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EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF MILTON SEVENTH DAY  
BAPTIST CHURCH IN MILTON, WISCONSIN,  
FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Nathan Davis Crandall  
December 2024

**APPROVAL SHEET**

EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF MILTON SEVENTH DAY  
BAPTIST CHURCH IN MILTON, WISCONSIN,  
FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

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*Soli Deo Gloria*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
PREFACE.....	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Context.....	2
Rationale.....	5
Purpose.....	6
Goals.....	7
Research Methodology.....	7
Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations.....	8
Conclusion.....	11
2. BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP.....	12
The Goal of Discipleship Is Worship.....	12
A Vision for Worship.....	13
Understanding Worship.....	14
Disciples Are Transformed through the.....	16
Empowering Work of the Spirit.....	16
The Spirit's Work in Conversion and Regeneration.....	17
The Spirit's Work in Transformation.....	18
A Disciple Knows Jesus (John 1:9–18).....	20

Chapter	Page
Christ Came to Enlighten the World (1:9).....	21
The World Does Not Know God (1:10–11) .....	23
The Believing Know God (1:12–13).....	24
Christ Revealed the Glory of God in His Incarnation (1:14–18).....	27
A Disciple Loves Jesus (John 15:4–12).....	28
A Disciple Abides in Christ (15:4–6) .....	28
The Words of Christ Abide in His Disciples (15:7–8) .....	31
A Disciple Abides in the Love of Christ (15:9–10).....	32
A Disciple Loves Like Christ (15:11–12) .....	33
A Disciple Serves Jesus (Phil 2:1–11).....	35
The Unity of Christ’s Body (2:1–4).....	35
The Mindset of Christ (2:5–8).....	36
The Exaltation of Christ (2:9–11).....	38
A Disciple Shares Jesus (Matt 28:18–20) .....	38
The Authority of Christ (28:18).....	38
The Mission of Christ (28:19–20) .....	40
The Empowering Presence of Christ (28:20).....	42
Conclusion .....	43
<b>3. THEORETICAL, CURRENT, AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO EQUIPPING FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP .....</b>	<b>44</b>
Models of Discipleship .....	45
The Cheap Grace Model.....	46
The Consumerism Model .....	48
The Pragmatic Model .....	51
The Imitation Model .....	53
The Essential Gospel Model.....	56
Contemporary Perspectives on Spiritual Formation .....	60

Chapter	Page
The Kingdom Spirituality School.....	61
The Holistic Spirituality School .....	63
The Biblical Spirituality School .....	64
Practical Issues in Discipleship.....	67
The Problem.....	68
The Solution.....	70
The Non-Negotiables.....	71
The Interrelated Dimensions.....	73
Conclusion .....	74
4. DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT .....	76
Pre-series Activity .....	76
Project Implementation .....	81
Post-series Activity .....	91
5. EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT.....	96
Evaluation of Project Purpose.....	96
Evaluation of Project Goals .....	96
Assessment of Current Understanding and Practices of Discipleship.....	97
Development of Ten-Week Sermon Series .....	97
Implementation of Sermon Series .....	98
Development of the Ministry Plan.....	98
Evaluation of Project Strengths.....	99
Evaluation of Project Weakness.....	101
Proposed Project Changes.....	102
Theological Reflections .....	103
Personal Reflections.....	105
Conclusion .....	105

Appendix	Page
1. DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY .....	107
2. SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC .....	110
3. MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC .....	112
4. T-TEST RESULTS .....	114
5. SERMON SERIES SUMMARIES AND OUTLINES .....	115
6. MINISTRY PLAN .....	126
7. REVISED DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY .....	129
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	132



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- CS* *Cistercian Studies*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian, 1973–
- FC* *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1947–
- LF* *A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church Anterior to the Division of the East and West*. Translated by Members of the English Church. 44 vols. Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1800–1881
- NICNT New International Commentary on the New Testament
- NPNF*<sup>1</sup> *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1*. 14 vols. Edited by Philip Schaff. Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1886–1889
- NSBT New Studies in Biblical Theology
- WBC Word Biblical Commentary
- ZECNT Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Pre-series participant response concerning discipleship definition.....	79
2. Pre-series participant response concerning God’s love.....	80
3. Pre-series participant response concerning spiritual practices .....	81
4. Post-series most significant positive mean change .....	93
5. Post-series most significant positive mean change .....	95

## PREFACE

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Nathan Davis Crandall

Milton, Wisconsin

December 2024

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The primary mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. In the classic text known as the Great Commission, Christ clarifies the mission in terms of obedience to his commands: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:18–20).<sup>1</sup> The apostles who received this commission and the leaders of the early church clearly understood that it was their responsibility to pass this mission on to the disciples who followed them.<sup>2</sup> Disciples of Jesus today do not universally agree that making disciples is the primary mission of the church, but even among those who do, there exists a wide variety of theology and practice. This is to be expected in one sense due to differences in biblical interpretation, church history, tradition, and culture. The diversity of God’s people, in the broadest understanding of the term, can and should be a reality that strengthens the church. When it comes to making disciples of Jesus, however, the most important aspect is faithfulness to the mission. To be faithful to the mission means that disciples will be made according to the teaching and the example of Christ. This requires churches first to ask if the model they are using to make disciples is biblical. Second, it is crucial for churches to test the validity of their model by examining the fruit of their discipleship. An honest evaluation of the state of the church would conclude that, in general, it lacks universal obedience to

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

<sup>2</sup> Paul instructs Timothy to pass on what he has learned from Paul in such a way that those he is discipling will understand their responsibility to do the same. “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 Great Commission and reflects much of the world's values rather than the transformation into the character of Christ to which it aspires. This ministry project aims to clarify a biblical understanding of discipleship in order to more effectively equip disciples of Jesus to make disciples in faithfulness to the mission of Christ.

### **Context**

The Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church (MSDBC) is a Christ-centered, gospel-focused, family-oriented church located in Milton, Wisconsin. The church was founded over 180 years ago by Seventh Day Baptists who migrated from western New York State. My personal history with the MSDBC reaches back to my parents who met in college while both attended the church. This was the church where I was dedicated, baptized, affirmed in my call to ministry, and, eventually, called to be one of its pastors, first as an associate, and for the last nine years as the senior pastor.

Like other Baptists, Seventh Day Baptists (SDBs) hold to traditional Baptist convictions such as believer's baptism, the priesthood of all believers, freedom of conscience, the autonomy of the local church, and a high view of the authority of Scripture. The distinguishing characteristic from other Baptists is the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath which is understood as an ongoing blessing for Christ-followers. SDBs value partnerships with other believers in the global church, and one of the core values of MSDBC is to work through partnerships for the advancement of the gospel.

MSDBC is a blend of traditional and modern ministry that can be seen visually on the one hand by its stone construction, bell tower, stained glass windows, and wooden pews, and on the other by its modern lighting, sound, and video equipment. Traditional elements of the worship service, like a children's message, the use of hymns, and responsive Scripture readings, are mixed with modern worship led by a band and the use of video and drama. All of this underscores that MSDBC is a family-oriented church with

a multi-generational approach to ministry. In this context, the gospel is the central priority.

The vision statement of MSDBC includes the phrase, “We connect people to Jesus and equip them to be his disciples.” Through the sharing of the gospel in the worship services, children’s ministry, youth ministry, the summer camp ministry which the church owns and operates, and in various programs like Q-place groups that invite seekers to have spiritual conversations, connecting people to Jesus and equipping them to be his disciples is certainly a present reality. However, it is also truly a vision statement in the sense that it is aspirational. It is in the mission of making disciples of Jesus that MSDBC needs ongoing transformation. To see the need for this more clearly, it will be helpful to briefly highlight some of the significant changes that have happened in the church to bring it to where it is today.

For much of its history, MSDBC could be described more as culturally Christian rather than gospel centered. Many of its long-time members, though moral and upright by the standards of the world, had not been exposed to the gospel. Bible stories were preached from the pulpit, and being a good person who served and cared for others was an expectation of church members. Baptisms took place, and potlucks were held. However, salvation by the grace of God through faith in Christ was not a concept that was generally understood and embraced by the people of the church.

By the grace of God, this began to change approximately forty years ago when the church brought in Evangelism Explosion. Several life-long members, even those considered pillars of the church, responded to the gospel and trusted Christ for salvation. Since that time, several other factors have contributed to the church’s transformation. In 1990, a new pastor began to preach the gospel from the pulpit and to invite people to respond in faith. Around the turn of the century, the church began an Awana ministry which was intentional about sharing the gospel with kids. In about 2010, the youth ministry and summer camp ministry began to be intentional about sharing the gospel with

teenagers. In 2016, the church began a ministry called Q-place, which invites adults to explore questions of faith and intentionally shares the gospel with them. Over the last forty years, the church's emphasis on the gospel has continued to grow with increasing levels of impact for the Kingdom of God.

These developments in the life of the church are tremendously encouraging because they reveal a devotion to the mission of making disciples. Yet, barriers still exist between the current state of the church and its vision to connect people to Jesus and equip them to be his disciples. This issue came to light recently during a Bible study with the application of personal involvement in helping others grow in Christ. Across the board, the greatest response to that application was a sense of inadequacy in the ability to personally make disciples. These responses came from those who would be considered mature believers. Much of this sense of inadequacy revolved around a perceived lack of biblical knowledge they deemed essential in order to be fully prepared to make disciples. Although correcting this incomplete understanding of the qualifications needed to make disciples has already begun, it is just one of many areas to be addressed concerning disciple formation.

When Christ-followers are equipped with a comprehensive and biblical understanding of discipleship, it will lead to greater effectiveness in their mission of making disciples. If MSDBC is going to be faithful in its mission, its members will need to know with confidence what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. This knowledge will be built through a model of discipleship that is biblical and actually leads to transformation into the image of Christ. The church has a solid foundation upon which to build. It must now strengthen this foundation and build upon it. For many generations, one of the strengths of the church has been how it cares for people both inside and outside the church. This is a value that is spoken of and praised by church members without prompting by church leadership. As the vision for biblical discipleship increases, this strength of caring for others will grow into an intentional component of making disciples

in a way that has not yet been fully realized. Once the vision of biblical discipleship is taught so that it becomes a clear and characteristic part of the church culture, it will be shared, embraced, and passed on to those who trust Christ as Savior and Lord in the future.

### **Rationale**

In a recent study by George Barna, just 28 percent of US Christians are both being discipled and discipling others, while 39 percent are not engaged in discipleship at all. Of the reasons identified for what keeps Christians from discipling others, not feeling qualified or equipped was the most identified.<sup>3</sup> By this measure, there are both reasons for concern as well as for hope that significant change is possible. The fact that such a small percentage of believers are engaged in making disciples is a tremendous concern. At the same time, there is reason to believe that if a good portion of those believers were better equipped, it would greatly enhance their ability to form and multiply disciples.

At MSDBC, not feeling equipped to make disciples has already been identified as a barrier to mobilizing a greater percentage of the church in this ministry. The mission of making disciples has been clearly communicated and embraced by the church to the point where the need for more focused teaching in discipleship has become evident. The rationale for training, however, is not merely pragmatic. It is biblical. Wherever the church is not acting in accordance with the mission of the gospel, it must be considered an imperative for change.

Paul directly connects the equipping of the “saints for the work of ministry” to “building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:10). In terms of making disciples, therefore, equipping believers in this ministry is essential, and it follows that the better the saints are equipped, the more effective they will be. The following reasons highlight the benefits of

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<sup>3</sup> Barna Group, “Two in Five Christians Are Not Engaged in Discipleship,” last modified January 26, 2022, <https://www.barna.com/research/christians-discipleship-community/>.



an effective disciple-equipping strategy.

First, it provides a place for new disciples and church attendees to connect to a disciple-making community. Relationship development happens in the context of disciple development. When making disciples is the culture describing who the church is and what the church does, it sends a powerful message. It communicates that making disciples is the job of the whole church, not just those called to equip others to do the work of ministry.

Second, when the expectation of a disciple is to become a disciple-maker, the end result is leadership development.<sup>4</sup> An effective disciple-making strategy leads to the equipping and empowering of future leaders in the church. This in turn supports and extends the church's mission to make disciples.

Third, to be effective at making disciples, a church must be intentional. This does not end with cognitive formation, but it certainly must include it. The more biblically faithful the spiritual formation foundation, the greater is the hope for discipleship to go wider and deeper.

MSDBC is also known as "The Connecting Church." Its members connect with Jesus Christ by faith and, through their relationship with him, connect with one another in true fellowship. To aid in these connections, my project sought to connect the members of the church more fully to biblical discipleship and to address the benefits of an effective disciple-making strategy.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip members of the Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church to make disciples of Jesus more effectively by teaching the biblical characteristics and practices of discipleship.

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<sup>4</sup> Eric Geiger and Kevin Peck, introduction to *Designed to Lead: The Church and Leadership Development* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), sec. 2, para. 7, Kindle.

## **Goals**

The following four goals were established to determine the completion of this project.

1. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of discipleship among members of MSDBC.
2. The second goal was to develop a ten-week preaching series that equipped this group for biblical discipleship.
3. The third goal was to implement the preaching series.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase understanding and practices of discipleship at MSDBC.

A specific research methodology was created to measure the successful completion of these goals.<sup>5</sup> The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

## **Research Methodology**

Successful completion of this project was defined by meeting these goals. The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of discipleship among members of MSDBC. This goal was measured by administering a discipleship pre-series survey to thirty-nine participants.<sup>6</sup> The pre-series survey was designed to assess the participant's present level of theological understanding and practice of discipleship. It was comprised of thirty questions for quantitative analysis and four general questions designed to discover the participant's Christian background. This goal was considered successfully met when this group completed the survey and the results were analyzed and interpreted.

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<sup>5</sup>All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use in the ministry project.

<sup>6</sup> See appendix 1.

The second goal was to develop a ten-week preaching series that equipped this group for biblical discipleship. This goal was measured by an expert panel that utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching methodology, and applicability of the teaching.<sup>7</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when 100 percent of the evaluation criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The third goal was to implement the preaching series. The content aspect of this goal was measured by re-administering the discipleship survey within one week after the completion of the series. It was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically-significant difference in the pre- and post-series results.

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase understanding and practices of discipleship at MSDBC. This goal was measured by a panel composed of MSDBC elders utilizing a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, and action steps.<sup>8</sup> This goal was considered successfully met when 100 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

### **Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations**

In this project, I used the following definitions for disciple, discipleship, spiritual formation, disciple-making, and equipping.

*Disciple.* A disciple, generally speaking, is a believing, committed, born-again follower of Jesus. In regard to the nature of following Christ, scholar and discipleship thought-leader Eugene Peterson describes a disciple as “a learner, but not in the academic setting of a schoolroom, rather at the work site of a craftsman. We do not acquire

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 3.

information about God but skills in faith.”<sup>9</sup> Ongoing growth in these skills in faith is inherent in the life of a disciple. With this in mind, and for the purposes of this project, a disciple is defined as a worshipper of God who knows, loves, serves, and shares Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Discipleship.* Discipleship is the process of spiritual growth by which a person becomes like Christ and learns to follow Christ. Author Keith Matthews, stipulates, “So it is that discipleship to Jesus is about our transformation into His likeness, becoming like Him in character and action.”<sup>10</sup> More narrowly defined concepts of discipleship, such as the use of spiritual disciplines or living a contemplative lifestyle, are to be placed in the context of this broader understanding.

*Spiritual formation.* Similarly, spiritual formation refers to the process by which a disciple is transformed.<sup>11</sup> Philosopher Dallas Willard describes spiritual formation as “the training process that occurs for those who are disciples of Jesus.”<sup>12</sup> This training process has as its goal “obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”<sup>13</sup> Professor of church history Richard F. Lovelace defines spiritual formation as “a lifelong pursuit of being conformed to the image of Christ.”<sup>14</sup> This pursuit is initiated by God and pursued by the disciple. Christian formation expert Les L. Steele

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<sup>9</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in The Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>10</sup> Keith J. Matthews, “The Transformational Process,” in *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, ed. Alan Andrews (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 96.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, Navigators Reference Library (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 35.

<sup>12</sup> Matthews, “The Transformational Process,” 55.

<sup>13</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 20th anniv. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 15.

<sup>14</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 114.

argues, “As Christians our formation is a result of both God’s initiative and our responsibility.”<sup>15</sup> The process of spiritual formation then requires human response to God’s plan of conformity to Christ.

*Disciple-making.* According to discipleship expert Bill Hull, disciple-making is comprised of three dimensions: evangelism, character development, and engagement in the mission of Christ.<sup>16</sup> The task of making disciples is not limited to training believers only but begins with introducing others to Christ through gospel presentation. Character development as a disciple hinges on obedience to the teaching of Christ. Engagement in the mission of Christ is the province of all disciples and results in the creation of more disciples.

*Equipping.* Equipping is the ministry training that contributes to the spiritual maturity of disciples of Jesus and engagement in the mission of Jesus. Ephesians 4:11–12 explains that this is accomplished by means of the various ministers Christ provides the church. Theologian Andrew T. Lincoln comments that believers are equipped as these ministers “exercise their ministries of proclamation, teaching, and leadership.”<sup>17</sup>

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the pre- and post-series surveys was dependent upon the willingness of the respondents to be honest about their understanding and practices of discipleship. To mitigate this limitation, the respondents remained anonymous. Second, the effectiveness of the curriculum was limited by the constancy of attendance. To mitigate this limitation, the sermons were video recorded each week so that those who were unable to attend any given session were able to view them before the next sermon.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, participants were required to

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<sup>15</sup> Les L. Steele, *On the Way: A Practical Theology of Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990), 11.

<sup>16</sup> Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 254.

be adults connected to the ministry of MSDBC. Second, the project was confined to a sixteen-week timeframe, which gave adequate time to prepare and teach the ten-week sermon series, conduct the pre- and post-series surveys, and develop and evaluate a ministry plan.

### **Conclusion**

If the church is to make disciples who reflect the image of Christ, then the foundation of its discipleship must be grounded in the Scriptures. The following chapters show how this understanding of discipleship as it is applied in the local church results in disciples being made according to the Lord's design. Chapter 2 explores the biblical and theological foundations of discipleship. Chapter 3 brings theoretical, contemporary, and practical issues of discipleship into focus. The final chapters highlight the implementation and evaluation of the project.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR EQUIPPING FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus calls the church to make disciples who become like him. This requires a biblical understanding that is both faithful to his character and to the process of discipleship. Foundational to this understanding is that a disciple is a worshipper of God who undergoes lifelong transformation into the image of Christ through the empowering work of the Holy Spirit in partnership with the disciple's obedience to the truth. Building upon this foundation, four passages from the New Testament show that a disciple knows, loves, serves, and shares Jesus. These must be understood as characteristics that are grown in the disciple through the process of transformation but are initiated by Christ's teaching and example. John 1:9–18 shows that a disciple is only able to know Christ because Christ has made himself known. John 15:4–12 shows that a disciple loves Christ because Christ has made it possible to love him. Philippians 2:1–11 shows that a disciple serves Jesus because Christ served the will of the Father. Matthew 28:18–20 shows that a disciple shares Jesus because Christ has empowered the disciple to share him. As these biblical characteristics of discipleship are taught, understood, and lived out, a disciple becomes conformed to the likeness of Christ.

#### **The Goal of Discipleship Is Worship**

God's glory is ultimate. He does everything so that he may be glorified in all things. Concerning God's activity in the world, Millard Erickson declares, "In the ultimate sense, the purpose of God's plan is God's glory. This is the highest of all values,

and the one great motivating factor in all that God has chosen and done.”<sup>1</sup> The result of God bringing glory to himself is to bring joy and benefit to humanity. John Piper exclaims that “God governs the world with glory precisely that he might be admired, marveled at, exalted, and praised!”<sup>2</sup> With this in mind, the development of disciples must be understood in the greater context of God’s being and reality. God is glorious, and disciples are those who respond to his glory with worship. Therefore, discipleship requires a biblical vision for and understanding of worship. Knowing that the ultimate goal of discipleship is to develop worshippers of God is a pre-requisite for a disciple to become conformed to the likeness of Christ.

### **A Vision for Worship**

The final destination of a disciple is to worship and bring glory to God continuously. The well-known statement of the Westminster Shorter Catechism posits, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and enjoy him forever.”<sup>3</sup> Piper argues that worship must be the primary vision of the church, for in eternity, worship will be the constant theme: “All of history is moving toward one great goal, the white-hot worship of God and his Son among all the peoples of the world.”<sup>4</sup> Since ongoing worship of God is the great eternal joy of mankind, making disciples must flow out of this picture of the future. All that discipleship consists of must lead the disciple to the worship of God.

Concerning the true worship of God, Jesus told the Samaritan woman that “true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking

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<sup>1</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, unabridged, one-volume ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1993), 352.

<sup>2</sup> John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Portland, OR: Multnomah, 1986), 34.

<sup>3</sup> The Westminster Divines, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: With Scripture Proofs* (2008; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2021), 5.

<sup>4</sup> John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 38–39.



such people to worship him” (John 4:23). The kind of worship the Father is looking for must be true to his nature. He does not seek those who worship him falsely or who worship false gods. The first two of the Ten Commandments read, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3) and “You shall not make for yourselves carved image . . . . You shall not bow down to them or serve them.” (Exod 20:4–5). The consequences of idolatry and the worship of false gods in Israel were severe. In the formation of a people who would belong to him, God emphasized as of first importance the absolute priority of the exclusive and true worship of himself.

The Father is seeking those who would worship him. The worship of God takes precedence over the mission of making disciples for the simple reason that the task of making disciples has an expiration date whereas the exaltation of God lasts forever. Piper puts worship of God and the mission of disciple-making in proper context when he argues that

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. When this age is over and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever.<sup>5</sup>

Worship is both the foundation and the capstone of the disciple of Jesus. Lesslie Newbigin sees the joy that comes from true worship of God as the launching pad of missions: “Mission begins with a kind of explosion of joy.”<sup>6</sup> A disciple becomes a worshipper of God upon being enlightened to the nature of God’s glorious self, and worship defines the existence of a disciple into eternity.

## **Understanding Worship**

To worship is to rightly value God or, in other words, to properly understand

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<sup>5</sup> Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 35.

<sup>6</sup> Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 116.

the state of his worth. In his classic text, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, Professor James F. White traces the history of the English word “worship” and states that it “signifies attributing worth or respect to someone.”<sup>7</sup> Knowing that God is worthy is the right response to seeing his glory. Upon seeing a vision of the Lord with his glory revealed on his throne, Isaiah cried out, “Woe is me! For I am lost: for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people with unclean lips” (Isa 6:5). Isaiah correctly understood the difference between his own unholy condition and that of the holiness of God and, therefore, was brought to a greater knowledge of God’s worth. When Moses went into the tabernacle in the wilderness, God would speak to him face to face (Exod 33:11). Yet, despite already having been in the presence of God, the desire of Moses was to experience even more of God’s presence. Following these encounters Moses asked of God, “Please show me your glory” (Exod 33:18). David declared, “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you” (Ps 63:1–3). As he recognized his need for God’s greatness in light of his weakness, David sought out God’s glory and responded with worship.

To glorify God is to examine God’s character and nature and, perceiving his absolute goodness and greatness, to proclaim that nothing compares to him for all of the reasons his character and nature display. It is to recognize and declare that he is worthy of worship because he is awesome in glory. God’s glory must be revealed before it can be recognized, examined, and found worthy. Contrasting the larger culture that does not know God and the church that does, theologian Marva J. Dawn explains, “As the subject of our worship, God draws us to himself by his revelation of himself. We respond with

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<sup>7</sup> James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 33.

the gift of our praise to the One we know.”<sup>8</sup> So then, disciples glorify God because he enables them to recognize his supreme worth. They see God as the ultimate treasure, and this is why they seek him above all things.

True worship, however, goes beyond seeking and responds by living in such a way that God is glorified. White contends, “Nothing glorifies God more than a human being made holy; nothing is more like to make a person holy than the desire to glorify God.”<sup>9</sup> Dawn affirms that “the Church throughout the ages has understood that its task as an institution is to provide opportunities for the worship and praise of God and the educating and forming of its people for a life of caring for others in response to that grace.”<sup>10</sup> To glorify God as a disciple requires holiness. To live for the glory of God touches the heart, soul, mind and strength, in short, one’s entire being. Jesus taught his disciples to “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 5:16). So, by the actions of their good deeds, disciples worship God as they shine the light of Christ to the world. As worshippers of God, disciples will seek to be like Christ, for in this, God is glorified and his glory is more clearly seen in the world.

### **Disciples Are Transformed through the Empowering Work of the Spirit**

The work of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to discipleship. The transformation of the human soul from one who is opposed to God to one who worships God cannot be accomplished by human initiative. It is a work of the Holy Spirit. Theologian Bruce Demarest sees the transformation of disciples as the work of the

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<sup>8</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for the Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 86.

<sup>9</sup> White, *Introduction to Christian Worship*, 29–30.

<sup>10</sup> Dawn, *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, 8.

Godhead where each person of the Trinity plays a distinct role.<sup>11</sup> Summarizing this work of God, he concludes, “The lifelong process of spiritual transformation, then, is the work of the triune God. The indwelling Trinity progressively recreates justified children of the Father (see Romans 8:15–16) into the likeness of the Son (see 2 Corinthians 3:18) by the power of the Spirit (see Romans 8:2–6).”<sup>12</sup> The empowering presence of the Spirit is necessary, then, for spiritual transformation. Commentator Michael Glerup encapsulates the specific role of the Spirit, asserting, “Spiritual formation takes place by the direct work of the Holy Spirit, regenerating and conforming us to the image of Jesus Christ as the Spirit indwells, fills, guides, gifts, and empowers people for life in the community of faith and in the world.”<sup>13</sup> Biblical discipleship recognizes the role of the Spirit in conversion, regeneration, and transformation of disciples through and by conformity to the Word of God into the likeness of Christ.

### **The Spirit’s Work in Conversion and Regeneration**

The Spirit works at the beginning of the Christian life in conversion. Erickson explains, “Conversion is man’s turning to God. It consists of . . . repentance, that is, abandonment of sin; and faith, that is, acceptance of the promises and the work of Christ.”<sup>14</sup> Though conversion involves man’s turning to God, man does not turn to God on his own initiative but in response to the gospel which reveals sin and the necessity of faith in Christ. Before repentance is possible, however, there must be a conviction of sin, and this, according to Jesus, is the work of the Spirit (John 16:8). Rector David Watson

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<sup>11</sup> Bruce Demarest, “The Trinity as Foundation for Spiritual Formation,” in *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, ed. Alan Andrews (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 239.

<sup>12</sup> Demarest, “The Trinity as Foundation for Spiritual Formation,” 242.

<sup>13</sup> Michael Glerup, “The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Formation,” in Andrews, *The Kingdom Life*, 251.

<sup>14</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 872.

describes the Holy Spirit's action on the conscience through the Word of God as the means by which a person becomes aware of their guilt and thus their need for God.<sup>15</sup> He argues that "it is only when the Holy Spirit convinces us of this need, that we shall begin to call on God for his mercy and forgiveness."<sup>16</sup> The Spirit convicts a person of their need for God and thus is the catalyst for conversion.

Likewise, the Spirit's activity in regeneration is essential to the beginning of new life in Christ. Citing Jesus's words to Nicodemus concerning his need to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6), Erickson argues, "Jesus here makes it clear that regeneration is a supernatural occurrence, and the Holy Spirit is the agent who produces it."<sup>17</sup> Contrary to discipleship formation that effectively limits the Spirit to a helper to guide in the transformation and the ministry of a disciple, the Spirit brings life to the spiritually dead. The Spirit's role, therefore, is essential to the start of a disciple's new life in Christ.

### **The Spirit's Work in Transformation**

Following conversion and regeneration, the Spirit works to transform the disciple through the Word of God. Jesus declared, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13). Glerup expounds on this ministry of the Spirit: "The Spirit guides us to the truth of Christ through the illumination of the Scriptures and then empowers us to be transformed into the image of Christ."<sup>18</sup> So then, the Spirit and the Word work together to change the disciple to be more like Christ. One aspect of the Word that the Spirit illuminates is the truth, which brings about conviction of sin. Glerup notes the importance of the Spirit by sharing his critique of contemporary discipleship: "It seems that much of contemporary discipleship or formation usurps the

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<sup>15</sup> David Watson, *Discipleship* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), 97.

<sup>16</sup> Watson, *Discipleship*, 97.

<sup>17</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 873.

<sup>18</sup> Glerup, "The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Formation," 260–61.

convicting role of the Spirit, which leads to repentance.”<sup>19</sup> The guiding role of the Spirit leading to transformation into the image of Christ includes the conviction of truth and the response of repentance. Renewal author Richard F. Lovelace notes the ongoing need for conviction of sin in the disciple: “*Acceptance of Christ and appropriation of every element in redemption is conditional on awareness of God’s holiness and conviction of the depth of our sin.*”<sup>20</sup> Both the initial response of faith in Christ and the ongoing sanctification into his image depend on conviction of the truth in light of God’s holiness. Lovelace sees the lack of awareness and conviction as a major problem in discipleship. He traces the “decay of spirituality” in Christianity to the drift away from these truths held by John Calvin, Martin Luther, and the Puritans and Pietists of the First Great Awakening.<sup>21</sup> By guiding into all the truth, the Spirit brings a conviction of the truth that leads to sanctification.

As the Spirit leads the disciple into all the truth, the picture of Christ, his image, becomes more and more clear. The disciple who is being transformed to be like Christ imitates him. Paul instructed the Corinthians to “be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). The Spirit leads, but the disciple follows by faithfully living out the example that the Spirit is bringing into clarity of the image of Jesus as presented by the Word. The disciple is empowered by the Spirit in this task. Spiritual formation author James C. Wilhoit indicates that while some writers think that “imitation of Christ” language can lead to an unbiblical view of sanctification, “faithful imitation respects the tension between the reality that the Holy Spirit ultimately brings about our imitation through conforming us to Christ’s likeness and the fact that we must work hard and

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<sup>19</sup> Glerup, “The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Formation,” 266.

<sup>20</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 81 (emphasis original).

<sup>21</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 81–83.

carefully at imitating Christ by adopting his lifestyle and patterns of life.”<sup>22</sup> The transformation into the likeness of Christ that a disciple undergoes is, therefore, a partnership that requires acting upon the leading of the Spirit through the Word and faithful dependence upon the power of the Spirit to do his work.

The result of discipleship is to be like Jesus. The vision for becoming like Jesus originates in the revelation of the greatness and glory of God and becomes complete as the disciple is conformed to the image of Christ in every respect. The disciple glorifies God through faithful obedience to the commands of Jesus, and in this transformation the Holy Spirit’s work is essential. The Spirit’s transformative activity leads a disciple to know, love, serve, and share Jesus. The following sections will clarify the ways in which a disciple becomes like Christ.

### **A Disciple Knows Jesus (John 1:9–18)**

A disciple knows Jesus personally and experientially. Jesus initiates this relationship by making himself known, for unless Christ reveals himself, no one can come to know God. John 1:9–18 shows that the purpose for which Christ came to earth was to make God known by revealing himself to the people of the world. His human entrance into the world was a necessary part of sharing this knowledge, for as Christ later proclaimed, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). Though not all receive his revelation and come to know God, those who do receive him in faith are born spiritually and are given the right to become children in God’s family. A disciple knows Jesus because he has revealed himself through the truth of his Word, and as the disciple grows in the knowledge of Christ, it leads to being conformed to the likeness of Christ.

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<sup>22</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 39.

## Christ Came to Enlighten the World (1:9)

The apostle John uses the metaphor of light to describe Christ's coming to make himself known to the world. John reveals the uniqueness of the light by his designation of it as "the true light." According to commentator James Hamilton Jr., John's construction in the Greek is emphatic: "The emphasis is to make clear that this light is the light *par excellence*, and its qualifier, 'true,' implies that it is real, authentic, and genuine even if it is not recognized as such (vv. 10–11)."<sup>23</sup> Reformation-era philosopher and theologian Francisco de Toledo qualifies this further by emphasizing that John "says 'true' because the true light was not illuminated by another light source to give light but gives light from itself."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the light is true, not only in the sense that it is real and authentic; but also in the sense that it is real light, being the source of all light. Theologian J. Ramsey Michaels summarizes, "The point of verse 9 is that the true light in question here, 'the light of humans' mentioned earlier, was the 'true' light (see 1 John 2:8), not so much in contrast to some 'false' or misleading light as in contrast to *all* other light."<sup>25</sup> Jesus is not just a light but "the" light which unveils the reality of God to the world.

Based on context, the "true light" is the Word mentioned by John in the first verse of chapter 1. Hamilton points out, "After making a sharp distinction between the light and the witness in v. 8, it is certain that the 'it' in v. 9 is no other than the Word."<sup>26</sup> The illumination of the light, therefore, comes from the Word itself. Ancient Christian Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria also speaks of this enlightenment as revelation that comes from the Word of God. He calls it "the seed of wisdom or divine knowledge" and, with it,

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<sup>23</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *John*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 9, *John-Acts*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 99.

<sup>24</sup> Francisco de Toledo, *In Ioannis*, 58, quoted in *John 1–12*, ed. Craig S. Farmer, *Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 4* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 22.

<sup>25</sup> J. Ramsey Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 61.

<sup>26</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 99.



“implants a root of understanding.”<sup>27</sup> This light is different and better than other means of revelation or “light” available to humans because it brings divine understanding.

Hamilton makes this distinction when he stipulates, “It is important to note that the light given to ‘every person’ is for John’s Gospel not systematic theology’s concept of general revelation but—fitting with the cosmological strand of John’s plot—revelation in general, which is divisive and confrontational.”<sup>28</sup> Although it gives light to everyone, not everyone is enlightened by it. In fact, some are repulsed by it. Early Church Father John Chrysostom gives his reason for this divergent response to the light and concludes that “some, willfully closing the eyes of their mind, would not receive the rays of that light, their darkness arises not from the nature of the light but from their own wickedness as they willfully deprive themselves of the gift.”<sup>29</sup> The problem is not the light but the darkness of the soul that refuses the light. The solution is not a different light source since the light that came into the world is needed to enlighten people’s hearts and minds to the true nature of God.

The Word, Christ Jesus, is the source of the true light that entered the world. Reformer John Calvin comments, “Christ is *the light*, shining from itself and by itself, and enlightening the whole world by its radiance; so that no other source or cause of splendor is anywhere to be found.”<sup>30</sup> This exclusive claim is echoed later in John’s Gospel by Christ himself when he said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (John 8:12). Though some walk

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<sup>27</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John 1.9* (LF 43:86–87), quoted in *John 1–10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 4a* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>28</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 100.

<sup>29</sup> John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John 8.1* (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 14:29), quoted in Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, vol. 2 of *Calvin’s Commentaries*, trans. William Pringle (1974; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 37.

in the light, it follows that others do not follow the light of Christ and are thus unable to know God.

### **The World Does Not Know God (1:10–11)**

John states that the people of the world did not know the true light. This knowledge, according to commentator Edward W. Klink III, “is almost certainly to be taken in an Old Testament sense and means a knowing and responding with moral commitment . . . . It was not that the world failed to perceive his existence but that the world failed to relate with humble obedience and trust.”<sup>31</sup> The world knows about God, but it does not know God in the sense of a discipleship relationship. The apostle Paul’s description of the way in which the world does not know God is helpful. He argues, “For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom 1:21). Cyril explains the reason for such a response: “But the god of this world, as Paul too says, has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, lest the light of the knowledge of God should be seen by them.”<sup>32</sup> Rather than the obedience and trust the Creator of humanity should engender, the world’s attention is turned toward the worship of creation by the effect of sin. Augustine portrays the condition of the world as indicative of their nature. It is “because of their eagerness to enjoy the creature in place of the Creator, people have been conformed to this world and have been fittingly called ‘the world.’”<sup>33</sup> The world does not know God because it has substituted the creation for God himself.

The world spoken of by John includes God’s people, Israel. If any in the world could have possibly recognized the true light, it should have been the people to whom the

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<sup>31</sup> Edward W. Klink III, *John*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 102

<sup>32</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* 1.9 (LF 43:101), quoted in Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 32.

<sup>33</sup> Augustine, *Christian Instruction* 1.12 (FC 2:35), quoted in Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 35.

Word of God had already been given. Instead, as Klink explains, “All creation, even the people with whom God made covenant, rejected the one to whom they owe existence and allegiance.”<sup>34</sup> Even those to whom the Word of God had already come did not recognize Christ and, therefore, did not receive him as Creator. Klink observes, “Creation rejects its Creator; the loved reject their Lover. When Jesus was not received by the people to whom he belonged, God himself was not received by the world that belonged to him.”<sup>35</sup> The world, even the ones to whom the Word of God had come, overwhelmingly did not recognize God in the flesh.

John leaves no room for the possibility that the world on its own can respond any differently other than to reject the true knowledge of God. Bede, the great scholar of the eighth century, explains that it was necessary for Christ to come “that he might give us the understanding to perceive the true God. For no one was able to come to life without perception of the divinity; no one was able to perceive God unless he himself taught us.”<sup>36</sup> Even so, when the Word came to teach the world about God, many did not listen and perceive his true reality but instead turned away from the truth his light revealed, even those among his own people. So then, the default condition of humanity and the world is to not know God; this is especially shown by the refusal to embrace the light of the Word that came into the world.

### **The Believing Know God (1:12–13)**

John contrasts the whole of the world with those who—having been illuminated by the Word—receive him. Michaels affirms that receiving and believing are “virtually synonymous in this Gospel.”<sup>37</sup> Though humanity on its own is unable to know

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<sup>34</sup> Klink, *John*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Klink, *John*, 103.

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *Commentary on 1 John 5:20* (CS 82:227), quoted in Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 33–34.

<sup>37</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 68.

God, and many who heard and saw the revelation of God in Christ were not receptive to it, some believed and consequently understood the true nature of God. Klink explains that “received” can have a more general meaning, “receive what is offered,” or a more specific meaning related to authority, “accept or recognize someone’s authority.” The second meaning is found later in John 5:43 and 13:20. In both occurrences, it matches the context of John 1:12 concerning believing.<sup>38</sup> In this light, it can be argued that the believing ones recognize the authority of Christ. Believing is qualified further to be “in his name,” a phrase John repeats twice more (2:23; 3:18). Michaels indicates that in the latter reference, it is linked to his title, “the One and Only Son of God,” and that it could have the same reason as in John 1:14 where Jesus is referred to as “the only Son.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the believing are the ones who understand that Christ is exactly who he claims to be in name and authority. This happens through receiving his Word in the way in which he intended. In his classic work, *Knowing God*, J. I. Packer describes the means by which a person can know God. He declares that “knowing God, first, involves listening to God’s Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God’s character and nature, as his Word and works reveal it.”<sup>40</sup> Those who know God do so by believing what the Word said about himself.

God welcomes those who receive the Word as children in his family. In contrast to the general understanding that every human being is a child of God, John’s meaning here is a specific relationship that can only come about by faith. Commentator George R. Beasley-Murray argues that the believing were not children of God by nature but that the Word gave them that right when they believed.<sup>41</sup> The means by which the

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<sup>38</sup> Klink, *John*, 104.

<sup>39</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 37.

<sup>41</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, 2nd ed., WBC 36 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999), 13.

believing become the children of God has been variously translated. Two representative examples can be identified. Either Christ gives them the “right” (ESV) to become children of God, or he gives them the “power” (NIV) to become children of God. Though seemingly interchangeable, these terms can be understood in significantly different ways. Klink thinks that “right” is the better term and argues, “In the context it can only be the former since John does not speak of power (an inherent ability) but of status (an authorization, an imparted title to a new status).”<sup>42</sup> Michaels concurs with this assessment, stating, “The authority (right) to become children of God is not the kind of thing where they could either decide to become children or not.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the status of “children of God” is not obtained through human power but is granted by Christ. Given the authority of Christ as Creator, this “right” is secure in a way that cannot be possible if it was based on human ability. Calvin defends this position by declaring, “They detract too much from the value of faith who say that, by *believing*, a man obtains nothing more than that he may become a *son of God*, if he chooses; for instead of a present effect they put a *power* which is held in uncertainty and suspense.”<sup>44</sup> The right of the children of God is a present effect put into place by the authority of God himself.

To further emphasize that this is the work of God and not of humans, John declares, by means of three successive comparisons, that the manner in which the believing become children of God is not by natural birth but spiritual. According to Beasley-Murray, “blood” alludes to the blood of the parents, “the will of the flesh” refers to sexual desire, and “the will of man” concerns human initiative.<sup>45</sup> All of these emphasize the human component of natural reproduction, which in no way contributes to

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<sup>42</sup> Klink, *John*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 70.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 13.

spiritual birth. Klink further contrasts the natural and spiritual birth, adding, “The natural urges of the body are intended to be in sharp contrast to the source of the children of God, which is supernatural and entirely from outside a person.”<sup>46</sup> In short, natural birth cannot create children of God since it is unable to bring about faith in Christ, which is its necessary antecedent. Commentator Richard D. Phillips describes the outcome of spiritual birth as “the spiritual ability and desire to know God, worship him, and do his will.”<sup>47</sup> Unlike those who turn away from the light of the revelation of Christ, this spiritual ability to know God is the exclusive right of the believing who have received entrance in his family and personally know him by his grace.

### **Christ Revealed the Glory of God in His Incarnation (1:14–18)**

John declares, “We have seen his glory” (1:14). The glory of God was revealed when “the Word became flesh” (1:14). Hamilton points out that “those born of God are enabled to see the work of God in Christ (cf. 3:3), so rather than flee the light they perceive it as glorious (1:14; 2:11; 3:21).”<sup>48</sup> The disciples of Jesus were able to perceive the glory of Christ, having been in the presence of the Word himself and responding to the Word by faith.

By coming to earth, Jesus made God known to the world. In his high priestly prayer, Jesus expresses this reality: “And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent” (John 17:3). Commenting further about the incarnation, Hamilton expresses the truth that knowing God comes through Christ: “In the Son we have a perfect revelation of the Father.”<sup>49</sup> The world that could not

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<sup>46</sup> Klink, *John*, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *John*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014), 1:52.

<sup>48</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 41.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 43.

know God, through Christ, has been given the revelation of God's nature and, by faith, can know God and receive the full right of the status as one of his children. Fifth-century theologian Theodoret of Cyrrhus summarizes the purpose of Christ's work on earth by declaring, "For this is why the Word became a human being and the Son of God became a Son of man: that the human being, by embracing the Word and receiving adoption, might become a son of God."<sup>50</sup> Those who embrace the light of the Word of Christ by faith come to know Christ and receive the gift of adoption as children in the family of God.

### **A Disciple Loves Jesus (John 15:4–12)**

A disciple loves Jesus because Jesus has made it possible to love him. An exegesis of John 15:4–12 will show that a disciple abides in Christ, in his words, and in his love. As a result of this abiding, the disciple will love Christ in return and share in his love for others. Obedience to the commandments of Christ, of which love for one another is foremost, defines what it means to abide in Christ and his love. A disciple loves Jesus because Christ has first shown his love and made it possible for the disciple to know the love of God and to love both God and others. As the biblical characteristic of love for Christ is taught, understood, and lived out, a disciple becomes conformed to the likeness of Christ in his character of love.

### **A Disciple Abides in Christ (15:4–6)**

Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine to help his disciples understand the nature of their relationship with him. As is the case with the relationship between the vine and the branches, the vitality of the disciple's relationship with Christ depends on abiding in him. Michaels shows that the command of Christ to his disciples, "Abide in me" (15:4), is given in the context of an existing relationship, in other words, to those who already know him. He explains, "The verb 'to dwell,' or 'stay,' or 'remain' somewhere, ordinarily

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<sup>50</sup> Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Dialogue 1.20* (FC 106:70–71), quoted in Elowsky, *John 1–10*, 37.

implies a continuing relationship, one in which a person is already involved, and this is supported by the present context (‘Already you are clean’).<sup>51</sup> However, it is clear that this is not a static reality since, as Michaels points out, the use of the aorist imperative suggests “an act of the will, a conscious decision to ‘dwell,’ or make a home, in one’s present relationship to Jesus.”<sup>52</sup> Having already entered into a relationship with Christ, the will and action of the disciple is essential to continue to abide in Christ. To focus on the metaphor, the sap that brings life to the branches so that they can produce fruit requires that the vine and the branches continue to be united on the deepest level. Phillips describes the nature of dwelling in Christ as “close communion and fellowship.”<sup>53</sup> Beasley-Murray adds, “To ‘remain’ in Jesus has a deeper significance than to continue to believe in him, although it includes that; it connotes continuing to live in association or in union with him.”<sup>54</sup> The expectation that Jesus presents to his disciples is an ongoing, deep connection that will remain unbroken.

The result of living in this union with Christ is to bear “much” (v. 5) fruit, just as the branch which abides in the vine bears fruit. Beasley-Murray states that “to ‘remain’ in Christ is to become fruitful.”<sup>55</sup> So then, fruitfulness is a distinguishing quality of a disciple, but it is not the power of the disciple that causes the fruit to appear since this is impossible apart from Christ. Augustine puts the relationship between Christ and the disciple in proper perspective when he states, “The relation of the branches to the vine is such that they contribute nothing to the vine but derive their own means of life from it.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 803.

<sup>52</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 803.

<sup>53</sup> Phillips, *John*, 1:289.

<sup>54</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 272.

<sup>55</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 273.

<sup>56</sup> Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John* 81.1 (NPNF<sup>1</sup> 7:345), quoted in *John 11–21*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 4b (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 166.



Though Jesus has not yet elaborated on what “bearing fruit” means specifically, Christopher Boyd Brown describes it here as Christ-like living that is only empowered by God in the context of abiding in him: “All spiritual power for living out the Christian life comes from God. There is only one way for a believer to receive this power, namely, to remain in unbroken fellowship with the source of power.”<sup>57</sup> Phillips concurs, “When we abide in Christ, he abides in us and his Spirit works in us with power . . . . Our calling is to abide in Christ, following him through his Word, prayer, worship, and service, and he will bear his fruit in us.”<sup>58</sup> Whether the fruit Christ grows in a disciple is more specific, like Paul’s definition of the fruit of the Spirit, or can be understood in a broader sense by anything that gives glory to God, it is clear that Christ’s intention for his disciples is to be fruitful, even very fruitful.

Not only did Jesus command his disciples to abide in him, but he also showed them how to live by his own relationship with the Father. J. D. Payne highlights Jesus’s practice of leaving the crowds in order to spend time with God the Father as the example for disciples to follow. He emphasizes the works of ministry that are impacted through a close relationship with Christ since “it is out of relationship, not routine ministry, that we are able to do the works of Him who sent us while it is still day.”<sup>59</sup> Ministry can be done without abiding in Christ, but it will not produce fruit that is the work of God.

In contrast to the disciple who abides in Christ and therefore bears fruit, Jesus compares anyone who does not abide in him to a dead branch that withers and eventually gets burned up (v. 5). He does not explain the cause of not abiding in him but instead focuses on the effect it produces, which includes, namely, the inability to produce fruit.

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<sup>57</sup> Christopher Boyd Brown, ed., *John 13–21*, Reformation Commentary on Scripture: New Testament 5 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 574.

<sup>58</sup> Phillips, *John*, 1:289.

<sup>59</sup> J. D. Payne, *To the Edge: Reflections on Kingdom Leadership, Mission, and Innovation* (self-pub., 2015), 4.

Concerning the state of a person's spiritual life, Hamilton distinguishes between the person who bears fruit and the person who does not, contending, "If a man is not bearing fruit, it is because he is not abiding in Christ. If a man is not abiding in Christ, he has no grounds for confidence that he has been born again. If a man has been born again, he is a branch that enjoys a living connection to the vine. He abides in Christ. He will bear fruit."<sup>60</sup> Since disciples of Jesus, by this explanation, abide in him and consequently bear fruit, it may seem unnecessary for Christ to instruct them to abide in him, in effect, to do what they are already doing. However, as Jesus further illuminates what it means to abide in him, the reason for his instruction becomes clear.

### **The Words of Christ Abide in His Disciples (15:7–8)**

Not only are the disciples to abide in Christ, but they are also to have his words abide in them (v. 7). According to Michaels, "One thing it can mean is that Jesus' spoken 'words' take root, or 'come to dwell,' in the disciples' minds and hearts so as to govern their attitudes and actions."<sup>61</sup> The result of his words dwelling in them, therefore, is to become united with the will of God. Hamilton argues, "Those who abide in Jesus will want what Jesus wants. Those in whom the words of Jesus abide will pray for what Jesus has declared he will accomplish."<sup>62</sup> According to Brown, "The prayers of Christians who abide in Christ are answered because 'whatever [they] wish' turns out to be what he would like to see happen. The fruit that we bear is the direct result of God's activity released by our prayers."<sup>63</sup> Answered prayer is the hallmark of those who abide in Christ. It is the fruit of a disciple who is in tune with his will, and in this, God is glorified.

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<sup>60</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 240.

<sup>61</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 807–9.

<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 240.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *John 13–21*, 575.

### **A Disciple Abides in the Love of Christ (15:9–10)**

To abide in Christ is to abide in his love. This is the love with which the Father loves Christ and Christ loves his disciples. Hamilton notes that the Father loved Jesus (5:20) by showing him all he does and by sharing his life with him (5:26). Jesus loved his disciples by revealing the Father to them (1:18) and by commanding them “to remain in vital communion with him by abiding in him (15:4).”<sup>64</sup> Thus, the example of love set by the Son for the disciples to follow is that of abiding in love. Indeed, before he commands them to love one another, he first commands them to abide in his love. Michaels sees this command to abide in his love as foundational to their very nature. In essence, Christ says, “Make my love for you your very identity.”<sup>65</sup> Beasley-Murray explores the various aspects of abiding in Christ’s love: “This must mean primarily remaining in the love that Jesus has for his disciples—rejoicing in its reality, depending on its support, doing nothing to grieve it, but on the contrary engaging in that which delights the Lover.”<sup>66</sup> Calvin conveys that Christ intends for his disciples to receive his love at all times, meaning specifically “that we should continually enjoy that love with which he once loved us, and, therefore, that we ought to take care not to deprive ourselves of it.”<sup>67</sup>

Against this backdrop, Jesus tells his disciples that to keep his commandments is to abide in his love (v. 10). Michaels comments, “The disciples display their identity as those whom Jesus loves by keeping his commands (as in 14:15 and 21), and this too is rooted in his own relationship with the Father.”<sup>68</sup> It must be emphasized that by saying this, Jesus does not mean that obedience to his commandments causes a disciple to enter into this close relationship with him. Hamilton explains, “Disciples are not connected to

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<sup>64</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 241.

<sup>65</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 810.

<sup>66</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 273.

<sup>67</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, 112–13.

<sup>68</sup> Michaels, *The Gospel of John*, 810.

Jesus because they obey commands. The words of Jesus do the miraculous work of cleansing disciples and connecting them to Jesus, and then, having made them alive, he commands their obedience.”<sup>69</sup> The ability to obey what Christ commands happens only in the context of knowing the love of Christ. As Phillips has stated, “Christians who know and rely on Christ’s love will respond by obeying his commands.”<sup>70</sup> To remove the context of knowing and relying on the love of Christ as the basis for obedience does not fit the context of the passage since it is not possible to abide in Christ without abiding in his love. Furthermore, as Basil the Great asserted, “Without charity—even though . . . the commandments of the Lord have been observed and great wonders of grace effected—they will be considered as works of iniquity . . . because those who perform these acts have as their aim the gratification of their own will.”<sup>71</sup> Such an aim does not lead to the glory of God but instead brings to mind the words of the apostle Paul: “If I . . . have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2).

### **A Disciple Loves Like Christ (15:11–12)**

Jesus’s motivation in sharing “these things” (v. 11) with his disciples is so that they may know the fullness of joy. Experiencing this measure of joy, however, is contingent upon his joy being present in them. Brown notes that Jesus’s joy is in “unbroken communion” with the Father or “joy of doing the Father’s will.”<sup>72</sup> The source of joy for Jesus comes from abiding in the Father and his love, which is only possible because he keeps the Father’s commandments. Since this is his joy, as his disciples abide in him, it becomes their joy also. As Brown writes, “Our joy is his joy in us.”<sup>73</sup> His

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<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, *John*, 240.

<sup>70</sup> Phillips, *John*, 1:293.

<sup>71</sup> Basil the Great, *Concerning Baptism* 1.2 (FC 9:381–82), quoted in Elowsky, *John 11–21*, 170.

<sup>72</sup> Brown, *John 13–21*, 576.

<sup>73</sup> Brown, *John 13–21*, 576.

disciples rejoice greatly in the love relationship of the Father and Son to which they are given access by abiding in Christ.

As this love is the highest source of joy for the disciple, it now gives greater insight into the reason for the Lord's command to abide or to remain in close relationship to that love. To know him is to know and abide in the love that finds its expression in the Godhead. The knowledge of this love was never meant to be a momentary experience, a mere taste of love, but an ongoing connection to its source. The result of abiding or dwelling in that love, therefore, is that the disciple is not only enabled but also commanded to love in the same way that he has been loved by Christ. Beasley-Murray emphasizes the importance of Christ's sacrifice as the example to guide the way in which the disciples are to love: "The addition 'as I have loved you' is important; it includes the manifestation of Christ's love in his death for others, and so reveals the standard of love that should be maintained among believers."<sup>74</sup>

In giving the command to love one another, Jesus noticeably shifts from the earlier expectation of keeping "my commandments (v. 10)" (plural) to the singular "my commandment (v.12)." Beasley-Murray echoes the sentiment of Jesus (Matt 22:40) and Paul (Rom 13:9) when he concludes, "The commands of Christ laid on those who would remain in his love (v. 10) are comprehended in the one command to love one another."<sup>75</sup> To love like Christ reveals itself in how a disciple loves others. Brown points out that John uses the present tense of the verb in the command to love one another in order "to stress the continuous relationship of love that should exist between believers."<sup>76</sup> As the disciple is commanded to remain in the love of Christ, so is he commanded to remain constant in his love for others.

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<sup>74</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 274.

<sup>75</sup> Beasley-Murray, *John*, 274.

<sup>76</sup> Brown, *John 13–21*, 577.

### **A Disciple Serves Jesus (Phil 2:1–11)**

In addition to knowing and loving Jesus, a disciple serves Jesus. As Christ served the will of the Father, likewise a disciple serves the will of Jesus. An exegesis of Philippians 2:1–11 shows that a disciple serves according to the example of Christ who demonstrated the mindset of a servant. His example reveals itself through the unity of heart and mind of those who share in the benefits and ministry of the gospel. This unity centers on the humility of Christ, which he showed most poignantly through his sacrifice on the cross. In his exaltation following his resurrection, contrary to human-centered thinking, his humility remains as it is the eternal character of God’s nature. As a disciple imitates the humble, servant mindset of Jesus in obedience to the will of God, it results in conformity to the likeness of Christ.

### **The Unity of Christ’s Body (2:1–4)**

Paul begins his second chapter with an appeal to unity of mind and heart among the Philippian believers. He bases his appeal on the benefits of what they share together in Christ, namely “encouragement,” “comfort,” and “fellowship” (Phil 2:1). Since each of these clauses begins with “if,” it may appear to convey a sense of uncertainty as to the strength of their appeal. However, Gerald F. Hawthorne notes that these clauses should not be read as conditional statements but instead as affirmative statements.<sup>77</sup> Since these believers have experienced these things from their connection to Christ and through Christ to one another, they ought to be united in heart and mind.

Paul states that such a unity would bring him “complete” or fullness of joy (2:2). His joy, however, was not based on the uniformity of their thinking. Fee writes that for Paul, it concerns “having the same mindset *in the Lord*—*not* on their all having the same opinions about everything.”<sup>78</sup> Paul’s concern is that they stand together in work for

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<sup>77</sup> Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC 43 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 64.

<sup>78</sup> Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 185.

the gospel in the midst of the opposition they were facing. His desire for the Philippians is to “hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” (1:27). Paul’s call for their unity is especially important in light of the trials they faced, which could easily have pulled them apart and into factions which would have hindered the communication of the gospel.

Unity of heart and mind, as Paul points out next, is characterized by humility, not selfish ambition (2:4). Humility is the mindset of the disciple in which the needs of others surpass the needs of self. According to Fee, Paul is not asking the Philippians to make a qualitative judgment about how important others are, but instead to be aware of and focused on their concerns. He writes, “We are so to consider others, not in our *estimation* of them—which would only lead to the very vices Paul has just spoken against—but in our *caring* for them, in our putting them and their needs ahead of our own.”<sup>79</sup> Such action would be impossible without the humility that concerns itself with the needs of others and, in effect, is convinced that the needs and concerns of others are just as important, if not more important, than the needs of oneself. In contrast, selfish ambition downplays the importance of the needs of others. The dividing line between humility and selfish ambition is dictated by one’s concern about the needs of others. The unity that Paul hopes for in these and all other believers cannot be attained when selfish ambition strikes at the priority of the gospel.

### **The Mindset of Christ (2:5–8)**

The humble and unselfish mindset Paul exhorts the Philippians to share amongst themselves finds its source and greatest example in Christ. They are to imitate his way of thinking which is characterized by humble obedience to the Father. Paul explains that Christ “did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped” (2:6).

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<sup>79</sup> Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 189.

Commentator Dennis E. Johnson contends that contrary to some interpretations which state either that Christ did not “possess equality with God” or gave up his “divine standing”, “Christ did not view or use his equality with God the Father as a pretext for self-serving or a platform from which to achieve his own interests (as the Philippians were prone to do, Phil. 2:3)”<sup>80</sup> By this account, by embracing the status of a servant whose very nature is humble obedience to the master, Christ was expressing the true nature of God. He did not merely humble himself in the incarnation, but the incarnation instead revealed his true character of humility.

Having this clear example of Christ to follow, the disciple’s vision is decidedly different than the default self-centeredness of sinful human nature. Instead of having the expectation of privileges that are owed, the disciple embraces the lowest of humble service in obedience to God, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Fee notes they are to “have a frame of mind which lives on behalf of others the way Christ did in his becoming incarnate and dying by crucifixion.”<sup>81</sup> Living on behalf of others is to live in obedience to God since this was his example through Christ. Although the result of our obedience does not attain the salvation and glory that came through the obedience of Christ, it does bear fruit for the kingdom of God and accomplishes his will on earth. In this way, we are like Christ in how we think and act. Fee writes, “The Philippians—and we ourselves—are not called upon simply to ‘imitate God’ by what we do, but to have this very mind, the mind of Christ, developed in us, so that we too bear God’s image in our attitudes and relationships within the Christian community—and beyond.”<sup>82</sup> The likeness of Christ, which is to characterize his disciples, should include his mindset and attitudes as essential components of his image.

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<sup>80</sup> Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 123-125.

<sup>81</sup> Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 229.



### **The Exaltation of Christ (2:9–11)**

As a result of his extreme humility, God exalted Christ to give him “the name that is above every name” (2:9). Fee makes it clear that this position is the same as Christ has always held. God exalted Christ to the highest place possible so he would be recognized as the Lord he has always been.<sup>83</sup> Jesus, the one who humbled himself to the lowest place, is the same one who has been exalted to the highest place. Christ is worthy of being worshipped, for in his humility, he revealed the glory of God. His humility is his eternal nature, and it is this nature the disciple honors and seeks to imitate.

### **A Disciple Shares Jesus (Matt 28:18–20)**

Included in the call to follow Christ is the call to testify of him to the world. Matthew 28:18–20 depicts the commissioning by Christ of his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. Jesus sent his disciples in the power of his authority, under the direction of his teaching, and with the promise of his empowering and lasting presence. His commission was not limited to certain disciples based on the possession of particular attributes and extends to all who have responded to his call. Therefore, it can be said that the work of making disciples is a defining characteristic of biblical discipleship. A disciple shares Jesus as a result of being commissioned by his authority and empowered by his presence to make disciples who will be transformed into his likeness.

### **The Authority of Christ (28:18)**

Jesus came proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing the sick and afflicted (Matt 4:23). He explained in various ways that he had been authorized by God to do this ministry. To emphasize that his work was done under the authority of God the Father, he declared, “Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (John 5:19). He indicated that the Spirit of the

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<sup>83</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 255.

Lord had empowered him to preach and to heal (Luke 4:18–19). His authority even extended to the granting of forgiveness of sins (Matt 9:6). Grant Osborne notes that throughout Matthew, the authority of Jesus is “emphasized often”; therefore, his reference to “all authority” (Matt 28:18) cannot be said to be a new authority “since it is linked to the authority Jesus displayed throughout his earthly ministry.”<sup>84</sup>

Yet Jesus reveals that the scope of his authority after his resurrection had expanded beyond what he had exercised prior to the resurrection. Osborne writes that “it is a new level of authority, as Jesus receives from his Father his preexistent glory and authority.”<sup>85</sup> D. A. Carson connects the granting of this authority to Christ’s obedient submission to the will of God in his death on the cross: “This well-defined exercise of authority is given Jesus as the climactic vindication of his humiliation (cf. Php 2:5–11), and it marks a turning point in redemptive history.”<sup>86</sup> It is because of his humility, according to Carson, that he has been elevated to the place where he becomes “the one through whom *all* God’s authority is mediated.”<sup>87</sup>

In this last moment before his return to heaven, having received all authority, Christ authorizes his disciples to continue the kingdom work he began. According to R. T. France, “It is this universal sovereignty that is the essential basis of the commission which is to follow.”<sup>88</sup> The commission did not originate from the will of the apostles but from the will of Christ, and it carries the stamp of his approval along with the strength of his power to carry it out. Jonathan K. Dodson contends, “Since all authority has been

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<sup>84</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1079.

<sup>85</sup> Osborne, *Matthew*, 1079.

<sup>86</sup> D. A. Carson, *Matthew*, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, *Matthew-Mark*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 665.

<sup>87</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 665.

<sup>88</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1113.

given to Jesus, all discipleship success is in his hands.”<sup>89</sup> This should not only be a source of encouragement but also a guard against the human tendency to operate outside of Christ’s authority and power. Disciple-making endeavors cannot be said to be creating disciples who become like Christ if they fail to work under the authorization of Christ. This is why the mission of making disciples must be engaged with a solid biblical foundation since it is under the Word of Christ that his authority has been given.

### **The Mission of Christ (28:19–20)**

Jesus commissioned his disciples saying, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19–20). In the Greek construction, “go,” “baptizing,” and “teaching” are all participles; however, Daniel M. Doriani notes that even though “make disciples” is “the only imperative and only finite verb” in the commission, the participles all carry “imperatival force.”<sup>90</sup> The implication here is that each command is an important component of the commission.

Concerning the call to go, Dodson clarifies Jesus’s intent: “The word *go* possesses a particular force, emphasizing our *sentness*.”<sup>91</sup> Being sent by Christ does not imply, therefore, that to go always means to leave one’s location, but rather that those who have received the commission are sent ones. This concurs with the experience of the early church since many of those early disciples remained in Jerusalem and did not leave for another location. It also gives support for the fact that Jesus intended the disciple-making to be the mission of every disciple. As David Platt so succinctly states, “To be a

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<sup>89</sup> Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, rev. and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 41.

<sup>90</sup> Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 8, *Matthew-Luke*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 442–43.

<sup>91</sup> Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 38 (emphasis original).

disciple of Jesus is to make disciples of Jesus.”<sup>92</sup>

The command to make disciples is brief and does not include details of strategy or method. France says, “The commission is expressed not in terms of the means, to proclaim the good news, but of the end, to ‘make disciples.’”<sup>93</sup> As with his disciples whom he called to “follow me” (Matt 4:19), the disciples they would make would learn to follow Jesus also. The apostle Paul describes the connection between following the disciple-maker and following Christ when he instructed the Corinthians, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). Although the command does not focus on the means of making disciples, this is not to say that the means, strategy, and method are unimportant. In fact, the scope of the mission, “all nations,” rather ensures that all of these are tremendously important.

Baptizing and teaching, according to France, “spell out the process of making disciples.”<sup>94</sup> Baptism indicates the beginning of a disciple’s life in Christ. Throughout the book of Acts, baptism was the first step taken when a person responded to the preaching of the gospel. Carson contends that baptism “is a sign both of entrance into Messiah’s covenant community and of pledged submission to his lordship.”<sup>95</sup> As Paul describes to the church in Rome, it indicates they have identified with Christ and have died to the authority and control of sin. He writes, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:3–4). The break with the world has been accomplished, and baptism displays that the disciple now lives under

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<sup>92</sup> David Platt, *Follow Me: A Call to Die, A Call to Live* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2013), 207.

<sup>93</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115.

<sup>94</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1115.

<sup>95</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 668.

the authority of Christ.

Likewise, the teaching of the disciples was derived from the authority of Jesus. France comments that “they are not to teach their own ideas, but what Jesus has ‘commanded.’”<sup>96</sup> The key qualifier of their teaching was to require disciples to live in obedience to the commands of Christ. Carson says, “Disciples are those who hear, understand, and obey Jesus’ teaching.”<sup>97</sup> Being those who are sent by Christ to baptize and to teach is the mission to which disciples are called.

### **The Empowering Presence of Christ (28:20)**

Jesus finishes with the promise that “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (28:20). This is a promise of ongoing power to accomplish the mission he has entrusted to them. According to France, the presence of Jesus is “not focused on the personal comfort of the individual disciple but on the successful completion of the mission entrusted to the community as a whole.”<sup>98</sup> The promise is in effect until the end of the age, when the mission will be completed. Dodson remarks that this is how we know the commission is not just for the original disciples or for a select group. He declares, “None of the original disciples lived until the end of the age; therefore Jesus must be addressing all who will hear or read his commission. Jesus calls each of us into making disciples.”<sup>99</sup> It is not, however, an individual task. His promise of being “with you always” has to do with his presence among his people. France makes the connection between Christ’s introduction at the beginning of Matthew as Immanuel or “God with us” (Matt 1:23) and Christ’s promise at the end of Matthew to be “with you always”

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<sup>96</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1118.

<sup>97</sup> Carson, *Matthew*, 666.

<sup>98</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1119.

<sup>99</sup> Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 38.

(28:20).<sup>100</sup> His presence always brings with it the power to accomplish his will and to establish his kingdom authority in the hearts of those who have been transformed by the gospel of Christ and the power of the Spirit. His will for every disciple is to share Christ. A disciple is, by Jesus's definition, a maker of disciples. This aspect of discipleship is clearly seen in the commission and the ongoing, empowering presence of Christ.

### **Conclusion**

A disciple knows Christ because Christ has made himself known. A disciple loves Christ and those whom Christ loves because Christ has loved him first. A disciple serves Christ because of the example Christ gave to humbly serve and obey the will of the Father. A disciple shares Christ because Christ has commissioned and empowered the disciple to make disciples of all nations. A disciple has been and continues to be transformed to be more like Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, the disciple sees the glory and greatness of God and lives both now and forever to worship him. These biblical truths of discipleship form a solid foundation upon which to develop disciples who will become like Christ. Gordon Fee brings our study to a conclusion with his eloquent statement of a life that imitates Christ: "Thus, in Pauline ethics, the principle is love, the pattern is Christ, the power is the Spirit, and their ultimate purpose the glory of God."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1108.

<sup>101</sup> Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, 227.

## CHAPTER 3

### THEORETICAL, CURRENT, AND PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO EQUIPPING FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

A cursory look at the state of contemporary discipleship reveals a crisis of great magnitude. The evidence for this can be seen on many fronts, including the fruit of the evangelical church in its proliferation of leadership scandals, its widespread abandonment of historical orthodoxy, its mass exodus of members from the church, its aging population, its shrinking pool of pastoral leadership in the younger generations, and its shallow spirituality. Certainly, there are notable exceptions to these trends, but the crisis cannot be ignored or argued away.

One avenue of analyzing the status of the church in terms of its effectiveness in discipleship is to look at the big picture. The results of polling organizations have brought strong awareness to the public of the changing reality of Christianity in America. In 2017, Gallup released a poll indicating that those adhering to Christianity had fallen to a low of approximately 70 percent.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the Pew Research Center released a study on October 17, 2019, confirming the trends it has been tracking for a decade. The percentage of American adults who describe themselves as Christian over the course of a decade dropped from 77 to 65 percent. Meanwhile, in the same time period, the percentage of those who describe themselves as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular” has risen from 17 percent to 26 percent. The title of their article puts a fine point on the state of

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Newport, “2017 Update on Americans and Religion,” Gallup, December 22, 2017, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/224642/2017-update-americans-religion.aspx>.

Christianity: “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at a Rapid Pace.”<sup>2</sup> While these findings do not tell the whole story as concerns the state of discipleship, they should be the needed wake-up call for the church to re-examine its identity and mission.

It is incumbent upon those who are called to lead the church to carefully consider their model of discipleship, perspective on spiritual formation, and practical considerations of how they make disciples. Disciple-makers must discern the influence of the surrounding culture on spiritual formation and diligently weed out those cultural influences of discipleship that lack biblical foundation. The first section of this chapter will discuss and evaluate various models of discipleship. The second section will explore the three main contemporary schools of spiritual formation and compare their perspectives on discipleship. The final section will look at practical issues in discipleship with a view toward how the church can better facilitate the making of disciples. Contrary to discipleship models and practices that depend on cultural norms or trends, discipleship that remains biblically faithful will develop disciples who are transformed into the image of Christ.

### **Models of Discipleship**

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, all Christian discipleship follows some sort of model. Certain models of discipleship are inherently weak in their ability to transform disciples into the likeness of Christ due to the lack of a comprehensive, biblical approach to discipleship. In many cases, the lack of transformation can be tied to fundamental flaws concerning the models used. Over twenty years ago, Dallas Willard put his finger on the problem: “For at least several decades the churches of the Western

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<sup>2</sup> Pew Research Center, “In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace,” last modified October 17, 2019, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.



world have not made discipleship a condition of being a Christian.”<sup>3</sup> Bill Hull concurs, “The church culture in the Global North . . . has largely accepted the idea of non-discipleship Christianity: people can be Christians without making any effort to submit to or follow Christ.”<sup>4</sup> Clearly a Christianity that does not submit to Christ will not make disciples who obey all that Christ taught. Hull goes on to identify what he calls “the Gospel Americana,” which reflects the nature of a Christianity without discipleship. The Gospel Americana has resulted in “many passive, accommodating Christians who possess a sense of entitlement. They are trained consumers with a strong sense of individualism that overpowers the common good. A vocal minority are rigid and focus more on dogma than on making disciples.”<sup>5</sup> Faulty models of discipleship will fail to accomplish the goal of making disciples in the image of Christ. This section will present five distinct models of discipleship as identified by biblical scholars and examine them for their faithfulness to the Bible.

### **The Cheap Grace Model**

The discipleship model of cheap grace offers forgiveness but requires no change of heart and mind. Instead of Christ’s call to “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), the cheap grace model centers on justification without the corresponding focus on sanctification in which a person is set apart from the world and set apart to God. In his classic book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer called out this diversion from biblical discipleship: “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession,

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<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds., *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 14.

<sup>4</sup> Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ*, Navigators Reference Library (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 41.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Hull and Brandon Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace: Reclaiming the Value of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020), 93–94.

absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”<sup>6</sup> He identified cheap grace as an excuse for continuing to live by the standards and perspective of the world. This is not the same grace of the gospel that Christ preached. Building on Bonhoeffer’s work, Hull insists, “Jesus comes with a gospel that expects personal change.”<sup>7</sup> The discipleship model of cheap grace will not develop biblical disciples because its concept of the gospel is incomplete.

In the gospel, a call comes *from* Christ to be *with* Christ. The grace found in this call is the provision for sin that opens the door to a relationship with him. Brandon Cook, co-author with Hull, notes that in the non-discipleship environment of contemporary Christianity, the gospel has been reduced to a transaction in which salvation does not depend on a relationship with Christ.<sup>8</sup> Salvation as a transaction does not comprehend the nature of a relationship with Christ as either something that is wanted, let alone needed. Dodson affirms the necessity of a relationship with Christ by contrasting it with a gospel that narrowly focuses on doctrinal belief alone: “With a thin-blooded gospel comes a focus on Jesus’ death and resurrection as only a doctrine to be believed, ignoring the person to be trusted and obeyed.”<sup>9</sup> To follow the call of Christ is to trust and obey him, not merely give assent to doctrine, no matter how strong the assent. There can be no true relationship with Christ unless he is followed. Bonhoeffer notes that the call to follow Christ is the call to “an exclusive attachment to his person.”<sup>10</sup>

According to Bonhoeffer, discipleship is the necessary component of this attachment,

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<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 44–45.

<sup>7</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 143–44.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, rev. and exp. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 114.

<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

which is based in the reality of Christ as the mediator between God and humanity. He stipulates, “Because the Son of God became Man, because he is the Mediator, for that reason alone the only true relation we can have with him is to follow him.”<sup>11</sup> Cheap grace omits the call of Christ to follow him in trusting obedience and by this omission cuts off a disciple of this model from transformation into the likeness of Christ.

Bonhoeffer’s prophetic warning to the church more than eighty years ago still applies to the church today. Christ calls us to follow him, and this call requires leaving behind life apart from his presence, his will, and his ways. Hull encapsulates this call: “It means not settling for a cheap substitute of salvation; namely, having your sins forgiven and obtaining the promise of heaven while you continue to live your banal life of meaningless production and consumption.”<sup>12</sup> The model of cheap grace that omits the transformation that comes by a relationship with Christ paves the way for the model of consumerism.

### **The Consumerism Model**

The discipleship model of consumerism is a product of the materialism of the culture that has found its way into the church. Hull sees that the consumerism model flows out of the soil of individualism. He contends, “The focus of American life post-World War II has been on attaining individual prosperity and pursuing the good life, largely assumed to mean material gains and the freedom to choose. It is not a surprise, therefore, that trained consumers would view the church as a source of religious goods and services.”<sup>13</sup> In response to this focus inherent in society, churches capitulate to the movement of culture and cater to the needs of the various constituencies they are trying to reach. In the world of church competition, having the best programs to meet felt needs,

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<sup>11</sup> Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 38.

<sup>13</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 86.

therefore, yields greater response. The price to be paid for catering to the wants of consumers is nothing less than a biblical approach to discipleship. Hull warns that this approach “discounts God’s truth and makes a god out of personal desire.”<sup>14</sup> In this model where personal desire plays such a heavy role, obedience to Christ and the authority of Scripture are the first casualties, for when following Christ goes against one’s personal desires, the call to obey him goes unheard.

Theologian Andrew Root traces the rise of youthfulness in Western culture and its corresponding tendency toward consumerism in his fascinating volume, which focuses on ministry in a secular age. He describes the spirituality arising from these conditions in the secular environment as Moral Therapeutic Deism (MTD). He explains, “Youthfulness, then, is a spirituality without transcendence or divine action (the deistic element of MTD), with an anthropology of self-pursuit (the therapeutic) and an ethic for individualism (the moralistic).”<sup>15</sup> He argues that youthfulness found its way into the church through the evangelicalism of post-World War II America and that the effect, unintentionally as it may have been, was that “Jesus became a kind of product. . . . an idea that would allow you as an individual to reach your authentic goal.”<sup>16</sup> In this scenario, Jesus is one of many kinds of “products” that can be applied in this self-pursuit. As long as following Jesus contributes to the acquisition of personal desires, his words are listened to and applied, but as soon as discipleship is clearly understood to mean submission to the will of Christ, the consumer-driven disciple turns away from following Jesus. The discipleship call to follow, submit to, and obey Christ is a foreign concept in the age of consumerism.

The impact of consumerism conversely also drives an impatience for spiritual

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<sup>14</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness*, Ministry in a Secular Age 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 74.

<sup>16</sup> Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 83.

development. Instead of recognizing that discipleship is a life-long process, there is an expectation for immediate change. Hull observes, “It is only natural in a world of shopping on the Internet and next-day delivery that people would expect their spiritual formation now.”<sup>17</sup> The spiritual formation that is expected, of course, is what makes life more fulfilling or “authentic,”<sup>18</sup> to use Root’s term, according to a spirituality characterized by self-pursuit. Hull highlights how the drive to be successful has infiltrated discipleship: “The mania for success trains people to think in terms of programs and gives them a short-term view of personal development.”<sup>19</sup> When programs are viewed as one of many products to consume in order to gain a desired spiritual outcome, transformation is short-circuited. Eugene Peterson observes that people “are impatient for results. They have adopted the lifestyle of a tourist and only want the high points . . . . The Christian life cannot mature under such conditions and in such ways.”<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps one of the biggest obstacles to addressing the model of consumerism is failing to recognize its influence in the church. D. A. Carson’s critique of the evangelical church from thirty years ago rings true today. He sees that the problem of consumerism is one of identity: “The endemic consumerism of the age feeds our greed, and even defines our humanity: we are not primarily worshipers, or thinkers, or God’s image-bearers, or lovers, but *consumers*.”<sup>21</sup> The unrecognized impact of consumerism is to supplant the disciple’s true identity in Christ, the effect of which is to evaluate spiritual content by its ability to fulfill personal desire, not by its faithfulness to Scripture. Carson

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<sup>17</sup> Bill Hull, “Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out,” in *The Kingdom Life: A Practical Theology of Discipleship and Spiritual Formation*, ed. Alan Andrews (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2010), 111.

<sup>18</sup> Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Hull, “Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out,” 112.

<sup>20</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in The Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, rev. and exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 17.

<sup>21</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism*, 15th anniv. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 463.

goes on to clarify, “The truth of the matter is that the consumer mentality authorizes people to judge all matters religious and theological by the simple criterion of whether or not they have been ‘helped’.”<sup>22</sup> Whether or not one has been helped depends greatly on personal desire which, unless that desire has undergone transformation by the working of the Spirit, will continue to resonate with this therapeutic perspective. Without a biblical identity founded in Christ, there can be no adjustment of the hopes and dreams of a person’s future from what is found in the secular culture around them to the joy of a future filled with, crafted, and led by Christ. The unfortunate reality is that the consumer culture is all too often reinforced by the church itself and leads to other models of discipleship driven by worldly principles for success.

### **The Pragmatic Model**

The discipleship model of pragmatism devalues theology and submission to Christ in favor of methods and principles of success. Theology is not absent, but for all practical purposes, it is not considered to be as relevant as strategies, programs, and other tools whose aim is to gather people, grow the church, and help the people of the church be successful. One of the signs of the prevalence of this model is the ongoing trend among mega-churches to hire pastors with business degrees and backgrounds rather than theological degrees. While business knowledge and skills are important for ministry, and strategy, programs, and relevant programming are all essential in the context of the contemporary church, the trend away from the priority of spiritual leadership that is deeply founded on theological training reveals the priorities of the pragmatic model. The emphasis of the pragmatic model is not what is biblical but what works. Carson pointedly articulates the problem: “The church is too pragmatic, hedonistic, relativistic, given to emotion rather than thought, and, in short, self-centered.”<sup>23</sup> Too often, the church has not

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<sup>22</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 467.

<sup>23</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 462–63.

discerned how strongly it has been influenced by the world's perspective and drive to be successful nor how its methods and culture have shaped its practices.

Pragmatism, according to Carson, is the result of a fundamental shift in our cultural identity away from “transcendent authority.”<sup>24</sup> The church has not been immune to this secular worldview shift. Carson sees that pragmatism in the culture is controlled by “faddishness and political correctness.”<sup>25</sup> In the church, pragmatism is controlled by ministry success as defined by church growth expectations and self-fulfillment. This is where success in life and ministry is not defined by the life of self-denial to which Christ calls his disciples, but instead resembles the perspective of Peter when he rebuked the Lord for telling the disciples about his coming suffering, death, and resurrection. To Peter and to the disciples of pragmatism, the Lord says, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matt 16:24–25). Clearly, Jesus both modeled and called his disciples to a life of complete submission to God.

As the church attempts to minister to an increasingly self-absorbed world, it so often either succumbs to the temptation or, perhaps more accurately, fails to recognize the temptation to adjust its ministry to accommodate the worldly desires of its people. In an attempt to be relevant, even genuinely so, and for the purpose of mission, self-centeredness rather than Christ-centeredness drives too much of the ministry. Concerning the trend in churches of pursuing relevance, Carson exclaims, “In its most virulent form, that is what the relevance is all about: shaping policy and priorities and even doctrine so as to accommodate the self-interests and self-defined needs of those affected.”<sup>26</sup> Though the slide toward pragmatism may couch itself in the effort to be contextual, its true nature

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<sup>24</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 382.

<sup>25</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 382.

<sup>26</sup> Carson, *The Gagging of God*, 470.

reveals itself in this accommodation. The model of pragmatism has no defense against compromising doctrine and values when self-interest takes priority over Christ-interest.

### **The Imitation Model**

The imitation of Christ is a biblical model for discipleship, used especially by Paul, and has served historically as a key model of discipleship in the church. Paul instructs the Ephesians believers, “Be imitators of God” (Eph 5:1). In his classic work, *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas à Kempis points out, as of first importance, the counsel of Christ, who instructs us “to follow His life and way if we desire true enlightenment and freedom from all blindness of heart. Let the life of Jesus Christ, then, be our first consideration.”<sup>27</sup> A disciple follows the life of Christ, according to à Kempis, by conforming “his whole life to him.”<sup>28</sup> Imitating Christ, therefore, concerns the transformation of the entire life of the disciple into the complete image of Christ as portrayed in Scripture of his life on earth.

Seeing the fullness of his image, as opposed to a caricature of it, is crucial to imitating Christ. Paul connects transformation into the likeness of Christ with clearly seeing the image of Christ and his glory: “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (2 Cor 3:18). The unveiled face is able to see the glory of the Lord and thus facilitates this transformation. Dodson explains, “A disciple of Jesus is a person who so looks at Jesus that he or she reflects his glory in everyday life.”<sup>29</sup> When the picture of Christ is clear, the imitation of Christ leads a disciple to be more like Christ by the power of the Spirit alongside the faithful work of the disciple.

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin Books, 1952), 27.

<sup>28</sup> Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 27.

<sup>29</sup> Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 58.



The challenge for discipleship comes when the image of Christ seen by the disciple does not reflect the actual nature and character of the Lord. The slide away from a scriptural understanding of Christ comes from a lack of clarity in both his image in the mind of the disciple and Christ's call to complete conformity to his life. The work of the Spirit is essential to obtaining this clarity. Concerning the transformation of disciples into the image of Christ, Paul goes on to declare, "For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:18). The Spirit magnifies the image of Jesus as presented by the Word of God and leads the disciple to see and know Christ. Hull affirms that this reliance upon the empowering Spirit "focuses our heart's attention onto Jesus, where beholding results in becoming like him."<sup>30</sup> It follows that beholding a false or skewed image of Jesus does not result in becoming like him.

The image of Jesus is not only expressed by Scripture but also in a tangible way through the life of his disciples, inasmuch as they are truly conformed to Christ. Paul emphasized this in his equipping of Timothy and the New Testament churches. He instructed the Philippians to "join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us" (Phil 3:17). The call was to imitate both Paul and other disciples as long as those disciples had followed the example of Paul and his apostolic team. Paul commended Timothy's imitation of him: "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings" (2 Tim 3:10–11). Timothy was in a position to imitate Paul because he knew all of these aspects of his life personally and because Paul expected Timothy to follow the life he modeled. Seasoned ministry trainers Colin Marshall and Tony Payne emphasize Paul's methodology and confirm, "It was not only the good deposit of the gospel that Paul passed on to Timothy, but *a way of life*."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship*, 58.

<sup>31</sup> Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2009), 72.

Discipleship must include the imitation of the disciple-maker's way of life, but it is only as good as it is conformed to Christ's way of life.

As strong as an example as Paul's life was, it was also in the process of being conformed to Christ. Imperfect examples of Christ and incomplete pictures of his character and way of life are arguments for discipleship to include the ongoing pursuit of Christ through the Scriptures. Theologian Christopher R. J. Holmes, in his work to encourage "imitation of God and participation in him,"<sup>32</sup> explains that "when we draw near to Scripture, we draw near to God."<sup>33</sup> The Scripture describes the nature of God in story, poem, instruction, and through the life of Christ and, by doing so, allows us to see God as he truly is as the Spirit illuminates our understanding. However, this illumination is not complete until the disciple acts to imitate Christ. Holmes declares, "We become like God by imitating God, living a life of love, thereby sharing in the divine nature."<sup>34</sup> The act of imitating Christ is a necessary component to becoming like Christ, and the disciple cannot be passive in this process. Professor James Wilhoit explains, "Faithful imitation respects the tension between the reality that the Holy Spirit ultimately brings about our imitation through conforming us to Christ's likeness and the fact that we must work hard and carefully at imitating Christ by adopting his lifestyle and patterns of life."<sup>35</sup> The clear example of Christ's lifestyle as described in the Gospels and imitated by the disciples can only be followed by the power of the Holy Spirit in a true disciple, one who has received the gospel and undergone a true conversion. When the biblical foundation of salvation and life in Christ has been laid, the imitation of Christ is empowered by the Spirit.

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<sup>32</sup> Christopher R. J. Holmes, introduction to *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), xi.

<sup>33</sup> Holmes, introduction to *A Theology of the Christian Life*, xiii.

<sup>34</sup> Holmes, *A Theology of the Christian Life*, 43.

<sup>35</sup> James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 39.

## The Essential Gospel Model

The discipleship model, which has as its foundation the essential elements of the gospel, will develop disciples who are transformed into the likeness of Christ. This does not mean that the foundation is the only thing necessary for spiritual growth, just as the foundation of a house does not constitute its entirety, but without it, transformation is impossible. This foundation is nothing less than a union with Christ. Its stones and mortar are justification, positional sanctification, progressive sanctification, and spiritual authority over the powers of darkness.

Union with Christ is the foundation for discipleship. Spiritual conflict author Neil Anderson discusses the obstacles that need to be overcome and the lessons that need to be learned in order for spiritual, rational, emotional, volitional, and relational growth to occur. He contends, “Every aspect of our growth in Christ is dependent upon our union with God.”<sup>36</sup> Theologian J. Gary Millar concurs, “For Paul in particular, our union with Christ leads to our transformation into his likeness.”<sup>37</sup> Without union with Christ, in other words, there can be no growth in Christ, and without the essential gospel, there can be no union with Christ. Richard Lovelace advocates for the clear articulation of “the essential elements of life in Christ” as the prerequisite to experiencing life in Christ. His view stands in contrast to a moralistic approach to Christianity, which fails to clearly spell out “God’s gracious provision in Christ.” He argues, “Redemption is participatory, not imitative. It is grounded on grace appropriated through faith, not merely on obedience. Spiritual life flows out of union with Christ, not merely imitation of Christ.”<sup>38</sup> Once a

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<sup>36</sup> Neil Anderson, *Becoming a Disciple Making Church: A Proven Method for Growing Spiritually Mature Christians* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2016), 76.

<sup>37</sup> J. Gary Millar, *Changed into His Likeness: A Biblical Theology of Personal Transformation*, NSBT 55 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021), 36.

<sup>38</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*, exp. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 73–74.

disciple by faith comes into union with Christ, the power to imitate Christ through the Spirit flows from this union.

All the blessings of the gospel flow from our union with Christ, and these essential elements of the gospel must form the framework for biblical discipleship. In conversion, both justification and positional sanctification are redemptive realities that create a legal standing before God (justification) and a relationship with God (sanctification). Relationship with God is described in various places in terms of adoption. For example, Paul declares, “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Rom 8:15–16). Redemption is more than the forgiveness of sins. It also establishes the relationship between God and the disciple. Hull acknowledges that “*The American gospel separates justification from sanctification.*”<sup>39</sup> In doing so, it cuts out discipleship from Christianity because it cuts out union with Christ.

With this strong foundation of conversion securely in place, the next foundation stone to be laid is ongoing or progressive sanctification. The grace of God manifested in the presence of the Spirit within the disciple works to lead him into all the truth of a Christ-centered life, along with the participation of the disciple in faithful obedience to that leading. This lifelong process is what Peterson calls a “long obedience in the same direction.”<sup>40</sup> Central to this obedience is the rejection of sin, which can be seen in Paul’s instructions to “put to death therefore what is earthly in you” (Col 3:5). Lovelace helpfully describes this as “a gradual detection process by which the particular forms in which sin expresses itself in our lives, our characteristic flesh, are uncovered to our view.”<sup>41</sup> As the Spirit works in the disciple to uncover sin, it must be addressed with

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<sup>39</sup> Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 42 (emphasis original).

<sup>40</sup> Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 110.

the same foundational understanding as in redemption if there is to be progress in sanctification. Lovelace points to the reality of “God’s gracious provision” for freedom from the power of sin. He states, “Believers should first be assured that sanctification, like justification, is grounded in union with Christ. The power of sin to rule their lives has been *destroyed* in the cross of Christ; we have died with Christ, and have been raised up together with him in newness of life.”<sup>42</sup> The grace of God is on display at every turn. It reveals our need for the forgiveness of sin, the newness of life in union with Christ, the ongoing conviction of sin, and the power to experience freedom from sin in the real world. Though this grace is present for the disciple, it must be combined with faith to believe in the work of God for sanctification in spite of the evidence to the contrary that, at times, characterizes the disciple’s life. As Lovelace affirms, “Sanctification, like justification, is based on faith.”<sup>43</sup> This turns us back to Paul’s declaration to the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). By grace through faith the disciple has been saved, and by grace through faith, the disciple is being transformed.

Yet, this journey to become like Christ is not without conflict. From the moment that the Lord began his ministry on earth, the kingdom of heaven was advancing to destroy the kingdom of the evil one. From the Lord’s temptation to his confrontations with demons to the resistance he received from spiritually dead religious leaders, Jesus’s presence clearly created conflict with the world. John reveals, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Likewise, those who follow Christ also take part in advancing the kingdom of God on earth. As Jesus experienced resistance when he came to preach the gospel of the kingdom, so also those who follow Christ who are being conformed to his character and making disciples of all

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<sup>42</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 115.

<sup>43</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 116.

nations in obedience to his command will experience resistance from the kingdom of darkness.

Christ gives authority to his followers, and this is to be applied in this spiritual conflict. When the seventy-two returned from their ministry tour, Jesus told them, “I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you” (Luke 10:19). While this authority over Satan still applies to disciples today, exercising that authority is a great challenge due to his cunning nature. Lovelace outlines five strategies of Satan: temptation, deception, accusation, possession, and physical attack.<sup>44</sup> Though these strategies can be used by demons directly, Lovelace submits that “normally, however, the destructive malice of Satan against all humanity, and particularly against the church, is channeled through human agents and the systems and institutions they have built.”<sup>45</sup> The context of the disciple’s world is one in which spiritual conflict is to be expected on every front with the intention of resisting the disciple’s ongoing sanctification and ministry of advancing the kingdom. As the disciple follows Christ, is led by the Spirit, and exercises faith, the kingdom of darkness is pressed back, and the will of God is done on earth. So then, a disciple by faith comes into union with Christ, by faith grows into the likeness of Christ, and by faith advances the kingdom of God in the world in the context of God’s grace.

A disciple who understands these essential elements of the gospel has a firm foundation upon which life in Christ can be built. Then, the disciple imitates Christ as a result of union with Christ and not merely by copying his life principles or actions, and the Spirit empowers the disciple to be like Christ in every aspect of life.

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<sup>44</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 137–39.

<sup>45</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 140.

## Contemporary Perspectives on Spiritual Formation

A model that has a strong foundation in the Word of God must more deeply consider the role of the disciple in spiritual formation. A disciple is formed, in part, by the pursuit of Christ through spiritual practices that are essential to the disciple's transformation. This pursuit is in response to and empowered by the grace of God at work within the disciple. Christian spiritual formation author Diane Chandler explains, "As God's children we are nurtured by a loving Father through the person of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, who in every way is dedicated to our overall growth and development."<sup>46</sup> God initiates and produces this growth just as Jesus indicated: "As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me" (John 15:4). Our action, abiding in the vine, is required, but it does not produce life. Professor of biblical spirituality Donald Whitney emphasizes this idea, "It's crucial—*crucial*—to understand that it's not our pursuit of holiness that qualifies us to see the Lord. Rather, we are qualified to see the Lord *by the Lord*, not by the good things we do."<sup>47</sup> Our spiritual practices do not form Christ in us, but they are the means God uses to form us spiritually. Hull and Cook note, "Spiritual disciplines, as Dallas Willard so often taught, are not about our producing anything but rather about our willingness to let the life of God produce life in us."<sup>48</sup> They are means of grace whereby the Spirit does his work of transformation. Three schools of spiritual formation (Kingdom Spirituality, Holistic Spirituality, and Biblical Spirituality<sup>49</sup>) are worth examining in greater detail in order to glean from their perspectives on spiritual practices. The strength of their

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<sup>46</sup> Diane J. Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation: An Integrated Approach for Personal and Relational Wholeness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 24, Kindle.

<sup>47</sup> Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. and exp. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 3.

<sup>48</sup> Hull and Cook, *The Cost of Cheap Grace*, 124.

<sup>49</sup> Matthew D. Haste, "Practical Theology in the Local Church" (unpublished class notes for 80474 Practical Theology in the Local Church, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Summer Semester, 2022).

approaches lies in their adherence to scriptural truth, for when spiritual formation rests on a biblical foundation, transformation into the likeness of Christ flows from dynamic union with him.

### **The Kingdom Spirituality School**

The Kingdom Spirituality School benefits from a historical Christian approach to the spiritual disciplines. Richard Foster and Dallas Willard are its main proponents. The focus of this school tends to be on an individual's experience with God rather than that of the church community.<sup>50</sup> In his introduction to the spiritual disciplines, Foster bemoans the "superficiality" of the age and its bent toward "instant satisfaction," which diverts people from spiritual life. To combat this trend, he submits, "The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm."<sup>51</sup> The inner life that has been neglected is the beneficiary of these disciplines. In truth, it is the inner reality—even more than the outward aspects of spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and worship—that Foster sees as core to the disciplines. He clarifies, "The Spiritual Disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life."<sup>52</sup> The practices of the spiritual life, then, are not the end goal. Transformation must take place on the inside, and only God can accomplish it. Foster points out, "The demand is for an inside job, and only God can work from the inside. We cannot attain or earn this righteousness of the kingdom of God; it is a grace that is given."<sup>53</sup> If only God can do this

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<sup>50</sup> Haste, "Practical Theology in the Local Church."

<sup>51</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, special anniv. ed. (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 1, Kindle.

<sup>52</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 6.



work, and human ability is useless in bringing out a change of heart, then the mistaken conclusion is to do nothing. Foster combats this notion decisively: “We do not need to be hung on the horns of the dilemma of either human works or idleness. God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”<sup>54</sup> Through the disciplines, we draw near to God, and in this, James reminds us of God’s response: “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (Jas 4:8).

In a manner similar to Foster, Willard emphasizes that spiritual formation centers on the condition of the heart. He sees that “the greatest need of collective humanity—is *renovation of our hearts*.”<sup>55</sup> The inner dimension of our life needs transformation, and the transformation is accomplished by Jesus. Willard describes this work of Jesus as “an invasion of natural human reality by a supernatural life ‘from above.’”<sup>56</sup> The result of this invasion is “an obedience or conformity to Christ that arises out of an inner transformation accomplished through purposive interaction with the grace of God in Christ.”<sup>57</sup> External human activity does not create this change. As Willard stipulates, “Christlikeness of the inner being is not a human attainment. It is, finally, a gift of grace.”<sup>58</sup> Rather, the inner change brings a disciple into obedience to Christ. As the heart is changed, the rest of life is impacted. Willard contends that the human heart “is the executive center of a human life,” and as the heart is transformed, the rest of human life—including its thoughts, feelings, choices, body, social context, and soul—can be

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<sup>54</sup> Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 20th anniv. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021), 6.

<sup>56</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 15.

<sup>58</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 16.

“fully integrated under God.”<sup>59</sup> In this integration, the disciple must follow a prescribed path. This path includes a “vision of the kingdom,” the “intention to be a kingdom person,” and the “means of changing my inner being.”<sup>60</sup> In each of these aspects lies a characteristic, ongoing pursuit of Christ. Christ calls to the disciple, and the disciple answers by seeking Christ until all of the many dimensions of life are formed into the image of Christ.

### **The Holistic Spirituality School**

The Holistic Spirituality School integrates the social sciences into its method of spiritual formation. It can be characterized by a focus on developing the whole person, including a tendency to be empirically driven or dependent on what can be proven or demonstrated.<sup>61</sup> One of the school’s main representatives, Diane Chandler, presents an integrated approach to Christian Spiritual Formation (CSF), which emphasizes restoring the disciple to the image of God in seven dimensions of spiritual experience: spirit, emotions, relationships, intellect, vocation, physical health and wellness, and resource stewardship.<sup>62</sup> Chandler ascribes the influence of the Spirit to all of these dimensions of life and not merely the inner aspects of life, noting especially that formation into the image of Christ must include all these dimensions since they are “intended by God to coalesce into an ethical lifestyle that witnesses to the unbelieving world of God’s redeeming love.”<sup>63</sup> Christ’s formation in the disciple extends to all dimensions of life and contributes to the advancement of the kingdom of God. Chandler’s approach differs in the emphasis it places on the disciple’s witness. She states, “One of the criticisms of

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<sup>59</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 24–25.

<sup>60</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 85–89.

<sup>61</sup> Haste, “Practical Theology in the Local Church.”

<sup>62</sup> Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 17.

<sup>63</sup> Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 18–19.

various Christian formation approaches is that they lean too heavily on personal development, including one's spiritual life in God, to the exclusion of manifesting the love and grace of God to others through active engagement and service in the world."<sup>64</sup> It is the image of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, as understood and applied in all these dimensions, which forms the disciple for God's purposes. The means through which Christ is formed may be spiritual disciplines, suffering, healing prayer, supportive relationships, forgiveness, and conflict resolution, just to name a few. In CSF, Chandler argues for the recognition of our integrated nature as human beings whose formation in all dimensions of life into the image of Christ has as its intended goal to bring glory to God in the world.<sup>65</sup>

### **The Biblical Spirituality School**

The Biblical Spirituality School emphasizes the role of theological foundation as the key component of forming disciples in the image of Christ. It is characterized by Word-centered theology worked out in life and places a heavy emphasis on the Reformers and the Puritans.<sup>66</sup> The perspective of Lovelace, one of the representatives of this school, has already been acknowledged in the biblical model of spirituality. His emphasis is on the clear "proclamation of the gospel in depth,"<sup>67</sup> specifically on the substitutionary atonement, which alone "gives the answer to the problem of guilt, bondage, and alienation from God."<sup>68</sup> The establishment of life in Christ belongs to those who "have experienced the shattering of their spheres of ignorance and darkness by a growing understanding of the nature of God, their sin and God's provision of grace in Christ

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<sup>64</sup> Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 273.

<sup>65</sup> Chandler, *Christian Spiritual Formation*, 23.

<sup>66</sup> Haste, "Practical Theology in the Local Church."

<sup>67</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 145.

<sup>68</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 97.

Jesus.<sup>69</sup> It is from this solid foundation that transformation into the likeness of Christ is able to progress.

Like Lovelace, J. I. Packer argues that the lack of the knowledge of God stands at the center of the problem of transformation.<sup>70</sup> This knowledge goes beyond knowing about God to include the knowledge of God that constitutes the aim of the disciple's life<sup>71</sup> in accordance with the Lord's declaration, "This is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Knowing God starts with the proclamation of the gospel, which Packer describes in terms of propitiation and adoption. Propitiation concerns both the "rubbing out of sin" as well as the "pacifying of God's wrath,"<sup>72</sup> and concerning adoption, "God takes us into his family and fellowship."<sup>73</sup> These acts are the province of God alone and result in the true knowledge of God. However, growth in the knowledge of all aspects of God's character ~~and nature~~ is essential for the disciple's transformation. Packer contends that growth in the knowledge of God, practically speaking, involves,

First, listening to God's Word and receiving it as the Holy Spirit interprets it, in application to oneself; second, noting God's nature and character, as his Word and works reveal it; third, accepting his invitations and doing what he commands; fourth, recognizing and rejoicing in the love that he has shown you in thus approaching you and drawing you into this divine fellowship.<sup>74</sup>

These practices of pressing into the knowledge of God in partnership with the ongoing work of God lead the disciple to becoming more like Christ.

A final representative of this school, Donald Whitney, maintains that "the only

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<sup>69</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 98.

<sup>70</sup> J. I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 12.

<sup>71</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 33.

<sup>72</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 182 (emphasis original).

<sup>73</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 207.

<sup>74</sup> Packer, *Knowing God*, 37.

road to Christian maturity and godliness (a biblical term synonymous with Christlikeness and holiness) passes through the practice of the Spiritual Disciplines.”<sup>75</sup> This is not merely a practical suggestion; it is a biblical imperative. Whitney argues, “Holiness is not an option for those who claim to be children of the Holy One (see 1 Peter 1:15–16), so neither are the means of holiness—that is, the Spiritual Disciplines—an option.”<sup>76</sup> The work of Christ in producing holiness, however, does not come from spiritual practice. As Whitney confirms, “Growth in holiness is a gift from God.”<sup>77</sup> Like Foster, Whitney sees the disciplines as tools to put us in position to receive God’s grace,<sup>78</sup> and in this way, they are a means, not the end, to “both closeness to Christ and conformity to Christ, a conformity that is both inward and outward, a growing conformity to both the heart of Christ and the life of Christ.”<sup>79</sup> In the spiritual disciplines as well as the pursuit of the knowledge of God and the in-depth proclamation of the gospel, biblical spirituality maintains the fundamental and primary role of the Scriptures in Christ-like transformation.

Each school takes a biblical approach to spiritual formation. Within this biblical framework, however, each emphasizes a different aspect of spirituality. Kingdom spirituality rightly centers on the transformation of the heart, but it can lean so heavily on personal transformation that it tends to isolate believers from the context of the greater church body without which transformation is short-circuited. Holistic spirituality aims to restore the disciple to the image of Christ in all dimensions of human life, and in doing so, it moves into areas outside the revelation of Scripture. Though these areas may truly be informed by biblical truth, it brings into question whether that which is prescribed by

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<sup>75</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 14.

<sup>77</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 11.

<sup>78</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 9.

the Bible is adequate to equip a disciple into Christ's image. Biblical spirituality focuses on the knowledge of and adherence to truth, but it can also de-emphasize the integrated nature of the whole person. By taking into account their strengths and weaknesses, disciple-making in the contemporary church can greatly benefit from each of these perspectives and strengthen the fruit of its labors. In spiritual formation, though the forming is done by God, the disciple's participation in that formation through spiritual practices is essential.

### **Practical Issues in Discipleship**

Models of discipleship and perspectives on spiritual formation need practical application in order for growth as a disciple to occur, and the context of that application is the church. The community of believers is a critically important element in biblical discipleship. A disciple is formed in the context of the collective life of the church for the simple reason that a disciple cannot exist as a solitary individual apart from the rest of the body. Hull asserts, "Any person of wisdom understands how much spiritual community is fundamental to being formed into Christ and not malformed into a life of sadness."<sup>80</sup> Pastor Andrew Ryder affirms this by pointing to the example used by Jesus of the vine and the branches: "The allegory of the vine, in particular, rules out the possibility of a disciple living an independent, solitary existence. . . . On a tree the living branches are not only united to the trunk; they are also joined to one another."<sup>81</sup> The interconnectedness of disciples, by virtue of their common union in Christ, highlights the importance of the covenant community in making disciples. Discipleship finds its greatest strength in the community of believers, but it is also where the greatest challenges lie. This section will diagnose a key problem of discipleship in the church,

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<sup>80</sup> Hull, "Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out," 111.

<sup>81</sup> Andrew Ryder, *Following Christ: Models of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward, 1999).

offer a solution, identify non-negotiable components, and, finally, discuss how the context of the church community facilitates interrelated dimensions of discipleship.

### **The Problem**

Typically, discipleship programs and literature fall into one of two categories: they are either hyper-individualistic or they see one structure or group type as the fail-proof method for all spiritual formation. In a critique of discipleship that over-emphasizes the role of the individual, professor of spiritual formation Paul Pettit, reports, “Much of the current evangelical discussion surrounding Christian growth emanates from an individualistic and privatized viewpoint.”<sup>82</sup> Pettit cautions that “problems arise when an overemphasis is placed on the individual believer—apart from his or her Christian community.”<sup>83</sup> Culturally speaking, an individualistic approach to spiritual formation typifies the American context. However, the small group approach to discipleship has also been a strong trend in the evangelical church, a trend which finds support in the method of Jesus and his followers throughout history.

Biblically and historically, small groups have been effective in discipleship development. Consider the method of Jesus. He called the twelve to be with him and further separated Peter, James, and John at times like at the Mount of Transfiguration (see Matt 12:1; 17:1). John Wesley used a two-part small group’s method, the band and class structure, that he borrowed from the Moravians as an integral part of his holiness societies.<sup>84</sup> These were key components of the rapid expansion through discipleship of the Methodist movement.

The method of Jesus to disciple small groups of people continues to be used

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<sup>82</sup> Paul Pettit, ed., *Foundations of Spiritual Formation: A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 21n5.

<sup>83</sup> Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 21.

<sup>84</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 166.

today. Discipleship pastor Greg Ogden follows the example of Jesus, who “intentionally called a few to multiply himself in them.”<sup>85</sup> To distinguish his strategy for multiplying reproducing discipleship groups from a program-based approach to small groups, he emphasizes relational life investment. While he agrees that some form of curriculum in these groups is necessary, “For transformation to occur all this must be processed in the context of relational commitment.”<sup>86</sup> Intentional relationships factor so heavily into his thinking that it permeates his definition of discipling: “Discipling is an intentional relationship in which we walk along other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ.”<sup>87</sup> In walking alongside other disciples, Ogden critiques the one-on-one disciple-making relationship for, among other reasons, its lack of ability to develop disciples who reproduce.<sup>88</sup> In contrast, he proposes, “As an alternative to the one-on-one model . . . triads (3) or quads (4), which I have been calling microgroups, as the ideal size for a disciple-making group.”<sup>89</sup> In this structure, Ogden finds the ingredients that work together for discipleship. There is much to commend in his approach, especially his emphasis on intentional relationship building. However, it would be a mistake to neglect individual discipleship altogether in favor of a small groups model. A quick examination of how Jesus made disciples will reveal that individual discipleship also factored heavily in his ministry. In addition, relationship building, a key component of discipleship, does not just happen in the small group setting even for those who use a small group model. A different approach could be to see the value of both small groups and individual discipleship in terms of their strengths and

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<sup>85</sup> Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 110.

<sup>86</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 117.

<sup>87</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 124.

<sup>88</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 135.

<sup>89</sup> Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 138.



weaknesses. Like Ogden, much of the contemporary church has recognized that the small group structure allows for integrating new members more easily and for expansion through multiplication, but it is crucial to recognize that small groups are not the sole environment where discipleship happens.

### **The Solution**

Depending on the church and the dynamics within the church, either a small group strategy or an individualistic approach alone will be insufficient. There are other factors in church life working against a one-size-fits-all approach, such as the discipleship of children, to name just one. The solution to both these extremes is to recognize that discipleship must be informed by the specific context of the local church and within the framework of union with Christ. This union with Christ unites the disciple with the rest of the church, as Paul so aptly describes: “We, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Rom 12:5). The relationships in the local church form a dynamic expression of this unity and create the fabric with which spiritual formation is woven.

In each local church, the web of relationships is unique. Because the unity of each body of believers is expressed in a unique way according to its makeup, the means and methods for discipleship should reflect that makeup. A more helpful construct may be to consider the various contexts in which discipleship takes place. Marshall and Payne identify nine contexts for discipleship: one-to-one, small groups, and large groups in each of three spheres of life—family, congregation, and community.<sup>90</sup> Opportunities exist in each of these contexts for discipleship, and it behooves pastors and leaders to take them into consideration as they equip their congregations. When discipleship is understood to be more than something done in a small group, or class, or an individual discipleship

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<sup>90</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 56.

relationship, it has the potential to become a way of life that is embedded in the culture of the church family rather than just the ministry of a few believers. In order to illustrate their point, Marshall and Payne give examples of how Bible reading, an important element of discipleship, can be accomplished in a variety of these contexts.

Imagine if all Christians, as a normal part of their discipleship, were caught up in a web of regular Bible reading—not only digging into the Word privately, but reading it with their children before bed, with their spouse over breakfast, with a non-Christian colleague at work once a week over lunch, with a new Christian for follow-up once a fortnight for mutual encouragement, and with a mature Christian friend once a month for mutual encouragement.<sup>91</sup>

Their example focuses here on individual discipleship, but, even so, it serves to broaden the perspective of how it can be applied in the various spheres of life in which a disciple lives and is engaged. The impact of thinking with this perspective would be to empower disciple-making beyond the boundaries in which it so often is constrained. This empowerment not only applies to the location and size of participants, but also to the participants themselves. In this way, everyone in the church body becomes united in the mission of making disciples since everyone has relationships in each of these contexts. This unity moves beyond uniformity and becomes centered on Christ and his mission.

### **The Non-Negotiables**

A focus on context does not negate the need for structures, such as small group organization, in the ministry of discipleship. Structures are needed for theory to become practice. The role of structure in discipleship, properly understood, is to support the life of Christ, which alone can grow disciples to be like Christ. Marshall and Payne use the metaphor of the trellis and the vine to explain the relationship between structures of church ministry and the work of discipleship. They note that preaching the gospel and seeing people converted and grow into maturity is “the work of planting, watering,

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<sup>91</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 57.

fertilizing, and tending the vine.”<sup>92</sup> To support this growth, the trellis “gives shape and support to the work”<sup>93</sup> of ministry. In the same way that the trellis does not cause the vine to grow, structures of ministry do not cause spiritual growth but instead help facilitate growth. They caution, however, that trellis work “tends to take over from vine work.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, structures are not the end goal but simply a tool in the discipleship process.

Regarding structure, Hull offers some wisdom: “The best research indicates that we learn and grow best in an environment that fosters trust, where people feel safe. When people gain trust and lower their defenses, they will be eager to follow a plan or a course of action that will lead them to Christlikeness.”<sup>95</sup> If anything should be a priority for the church, it should be to create relationships of trust that facilitate growth in Christ. Relationship building is key in making disciples. The intentionality of making disciples is the underlying principle, whatever the structure turns out to be, whether small group, one-on-one, prayer group, missional group, or whatever other form the structure may take. The context of the local church will shape the best structures for discipleship, but the non-negotiables are (a) the intentionality of disciple-making and (b) deepening relationships (facilitated by the covenant community of a local church). Old Testament professor Gordon Johnston identifies the covenant of a community as a “relational concept” that “forms a bond between the two contracting parties.”<sup>96</sup> Within the borders of the covenant community, when the covenant is properly upheld, relationships are able to work as God intended for the growth of disciples. Johnston argues, “Community is an

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<sup>92</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 8.

<sup>93</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 8.

<sup>94</sup> Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Hull, “Spiritual Formation from the Inside Out,” 132.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon Johnston, “Old Testament Community and Spiritual Formation,” in Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 76.

essential element of spiritual formation.”<sup>97</sup> Professor Joanne J. Jung concurs with Johnston: “Transformation is a process that requires the individual’s cooperation and effort, but it is also intended to be accomplished in community with God and others.”<sup>98</sup> Where there exists commitment to the community (i.e., through the covenant), and that community fosters trust and is dedicated to making disciples, the key elements are in place that can then be supported by a structure that is right for the context of the church.

### **The Interrelated Dimensions**

Certain dimensions of discipleship are only possible in the context of the church community. These dimensions flow out of relationship with Christ and relationships within the church. Richard Lovelace identifies primary and secondary elements of spiritual life that are necessary for the renewal of the church. The primary elements center on what is received through the atonement of Christ, such as justification and sanctification. The secondary elements follow as a result of the primary elements and are “closely connected with our union in Christ.”<sup>99</sup> As the church is united to Christ, Christ works in and through the church to grow its focus on his mission, its dependence upon him in prayer, its expression of life-giving community, its theological integration, and its disenculturation from the ways of the world. In union with Christ, the church shares his mission to take the gospel to the world. Prayer defines the communication that being united to Christ makes possible. Community exists because of the life of Christ and is shared by his disciples. Theological integration flows out of being united to the mind of Christ under the leadership of the Spirit. Union with Christ leads to disenculturation, as

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<sup>97</sup> Johnston in Pettit, *Foundations of Spiritual Formation*, 101.

<sup>98</sup> Joanne J. Jung, *The Lost Discipline of Conversation: Surprising Lessons in Spiritual Formation Drawn from the English Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 26.

<sup>99</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Christian Life*, 145.

the gospel permeates every aspect of the disciple's life.<sup>100</sup>

These five dimensions, however, do not stand by themselves but are realized through the relationships of the church. Lovelace explains that they are “related and reinforce one another.” He reasons,

Mission cannot be effectively pursued without prayer, disenculturation and theological integration. Realistic and effective prayer can only grow out of a community oriented toward mission. Genuine Christian community takes part of its motivation from shared consciousness of mission, grows out of and expresses itself in prayer, and requires disenculturation and theological integration.<sup>101</sup>

Without the covenant community, practically speaking, growth into the fullness of Christ in these dimensions is not possible. The church's union with Christ and one another creates the environment for dimensions of discipleship that cannot exist independently. It is in such a context that these interrelated dimensions can flourish. When the community of gathered disciples embraces its biblical mandate to make disciples and understands its role communally in that process, transformation into the likeness of Christ happens according to the Spirit's plan and power.

### **Conclusion**

Contrary to discipleship models, methods, and practices that depend on cultural norms or trends, discipleship that remains biblically faithful will develop disciples who are transformed into the image of Christ. Unbiblical models of discipleship abound in the contemporary church. These models lack the power to conform disciples to the character of Christ due to their lack of foundation on the truth of the Word. On the other hand, models that stay true to a comprehensive understanding of the gospel in conversion, sanctification, and devotion to advancing Christ's kingdom will be effective in discipleship. Though the three schools of spiritual formation examined take different

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<sup>100</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Christian Life*, 145–46.

<sup>101</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Christian Life*, 146.

approaches, their biblical foundations strongly argue for benefitting from each method. The Kingdom School emphasizes practices that transform the heart as the means by which the life of Christ is fully realized. The Holistic School views transformation into the image of Christ for the whole person in its interrelated dimensions. The Biblical Spirituality School prioritizes the in-depth knowledge and application of Scripture as the vehicle for transformation. Finally, discipleship occurs in the context of a community of believers. The strength of this discipleship rests squarely in the strength of its relationships. Structures of discipleship are needed to facilitate making disciples but must fit the context of communal and individual needs. Integration of mission, prayer, community, theology, and transformation out of the world can only find its footing in the context of this community. Having delved into the models, methods, and practices that foster disciple-making, this project now turns to the series of sermons that will serve to communicate these concepts to the congregation of the Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church.

## CHAPTER 4

### DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the implementation of the project. My project was a series of ten sermons given to MSDBC over three months, from February to April 2024. My goal in this series was to clearly express each of the components of a biblical disciple based on my definition: a disciple is a worshipper of God who knows, loves, serves, and shares Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. I was working from the presupposition that only those who know what a disciple is from a biblical perspective can cooperate with God to be formed as disciples and to make other disciples. In this way, the vision of discipleship was cast by a biblical foundation connected to an easily communicated vision statement whose purpose was to clarify the nature of a disciple and to encourage living as a disciple.

#### **Pre-series Activity**

On January 20, 2024, two weeks before the start of the sermon series, I invited MSDBC members to take the Discipleship Survey.<sup>1</sup> The survey questions corresponded to the key components of discipleship I addressed in the series. Five questions each were dedicated to worshipping God, knowing, loving, serving, and sharing Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit. I presented the invitation to the congregation members during our Sabbath morning worship services for each of the two weeks leading up to the start of the series and sent emails to all of those subscribed to our church network. Thirty-nine participants completed the initial survey.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

The group that took the pre-series survey included a wide range of ages and church and Christian experience. The gender distribution was just about even, with nineteen male and twenty female respondents. About half of the respondents were senior adults. Although the church includes a good percentage of senior adults, the response to the pre-series survey does not accurately reflect the age distribution in the congregation. Many of the adults ages 20 to 50 chose not to participate. I was hoping for more participation in the younger age range. Perhaps the greater response among the seniors is indicative of a greater level of commitment to church life. Even with the greater number of participants coming from the older generations, the respondents of all ages tended to be long-term church members. Twenty-six of the respondents have been church members for over twenty years. In addition, thirty-two of the respondents indicated that they have been believers for over twenty years. Upon my initial review of these demographics, especially concerning the amount of Christian experience along with the large number of older adults, I readjusted my expectations for the potential for change from the project. I still believed that the project would see positive results, but the group that I was most interested in assessing for Christian understanding and practice was underrepresented.

Upon my initial analysis of the survey, I realized quickly that a few of my questions did not measure the understanding of discipleship in the way I had anticipated. For example, the first question probed the participant's ability to define what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. Just under 90 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed they could define what it means to be a disciple. On a simplified level, based on my long-term knowledge of the congregation, this result was not surprising. During several conversations over the course of the series, I was told that a disciple is a follower of Jesus. This is a true, albeit simplified definition of disciple. However, my intent in asking the question was to assess the depth of their understanding. Therefore, I recognized this question needed to be worded differently in order to uncover the information that I was looking for. Even so, the answers to this question provided a baseline from which to



compare answers to other questions in the survey that did probe aspects of discipleship more deeply. Each week during the series, I brought the congregation back to my definition of discipleship in the hopes that they would have a solid framework from which to point themselves and others to the work of Christ in and through them. In addition, my definition provided a greater depth and breadth of understanding of discipleship than the default understanding of many of the participants, as verified through my personal conversations.

Table 1: Pre-series participant response concerning discipleship definition

Survey Question (39 responses)		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I can define what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.	0	1	3	17	18

One of the more surprising results of the pre-series survey was the contrast between the participant’s experience of God’s love for them personally and the ongoing belief in God’s love for them. Ninety-two percent of the respondents indicated that they “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with having experienced God’s love for them personally. Yet, 69 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they sometimes had trouble believing that God loved them. That leaves 31 percent who were at least unsure or doubted God’s love for them at times. This data confirmed a strong sense of doubt concerning God’s love that has become apparent to me over the years of ministry. One experience in particular emphasizes this reality. About seven years ago, at the end of a service, I made an off-the-cuff remark in which I told the congregation that God loves them and I love them too. When I did not make the same remark the next week, an older member of the church came up to me and asked me why I forgot to say it. From then on, every week, this has become my sign-off phrase. I get regular feedback from individuals

about how meaningful that phrase is to them. Among other reasons, this highlights the fact that the people of the church have an ongoing need to know that God loves them. The surveys affirmed my emphasis in the sermon on God’s love for the disciple and that God initiates a loving relationship apart from any human activity. This also affirmed my decision to emphasize the initiative of God for every aspect of discipleship. Discipleship that focuses on human initiative, without recognizing God’s primary role in revealing knowledge of himself in loving, serving, and sharing himself with the disciple, does not accurately reflect the basic nature of biblical discipleship.

Table 2: Pre-series participant response concerning God’s love

Survey Question (39 responses)		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	I have experienced God’s love for me personally.	1	0	2	4	32
12	I sometimes have trouble believing that God loves me.	13	14	3	8	1

As I was contemplating the sermon series, it occurred to me that I wanted to emphasize spiritual practices to a greater degree than a simple application at the end of each message. So, I made as one of the three major points of each message the application of a spiritual discipline or practice whose design was to help facilitate growth in each of the ten areas of discipleship addressed in the series. The pre-series data affirmed my decision, as my analysis showed that many who were strong in knowledge did not have a corresponding command of spiritual practices. For example, one area in which I had expected a greater response was daily Bible reading. This is a spiritual practice that has been highly emphasized during my ministry in the church and even before I became senior pastor. However, 56 percent of the respondents indicated that they agree or strongly agree to daily Bible reading compared to 66 percent who agree or

strongly agree to the understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines. The only practices showing less actual practice than daily Bible reading were inviting the unchurched to church and sharing the gospel. I had expected these practices to have a lower response, although our church has had regular evangelism training opportunities. This data was a strong encouragement to make spiritual practices a major aspect of each week's sermon.

Table 3: Pre-series participant response concerning spiritual practices

Survey Question (39 responses)		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	I use my spiritual gifts and talents to serve my local church in ministry.	0	1	3	17	18
5	I understand and practice spiritual disciplines.	0	1	12	17	9
10	I often ask God to help me know him better.	0	5	0	18	16
11	In the last month, I have shared a testimony of what God has done in my life.	3	9	5	15	7
13	I pray for others to know God personally.	0	4	2	15	17
15	I am currently personally helping someone to grow closer to the Lord.	3	7	6	16	6
21	In the last 6 months I have invited an unchurched person to church.	9	11	3	8	5
25	In the last 90 days, I have shared with someone how to become a Christian.	10	11	7	10	1
28	I worship God with others when I'm not at church.	0	13	6	11	9
29	I read the Bible daily.	3	14	5	8	9

Prior to the start of the series, I gave an overview of the messages to an expert panel, and each week as the series progressed, I provided my manuscripts for their review. The expert panel consisted of the three members of my board of elders. They are all seminary-trained pastors with a combined experience of over fifty years in ministry,

which includes training and overseeing Seventh Day Baptist pastors. Their many years of experience contributed to my decision to include them as members of the expert panel. Their feedback affirmed the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the sermons in the series.

### **Project Implementation**

I began the sermon series on February 3, 2024, and concluded on April 20, 2024. The basis for the sermon series was guided by my definition of a disciple and centered mainly on the four passages that I exegeted for this project: John 1:9–18, John 15:4–12, Philippians 2:1–11, and Matthew 28:18–20. As I spent time in these texts, I saw more and more clearly the discipleship dynamic: God initiates a relationship with his disciples, and his disciples respond to his initiative. A disciple can know Christ because Christ first made himself known to that disciple. A disciple can love Christ because Christ first loved his disciple. A disciple can serve Christ because Christ first served his disciple. A disciple can share Christ because Christ first shared himself with his disciple. The four main passages correspond to the truths that a disciple knows, loves, serves, and shares Jesus. For each of these four truths, I prepared two sermons: the first focused on Christ’s initiative and the second on the disciple’s response. The remaining two messages described the life of a disciple as a worshipper of God who is empowered by the Holy Spirit.<sup>2</sup>

#### *Sermon 1: “A Disciple Is a Worshipper of God”*

In this first sermon, I introduced the series and its purpose. I explained that the goal of discipleship is worship. This goal is two-fold. The first aspect is to recognize that being a disciple and worshipping God are inseparable realities. To be a disciple is to be a worshipper of God for the simple reason that a disciple can see and understand the

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 5.

greatness of God's nature and respond with worship. The second aspect of this goal is to recognize the ongoing reality of worshipping God in the life of a disciple. Worship of God grows in a disciple as more of God's nature is revealed, which then causes change in the disciple's heart and life. Worshippers of God do not stay the same but are changed by the presence and power of God. The goal then culminates in life after death with Christ, as pure and perfect worship characterizes the existence of those who are in his presence forever.

The spiritual practices that facilitate the worship of God are daily worship at home and weekly worship with a church family. Regular habits of worship help to facilitate the disciple's growth as a worshipper. Weekly worship with a church family, in addition to daily worship at home, provides the context for the Spirit to reveal God's nature through the Word. The habit of daily worship at home presses a disciple past the mindset of worship-as-obligation and into the idea of worship-as-lifestyle. These worship practices do not ensure growth as a worshipper. Instead, they provide the opportunity to be worshippers, which is the goal of discipleship.

*Sermon 2: "A Disciple Knows Jesus, Part 1"*

In the second message, I asserted that a disciple knows Jesus because Jesus has made himself known. Jesus came as the light into spiritual darkness to show the world God's true nature. His light was unique in that, as he was God the Son, he surpassed every other revelation of God. By his person and through his words, he illuminated human understanding of God's true self. On its own, humanity does not have the ability to know God due to the condition of the human heart, which is marred by sin. The sinful nature is idolatrous in nature. It cannot recognize the glory and greatness of God but instead seeks to worship that which has been created. However, when the light of Christ dawns upon a human soul, it breaks the power of sinful nature to warp the image and understanding of God. Only the light of Christ can reveal the glorious nature of God and

his redemption. There are not many ways to God but only one way—through the light of Jesus. The result is true worship of God by means of conversion, regeneration, and adoption into God’s family. The light leads to personally knowing Christ and having a relationship with him by faith. The light is the Word of Christ, and it is this light that brings true understanding of God.

All those who have been adopted into his family are drawn to his Word by their new nature in Christ. Once Christ reveals himself, the believer desires to know more of him, and this happens through the Word. Therefore, disciples of Jesus engage in regular habits of study and listening to the preaching of the Word. These habits facilitate growth in the knowledge of God’s nature. It is through the Word of God that Jesus has made himself known and continues to make himself known to those who belong to him.

*Sermon 3: “A Disciple Knows Jesus, Part 2”*

In this third message, I expounded on the truth that a disciple knows Jesus personally and desires to know him more. To know Jesus personally leads to the understanding that his greatness and glory surpass all other things. Therefore, nothing can compare to knowing him. This knowledge is dynamic. The disciple desires deeper and greater knowledge of Christ and will go to great lengths to acquire it, even facing great suffering and trial, as the apostle Paul described in his letter to the Philippians. Personal knowledge of Christ brings great gain to the disciple. The first gain is to be found in Christ. For those who are lost, without hope, and without God in the world, this gain cannot be overstated. Outside of Christ, we are powerless against the forces that seek to destroy us. Outside of Christ, we are continually seeking a home that cannot be found. Outside of Christ, we are unaware of his unsurpassed glory and seek to find satisfaction in things that can never truly satisfy our souls. Yet, those in Christ can know him, see his glory, worship him, and do his will. To be in Christ comes as a result of gaining the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness is both the application of Christ’s

righteousness to our sinful condition as well as the ability, through Christ, to do the will of God. His righteousness, applied to our human condition, creates a love of God's righteous ways. This coincides with the final gain of knowing Christ. Resurrection power is the power of God applied to the rebellious human heart. Only God has the power to bring life to what is dead, and only God can transform a heart desiring sin that leads to death into a heart desiring the things of God.

The desire to know Christ more must be cultivated. It does not grow without spiritual practice and training. The deceitfulness of sin will wear away at the desire to know Christ more when the Word of God is absent from a disciple's life. As the psalmist says, the Word must be hidden in our hearts. To hide it requires both meditation on and memorization of Scripture. Biblical meditation means to think deeply about the meaning and application of the Word. In this activity, God's perfect nature and ways profoundly impact the heart and mind through the work of the Holy Spirit present in the disciple. By memorizing the Word, it is ready to be brought to mind at any given moment for the encouragement and strengthening of the disciple. As the Word guides us in the ways of God, it provides guardrails to keep us from those pitfalls that would keep us from wanting to grow in our knowledge of him.

*Sermon 4: "A Disciple Loves Jesus, Part 1"*

In this fourth message, I argued that a disciple loves Jesus because he or she has experienced his love. Through Christ's life and death, God showed his love for the world. His love extends to all of humanity in general but also to each individual personally. It was not because anyone loved God that he showed his love in return. Rather, because God's very nature is love, he loves despite humanity's natural disposition to not love God. To not love God is the consequence of sinful nature, but the reality of sin is not strong enough to keep God's love from being extended to each person that he has made. His love draws people to himself through the giving of his Son on the cross.

Ultimately, the result of this love is to bring those who are far away from him into a close personal relationship with him. This relationship is described by Scripture as adoption into his family. As members of his family, we who once did not know how to love as God loves have been and are being transformed to love in the same way that he loves. The love of God is different than the love of the world. Without experiencing the love of Christ, we are unable to love as he loves because the only love we would have known does not compare to his love. His love finds its ultimate glory in his sacrifice when he bore the punishment for the sins of the world.

Those who are in Christ have been given his love and have seen his example of love. Still, the pull of the sinful nature is strong, so God's love must be cultivated in us. The first step of this cultivation is to embrace the will of God to love him and to love one another. To recognize that this love is his highest will for us requires letting go of other priorities in our lives in addition to working out this love in daily life. We soon recognize that this call to love is far greater than our own ability to live out. Therefore, we must learn to depend on his grace and develop the habit of asking the Lord to teach us to love and to grow his love in us.

*Sermon 5: "A Disciple Loves Jesus, Part 2"*

In this fifth message, I contended that the source of a disciple's love is abiding in Christ. As with Jesus's example of the vine and the branches, the disciple must remain in vital connection with the Lord in order to bear the fruit of love. It is the presence of Jesus that causes love to flow through his disciples, for Christ is love. So, then, a disciple must abide in Christ; to abide in him is to abide in his love. Abiding in his love requires being loved by him, enjoying his love, and always being a recipient of his love. Additionally, abiding in his love requires following his commands since anyone who does not live according to the will and ways of God is not following the way of love. In this way, the disciple is empowered to love like Christ. The spiritual dynamic of his love



flowing through the disciple comes from the love of his presence, which has been deposited in the heart of the disciple. Practically speaking, the disciple has been given the example of Christ through the Word. An ongoing connection with the Word of God is essential to abiding in Christ and, therefore, abiding in his love. It is only through this ongoing connection to the Lord through the Word and by his empowering presence that his disciples may continue to love like him.

To cultivate the love of Christ, a disciple's efforts must focus on maintaining the connection to Christ. Daily life and its pull away from the Lord and his will work to keep the disciple separated from the reality of abiding in him. Therefore, regular confession and forgiveness of sin are essential discipleship practices. Confession of sin is both a personal and community practice. It removes the obstacles that hinder a close relationship with the Lord. Forgiveness of one another likewise removes the obstacles standing in the way of abiding in Christ. Together, these spiritual practices lead the disciple to continue to abide in Christ and in his love.

*Sermon 6: "A Disciple Serves Jesus, Part 1"*

In this sixth message, I explained that a disciple serves Jesus because Jesus came to serve. Serving is the nature of God, which Jesus revealed in his life on earth. Instead of using his right as God to his own advantage, Christ embraced the status of a servant in humble obedience to the Father. This was shown first in his incarnation; he was a servant in that he humbled himself to be born into this world. Jesus also showed himself a servant by his lifestyle of serving others. Though he was and is king, he lived with the mindset of a man of low position. Ultimately, Jesus served to the greatest extent through his sacrifice on the cross. He submitted to the will of the Father to the end, and in this way, he proved the full extent of what it means to be a servant. As a result of Christ's submission to the will of the Father, God exalted him to the highest place of honor. This was not a new position, but one in which Jesus would be recognized as the Lord that he

had always been. His life of humble service revealed the character and nature of God himself, which is worthy of all praise and honor.

Jesus's example and his acts of serving sinful humanity are the reason and motivation for his disciples to also serve God and one another as he did. To serve in this way requires submitting to the will of God and rejecting the will of the flesh. Fasting is a spiritual habit that cultivates this ability to serve simply because fasting works against the desires of our bodies. Fasting is the act of denying self so that Christ can practically and in every way be the Lord of our lives. Fasting from food, when it is done by considering the individual needs of one's own body, can create an environment whereby the Spirit's work in us to deny the flesh becomes stronger. Another type of fasting that is especially helpful in this day and age is fasting from devices. Whatever means of fasting a disciple practices, it will serve to discipline the body for the sake of serving the will of God rather than the passions of the flesh.

*Sermon 7: "A Disciple Serves Jesus, Part 2"*

In this seventh message, I clarified that a disciple serves Jesus by serving those whom Jesus came to serve. To truly serve Jesus, a disciple must serve like Jesus. This requires much more than the act of serving. It requires having the same mindset as Jesus, which is the mindset of a servant. During his life on earth, Jesus painted a masterpiece of what it means to serve, and it is this vision of servanthood the disciple must embrace. The ability to embrace it comes, first, from the spiritual reality that every disciple has been given the mind of Christ at conversion. This mindset is one that serves the will of the Father above the will of the self. Having received the mind of Christ, the disciple then can truly imitate the example of Christ and not simply imitate his actions. All the responsibilities of a humble servant are willingly embraced by the disciple who has the mind of Christ. The mindset to serve goes beyond individual service to recognize that the rest of the body of Christ is also called to serve Jesus. A disciple must share the same

mindset with the church. This unity of mind does not mean uniformity of thinking. Rather, it is guided by a common vision of the priority of the gospel and the glory of Christ. With these as guidelines, the overriding characteristic of the serving mindset of a disciple is humility, not selfish ambition.

A disciple cultivates the Christ-like attitude of serving by serving the church family. Serving the church family makes us more like Jesus, brings glory to God, demonstrates knowledge of God, expresses love for God, and brings pleasure to God. Although the ways in which disciples serve the church typically reflect the spiritual gifts they have received, a Christ-like attitude shows a willingness to serve wherever there is a need. In the church, there are always opportunities to serve, requiring humility of heart and mind. These opportunities are God's grace designed to grow us in the servant mindset of Christ.

*Sermon 8: "A Disciple Shares Jesus, Part 1"*

In this eighth message, I specified that a disciple shares Jesus because Jesus shared himself with the world. In sharing himself with the world, Christ proclaimed the gospel and called people to repent and turn to God. His mission was to share good news, but good news can only be understood as good in the context of bad news. When the Lord proclaimed good news to the poor, he spoke into the poverty of people's lives in order to make them rich in their souls. He was the good news since he came to destroy the power of sin. He was the light that dawned upon people who lived in spiritual darkness. His coming to earth was the inauguration of the kingdom of God, and he called people to embrace this kingdom. His light was not perceived by many as good news, but all who did receive it were given the ability to see the greatness of the value of his kingdom. They received the good news he brought: freedom from the penalty and power of sin, spiritual sight to see the goodness and mercy of God, and the blessing of a restored relationship with Christ.

Jesus came proclaiming the good news, and he called those who followed him to do the same. His call extends to every disciple from every age. Disciples today are commanded to proclaim the gospel and testify to the glory of Christ. This work goes beyond understanding the meaning of the gospel and extends to the reason why a disciple shares the gospel. The motivation is the same as Jesus revealed to Nicodemus. God's love for the world moved him to send his Son, who came to preach the gospel. Likewise, his disciples are moved by love for God and the world to share the message and the nature of Christ. Praying daily for the opportunity to share Christ is a spiritual habit that cultivates love for the lost and readiness to share the good news. Christ shared himself with the world, and his disciples, following his lead, share him with the world.

*Sermon 9: "A Disciple Shares Jesus, Part 2"*

In this ninth message, I contended that a disciple of Jesus makes disciples. The very nature of a disciple is to make other disciples. Christ commands his disciples to follow him in this ministry because he has authorized, equipped, and empowered them to do so. By Christ's authority, a disciple has both the right and the power to make disciples. By his example and through the words of Scripture, a disciple becomes equipped for the task. By the power of the Spirit, a disciple is empowered to do the work of ministry according to the will of God. Since making disciples is integral to the reality of being a disciple, it must be understood as a way of life rather than a mere task to perform. Discipleship is a life-long, daily process of being conformed to the character of Christ. It involves intentionally being discipled and discipling others. As a way of life flowing out of the identity of a disciple, it must permeate all contexts of life. Making disciples should not be limited to church life only. It must also flow out of family and community life. Once every sphere of life is seen as a context in which to make disciples, then it can become a way of life as the Lord intended it to be.

There are many practices that can be helpful to encourage growth in the

making of disciples, such as the art of spiritual conversations, learning a gospel presentation, and giving a testimony. One practice that is easily overlooked but is a powerful discipleship tool is the habit of hospitality. Hosting a party or a meal is a means to be hospitable and is certainly the notion that people think of first; however, hospitality is more than cooking and party planning. The core of hospitality is to make a person feel welcome. It displays the heart of Jesus to bring those who are on the outside in. Hospitality notices people, welcomes people, and connects people to one another. Hospitality does not need to be paired with a meal because it can and should operate anywhere. With the practice of hospitality, disciples have a powerful tool with which to make disciples.

*Sermon 10: "A Disciple Lives by the Power of the Holy Spirit"*

In this tenth message, I explained that the Spirit forms disciples to be like Jesus. This formation starts before salvation and continues throughout a disciple's transformation into Christlikeness. To become worshippers of God who know, love, serve, and share Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit must be at work. The Spirit begins his work in conversion and regeneration. Starting with the conviction of sin that accompanies the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit brings new life to the dead spirit of those who respond by faith to its message. Accompanying regeneration is the desire for the things of the Spirit and the rejection of the things of the flesh. This desire continues to grow as the Spirit works in progressive sanctification in the life of the believer. It is the work of the Spirit that moves the disciple to submit in ever-increasing ways to the will of God. The Spirit guides the disciple to understand and embrace the truth of the Word of God, which leads to repentance and a transformed life. The conviction of the Spirit is an ongoing necessity for the disciple to be conformed to the image of Christ. The Spirit not only guides the disciple to the destination of conformity to Christ, but the Spirit also empowers the disciple to get there.

One of the spiritual practices through which the Spirit powerfully works is the habit of spiritual conversations. Spiritual conversations focus on matters of the soul. These conversations do not happen by accident. It is an intentional habit that needs to be developed. The way into these conversations is through asking focused questions. Several hundreds of years ago, the Puritans practiced spiritual conversations as a regular habit. One of the questions that they asked one another was, “How’s your soul?” By asking good questions that get at the current state of the heart and by listening well to one another, disciples can create an environment through which the Spirit is able to do the work of convicting and encouraging. This work of the Spirit is vital to the transformation of a disciple into the character of Christ.

During the sermon series, I noticed that the responses from the congregation were both more numerous and more specific than I received from a typical series. The feedback was split evenly between the knowledge and the practice aspects of discipleship. Regarding spiritual practices, the most notable comments focused on an increased desire to participate in spiritual practices such as fasting, personal worship, and corporate confession of sin. The teaching on God’s love, the purpose of fasting, and the identity of a disciple as a disciple-maker topped the comments on the nature of discipleship. As a result of this feedback, I provided a summary at the end of the series of the main emphasis of each message along with the accompanying spiritual practice as a reminder and encouragement to the congregation to practice these habits.

### **Post-series Activity**

After the completion of the series, I re-administered the Discipleship Survey. The post-series survey included the same quantitative questions as the pre-series survey but also included one additional question that was qualitative in nature. This question asked the participants to share how the series of messages had influenced their understanding of discipleship. Of the twenty-six post-series surveys that were returned,

twenty-three shared their thoughts on what they had learned. Most completed the post-series survey within two weeks of the conclusion of the series. Once I had received the surveys, I compiled and analyzed the data.

Table 4 presents the results of the mean scores between pre- and post-series surveys (on a five-point Likert scale) that saw the most significant positive change.

Table 4: Post-series most significant positive mean change

Survey Question	Pre-Series Mean	Post-Series Mean	Change
4   I feel equipped to make disciples.	3.35	4.08	+0.73
5   I understand and practice spiritual disciplines.	4.00	4.35	+0.35
12   I sometimes have trouble believing that God loves me.	3.92	4.52	+0.60
13   I pray for others to know God personally.	4.12	4.46	+0.35
20   I am not serving my church currently in a place where my gifts and talents can be used.	3.81	4.15	+0.35
26   I make it a priority not to miss worship with my church family.	3.88	4.38	+0.50
28   I worship God with others when I'm not at church.	3.42	3.77	+0.35

The greatest increase in discipleship knowledge and practice occurred in the feeling of being equipped to make disciples (+0.73), the belief in God’s personal love for the participants (+0.60), and the priority of weekly worship (+0.50). Since my rationale for this project was based on, among other factors, the feeling of not being equipped to make disciples, these results verify the rationale and highlight the effectiveness of the sermon series. Based on the pre-series data for question 12, “I sometimes have trouble believing God loves me,” there was good reason to expect a large increase in the post-series surveys. The mean for all thirty-nine pre-series surveys was 3.77. After the post-series surveys were collected and the data was dropped for the participants who chose not

to do a post-series survey, the mean increased to 3.92 for the pre-series surveys. Despite this increase, the post-series data shows one of the higher mean results (4.52). I conclude that the series addressed a core discipleship deficiency in the congregation and solidified their belief in the reality of God's love for them personally. Question 26, "I make it a priority not to miss church," had an initially higher mean than I was expecting. I suspect that the congregation estimated themselves at a higher level of commitment to church attendance as compared to my perspective. The significant increase can be attributed to a renewed sense of commitment to church attendance stemming from the series. Regardless of what the commitment level is perceived to be, the positive increase reveals a recognition on behalf of the congregation of the need for growth in regular church attendance.

Of the remaining questions having the most significant increase, "understanding and practicing spiritual disciplines" (+0.35) and "worshipping God with others when not at church" (+0.35) were to be expected based on the feedback that I had received over the course of the series. I attribute the increase in the practice of "praying for others to know God personally" (+0.35) to the specific application in the eighth sermon of the series in which I challenged the church to pray daily for the opportunity to share Jesus with five people they know. One of the surprising results was the increase in "serving the church community" (+0.35) when compared to question 16, "I think of myself as a servant to others," which had a mean decrease (-0.04). Despite the decrease in identifying personally as a servant, there was an increase in actually serving the church.

A few of the post-series surveys were unexpectedly incomplete. Three of the questions were left unanswered. Participant 6 did not complete question 12, "I sometimes have trouble believing that God loves me." Since he strongly disagreed with this question on the pre-survey, this appears to be an oversight where he just skipped over a question accidentally. Participant 27 skipped question 23, "Discipleship is only for committed



Christians.” This also seems like an oversight since he completed the answer on the pre-series survey. Participant 30 skipped over question 17, “I understand the gospel and can share it easily.” Instead of marking an answer, she wrote in the word, “sometimes.” Since only one answer was missing from each of these three questions, I conclude that the difference in results is not significant in terms of the overall results.

Table 5 presents the results of the *t*-test for dependent samples for the pre- and post-series survey questions. A *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-series survey scores:  $t_{(26)} = -2.204$ ,  $p = .018$ .

Table 5: Post-series most significant positive mean change

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	115.62	120.12
Variance	180.65	128.27
Observations	26	26
Pearson Correlation	0.658825772	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	25	
t stat	-2.20447294	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018458354	
t Critical one-tail	1.708140761	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.036916708	
t Critical two-tail	2.059538553	

Following the sermon series, I developed a ministry plan, which was informed

by the feedback from the series in conjunction with conversations held with my board of elders.<sup>3</sup> The plan clarifies and updates the current discipleship pathway at MSDBC to include personal coaching in discipleship by one of the elders, along with peer mentoring for those who are taking the initial steps of the pathway. The aim of personal coaching is to more accurately guide the disciple along the path to growth by means of an evaluation of their current needs and a more tailored prescription of the steps in discipleship they need to take. The peer mentor is designed to have an added helper to guide the disciple through the beginning phases of following Jesus. The plan also provides for ongoing opportunities to assess a disciple's progress in Christ. Finally, I asked my board of elders to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes, training elements, and action steps.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 6.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter will evaluate the project's purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses. I will also include reflections on what I would do differently and my own growth, theologically and personally. Although the sermon series is the focus of this evaluation, my learning and experiences in doctoral studies were so integral to the formation and implementation of the project that their influence will also be a source of my reflections.

#### **Evaluation of Project Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to equip members of the Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church in Milton, Wisconsin, to make disciples of Jesus more effectively by teaching biblical characteristics and practices of discipleship. Among other reasons, the rationale behind this purpose stemmed partly from the members' statements that they felt they were not well-equipped to make disciples. The project successfully fulfilled the teaching aspect of its purpose through the exegesis of key texts regarding the biblical foundation of a disciple and through the sermon series based on these texts and the biblical practices of discipleship. Although it will be necessary to equip members for discipleship on an ongoing basis, the project has successfully created a foundation on which to build. The common ground established by this teaching will provide the language, perspective, and tools needed for further equipping.

#### **Evaluation of Project Goals**

Four goals supported the project's purpose and proved effective in equipping the people of MSDBC for biblical discipleship. The project included the following goals:

(1) to assess the current understanding and practices of discipleship among members of MSDBC; (2) to develop a ten-week preaching series that equipped this group for biblical discipleship; (3) to implement the preaching series; and (4) to develop a ministry plan to increase understanding and practices of discipleship at MSDBC.

### **Assessment of Current Understanding and Practices of Discipleship**

The first goal was to assess the current understanding and practices of discipleship among members of MSDBC. Two weeks before the sermon series, the pre-series survey evaluated the participants' knowledge and practice of discipleship.<sup>1</sup> Thirty-nine participants completed the survey, providing a sufficient sample size for the congregation. The initial data confirmed my hypothesis of the need for equipping in discipleship principles and practices based on the wide range of responses from the whole participant group as well as the gaps in discipleship found in individual participant responses. This goal was considered successfully met when the surveys were compiled and analyzed.

### **Development of Ten-Week Sermon Series**

The second goal was to develop a ten-week sermon series that equipped this group for biblical discipleship. I developed and presented the sermons weekly during the ten weeks of the series. Chapter 2 of this project served as the major contributor to the outline for the sermon series. Additionally, a spiritual discipline was presented as the final point of each sermon's outline. I provided the sermon outlines to the expert panel, and they gave their evaluation and feedback. This goal was considered successfully met when 100 percent of the evaluation criterion, biblical faithfulness, scope, teaching

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1.

methodology, and applicability of the teaching met or exceeded the sufficient level as determined by the expert panel.<sup>2</sup>

### **Implementation of Sermon Series**

The third goal was to implement the sermon series. The first part of this goal was successfully met during February, March, and April 2024 when I presented each of the ten messages in my series entitled “What Is a Disciple?” The content aspect of this goal was measured by re-administering the discipleship survey after the completion of the series. It was considered successfully met when a *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-series survey scores:  $t_{(26)} = -2.204, p = .018$ .<sup>3</sup>

### **Development of the Ministry Plan**

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan to increase understanding and practices of discipleship at MSDBC. During the series, I began to talk with the church elders about the current discipleship pathway of the church. From those conversations, I ascertained a need for greater clarity and communication with the congregation of that pathway. I also saw an opportunity to add to the pathway a personal coaching component, which would take advantage of the knowledge gained through this project. Specifically, through individual assessment of members, the ministry plan prescribes that the elders will help develop a personalized discipleship plan based on the feedback they receive from their coaching sessions with members. The ministry plan will be enacted as a major emphasis at the beginning of the next ministry season.<sup>4</sup> This goal was successfully met when 100 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators, including functionality of the

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 4.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 6.

plan, communication processes, training elements, and action steps, met or exceeded the sufficiency level as measured by the elders of MSDBC.

### **Evaluation of Project Strengths**

The first strength of the project was the in-depth teaching on the nature of discipleship. The mission of the church is to make disciples, yet if the nature of a disciple is unclear or unbiblical, this mission will not be accomplished according to the command of the Lord (Matt 28:18–20). The feedback I received weekly and in the comments from the post-series surveys repeatedly emphasized the benefits participants received from the messages. Aspects of discipleship that were not clearly understood were clarified. This clarity is crucial for MSDBC to fulfill its mission.

The second strength of the project was the presentation of a clear vision for discipleship. This vision is contained in the statement, “A disciple is a worshipper of God who knows, loves, serves, and shares Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.” The benefit of this statement is twofold. First, it aids in the self-evaluation of a disciple concerning his or her own growth in discipleship. This evaluation can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, it can affirm the disciple’s identity in Christ. On the negative side, it can serve as a means by which the disciple can aspire to become more like Christ. Second, it aids in the development of disciple-makers by providing a picture of spiritual formation, which guides the disciple’s work of ministry.

The third strength of the project was that it addressed a specific discipleship need at MSDBC. As I discussed in chapter 1, many members expressed a general sense of not feeling equipped to make disciples. The irony of this feeling is that it was shared by those who have been believers and committed church members for many years. This feeling was captured in the pre-series surveys. The pre-series survey yielded an average score of 3.35 out of 5 on a Likert scale measuring the feeling of being equipped to make

disciples. The post-series survey saw that number increase to 4.08 out of 5, demonstrating the sense of felt need.

In addition to the quantitative analysis of the surveys, the qualitative question from the post-series surveys reinforced the need to feel equipped to make disciples. Here are a few examples. One respondent expressed that the series “reinforced that I AM equipped even though I don’t feel like I’m ready. We never feel ready! Jesus needs to be known in all the earth and we have a responsibility and privilege to share this!” Another participant commented, “I still don’t consider myself an expert or to have all the answers but am spending more time in daily devotions and discussion. I am finding greater confidence and joy in sharing His love. It is definitely a journey, and I certainly have not reached my destination.” Only time will tell the full extent to which this sermon series served its purpose of equipping my congregation to make disciples more effectively. In the short term, however, the responses from the post-series survey and the change from the pre- to the post-series survey indicate a significant increase in the feeling of being equipped to make disciples.

The fourth strength of the project was that it facilitated growth in discipleship. By comparing the pre- and post-series surveys, the church grew in its knowledge and practice of discipleship. The *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a ~~positive~~, statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-survey overall scores:  $t_{(26)} = -2.441, p < .011$ . Throughout the series, I received feedback from participants who were implementing spiritual disciplines as well as those who were greatly encouraged by the increase in their own understanding of discipleship. These sentiments were echoed in the comments from the post-series survey. One respondent explained, “It has deepened and widened my sense of what discipleship is. While I don’t consider myself an evangelist (because as an unbeliever I was really turned off by pushy evangelists, so I err on the side of not being that way), I am seeing more how I can and am discipling people, especially fledgling believers, mostly by responding to cues I get from them that they are searching

and open to spiritual conversation.” Another respondent reflected, “This series has created a greater need to grow, reflect, and pursue God’s call to discipleship. I don’t think I really spent time considering what it meant to be a disciple before; I just assumed I was. I have a better understanding and feel a stronger desire to serve Him and help others grow.” Not all of the respondents answered as positively as these comments, but all of the responses were positive in nature and emphasized the contribution of the sermon series to their growth as disciples.

### **Evaluation of Project Weakness**

The first weakness of the project was the limited number of participants in ages 20 to 50. Only seven participants fell into that age range. I was especially interested to understand the discipleship dynamics of that age range to see how they compare with the older generations. A different approach, such as more targeted personal invitations to those under the age of 50, could have yielded better results.

The second weakness of the project was the content of certain questions in the survey. A few of the questions could have been worded differently for greater clarity of meaning and a greater focus on the desired measurement. For example, “I wish I had a closer relationship with God” could have been worded “I do not feel close to God” in order to measure the status of a participant’s relationship with God more accurately. “I sometimes think that non-Christians are able to know God just like Christians” could have been worded as “Non-Christians are able to know God just like Christians” to take away any ambiguity in the question. In addition, the measurement of spiritual practices could have been made stronger by questions that more closely aligned with the spiritual practices taught in the sermon series. The development of spiritual practices, a major point in each of the sermons, came after the survey was completed. Therefore, only a few of the practices that were included in the series were also addressed in the survey.

The third weakness of the project was the absence of a communal context to



process and apply the sermon series. During the series, I came across the wise and practical words of Pastor Tim Keller: “Churches often view themselves only in the business of teaching, assuming that if they’ve taught it, their congregation will apply it. But the study of adult learning has shown that people change only when they *hear* the new thinking (so we equip them), can *discuss* it among their peers (so we connect them), and can *apply* it in simulated or actual situations (so we try to mobilize them).”<sup>5</sup> MSDBC lacks a small group structure from which to carry out the peer discussion and application of which Keller speaks, so the practical challenges of creating a small group structure would have been prohibitive for this project. However, the study of adult learning argues for a greater long-term impact of the project with the appropriation of a communal context for discussion and application.

### **Proposed Project Changes**

In an effort to take into account the context for discussion and application, one potential change to the project would be to organize participants into small groups that would meet weekly following each sermon. The purpose of these groups would first be to discuss the content of the sermons using pre-designed questions as a guide. The second purpose would be to serve as an accountability group concerning the application of the spiritual disciplines advocated during the series. The accountability discussion for each gathering would consist of sharing the individual’s experience of exercising the spiritual discipline for the previous week and clarifying the spiritual discipline to be exercised for the coming week. For MSDBC, it could be fair to suggest that this approach would limit the number of participants. However, the advantage of this approach would be the ability to gather more specific feedback on each aspect of discipleship knowledge and practice.

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<sup>5</sup> Timothy Keller, *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God’s Plan for the World* (London: John Murray Press, 2012), 258 (emphasis original).

In addition, the hope would be for greater growth in discipleship as a result of the discussion and application.

Another potential change to the project would be to include more qualitative questions to the survey. The information gleaned from the singular qualitative question at the end of the post-series survey leads me to believe that much more in-depth responses could be expected from such an approach. These questions would address specific thoughts, attitudes, and practices of discipleship.

### **Theological Reflections**

In the course of preparing for this project, a few key theological truths greatly influenced me. First, my biblical understanding of discipleship was affirmed by the truth that worship is the destination of the disciple. The mission of Christ, to make disciples, is subservient to the ultimate goal of worshipping and glorifying God forever. The end goal of becoming like Christ is not an end in and of itself but rather the path to living in every way for the honor and glory of Christ. Spiritual formation that emphasizes mission or personal transformation is incomplete unless it holds the final destination of the disciple as worshipper as the ultimate goal.

Second, the process of becoming like Christ is initiated by Christ, guided by the Holy Spirit, and brought to completion in eternity in the presence of God. The words of Scripture echo in my mind: “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). The work is begun by Christ, and the disciple of Jesus responds to his initiative. The glory for this work goes to God and not to the ability of the disciple. In this way, discipleship is not merely the path of moral growth but rather of glorifying the Lord above all things. I believe this truth is essential to giving hope to many who have seen discipleship as just another to-do list they can never complete.

Third, my understanding of discipleship was deepened and expanded greatly in

regard to the process of conversion. One of the required texts during my course of study was Richard Lovelace's *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal*.<sup>6</sup> His argument for the in-depth preaching of the gospel and its crucial role in conversion was transformative for me. It greatly helped to answer the question in my mind of how so many people that I have known over the years can have a powerful experience with the Lord and yet fail to produce the fruit of discipleship. Adding to this was my study of revival, specifically the Ulster revival of 1859. The pastors who lived through the revival reflected on those who had overpowering experiences during the revival but later turned away from Christ. In-depth preaching of the gospel is no guarantee of conversion, but faithfulness to the gospel requires that we distinguish between experiencing the touch of God and saving faith in Christ. The two are not necessarily linked, as Jesus clearly shows in the parable of the sower (Matt 13:18–22). This study has contributed to more in-depth preaching of the gospel in my own ministry, both to the church for the purpose of clarifying their salvation and to those who believe they are Christians but have never experienced conversion.

Fourth, the response of my congregation to the teaching of spiritual practices was very well received. Some responded by taking immediate steps to add a spiritual practice to their lifestyle. If the greater response from the congregation came as a result of the greater emphasis on spiritual practices, as I surmise it did, then it follows that a greater emphasis on practice in the future will potentially have a greater influence on the congregation. Theology that is not put into practice is not discipleship but simply information. The means to put truths into practice will vary, but I am convinced as to the necessity of increasing the emphasis on application in my preaching.

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<sup>6</sup> Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979).

## **Personal Reflections**

Of the many things that this project has taught me, I have learned that I still have much to learn as a minister. Much has been written and applied about discipleship in the last thirty years with which I had not engaged. I recognize the ongoing need to stay engaged in the scholarship of making disciples even as I continue to be engaged in the making of disciples in the local church.

Another powerful personal realization is that my own purpose had waned in the light of ministry work. The work of the ministry is necessary and good, yet for me, the connection between living for the glory of God and making disciples was reaffirmed and deepened, especially by reading John Piper. His explanation of what he calls “Christian Hedonism” has been familiar to me for many years. However, when I recently read about his own personal journey to arrive at this perspective, it revived in me something that I did not realize needed reviving. He states quite pointedly, “We waste our lives when we do not pray and think and dream and plan and work toward magnifying God in all spheres of life.”<sup>7</sup> This is indeed the goal of discipleship. The study of discipleship, of making and forming disciples, has re-kindled in me my own desire to grow as a disciple of Jesus. For what remains of my life, my heart and soul yearn to know, love, serve, and share Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit so that in every way, God will be glorified in me.

## **Conclusion**

This project succeeded in its stated purpose: to equip members of Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church to make disciples of Jesus more effectively by teaching the biblical characteristics and practices of discipleship. The initial results of the project are promising both in terms of the increase in knowledge of discipleship and in the spiritual practices of a disciple. Since the mission of the church is to make disciples, only a church

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<sup>7</sup> John Piper, *Don't Waste Your Life*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway), 34.

that is clear about its mission will be able to accomplish it effectively. By focusing on the biblical aspects of a disciple, this project clarified what the congregation correctly understood and what it still needs to understand to be obedient to the mission Christ gave it. Only time will tell the extent to which this training has served as a catalyst to develop more biblical disciples at MSDBC. If the church is to be faithful to its mission of connecting people to Christ and forming them as disciples, this foundation must be built upon and strengthened.

APPENDIX 1  
DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

The following instrument is the Discipleship Survey, a thirty-question survey with a five-point Likert scale followed by four general questions designed to discover the participant's Christian background. The instrument's purpose was to assess each participant's present level of theological understanding and practice of discipleship.

## Discipleship Survey

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current understanding of Christian Discipleship. This research is being conducted by Nathan D. Crandall for the purpose of collecting data for a dissertation 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 your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this research.

### Follow these directions to complete the survey:

1. Answer the following questions as honestly as possible.
2. Check the box that most closely represents your current beliefs and practices.
3. Do not spend too much time on any one question.

The scale is as follows:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Not Sure
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I can define what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.					
2	I have experienced God's love for me personally.					
3	I use my spiritual gifts and talents to serve my local church in ministry.					
4	I feel equipped to make disciples.					
5	I understand and practice spiritual disciplines.					
6	I wonder from time to time if God is pleased with me.					
7	I wish I had a closer relationship with God.					
8	I sometimes think that non-Christians are able to know God just like Christians.					
9	I can explain what God is like to someone else.					
10	I often ask God to help me know him better.					
11	In the last month, I have shared a testimony of what God has done in my life.					
12	I sometimes have trouble believing that God loves me.					
13	I pray for others to know God personally					
14	I believe that weekly worship with the church family is an essential part of being a disciple.					

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5
15	I am currently personally helping someone to grow closer to the Lord.					
16	I think of myself as a servant of others.					
17	I understand the gospel and can share it easily.					
18	I forgive others when they hurt me even when they are not sorry.					
19	It is my responsibility to help others in the church when they are in need.					
20	I am not serving my church currently in a place where my gifts and talents can be used.					
21	In the last 6 months I have invited an unchurched person to church.					
22	I strive to live by the teachings of the Bible because of my love for God.					
23	Discipleship is only for committed Christians.					
24	I think that every Christian should serve in his or her local church.					
25	In the last 90 days, I have shared with someone how to become a Christian.					
26	I make it a priority not to miss worship with my church family.					
27	I intentionally try to show love to people who rub me the wrong way.					
28	I worship God with others when I'm not at church.					
29	I read the Bible daily.					
30	I strive to live with integrity because I know my actions tell others about my relationship with God.					

**Circle the answer which best describes you.**

1. Are you male or female? **Male** **Female**

2. What is your age group? **1 2 3 4 5 6**

1=18–22

2=23–30

3=31–40

4=41–50

5=51–60

6=61 and over

3. How long ago did you first make a profession of faith in Christ? **1 2 3 4 5**

1=Less than a year

2=1–3 years

3=4–10 years

4=11–20 years

5=more than 20 years

4. How long have you been an active member of a local church? **1 2 3 4 5**

1=Never

2=less than 3 years

3=3–10 years

4=11–20 years

5=more than 20 years



## APPENDIX 2

### SERMON EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation was sent to an expert panel of three seminary-trained MSDBC elders. This panel evaluated the sermon series to ensure it was biblically faithful, sufficiently thorough, and practically applicable.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Sermon Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
<b>Biblical Accuracy</b>					
Each sermon was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each sermon was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
<b>Scope</b>					
The content of the sermons sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The sermons sufficiently cover a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
<b>Pedagogy</b>					
Each sermon was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each sermon provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
<b>Practicality</b>					
The sermons clearly detail how to apply spiritual disciplines that facilitate growth as a disciple.					
At the end of the series, participants will be better prepared to make disciples.					

Other Comments:

## APPENDIX 3

### MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

The following evaluation was sent to three MSDBC elders. This panel evaluated the ministry plan for functionality, communication processes, training elements, and action steps.

Name of Evaluator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool</b>					
<b>1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary</b>					
<b>Criteria</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Comments</b>
The goal of the ministry plan to make disciples is clearly stated.					
The need to understand discipleship at MSDBC is clearly stated in the ministry plan.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.					
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.					
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.					
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.					
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.					
Overall, I believe the plan, when executed will promote growth in discipleship at MSDBC.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4  
T-TEST RESULTS

<b>T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means</b>		
	<i>Pre-Test Total</i>	<i>Post-Test Total</i>
Mean	115.62	120.12
Variance	180.65	128.27
Observations	26	26
Pearson Correlation	0.658825772	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	25	
t stat	-2.20447294	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.018458354	
t Critical one-tail	1.708140761	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.036916708	
t Critical two-tail	2.059538553	

## APPENDIX 5

### SERMON SERIES SUMMARIES AND OUTLINES

This section contains the outlines and summaries of the ten sermons preached at Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 1: “A Disciple Is a Worshipper of God”  
Revelation 4:1–11  
February 3, 2024

1. The Nature of Worship
  - a. True worship is true to God’s nature. (John 4:23)
  - b. Worship is a response to the reality of God, not a quest for fulfillment.
  - c. The final destination for disciples is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.  
(Rev 4:1–11)
2. The Path of Worship
  - a. True worship begins by accurately knowing God’s worth.
  - b. True worship requires revelation.
  - c. True worship requires change.
3. The Habits that Grow Worship
  - a. Daily worship at home.
  - b. Weekly worship with the church family.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 2: “A Disciple Knows Jesus, Part 1”  
John 1:9–18  
February 10, 2024

1. Jesus came to enlighten the world about God.
  - a. Jesus is THE light that gives light to every other light. (John 1:9)
  - b. Jesus revealed the true nature of God. (John 1:14)
  - c. The light is the Word of God who is Jesus. (John 1:1)
  - d. The light either illuminates those who receive it to the nature of God or blinds those who do not receive it to his nature. (John 1:10–12)
2. The world is incapable of knowing Jesus on its own.
  - a. Without Christ, we are blinded by the gods of this world. (Rom 1:21)
  - b. Truly knowing God results in worship.
  - c. All who receive Jesus become children of God who know him personally.  
(John 1:12)
3. Spiritual habits facilitate knowing Jesus.
  - a. A disciple engages in regular personal and group study of the Word.
  - b. A disciple regularly attends church to hear the preaching of the Word.



“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 3: “A Disciple Knows Jesus, Part 2”  
Philippians 3:7–11  
February 17, 2024

1. Knowing Jesus is the greatest thing.
  - a. Once we know Jesus and begin to see the greatness of his being, the desire to know him more grows.
  - b. Paul explained this desire as, “the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” (Phil 3:8).
  - c. Paul even considered all of his sufferings worth the value of knowing Jesus. (Phil 3:8)
2. Knowing Jesus brings great gain.
  - a. The first thing to be gained is what Paul calls to “be found in him. . . .” (Phil 3:9)
  - b. The second thing to be gained is the righteousness of Christ. (Phil 3:9)
  - c. The third thing to be gained is resurrection power. (Phil 3:10–11)
3. Knowing Jesus more fully takes spiritual discipline.
  - a. The desire to know Jesus more is not just something we receive. We also need to cultivate it. (1 Tim 4:7–8)
  - b. The discipline of memorizing and meditating on Scripture creates the environment for ongoing growth in the knowledge of Christ. (Ps 119:11)

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 4: “A Disciple Loves Jesus, Part 1”  
Ephesians 3:14–21  
February 24, 2024

1. God loves us personally.
  - a. We are part of the world God loves. (John 3:16)
  - b. We are the ones for whom Jesus died. (Rom 5:8)
  - c. God loved us even when we did not love him. (1 John 4:10)
2. God’s love draws us to himself.
  - a. God’s plan was to bring us into a close, personal relationship. (Eph 1:4)
  - b. In the same way that children are like their father, we who have been adopted by faith are like him in our love. (1 John 3:1; 1 John 4:7)
  - c. The love we experience from God is different that the love of the world.
3. God’s love must be cultivated.
  - a. We must embrace God’s will for us to love him and love others.
  - b. We must develop the habit of praying for God’s love to grow in us.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 5: “A Disciple Loves Jesus, Part 2”  
John 15:4–12  
March 2, 2024

1. A disciple abides in Jesus.
  - a. The parable of the vine and the branches illustrates what it means to abide in Christ. (John 15:4–5)
  - b. To abide in Christ is to abide in his love. (John 15:9)
  - c. To abide in his love is to obey his commands. (John 15:10)
2. A disciple loves like Jesus.
  - a. To love like Jesus is to follow his example. (John 15:12)
  - b. To love like Jesus is only possible because his love has been deposited in the heart of the disciple. (1 John 4:20)
  - c. A disciple can only continue to love like Christ because of an ongoing connection to his love. (John 15:5)
3. A disciple cultivates the love of Jesus.
  - a. This cultivation focuses on staying connected to Jesus.
  - b. The regular practices of confession and forgiveness of sin help to maintain a disciple’s vital connection to Jesus.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 6: “A Disciple Serves Jesus, Part 1”  
Philippians 2:1–11  
March 9, 2024

1. The Servant Mindset of Christ
  - a. The humble and unselfish mindset that Paul exhorts the Philippians to share amongst themselves finds its source and greatest example in Christ. (Phil 2:6)
  - b. Jesus served his disciples by living among them, serving them daily, and sacrificing himself on the cross. (Phil 2:7–8)
2. The Exaltation of Christ
  - a. As a result of his extreme humility, God exalted Christ to the highest place. (Phil 2:9–11)
  - b. In his humility, he revealed the nature and the glory of God. (Luke 22:27)
3. The Habit That Cultivates the Servant Mindset of Christ
  - a. The will of the flesh must be brought under control since it works against the disciple’s ability to submit to the will of God. (Rom 13:14)
  - b. Through regular fasting from food or devices, a disciple learns to say no to the will of the flesh. (1 Cor 9:27).

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 7: “A Disciple Serves Jesus, Part 2”  
Philippians 1:27–2:8  
March 16, 2024

1. A disciple possesses a vision to serve.
  - a. This vision comes from having received the mind of Christ. (1 Cor 2:16)
  - b. The vision to serve embraces all the responsibilities of a servant in order to live on behalf of others. (Phil 2:5)
2. The unity of the church guides a disciple’s vision to serve.
  - a. The vision is to be like-minded with other believers. (Phil 2:1–2)
  - b. This unity is not based on uniformity of thought.
  - c. This unity of mind instead is based on the priority of the gospel. (Phil 1:27)
  - d. Unity of heart and mind is characterized by humility, not selfish ambition. (Phil 2:3)
3. A disciple serves Jesus by serving the church.
  - a. Serving the church family makes us more like Jesus, brings glory to God, demonstrates knowledge of God, expresses love for God, and brings pleasure to God. (1 Peter 4:10–11)
  - b. A disciple’s life should be characterized both by the attitude of a servant as well as faithfulness to the work of a servant.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 8: “A Disciple Shares Jesus, Part 1”  
Luke 34:16–21  
March 23, 2024

1. Jesus proclaimed the gospel.
  - a. The gospel is good news. (Mark 1:15)
  - b. Good news only makes sense in relation to bad news. (Luke 4:18–19)
2. Jesus brought the kingdom.
  - a. He was the light that dawned into spiritual darkness. (Matt 4:13–17)
  - b. His light was not perceived by many as good news. (John 1:10)
  - c. Jesus taught about the greatness of the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 13:45–46)
3. Jesus called his disciples to follow him.
  - a. Disciples today receive the same call to follow him as did his first disciples.
  - b. This call includes the task of sharing him with others. (Matt 4:19)
  - c. Disciples should develop the daily habit of praying for the opportunity to share Jesus.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 9: “A Disciple Shares Jesus, Part 2”  
Matthew 28:16–20  
April 13, 2024

1. Jesus has authorized, equipped, and empowered us to make disciples.
  - a. Jesus has the right or authority to command us because all authority belongs to him (Matt 28:18–19).
  - b. Jesus has equipped us through his instructions on baptism and teaching (Matt 28:19–20).
  - c. Jesus has promised his empowering presence for the completion of the task (Matt 28:20).
2. We must embrace making disciples as a way of life.
  - a. Discipleship is a life-long, daily process.
  - b. Discipleship involves both being disciplined and discipling.
  - c. Making discipleship a way of life is realized by discipling and being disciplined in all of the contexts of our life.
3. Hospitality is a habit that will help us make disciples.
  - a. Hospitality embraces the heart of Jesus to bring those on the outside in (Lev 19:33–34).
  - b. Hospitality is not primarily about making food but about making people feel welcome.

“WHAT IS A DISCIPLE?” SERIES  
Sermon 10: “A Disciple Lives by the Power of the Holy Spirit”  
Romans 8:2–16  
April 20, 2024

1. The Spirit works in conversion and regeneration.
  - a. The Spirit convicts of sin and the need for Christ. (Rom 8:2)
  - b. The Spirit makes the disciple spiritually alive. (Rom 8:5)
2. The Spirit works in progressive sanctification.
  - a. The Spirit guides the disciple into all truth. (John 16:13)
  - b. The Spirit empowers as he guides. (Rom 8:12–14)
3. The Spirit works through the habit of spiritual conversations.
  - a. Spiritual conversations focus on matters of the soul.
  - b. The skills needed are asking good questions and listening well.



APPENDIX 6  
MINISTRY PLAN

This section contains the ministry plan to increase understanding and practices of discipleship at Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church.

<b>Ministry Plan</b>	
The goal of the ministry plan to make disciples is clearly stated.	The primary mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. We express our affirmation of this mission by the phrase, “We connect people to Jesus and equip them to be his disciples.” This ministry plan aims to help the church improve its ability to make disciples by clarifying our discipleship pathway.
The need to understand discipleship at MSDBC is clearly stated in the ministry plan.	<p>Every disciple that is connecting to MSDBC needs to clearly understand the path to growth as a disciple. This pathway needs to be clearly communicated, first of all. There is also the need for personal guidance. In order to improve our communication and guidance in discipleship, the elders will clearly articulate the pathway and provide that guidance by implementing the following steps.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agree upon the steps of the discipleship pathway and then prepare materials.</li> <li>2. Communicate the pathway to the church family during our worship services and by means of print and other media.</li> <li>3. Provide training for disciple partners. Disciple partners will be peer mentors to whom a disciple can go to for help in walking the discipleship pathway.</li> <li>4. Implement the pathway for those wanting to become members this fall.</li> <li>5. Integrate the discipleship pathway into the regular ministry of the church (e.g. Heritage Sabbath, etc.) so as to provide multiple onramps for those either new to the pathway or those who are re-engaging with it.</li> </ol>
The material presented in the ministry plan is faithful to the Bible.	<p>Steps on the Discipleship Pathway:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Where are you? Coaching with an elder who will determine a course of action from one or more of the following: evangelism, conversion, baptism, basic disciple training, doctrinal training, ministry training and connection, freedom and restoration ministry, and church membership.</li> </ol>
The material presented in the ministry plan is theologically sound.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. What is a disciple? Watch and discuss the “Disciple” sermon series in a group that can discuss and apply these truths: “A disciple is a worshipper of God who knows, loves, serves and shares Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.”</li> </ol>
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. How do you fit with our church family? Training in ministry, understanding the vision, values, covenant, and organization of MSDBC, growth in understanding the doctrines of the church, completion of membership.</li> </ol>

<b>Ministry Plan</b>	
The components of the ministry plan are well-organized and concise.	<p>4. Where do you need to be set free? Freedom and restoration ministry.</p> <p>5. What's next? Ongoing coaching as needed to take your next steps along the discipleship pathway.</p>
A timeline for implementing the ministry plan is clearly stated.	<p>1. August: Preparation of materials</p> <p>2. September: Communication/training of disciple partners</p> <p>3. October: Implementation</p>
The number of people necessary for implementing the ministry plan have been stated.	The four elders in addition to disciple partners. The number of disciple partners will be determined based on the need and the ability of a partner to walk alongside more than one disciple.
Obstacles that may hinder implementing the ministry plan have been stated.	Lack of discipleship partners responding. Busy schedules both for leaders and disciples.

## APPENDIX 7

### REVISED DISCIPLESHIP SURVEY

The following instrument is the Revised Discipleship Survey, a thirty-question survey with a five-point Likert scale followed by four general questions designed to discover the participant's Christian background. The purpose of this instrument is to assess each participant's current discipleship perceptions and practices.

## Revised Discipleship Survey

### Agreement to Participate

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to assess your current understanding of Christian Discipleship. This research is being conducted by Nathan D. Crandall for the purpose of collecting data for a dissertation 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 your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey, you are giving informed consent for the use of your response in this research.

### Follow these directions to complete the survey:

1. Answer the following questions as honestly as possible.
2. Check the box that most closely represents your current beliefs and practices.
3. Do not spend too much time on any one question.

The scale is as follows:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Not Sure
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I have a thorough understanding of the characteristics of a disciple of Jesus.					
2	God shows his love to me personally.					
3	I use my spiritual gifts to serve my local church in ministry.					
4	I have great confidence in my ability to make disciples.					
5	Spiritual disciplines characterize my daily life.					
6	I wonder from time to time if God is pleased with me.					
7	I set aside time to develop a closer relationship with God.					
8	Non-Christians are able to know God just like Christians.					
9	I feel comfortable explaining what God is like to someone else.					
10	I often ask God to help me know him better.					
11	I regularly share with others what God is doing in my life.					
12	I have trouble believing that God loves me.					
13	I regularly pray for others to know God personally.					
14	I believe that weekly worship with the church family is an essential part of being a disciple.					
15	I make it a priority to help others grow closer to the Lord.					

#	Question	1	2	3	4	5
16	I think of myself as a servant of others.					
17	I understand the gospel well enough to explain it to others.					
18	I forgive others when they hurt me even when they are not sorry.					
19	It is my responsibility to help others in the church when they are in need.					
20	I am not serving my church currently in a place where my gifts and talents can be used.					
21	I occasionally invite unchurched people to church.					
22	My love for God compels me to live according to the teachings of the Bible.					
23	Discipleship is only for committed Christians.					
24	I think that every Christian should serve in his or her local church.					
25	I occasionally share with others how to become a Christian.					
26	I make it a priority not to miss worship with my church family.					
27	I intentionally try to show love to people with whom I don't get along.					
28	I worship God with others when I'm not at church.					
29	I read the Bible daily.					
30	I strive to live with integrity because I know my actions tell others about my relationship with God.					

**Circle the answer which best describes you.**

- Are you male or female? **Male**      **Female**
- What is your age group? **1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8**  
1=18–22                      2=23–30                      3=31–40                      4=41–50  
5=51–60                      6=61–70                      7=71–80                      8=81 and over
- How long ago did you first make a profession of faith in Christ? **1 2 3 4 5**  
1=Less than a year      2=1–3 years                      3=4–10 years  
4=11–20 years                      5=more than 20 years
- How long have you been an active member of a local church? **1 2 3 4 5**  
1=Never                      2=less than 3 years                      3=3–10 years  
4=11–20 years                      5=more than 20 years

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## ABSTRACT

### EQUIPPING MEMBERS OF MILTON SEVENTH DAY BAPTIST CHURCH IN MILTON, WISCONSIN, FOR BIBLICAL DISCIPLESHIP

Nathan Davis Crandall, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. John D. Morrison

The purpose of this project was to equip members of Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church in Milton, Wisconsin, for biblical discipleship. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of Milton Seventh Day Baptist Church and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of four passages of Scripture (John 1:9–18; John 15:4–12; Phil 2:1–11; Matt 28:18–20) to show the biblical foundation of discipleship. Chapter 3 contrasts existing models of discipleship with the practical application of biblical discipleship both collectively and individually. Chapter 4 describes the project itself, recounting the content and teaching methodology of the sermon series. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on the completion of the specified goals. Ultimately, this project sought to equip believers in biblical discipleship that leads to transformation into the character of Christ.

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### PUBLICATIONS

“Paul’s Prayer for God’s Will.” *Sabbath Recorder* 240, no. 4 (2018): 7–9.

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