes, “To be a Christian means to be a disciple. There are no Christians who are not disciples. And to be a disciple of Jesus means that you follow Jesus.”⁵ In the New Testament, terms like believer, saint, and disciple are used interchangeably to refer to the same group of people: those who are saved by grace through faith in Christ (Acts 6:1, 7; 11:26; 14:20).

Disciple-making. This term, which comes from the Greek verb μαθητεύω in Matt 28:19 and Acts 14:21, means “to cause someone to be a follower or disciple of another.”⁶ To make a disciple is to make a committed, life-long follower of Christ.⁷ Disciple-making therefore encompasses the church’s responsibility to not only evangelize unbelievers but also to teach believers to continually submit to Christ in all areas of life (Matt 28:18–20). Succinctly stated, disciple-making is helping people to trust and follow Jesus.

Disciple-making ministry. In this project, disciple-making ministry refers to the various ways the church makes mature, Christlike disciples. Disciple-making ministry takes place both formally and informally as believers prayerfully proclaim the truths of God’s Word to encourage others to trust and follow Christ.⁸

One limitation applied to this project. Not all participants were able to physically attend the classes each Sunday for eight weeks. To mitigate this limitation,

⁵ Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 15.

⁶ L&N, s.v. “μαθητεύω” (p. 470).

⁷ BDAG, s.v. “μαθητεύω” (pp. 609–10).

⁸ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2009), 41.

each lesson was offered via the Thinkific online training platform so that participants could read the notes and hear the recording of the lesson.⁹

One delimitation applied to this project. As noted, due to various circumstances, some class participants were unable to attend all of the class sessions. To provide enough data to develop a statistically meaningful understanding of participants' increase in understanding of disciple-making ministry, the post-project survey was only administered to those who were able to attend at least four of the eight classes. The reason for this delimitation was to focus on accurately assessing the effectiveness of the class for those who were able to attend.

Conclusion

God's Word provides the basis for the church's disciple-making mission. The following chapters show how the truths of God's Word inform, guide, and shape the church's task of making Christlike disciples. Chapter 2 focuses on the biblical and theological foundations of a disciple-making ministry. Chapter 3 focuses on how Biblical principles inform how the church equips its members for disciple-making ministry. In chapter 4, I provide details and a description of the project. In chapter 5, I offer an overall evaluation of the project.

⁹ Thinkific, "Home," accessed April 3, 2023, <https://www.thinkific.com>. To view the online version of the class, see <https://rootedthinking.thinkific.com/courses/the-disciple-making-life-course>.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to equip the members of Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, for disciple-making ministry. Disciple-making ministry is how the church fulfills its God-given mission. Therefore, it is paramount that the members of our church have a robust, working theology of mission that is thoroughly rooted in God's Word. In this chapter, I provide the biblical and theological basis for the church's mission. I explore the relationship between the church's mission and the mission of God and examine key Biblical texts that clarify the mission of the church. In addition, I explain how this ministry project enables Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, to fulfill her God-given mission.

Clarifying Mission

Mission is a buzzword that Christians love to use but struggle to define. It is common for churches, small groups, and even clothing brands to advertise themselves as missional. Mission seems to encompass almost everything from preaching the gospel to digging wells in Africa. Is mission simply an umbrella term that modifies everything churches do in service to Christ and community, or it is something more specific?

Greg Gilbert wisely notes, "Mission . . . is not everything we do in Jesus's name, nor everything we do in obedience to Christ. Mission is the task we are given to fulfill."¹

¹ Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 29.

According to the Scriptures, the specific task that God gave to the church is to make Christlike disciples for the glory of God (Matt 28:18–20; Eph 4:11–16). As Gilbert states, “The mission of the church is to go into the world and make disciples by declaring the gospel of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit and gathering these disciples into churches, that they might worship and obey Jesus now and in eternity to the glory of God the Father.”² Churches should, of course, bless their communities through acts of service. God’s people are called to be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14). Christian service glorifies God (Matt 5:17). Good works in and of themselves, however, are not the church’s mission. They might help facilitate the mission, but apart from gospel proclamation and spiritual formation, they fall short of the church’s God-given responsibility.

In short, mission is far more than an umbrella idea, trendy modifier, or extracurricular activity. It is the church’s specific, God-given task. Mission shapes who we are and how we live as the people of God in this world. In the next section, I explain how the church’s mission relates to the eternal mission of God.

God’s Mission: The Impetus for the Church’s Mission

The mission of the church does not begin with a command or a need. It begins with God. George Peters notes, “In Christian missions, God is foremost the subject of missions and not simply the object. He is the gracious Actor, merciful Initiator, and sustaining Presence. Missions is of Him, by Him, and unto Him.”³ The church was birthed *by* and *for* God’s mission. The mission of God shapes, informs, and empowers the church’s disciple-making responsibility. As Christopher Wright notes, “Fundamentally, our mission (if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation

² DeYoung and Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?*, 62.

³ George W. Peters, “Missions in Biblical Perspective: Perspectives on the Church’s Mission Part 1,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136, no. 541 (1979): 6 (emphasis original). In the article, Peters uses the term *missions* to refer to the outworking of the church’s mission within the context of cross-cultural ministry.

as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation”⁴ Therefore, it is paramount that God’s people understand God’s mission so that they can see how the church’s mission fits into God’s eternal purposes.

Keith Whitfield states, “Because the Trinity is the ground of all reality, the mission of the triune God is the mission for everything. The church is redeemed for this purpose, and the church’s mission is to participate in this God-glorifying mission.”⁵

An Overview of God’s Mission

God’s mission refers to his goal or purpose in, for, and through creation. According to the Scriptures, the mission of God is to reveal his glory, redeem his people, and restore creation to himself. God accomplishes his revealing, redeeming, and restoring mission through the work of his Son, Jesus Christ. There are four basic acts or movements in the Biblical narrative that progressively reveal God’s mission: creation, the fall, redemption, and restoration.⁶

Creation

God created all things for his glory. Psalm 19:3–4 states that the heavens declare the glory of God. In his benevolence, God created a universe that continually displays his eternal power and divine nature (Rom 1:19–20). Everything that God made was created by and for Christ. Jesus is the ruler, sustainer, and goal of all creation. The Scriptures state,

⁴ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 23.

⁵ Keith Whitfield, “The Triune God: The God of Mission,” in *Theology and Practice of Mission: God, the Church, and the Nations*, ed. Bruce Riley Ashford (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 27.

⁶ The creation, fall, restoration, and redemption framework is used by Ashford and other writers in *Theology and Practice of Mission*. I have adopted this framework in this chapter to develop the story of God’s mission from the Scriptures.

All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:3)

He is the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Col 1:15–17)

But in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (Heb 1:2)

The crowning jewel of God’s creation was humanity. God uniquely created Adam and Eve in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26–28) so that they would know, love, worship, and glorify him. God blessed his people and commissioned them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the world with divine image bearers who would radiate his glory as they lived under his rule. On the final day of creation, God declared that everything he had made was very good (Gen 1:31).

God wills that his glory be known, seen, and celebrated by the peoples of the earth. As Whitfield notes, “God’s mission is to make himself known to his creation. . . . This is the driving plan for God’s purpose for all of history.”⁷ God’s mission is “for the earth [to] be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).

The Fall

Instead of submitting to God, Adam and Eve sinfully attempted to become like him. They believed Satan’s lie and rebelled against their Creator (Gen 3:1–7). In so doing, they questioned God’s Word, doubted God’s goodness, and ultimately defied his command. Through Adam’s transgression, sin and death entered the world and spread to all people (Rom 5:12). Sin not only severed humanity’s relationship with God, but its decaying and deadly effects impacted the rest of creation as well (Rom 8:19–23). God punished Adam and Eve and cast them out of his presence in the garden (Gen 3:16–24).

⁷ Whitfield, “The Triune God: The God of Mission,” 22.

Man's relationship with God, each other, and the world was fundamentally broken. Apart from divine intervention, humanity would be doomed to face the eternal consequences of their rebellion against God (Rom 6:23; Rev 20:11–15).

Redemption

God knew that man would rebel. He knew that people would sin and fall short of his glory (Rom 3:23). God's plan for creation and humanity, however, would not be thwarted by man's rebellion. From eternity past, God determined to redeem for himself a people who would be "to the praise of his glorious grace" (Eph 1:3–14; Titus 2:14; 1 Pet 2:9–10). God, of course, would hold Adam and Eve accountable for their sin. As he promised, they would surely die (Gen 2:17). Nevertheless, God had not given up on his image-bearers. Nestled in God's pronouncement of judgment in Genesis 3:14–19 was a promise of hope. Sin and death would reign, but not entirely. God would raise up a redeemer from the seed of the woman who would triumph over Satan and restore man to a right relationship with God. Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum describe this promise of grace in Genesis 3:15: which "runs across the entire Canon, and it is through the biblical covenants that it takes on greater clarity and expansion until it reaches its crescendo in the person and work of Christ."⁸

God's redemptive mission and promise of grace are further clarified in his covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:9–14). As Wright notes, "The dynamic narrative of God's saving purpose for all nations through Abraham . . . is the heart of the gospel as announced by the Scriptures."⁹ In this monumental covenant, "God chooses not only to make Abraham and his offspring the object of his blessing, but also to make them

⁸ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God's Kingdom through God's Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 255.

⁹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 193.

the instruments of his blessing to the world.”¹⁰

The blessing God promised to Abraham would not be limited to one ethnicity or people. God’s mission has always been multiethnic (Rev 5:9–10; 7:9–12). His heart for the nations is not merely a New Testament reality. From the Old Testament narrative, we see that God’s mission was not limited to the nation of Israel. Gentiles like Ruth, Rahab, Jethro, and even Nebuchadnezzar worshiped God as the one true God who rules over all. David prayed throughout the Psalms that God would bless his people so that his saving reign would be known in all the earth (Pss 67, 96, 98). At the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed that the Lord would maintain the cause of his people so “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the Lord is God” (1 Kgs 8:60). Through their obedience to the Mosaic covenant, Israel would be a light to the nations as they demonstrated the beauty of what life looks like under the righteous reign of God (Exod 19:4–6).

The apostle Paul clarified the nature, extent, and promise of God’s covenant with Abraham in Galatians 3–4. According to Paul, participation in Abraham’s covenantal blessing comes not through ethnic heritage, but through faith in the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus Christ (Gal 3:7–10, 14). As Colin Smith notes, “[God’s] blessing would not come to people from all nations through Abraham himself or through his descendants in general, but through one child called ‘the seed’ who would be born in Abraham’s line (Gal 3:16).”¹¹ All those who are in Christ are Abraham’s offspring and heirs of the promised blessing (Gal 3:29).

The remainder of the Old Testament story progressively reveals God’s redemptive plan. God gave various other covenants that provided further clarity on his promise of grace in Genesis 3:15. The climax of God’s redemptive revelation is found in

¹⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, 253.

¹¹ Colin S. Smith, “The Plan,” in *The Gospel as Center: Renewing Our Faith and Reforming Our Ministry Practices*, ed. D. A. Carson and Timothy Keller (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 93.

the coming of the seed of Abraham, the Lord Jesus (Gal 4:4–5). The eternal Word became flesh to fulfill God’s promises, reveal God’s glory, and redeem humanity from sin (John 1:14, 18). Through his sinless life and sin-bearing death, Christ provides salvation for those who repent and trust in him.

In summary, God’s redemptive mission is first revealed in Genesis 3:15. God’s promise to send a Redeemer was clarified in his covenant with Abraham and further revealed in the other key covenants of Scripture. His redemptive purposes find their fulfillment in the person and work of Christ (Eph 1:9–10; 3:2–11) and are now made manifest through the church (Eph 3:8–10). As Bruce Ashford states,

At the center of God’s redemptive purpose is the salvation of man, the creature made in the image and likeness of God. God does not, however, simply save an individual; he redeems a people for himself, a people for his own possession (I Pet. 2:9). This people of God is the body of Christ (Eph. 4:16) and the temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19), whom God will make into a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19) to serve him and glorify him forever. Through his redeemed community and its proclamation (Matt. 28:18–20; Ro. 10:14–17) and spiritual ministries (Acts 2:42–47), God unleashes his gospel on the world. The Bible unfolds this grand redemptive narrative from Genesis to Revelation.¹²

Restoration

Sin and death will not have the final say in God’s creation. Jesus has promised that he will make all things new (Rev 21:5). Christ will come again to reverse sin’s curse, execute final judgment on his enemies, and reign with his redeemed people in the new heavens and earth. The mission of God will find its climax when all things are restored to Christ.

The Church’s Task in Carrying Out God’s Mission

What then is the relationship between the church’s mission and God’s eternal plan? God’s mission and the church’s mission are clearly interrelated but not identical.

¹² Bruce Riley Ashford and David P. Nelson, “The Story of Mission: The Grand Biblical Narrative,” in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 13.

Ashford explains,

Although the two are not synonymous, the church's mission is framed by God's mission, seen upon the backdrop of God's mission, and understood in the light of God's mission. The church takes its cues from God himself and therefore is committed to his mission, seeking to increase his renown, proclaim his gospel, advance his church, and bear witness to the truth of His Word.¹³

The church participates in God's mission as it fulfills its specific disciple-making mission. The church "fills the earth with God's glory" by making Christlike disciples of all nations. This mission encompasses both evangelism and the ongoing formation of a Christlike people who faithfully bear God's image in obedience to God's Word for God's glory. In summary, the church's disciple-making ministry is shaped by God's mission, is driven by God's glory, and is the means by which God carries out his redemptive purposes in the world today.

The Church's Mission and the Great Commission

The most well-known passage articulating the church's mission is Matthew 28:18–20. This text, commonly referred to as the Great Commission, concisely states the final marching orders Christ gave to his followers before ascending into heaven. Phillip Graham Ryken notes that in this commission, Jesus provides "a clear, unambiguous statement of [the church's] mission to the world."¹⁴

While Jesus specifically addresses his disciples, it would be a mistake to assume that his command is only binding to them. D. A. Carson notes, "The injunction is given . . . to the Eleven in their role as disciples (Matthew 28:16). Therefore, they are paradigms for all disciples. . . . It is binding on all Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are—disciples of Jesus Christ."¹⁵ Authors Colin Marshall and Tony

¹³ Bruce Riley Ashford, ed., introduction to *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 1–2.

¹⁴ Phillip Graham Ryken, *City on a Hill: Reclaiming the Biblical Pattern for the Church* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 129.

¹⁵ D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 596.

Payne state that the Great Commission “makes disciple-making the normal agenda and priority of every church and every Christian disciple.”¹⁶

Due to the important role this passage plays in a biblical theology of mission, I will carefully examine the basis, command, and promise for the church’s disciple-making mission to the nations.

The Basis of the Commission

The mission of the church is based on the authority Christ has as the sovereign King over God’s kingdom. Before commissioning his disciples, Jesus declared, “All authority in heaven and on earth is given to me” (Matt 28:18). This statement does not mean that Christ possessed limited or partial authority prior to his resurrection.

Throughout Matthew’s gospel, the authority of the divine Son is clearly stressed.¹⁷

Commenting on Christ’s statement, Carson notes,

It is not Jesus’ authority per se that becomes more absolute. Rather, the spheres in which he now exercises absolute authority are enlarged to include all heaven and earth, i.e., the universe. This authority has been “given” him by the Father. . . . The Son becomes the one through whom *all* God’s authority is mediated. He is, as it were, the mediatorial King. This well-defined exercise of authority is given Jesus as the climactic vindication of his humiliation (cf. Philippians 2:5–11); and it marks a turning point in redemptive history, for Messiah’s “kingdom” (i.e., his “kingdom,” the exercise of his divine and saying authority; see on 3:2; 13:37–39) has dawned in new power.¹⁸

A new chapter in redemptive history had begun. The limitations of Christ’s incarnation were now over. Assuming his rightful place as the risen King who reigns over God’s kingdom, Christ has ultimate authority over the created universe. In light of Christ’s cosmic authority, the church is commanded, empowered, and equipped to carry

¹⁶ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2009), 13.

¹⁷ See Matt 7:29; 10:1, 7–8; 11:27; 22:43–44; 24:35.

¹⁸ Carson, *Matthew*, 594–95.

out God’s redemptive mission in the world. Christ’s authority, therefore, is the grounds for the church’s authority to make disciples of all nations.

The Command of the Commission

The risen King has commissioned his people to go and make disciples of all nations. Grammatically, the thrust of the Great Commission is to make disciples. The verb translated as *make disciples* is the only imperative in the text. The other key activities (go, baptizing, and teaching) are all participles that clarify the central command. Commenting on the structure of this passage, D. Edmond Hiebert notes,

Only the second term “make disciples” is an imperative, second person plural verb; the other three terms are nominative plural participles, all directly related to the plural subject of the main verb. The construction thus stresses the focal point in this commission, namely, the assignment to “make disciples of all the nations.” The three participles, grammatically dependent on the main verb, denote activities related to the accomplishment of the central assignment.¹⁹

Each activity of Christ’s commission will be examined below.

Go

Unlike the other two present active participles that emphasize ongoing action, πορευθέντες (“go”) is an aorist passive participle. Scholars disagree about the nature of this first participle. Some argue that *go* is a contemporaneous participle which expresses an action happening relatively within the same time frame as the imperative.²⁰ If the participles are contemporaneous, it would literally be translated as “having gone, make disciples.” Commenting on the relationship between *go* and *make disciples*, Robert Culver notes, “Presupposed by this basic command is the fact that Christian believers are already to be deployed on the scene of their missionary labors— πορευθέντες having

¹⁹ D. Edmond Hiebert, “An Expository Study of Matthew 28:16–20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149, no. 595 (July 1992): 348.

²⁰ See Albert L. Lukaszewski, *The Lexham Syntactic Greek New Testament Glossary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2007), s.v. “contemporaneous participle.”

gone, or, as ye go.”²¹ Carson, however, argues that *go* is a circumstantial participle that has imperatival force: “While it remains true to say that the main imperatival force rests with ‘make disciples,’ not with ‘go,’ in a context that demands that this ministry extend to ‘all nations,’ it is difficult to believe that ‘go’ has lost all imperatival force.”²²

Whether *go* is seen as an attendant command or an action that is already happening, it is clear from the context that God’s people have been sent by Christ to carry out his mission to the nations. Disciple-making does not happen accidentally or haphazardly. It requires initiative and intentionality. The church must proactively engage unbelievers with the gospel if she is to be faithful to her God-given mission.

Make Disciples

The central command and thrust of Christ’s mission for the church is to make disciples. Doug Coleman states, “Jesus defined his followers’ task as making disciples, a more comprehensive assignment that includes teaching believers to obey all that Christ commanded. In biblical or theological terms, the aim is sanctification and conformation to the image of Christ.”²³ As noted earlier, a disciple is a student, pupil, or learner.²⁴ In ancient times, a disciple would apprentice under a teacher or rabbi, following them closely to learn their teachings and imitate their lifestyle.²⁵ When a person believes the gospel, they become a lifelong follower or student of Jesus (John 10:27). As Leon Morris notes,

²¹ Robert D. Culver, “What Is the Church’s Commission? Some Exegetical Issues in Matthew 28:16–20,” *JETS* 10, no. 2 (Spring 1967): 119.

²² Carson, *Matthew*, 595.

²³ Doug Coleman, “The Agents of Mission: Humanity,” in Ashford, *Theology and Practice of Mission*, 44.

²⁴ Michael J. Wilkins, “Disciples,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 176.

²⁵ BDAG, s.v. “μαθητεύω” (p. 609).

A disciple takes Jesus as his teacher and learns from him, and a disciple also follows Jesus. The life of a disciple is different because of his attachment to Jesus. The Master is not giving a command that will merely secure nominal adherence to a group, but one that will secure wholehearted commitment to a person. In the first century a disciple did not enroll with such-and-such a school, but with such-and-such a teacher. Jesus' disciples are people for whom a life has been given in ransom (20:28) and who are committed to the service of the Master, who not only took time to teach his disciples but who died for them and rose again. Those who are disciples of such a leader are committed people. And, of course, this is the kind of disciple that he looks for his followers to make. They are to make disciples *of all the nations*, which points to a worldwide scope for their mission.²⁶

Disciples are those who respond to the gospel in repentant faith and begin lives of transformation following Christ. They trust, obey, and submit to Jesus. To make a disciple is to make a committed, life-long follower of Christ.²⁷ Disciple-making, therefore, encompasses the church's responsibility to not only evangelize unbelievers, but also to teach believers to continually submit to Christ in all areas of life. Succinctly stated, disciple-making is helping people to trust and follow Jesus.

How are disciples made? Christ clarifies and explains his command with two present participles: *baptizing* and *teaching*. As Robert Culver states, "Two activities will be involved in making disciples of the nations, not successively, but somehow contemporaneously, βαπτίζοντες 'baptizing,' and διδάχοντες 'teaching.'"²⁸ Both of these actions are essential in the church's task of extending God's redemptive mission to the nations.

Baptizing

The word baptize (βαπτίζω) literally means "to put or go under water."²⁹ In Jewish tradition, baptism was a symbolic act used in reference to ceremonial dedication,

²⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 746.

²⁷ BDAG, s.v. "μαθητεύω" (pp. 609–10).

²⁸ Culver, "What Is the Church's Commission?," 119.

²⁹ BDAG, s.v. "βαπτίζω" (p. 164).

cleansing, renewal, and purification.³⁰ Christian baptism is an ordinance that symbolizes a person's identification with Christ and the church. The London Baptist Confession of 1689 states,

Baptism is an ordinance of the New Testament, ordained by Jesus Christ, to be unto the party baptized, a sign of his fellowship with him, in his death and resurrection; of his being engrafted into him; of remission of sins; and of giving up into God, through Jesus Christ, to live and walk in newness of life.³¹

Baptism is a necessary part of the church's mission for several reasons.

Baptism distinguishes those who belong to Christ from those who do not. Becoming a disciple is not a private or individualistic matter that has no bearing on the convert's life or identity. True repentance leads to a decisive break from the old way of life. Through baptism, the new convert indicates his resolve to follow Christ as one who is dead to sin and alive unto God. The disciple also publicly identifies with Christ's body, the church. This identification with the church can be seen in the New Testament pattern of baptism.³² First, the new convert hears the gospel and turns to Christ in repentance and faith. Second, the convert outwardly demonstrates his inward faith through baptism. Third, the baptized convert unites with a local church where he can live out the commands of Christ with other believers.

Teaching

New converts mature in the faith as they are taught to live a life of obedience to Christ and his commands. This obedience, however, is not merely an external activity or duty. It is an obedience that springs from faith (Rom 1:5). It is the overflow of a mind and heart captivated by the rich truths of the gospel. These truths must be taught so that

³⁰ BDAG, s.v. "βαπτίζω" (p. 164).

³¹ LBC 29.1. Similar definitions of baptism can be found in the New Hampshire Confession of Faith and the Baptist Faith and Message. Historically, there have been debates about the mode and recipients of baptism. Nevertheless, for our purposes, baptism is a symbol of identification with Christ and the church.

³² For example, see Acts 2:41–47; 16:14–15, 31–34; 18:8; 19:1–7.

the believer can live a life of submission to Christ.

The word teach (διδάσκω) encompasses both formal and informal instruction.³³ The focus of teaching in New Testament times was to provide practical knowledge to help the learner develop a new way of thinking and living.³⁴ Teaching can take place in a variety of contexts and ways as believers encourage one another in the pursuit of Christlikeness.

Teaching God’s Word is at the heart of all disciple-making ministry. Teaching, therefore, must occupy a place of preeminence in the life of the church. One of the primary responsibilities of elders is to teach and preach God’s Word (Col 1:28–29; 2 Tim 4:1–4). The elder’s teaching ministry is not merely confined to the pulpit but must be carried out in private as well (Acts 20:20). Teaching is not only the primary task of elders but the God-given responsibility of each member of the body of Christ (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:11–16). Every believer is called to prayerfully share the truths of God’s Word to help fellow believers mature in Christlikeness. The Scriptures exhort the older believers to teach or train the younger believers so that God’s people might adorn the gospel in each stage of life (Titus 2:1–12). The author of Hebrews urges all believers to exhort, encourage, and strengthen one another in the truths of God’s Word so that no one becomes hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 3:12–14; 10:22–25). Apart from the consistent, faithful teaching ministry of the body of Christ, disciples will never mature into Christlikeness.

The Promise of the Commission

After commissioning his disciples to make disciples of all nations, Jesus promised that his presence would go with them: “And behold, I am with you always, to

³³ BDAG, s.v. “διδάσκω” (p. 241).

³⁴ Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “Διδάσκω, Διδάσκαλος, Νομοδιδάσκαλος, Καλοδιδάσκαλος, Ψευδοδιδάσκαλος, Διδασκαλία, Ἐτεροδιδασκαλέω, Διδαχή, Διδακτός, Διδακτικός,” in *TDNT*, 10:135.

the end of the age” (Matt 28:20). Although Christ as God is omnipresent, there is a unique sense in which his presence sustains, strengthens, and supports his people as they carry out his mission to the nations. R. T. France notes, “The presence of Jesus himself among his people (cf. 18:20) ensures that it is not simply a relationship of formal obedience. In context this assurance is focused not on the personal comfort of the individual disciple but on the successful completion of the mission entrusted to the community as a whole.”³⁵ In light of this promise, God’s people can take heart as they seek to make mature, Christlike disciples for God’s glory.

The Context for Great Commission Ministry

God has ordained the church to be his primary discipling agent in the world today. J. T. English posits, “The local church is meant to be the primary spiritual guide for disciples who are on the journey of growing deeper in the love and knowledge of God.”³⁶ Jesus did not commission his followers to make rogue disciples who were disconnected from the body of Christ. Rather, the Bible teaches that the church is the primary discipler of the believer. Through the accountability, leadership, and ministry of the local church, the gospel is advanced and believers are built up in the faith (Eph 4:11–16; Col 1:28–29). The church’s regular gatherings enable God’s people to edify and stir up one another for love and good works (Heb 10:24–25).

Each church is called to labor with God in his disciple-making, God-revealing mission. Discipleship should be taking place primarily within the context of the local church. J.T. English states, “Discipleship outside the local church is exploding because discipleship inside the local church is neglected, but . . . Jesus has commissioned the local

³⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1119.

³⁶ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 49.

church specifically to teach, form, and develop maturing followers of Christ.”³⁷ When churches fail to fulfill their God-given mission, God’s people will be tempted to turn to outside voices for spiritual nourishment. “Someone should be able to come to faith, grow in the faith, and walk in Christian maturity solely from being formed by a local church.”³⁸ If the church is to be what God designed her to be, she must be committed to making Christlike disciples for God’s glory.

The Aim of Disciple-Making Ministry: Maturity in Christlikeness

The mission of the church is not merely to evangelize the lost but to make mature, Christlike disciples who glorify God and impact others with the gospel. If churches are to fulfill their mission, they must be clear on the characteristics of a mature disciple.

Characteristics of a Mature Disciple

According to Ephesians 4:11–16, a mature disciple is grounded in the word of God, growing in his walk, and going out as a gospel witness. A brief profile of each characteristic of a mature disciple will be provided below.³⁹

Grounded in the Word of God

A mature believer is grounded in the Word. Unlike a spiritually immature person who is “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14), a mature disciple is rooted and grounded in the faith “once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3).

³⁷ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 10.

³⁸ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 50.

³⁹ The following characteristics and descriptions are taken from Micah Colbert, “A Disciple-Making Philosophy for Church-Planting” (research paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

They partake of the “solid food” of God’s Word and can discern between truth and error (Heb 5:14). Practically, this means that mature believers have a firm grasp of essential Bible doctrines and the overall message of the Bible. They know how the various “pieces of the puzzle” in God’s Word work together to communicate God’s redemptive story. They can study the Bible on their own in a life-transforming manner (2 Cor 3:18). They consistently nourish their souls with the truths of God’s Word so they can actively “grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

Growing in a Walk

Mature disciples are not only grounded in the Word but also growing in a Christlike walk. Maturity is ultimately measured in terms of Christlikeness (Eph 4:13). A Christlike walk encompasses both a person’s inward character and outward conduct. Mature believers bear the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–24) and embrace a life of loving service to God and others (Matt 22:38–39). By God’s grace, they daily strive to mortify sin, grow in grace, and delight in the glory of God through the consistent, prayerful practice of spiritual disciplines. They “speak the truth in love” as they use their gifts to build up the body of Christ (Eph 4:15–16).

Going Out as a Witness

Finally, mature believers are witnesses to the transforming power of the gospel. Mature believers are equipped to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:12). They use their gifts to minister so that the gospel is advanced, disciples are reproduced, and the church is built up (2 Tim 2:2). Mature believers testify to the power of the gospel, communicating the message of Christ in ways that are winsome, faithful, and compelling. They can explain the hope of Christianity (1 Pet 3:15) as they call unbelievers to a life of repentance and faith. They embrace their gospel identity as “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20) as they actively engage unbelievers with the good news of Jesus.

Laboring for Maturity: An Analysis of Colossians 1:28–29

The goal of the apostle Paul’s preaching and teaching ministry was to see every believer mature in Christ. Paul used words like *toil*, *strive*, *struggle*, and *work* to describe his tireless labors to see God’s come to a place of maturity. As F. F. Bruce notes, “His apostolic work did not rest with the conversion of his hearers. That was a beginning; the end would not be reached until the day of Christ, and the quality of his ministry would be tested by the quality and maturity of those whom he could present as his spiritual children.”⁴⁰ The word translated *mature* (τέλειος) means “meeting the highest standard; perfect, complete, full grown.”⁴¹ As noted earlier, maturity in the Scriptures is measured in terms of Christlikeness. In Col 1:28–29, Paul declares both the message and process of building up believers in maturity.

The Message of Maturity

According to Paul, preaching Christ is not only necessary for conversion but for maturity in the faith as well. Having received Christ, believers are called to walk in him, “rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving” (Col 2:6–7). The truths of Christ, therefore, are not something believers move on *from* but move deeper *into*. Curtis Vaughan notes, “At the deepest level, therefore, the apostle conceived of his message not as a system or as a collection of rules and regulations, but as a living and glorious Person who is the fulfillment of the deepest hopes of mankind and the source of new life for all his people.”⁴² Christ was, as Bruce notes, “the sum and substance of their message, whether in the saving news which they announce in the world to bring men and women to faith, or

⁴⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 2nd ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 88.

⁴¹ BDAG, s.v. “τέλειος” (p. 995).

⁴² Curtis Vaughan, *Colossians*, in *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, *Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 192–93.

in the teaching which they impart to those who have believed.”⁴³ Unlike the false teachers at Colossae, who were peddling “higher knowledge” as necessary for perfection, Paul believed that all of God’s people have everything they need for life, wisdom, and godliness in Christ. Bruce again notes, “In the proclamation of Christ we bring all wisdom within the reach of all, and our purpose is to present each believer before the face of God in a state of complete spiritual maturity. There should be no exceptions; there are no heights in Christian attainment which are not within the reach of all, by the power of heavenly grace.”⁴⁴

The Means of Maturity

To present believers mature in Christ, Paul recognized the vital importance of both warning and teaching as he proclaimed gospel truths to God’s people. To warn (νουθετέω) means “to set right; to have a corrective influence on someone; to correct the mind, to put right what is wrong, to improve the spiritual attitude; to appeal to the moral consciousness to gain a hold over men and bring them to repentance.”⁴⁵ To teach is to instruct God’s people in the core truths of Scripture. Both warning and teaching emphasize the importance of imparting God’s Word in a way that impacts the mind, affections, and will. Both are needed to help God’s people understand who we are and what we should be in Christ.

Applying Paul’s Example

Proclaiming Christ means that believers teach and apply the truths of the gospel to God’s people so that together believers can walk “in newness of life” (Rom

⁴³ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 86.

⁴⁴ Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, 87.

⁴⁵ Johannes Behm and Ernst Würthwein, “Νοέω, Νοῦς, Νόημα, Ἀνόητος, Ἄνοια, Δυσνόητος, Διάνοια, Διανόημα, Ἔννοια, Εὐνοέω, Εὐνοια, Κατανοέω, Μετανοέω, Μετάνοια, Ἀμετανόητος, Προνοέω, Πρόνοια, Ὑπονοέω, Ὑπόνοια, Νουθετέω, Νουθεσία,” in *TDNT*, 10:1020.

6:4). Paul modeled this type of gospel-shaped discipling ministry throughout his epistles. Exhortations and imperatives for Christian living are almost always explicitly grounded in the diverse truths and implications of the gospel. For example, Paul roots his exhortations to mortify sin and pursue holiness in the reality that God's people are dead to sin and alive unto God in Christ (Rom 6:1–23; Eph 4:17–32; Col 3:1–17). God's people pursue practical sanctification because in Christ they are positionally sanctified. Disciple-making ministry must therefore be informed and shaped by gospel truths if God's people are to mature in Christlikeness.

Equipping for Maturity: An Analysis of Ephesians 4:7, 11–16

God gives the church pastors and teachers “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). Some believe that this verse refers to three separate responsibilities for the ministry offices. In other words, the “job” of a pastor is (1) to equip the saints, (2) to do the work of ministry, and (3) to build up the body of Christ. This view is expressed in some of the older English translations (e.g., the KJV). Others understand this passage as a flow of thought. The office gifts are responsible to equip God's people for service so that the body of Christ is built up. The main responsibility of pastors and teachers, then, would be to equip believers to exercise their gifts so that God's purposes for the church can be accomplished. It is clear from the overall context that Paul is referring not to three tasks, but one. All believers have received grace (v. 7) to do their part (v. 16) to grow the church in Christlikeness. The task then of the elders is to equip and empower God's people to use their gifts to help the church grow in Christlike maturity.

The Greek word for *equip* (καταρτισμός) comes from the word ἄρτιος, which

means “suitable” or “adapted” for something.⁴⁶ To equip someone is to train, disciple, and empower them to accomplish a task.⁴⁷ The task that pastors are called to help each member accomplish is the work of ministry. The work of ministry can be taken in both a specific and general sense. Specifically, the work of ministry is seeing people reconciled to God through Christ (2 Cor 5:14–21). Generally, the work of ministry is serving God’s people for their edification. When God’s people are equipped and empowered for disciple-making ministry, the church grows in its doctrinal unity (e.g., the unity of faith, v. 13) and its unity in Christlikeness (v. 13). How pastors can equip God’s people for ministry work will be explored in chapter 3.

Application: How This Project Will Help Community of Grace Church Fulfill Our God-Given Mission

The role of pastors is to train, equip, and disciple God’s people for the work of disciple-making ministry. Disciple-making ministry is how the church fulfills its God-given mission. I seek to fulfill my equipping responsibility by teaching the members of Community of Grace a biblical theology of mission and providing practical instruction on how to share the truths of the gospel to one another so that the church can grow in Christlike maturity.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Delling, “Ἄρτιος, Ἐξαρτίζω, Καταρτίζω, Καταρτισμός, Κατάρτισις,” in *TDNT*, 10:475.

⁴⁷ BDAG, s.v. “καταρτίζω” (p. 526).

CHAPTER 3

PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Every church is called to participate with God in his redemptive mission. The church “fills the earth with God’s glory” (Hab 2:14) by making mature, Christlike disciples of all nations. Through the ministry of the church, God is glorified, the gospel is advanced, and believers are built up in the faith. God has called pastors to equip his people for the work of disciple-making ministry so that the church can faithfully carry out its mission. The church’s missional mandate should therefore shape the church’s overall ministry philosophy and plan.

In this chapter, I will examine how a disciple-making philosophy of ministry informs the goals, priorities, and plans of Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York.¹ An overview of the definition and components of a disciple-making philosophy of ministry will be provided. Emphasis will also be placed on ways church leaders can strategically develop and implement a ministry plan as we equip the members of our church for disciple-making ministry.

Defining a Disciple-Making Philosophy of Ministry

Every church, whether or not they understand or articulate it clearly, has a philosophy of ministry. A philosophy of ministry is not merely a church’s doctrinal beliefs, mission statement, or core values. Rather, it is the theological vision that undergirds the church’s ministry practices.²

¹ This chapter is an adaptation of Micah Colbert’s, *A Disciple-Making Philosophy for Church-Planting* (research paper, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022).

² This definition of a philosophy of ministry is essentially synonymous with Tim Keller’s definition of a theological vision for ministry. See Tim Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-*

A ministry philosophy explains how a church lives out its gospel identity and carries out its God-given mission within its particular context. A philosophy clarifies how the church’s convictions, vision, and goals are fleshed out within its ministry setting. In many ways, it is, as Tim Keller states, “the middle space between doctrine and practice—the space where we reflect deeply on our theology and our culture to understand how both of them can shape ministry.”³ Keller and Allen Thompson note, “A philosophy of ministry makes the church distinct, describing a vision for the church which is specific and unique to that congregation.”⁴ In short, a philosophy of ministry answers the question: “How can we best fulfill our Biblical purposes in accord with our theological commitment?”⁵

A biblical philosophy of ministry must be shaped by the church’s disciple-making mission. Every aspect of the church’s ministry should be viewed through the lenses of the church’s responsibility to make mature, Christlike disciples who glorify God and advance the gospel. A disciple-making philosophy of ministry answers the specific question, How are we as a church going to make and mature Christlike disciples in our unique cultural context?

The Value of a Philosophy of Ministry

A clearly defined ministry philosophy functions as a map to guide the church in its various ministries. A philosophy provides clear goals, direction, and focus so that the church can faithfully glorify God and carry out its mission. It enables the leaders and members of the church to maximize their time, energy, and resources for the sake of the

Centered Ministry in Your City (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 17–20. According to Keller, a theological vision for ministry is “a faithful restatement of the gospel with rich implications for life, ministry, and mission in a type of culture at a moment in history” (20).

³ Keller, *Center Church*, 17.

⁴ Timothy J. Keller and J. Allen Thompson, *Church Planter Manual* (New York: Redeemer City to City, 2002), 89.

⁵ Keller and Thompson, *Church Planter Manual*, 86.

gospel. It gives church leaders a unifying framework to assess, evaluate, and potentially recalibrate existing ministries to see if they are effective and/or truly essential to the life and mission of the church.

Where there is no unifying philosophy guiding church leaders in their decision-making, the church will flounder instead of flourish in its mission. Developing a thoughtful philosophy of ministry, however, requires careful reflection and evaluation. Unfortunately, many church leaders do not take the time to develop a robust, biblically faithful, culturally engaging ministry philosophy. Naively, they go about doing ministry the way they have always done it or attempt to parrot what other larger or more well-known churches do. When this happens, leaders can easily fall prey to the temptation to simply transport or implement a model of ministry they have seen in another church that may not be doable or culturally appropriate in their specific church context.

Two Dangers to Avoid

There are two dangers to avoid when developing a ministry philosophy. The first danger is not cultivating convictional clarity. Where ambiguity exists, temptations to become political or pragmatic will abound. Church leaders who have not clarified their essential, non-negotiable beliefs and values will find themselves overwhelmed by the many pulls and pressures of ministry. Precious time and energy will be spent trying to please people, put out relational fires, get more people in the building, or keep the programs running instead of making Christlike disciples by God's Word for God's glory. Temptations to take short cuts or pursue relevance have caused many church leaders to drift from their theological moorings, leading them away from the safe harbor of faithfulness into the murky waters of pragmatism. At Community of Grace, the elders have spent significant time clarifying our core convictions and teaching the church our theological identity, mission, and values. Currently, the elders and other church leaders enjoy great unity around our essential convictions.

Downplaying or ignoring the church's cultural context is the other danger to avoid when developing a ministry philosophy. A ministry philosophy must be both biblically and contextually informed. There are many churches with strong biblical convictions that lack the cultural awareness necessary to make new disciples in their ministry setting. They understand their gospel identity and purpose but fail to think through how they will carry out their mission in the community where God has called them to serve. These churches struggle to accomplish their God-given mission in a contextually appropriate manner. Churches like these might be theologically faithful but are culturally disengaged and therefore minimally fruitful. As a result, the gospel does not take root or advance in the community.

The Necessity of Contextualization

Each church needs to move from the questions, Who are we? and What are we called to do? to Who are the people that we are called to reach? Church leaders must understand the important role of contextualization in the church's disciple-making mission. Contextualization is communicating the message of Christ so that the truths of the gospel take root and flourish indigenously within a cultural context. As Keller states, contextualization is "giving people *the Bible's answers*, which they may not want to hear, *to questions about life* that people in their particular time and place are asking, *in language and forms* that they can comprehend, *and through appeals and arguments* with force they can feel, even if they reject them."⁶ Contextualization takes place when the truth is communicated in such a way that the message, meaning, and implications of the gospel are not "unnecessarily alien at the merely cultural level."⁷ Cultural barriers are gradually removed so that the truth of God's Word can be understood in terms and ways

⁶ Keller, *Center Church*, 89 (emphasis original).

⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 122.

that resonate with native hearers.

The challenges of contextualization for churches in the twenty-first century can be overwhelming. Almost no aspect of American society is monolithic. Even in areas predominately made up of one ethnicity, conflicting ideologies, worldviews, religious beliefs, and philosophies abound. With the rise of technology, people are exposed to more ideas than ever before. Postmodern philosophies about truth have made just about everything fluid. Today, people can determine their “own truth” about who they are and how they should live. Expressive individualism, the sexual revolution, and religious skepticism have profoundly altered the cultural landscape. Churches cannot rely on outdated, obsolete strategies for reaching people. Rather, they must consider new ways of engaging people with the good news of the gospel.

Contextualization is not a tertiary or optional element in the development of a ministry philosophy. As will be demonstrated later in this chapter, understanding and adapting to one’s cultural context in order to make disciples is an ongoing process that requires meaningful engagement and active presence in the community.

Four Key Components of a Philosophy of Ministry

There are four key components to a philosophy of ministry that need to be clearly defined and understood for the church to flourish in its disciple-making mission:

Theological Identity

A church’s theological identity refers to its beliefs, affiliations, and core values. Church leaders and members need to be able to clearly answer the questions: Who are we? What do we believe? What are we all about? What a church does flows out of what a church is. Fundamentally, the church is the redeemed people of God who are called to “proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9–10). Each church is a local expression of the larger church that is comprised of believers from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation. A local church,

however, is typically associated with a denomination or historical tradition that is marked by distinct doctrinal convictions. For example, Community of Grace Church is a Reformed Southern Baptist church that adheres to the *Baptist Faith and Message 2000*.⁸ We are also historically orthodox, affirming the Nicene and Apostles' Creeds.

A church's theological identity includes not only its doctrinal beliefs, but also its core values. Core values are the most significant beliefs and highest priorities (whether stated or unstated) that drive a church's behavior. Values answer the questions What matters most to us? and What are we most excited about? Community of Grace has summarized our core values in three words: gospel, community, and mission.⁹ The elders of our church continue to teach, review, and explain the implications of these three core values whenever we gather for prayer, training, and leadership meetings.

Mission

Mission answers the question What are we called to do? As has been argued throughout this paper, the church is called to make mature, Christlike disciples by God's Word for God's glory. Everything a church does should be in alignment with its God-given, disciple-making mission.

Vision

Although the terms "mission" and "vision" are often used interchangeably, vision answers the questions, What kind of a church can we become? and What would it look like for our church to carry out our God-given mission? Vision not only influences a church's specific ministry plans but also its trajectory and priorities. Vision provides the church leaders with a deeper sense of unity, purpose, direction, and focus in their

⁸ For a further explanation of Community of Grace Church's doctrinal beliefs, see Community of Grace, "What We Believe," accessed April 25, 2023, <https://cogamherst.org/about-us/what-we-believe>.

⁹ For a further explanation of Community of Grace Church's three core values, see Community of Grace, "Our Vision," accessed April 25, 2023, <https://cogamherst.org/about-us/our-vision>.

decision-making and ministry investments. It also helps church members understand more of the “why” and “how” of a church’s various ministries.

The vision of Community of Grace is to be a healthy, disciple-making church that impacts our region and beyond for the cause of Christ. The elders would define health in terms of fidelity to our convictions and mission. Regularly, elders meet to gauge the health of the church as we prayerfully seek to be the kind of church that we believe God has called us to be.

Ministry Plan

The final component of a philosophy of ministry is the development and implementation of a ministry plan that is contextually appropriate. A ministry plan faithfully answers the question, How will we fulfill the mission that God has entrusted to us? We will explore Community of Grace Church’s ministry plan below.

Distinct Components of a Disciple-Making Philosophy of Ministry

As noted in chapter 2, disciple-making is a comprehensive term that includes both the church’s work in evangelizing the lost and its ongoing ministry of helping believers grow in maturity through the prayerful proclamation of Scripture. There are three distinct components of disciple-making ministry: making disciples, maturing disciples, and multiplying disciples.

Making Disciples

Making disciples starts with the church’s responsibility to evangelize those who are not yet believers. The Greek verb that Christians frequently translate as “evangelize” or “preach the gospel” relates to the noun evangel, or gospel. To evangelize literally means “to gospelize.”¹⁰ Church members cannot “gospelize” if they have not

¹⁰ BDAG, s.v. “εὐαγγελίζω” (p. 402).

personally understood and received the gospel (1 Cor 15:3a). Furthermore, they cannot communicate the gospel with clarity or persuade unbelievers to repent and believe in Christ if they have not become fluent in the truths of the gospel.

Sadly, much of what is called “evangelism” lacks gospel clarity. As J. Mack Stiles notes, “The gospel often remains untaught, and unbiblical words water down the poignant true meaning of sin, death, and hell, or confuse those who are genuinely seeking truth”¹¹ Church leaders and members must be clear not only on what are the central truths of gospel, but how they can communicate those truths in a biblically faithful, culturally engaging manner if they are to effectively make new disciples of Christ.

Churches not only need to be clear on the gospel message; they must also be clear on the goal of evangelizing. When God’s people evangelize, they are not simply presenting facts—they are calling sinners to respond to Christ in repentance and faith. Among other reasons, they do this because they know that apart from Christ, people are condemned and heading to eternal damnation. The goal of evangelism, then, is to persuade unbelievers to repent and believe the gospel. Unfortunately, many Christians are afraid to be persuasive because they do not want to come across as manipulative. Christian persuasion, however, is not manipulation. Manipulation occurs when Christians seek to provoke a response from unbelievers that is hasty, emotional, or ill-informed. Persuasion takes place when God’s people evangelize from the overflow of a heart fully convinced of the gospel’s truth and power.

In summary, the church makes disciples through the prayerful, persuasive proclamation of the gospel message. The church is responsible for teaching the truths of the gospel and calling unbelievers to repent and believe in Christ. Of course, many unbelievers will not receive the message. Those who do repent and believe become

¹¹ J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus*, 9 Marks: Building Healthy Churches (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 28.

disciples who must now be incorporated into the life of the church. Within the context of the local church, they are baptized and taught how to live a God-glorifying life of obedience to Christ (Matt 28:19–20).

For this project to be successful, I will need to equip our members with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in evangelistic conversations. During the first half of my project, I will teach the core truths of the gospel and explain how we as a church can clearly communicate redemptive truths to unbelieving family members and friends. I will provide opportunities for members to not only deepen their knowledge of the gospel through instruction and outside reading, but also to develop the skill of communicating the gospel to others through practice opportunities within the class time.

Maturing Disciples

Evangelism is the beginning, not the culmination, of the Great Commission. When a person professes faith in Christ, the church is now responsible to teach, love, and help the new believer become a mature follower of Christ.

Discipling Towards Maturity

Having a clear picture of what a mature disciple looks like should guide a church in her discipling efforts. As mentioned in chapter 2, a mature disciple is grounded in God's Word, growing in a Christlike walk, and going out as a gospel witness. The various ministries of the church should encourage growth in each of these three areas in order to help believers grow in grace.

Church leaders need to recognize, however, that there are limits to what they alone can do to help people mature in the faith. New believers need more than a personal instructor or mentor to grow in Christlikeness. They need a family of believers to teach and show them how to live in the light of the gospel. They need the gifts, experience, friendship, exhortation, teaching, instruction, and care of the *entire church family*. As J. T. English states,

The local church is the family that is growing up in Christ. What Paul is aiming for in Ephesians is that gifted people in the church have the responsibility of helping others find and use their gifts for the building up of the body of Christ. That process will continue until all believers mature into the measure of the fullness of Christ. The purpose of the local church is to point people to that end and equip them on that journey. The primary purpose of discipleship in the local church is maturing in Christ together.¹²

Discipling requires the entire church to embrace a lifestyle of prayerfully sharing and humbly modeling the truths of God’s Word so that each member can help one another grow in Christlikeness. The necessity of “one another” ministry is one of the major reasons why the elder team at Community of Grace Church believes that this project is so vital to our continued growth and development as a disciple-making church. Members must be equipped to prayerfully share and apply the truths of God’s Word to one another so that together we can grow towards maturity in Christ.

Two Key Convictions

A discipling ministry of prayerful speaking the truth in love is built on two key Biblical convictions. First, disciple-making churches believe that *God uses his Word to build his people*. Through the power of his Word, God redeems and transforms a people for himself (John 17:17; 2 Cor 3:18; 1 Pet 1:23). God’s Word is what nourishes, sustains, and strengthens his people in their pilgrimage to the celestial city (Matt 4:4). There is no life in the truest sense apart from God’s Word.

Disciple-making churches also recognize that *spiritual growth is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit*. Nothing spiritual happens apart from the work of the Spirit. He is the one who makes the Word come alive, enabling God’s people to see its manifold glories (Ps 119:18–19). He is the one who opens our eyes to the significance, meaning, and application of God’s Word (1 Cor 2:11–16). He assures us, comforts us, teaches us, and empowers us to grow in Christlikeness. In prayerful dependence upon the Spirit,

¹² J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B&H, 2020), 72.

disciple-makers speak the truths of God's Word to one another so that together, we can "attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Based on these biblical convictions, church leaders must model a life of prayerful proclamation and equip the members of the church to do the same. Church leaders must labor to make discipling a normal part of the life and gathering of the church. The disciple-making church equips its members to help others trust in and follow Jesus.

In the second half of my project, I will endeavor to equip our church with the knowledge and skills necessary to disciple one another towards maturity. After providing the biblical foundation for the necessity and nature of discipling ministry within the body of Christ, I will provide opportunities for people to apply the truths of God's Word to others through various case studies.

Multiplying Disciples

The third component of a distinctly disciple-making ministry philosophy is ministry multiplication. Multiplication should be the norm, not the exception, for gospel ministry. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul charged Timothy, one of his protégés in the faith, to disciple faithful men who would in turn teach and disciple others. Paul was not content with his gospel ministry and influence stopping with Timothy. Rather, he fully expected that his discipling efforts would multiply and expand as Timothy faithfully trained disciple-making disciples.

Multiplication is one of those buzzwords that church leaders frequently use but rarely plan for or accomplish. Multiplication takes place as leaders are developed and then deployed to make Christlike disciples locally in the church and globally for the gospel's advance. Multiplication has two essential ingredients: leadership development and leadership commissioning.

Developing Leaders

Church leaders equip God's people for God's work so that the body of Christ is built up (Eph 4:11–12). Equipping God's people to be all that God has called and gifted them to be requires a commitment to leadership multiplication. Mac Lake wisely notes, "The long-term health and spirituality of any church is dependent upon leadership development."¹³ Church leaders must prayerfully seek to cultivate a culture where leaders are continually raised up and trained to serve in various ways for the advance of God's Kingdom.

James Plueddemann writes that church leaders are called to use "their gift of leadership by taking initiative to focus, harmonize, and enhance the gifts of others for the sake of developing people and cultivating the kingdom of God."¹⁴ The multiplication strategy for disciple-making church leaders begins with people, not programs. It is tempting for church leaders to simply plug willing people into ministry programs instead of developing peoples' unique gifts for gospel ministry. When leaders fail to develop future leaders, people can easily become cogs in the ministry wheel instead of dynamic disciple-makers who are equipped and empowered to use their gifts to serve others. To create a culture in which disciple-making leaders are developed, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne advise, "Start with the people in your church, having no particular structures or programs in mind and then consider who are these people God has given you, how you can help them grow in Christian maturity, and what form their gifts and opportunities might take."¹⁵

For the church to cultivate a multiplication mindset, church leaders need to do

¹³ Mac Lake, *The Multiplication Effect: Building a Leadership Pipeline That Solves Your Leadership Shortage* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 25.

¹⁴ James E. Plueddemann, *Leading across Cultures: Effective Ministry and Mission in the Global Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 15.

¹⁵ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2009), 18.

a lot more than simply teach or exhort people to reproduce disciples. They must model what reproductive disciple-making ministry looks like so that others can see and follow their example. Justin Irving and Mark Strauss note, “The best way to lead is not to tell people what to do but to show them by example. And showing involves more than just a training session. It is a complete lifestyle that exemplifies what matters most.”¹⁶

Commissioning Leaders

Churches should prayerfully consider how their disciple-making ministry will multiply so that the gospel “sounds forth” from their church to other areas as well (1 Thess 1:8). As an eldership, we want to not only see Community of Grace built up in maturity, but also see other churches in the area planted and strengthened so that the gospel will continue to have an impact in our community. No single church has the capacity to effectively reach a community or city for Christ. If church leaders want to see their community reached for Christ, they will need to have a vision and agenda beyond the four walls of their own church.

It is tempting for churches to become so fixated on numerical growth that they fail to pursue exponential gospel growth. Church leaders need to guard against a “my kingdom” instead of “Thy kingdom” mentality. J. D. Greear urges leaders need to continually ask the following questions to avoid falling prey to a small kingdom mindset: “Whose kingdom are we actually building: ours, or God’s? Do we really believe that Jesus grows his kingdom most as we ‘give away’ what he’s given to us?”¹⁷ Multiplying ministry flourishes when church leaders have a vision bigger than themselves and their church. Churches that multiply are captivated by God’s eternal purpose to advance his Kingdom and glory to the ends of the earth. Beginning with the big picture in view

¹⁶ Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 19.

¹⁷ J. D. Greear, *Gaining by Losing: Why the Church Belongs to Churches That Send* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 17.

guards church leaders from the temptation of hoarding people instead of sending people. Churches committed to God's mission seek to win people to Christ, build them up in the faith, and send them into the world to make more Christlike disciples.

This vision for multiplication is something that the eldership and members of Community of Grace Church have embraced. In 2021, we sent one of our elders to replant a struggling church in the area. In 2022, we also trained three new teachers as well as four new small group leaders to oversee or start crucial discipling ministries within our church. Beginning in 2023, the elders started elder training with a young man who potentially will join the eldership in 2024. We have also started a monthly preaching cohort where twelve area pastors receive ongoing training and sharpening in the art of expository preaching. By God's grace, our desire is to continue to build and send leaders for the advance of the gospel in our region.

Ministry Strategies Based on a Disciple-making Philosophy of Ministry

A disciple-making philosophy of ministry that is divorced from clear, compelling, and contextual ministry plans is doomed to fail. In this section, strategies will be offered to help Community of Grace Church consider how we can more effectively make, mature, and multiply Christlike disciples.

Strategies for Making New Disciples

Currently, the elders at Community of Grace Church are encouraging three contextually specific strategies to help our church family engage unbelievers with the good news of Christ as we seek to make new disciples.

Establish Meaningful Presence

Demographic surveys can greatly aid churches in understanding their cultural context. Nevertheless, nothing is as valuable as first-hand cultural engagement as the church establishes a meaningful presence in the community. Church leaders and members

must immerse themselves in the lives of the people God has called them to reach so that they can understand their needs, struggles, questions, and worldviews. Keller notes,

Immersion in the pastoral needs of people in our community and continued involvement in evangelistic venues could not be more important [to gospel contextualization]. If we are deeply involved in the lives, questions, and concerns of the people, then we will study the Bible in order to preach it to them, we will see God's answers to their questions. If we are living in the culture and developing friendships with people, contextualization should be natural and organic. It will simply bubble up from the relationships in our lives and in our pastoral ministry.¹⁸

There are, of course, numerous ways to establish a meaningful presence in the community. Coaching, volunteering, tutoring, and joining community groups are all ways Christians can serve and build relationships with their surrounding community. At Community of Grace Church, we have organized two primary venues for members to naturally build relationships with unbelievers for the sake of the gospel. First, we host a community garden on our property that is maintained by people in our church and neighborhood. Over the past five years, the Lord has provided numerous meaningful opportunities for members to share the gospel with unbelievers who normally would not attend a church. We also have an outreach to international students who attend the University at Buffalo. Geographically, the church is located within walking distance of the university's north campus, where many of the students reside. In 2019, College Factual ranked the University at Buffalo 26th out of a total of 1,279 college and universities for popularity with international students, with over 6,000 international students from more than 48 different countries enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs.¹⁹ Numerous apartment complexes housing a sizeable number of international students surround the church. Many of these students have come from countries in the

¹⁸ Keller, *Center Church*, 122.

¹⁹ College Factual, "University at Buffalo International Student Report," accessed April 25, 2023, <https://www.collegefactual.com/colleges/university-at-buffalo/student-life/international>.

10/40 window where they have had little or no exposure to the gospel.²⁰ Currently, we host activities every other week and meet with students interested in studying the Bible.

Discover Peoples' Stories and Hopes

As church members build relationships in the community, they should listen carefully to the stories people share and tell. Stories powerfully shape who we are and how we process the challenges of life. Joshua Chatraw notes, “The stories we hear and tell each day frame how we live and answer the big questions of life. Who are we? What is the meaning of life? What is the fundamental problem, and how can it be fixed? Is there reason to have hope?”²¹ Asking people about their hopes, dreams, and goals in life enables believers to understand what people are looking to for meaning and purpose in life. Once peoples’ hopes have been identified, Christians can winsomely explain how the gospel provides true salvation, purpose, and hope in life and death.

Host Gospel Bible Studies

Churches cannot assume that the average unbeliever has any biblically informed understanding about God, man, sin, Christ, or repentance and faith. Churches need to consider long-haul approaches for engaging unbelievers with the good news of Jesus. One such approach is hosting gospel Bible studies. As I have noted elsewhere,

Gospel Bible studies are designed to methodically present the redemptive truths of Scripture to people with little or no Christian background. They typically blend inductive Bible study questions with clear explanations so that readers can see and understand Biblical truth for themselves. Evangelistic studies help unbelievers explore essential redemptive truths about God the Creator, man the sinner, Jesus the Savior, and the need for repentance and faith.²²

²⁰ For more information on the 10/40 window, see Joshua Project, “What Is the 10/40 Window?,” accessed April 25, 2023, https://joshuaproject.net/resources/articles/10_40_window/.

²¹ Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 5.

²² Micah Colbert, “Evangelism in a Post-Christian Culture,” Rooted Thinking (blog), December 9, 2021, <http://rootedthinking.com/2021/12/09/evangelism-in-a-post-christian-culture/>.

There are several good resources that churches can use to lead gospel Bible studies.²³

Strategies for Maturing Disciples

David Wells wisely states, “It is very easy to build churches in which seekers congregate; it is very hard to build churches in which biblical faith is maturing into genuine discipleship.”²⁴ Disciple-making church leaders are not satisfied with mere numerical growth. Their sights are set on gospel growth. Following in the footsteps of the apostle Paul, they labor to present every person in their church as mature in Christ (Col 1:28–29). They preach, teach, mentor, serve, pray, warn, admonish, and equip so that each person entrusted to their care is grounded in God’s Word, growing in a Christlike walk, and going out as a gospel witness. The following are strategies that churches can use to help their congregation mature in Christlikeness.

Sunday Corporate Worship

A disciple-making church leader does not underestimate the powerful discipling effect of the Sunday morning gathering in the lives of God’s people. He carefully plans every aspect of the Sunday morning church gathering so that each part points people to a life of repentance, faith, and worship. He makes sure that the songs, liturgy, and preaching are gospel-shaped, biblically faithful, doctrinally rich, and culturally understandable. He also wisely instructs people on the elements of the church’s liturgy so that people understand why each part of the worship service is vital to the Christian life.

²³ *Christianity Explored* and *The Story of Hope* are excellent resources that can be used for gospel Bible studies. See Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, *Christianity Explored: What’s the Best News You’ve Ever Heard? Handbook* (Surrey, UK: The Good Book Company, 2016); Wayne Haston and Ron Berrus, *The Story of Hope: Discovering the Provision in God’s Plan* (New Cumberland, PA: ABWE, 2016). I have also written a study that covers the redemptive theme and story of God’s Word in a series of eight lessons. See Micah Colbert, *Discovering Hope: Exploring the Good News of Jesus Christ* (self-pub., 2020).

²⁴ David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 119.

Theological Education

Teaching God’s Word in the power of the Spirit is the heart of discipling (Matt 28:19). Teaching is simply helping people understand the meaning and application of God’s Word. It can take place behind a pulpit, in a classroom, one-on-one over a cup of coffee, or through a timely text message to a discouraged friend. Teaching is the primary duty of church leaders (Col 1:28–29; 2 Tim 4:1–4) and the God-given responsibility of every Christian (Rom 15:14; Eph 4:11–16).

Churches today do not need less teaching. They need more. Sadly, many churches are eliminating teaching venues like Sunday School or Sunday evening services in favor of “simple church” models. J. T. English notes,

The tragic irony of the demise of Christian education is that it is happening at precisely the wrong time. Study after study shows that Christians do not know their Bible, the basics of the faith, or how to practice spiritual disciplines. We are basically illiterate when it comes to the Christian faith, yet we are adopting philosophies of ministry that de-emphasize the importance of learning for the Christian life.²⁵

At the beginning of 2021, Community of Grace Church started EQUIP classes so that people could engage in deeper theological learning. Classes were designed to promote transformational community learning through interactive studies in biblical, systematic, and practical theology. We rotated studies in God’s Word based upon these three categories of study so that people could acquire a comprehensive, life-changing knowledge of the Scriptures over the course of several years. Not only did people clearly learn God’s Word in these environments, but potential ministry leaders had opportunities to explore and exercise their gifts for teaching as well.

Small Group Discipleship

Discipleship takes place within the context of loving, intentional, and meaningful relationships in local churches where believers actively pray for and

²⁵ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 85.

encourage one another in the pursuit of Christlikeness. Well-trained small groups provide rich opportunities to cultivate such discipling relationships. Within a small group environment, openness and transparency can occur as each member seeks to “grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).

Small groups need to be organized around disciple-making convictions and practices if they are to foster deep discipleship. English notes, “Community is indispensable to discipleship, but community is not discipleship. . . . It is not enough to connect people to community; it must be a community that is committed to learning the way of Jesus together. It must be a community that learns.”²⁶ Small groups should be a place where Christians share their lives together as they gather consistently for prayer, Bible study, accountability, and mission.

In 2021, the church had only two small groups. By God’s grace, the church now has six small groups that are being led by qualified individuals who are equipped to teach and build up believers in the faith. As Community of Grace continues to grow, more potential leaders need to be identified and trained to expand the church’s small group ministry.

Strategies for Multiplying Disciples

Church leaders must not only be confident in their convictions about leadership development but also committed to cultivate a healthy leadership development culture by providing constructs to systematically train future leaders.²⁷ Leadership development does not happen haphazardly. Church leaders need to be intentional and clear about their development process. In 2022, the elders at Community of Grace developed and used the following three step process to choose, train, and equip disciple-making leaders for

²⁶ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 83.

²⁷ Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 14–15.

gospel-advancing ministry. This process is flexible enough to be adapted for nearly any cultural context.

Identify

The first step in leadership development is to identify people who can be trained and entrusted with real leadership responsibility. This step might be the most crucial. Leaders who desire a fruitful ministry that reaches beyond their immediate influence will spend most of their time and energy pouring into the lives of potential leaders. Commenting on Paul's strategy for gospel multiplication, Ken Cochrum writes, "Paul invested in people as his primary strategy. He aggressively entrusted others with the mission. Paul also had clear selection criteria for his missionary teams and local church leaders (Acts 15:36–40; 2 Timothy 2:2; Titus 1:5–9, 2:2–10)."²⁸

At Community of Grace Church, we use the acrostic STAFF to identify the qualities that are essential for potential leaders. STAFF refers to servants who are teachable, able, faithful, and fruitful.

Develop

Once STAFF people are identified, they need to be trained and equipped so that they can effectively use their gifts to serve. Initial and ongoing training should focus on three major areas: convictions, character, and ministry competence. Training can take place formally through theological courses or classroom instruction. The most important, transformative equipping, however, takes place as elders pour their time, energy, and resources into mentoring future leaders.

Deploy

People who prove themselves to be faithful and fruitful need to be entrusted

²⁸ Ken Cochrum, *Close: Leading Well across Distance and Culture* (self-pub., CreateSpace, 2013), 29.

with real ministry responsibility. Following Bill Hull’s six-step approach to ministry development, a church leader “tells them *what*, tells them *why*, shows them *how*, does it with them, lets them do it, and releases them” to lead in ministry.²⁹ For some, ministry deployment might take place in the local church where people will serve as elders, deacons, small group leaders, or ministry leaders. For others, deployment might result in the church sending the new leader out for disciple-making ministry in other contexts. Either way, the church that deploys leaders will experience the blessings of being used by God for gospel-increasing ministry.

Conclusion

Our desire at Community of Grace is to implement a disciple-making ministry philosophy and plan to help us make, mature, and multiply Christlike disciples in ways that are biblically faithful and culturally engaging. We want to continually evaluate how we can more effectively reach our community with the gospel, mature and equip believers to grow in Christlikeness, and develop ministry leaders who will serve and lead for the gospel’s advance.

²⁹ Bill Hull, *The Disciple-Making Church: Leading a Body of Believers on the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2010), 29.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

In the spring of 2023, I taught an eight-week course titled, “The Disciple-Making Life.” My goal in teaching this course was to help equip the members of Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, with the knowledge and skills necessary to faithfully engage in disciple-making ministry. Those who attended the class expressed a desire to grow in their ability to evangelize unbelievers and disciple fellow believers towards maturity. The goal of this chapter is to describe this ministry project in the context of Community of Grace Church. In addition, I hope that the insights gained from this project will help church leaders in other ministry contexts equip believers to make mature, Christlike disciples.

Recruiting Project Participants

I made this course available to anyone within the congregation who desired to grow in their understanding of how to make Christlike disciples. I also made the course available online for those who might not have been able to attend classes in person. Two weeks prior to the start of the course, I emailed a sign-up sheet to members and regular attendees within the congregation. I also announced the course two Sunday morning worship services prior to the start date. Eighteen individuals signed up to take the course. Four other individuals who did not sign up attended two or more classes during the 8-week course.

Most of those who participated in the course regularly attend the church’s Sunday morning adult Bible classes and are actively involved in various disciple-making ministries within the church. Seventeen are members of small groups, three are adult

Bible class instructors, four are children’s Bible class teachers, four are deacons, and five are helpers in the church’s international student outreach. During the course, two participants who were previously not involved in small groups signed up to join a group in their area.

Table 1. Participant involvement

COG Members	Participants in 8-week disciple-making course	Participants completing both pre-project and post-project DMRS
85	22	14

Survey Development

I developed a Disciple-Making Readiness Survey to assess the effectiveness of the training. The survey included fifteen questions related to the participants’ knowledge of and engagement in disciple-making ministry. Questions were based on the objectives and topics that were covered in the eight-week course. Prior to administering the survey, I shared it with four ministry leaders for feedback. Each leader believed that the survey would provide a helpful analysis of what participants know and need to know about disciple-making ministry.

The DMRS was administered at the start of the first class and served as a baseline to measure the effectiveness of the training.¹ After administering the pre-survey, I noticed that some who believed that they could explain the core truths of the gospel nevertheless felt ill equipped sharing the gospel message with unbelievers. Seeing this discrepancy between the participants’ knowledge and confidence, I modified my initial lessons on evangelism to include case-studies so that participants could practice applying their knowledge in real-life evangelistic scenarios.

¹ See appendix 1.

Curriculum Development

Beginning in January 2023, I gradually developed the curriculum in preparation to teach the course in May. The lessons were based on my research for chapters 2 and 3. Key sources from my research significantly informed the content and emphasis of the lessons.² Some of the topics that we covered included how to make disciple-making a normal part of the Christian life, how to grow in gospel clarity and fluency, how to faithfully communicate the gospel to unbelievers, how to help other believers grow in Christlike maturity, and how to wisely apply the truths of the gospel in our discipling relationships with others. In the first lesson, I explained the biblical foundations for disciple-making ministry. Lessons 2, 3, and 4 focused on evangelism, while lessons 5 through 8 focused on how believers can disciple one another towards maturity in Christ.

Training Implementation

The course met eight consecutive Sunday mornings from May 7 to June 25, 2023. Each class was forty-five minutes long. Each class began with small group introductory questions to help prepare participants to understand the significant and practical relevance of the content we would cover in the lessons. Students would then come together as a large group to briefly discuss their answers before engaging in the instruction portion of the lesson. I provided opportunities throughout my instruction for participants to ask questions and interact with the material. Each class ended with small group application questions based on the lesson's content. The remainder of this section summarizes the weekly content of each class.³

² Key resources include the following: Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk about God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020); Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009).

³ Appendix 4 provides a brief outline of the course.

Week 1

The focus of this week was to provide the biblical foundations for disciple-making ministry. At the beginning of the class, I asked the attendees to complete the Disciple-Making Readiness Survey. After the attendees completed the survey, I divided the class into small groups to briefly discuss three questions related to disciple-making ministry. We then came together as a class to discuss concerns, apprehensions, and difficulties that hinder people from becoming disciple-makers. Attendees identified four significant challenges to disciple-making ministry. The first was a feeling of inadequacy. Students commented that they felt like they were not equipped to respond to challenging questions their unbelieving friends would raise about Christianity. They also noted that oftentimes they were not sure how to practically help other believers mature in the faith. The second challenge students identified was personal sin, guilt, and shame. One student remarked, “How can I help other believers grow when I’m dealing with my own sin?” The third challenge was how to evangelize Catholics or religious people who already consider themselves to be Christians. The final challenge students identified was time. One student remarked, “I feel like I’m already so busy. How can I disciple others when my schedule is full?”

After our opening discussion, I shared my own testimony of how the Lord used the promise of 1 John 5:14–15 to challenge me to ask in faith for opportunities to disciple others. I then challenged students to begin praying in faith that the Lord would also use them to make disciples as well. The main teaching portion of the class was devoted to defining key terms and explaining biblical foundations for disciple-making ministry. The terms we defined were disciple, discipling, and disciple-making. After defining these terms, we explored three key foundational truths related to disciple-making: (1) the disciple-making life is the normal Christian life; (2) disciple-making is rooted in God’s eternal plan to glorify his Son in the midst of a redeemed, transformed people from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 4–5); and (3) prayerfully sharing God’s Word in

the power of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of genuine disciple-making ministry.

To end the class, I broke up the group into their previous small groups to discuss application questions related to the content that we had explored in the lesson. There were four questions from which students could choose. Many of the students chose the third question: “Why is the prayerful proclamation of God’s Word so necessary in disciple-making ministry?”

The first class helped clarify what disciple-making is and what it is not. By addressing some of the common misconceptions about disciple-making, students were able to see how the Lord can use them to help others trust in and follow Christ.

Week 2

The focus of this week was to help attendees understand the message, activity, and goal of evangelism. To begin the class, we spent a few moments reviewing significant points from the first lesson on the foundations of disciple-making ministry. Afterward, we divided the participants into small groups to discuss the opening questions together.

After discussing answers to the opening questions, we briefly addressed four common concerns that people have about evangelism. Many of these concerns had already been brought up in our opening discussion. In discussing common challenges, we attempted to collectively consider how the truths of God’s Word relate to our concerns or objections. Following this discussion, we defined evangelism as proclaiming the good news of Jesus with the goal of persuading people to repent and believe. We explored this definition in detail, focusing on the message, activity, and goal of evangelism. I then defined the gospel as the good news that sinners can be saved from sin and reconciled to God through repentant faith in Jesus Christ. I noted that the message of the gospel contained truths about God, man, sin, Christ, and our response that need to be carefully explained in our evangelistic endeavors.

At the end of the class, I asked students two key questions to prepare them for the next lesson: Why is gospel fluency and passion essential in evangelism? What steps do you personally need to take to grow in gospel fluency?

Week 3

The focus of this week was to clarify the core truths of the gospel that a person needs to understand and believe in order to become a Christian. I began the class by dividing the participants into small groups to discuss four evangelistic case-study scenarios. Each scenario highlighted a different kind of unbeliever with whom most of the participants would interact on a regular basis.⁴ In each situation, I asked the participants to identify which gospel truths they would emphasize with each person.

Following the opening discussion, I took a few moments to highlight the importance of gospel clarity in our evangelistic endeavors. During the remainder of the class, I explained and clarified the core truths of the gospel using five main headings: (1) God the holy creator; (2) people the rebellious sinners; (3) sin's judgment: death; (4) Jesus: the substitute Savior; and (5) our response: repent and believe. Under each heading, I summarized the essential truths using key Scriptures and provided reasons why we must communicate these truths in our evangelism. I also provided a handout that participants could take home for review.⁵ At the end of class, I asked participants if their responses to the initial case studies would change based on the content that we discussed in class. I also challenged the class to take practical steps to grow in their knowledge and understanding of the gospel.

Week 4

This was the final lesson specifically devoted to the topic of evangelism. The

⁴ See appendix 5, "Evangelism Case Studies."

⁵ See appendix 6, "Understanding the Core Truths of the Gospel."

focus of this week was to explain how to prayerfully initiate gospel conversations with unbelievers. I began the class by briefly reviewing the need for gospel fluency and passion in our evangelism. I then broke up the group into three small groups to discuss the following questions: What are some of the challenges you face in starting gospel conversations? How do we evangelize someone who does not believe that the Bible is true? How does the gospel address the hopes that people build their lives on?

After the small group discussions, I addressed the need for prayerful preparation. I briefly explained the role of prayer, both biblically and historically, in the gospel's advance. I then took time to explain four ways that we can pray for the gospel's advance. We then discussed why a long-haul approach to engaging unbelievers with the gospel is necessary in a post-Christian culture. I noted that reading the Bible (e.g., Mark) with unbelievers is one of the most effective ways Christians can evangelize their unbelieving family members and friends (Rom 10:14; 1 Pet 1:23).

In the final main section of the lesson, I tried to show students how the gospel relates to peoples' life stories. I noted that each person has a narrative that they are constructing with their lives in order to find meaning and fulfillment. The cycles of that narrative are hope, problem, deliverance, and fulfillment. I then explained how the gospel message relates to each of these four main parts. We concluded this section of the lesson by learning how to apply the narrative approach to evangelism using a case-study scenario.

Week 5

Beginning in week 5, we shifted our focus from evangelism to the ongoing work of discipling one another towards maturity in Christ. The focus of this week was to explain how the gospel relates to our discipleship. I argued that the gospel was not simply the door that we enter for eternal life, but the very soil in which we grow in Christlike maturity. I provided four key texts to help set the tone for this portion of our class:

Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:28–28 and 3:16, and 2 Peter 1:3–4. From these texts, I explained that who we are and how we live is shaped by who God is and by what he has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ.

I then divided the participants into three small groups to discuss the following questions: How does the gospel relate to our ongoing growth in maturity as disciples of Christ? How does the gospel relate to our lives in the “here and now?” How do we apply gospel truths in our discipling efforts? One of the members pointed out that repentance and faith are not simply one-time responses to the gospel. Rather, we grow in repentance and faith daily as we consider the work of Christ on our behalf. I thought this comment was extremely helpful. Commenting on his point, I was able to explain how our church liturgy demonstrates the ongoing life of repentance and faith in our growth in grace. For some of our members, this explanation seemed to be clarifying and helpful.

In response to our opening discussion prompts, we explored three key aspects of the gospel that relate to the believer’s growth in grace: gospel identity, gospel provisions, and gospel confidence.

Week 6

The focus of this week was to help attendees think through how to apply gospel truths to common discipling situations. I began the class by reading and commenting briefly on Colossians 3:16–17. I noted how believers are able to wisely disciple one another as the Word of Christ (the gospel) dwells richly within them. I noted that our discipling efforts are often void of gospel truths. Instead of building one another up in Christlikeness, we tend to simply offer advice or counsel that fails to address the heart.

Knowing that several folks had missed the previous week, I provided the class with a handout that overviewed the previous lesson on gospel identity, provision, and confidence. I then divided the class into small groups and gave a handout containing

three case studies to work through together.⁶ The case study situations focused on how they would apply gospel truths to discouragement, worry, and habitual sin patterns.

Most of the time was spent on the first case study concerning how the gospel applies to a discouraged believer. Some participants commented on how our gospel identity frees us from becoming discouraged when our service to Christ and others appears futile. People also pointed out how God’s grace and sovereign purposes provide hope when there seems to be little progress in our efforts. Another individual insightfully commented how we can point out evidence of God’s grace at work in the life of the discouraged Christian for their encouragement.

To end the class, I asked the following questions: Why do we typically offer “try harder” or “do more” counsel in our discipling efforts? Why is this counsel insufficient and potentially antithetical to gospel growth? The ensuing conversation helped us collectively think through how we can intentionally create a culture where we are building one another up in the truths of the gospel.

Week 7

The focus of this week was to explain the vital role the local church plays in the ongoing discipleship of God’s people. I introduced the class by briefly reviewing the nature of disciple-making ministry and the essential role the gospel plays in our evangelism and ongoing efforts to disciple believers towards maturity. I then broke up the group into two small groups to discuss the following questions: What is the danger of looking to para-church ministries or impersonal sources of information (e.g., YouTube) for your primary source of spiritual formation? Can mature disciples be developed apart from the church? How does the ministry of the church help believers mature in the faith? The first question generated the most discussion. The responses were varied, but some

⁶ See appendix 7: “Applying the Gospel: Case Studies.”

common concerns students expressed were a lack of accountability, lack of service to others, and the potential for imbalance. In answering this question, people noted that books, blogs, et cetera can supplement, but not replace, the discipling ministry of the church.

For the second question, students noted that the Lord can certainly work in cases where a person might be temporarily cut off from a local church (e.g., military deployment). Nevertheless, God has designed the church to be the primary discipling influence in a person's life (students pointed to the Ephesians 4:11–16 passage to support that argument) and therefore must not be considered optional. For the final question, students pointed to the church's liturgy, preaching, teaching, corporate worship, intergenerational relationships, and ministry opportunities as ways the church discipled others. Two individuals who came to Christ through student ministries shared how formative Community of Grace has been in their lives. Their testimonies helped make the concepts that we discussed come alive to others in the class.

Following our small group discussion, I explained how the church is not merely a place we attend, but a body of believers with whom we covenant in order to glorify God and carry out his commands together. I demonstrated from Ephesians 4:11–16 how God has ordained the church to be his primary discipling agent in the world today. Through the accountability, leadership, and ministry of the church, the gospel is advanced and believers are built up in the faith. God's plan, therefore, is that Christians would belong to a local church where they can live out the Christian life within the context of a committed Christian community. We discussed six ways in which the church is necessary for our ongoing discipleship: accountability to a body of believers; the pastoral ministry of godly elders; the weekly ministry of the Word, prayer, and ordinances; diverse giftedness within the body; opportunities to use one's spiritual gifts in the gospel's advance; and intergenerational discipling relationships.

I then explained how maturity can only be consistently cultivated within the

context of the church. To demonstrate this point, I had to define maturity. I noted that maturity was not merely theological knowledge or Christian activity. Rather, maturity is Christlikeness. From Ephesians 4:11–16, I noted three marks of maturity: being grounded in the Word of God, growing in a Christlike walk, and going out as a witness to the gospel. These three interrelated marks cannot be developed in isolation. Rather, these marks were designed to be developed within the context of local churches where believers grow in grace together.

Week 8

The focus of this week was to explore Christ’s approach to disciple-making so that we might learn from his example. Because this was the final class, I took the first few minutes to highlight the most important ideas that we covered in the course thus far. Following the review, we discussed the following introductory questions in smaller groups: What can we learn about disciple-making from Jesus’s life and ministry? How does Christ’s “method” of disciple-making differ from programmatic approaches to evangelism and discipleship? After small and large group discussions on these two questions, we looked at four aspects of Jesus’s approach to disciple-making: initiative, investment, instruction, and imitation. In working through these four points, I noted that discipleship is more than leading a Bible study or attending a course; it is a deliberate, intentional lifestyle of prayerfully proclaiming and humbly modeling the truths of God’s Word to help other believers grow in Christlikeness.

Conclusion

I believe that “The Disciple-Making Life” was a helpful, edifying course for all participants. We were not able to cover as much content as I would have liked to cover, but participants grew in their understanding, desire, and ability to evangelize unbelievers and build up one another in Christlikeness. Based on follow-up conversations, many participants are using what they have learned in the course in their outreach and

discipling efforts.

The DMRS was re-administered following the course and was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-project results. The *t*-test result indicates that “The Disciple-Making Life” course made a statistically significant difference, resulting in their increased competency to make disciples. The following chapter will provide an extensive evaluation of this project.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Developing and implementing this project was a vital part of the elders' commitment to equip the members of Community of Grace for disciple-making ministry. Those who participated in the project expressed a strong desire to become faithful, fruitful disciple-makers who actively help others trust in and follow Christ. Throughout the course, attendees expressed enthusiasm and appreciation for the training that they received. Overall, I believe that this project accomplished its objectives and provides the elders a foundation to build upon for further training and equipping.

In this chapter, I will provide an evaluation of the project's overall purpose and goals, noting areas of strength and weakness. I will also provide theological and personal reflections as I consider ways this project could be improved upon for future usage.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

This project was recommended by the elders and adult Bible class teachers of COG. The purpose of the project was to equip the members of Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, for disciple-making ministry. Course instruction provided a biblical and practical framework for elders to train the members of our church to evangelize unbelievers and disciple fellow believers towards maturity.

The purpose of this project was completed as fourteen participants were equipped for disciple-making ministry. The overall success of the project can be determined by examining three main criteria. First, feedback from the panel of church leaders and elders indicated that the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the disciple-making course curriculum were exemplary. The panel stated that the

lessons were clear, concise, theologically rich, and practically applicable. For example, one member noted, “Providing definitions for commonly used terms brought a lot of clarity to the lessons.” Panel members also thought that the interactive nature of the course helped clarify the most significant concepts and truths from each lesson. One panel member remarked, “Excellent engagement questions; thought provoking, but also probing and challenging in a practical way.” Finally, the panel liked the overall flow and unity of the curriculum. One member stated, “Strong usage of the review slides not only connected together the previous lesson and the new material, but also consistently built up and tied the whole curriculum together.”

Engagement and feedback from the class participants was overwhelmingly positive. By addressing some of the common misconceptions about disciple-making in the first lesson, participants could see how the Lord can use them to help others trust in and follow Christ. Participants stated that they were encouraged to understand how simple, doable, and relational disciple-making ministry can be. Class discussion times were lively, edifying, and eye-opening for many of the participants. Opportunities to discuss the course content helped forge bonds between participants who desired to grow in their disciple-making competence. Discussion times also helped attendees consider how the truths that we were learning could be applied in everyday life. I was also encouraged to see participants talking about the content of the lessons after class times were over. These informal conversations provided further opportunities for participants to discuss ways to apply what we were learning during class times. Interacting with attendees during discussion times enabled me to tweak what I was going to teach to drive home the big ideas and key concepts I wanted people to take away from the training. I was also encouraged that participants took practical steps to apply what we were learning in class. For example, two of the attendees who had been relatively unengaged in the life of the church decided to join a small group so that they could more consistently disciple others. Another student told me that they were able to apply the “life stories” evangelistic

method we discussed in week 4 in a conversation with one of their non-Christian friends.

Finally, the success of the project can be shown by the accomplishment of the project’s stated goals in chapter 1. The following section provides an evaluation of whether the project’s goals were accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

Successful completion of this project depended upon the completion of three goals. The first goal was to assess the class participants’ prior knowledge of disciple-making ministry. This goal was measured by administrating a Disciple-Making Readiness Survey to participants at the beginning of the first class. This goal was considered successfully met when fourteen members completed the pre-project DMRS and results were compiled electronically for a fuller analysis of disciple-making ministry knowledge and competency at COG.

Table 2. Pre-project DMRS results

Question	Average Results by Question
I know what disciple-making ministry is.	4.5
I know how to disciple others.	3.7
I believe that God can use me to disciple others.	4.9
I believe that disciple-making can be a normal part of my Christian life.	4.9
I am currently involved in disciple-making ministry.	3.7
I regularly pray for the salvation of others.	5.3
I regularly pray for people in my church.	4.6
I can explain the core truths of the gospel.	5.1
I feel equipped to share the gospel with unbelievers.	4.2
I know how the gospel relates to peoples’ life stories.	4.4
I know how the gospel relates to the “here and now” of our Christian lives.	4.9

Question	Average Results by Question
I know how to help believers grow in grace through the truths of the gospel.	4.5
I believe that discipleship apart from the church will always be insufficient.	5.3
I can explain why the church is necessary in our discipleship.	5.1
I believe that I can practically implement Jesus’s disciple-making example in my own life and ministry to others.	4.6

Scores listed in table 2 are based on a point system assigned to each of the six possible responses to the survey questions (ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 6 = “strongly agree”).¹ After completing the survey, one of the attendees remarked, “I knew that this course would be helpful, but now I realize just how much I need this training.” The results of the pre-project DMRS indicated that participants did not have a strong working knowledge of how to disciple others. Subsequently, many participants did not strongly believe that they were currently involved in disciple-making ministry. I also noticed the discrepancy between students’ knowledge of the core truths of the gospel and their confidence in sharing the gospel with unbelievers. These observations enabled me to emphasize key points in the lessons to help attendees become more confident and competent in disciple-making ministry.

The second goal was to develop an eight-lesson curriculum to train and equip members for disciple-making ministry. This goal was measured by a panel of elders and church leaders who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, teaching methodology, scope, and applicability of the curriculum.² The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criteria met or

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 2.

exceeded the sufficient level. As noted in the table below, the criteria was sufficiently met prior to the implementation of the course project:

Table 3. Curriculum evaluation results

Criterion	Sufficient (Percent)	Exemplary (Percent)
Biblical Accuracy	10	90
Scope	10	90
Pedagogy		100
Practicality		100

The third goal was to increase knowledge of disciple-making ministry by teaching the eight-lesson training curriculum to the church. This goal was measured by re-administering the DMRS after the training and measuring the change in disciple-making knowledge. The goal was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-project survey scores. The result of the *t*-test indicates that the equipping of disciple-makers made a statistically significant difference, resulting in the participants' increased competency to evangelize and disciple others ($t = 6.15, p < 3.46$).³ Results for each of the fourteen participants who completed both DMRSs ranged between a minimum score of 60 and a maximum of 90. The average pre-project DMRS score was 70.9 and the average post-project DMRS was 79.6, indicating an average improvement of 8.7. The highest pre-project DMRS result was 81 and the lowest was 60. The maximum and minimum post-project scores were 90 and 67, respectively. As for the change between the pre- and post-project results, the maximum observed change was 19 points, while the lowest was 1. Tables 4 and 5 depict the comparison of these results.

³ See appendix 3.

Table 4. DMRS results comparison

Category	Pre-Project DMRS Total Points	Post-Project DMRS Total Points	Difference
Average score	70.9	79.6	+8.7
Maximum score	81.0	90.0	+9.0
Minimum score	60.0	67.0	+7.0

Table 5. Pre- and post-project DMRS results⁴

Participant	Pre-Project DMRS	Post-Project DMRS	Difference
1	68	77	9
2	60	71	11
3	75	78	3
4	69	80	11
5	61	73	12
6	76	90	14
7	66	67	1
8	75	78	3
9	75	79	4
10	76	80	4
11	79	87	8
12	81	89	8
13	64	83	19
14	66	81	15

It should be noted that participant 7 was only able to attend half of the classes. Based upon the pre- and post-project DMRS results, the project goals were met in a satisfactory manner. The next section describes strengths and weaknesses of the project.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of the project was its contribution to the personal growth of the participants. As indicated in table 6, students clearly improved in their understanding of disciple-making ministry and in their confidence to share the gospel with unbelievers.

⁴ It should be noted that participant 7 was only able to attend half of the classes.

Table 6. Comparison of pre- and post-project DMRS responses

Question	Improved (number)	Stayed the same (number)	Declined (number)
I know what disciple-making ministry is.	10	4	—
I know how to disciple others.	11	3	—
I believe that God can use me to disciple others.	7	6	1
I believe that disciple-making can be a normal part of my Christian life.	7	7	—
I am currently involved in disciple-making ministry.	7	6	1
I regularly pray for the salvation of others.	3	10	1
I regularly pray for people in my church.	4	9	1
I can explain the core truths of the gospel.	5	9	—
I feel equipped to share the gospel with unbelievers.	8	5	1
I know how the gospel relates to peoples' life stories.	9	2	3
I know how the gospel relates to the “here and now” of our Christian lives.	6	4	4
I know how to help believers grow in grace through the truths of the gospel.	4	7	3
I believe that discipleship apart from the church will always be insufficient.	6	8	—
I can explain why the church is necessary in our discipleship.	8	5	1
I believe that I can practically implement Jesus's disciple-making example in my own life and ministry to others.	6	7	1

As noted in Table 6, some participants indicated in the post-test a decline in their knowledge of disciple-making ministry. In particular, a number of people indicated

either stagnation or decline in their knowledge of how the gospel relates to the Christian life and in their ability to help believers grow in grace through the truths of the gospel. Based upon conversations that I had with participants, I believe that there were a few significant factors that contributed to this decline. Many confessed after lesson five that they had an overly simplified view of the gospel. As we explored the present and future implications of the gospel, some participants acknowledged that their understanding of the gospel's transforming power in the Christian life was clearly insufficient. Due to time constraints, I was only able to briefly overview how gospel shapes growth in grace. In addition, I did not provide enough time in the case study conversations during lesson six for people to think through how to apply gospel truths in their discipling ministry with other believers. Ultimately, I believe that a lack of knowledge combined with a lack of time to further explain or apply what we were learning led many to realize that they didn't know as much as they previously thought that they knew. I am thankful, however, that some of these same people asked me for reading recommendations to help grow in their understanding of how the gospel shapes the Christian life.

Another strength of the project was the relational and spiritual bond participants experienced through weekly discussions and case studies. Attendees were able to learn with and from one another as they discussed the content of each lesson together. In many ways, these conversations were an application of the discipling principles we were learning in the class. I was encouraged to see relationships formed with people who previously had few interactions with each other. Many also commented how helpful it was to hear from others who have had similar faith stories or struggles.

I was also encouraged to see participants humbly talk about their struggles with one another. For example, in our first class, participants acknowledged that they felt ill-equipped to answer questions that their unbelieving friends raise about Christianity. Many acknowledged before the entire class that were not sure how to help other believers

mature in the faith. Others admitted that they felt inadequate to disciple others due to their own personal struggles. As one participant remarked, “How can I help other believers grow when I’m dealing with my own sin?” The overall transparency and humility of the class participants helped create an environment where honest conversations and real learning could flourish.

The final major strength of the project was the active, transformational learning that took place through case study conversations. The case study scenarios that we explored in class provided meaningful context to help participants see the applicability of the instruction that they were receiving. Several times during case study conversations, participants remarked, “Pastor, this is so almost the exact situation I’m facing right now!” A few attendees told me after class that they now felt more confident and equipped to talk with their unbelieving friends about the gospel after working through a case study with others.

Weaknesses of the Project

Perhaps the most significant weakness of the project was its limited scope. There were several important topics related to disciple-making ministry that we were not able to discuss. For example, I did not have the time to discuss how to appropriately incorporate apologetics in evangelism. Although we were able to explore how the gospel relates to people’s hopes and aspirations, I did not provide instruction on how to understand or identify a person’s worldview. We were able to see how the gospel addresses Catholic and postmodern beliefs but did not talk about how to evangelize people from Muslim or Eastern religious perspectives. In addition, I was not able to evaluate common evangelistic phrases or cliches that potentially muddy the gospel call to repent and believe. I will need to develop and teach a more advanced class on evangelism that covers the areas mentioned above in order to further equip the church for disciple-making ministry.

What I Would Do Differently

The most significant way to improve this course would be to add more case studies so participants could apply the principles we learned in class. Based on participant feedback, conversations that took place during case studies helped bridge the gap from theory to practice. If I could reteach this class, I would lengthen the duration to ten or twelve weeks so that we would have more time for case studies.

Another way to improve the course would be to include weekly homework assignments to supplement and reinforce classroom instruction. Homework assignments would have also helped prepare students to engage more meaningfully with the upcoming week's content.

Finally, I think it would have been helpful to provide participants with a bibliography or recommended resources document so that attendees could continue learning at their own pace after the course was finished. Due to the limited scope and duration of the course, students would have greatly benefited from access to more resources available either in print or online.

Theological Reflections

The theological emphases of this project have been fully detailed in chapters 2 and 3. In the course, we provided a theological basis for disciple-making ministry. We discussed how to faithfully communicate the gospel to unbelievers, how to help other believers grow in Christlike maturity, and how to apply the truths of the gospel in our discipling relationships with others. Table 7 compares the pre- and post-project total point results to demonstrate how participants grew in their theological understanding of disciple-making ministry.

Table 7. DMRS pre- and post-project total points results comparison

Question	Pre-Project Totals	Post-Project Totals	Difference
I know what disciple-making ministry is.	63	76	13
I know how to disciple others.	55	73	18
I believe that God can use me to disciple others.	68	81	13
I believe that disciple-making can be a normal part of my Christian life.	69	82	13
I am currently involved in disciple-making ministry.	52	64	12
I regularly pray for the salvation of others.	74	76	2
I regularly pray for people in my church.	65	76	12
I can explain the core truths of the gospel.	72	82	10
I feel equipped to share the gospel with unbelievers.	59	69	10
I know how the gospel relates to peoples' life stories.	61	71	10
I know how the gospel relates to the "here and now" of our Christian lives.	68	69	1
I know how to help believers grow in grace through the truths of the gospel.	63	70	7
I believe that discipleship apart from the church will always be insufficient.	74	82	8
I can explain why the church is necessary in our discipleship.	71	76	5
I believe that I can practically implement Jesus's disciple-making example in my own life and ministry to others.	65	72	7

Personal Reflections

This project reinforced the importance of helping believers cultivate gospel clarity, fluency, and passion. Methods, approaches, and techniques can be taught, but ultimately, fruitful disciple-making efforts flow out of a believer's understanding of and love for the manifold glories of the gospel. We cannot faithfully help others trust in and follow Christ if we are not first captivated by the truths of the gospel.

This project also reminded me how often misconceptions or a lack of training can hinder people from taking the next step in their usefulness for Christ. To see participants gradually grow in their excitement and confidence for disciple-making ministry, knowing that God can use them to disciple others, was a huge blessing. Watching people then take practical steps to apply what they were learning encouraged me and other church leaders to build upon the foundation laid in this course and provide further training and equipping in the near future.

Conclusion

Developing and implementing this course on disciple-making ministry was deeply challenging and richly rewarding. Preparing a course that was biblically thorough, contextually relatable, and practically applicable challenged me to carefully think through how to identify, teach, and press home the most important truths participants needed to learn and apply in order to make mature, Christlike disciples. To see people not only improving in their knowledge of disciple-making ministry, but also growing in their confidence and ability to apply the principles that we discussed in class was profoundly encouraging. The elders and I believe that our church has been strengthened as participants became equipped to help others trust in and follow Christ.

APPENDIX 1

DISCIPLE-MAKING READINESS SURVEY

The following survey was provided to the Community of Grace class participants to determine the participants' knowledge of and readiness for disciple-making ministry.

DISCIPLE-MAKING READINESS SURVEY

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help equip our church for disciple-making ministry. This research will gather information on your current understanding of disciple-making ministry as well as your discipleship involvement. This research is being conducted by Micah Richard Colbert for the purpose of collecting quantitative and qualitative data for a ministry research project at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and after the project. 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.

By your completion of this assessment and by checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Date: _____

Name: _____

Answer the following questions by placing a checkmark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:

SD = Strongly Disagree (1), D = Disagree (2), DS = Disagree Somewhat (3),

AS = Agree Somewhat (4), A = Agree (5), SA = Strongly Agree (6).

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1	I know what disciple-making ministry is.						
2	I know how to disciple others.						
3	I believe that God can use me to disciple others.						
4	I believe that disciple-making can be a normal part of my Christian life.						
5	I am currently involved in disciple-making ministry.						
6	I regularly pray for the salvation of others.						
7	I regularly pray for people in my church.						

#	Question	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8	I can explain the core truths of the gospel.						
9	I feel equipped to share the gospel with unbelievers.						
10	I know how the gospel relates to peoples' life stories.						
11	I know how the gospel relates to the "here and now" of our Christian lives.						
12	I know how to help believers grow in grace through the truths of the gospel.						
13	I believe that discipleship apart from the church will always be insufficient.						
14	I can explain why the church is necessary in our discipleship.						
15	I believe that I can practically implement Jesus's disciple-making example in my own life and ministry to others.						

Post-Project Additional Questions

How many of the eight sessions did you attend? _____

Did you attend any of the sessions online? (Y/N) _____ If so, how many? _____

APPENDIX 2
CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The following evaluation was provided to five ministry leaders at Community of Grace. This panel evaluated the sermons to ensure that they were biblically accurate, sufficiently thorough, clear in their presentation, and practical.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Disciple-Making Curriculum Evaluation					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently balances theory with practice.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson is clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly explains how believers can make disciples.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to better disciple others.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3
T-TEST RESULTS

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Project Total</i>	<i>Post-Project Total</i>
Mean	65.06666667	74.6
Variance	48.4952381	30.82857143
Observations	15	15
Pearson Correlation	0.710115668	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	14	
t stat	-7.473271399	
P(T<=t) one-tail	1.49908E-06	
t Critical one-tail	1.761310136	
P(T<=t) two-tail	2.99815E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.144786688	

APPENDIX 4
COURSE OUTLINE

This appendix contains the 8-week course, outlined by lesson. Each lesson begins with a brief review and opening questions and concludes with discussion questions.

Lesson 1

Biblical Foundations for Disciple-Making

Opening Questions

- What does it mean to “make disciples” of Jesus? How do we do that?
- Why is it so hard for us to make disciples? What challenges do you face that hinder you from being a disciple-maker?
- What are some apprehensions or concerns you have about being a disciple-maker?

Defining Our Terms

- *A Disciple* – a follower of Jesus. Someone who responds to the gospel in repentant faith and thus begins a new life following Jesus (cf. John 10:27–28; 2 Cor 5:17)
- *Discipling* – helping believers mature in the faith so that they might follow Christ more faithfully.
- *Disciple-Making* – a comprehensive term that includes both our work in evangelizing the lost and helping believers grow in grace through the prayerful proclamation of Scriptures. In other words, it's helping people to trust and follow Jesus.

Biblical Foundations for Disciple-Making

- The disciple-making life is the normal Christian life.
- Disciple-making is rooted in God’s eternal plan to glorify His Son in the midst of a redeemed, transformed people from every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation (Rev 4–5).
- Prayerfully proclaiming God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit is at the heart of genuine disciple-making ministry.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to understand that every Christian is a disciple who is called to make disciples?
2. Which Biblical foundation was most encouraging or clarifying to you personally?
3. Why is the prayerful proclamation of God’s Word so necessary in disciple-making ministry?
4. Will you begin to pray that the Lord would give you people that you can intentionally disciple?

Lesson 2

Understanding Evangelism

Brief Review

- All Christians are disciples who are called to make disciples.
- Disciple-making is helping people trust in and follow Jesus.
- Disciple-making is rooted in God's plan to glorify His Son in the midst of a redeemed, transformed people.
- Prayerfully proclaiming God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit is the heart of disciple-making ministry.

Opening Questions

- What is evangelism? What are the biggest struggles you face in evangelism?
- Why do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Preach the gospel at all times. Use words if necessary"?
- What are the core truths a person needs to know and believe in order to become a follower of Christ?

Concerns about Evangelism

- "I'm not gifted in evangelism."
- "I don't know what to say / what if I say the wrong thing!"
- "I'm not a confrontational person. I'm more into life-style evangelism."
- "I don't want to come across as manipulative or pushy."

Defining Evangelism

To evangelize literally means "to gospelize." Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of Jesus with the goal of persuading people to repent and believe.

Message: The gospel

Activity: Teaching the truths of the gospel

Goal: Persuading people to repent and believe

Defining the Gospel

The gospel is the good news that sinners can be saved from sin and reconciled to God through repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

- God
- Man / Sin
- Jesus
- Response

Discussion Questions

1. What is the message, activity, and goal of evangelism? Why is gospel fluency essential in our evangelistic endeavors?
2. What steps do you need to take to grow in gospel fluency?

Lesson 3

Understanding the Core Truths of the Gospel

Brief Review

- Evangelism is proclaiming the good news of Jesus with the goal of persuading people to repent and believe.
- Gospel fluency and passion are two essential ingredients in evangelism.
- Prayerfully proclaiming God’s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit is the heart of all evangelistic/disciple-making ministry.

Opening Case Studies

- “I’m Catholic. You’re Protestant. But we’re all Christians.”
- “I’m glad the Jesus thing works for you.”
- “How could a loving God send anyone to hell?”
- “I’m set. I prayed the prayer when I was a kid.”

The Necessity of Gospel Clarity

- When we proclaim the gospel, we need to be clear on what we are calling sinners to do in response to what Christ has done.
- Much of what is called evangelism today lacks gospel clarity. “The gospel often remains untaught, and unbiblical words water down the poignant true meaning of sin, death, and hell, or confuse those who are genuinely seeking truth.”¹

God the Holy Creator

Summary: God, the holy Creator, made us in His image so that we would know Him and live by faith under His righteous rule (Gen 1:26–27; Rev 4:11).

People: The Rebellious Sinners

Summary: Instead of trusting in God and submitting to His righteous rule, we’ve rebelled against Him. We are sinners by birth and by choice (Rom 3:9, 23; Jer 17:9; Eph 2:1).

Sin’s Judgement: Death

Summary: Because God is holy, He must judge sin. The penalty of sin is death: separation from God both in this life and for all eternity (Rom 6:23; Eph 2:1; Rev 20:11–15).

Jesus the Substitute Savior

Summary: Jesus, God’s Son, lived, died, and rose again as a substitute for rebels like us (1 Pet 3:18; Rom 5:6–8).

¹ J. Mack Stiles, *Evangelism: How the Whole Church Speaks of Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 28.

Response: Turn and Trust

Summary: The good news of what Jesus has done demands a response: Repent and believe the gospel (Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 3:36)

Discussion Questions and Application

1. What steps do you need to take to grow in gospel clarity and fluency?
2. How might your initial responses to the case studies we began class with change after going through this lesson?

Lesson 4

Prayerfully Initiating Gospel Conversations

Brief Review

- The disciple-making life is the normal Christian life.
- Gospel fluency and passion should characterize our lives as disciple-making disciples.
- Prayerfully proclaiming God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit is the heart of disciple-making ministry.

Opening Questions

- What are some of the challenges you face in starting gospel conversations?
- How do we evangelize someone who doesn't believe that the Bible is true?
- How does the gospel address the hopes that people build their lives on?

Prayerful Preparation

The gospel's advance, both scripturally and historically, has always been preceded and sustained by fervent prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:23-31; 6:4; 13:3; 14:23).

1. Praying for the Spirit's convicting ministry – John 16:8-11
2. Praying for boldness to proclaim the gospel – Acts 4:23-31, Eph 6:19-20
3. Praying for open doors/opportunities – Col 4:3
4. Praying that the spread of the gospel would triumph – 2 Thess 3:1

A person with gospel clarity and prayerful expectancy is a powerful tool in the Redeemer's hands.

In It for the Long Haul

- In a post-Christian culture, believers must take a long-haul approach to engaging unbelievers with the gospel. We simply can't rely on quick, "hit-and-run" gospel presentations for effective disciple-making outreach.
- Inviting friends to read the Bible (ex. Mark) with you is one of the most effective ways we can evangelize (Rom 10:14; 1 Pet 1:23).

Addressing the Narrative

- Each person has a narrative that they are constructing with their lives in order to find meaning and fulfillment.

Life Story Cycles

1. Hope
2. Problem
3. Deliverance
4. Fulfillment

Life apart from God in a sin-cursed world is ultimately futile and pointless (see Ecclesiastes).

The Gospel Narrative

1. *Hope*: We were made by God for God. “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You.” ~ Augustine
2. *Problem*: Sin separates us from God. The punishment of sin is death (Ro 6:23)
3. *Deliverance*: Christ died for our sin so that we might be forgiven and reconciled to God (I Pet 3:18)
4. *Fulfillment*: Through repentant faith in Christ, we receive eternal life (John 17:3)

Case Study

A non-Christian friend has been talking to you lately about how frustrated they are with things going on in our country. How might you be able to take the “narrative” approach in order to help him/her find their ultimate hope in God?

Discussion Questions

1. What are the four parts of the life story cycle? How does the truths of the gospel fit into this narrative?
2. How do we discern the “life stories” of our unbelieving friends and family?
3. Why is it important to specifically address the problem of peoples’ hopes as we communicate the truths of the gospel?

Lesson 5

The Gospel and Discipleship

Key Texts

- “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom . . .” (Col 3:16)
- “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ . . .” ~ Col 1:28–29
- To proclaim Christ is to proclaim the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 1:21–25). The gospel, therefore, is not only essential in our evangelism, but in our maturity as well.

Opening Questions

- How does the gospel relate to our ongoing growth in maturity as disciples of Christ?
- We tend to think about the gospel almost exclusively in terms of our past or our future. How does the gospel relate to our lives in the “here and now?”
- How do we apply gospel truths in our discipling efforts?

The Centrality of the Gospel

- Who we are and how we live is shaped by who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ.

The Gospel for Today

- “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Gal 2:20)
- In the gospel, we find all the provisions and promises we need for life and godliness in this present world (2 Pet 1:3-4).

Gospel Identity: Who I Am in Christ

- John 1:12
- John 15:1–11
- Rom 6:1–13
- 1 Pet 2:9
- Eph 1:3-14; 2:10
- 2 Cor 5:17
- Rom 8:1, 14-17; 31–37
- Col 3:1–4; 12–17

Gospel Provisions: What I Have in Christ

- The indwelling presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8; Rom 8:14–17; 1 Cor 2:10–11; Eph1:17–20; etc.). Note the relationship between Eph 5:18–20 and Col 3:16–18
- A sufficient, never-ending supply of sanctifying, transforming grace (cf. 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 12:9–10; Titus 2:11–14).

Gospel Confidence: The Hope I Have in Christ

Because of the gospel, I can have confidence that:

- I am fully accepted and loved by God – Rom 8:31-37
- A wise, sovereign, and loving God is carefully orchestrating all things for my good – Rom 8:28
- I have everything I need for life and godliness in this present age - 2 Peter 1:3–4

Discussion Questions

- Why do we need to consistently remember and rehearse the glories of the gospel?
- How should we respond to the truths about the identity, provision, promises, and hope we have in the gospel (think Gal 2:20)?
- How can we help one another grow in our awareness and application of our gospel blessings?

Lesson 6

Applying the Gospel in Our Discipleship

Brief Review

- To disciple someone is help them trust and follow Christ.
- The gospel is essential not only in our evangelism, but in our ongoing efforts to disciple others towards maturity.
- Who we are and how we live is shaped by who God is and what He has done, is doing, and will do for us in Christ.
- Gospel identity, provision, promises, and hope profoundly shape our Christian lives in the “here and now.”

The Need for Gospel Fluency

- “We need the gospel and we need to become gospel-fluent people. We need to know how to believe and speak the truths of the gospel—the good news of God—in and into the everyday stuff of life. In other words, we need to know how to address the struggles of life and the everyday activities we engage in with what is true of Jesus: the truths of what he accomplished through his life, death, and resurrection, and, as a result, what is true of us as we put our faith in him. The gospel has the power to affect everything in our lives.”² ~ Jeff Vanderstelt

Applying the Gospel: Case Studies

How would you apply the truths of the gospel in the following case studies?³ Discuss and be ready to share your answers with the class.

1. The gospel and discouragement
2. The gospel and worry
3. The gospel and ongoing sin struggles

Discussion Questions

- How has your perspective or understanding of the gospel’s sufficiency for our present struggles changed or been strengthened as result of this exercise?
- Why do we typically offer “try harder” or “do more” counsel in our discipling efforts? Why is this counsel insufficient and potentially antithetical to gospel growth?

² Jeff Vanderstelt, *Gospel Fluency: Speaking the Truths of Jesus into the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton IL: Crossway, 2017), 23.

³ See appendix 7, “Applying the Gospel: Case Studies.”

Lesson 7

The Church and Discipleship

Brief Review

- The disciple-making life is the normal Christian life.
- Disciple-making includes both evangelizing unbelievers and helping believers grow in grace. In short, it's helping people to trust and follow Jesus.
- The gospel is essential not only in our evangelism, but in our ongoing efforts to disciple others towards maturity.

Opening Questions

- What's the danger of looking to para-church ministries or impersonal sources of information (ex. YouTube) for your primary source of spiritual formation?
- Can mature disciples be developed apart from the church? Why or why not?
- How does the ministry of the church help believers mature in the faith?

The Church and Discipleship

- The church is not simply a place we attend, but a body of believers we covenant with in order to glorify God and carry out His commands.
- God has ordained the church to be His primary discipling agent in the world today. Through the accountability, leadership, and ministry of the local church, the gospel is advanced and believers are built up in the faith (see Eph 4:11–16).
- God's plan is that we would belong to local churches so that we can live the Christian life within the context of a committed Christian community.

The Necessity of the Church

Why is the church necessary in our discipleship?

1. Accountability to a body of believers
2. The pastoral ministry of godly elders (ex. Titus)
3. The ministry of the Word, prayer, and ordinances
4. Diverse giftedness within the body (ex. I Cor. 12)
5. Usefulness in the gospel's advance
6. Word-based, intergenerational relationships

If maturity in Christ was basically about Christian activity or the accumulation of Bible knowledge, then the church wouldn't be necessary. However, maturity can only be cultivated within the context of a local church.

Maturity in Christ is personal, but not individualistic. It takes place within the context of the covenant community.

Discussion Questions

- How does a church-rooted approach to disciple-making differ from other approaches (ex. radio, internet, or book ministry)?
- Why is discipleship apart from the local church insufficient?
- How has your understanding of the necessity of the church in our growth in grace been strengthened or changed as a result of our study?

Lesson 8

Discipling Like Jesus

Brief Review

- The disciple-making life is the normal Christian life.
- Prayerfully proclaiming God’s Word in the power of the Spirit is the heart of disciple-making ministry.
- Gospel fluency is essential both in our outreach and in our ongoing discipling of one another.
- God designed the church to be His primary disciple-making agent in the world today.

Opening Questions

- What can we learn about disciple-making from Jesus’ life and ministry?
- How does Christ’s “method” of disciple-making differ from some of the common methods associated with evangelism and discipleship?

Jesus: The Model Disciple-Maker

#1. Initiative

Discipling others doesn’t just happen. It requires a great deal of prayerful thought, deliberate planning, and ongoing care.

#2. Investment

Although Christ ministered to the multitudes, He intentionally invested in a few. Christ chose to pour His life into people who were teachable, responsive, and earnest about the things of God.

#3. Instruction

Teaching is the primary duty of church leaders (2 Tim 4:1–4; Col 1:28-29) and the God-given responsibility we all share as members of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11–16; Rom 15:14). Each of us has a responsibility to prayerfully proclaim the truths of God’s Word to our fellow believers in order to help them mature in Christlikeness.

#4. Imitation

Discipleship is not merely informational, but relational. It demands that the truth be proclaimed and modeled (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9)

We need to not only hear the truth, but also see the truth in action. We all need flesh-and-blood examples to show us what holiness looks like in the trenches of life.

Discipling is more than leading a Bible study or doing life together. It’s a deliberate lifestyle of prayerfully proclaiming and humbly modeling the truths of God’s Word in order to help other believers grow in Christlikeness.

Discussion Questions

- Which part of Christ's example of disciple-making (initiative, investment, instruction, imitation) do you find most challenging to you personally?
- How does the gospel encourage and fuel us to follow Christ's example in making disciples?

APPENDIX 5
EVANGELISM CASE STUDIES

This appendix contains the evangelism case studies used during lesson 3 of the 8-lesson course.

Equip Course: The Disciple-Making Life

Lesson 3: Evangelism Case Studies

What gospel truths would you emphasize in the following situations? Discuss and be ready to share your answers with the group.

Case Study 1: “I’m Catholic. You’re Protestant. But we’re all Christians.”

One of your family members is Catholic. She knows that you go to church each week, but she thinks Catholicism and Christianity are basically the same. “I’m Catholic. You’re protestant. But there’s really not that big of a difference. After all, we’re all Christians, right?” What gospel truths might you emphasize in response to her statement / question?

Case Study 2: “I’m glad the Jesus thing works for you.”

During one of your lunch breaks, a conversation breaks out about spirituality. Your co-worker knows that you’re a Christian and asks you about your “spiritual journey.” As you share your testimony of how you came to Christ, he remarks, “That’s cool. I’m glad that Jesus thing works for you. I’m trying some different religions and stuff to see what works for me.” What gospel truths might you emphasize in a follow up conversation with this co-worker?

Case Study 3: “How could a loving God send anyone to hell?”

You’ve been witnessing to a friend for a while now, but she believes that hell is not real. “How could a loving God send anyone to hell? That’s extreme. I can’t believe God would do that! As long as we’re good people and don’t hurt others, that’s all that matters.” What gospel truths might you emphasize in response to her statement / question?

Case Study 4: “I’m set. I prayed the prayer when I was a kid.”

One of your longtime friends grew up in the same gospel-preaching church that you attended. When he was a kid, he “asked Jesus into his heart” at a Christian camp. Now that he’s on his own, he doesn’t attend church and shows no real interest in the things of God. One day you lovingly confront him about his lack of spiritual interest and commitment. He responds, “I’m not worried. After all, I prayed the prayer when I was a kid. I’m set.” What gospel truths might you emphasize in response to his statement?

APPENDIX 6
UNDERSTANDING THE CORE TRUTHS
OF THE BIBLE

This appendix provides the handout on the core truths of the Bible. This handout was used during the 8-lesson course.

The Message of Evangelism:
Understanding The Core Truths of the Gospel

Defining the Gospel

Definition: The gospel is the good news that sinners can be saved from sin and reconciled to God through repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

To understand this news, essential truths about God, man, sin, Christ, repentance, and faith need be clearly explained:

God the Holy Creator

Summary: God, the holy Creator, made us in His image so that we would know Him and live by faith under His righteous rule.

Scripture: Gen 1:26–27; Rev. 4:11

Explanation: The gospel is fundamentally about God. Christ came, suffered, and died to “bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). God is both the giver and the gift of the gospel. For people to understand the gospel, they must first have a basic understanding of who God is.

We cannot assume that the average unbeliever has any kind of Biblical notion about God. As we talk about God, we must first emphasize that He is the Creator. Life begins with Him. He made us in His image so that we could know Him. Because He is the Creator, He has the right to rule over His creation. As creatures, we are ultimately accountable to Him for how we live.

God is holy, which means that He is distinct from His creation. He is perfectly righteous and separate from sin. God cannot ignore, overlook, or tolerate sin (see Hab. 1:13). Instead, He must judge sin because sin is rebellion against Him. Only against the backdrop of God’s holiness will sinners be able to understand the magnitude of their sin and the beauty of His love.

People: The Rebellious Sinners

Summary: Instead of trusting in God and submitting to His righteous rule, we’ve rebelled against Him. We are sinners by birth and by choice.

Scriptures: Rom 3:9, 23; Jer 17:9,

Explanation: Most people think of sin as an action that hurts others. The Bible, however, tells us that sin is rebellion against a holy God. Our sinful thoughts, words, and actions

stem from hearts that reject God and His rightful authority over our lives. Only as people see sin the way God sees it will they begin to understand sin's judgment and their need of a Savior.

So how do we help people understand their sinful condition? By showing them God's Law. In Romans 7:7, Paul testifies, "If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin [it's gravity or scope]." The Law was given in order to show us our sin (Romans 3:20) and subsequent need of Christ (Galatians 3:21–24).

Sin's Judgment: Death

Summary: Because God is holy, He must judge sin. The penalty of sin is death: separation from God both in this life and for all eternity.

Scriptures: Rom 6:23; Eph 2:1

Explanation: Sin makes us guilty before God. The good things we do, compared to how holy God is, are like filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Each one of us has broken God's Law and stand guilty before God. We are not "basically good people who occasionally mess up." We are rebels against God who deserve His wrath.

Jesus: The Substitute Savior

Summary: Jesus, God's Son, died as a substitute for rebels like us. Jesus paid the debt that we owed God by dying in our place. He took the full force of God's justice on himself so that forgiveness and pardon might be available to us. He rose again, conquering sin, death, and hell so that we could have life forever with God.

Scriptures: 1 Pet. 3:18; Rom 5:6–8

Explanation: In His love and grace, God sent His Son Jesus to do for us what we could never do for ourselves. We've broken God's Law. Jesus kept it. We deserve death for our sin. He died in the place of sinners so that our sin debt might be cancelled. The good news of the gospel can be summarized in four words: Jesus in my place.

Response: Turn and Trust

Summary: The good news of what Jesus has done demands a response: Repent and believe.

Scriptures: Mark 1:15; John 1:12; 3:36

Explanation: The grace we need for salvation can only be received through repentance and faith.

Repent / Turn: To repent means to decisively turn from sin to God through faith in Jesus. Greg Gilbert accurately notes, “To repent of our sins means to turn away from our rebellion against God. Repentance doesn’t mean we’ll bring an immediate end to our sinning. It does mean, though, that we’ll never again live at peace with our sins.”

When people repent, the following things happen:

- They realize that they are sinners who deserve eternal death because of their sin.
- They hate their sin and have no desire to continue living in it.
- They acknowledge that they are spiritually bankrupt. They know that there is nothing that they can do on their own to take away sin’s punishment or earn God’s favor.
- They turn from pride, self-reliance, and sin to God, humbly trusting in God’s grace to be forgiven and reconciled to Him.

Believe / Trust: Believing in Jesus is not simply agreeing with the facts of the gospel. Faith is completely depending upon Jesus alone for salvation from sin.

When people place their faith in Jesus, the following things happen:

- They believe that Jesus is the Savior who died and rose again to pay sin’s penalty for them.
- They believe that Jesus is the Lord who is worthy of their worship, love, and obedience.
- They stop depending upon their own goodness and self-righteous efforts for a relationship with God. Instead, they place their entire trust and hope in Jesus for salvation.

Conclusion: Two Ways to Live

Summary: The gospel of Jesus demands a response. We either continue in our rebellion against God, trusting in our own goodness and living life according to our own rule, or we humbly submit to God and His way of salvation in repentant faith, trusting in Jesus alone for forgiveness and life everlasting with God.

APPENDIX 7
GOSPEL CASE STUDIES

This appendix contains the gospel case studies used during lesson 6 of the 8-lesson course.

Equip Course: The Disciple-Making Life
Lesson 6: Applying the Gospel: Case Studies

How would you apply the truths of the gospel in the following situations? In each hypothetical case study, assume the individual is a Christian who sincerely loves the Lord. Discuss and be ready to share your answers with the group.

Case Study 1: Discouragement

Tom feels deeply discouraged about a number of things taking place at work and home. Even though he's an outstanding worker, he consistently gets passed over for promotions or bonuses. He doesn't feel valued or appreciated by his supervisor or co-workers. Tom enjoys a loving marriage, but his children demonstrate little or no interest in the things of God. The harder he tries to provide spiritual leadership in the home, the more apathetic or indifferent his children seem to become. "I feel like a failure. Nothing I do seems to work," Tom laments. How does the gospel apply to Tom's discouragement?

Case Study 2: Worry

Jennifer is worried about what's taking place in our country. She spends a lot of her free time trying to keep informed but feels overwhelmed by the pervasive onslaught of secularism that's taking over culture (even church culture). Jennifer is worried that the freedoms we enjoy will soon be taken away. Will we cave to socialism? Will we be able to worship freely? Will the stock market crash because of inflation? The more she thinks about these and other scenarios, the more worried she becomes about her future. How would you apply the gospel to her struggle with worry?

Case Study 3: Battle with Sin

For many years, Fred has wrestled with anger. Fred loves the Lord and is determined to conquer this sin struggle. He has memorized verses on anger, confessed his sin struggle with others, and has actively sought accountability. Despite his efforts, Fred doesn't seem to be making any progress in his sin struggle. "I need to try harder!" he says. How would you apply the gospel to Fred's battle with anger?

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ABSTRACT

EQUIPPING THE MEMBERS OF COMMUNITY OF GRACE CHURCH IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK FOR DISCIPLESHIP-MAKING MINISTRY

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023
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This project seeks to help Community of Grace Church in Buffalo, New York, equip its members for disciple-making ministry. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Community of Grace and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of seven passages of Scripture to demonstrate that the church's mission is to make, mature, and multiply Christlike disciples who glorify God and impact others with the gospel. Chapter 3 presents the practical steps a disciple-making church needs to take to equip its members to fulfill the church's God-given mission. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the disciple-making knowledge and readiness assessment, the content and teaching methodology of the specific course curriculum, and the results of the disciple-making readiness interviews. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the completion of the specified goals.

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