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INCREASING THE KNOWLEDGE OF DISCIPLESHIP
AMONG MEMBERS OF SOUTHBROOK BAPTIST
CHURCH IN WADENA, MINNESOTA

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INCREASING THE KNOWLEDGE OF DISCIPLESHIP
AMONG MEMBERS OF SOUTHBROOK BAPTIST
CHURCH IN WADENA, MINNESOTA

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Thank you to the remarkable faculty at SBTS for their assistance and personal interest in my life and ministry. Special thanks to my church family at Southbrook Baptist Church for their enthusiastic encouragement and participation in this undertaking. Thanks to Neal Richards for encouraging me to pursue this milestone. I owe all to my Redeemer.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
LIST OF TABLES.....	viii
PREFACE.....	ix
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	1
Strengths.....	2
Weaknesses.....	3
Rationale.....	4
Purpose.....	6
Goals.....	6
Research Methodology.....	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	8
Conclusion.....	9
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE PROJECT.....	10
Converting to Christ’s Kingdom: Exegesis of Mark 1:14–15.....	10
Repentance and Belief Are Simultaneous.....	11
The Disciple Must Repent from Sin.....	12
The Disciple Must Believe in the Gospel.....	16
Answering the Call of Christ: Exegesis of Mark 1:16–20; 2:13–17.....	17
Meaning of Disciple.....	18
A Disciple Is Called to Leave.....	20

Chapter	Page
A Disciple Is Called to Follow	22
Anticipating the Cost of Following Christ: An Exegesis of Mark 8:34	23
Adopting the Character of Jesus: An Exegesis of Mark 10:42–45	26
3. THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT	31
A Theology of Discipleship	31
The Act of Conversion.....	32
Defining Discipleship	35
The Aim of Discipleship.....	36
The Scope of Discipleship.....	37
The Fundamentals of Discipleship	41
The Task of Discipleship.....	41
The Vehicle of Discipleship	42
Preaching For Discipleship	44
Advantages of Preaching Discipleship	45
Limitations of Preaching Discipleship.....	50
Conclusion	51
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT	53
Development of the Sermon Series.....	53
Evaluation of the Sermon Series	56
Schedule of the Project.....	59
Pre-survey	59
Sermon Series Description.....	61
Post-survey.....	65
Conclusion	67
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT	69
Introduction	69

	Page
Evaluation of the Project’s Purpose	69
Evaluation of the Project’s Goals.....	70
Goal 1: Pre-survey	70
Goal 2: Sermon Series	70
Goal 3: Quantitative Analysis.....	71
Goal 3: Qualitative Analysis.....	74
Strengths of the Project	75
Strengths of the Execution of the Project	75
Strengths from Survey Data.....	76
Weaknesses of the Project	79
What I Would Do Differently.....	80
Theological Reflections	81
Personal Reflection	82
Conclusion	82
 Appendix	
1. DISCIPLESHIP KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE SURVEY	84
2. SCORING RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE APPLICABILITY AND FIDELITY OF THE SERMON SERIES.....	87
3. SERMON SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK	90
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	102

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BEB* *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*. Vol. 2, *J–Z*. Edited by Walter A. Elwell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988. Logos
- EDB* *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*. Edited by Daniel Noel Freedman. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Logos
- HMNTC Holman New Testament Commentary
- ISBE* *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Vol. 2, *E–J*. Edited by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982. Logos
- RHNTBC Randall House New Testament Bible Commentary

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. T-test comparison of pre-survey and post-survey	72
2. Correlation between sermon attendance and increase in knowledge	73
3. Surveys that included items that increased by 3.....	77
4. Survey items that increased by 3	78

PREFACE

This project is dedicated to all who have, without reserve, poured their lives into mine. Thank you to my parents who have built a household of faith from the very beginning. Thank you to my church family for your undying support of the local church ministry and my leadership as your pastor. Your bold pursuit of the Savior has humbled me and inspired me. I cannot wait to see heaven with you. Thank you to my wife, Autumn, and the daily sacrifices she has made to allow me the time to study and write. You anchor me; I love you more because I desperately depend on your ministry in my life.

Jacob Heppner

Wadena, Minnesota

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is the highest priority of the church. This priority should be continually revisited to protect this function from being lost in ineffective programming. Each believer should be consistently centering each area of their Christian journey onto the figure of Jesus Christ. The preaching series of this project is a component of a more comprehensive implementation of a discipleship program at Southbrook Baptist Church. The entire program consists of the recruiting of a discipleship steering team, an annual church-wide discipleship seminar, and the implementation of a year-long discipleship study program. This project is intended to increase knowledge of discipleship and present opportunities for character development through preaching in the book of Mark.

Context

This project will be in the context of Southbrook Baptist Church (SBC). Southbrook is a smaller rural church consisting of mostly younger families. I have been at Southbrook for fifteen years and most of the congregation are first-generation Christians who desire to establish a Christian home setting but have not seen the model of a Christian home in their own childhood. The primary church programs are Sunday school for students, men's and women's Bible studies on Sunday mornings, Sunday worship, and Wednesday Kids' Club and youth group. The adult Bible studies on Sunday mornings fulfill the opportunity for prayer, fellowship, and Bible intake. Sunday worship is faithfully attended but seems to be predictable and unimaginative at times. Southbrook Baptist Church is a congregation of younger families that are bona fide followers of Christ. The attendees at SBC have a desire to incorporate their faith into all areas of life,

they are willing to think of innovative ways to reach their families and friends with the gospel, and their testimony has carried a reputation of favor in the community.

Strengths

The first strength is the authenticity of the church people. Many of the people come because they are thirsty for spiritual truth and nourishment from God's Word. Few of the parents were brought up in an evangelical church environment and received no support or commendation for church attendance or involvement, so the people who come to a church service or function are appreciative and are eager to build convictions for their personal faith journey. This context has created a tightly knit congregation who can often identify with each other in spiritual struggles and share testimony of God's might and power in their own spiritual skirmishes. There is a high level of transparency and interdependency.

The second strength is the age demographic of the church. Young families make up the majority of the church, and they have an urgency and passion for their own personal growth in Christ and for the spiritual development of their children. The young families and their children create a lively environment to worship and church meetings. Parents who are newer believers help with the Wednesday night programs, allowing for an additional time of shoulder-to-shoulder mentoring. After the Wednesday night program is over, the parents often stay later for fellowship and sharing.

A third strength is the reputation of the church. There have been conversations about changing the name of the church or removing the word "Baptist" from the name because of the preconceptions of the community about the church, but many people thought it would be better to use the reputation factor as motivation to serve the community and be more consciously visible as compassionate and genuine. The church now enjoys a reputation as an institution that stands for truth and speaks truth in love. Many of the people are frank in the discussions of the kind of lifestyle Christ saved them

out of, and they share in the joy of Christian transformation.

A fourth strength is that there is a willingness to try new ideas and attempt things that have not been done before at this church. This is likely a result of being a largely first-generation Christian congregation; there are no traditions or nostalgic notions that cannot be changed or adjusted. The people thrive on thinking of new ways to minister and create avenues to show care to the community. They also develop organic patterns for fellowship outside of organized church programming.

Weaknesses

One weakness is the lack of leadership. In a congregation where so many are first-generation Christians, there is hesitancy or reluctance to minister in a leadership capacity. Some of the problem lies with the way I have pastored, some of the issue is a lack of confidence or lack of modeling because of the demographic of the church. There are only a handful of people over the age of fifty, and the imbalance shows in the area of leadership. There is a lack of one-on-one mentorship that would prepare people for leadership.

A second weakness is that the season of life many of the younger parents find themselves in is very busy. Some mothers come to church just to sit in the nursery with their own children and are unable to serve or contribute very much in volunteer serving or teaching roles at this time. Many of the fathers are watching their other children and do not feel comfortable teaching in a classroom. Many of the men are not comfortable enough in their Christian maturity to lead a Bible study, mentor peers or help disciple other believers.

A third weakness is the organizational bottleneck at the pastor level. I have been successful with personal study and personal relationships, but the current way of doing things is that everything goes through the pastor. There is some wisdom in this organizational flow currently because of the spiritual context, but a working knowledge

of discipleship will allow more people in the congregation to be comfortable and trained to take on leadership in various ministry levels.

A fourth weakness is a lack of consistency and long-term follow through for a comprehensive discipleship program. Currently, the pastor discovers the understanding level of newer attendees and applies the type of Bible study that will best fit the next step in their discipleship journey, but many times there is little intentional effort after the introductory course or study. This weakness has been addressed piecemeal over the last year, but an overarching program that consistently moves people further in their relationship with Christ and with each other will bring organization and stability to growth in Christ.

Rationale

This project addressed discipleship knowledge in the congregation of Southbrook Baptist Church. The people are genuine and love the Lord; they have previously responded to spiritual growth, patterns of prayer, Bible intake, and service. This project united them together in maturing through understanding additional discipleship aspirations through a preaching series on Sunday mornings and evaluating their understanding of discipleship to discover further areas of maturity.

The first reason this project was needed at Southbrook Baptist Church is to be in general compliance with Christ's Great Commission to make disciples. Every local church needs to be obedient to Christ's design of spreading the gospel and making disciples (Matt 28:19–20). Discipleship should have a priority in every local church setting, and every local church should have an intentional method of fulfilling the obligation to Christ's imperative. The first stage of the project was to create a culture of prioritizing discipleship with a sermon series through the Gospel of Mark—this impacted the entire congregation in a general sense and created anticipation of opportunity for growth in Christ.

The second reason this project was needed was for the health of this local church. Christ’s general imperative of making disciples needed to be localized at Southbrook Baptist Church. Southbrook’s mandate from Christ is to guide believers in the journey of making Christ the center of their lives. Christians ought to be able to look back through previous years of their church experience and see how they have been brought closer to Christ through their church community. Ephesians 5:1–3 is an example illustrating how the local church community was successful in discipleship through imitating God, relating as spiritual siblings, walking in love, and resisting carnal temptations: “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”¹

The third reason was to personalize principles of discipleship among the congregants of SBC. This project informed the participants of the ways they could incorporate following Christ into their spiritual journey. The majority of people have not grown up in a setting where salvation was taught; many of them are moral but need to learn heart transformation. New believers and those who have not been discipled need to learn more about discipleship. First-generation Christians need the most amount of exposure to Jesus, and this group of people will benefit more from narrative messages that highlight their Savior Jesus than from expositions from the epistles.

This project clearly described the calling, commitment, and character development of modern-day disciples. Mark’s account shows ordinary people who respond to Jesus’s call to follow Him, and as they respond to His call to follow, they better understand how to join Christ and His mission. Jesus’s first disciples were common fishermen who left their nets to follow their new teacher: “And Jesus said to them,

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:17–18). The believers at SBC had responded to the initial call of Christ on their lives and were ready to discover how to make Christ central in everything.

Mark’s Gospel was an excellent starting point. The narrative is rich with stories and examples of how average people were transformed when they encountered Jesus. All the people who encountered Jesus had a different story yet were connected together through Jesus’s calling on their lives and His mission for them that changed their world. Mark is a Gospel narrative showing people following Christ and emulating His life and character. First John 2:6 instructs, “Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked.” The people of SBC connected personally with this Gospel and the stories of calling and transformation resonated in their hearts and minds as they saw how to follow Christ in every area of their lives.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase knowledge of discipleship among the members of Southbrook Baptist Church in Wadena, Minnesota.

Goals

The goals of this project were designed to teach discipleship to the maximum amount of people in the congregation. The Sunday morning worship service was the most highly attended and reached the greatest percentage of people, so the Sunday sermon was the platform for teaching discipleship principles for this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the present knowledge of discipleship among the attendees of Southbrook Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a sermon series from the book of Mark that taught the growth of a disciple. This sermon series addressed the call, character, spiritual disciplines, theology, and virtues of a disciple.
3. The third goal was to assess the increase of knowledge in the areas of Christian discipleship among the attendees of Southbrook Baptist Church.

A specific research methodology was created that measured the successful completion of these three goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

The first goal was to assess the knowledge of discipleship among the attendees of Southbrook Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering a discipleship assessment to twenty adult attendees who represented a cross-section of the demographics of the membership as a whole. This goal was considered successfully met when the assessments were gathered, and the data analyzed yielding a clearer picture of discipleship comprehension and satisfaction among the adults at Southbrook.

The second goal was to develop a sermon series from the book of Mark that taught the growth of a disciple. This sermon series addressed the call, character, spiritual disciplines, theology, and virtues of a disciple. This goal was measured with two methods. The first method was to submit the sermon series for evaluation and grading in the Foundations of Teaching class that was a part of the doctorate training. The second method was to ask another pastor to critique the series using a rubric to evaluate biblical faithfulness, clarity, and pertinence to the topic of discipleship. This goal was considered successfully met when the sermon series was graded with a B or above in the Foundations of Teaching class, and when a minimum of 90 percent of the rubric evaluation indicators from the pastor met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to assess the increase of knowledge in the areas of Christian discipleship among the attendees of SBC. This was measured by administering a post-survey to the same twenty adults that measured the knowledge and transformation of discipleship practices in the attendees of Southbrook Baptist Church. This survey asked the same twenty quantitative survey items as the pre-survey, but also included five qualitative responses at the end. This goal was considered successfully met when a t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference from the

initial discipleship assessment.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

The following definitions of key terms will be used in the ministry project.

Disciple. A disciple is one who follows the teachings of Jesus Christ, imitates Jesus's life and character, and teaches other individuals to follow Jesus. This definition emphasizes the transformational aspects of following Jesus Christ: following His teachings, emulating His life, and replicating Jesus's ministry in the lives of other people. These aspects were major teaching points in the sermon series.²

Discipleship. Discipleship is the journey of growing deeper in the love and knowledge of God and connecting all of reality to God.³ This definition correlates with the sermon themes that discipleship is about transformation and growing in relationships, not merely adopting additional spiritual disciplines or practices.

One delimitation applied to this project. This project focused on discipleship activity in the Gospel of Mark. Other Scriptures were utilized as needed, but the majority of material in the sermon series found its foundation in Mark's Gospel. This allowed the sermon series to remain in the same major context.

Two limitations applied to this project. The first limitation was that the preaching series was eight weeks in length. This seemed to be a manageable amount of sermons for the church attendees to maintain attendance and attention. The second limitation was that there would be participant consistency in the pre- and post-questionnaires. This would allow a comparison required to demonstrate the success of the project in increasing knowledge of discipleship among the attendees at SBC.

² Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 15–20.

³ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 22, 49.

Conclusion

Jesus's expectation for His disciples is that they follow His calling, imitate His character, and obey His teachings. He has given His followers His words, His example, and His church community as resources to fulfill His commission of discipleship; the believer is sufficiently equipped to thrive in a daily connection with their Savior. The church community at SBC was ready to learn teachings and principles they could add to their personal discipleship practices. The preaching series of this project was a timely contribution to inspiring a discipleship culture at SBC that assisted the people in confidence of their further discipleship implementations. Chapter 2 will examine the texts of Scripture that reveal the areas of discipleship, and chapter 3 will explore the theoretical and practical issues of discipleship in current church ministry. Chapter 4 will describe the project's execution and research methodology, and chapter 5 will evaluate the project's effectiveness and draw conclusions from the research.

CHAPTER 2
BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR THE
PROJECT

Discipleship is the progression of following Jesus from conversion to maturity. Every day in the disciple's life is a day of spiritual development as the disciple follows Jesus and submits more areas of life to Jesus's guidance. A disciple of Jesus grows through an increase in knowledge about Jesus and a pattern of submission to the will of Jesus so that the disciple can display the spiritual fruit of good works and righteousness (Col 1:9–12). Using the Word of God, I will demonstrate the process of maturity in a disciple as they follow Christ. A disciple follows Christ by converting to His kingdom, responding to His calling, anticipating the cost, and emulating His character.

**Converting to Christ's Kingdom:
Exegesis of Mark 1:14–15**

An exegesis of Mark 1:14–15 supports this thesis by indicating that conversion is the initiation of the disciple into the kingdom of God: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’”

This opening salvo of Jesus's preaching ministry builds on John the Baptist's message of repentance in Mark 1. John anticipated the Messiah, who would be the object of salvation and proclaim the gospel of the kingdom of God. John's purpose was not to build a kingdom around himself but to prepare his culture to see their Messiah. Although John preached a message of repentance, he did not have the object of belief to point

people to,¹ except to predict the coming of Christ: “And he preached, saying, ‘After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit’” (Mark 1:7–8).

When Jesus preached the message of the kingdom of God, He was able to add belief to John’s message of repentance, requiring not only a recognition of separation from God in repentance but offering redemption through belief in the gospel. Jesus declares that the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The two following imperatives reveal how an individual enters the kingdom of God: “repent” and “believe in the gospel.”² These twin graces of conversion occur simultaneously. As the sinner turns toward His savior in belief, He also turns from the path of sin He was traveling. This conversion is the retrofitting of the sinner to become a disciple—a follower of Jesus Christ. Immediately after this pronouncement, Mark records that Jesus began to call disciples to follow Him (Mark 1:16–20).

Repentance and Belief Are Simultaneous

Jesus calls His disciples to abandon the trajectory of sin and to turn to Him in belief. His parable of the prodigal son illustrates the concurrent nature of these two decisions (Luke 15). The prodigal son who strayed from his father reached a point in his sinful excursion where he was convicted through the extent of his sinful circumstances and made the decision to leave the pig farm and return to his father’s house. Both repentance and belief are involved in turning to God; the negative expression is turning from sin, and the positive expression of the same action is turning in trust and faith

¹ Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, Biblical Illustrator Series (London: James Nisbet), 26, Logos.

² R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 53, Logos.

toward God. Both imperatives are in Greek present tense.³

Sinclair Ferguson succinctly summarizes the simultaneous nature of the disciples' decision to repent and believe:

When the gospel is proclaimed, it seems at first sight that two different, even alternative, responses are called for. Sometimes the summons is, "Repent!" Thus, "John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness of Judea, 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 3:1–2). Again, Peter urged the hearers whose consciences had been ripped open on the day of Pentecost, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ" (Acts 2:38). Later, Paul urged the Athenians to "repent" in response to the message of the risen Christ (Acts 17:30).

Yet, on other occasions, the appropriate response to the gospel is, "Believe!" When the Philippian jailer asked Paul what he must do to be saved, the Apostle told him, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved" (Acts 16:31).

But there is no mystery or contradiction here. Further on in Acts 17, we discover that precisely where the response of repentance was required, those who were converted are described as believing (Acts 17:30–34).

Any confusion is surely resolved by the fact that when Jesus preached "the gospel of God" in Galilee, He urged His hearers, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14–15). Here repentance and faith belong together. They denote two aspects in conversion that are equally essential to it. Thus, either term implies the presence of the other because each reality (repentance or faith) is the *sine qua non* of the other.

In grammatical terms, then, the words *repent* and *believe* both function as a synecdoche—the figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole. Thus, repentance implies faith and faith implies repentance. One cannot exist without the other.⁴

The simultaneous nature of repentance and belief, then, can be illustrated by a coin with two sides. As the coin is turned, one side is being turned away, and the other side is being turned toward. So it is with repentance and belief in conversion—one turns from sin in repentance as one turns to Jesus in belief.

The Disciple Must Repent from Sin

In the New Testament, *metanoia* is the Greek word normally used for repentance, meaning "to understand something differently after consideration."⁵ The

³ Robert E. Picirilli, *Mark*, RHNTBC (Nashville: Randall House, 2003), 41, Logos.

⁴ Sinclair Ferguson, "Faith and Repentance," Ligonier Ministries, accessed August 12, 2022, <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/faith-and-repentance>.

⁵ Linda Oaks Garrett, "Repentance," in *EDB*, 1118, Logos.

Greek view was that the changed mind inevitably leads to changed actions because the mind controls the body.⁶ This is the expectation of repentance that Jesus preached was necessary for the disciple to follow Him—a changed mind that resulted in a will to demonstrate a changed set of behaviors. This whole-being repentance was confirmed by John the Baptist in Luke 3:8 when he preached that the crowds needed to bear the fruit of repentance; it is not a change of only the mind but a settled determination to change course. Intellect, emotion, and will all contribute to the effect of a disciple’s repentance.

Intellect seems to be the first contributor to the process of repentance. It is the change of mind that leads a sinner to turn from their sin.⁷ The knowledge of both sin and of God’s expectations of righteousness and holiness is needed to affect the mind in such a way. The realization of sin and the sin condition is the basis for repentance, but as E. W. Smith and B. H. Dement observe, “Repentance is only a condition of salvation and not its meritorious ground.”⁸

This intellectual recognition of sin leads to the emotional response of sorrow for sin in legitimate repentance. There is a conviction of sin in the heart that the effects of one’s sin are offensive to God and bring harm to self and others.⁹ There is a worldly sorrow over sin that does not engage in penitence or reformation, but the fruit of that sorrow is death: “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death” (2 Cor 7:10). Genuine repentance, however, is replete with appeals to God for forgiveness and cleansing: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin”

⁶ Garrett, “Repentance,” 1118.

⁷ E. W. Smith and B. H. Dement, “Repent,” in *ISBE*, 2:136, Logos.

⁸ Smith and Dement, “Repent,” 2:137.

⁹ Smith and Dement, “Repent,” 2:136.

(Ps 51:1–2). This appeal represents the turn toward God in the disciple’s repentance.

The volitional aspect of the disciple is represented in the determination of the will to forsake sin. Although repentance is accompanied by deep feelings, whole-person repentance is not equivalent to those feelings but is completed in the volitional convictions about the sinner’s desperate need to be right with God.¹⁰ Through repentance and conversion, disciples remove themselves from the throne of their hearts and place Christ on the throne as the rightful ruler.¹¹

The fruit of repentance stems from the volitional aspect of repentance. The change of perspective on sin builds into a settled determination to avoid it. The will allows the individual to turn the sorrow of guilt into the action of turning and following—turning from sin patterns and proceeding toward the Savior. This volitional aspect demonstrates a change of purpose.¹² John the Baptist called the Pharisees out for a surface response to his message of repentance when he said, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance!” (Matt 3:8). The Pharisees neglected any volitional response of repentance. They refused to turn from human merit and turn to a Savior they would submit to and follow.

The Old Testament often uses the word *shub* for human repentance. The word *shub* carries the meaning “to turn back, away from, or toward.” It is confessing that you are on the wrong road, turning away from your current direction and turning toward the right way.¹³ This repentance calls for a change of the entire person—physically, volitionally, intellectually, morally, and spiritually. It is not enough for a disciple to feel

¹⁰ Paul Helm, “Repentance,” in *BEB*, 2:1837, Logos.

¹¹ Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, HMNTC 2 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 20–21, Logos.

¹² Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 3, *The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 65.

¹³ Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

sorrow for his sin or sinful condition; he must also make the change of direction to align himself in Christ's direction.

First Kings 8:46–50 is such an example of repentance and conversion in the Old Testament:

If they sin against you—for there is no one who does not sin—and you are angry with them and give them to an enemy, so that they are carried away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near, yet if they turn their heart in the land to which they have been carried captive, and repent and plead with you in the land of their captors, saying, “We have sinned and have acted perversely and wickedly,” if they repent with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies, who carried them captive, and pray to you toward their land, which you gave to their fathers, the city that you have chosen, and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven your dwelling place their prayer and their plea, and maintain their cause and forgive your people who have sinned against you, and all their transgressions that they have committed against you.

R. Scott Clark, professor of historical theology at Westminster Seminary in California, equates conversion and repentance through the use of the Hebrew word *shub*: “The principal Old Testament word for conversion (*shub*), in its most basic usage, means ‘to return’ or ‘to go back.’ It can signal the sense of changing one’s mind and in some forms can refer to being brought back to a place or a state.”¹⁴ Clark points to 1 Kings 8:48 as a prominent example of whole-person repentance to conversion: “If they repent with all their heart and with all their soul.”

Isaiah 55:6–7 is another Old Testament example of a call to repentance framed by the picture of turning away and turning toward: “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him return to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon.”¹⁵ The wicked can be converted by abandoning their current trajectory and turning toward the position God occupies. Actions and thoughts are

¹⁴ R. Scott Clark, “Conversion,” The Gospel Coalition, accessed September 3, 2022, www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/conversion.

¹⁵ Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

described, again lending to the whole-person repentance imagery. God will show mercy and pardon the previous wicked actions and intentions of the penitent when they turn away from their previous state and make an about-face toward God.

The Disciple Must Believe in the Gospel

The New Testament Greek usage of the word *pístis* is the typical usage for “belief” and indicates a depth of trust that transcends into confidence in God’s faithfulness.¹⁶ An acknowledgment of truth or reality can be described through the words “belief,” “trust,” and “faith,” but *pístis* emphasizes the “trust” aspect—a reliance on truth.¹⁷ When Jesus preaches that a disciple must believe the gospel, He indicates a dependence and trust in God Himself as a Savior is provided—not just an assent to fact or reality, but trust in Jesus Himself.¹⁸

The intellectual element of this belief needs to comprehend the gospel’s message factually, but the extent of “belief” exceeds academic knowledge. Joseph Exell observes, “It is not merely a faith in the Divine mission and authority of Christ, and in the truth of that system of doctrine which He taught.”¹⁹ This belief is a volitional trust and reception of the words and works fulfilled in Christ as recorded in Scripture; a mere assent to the body of facts and truths is still less than this belief.²⁰ This kind of trust carries “a redirection of the emotions and a liberation of the will, so that there can be true committal to God and a true reorientation of the whole life and person in this committal.”²¹ Belief surpasses intellectual assent to facts or data and becomes fastened to

¹⁶ G. W. Bromiley, “Faith,” in *ISBE*, 2:270, Logos.

¹⁷ Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:270–71.

¹⁸ Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:270–71.

¹⁹ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, 29.

²⁰ Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:271.

²¹ Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:271.

the nature of God in Christ and the nature of man as the rebellious sinner who is hopeless without God.²² The object of saving faith is not data but Jesus Himself and His redemptive work on the cross.²³

The gospel package—the facts of the gospel that must be acknowledged—are condensed to the fundamental essentials in 1 Corinthians 15:3–4: “For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.” So factually, the disciple is converted by comprehending that Jesus is the Christ, that He died on their behalf for their sins, and that He was buried yet rose from the dead. When Jesus states, “believe in the gospel,” He was offering Himself as the Messiah and directing those penitent seekers of God toward Himself for conversion. The belief that saves is bound to these irreducible redemptive elements.²⁴ One cannot genuinely trust in Jesus Christ without acknowledging He is the Messiah, the Son of God, and the crucified and risen Savior.²⁵

Conversion is the initiation of the disciple into the kingdom of God through repentance and belief in Jesus Christ. Mark 1:14–15 is succinct in the message of Jesus’s own words that in order to follow Him, one must repent, turn from his sinful path, and believe, turning to Jesus Himself in trust and surrender.

Answering the Call of Christ: Exegesis of Mark 1:16–20; 2:13–17

Jesus’s calling, extended to those who would follow Him, mirrors the process

²² Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:271.

²³ Picirilli, *Mark*, 41.

²⁴ Robert E. Picirilli, *1, 2 Corinthians*, RHNTBC (Nashville: Randall House, 1987), 214, Logos.

²⁵ Bromiley, “Faith,” 2:271.

of conversion through repentance and belief. Just as “conversion” is simultaneously turning from sin in repentance and turning to Jesus in belief, Jesus’s invitation to the disciples in Mark 1 and 2 called them away from what they had been doing so they could answer the call to follow Jesus. Jesus continues to call disciples today to leave a secular way of life so they can live a new life in Him (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 2:20).

Meaning of Disciple

Jesus launched His ministry by calling the four fishermen to Himself. Mark 1:16–17 recounts the calling of the first disciples: “Passing alongside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net into the sea, for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, ‘Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’” Jesus continues to assemble a community of learners and His call is extended to Levi, a tax collector: “And as he passed by, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And he rose and followed him” (Mark 2:14).

Jesus’s invitation to the men to “follow” is the Greek word *deute*, which is a call for attention and commitment—it is a summons to follow behind, as is the usual practice for a disciple to walk behind their teacher.²⁶ This indicates that these disciples follow a person, not just a religious school of thought.²⁷ When Jesus extended that call to follow, the Greek present tense of this imperative verb indicates that Jesus was calling him to an ongoing relationship.²⁸ They were to be with Him for intensive training, and He would train them to carry on His work after His resurrection—they would be an extension of His life and ministry.²⁹

²⁶ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42.

²⁷ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, 32.

²⁸ Picirilli, *Mark*, 72.

²⁹ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42.

After Levi's call, Mark refers to these followers as "disciples" fifty-eight times in his account, indicating the priority of this call in Jesus's kingdom.³⁰ Mark uses the Greek word *mathetes* for "disciple," which means "learner."³¹ These disciples, however, enjoyed a covenant-style relationship with their teacher as Jesus taught them and trained them to be ministers to the needs of others as He was.³² The disciples were devoted to Him as a person even more than simply the teachings or religious instruction of a rabbinic school creed. The disciples and others called Jesus "Rabbi" at times, but the term disciple is never used in describing a rabbi's students.³³ Jesus was building a church—a body of people who would carry His message and ministry to all the world.³⁴

The Old Testament pattern of apprenticeship in this manner can be found in 1 Kings 19:19–21 through the account of Elijah calling Elisha to be his successor:

So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat, who was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he was with the twelfth. Elijah passed by him and cast his cloak upon him. And he left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Let me kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back again, for what have I done to you?" And he returned from following him and took the yoke of oxen and sacrificed them and boiled their flesh with the yokes of the oxen and gave it to the people, and they ate. Then he arose and went after Elijah and assisted him.

The framework of leaving one's work and family to follow a man of God is found through Elisha's farewell to his parents and the sacrifice of his oxen, just as Jesus's first disciples left their families and livelihood to follow Jesus. Mark skillfully combines a call story pattern from the biblical example of Elijah and Elisha with the present

³⁰ James A. Brooks, *Mark: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition on Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary 23 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1991), 62, Logos.

³¹ Picirilli, *Mark*, 72.

³² Brooks, *Mark*, 62.

³³ David L. Turner and Darrell L. Bock, *Matthew and Mark*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 410, Logos.

³⁴ Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

Hellenistic culture.³⁵

A Disciple Is Called to Leave

The decision of the disciples to follow Jesus was both negative and positive. They immediately left what they were doing to follow Jesus; the fishermen left their nets and boats, and the tax collector left his booth. Mark uses the Greek word *aphiemi* for the fishermen leaving their tackle and their father; it means “left” or “forsook.”³⁶ Robert Picirilli again comments, “They left the nets by which they had earned their living and set out to follow Jesus in a new life of bringing people into the kingdom. Both verbs focus our attention (as Greek aorists) on the acts themselves, perhaps because of their decisive nature.”³⁷ Jesus’s call was a strong invocation, signifying that these brothers should commit to leaving behind their established way of life.³⁸ The decision to leave the secular by committing to the Savior was indelible.

Simon and Andrew demonstrated the appropriate response to Jesus’s beckoning—they left their nets immediately. This act demonstrates that there is a cost to following Jesus. Simon and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their boats and their family business, and Levi left a lucrative tax booth. They were willing to pay the cost of following Jesus.

James and John also left their father when they left their boats: “And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him” (Mark 1:19–20). James

³⁵ Sharyn Dowd, *Reading Mark: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Second Gospel*, Reading the New Testament (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2000), 17, Logos.

³⁶ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42–43.

³⁷ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42–43.

³⁸ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42.

and John are called the sons of Zebedee, yet not only did they leave their family business, but also broke tradition and familial expectations by leaving Zebedee.³⁹ The cost of following Jesus occasionally even involves severing family ties.⁴⁰

Jesus understood the cost of sacrificing family connections; not only did He leave the Father in the incarnation, but His earthly family was often mystified by His ministry. Just a short time later, Mark records that His family would try to deflect His divine ministry, but Jesus taught that His family were those who joined Him in His kingdom:

And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” And he answered them, “Who are my mother and my brothers?” And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31–35)

Rodney Cooper writes, “Jesus’s aim was not to destroy family . . . but family must be viewed in light of higher priorities. Jesus’s life and mission revolved around the will of God. When Jesus asked, “Who are my family,” He was stating that there are some matters and some relationships that transcend the normal blood relations known as “family.”⁴¹ Many disciples today understand the same tension of earthly allegiances and divine loyalty and have sacrificed the comfort of human relationships that conflicted with total devotion to Jesus. Following Jesus is costly and can supersede family ties.⁴²

Levi abandoned a profitable tax booth.⁴³ Levi was set up to collect tolls or usage taxes. Levi won the position in a bid for the right to levy the tolls and to add his

³⁹ Cooper, *Mark*, 12.

⁴⁰ Brooks, *Mark*, 49.

⁴¹ Cooper, *Mark*, 54.

⁴² Brooks, *Mark*, 49.

⁴³ Cooper, *Mark*, 33–34.

own fees (Luke 3:13). Many tax collectors abused the privilege license of the tax booth for personal gain.⁴⁴ Due to their dishonesty and relationship with Rome, tax collectors were viewed as traitors and excommunicated from worship. When Levi left his tax collection booth to follow Jesus, he traded wealth for fellowship with Jesus and his new spiritual family. What happened with this tax collector is the same picture as what happens when anyone is saved. The person who was an enemy is now a brother in Christ. “Levi, becoming a disciple, became a brother to the people he had taxed in the past.”⁴⁵

A Disciple Is Called to Follow

Jesus recruits these disciples with the summons to “follow me.” This is the most basic depiction of a disciple—one who follows. Jesus builds His kingdom by calling followers to Himself because He is the creator of the new life of a disciple. Mark includes details in the call of Simon and Andrew that Jesus affirms that He will make them fishers of men. Jesus indicates He will fashion a divine, spiritual transformation in His followers. Paul later defines this transformation in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” Before Christ, each of these individuals had been occupied with the normal secular functions of their daily lives. Still, Christ interrupts their daily operation by calling them to be a part of the new creation He constructs in His followers.

The first transition Jesus promised His disciples was that He would turn them into different fishermen. This kind of fisherman would catch human beings. These disciples were accustomed to the secular occupation of netting fish, but Jesus would show them “how to cast nets of influence and persuasion to bring people into the kingdom of God that he had announced and represented in person.” These disciples would carry on

⁴⁴ Turner and Bock, *Matthew and Mark*, 420.

⁴⁵ Cooper, *Mark*, 33–34.

Jesus's message of repentance and belief and assist Jesus in building His kingdom. This remains the central purpose for Jesus's followers today.⁴⁶

The paradigm of fishing for men was familiar in both Jewish and Greek cultures. Old Testament references to fishing evoke images of judgment (Hab 1:14-15; Jer 16:16) as the fishermen pictured harvest the fish they catch, but in secular literature, being caught in the net of the gods depicted being saved by them.⁴⁷ Culpepper asserts, "In the Gospels, where it becomes a call to gather men and women for the kingdom, it retains eschatological overtones from the biblical traditions, authorizes the disciples as representatives of their teacher and agents of the kingdom, and looks on to the church's evangelistic mission."⁴⁸

Jesus is the object of faith that disciples turn to and is the agent of transformation from secular to spiritual. His mission of fishing for people demonstrates that souls are the subject of His attention. His followers are commissioned to spread His kingdom by teaching repentance and belief in Jesus. Jesus calls His disciples to expand their nets and join in catching men for His kingdom.

Anticipating the Cost of Following Christ: An Exegesis of Mark 8:34

After Peter attested to his belief that Jesus was the Christ, Jesus started to prepare the disciples for the hardships and persecutions that accompany Him: "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The disciples leaving their nets, boats, and booths to follow Jesus was an initial act of accepting the cost of being disciples.⁴⁹ However, Jesus's kingdom that He was

⁴⁶ Picirilli, *Mark*, 42.

⁴⁷ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 17.

⁴⁸ Culpepper, *Mark*, 53–54.

⁴⁹ Culpepper, *Mark*, 287.

constructing was built on the foundation of the cross. Just as Jesus suffered the sacrifice of the cross, His disciples should anticipate a high price for following in His steps: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). An exegesis of Mark 8:34 will demonstrate that answering the call of Jesus means anticipating the cost of following Him.

Robert Picirilli observes, “The demands of discipleship are encapsulated in this passage: to deny oneself, to take up the cross, and to follow Jesus. All three are third-person imperatives in Greek; the first two are ‘decisive’ (Greek aorist tense), and the final imperative is ongoing, expressing the way of life that follows from the first two (Greek present).”⁵⁰ As Jesus revealed more about His method for building His kingdom and His purpose for ministering on earth, the disciples were exposed to the reality that this entire earthly life would be a daily exercise of self-denial and sacrifice. Jesus had set the pace for self-sacrifice: “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

To “deny” is to reject or refuse (Greek *aparneomai*); to deny oneself is to renounce one’s own claim to one’s life.⁵¹ The disciple follows Christ’s example of accepting God’s claim upon one’s life.⁵² If the disciple lives, he lives to Christ; if he dies, he dies for Christ (Rom 14:8). Self-centeredness is a natural idol of the sin nature that must be repudiated.⁵³ To follow Christ means anticipating the sacrifice of living for self, but the return is spiritual gain (Mark 8:35–38).

Taking up one’s cross pictures the possibility of sacrifice and even martyrdom

⁵⁰ Picirilli, *Mark*, 233.

⁵¹ Picirilli, *Mark*, 233.

⁵² Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 89.

⁵³ Picirilli, *Mark*, 233.

that is possible in following Jesus. The cross is a graphic image of execution; it symbolizes ultimate self-denial. Sharon Dowd states, “To pick up one’s cross is to assent to one’s own execution rather than to be ashamed of Jesus and his message.”⁵⁴ The followers of Jesus are a procession of cross-bearers; Jesus leads His kingdom with His cross on His shoulders.⁵⁵ Each disciple has their own cross and will suffer their own indignations, persecutions, and rejections, but the trajectory of the disciples’ procession is toward the heavenly kingdom.⁵⁶ Jesus does not shield His listeners from the high cost of following Him but promises eternal reparations that will more than compensate for earthly sacrifices.

Jesus described His expectations of His disciples’ commitment in Luke 14:27: “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” The portrait of bearing a cross illustrates absolute dedication, demonstrating a commitment for the remainder of this life all the way until it ends in death. Trent Butler states, “Dedication to Christ is dedication to crucifixion. Rewards come only in the next world, with resurrection.”⁵⁷ Disciples should anticipate the cost of this venture as they prepare to follow their Savior.

A disciple who denies self to follow Christ requires courage to claim the identity that God fashions, regardless of the cost in this world.⁵⁸ A Christian who is unwilling to risk anything from the earthly economy is a Christian who denies Jesus as the center of his life in the present age and forfeits the blessings of the kingdom of God. Christians should not concern themselves with shifting to avoid persecution or sacrifice

⁵⁴ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 88.

⁵⁵ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, 325.

⁵⁶ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, 325.

⁵⁷ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, HMNTC 3 (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 238.

⁵⁸ Dowd, *Reading Mark*, 89.

but should attend to bearing unavoidable persecutions with a determined mind.⁵⁹

Adopting the Character of Jesus: An Exegesis of Mark 10:42–45

As the disciple follows Jesus, the Holy Spirit shapes his character to align with the virtues that Jesus displayed. Jesus taught that the desirable characteristics and ideals of this world are against the value system of His kingdom. Jesus emphasized that in His kingdom, the least shall be great, the poor shall be rich, the humble shall be first, and enemies should be forgiven and loved. Jesus ultimately demonstrated to His disciples the authenticity of kingdom values by shunning the glory He deserved so He could pay the price of sin. Even the king would be a servant and sacrifice. An exegesis of Mark 10:42–45 will show that a disciple follows Jesus by adopting kingdom character.

Using Mark 10:42–45 as a starting point, the project of this paper will demonstrate that the disciple should adopt the character of Christ in purity (Mark 7:1–23), service (Mark 10:25–35), forgiveness (Mark 11:20–25), and generosity (Mark 12:41–44). The core virtue Jesus displays stems from His lesson on humility and kingdom greatness in Mark 10:43–45: “But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”

Earlier in Mark 10, the disciples had been arguing about greatness in the kingdom of God, and some had even asked for regal positions around the throne. Jesus corrected them, showing they had misunderstood the new creation of character He intended for His followers. Jesus emphasized that in His kingdom, the demand for self-denial promoted the virtue of humility as one of the defining characteristics of His community. The secular ideal of greatness that the disciples had attributed to Jesus’s

⁵⁹ Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: St. Mark*, 325.

kingdom stood in polarity to His transformative character. In Christ's kingdom of followers, those who are great are those who are servants.

The phrases "to be served" and "to serve" are translated from the Greek word *diakoneō*, which is the noun's verbal form in verse 43.⁶⁰ The original meaning is to wait on tables, but in Jesus's context takes on the special significance of personal service rendered to one another in the community.⁶¹ The word "slave" is *doulos* and means one who has no rights of their own except those granted by their master, with the emphasis in context on subjection to one another.⁶² Jesus's life was marked by servant ministry, yet His disciples quickly forgot that His kingdom was to be different from secular hierarchical systems.⁶³

Jesus's depiction of servanthood correlates precisely with the Old Testament understanding of the servant's submission to God as an instrument of service. Moses, the first significant leader of the people of Israel, is recognized not for royal prowess but as God's servant. Numbers 12:7–8 is one of many passages that refer to Moses as a servant: "Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?" Being a servant of God is a prominent description of the leaders of God's people in the Old Testament.

Other Old Testament leaders who gained the title "servant of God" include Abraham (Gen 26:24), Job (Job 1:8), Elijah (2 Kgs 9:36), and Isaiah (Isa 20:3).⁶⁴ The patriarch Jacob, father of the twelve tribes of Israel, is granted the title "servant of God"

⁶⁰ Brooks, *Mark*, 171.

⁶¹ Culpepper, *Mark*, 349.

⁶² Culpepper, *Mark*, 349.

⁶³ Brooks, *Mark*, 170.

⁶⁴ J. Albert Harrill, "Servant," in *EDB*, 1189, Logos.

in Isaiah 41:8–9, implying submission of the entire nation of Israel as a national servant of God.⁶⁵ David is often cited as “my servant David” throughout the Old Testament (1 Kgs 11:13; Ps 89:3; Jer 33:22) with usage similar to 2 Samuel 3:18, “By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies.” These references demonstrate that the term “servant” is used for “the pious and faithful in Israel and Judah, especially prophets and rulers. NT authors build on this metaphorical usage.”⁶⁶

Jesus indicates that desiring leadership in His kingdom is an admirable aspiration, but His disciples did not know that leadership meant serving people and adopting Jesus’s characteristic humility.⁶⁷ Jesus referred to His future sacrifice as the ultimate act of service when He said that the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life for many. This passage is a reference to Isaiah’s descriptive messianic passage in Isaiah 53:9-10:

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah connects the position of servant to the substitutional guilt offering of the Messiah.⁶⁸ The king of the kingdom becomes the servant his people needed.

This role was a reversal of all the notions the disciples held about the kingdom of Jesus concerning rank and recognition.⁶⁹ Jesus corrected their error by pointing out

⁶⁵ Walter A. Elwell, “Servant of the Lord,” in *BEB*, 2:1927, Logos.

⁶⁶ Harrill, “Servant,” 1189.

⁶⁷ Steve Wilmschurst, *A Ransom for Many: The Gospel of Mark Simply Explained*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, UK: Evangelical Press, 2011), 237, Logos.

⁶⁸ Culpepper, *Mark*, 349.

⁶⁹ Culpepper, *Mark*, 349.

how the nations equated leadership with giving orders and authority by lording it over others.⁷⁰ In stark contrast, the king showed that he was a servant of many by offering his life in the very essence of service.⁷¹ His instruction to the disciples directed them to serve and care for others, even to the point of being a slave to others in the kingdom.⁷² Christ's kingdom is not parallel to the constructs of power in this world. "Not so among you" proclaims that the virtues and priorities of His kingdom are the polar opposite of the world's values.

Colossians 3 condenses a lifetime of Christ's teaching and display of kingdom virtues into one chapter. The opening verses are an imperative for the follower of Christ to surrender to the new life that Christ offers. Colossians 3:1–4 teaches that the disciple's life is shaped as he centers his mind on heavenly priorities: "Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:2–3). Verse 5 annunciates the fleshly actions that the disciple should mortify: "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Colossians 3:12–14 specifies the virtues of Christ that His followers should emulate: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive."

Colossians 3:9–10 reveals that this character alignment is a fruit of the new self that Christ fashions in His followers: "Seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator." Jesus renews the mind of His disciples so that they can comprehend

⁷⁰ Turner and Bock, *Matthew and Mark*, 495.

⁷¹ Culpepper, *Mark*, 349.

⁷² Turner and Bock, *Matthew and Mark*, 495.

the shift of priorities and virtues in His kingdom. The things that the world values become irrelevant and the things that Christ values can bring an eternal reward.

In this reversal of values, others are to be considered before self, and Christ is to be honored before all. Enemies are to be loved, and the poor are to be valued. Self-rights should be surrendered in favor of forgiveness, and giving should be practiced over hoarding. The King has shown the way that leads to His heavenly kingdom and gives His disciples the power to follow it step by step as they walk with Him.

A disciple of Jesus converts to His kingdom through repentance and belief, responds to the call of Jesus to follow Him, anticipates the cost of following Him, and allows Jesus to create virtuous character in his or her life. Together, these disciples make up the community of followers in Christ's kingdom and are commissioned to invite other people to follow Him as well.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL ISSUES RELATED TO THE PROJECT

Making disciples is the elemental task of the church. Jesus’s final charge to His disciples revealed what the directive of His church would be—to make disciples on a global level. In many organized churches, however, the pattern of making disciples is ambiguous and has been overshadowed by other priorities within the church. “Discipleship” has become a nebulous term that can take on different meanings and connotations, and there is a lack of clarity on what a disciple is and how disciples are developed. Many church programs have been put on autopilot with the expectation that discipleship will happen automatically as people attend studies and services. Churches need to avoid the haphazard approach that disciples develop holistically simply by attending services and passive listening. Preaching, worship, prayer, and fellowship are critical components of Christian growth, but without a clear understanding of Christ’s purpose of conversion and maturity, a church’s discipleship culture will lack aims and purpose, intentional progressions, and measurable metrics.¹ In this chapter, I will develop a theology of discipleship and evaluate the role of preaching in local church discipleship.

A Theology of Discipleship

A comprehensive theology of discipleship will clarify the believer’s expectations of Christian maturity and specify the church’s duties to Christ’s Great Commission to go and make disciples. A biblical study of discipleship should define discipleship and should detail Christ’s intent for salvation and conversion, as well as

¹ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything*, 2nd ed. (Sydney, NSW: Matthias Media, 2021), 102.

consider the scope of Christian transformation. Seeing what Jesus's expectations for His followers are will benefit believers who are struggling with uncertainty in their journey of following Christ. Luke 6:40 shows that Jesus expects His followers to be like Him: "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." However, many believers wrestle with what steps to take after Bible reading, prayer, and church involvement. Understanding Jesus's intent for His followers will help believers know where to focus in order to strive for spiritual maturity in all areas.

The Act of Conversion

The key to defining discipleship is understanding conversion and Christ's intent for salvation. Conversion is the term used when an individual decides to become a Christian.² "Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life" (Rom 5:9–10).

Conversion, however, is not the finish line; it is the starting line. Conversion establishes the relationship between master and disciple and outfits the followers of Jesus for transformation into His likeness. When Jesus tells His followers that He will give them abundant life in John 10:10, He is teaching that in the process of following Him, His followers are liberated and empowered to overcome earthly and fleshly characteristics by replacing them with righteous virtues and fruits of the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:17–18 demonstrates that the purpose of conversion is transformation: "Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the

² Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 28.

Spirit.”

Conversion, then, is the turning point of repentance as an individual pivots in their path of independence and turns in dependence to follow in the life that Jesus leads. Paul describes this new life in Galatians 2:20: “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.” On the day that a person chooses to receive Christ as Savior, the remainder of their life is a journey of transformation into Christlikeness. This process is called progressive sanctification because each Christian life should visibly conform to Christ’s righteous example in renewed knowledge, Christ-like characters, and Spirit-filled behaviors. Justification and positional sanctification secure the status of a believer’s eternal destination, but salvation power continues to overcome sinful and natural impulses and appetites in the mind, heart, and soul of all who believe in Christ.

This understanding of conversion is a corrective measure that combats the age-old conundrum of those who would quickly accept the position of forgiveness and justification while making no effort at Christlike transformation in their hearts. Paul addresses this half-hearted allegiance in Romans 6:1–4:

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

Western Christianity has been guilty of falling into a two-tiered religion—those who have accepted Christ for salvation but have not submitted to following Him, and those who are committed to their faith. This stems from an assumption that salvation has two parts—first when someone receives Christ as Savior, and then at a future time when they commit to following as disciples. The term “disciple” is reserved for those Christians who have made a separate commitment to pursue

maturity in Christ, but that expectation is not held to every church member. This two-tiered system is alien to the New Testament teachings of Jesus and the apostles.³

The New Testament anticipates this issue because of the freedom and liberty through Christ but assumes that the victory over sinful appetites would be so astounding that believers would be compelled to walk in Christ's steps because of His love and reformation, not because of fear of disfellowship or consequential condemnation. Second Corinthians 5:14–15 asserts that it is the love of Christ that compels His disciples to follow Him in newness of life and that this is possible through the justification of His death. His death secures forgiveness and eternal life for those who believe, and His resurrection gives new life to those who believe in His name. The intent of conversion is that those who identify with His death and receive forgiveness are expected to identify with His resurrection and walk in a newness of life. “For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Cor 5:14–15).

A proper understanding of salvation directs attention not only to what Christians are saved *from*—eternal condemnation and separation from God in heaven—but also to what Christians are saved *to*. Death and sin have been defeated, and that victory is applied to the Christian's eternal destiny and also to the present corporeal life. Paul shows in Romans 6:6–7 that the power of sin in the lives of believers has been broken: “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.”

The purpose of conversion can be seen in the remainder of Romans 6. Paul reasons that the dominance of the believer's old self has been broken through Christ's

³ Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 47.

resurrection, and every believer that now lives has a new purpose along with the new life in Christ. The new purpose of every Christian convert is to present himself as a righteous instrument for God to use.

This understanding of conversion answers this question: is every believer a disciple, or is becoming a disciple a separate decision after salvation? The New Testament correlates the concept of discipleship with being a Christian. The word “Christian” is only used a handful of times in the New Testament, while the term “disciple” is used over 250 times. This signifies that early believers were understood to be “disciples” whose very essence was to follow Jesus’s pattern and teachings.⁴ The idea that there is an intended distinction between “Christian” and “disciple” is alien to the New Testament. Although maturity and understanding take time after conversion, the point of conversion is a turning point in the life of the believers where they turn from the sinful or self-centered path and turn to follow Jesus Christ.

Conversion, then, is the beginning of discipleship. Every Christian is a disciple because conversion is the choice to follow a different Master. Christ’s intent is to righteously transform every believer. What happens at conversion continues uninterrupted into an ever-fuller life in kingdom living.⁵ Life after conversion is a discipleship of transformation—indeed, transformation is the purpose of conversion, and the subsequent discipleship lifestyle should evidence a progressive mortification of sin and the development of Christlike virtues and priorities.

Defining Discipleship

Disciples are followers of Jesus. The word “disciple” means “a learner who

⁴ Christy Hill, “What Is the True Meaning of Christian Discipleship?,” Grace Theological Seminary, December 9, 2021, <https://seminary.grace.edu/what-is-the-true-meaning-of-christian-discipleship/>.

⁵ Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 20.

follows a master teacher.”⁶ All of the disciples in the New Testament were called to follow Jesus. To be a disciple is to be a learner—disciples are learning the way of Jesus. According to the Great Commission, discipleship is about learning and teaching; its fulcrum pivots on being taught and becoming a teacher.⁷ Discipleship expands beyond information transfer, however—following Jesus means imitating the teacher’s life, adopting His values, and being able to reproduce His teachings. This type of discipleship was very relational; the disciples were called to adhere to Jesus’s life so that their own ethos was shaped by Jesus’s way of life.⁸ Bill Hull writes, “A disciple is someone who thinks like Jesus, causing them to act like Jesus and invest like Jesus.”⁹

The Aim of Discipleship

Discipleship occurs when someone answers the call to learn from Jesus how to live his or her life as though Jesus was living it.¹⁰ Disciples are learning the way of Jesus. Discipleship is being reoriented to who God is and who we are—that He is the Redeemer and we are in need of redemption.¹¹ Second Corinthians 5:17 indicates that everyone who is in Christ is experiencing a transformation as the new creation replaces the old. Missionary trainer D. Ray Davis writes, “The aim of discipleship is nothing less than the complete transformation of the believer’s heart, mind, affections, will, relationships, and purpose.”¹²

⁶ Hill, “What Is the True Meaning of Christian Discipleship?”

⁷ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 84.

⁸ Hill, “What Is the True Meaning of Christian Discipleship?”

⁹ Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 183

¹⁰ Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 20.

¹¹ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 29.

¹² D. Ray Davis, “The Missionary Task: Making Disciples Who Make Disciples,” International Mission Board, October 29, 2018, <https://www.imb.org/2018/10/29/missionary-task-disciple-making/>.

A disciple is more than someone who has only learned Bible content or practiced religious exercises; the purpose of God’s Word and spiritual disciplines is intended to assist in Christlike transformation. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 3:18, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” Discipleship that does not result in transformation is not biblical discipleship.¹³

The Scope of Discipleship

The scope of transforming discipleship in the lives of Christ’s followers is to be realized throughout their entire being. Jesus emphasizes the holistic allegiance to loving God for His followers: “And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). The disciple’s love for his Savior compels him to live like his Savior, to know his Savior, to serve his Savior. A hunger and thirst for righteousness are developed through the Holy Spirit, spiritual fruits of godliness develop in the character, and a passion for good works and spiritual service takes root.¹⁴ Paul denotes the holistic process of discipleship maturity as he writes to Titus in Titus 2:11–14:

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

Holistic discipleship is a transformation that penetrates every sphere of a believer’s being. Every part of the believer’s life is reoriented to Christ, and all of life is connected to Christ’s influence and power.¹⁵ This transformation may begin at the level

¹³ Davis, “The Missionary Task: Making Disciples Who Make Disciples.”

¹⁴ Davis, “The Missionary Task: Making Disciples Who Make Disciples.”

¹⁵ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 22.

of the mind, and as knowledge of Christ and God’s Word is gained, thought patterns begin to change and take effect at the heart level. The believer’s heart transformation initiates a desire to minister and serve. In this process, Christ’s supremacy infiltrates the entire being of His disciples—heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Many authors recognize a trichotomy in the scope of discipleship that apply to the mind, the heart and soul, and the strength or behaviors regarding spiritual maturity. Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowrey describe these three categories as radical changes in understanding, character, and ministry capability.¹⁶ Kyle Hughes labels the classifications as head, heart, and hands.¹⁷ Max Anders refers to the three areas as know, be, and do.¹⁸ Ken Hindman, Landry Holmes, and Jana Magruder entitle them as thinking, being, and doing.¹⁹

Head

The first category a disciple must experience transformation in is knowledge or thinking. The mind must be transformed first in order to resist the influence of secular pressures and to be conformed to Christ’s truth. Romans 12:2 shows the importance of starting with this transformation: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” God’s living Word shows what truth is and works its way into the mind so that the spiritual eyes are enlightened, and patterns of thought are changed.

¹⁶ Dennis McCallum and Jessica Lowery, *Organic Discipleship: Mentoring Others into Spiritual Maturity and Leadership*, rev. ed. (Columbus, OH: New Paradigm, 2012), 23.

¹⁷ Kyle R. Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation: A Patristic Approach to Christian Education in a Convulsed Age* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2022), 201.

¹⁸ Max Anders, *Brave New Discipleship: Cultivating Scripture-Driven Christians in a Culture-Driven World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 111.

¹⁹ Ken Hindman, Landry Holmes, and Jana Magruder, *Every Age, Every Stage: Teaching God’s Truth at Home and Church* (Nashville: B & H Books, 2021), 21.

This new mindset is developed by learning biblical theology, Bible content, a Christian worldview, discernment, resilience against false teaching, and the ability to use Scripture in ministry and life.²⁰ The duty of a teacher toward a disciple in the area of the mind is to teach information and knowledge and help them learn to think.²¹ A disciple can grow in this foundational area by reading the Bible daily, memorizing Scripture passages, participating in Bible studies, attending church services, and listening to biblical content like preaching programs.

This cognitive domain includes learning facts about the Bible, such as the people, places, and events in the Bible, as well as the timeline of the stories. Theology is also in this area of knowledge; a disciple learns about what Scripture says concerning the Bible, the Godhead, humanity, sin, salvation, the church, and end times. A disciple also becomes familiar with the principles based on the Bible, such as how to live the Christian life, how to pray, how to resist spiritual attacks, and how to follow God’s will. A disciple will become familiar with the topics of the Bible that address the issues of life such as emotions, purity, family relationships, dealing with sin, and recreational boundaries.²²

Heart

The second category a disciple must experience transformation in is the heart. This is the core of the disciples—the affective domain. Anders observes, “A Christian is measured not primarily by what he knows or what he does, but by who he is. Therefore, a complete Christian commits to being conformed to the character image of Christ.”²³ This is the “being” level of following Christ—becoming like the teacher. This heart domain

²⁰ McCallum and Lowry, *Organic Discipleship*, 23.

²¹ Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, 115.

²² Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, 120.

²³ Anders, *Brave New Discipleship*, 65.

includes character traits and virtues such as the ones described as the fruits of the Spirit: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:22–23). The fleshly instincts of anger, jealousy, envy, strife, and impurity are replaced with the virtues that Christ displayed.

Character transformation is a work of the Holy Spirit as biblical knowledge is assimilated into the disciple’s heart. Contentment, generosity, integrity, kindness, self-sacrifice, forgiveness, and service are additional virtues that the disciple adopts. Although knowledge is a precursor to developing these characteristics, heart transformation is a result of God’s work on the heart of the disciple. God gives new birth, makes disciples a new creation, and puts in the disciple a renewed heart that desires the transformation into Christlikeness.²⁴

Hands

The third category a disciple must experience transformation in is behavior. This psychomotor domain reveals a transformed mind and heart by activity and ministry that positively affects the kingdom of Christ. A disciple has been given spiritual gifts by Christ to be used for ministry to advance the gospel and minister to other disciples. First Peter 4:10–11 teaches that every believer is a steward of spiritual gifts meant to glorify God with the transformed life: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.” Teaching and service are two of the prominent ministry skills

²⁴ Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation*, 26.

that disciples need to develop from a transformed heart.

This ministry capacity is the development of skills used to build other believers. Evangelism, pastoring, teaching, leading discussions, and showing love are actions through the hands and mouths of disciples that exercise these spiritual gifts.²⁵ The “hands” category is the “doing” of discipleship. Acts of service, teaching, leadership, administration, hospitality, and evangelism are all activities that disciples can develop to bring glory to God.

The Fundamentals of Discipleship

The four fundamentals of discipleship are Bible study, prayer, fellowship, and witnessing.²⁶ This pattern is the essence of the church laid out in Acts 2:42: “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” All discipleship expectations can be reduced to connect with one of these four fundamentals. Bible intake is critical because it is the power of the gospel which has the potency for transformation. Prayer is the connecting tie of communication between the Christian and God. Fellowship is the participation in the bond that disciples share as they follow Jesus Christ. Witnessing is the obedience to Christ’s command to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them. These four fundamentals of church activity constitute the worship that disciples engage in.²⁷

The Task of Discipleship

The task of discipleship is multiplication. Jesus demonstrated this task with His own disciples by inviting them to watch, having teaching conversations with them, giving

²⁵ Hughes, *Teaching for Spiritual Formation*, 23.

²⁶ Hull, *Jesus Christ, Disciplemaker*, 140.

²⁷ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2019), 271.

them authority to continue His ministry, and sending them out with His message. Mark 6:7–13 recounts Jesus sending out the twelve disciples with authority to heal and cast out unclean spirits, and with the message to repent. The good news of the gospel causes such a transformation that it would be selfish to keep it to oneself, and followers of Christ are to share this transformation with others, inviting them to follow Jesus as well.

The Great Commission consists of Jesus’s final command to His disciples. Matthew 28:18–20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:47–48, John 20:21, and Acts 1:8 all indicate that the intent of a disciple should include bringing other people into alignment with the gospel. Duplication is the crown of discipleship. Matthew 28:19–20 summarizes the task of discipleship: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” This multiplication is how Christianity is carried from city to city and from generation to generation.

The Vehicle of Discipleship

The primary vehicle for discipleship is the local church.²⁸ The gathering in Acts 2 was following the prescription of Jesus Christ in Matthew 16:18: Jesus is building a church with His disciples. This meeting of believers makes up the body of Christ as they assemble. The church is to be the institution that provides disciples with what they need in their journey of following Christ. The church is the place for worship, mutual edification, service, correction, Bible instruction, and mentoring. The church’s duty is to operate as the community of Christ’s body, guiding each believer to a place of service and opportunity for learning.

Parachurch organizations like campus ministries, Bible camps, seminaries, and

²⁸ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 10.

Bible clubs are certainly advantageous for growth and involvement for believers, but they should be an extension of Christ's church, not a replacement. The institution of the church is what believers are baptized into, and it is the church that Christ describes as His own body. First Corinthians 12:12–13 describes this spiritual distinction that sets the church apart from all other organizations: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.”

Ephesians 5:25–27 shows another preeminence of the church over all other organizations: the church is Christ's bride that He gave Himself for. Paul lifts up Christ's love for the church as an example for husbands to emulate toward their wives: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

Disciple-making cannot be neglected within the church and delegated to other organizations because the church is what Christ paid for and the church is what disciples belong to. Disciples learn to follow Christ by belonging to His body and connecting to other believers.²⁹

Only the church has been founded by Christ (Matt 16:18). Only the church has been bought by His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead (Acts 20:28). Only the church has the promise of standing united with Christ for eternity (Rev 19). Only the church enjoys the global and timeless purposes of Christ that bind disciples from across the span of centuries together in His body. The church is not one option among many for believers to belong to, it is the driving apparatus for advancing Christ's spiritual kingdom

²⁹ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 48.

in this world. It is Christ's design that every disciple belongs to His church and participates in His church, being shaped and equipped so that transformation is encouraged and so many more disciples are sent out. The church is the vehicle for discipleship because it is the institution that Christ ordained for His disciples, calls His own body, and sacrificed Himself for so the church could be His bride.³⁰

Preaching For Discipleship

The project phase of this research is a preaching series on discipleship through the Gospel of Mark. However, I questioned how useful sermons are in the process of discipleship. There is a common perception that worship services and study groups serve two different functions. The worship service fulfills corporate fellowship and advances in knowledge, while study groups can utilize the participation of the people and are better suited for measurable discipleship steps. I believe there are not two different goals, but two different methods to accomplish the same goal—Christlikeness. Truly, too many sermons are delivered that lack connection, application, passion, and an opportunity to connect with God in new ways, but that is the fault of preachers, not the subject matter. If preaching had been insufficient as a medium for discipleship, Christ would not have used it in His ministry and the early church would not have depended on it in those early days.

One of the most important Christian discipleship practices is Bible intake, and it comes in several forms. Personal reading is the most critical, followed by corporate hearing. Other forms can include listening to preachers or teachers and being involved in smaller group study or classroom teaching. However, the early church relied heavily on preaching as the method of Bible instruction for growing disciples. Concerning preaching, David Schrock notes, “All discipleship begins with this core spiritual discipline. While preaching by itself is inadequate for maturing a disciple . . . biblically

³⁰ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 47–48.

and practically, it is the place to begin.”³¹ Each method of disciple training is beneficial and intensifies the work of making disciples, but there is something irreplaceable to hearing Scripture openly declared among the saints.³²

Advantages of Preaching Discipleship

Biblical preaching is the foundation for discipleship in the church. Although preaching alone may be inadequate for every aspect of development, preaching is a core spiritual discipline for the believer to germinate his or her discipleship journey. The initiation of discipleship should begin with an examination of preaching.³³ The centralized ministry of a church’s preaching gives consistency to the believer’s worship, provides community and a shared worldview, is a powerful tool for conviction and decision-making, is a prominent feature of New Testament church growth, addresses the universal needs in a public fashion, and allows many believers to be fed from God’s Word together at one time. Well-crafted sermons are powerful instruments for developing disciples.³⁴

The principal advantage of preaching is that it projects God’s Word to the gathering of God’s people. Preaching employs the power of God’s Word. Preaching is one of the tenants of the local church because it is an instructional ministry that reaches everyone. The Word of God is alive and active, and preaching emphasizes the power of the living Word of God. Hebrews 4:12–13 accentuates the value of God’s Word in the disciples’ life: “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and

³¹ David Schrock, “How Preaching Makes Disciples,” Southern Baptist Equip, August 11, 2016, <https://equip.sbts.edu/article/what-has-preaching-to-do-with-discipleship/>.

³² “What Is the Role of Preaching in Discipleship?,” The Pillar Network, accessed January 25, 2023, <https://www.thepillarnetwork.com/pillarblog/role-preaching-discipleship>.

³³ Schrock, “How Preaching Makes Disciples.”

³⁴ English, *Deep Discipleship*, 55.

discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” Scripture is God’s voice that works its way into the immaterial parts of people—the hearts, souls, and minds—and confronts those parts with God’s truth. Through preaching, Scripture is held up as the standard of truth, and every sermon should be a stark reminder that there is more to life than these earthly moments. God observes all, and one day every person will be brought before Him. Preaching is the primary tool at the church’s disposal to magnify God’s inspired Word.

Paul affirms to Timothy that preaching God’s Word is the elemental ministry to disciples. First Timothy 4:13 is Paul’s insistence that Timothy devotes his ministry to the public reading of Scripture, using that as the source of exhortation for followers of Christ. Preaching may not seem to be the most dynamic discipleship factor because it is not relational or participatory, but Paul charges Timothy to minister to the disciples through preaching the Word of God. Paul is so insistent on Timothy recognizing the value of preaching that he tells Timothy that this is Paul’s charge to him, which is some of the most sobering wording Paul could use:³⁵

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. (1 Tim 4:1–4)

Preaching is advantageous in its application to the congregating of disciples for correction, rebuke, and encouragement. The sermon is meant to be a broad-spectrum implement that will be the source of regular growth and encouragement to the believers. The sound doctrine of Scripture is continually corrective against the wandering of

³⁵ “What Is the Role of Preaching in Discipleship?”

worldly desires and false spiritual ideas. Paul does not ignore the value of relational and personal features of discipleship, but he does crescendo toward preaching as a corporate act of discipleship.³⁶ The public declaration of the gospel should generate disciples, and Paul demands this of Timothy.³⁷ Preaching punctuates the power of God’s Word.

Another advantage of preaching is that it teaches disciples how to know God’s Word and strengthens their faith. Preaching is the fountainhead for discipleship in the local church by providing instruction of God’s Word. Explaining God’s Word strengthens the souls of disciples by teaching them what to expect and how to react to hardships and trying times in the disciples’ journey. Paul preached to the disciples in the churches he planted, knowing that God’s Word would provide the encouragement and refreshment their weary souls needed during their hardships: “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21–22).

Biblical sermons are to systematically work through Scripture texts, transmitting a standard of sound doctrine that the apostles received from Christ and have passed on from church to church.³⁸ Paul writes in 2 Timothy 1:13, “Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” The teaching and explanation of Christ’s doctrine helps disciples shape a right belief system concerning God, His Word, and His expectations for believers. This true theology will impart strength and encouragement to those gathered saints sitting under

³⁶ “What Is the Role of Preaching in Discipleship?”

³⁷ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 189, Kindle.

³⁸ John Piper, “Advice to Pastors: Preach the Word,” *Desiring God* (blog), February 5, 1996, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/advice-to-pastors-preach-the-word>.

the preaching of Scripture. David Schrock notes, “Christ’s disciples always need the word of God and they need faithful teachers to help them understand what it means and how it applies.”³⁹

If Scripture is regularly heralded to the gathered disciples, they can grow by seeing how every passage of the Bible contains truth and useful doctrine. Through the process of preaching, they can see how biblical realities can be applied to their daily lives. Disciples will be exposed to the grand themes of Scripture such as creation, covenant relationships, Christian family and work, redemption, transformation, and awaiting Christ’s return.⁴⁰

An additional advantage of preaching is that preaching deepens faith and strengthens spiritual resolve. Christian faith is both propositional assent and personal allegiance. Not only does preaching develop content to believe but it intensifies allegiance, conviction, and loyalty to Christ as Master. The sermon, if crafted correctly, addresses both dogmas and builds a passion for clinging to those truths with tenacity.⁴¹ Marshall and Payne describe how the sermon is unique in developing passion and conviction among the disciple-making programs:

Conversely, clear, strong, powerful pulpit preaching is the bedrock and foundation upon which all other ministry in the congregation is built. The sermon is the rallying call. It is there the whole congregation can together feed on God’s Word and be challenged, comforted, and edified. The public preaching ministry is like a framework that sets the standard and agenda for all the other word ministries that take place. . . . We long for more godly gifted Bible teachers who will set congregations on fire with the power of the preached word.⁴²

It is one thing for disciples to read the Bible privately, it is another to study

³⁹ Schrock, “How Preaching Makes Disciples.”

⁴⁰ Kyle Bueermann, “Biblical Preaching as Discipleship,” North American Mission Board, May 20, 2022, <https://www.namb.net/church-replanting/resource/biblical-preaching-as-discipleship/>.

⁴¹ Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 101.

⁴² Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 102.

Scripture in a discussion group or with a friend. Preaching intensifies disciple-making as Scripture is openly declared in the community of the saints and trumpeted in public spectacle.⁴³ Preaching defines and rallies the community of disciples as the gathered assembly together hears God's Word declared with all its power to all God's people.

A further advantage of preaching is that it shapes the disciples' biblical worldview. Jesus expects His followers to be in this world but not conformed to this world. Disciples are continually resisting the pressure of the world that is all around them. These humanistic and secular values are polar opposites of Christlike virtues and purposes. Seeing life through the biblical lens of Scripture on a weekly basis allows disciples to correctly understand the world around them. Disciples must formulate principles, purposes, values, and behaviors from Scripture, and preaching that is faithful to God's Word helps impart a correct perspective on the world around them by focusing attention on Jesus and His truth.⁴⁴

Another prominent advantage of preaching is that it gives regular opportunities for repentance from sin. Kyle Bueerman states, "Preaching helps us align our lives with what God has said, and it calls us to repent when we don't."⁴⁵ Disciples must be reminded of the things that God calls sin, and the sermon allows for a regular time for a disciple to listen for the prompting of the Spirit's conviction as the Bible is applied to the heart and mind. Every believer is always in need of examination and repentance—no matter how long they have been saved, or what position they hold in the church. No believer is above the temptations held out by the world, presented by the devil, or desired by the flesh. Sincere disciples are not marked by moral perfection, but by persistently repenting from sins and determining to live in God's grace and provision of forgiveness.

⁴³ "What Is the Role of Preaching in Discipleship?"

⁴⁴ Bueermann, "Biblical Preaching as Discipleship."

⁴⁵ Bueermann, "Biblical Preaching as Discipleship."

There is no replacement for God’s Word in being presented with the need for repentance and revival: “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether” (Ps 19:7–9).

Preaching is an opportunity to demand a verdict in the heart of the listener. This verdict is one of the characteristics that distinguishes preaching from teaching. Greg Ogden writes, “Preaching is the first step in addressing a particular lack in Christian living. This may seem like a caricature, but in my experience it is not too far off-track.”⁴⁶ When a disciple comes to sit under the preaching of God’s Word, they are submitting to the influence and conviction of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit applies Scripture to wandering areas of the heart.

Limitations of Preaching Discipleship

Although preaching is the main teaching ministry of the corporate service, its broad and blanket effect has drawbacks that need to be supplemented with other discipleship methods. The pastor’s duty is to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), and many ministers attempt to systematically work their way through the whole array of biblical books over the course of time. However, some books of the Bible apply to believers differently, and there may not be a systematic approach that fits where every church attendee is in their spiritual discipleship journey. Some may be struggling with basic faith; others may be failing morally. One demographic might be exhausted in their daily lives, while another is looking for activity. It is impossible to craft a message that addresses the most recognizable needs of every individual in attendance at church, and

⁴⁶ Ogden, *Transforming Leadership*, 187.

many discipleship issues are better dealt with individually than corporately.

Ogden recognizes one of the risks of relying too heavily on preaching alone for Christian growth: “Good preaching requires considerable effort on the part of the preacher but very little from the person in the pew.”⁴⁷ Much of discipleship is relational, and although preaching is the place to begin with discipleship, there need to be additional methods that best suit the development of each disciple. Some stages of discipleship are achieved by modeling; other areas, like skill development, require intentionally specific hands-on training.

Not all areas of discipleship are best addressed through sermons. Some stages of discipleship are achieved by modeling; other areas, like skill development, require intentionally specific hands-on training. Personal accountability happens individually or in small groups. Character discipleship is “picked up” as the less developed disciple watches the way a mature disciple reacts to the issues of life. By nature, the sermon has a narrow focus and broad, generic applications, but small groups of believers are flexible and can adjust their conversation to deal with immediate and specific applications for those participating. Teaching ministry skills need to have a different format than a worship sermon, and training for evangelism and duplication would best be achieved in an instructional setting where the teacher can address the questions and situations encountered by the students. While preaching is a powerful tool in the arsenal of discipleship, the sermon should not be the only tool that a church relies on to grow believers.

Conclusion

Each ministry facet in Christ’s church has its place in the role of Christian maturity. Small groups allow openness and transparency, while one-on-one relationships

⁴⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Leadership*, 187.

provide the best climate for accountability and intimacy. Mentoring relationships that mirror Paul’s training of Timothy and Titus help develop future leaders and spiritual pillars for the church. Modeling contexts provide learners with an example to emulate and allow them to ask questions.⁴⁸ Christ designed His church to function as a body, where each member is fully assimilated and functioning for the glory of Christ and in service of the other members, and relational contexts are integrational to growth and maturity, but preaching the Word of God as the body is gathered is the central pillar of discipleship.

There are essential outcomes of discipleship that thrive on relational aspects of church culture, but preaching is discipleship’s pinnacle—it is discipleship on a grand scale.⁴⁹ Although preaching should not be the singular procedure for making disciples, biblical discipleship begins with the biblical pulpit by setting the agenda of discipleship. A disciple-making church, therefore, stems from a gospel-centered pulpit. Small groups and mentoring relationships provide the rich soils of transparency, openness, and accountability. Preaching projects the power of God’s Word into the lives of the listening disciples, preaching teaches the disciples the content of Scripture, preaching deepens convictions and gives the opportunity for repentance, and preaching holds forth a biblical worldview. While discipleship does not end with gospel preaching, it surely must begin with it.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Bobby Harrington and Alex Absalom, *Discipleship That Fits: The Five Kinds of Relationships God Uses to Help Us Grow* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 168.

⁴⁹ “What Is the Role of Preaching in Discipleship?”

⁵⁰ Schrock, “How Preaching Makes Disciples.”

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The primary objective of this project was to measure the increase of knowledge of discipleship through an eight-sermon preaching series through pertinent texts in the Gospel of Mark. This series emphasized two specific aspects of discipleship. The first half described the call of a disciple, and the second half described the transformation of a disciple. My intent was to begin the series with an in-depth presentation of the gospel and then examine how that definition anticipates a believer that follows the call of Jesus in surrendering the direction of their lives to Him and bringing every area of life into orbit around Him. The disciple's surrender to this calling leads to specific areas of character transformation, and those areas I chose from the Gospel of Mark were purity, forgiveness, giving, and serving. I dedicated each of the final four sermons to one of these Christlike characteristics.

Development of the Sermon Series

I took the Foundations of Teaching seminar in the spring of 2022, a year before I delivered my project. I created the sermon series and submitted it for feedback from the teacher and students as a part of that course. The first step in developing the sermon series as a teaching plan was to create a course outline that would include the topic for each sermon, a title, and a summary of the content. I was able to choose the issues I wanted to address from the Scripture passages in Mark and create a series outline that addressed defining discipleship, the centrality of Christ in a disciple's life, the discovery of a disciple's calling on their discipleship journey, and the incorporation of inner virtues and character transformations that a disciple undergoes.

I wanted to address inner virtues and transformations of character that are not part of a normative discipleship course. I believe virtues like purity, sacrifice, serving, patience, integrity, and perseverance are often overlooked in progressive discipleship courses because measuring maturity and progress in these subjective areas is difficult. However, I wanted to implement several of these virtues and characteristics from Jesus's teaching in the Gospel of Mark. I included the four virtues and character traits of purity, forgiveness, giving, and serving and submitted my topic outline on March 9, 2022.

The next phase of the sermon series development was to create a learning outcome outline for the eight topics. This exercise honed the focus of each sermon around my intent for the learned behavior or attitude of each sermon from the critical idea or subject of the sermon. I wrote one sentence for each sermon that answered the statement, "By the end of this session, my students will . . ." This gave me a clear understanding of what I wanted the listeners to learn in each lesson. I identified each sermon's desired learning outcome as developing knowledge, skill, attitude, or insight. I submitted this learning outcome outline on April 2, 2022.

I spent the month of April continuing to develop and refine my eight sermons from the Gospel of Mark. I was working toward a rubric satisfaction that would evaluate the sermon series for a robust theological plan for applying Scripture to my sermon topics. The series would also be weighed for clarity in understanding what the listeners ought to gain from each sermon. These were helpful markers for me to arrange my data and material around to satisfy the assignment rubric. I submitted my sermon series on May 6, 2022.

I received the assignment grade and rubric evaluation back the following week. The final grade was a 94. There were four areas of evaluation on the rubric. My sermon series scored full points for "exceeds expectations" in the areas of "content outline" and "course description" and scored "meets expectations" with six points deducted in "lesson

outcome outline” and “lesson plan.” This helped me know where to go back and refine my outcomes—what I wanted learners to know or do as a result of each sermon. The result of the graded rubric gave me confidence that my sermon series would score well with my evaluating pastor later in my project.

I serve as the speaker for the teen camp at Miracle Bible Camp in Hackensack, Minnesota, so I asked the camp if we could build the week’s theme around the topic of discipleship. I preached the sermon series at a teen Bible camp June 12–16, 2022. I had two speaking sessions daily—one in the morning and one in the evening, followed by cabin devotions. On the first night—Monday night—I delivered the first message that emphasized the gospel and gave an invitation for salvation. I used the remaining three evening sessions to preach the sermons on a disciples’ calling, and I used the sermons on Christian character transformation in the morning chapels. I made some modifications for use in a camp setting, but running through the series at teen camp helped me evaluate and polish the delivery and trim excessive material that detracted from the message’s aims. I felt very prepared for the project series when I delivered it at my church in the summer of 2023.

The teens at camp also gave me helpful qualitative feedback. After I had preached the final message at the closing campfire on Friday night of teen camp, the teens had a campfire for worship and testimonies of how God had worked in their lives that week. The most insightful and memorable comment during that time was from a girl who made a decision to grow in the area of forgiveness. She came from a single-parent home and told us her mother struggles with mental illness and outbursts of anger against her two daughters. The daughter at the campfire said to us that her mom regularly tells them they are bad daughters and that she hates her mom. Her decision that week, however, came from the message on forgiveness, and she said that she is committed to forgiving her mom every day that summer, and she is praying that she can come to love

her mom before school starts.

Another testimony came from a boy who said his mother had been diagnosed with an illness requiring frequent hospital visits for treatment. He stays home with a brother and his father while his mother is in the hospital, and he said he usually shuts down and feels sorry for himself while his mom is away. He was convicted during the message on serving because instead of feeling sorry for himself and the family's limitations, he needed to be serving and helping his father while his mother was hospitalized. He committed to helping with two chores around the house to help his father in his mother's absence.

Many other testimonies were from teens who wanted to find their ministry calling for their current season of life. Some mentioned helping at church, some talked about joining Christian networks at school, and one said he would approach some of his teammates to do a Bible study. These testimonies were excellent qualitative responses that allowed me to see how the sermons might impact my church people, and I redoubled my efforts to make the information and aims specific for application in the lives of my church people.

Evaluation of the Sermon Series

In addition to the grade and evaluation I received in the Teaching Methodology class, I wanted to have a veteran pastor read my sermon manuscripts so I could gain insights from a pastoral perspective. I asked Jim Hinson, a recently retired pastor with forty-one years of pastoral ministry experience if he would read my manuscripts and complete the rubric I created. Jim has pastored a rural Baptist church in Two Harbors, Minnesota, and a multi-staff Baptist church in Detroit Lakes, Minnesota. He is a seasoned speaker frequently recruited for Minnesota pulpit supply and speaking engagements.

Jim returned the rubric and the manuscripts in April of 2023. Out of the ten items on the rubric, he scored seven with a maximum score of "4," representing an

“excellent” rating. The other three items scored a “3,” representing an “acceptable” rating. The first rubric item asked the question, “Is each sermon faithful to Scripture?” Fidelity to the intent of Scripture is the most critical aspect of a sermon, and I wanted verification of faithfulness to Scripture from an outside perspective. Jim validated this primary concern by scoring this question with a “4.” Each sermon is rooted in Scripture and rests on a biblical text.

The next rubric items evaluated if the sermons were relevant and if they were understandable. The rubric item “Is this series relevant to discipleship?” scored a “4” with an additional comment, “Good common-sense ordering of points made, and excellent use of illustrations.” However, the other rubric item, “Is the content comprehensible for newer believers?” was given a “3.” Jim noted that I had used the term “sabbath” frequently in one of the messages, and that term should have been defined. He wrote, “A simple yet pointed explanation might be very helpful.”

Question 4 asked, “Is the material relevant to the church?” This was another area of importance to me because I have heard a lot of sermons that never connected with real life, and I have heard from many people that sermons in today’s churches are often dull and uninspiring. I feel a lot of pressure every weekend to ensure that the most is made of all the time and person-hours that people spend coming to a church service to worship. Some of our people drive 30–40 minutes each way, and I often ask myself if the message I have prepared is “worth the drive in.” A sermon without a connection is only half finished, but it is often neglected. This is where the teaching outline from the Foundations of Teaching class was beneficial because I was forced to identify precisely where I wanted to see change occur or what I wanted to impact in the lives of the hearers. I had to determine if I was working toward an insight, an attitude, a skill, or increasing knowledge.

Relevance can make a sermon beneficial to discipleship or static to

discipleship. I was apprehensive that the vehicle of preaching would lead to a substantial increase in knowledge on the topic of discipleship. Extra work is needed to make each sermon pertinent to the listeners' everyday lives. The people needed to know more than simply what the text said; they needed to comprehend why it mattered and where it fit in their lives. Jim scored this rubric item with a "4" and said he appreciated how the sermons dealt with the "so what?" aspect of the messages in coping with personal application.

The next area of critique concerned the sermon's organization. Two of these questions each scored a "3." Jim noted that the wording of the points did not always align with the thesis. In answering the question, "Is the content of each message organized around the thesis?" he wrote "yes" but scored a "3." This area of sermon organization is the area with the most shortcomings, but I had time before I preached the sermons to adjust the wording of the points. The subsequent question about organization asked, "Does the series have a logical progression?" Jim scored this question with a "4" and wrote that the sermons progressed well.

The next area of assessment weighed the message of the sermons with the overall context and message of Scripture. The eighth rubric item asked, "Is this series consistent with Christ's work with His disciples?" I wanted an outside perspective on the cohesion of my interpretation of discipleship in Mark with the general message of discipleship in the New Testament books. I wanted to avoid constructing a picture of discipleship foreign to Christ's intent. Jim Hinson verified that the other Gospel authors and the New Testament epistles could support the series. He scored this area as a "4" and said that the message aligned with the broader teachings of Scripture. Jim also scored a "4" on the other rubric item with a similar concern: "Is the theme and content of the sermons faithful to Mark's theology and intent?" Not only did each sermon unfold from a primary text, but the message of the sermons was consistent with the broader context and

message of the Gospel of Mark.

The final rubric item evaluated if the sermon topics were appropriate matches to the theme of discipleship. This question asked, “Does this sermon series emphasize practical discipleship topics?” Jim scored a “4” for this item, and he especially appreciated the topic of purity addressed in the sermon series. When he gave me the completed evaluation, he told me that issues like purity and other inner virtues are often not addressed enough in sermons or discipleship materials. This topic of purity was also a topic of much conversation during my week at teen camp. I want to circle back and make a shorter series on purity with the background of God’s holy character at a future time.

Schedule of the Project

By the time I could deliver my sermon series project at my church, I had already developed the series and delivered each sermon at Bible camp, so the schedule for each week of the project was straightforward.

In week 1, I distributed and collected the pre-survey, preached the first message from Mark 1:14–16, and gave a call to respond to the gospel. In the following six weeks, I preached from Mark 1:16–20, Mark 2:13–17, Mark 3:13–19, Mark 7:1–23, Mark 10:32–45, and Mark 11:22–25. In the final week of the sermon series, I preached from Mark 12:41–44 and distributed and collected the post-survey. In week 9, I compared the pre-survey and post-survey for an increase in knowledge and ran t-tests for the two surveys. In week 10, I analyzed quantitative data for patterns helpful in my research.

Pre-survey

I was able to create the pre-survey a semester before the project when I took the Applied Empirical Research class, so I felt comfortable with the content of the survey questions after hearing feedback from the instructor and other students. Other students who completed my survey said they could finish it in under five minutes. The pre-survey

consisted of twenty questions concerning discipleship that I would address in the sermon series. Each question on the pre-survey was answered by the respondent circling the best answer from a five-point Likert scale that was made of “strongly disagree” (SD), “disagree” (D), “neutral” (N), “agree” (A), and “strongly agree” (SA).

I tried to be specific enough that participants would be unable to score themselves as having no room for an increase in knowledge. Some questions were, “If asked, I could articulate the gospel.” “I understand the correlation between ‘repent’ and ‘believe.’” “I have a Christian virtue I am intentionally developing.” “I know what my individual calling is.” “I have made a serious effort to discover God’s will for my life.” I did not have any qualitative data gathering on the pre-survey.

My plan for week 1 was to distribute the pre-surveys to all adults attending the first sermon series and give them seven minutes to complete the survey before the first message. I recruited the teens to take the children out of the service for this time, and I purchased donuts for the teen workers and the children because I knew this service would take longer than usual to take the survey. I set up a table in the back of the sanctuary at church and put several boxes of pens and a stack of surveys on the table. I recruited two deacons to distribute the pre-survey for the morning after the singing.

At the beginning of the worship service, I reminded people that this Sunday was the first sermon in the series on discipleship in the Gospel of Mark and that I would be looking for volunteers to participate in filling out a pre-survey later in the service and a post-survey in eight weeks. After the singing portion of the worship service, I dismissed the children and teen volunteers and asked the deacons to distribute the pre-survey to the adults in the room and give pens to anyone who needed one. I instructed the adults to create a personal identification number to use on their survey so I could compare the pre-survey and post-survey results of individuals while maintaining anonymity. Most of the adults knew what the survey was for before this service because I had described the

process during the previous two Sundays.

After creating a personal identification number, I told the adults they would have seven minutes to complete the survey. I gave a verbal reminder when there was one minute left to complete the surveys. When the seven minutes had concluded, I asked the voluntary participants to turn in their pre-survey on the back table at the end of the service as they exited. I then commenced with the first sermon from Mark 1. At the end of the message, I reminded the people to turn in their survey on the table in the back. After everyone had left, I collected thirty-five completed pre-surveys from the back table.

Sermon Series Description

The first sermon for week 1 was from Mark 1:14–16. Its aim was to help people understand that discipleship is a life-long decision to follow Christ. This passage reveals Jesus’s first sermon of His public ministry as He preached the gospel by saying, “Repent and believe in the gospel.” The first thing I wanted from this message is that every person would be able to articulate the four criteria of the gospel message from 1 Corinthians 15:3, that Christ died, for our sins, was buried, and was raised back to life. This is the gospel data—the package of truth in which one must put their faith to be saved.

The second thing I wanted from this sermon was for people to understand the correlation between “repent” and “believe.” I used the slide presentation to illustrate that repentance and belief are two sides of the same coin. Repentance means to turn or to have a change of mind, and belief is accepting Christ. We have several people in our church who came from another church where the leadership insisted repentance was a human work and did not have any place in salvation. The other pastor told me that this was the doctrinal point of division that separated his gospel preaching from human-works preaching, so our people needed clarity on this subject. I demonstrated that repentance and belief can happen simultaneously and that Jesus preached both as critical to the

gospel. As individuals turn to Christ, they simultaneously turn from sin and self. I used this first message as an opportunity to give a gospel call to receive Christ as Savior at the end of the service. No one responded publicly, but I did receive thirty-five completed pre-surveys at the end of the service.

The week 2 sermon was on following the call of Jesus on your life, from Mark 1:16–20. This is the account of Jesus calling the fishermen to be His disciples. The aim of this second sermon was to show that discipleship is a lifetime journey of following Jesus Christ and making Him central to everything. Mark 1:20 was used to show that Jesus calls disciples to Himself, and they are to follow Him immediately. Just as these disciples were transformed from earthly fishermen to spiritual fishermen, Christ retools His followers to become lifetime disciples of His. This sermon demonstrated that to leave all and follow, people need to understand who they follow, the things that need to stay behind, the cost of following Christ, the importance of immediacy, and the purpose of following Christ. The purpose of following Christ is to be transformed into Christlikeness. Christ sanctifies His followers and transforms them so they can live a sanctified life. We described this as the disciple’s primary calling.

Week 3 examined the call of Matthew Levi in Mark 2:13–17. The aim of this message was to assist our people in considering if they have a calling in ministry. Matthew responded to his primary calling by leaving the tax collection booth and becoming a follower of Jesus, but this passage also reveals that Matthew is bringing his network of friends and his community to Jesus. He uses his home to introduce his neighborhood to the Savior. He went on to compose the Gospel of Matthew. These were some of the ministry callings in the life of Matthew. At the beginning of this sermon, I asked our people to write down what they thought their calling was—the ministries on earth among family, church, community, and work where they were purposefully serving in ministry for Christ. We described this as the disciple’s secondary calling—the call to

center every area in our life on Christ.

At the end of this message, I distributed spiritual gifts assessments for people to complete. Many people indicated before the sermon series that they were unsure what their spiritual gifts were, which seemed to be a critical step in knowing where to start in finding a ministry to participate in. This may have been one of the highlights of the sermon series, although it was something in addition to my project. Spiritual gifts assessments are not an infallible form of discovering spiritual gifts, but they were a beneficial addition to the sermon on finding your place in ministry.

The fourth week's sermon was on discovering your heart calling, from Mark 3:13–19. In this passage, Jesus takes the disciples to a mountain, giving them responsibilities distinct from the general followers. They were sent out to complete His mission and fulfill their calling for that season of life. I challenged our people to find their “heart” calling—the call that Jesus gives them by assessing their passion and gifts and asking for God's leading. I asked our people if they had a place in ministry where they were joyously using their passion and gifts in service and, if not, to define what those might be and determine to put their gifts to use. The second half of the sermon was on steps to finding God's will and following His direction. I gave our people five steps to discover where God might like to use them, and where they could discover their calling.

I used the last four sermons to emphasize the importance of personal transformation in discipleship. Week 5's sermon was from Mark 7:1–23, where Jesus differentiates between legalism and genuine, inner purity. The legalism the Pharisees taught was a rule-keeping system as a shortcut for actual heart change. Jesus's disciples were at risk of being influenced by counterfeit purity, but Jesus corrected their fears by showing that the Pharisees were vainly worshiping with lip service while their hearts were far from pure. Purity is a prerequisite for seeing God, according to Jesus's beatitudes. Purity does not come from an outward rearrangement of behavior, as Jesus

taught in Mark 7, but in surrendering to God's inner transformation.

This passage also served an additional benefit in including the distinction between Old Testament purity rules and New Testament liberty in eating all foods. This had been the subject of discussion in one of our Sunday School groups, and one lady had said that she was not going to eat shellfish "just to be sure." This passage was the perfect tool to show that the purity God is looking for is disconnected from the food we are provided to eat, but it is connected to the purity of heart from thefts, adulteries, covetousness, and pride that Jesus describes in this text.

Week 6 was on serving from Mark 10:32–45. Jesus's lesson that the first shall be last and the last first corresponds with the prediction of His imminent sacrificial death. Serving is a virtue that will set the follower of Christ apart from secular society by showing what kind of God we have—a God that values humility and prizes serving others. Mark 10:45 was a focal point, showing that even Jesus came not to be served but to serve. He showed what true greatness is and demonstrated how His kingdom operates in this world. My people were challenged to lead the self-centered flesh into holy transformation by serving others and putting others first. The act of serving others allows our pride to be swallowed up by humility and replaces a "me-first" mentality with an awareness of others' needs.

Week 7 was based on Mark 11:22–25, where our people were challenged to purposefully adopt a measure of forgiveness in their lives. Forgiveness is an event and a process because when we choose to forgive someone of an offense, that offense continues to come to mind, and we again need to continue in our resolve to forgive that person by releasing them from their debt against us and by absorbing the cost of that debt ourselves. This is costly forgiveness, but not forgiving is even more costly. At the end of the service, our people were challenged to imagine the face of their enemy in their mind, to calculate the wrongs they have incurred, and then compare those wrongs to the sacrifice of Christ's

body on the cross, and then make the decision to forgive that offense today. We concluded by telling God that we rely on His strength to continue forgiving as a process in the days ahead.

Week 8 was the last sermon, taken from Mark 12:41–44, where Jesus observes the widow contributing her final two pennies in the temple offering box. This was a noteworthy act in Jesus’s eyes because He called His disciples together to explain the importance of the widow’s noble character. Giving is an act of trust on behalf of a disciple in the provision of their master.

Giving sets a disciple of Christ apart from the world because we follow the example of God Himself when He gave His Son and of Jesus when He gave His life. Generosity is not related to what we have but is in view of God’s provision for us. Christ can use money as a litmus test of faithfulness and responsibility. Those who are faithful stewards with earthly riches can be entrusted with the resources of Christ’s kingdom.

Post-survey

For week 8, I printed the post-surveys and put them on the table in the back of the sanctuary. The post-survey was identical to the pre-survey’s twenty quantitative items except for five additional open questions at the end. The questions were, “Which level of ‘calling’ have you been convinced to respond to?” “In the past month, what steps have you taken to develop inner purity?” “In the past month, how have you implemented serving into your Christian habits?” “In the past month, how have you exercised forgiveness toward someone?,” and “In the past month, how have you developed the discipline of giving?”

I also added a question before the quantitative questions, asking the participants to respond to how many sermons they had heard. The question stated, “To the best of your recollection, how many ‘Discipleship in Mark’ sermons have you heard in the last eight weeks?” This idea was from my Applied Empirical Research class. This

question served as a tool in comparing the pre-surveys and post-surveys to demonstrate if the participants who heard more sermons demonstrated a higher increase in knowledge than those who heard fewer sermons.

At the beginning of the worship service, I reminded the people that this was the last week of the sermon series and that we would conclude the service with the post-survey for anyone who completed the pre-survey and would like to volunteer to participate in the post-survey. After the worship in singing, I delivered the final sermon. At the conclusion of the sermon, I asked the deacons to take a stack of post-surveys and pens and distribute them to anyone who had completed the pre-survey. I told the people they could have seven minutes to complete the post-survey, then I would close the service in prayer, and anyone still working on their survey after that could finish up after the prayer. I asked them to turn in the completed surveys to the table at the back of the sanctuary as they exited. After everyone left, I gathered twenty-five post-surveys from the table in the back of the foyer.

I spent weeks 9 and 10 matching the personal identification numbers on the surveys, running t-tests, and analyzing the data represented in the difference between the surveys. I had received twenty-five post-surveys, but when I paired them up, I discovered I only had twenty-two matching sets of surveys. This was enough to complete my project and to represent my congregation accurately, but I was hoping for thirty completed sets.

I entered the data from the matching sets of surveys into a database program where I could use formulas to help extrapolate the t-test information. I chose a one-tailed test because I anticipated an increase in knowledge after listening to eight weeks of sermons. I chose a paired test because I knew I was testing the same population. The database analysis immediately showed an increase in the average mean between the two survey sets. I also went through the individual pairs of surveys, comparing each pre-survey with its corresponding post-survey and calculating the difference between each

survey item. I then added the total number from the increase at the top of each post-survey.

I also noted the number of sermons the respondents reported they had heard. I separated the pairs of surveys into two categories: those who listened to six to eight of the sermons and those who had listened to three to five. One respondent was present for only three sermons; the remainder were in attendance for at least four of the sermons. When I compared the two groups by attendance, I saw a correspondence between the number of sermons listened to and the increase of knowledge in discipleship. The group that heard more sermons increased in knowledge more than the group that heard three to five sermons, as noted in chapter 5.

My last analysis was to analyze the total increase in each survey item. I added the increase in each post-survey item to make a total increase for each item. I was hoping to see if there were areas of common interest or disinterest. One area of common increase was in the two survey questions about spiritual disciplines, and the area of least increase was in Christian virtues.

Conclusion

After the ten weeks of project execution, I could see how the research method was employed in the statistical analysis of the increase of knowledge. I am certain that the classes I took in 2022—Foundations of Teaching and Applied Empirical Research—helped me prepare my sermon material and a survey tool that would be useful in analyzing an increase in knowledge. I had been creating and refining the sermon series for this project for over a year, and I had received input and suggestions from teaching faculty, other doctoral students, pastors, and teens. I had the opportunity to deliver all eight sermons in a different ministry setting and evaluate introductions, illustrations, content, and conclusions. The Applied Empirical Research class taught me how to avoid common pitfalls in survey research and how to gather and interpret quantitative data in

the research. I believe this project is ready and polished and that the survey results will demonstrate increased discipleship knowledge among the people at Southbrook Baptist Church.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

This preaching series has benefited our congregation and myself by heightening an awareness that every sermon is a joint venture between preacher and listener to approach the Word of God with an anticipation to grow and change. Discipleship is found in every aspect of church ministry, but there was a special attention given to the sermon in our church this last summer that seemed to reinvigorate my people to listen closely and be creative in applying God's truth to their lives. Our people seemed eager to listen, participate in the weekly review, and contact me throughout the week with comments, encouragement, and questions. This project has brought people together and tightened the community of hearers as people engage in the sermons together. People have been revitalized in their spiritual journey of discipleship as they have discovered new ministry callings, new avenues of worship, and new service opportunities.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to increase knowledge of discipleship among the members of Southbrook Baptist Church in Wadena, Minnesota. The purpose was excellent. SBC is comprised of first-generation Christians, and it seemed like this purpose accelerated the normative maturity that occurs in regular weekly worship attendance. However, I was uncertain how conducive preaching would be as a vehicle for increasing knowledge. My outlook on discipleship and preaching has been that discipleship happens best in small groups that can be interactive, while preaching is best for worship and slow, sustained spiritual sustenance for the week at hand. I did make some adjustments to my

preaching methodology by bringing an interactive review of previous sermons in the series, but I was able to track through this project to determine if people would sustain a measurable increase in knowledge throughout the sermon series. To assess the success of this project, I evaluated the quantitative data from the pre-survey and post-survey to observe a measurable change in knowledge.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Goal 1: Pre-survey

The first goal was to assess the present knowledge of discipleship among the attendees of Southbrook Baptist Church. This was accomplished by distributing a pre-survey instrument with twenty quantitative items that the participants would complete based on their current knowledge of discipleship knowledge. The majority of the survey items were specific to the disciple's calling and the disciple's transformation. I received thirty-five completed pre-surveys, successfully completing the first goal.

Goal 2: Sermon Series

The second goal was to develop a series of eight messages from the book of Mark that taught the growth of a disciple. The sermon series addressed the disciple's call and the disciple's character transformation through spiritual disciplines. The first method in completing this goal was to submit the sermon series for grading and evaluation in the Foundations of Teaching class at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and receive a "B" or above. The sermon series received an "A," and I received feedback on ways to refine the sermon series.

The second method was for the sermon series to be critiqued by another pastor using a rubric to evaluate biblical fidelity and practical comprehension. The sermons were evaluated in four areas: fidelity to biblical content and intent, organizational structure of the sermon, clarity of the material, and practicality for the believer. The

rubric consisted of ten statements to rank the sermon in these areas using a 4-point scale ranging from one to four. A rating of “1” was deemed unacceptable, while “2” represented the need for improvement, “3” represented an acceptable rating, and “4” represented an excellent rating. This represented the quantitative data gathering needed to complete the goal. Under each rubric item, there was a place for comments to be given to gain qualitative data. Goal 2 would be considered successfully met when all ten of the rubric items met or exceeded the acceptable level and the total percentage of the rubric had a minimum of 90 percent.

The pastor who evaluated my messages recently retired from over forty years of full-time ministry in rural and metropolitan pastorates. Seven rubric items were scored with a “4,” representing an “excellent” rating, and three were scored with a “3,” representing an “acceptable” rating. Two of the “acceptable” areas were in sermon organization, and the other “acceptable” area was on the comprehensibility of the material for new believers. Some of the qualitative comments included a note that the material was very relevant for the church, that there was excellent application in every sermon, that the series had a clear progression, and that the series dealt with the critical issue of purity in the life of a disciple. The total rubric score was 37/40 points for an average of 92.5 percent. All the rubric items scored in the “acceptable” or “excellent” rating, successfully completing the second goal.

Goal 3: Quantitative Analysis

The third goal was to assess the increase of knowledge in the areas of Christian discipleship as a result of the sermon series. My project thesis states that a sermon series on discipleship in Mark has value in measurable maturity. My alternate, or H_a hypothesis, is that listening to the sermons will produce a quantifiable increase in knowledge in the participants. The null, or H_0 , theory states that listening to the sermons will demonstrate no measurable maturity in the participants. A t-test was used to determine whether the

null hypothesis should be accepted or rejected.

Table 1. T-test comparison of pre-survey and post-survey

Test	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	65.54545	81.7272727
Variance	106.4502	80.2077922
Observations	22	22
Pearson Correlation	0.331508	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	21	
t Stat	-6.77798	
P(T<=t) one-tail	5.27E-07	
t Critical one-tail	1.720743	
P(T<=t) two-tail	1.05E-06	
t Critical two-tail	2.079614	

The first criterion of success came in the form of the change in the mean score between the two surveys. The mean score for the pre-survey was 65.57, while the mean score for the post-survey was 80.29. The quantitative data reflected here is the first benchmark of success.

I applied a one-tail t-test because I anticipated an increase in knowledge based on the increase in the mean average scores. I am using a paired test to test the same population twice. The absolute value of my t-statistic from the t-test is 6.778, and the critical one-tailed value is 1.72. Because the t-statistic is higher than the critical value, I can deduce that there is a significant statistical increase, and the null hypothesis can be

rejected. This is the second benchmark of success.

The final benchmark for success is found in the comparison of the t-test and the alpha of 0.05. The p-value of the t-test is $5.27e-7$. This is a smaller value than the alpha of .05. Running the test with two tails resulted in the p-value of $1.05e-6$, which is still smaller than the alpha of 0.05. This method again confirms that there was a statistically significant increase in the results of the post-survey when compared to the pre-survey. The H_a hypothesis that the sermon series led to an increase in knowledge of discipleship among the participants at Southbrook Baptist Church is confirmed.

One additional statistical analysis was beneficial in demonstrating a direct connection between sermon attendance and the increase in knowledge. The post-survey asked the question, “How many project sermons have you heard in the last eight weeks?” The answers I received ranged from three weeks (from 1 respondent) to eight weeks. I divided the post-surveys into two groups—the first group included surveys from people who had heard six to eight sermons, and the second group included surveys from people who had heard three to five sermons. The first group, which listened to more sermons, demonstrated a mean average of a 22.3-point increase between the pre-survey and post-survey. The group who heard fewer sermons demonstrated a mean average of an 8-point increase. This supports the direct correlation between the amount of sermon material the listeners were exposed to and the increased knowledge. The more sermons the participant heard, the more discipleship knowledge they gained. This data dispels any speculation that the results of the surveys were coincidental.

Table 2. Correlation between sermon attendance and increase in knowledge

Sermons Attended	Increase in Survey
6-8	22.3
3-5	8.0

Goal 3: Qualitative Analysis

I only received fourteen surveys with any notations in the qualitative spaces. I was hoping for more because I was looking forward to seeing what parts of the sermons the people were inspired by or how many people implemented lasting change by responding to Christ's calling or character transformation. One qualitative survey item addressed what level of "calling" people were striving for—primary, secondary, and individual. There were four qualitative questions on character transformation, one for each character transformation trait I addressed in the sermon series: purity, serving, forgiving, and giving.

Forgiveness was the qualitative response that I received the most substantial answers for. Four respondents wrote that they learned that forgiveness is a process and an event. One respondent was very specific and said that he had a friend who abandoned him this last year, and he wanted to forgive him. This same respondent called me and told me that this decision to forgive led to him asking his friend to do a Bible study, and he was looking for Bible study material that would be good for the two to go through together.

Another respondent said that through their decision to forgive, they discovered that someone's action against them was an attempt to protect them, and the respondent was able to be released from the root of bitterness. Another respondent wrote that they had added prayer time in their week to pray for someone who had hurt them, and another respondent noted that they wanted to pray for someone who dislikes them.

The sermon on purity was another topic of interest in the surveys. People answered the question "What steps have you taken to develop inner purity?" with various answers: limit worldly input, pray more, read the Bible more, change who I am around, and be careful about what I put in front of my eyes. One person wrote that they had started praying on the drive to work and back due to the message on purity.

There were few responses about giving—one substantial responder wrote that

they had exercised faith in giving this last month, and one person wrote that they would not hold back when they felt compelled to give—and only a few substantial responses about serving. However, one of the respondents said that for serving, they were going to serve as a discipleship group leader at college. That individual called me several weeks later and said they had completed the discipleship group leader training and held several meetings with their discipleship group as the leader. This has been a significant event in the life of this individual.

Strengths of the Project

Strengths of the Execution of the Project

One of the successful research elements was that I allowed time in the church service for people to complete the survey and turn it in while they were still on campus. We had to rearrange our staff and children's ministry to supervise kids during that time, but I received a survey from a high percentage of church attendees. Our people seemed to be excited to take the survey and be a part of my research.

Another strength of the project was that I was focusing on information retention and life change in the lives of our people. This survey gave me an intense focus and forced me to be clear and intentional in how I wanted people to respond to my sermons. I intended to help them retain information for two months and make calculated adjustments to their discipleship journey. I wanted to specify a particular area or ministry in their life they needed to develop and a specific step I wanted them to take. I was fascinated by how this narrowing of purpose allowed people to be consistent in the areas of their lives they were addressing and how it allowed for long-term follow-through.

A further strength of the project was the time spent on review each Sunday. After the opening song at the worship service each week, we spent three to five minutes reviewing the previous material and asking the people how they were maintaining their decisions. Revisiting the material, bulletin outline, and slideshow presentation helped

people maintain the increase of information from week to week throughout the project.

An additional strength is that it seemed to resonate with people. I received several unsolicited texts each week from my church people on how they were applying the material or how the sermon convicted them. I received three messages from people saying that the previous Sunday's message was the best they had heard from me. I believe that is because the project's focus motivated me to redouble my efforts in creating sermons that were applicable to people and helped people take specific steps of surrender and transformation.

Strengths from Survey Data

One way I tried to interpret that data from the increase in knowledge was to compare the individual survey items that had an increase of three on the post-survey. Many survey items demonstrated an increase of one or two, but I considered an increase of three on individual survey items to be a significant increase. I was interested to see if this type of quantitative data would show any patterns in the topics of significant growth or among the participants who saw significant growth.

Nine post-surveys had survey items that had increased by 3 from the corresponding pre-surveys. There were eighteen total increases of 3. Five of these increases came from one survey, and four came from another survey. Two surveys had two of these increases, and five surveys had one increase of 3. My interpretation of the two surveys with four and five of these significant increases is that these are likely new attendees at our church. Our church currently has fourteen adults in the membership class, and ten of those are new believers with no church experience. I believe this sermon series addressed topics that were valuable to these new believers.

Table 3. Surveys that included items that increased by 3

Survey Items that Increased by 3	Number of Surveys	Sermons Attended
5	1	6
4	1	8
3	0	
2	2	7-8
1	5	7-8

There is another strength to be found in the spectrum of impact people reported. In the group of surveys returned by people who reported listening to six to eight sermons of the series, all but two had a significant increase in at least one survey item. This means that nearly everyone who attended regularly was impacted by some topic of discipleship in an appreciative way. This data affirms that regular attendance to good preaching will lead to tangible benchmarks of Christian maturity. One of the comparisons I wanted to make in my project was to see if preaching would make any noticeable benchmarks of discipleship growth that would compare to relational group or small group studies. There are many areas of the Christian life that small groups may help build and grow, but preaching is far from ineffective as a discipleship tool.

Table 4 shows that almost half of the survey items saw a significant increase by at least one of the participants. The highest survey items were the ones asking about spiritual disciplines, but several participants scored increases of 3 in being able to define a Christian calling and in knowing what it means to take up one's cross daily. There were five other survey items that were scored with a significant increase in at least one survey. This demonstrates that various discipleship topics spoke to people differently or that the participants found different topics more applicable to their lives.

Table 4. Survey items that increased by 3

Survey Item	Surveys With an Increase of 3
I can describe what spiritual disciplines are.	6
I have a spiritual discipline I am intentionally developing.	3
I can define what a “call” is.	2
I know what it means to take up my cross daily.	2
I understand the correlation between “repent” and “believe.”	1
I can define discipleship.	1
I have a Christian virtue I am intentionally developing.	1
I am intentionally putting my spiritual gifts to use.	1
I consistently contribute financially to my church each month.	1

My interpretation of this data is that spiritual disciplines were the subject most of the people benefited from. Six surveys showed that the participant increased in knowledge by 3 in describing spiritual disciplines. Three more surveys demonstrated an increase of 3 by intentionally developing a spiritual discipline. Nine out of eighteen significant increases were concerning spiritual disciplines. This is a major project strength because spiritual disciplines are a foundational spiritual growth tool in discipleship.

In addition to the surveys with items that were increased by 3, one survey had an item that increased by 4. Survey item eighteen asked the question, “I consistently contribute financially to my local church each month.” This individual increased from a

“strongly disagree” on the pre-survey to a “strongly agree” on the post-survey. There was a corresponding qualitative survey question on the post-survey that asked, “In the past month, how have you developed in the discipline of giving?” This respondent wrote that they planned to give and write out church checks before they came to church. On this same survey, there was an increase of 3 on item eight, “I have a spiritual discipline I am intentionally developing.” These were the two significant increases in this particular survey, so it is likely that the spiritual discipline developed corresponds with the commitment to give regularly.

Weaknesses of the Project

One of the weaknesses of the project is that although I spent sufficient time on the topic of a disciple’s calling in the first four sermons, I did not spend enough time on the subjects of transformation virtues and spiritual disciplines. I would have liked to continue to develop these themes or to have made the entire sermon series on these topics. I dealt with four specifically that I thought were pinnacle in Jesus’s teaching—purity, serving, giving, and forgiveness. Still, I would have liked to spend several more weeks on a disciple’s spiritual transformation.

Another weakness is that I started three sermons on discipleship two years ago while going into my Teaching Methodology class. As I was taking the course, I saw that the material I wanted to do in discipleship would be a good fit for my project material. I abandoned that discipleship series and went on to another series, but some of that material would have overlapped with my Mark discipleship sermon series, so there would have been a portion of the material that would not have been new to some of our congregation. That would have made an increase in knowledge more difficult in the first two messages in my project, although I expanded beyond the former material. I also used this sermon series when I was the speaker at teen camp last summer, and there are a few adults who would have heard several of the messages there, so not all the material would

have been new to them.

A third weakness came from the design of the research survey's open-ended questions at the end of the survey. I was attempting to gather qualitative data on how my people were integrating the transformational characteristics of purity, serving, giving, and forgiveness into their lives, but each of the questions was framed like, "In the past month, what steps have you taken to develop purity?" or "In the past month, have you developed the pattern of giving?" However, a month had not yet transpired when the respondents completed the post-survey.

What I Would Do Differently

I would have liked to know more about the respondents. I would have liked to ask a few additional questions on the survey to see how long a respondent had been a Christian, involved at a church, or been exposed to preaching or discipleship. Several of the compared post-surveys had significant improvements in knowledge on subjects like articulating the gospel, knowing their calling, or knowing their spiritual gifts. I would have liked a way to verify my suspicions that this was the first time through any gospel material like this. We have a range of newer believers at our church and a few who have not been saved yet, and I would have liked to be able to look at those surveys compared to the surveys of Christians who have heard hundreds of sermons.

I also would have had a better system for people to keep track of their personal identification numbers on their survey. I told them to choose a number they would remember and to enter it into their phone so they could keep track of it, but there was still a lot of confusion on the final Sunday when people were filling out the post-survey. I ended up with two post-surveys with identification numbers that had no correlating pre-survey number. I only had twenty-two matching surveys returned, so those two would have been helpful. Our college students also left for college the week before the final Sunday, so I missed out on another potential three to five returned surveys from the

college students who were away.

Furthermore, I would have phrased the third survey item differently. The current reading is, “Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.” This item was difficult to score because it was phrased in a negative perspective, so any positive growth would show as a detraction from the total survey score. It did not seem like there was much movement on this survey item, and I wonder if it was because the question seemed confusing to score compared to the other survey items. If I used this survey instrument again, I would phrase the question positively, “People around me know that I am a Christian.”

Theological Reflections

I enjoyed the intense focus on the gospel criteria. We have a range of new believers who grew up in Catholic or Lutheran settings and have had exposure to biblical elements such as Jesus as God’s Son, His death on the cross, and His resurrection from the dead, but they experience a lot of confusion about precisely what it is that makes a person a Christian. The focus of Jesus’s first sermon to repent and believe in the gospel was an opportunity to show which religious elements are essential to conversion—to place one’s faith solely in Jesus Christ’s death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. The steps after conversion are the disciples’ journey, so conversion is not the end goal but the threshold of new transformational life. Every adult in attendance this summer can now articulate the gospel elements from 1 Corinthians 15:3 as a basis of faith for us to believe in to be saved.

I appreciated the opportunity to explore the concepts of repentance and conversion. I understand repentance and its place in conversion more clearly than ever. I did a lot of study on the *ordo salutis* and understand repentance’s place in salvation enough to relay that to our people who had questions about it. I benefited from studying repentance and conversion for chapter 2 of this project.

Personal Reflection

Discipleship is one of my passions in ministry because it allows me to walk alongside my people as they journey toward the cross and experience spiritual transformation. This project allowed me to advance my depth of knowledge through personal, dedicated study in preparing for chapters 2 and 3 and for that knowledge and understanding to pour out in my preaching and teaching. I could share with my people the things I had learned and could be stretched personally so that my dependence on success was on the strength of Christ. Many times in my discipleship journey, I had to pause to apply the values and virtues to my own life, which helped me connect with my people on Sundays and set this sermon series apart from the previous years.

I have been frustrated before by the seeming inability of the sermon itself to make faster noticeable spiritual growth in the lives of the hearers, and my determination through this series was to evaluate if that problem stemmed from me as the preacher, the method of preaching as lecture, or the distracted hearts of the hearers. I was able to see through this series that my preparation each week will have to address the needs of the hearer more closely, and my attention will have to maintain an intense focus on the aims of each sermon. I have found that this sermon series and the auxiliary components, like the spiritual gifts assessment and the weekly review, complemented each other to emphasize the immediate need for spiritual growth in calling and character transformation. I will need to keep up that same intentionality in my future sermons, but I was very encouraged to see how heartily the people engaged with the sermon series.

Conclusion

The sermon series and the focus on intentional spiritual growth were a source of excitement and conversation among the attendees at Southbrook. The people were intrigued by the surveys and the material, and many of them took the spiritual gifts assessment to heart to discover possible areas of calling in their lives. One of the common

themes of the informal discussion I participated in revolved around the concept that discipleship is transformation through journey. This description inspired people to share their spiritual journeys, and I believe this sermon series was a catalyst in bringing people together as they shared their stories. This was evidence that the information was assimilated into their minds and hearts, as the information they heard on Sunday morning became source material for fellowship that reached a deeper level than regular discussions.

I have been reinvigorated, and our people have been reinspired by the distinction put on the discipleship project. The project showed me that preaching remains a vital tool in discipleship ministry, but I need to bring my very best effort every week and ask God for His help and His Spirit to be active in the hearts of the listeners. I believe these sermons uniquely connected with our people because of the messages I received throughout the week about them and because our church experienced a fresh wave of volunteers for ministry after the first four weeks. I looked forward to preaching the next sermon every Saturday night, and I brought a lot of intentionality into the execution of the sermons. I wanted each one to resonate, and I attempted to craft each introduction, thesis, and conclusion to emphasize the importance of discipleship. I believe the attendees at Southbrook Baptist Church have taken a significant step forward in understanding discipleship's calling and Christ's transformation in their lives. I look forward to building on this foundation so that our people will continue to have weekly opportunities to deepen their spiritual roots.

APPENDIX 1
DISCIPLESHIP KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE
SURVEY

The following survey was used to provide a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of current discipleship knowledge and practice among congregants.

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY FOR DISCIPLESHIP
IN MARK SERMON SERIES

Please provide a unique 4-digit personal identification number. It may be the last four digits of your phone number, your birth month and date (MMDD), or any other 4-digit number you choose. This number will be used to match up responses to any future leadership training participation surveys.

Personal Identification Number _____

To the best of your recollection, how many ‘Discipleship in Mark’ sermons have you heard in the past eight weeks? _____

Reflecting on the most recent training event you attended, give your honest response to the statements below using the following scale: SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree. Please select only ONE answer that is most appropriate.					
1. If asked, I could articulate the gospel.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. I am hesitant to let others know that I am a Christian.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ with someone else.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. I have a strong grasp of what it means to be a disciple of Christ.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. I know what it means to take up my cross daily.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. I have a person in my life who discipulates me.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. I desire to make disciples.	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. I am currently discipling another believer.	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. I am a consistent disciple-maker.	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. I have made a serious attempt to discover God's will for my life.	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. I believe that God has a purpose for all events in my life, regardless of whether I perceive each event as being good or bad.	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. I know my place in the body of Christ.	SD	D	N	A	SA

14. I can identify my spiritual gifts.	SD	D	N	A	SA
15. I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.	SD	D	N	A	SA
16. I feel empowered by Jesus to do what he has called me to do.	SD	D	N	A	SA
17. I believe everything I have belongs to God.	SD	D	N	A	SA
18. I can describe what spiritual disciplines are.	SD	D	N	A	SA
19. I pray regularly in a group with other Christians.	SD	D	N	A	SA
20. I consistently contribute financially to my local church each month.	SD	D	N	A	SA
21. Which level of 'calling' have you been convinced to respond to? (primary, secondary, individual).					
22. In the past month, what steps have you taken to develop inner purity?					
23. In the past month, how have you implemented serving as Christ served into your Christian habits?					
24. In the past month, how have you exercised the procedure of forgiveness toward someone?					
25. In the past month, how have you developed in the discipline of giving?					

APPENDIX 2

SCORING RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE APPLICABILITY AND FIDELITY OF THE SERMON SERIES

The following rubric was used to provide an evaluation of the practicality of the sermon series to the life of the hearer and of the accurate representation of biblical content. The evaluating pastor's scores have been recorded with underline and bold font, and his comments have been included on this form in italics.

SCORING RUBRIC TO EVALUATE THE APPLICABILITY AND FIDELITY
OF THE SERMON SERIES

Using the following scale, please circle the answer that best corresponds to your observations in response to the evaluation described below. For any area scored a '1' or '2,' please comment on what could be improved.

1 = Unacceptable 2 = Needs Improvement 3 = Acceptable 4 = Excellent

Please evaluate the sermon series based on the following criteria:

Unacceptable-----Excellent

1. Is each sermon faithful to Scripture? Comment: <i>I appreciate Jake using 'Mark' as the basis for his theme of discipleship.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
2. Is this series relevant to discipleship? Comment: <i>Good common sense ordering of points made. Some excellent illustrations.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
3. Is the content comprehensible for newer believers? Comment: <i>Sometimes the manuscript of the sermon strays from the outline in the bulletin.</i>	1	2	<u>3</u>	4
4. Is the material relevant to the church? Comment: <i>Yes, absolutely.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
5. Is each homiletical thesis clearly stated and succinct? Comment: <i>Yes</i>	1	2	<u>3</u>	4
6. Is the content of each message organized around the thesis? Comment: <i>Yes</i>	1	2	<u>3</u>	4
7. Does the series have a logical progression? Comment: <i>Yes! I like Jake's common sense and contemporary progression of application.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
8. Is this series consistent with Christ's work with the disciples? Comment: <i>Yes. This series can easily be supported by the synoptics and epistles.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
9. Is the theme and content of the sermons faithful to Mark's theology and intent? Comment: <i>I believe yes.</i>	1	2	3	<u>4</u>
10. Does this sermon series put emphasis on practical discipleship topics?	1	2	3	<u>4</u>

Comment: *I especially appreciated the topic of purity.*

APPENDIX 3

SERMON SERIES ON DISCIPLESHIP IN MARK

This is the sermon series used at Southbrook Baptist Church developed with the intention of increasing knowledge of discipleship. This sermon series project examined the patterns of discipleship from the Gospel of Mark. This series focused on (1) defining discipleship (2) teaching the centrality of Christ in discipleship (3) discovering one's own calling in their discipleship journey, and (4) learning the virtues of a disciple's character. Inner virtues and character are difficult to incorporate into discipleship stratagems because they are difficult to measure, so half of this course gave attention to the character development of the disciple through knowledge of the virtues Christ promoted. The first four messages emphasize joining and committing to Christ, and the last four messages develop the character transformations of purity, serving, forgiving, and giving.

Sermon 1: Repent and Believe

Session 1 will define the meaning of discipleship. Mark 1 and 2 demonstrate the initial, foundational steps in the process of turning one's life around to follow Jesus. 'Repent,' 'leave' and 'follow' are the significant terms that will be examined.

Learning Outcome (knowledge): After hearing this message, students will know how to believe in Jesus Christ for salvation.

In the Old Testament, the word 'repentance' implies turning around, while the New Testament word pictures a change of mind.

Repentance fundamentally means to change your mind about something.

It is significant to note that repentance is the message of the gospel.

The two preachers of the Kingdom of Heaven – John the Baptist, and Jesus Himself, preach repentance in Mark 1.

Mark 1:4 John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:15 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

This sermon will define repentance is and how it works.

The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 illustrates repentance and the way each aspect of personhood is affected: intellect, emotions, and will.

Intellect. There must be a knowledge and understanding of sin and transgression.

Emotional. The conscience is stricken. This is the operational level of repentance. It is not just a feeling, but a holistic stirring.

Peter's audience in Acts 2:36-39 demonstrate the emotive response in repentance when they were cut to the heart and asked Peter what they needed to do to

resolve their transgression. Emotions of conviction can include rage, anger, grief, sorrow, depression, zeal, despondency, or desperation.

Will. This aspect is where the individual decides what to do with the build up of the knowledge of wrong and the conviction in the heart.

This is the actionable side—to turn, to return.

Without a change, the conviction of repentance is not holistic and remains at the emotional level, which may be recognized as regret, grief, or sorrow. 2 Corinthians 7:10-12 teaches that godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation, but worldly grief produces death.

Judas Iscariot is an example of a person who never arrived at this final level of returning.

Steven's persecutors in Acts 7:52-55 were convicted at Steven's preaching, yet they became enraged and gnashed their teeth in anger.

Conclusion: Romans 2:4 leads us to the understanding that repentance is a response to the goodness of God as a gift to you: "Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?"

Sermon 2: Follow Your Call – Primary Calling to Follow Christ

Sermon 2 will use Mark 1:16-20 to show that discipleship is a lifetime journey of following Jesus Christ and making Him central to everything. 'Follow' and 'cost' are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (attitude): After hearing this message, students will be challenged to commit to the journey of discipleship.

This is the primary call – the call to follow Christ with your life.

In order to leave all and follow, understand:

Who you follow

What stays behind

The cost of following

The importance of immediacy

The purpose of following

Conclusion:

What do you need to let go to follow daily? What is it that you are using for a crutch? What keeps a believer from being a disciple, a follower? Fear? Procrastination?

STEPS: Make a commitment to your Savior to follow Him for life.

Sermon 3: Fill Your Position – Secondary Calling of Kingdom Ministry

Session 3 will explore Mark 2:13-17 to understand the cost of following Christ in this life. ‘Treasure,’ ‘kingdom,’ and ‘follow’ are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (insight): After hearing this message, students will discover their role on Christ’s team and their spiritual gifts.

The secondary call is to live out our new identity in all spheres of life.

The church is the ‘base camp’ from which we go into various realms of our lives.

God’s call is to all who believe to be Christian in all we do.

Being a factory worker or mechanic, a homemaker or a salesman, a construction worker or an entrepreneur or wife or teacher or mom or farmer or businessman or professional athlete –

Every occupation for the Christian IS a Christian vocation.

The danger in seeking God’s call is very rarely in doing the wrong thing, but in doing too little. Don’t do too little!

Our secondary call can be divided into 5 spheres in which we live out our calling to holiness/Christlikeness:

The Church

The World (diaspora)

The ministry of Work

Family

Sabbath

Each sphere has its own internal design, order, and place in God's scheme.

Conclusion: Christ calls each of us away from the self-life and addresses this call individually in each of these areas in our life, calling us away from the way we would distort these areas and toward Himself with the same abruptness that Matthew the tax collector was called.

Sermon 4: Find Your Passion –your ‘heart calling’ – the reason you were put here on earth

Sermon 4 will use Mark 3:13-34 to develop an understanding of the individual calling in the life of a disciple. Each believer is equipped for service, and disciples need to respond to Christ's burden in their life to accomplish the specific ministries that will fulfill their calling. “Call,” “send,” and “will” are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (insight): After hearing this message, students will discover their role on Christ's team and their spiritual gifts.

Heart Calling – the intersection of passion and gifts

1. Assess your passion and gifts

What is my passion?

What are my gifts?

What place do I fit in?

What part do I play?

What difference do I make?

What is it that I can be commended for by the King?

2. Ask for God's Leading

Guiding lights that help you discern God's will for your calling:

Scriptural guidance: the Bible is ALWAYS the starting point, and definite principles in the Bible trump everything else

Prayer

The circumstances we face

Advice from Christians

A sense of the Holy Spirit's peace about our decisions

Conclusion:

Christ's primary call is universal – every believer is called to follow Him. As we journey with Him, we minister in the areas of Church, Family, Work, World, and Sabbath. But each believer is also gifted and burdened for individual ministries, which need to be discovered and developed by assessing gifting and asking for God's direction. This assessment should result in the discovery of a calling which brings joy and energy as you pour yourself into the work that Christ gives you.

Sermon 5: Developing Purity in Character

Sermon 5 will rely on Mark 7:1-23 as a basis for developing purity-the first of the disciples' virtues. Purity begins in the inner, spiritual parts of the disciple. 'Defile,' 'tradition,' and 'heart' are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (knowledge): After hearing this message, students will become aware of the importance of developing purity.

Character Virtues: these character values set the disciple of Christ apart from

the values of the world – there is a stark contrast between natural and regenerate, between fleshly and spiritual, between dark and light, between self-centered and heaven-oriented.

Character of Disciples: Purity, Serving, Forgiveness, Giving.

These are prominently counter-intuitive to the fleshly nature and apart from Christ's church are a rare find on this earth.

Where does IMPURITY come from? It comes from within – it is natural contamination (verse 20,23). Outside of Christ, people turn inward for their identity and guidance with mantras like 'be true to yourself.' But inside is a cesspool.

1. Purity is a prerequisite for seeing God

2. Purity does NOT come from an outward re-arrangement of behavior

TRADITION: religious exercise that is thought to bring favor from God.

So why all the attraction with rules?

Because rules don't require a change of HEART.

You can follow rules and yet remain on the throne.

Religion is so full of rules! I think Satan loves religious rules. What he despises is purity.

3. Purity comes as a result of surrender to God's inner creation/formation

Purity must be created by God's hand within each one of us

Psalm 51:10 "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."

Purity must be created by God's hand within each one of us

This is the advantage of the Spiritual Kingdom!!! The Law could NEVER give this kind of purity, and none of US are naturally inclined toward this purity.

Pure in heart - a direct contrast to the Pharisees who were ritually clean but woefully impure.

Conclusion: How have you structured your life to maintain purity? To see

God? To maintain the touch of His hand?

Sermon 6: Developing the Virtue of Serving

Sermon 6 will examine Mark 10:35-45 as a pattern for serving. Serving is Christ's way of overturning the world's rubric for greatness. 'Servant' and 'great' are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (attitude): After hearing this message, students will plan to incorporate service ministries into their lives.

Some of the disciples, and a lot of the culture they were raised in, viewed greatness exactly the way a secular society would – how many followers, how successful, how wealthy, who is talking about you—this was the Pharisaic methodology. Whose side are you on? Which school are you from? How successful is your rabbi? How wealthy is such and such Sadducee?

It is unsurprising that Jesus's disciples fall into the same way of thinking – they want to be rewarded for choosing Jesus! They want to be memorialized and immortalized at the right hand and left hand. **Jesus's lesson, the first shall be last and the last first, corresponds with His prediction (for the third and last time) of His imminent sacrificial death.**

1. This lesson shows us what kind of God we have.

Without this kind of divine revelation, people make their gods into an extension of their own lusts and desires – a divine license to gratify the desires of the flesh.

Gods of the Romans and Vikings celebrated war and violence.

Gods of the Greeks promoted temple prostitution.

Old Canaanite gods—fertility and prosperity.

Haiti—wicked, evil gods they have made for themselves.

The God as described in the Bible is a God who celebrates, commands, and

demonstrates SERVANTHOOD to be great. OUR God prizes helping others.

Remember Jesus's washing feet—is there any better demonstration before the cross? This act proves that the cross was a deliberate act of ultimate serving.

2. This lesson reveals what true greatness is.

Greatness is the measured advancement of reducing self and putting God first and others before you. Greatness comes when we can see what lies beyond this world and perceive Christ's Kingdom. This is the ability and perception to see beyond the brick-and-mortar of this world to His Kingdom and to what matters eternally. James and John were thinking like the world—that authority was meant to lord over others. Their request was fleshly.

There are many who want to exercise authority, but few who want to wash feet. You are the most like your Savior when you are serving.

3. This lesson exhibits what Christ's Kingdom looks like in this world.

There is Christ's Kingdom in this world—and then there is Christ's Kingdom in the future.

4. This lesson teaches that serving leads the self-centered flesh into holy transformation.

Serving others goes against the grain of the flesh, but serving/servanthood is critical to Christ's transformation in your spirit and soul!! Servanthood penetrates—it reaches deep into our center, our core—and opens us up to the Holy Spirit's pouring in.

Conclusion: Be aware that in servanthood,

Pride is swallowed up by humility.

'Me first' is overtaken by an awareness of the needs of others

The blinders of self-love are removed as agape love is poured out of you from on high.

The desire for ease/comfort is conquered by fervor for Kingdom labor.

Survival overshadowed by sacrifice—He gave His life.

Sermon 7: Developing the Virtue of Forgiveness

Session 7 will examine Mark 11:20-25 as a pattern for forgiveness.

Forgiveness is one of the most frequent opportunities disciples have to emulate Christ's character. 'Forgive' and 'hold' are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (skill): After hearing this message, students can apply the steps of forgiveness to those who have wronged them.

Forgiveness is one of the most prominent counter-cultural character virtues that Christ teaches His followers. Forgiving enemies is a prominent feature of discipleship.

Our forgiveness shows what we think of God's forgiveness (verse 25).

3 Layers of Conflict

Interpersonal conflicts in Christ's church: the one who hurt you is a brother or sister in Christ, and the conflict is a personal conflict. No laws have been violated, no 'victimization' etc.

Conflict outside of church: 'secular' offenses; injustice, etc.

Deeply personal victimization: you have been taken advantage of, hurt, or violated – laws or trust have been broken, but the punishment of the offender doesn't go very far in your own soul healing. Forgiveness may be a life-long event; forgiveness will never mean 'forgetting' by erasing from memory, but it may mean allowing God to heal that until it's no longer the first thing you think of when you go to bed or wake up in the morning.

What is forgiveness? How can I forget or release the debt owed to me?

1. Forgiveness is a singular decision and an unfolding procedure.

You decide to forgive them. You make that decision, but the pain wells up again the next day, the next time you see them, or hear them speak. You have to make the

decision AGAIN to forgive them—and maybe the next day, and the next, and seventy times seven.

2. Forgiveness is liberating the perpetrator from their moral debt.

3. Forgiveness is costly, but not forgiving is more costly.

Conclusion and next steps:

See the face of your enemy in your mind.

Calculate the wrongs from them you have incurred.

Compare those wrongs to the sacrifice of Christ's body on the cross.

Choose to forgive today.

Tell God that you are relying on His strength to forgive in the future.

Sermon 8: Developing the Discipline of Giving

This sermon will examine Mark 12:41-44 to show that giving and faith are intrinsically connected. 'Wealth' and 'poverty' are the significant terms that will be developed.

Learning Outcome (attitude): After hearing this message, students will be enthusiastic about collaborating with others in giving to accomplish big things for Christ.

Giving is an act of trust on behalf of a disciple in the provision of his/her master.

New Testament principles of giving:

1. Giving is investing with God.
2. Giving is to be sacrificial.
3. Generosity is not related to what we have.
4. Giving correlates with spiritual riches.
5. Giving is personally determined.
6. Giving demonstrates love, not law.

7. Generosity is in view of God's provision for us.

Conclusion and next steps:

Figure a tithe of your income. Plan on giving first. Give to church, give to the needy, give to missions, give to causes. Put cash in your wallet to give away this week!

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ABSTRACT

INCREASING THE KNOWLEDGE OF DISCIPLESHIP AMONG MEMBERS OF SOUTHBROOK BAPTIST CHURCH IN WADENA, MINNESOTA

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
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This project sought to inform congregants at Southbrook Baptist Church in Wadena, Minnesota, in the components of discipleship through a sermon series in the Gospel of Mark. The believer learned how to align heart, soul, mind, and strength with the teachings and pattern of Jesus Christ. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Southbrook Baptist Church and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides exegesis of four passages of Scripture (Mark 1–2; John 14:15–24; Matt 10:24–25; 2 Tim 2:2) to demonstrate the components of discipleship. Chapter 3 demonstrates how to be a disciple through spiritual disciplines, obeying Christ’s teachings, and imitating Christ’s character. Chapter 4 presents the project itself, reporting on the content of the discipleship preaching series. Chapter 5 assesses the effectiveness of the project based on goal completion. Essentially, the aim of this project is to equip believers to connect all areas of their life to their relationship with Christ.

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