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STRENGTHENING DISCIPLESHIP BY IMPLEMENTING
MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES FOR MEMBERS AND
ATTENDERS AT BEREAN BAPTIST CHURCH
IN MANSFIELD, OHIO

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All glory and thanks be to God and my Savior, Jesus Christ, who saved me and is empowering me by His Spirit to walk in His grace day by day.

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PREFACE

“It takes a village.” So many have invested in my life over the years, and I would not be here apart from them. First, to my God and Savior Jesus Christ, who has relentlessly pursued me by His grace, and empowered me to walk by His Spirit day by day.

Second, to my bride, Sarah, you continually sacrifice for what God is calling us to do, and I do not deserve your grace and support. Thank you for being my biggest fan, support, and friend throughout all our pursuits.

Third, great thanks to Pastors Dan Krause and Mike Wells, who encouraged me to pursue this degree, and Pastor Lentrail Abston for the many conversations, times of prayer, and cooperation in moving our church towards a more missional community. To Pastor Rick Leineweber, my late father, who lived out the principles of this project and faithfully disciplined me in them at every opportunity.

Fourth, I want to thank the families, members, and attenders at Berean Baptist Church. In so many ways, you have been the epitome of a Christ-exalting church family. You have encouraged me, supported me, provided for me, and challenged me to be an exemplary under-shepherd in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. You have set the bar high for a generous and supportive faith family, and for this, I thank you.

All for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Phil Leineweber

Mansfield, Ohio

May 2024

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Complexity kills growth. As churches expand their discipleship ministries to adults, they often do so as a form of addition that inevitably prevents multiplication. It also piecemeals different aspects of discipleship to various “ministries” instead of allowing members and attenders to join communities that allow for life on life, life in community, and life on mission. Making disciples for the glory of God is the calling of every local church, and church leaders should labor in this work and seek to create systems and equip their congregants to this end. For the discipleship of a church to thrive, certain systems and processes must be continually sharpened. Such is the case at Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio. This project seeks to address the increasingly dull axe of discipleship ministries by beginning to form more healthy missional communities that are easily accessible through the assimilation of membership, better led by equipped leaders, and more effective at making new and better disciples of Jesus Christ.

Context

Berean Baptist Church possesses a strong legacy of biblical disciple-making, generous giving, and missional sending. Founded in 1979 as a church that would be conservative and grace-filled, Berean saw steady growth for its first twenty-five years. The church progressed from the original forty charter members meeting in a cafeteria of the local Christian school to well over a thousand in weekly attendance in a large facility of its own that encompasses over 40,000 square feet. From a peak in attendance in 2005, Berean had a steady decline of around 50 attenders a week until settling at an average attendance of about 500 adults. Over the last three years, this trend has reversed, and the

church has been growing by almost 100 weekly attenders in the last two years, finishing 2023 with an average attendance of over 750. The church has an array of ministries and outreaches and still retains a strong reputation in the community. Its primary strengths could be described as its resources, commitment to missions, and congregational spiritual maturity. Its weaknesses could be summarized as an overly complex adult ministry, the lack of a true missional culture, and little organized development of spiritual leadership.

The first strength that is visible at a cursory glance is Berean's resources. Berean occupies a large physical footprint and is well-maintained. Its over 40,000 square foot building has dedicated youth and children's space and a gym for sports ministry and community. It has a large worship center that can seat over eight hundred for corporate gatherings, dozens of office spaces, and an adult education space with many large classrooms. These resources reflect the generosity of the congregation, which will be touched on in a moment, and the continued giving over the years has put the church in a position of financial strength with income of more than \$1.5 million every year and a current state of being debt-free! In addition to the primary building, the church also has a warehouse facility supporting two ministries: a food pantry that serves over forty family units monthly, and a furniture delivery ministry in which a team of men delivers used furniture to households in need every week. God has dealt generously with Berean Baptist Church, and these resources are some of the primary strengths that poise the church to have a continued impact in the local community.

A second strength Berean has is its culture. For decades the people of Berean have valued missions and multiplication. The church has sent many missionaries and has been part of two church plants. The one church plant across town, Crossroads Church, is now several times larger than Berean itself! One out of every five dollars given to Berean goes towards missions. This has been a standard for several decades, allowing the church to give millions of dollars to missions. They have many short-term mission trip opportunities and have had years recently where upwards of five to six different teams

went out in one year all over the world! For years, the church had a gym sale that would raise over \$10,000—all going towards missions. All of these things describe a church that takes personal responsibility for the Great Commission, the imperative to make disciples of all nations.

The last strength that deserves special attention is congregational spiritual maturity. This maturity demonstrates itself in three primary ways: biblical literacy, service, and generosity. The first Sunday this author ever attended Berean, he remembers looking down the aisle and seeing study Bibles on people's laps. This was symptomatic of a strength of this church: a rich heritage in the Word of God resulting in spiritual maturity. Biblical preaching has been a priority, and Berean is a congregation that values depth of preaching, especially preaching that is Word-centered and expositional. Since its inception, there have been weekly Bible studies and Sunday school classes that have been faithful in rightly dividing the Word of truth. There is also a depth of teaching and preaching in the kids' and student ministries, with large volunteer teams that seek to disciple the next generation of Christ followers in the Word of God, not just bring them in for fun and games. Berean's belief that God's Word is a pillar of the church is entirely appropriate given its namesake (Acts 17:11), which is by no means a misnomer.

Congregational spiritual maturity is also displayed in a church that is known in the community for its service. Some of this local service involvement has already been mentioned in the furniture and food pantry ministries, but Berean also has members who serve and work in the leadership of Richland Pregnancy Services, a local non-profit that helps the needy called Love I.N.C., the Gideons, Salvation Army, and many others. Inside the church, Berean mobilizes hundreds of volunteers every month who serve in a plethora of ways from children to youth to cleaning to worship arts. Berean held a volunteer banquet a few years ago that saw 350 attend, well over 50 percent of the Sunday morning worship service attendance at the time. This service culture also translates to sacrificial giving, the final mark of spiritual maturity. On average, Berean gives far about the

national per capita average for American evangelical church giving. They tithe and give generously to other ministries, missionaries, and endeavors locally and abroad. In a culture where many Christians are less and less apt to give, Berean still has a culture that seeks to be generous with their finances, honoring the pastors with generous salaries and supporting their vision and strategy.

Despite these significant strengths, several daunting weaknesses have been exposed in the life and ministry of Berean Baptist Church over the last decade. No church is perfect, but there are reasons some churches are more effective at accomplishing their mission and vision while others fail to do so.¹ These reasons can be related to personnel, culture, strategy, organization, and even outside influences that a church and its leaders may or may not be able to discern. In the case of Berean, there are three primary weaknesses: two of these are system or strategy related, and one is cultural. The first systemic problem is an overly complex ministry strategy. The Berean of today is the antonym of simplicity. Berean has a buffet-style adult ministry. Year after year, when someone expressed desire to start a “ministry” or “program,” the answer was “Sure!” Over time, this created a lot of growth, but it caused disunity at some points and a strain on the overall discipleship ministry of the church. It has been said that “growth creates complexity and complexity is the silent killer of growth.”² Berean’s complexity stalled its growth and eventually led to an extended period of decline.

This complexity of ministries, especially for adults, has made assimilation a difficult challenge. Where does a new person start? Where do they fit? Even staff and

¹ See Andy Stanley, *Deep and Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 150. Stanley states that “your current template is perfectly designed to produce the results you are currently getting,” a play off a popular quote, “Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets,” attributed to Paul Batalden. See “Like Magic? Every system is perfectly designed . . .,” Institute for Healthcare Improvement, August 21, 2015, <https://www.ihl.org/insights/magic-every-system-perfectly-designed>.

² Chris Zook and James Allen, *The Founder’s Mentality: How to Overcome the Predictable Crises of Growth* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2016), 1.

ministry leaders are not on the same; it really depends on who you talk to. Rather than finding a simplicity in defining discipleship pathways and processes, Berean erred towards many programs, staffing these with leaders who could run the programs instead of developing people who could adopt and adapt the right processes. This resulted in the burnout and discouragement of at least three full-time staff members who oversaw adult ministry. Connect groups, Sunday school classes, prayer meetings, men's and women's Bible studies, M.O.P.S., care groups, men's breakfasts, discipleship groups, senior adult banquets, and more all combined to create a church that has a little of everything but lacked focus on the most important thing: disciple-making.

Another systemic weakness has been Berean's lack of focus on developing ministry leaders and shepherds. Berean has a tradition of burning out spiritual leadership. The too-complex "machine" of ministry constantly asks more from people, especially those gifted in leadership or teaching, but fails to develop those people in a healthy way. Over the years, Berean's most valuable resource, its members, seem to be used more like cogs in a machine than vital organs determining the health of the whole body. This has resulted in church staff and lay leaders leaving the fellowship after being overutilized and not developed or kept in a place of spiritual health. In a church that should be, during this stage of its life, seeing mature spiritual leadership flowing out of every corner of the church, instead there is a leadership vacuum. This creates real challenges since Berean is already over-programmed; every ministry seems to be asking for more workers, but most people are already serving in several places, and the few that are not are either burnt out or not qualified.

Lastly, Berean also has a culture problem: the vast majority of its members do not think or live missionally. It is sad for a church that speaks so much about missions, but is probably more typical than Christians would like to admit. It is easy in some regard to sponsor a child in a third-world country or deliver a food box once a month to a family you will never see again, but living missionally takes greater intentionality. By missional

here, I mean to live and act like a missionary, an ambassador of Christ, salt and light in your everyday life. It means seeing your workplace, neighborhood, and community as your mission field. Berean, like many churches, has made mission about impersonal programs and not personal relationships. It prioritizes invitation over relation. Members get excited about international and cross-cultural ministry but not personal evangelism. There are some families who are living in this way, but overall Berean does not have a culture where there are stories of members living intentionally as missionaries where God has placed them. The bar seems to be set at inviting a friend to an event, which, though commendable, is a far-cry from biblical disciple-making.

I am concerned about all of these weaknesses, and I think they are somewhat interrelated. The most glaring weakness is the lack of simplicity and organization in adult ministry that, I believe, discourages people from taking their next step after Jesus because the step is not clear. Someone could attend Berean for years, never being involved in a community where they can be known, discipled, and live on mission, and never feel that they are “doing church wrong.” This is a problem.

Rationale

These weaknesses of confusing complexity, a lack of leadership development, and a lack of missional culture at Berean Baptist Church must be addressed. God’s will is for His church to be fruitful, and these challenges should not discourage the church from leaning into a more organized and purposeful expression of the local church. This project addresses these challenges by first creating a more organized system of assimilation for attenders and members. The focal point of this is adopting missional community as the primary engine for discipleship and missional community in our church. Having established this process, the current leaders of various community groups and Bible studies were surveyed to assess the needs of these leaders and their communities. This information was used to develop a leadership development curriculum to further train and

equip missional community leaders and was delivered to a group of our leaders as a part of this project.

The first theological conviction driving this project is that the church should be an every-member functioning body. One of the most pervasive problems in the American church is consumerism. Consumerism is seen in the church when being a Christian is understood as consuming a church's production of a Sunday gathering and other additional programming. The idea of missional community turns this idea on its head and defines health not by what you receive but by what you give. This change is not only about helping more people find community; it is about followers of Jesus functioning in and through community for the glory of God and their mutual good and growth. By definition, the church, or the body of Christ, ought to be an every-member functioning organism. Paul writes in Ephesians, "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph 4:15-16).³ I firmly believe that missional communities will help us take a greater step towards this kind of every-member functioning church.

A second theological conviction driving this project is God's calling on pastors and shepherds to equip the saints for the work of ministry. Paul writes in the same chapter of Ephesians, "And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). Too often, the staff pastors are providing pastoral care and discipleship for all the members and attenders of the church, but in a large church like Berean—and in even in a smaller church—the pastor's role is not to do all the ministry and ministering but to equip the saints for this work. This is also seen in Paul's

³ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is from the *English Standard Version*.

instruction to Timothy: “And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). The training of missional community leaders should be a pastoral priority. This decentralizes pastoral care, discipleship and evangelism. It serves individuals in the church better *and* provides opportunities to serve for the glory of God. In the end, a missional community model will organize discipleship at Berean in such a way that it will be able to grow and scale in a form that is not dependent only upon paid staff members but also on the equipping of saints for the work of ministry.

A practical reason this project is needed is that Berean Baptist Church has all the right ingredients, but they are perhaps not organized rightly to create a dish that has the appropriate effect for a church of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are hundreds of disciples who know the Word of God and are eager to serve. We have resources aplenty to allow for connection and invitation. We have a theology that says mission is important. But all these wonderful ingredients need to be activated through the proper form, which I believe is missional community. Missional community will more effectively assimilate newcomers into groups that will stimulate growth, connection, and support. They will challenge presuppositions about the Christian life and much of American Christianity by seeking to move every believer into settings which encompass life on life, life in community, and life on mission.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio, by implementing missional communities as the primary strategy for spiritual growth for members and attenders.

Goals

In the process of this project, the hope was to strengthen discipleship through missional community by emphasizing the following tasks:

1. The first goal was to define a clear and concise assimilation plan that moved attenders and members into missional community.
2. The second goal was to assess the current discipleship and missional community understanding and practices in Berean Baptist Church's current group leaders.
3. The third goal was to develop an eight-part training curriculum on leading and shepherding a missional community.
4. The fourth goal was to increase understanding of the biblical foundation for the Christian life and its expression in missional living and missional community by implementing the above curriculum for a group of current missional community leaders and assessing their growth at the conclusion of the course.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these four goals. This methodology is described in the following section.

Research Methodology

In the process of this project, the hope was to strengthen discipleship through missional community by emphasizing four tasks. The first goal was to define a clear and concise assimilation plan that moved attenders and members into missional community. This goal was measured by a panel of pastoral staff and leadership at Berean Baptist Church who utilized an Assimilation Plan Rubric (APR) to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, and actions steps.⁴ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The second goal was to assess the current discipleship and missional community culture at Berean Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering a Missional Community and Discipleship Inventory (MCDI) to ten community leaders, including Sunday school teachers, connect group leaders, and D-group leaders.⁵ This goal was considered successfully met when eleven community leaders completed the MCDI and the inventory was analyzed, yielding a clearer picture of the current discipleship and

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ See appendix 2.

missional practices in communities at Berean Baptist Church.

The third goal was to develop an eight-part training curriculum on leading and shepherding a missional community for missional community leaders. This goal was measured by the pastoral staff at Berean Baptist Church, who used a Leader Training Rubric (LTR) to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, clarity, and relevance of the curriculum.⁶ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The fourth goal was to increase understanding of the biblical foundation for discipleship and its expression in missional community by implementing the above curriculum for a group of current missional community leaders. This goal was measured by administering the MCDI with at least ten current leaders who took this course to assess how much the leaders learned about discipleship and the practice of missional community by comparing their post-training scores on the MCDI to their scores from before the training. This goal was considered successfully met when the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-training scores.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Assimilation. By assimilation at Berean Baptist Church, we mean the processes or systems whereby guests, attenders, and members are moved into missional community, service, and membership. The assimilation plan clarifies what an individual's next step is to be a fully functioning member of the church.

Discipleship. In this paper, *discipleship* refers to the relationships, behaviors, systems, and processes that help mature a follower of Jesus Christ. When this paper

⁶ See appendix 3.

speaks of *discipleship* at Berean Baptist Church, it concerns the culture, processes, and systems that seek to help followers of Jesus Christ grow, gather, and go (See “Definition of a Disciple” on p. 67).⁷

Discipleship training. At Berean Baptist Church, *discipleship training* refers to the classroom environments where members and attenders have the opportunity to receive instruction over an eight- to twelve-week period. These electives are focused on areas such as Bible study, parenting, marriage, hermeneutics, and leadership development.

Missional. A term used to describe a certain mode of church, leadership, Christianity, small group, community, or individual that denotes an entity or person who is committed to realizing “the missionary calling of the people of God.”⁸

Missional community. A family of missionary servants who make disciples who make disciples.⁹ Missional communities are a group of individuals who covenant together around the gospel to see missional living not as an event but consistently living life on life, life in community, and life on mission.

One delimitation applied to this project. The training and assessment limited the sample group to current and prospective community group and Sunday school class leaders. The reason for this delimitation is that we believe that the primary means for creating missional community is through the understanding and practices of their leaders. Missional living and biblical community are better caught than taught. We first wanted to raise the bar of our group leaders in order to shift the discipleship culture of our church.

⁷ This definition resembles Bill Hull’s understanding of “disciple-making.” He defines “discipleship” more broadly as “the process of following Jesus” or “the state of being a disciple.” See Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, Navigators Reference Library (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 32-35.

⁸ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 284.

⁹ This definition originates with Jeff Vanderstelt, the visionary leader of Saturate and author of *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

Conclusion

Discipleship in the local church is not optional. Pastors will be held to account for how their churches are structured and to what degree these structures affect the making of disciples. This project will show that when we look at Scripture, church history, and present ministry trends, we see that missional community is the most effective form of discipleship and mission in an increasingly post-Christian context. Furthermore, missional community is the best approach for discipleship in the context of Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio, a church with a rich heritage of organizing believers together for worship but needing a fresh approach to mobilizing members and attenders to live in community and on mission every day. Chapter 2 argues for the biblical and theological basis for missional community as a means of discipleship by demonstrating that the Bible teaches that followers of Jesus are to make disciples by living in a missional posture, being in unified community, and embracing relational accountability.

CHAPTER 2
THE BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR
MISSIONAL COMMUNITY AS A MEANS
OF DISCIPLESHIP

Introduction

The thesis of this chapter is that four New Testament passages prescribe that followers of Jesus are to make disciples by living as a missional community. The church exists for the glory of God under the kingship of Christ and has been commissioned to make disciples of all the nations. The church, as a missional community, is centered on the gospel, focused on the nations, living in unified community, leveraging its varied giftings, and deployed to live missionally in the power of the Spirit. Bound together by the Spirit of God in love, the church as a missional community will inevitably see fruit and impact through the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ working in and through His people.

**The Great Commission as the Church's Primary
Mission (Matt 28:18-20)**

Jesus's last words in the Gospel of Matthew emphasize the overarching mission for which His disciples were sent. The clarity of the one imperative, "make disciples," is first supported by the foundation of Jesus's kingship for mission. The process of disciple-making is described as going, baptizing, and teaching. The target of this command is "all nations" or peoples, and the empowerment and purpose for this command comes from the Trinitarian God the disciple follows and seeks to obey. The people of God are called to live on mission.

Jesus's Kingship as the Prerequisite for Mission (28:18)

Jesus's kingship establishes the mission of His people. John Piper has said, "Missions is not the ultimate goal of the Church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man."¹ Notice in the verse before the text at hand, the disciples, after seeing Jesus, worship Him (28:17). In the parallel passage in the Gospel of Luke, the worship of king Jesus is reiterated (Luke 24:52). The mission of Jesus starts with the worship of Jesus. Paul describes this eschatological end of redemption history in Philippians 2: "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:9-11). Jesus is already on the throne, but His rule and reign have not yet been fully realized, and He *will* receive all worship. John also reiterates this future state of worship from all nations, where a multitude from "all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" are praising the Lamb (Rev 7:9-10). Jesus's kingship makes Him worthy of worship and therefore worthy of the work of mission in the lives of His disciples.

Jesus, in his majesty, proclaims, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (28:18). This kingly language denotes absolute sovereignty over all of creation. It describes "authority which resides in the nature of one's being."² It is not just the function of the king, it is ontological—He *is* king Jesus. Herschel Hobbs elaborates on this ontological kingship by stating the certainty of its fulfillment: "This mediatorial

¹ John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 17.

² Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Four Gospels*, vol. 1, *Matthew-Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 418.

reign will continue until His purpose is accomplished.”³ His rule is bound to who He is, and there is a certainty concerning the consummation of His person. The kingship of Jesus has been the consistent message of Matthew in his Gospel. As Merrill Tenney states, “Through all of the Gospel [of Matthew] the royalty of Christ is prominent.”⁴ So, for Matthew, this idea of “all authority” is just the summation or culmination of his presentation of Jesus as king.

Lastly, the transition word in verse 19, “therefore,” also communicates that the words that lie before the coming command, “make disciples,” are the basis or foundation for it. Charles Quarles explains that the Greek word for “therefore” here “is inferential and indicates that Jesus’s command is grounded in his absolute authority.”⁵ Some have said that the “indicative” always precedes the “imperative,”⁶ or, more simply, facts precede acts. In this case, the reality or fact of the authority and kingship given to the Son of God is the absolute terms upon which this command can and must be fulfilled. He has all authority, and His followers must work to see His rule and reign realized through disciple-making in all the earth amongst all peoples. Understanding Jesus’s kingship over all creation and over our lives is a prerequisite for life on mission.

Making Disciples: Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing (28:19)

Many are familiar with the “Great Commission,” but are they really? Thom Rainer assesses accurately that the Great Commission has often become the “great omission” in many local churches and argues that this is one of the reasons churches die. But even he, in looking at this text at the end of Matthew’s Gospel, wrongly understands

³ Hobbs, *Exposition of the Four Gospels*, 1:420.

⁴ Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 159.

⁵ Charles Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H, 2017), 351.

⁶ Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 253.

the grammar of the passage. He says, “The imperative in those verses is ‘go.’ But as we go there are several sub-commands. We are to make disciples. We are to baptize. We are to teach.”⁷ Rainer wrongly identifies the main imperative “make disciples” as “go.” The main thing must be the main thing, and sadly much of contemporary literature emphasizes missiology and evangelism as the “going” but misses the mark on Jesus’s own emphasis on discipleship. Jesus knew no dichotomy between evangelism and the making of disciples.

Christopher Wright understands the primary thrust of the Great Commission in his masterpiece, *The Mission of God*. He states, “Jesus did not primarily command his disciples to go; he commanded them to make disciples.”⁸ At the most basic level, the term “disciple” means learner or apprentice. Disciples follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This involves all of life. There is no stone to be left unturned in the life of a disciple; the king has “all authority.” Explicit in this command to Jesus’s disciples to *make disciples* is the truth that healthy disciples make disciples. The mission of God is not for the few or the extraordinary; it is for the everyday disciple of Jesus. After tracing the teachings of Christ through the four Gospels, Darrell Bock rightly asserts that throughout all of Jesus’s teachings, “the call of the disciple is to take the message of the deliverance of God and forgiveness, along with the message of how one should live before God, into all the nations.”⁹ Disciples make disciples; this is life on mission.

Making new disciples, or reproduction and multiplication through evangelism and mission, is the reason the church persists in this fallen world. There is one thing that will certainly not happen in heaven: conversion. In this age, the kingdom of God is

⁷ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H), 41.

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 35.

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 636.

outbreaking into the world through the kingship of the Son working through the church. There is an expanding nature and missionary call on the people of God. Though important, the church does not exist to merely participate in loving fellowship, worship, or the ministry of the Word. The church must join God in mission. John MacArthur asserts, “There is only one reason the Lord allows His church to remain on earth: to seek and to save the lost, just as Christ’s only reason for coming to earth was to seek and to save the lost.”¹⁰ Notice that MacArthur connects the idea of missional living to the way of Jesus. Christ Himself models “living sent,” and disciples of Jesus will follow in His footsteps by participating in disciple-making in their lives. This is the main thing: making disciples who make disciples of all the nations is the Great Commission.

The How of Making Disciples (28:19-20)

Jesus unpacks the main verb, “make disciples,” using three participles: “go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching.” These three adverbial participles describe the process or “how” of making disciples. The first of these is “go.” This participle implies active witness. Making disciples is not a passive endeavor. It hearkens to Jesus’s words from the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light shine before others” (Matt 5:16). This aspect also denotes an expansive mission that must not stay local but extends globally. Disciples intentionally seek to be witnesses of Christ “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). This text clearly illustrates the going nature of the call to disciple-making.

Additionally, the work of making disciples includes conversion to new life in Christ through faith that is then expressed publicly through baptism. The early church illustrates this close association with faith and the public response through baptism in the book of Acts (Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13, 36-38; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:33; 18:8; 19:5; 22:16).

¹⁰ John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1989), 333.

The reality that disciples are the ones to be baptized and the parallelism between baptizing and teaching illustrate the reality that baptism and obedience to Christ's commands are critical for the disciple but not salvific. Baptism is the first fruit of saving faith, not a work that saves.

Referring to this passage, Bock explains, "Discipleship means not only trusting in Jesus and identifying with him, as baptism pictures, but also the pursuit of obeying him."¹¹ The third aspect of disciple-making encompasses "teaching" disciples "to observe" the commands of Christ. Hobbs clarifies, "These words involve the whole of evangelism. They were not simply to win, but also to develop."¹² This idea of "observing" or "obeying" is key. Too often, discipleship in an American context means Sunday school classes and theological or biblical training. Sadly, this frequently produces disciples who are not "doers of the Word" but merely hearers (Jas 1:22-25). MacArthur rightly elaborates, "No one is a true disciple apart from personal faith in Jesus Christ and there is no true disciple apart from an obedient heart that desires to please the Lord in all things."¹³ Jesus Himself describes this reality in John 14:15: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." Following Jesus's commands demonstrates genuine saving faith and love for the Savior.

The church and the disciples therein are bound to obey the teachings of king Jesus. Tom Schreiner, who emphasizes the kingship of Christ throughout all of Scripture, rightly asserts that "Matthew also emphasizes that those who are disciples live transformed lives. Only those who obey the Christ will receive eternal life."¹⁴ John Calvin, who lived in a day where papal power and the church's authority were corrupt

¹¹ Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture*, 402.

¹² Hobbs, *Exposition of the Four Gospels*, 1:421.

¹³ MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, 345-46.

¹⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 453-54.

and destructive to the gospel, understood that the church's task and its authority were bound to teachings of Christ. He writes concerning this text, "The power of the church, therefore, is not infinite, but is subject to the word of the Lord."¹⁵ Disciples are not bound to the dictates of man but to the commands of Christ. One is not making a disciple if there is no obedience and submission to the Lordship of Christ and His commands.

The Who of Making Disciples: All Nations (28:19)

The recipients of this great work of disciple-making in this passage are "all nations." This, too, flows out of Jesus' kingship and authority. He has all authority, so He must have people from all nations. The gospel of Jesus Christ is good news to all ethnicities. King Jesus is gathering "disciples of all nations, both Jews and Gentiles."¹⁶ The gospel is indeed "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Rom 1:16). This idea of an ever-expanding kingdom of God amongst all peoples of the earth is a fulfillment of the metanarrative of redemption history that we see from the Old and New Testaments.¹⁷ As John Piper accurately summarizes, "God's will for missions is that every people group be reached with the testimony of Christ and that a people be called out for his name from all the nations."¹⁸ Making disciples necessitates a going and preaching the gospel to all people groups and ethnicities on the planet (Matt 24:14); this is the "who" of making disciples.

The God Who Sends Us to Make Disciples (28:19-20)

The last aspect of making disciples seen in this supreme text in Matthew is that

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by Henry Beveridge (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 762.

¹⁶ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 452.

¹⁷ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 189-224.

¹⁸ Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad*, 179.

of the nature of the Sender: the omniscient, Trinitarian God. One cannot separate the mission of God from the power and presence of God. This has already been seen earlier, where mission is described as the outflow of Christ's authority and kingship. It is also observed in the Trinitarian baptism. Being baptized "in the name" is singular, with the three persons being in the genitive modifying the one name. Quarles explains, "The construction affirms the deity and unity of the three persons and implies incipient trinitarian doctrine."¹⁹ All three persons are present in this ordinance, but they are one united being: the God who sends. Acts 1:8, which describes the same moment of the commissioning of the disciples, emphasizes the work and the power of the Spirit to come: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses." Luke 24:49 hearkens to this same reality of the coming Spirit empowerment: "Behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Notice Jesus's commissioning involves the power of the Spirit by the promise of the Father and with the presence of Jesus.

Jesus closes His commission with the powerful words: "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20). Jesus's commands always come with His accompanying presence. D. A. Carson rightly summarizes, "The gospel ends with the promise of Jesus' comforting presence, which, if not made explicitly conditional on the disciples' obedience to the Great Commission, is at least closely tied to it. He who is introduced to us in the prologue as Immanuel, 'God with us' (1:23), is still God with us every day to the end of history as we know it."²⁰ Jesus's abiding presence is the basis upon which the believer's obedience and fruitfulness is founded (John 15:1-10). The

¹⁹ Quarles, *Guide to the Greek New Testament*, 352.

²⁰ D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament*, ed. Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 134.

mission cannot and will not fail because Jesus goes with His people. These comforting words are meant to give certainty about the conclusion of the given task. Making disciples is the work of God's church until the end of the age and "the mission that [Christ] gives to his followers to go and make disciples of all nations *will* come to pass."²¹ Life on mission, making new and better disciples by the power of the Spirit in the presence of Christ for the glory of God, is the purpose of the church and will remain so until Christ returns for His people.

A Unified Community Called to Mission (John 17)

There is perhaps no clearer picture of the heart of Jesus for His people than the high priestly prayer of John 17. Wright explains the thought of the apostle: "For John, the universal revelatory function of Jesus' identity and mission is highlighted from the very beginning, repeated at intervals through the Gospel, and climaxes in the great prayer of Jesus in John 17."²² Jesus's prayer teaches the modern-day disciple much, but of greatest importance is the stark difference between its focus versus the content of contemporary Christian prayers in many American churches. John Phillips extrapolates on the contrast with most modern superficiality in prayers: in Jesus's prayer "all of its items of petition and praise are of a spiritual nature."²³ At the forefront of this spiritual focus is the glory of God through the unity and mission of the people of God.

The Glory of God in the Son

Jesus first prays that He would glorify the Father. Kent Hughes sees three aspects of glorification for which Jesus prays in this text: "His glorification in the cross

²¹ John Piper, *What Jesus Demands from the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 372.

²² Wright, *Mission of God*, 124.

²³ John Phillips, *Exploring the Gospel of John: An Expository Commentary*, John Phillips Commentary (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1989), 317.

(vv.1, 4),” “in Heaven (v. 5),” and “in the church (vv. 2, 3, 10).”²⁴ At the forefront of the Savior’s mind is glorifying the Father through everything. Hobbs points out that Jesus’s only desire “is that as He is lifted up on the cross He may glorify His Father.”²⁵ This connection between suffering and glory is a theme of Jesus’s ministry and the ministry of the apostles (Matt 5:10-16; 1 Pet 4:12-16). The Messiah knew that His purpose was bound up in being the suffering servant: “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).

Jesus demonstrates a heart that is centered on the glory of God. After expositing the beauty of this passage, Arthur W. Pink states, “Not for a moment would [Jesus] dissociate His own glory from His Father!”²⁶ In modern times, too often churches propagate their brand, pastors promote their own celebrity, and believers pursue their own preferences. Church growth techniques reign supreme over theology. Exponential growth and multiplication are talked about more than the gospel. Leadership is the buzzword not discipleship. All these trends may demonstrate that the American church has lost its focus on the glory of God. Jesus modeled, even in His prayers, a heart centered on the glory of the Father. But how is the Father most glorified through His people? The content of Jesus’s prayer leaves no doubt to this question: God is glorified in His people being united and on mission for His name.

The Oneness of God’s People

Jesus’s next emphasis after His own desire for the Father to be glorified through His life and sacrifice is the unity and sent nature of His disciples (17:6-19). This

²⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *John: That You May Believe*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1999), 392.

²⁵ Herschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Four Gospels*, vol. 2, *Luke-John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996), 240.

²⁶ Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, vol. 3, *John 15:7-16–21:15-25* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 108.

is similarly followed by the same two aspects as they are to be demonstrated in the future church (17:20-24). Amazingly, Jesus associates this unity to the oneness of the Trinity. Wayne Grudem points out that Jesus's prayer for oneness here is one of the "boldest" analogies for the unity of the body of Christ. He writes, "This is a reminder to us that our unity should be eternal and perfectly harmonious (as God's unity is)."²⁷ The Trinity illustrates this unity well in that it is not sameness in personality. Grudem continues, "Even though we shall someday attain perfect unity with other believers and with Christ, yet we shall forever remain distinct persons as well, with our own individual gifts, abilities, interests, responsibilities, circles of personal relationships, preferences, and desires."²⁸ This variety of giftings will be further unpacked in the exposition of Romans 12 to follow, but for now it is sufficient to say that God's desire for His people is a harmonious unity in the midst of the diversity that he has created in His church.

This unity is produced by the truth of God and the person of God at work in the people of God. Unity and oneness in the body results from unity with God. Jesus prays "that they also may be in us" (17:21) and "I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one" (17:23). Union with Christ is a prerequisite of unity in the church. Knowledge of the truth and the gospel is as well: "The basis for His people's unity is to be the gospel of eternal life."²⁹ The request for unity is for those "who will believe in [Jesus] through [the disciples'] word" (17:20). Living at peace with "all men," as in those outside the church, should also be a pursuit (Rom 12:18), but it is not the barometer of the health of a church or the people of God. Churches and disciples alike can be rejected, persecuted, and hated. Jesus states earlier, "The world has hated them because they are not of this world" (17:14). The church should pursue oneness with God, knowledge of the

²⁷ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 844.

²⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 844.

²⁹ St. Helen's Church, Bishopsgate, *John* (Great Britain: Marshall Pickering, 1999), 205.

truth, and unity with one another for the glory of God.

What is the purpose of this unity for which Jesus prays? Tenney argues that this is an “underlying unity of a spiritual nature and of devotion which would enable His people to bear a convincing testimony before the world.”³⁰ It is a kind of unity and love that is reminiscent of the words of Christ recorded by the apostle earlier in John 13:35: “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” The unity and love of the people of God should be one of the primary means of witness to the people of the world. It is not merely conceptual, theoretical, or internal. Love and unity must be seen and expressed. A. B. Bruce explains that this unity must be “in some way made manifest. A unity which is not apparent can have no effect on the world.”³¹ Just as Jesus came into the world as a light and remained in perfect union with the Father and entirely separate from sin, the world, and the evil one (17:11, 15-16), so too should the follower of Jesus exemplify unity in such a way that it enhances their missional endeavors, which is Jesus’s third desire for His people.

A People Sent with the Truth

The mission of the people of God is to be sent into the world as ambassadors of light. Followers of Jesus are commissioned unto mission. Jesus prays, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world,” that the disciples’ testimony may result in the world believing and knowing the sent one (17:18, 21-23). Wright is correct here: “God’s mission to be known to the world dominates the thinking of the Son even as he engages in prayer with His Father.”³² On the Savior’s mind is most definitely the future salvation of those who do not yet know and believe. Jesus’s death, burial,

³⁰ Merrill C. Tenney, *John: The Gospel of Belief*, Eerdmans Classic Biblical Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 249.

³¹ A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971), 459.

³² Wright, *Mission of God*, 125.

resurrection, and ascension are all coming quickly, but all these miraculously take a kind of backseat to the “the joy that was set before” Jesus (Heb 12:2). Christ prayerfully anticipates the future work of His followers that will result in “the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). In speaking of Jesus’s prayer, George Eldon Ladd summarizes the Savior’s anticipation: “The disciples are to carry out a mission in the world that is nothing less than a continuation of Jesus’ mission.”³³ Craig Blomberg explains how this missional impact flows out of the aforementioned oneness in the body of Christ: “Unity is to produce a powerful evangelistic effect.”³⁴

Beyond just unity, Jesus prays for their holiness. His desire is that they be sanctified “in the truth” (17:17). Sanctification provides protection while being sent into the darkness of this world. F. F. Bruce writes, “Since they are to be sent into hostile territory, to reclaim it for its rightful owner, they must be given spiritual protection . . . this involves their consecration for the task now entrusted to them.”³⁵ This idea of being set-apart as “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20) and “citizens of heaven” (Phil 1:20-21) is integral to understanding the mission of the church. Jesus described this in the Sermon on the Mount, where in the face of persecution He commands the disciples to be “salt” and “light.” This is not merely gospel witness but holy gospel living: “that they may see your good works” (Matt 5:13-16). Bock concurs stating that Jesus’s request “to sanctify them in the truth . . . is a call to dedicate them to God’s service (see John 10:36; 17:19; Jer 1:5; Exod 28:41). They already are taken from the world, and now they need to be equipped for the sacred duty of mission. It is their work in the truth that will make this

³³ George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 263.

³⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels: An Introduction and Survey* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 165.

³⁵ F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 334.

possible.”³⁶

Indeed, a Christian’s life should be distinct but not separate in the sense of removal. Jesus prays, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world” (17:15). Hughes rightly assesses the desire of Christ here, “The Christian attitude toward the world should not be one of withdrawal. Christ does not ask that we be taken away.”³⁷ The people of God are a sent people; they imitate the Son by living in the world while not being of the world. Just as the Son lived perfectly amongst a sinful people in a dark world, so should the church and the followers of Christ exemplify oneness and holiness for the sake of mission. This idea is echoed in Jesus’s post-resurrection commissioning in John 20:21: “As the Father sent me, I am sending you.” Followers of Jesus are never more like their Savior than when they are living unified and holy lives of mission.

Missional Community in the Early Church (Acts 2:42-47)

Acts 2 moves the observer from an abstract idea of Christian unity to a concrete example of vibrant, Spirit-filled community. This passage follows the momentous occasion of Pentecost where the Holy Spirit indwells the people of God. Polhill points out that this text “comprises the first extensive ‘summary’ in Acts.”³⁸ This text unpacks the foundational practices of the redeemed and Spirit-empowered people of God. Here, Luke transitions to a new section of Acts that continues through chapter 6. In this portion of his narrative, Luke describes the dynamic church community in Jerusalem and its initial gospel fruitfulness and its internal and external threats.³⁹ This summary in

³⁶ Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture*, 523.

³⁷ Hughes, *John*, 400.

³⁸ John B. Polhill, *Acts: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 118.

³⁹ D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 182.

2:42-47 contends that the primary characteristics of a missional community are gospel-centeredness, gospel community, and gospel impact.

Gospel-Centered

From day one, the early church was a community that clung to words of good news. Peter's first act as an apostle directly after the birth of the church at Pentecost was to stand up and speak the Word of the God to the people of God by the power of the Spirit of God. This was not novel to the New Testament church but became a defining aspect of the community of saints. This good news of the Word of God became the substance of the devotion of the early church as they dedicated themselves to the "apostles' teaching" (Acts 2:42). Hughes rightly observes, "When the Spirit reigns, God's people *continually* devote themselves to the study of his Word."⁴⁰ The good news of Jesus, His resurrection, and His teachings was the gravity pulling the church together. The apostles' teaching "refers to a body of material considered authoritative because it was the message about Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed by accredited apostles."⁴¹ The words and teachings of the apostles were vital because they most closely represented the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This gospel-centeredness via focus on the Word of God was replete throughout Jesus's ministry and the ministry of the apostles in the early church. Jesus said, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matt 7:24). Paul exhorted the church at Corinth to build their community on Jesus, "for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). Paul then challenged Timothy, a young pastor whom he disciplined, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to

⁴⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1996), 48.

⁴¹ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, *New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 397.

faithful men, who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). Similarly, he called Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine” (Titus 2:1). Jude called the church to “contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). The Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ must be the foundation of the local church.

The gospel-centeredness of this infantile church went beyond its devotion to the apostles’ teaching. It exhibited itself in the regular rhythm of “breaking of bread and the prayers” (2:42). John Polhill argues that the term “breaking of bread” in this context, when “joined with fellowship, would likely carry the cultic sense of sharing a meal with the Lord, participating in the Lord’s Supper.”⁴² The Lord’s Supper is a gospel-centered event for the body of Christ. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). John Calvin agrees that this passage in Acts calls for these specific gospel-centered elements every time the church gathers: “Thus we ought always to provide that no meeting of the church is held without the word, prayer, the dispensation of the Supper, and alms.”⁴³ Whether it be through prayer (v. 42), communion (vv. 42, 46), generous giving (vv. 44-45), thanksgiving (v. 46), praise (v. 47), or the focus on the teachings of the apostles (v. 42), there is no doubt that the early church exhibited a gospel-centeredness in all its conduct, and the message of Jesus and its implications defined the early church’s identity and practice.

Gospel Community

The gospel-centeredness of the early church community was not only expressed in its spiritual practice and focus on the teaching of the Word of God but also through the vibrant community amongst the family of God. Kenneth Gangel suggests that

⁴² Polhill, *Acts*, 119.

⁴³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 929.

this passage should be understood as a description of the life of a “local congregation” of the church.⁴⁴ No word better summarizes this local congregation in Jerusalem than “communal.” They ate together (vv. 42, 46), they met together daily (v. 46), they “had all things in common” (v. 44), and they spent time in one another’s homes (v. 46). The Spirit of God through the gospel of God was creating a new community of God. Ladd rightly assesses, “One of the most striking elements in the life of the primitive churches was their sense of fellowship.” He continues, “The early Christians were conscious of being bound together because they were together bound to Christ.”⁴⁵ Their unity in Christ through the gospel created their communal life together as the church, the holy people of God.

The early church’s devotion to gospel teaching translated to gospel “fellowship” and sharing (v. 42). Kent Hughes observes, “This is the first occurrence of the word [fellowship or *koinonia*] in the New Testament. The root idea is ‘commonness’ or ‘commonality’ Every time this word is used in the New Testament, it denotes some kind of sharing.”⁴⁶ This unique kind of giving, sharing, and relationship was a marked uniqueness of this early church community. Verse 44 elaborates, “And all who believed were together and had all things in common.” “Together” here could be translated “with one accord” and expresses “unity of purpose.” Polhill comments that this “unity of the Christian community derives from and is guided by the gift of the Spirit that lies at the heart of its life together.”⁴⁷ Gospel-founded, Spirit-filled community is the mark of the true church. Jesus’s high priestly prayer was being answered, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us” (John 17:21). The community and unity of this new humanity set the church apart from the

⁴⁴ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, Holman New Testament Commentary 5 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 37.

⁴⁵ Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*, 387-88.

⁴⁶ Hughes, *Acts*, 48.

⁴⁷ Polhill, *Acts*, 121.

world around them, and this distinctiveness was not without effect.

Gospel Impact

When a church community embodies gospel-centeredness and vibrant community, there is always an effect. Jesus illustrates this reality in his discourse on the on the mount:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. (Matt 5:13-16)

The beauty of the New Testament as illustrated in Acts 2 is this command of Christ fulfilled. Their “light” was shining, the Jewish community could taste the “salt,” and their “good works” were drawing others to the gospel and to the “praising” of God. Polhill understands Luke’s intention here; he states that these “summaries present an ideal for the Christian community which it must always strive for, constantly return to, and discover anew if it is to have that unity of spirit and purpose essential for an effective witness.”⁴⁸ Notice in the text first that their impact was connected to the “wonders and signs” the apostles were doing. Clinton Arnold rightly explains, “These miracles contribute to the development of a climate of receptivity to the gospel message.”⁴⁹ The Christian community certainly had an effect, but the powerful movement of the Spirit through the apostles was also one of the primary reasons for evangelistic fruitfulness.

The early church’s impact also found them regularly having a presence in the public place: “And day by day, attending the temple together” (v. 46). The church is not meant to be quarantined off from the world, as was seen in Jesus’s prayer, “as you sent

⁴⁸ Polhill, *Acts*, 122.

⁴⁹ Clinton E. Arnold, ed., *Acts*, Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 22.

me into the world, so I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18). Missional living must involve a presence in the community; the temple served as a public place to represent this new covenant community. Notice that Luke also points out that this community of believers, because of their positive presence, had “favor with all the people” (v. 47). The inevitable result of such a catalytic missional presence in Jerusalem was an explosive, daily growth of new converts. Certain to give God the credit for any impact His people were having, Luke emphasizes that it was “the Lord” who added to their number (v. 47). This is always the case for the church: “It is the Lord himself who adds to his church.”⁵⁰ Gospel impact and missional fruitfulness are not things that can be manipulated. It is not something that the church can cause in and of itself. It is always the Spirit of God working in and through the people of God as they carry the gospel of hope into the world.

Acts 2 demonstrates a biblical precedent for life on life, life in community, and life on mission. The church was a radically transformed community because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This message of hope was at the heart of who they were and was the word they consistently proclaimed. This gospel was not just an idea or theological belief. The gospel by the power of the Spirit created a new humanity, a transformed community that lived in proximity and gave generously as any had need. This community kept the teachings of Jesus and the apostles front and center, and this transformed how they lived and fellowshiped together. All of these coalesced to allow them to have significant gospel impact.

Life in Community as Sanctified Service in the Body of Christ (Romans 12)

Acts 2 illustrates how gospel community and transformed lives in the local church precedes missional impact. Jesus alluded to this reality when He said, “By this all

⁵⁰ Barker, *NIV Bible Commentary*, 2:399.

people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). Missional fruitfulness follows communal faithfulness. In Romans 12, Paul describes communal faithfulness as an every-member functioning body that selflessly loves and serves one another in all circumstances. This changed community flows out of the truth of the gospel, which is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). It is only by living as this loving and unified community and using the varied gifts that God has endowed through His Spirit to serve one another that the church can be postured for maximum impact in the world for the glory of God.

Right Theology

The truth of the gospel transforms the person and by extension creates an impactful, loving community that demonstrates new life in Christ together. Romans 12 begins with the conjunction “therefore,” which points back to the theological basis that Paul has been constructing for the first eleven chapters of the epistle. Paul, as he often does in his letters, transitions from orthodoxy to orthopraxy, from right believing to right living. As Douglas Moo rightly states in reference to this passage, “the New Testament knows nothing about a theology that remains on the theoretical level. All theology, all teaching about God, has implications for life.”⁵¹ Paul’s “therefore” hearkens back to the saving and sanctifying work of God in the life of a sinner who is saved by grace through faith in Christ. This whole argument is summarized by Paul as “the mercies of God” (12:1). Christian community, service, and transformation must be founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Alva McClain rightly presumes, “Until sinners have experienced God’s mercies, you will get no place. The mercies of God are the basis of all living that is really holy.”⁵² Communal faithfulness in the body of Christ must be established by and rooted

⁵¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Encountering the Book of Romans: A Theological Survey*, Encountering Biblical Studies (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 176.

⁵² Alva J. McClain, *Romans: The Gospel of God’s Grace* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 207.

in the good news of Jesus.

Notice in these introductory verses that Paul follows this idea of being established in right theology and the mercies of God from the chapters that preceded with the concept of being “transformed by the renewal of your mind” (12:2). Transformation starts in the mind with truth. As Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). This is a personal and corporate transformation based upon the truth of God at work in the people of God. It also follows typical Pauline structure of “put off” and “put on.” The church is first commanded to “not be conformed to this world” (12:2). God desires that the church embody right theology and righteous living in the context of the world. This idea also connects to Jesus’s prayer in John 17, where Jesus prayed, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one” (John 17:15). It is not that the dynamic community of the church should be removed from its missional location, but rather that it should properly embody Christ in the world. Kent Hughes sees Jesus praying that His disciples be protected from the evil one as in direct correlation to Romans 12:1-2. He elaborates, “Christ prayed that we would succumb to neither isolation nor assimilation, though both temptations are great.”⁵³

In this regard, as Tenney argues, “Romans is a superb example of the integration of doctrine with missionary purpose.”⁵⁴ For Paul, mission begins with right doctrine and belief. Theology produces a catalytic missional presence through the people of God. Just as is seen in Jesus’s exhortation in Matthew 5 to “let your light shine . . . that they may see your good works,” Paul is about to unpack the good works that the transformed community of God should embody. Moo states rightly, “The person transformed by the renewing of the mind is able to discern and put into practice the will

⁵³ Hughes, *John*, 403.

⁵⁴ Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, 307.

of God.”⁵⁵ Paul lays out for the rest of his epistle to the Romans what the will of God is for His church. It cannot be ignored that the engine of living in this way in this world is the gospel and right theology. One cannot miss the inseparable nature of right theology and the righteous, selfless living that should be demonstrated in Christian community.

Members Function

Right theology expresses itself through humble service toward one another. This flows out of a Pauline theology of worship: “Present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (12:1). In a real sense, this is a priestly service that the body Christ, through the gifts of the Spirit, participates in. Calvin assesses, “Since we have been reconciled to God through Christ by His one true sacrifice, we are all by His grace made priests in order that we may dedicate ourselves and all we have to the glory of God.”⁵⁶ The child of God glorifies his Lord and Savior through reverential service in the body of Christ. Notice that humility is integral: “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think” (v. 3). One does not stoop to his knees with a towel until he embraces his kingdom identity as a servant of the King. Humility means embracing the unique role that God has intended for each person. “Each of us needs carefully to understand our role in the church and not to think more of ourselves than we should.”⁵⁷

This humble service produces unity. Martin Luther explains, “All this [Paul] writes in the interest of unity; for nothing is likely to cause so much division as when people do not stay within the proper bounds of their calling, but neglect their own

⁵⁵ Moo, *Book of Romans*, 178.

⁵⁶ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin’s Commentaries 8 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 264.

⁵⁷ Moo, *Book of Romans*, 178.

ministry and break in upon others.”⁵⁸ When every member is functioning according to their gifting in the body of Christ, it produces life and unity. Just as organs within the body together cooperate for the good of the whole, so do the individual members in the body of Christ when embracing and acting out their unique roles bring life for the whole church. This is a Christocentric service, though Christ is not here explicitly mentioned. Schreiner notes, “Paul often uses the image of the body without designating it specifically as the body of Christ (e.g., Rom 12:4; 1 Cor 12:13-17; Eph 3:6; 4:4, 16; Col 2:19; 3:15), though in context the relation to Christ is implicit or obvious.”⁵⁹ The highest imitation of the servant king is humble service as a unified body.

Unity in the body must appreciate the distinctive gifts the Holy Spirit gives, for “diversity, not uniformity, is the mark of God’s handiwork. It is so in nature; it is so in grace, too, and nowhere more so than in the Christian community. . . . Yet because and by means of that diversity, all can co-operate for the good of the whole.”⁶⁰ Healthy missional community mobilizes each member to function according to his or her own gifting. Too many churches have just the faithful few who do the majority of ministry, but Paul—here and elsewhere (1 Cor 12; Eph 4:11-16; 1 Pet 4:9-11)—makes a point to list varied gifts. He describes gifts that are public and gifts that are more private, spoken and unspoken gifts, gifts the church would normally all see, and gifts that would mostly be unseen. All the gifts are integral to the growth and edification of the body of Christ.

Selfless Love and Devotion

Immediately in the following verses, Paul exhorts the believers in the church of Rome to “let love be genuine” (12:9). This is not a novel idea. Love is always in the

⁵⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Epistle to Romans*, trans. J. Theodore Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976) 169.

⁵⁹ Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 573.

⁶⁰ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), 227.

context of spiritual gifts. First Corinthians 12 is followed by 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter. Before its admonition towards spiritual gifts in his first epistle, Peter commands the church to “above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Pet 4:8). Finally, Ephesians 4 describes the healthy, every-member functioning church as one which “makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:16). In a sense, love is at the heart of the spiritual gifts of the church. Spiritual gifts could be described as the language of love in the local church. When Jesus said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35), he likely had in mind the body using its varied gifts in humble service and loving devotion towards one another.

This familial bond should define the body of Christ. F. F. Bruce rightly assesses, “The church, Paul implies, is to be a kind of extended family, in which believers have natural affection for one another.”⁶¹ Serving one another becomes natural in a context where familial love is being poured out by the Holy Spirit in one another’s hearts. Indeed, “Paul expects the gospel to transform the way that we treat other people, both within and without the church.”⁶² The outworking of Paul’s theology of the gospel in Romans 1-11 is a transformed mind that results in transformed lives and a transformed community that seeks to love and serve one another. It begins with right doctrine but then expresses itself with humility and love as every member seeks to use their gifts for the good of the whole body, always with the goal of presenting oneself to God as a “spiritual act of worship” according to the “will of God” (Rom 12:1-2). Missional communities seek to deploy every member to their appropriate place of service for the glory of God.

⁶¹ Moo, *Book of Romans*, 180.

⁶² St. Helen’s Church, *Romans*, 232.

Conclusion

God's Word clarifies the Lord's will for His people. God desires His people to live missionally. This is not optional. The commission to mission begins at the moment of salvation, when a person submits in faith to the lordship and kingship of Jesus Christ. This salvation comes only through faith in Jesus Christ, for "there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The church, then, is first a gospel community. The gospel transforms the people of God into the body of Christ. In love and unity, they are one. This oneness displays itself in fellowship and sharing with one another. The body of Christ is full of members that function out of love according to their various giftings. This is the portrait of a missional community: lives changed by the gospel and empowered for the Spirit for mission. These "relationships that have been transformed in these ways by the gospel will inevitably attract some unbelievers."⁶³ Mission flows out of gospel transformation in the family of God, and gospel transformation produces missional fruitfulness. As Emil Brunner has famously written, "The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."⁶⁴ Biblically, these texts demonstrate the truth that the healthiest church is one that is composed of every-member functioning missional communities.

⁶³ St. Helen's Church, *Romans*, 233.

⁶⁴ Emil Brunner, *The Word and the World* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1931), 108.

CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL
ISSUES RELATED TO DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH
MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES

Introduction

Few would question the seismic shift in culture that the contemporary Christian is experiencing. From technology and communications to evolving cultural perceptions of the role of faith, spirituality, and truth, these are uncharted waters for many followers of Jesus in the twenty-first century. Scripture has not changed, and the ways or methods the Master uses to build His church have not changed. However, the Western church needs a reawakening to its “forgotten ways”¹ if it is to effectively meet the needs of the world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The thesis of this chapter is that, in light of the pressing need created by a post-Christian culture, the legacy and tradition of renewal through missional community in church history—especially in the ministry of John Wesley and the theoretical and practical work of present-day missiologists— demonstrate that forming missional community as a means of strengthening discipleship and mission is the most faithful and effective undertaking for the local church.

The church must form missional community in order to experience renewal. Richard Lovelace, an expert on renewal in church history, writes, “[A] major area of structural renewal needed within the local congregation is the formation and strengthening of nuclear subcommunities within the larger church community.”² Renewal

¹ Alan Hirsch has been one of the more prominent voices in favor of a revolution in ecclesiology, returning to a more organic and biblical form of church, community, and mission. See Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006).

² Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 225-26.

must start in the context of rich, relational, discipleship community that seeks to mobilize itself for the purpose of missional impact. The needs in the surrounding culture seem to be insurmountable, but the gospel message and the church that the gospel creates are more than capable to answer the missionary call of *this* generation—as consistently demonstrated in the past—by the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

The Need for Missional Community

Current trends in the West support the need for forming missional community as a means of spiritual renewal. There is an increasing need for missional community for discipleship in a post-Christian culture. Whereas for many generations in an American context, the church and Christianity were towards the center of culture, the West is waking up to a different set of circumstances. As David Kinnaman, president of the Barna Group, states, “Our contention is that today’s society is especially and insidiously faith repellent.”³ This is a new reality for most modern Christians. This shift is demonstrated perhaps most potently in the frequent narratives of prodigal sons and daughters who are not just wandering from the church and faith but who are completely, and often publicly, repudiating Christianity. Have things really changed? The data demonstrates that, sadly, they have.

Post-Christian Culture

The youngest generation in American culture is swimming in a completely new current of cultural ethos. James Emery White explains, “The most defining characteristic of Generation Z is that it is arguably the first generation in the West (certainly in the United States) that will have been raised in a post-Christian context. As a result, it is the first post-Christian generation.”⁴ There is a steady stream of young people moving into

³ David Kinnaman, Mark Matlock, and Aly Hawkins, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 15.

⁴ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-*

culture, workforce, and influence who have little or no Christian foundation for their lives or way of thinking. They think in entirely different categories, and Christianity is not in any way nostalgic to them; in fact, it is often completely foreign.

What does it mean to be post-Christian? It means that the building blocks of society and worldview that used to underpin much of thinking, culture, law, government, family, and society are being deconstructed. Post-Christian cultures often move from a Christendom existence, where the church is at the center of culture, to a non-Christendom reality, where the church is pushed to the margins. Stuart Murray is helpful here: “Post-Christendom is the culture that emerges as the Christian faith loses coherence within a society that has been definitively shaped by the Christian story and as the institutions that have been developed to express Christian convictions decline in influence.”⁵ This lost “coherence” contributes to difficulty in building bridges from the church to its host culture. A culture that had a primarily Christian basis has significantly shifted.

The “nones,” those who are religiously unaffiliated, have exploded onto the scene in American culture. This demographic of people has no membership in a religious organization or church and does not associate with one either. White is again informative: “The nones are no longer the second largest religious group in the United States; they are the largest. And they are still, by far, the fastest growing.”⁶ Religion and spirituality have taken a backseat in American culture. It used to be that there was a common language, morality, and basic Christian framework that most shared, even many of those outside the church. In this now past environment, Evangelism Explosion was effective. Asking people “Do you know for certain that when you die you will go to heaven?” and “What would you say, if God asked you, ‘Why should let you into my heaven?’” worked well as

Christian World (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 49.

⁵ Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom: Church and Mission in a Strange New World* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2004) 6.

⁶ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 22.

conversational tactics in evangelism.⁷ This is less commonly the case. The unreached person does not believe in hell or heaven, God, or the Bible as an authority for much of anything. In contrast, they are suspicious of the person who would even ask such questions! This is the new reality of a post-Christian culture.

Faith for Exiles

Considering this colossal shift in culture, how then should the church posture itself for maximum missional impact in the post-Christian world of the non-religious? Something must change. David Kinnaman suggests shifting to a relational approach:

We are at a critical point in the life of the North American church; the Christian community must rethink our efforts to make disciples. Many of the assumptions on which we have built our work with young people are rooted in modern, mechanistic, and mass production paradigms. Some (though not all) ministries have taken cues from the assembly line, doing everything possible to streamline the manufacture of shiny new Jesus-followers, fresh from the factory floor. But disciples cannot be mass-produced. Disciples are handmade, one relationship at a time.⁸

This is not a new idea; it is a very old idea. When one thinks back to the way of Jesus and the rhythms of the local church, those ways were less en masse and more individualized in smaller communities. Perhaps much of the modern rejection of Christianity is not just part of a systematic rejection of institutions in American culture but a restoration of biblical Christianity. Have the younger generations soured on a form of church that is less about Jesus and more about buildings, budgets, and big personalities? Additionally, the culture wars from the latter half of the twentieth century through today have presented a Christianity that is opposed to culture instead of a light in and for those in the culture. But there is such a thing as resilient discipleship even in this uncharted water for American Christianity.

Kinnaman is again helpful; the Barna Group identifies characteristics of

⁷ See D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1983).

⁸ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 12-13.

resilient disciples in the younger generation who are growing up amid what Kinnaman calls “digital Babylon.” Their research shows that they embrace missional living and community. He explains, “Countercultural mission is the outward-facing expression of all the other practices—what we do together as the body of Christ for the sake of the world. It is about the people of God resolving to be on mission together to influence the world toward God’s good, original intentions.”⁹ This missional, instead of oppositional or attractional, posture appeals to this younger generation of disciples who long to have an impact for the glory of God. As was seen in chapter 2 of this paper, there is strong biblical precedent for this idea of the people of God being “a sent people.” Forming missional community is essential in reaching this increasingly post-Christian context.

Kinnaman elsewhere comments on the state of the church that many of the next generation are leaving. In his book, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church, and Rethinking Faith*, he says “Compare the mentality of today’s Western church to Jesus’s work with his disciples, which was characterized by life-on-life mentoring and apprenticeship. Can we really conclude that by embracing an industrialized, more-is-better approach, we have improved on the Lord’s results?”¹⁰ There is much freedom within the pages of Scripture for how the church organizes itself, but this freedom does not include ignoring the clear and consistent exhortations to live missionally and be a part of a dynamic faith family. Could God be using this less comfortable environment to build resilience and form the bride of Christ into a purer expression of what the body is supposed to be? Could the discomfort that post-Christianity causes be the spark that lights the flame of gospel-centered community across the West?

There yet remains hope. Christ certainly promised that He will build His church (Matt 16:18), and perhaps this situation is leading the people of God into a place

⁹ Kinnaman, Matlock, and Hawkins, *Faith for Exiles*, 180.

¹⁰ Kinnaman and Hawkins, *You Lost Me*, 121.

of new desperation; in this place miraculous things can happen. In his seminal work on spiritual renewal, Richard Lovelace declares, “Redemption comes under the direction of leaders whom God raises up in his sovereign mercy in response to the deep longing and intercession of the laity generated under the pressure of defeat and suffering.”¹¹ This very well may be the case in the present circumstance. As the culture shifts away from some of its Judeo-Christian roots and the church struggles in this present day, perhaps it is time for another awakening of the church of Jesus Christ.

From Jesus to John Wesley

In the paragraphs that follow, it will be seen that missional community has always been God’s plan to revitalize His church. When the church identifies itself as a sent people of God and unites together in community, it is a powerful antidote to cultural rejection of the Christian message. The church was not planted in a friendly environment, and all light shines brightest in the darkness. Leveraging missional community for discipleship has been a primary key to spiritual renewal movements in the past. This will be especially seen through the ministry of John Wesley in the Great Awakening. Times change, but God’s ways do not. Ed Stetzer and David Putman state correctly, “Our churches need to decide whether they will be outposts of modernity in a new age or embrace the challenge of breaking a new cultural code.”¹² This paper contends that missional community is the code that will unleash impact in a post-Christian culture.

The Sent Church

As was seen in the earlier exegesis of selected passages (Matt 28; John 17; Acts 2), from the outset of the church, mission was part of its culture and mandated by

¹¹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 65.

¹² Ed Stetzer and David Putman, *Breaking the Missional Code: Your Church Can Become a Missionary in Your Community* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 8.

the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is a sent people. The whole book of Acts is a description of the expansion through the mission of the church. Jesus's promise in Acts 1:8, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth," finds much of its fulfillment in the book of Acts! This missional nature of the church as a sent community of God continues throughout church history as a constant characteristic of the people of God. In his work *Evangelism and the Early Church*, Michael Green describes the missional culture of the early church: "It was axiomatic that every Christian was called to be a witness to Christ, not only by life but by lip. Everyone was to be an apologist, at least to the extent of being ready to give a good account of the hope that was in them."¹³ The apostolic church understood that to be a follower of Jesus was to be sent.

Like a thread, this idea of missional community flows throughout church history. One need not spend more than a few minutes reading John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* to see the legacy and tradition of gospel proclamation at all costs in every corner of the historic church and in spite of intense opposition and persecution.¹⁴ The mission has continued and the church has flourished in spite of this opposition, as in the famous words of the church father Tertullian: "We multiply whenever we are mown down by you; the blood of Christians is seed."¹⁵ The missional church ebbed and flowed in different movements throughout history, but it has always been at the heart of biblical Christianity. In the Reformation, Martin Luther's translation of the Scriptures into the common tongue demonstrated a reawakening to the gospel need for everyday people. The Anabaptist movement also serves as a wonderful example. Timothy Beougher writes,

¹³ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 175.

¹⁴ See John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ed. Paul L. Maier and R. C. Linnenkugel, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2016).

¹⁵ Tertullian, *Apology: De Spectaculis*, trans. T. R. Glover, in *Apology. De Spectaculis. Minucius Felix: Octavius*, by Tertullian, Minucius Felix, trans. T. R. Glover and Gerald H. Rendall, Loeb Classical Library 250 (London: W. Heinemann, 1931), 227.

“The Great Commission was a central focus of the teaching of the Evangelical Anabaptists. They saw it as binding on every Christian. Lay-persons actively witnessed to others.”¹⁶ Throughout the centuries, missional community has been at the heart of what it means to be Christian. This has been one of the primary means God has used to revitalize His church, and this is seen beautifully in the life and ministry of John Wesley and his leadership in the first Great Awakening.

John Wesley on Missional Community

John Wesley stands out as a key leader in the history of the church who witnessed a spiritual awakening. He ministered heartily with an unmatched work ethic for his entire adult life. As Robert Tuttle observes, “He traveled some 250,000 miles throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, preaching some 40,000 sermons.”¹⁷ He left behind a movement that has grown a multitude of arms and legs in faith communities that bear the names Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, Christian Missionary Alliance, Pentecostal and more—all of which owe much of their heritage to John Wesley. Popular historical works, both secular and religious alike, would describe his work as indispensable to the Great Awakening, seeing John and his brother Charles as “powerful evangelists” and acknowledging their influence on the Great Awakening in Britain as well as America alongside “the greats,” George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.¹⁸ Since the Reformation, few names in the Christian world ring as loudly as John Wesley.

For Wesley, evangelism and discipleship were intertwined. His heart was greatly burdened by the dry condition of the Anglican Church, and he desired to awaken,

¹⁶ Timothy K. Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel with Compassion and Conviction*, Invitation to Theological Studies (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2021), 70.

¹⁷ Robert G. Tuttle Jr., “John Wesley,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), 1164.

¹⁸ Alan Brinkley, *The Unfinished Nation: A Concise History of the American People*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008), 84.

by the power of the Spirit and the preaching of the Word, a “heart religion” that influenced the affections. Much like the modern church, too many were just “Sunday Christians” who practiced the rhythms of religion out of habit and culture rather than a heart that had been transformed by the grace of God. The Moravian tradition, having impacted him early in his spiritual journey, perhaps influenced Wesley’s approach to community, as they organized a “breakdown of local congregational life in small group meetings.”¹⁹ Lovelace points out that at the heart of the First Great Awakening, especially in Britain, was a fellowship of believers. They saw genuine spiritual renewal through the age-old disciplines of preaching the sin of man and the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, worship through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and the organization of converts into discipleship community where life on life and decentralized shepherding could occur.

From the outset and throughout his ministry, Wesley sought to reform the Anglican Church through spiritual renewal in the lives of everyday Christians. Many see Wesley as the founder of Methodism and view him as a separatist, but this was not his intention. In fact, “historical circumstances and his organizational genius conspired against his desire to remain in the church of England.”²⁰ John Wesley and George Whitefield together set the pace for a new kind of ministry, and it was not long before “*Methodist* was a loose term for whoever preached in this new, earnest, Whitefield-and-Wesley way. Their message was salvation by grace through faith.”²¹ Wesley’s genius was in multiplying lay preachers who could continue this new work of evangelism and discipleship. He would raise up lay leaders, both men and women, to lead classes, “an

¹⁹ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 45.

²⁰ Mark Galli and Ted Olsen, eds., *131 Christians Everyone Should Know* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2000), 183.

²¹ Fred Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life: The Heart Renewed in Love* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 36.

intense small group (about ten or twelve people) that met weekly and emphasized mutual accountability for spiritual growth.”²² These classes were meant to enhance the weekly corporate assembly of the church, not in any way to replace them. Wesley flourished at organizing these groups as he was “highly successful as an organizer and planner.”²³

Wesley believed in the power of the Christian community to transform the follower of Jesus Christ. Michael Henderson reflects, “Wesley was convinced that learning is expedited by group interaction. . . . It seems that he responded to every instructional need he met by establishing a group.”²⁴ This is seen explicitly in Wesley’s sermons, in which he exhorts followers of Christ to reprove one another and join together for mutual edification and sanctification. In a sermon on reproofing one another, he says that if anyone has sinful faults, “we are to do all that in us lies to convince him of his fault, and lead him into the right way.”²⁵ John Wesley understood the power of decentralized care. He knew that everyday followers of Jesus needed to be in community with other believers under the shepherding of godly and mature spiritual leadership. Henderson elaborates, “Every Methodist was under someone else’s direct and immediate supervision. There was a constant emphasis on ‘bearing one another’s burdens,’ so that even the slightest affliction went unnoticed.”²⁶ Too often, local churches have several hundred members and only one or two paid pastors who are expected to shepherd the whole congregation. Wesley understood that raising up an army of under-shepherds would be the most effective method of making disciples.

As the old axiom goes, “Aim for nothing, hit it every time,” or one could say

²² Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life*, 40.

²³ Sanders, *Wesley on the Christian Life*, 41.

²⁴ D. Michael Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel, 1997), 132.

²⁵ John Wesley, *The Complete Sermons* (Charleston, SC: CreateSpace, 2013), 339.

²⁶ Henderson, *Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 144.

similarly, “You cannot expect what you do not inspect.” John Wesley understood the priority of having healthy systems to measure the effectiveness of missional community. Henderson observes this, saying, “The record-keeping process was an essential ingredient to the proper functioning of the group system, and Wesley kept it well-oiled.”²⁷ If the body of Christ is called to be a missional people living in community together, then pastors and leaders would do well to, like Wesley, monitor the health and regularity of expressions and actions that reflect these values. Is the group or community meeting regularly? Are their needs being met? Are the “one another’s” being practiced? Is the gospel being shared with and preached to non-believers? Is the Word of God being read? These are not the end, but a means to an end: gospel impact for the glory of God.

Wesley’s missional heart is vividly displayed in his many sermons. In speaking of new believers coming to understand the doctrines of sanctification and justification by faith alone, he says, “These great truths they declared on all occasions, in private and in public; having no design but to promote the glory of God, and no desire but to save souls from death.”²⁸ When Christians encounter the saving gospel of Jesus Christ, they seek to boldly declare it to everyone. One can hear this same yearning in Wesley and his concern for the accomplishment of the Great Commission when he speaks of the progress of global missions. He states, “The God of love will then prepare his messengers and make a way into the polar regions; into the deepest recesses of America, and into the interior parts of Africa; yea, into the heart of China and Japan.”²⁹ In these excerpts, one can quickly see Wesley’s heart for global missions.

This same missionary instinct displayed itself on a local level as well. In one sermon, Wesley rebukes those who would criticize the attempt to evangelize sinful

²⁷ Henderson, *Wesley’s Class Meeting*, 144.

²⁸ Wesley, *Complete Sermons*, 333.

²⁹ Wesley, *Complete Sermons*, 335.

people, specifically drunkards: “I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, do not despise poor drunkards! Have compassion on them! Be instant with them in season and out of season! Let not shame or fear of men prevent your pulling these brands out of the burning.”³⁰ Wesley’s heart is to pursue all men with the transformative gospel of Jesus Christ. Of the idea that a drunkard is a non-believer who is “too far gone,” he says, “He that tells thee there is no help is a liar from the beginning.”³¹ To not have a heart for the lost is to have the heart of the devil. For Wesley, the gospel is the power of God unto salvation for *all* who believe (Rom 1:16). Every follower of Jesus should proclaim the gospel and call people to repentance and faith. For Wesley, mission and community go together in the life of a disciple.

Renewal will start in the local church when followers of Jesus Christ are introduced into authentic biblical and missional community beyond just the corporate gathering. Increasingly in the twenty-first century, a large percentage of the budget and attention goes into the once-a-week worship experience. Much of a church’s funding goes towards the staff, facilities, marketing, technology, lighting, video content, and music to make this experience something “worth” returning to see next week. Wesley and the Methodists did not turn the British religious establishment upside down because they had the best sound system and light show in Anglican Church gatherings. Too much of twenty-first century American Christianity is building-centric, large-gathering focused, and entertainment-driven. The church would do well to return to these old, well-trodden paths again and perhaps by God’s grace then witness a movement of God like that in Wesley’s day.

³⁰ Wesley, *Complete Sermons*, 342.

³¹ Wesley, *Complete Sermons*, 342.

A Return to Renewal

Wesley's "heart religion" is not an original idea; it is merely a continuance of the evangelical renewal movements that have taken place since Pentecost. The Holy Spirit of God working through the truth of God in the people of God for the glory of God has always been God's plan for renewal in every generation of the church. To experience this, though, requires an adoption of mission and community as the way of life for the follower of Jesus. Wesley demonstrates how decentralizing these tasks of the church compounds growth. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, pastors with experience in post-Christian contexts in the United Kingdom, also argue for this kind of expression of the church:

We need to do mission outside church and church events. This is something we need to *recover* rather than *discover*, for the modern evangelical movement was born out of a recognition that the United Kingdom was not a Christian nation and that it needed to be evangelized outside of church buildings and services. George Whitefield and John Wesley preached the gospel in the open air because they were not welcome in church buildings and because the people they wanted to reach were not in the church.³²

Missional community does not abandon the preaching of the Word and the healthy functioning of the local church; it amplifies it. It unleashes the power of discipleship in the context of fellowship and raises up spiritual leadership that can take ownership of the task of shepherding others. There has been much effort in creating Christian cultures that believe the right things, but what about living out these same practices in everyday life in an increasingly post-Christian culture? In reflecting on the Nicene Creed and its contribution to evangelical faith and worship, David Nelson argues that God is most glorified where orthodoxy and orthopraxy meet. He writes that a Spirit-empowered renewal of the church would have a significant impact:

[It] would make much of Christ, since this is the mission of the Holy Spirit (John 16:14), and we would witness such a renewal in both doxology and evangelism. Likewise, such a renewal would be grounded in truth and would make truth known,

³² Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27.

since the Spirit is the Spirit of truth. And finally, a pneumatological renewal would promote the unity of the church (Eph. 4:3-6).³³

Nelson's point is that worship, evangelism, spiritual renewal, and unity all are fruits of the Spirit of God doing a powerful work in the church.

What does the divisiveness, lack of evangelism, and self-centered consumerism in the American church say about the lack of real spiritual renewal in contemporary Christianity? In contrast, when unity and purpose meet in the context of the body of Christ, there is a powerful effect. This renewal must have the Holy Spirit at its heart, for He is the one who brings forth unity in the body of Christ and empowers the church to be a witness throughout the world (Acts 1:8). This paper contends that the best model to create an environment for spiritual renewal in the local church is missional community.

Missional Community as a Contemporary Model

As stated earlier, a missional community is a family of missionary servants who make disciples who make disciples.³⁴ Missional communities are a group of individuals who covenant together around the gospel to see missional living not as an event but as a consistently practice of doing life in community, life on life, and life on mission. Life in community means that those individuals who have covenanted together do life outside of meeting times; they do everyday life together and seek to foster deep and real relationship. Life on life means that there is proximity in relationship and accountability for spiritual growth, and community members actively seek to serve one another using their spiritual gifts, seeking to love one another and bear one another's burdens. Lastly, life on mission means that the missional community embraces their

³³ David P. Nelson, "The Nicene Faith and Evangelical Worship," in *Evangelicals and Nicene Faith: Reclaiming the Apostolic Witness*, ed. Timothy George, Beeson Divinity Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 157.

³⁴ This definition originates with Jeff Vanderstelt, the visionary leader of Saturate and author of *Saturate: Being Disciples of Jesus in the Everyday Stuff of Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015).

identity as a sent people; they are not merely disciples and family, they are missionaries. By using this methodology, missional communities are one of the most effective tools for discipleship and mission in a post-Christian context.

Life in Community: Relational Fellowship as the Foundation

Missional community is powerful first because it transitions the work of evangelism in the local church from a programmatic, often impersonal, practice to a relational, familial rhythm. It shifts from a “come to us” focus to a “let’s go to them” mentality. It trusts that the lost are drawn to Christ by the loving fellowship of the saints lived out before them (John 13:35). John Stott argues that his kind of loving and dynamic fellowship, which seeks to serve and transform its community, has great influence for the kingdom:

Christ calls us to be the world’s salt and light, in order to hinder its social decay and illumine its darkness. But our light must shine and our salt must retain its saltness. It is when the new community is most obviously distinct from the world—in its values, standards and lifestyle—that it presents the world with a radically attractive alternative and so exercises its greatest influence for Christ.³⁵

Stott implicitly highlights the misdirection of much of the American church. On one side, there are evangelicals who seek to look and feel like the world to make the church and the gospel more palatable to the unchurched. Too often, these church communities distort or compromise the gospel by deemphasizing those beliefs or practices that might offend those in the world. On the other side, there are many Christian communities that build up a wall around their church. They build no bridges to their community, do not seek to meet the real needs of their neighborhoods, and stay away from sinners for fear of becoming “contaminated.” Neither of these approaches is God’s design for the church. The first compromises the distinctiveness of Christian community—the salt has lost its flavor. The

³⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Radical Disciple: Some Neglected Aspects of Our Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 49.

second keeps the salt and light away from the world and also is rendered without much use. Renewal requires that the church retain its holiness *and* embrace its mission.

Being truly missional means that the church must be “a community that does not live for itself but is deeply involved in the concerns of its neighborhood.”³⁶ The Christian community is not an end unto itself but must live out its identity as sent people. By divorcing the concepts of fellowship, discipleship, and evangelism, the modern church has inadvertently caused many Christians to “silo” areas of their spiritual life, most often to the detriment of all of the above. Fellowship and relationship are crucial, as will be demonstrated. Neither discipleship nor mission can be accomplished most effectively apart from relationship. Interestingly enough, invitation to community is especially compelling with the youngest generation. Even in the midst of the busyness and the white noise of technology, “the personal and relational cut through the noise of their lives.”³⁷ Missional communities meet the need that so many in contemporary culture have for a sense of belonging while also providing purpose that is greater than just the existence of the group or fellowship: the glory of God through the *missio Dei*.³⁸

Life in Community: Everyday Life Together

Missional community necessitates doing everyday life together in the context where God has planted that community. Just as Jesus did everyday life with his disciples, so should followers of Jesus come together in regular community around all of life. Alan Hirsch and Michael Frost assert the need to relocate the church’s presence “in the home and around the table. . . . The shared table is a powerful symbol of intimacy, generosity,

³⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 229.

³⁷ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 124.

³⁸ *Missio Dei* is Latin for “mission of God” and is a common theme in much of missional literature in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

and acceptance.”³⁹ Church buildings can be a great blessing, but they often foster a building-centric faith that encourages a sacred and secular divide. One begins to believe that discipleship happens at church building, not in the home, workplace, or community. Jesus, Paul, and the early church certainly visited the synagogue, but they also frequented streets, homes, marketplaces, and everywhere people spent time (Matt 5:1; Luke 7:7-23, Acts 2:46; 17:16-34; 20:7-12, etc.). Indeed, some of the most memorable sermons remembered from them were preached outside, on a road, or in the upper room of a home. Missional community encourages the Christian life to be lived with others in the presence in their locality.

There are many reasons why everyday community and mission go together so effectively. Mark Dever highlights one of these: “Our individual lives alone are not a sufficient witness. Our lives together as church communities are the confirming echo of our witness.”⁴⁰ How will people see the transformed community that the church is unless it is lived out before them. Francis Chan exhorts believers to embrace this same idea: “God cares about the way we love each other and the way we pursue His mission.”⁴¹ The two are inextricably linked. The world will see the true light of Jesus in the body of Christ.

Everyday life also counters one of the greatest woes found in American Christianity: hypocrisy. This accusation is both unfairly and fairly cast against the church almost constantly via social media, news networks, and shared personal stories and experiences. This ought not be so. It should be remembered that some of Jesus’s harshest words were reserved for the hypocritical religious people (e.g., Matt 23). Doing life

³⁹ Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st-Century Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 79.

⁴⁰ Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 147.

⁴¹ Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2012), 52.

together helps disciples of Jesus address their fellowship of Christ in real-time, just as Jesus did with His disciples. Vanderstelt is again helpful:

When you actually get out of the comfort of your Christian community and onto the streets of mission (in your neighborhood, at a café, in the park, or at a local high school), you will discover together where everyone still needs to be disciplined. The junk will come out, and then you will be able to disciple one another in the everyday stuff of life.⁴²

It is not about being perfect in the world for missional impact. It is about being authentic and real and allowing even that imperfection and slow transformation be something seen and understood by those who are far from Jesus. Doing life more regularly together fosters discipleship and transformation in the life of a disciple.

Life on Life: A Greenhouse for Spiritual Growth

George Barna, in looking at the state of discipleship in the American context, concludes that “few believers have relationships that hold them accountable for spiritual development” but “given the proper motivation, it seems that most believers would be willing to commit to a more demanding regimen of spiritual development.”⁴³ There is a great desire for spiritual growth but most churches lack a system for accountability for spiritual growth. The problem with all of the white noise in American Christianity (i.e., assimilation, Sunday schools, discipleship tracks, growth paths, technology tools, published devotionals, and discipleship materials) is that they ignore the reality that “a life-giving spirituality is something that can only happen within community.”⁴⁴ There are more tools for spiritual growth than ever before and yet many Christians are increasingly isolated and not growing spiritually.

⁴² Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 116.

⁴³ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples: New Strategies for Producing Genuine Followers of Christ*, Barna Reports for Highly Effective Churches (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2001), 54-55.

⁴⁴ J. R. Woodward, *Creating a Missional Culture: Equipping the Church for the Sake of the World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 152.

Indeed, “a healthy church is characterized by having members who are seriously concerned for their spiritual growth. In a healthy church, people want to get better at following Jesus Christ.”⁴⁵ Barna’s research demonstrates that many Christians do have this concern and desire to grow but lack the structure for growth. What is healthy growth? This depends completely on your definition of a disciple. Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, in their helpful resource on creating healthy communities or small groups in a local church, contend that “rather than a completed program or the acquisition of a skill, growth is a continual expression of love in our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with one another.”⁴⁶ The vertical relationship is on the forefront, but does the church fall short of proper relating to God because it has not structured itself in a way that allows intimate relationship with one another? Can you really love God if you do not love one another (1 John 4:20)?

Francis Chan hits the nail on the head: “While every individual needs to obey Jesus’s call to follow, we cannot follow Jesus as individuals. The proper context for every disciple maker is the church. It is impossible to make disciples aside from the church of Jesus Christ.”⁴⁷ The Christian life is not meant to be lived alone or in isolation. Sadly, with the majority of American Christians attending mega churches, the church experience feels largely isolating. The impersonal nature of church gatherings and worship experiences, in small and large churches alike, fails to create the community that is meant to be the spiritual growth greenhouse that God has designed. If intimate relationships and spiritual accountability are lacking, are disciples really being made? Mike Breen summarizes the problem well: “The destiny of the Church is directly tied to how passionate she remains to her mission. In past decades, our zeal to fulfill the Great

⁴⁵ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 210.

⁴⁶ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: Five Keys to Building a Thriving Small Group Culture*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2021), 48.

⁴⁷ Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 51.

Commission has often led to the great omission—we’ve made converts without making disciples fully trained and equipped in all Jesus taught.”⁴⁸ The church cannot make disciples apart from mission, and mission and real spiritual growth are not effectively accomplished without community.

Life on Life: An Engine for Service

Spiritual gifts are all fulfilled in the context of Christian community. One cannot show hospitality or generosity apart from relationship. As Frost and Hirsch assert, “worship and mission and the development of Christian community must inform each other closely and regularly.”⁴⁹ Lesslie Newbigin likewise states, “only when a congregation can accept and rejoice in the diversity of gifts, and when members can rejoice in gifts which others have been given, can the whole body function as Christ’s royal priesthood in the world.”⁵⁰ The whole body cannot be built up and the world will never be reached apart from an every member functioning church.

The sad reality is that in the majority of churches a small percentage of individuals do the majority of the work. The church is meant to be an organism in which all its parts serve their function by the Spirit. Organizing the body of Christ into family size communities enables this to be a reality. Many pastors will preach in front of hundreds or even thousands of church members, encouraging them to use their gifts and yet give no structure to practically use them on a regular basis apart from watching some children in the nursery and greeting at the door.

Spiritual gifts are meant to be part of the discipleship and missional process in the local church. The expired “come to us” mentality operates off of assumptions about

⁴⁸ Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture: How to Release a Missional Movement by Discipling People Like Jesus Did*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM, 2017), 105.

⁴⁹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 103.

⁵⁰ Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, 231.

people and culture that no longer hold true. Chester and Timmis are again helpful, “most of our current dominant models of church and evangelism are Christendom models. This needs to change as we move to a post-Christendom and post-Christian context.”⁵¹ The assumptions that a “Christendom” approach embraces no longer hold true. Most of the unchurched do not have a biblical worldview and do not trust the Bible and certainly not the church. The structures that held cultural Christianity in place are quickly crumbling. All the more, then, today it will require the whole body working together, using all of its gifts in ministry, to make fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.

Jeff Vanderstelt, a very effective pastor and missiologist in the pacific northwest, one of the most post-Christian regions in the United States, heartily agrees with the value of an every member sent and every member functioning church. He writes, “Every person in Christ’s body is meant to work this way. You are meant to play a part in equipping and encouraging others. God intends for all of us to actively engage in disciple-making in light of our unique design so that we both do the work and equip others to do it.”⁵² It is essential that the modern-day church remember that it is not the pastors and church staff who primarily do the ministry, but the whole membership of the church. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4, the role of spiritual leadership is rather “to equip the saints for the work of ministry” (Eph 4:12). Chester and Timmis say, “We need to recapture the sense that gospel ministry is not something done by pastors with the support of ordinary Christians but something done by ordinary Christians with the support of pastors.”⁵³ Missional community helps unleash the power of the Spirit of God working through the gifts given to the people of God.

⁵¹ Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 23.

⁵² Vanderstelt, *Saturate*, 116.

⁵³ Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 96.

Life on Mission

The greatest strength of a missional community is its focus on outreach and evangelism. A missional community finds its identity not just in growing to be more like Christ but in taking the message of Jesus to those who do not yet have it. Bill Hull, one of the premier thinkers and writers on discipleship in the local church, states, “Every small group needs a mission outside itself. . . . Without outreach, Bible study becomes academic, prayer turns stale, fellowship becomes superficial.”⁵⁴ Writing years before the missional movement in Christian literature and thought, Hull was ahead of his time. The church is a missionary organism just like God is a missionary God. In his classic work, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, Robert Coleman similarly says, “We have not been called to hold the fort, but to storm the heights.”⁵⁵ This is the heart of missional community: taking ground for Jesus Christ through the power of the gospel. It is the fulfillment of the Great Commission for the glory of God.

As to which has already been alluded, this idea is a culture shift in most local churches. There is a marked difference between a Christendom mentality and a missional mindset. It seeks to create missional rhythms, language, and culture not just start outreach programs. Frost and Hirsch summarize this shift:

The missional church is *incarnational*, not attractional, in its ecclesiology. By incarnational we mean it does not create sanctified spaces into which unbelievers must come to encounter the gospel. Rather, the missional church disassembles itself and seeps into the cracks and crevices of a society in order to be Christ to those who don’t yet know him.⁵⁶

Missional communities, as small groups of disciples with an outreach focus, are able to practice more flexibility and customize the mission to reach a particular neighborhood, people group, or network of relationships. This incarnational approach makes them far

⁵⁴ Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, Navigators Reference Library (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 235-36.

⁵⁵ Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1993), 87.

⁵⁶ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 25.

more effective at outreach than a typical church program or evangelism ministry that may only connect with a certain demographics of lost people. To facilitate missional community requires intense effort by church leaders in several key areas.

Creating a Missional Culture

The first task to create an authentically missional community or organization of missional communities in a local church is to seek to build a missional culture. Culture begins with leadership. Leaders must have a heart for the lost, prioritize missional living and share stories of their own evangelistic efforts in their personal context. Mike Breen shares this concern for leadership: “Many Christian leaders spend their entire lives within the confines of the church campus and wonder why they see little breakthrough in the area of evangelism. Leaders define culture and as such, your disciples and the Huddles they lead will imitate what you actually do, not necessarily what you teach.”⁵⁷ Pastors are shepherds and the sheep will generally follow their lead. As spiritual leadership in the church live missionally themselves it often becomes contagious.

Part of developing a missional culture is not just teaching church members to have evangelistic conversations, which will be touched on briefly in the next section, but it is helping them think and live with mission in mind. Chester and Timmis understand that “the bedrock of mission will be ordinary life.”⁵⁸ Living missionally is not about addition; it is not primarily adding more things to the schedule. Living missionally means leveraging the relationships and environments God has already provided to show and share Jesus. One of the most helpful tools for this is the B.L.E.S.S. acronym.⁵⁹ Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson unpack this concept in their book, which gives five regular

⁵⁷ Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 112.

⁵⁸ Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 28.

⁵⁹ See Dave Ferguson and Jon Ferguson, *B.L.E.S.S.: 5 Everyday Ways to Love Your Neighbor and Change the World* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021).

rhythms that every believer should practice to live missionally: be in prayer, listen to non-believers, eat a meal with someone far from Jesus, serve by meeting practical needs of lost people, and share your own and Jesus's Story. Sam Chan is also helpful in this regard. He suggests six strategies that enable the believer to tell his or her friends about Jesus. He presents them as follows: "(1) Get our friends to become their friends; (2) go to their things before they come to our things; (3) invite them for coffee, then dinner, then talk about the gospel; (4) listen to their story as story; (5) tell our story as story; and (6) tell a story about Jesus."⁶⁰ There are many similar tools like both of these methods which are reminiscent of "relational evangelism" or a "lifestyle approach."⁶¹ The goal is simply helping followers of Jesus develop habits that will bear gospel fruit.

What this paper contends, though, is that in order to see transformation in a post-Christian context, it will require more "going" than inviting lost people to "come." To go effectively "we need to connect the gospel with the specifics of people's lives rather than, or as well as, starting with the big metaphysical questions."⁶² This normally requires some proximity to the person with whom the believer is sharing. This also means, that *who* the believer is matters very much. Beougher, in his helpful work on evangelism, presents a biblical approach to evangelism that is urgent, sensitive, and with integrity.⁶³ This balanced approach is helpful. Churches must help their membership realize that the task of evangelism and the call to missional living is serious and pressing, but we must also be cognizant of the culture in which we have been planted, being sensitive to our context, and act in a moral character that reflects Jesus, never separating the messenger from the message. A missional Christian realizes that there is no

⁶⁰ Sam Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World: How to Make the Unbelievable News about Jesus More Believable* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 61.

⁶¹ See Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 171-76.

⁶² Chester and Timmis, *Everyday Church*, 122.

⁶³ Beougher, *Invitation to Evangelism*, 176-78.

distinction between sacred and secular. Wherever the believer goes, he or she is to be an “aroma of Christ” (2 Cor 2:15). The message of the gospel of Jesus Christ should be strongly confirmed by *how* the individual lives and speaks in the community in which he or she has been planted to have an impact. A missional culture helps church members realize that all of life is a mission field, and you cannot separate the message from the missionary.

Cultivating Gospel Fluency

As was already established, the cultural moment in which the church now resides is radically different than it was even one generation ago. This necessitates a change in how the gospel is framed when presented. In this culture, what David Kinnaman calls “digital Babylon,” “the Bible is one of many voices that interpret human experience; it is no longer viewed as the central authority over people and society.”⁶⁴ The statement, “because the Bible says so,” does not hold the same weight as it did a few decades ago. As White has stated, “it is as if we have moved from an Acts 2 cultural context to an Acts 17 cultural context.”⁶⁵ Paul adapted how he shared the gospel in Athens, in Acts 17, by finding common ground with the religious pagans. Paul saw the idol to “the unknown god” and leveraged this, an argument from creation, and even words from their own philosophers to create evangelistic bridges to the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Sam Chan has said, “I believe that every cultural storyline has elements that can be entered because of God’s common grace and general revelation.”⁶⁶ Gospel fluency means training church members to have a cultural awareness and to be learners of their context so that they know how to speak the truth of a gospel in a way that it can invite a winsome hearing.

⁶⁴ Kinnaman and Matlock, *Faith for Exiles*, 21.

⁶⁵ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 110.

⁶⁶ Chan, *Evangelism in a Skeptical World*, 168.

There is perhaps no greater example of this than in the life and conversion of Rosaria Butterfield. Butterfield was a tenured professor of English and women's studies at Syracuse University living as a lesbian and completely non-religious but then she met a pastor, Ken, doing research for one of her projects. This led to a dinner invitation to Ken's home with his wife, Floy. Her reflections on that first dinner with the couple are powerful:

Ken and Floy did something at the meal that has a long Christian history but has been functionally lost in too many Christian homes. Ken and Floy invited a stranger in—not to scapegoat me, but to listen and to learn and to dialogue. Ken and Floy have a vulnerable and transparent faith. We didn't debate worldview; we talked about our personal truth and about what "made us tick." Ken and Floy didn't identify with me. They listened to me and identified with Christ. They were willing to walk the long journey to me in Christian compassion. During our meal, they did not share the gospel with me. After our meal, they did not invite me to church. Because of these glaring omissions to the Christian script as I had come to know it, when the evening ended and Pastor Ken said he wanted to stay in touch, I knew that it was truly safe to accept his open hand.⁶⁷

Rosaria, Pastor Ken, and Floy continued to meet for two years studying God's Word and the claims of Jesus. Suffice it to say, she converted, giving her life to Jesus, and is now in a Christian marriage and boldly sharing her story of the gospel's transforming power. "They listened to me and identified with Christ," she writes.⁶⁸ Too many Christians pivot too quickly to arguing or lecturing when sometimes it is best to listen, learn, and love. The gospel message and the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ alone by faith must be shared, but gospel fluency entails the words used and the heart behind those words.

Preparation for Rejection

Lastly, to be on mission together in missional community, followers of Jesus must be prepared for suffering and rejection. One of the greatest missteps of much of the modern missional movement is the assumption that, when the gospel is proclaimed

⁶⁷ Rosaria Champagne Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert: An English Professor's Journey into Christian Faith* (Pittsburgh, PA: Crown & Covenant, 2012), 11.

⁶⁸ Butterfield, *Secret Thoughts*, 11.

“properly” in a host culture, it will be appreciated and welcomed. Contextualization is important, but it certainly does not guarantee acceptance, and may invite outright rejection. As Jesus said, “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Paul said similarly, “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). But it will be worth it. John Piper, in advocating for the importance of the missionary call on the true disciple of Jesus, exhorts the Christian hedonist with these words,

I appeal to you to count all things as rubbish for the surpassing value of standing in service of the King of kings. I appeal to you to take off your store-bought rags and put on the garments of God’s ambassadors. I promise you persecutions and privations—but “remember the joy”! “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10).⁶⁹

The call to live on mission is one of the greatest adventures on which the follower of Jesus can embark. There is and will be suffering in this broken world filled with unbelief, but there is also reward and every Christian has a living hope. As has been rightly said, “When I am in the cellar of affliction, I look for the Lord’s choicest wines.”⁷⁰ To truly follow Jesus on mission, the disciple must be prepared to suffer.

Conclusion

It has been seen that the context in which the Western church now ministers has dramatically shifted. No longer do most neighbors and coworkers share some semblance of a Christian worldview, and, increasingly, they will see the Christian faith as a threat. The church need not fear, though, as it founds its birth and inception on the margins of culture and society and yet they “turned the world upside down” (Acts 17:6). This too can be the destiny of the American church if it embraces missional community.

⁶⁹ John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2003), 251.

⁷⁰ This quote is often attributed to Samuel Rutherford. See “Samuel Rutherford (1600-1661),” *A Puritan’s Mind*, <https://www.apuritansmind.com/puritan-favorites/samuel-rutherford/>.

Frost and Hirsch are right to conclude that “a missional church is the hope of the post-Christendom era.”⁷¹ The light still shines brighter than the darkness, and the church needs to fearlessly take up the light of Christ again and let it shine in every neighborhood, school, workplace, community, and church.

It has been shown that God’s plan for spiritual renewal and the life of the disciple has always been missional community. From the apostolic church to the early church fathers, and then especially in the ministry of John Wesley, God’s plan for church revitalization is gospel community and gospel mission. Wesley modeled the importance of moving every disciple of Jesus Christ into a community where he or she could be shepherded, be held spiritually accountable, and be mobilized for witness. Wesley understood that missional community needed to be part of the very structure of the church if it was to be returned to health. Robert Coleman is right: “Unless the personal mission of the Master is vitally incorporated into the policy and fabric of all these plans, the church cannot function as she should.”⁷²

Lastly, missional community was presented as the best and most effective method for accomplishing life in community, life on life, and life on mission. By organizing the body of Christ into groups where they can be known and shepherded, the church will move towards greater health. Missional community allows the body to experience spiritual growth, accountability, and relational intimacy and it postures every believer for missional living in their context. The mission of Jesus, accomplished through the body of Christ, is of utmost importance. It is absolutely essential that church leaders and pastors seek to lead their churches towards greater purity of doctrine and practice, and especially a vibrant missional culture. Mark Dever has said, “The call to evangelism is a call to turn our lives outward—from focusing on ourselves and our needs to focusing

⁷¹ Frost and Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come*, 33.

⁷² Coleman, *Master Plan of Evangelism*, 97.

on God and the world that he has made.”⁷³ The church can and must mobilize its members for mission, and disciples are not being made unless they are really and truly living missionally. Missional community is the most effective means to move towards healthier discipleship, evangelism, fellowship, and renewal in the local church for the glory of God and the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

⁷³ Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 140.

CHAPTER 4
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

“Ministry is never done.” These were wise words shared with me by a mentor early on in ministry, and I have clung to these words when the to-do list seems insurmountable and the needs are greater than my capacity. This phrase is not meant to be defeating but rather an encouragement in the midst of feeling overwhelmed. All one can do as a shepherd and leader in Christ’s church is seek to serve faithfully and wisely today. Though the needs of Berean Baptist Church may be great, and the discipleship and missional focus at times lacking, this project seeks to turn one page, or perhaps even a few pages in writing a story that causes this local church to be more fruitful and glorifying to God.

In order to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio, this project sought to implement missional communities as the primary strategy for spiritual growth for members and attenders. It accomplished this by first defining a clear and concise assimilation plan that will move people from casual attender to committed and functioning member. This project assesses the current culture at Berean and then will seek to start building a healthier culture of missional community and discipleship through a leadership training class. The assimilation plan, the curriculum for the leadership training, and the process to evaluate each of these facets will be presented in the following pages. To borrow some other often spoken words of wisdom, “How does one eat an elephant? One bite at a time.” Or, to borrow a word that relates to assimilation, one step at a time. This is where this project begins.

Step 1: Define a Clear and Concise Assimilation Plan

It was identified that one of the greatest challenges to moving members and attenders at Berean Baptist Church into a healthy missional community where they could grow spiritually was the lack of clarity in an assimilation process. This weakness was addressed by developing a clear and concise assimilation plan that would help unify staff and leadership around one system or process as well as provide easy-to-follow steps for every guest, attender, and member. The purpose was to help every believer to take practical steps toward Jesus through the church.

Inspecting Current Adult Ministry

To move towards a more functional and faithful reality first required an understanding of what has existed and why. Several realities about assimilation at Berean were observed through countless conversations with current group leaders, teachers, staff members, and attenders. First, Berean has a plethora of ministries, discipleship opportunities, and programs that seek to make disciples. As stated in the introduction, this complexity at times inhibited the goal of connecting members and attenders to missional communities where they could grow as disciples. Additionally, the lack of simplicity in this regard made it difficult for those who were not yet connected to discern their first step. Many are very involved in the ministries of the church but not experiencing every facet of healthy missional community. For instance, a person might be serving in multiple areas in the church but not experiencing a sense of family, life in community, or life on mission outside the church. Conversely, a person might be very connected and learning in many community and discipleship environments but not active in service. It was determined that an assimilation plan must paint a picture of healthy rhythms in the life of a disciple, inviting people not just to *do* more but to *live* more balanced lives of missional community. This led to creating an accessible and easy-to-understand definition of a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Definition of a Disciple

After much discussion and conversation with staff and leadership at Berean, the following definition of a disciple was developed: “A disciple is a devoted follower of Jesus Christ who is growing, gathering, and going.” These three behaviors—growing, gathering, and going—flowed out of the study of missional community in chapter 3. In the context of the local church, these three are best accomplished through life on life, life in community, and life on mission. Growing involves strengthening one’s relationship with God and becoming more like Jesus. In the church, followers of Jesus draw near to God in corporate worship, the ministry of the Word, and spiritual accountability (life on life). These rhythms help the believer *grow* as a disciple of Jesus. *Gathering* involves the fellowship of the church. This is where the family of God is embodied. It involves sharing life together and using one’s gifts as members of one body for the edification of the church. Lastly, *going* involves living as an ambassador of Christ, seeking to fulfill the Great Commission wherever God has sent you. This definition now allowed for a metric for health in the life of a believer and directed the primary pillars of the assimilation plan.

Developing the Assimilation Plan

The assimilation plan revolves around moving every attender and member into four rhythms where they can live out the balanced life of a disciple.¹ These four rhythms are: “attend a gathering,” “join a group,” “serve in the church,” and “go as the church.” These are preceded by an initial step: “connect with us.” “Connect with us” involves the step in the process where a newer person begins a relationship with the church. It could involve introducing that person to Jesus, meeting with them or calling them to become more acquainted, answer any questions they may have, and then hopefully invite them to attend a corporate worship gathering.

Attending a gathering involves being part of weekly worship services at

¹ See appendix 4 to view the Assimilation Plan.

Berean. The purpose of these gatherings is to glorify God through the practice of the ordinances, praise and worship, and the ministry of the Word. The rhythms of body life practiced here are integral to health in the life of a believer and the church. Berean is a larger church, though, so one could attend gatherings and not experience the fellowship of the saints as God desires; hence the need for missional community in groups. It is regularly stated from the pulpit that “God does not just want you to sit in a row, He wants you to be part of a circle.” On a regular basis, attenders of the corporate gathering are invited to connect on a deeper level by visiting the connection center and attending a connection lunch and a next steps class. The expected outcome from these touchpoints is that they lead to mere attenders taking the second step in assimilating: joining a group.

Joining a group involves becoming part of an ongoing missional community where life on life, life in community, and life on mission occur. Groups vary in terms of form, content, and meeting place, but all groups are led by deacon-qualified leaders who are passionate about discipleship. One tool that was launched in the process of this assimilation process was the Berean Group Finder. This tool is available on the church’s website² and allows members and attenders to view groups and filter for preferences such as meeting day and time, demographics, and discipleship focus. Once in a group, leaders should seek to equip and deploy group members for service both in the group and the church. This leads to the third key rhythm in the assimilation plan: serving in the church.

The healthiest church is an every-member-functioning church. As has been said, too often, the majority of followers of Jesus in a local church are just an audience or passive observers when God’s design is that they be functioning participants. It may be that a Christian’s primary service is in his or her group as a leader or host, but one of the most effective means of deploying the people of God is establishing teams that help provide structure to service in the local church. This step in the assimilation plan helps

² <https://bereanfamily.com/groupfinder/>.

members discover their gifts and deploys them for active service in the body of Christ. This leads to the last step in the plan: the service and impact of the Body of Christ must not stay within the four walls of a church building or allow for a closed-family mentality—the church is called to go.

The final rhythm in the assimilation plan is to call attenders and members to go to the world as a missional force. Just as service can be effectively accomplished in the context of a missional community, so is mission most effectively accomplished in the context of a group where fellowship is already established. This step in the plan, though, allows for other ways to be equipped for mission and engage in outreach. This might occur through taking a growth class on evangelism or apologetics, or serving with one of the church's local partners who specialize in outreach (e.g., such ministries in Berean's context are Child Evangelism Fellowship, LifeWise Academy, or Love I.N.C.). Going as the church could even involve volunteering at an outreach or community service event or mission trip or even coaching a sports team in a local public school or rec league. Regardless, a disciple is not healthy until he or she has joined God on mission as an ambassador of Christ.

The Assimilation Plan and a New Website

The completion of this goal in the fall of 2023 was timely as this coincided with the launch of a new church website. As the communication team discussed how to lay out and organize the website pages, the assimilation plan played an integral part and is represented especially on the Adult Ministry Webpage.³ A website is designed to both communicate with members and cast vision and give information to guests. From first actions like contacting the church, asking for prayer, or finding and joining a group, the new website fully implements the assimilation plan on a digital platform.

³ <https://bereanfamily.com/ministries/adults/>.

Evaluating the Assimilation Plan

Having defined a clear and concise assimilation plan that seeks to move attenders and members into missional community, evaluation was the next step. A panel of pastoral staff and leadership at Berean Baptist Church utilized the Assimilation Plan Rubric (APR) to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, and action steps.⁴ These individuals were given the assimilation plan and given adequate time to review and ask questions and then evaluate the plan. The results of the APR from the evaluators are discussed in chapter 5.

Step 2: Assessing Current Discipleship Culture

The second step was to assess the current discipleship and missional community culture at Berean Baptist Church. This was accomplished by administering the Missional Community and Discipleship Inventory to eleven community leaders, including Sunday school teachers, group leaders, and leaders.⁵ This test was administered with the leadership training class on the first day of meeting before any of the content was delivered on Sunday, August 6, 2023. The inventory was adjusted beforehand to better complement the content of the training but still gave a holistic picture of discipleship and missional living at Berean. The survey consisted of thirty-six items and assessed the current discipleship and missional community culture concerning four primary areas: Life on Life, Life in Community, Life on Mission, and Leadership and Shepherding.

Step 3: Developing Training Curriculum

One can change the culture of a church or organization first by investing in the leadership. For this reason, it was determined that strengthening discipleship at Berean

⁴ See appendix 1.

⁵ See appendix 2.

would best be accomplished through equipping and training various leaders who already have influence in the church and the ability to help change the culture and lead groups toward being missional communities. Targeting leaders for this training allowed it to maintain an equipping focus that was highly applicable and could be implemented immediately. To accomplish the task of training leaders of missional communities, an eight-part leadership training curriculum was developed from April through July of 2023 and then implemented in August of the same year.

Curriculum Summary

The leadership training curriculum walked through the three primary facets of healthy discipleship and missional community: life on life, life in community, and life on mission. The curriculum was titled “Strengthening Discipleship through Missional Community: Group Leader Training.” In addition to primary Scriptures, the curriculum used *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis as a textbook, with assigned readings to complete for each session.⁶ This book was selected because it best complemented the overall content of the curriculum and—having been written from a primarily post-Christian cultural context in the United Kingdom—served as a helpful primer on missional living for the leaders in the class. This book, along with accompanying Scripture, was designed to help create an environment of growth and learning during the self-study portions of the curriculum. The curriculum consisted of eight sessions, which are summarized below.

Session 1

In session 1, the curriculum introduces the definition of a disciple as one who is “called to be a devoted follower of Jesus who is growing, gathering, and going.”

⁶ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 27.

Matthew 28:18-20 is considered in depth to demonstrate that “making disciples” is the primary function of a healthy church. To accomplish this mission, missional community is required. The increasingly post-Christian context in American culture demands a missional posture that involves “going.” This new reality, often referred to as post-Christendom, where Christianity and the church have been pushed to the margins, is presented. This first session demonstrates how a healthy missional community makes disciples through three rhythms. First, it helps members grow in Christ through life on life and spiritual accountability. Second, it unites members as they gather with the body through life in community. Last, it deploys members to go to the lost through life on mission. All three rhythms are essential to make healthy disciples living in missional community.

Session 2

Session 2 is the first self-study portion of the curriculum and involves reading the first two chapters of the companion book, *Everyday Church*. This is followed by reading through all the “one another’s” in the New Testament, using a list included in the booklet, and reflecting on what healthy life in community should look like in the body of Christ. This reflection involves personal exegesis of at least three “one another” Scripture passages. The emphasis on these Scripture passages in the self-study prepares the student for session 3, which looks more deeply into life in community.

Session 3

Session 3 begins with a review of the first two sessions and invites discussion and time for questions thus far. It also affords students the opportunity to share their observations regarding their self-study on their chosen one another’s. This provides a foundation for the main idea of session 3: that life in community means relating to one another as a family. Healthy missional community embodies a kind of family life. The primary text explored in this session is Acts 2:42-47. There is perhaps no example of a

biblical text that better exhibits a healthy family life with deep spiritual fellowship and sharing and providing for one another. Characteristics of a healthy family are presented, including communication, loving care, sharing time and space, a mutual commitment to one another, hospitality, celebrating, and eating together. These and other rhythms in a healthy family could be summarized in three words: unity, love, and service.

Session 4

Session 4 is the second self-study portion of the curriculum and begins with reading chapter 3 of the companion book, *Everyday Church*. This is followed by looking at the element of service that should be expressed in life in community by reading through a comprehensive spiritual gifts list and applicable passages of Scripture. Students are challenged to reflect on their own giftings, consult with those close to them, and imagine how spiritual gifts are best expressed in a missional community. Lastly, students receive a website link to an introductory video of the life and ministry of John Wesley and are given a handout describing his “small group rules” for his class meetings, which were instrumental in helping build systems for discipleship that helped facilitate the First Great Awakening in England. The reflection on Wesley’s high standard of spiritual accountability within these class meetings prepares the student for session 5, which looks more deeply into life on life, or the art of spiritual accountability.

Session 5

Session 5 begins with a review of the previous sessions and invites discussion around some of the reading in *Everyday Church*. The emphasis thereafter is on life on life, which is defined as followers of Jesus willingly submitting themselves to community and spiritual accountability from other believers for the sake of growth into Christlikeness of Jesus. The primary text explored in this session is Ephesians 4:1-16. This passage describes the reality that every member has a part in the “building up of the body of Christ,” and “when each part is working properly,” it “makes the body grow”

(Eph 4:11, 16). Every member has a part in the spiritual growth of other believers; this is life on life.

Session 6

Session 6 is the third self-study portion of the curriculum and requires the reading of chapters 4 and 5 of the companion book, *Everyday Church*. This is followed by putting into practice the life on life idea in the student's own life. Students will articulate five to ten accountability questions that they will share with one or two accountability partners, submitting themselves to the spiritual shepherding of others. They will also choose and list their accountability partners. The last component of this session is to watch a video describing the B.L.E.S.S. acronym, take notes, and reflect on this method of missional living. This last section prepares the student for the final element of a healthy missional community, life on mission, which is discussed in session 7.

Session 7

Session 7 begins with a brief review of all previous sessions and paints a picture of spiritual growth using a spiritual growth plan. The curriculum presents a template for a spiritual growth plan that includes goal setting in all three critical areas of discipleship: growing in Christ, gathering in community, and going to the lost. This will encompass the primary work of self-study in session 8. The remainder of session 7 is divided into two parts: life on mission and spiritual multiplication. In the life on mission portion, the B.L.E.S.S. acronym from session 6 is reviewed along with several passages of Scripture emphasizing these elements of missional living. Life on mission also encompasses gospel fluency, being able to articulate the good news of Jesus in a post-Christian culture, and some strategies for sharing Jesus are discussed. This is followed by the final section of session 7, in which the concept of spiritual succession is discussed. The primary text explored in this section is 2 Timothy 2:2. Students are challenged to

make disciples who can make disciples; this is God’s plan for fulfilling the Great Commission.

Session 8

Session 8 is the final self-study portion of the curriculum. Students will finish reading the companion book *Everyday Church* and reflect on what they have learned in it and throughout the class. Each student will then complete the spiritual growth plan, which helps students set goals related to the training course’s content and share these with their accountability partner(s). Lastly, students are challenged to take this curriculum and go through it with someone they are discipling or with a group or class they are leading.

Curriculum Evaluation

Having successfully written and developed this leadership training curriculum, evaluation of the curriculum content was the next step. A panel of pastoral staff and leadership at Berean Baptist Church utilized the Curriculum Evaluation Tool to evaluate the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the curriculum.⁷ The evaluators also provided some encouraging qualitative feedback via comments. The results of this evaluation are provided and reviewed in chapter 5 and in appendix 8.

Step 4: Curriculum Implementation

Having successfully developed the leadership training curriculum, the next step was to implement this curriculum with a select group of leaders at Berean Baptist Church with the goal of increasing understanding of the biblical foundation for the Christian life and its expression in missional living and missional community. The dates chosen for this leadership training class were August 6 to August 27, 2023.

⁷ See appendix 3.

Class Recruitment

In July 2023, I reached out to several key staff ministry leaders and group leaders via text message and e-mail and invited them to the leadership training class. I recruited a diversity of leaders. Some had decades of experience shepherding groups at Berean, a few others even had vocational ministry experience, and there were several young adults who were involved in leading a young adult community in our church and on a local campus. In summary, fifteen participants joined the class, but only eleven completed both the pre-training and post-training surveys.

Curriculum Delivery

Classes were held in a classroom at Berean on Sundays at 9:15 a.m. throughout August 2023. The class had about ninety minutes in which it could meet. As mentioned, on the first day of class, before any content was delivered, I administered a pre-training survey to the class using the MCDI. This pre-training survey served as a baseline for later comparison to the post-training survey, which helped me determine the learning and growth of those who received the training. Throughout the training, I gave students handouts that included notes for each session as well as the homework and content needed for the self-study sessions that were designed to be completed throughout the week. I also gave students a copy of *Everyday Church: Gospel Communities on Mission* by Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, a book that paired well with the class content.

Each class consisted of approximately 60 percent lecture based on the notes and 40 percent discussion, in which participants shared what they were learning from the reading and their past/present experience in discipleship and missional community. The discussion was lively; everyone in the case was engaged and excited to explore how to better make disciples at Berean. The ninety minutes flew by! Almost every participant attended every week, but there were a few conflicts that necessitated individuals occasionally missing a class. Those who missed a class were still given the notes from the missed session, and they committed to do the homework and self-study sessions outside

of class.

Post-training Assessment

At the conclusion of the leadership training class, I re-administered the MCDI, and eleven participants completed this post-training assessment. Having met the minimum of ten leaders taking the MCDI, the next step was to determine how much the participants learned about discipleship and the practice of missional community by comparing their post-training scores on the MCDI to their pre-training scores. A primary goal of the training was to increase the participants' understanding of the biblical foundation for discipleship and its expression in missional community. After gathering and logging the results, I used a t-test for dependent samples to demonstrate a positive, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-training scores. I also compared the four primary sections to see what facet of missional community was most affected by the curriculum. Lastly, I calculated a standard deviation to determine if any survey items lacked strength in yielding accurate results. The results from both MCDI Assessments can be observed in appendices 6 and 7 and are analyzed in chapter 5.⁸

Positive Effects

The preparation and implementation of the project definitely moved the needle of discipleship at Berean Baptist Church. By defining a assimilation plan, there has been a steady movement of attenders and members into missional community and membership. In the last two years, over fifty individuals have completed the membership class, and the church has launched five new groups. In the fall of 2023, after continually championing the need to “join a group” and “grow as a disciple,” over 180 individuals joined a group, some for the first time ever. With renewed emphasis on adult ministry, a

⁸ Though fifteen individuals participated in the class, only eleven completed both the pre-course and post-course MCDI assessments due to being absent from the class. Only the results for these eleven are included and analyzed in this paper.

reputation for discipleship in the community, and a Word-centered ministry in the community, Berean saw over 34 percent growth in average worship service attendance, an increase of almost two hundred in two years! Numbers are not everything, but disciples of Jesus moving into a community where they can experience fellowship and accountability for growth is a positive fruit of God working in the local church.

Summary

The steps that were formulated and then implemented in this project sought to establish missional communities as the primary strategy for spiritual growth for members and attenders at Berean Baptist Church. This was accomplished by first defining a clear and concise assimilation plan that moved people from casual attenders to committed and functioning members. This project then successfully assessed the current culture at Berean in order to start building a healthier culture of missional community and discipleship through the leadership training class. I created, assembled, and evaluated the curriculum for this class, and a group of leaders at Berean assembled to be trained in this curriculum with the purpose of better leading and fostering missional community. This group was surveyed before and after to assess the effectiveness of the leadership training curriculum. All in all, multiple facets of this project sought to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church through implementing the right processes and investing in the right leaders to better foster an effective missional community. In the following chapter, the success of these efforts will be evaluated to discern the breadth of effectiveness and consider to what degree the intended purpose and goals were met.

CHAPTER 5
EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Introduction

Throughout this project, the purpose was to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church. It will be shown that each step helped to make this overall purpose a reality. The project includes tangible evidence that discipleship was indeed strengthened on several fronts through system implementation and by curriculum development, implementation, and instruction with group leaders. Though there were some weaknesses in the project, overall, it commendably equipped staff and volunteers to help members and attenders take steps toward missional community and communicated these steps to the congregation. Furthermore, it effectively provided missional community training to over a dozen leaders at Berean who are actively implementing discipleship in the church.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio, by implementing missional communities as the primary strategy for spiritual growth for members and attenders. Effectively making disciples requires that one define what a disciple is. Discipleship, the process of making disciples in the local church, is measured based upon what people know (good theology), or by what people do (certain key practices), but very often, these approaches lack certain priorities of Christ. For instance, “going to church” can be easily measured, and it is a good thing for a disciple. But one can “go to church” and be living in habitual sin or neither be growing in Christ nor living missionally. For this reason, strengthening discipleship at Berean first required defining what a healthy disciple is. This task, though

in some ways simple, proved determinant for the whole project.

It was determined that a disciple is “a devoted follower of Jesus Christ who is growing, gathering, and going.” This definition encompasses the Great Commandment (Matt 22:36-38), the Second Great Commandment (Matt 22:39), and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). These three emphases are best brought into the life of the believer through missional community, a group or fellowship of believers where he or she can do life on life, life in community, and life on mission with spiritual accountability existing for all three. By implementing missional community through an assimilation plan and bolstering missional community through a leadership training class, the purpose of strengthening discipleship at Berean was accomplished.

Evaluation of the Project’s Goals

The project was arranged around four primary objectives or goals to accomplish its purpose. These goals were formed in partnership with the leadership of the church and sought to assess the discipleship culture, create systems to move individuals towards greater involvement and connection, and write and deploy leadership training curriculum that would move the needle on understanding and practice for Berean’s group leaders. These goals are assessed below.

Goal 1: Creating and Evaluating the Assimilation Plan

The first goal involved defining a clear and concise assimilation plan that sought to move attenders and members into missional community. This plan was successfully created with help from a few staff members, including the Next Steps Director at Berean who oversees assimilation. Evaluation was the next step. A panel of pastoral staff and leadership at Berean Baptist Church utilized the Assimilation Plan Rubric to evaluate the plan for functionality, communication clarity, training elements,

and actions steps.¹ These individuals were given the assimilation plan and provided adequate time to review and ask questions and then evaluate the plan. This goal was considered successfully met as all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.² Evaluators also provided some helpful qualitative feedback that has helped to continue to shape the Assimilation Plan and its implementation at Berean.

Goal 2: Assessing Current Discipleship Culture

The second goal, to assess the current discipleship and missional community culture at Berean Baptist Church, was accomplished by administering the Missional Community and Discipleship Inventory to eleven community leaders, including Sunday school teachers, group leaders, and leaders.³ This test was administered with the training class of leaders on the first day of meeting before any of the content was delivered on Sunday, August 6, 2023. The inventory was adjusted beforehand to better complement the content of the training. It assessed the current discipleship and missional community culture in regard to four primary areas: Life on Life, Life in Community, Life on Mission, and Leadership and Shepherding.

In general, the respondents scored very well on this assessment of the MCDI. Complete results for the pre-training and post-training assessments are available in appendices 6 and 7, respectively. The average overall score for the pre-training inventory was 149 out of a potential maximum score of 192. The median score was also 149. The lowest score was 119 and the highest score was 175 out of 192. With a mean score of 4.65 on all items, the pre-training assessment group was closer to an “Agree” average on the scale and well above “Somewhat Agree.” This reflected the reality of the respondents

¹ See appendix 1.

² See appendix 5.

³ See appendix 2.

being mature believers who are active disciples of Jesus and already involved in leading missional communities. It can be inferred that these scores would be above the average score of general attenders and members at Berean Baptist Church.

Of the four primary areas, Life in Community scored the highest average mean on the pre-training inventory (4.91 out of 6). Two of the higher (mean) scoring items in this category were item 15, “I am part of a spiritual family” (5.55), and item 18, “I regularly gather with a small group of believers to do life together by supporting one another” (5.27). This was encouraging, especially considering the level of involvement of those assessed. These are some of the most connected and involved members at Berean; if they were not experiencing healthy community there would be significant dysfunction in the church.

The lowest scored area was Life on Mission (4.50). One of the lowest scoring items in this section was item 28, “I can explain at least three missional practices that a believer can live out in his everyday life,” with a 4.09 mean score. This weakness was consistent with initial contextual observations that were hypothesized in chapter 1. There, it was stated, “Berean does not have a culture where there are stories of most of our members living intentionally as missionaries where God has placed them, and the bar seems to be set at inviting a friend to an event, which, though commendable, is a far cry from biblical disciple-making.” This was further illustrated by the lowest scoring item, item 20, “I am currently discipling another believer,” with a 3.55 mean score. Berean members and attenders, though passionate about missions, Bible study, and the church, too often lack intentionality in fulfilling the Great Commission in their everyday lives.

Goal 3: Curriculum Development and Evaluation

After writing and developing the leadership training curriculum, evaluation of the content of the curriculum was the next step. A panel of pastoral staff and leadership at Berean Baptist Church utilized the Curriculum Evaluation Tool to evaluate the biblical

accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the curriculum.⁴ The goal in this evaluation was to meet or exceed the sufficiency level on all of the evaluation criteria. Four evaluators scored the curriculum with an average no lower than 3.75 out of 4.0 on any of the criteria, successfully meeting the goal. Having met the benchmark of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators meeting or exceeding the sufficiency level, no revisions were required. The evaluators also provided some encouraging qualitative feedback via comments.⁵

Goal 4: Effectively Train Group Leaders

The fourth goal was to increase understanding of the biblical foundation for the Christian life and its expression in missional living and missional community by implementing the above curriculum for a group of current missional community leaders and assessing their growth at the conclusion of the course. As was previously stated, this was effectively accomplished in August of 2023. Furthermore, by assessing the leadership training class with the MCDI before and after the training, I was able to evaluate the effectiveness of the training. Also, there was a lot of positive feedback. Many in the class wished that the time together could continue, and they left inspired to help create missional community at Berean. The discussion during the class was robust, biblically saturated, and inspiring for all those involved.

Overall, the pre- and post-training scores saw marked improvement. The maximum score on the MCDI was 192, and in the pre-training assessment the mean score was 149. The post-training assessment mean score improved to 162. This represents, on average, about a 7 percent improvement. Looking more closely, the mean score on the items pertaining to life on life or spiritual accountability improved from 4.78 to a 5.29 out

⁴ See appendix 3.

⁵ See appendix 8 for the results of the panel's evaluation.

of a maximum score of 6. This represents a positive change of 0.51. This was the most significant shift, but all four areas saw at least an improvement of 0.33 or greater.

Additionally, the t-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive and statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-assessment scores.⁶ In statistical analysis, generally one looks for a p-value that is less than .05 in order to demonstrate a meaningful difference between scores. The p-value comparing the pre- and post-MCDI scores came in at .0347 and so demonstrated a statistical difference strong enough to state that the leadership training class made a modest difference in the understanding of those who worked through the curriculum. In the end, the curriculum was created and effectively deployed to help foster missional community at Berean, post-training scores demonstrated that there was statistically significant growth in the class.

Strengths of the Project

There were several notable strengths of this project. First, since Berean is a larger church with a staff team of around twenty individuals, implementing any churchwide change affects multiple personnel. For this reason, cooperation with staff and leaders was essential. This project is not the product of one person's efforts. It was a team of leaders in a church working in conjunction with the primary implementer and author of this project to have this impact. This reality made the project better and illustrated one of the project's assertions that "the healthiest church is an every member functioning church."

A second strength was the implementation of the Assimilation Plan. This tool is not just a file sitting unused on a computer. Pertinent staff have been trained in it, new attenders are debriefed on it, and the primary components are publicly visible in several places on the church's new website. New attenders who come to the Connection Lunch

⁶ The results of the t-test can be viewed in appendix 9.

will hear a leader walk through the main components of the plan, and these concepts have already found their way into various sermons in the corporate worship gathering. The Assimilation Plan has moved from “theoretical” to “functionally deployed” in the context of Berean Baptist Church.

Third, there was improvement in the pre- and post-training MCDI scores. This was the goal beforehand but is never a given. It was a grace that God allowed for there to be growth in the lives of the leaders who took the leadership training class. This improvement was best displayed in the Life on Life section of the MCDI, where the mean score on the items pertaining to life on life or spiritual accountability improved from 4.78 to a 5.29 out of a maximum score of 6. This is very likely due to the emphasis on John Wesley and his “class meetings” as a mechanism for accountability in the life of the believer. This, combined with the tasks of creating accountability questions, naming accountability partners, and creating a spiritual growth plan, all served to help participants grow in their confidence of their own spiritual life and relationship with God, which is the goal of Life on Life.

The second area that saw the most improvement was the Life on Mission section of the MCDI. This was encouraging, as “mission” is at the heart of missional community. One specific item that saw significant progress was item 28, “I can explain at least three missional practices that a believer can live out in his everyday life.” As stated earlier, the pre-training mean score was 4.09, but the post-training mean score rose to 4.90, an improvement of 0.81! The class spent ample time emphasizing missional habits, including the B.L.E.S.S. acronym, and it was encouraging that so many of the leaders who received the training advanced in their confidence of knowing how to live missionally in their everyday lives.

Weaknesses of the Project

Despite a lot of things to celebrate, there were admittedly some weaknesses in

the project. First, the content of the leader training class was too broad. It is commonly said that “less is more,” and this would have been the case here—not necessarily less content, but a narrower focus of the material. When one tries to teach on everything, sometimes a lot of things are lost. This lack of focus was illustrated in the thirty-six-item survey as well. Not only was the curriculum at times too broad, but the tool for measurement of progress was also too extensive and far-reaching. The broadness of the survey made addressing each item in a significant way difficult in the training. For this reason, some items on the MCDI saw minimal movement or even a lower score on the post-test when compared to the pre-test.

Secondly, after further evaluation, the MCDI had two identical items that were not scaled items but rather on a binary (yes/no) scale. These were items 20 and 31, “I am currently discipling another believer.” On item 31, the score actually decreased from a 3.71 to a 3.55. The standard deviation for this item was rather high (1.7) as well. In addition to the binary scale being problematic, there were a few other weaknesses in this item. First, though an individual may have strengthened their conviction that they *should* be discipling another believer, the four weeks allotted to the training may not have been sufficient time to find someone to disciple and begin that discipling relationship. Second, though the item was revealing in understanding the discipleship context of the class, it may have been somewhat subjective. The class presented such an intensive view of what it is to be and make a disciple that a few individuals may have answered less confidently in the post-training MCDI, resulting in a slightly lower score. Although this is perhaps a positive movement in that their understanding of discipleship was strengthened, it shows a weakness in the survey.

Since the standard deviation was so high in these two items (1.9 and 2.0) and their binary structure made them a poorer-quality item, their results were removed from the MCDI, and a new t-test for dependent samples was completed (See appendix 10). When comparing the pre- and post-MCDI scores, the p-value changed to 0.0366, which

was not a significant change from before removing the items 20 and 31 (it was 0.0347 before the removal). This was not surprising after seeing the similarity between the pre- and post-training mean scores. Before removing these binary items, the pre-training assessment mean score was 149, and the post-training assessment mean score improved to 162. After removing these two items, the pre-training assessment score mean was 141, and the post-training assessment mean score was 154. Both were identical, at 13 points apart. Though items 20 and 31 may have provided interesting insights into disciple-making behavior, they were not helpful in determining learning progress. Thankfully, they did not significantly distort the results of the MCDI or the t-test.

Two other weaknesses of the project worth mentioning were the timetable of certain components and the percentage of engagement in the leadership training class. First, there were several things lacking in the timetable of implementing the project. Since the Berean church culture assessment doubled as the pre-training course survey and was taken on the first day of class, there was no time to analyze the survey and alter the curriculum accordingly. Better planning here would have allowed the curriculum to more effectively drive at specific weaknesses in the Berean discipleship culture. Even more negatively, the curriculum evaluation tool was not leveraged until after the leadership training class. This survey provided minimal feedback, and no adjustments were needed, but it still would have helped strengthen the curriculum were this done in a timelier manner. Secondly, delivering the leadership training curriculum in eight parts in four weeks was difficult. Though at Berean, just like many churches, it is often difficult to get people to commit, it would have had a greater impact if the class could have been lengthened. Perhaps the length was ideal for the context, for as it was, less than 50 percent of the leaders were able to participate. Regardless, more time with the class would have created a context in which each individual could begin implementing what he or she was learning as opposed to merely *planning* on how to put the curriculum into action.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to do this again, there are several key changes I would make in the preparation and implementation of the project. First, I would alter the timeline of the project by assessing the current discipleship and missional community understanding and practices in Berean Baptist Church's current group leadership via a survey—long before the leadership training class—to allow for plenty of time to assess the direction the training needed to go in. This also would have allowed the ability to strengthen the curriculum and focus it on several noted weaknesses that arose from the culture survey. This would have addressed the weaknesses of the broadness of the curriculum and MCDI and allowed for a narrower and more productive focus in the development of the group leaders.

Second, as was mentioned above, it would have been more effective to use the curriculum evaluation tool several weeks before the curriculum was implemented in training. Thankfully, the pastors and staff who evaluated the curriculum saw no glaring errors or weaknesses and recommended no changes, but had this been otherwise, the curriculum would have already been delivered in a less than adequate state. Also, in hindsight, hand-picking group leaders for the leadership training class could have excluded some who would have liked to participate. Similarly, the class was offered on Sunday mornings which conflicted with some of our Sunday groups that meet onsite, and this proved to be a barrier for some of the leaders who may have really liked to participate. Perhaps offering an online alternative or a different time every week for the training would have better engaged more of Berean's group leaders. The leadership training curriculum will continue to be refined and will definitely be used again for group leadership training, but this was a missed opportunity to engage a larger percentage of current group leaders at Berean.

Lastly, if one were to evaluate the leadership training curriculum based upon head, heart, and hands or, as some frame it, beliefs, values, and skills, I think it would be

demonstrated that the emphasis is strongly on “head,” or the proper thinking of the concept of discipleship, and slightly less on the skills or “hands.” Sadly, the “heart” was largely ignored. It may have, considering the audience, been an oversight since it is assumed that mature believers should love God, the church, and those far from Jesus, but this assumption caused a poor emphasis on the affections, and the curriculum became more about knowing and doing than about strengthening communion with God that drives the right relationship with others. I think, were I to do this again, I would have intentionally focused on each of the three elements explicitly to help leaders understand the primary facets in life change and discipleship.

Theological Reflections

In the process of the research, preparation, and implementation of this project, many theological convictions were birthed, refined, or strengthened. First, Jesus’s life creates a portrait of the ideal missional community. The simplicity of God’s plan of discipleship as life on life, life in community, and life on mission is remarkable. Jesus spent His life doing much of His ministry with a few, fostering their intimacy with and love for the Father, sharing life together, and living on mission with them to share the gospel of the kingdom of God. This presents a highly relational view of discipleship. This means that disciples cannot be mass produced. There is no assembly line that makes fully devoted followers of Jesus. Too many churches are busy working and spending unbelievable amounts of their budget to do things that are not remotely reflective of Jesus’s life or priorities. We need a rebirth to a decidedly Christocentric philosophy of discipleship. The keystone of Jesus’s method was relationship with a small community of disciples. In a culture of media, megachurches, and a me-centered individualism, we need to wake up again to the reality that one cannot divorce discipleship from relationship.

Second, at the outset of this project it was asserted that the healthiest church is an every-member functioning body. I argued that one of the primary ways members

function is through leveraging their spiritual gifts. I firmly believe that missional communities will help us take a greater step towards this kind of every-member functioning church. Missional communities by design seek to deploy every individual for ministry both in community, in the body of Christ, and on mission in the world. Too often, churches associate service with programmatic ministry functions and do not utilize spiritual gifts in gospel community. Healthy churches find ways to unleash the power of the Spirit through the spiritually endowed gifts of the saints. This is how those in the church are best cared for, and this is how lost people in the community will come to know Jesus—through the ministry of individuals in the church.

Related to this is one last theological conviction. Paul wrote clearly, “And [Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). If missional community and relationships are integral for discipleship, then the work of the pastor ought to be to seek to move every member in the church into healthy community and, in this context, equip each person to use his or her gifts for the edification and growth of the whole body. This means that what we should measure is less *how many people are sitting in pews* and more *how many people are regularly engaged in discipleship and community rhythms with other believers*. For pastors, success should not be measured by the size of the building or the budget, but by how many healthy and trained units he has deployed onto the battlefield.

Personal Reflections

The scope and length of this project necessitates a few personal reflections. First off, one cannot lead where he has not been. The work in the previous chapters brought on serious conviction in my life in each of the primary areas. How am I taking responsibility for my own discipleship in my life? Where am I receiving spiritual accountability or, as this paper describes it, life on life? Interestingly, God brought a good

friend, Dave, who I had known for several years through our church, into my life to be just that. In the summer of 2022, we started meeting every other week for spiritual encouragement and accountability. As the work of this project was refined and then implemented and taught month after month as I was meeting with Dave, I could not help but begin to apply some of the principles of spiritual accountability. This relationship continues and has become more and more integral to my spiritual life and growth. I must “practice what I preach,” not just to be a good example, but to be a better disciple!

As has been already stated, Berean is quite “program heavy.” There are a lot of opportunities for spiritual enrichment. Too often, my job has become maintaining the systems or “machine” that keeps all these things running. This paper convicted me to better leverage our programming and my team towards the purpose of creating missional community. Busyness is not always in and of itself healthy. Narrowing the focus through the Assimilation Plan and a biblical portrait of missional community was instrumental in me understanding what my priorities are going forward. If people are not moving into community, I am failing. Attendance at events or classes does not necessarily equate to discipleship or mission. Much of the work of preparing for and implementing our programs could be easily delegated so that my focus could be developing leaders who can foster missional community amongst our membership. In a large church, we need an army of disciplers who take seriously the call to shepherd people and be an example to the flock. From where will this army come? It must come through me intentionally investing in a few who can have a great effect on the many. I feel a fresh conviction to prioritize the work of equipping disciples to make disciples. This equipping ought to be my primary task.

Conclusion

The nature of a project like this is that one must make certain hypotheses beforehand and prayerfully hope that the original assertions hold out under the weight of

Scripture, research, and implementation in the local church. What a joy it is to see discipleship strengthened and strengthening through missional community. Berean has not arrived, and it will never arrive until Christ returns to finally perfect His people, but God is doing and has done amazing things through His people in Mansfield, Ohio, who call themselves Berean. In 2023 alone, the church saw twenty-seven individuals baptized, and Sunday attendance grew by 17 percent! As the church continues to see fruitfulness, healthy assimilation and missional community will be all the more necessary.

This project demonstrated that discipleship via missional communities is the most effective strategy for spiritual growth. In looking at Scripture, church history, and present ministry trends, it was shown that missional community is the Master's plan of discipleship. When believers live together in missional community, they experience life on life, life in community, and life on mission. They are challenged to grow personally as a disciple in their walk with Jesus Christ. They gather regularly together as the family of God. Last, they live missionally with boldness, seeking to impact their network of influence for Jesus through incarnational living and gospel proclamation.

No pastor can walk the journey of discipleship and mission for anyone else in the church. A faithful pastor, though, can model the life of a disciple who lives in missional community, inviting spiritual accountability for growth, interacting with other believers as family, and being an enthusiastic ambassador of Christ. Additionally, he can create and champion easy pathways for members and attenders to move into missional community. Finally, he can invest in leaders who, just like himself, can foster missional community in the local church with the goal of making disciples of Jesus Christ. Discipleship, mission, and community are not optional for the body of Christ. It is the Christ's Great Commission for His church. By the power of the Spirit and for the sake of the gospel, may we all be found faithful for the glory of God.

APPENDIX 1

ASSIMILATION PLAN RUBRIC

The following rubric was used to evaluate the Assimilation Plan for Berean Baptist Church developed by the author and was distributed to the pastoral and leadership staff of BBC.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Assimilation Plan Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
The goal of the assimilation plan is clearly stated.					
The need to assimilate members and attenders is clearly stated.					
The material presented in the assimilation plan is faithful to the Bible and theologically sound.					
The assimilation plan is easily understood.					
The components of the assimilation plan are well-organized and concise.					
A process for implementing the assimilation plan is clearly stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the assimilation plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote the assimilation of members and attenders at BBC.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2

MISSIONAL COMMUNITY AND DISCIPLESHIP INVENTORY (MCDI)

The following survey was used to provide a picture of the strengths and weaknesses of current discipleship and missional culture among the community groups and classes at Berean Baptist Church. It was administered to the leaders of current communities.

Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to identify the current understanding of missional community and discipleship of the participant. Philip Leineweber is conducting this research for the purpose of collecting data for a ministry project. In this research, you will answer questions before the project and you will answer the same questions at the conclusion of the project. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. Participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time. By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

By completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

Part 1: Demographics

The first section of this questionnaire will obtain some demographic information.

Directions: Answer the following multiple-choice questions by placing a check next to the appropriate answer.

1. Have you ever been disciplined by another believer?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

2. Are you leader in the church (Sunday School Teacher, Connect Group Leader, D-Group Leader, Student Small Group Leader, Staff Member, Worship Ministries Member, etc)?

___ A. Yes

___ B. No

3. How long have you been a believer?

- A. 0-5 Years
- B. 6-10 Years
- C. 11-15 Years
- D. 16-20 Years
- E. 21-25 Years
- F. 26 Years and over

4. What is your age in years?

- A. 18-24 Years
- B. 25-34 Years
- C. 35-44 Years
- D. 45-54 Years
- E. 55-64 Years
- F. 65 and over

Part 2: Life on Life

Directions: Answer the questions and statements below using the following options:
(1) place a check by multiple-choice answers, and (2) based on the following scale, circle the option that best represents your agreement with the statement:

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, DS = Disagree Somewhat,
AS = Agree Somewhat, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

5. I can effectively outline principles of disciple making found in the Great Commission. SD D DS AS A SA

6. I can share the definition of a disciple. SD D DS AS A SA

7. I can confidently explain biblical principles of discipleship. SD D DS AS A SA

8. I can explain the biblical identity of a follower of Jesus.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
9. I can explain the importance of having a daily quiet time/devotion time.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
10. I can describe what effective spiritual accountability looks like.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
11. I consider personal accountability with another believer important for spiritual growth.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Part 3: Life in Community

12. I can list several key “One Another” commands.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
13. I understand what it means to live out the gospel in community.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
14. I know my place in the body of Christ.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
15. I am part of a spiritual family.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
16. I understand biblical forgiveness.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
17. I know my spiritual gifts and how to use them to serve my brothers and sisters in Christ.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
18. I regularly gather with a small group of believers to do life together by supporting one another.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Part 4: Life on Mission

19. I regularly pray for specific people to come to know the Lord.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
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20. I am currently discipling another believer.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
21. I am comfortable sharing my faith with unbelievers.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
22. I know how to share my testimony with someone far from Jesus.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
23. I can reach the world from where I live through living missionally.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24. Using Scripture, I can lead another person to faith in Christ.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
25. I know several key biblical texts to use in sharing my faith.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
26. I can explain the overall redemption story of Scripture.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
27. I look for opportunities in my daily life to share my faith.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
28. I can explain at least three missional practices that a believer can live out in his everyday life.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

Part 5: Leadership & Shepherding

29. I have had adequate training to comfortably serve as a leader in the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
30. I understand the role of a leader or shepherd of a group/community.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
31. I am currently discipling another believer.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
32. I can adequately explain how discipleship can take place outside of the church.	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA

33. I am intentional in my relationships with fellow believers. SD D DS AS A SA

34. I feel capable of training others to be stronger believers. SD D DS AS A SA

35. I use normal/everyday activities as opportunities to help others grow in their faith. SD D DS AS A SA

36. I can help change the world through pouring myself into just one other person. SD D DS AS A SA

Personal Identification Number: _____

APPENDIX 3
LEADERSHIP TRAINING CURRICULUM
EVALUATION TOOL

The following rubric was used by the pastoral staff of BBC to evaluate the Leadership Training Curriculum for Berean Baptist Church developed by the author.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The points of each lesson clearly support the thesis.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to contextualize biblical truth in missional community.					
At the end of the course, participants will be better equipped disciple prepared to model, lead, and shepherd missional community.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4
ASSIMILATION PLAN

The following document is the completed Assimilation Plan that was evaluated by the pastors and some key staff members at Berean Baptist Church. It continues to be utilized as a guide for moving guests and attenders into membership and missional community.

Summary

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
(Ephesians 4:11-16 ESV)

The church is essential for spiritual growth. Discipleship is most effective when one is committed to and gathering with other believers under the oversight of spiritual leadership.

The goal of this plan is to define a clear pathway for staff and leadership as we seek to move members, guests, and occasional attendees towards becoming fully-functioning and committed members of Berean Baptist Church.

Implementation

To effectively implement this plan will require orienting Berean staff and leadership to this process. This would be best accomplished in staff and board meetings. This will be followed by sharing the plan for members and attenders to view and interact with on the website. Lastly, creating a system to help track the movement of our people through these steps will more help monitor the ongoing effectiveness of this plan.

Some barriers to effectively implementing this would be a lack of cohesiveness in language amongst staff and leadership, resistance to a new process, and under-developed systems to track the movement of individuals through this assimilation plan.

Assimilation Plan

This assimilation plan narrows the focus to five primary action steps moving from an initial contact or connection all the way to a reproducing missional disciple. Under each of these primary action statements are a list of possible action steps. They are NOT sequential but merely potential ways to live out the primary “action step”. The five primary action steps are:

1. Connect with Us
2. Attend a Gathering
3. Join a Group
4. Serve in the Church
5. Go as the Church

The first step is necessary to start the process. The following four should be regular patterns in the life of every believer. A member would be considered “assimilated” when he or she is functioning regularly in steps 2-5.

Assimilation Plan in Detail

1. Connect with Us

a. **Fill out our Connect Form** - Seems simple right? But it all starts here! Fill out our "Contact Us" form to get the ball rolling so we get to know one another.

b. **Share a Prayer Request** - Maybe you found yourself here because you need help. Every week our team prays for needs or requests in our community and shared by our church family. We would be honored to pray for you and even, if you want, send your request to our prayer team who will commit to praying for you and your request.

c. **Learn More about Jesus** - We are not exaggerating when we say that we believe that Jesus changes everything! There is nothing we would love more than to introduce you to Him and the gospel or good news that He brings.

d. **Watch a Worship Service** - Curious what our gatherings are like? We have a livestream every week and a sermon library for you to hear our past messages. This is a

great way for you to get to know us a little better and see what we are all about!

e. **Meet with a Staff Member** - We have a dedicated team who are passionate about helping people connect and grow. We would love to sit down with you, hear your story, and explore how our church can serve you and be a family to you. Click below to contact any of our staff members!

f. **Read about our Church** - Curious about our story? Want to know more about our beliefs? We would love to introduce ourselves to you and tell you our story in person but these pages will give you a head start! (Links to Our Story, Beliefs, Our Team)

2. Attend a Gathering

a. **Plan your Visit** - Visiting a church can be uncomfortable. Head over to our Plan Your Visit page to find all the details to make your first Sunday seem like home.

b. **Pre-Register your Kids** - If you have kids this makes your first visit so much easier! Fill out our pre-registration form and we will make sure our Berean Kids team is ready to greet them and get them plugged right in.

c. **Visit our Connection Center** - We have a team ready to greet you every Sunday before and after each worship service in the lobby. We would love to learn your name, pray with you, and help you discover your next step in your journey after Jesus. We also have a gift for you just for stopping by!

d. **Own a Bible** - We believe one of the most amazing things in the world is that God speaks to us through His Word! If you don't own a Bible personally we would love to give you one, just stop by the Info Desk in the lobby. We use the English Standard Version (ESV) in our services. We also encourage every Christian who is serious about growing in Christ to own a Study Bible. Here are two we recommend (ESV Study Bible & MacArthur Study Bible)

e. **Attend a Connection Lunch** - Every few months we have a special lunch we invite anyone who is newer to Berean to. This is an informal time to connect, meet some

of our staff and pastors, and hear more about how you can get connected, and it is a free lunch! Keep an eye out on the events page for our next scheduled lunch.

f. **Take our Next Steps Class** - If you are newer to Berean or are just looking to get more connected we have a class just for you. Our 4-week Next Steps class is offered several times a year and introduces you to everything about Berean. You will learn more about our history and beliefs and hear about our vision to impact our community and the world of Christ. This is also a great time to connect with other attenders, meet several of our staff members, and discover your next steps to connect and serve at Berean. This class is required for church membership.

g. **Be Baptized** - If you have committed to follow Jesus by putting your faith in Him, receiving Christ as your Savior and Lord, the first step of obedience is publicly declaring your faith through baptism. This act of obedience is a wonderful step that declares your love and devotion to Jesus and helps you identify with Christ and your new life in Him. If you are interested in taking this step we would love to talk with you!

3. Join a Group

a. **Take our Foundations Class** - *Foundations is our Discipleship 101 class. What is a disciple? What does a healthy community look like? Why are groups so important for spiritual growth? In this class you will learn about our vision for discipleship and community at Berean. If you are looking to join a group, this is a great place to start!*

b. **Find a Group** - Feel free to browse through our Group Finder and if you see one that you think will fit, click to join. Or feel free to reach out to us at groups@bereanfamily.com and we would love to connect you with a group that is right for you. Or let us help you find the group that is right for you by filling out our contact form.

c. **Connect with the Leader** - Our leaders are hand-selected because of their hearts for community and discipleship. A leader will reach out to you to connect and invite you

to the next group gathering.

d. **Attend your Group** - It all starts with showing up. We know this can be the hardest part, putting yourself out there, but trust us when we say it is worth it! We can't wait for you to find your "people," a family to do life and mission with. Not every group will be a fit, reach out to us if you don't think this is the right group for you!

e. **Invite Your Group into Your Life** - Don't settle for meeting a couple of times a month. Invite some from your group over for dinner or go out to eat together. Participate in a hobby together or attend your kids' athletic events together. At Berean we call this "doing life together."

f. **Find a Mentor** - Every follower of Jesus needs a mentor, even Timothy and Paul. Who is speaking truth into your life? Who has permission to speak truth into your life on a regular basis? A great place to start is with your group leader or their spouse!

g. **Grow as a Disciple** - Attend a growth class with some from your group. Ask your leader to mentor or disciple you. Attend events and conferences that will sharpen you as a follower of Jesus.

4. Serve in the Church

a. **Become a Member** - Commitment is a good thing. We want to commit to you and we ask that those who are joining a serve team commit to us as well. (Next Steps Class and baptism are required).

b. **Take our SHAPE class** - Not sure where you should serve? Our SHAPE class helps you discover your spiritual gifts, passion, and heart for ministry. God has shaped you uniquely to serve in His kingdom and the family of God and we would love to help you learn where and how to do this.

c. **Join a Serve Team** - At Berean we have various serve teams that help us fulfill our mission as a church. From hospitality, to cleaning, to leading a group or helping with

our young people we have a ministry that will fit your gifting and passion.

d. **Volunteer for an Event** - Throughout the year we have various events to minister to those inside and outside of our church. These can be great opportunities for you further discover and develop your spiritual gifts.

e. **Give Financially** - We believe that part of service is supporting the church financially. Everything we have really belongs to God: our time, treasure, and talent. Giving generously to our church is an act of service and worship. It also is what allows us to continue to minister in the many ways we do to fulfill our mission locally and globally.

f. **Serve in Your Group** - We believe that ultimately your spiritual gifts are the language of love in community. As you discover your gifts use them to bless those in your Berean group. This might be showing hospitality, encouraging others, or teaching God's Word. Regardless, we believe that loving service is best expressed in the context of a relationships.

g. **Host a Group** - Has God given you the gift of hospitality? Groups are the lifeblood of community and discipleship at Berean and we need dozens of families and individuals who are willing to host the space where groups meet.

h. **Lead a Group** - Has God given you the gift of leadership? Are you a mature follower of Jesus who is ready for your next step? One of the greatest discipleship impacts you can have in the local church is leading and facilitating community in a group. We would love to train and equip you to make disciples in community by leading a group.

5. Go as the Church

a. **Pray for lost** - We believe in the power of prayer. God calls every believer to pray for friends and family who are far from Jesus. Who is on your list? You can ask our prayer team to pray for them as well here.

b. **Live Missionally** - God is sending you to live on mission wherever He has placed you. Start thinking about where you work, eat, and play. How can you leverage these environments for mission? Learn and practice the B.L.E.S.S. acronym.

c. **Take a Growth Class** - We offer various growth classes to help you live on mission for Jesus. Take a class on evangelism, sharing your faith, or apologetics, how to defend your faith and answer skeptics. We also have various recommended resources to help you grow in confidence in sharing Jesus with others.

d. **Partner with a local organization** - We have many local partners who are doing gospel work in our local community. One way to “go as the church” is to volunteer regularly with one of these organizations to help you show and share Jesus with those who in our region.

e. **Invite a friend to a church event** - Throughout the year we have events that are more geared for those who are far from Jesus. These are great opportunities to invite an unchurched or dechurched friend. This is one way you can live missionally.

f. **Go on a Short-Term Mission Trip** - Going on a short-term mission trip is a great way to practice missional living in community and also cultivate a heart for the world. We have several partners who we send teams to regularly and would love to explore this as an option for you to go as the church.

g. **Pray for our Missionaries** - Join God in what He is doing across the globe by praying for those who are far are doing ministry cross-culturally across the world. You can view all our missionaries **here**.

h. **Give to Support Missions** - You can be a part of the mission of the church by supporting those who are active in going. 20% of every dollar goes towards missions locally and globally so when you are supporting Berean by giving you are participating in God’s mission and bringing the good news of Jesus to those who do not yet know Him.

APPENDIX 5
CURRICULUM EVALUATION TOOL RESULTS

Curriculum Evaluation Tool Results	
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary	
Criteria	Mean Score
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.	4.00
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.	4.00
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.	3.75
The points of each lesson clearly support the thesis.	3.75
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.	3.75
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.	4.00
The curriculum clearly details how to contextualize biblical truth in missional community.	4.00
At the end of the course, participants will be better equipped disciple prepared to model, lead, and shepherd missional community.	3.75

Comments:

“This would be a valuable asset to any church wanting to engage in biblical discipleship within the boyd and outward into their community.”

“This is great, clear content that will help a church do a better job of equipping leaders.”

APPENDIX 6
ASSIMILATION PLAN EVALUATION RESULTS

Assimilation Plan Scoring	
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary	
Criteria	Mean Score
The goal of the assimilation plan is clearly stated.	4.00
The need to assimilate members and attenders is clearly stated.	4.00
The material presented in the assimilation plan is faithful to the Bible and theologically sound.	4.00
The assimilation plan is easily understood.	3.20
The components of the assimilation plan are well-organized and concise.	3.60
A process for implementing the assimilation plan is clearly stated.	3.40
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the assimilation plan have been stated.	3.60
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote the assimilation of members and attenders at BBC.	4.00

Comments:

Evaluator 2: Well done. I think this is a very good plan. I like the detail of the specific steps that comprise each section so people know some specific things they can do to, for example, Go As The Church. Some thoughts that came to mind as I read through this are:

1. Perhaps provide a little more support for WHY “discipleship is most effective when one is committed to and gathering with other believers under the oversight of spiritual leadership.”
2. You mentioned people interacting with this plan on the website. I wonder if it might be intimidating in some way for brand new people, if they are on the website, maybe thinking at the outset “I have to do all that?”

Evaluator 4: Looks great, Phil! I can see how some of the things we've begun to implement in adult ministry fit into this vision (next steps, foundations, shape). I think you're right, getting everyone on the same page with the various components of this plan and tracking individual progress through these steps could be challenging. The only thing that seems a little out of place in this framework is having baptism under "attend a gathering". I'm not sure it would fit better in any of the other categories, though. And baptisms do typically take place in our gatherings, so maybe it's right where it belongs! Hope this helps.

Evaluator 5: Easy to understand and follow for a visitor or someone having attended Berean for years. Helps them connect to the church and encourages growth in Christ.

APPENDIX 7

PRE-TRAINING MCDI RESULTS

Table A1. Pre-training MCDI results: “Life on Life” and “Life in Community” items

Pre-Training MCDI Results														
	Life on Life							Life in Community						
ID	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18
1125	4	5	4	5	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	5	6	6
1111	4	3	3	4	5	4	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5
1012	4	5	5	6	6	6	6	4	5	4	6	5	5	6
927	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	6	5	4	6
825	5	4	4	4	6	4	4	5	4	3	6	4	5	4
716	5	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5
603	4	4	4	4	5	4	4	3	5	4	5	5	4	5
322	3	6	4	6	4	6	6	1	4	4	5	5	5	6
310	3	4	5	5	6	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	6	6
321	4	5	3	4	6	6	6	4	5	4	6	5	4	3
602	5	5	5	5	6	5	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
Total	45	51	45	52	60	56	59	47	52	49	61	56	55	58
Mean	4.09	4.64	4.09	4.73	5.45	5.09	5.36	4.27	4.73	4.45	5.55	5.09	5.00	5.27
Median	4	5	4	5	6	5	6	5	5	4	6	5	5	6
Mode	4	5	4	4	6	6	6	5	5	4	6	5	5	6
Std Dev	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.3	0.6	0.9	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.0

Table A2. Pre-training MCDI results: “Life on Mission” and “Leadership & Shepherding” items

Pre-Training MCDI Results																			
	Life on Mission									Leadership & Shepherding								Total	
ID	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31	Q32	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	
1125	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	6	5	4	6	6	6	5	6	5	5	6	173
1111	4	2	4	3	4	3	3	4	2	4	2	4	2	3	5	3	4	4	119
1012	4	2	6	5	4	4	3	2	4	5	3	4	3	5	6	4	4	6	147
927	5	1	4	4	5	3	3	5	4	3	3	4	1	3	4	2	3	4	126
825	6	6	3	3	3	5	6	6	6	6	5	4	6	3	5	4	6	4	149
716	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	157
603	4	1	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	5	1	4	4	4	4	3	131
322	5	4	5	4	5	3	5	5	4	2	3	4	4	5	6	5	3	4	141
310	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	4	5	5	6	6	175
321	6	6	6	4	4	3	4	5	5	4	4	6	6	5	6	4	4	6	153
602	6	2	4	5	6	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	2	5	6	4	6	6	167
Total	56	39	53	49	53	48	49	53	50	45	48	54	41	47	58	45	50	54	1638
Mean	5.09	3.55	4.82	4.45	4.82	4.36	4.45	4.82	4.55	4.09	4.36	4.91	3.73	4.27	5.27	4.09	4.55	4.91	148.91
Median	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	156
Mode	5	2	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	4	6	4	6	5	6	4	4	6	
Std Dev	0.8	1.9	0.9	0.9	0.9	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.4	0.9	2.0	0.9	0.7	0.9	1.1	1.1	30.79

APPENDIX 8

POST-TRAINING MCDI RESULTS

Table A3. Post-training MCDI results: “Life on Life” and “Life in Community” items

Post-Course MCDI Results														
ID	Life on Life							Life in Community						
	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q14	Q15	Q16	Q17	Q18
1125	5	6	5	5	6	5	6	6	5	5	6	5	5	5
1111	5	5	4	5	5	4	6	6	5	4	5	6	5	4
1012	5	5	4	5	5	5	6	4	5	5	4	4	4	6
927	2	6	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	6	5	4	5
825	5	5	5	6	6	4	4	6	5	6	5	5	5	6
716	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5
603	6	5	5	5	5	5	6	4	6	4	6	6	4	6
322	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	4	6	6	6	6	5	6
310	6	5	5	5	5	6	5	6	5	5	5	6	5	6
321	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
602	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Total	57	60	54	59	60	56	61	58	59	56	61	61	54	61
Mean	5.18	5.45	4.91	5.36	5.45	5.09	5.55	5.27	5.36	5.09	5.55	5.55	4.91	5.55
Medium	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	6
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	6	6	5	6
Improvement	1.1	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.2	1.0	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.5	-0.1	0.3
Std Dev	1.1	0.5	0.7	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.9	0.5	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7

Table A4. Post-training MCDI results: “Life on Mission” and “Leadership & Shepherding” items

Post-Course MCDI Results																			
	Life on Mission											Leadership & Shepherding							Total
ID	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25	Q26	Q27	Q28	Q29	Q30	Q31	Q32	Q33	Q34	Q35	Q36	
1125	5	6	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	4	162
1111	4	2	4	4	5	4	4	5	4	5	4	5	2	5	5	5	4	6	146
1012	5	4	6	4	5	4	3	3	4	4	2	3	3	4	6	4	4	6	141
927	4	1	3	4	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	5	1	4	4	1	3	5	129
825	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	5	6	6	6	6	177
716	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4		5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	152
603	4	1	6	6	5	5	5	4	3	4	6	6	3	5	3	5	4	5	153
322	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	6	5	6	184
310	6	6	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6	5	5	5	6	6	6	6	6	179
321	5	3	6	6	5	5	5	6	5	5	5	6	2	5	6	5	6	6	176
602	6	2	4	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	2	6	5	4	5	6	178
Total	56	42	56	56	57	56	55	56	51	49	54	57	39	54	57	52	52	61	1777
Mean	5.09	3.82	5.09	5.09	5.18	5.09	5.00	5.09	4.64	4.90	4.91	5.18	3.55	4.91	5.18	4.73	4.73	5.55	161.99
Median	5	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	5	5	5	5	6	163
Mode	5	6	6	5	5	5	5	6	5	4	5	5	2	4	6	5	4	6	
Improvement	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.4	0.7	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.3	-0.2	0.6	-0.1	0.6	0.2	0.6	13.08
Std Dev	0.8	2.0	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.8	1.0	1.0	1.1	0.8	1.2	0.8	1.7	0.8	0.9	1.4	1.0	0.7	27.63

APPENDIX 9
T-TEST RESULTS

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	148.9090909	161.5454545
Variance	347.6909091	341.4727273
Observations	11	11
Pearson Correlation	0.572469483	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t stat	-2.441528989	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.017378967	
t Critical one-tail	1.812461123	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.034757934	
t Critical two-tail	2.228138852	

APPENDIX 10

T-TEST RESULTS WITH BINARIES ELIMINATED

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	141.636364	154.181818
Variance	265.854545	275.763636
Observations	11	11
Pearson Correlation	0.45010723	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	10	
t stat	-2.4108344	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.01831555	
t Critical one-tail	1.81246112	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.03663109	
t Critical two-tail	2.22813885	

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ABSTRACT

STRENGTHENING DISCIPLESHIP BY IMPLEMENTING MISSIONAL COMMUNITIES FOR MEMBERS AND ATTENDERS AT BEREAN BAPTIST CHURCH IN MANSFIELD, OHIO

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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024
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The purpose of this project was to strengthen discipleship at Berean Baptist Church in Mansfield, Ohio, by implementing missional communities as the primary strategy for spiritual growth for members and attenders. Chapter 1 explores the background of Berean Baptist Church and current ministry challenges. Chapter 2 provides strong biblical support for the conviction that devoted followers of Jesus should live in missional community. This chapter provides an exegesis of Matthew 28:18-20, John 17, Acts 2:42-47, and Romans 12. Chapter 3 describes the effective form of missional community in an American context. Chapter 4 describes the preparation and steps taken to implement missional community at Berean Baptist Church. Chapter 5 concludes the project with an evaluation of the project's goals and purpose.

VITA

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EDUCATION

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