DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS AT BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH IN BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

A Ministry Project

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by

Mardon Randall Day

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APPROVAL SHEET

DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS AT BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH IN BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

Mardon Randall Day

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Jeffrey W. Hunter, PhD

Second Reader: Chris Smith, PhD

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For the glory of God

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PREFACE

This ministry project was a labor of love, being in production for over ten years. The formal documentation and subsequent presentation as the consummation of a three-year pursuit of a Doctor of Educational Ministry degree began in 2022, but the Spirit-led concept and piloting process began long before. Over the course of ten-plus years, my wife and I have been dedicated to the discipleship of young adults. We have seen the church increasingly recognize young adults as a distinct local church demographic needing dedicated ministry effort and resources. There are increasing efforts on the part of co-laborers in ministry to write about, speak about, and become advocates for this particular demographic within the local church. This project can be described as the next chapter in the effort of Brentwood Baptist Church to develop and refine its young adult ministry. The mantle of church leadership and the preservation of sound biblical teaching will someday rest on the shoulders of this emerging local church demographic.

As Western culture seeks truth, we find that young adults, led by the Holy Spirit, recognize it in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The culture may seem ever changing, but young adults seek and find comfort and stability in the Word of God. There is good discussion on how to disciple young adults in the church without falling into the trap of innovative theologies that upend the orthodoxy of the faith. Style versus substance discussions help to maintain the fidelity of sound biblical teaching. The style or manner in which young adults receive the gospel is less important than making sure they are receiving the gospel in a way the promotes unity in fellowship with the local church. My wife, Richelle, and daughters, Elizabeth and Emily, are committed to serving God in ways that may be unique in their respective application but unified in purpose, to glorify God and enjoy him eternally.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above ye heav'nly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

Mardon Day

Birmingham, Alabama

December 2025

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discipleship is both a responsibility and a privilege given to the church at the foundation of the New Covenant faith through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19–20 states that Christians are called to make disciples. This imperative includes both evangelistic and equipping elements that when effectively executed fulfill the Great Commission. In the current cultural context of Western Christianity, young adult discipleship presents unique challenges to local church discipleship. Historically, this young adult demographic in the local church has been a short-lived transition between post-secondary or advanced education, singleness, and emerging young marrieds at the beginning of adulthood.

At Brentwood Baptist Church, this young adult demographic has been redefined into a recognized age-stage of life that is no longer considered a short-lived transition status but rather a categorical adult demographic. Discipleship that addresses the unique spiritual needs of this adult demographic segment can be structured in a way that accomplishes this church directive through a multilevel model that not only makes provision for increased biblical literacy but also development of Christian integrity through small group dynamics. This ministry project intends to provide training of member/leaders who are or will be engaged in young adult discipleship in a way that meets the unique spiritual necessities of young adults.

Context

The context of this ministry project is within the existing ministry structure of Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee (BBC). BBC is a large multi-campus

fellowship composed of eight individual but interconnected campuses. Of the eight, the Brentwood campus is the original and largest and is where the administrative and ministerial central offices are located. In 1968, Woodmont Baptist Church in Nashville, Tennessee sponsored a church plant in Brentwood that became known as Brentwood Baptist Church. Sixty-five people gathered for the first service on September 8, 1968, in the chapel of the Tennessee Baptist Children's Home. January 6, 1980, marked the first worship service of more than one thousand people at the current location in Brentwood, Tennessee. In January of 2014, BBC adopted what became known as the Middle Tennessee Initiative with the purpose of addressing poverty, healthcare, and education needs in Middle Tennessee. Part of this strategy involves the partnering of BBC and other area churches that struggle to maintain a ministry presence in their respective communities by incorporating them under the ministry structure and governance of BBC thereby supplying material and personnel support to invigorate the work of the church.

The Brentwood campus promotes and supports on and off-campus discipleship groups that are age and stage of life oriented, inclusive of a robust children, teen, college, and adult ministries to include discipleship. As in many churches, a segment of adults fall into a category of "young adult" that would be inclusive though not exclusively single, twenty-five to thirty-five years of age, both male and female, and who are returning to church post-college or are new or returning members to the surrounding community and entering into their respective careers. This ministry project will be executed at the main campus initially but will not be exclusive to this campus.

There is a growing young adult population in Middle Tennessee as those seeking career first-starts are finding opportunities in the area. According to a recent census report, the total population within the ministry reach of BBC is 2,013,506 with a median age of 37.2 years. Approximately 14 percent of that population are between the

ages of 20 and 29.[1] There are four major universities within the ministry reach or geographical and cultural presence of BBC and with the expanding vocational opportunities in the area, many graduates of these institutions choose to enter their respective careers within the reach of many of the Brentwood campuses. As these college or vocational school graduates begin to integrate into the local communities surrounding BBC, there is a growing need to provide small group discipleship to single young adults as they pursue both a career and Christian community.

A historical weakness in young adult ministry in general is that this particular segment of adults has been considered a small minority of people attending BBC. However, with the growing trend of young adults remaining single extending into their late twenties or early thirties, the church has been slow to recognize this growing segment that desires discipleship focused on their particular context, single young adult. While a few small groups engaging with young adults have formed over the years to that end, many young adults have sought discipleship outside of the local church due to the absence of a fully developed ministry for their demographic. This creates a discontinuity with the larger fellowship and the potential for conflicting secondary and tertiary church issues that create a barrier to a more uniform fellowship.

The existing discipleship groups for young adults that do meet on campus do so autonomously when it comes to any cohesive ministry effort. Some of these groups employ relational discipleship strategies in developing Christian community for its members. Other groups may unitize programmed curriculum that has been made available through various publishing resources through the church with the goal of increasing biblical literacy. The current model promoted for church-wide discipleship is called Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples (DXD) and consists of four components: gospel

[1] "Nashville-Davidson—Murfreesboro—Franklin, TN Metro Area," US Census Bureau, accessed May 15, 2023, http://censusreporter.org/profiles/31000US34980-nashville-davidson-murfreesboro-franklin-tn-metro-area/.

conversations, groups, gather, and going. It is in the core component of groups where this project is to be focused. A strength or success in the groups component of this model is connecting unassociated or unconnected Christians with a small group where the intent is to engage them in Christian community for the purpose of discipleship.

In 2020, Matthew Purdom published his ministry project entitled "Equipping Young Adult Small Group Leadership and Discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee." The stated purpose of this project was to establish a discipleship structure for small groups of young adults with the introduction of the theory and implementation of proxemics.[2] This theory of proxemics addresses the social and personal spaces necessary for practicable discipleship. In a large group, participants may engage with one another on a social level with little opportunities to discuss more personal and intimate life issues that impact spiritual integrity and health. As smaller subset groups are organized, with fewer participants, group discussion becomes increasingly personal and intimate, addressing spiritual issues impeding spiritual integrity and health. In essence, the basic structure of discipleship is established within this foundational project as presented by Purdom. The intent of this project is to extend and further develop functional discipleship within this structure with a few modifications that facilitate reciprocal interactions between these groups and improve the existing discipleship strategy for young adults.

Rationale

It is not uncommon for young adults to contact the church office by email or text inquiring about single adult small groups with whom they can get connected. Many of these men and women have had prior involvement in a local church as children, teens, or even as college students but have not been able to find a suitable local church

[2] Matthew James Purdom, "Equipping Young Small Group Leadership and Discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 74.

discipleship group as a single young adult. Still others either have had no previous church background before coming to faith or have had nominal church involvement before coming to BBC in search of a community of peers. All these subset groups of young adults are seeking discipleship but in a way that meets them where they are in their spiritual stage of life. When it comes to discipleship, young adults want to grow spiritually and want to be challenged. They want to understand how their vocation and calling fit into a life of worship.[3] These young adults seek Christian community and the developing of nurturing supportive relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ. Simply stated, Christian community is a group of people committed to one another as being part of each other's lives, seeking the best for one another, and not withholding truth even if it is hard to give or receive.[4]

Discipleship has benefitted from organization strategies within the local church but may be lacking in the organic tactics leading to disciple-making. Organic tactics can be understood as discipleship leaders' modeling of spiritual disciplines. Organic tactics in combination with sound biblical teaching can be an effective strategy for filling the discipleship gap between discipleship strategies and disciple-making. Discipleship groups can be led by identified members/leaders that can engage in discussion on a more personal and intimate level. Their respective needs with regard to spiritual disciplines, issues of purity, social moral behavior, and accountability, as well as open and honest discussions of faith maturity levels that impair faith formation and spiritual growth can be addressed with less apprehension and fear. Out of these smaller subset groups, common issues can be identified that can inform choices of curriculum or subject matter to be taught and discussed at the larger group level without violating confidentiality of the smaller subset group members.

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[3] Jonathan Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church: How to Reach, Teach, and Engage Young Adults* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 87.

[4] Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 99.

Any young adults seeking discipleship that do not have a firm foundation in the basic tenants of faith, for whatever reason, need to have these taught through Bible study so that moral and theological triage can occur as they navigate young adulthood and its challenges. This approach can be achieved irrespective of the size of the group. However, in-depth conversations and openness to discuss one's own perceived deficiencies in biblical literacy, social and moral failings, and the opportunity to engage accountability partners is oftentimes an impossibility in a large group setting. In smaller subset groups however, these issues can be laid out before the group with less fear of judgement thus promoting spiritual growth that feeds back into the larger group.

As the church encounters an increase in young adults seeking Christian community with their peers, an enhanced strategy or process of discipleship must be presented in order to improve current discipleship efforts so that disciples can, in turn, make disciples. Identifying and training discipleship leaders within the existing young adults involved in discipleship groups at Brentwood Baptist is where this project is to be focused and developed. Without developing an intentional and well-developed young adult discipleship process, opportunities may be lost in raising a generation of spiritual leaders that will advance the kingdom of Christ as they engage in disciples-making-disciples as these young adults strive to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:19).

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a discipleship process for young adults at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, that seeks to build on the current model by developing and implementing a four-learning session seminar on multilevel discipleship

Goals

Four goals were established from the outset of this ministry project that in turn were assessed at its completion to measure their successful achievement. These goals and

the process for achieving them include the assessment of current discipleship practices among young adults, increasing knowledge of multilevel discipleship, developing a curriculum to teach member/leaders of the current young adults engaged in discipleship ministry to implement this discipleship process, and finally, developing a ministry plan to enhance current young adult discipleship practices that can be reproducible:

1. The first goal was to assess attitudes or perceptions of young adult discipleship among leaders in young adult discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church.
2. The second goal was to develop a curriculum to teach members/leaders currently engaged in young adult discipleship with this enhanced process of multi-level discipleship building on the current model.
3. The third goal was to present this multilevel discipleship model of young adults to young adult discipleship leaders in order to improve upon existing discipleship structure at Brentwood Baptist Church.
4. The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan that could be used to reproduce this multi-level discipleship process of young adults among the different campuses of Brentwood Baptist Church.

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

Research Methodology

Successful completion of this ministry project depended upon the completion of the four goals established at the outset. The first goal was to assess the attitudes or perceptions of discipleship practices among adults engaged in young adult discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church. To measure this goal, a mixed-method pre-seminar survey that included both quantitative statements and qualitative questions on attitudes and perspectives of young adult discipleship was administered to young adult discipleship leaders. This survey generally assessed the leaders' attitudes and perceptions of small group dynamics, teaching approaches, spiritual disciplines, and the ultimate purpose of young adult discipleship as it relates to the imperative given to Christians regarding

discipleship.[5] This goal was considered successfully met when ten participants completed the survey, and the results were interpreted to yield a clearer picture of the current small group discipleship practices at Brentwood Baptist Church.

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to teach leaders engaged in young adult discipleship with this proposed process of multi-level discipleship. This goal was measured by two curriculum reviewers who utilized a rubric to evaluate the biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy, and practicality of the curriculum.[6] This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

The third goal was to increase knowledge of multilevel discipleship of young adults at Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was measured by administering the Multilevel Young Adult Discipleship Process survey again to participants after the seminar to measure the change in attitude or perception on young adult discipleship.[7] This goal was considered successfully met when the *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrates a positive statistically significant difference in the pre- and post-training survey scores.[8]

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan that could be used to reproduce this multi-level discipleship process of young adults among the different campuses of Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was measured by a panel of three ministry pastors who utilized a rubric to evaluate the functionality of the plan, communication processes,

[5] See appendix 1. 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.

[6] See appendix 2.

[7] See appendix 3.

[8] See appendix 4.

and training elements.[9] This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of all the rubric evaluation indicators met or exceeded the sufficiency level.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Multilevel discipleship. For this project, *multilevel discipleship* is a reciprocating discipleship model where weekly Bible study and teaching occur in a large coed group consisting of 15 to 25 young adults. A subset level of this large group is gender-specific where gender sensitive issues can be discussed. These gender-specific groups are further divided into elemental discipleship groups consisting of 3 to 4 persons where transparent accountability of spiritual, moral, and social issues that impede spiritual growth and maturity can be discussed in confidence. Leaders of these elemental discipleship groups can discuss between themselves general issues or themes encountered to help guide the discussion in the larger gender-specific subset and the teaching curriculum of the weekly large group Bible study and discussion.

Gender-specific discipleship groups. Gender-specific discipleship groups is a smaller subset of the large coed young adult ministry group specifically differentiated by gender and led by either male or female leaders. This intermediate subset discipleship group size should not consist of fewer than 5 people but can accommodate as many male or female participants as interest provides. The frequency of meeting can vary as needs dictate but should meet regularly in order to establish a regular rhythm so that it naturally becomes part of the individual's monthly or weekly schedule. Within this subset group, gender sensitive discussions can be discussed relative to spiritual health and growth.

Elemental discipleship groups. Elemental discipleship groups are drawn from the larger gender-specific discipleship groups that consist of no more than 4 to 5 male or female members. Within this smaller subset group, discussions can be intimate, transparent,

[9] See appendix 5.

and honest with regard to personal struggles with sin, confession, prayer, enlisting accountability partners, and engagement in spiritual disciplines.

Members/leaders. Members/leaders are leaders of either the gender-specific and elemental discipleship groups that are also members of the larger young adult discipleship group previously identified to receive training for this discipleship process.

Two limitations applied to this project. The first was a time limitation. The training of member leaders occurred within a finite period of time to accommodate the timeline for ministry project completion. To mitigate this time limitation, the process curriculum was available for review at any time as the leaders may require. The second limitation was the number of people to be trained. The pool of participants was from existing participants in young adult discipleship. To mitigate this people limitation, the training curriculum as well as repeat sessions are made available as new member/leaders are added to the process of young adult discipleship.

Three delimitations applied to this project. The first delimitation was that this ministry project involved only a portion of the total number of people involved in young adult discipleship at BBC. The purpose of this delimitation was to evaluate the efficacy of the training to revise and modify it based on participant feedback before engaging with a wider audience. The second delimitation was that this ministry project was to be considered a phase 1 of an overall effort to establish this discipleship process. As this multilevel discipleship process is put into action, it can be modified and broadened where appropriate to be used in other age-stage discipleship groups churchwide. A third delimitation had to do with structure of the multilevel discipleship process. If the large group is not coed, then there would only be a larger gender-specific discipleship group and the subset elemental discipleship groups. If the gender-specific discipleship group was no larger than 4 to 5, then it functioned as both a gender-specific and elemental discipleship group until the size exceeded the restriction of the elemental discipleship group at which time a gender-specific larger discipleship group was established.

Conclusion

This ministry project outlines the development and implementation of a discipleship process within the young adult demographic of BBC in Brentwood, Tennessee. Building on prior work in this area, this discipleship process is multilevel in its structure and is dynamic in its function. This discipleship process fortified the local church's discipleship ministry to not only fulfill the Great Commission imperative locally but also equip young adults to become leaders in young adult discipleship. The ultimate goal of discipleship at BBC is to facilitate the process of spiritual maturity where disciples make other disciples. By increasing awareness and establishing a training process to address the specific spiritual necessities for growth and maturity among young adults, members/leaders in young adult discipleship can in turn train emerging members/leaders, thereby meeting the goal of disciples making disciples.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR A DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS

During the Roman era, it was common for men to seek out fellowship with other similar minded men through various guilds and societies.[1] A sense of belonging and acceptance otherwise withheld in a largely societal hierarchy system promoted class segregation, driving men to seek membership in these associations. Contemporary men share with those of the past the absence of this sense of belonging, or an awareness of being orphaned. This disconnectedness that men and women are keenly aware of today without the understanding of its origin is what Christians understand as a consequence of the sin of man and separation from God. Men and women seeking identity and to satisfy this desire to belong can be found in all manner of social or religious affiliations within current culture. These futile efforts, however, do not satisfy the longing for identity or value that can only be found in reconciliation between mankind and God, regardless of whether these men and women are aware of it. What has become known in the church as the Great Commission is God's rescue and recovery plan for mankind. This recovery plan of humanity is without distinction that ultimately and completely fulfills man's desire to know and be known according to his design, which all Christians are called to participate.

In April 1861, Charles Hadden Spurgeon delivered a sermon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London entitled "The Missionaries' Charge and Charta." Using Matthew 28:18–19 as his sermon text, he begins with his own revelation: "The injunctions of the Saviour are perpetual in their obligation; they were not binding upon the Apostles merely,

[1] Robert Louis Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 2003), 36.

but upon us also, and upon every Christian does this yoke fall, 'Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, And of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'"[2] His point plainly and unambiguously expressed is that there is no exception or exemption regarding this imperative given to all Christians: *ubique, semper, ad omnes* or everywhere, always, to all. Disciple-making is not a special calling for certain Christians but is a command to be acknowledged and acted upon by the entire community of faith.[3] Teaching, or discipling as it is more commonly referred to in Western Christianity, is one of two integral imperatives given to Christians in Matthew 28:18–19, and is not an obligation of faith but a privilege by faith. It should be so highly esteemed that it causes the church to seek and maintain fidelity with the post apostolic witness as well as continuity for those who have yet come to place their faith in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

In postmodern Western Christianity, young adults struggle to establish and maintain connectedness with their local churches resulting in a falling away or disengagement, owing in part to the lack of open dialogue on culturally relevant issues with cogent presentations of a Christian response and worldview.[4] Teaching, as detailed in Jesus's call to the mission of making disciples, must make space to discuss the destructive aims of ever-evolving counterfeit gospels and cultural trends that assail young adults today while balancing the presentation of sound Christian doctrine. Tim Keller, in his comments regarding Paul's letter to the Galatians, addresses the problem of imposing longstanding modes and means of discipleship that may be perceived as out of step with those whom the local church intends on teaching or discipling. It is much akin to foreign

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[2] Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "The Missionaries' Charge and Charta," The Spurgeon Center, April 21, 1961, https://www.spurgeon.org/resource-library/sermons/the-missionaries-charge-and-charta/#flipbook/.

[3] Robert E. Coleman. *The Master Plan of Discipleship.* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 12

[4] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 11.

missionary strategies that fail to recognize cultural distinctions such as social constructs within a community and their worldview perceptions. These deficiencies, including the means of communication can become barriers to discipleship, result in alienation instead of assimilation as adopted children of God. Keller states, "We often insist that other people become like us in their cultural style and preferences."[5]

Within the strata of local church attendees, young adults can sometimes feel marginalized from that lack of open and intimate dialogue in the midst of discipleship. Young adults want to discuss the Christian perspective and response to contemporary issues such as personal purity, holiness, identity, and purpose that were previously considered conversationally awkward by older or more mature Christians raised in an era where some things are not openly discussed. The level of awkwardness of the topic needing to be discussed does not lessen or negate the need to have it. Without a mechanism to give a biblical response to these intimate questions of personal holiness, young adults are left with and often seek a secular worldview response to their spiritual detriment. An adaptable process of discipleship for young adults must certainly remain faithful to the intent of Matthew 28:18–19 of biblically sound disciple-making and teaching but should also be responsive to the intra-cultural distinctions of young adults compared with those of more mature Christians having the privilege and task of making disciples.

Biblical and theological support for a discipleship process that addresses the contemporary needs of young adults begins with an exegesis of biblical passages beginning with Matthew 28:18–19 that calls for the work of teaching and the making of disciples inclusive of the challenges of today's young adults. Following the exegesis of Matthew 28:18–19, an exegesis of Matthew 22:39, Acts 2:42–47, and Romans 12:1–2 frames the call, means, and goal of young adult discipleship. A review of the interpretative work of church fathers serves to support and preserve the divinely authoritative revelation of God

[5] Tim Keller, *Galatians: Living in Line with the Truth of the Gospel* (New York: Redeemer Churches and Ministries, 2010), 11.

from the prophets and apostles disclosed on Scripture.[6] Additionally, modern, and postmodern theological writers who have contributed to the discussion of Matthew 28:18–20 discipleship will be examined.

Exegesis of Matthew 28:18–20 and the Call to Disciple-Making

At the end of Matthew's gospel, the remaining disciples worship the resurrected Jesus in Galilee where he gives them what is known in the church as the Great Commission: "All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth. 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 everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:18–20).[7] This directive as given to Christians contains imperatives in the making of disciples, which includes teaching, or what is referred to in the church as discipleship. The going and making of disciples imperative has been interpreted and applied in the church as differently as those inclined to fulfill it. Does the imperative to make disciples always mean leaving one's home to fulfill? Craig Blomberg sees that the fulfillment of these assigned imperatives should focus on the task given to all Christians, which is to duplicate themselves wherever they may be.[8]

The Gospel of Mark and Luke also document this commission with some variation that can be helpful in discerning a right application and fulfillment of the disciple-making commission. In Mark's account, the Great Commission is recorded, "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes and is baptized

[6] William M. Marsh, "Scripture and Tradition," in *Historical Theology for the Church*, ed. Jason G. Duesing and Nathaniel A. Finn (Nashville: B & H, 2021), 165.

[7] All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

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

will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned" (16:16). In Luke's gospel, the account is recorded as "and he said to them, thus it is written that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning in Jerusalem" (24:46–47). Local churches tend to hold in tension the emphasis on both international disciple-making and domestic disciple-making as they endeavor to faithfully fulfill the imperative given to make disciples.

Considering the other gospel accounts, Blomberg's interpretation may offer relief for this tension to rightly fulfill Jesus's directive to make disciples. International disciple-making, while called for and certainly necessary, should not be viewed with any greater consequence than this same vital task in one's local church, large group Bible study, or small group discipleship community. In fact, a reading of the Lukan narrative in context of the issue of disciple-making may find that it further strengthens the predicate task of proximate disciple-making before distant disciple-making can begin. In Luke, the disciples were directed to proclaim God's redemptive plan beginning in Jerusalem.

Proximate Disciple-Making

This proximate discipleship that began with Jesus's disciple-making locally ends, according to Robert Stein, with the equipping and sending of the disciples for distant disciple-making.[9] The receiving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2 demonstrates the process by which the disciples were equipped locally to spread the gospel distantly. The disciples were taught by Jesus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and then released to go and make disciples. In Acts 1:8, the disciples are to be sent for disciple-making work first in Jerusalem and then to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. As in the Lukan narrative, disciple-making begins where the disciples were, Jerusalem.

[9] Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, New American Commentary, vol. 24 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 41.

Further support for the need for disciple-making at the local level before advancing to a regional, national, and international level can be found in what Gailyn Van Rheenen details in the Missional Helix Spiral. In this model, theological reflection is the beginning point of ministry formation.[10] Without the foundation of sound faith formation through discipleship, missional efforts can easily become corrupted by the surrounding culture in which the missional work is being performed. Therefore, prudence mandates that before distant disciple-making can be effectively engaged, proximate disciple-making must occur to maintain proper theological reflection. The educational strategies of the local church are intentional in making doctrinally sound and theologically driven disciples.[11] John Chrysostom seems to have supported this idea of first establishing a firm faith foundation before advancing to distant disciple-making by separating the two distinct imperatives found in Matthew 28:19 with the first being to teach or make disciples and the other concerning the adherence to the commandments of Jesus in Matthew 28:20.[12]

Jonathan Edwards also appears to have agreed with Blomberg's interpretation of Matthew 28:18–19. After being released from his pastoral duties in Northampton, Massachusetts in 1750, Edwards became aware of a people group near Stockbridge, Massachusetts where a missionary village had been established.[13] Edwards may very well have been motivated to fulfill Jesus's directive to make disciples in the context of his ministry to the indigenous peoples of New England as he accepted the obligations of missionary to the Mohican and Mohawk Indians that inhabited the lands around the

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[10] Gailyn Van Rheenan with Anthony Parker, *Missions: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Strategies*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 311.

[11] Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 443.

[12] John Chrysostom, *Matthew 14–28*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: New Testament, vol. 1b (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 313.

[13] George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 119.

Stockbridge, Massachusetts area.[14] Edwards did not seek a ministry re-assignment in some distant land but instead endeavored to fulfill Matthew 28:18–19 through the duplication of himself among the people less than sixty-miles from Northampton. It is at this time when Edwards penned several books that, among other issues, addressed free will, which impacted the wider Christian community beyond the physical reach of his proximate disciple-making work in Stockbridge.[15] Edwards's life and ministry can be summarily described as proximate disciple-making that preceded distant disciple-making through his work and writing.

Historical Discipleship and the Jesus Model for Disciple-Making

What is the measure of efficacy of the local church's disciple-making efforts? Throughout history, Christians have sought to engage in discipleship in a variety of ways. At different eras, there were different modes of discipleship seeking efficacy. The following examples provide examples of these different modes of discipleship. Early monastics such as Anthony secluded themselves to remove any distractions to pursuing holiness and were known as anchorites, which became known as those who are withdrawn.[16] Seekers of Christian truth would look to the monastics to gain knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, oftentimes in remote places. While there would certainly have been spiritual benefit for the individual, was there an expectation of establishment of Christian community upon return to their respective communities? In contrast, Patrick, who evangelized and discipled new Christian converts in Ireland in the fifth century, gives historical discipleship a new strategy. Instead of Christians seeking out a disciple-

[14] Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jefffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin's Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 91.

[15] Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards*, 128.

[16] Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, vol. 1 of *The Story of Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 161.

maker, the disciple-maker sought disciples. Patrick committed himself to teaching and baptizing new Christians throughout Ireland, stating, "Christ the Lord who bade me come here and stay with them for the rest of my life, if the Lord will."[17] In 1724, Ludwig von Zinzendorf, seeking to promote unity among different Christian factions, established a community named Herrenhut.[18] Within this community of believers, members prayed and sought the Holy Spirit's guidance in how to best live the Christian life. Missionaries were sent out from among the members of the Herrenhut community to make disciples of people in surrounding communities. In contrast to the secluded monastic discipleship strategy where Christians would have traveled to seek out knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of what it is to be Christian and the single traveling missionary strategy to make disciples, Zinzendorf combined these two successfully, recognizable today as the modern church's discipleship process. The local church serves as a base for discipleship with community disciple-making as an outflow.

David Platt makes the point that if asked what it means to make disciples today, most Christians would not be able to articulate a cogent or biblically sound response.[19] Therein lies the motivation and a starting point for disciple-making. The task of disciple-making begins in the space currently occupied by the disciple-maker and those in need of discipleship. Mike Breen gives a second motivation for disciple-making in that "making disciples, you always get a church."[20] Discipleship is integral to faith formation and in the end cultivates a Christian community through which a person may find a sense of belonging and an encouragement to fully develop spiritually and grow in faith and

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[17] Michael A. G. Haykin, *Rediscovering the Church Fathers: Who They Were and How They Shaped the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), Patrick, quoted in Haykin, 141.

[18] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 36.

[19] David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, Christ-Centered Exposition (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 375.

[20] Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM, 2016), 5.

maturity.

Jesus gave the local church a practical example of disciple-making among young adults in terms of group dynamics and content. During the three-year earthly ministry of Jesus, he practiced proximate disciple-making. Within the narrative accounts of the Gospels, Jesus went about disciple-making within the context of personal relationship where there was instruction, application, and the cultivation of community among those called to be his disciples. With this model of disciple-making, Breen's statement that making disciples produces a church is certainly true. Jesus's progressive revelation of truth to the disciples occurred through the purposeful teaching began with his recognition of their spiritual needs. With the investment of time, effort, and emotion, he was able to meet those needs. The expression of love without precondition that is emblematic of what disciple-making should be leading to faith formation and spiritual maturity.

Exegesis of Matthew 22:39 and the Application for Young Adult Discipleship

Matthew 22:39 offers the practical starting point for disciple-making. Jesus gives the imperative to love one's neighbor as part of the broader commandment that defines both the vertical relationship between man and God and the horizontal relationship between man on earth. In Luke's narrative of this same discussion Jesus further defines who is one's neighbor through telling the compassion a Samaritan man had on victim of a violent robbery on the road to Jericho (Luke 10:25–37). Where others had forfeited the opportunity to extend care and compassion to this man who was in need, the Samaritan man did not withhold compassion or aid, demonstrating what fulfillment of God's command to love one's neighbor as oneself should be (Lev 19:18).[21] The contemporary understanding or interpretation of *love* within the church body can often become an institutionalized idea.

[21] While this particular passage in Leviticus addresses the horizontal relationship that God's chosen among the nations should have with one another, Jesus would refine the application to include those in need, regardless of one's familiarity or relationship.

The concept of love, when viewed from the historical context of the Hebrew text of Leviticus, has a broader and deeper meaning than how contemporary culture can understand and apply it in the context of young adult discipleship.

Discipleship Begins with Loving One's Neighbor

In Leviticus 19:18, God instructs the Israelites to "love your neighbor as yourself." God's Word to his people of that time and place are not the sole possession of the historical people of God. Jesus draws on this passage as he issues the imperative to "love your neighbor as yourself," and should be considered more broadly than just emotion. The word love in Hebrew is אהבה pronounced *ahavah*.[22] *Ahavah* encompasses affection of one person for another, of course, but is more accurately understood as a response of action toward another person that exceeds mere passive emotion and is inclusive of active loyalty, devotion, and acceptance. *Ahavah* functionally translated is an action tense "to love," in contrast with *ahavot*, which is an adjective meaning the "love of," and is descriptive. The Shema of Deuteronomy 6 begins with the imperative "hear O' Israel, you shall love the Lord your God," and is functionally translated into "listen and do." Similarly, Jesus's call to love one's neighbor is to be taken in the same way: listen and do.

Ahavah is not transactional as being without precondition just as God's love for those whom he has chosen exceeds mere emotion and is without precondition. *Ahavah* is the posture in which all Christians are called upon to have with their neighbor. At the end of Luke's narrative of the Samaritan who showed mercy to the injured man (Luke 10:25–37), Jesus gave this command: "Go and do likewise." How important is it for a disciple of Jesus Christ to express love to his neighbor? The apostle Paul answers this in his letter to the church at Corinth addressing this question: "If I have prophetic powers, and understand

[22] Thom Blair, ed., *The Hebrew-English Interlinear ESV Old Testament: Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia and English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 283.

all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith, so as to remove mountains but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). Plainly stated, disciple-making begins with love of one's neighbor exceeding emotion or affection and is the motivation of disciple-making. Christians, then, are to give this same *ahavah* to others as they themselves have received from God.

Disciple-making begins and ends with *ahavah* in that the disciple seeks to give that which has been received inclusive of the elements necessary for faith formation and becoming a conduit of God's love. The desire to give another person within physical proximity that which has been received is not based on obligation but is a privilege or opportunity. In 1 John 4:19, receiving and then giving God's love is explained: "We love because he first loved us." The apostle Paul demonstrates this as well during his trial before King Agrippa as he testified to his ministry call and work, stating plainly that he wished all who were listening would "become what I am except for these chains (Acts 26:29). In obedience to Jesus's command to love one's neighbor and make disciples, Paul effectively merged the two as he worked to express *ahavah* to those within hearing proximity to be a conduit of God's *ahavah* and duplicate himself even in the midst of his persecution. Disciple-making is not just imparting knowledge to willing students but rather participating in whole person faith formation of those in proximity to one's location. Engaging with neighbors through biblical instruction, leading to knowledge, understanding, and then wisdom, is driven by a desire to cultivate a community of like-minded and spiritually bonded Christians drawn together by the Holy Spirit, leading to a full expression of *ahavah*. Love then when understood and applied in this way fulfills the imperative given by Jesus in Matthew 22:39.

Exegesis of Acts 2:42–47 and Discipleship in a Christian Community

The narrative of Acts 2:42–47 demonstrates the expression of *ahavah* within a discipleship community. The people devoted themselves to the apostle's instruction.

There was growing concern for one another as each willingly sacrificed materially to be in support of another's needs. Through this mutual *ahavah*, the people grew in knowledge and relationship with God and each other, drawing even more people into their midst seeking that which is only obtainable through God's grace and mercy. This discipleship community extended the conduit of God's love to a wider audience and increasing geographical space. This proximate disciple-making preceded more distant disciple-making.

John Polhill, commenting on these passages, observes that this community of Christians devoted themselves to four practices: teaching of the apostles, devotion to the fellowship, mutual meals, and prayer.[23] This Christian community cultivated a healthy interdependence among its members that promoted spiritual growth and maturity that began on a small scale but then grew as more Christians sought similar community. Later in Acts there is further evidence that this group pf Christians developed into a cohesive community as Luke details in Acts 4:32, "those who believed were one in heart and soul." What had developed through this spiritual interdependence for mutual edification was strength through spiritual unity. The apostle Paul provides even further encouragement to seek the benefits of close Christian fellowship as he wrote to the Galatian churches to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2). Through interpersonal relationships, such as within small group discipleship, these burdens can be shared with one another without fear of judgement or ridicule as each member seeks mutual welfare, acceptance, and security by his or her fellow brothers or sisters in Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells Christians to consider how to spur each other on to love and good works (10:24). Experience shapes theology when it comes to understanding God, humanity, sin, and salvation.[24] This is a bidirectional concept in that the disciple forms a worldview based

[23] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary, vol. 26 (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 119.

[24] Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 27.

on gospel truth, interpersonal relationships with other Christians, and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. He or she also develops Christian character and integrity through these same influences as the sanctification process proceeds.

Discipleship, however, is not the same as disciple-making, and the distinction is key when seeking to fulfill Jesus's call to make disciples. According to Bill Hull, discipleship is the state of being a disciple and is equivalent to spiritual formation, whereas disciple-making is the three-step process of evangelism, development, and deployment.[25] Practically speaking, discipleship and disciple-making can be understood as interchangeable as long the process is dynamic in moving a person from student to leader with the result of duplicating themselves and building a Christian community. Disciple-making then should be a comprehensive process whereby disciple-makers engage with those being discipled within Christian community and in diverse group dynamics that lends itself to whole person discipleship. This process can be accomplished among young adults in multilevel group dynamics.

Multilevel Disciple-Making

In the Jesus model of disciple-making there is multilevel discipleship with the overall Christian community. Jesus taught in large group dynamics where the gospel message could be broadcast to a wider audience such as recorded in Mark 4 but in a way that those the Holy Spirit had prepared to receive his words would be moved by them (v. 20). This large group format does not lend itself to interpersonal dialogue with the disciple-maker but does allow for dissemination of biblical knowledge. At other times Jesus taught in a smaller group dynamic, for instance in Luke 10:38–42 where he and the disciples visited the home of Mary and Martha. In this format there is space for interpersonal dialogue and teaching, but the discipling is broad in content responding to a

[25] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 34–35.

broad issue of faith that may have developed out of the large group dynamic. In this instance, the lesson Jesus taught Martha as well as the present witnesses over two-thousand years ago can be applied today—maximize every opportunity to experience Jesus in a meaningful way. In the context of modern Christianity, young Christians are not seeking to busy themselves with the mechanics of religious practices but desire relationships with Jesus Christ and other Christians.

Most often, however, Jesus would withdraw from the crowds and disciple his group of twelve men in a smaller group setting where the depth of teaching could extend from the experience beyond their interaction with larger groups. This can be seen the John 13–17. Even further, Jesus would spend time in a yet smaller discipleship group such as with Peter, James, and John to become more personal in specific discipleship. In Luke, Jesus only allows these three disciples to accompany him as he goes to Jairus's home where he heals his daughter. These three were also the privileged trio to witness the transfiguration as recorded in Mark 9:2. Paul later refers to Peter, James, and John as "pillars" of the Church (Gal 2:9). Jesus clearly made space for small group discipleship. Each level of group dynamic served a discipleship goal with specific goals and purpose.

Multilevel Discipleship Purpose

The ultimate purpose of multilevel discipleship is to glorify God through the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom and a life lived that honors the person and work of Jesus Christ. In Romans 12, Paul writes that Christians are not to be conformed to the world but are to be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rom 12:2). In effect, this is faith formation through transformation. Discipleship does not take place in a vacuum but through interpersonal relationships within the context of a Christian community. As Proverbs 27:17 reads, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." The caveat here is that iron cannot sharpen iron if the two pieces never come in contact with one another, and so it is with discipleship.

Paul gives practical application of Jesus's imperative to love one another in his

letter to the Roman church found in chapter 12. Discipleship undertaken out of love for one's brothers and sisters in Christ develops into devotion and commitment to those whom the disciple-maker has engaged in discipleship. Romans 12:9–10 says, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor." The Greek word for this extent of love is *agapao*, which is unconditional and acted upon without precondition. It is the type of love derived from God's love for Christians. In 1 John 4:7–8, John charges Christians to "love one another, for love is from God." In multilevel discipleship, the cultivation of *ahavah* or *agapao* among those in each group dynamic begins with outlining in broad context what the conduct of a Christian should be and is unique to Christians.[26]

The Greek word for love that may be cultivated in a large group dynamic or level can be applied as φιλαδελφία or *phileo*, and is functionally interpreted as brotherly affection or love of one's brother or sister, recognizing that within this group is a familial bond. In a smaller subset group, love can be expanded in application to become a family love or uniting love. In Greek this is written φιλόστοργοι, or *philostorgos*, which is love between family members where there is deeper affection and motives are pure in intent, seeking to bring honor and respect to one another instead of themselves.[27] This *philostorgos* love can be further amplified and applied in a smaller or elemental subset group of three to four people where intimate discussion, confession, prayer, and accountability can take place. In turn, as this relationship between brothers and sisters in Christ matures and the commitment to mutual love, respect, and benefit is cultivated at this elemental subset level, it can be transmitted upward and outward among the members of the larger subset groups as these men and women rejoin and interact in a broader sense

[26] Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 444.

[27] Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 445.

and even in missional community relations. While there are different Greek words for love, they are nuances of the concept in application. As with the English word *love*, many Christians may have learned the Greek word for it as *phileo*, in Bible studies or commentaries. Without fully understanding how the nuances between *phileo* and *philostorgos* help to frame the concept of love in action on a horizontal plane between God's people, biblical discipleship can be impeded.

Disciple-Making of Young Adults

Is disciple-making or discipleship different when engaging in it with young adults? The answer is no, in that the goal is not dissimilar to that of children, teens, adults, and senior adult discipleship, which is to cultivate a Christian community through spiritual growth and maturity that extends to one's neighbor. The answer is yes, in that a set of unique characteristics drive young adults to seek Christian community on their terms and preferences. Discipleship can be structured in a way that meets these preferences without compromising the goal. Augustine makes the point that there are two goals of Scripture study: discover what needs to be understood and pass on to others what has been understood.[28] Discipleship inclusive of Bible study can achieve these goals if the one's being discipled participate. In David Kinnaman's book *You Lost Me*, exploring the reasons for the disconnectedness of young adults from church, he observes that "our culture is discontinuously different."[29] What are these differences that can impair young adult discipleship? Young adults live in a discontinuous reality from older adults in that their technological, social, and spiritual intake is shaped by the fast-paced cultural shifts that affect them. This reality is summed up in three distinct aspects: access, alienation,

[28] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 109.

[29] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 38.

and authority.[30] The specifics of these three barriers to discipleship will be covered in more detail in the next chapter but remain the driver of this multilevel model for engaging with young adult Christians to accomplish the goal of discipleship.

Technological advances in Western culture have provided many more tools that can be employed in service to the work of discipleship. The way one generation received discipleship should not be expected to be the way the next should receive it as the church experiences the onward flow of life and culture.[31] The apostle Paul's efforts at making disciples certainly support this in that the strategy needs to fit those being discipled. In each of his letters to the churches in the New Testament, a specific issue or issues were addressed that were somewhat unique to that group. Although applicable churchwide, the lessons were derived from the actions or activities of the members of those specific groups of Christians. In Colossians 2:18, Paul corrects the church at Colossi regarding ascetic practices and angel worship as a means by which one achieves righteousness. Whereas in the letter to the church at Philippi, Paul encourages unity of fellowship with all Christians exhorting them to "adopt the same attitude of Jesus Christ" as it relates to humility and servitude (Phil 2:5). Here are two examples of how pastoral advice is incorporated into discipleship of young adults while maintaining the overall goal of disciple-making as developing and deploying disciples. While the relatively smaller group of Christians received direct counsel from Paul, the larger church as a whole benefits from the encounter and provides support for multilevel discipleship.

Conclusion

The call to disciple-making is certainly an unambiguous imperative given to all Christians by Jesus Christ. The church throughout history has endeavored to comply with

[30] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 39.

[31] Harold L. Senkbeil, *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart.* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 61.

and fulfill this imperative with varied interpretations, applications, and results. If the common goal of disciple-making is multiplication, then recognizing the dynamic culture of today's Western Christianity and young adult trends is indispensable. Discipleship strategies can be adjusted to maximize efficacy without compromising the gospel with regard to the imperative to make disciples. One observation of young adult engagement in church is that there is an increasing sense of discontinuity when it comes to cohesive fellowship. Young adults desire community with one another that is mutually supportive and inclusive as it relates to an individual level of biblical knowledge and spiritual maturity.

In reference to the imperative given in Matthew 22, Deuteronomy 6 provides an example of application for discipleship. Just after God commands Israel to love one's neighbor, he gives the command to pass on his Word to the next generation (Deut 6:7). Additionally, in 2 Timothy 1:8–13, Paul echoes this imperative and instructs Timothy to be bold, teach the next generation, and guard the Word entrusted to him just as he had done. This is the pattern set for Timothy, not a rigid generational strategy that had once been an effective tool. There does not appear to be a prohibition on creativity when approaching disciple-making if there is no compromise of the gospel message or orthodox Christian principles. Multilevel discipleship of young adults attempts to serve the spiritual needs of that demographic while being faithful to the gospel and church tradition.

Although it may seem overly reductive, the New Testament seems to give support to the proposed multilevel discipleship concept. As Paul, Peter, James, and John all address specific issues of the intended recipients in their respective letters to individual churches, the truths revealed in their work of discipleship is applicable to all Christians, past, present, and future. Jesus provided further support for this model in that as the group size decreased, the depth and intimacy of the discussion increased. There is also a reciprocal continuity of the faith formation at the very small group level that is transmitted

upward and outward for the benefit of the larger groups. The cohesion of the functionality of multilevel discipleship being pursued in this model intends to impart Christocentric discipleship that is faithful to Christian orthodoxy of the church, but in a way that meets the unique needs of young adults.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL, PRACTICAL, AND HISTORICAL ISSUES RELATED TO DISCIPLING YOUNG ADULTS

On September 18, 2023, Dr. Albert Mohler Jr. published an article titled "The Train Is Leaving the Station: Andy Stanley's Departure from Biblical Christianity." In this article Mohler chronicles the slow but incremental deviation from historical Christianity as it relates to the current trends in Western society. Mohler includes references to Stanley's call for the church to be "unhitched from the Old Testament," as well as the encouragement to abandon orthodox Christianity if it "gets in the way of ministry."[1] Stanley, a popular pastor in Atlanta, Georgia, offers teaching characteristic of the trend in Western society that appeals to a religion-seeking culture but in a way that compromises biblical Christianity. This departure leads those young adults searching for truth into yet another type of lie that is just a repackaging of the lie Satan presents in Genesis 3:1—"did God actually say," and by extension does the inspired Word of God really say—which is emblematic of the critical need for both a bibliocentric source for truth and Christocentric worldview in discipleship that aids in faith formation and spiritual growth.

Part of the human experience is identity-seeking, especially in young adulthood. The question at the forefront of many if not all young adults is "who am I" and "is this all there is" when it comes to seeking an understanding of the world around them and the Christian faith. Discipleship answers these two driving questions through the teaching of God's Word. Additionally, development of a Christocentric worldview cultivates an

[1] R. Albert Mohler, "The Train Is Leaving the Station: Andy Stanley's Departure from Biblical Christianity," World Opinions, September 18, 2023, https://wng.org/opinions/the-train-is-leaving-the-station-1695036498.

interdependent and mutually supportive community with the common goal of seeking greater understanding of Scripture, maturity of faith, and life application of God's truth.

Young Adult Discipleship Goals

The teaching goal of young adult discipleship should be toward faith formation and cultivation of a discipleship culture. Churches may fall short in achieving these goals when more emphasis is placed on structure at the expense of function. At Brentwood Baptist, the discipleship strategy, Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples (DXD), consists structurally of four pillars: gospel conversations, groups, gather, and going. Structure, however, in and of itself does not achieve these discipleship goals. To address faith formation within a discipleship group, a functional yet dynamic strategy that is responsive to the expressed or perceived spiritual needs of the individual and the group as a whole is indispensable for whole person discipleship.

Historically, the church has experienced periods of spiritual decay and subsequent renewal as the orthopraxy of one generation fails to be transmitted practically to the next. Jonathan Edwards, commenting on this observation in the year 1727, stated that members of his congregation exhibited a form of godliness while at the same time denying its power.[2] There was no pursuit of progressive spiritual growth and faith formation among the succeeding generation leading them into complacency. As young adults seek community within their own cultural context, the local church can be slow to appreciate the disjunction between an older generation and the younger one when it comes to biblical truth or doctrine and cultural relevancy. Discipleship that articulates sound biblical doctrine for an older generation in the historical past is sometimes viewed by a younger generation as antiquated and therefore irrelevant. This antiquated or irrelevant perception of established discipleship strategies can lead to the detrimental pursuit of

[2] Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 37.

innovative theologies by young adults that seem biblically sound to the immature Christian or biblically illiterate but ultimately present a counterfeit gospel. Indeed, church-going millennials are often viewed as disenchanted nomads who participated in the local church with their parents but abandoned church activities in young adulthood.[3] As cultural trends change, the same biblical truth and doctrine must be shown as applicable and relevant today as it was in the historical past in a way that speaks to the current cultural pressures. During Edwards's time as pastor in Northampton, Massachusetts, he encountered young adults seemingly in rebellion when it came to proper Christian behavior. He commented that the young adults of his congregation sought out a secular subculture to fulfill their desire for culturally relevant community.[4] The fulfillment of relevant secular community, or "tavern culture" as Edwards describes it, came at the expense of faith formation and produced a tumult within the church community.

During what became known as the Jesus Movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in America, young adults seeking authenticity exchanged the psychedelic experience through drug use with the ecstatic experience or awareness of the Holy Spirit.[5] For many, this shift away from identity-seeking through illicit drug use was replaced with identity-seeking through an spiritual/emotional experience that is still alive and well today in Western Christianity at the expense of true faith formation. Identity-seeking and character formation, that together help shape the whole person, according to Dallas Willard, is very much a component of experiences and choices both historically and contemporarily that defines what it is to be formed.[6] As with some who experienced the Jesus Movement and

[3] David John Seel Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2018), 28.

[4] George M. Marsden, *A Short Life of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2008), 43.

[5] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 356

[6] Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2021), 5.

mistakenly settled for nothing more than a spiritually or emotionally therapeutic season of life devoid of whole-person transformation, many young people today are drawn to an experience rather than transformation.

In the current cultural context of Western society is the consistent lament of young adults seeking ill-defined authenticity that has filtered into and affects local church discipleship. The glorification of the anti-hero has become prevalent in secular society.[7] This anti-hero is celebrated because of the consistency of character expressed, albeit negative and even contrary to societal norms, where his or her motives are seen as pure or authentic even if they may be destructive. Young adults are respectful of the reliability of the anti-hero to live out in front of them that which is proclaimed. In Christian discipleship, young adults are seeking this same reliability of living out what is proclaimed through faith. As young adults seek authentic faith it can often become a self-defined ideology with the blending of what appears to be Christianity on the surface but conceals an anthropocentric morality code at its core.

Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) has emerged in Western society as so-called authentic faith.[8] Within the construct of this ideology, morality is a code of conduct that a person can choose for themselves. The power to be good is within a person and does not require any regenerative transformation to enact. In MTD, God is a benevolent being that just wants his creation to be happy, and what makes that person happy is justified. MTD as a counterfeit religion is neither Christocentric nor biblically defensible. The mistake that should be avoided is believing that MTD is nothing more than a "weed in the midst of the garden"; MTD is becoming an indigenous plant.[9]

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[7] Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 6.

[8] Christian Smith and Melinda L. Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University, 2005), 163.

[9] Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age*, 12.

Edwards can be viewed as a herald of this warning when he summarily observed that fallen human nature is what he described as "fertile ground for fleshly religiosity" promoted as spiritual but ultimately rooted in self-love.[10] The local church in its discipleship strategy needs to respond to this seeking of authentic faith. This authenticity is achieved through faith formation in the context of a Christocentric worldview where truth is based on sound biblically based doctrine.

Process \Toward Faith Formation in Young Adults

Foundationally, any young adult discipleship effort in the local church should maintain a simple but often overcomplicated purpose of making little Christs. Applying to young adult discipleship what C. S Lewis declared as the purpose of church is the drawing of men into Christ.[11] The spiritual health of a local church fellowship is directly related to the spiritual health of its leadership and members. In the same way, the spiritual health of a young adult demographic within the local church is dependent on the spiritual health of its leaders and its members and is integral in accomplishing the simple purpose of making little Christs. The substrata of young adult groups in this particular scenario are not mutually independent but rather mutually dependent and interactive. Faith formation of the individual person and Christian character development drives the spiritual health and influence of the larger grouping of individuals that in turn shapes the spiritual identity of the entire fellowship. In the process of faith formation in young adults, discipleship happens at the individual level and at the larger grouping level where there is a reciprocating continuity of influence throughout. There is neither a top-down nor bottom-up approach in discipleship, but both occur simultaneously.

Where does the process of faith formation of young adults through discipleship begin in the local church? The answer lies within the framework of each group made up

[10] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 42.

[11] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1952), 199.

of individual Christians seeking access, inclusion, and the dissemination of sound biblical doctrine in a context of their peers. One of a leader's first challenges of engaging in young adult discipleship is developing an appreciation of the spiritual background of each member of the larger group. While some may have a firm faith foundation and knowledge of sound biblical doctrine, others may have no prior church experience, or their church experience is nominal. For the new Christian, there should be an expectation of no prior formative exposure to sound biblical doctrine. Alternatively, some have had some prior formative exposure to sound biblical doctrine but, as David Kinnaman points out, the connections were "shallow and valued as cultural identification" rather than faith formation.[12] This knowledge is indispensable so as to not assume a level of biblical knowledge and understanding.

The apostle Paul addressed this situation when he reprimanded the Christians in Corinth that they had not advanced in knowledge and understanding of what it is to be Christian than when they first came to faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:2). Mark Taylor, commenting on this particular passage, characterizes the subjects of Paul's rebuke as failing to fully comprehend the gospel.[13] Much like these Corinthians, young adults in the local church may fail to fully comprehend the gospel of Jesus Christ and continue in their self-centeredness at the expense of true faith formation. Additionally, young adults likely have not cultivated habitual spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and Bible intake. Of this subgroup of the local church having had some prior engagement, there may be progressive disengagement or absenteeism from involvement in young adulthood drawing the characterization of being a church drop out by researchers in the area of young adult trends in Christianity. The drop out problem can be traced back to its

[12] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 23.

[13] Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, New American Commentary, vol. 28 (Nashville: B & H, 2014), 99.

causative core—incomplete faith formation, or as some may similarly describe as incomplete faith development.[14] The two distinct subgroups of young adult Christians in part comprise the large group of young adults in the local church that receive sound biblical doctrine in different ways.

Young adult discipleship begins by addressing the state of discipleship today in the local church and its deficiency. What stands out in his summation is the superficiality of today's young Christians. There is an incongruity between the young adults' profession of faith and its impact on the surrounding community.[15] For a new Christian, immaturity would be expected as their faith formation is just beginning. However, there is not a guarantee that young adults who have an affiliation or experience with a local church or ministry have progressed in faith formation. Commenting on heretical views held by professing Christians, according to a recent survey, Jonathan Pokluda found that 60 percent of respondents believe everyone will eventually go to Heaven; Jesus was the first of all created beings; 64 percent believe God accepts all religions; greater than 40 percent believe the Bible contains helpful myths but not a reliable truth; and greater than 70 percent believe in works-based salvation.[16]

To determine if there is consistency of the reported Young Adult Discipleship trends in literature with those experienced at BBC and those from a church similarly engaged in addressing faith formation of young adults in another region of the United States, Nate Hilgenkamp from Harris Creek Baptist Church provided his insights on the

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[14] John S. Dickerson, *The Great Evangelical Recession: 6 Factors That Will Crash the American Church . . . and How to Prepare* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 107.

[15] Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 23.

[16] Jonathan Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church: How to Reach, Teach, and Engage Young Adults* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 29.

subject.[17] The demographic of young adults at Harris Creek and that which is defined within this project are similar in terms of age range and perceived spiritual state. According to Hilgenkamp, most young adults that are engaged in discipleship present with no faith development or formation. Those that may have been involved as children and teens have "learned the rules" of Christianity but have no personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Hilgenkamp describes one of the processes of young adult Christian discipleship as "re-parenting," where young adults receive foundational teaching on how to integrate sound biblical doctrine into their words, thoughts, and actions in a way that is God-honoring. Similar to the structure and function of this proposed multilevel discipleship process, Harris Creek engages in gender specific small groups, monthly coed meetings for contextual biblical instruction, and churchwide ministry engagement with dedicated staff and resources allocated to this young adult demographic. Faith formation in young adults should not assume a level of knowledge and understanding of the Bible or sound biblical doctrine without first establishing their position on the continuum of Christian maturity. While there is no universal metric to assess and then assign this position on the continuum at the outset, there should be a constant awareness of the diversity of knowledge and understanding within the group, which is essential as the work of young adult discipleship progresses. To that end, structure and function are integral components to any discipleship strategy.

Proxemics in Young Adult Discipleship

In December 2020, Matthew Purdom completed a ministry project that centered on the concept of proxemics as a means toward cultivating a discipleship culture.

[17] An interview with Nate Hilgenkamp, who serves on the Community and Teaching Team at Harris Creek Baptist Church in McGregor, Texas, was conducted on May 22, 2024. Interview responses are included with permission.

Proxemics is a concept where distance determines the type of communication.[18] A critical pillar of young adult discipleship leading to an advance in faith formation is individuals being engaged in highly accountable and relational discipleship groups of three to four people.[19] Within the discipleship structure that utilizes proxemics, an inverse relationship between group size and the openness and depth of discussion occurs that affects the group leader's ministry. There is biblical warrant for such a concept found in Exodus 18:13–23 where Moses is advised by his father-in-law Jethro to compartmentalize the management of the Israelite communities' affairs. Jethro recommends that the Israelites be divided into smaller subset groups with an appointed small group leaders to serve as their respective shepherd, thereby improving the overall management of their daily needs.

Functionally, the smaller the group size the greater the opportunity for open discussion of more intimate topics with more transparency that can be addressed with biblically sound counseling, while the greater the group size the less intimacy or transparency in those discussions are expected to occur. The framework of this proxemics inverse in young adult discipleship is applied in that at the small or elemental level, there should be more transparent revelation and open discussion of spiritual challenges. While these issues may be perceived as altogether unique to one or two people, they are likely to be common among the larger young adult ministry members. Another functional use of proxemics in this regard is to identify issues that create spiritual growth stagnation or impediment that inform topics of discussion in the larger group setting based on sound biblical doctrine while preserving anonymity and confidentiality of the elemental group. In doing so, a basic mistake in young adult discipleship can be avoided, which is to

[18] Matthew James Purdom, "Equipping Young Small Group Leadership and Discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee" (DMin project, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 51.

[19] Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 55.

erroneously assign of a level of knowledge and understanding of Christian belief in a group that can perpetuate incongruities in faith formation.

The Elemental Level of Young Adult Discipleship

Where proxemics provides organization for discipleship, organic discipleship or modeling of Christian habits and practices can be incorporated within diverse levels of a discipleship structure in response to the demographic within the group or groups. Millennials, for example, respond to a leaders' openness in sharing their spiritual wrestling and triumphs in a way that promotes relatability as they model Christian attitudes and practices within this small group.[20] At the elemental level, there is a small number but a greater opportunity to discuss in depth specific issues or challenges to faith formation. The leader of an elemental level group needs to be aware that individuals are looking to the leader to be relatable. Relatability is defined and cultivated through interaction. There is no static means by which a leader's relatability is qualified or quantified, but it is developed through personal engagement, open and honest discussion of personal spiritual challenges, and the steps taken that may be ongoing in their life that have either proven to be effective or ineffective in overcoming impediments to faith formation.[21] A sense of acceptance and belonging have long been a prerequisite to faith formation with relationship building coming before creedal affirmation.[22] At this level, in depth discussions, confessions, and repentance become the substance in place of lecture or program.

The leader of the elemental level of gender homogenous young adults should expect to and encourage dialogue on distinct culturally relevant issues that affect faith

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[20] David Gregg, "Ministry to Millennials, Young Men, and the Next Generation," in *How to Disciple Men: 45 Proven Strategies from Experts on Ministry to Men*, ed. Jay Payleitner and David Murrow (Racine, WI: BroadStreet, 2017), 143.

[21] Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 86.

[22] Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 141.

formation. Without attempting to be overly prescriptive, these suggestions may instigate open and honest dialogue regarding social and moral challenges to holiness, biblical literacy, and insight into a person's doctrinal soundness and alignment. Singleness in a Christian context encompasses subordinate issues relative to faith formation many young adults may find the local church to be in out of sync with contemporary cultural challenges. Failures in personal holiness, dating boundaries, or the opposite feeling of isolation and loneliness can be considered and evaluated through the lens of biblical truth. A person's vocation or workplace dynamic can both positively and negatively impact a young adult Christian in the pursuit of faith formation. Identity-seeking is a significant yearning among young adults, and when sought entirely in the workplace can result in the suppression truth of how God identifies his children. Looking to material success within the parameters of one's vocation solely as the determinate of a person's value leads to a perpetual instability driven by the whims and trends respective of that vocation. Without personal spiritual discipline, influences encountered in one's secular vocational will be a dominate voice that impairs faith development and Christian maturity.

The cultivation of habitual spiritual disciplines can and should be an integral part of elemental level discipleship inasmuch as accountability can be much more effective. Spiritual disciplines are practices found in Scripture that promote the spiritual growth of Christians and are the habits of devotion and experiential Christianity.[23] With an openness and acceptance within this smaller group, individuals are more likely to ask for guidance from the leader and each other as trust between the members eliminates critical judgment or embarrassment. While these same disciplines can and should be discussed at the larger group sizes, accountability in cultivating their habitual practice occurs at the elemental level.

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[23] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

These are but a few of the relevant points of discipleship where the elemental small group leader can be a relatable guide to the path forward in faith formation.[24] Trust is developed between the leader and the other members of the group through this elemental level of discipleship. Trust that is consistent and reliable despite confessed moral or social failings, past and present, and without fear of alienation or judgment is critical in cultivating discipleship relationships. Trust is predicated on love for one another. John Owen advocated for this idea as far back as 1648. Drawing from John 15:12, 13:34–35, and 1 Thessalonians 3:12, among other similar passages, Owen, addressing the proper Christian posture one to another, wrote that Christians ought to show love in all things like Christ showed to his church, which is just as true today.[25] The elemental level of discipleship in the multilevel model provides the space for organic discipleship in the form of confession, repentance, and accountability that removes barriers to faith formation and Christian maturity. Through young adult discipleship at the elemental level, discussion points at the gender-specific level originating from the varied cross-section of all elemental level groups can be developed into issue-focused discussions for the larger gender-specific discipleship group.

The Gender-Specific Level of Young Adult Discipleship

In large co-educational young adult discipleship, challenges to faith formation often arise that could be more appropriately considered in a gender homogenous discussion group setting. This level of discipleship would be functionally placed between the gender homogenous small or elemental groups and the large gender heterogenous or coed young adult ministry group. Based on the aforementioned discipleship structure, based on proxemics, this level of discipleship would have an expected inverse relationship between

[24] Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 93.

[25] John Owen, *Rules for Walking in Fellowship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2014), 27.

the number of participants and the willingness to openly discuss and be personally transparent relative to the topics. The topics considered at this level of discipleship are derived from bi-directional input originating from the various elemental discipleship level groups collated from among the respective leaders or from the large coed discipleship group. Functionally, this level of discipleship is an intersection of sound biblical doctrine taught at the large group level and culturally relevant issues that affect faith formation revealed at the elemental small group level. When the application of sound biblical doctrine to an issue requires a gender-sensitive perspective and sensitivity, this level provides space for that gender-homogenous discussion. When members at this level need space for introspective reflection and spiritual self-inventory, the elemental level small group provides the vehicle for prayer, confession, repentance, and accountability.

The cultural pressures and spiritual repercussions on men and women are not necessarily the same when it comes to issues such as pornography, physical and sexual abuse, abortion, divorce, purity, workplace integrity, singleness, and dating. Gender specific discipleship groups allow men and women to have open and honest discussions on these sensitive issues without fear of embarrassment or judgement of group members of the opposite sex. As previously established, all young adults come with a historical past. That historical past may have had no godly influence or nominal church influence, which could have resulted in self-destructive and spirit damaging life choices. The following two examples of faith formation and spiritual growth impediments common among young adults are not necessarily unique to a particular gender but affect both Christian men and women but are perhaps experienced differently and thus require counseling specific to gender.

Pornography is a particularly pernicious addiction among young adults in the United States. Todd Bures, writing on the subject of pornography addiction and its impact on discipleship, reports that at least 93 percent of boys and 62 percent of girls have been exposed to pornography by the age of eighteen, with 64 percent of Christian men and 15

percent of Christian women viewing pornography at least once a month.[26] In a more recent survey, Michael B. Robb and Supreet Mann found that 73 percent of the 1,300 teens surveyed had been exposed to pornography with the gender breakdown of 75 percent boys and 70 percent girls.[27] Of these teens who have been exposed to pornography, 52 percent of boys and 36 percent of girls consume pornography intentionally. As these statistics seem to forecast for young adult discipleship, there is a decreasing ratio between Christian men and women who may struggle with pornography. As an anticipated impediment to faith formation, pornography should no longer be an issue relegated only to men's discipleship; it should be an anticipated issue that can also arise in a women's discipleship setting. How the issue of pornography is discussed in a group setting would differ between men and women necessitating a gender-specific space.

Another example of a contemporary issue affecting faith formation of both men and women is abortion. While the physical, mental, and spiritual trauma of an abortion affects women in unique ways, men who have engaged in the violation of proper physical boundaries leading to a pregnancy that ended after an abortion bear their own unique mental and spiritual trauma. Husbands or boyfriends of women who have had an abortion experience psychological trauma that is often overlooked.[28] An unmarried man may suffer psychological illness up to eighteen months after the series of steps that ended in abortion.[29] This illustration of the collateral effects of abortion sheds light on the fact that young adult discipleship leaders should anticipate that both men and women may

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[26] Todd Bures, "Conquering Porn Addiction," in Payleitner and Murrow, *How to Disciple Men*, 110.

[27] Michael B. Robb and Supreet Mann, "Teens and Pornography," Common Sense Media, 2022, https://www.commonsensemedia.org/sites/default/files/research/report/2022-teens-and-pornography-final-web.pdf.

[28] John Jefferson Davis, *Evangelical Ethics: Issues Facing the Church Today*, 4th ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2015), 145.

[29] Judith Wallerstein and Marion Bar Din, "Seesaw Response of a Young Unmarried Couple to Therapeutic Abortion," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 27, no. 2 (August 1972): 251–54.

struggle with the long-term implications of having experienced this type of trauma. While both men and women may experience similar shame and guilt arising out of the series of events that lead to an abortion, women's ministry is often where this impediment to spiritual formation and growth is discussed and addressed from a faith formation perspective. As with the previous example, leaders of men's gender specific discipleship groups should anticipate this as an issue that may impede faith formation and spiritual growth. A gender-specific discipleship group, as with the previous example, provides the space for both men and women to receive godly counsel based on their unique perspective.

Gender specific discipleship is a key component of young adult discipleship. It is indispensable in that while perhaps only one or two individuals from the elemental subgroups were led to an openness to discuss any of these sensitive issues in a larger gender-specific setting. This openness or freedom is indispensable for prompting discussions at the larger gender specific level. Out of the gender-specific level of discipleship, others who identify these issues as impediments to faith formation may gain courage to begin their own process of confession, restoration, and accountability at the elemental level, thereby addressing their own faith formation impediments.

While God's grace is sufficient for the justification of the sinner, healing relative to identity and value often requires discipleship and biblical counsel. As young adults seek God's truth for their identity and value, the local church must provide space to address impediments to growth and faith formation, even if that impediment is unpleasant or scandalous. One perception of young adults who are disengaged from a local Christian fellowship is that their church did nothing to prepare them for "real life." David Kinnaman comments that young adults have a shallow understanding of God's truth, and their faith roots cannot survive life's episodic tumults.[30] The goal of young

[30] Kinnaman, *You Lost Me*, 116.

adult discipleship is, in part, to lead men and women respectively into biblical manhood and womanhood. The apostle Paul speaks to biblical manhood or womanhood when he prayed for the Christians at Ephesus that they would come to the full knowledge of the one who chose them for salvation and that they would have an enlightenment of their hearts as to the hope they now have in Christ (Eph 1:16–18). At the gender-specific level of discipleship, sound biblical doctrine is taken from the abstract to application, addressing specific and unique impediments to faith formation. The intersection of sound biblical doctrine that found application specific to a spiritual impediment can then be taken up at the elemental level where a more open discussion, transparency, and accountability occurs, thereby eliminating impediments to faith formation and spiritual growth. The uniqueness of this particular level is that the respective leaders of elemental level subgroups communicate with one another to determine issues requiring broader discussion at both the gender specific and large group level of discipleship.

Large Group Level of Young Adult Discipleship

Leaders engaged in young adult discipleship at the large group level should anticipate a gender heterogenous group with particular purpose and expectations. The expectations regarding group member discussion would follow the proxemics inverse. The greater the number, the less likely there is to be in-depth and intimate discussion of personal spiritual issues affecting faith formation and growth. The large group level should be considered the entry point to young adult discipleship and not the endpoint. It is the introduction to a Christian community of peers where relationships are established both with members and leaders. As stated previously in this chapter, the summative impediment to young adult discipleship finds its locus in the superficiality of this demographic. Nearly 96 percent of millennials believe that they will do something great

in their lifetime.[31] Where young adults fail in their pursuit of accomplishment, accolade, and recognition in secular society is the absence of a clear and reliable arbiter of what distinguishes between the ordinary or mundane and what is remarkable. For young adult Christians, there is this same tension as well in who will be the one to define that something great? The driver of this tension is founded in one's personal identity and character. The pursuit of identity apart from and independent of that which is revealed through a personal and transformative relationship with Jesus Christ will only lead to empty idolatry.[32] The large group discipleship is where this issue begins to be addressed with the progressive presentation of the whole counsel of Scripture in a way that gives the right perspective of a person's identity and purpose. Large group discipleship is where young adults begin to encounter and fully understand the salvific work of Jesus Christ as the "something great" in their redeemed lives. The search for fulfilling achievement or accolades is satisfied through the teaching of the gospel and Scripture and their dedicatory response. The proper ordering of the lives of young Christians, therefore, rests entirely on their relation to God as the cause of their existence.[33]

Secular worldviews present young adults with incomplete and therefore erroneous understandings of identity and purpose. These ideas were founded in part on Rene Descartes's *Cogito, ergo sum* or "I think therefore I am" as a stand-alone dogma.[34] Secular humanism arising out of this anthropocentric worldview has directed mankind to find identity and purpose in and of themselves and has therefore become self-

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[31] Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church*, 126.

[32] Brian S. Rosner, *Biblical Theology for Life: A Biblical Theology of Personal Identity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 63.

[33] Christopher R. J. Holmes, *A Theology of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids*:* Baker, 2021), 4.

[34] Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 77.

authoritative and the arbiter of what is the "something great."[35] This benchmark that defines what is good and perfect in a secular society is often associated with a series of exchangeable idols that purportedly promise completeness. In secular humanism, there is no benchmark at all. This ambiguity, in turn, keeps a person in a constant state of incompleteness as they are reliant on a defective worldview and pursuit of identity. Young adults come to discipleship with a rudimentary idea that there is already a disjunction between what is and what ought to be.[36] Leaders engaged in young adult discipleship should expect new or immature Christians at the large group level to still be under the influence or at least affected by this secular ideology. They discover the truth that God as the arbiter of what is considered good and acceptable and significant is both unearned and not merit-based but given freely to those the Holy Spirit chooses.

Mark 10:35–45 speaks to this issue as James and John also believed they would do something great, but how they defined the something great and how Jesus defined it were two very different points on the perspective scale. Just as Jesus's disciples had their perspective reshaped, young adult Christians often need to redirect their focus off themselves and onto the person and work of Jesus Christ. One of the major impediments to spiritual growth, according to Richard Lovelace, is that there is a dominant misunderstanding of spiritual growth that has its motivational roots in the flesh rather than in the enlivening control of the Holy Spirit.[37] Large group level discipleship is where young Christian adults receive sound bibliocentric doctrine, thereby putting into sharp contrast the deficiencies of an anthropocentric worldview and the sufficiency of a Christocentric worldview. The apostle Paul reminds Christians that before coming to

[35] Ralph C. Wood and G. K Chesterton, "Apologist of the Literary Imagination," in *The History of Apologetics: A Biographical and Methodological Introduction*, ed. Benjamin K. Forrest, Joshua D. Chatraw, and Alistair E. McGrath (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 561.

[36] Seel, *The New Copernicans*, 181.

[37] Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 73.

know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and the realization that he knows them, they were once slaves to the things that promised an identity and purpose but could never provide (Gal 4:8–9). Teaching biblical truths such as John 5:24, Galatians 2:20, and 2 Corinthians 5:17, and the leading of someone in their life application that is reflective of the this whole person transformation leads to increasing knowledge and understanding of eternal redemption.[38] Smaller subgroups can then address any impediments in the progression of this mindset transformation by utilizing the proxemics inverse so participants can freely articulate their spiritual, moral, and ethical struggles while pursuing what the apostle Paul characterized as a life worthy of the gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27).

One purpose of large group-level discipleship is to invite people into the Christian community. This leads to opportunities and encouragement to participate in smaller gender-specific groups and elemental small groups. Mike Breen rightly characterized the disciples whom Jesus called "learners."[39] The large group level cultivates this posture of learning, which leads to faith formation and spiritual growth. Spiritual growth is then achieved through renovation of the heart, where outlook, choices, and actions can be transformed.[40] In the large group level, sound biblical doctrine is presented, discussed, and shown to be applicable in one's life with the development of a Christocentric worldview based on bibliocentric truth.

Toward Disciples Making Disciples

Just as large group discipleship is an entry point and not the destination for young adults, participation in this multilevel discipleship process is not an endpoint. As

[38] These passages speak of newness of life, or a new life received through the belief and acceptance of the salvific work of Jesus Christ. There is, however, need for guidance through discipleship in this newness of life that leads young adult Christians in increasing biblical literacy but also in continuous application of sound spiritual truth in their own context that demonstrates and is reflective of this new life in Christ and the new identity and purpose that follows.

[39] Mike Breen, *Building a Discipling Culture*, 3rd ed. (Greenville, SC: 3DM, 2016), 75.

[40] Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 6.

the reciprocal discipleship process permeates through the elemental, gender-specific, and large groups and back again, young adults learn, grow, and mature into Christians who become equipped to lead in discipleship. Leaders of these young adult groups should expect that men and women at each level will display maturing leadership qualities and can be enlisted to take on discipling roles in teaching and management at the large group and gender-specific levels while remaining within with their own elemental subgroup. Leaders should also encourage those who exhibit the ability to lead in discipleship to establish new elemental small groups from the existing pool of members of the large and gender-specific group participants that are unconnected at this level. The multiplication of elemental and gender-specific level groups allows for control of the proxemics function of these group levels. It maintains the integrity of the discussion, transparency, and accountability process. If, however, these smaller subgroups find that there has been an attrition of participants to a number that can no longer be effectively sustained, remaining members should join other thriving subgroups to mitigate further loss of young adult participants. For practical application, if the gender-specific subgroup participant numbers fall to four or less, this is an elemental subgroup and should transition to this designation. If the elemental subgroup participant numbers fall to two, they should be invited to join another thriving elemental group.

In addition to managing the multilevel young adult discipleship, leaders should remain aware that the young adult demographic within the local church will not remain within the young adult categorization. As they move into another discipling category based on age, or marital status, or any number of life circumstances where their peer group changes, there needs to be ministry-wide strategy to facilitate any beneficial discipleship group transitions. Leaders should cultivate relationships with leaders of these discipling ministries to facilitate transitions within the local church's discipleship construct that mitigates against attrition. On the other end of the young adult discipleship ministry, leaders should cultivate relationships with college discipleship leaders so that

emerging young adults will have continuity in discipleship within the young adult categorization when the time comes.

Conclusion

The development and implementation of a multilevel young adult discipleship process at BBC accomplishes the overall discipleship strategy of Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples as it relates to young adults. The fundamental goal of the Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples and this multilevel young adult discipleship process are one and the same—to fulfill the directive of Mathew 28:19–20, which is to make disciples. Where both the Disciples-Making-Disciples strategy and the proxemics concept of small group dynamics provide parameter and organization, this multilevel process allows for integrated function of organic disciple-making tactics. By creating pathways facilitating the communication and exchange of emerging or revealed faith formation impediments between the large group, gender-specific group, and elemental small groups, discipleship of young adults is both coherent and evolving, tracking along with their spiritual growth requirements in this individual and age and stage demographic. The organization of this multilevel discipleship process should be considered dynamic in that adjustments in size and levels can be made in response to the needs and participation of the members engaged in the overall young adult discipleship strategy. Leaders at the elemental level lead independently in response to the content of small group discussions but are interdependent as they identify common spiritual issues that can be addressed in a larger group discussion for the mutual benefit of the entire age and stage demographic of young adults.

Leaders at any level within this discipleship structure maintain a continuity of relationship through regular contact with one another, thereby responding to and advancing the curriculum or teaching resources in a way that remains spiritually sensitive to young adults. Anonymity regarding transparency and accountability at the elemental level is protected while an awareness of any common or trending spiritual conflicts within the

young adult demographic can be identified so that sound biblical instruction can be brought forward at the large group level. The dynamic function within this discipleship structure also creates interactive community that gives young adult participants a sense of relevancy, acceptance, and inclusion. As new young adults to the discipleship ministry become engaged at the large group level, established leaders also cultivate more mature members among them, and emerging leaders can duplicate elemental group level small groups to accommodate growth and expand the model when needed.

CHAPTER 4

DETAILS AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the purpose and implementation of this ministry project.[1] This project developed and then presented for implementation a model of young adult discipleship that not only utilizes a multilevel structure but provides for a curricular approach that is responsive to the current young adult contextual needs for faith formation. Participants were current or potential leaders in young adult discipleship at BBC. The multilevel discipleship model grew out of the existing Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples (DXD) model that was already in place at BBC. In response to a group of young adults seeking but not finding discipleship within a Christian community of their peers within the DXD strategy, a rudimentary form of the multilevel model was developed in 2020.

Over the course of three years, the discipleship structure and curricular approach of this rudimentary multilevel discipleship model began to take on the basic structure and function of the proposed discipleship model in this project. A small pilot group of young adults that became known as Solomon's Porch at Brentwood Baptist Church served as the example of how this multilevel discipleship model not only functions but currently thrives at BBC to accomplish the imperative of Matthew 28:19–20.[2] The practical lessons learned through the development of the Solomon's Porch young adult discipleship community over three years were used to construct a scalable discipleship model that not

[1] To maintain the integrity of this project, while in the midst of the development and subsequent implementation of the curriculum there was a change in my vocational ministry position requiring a relocation to Birmingham, AL. The ministry project remained unaffected by this change as all aspects of the implementation of the curriculum and participants were at BBC.

[2] The imperative given to all Christians through the apostles is to go and make disciples.

only included the organizational strategy of DXD but also provided for organic disciple-making tactics that can augment the current strategy. A curriculum was developed to provide young adult small group leaders with not only the framework of a multilevel young adult discipleship model but real-life experience with the model, demonstrating the organic discipleship tactics that qualify it as a viable discipleship strategy instead of an abstract or theoretical means by which discipleship of young adults can be effective.

This discipleship strategy will be presented in this chapter in three stages. The first stage is curriculum development, where lessons were designed to be presented to discipleship leaders for practical implementation as a young adult discipleship model. The second stage is the implementation of the teaching curriculum during a scheduled seminar on multilevel discipleship at BBC. This stage involved identifying and engaging young adult discipleship leaders to participate in the project. The third stage reviews this proposed discipleship model as an acceptable discipleship strategy by the leaders who participated in the project. Statistical analysis of the pre- and post-survey responses are also completed to assess the impact of the proposed model and the likelihood that young adult leaders see it as an improvement over the current discipleship model.

Stage 1: Curriculum Development

The curriculum for this project was developed over twelve weeks, producing an initial teaching plan of eight lessons to present the model to current and emerging young adult discipleship leaders at BBC. The curriculum was designed to teach the eight lessons in five learning sessions. The pattern of presenting this teaching curriculum is modeled after the way Mathew Purdom successfully presented his project curriculum at BBC that became the core of the DXD discipleship model previously referenced. Lessons 1 and 2, constituting Learning Session 1, presented an overview of discipleship and disciple-making, deriving much of the content from chapters 2 and 3 of this project to give participants a fundamental understanding of young adult discipleship. Learning Session 2 consisted of Teaching Lessons 3 and 4, which was a review of the current DXD

discipleship model that was presented, along with its inherent strengths and weaknesses as it related specifically to young adults and their context within the local church. Learning Session 3 encompassed the presentation of the proposed multilevel discipleship model consisting of Teaching Lesson 5. Learning Session 4 consisted of the next two lessons, 6 and 7, that present an overview of the four teaching categories in Christian education, namely traditional, social-cultural, contemporary, and social science.[3] The traditional curriculum teaching method used in discipleship, which is the communication of the divine message, is typified as being content-centered.[4] James Pluddemann characterizes the traditional teaching strategy as a common approach in Christian education and the top rail of the Rail Fence teaching strategy.[5] This teaching strategy can either be the form of Bible-based published curriculum or strict reading of the Scripture that is both organized and linear, along with its inherent limitations in young adult discipleship. The second strategy is social-cultural, where participants are encouraged to discuss personal and social experiences. In the Rail Fence teaching strategy, the traditional teaching strategy or communication of the divine message alone would be considered the bottom rail. A presentation of Plueddemann's Rail Fence teaching strategy not only shows how these two strategies are integrated but also that the other two strategies, contemporary and social science, can be incorporated to lead students into more holistic discipleship. A presentation of a nonlinear and flexible teaching method would then be presented along with the Rail Fence teaching strategy to be shown as a better overall teaching approach in responding to group members' spiritual needs toward faith formation. As the Rail Fence teaching approach is presented, the previously identified goals of discipleship established in

[3] Karen L. Estep, "Surveying the Local Terrain: Curriculum Development," in *Mapping Out Curriculum in Your Church: Cartography for Christian Pilgrims*, ed. James Estep, Roger White, and Karen Estep (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 149.

[4] Estep, "Surveying the Local Terrain," 149.

[5] James E. Plueddemann, *Teaching across Cultures: Contextualizing Education for Global Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018), 19.

Teaching Lessons 1 and 2—inclusive of biblical literacy, presentation of sound biblical doctrine, and cultivation of Christian community—were shown to be achievable as it is amenable to a multilevel discipleship model. Learning Session 5, which is Teaching Lesson 8, provided the means by which modification of the multilevel structure and function can be adapted to meet the spiritual needs of young adults as they enter and others exit this age-stage of the discipleship model and their evolving cultural context.

The curriculum was submitted to a panel of three reviewers. The panel consisted of two males and one female to identify any gender biases within the curriculum. The two male reviewers are pastoral staff members at BBC, and the female reviewer serves as an adjunct professor at Samford University in Birmingham, Alabama. Their reviews and critiques were received, along with the approval to proceed with the presentation of this discipleship model on the campus of BBC in January 2025.

Stage 2: Implementation of the Project

Once the teaching curriculum was reviewed and approved, current or emerging young adult discipleship leaders were identified and invited to participate in the discipleship seminar. These participants were also given permission to extend an invitation to other men and women who were considering leading in young adult discipleship. In terms of selecting participants for the seminar, a requisite characteristic among both men and women was the evident willingness to step into the enterprise of disciple-making in a backward oriented intentionality to pass on to the emerging young adults what they have received as far as discipleship.[6] The seminar was held on the campus of BBC in Brentwood, Tennessee, on January 25, 2025.

Prior to presenting the curriculum, the participants completed a pre-training survey. This survey consisted of thirty-two statements with responses of strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, agree, somewhat agree, or strongly agree. Each

[6] Robert E. Coleman. *The Master Plan of Discipleship.* 48

response option had a numerical value to be analyzed on a six-point Likert scale. Qualitative open-ended survey questions were also included to identify common themes regarding young adult discipleship. The responses from the quantitative portion of the survey, graded on a six-point Likert scale, were compared with the results from the same quantitative portion given post-seminar to analyze the participants' responses. The responses from the qualitative portion of the surveys were categorized by identifying themes to provide deeper insight into attitudes and perspectives pre- and post-training.

The teaching curriculum was divided into four learning sessions, each with a predetermined teaching lesson(s).[7] The learning sessions systematically presented the curriculum and consisted of learning session 1—background; learning session 2—presentation of the multilevel discipleship model; learning session 3—contrasting teaching approaches to young adult discipleship; and learning session 4—evaluating and modifying the proposed discipleship model for applicable use.

Learning Sessions

Learning session 1 consisted of teaching lessons 1 and 2, which established a baseline understanding of discipleship within the local church and served as the impetus for this proposed model. The first learning session clarified a definition of a young adult in the context of the local church within the construct and function of the current discipleship model at BBC. The second learning session consisted of teaching lesson 3, which presents the multilevel discipleship structure. In this discussion, an illustration of a discipleship funnel was utilized, representing the intentionality of cultivating a Christian community and the maturing Christian (see figure A1). This funneling illustration demonstrated broad involvement in young adults at the top, which is both invitational and welcoming.

This broad involvement, referred to as the large group, brings low commitment,

[7] See appendix 5.

low intimacy, and an expected low accountability of participants but serves as the entryway into Christian community. The concept of proxemics in discipleship is introduced in this lesson. Additionally, there is an opportunity to connect with and participate in smaller subset groups such as gender-specific and elemental. As one moves from the broad entry into young adult discipleship at the large group level into the lower sections of the discipleship funnel, the number of participants decrease, but the level of intimacy, accountability, and transparency increases, which further illustrates the concept of the proxemics inverse in discipleship as discussed in chapter 3. With the introduction of the subset groups, gender-specific and elemental, the recruitment of leaders at these levels within the model was presented. The illustration of the functional aspects of multilevel discipleship or figure A2 was presented and further explained in learning session 3.

The third learning session consisted of teaching lessons 4 and 5, which presented a contrast between traditional and social-cultural teaching strategies and the Rail Fence strategy for discipleship and a flexible and nonlinear method better suited to the young adult demographic. In this session, the group was given the opportunity to reflect and comment on the strengths and weaknesses of both curriculum approaches. The funnel diagram depicted in figure A2 was used in this lesson to demonstrate that, based on discipleship discussions at both the gender-specific and elemental levels, a flexible curriculum approach at the large group level is better suited to respond to uncovered or discovered spiritual struggles that can be addressed through sound biblical doctrine. This lesson also demonstrated that a nonlinear rigid curriculum method would not be amenable to what is referred to as a parenthetical pause in the midst of a current teaching plan. This pause would allow for a brief deviation or interruption and a redirection to address any identified questions of a doctrinal or spiritual nature that may be disruptive to the spiritual growth and maturity of the group as a whole. Once this particular issue was addressed via the pause, the previous curriculum resumed. This functional aspect of the

multilevel discipleship model is missing from a typical model that relies heavily on structure. The dynamic function inside of a rigid structure allows for an improved response to contemporary spiritual issues. The funnel diagram is a useful depiction of how the flexible, nonlinear teaching approach and the concept of Rail Fence teaching strategy is a better overall teaching strategy for the multilevel discipleship model.

Learning session 4 was a presentation of evaluation and modification recommendations that make the multilevel discipleship model adaptable to the changes within a local church's young adult demographic. As this local church demographic expands and contracts in the number of participants, it may become necessary to adjust the structure while striving to maintain the functional aspects of the discipleship model. The curriculum choices can also be adjusted to keep pace with the maturity level of the group as a whole. The transient nature of this age and stage demographic effects choices in curriculum year after year as emerging young adults entering into this discipleship demographic will not have an assumed level of spiritual maturity or biblical literacy. This again affirms the need for a non-linear and flexible curricular approach to discipleship.

Stage 3: Review of Proposed Discipleship Model

For the assessment of this discipleship model as an acceptable strategy for young adult discipleship, a means by which the intended goals of the curriculum were established. Four goals were detailed at the outset of this project, as discussed in chapter 1. A pre- and post-seminar survey was developed and administered to participants, designed to assess their perceptions of current discipleship practices, the need for a discipleship strategy change for young adults, and the acceptability of the proposed multilevel discipleship model.

Goal 1: Assessing Current Discipleship Practices

The project's first goal was to assess attitudes or perceptions of young adult discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church. As part of this assessment, a cross-sectional

pre-seminar survey was administered to obtain current and emerging leaders' baseline attitudes and perceptions of young adult discipleship. The survey utilized a mixed method approach with qualitative and quantitative components that assessed the foundations of discipleship leadership ranging from theology, importance of spiritual disciplines, structure and function of discipleship, and confidence in leading a young adult group based on current preparedness within the local church.

The qualitative part of the survey included three short-answer questions that asked participants prior to training to ascertain their personal experience with discipleship to test the theory that young adult discipleship at BBC would benefit from this proposed model. The quantitative part of the pre-training survey consisted of statements and responses from which the participant could register their agreement or disagreement. These anchor responses were coded on a Likert six-point scale to assess post seminar changes as follows: Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1, Disagree (D) = 2, Disagree Somewhat (DS) = 3, Agree Somewhat (AS) = 4, Agree (A) = 5, and Strongly Agree (SA) = 6. For statements 5, 9, 10, 19, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, and 32 on the pre- and post-survey, the response coding was reversed as follows: SD = 6, D = 5, DS = 4, AS = 3, A = 2, SA = 1. The following qualitative questions were designed to elicit response themes from the pre-seminar survey.

1. How has your prior experience in young adult discipleship groups prepared you in making disciples?
2. What keeps you from feeling confident to lead a young adult discipleship group?
3. How should young adult discipleship curriculum be determined?

At the end of the seminar, this mixed method survey was administered again to assess changes in the participants' responses. The quantitative portion was identical to the pre-training survey that was later statistically evaluated to determine whether the curriculum improved discipleship strategies for young adult leaders. The qualitative portion contained three short-answer questions, and responses were categorized into

themes and evaluated to assess further post-training attitudes and perceptions of the multilevel discipleship model of young adult discipleship.

The following statements were designed to assess what were considered foundational discipleship principles of the participants.

1. I am confident that I am a Christ-follower
2. Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ
3. The Holy Spirit dwells in the life of every believer guiding him/her into a life of righteousness
4. The Bible is the error free written Word of God
6. God calls all Christians to be disciple makers
14. Young adult engaged in discipleship have increased participation as active members in the local church fellowship
15. Having a habit of church attendance or having a habit of no church attendance impacts spiritual maturity
32. Small group Bible study accomplishes the goal of young adult discipleship

The following statements were designed to assess perceptions and attitudes of discipleship.

5. The primary goal of young adult discipleship is to know God's Word
7. I find spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, journaling, etc., to be an integral part of young adult discipleship
10. The goal of young discipleship is to connect a person to a group of other young adults in the local church
11. A sense of belonging is what is most important to young adults in a discipleship context
12. Community is most important to young adults in a discipleship context
13. Acceptance is what is most important to young adults in a discipleship context
16. Young adults who do not have a Christian community develop an incoherent comprehension of what it means to be Christian
18. Discipleship of young adults is best conducted in a community with other Christians
19. Young adult discipleship is best achieved in a large group setting

20. Young adult discipleship in a large coed group is better for cultivating spiritual growth compared with a large gender-specific group

21. Larger discipleship groups tend to foster greater spiritual growth

22. Young adult discipleship with organization that can be changed is better for people to achieve spiritual growth

26. There should always be a group of men and/or women no larger than 3-5 that meet together as part of a young adult discipleship model

The following statements were designed to assess perceptions of teaching approaches in discipleship.

8. I have been adequately trained to lead a young adult discipleship group

9. A teaching strategy that consists of communication of the divine message alone is the most effective way to disciple young adults

17. Teaching the application of sound biblical teaching that keeps pace with the current cultural context of young adults is integral to discipleship

23. What is discussed in young adult discipleship groups should be content-centered (theological)

24. What is discussed in young adult discipleship should be student-centered (contextual)

25. Discipleship should not include the revealing of intimate moral weaknesses to protect participants

27. Leaders should adhere to a teaching curriculum that is uniform across all local church-wide demographics

28. Adherence to a pattern of continuous presentation of curriculum lessons is best to achieve faith formation in young adult discipleship

29. Discussions that occur in smaller groups should determine large group discipleship curriculum choices

30. A teaching approach that can be interrupted periodically is good for faith formation

31. A multilevel discipleship model for young adults would be an improvement over the existing model

The following statements were qualitative questions from the post-seminar survey

1. Which part of the Multilevel Discipleship model is an improvement over the established discipleship of young adults

2. How has this seminar prepared you to consider leading in young adult discipleship?

This goal was deemed having been met with the completion of this pre-training

survey by all participants in the training seminar.

Goal 2: Curriculum Development for Young Adult Leaders

The second goal was to develop a teaching curriculum that would build upon the established DXD discipleship model currently in place. The current model relies more on structure and less on function regarding group discipleship. Through practical experience teaching within this model and research into contextual distinctives of young adults, modifications were developed to respond to the current young adult discipleship needs. A pilot model was put into action and modified over a three-year period with the resultant structure and function synthesized into a scalable model, and a teaching curriculum detailing the constituent components of this end-result model was developed. The experience from the pilot was used to develop a curriculum to teach young adult leaders to implement a multilevel discipleship model.

The curriculum was submitted to a panel of two reviewers to identify any gender bias, deficiencies, or omissions order that modifications or corrections could be made in the curriculum before implementation. A rubric was used to evaluate the curriculum revealed that 100 percent of the curriculum assessment categories received a sufficient or exemplary rating by the panel. The total mean of all categories graded by the reviewers showed it to be 3.9375 out of a possible total mean of 4. Approval was received by the BBC pastoral staff to proceed with a seminar to present the model to a group of young adult leaders.

Table 1. Rubric results

Reviewer	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
1	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4
2	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	4

Goal 3: Presentation of the Multilevel Discipleship Model

A seminar was scheduled for a single day where six teaching lessons divided into four learning sessions were presented. Each teaching lesson provided for teacher-participant interaction so that the model could clearly be presented. Ten leaders and emerging leaders attended the seminar. The same mixed method survey given prior to the seminar was re-administered with the quantitative part of the survey coded on a six-point Likert scale. The two questions on the post-seminar qualitative part of the survey were designed to elicit themes that were respective of any attitude or perception changes of the participants resulting from the presentation of the discipleship model curriculum.

Goal 4: Ministry Plan for Implementation

The ministry plan provides for the initial adoption of this model that includes organization and organic function between the multilevel discipleship groups. Curricular choices are not prescriptive in this model and leave space for any churchwide initiatives or seasonal focus studies that can be utilized at the large group level. The ministry plan was submitted for review, and an evaluation rubric tool was used to assess the practicality and soundness of the ministry plan represented in appendix 3.

Conclusion

The Multilevel Discipleship model, along with the curriculum strategy, intends to augment the existing young adult discipleship strategy at BBC. This project intended to find a practical modification of existing discipleship strategies to close the discipleship gap between the intent or expectation of a discipleship strategy of disciples making other disciples and its achievement. There are functionally two aspects of this model: organizational and organic disciple-making tactics. The organizational tactics demonstrated in how groups can be ordered provide for the means by which a young adult Christian community can provide space where organic disciple-making tactics can be implemented. The organic disciple-making tactics consist broadly as the modeling of Christian practices,

attitudes, behavior, and relationship by young adult discipleship leaders in a demographic that desires belonging, acceptance, and community.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

This final chapter will include an assessment of whether the project's purpose was achieved, an evaluation of whether project goals were met, a review of strengths and weaknesses, project reflections, and an examination of the changes needed for future implementation.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a discipleship process for young adults at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, that seeks to build on the current model by developing and implementing a four-learning session seminar on multilevel discipleship. A curriculum was developed and presented to a group of young adult leaders and emerging leaders detailing the proposed multilevel discipleship model as an alternative to the current discipleship model currently used at Brentwood Baptist Church.

Project participants were chosen based on my familiarity with each one from years of active discipleship as part of Solomon's Porch, a young adult discipleship group at Brentwood Baptist Church. Having developed personal relationships with these participants, their readiness to take on a leadership role and become disciple-makers in young adult discipleship was evident. The curriculum was shaped, in part, to provide necessary encouragement for the participants to impart what they have learned about knowing and growing in what it is to be Christian to the next generation of young adults. A mixed methods pre- and post-training survey was administered to all participants to measure perceptions and opinions of young adult discipleship to establish a baseline

profile of these perceptions and opinions. Ten participants both started and completed the implementation stage of the project.

The project curriculum detailed the multilevel discipleship model of young adults to young adult discipleship leaders to improve upon the existing discipleship structure at Brentwood Baptist Church. A statistical analysis of the results was conducted to determine if the multilevel discipleship model curriculum impacted participants' perceptions in a way that suggested the proposed model would be an improvement over the current discipleship strategy.

A *t*-test for dependent samples demonstrated a positive, statistically significant difference between pre- and post-training survey scores: $t_{(9)} = -4.777112133$, $p = 0.0005$.[1] Based on these results, there was a significant positive change in perceptions of young adult discipleship achieving the purpose of the project.

Evaluation of the Project's Goals

Four goals were set for this project. This section will evaluate these goals to determine whether they were met.

Goal 1

The first goal was to assess attitudes or perceptions of young adult discipleship among leaders in young adult discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church. The pre-training mixed method survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. The pre-training survey was administered three weeks prior to the curriculum presentation. Based on the responses, teaching points that were interpreted as needing special emphasis were identified so that the multilevel discipleship model curriculum could be better integrated into the current discipleship model at Brentwood Baptist Church. On the quantitative portion of the pre-training survey, the anchor statement responses were scored

[1] See appendix 4.

individually to obtain a mean of all respondents. Any statement that scored less than 4 on a 6-point Likert Scale was interpreted as a perception of young adult discipleship that needed to be emphasized in the corresponding curricular Learning Session. This goal was considered met when participants completed the pre-training survey providing responses to all anchor statements and responses to the qualitative questions.

There were eleven anchor statements with a mean score of less than 4 from all respondents (5, 9,10, 16, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 28, and 32). The survey was reviewed to identify any categorical themes between these anchor statements. Statements 9, 20, 22, 26, and 32 were perceptions of discipleship structure. Statements 23, 24, 25, and 28 were perceptions and opinions on teaching strategies. Statements 5, 10, and 32 were perceptions and opinions on discipleship in general that revealed what was interpreted as a foundational misunderstanding that will be discussed in detail as part of Theological Reflections of this project.

Three short answer questions constituting the qualitative portion of the pre-training survey were evaluated to identify themes in young adult discipleship. The first question, "how has your prior experience in young adult discipleship groups prepared you in making disciples," yielded the following thematic responses: (1) a group discipling model is best so that others can share their experiences, and (2) transparency and vulnerability in gender-specific group is beneficial.

The second question, "What keeps you from feeling confident to lead a young adult discipleship group," yielded the following thematic responses: (1) fear and inexperience, (2) feelings of inadequacy, and (3) being discouraged from prior experience

The third question, "How should young adult discipleship curriculum be determined," yielded the following thematic responses: (1) current contextual challenges met with wise counsel, (2) gospel-centered and relatable, and (3) leaders should discern with guidance by the Holy Spirit.

These qualitative responses served two purposes. They affirmed the expected responses that seem to correlate to the published data on young adults and discipleship as well as supported the need for the proposed young adult discipleship model based on the designed curriculum.

Goal 2

The second goal was to develop a curriculum to teach members/leaders currently engaged in young adult discipleship with this enhanced process of multi-level discipleship, building on the current model. This goal was met in cooperation with the pastoral staff at Brentwood Baptist Church and an independent female reviewer of the curriculum to ensure no gender bias.[2] Each reviewer used a curriculum review rubric to evaluate the curriculum.[3] The pre-determined acceptable rating of the curriculum was to be either sufficient, scored as a 3, or exemplary scored as a 4. The mean reviewer's score of the curriculum was 3.875. This goal was met when the curriculum reviewers completed their respective critiques of the curriculum and completed the rubric, with 100 percent of the rubric scores meeting or exceeding a rating of sufficient.

Goal 3

The third goal was to present this multilevel discipleship model of young adults to young adult discipleship leaders in order to improve upon existing discipleship structure at Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was met on January 25, 2025, as a day-long training seminar was conducted on the main campus of Brentwood Baptist Church. Ten young adult leaders participated, with all participants completing the pre- and post-training survey. A *t*-test for dependent variables was performed to determine if a change in perception or opinion on young adult discipleship occurred.

[2] See appendix 5.

[3] See appendix 2.

Two qualitative questions were included in the post-training survey to assess opinions and perspectives on this proposed multilevel young adult discipleship model as an improvement over the existing model at BBC. The first question was, "Which part of the Multilevel Discipleship model is an improvement over established discipleship of young adults?" Themes from participant responses included (1) the importance of having subordinate small groups of 3–5 people, (2) a combination of both content and contextual teaching strategy, and (3) the opportunity provided for increased transparency and accountability

The second question asked, "How has this seminar prepared you to consider leading in young adult discipleship?" The responding themes included (1) provided an understanding of group dynamics in discipleship, (2) the ability to move toward making disciples, and (3) this model provides for a team effort in disciple-making. The thematic responses affirmed the quantitative results in that this proposed model provides an improved young adult discipleship model at BBC.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to develop a ministry plan that could be used to reproduce this multi-level discipleship process of young adults among the different campuses of Brentwood Baptist Church. This goal was met as the Ministry Plan was submitted for review.[4] A rubric was provided as well with the presentation.[5] The pre-determined acceptable rating of the Ministry Plan was to be either sufficient, scored as a 3 or exemplary scored as a 4. All nine items received a score of 3 or 4. The mean reviewer's score of the Ministry Plan was 3.89.

[4] See appendix 6.

[5] See appendix 3.

Strengths of the Project

The overall strength of the project is founded on the receptivity of it not only from the pastoral staff at Brentwood Baptist Church but also the young adult discipleship leaders who participated in the training seminar. In coordinating with the discipleship team at BBC, there was an agreement that a discipleship gap exists between the expectations of disciple-making and the realized achievement of that intention. The proposed model was not intended to upend or replace the current discipleship strategy at BBC but to address the perceived need for modification. Matthew Purdom, who was responsible for introducing the proxemics concept in discipleship to BBC, was an invaluable ministry partner as the curriculum was developed and presented. This young adult discipleship model is unique in its responsiveness to young adults in their current cultural context. When the project was initiated, some published works seemed to speak to and provide great insight into the state of young adults and discipleship in the local church in America. This project did not intend to create an innovative program but rather provide an improved organization and organics of young adult discipleship. In short, this project was not developed in a vacuum. The three-year pilot group that eventually produced the framework for what would become multilevel young adult discipleship and provided evidence that this model could be integrated with the current discipleship strategy.

Another strength of this project is its intended beneficiaries. Young adults, defined in this project as those twenty-five to thirty-five years of age, constitute the emerging local church leadership. The sense of urgency to ensure that both the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of young adult Christians toward the health of the local church cannot be overstated. Developing the framework of this discipleship model relied on Scripture to inform not only the purpose of discipleship but also its necessity.

Weaknesses of the Project

After completing and implementing the curriculum for this discipleship model, it quickly became evident that an indispensable aspect of discipleship is one-on-one

discipleship. The one-on-one discipleship component level, in essence, would be located below the Elemental Group (see figure A1). One-on-one discipleship incorporates spiritual mentorship and counseling for individuals who may have more extensive spiritual conflict that requires dedicated conversations. Incorporating professional spiritual counseling can also be brought into this effort, either from within the local church or from ministry partners outside the local church. The recognition of this integral aspect of young adult discipleship, along with this proposed model, speaks to the necessity of whole-person discipleship.

Another weakness of this discipleship strategy was that, through an increasing interest and discovery of the deficiencies of institutionalized discipleship programs, there is no mechanism or metric to measure the effectiveness of existing discipleship models. In many instances, it may be years before deficiencies in young adult discipleship strategies are revealed and only after a conspicuous downsizing of the local church's young adult demographic. Evidence of effective discipleship can sometimes be measured in "seeing lives changed" with a subjective determination of how this goal is met. Jonathan Pokluda states, "Young adults want to grow in their faith. They want opportunities to learn and be challenged. They want to be mentored. They want to understand how their vocation and calling fit into a life of worship."[6] Most discipleship models or strategies reviewed do not have a system or mechanism where leaders, in coordination with local church leadership, self-evaluate their discipleship strategy. Interestingly, there was a misunderstanding of the purpose of discipleship in this project, which was determined in the quantitative portion of the pre- and post-training survey. The curriculum clearly stated that the purpose of discipleship is to make other disciples. Certainly, there would be expectations that the anchor statement responses for survey statement 5 would be varied, however, there

[6] Jonathan Pokluda, *Welcoming the Future Church: How to Reach, Teach, and Engage Young Adults* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), 87.

was a consistency in pre- and post-training responses to the anchor statement of "Knowing God's Word" as the proper response despite the taught purpose of discipleship.

Each participant was asked to give their opinion on statement 5, "The primary goal of young adult discipleship is to know God's Word." The mean response to this statement was that they agreed. If the goal of young adult discipleship is to make disciples, then a disjunction between the expectation and achievement of discipleship is present in those who are engaged in leading young adult discipleship. Knowing God's Word should be the goal of Bible study and is an integral part of discipleship but knowing God's Word is not the end goal. This proposed model of young adult discipleship does not provide for assessing leaders' understanding of the foundational goal of the discipleship mandate of Matthew 28:19–20. This project included survey statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 to affirm foundational agreement between young adult discipleship leaders and orthodox Christian principles. As revealed in statement 5, these young adult leaders were chosen based on availability and ability to lead but may have had an incoherent agreement with the goal of young adult discipleship set by the local church and Scripture. Perhaps the reason there is not a predicating vetting of young adult leaders as an integral pre-requisite component in implementing discipleship models or strategies is that this vetting has already occurred by the local church. Nonetheless, as strong of the proposed model of young adult discipleship inclusive of this project may be, if the leaders recruited to implement it are out of sync with the local church's expectations of biblical discipleship, then the gap between expected and achieved discipleship may be propagated.

An unforeseen obstacle in completing the project that can be included as a weakness was encountered when the time came to have the Ministry Plan critically evaluated. I intended for one or more Brentwood Baptist Church pastors familiar with the curriculum to provide feedback via the analysis rubric provided. Requests were made, but assistance in completing the analysis was turned down due to what was detailed as an

overburdened schedule of ministerial duties. In consultation with my faculty supervisor, permission was granted to have an alternative reviewer, one who was also a curriculum reviewer, to analyze the Ministry Plan.

What I Would Do Differently

As with any ministry project, it is important to critically assess the process in which the project was developed and implemented. In retrospect, I would modify the statements used in the pre- and post-training survey. Survey statements 1–4 intended to affirm foundational Christian beliefs that were perhaps unnecessary. Each participant's responses to those statements on the pre- and post-training surveys were unchanged, thereby failing to yield any greater insight into the participant's perspectives on young adult discipleship. The survey was created to measure changes in opinion or perspective regarding young adult discipleship and each participant's receptivity of the curriculum and proposed model. In retrospect, statements created in collaboration with the pastoral staff at Brentwood Baptist Church could have been included in the surveys, which would have been useful in developing the ministry plan part of the project. Another possible weakness of this project is that without closer collaboration with the church at the outset, this proposed discipleship model could be viewed as just another concept instead of a response to the perceived needs of young adults.

Including more interviews with other area young adult discipleship leaders would have been useful to affirm or revise published perspectives on young adults and young adult discipleship. These interviews, if found to agree with the presupposition that change is needed, could strengthen the perceived need for modifying the current discipleship strategy and BBC and show it to be in sync with its neighboring churches. As part of the curriculum, a separate teaching lesson could be dedicated to the presentation of interviews with young adults on the topic of young adult trends and perceptions of young adult discipleship. These personal testimonies would be most helpful in making

the case for modifying the current model of discipleship and presenting the ministry plan to the pastoral leadership at BBC.

Lastly, as my vocational and geographical context changed upon moving to another state and entering full-time ministry, I regret not putting in place the means by which established relationships could be maintained. As my position of young adult discipleship leader was filled by another, there was no communication or conveyance of the growth progress, strengths, or weaknesses of the members of Solomon's Porch to their new leader. While there were infrequent visits with those who were to become project participants before its implementation, there should have been more effort to maintain ongoing communication with the group. This could have had a moderating effect on my sense of abrupt neglect of their spiritual well-being that is, admittedly, self-inflicted but never validated by the great men and women of Solomon's Porch.

Theological Reflections

The imperative given to all Christians in Matthew 28 is to make disciples. There is great usefulness for a local church to develop and implement a strategy to fulfill this imperative. The story of the Bible does not change. How that story of the Bible is taught to successive generations and indeed across different cultures can be modified as long as there is fidelity to God's Word. Christopher Holmes points out that the church must learn of its only foundation: the person and work of Jesus Christ.[7] The apostle Paul demonstrates one of the most important principles of discipleship when he exhorts the church at Corinth: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). Young adult discipleship group members, large or elemental, look to leaders not as instructors but as

[7] Christopher R. J. Holmes, *A Theology of the Christian Life: Imitating and Participating in God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 145.

model leaders.[8] Perhaps a clear, Scripture-based definition of young adult discipleship can close the discipleship gap.

The discipleship principles of teaching the churches' only foundation and modeling faith by the leaders in the context of the day-to-day activities of life in young adult discipleship are a primary requisite to making disciples. Pre-training survey statements 5, 10, and 32 were designed to assess opinions and perspectives on discipleship goals. The results were concerning because there was a clear misconception of the purpose of discipleship. In all three statements, participants largely agreed that the end goal of young adult discipleship was to connect young adults to a small group that engages in Bible study. This may indicate the cause of the discipleship gap between expectation and achievement of disciples multiplying disciples. Connecting young adults to a "small group Bible study" is where discipleship begins, not the end goal. The multilevel young adult discipleship model begins at the large group level, the point of contact with young adults, and thus where discipleship begins.

Paul tells in Romans 12:1 that we are to "present our bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." The body we are to present is not just the physicality of our being but is inclusive of our minds, spirit, and whole person. Knowing God's Word alone, without its life applications and propagation within our communities, falls short of the imperative to make disciples. The DXD discipleship model and Brentwood Baptist Church have as their core, disciples multiplying disciples. By settling for knowing God's Word at the expense of being transformed by it misses the mark of discipleship.

One of David Kinnaman's recommendations to reconnect the church with those who may find themselves disconnected from a fellowship of believers is to stop

[8] Walter A. Henrichsen, *Disciples Are Made Not Born: Helping Others Grow to Maturity in Christ* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2018), 104.

producing nominal Christians.[9] Young adults who are knowledgeable of Scripture may see the exhortation of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:5–6 to examine themselves as to whether they are "in the faith" but remain unaware of what biblical Christianity ought to be and may be satisfied with a nominalist faith. Augustine makes the point that the purpose of Scripture study is to "put across to others what has been understood."[10] This is, in essence, the role of the discipleship leader and the purpose of young adult discipleship.

Personal Reflections

Developing and writing this ministry project has been, at times, a challenge and, at other times, a great joy. I am most encouraged that at the same time I began this project to address the discipleship gap in the young adult demographic, Brentwood Baptist also began. Under the leadership of Matt Purdom, who was the first to work on this issue at BBC, there have already been changes in the young adult culture regarding discipleship. My work was built on a foundation laid over six years ago. That is not to say that there is no work to be done in the area of young adult discipleship. Leaders in discipleship should seek to always reflect on discipleship strategies and make adjustments based on the spiritual needs of those who are being led. As long as the culture of the young adult demographic in the local church has to navigate the ever-changing secular trends, the local church should identify ways in which sound biblical teaching provides for effective application of God's Word.

As previously noted, during this project, I had a change not only in vocation but also in geographic location. Leaving behind my involvement in young adult discipleship at Brentwood Baptist Church, I moved into full-time ministry by accepting the position of Executive Director of Christian Medical Ministry of Alabama in

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[9] David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church . . . And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 215.

[10] Augustine, *Teaching Christianity*, trans. Edmund Hill (Hyde Park, NY: New City, 1996), 109.

Birmingham, Alabama. This mid-project transition did come with its own set of consequences in the pursuit of project completion. First, I had developed a mentor-mentee relationship of sorts with Matt Purdon, who laid the groundwork for my project. He provided good counsel and critique as the project developed. Collaboration became somewhat difficult as living in two different states might suggest. Because of the geographic encumbrance, easy access was impossible, and convenient conversation was not available. Second, there is the expectation that while the project was developed and implemented at Brentwood Baptist Church, the short and long-term fruit of it will not be readily observable.

Conclusion

Multilevel young adult discipleship was presented to Brentwood Baptist Church to address the unique spiritual needs of the young adult demographic. While this ministry project focused on young adult discipleship on the main campus of BBC, it can easily be implemented at any of the other eight campuses. The last teaching lesson was developed so that as the young adult demographic changes relative to the organization, the organic aspects remain relevant with respect to fidelity to the purpose of discipleship. During the research aspect of this project, I could not help but feel a sense of urgency to develop and implement a young adult discipleship model that bridges the perceived discipleship gap between expected and achieved disciple-making. I recognize that there has been a historical urgency that countless local church discipleship leaders and pastors have wrestled with in their efforts to meet young adults where they are and move them toward a disciple that makes disciples. My prayer is that this multilevel discipleship model for young adults generates interest and encouragement for local church discipleship leaders to examine their own discipleship gap and take steps to close it.

APPENDIX 1

YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS SURVEY

The following appendix is the quantitative and qualitative portions of the pre- and post-training survey given to project participants.

YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS SURVEY

Agreement to Participate
This survey is part of a ministry project in young adult discipleship that is focused on a multilevel discipleship process that can be implemented at Brentwood Baptist Church. This survey gathers basic information on you as a participant in this training session for young adult discipleship leadership. There will be a pre-training and post-training survey to measure any significant change in the understanding of young adult discipleship. The research is being conducted under the direction of the Professional Doctoral Studies office at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and the answers/responses provided will be held strictly confidential and that at no time will participants' names be reported or identified with their responses. The participation in the survey assessment is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw from the training at any time. By completing the survey and/or checking the appropriate box below, participants are giving informed consent for the use of their responses in this research.

Name_____ [ ] I agree to participate [ ] I do not agree to participate

PIN # _____ (Leave blank. Will be assigned by researcher at submission)

Directions: Respond the following statements by placing a check mark in the box that most closely represents your current practices or beliefs.

The scale is as follows:
SD = Strongly Disagree
D = Disagree
DS = Disagree Somewhat
AS = Agree Somewhat
A = Agree
SA = Strongly Agree.

Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
1. I am confident that I am a Christian						
2. Salvation is found in no one else but Jesus Christ						
3. The Holy Spirit dwells in every believer guiding him/her into a life of righteousness						
4. The Bible is the error free written Word of God						
5. The primary goal of young adult discipleship is to know God's Word						
6. God calls all Christians to be disciple makers						
7. I find spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, journaling etc. to be an integral part of young adult discipleship.						

Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
8. I have been adequately trained to lead a young adult discipleship group.						
9. A teaching strategy that consists of communication of the divine message alone is the most effective way to disciple young adults						
10. The goal of a young adult discipleship is to connect a person to a group of other young adults in the local church						
11. A sense of belonging is what is most important to young adults in a discipleship context						
12. Community is what is most important to young adults in a discipleship context						
13. Acceptance is what is most important to young adults in a discipleship context						
14. Young adults engaged in discipleship have increased participation as active members in the local church fellowship.						
15. Having a habit of church attendance or having a habit of no church attendance impacts spiritual maturity.						
16. Young adults who do not have a Christian community develop an incoherent comprehension of what it means to be Christian.						
17. Teaching the application of sound biblical teaching that keeps pace with the current cultural context of young adults is integral to young adult discipleship.						
18. Discipleship of young adults is best conducted in a community of other Christians.						
19. Young adult discipleship is best achieved through a large group setting						
20. Young adult discipleship in a coed group is better for cultivating spiritual growth compared with a large gender-specific group.						
21. Larger discipleship groups tend to foster greater spiritual growth.						
22. Young adult discipleship with organization that can be changed is better for people to achieve spiritual growth.						
23 What is discussed in young adult discipleship groups should be content-centered (theological)						

Statement	SD	D	DS	AS	A	SA
24 What is discussed in young adult discipleship groups should be student-centered (contextual)						
25 Discipleship should not include the revealing of intimate moral weaknesses to protect participants.						
26. There should always be a group of men and/or women no larger than 3-5 that meet together as part of a young adult discipleship model.						
27. Leaders should adhere to teaching curriculum that is uniform across all local church demographics.						
28. Adherence to a pattern of continuous presentation of curriculum lessons is best to achieve faith formation in young adult discipleship.						
29. Discussions that occur in smaller groups should determine large group discipleship curriculum choices.						
30. A teaching approach that can be interrupted periodically is good for faith formation.						
31. A Multilevel Discipleship model for young adults would be an improvement over the existing model						
32. Small group Bible study accomplishes the goal of young adult discipleship.						

Directions: Please provide a short-written response to the following questions:

1. How has your prior experience in young adult discipleship groups prepared you in making disciples?

2. What keeps you from feeling confident to lead a young adult discipleship group?

3. How should young adult discipleship curriculum be determined?

4. Which part of the Multilevel Discipleship model is an improvement over established discipleship of young adults?

5. How has this seminar prepared you to consider leading in young adult discipleship?

Note: Questions 1, 2, and 3 are to be included as the qualitative part of the pre training survey. Questions 4 and 5 are to be included as the qualitative part of the post training survey.

APPENDIX 2

MULTILEVEL YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS CURRICULUM EVALUATION RUBRIC

This curriculum evaluation tool was used by a panel of ministerial staff at BBC to evaluate the sufficiency of the multilevel young adult discipleship curriculum with regard to its stated goals. Each item was rated on a scale of 1 through 4, ranging from insufficient, requires attention, sufficient, and exemplary.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Curriculum Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Comments**
Biblical Accuracy					
Each lesson was sound in its interpretation of Scripture.					
Each lesson was faithful to the theology of the Bible.					
Scope					
The content of the curriculum sufficiently covers each issue it is designed to address.					
The curriculum sufficiently covers a biblical pedagogical methodology.					
Pedagogy					
Each lesson was clear, containing a big idea.					
Each lesson provides opportunities for participant interaction with the material.					
Practicality					
The curriculum clearly details how to develop skills to lead young adult small group discipleship.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to lead a young adult small discipleship group.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 3

MULTILEVEL YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS MINISTRY PLAN EVALUATION RUBRIC

This ministry plan evaluation tool was used to evaluate the ministry plan for implementing a multilevel young adult discipleship model. The ministry plan was evaluated on a scale from 1 to 4, ranging from insufficient, needs attention, sufficient, and exemplary.

Name of Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Ministry Plan Evaluation Tool					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**Comments**
The goal of the ministry plan to improve upon current discipleship strategy is clearly stated.					
The need to train leaders at BBC 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 multiplication of leaders at BBC.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 4

T-TEST RESULTS

T-Test: Paired Two Sample for Means		
	Pre-Test Total	*Post-Test Total*
Mean	140.6	156.3
Variance	37.6	54.011
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	–0.181961025	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t stat	–4.777112133	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.000502661	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112933	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.001005323	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157163	

APPENDIX 5

MULTILEVEL DISCIPLESHIP MODEL OF YOUNG ADULT PROJECT CURRICULUM

Lesson Plan

I. **Definition of the Young Adult Demographic at the Local Church**

a. Lesson #1 will present to the young adult leaders a clarified definition of what is a Young Adult. A review of the historical treatment of this age and stage-of-life demographic and shortcomings that impair faith formation and spiritual growth.

b. Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will have a clear understanding of what the Young Adult demographic is within the context of the local church

1. Outline
    a. Introduction
        i. Beginning of lesson #1 and the course overall will begin with a presentation of young adult discipleship and an overview of the purpose of the class.
        ii. Review of Matthew 28:19-20 as the foundational imperative of discipleship.
        iii. How do you define discipleship in the context of the local church?
            1. Discipleship in terms of Bible study, faith formation, Christian community, growth and maturity
            2. Discipleship does not end with a disciple but in a disciple that makes disciples
    b. Discuss what defines the demographic of Young Adult in the context of the local church
        i. There has, historically, been a fairly narrow definition of what local church ministries may have considered to be young adult
            1. Often this demographic was considered to be a narrow band of a local church congregation
            2. In many cases, minimal resources were allotted as the expectation being that these single young adults would soon enter into one of the established ministry categories such a married or married with children
        ii. Young Adults have emerged as a definite discipleship category characterized as single, twenty-five to thirty-five years of age, both male and female, and who may be returning to church post-college,

or they are a new Christian from the community and entering into their respective careers

1. Often, young adults are very much like nomads having both positive and negative feelings about their faith
2. Most young adults have become disenchanted with religion but have not cut all ties to faith or church

iii. Men and women in this demographic may have no church experience, minimal to some church experience (redeemed or not), or "grew up" in church and would consider themselves Christian

1. It may be a common finding among those young adults professing salvation based on some childhood church experience to now question authentic regeneration through the Holy Spirit even if those are not the exact words used to describe their search for meaning
    a. Those with some church experience or "grew up" in church may have not been exposed to practical application of sound biblical doctrine leading to faith formation
        i. Their exposure to discipleship may have only consisted of Bible study and learning local church orthopraxy
    b. In their experience, church was not a safe place to express doubts or asak questions about issues of faith and remained bottled up until after graduation. Some studies report that 80 percent of children who participated in high school youth programs at church abandon their faith in college

c. Discuss the shortcomings that impair faith formation and spiritual growth.

i. A historical weakness in young adult ministry in general is that this particular segment of adults has been considered a small minority of people.

ii. The growing trend of young adults is that they are remaining single extending into their late twenties or early thirties

1. The church has been slow to recognize this growing segment that desires discipleship focused on their particular context of single young adult
2. By doing so, little resource is devoted to a targeted ministry as their status of remaining single has only recently been acknowledged as extending long into young adulthood
    a. With this in mind, the local church, with finite staff and resources, may have omitted this ministry category from its overall discipleship strategy

iii. Many young adults have sought discipleship outside of the local church due to the absence of a fully developed ministry for their demographic.

1. This creates a discontinuity with the larger fellowship and the potential for conflicting secondary and tertiary church issues that create a barrier to a more uniform fellowship.

2. The danger is that young adults have subscribed to the teaching characteristic trend in Western society that appeals to a religion-seeking culture but in a way that compromises biblical Christianity.
    a. This departure leads those young adults continuing to search for truth or even giving up on searching
3. It is incumbent on leaders in discipleship to start by listening closely to young adults; respecting their confusion; and walking with them in discipleship

2. Conclusion
    a. Young Adults have become an identifiable local church demographic that requires dedicated ministry effort
    b. Discipleship as an imperative for Christians and task for the local church must keep pace with the culture in terms of the expanding demographic of young adults within the local church

II. Identified Trends of Young Adults and Local Church Engagement/Disengagement

a. Lesson #2 will present the current trends in local church involvement by young adult Christians. A review of published insights into why young adults are not finding spiritual community and the impediments to spiritual growth.
b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will have an understanding of the current trends in Young Adult engagement within the context of the local church as it relates to involvement in discipleship***

1. Outline
    a. Introduction
        i. When it comes to discipleship, young adults express the desire to grow spiritually and want to be challenged. They want to understand how their vocation and calling fit into a life of worship
            1. In many cases, young adults have been deceived into having two identities, their vocational identity and the Christian identity
            2. Without proper discipleship, young adults find themselves with no support or community to rely on as they enter into their respective careers
                a. Biblical illiteracy, lack of Christian growth, and the complex social trends of Western society work together to impede spiritual maturity
                b. With this binary identity split between faith and vocation, often young adults hear two conflicting voices leading to incomplete Christian identity

ii. Young adults seek Christian community and the development of a nurturing supportive relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ
    1. With a binary identity, Christians may seek Christian community but are only offered secular community that is all too often presenting activities and social engagements that can be destructive
        a. Matthew 6:24 No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other
        b. In an increasingly secular climate, Christians need to be less focused on what separates us from one another and more focused on what separates us from the world.
        c. This conflict leads men and women into an insecurity. James 1:8 A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways
        d. Spiritual instability in the absence of a healthy Christian community and discipleship leads to an incoherent comprehension of what it is to be Christian

b. The cause and effect of young adult disengagement with the local church
    i. David Platt makes the point that if asked what it means to make disciples today, most Christians would not be able to articulate a cogent or biblically sound response
        1. Is this a product the lack of young adult discipleship strategy where young adults attend church?
    ii. David Kinnaman speaking on his research into issues of faith among young adults with faith finds that it is generally shallow and valued as cultural identification
        1. Young adults who may have some previous church experience may have only learned the mechanics of religion as a child or adolescent so as to be acceptable among their church peers
        2. With no depth of Christian integrity, it is not uncommon for college students for example, raised in church, to abandon personal moral and spiritual boundaries.
            a. Not unlike the parable of the Prodigal Son having been given the eyes to see that what he really desired, the world could not give him, these Christian young adults still retain the blessing of the Holy Spirit that will draw them back to the desire for godliness and Christian fellowship
                i. The local church must stand ready to receive
    iii. Young adults likely have not cultivated habitual spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and Bible intake
        1. Cultivation of habitual spiritual disciplines that are purposeful and meaningful are key to maturity

2. Many local church practices if left unexplained, become mechanical and purposeless. Additionally, if not corrected can replace true faith formation with works-based righteousness

c. Faulty beliefs of young adults due to disengagement
    i. Jonathan Pokluda, found according to a recent survey that 60 percent of respondents believe everyone will eventually go to Heaven; Jesus was the first of all created beings; 64 percent believe God accepts all religions; greater than 40 percent believe the Bible contains helpful myths but not a reliable truth; and greater than 70 percent believe in works-based salvation.
d. The disengagement problem can be traced back to its causative core—faith development.

2. Conclusion
    a. The current trends identified among young adults who are disengaged from the local church and discipleship have been identified with the driving underlying effect is a search for meaning and purpose.
    b. Christian community, acceptance, and whole person discipleship provides for what young adult Christians seek

III. **Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples (DXD) model at Brentwood Baptist Church**
    a. Lesson #3 will consist of a presentation and review of the DXD discipleship strategy representing the organization strategy toward young adult discipleship with a discussion of the possible augmentation of the strategy to introduce organic disciple making tactics
    b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will become familiar with a typical discipleship model represented by the DXD model at Brentwood Baptist Church along and possible augmentation with organic disciple making tactics***

1. Outline
    a. An organized discipleship approach as represented by the strategy in place at Brentwood Baptist Church. It is referred to as Disciples-Multiplying-Disciples (DXD) and consists of four components: gospel conversations, groups, gather, and going
    b. Discussion of each of the four pillars of the DXD model
        i. Gospel Conversations
            1. This first pillar of the DXD model seeks to equip young adults in evangelism and having Gospel conversations
                a. The DXD model provides organization by which this goal is reached either by

ii. Groups
    1. The end goal of this part of the strategy is to connect young adults to a group in order to cultivate Christian community leading to disciples making other disciples.
    2. This second pillar is where the Multilevel Discipleship model begins incorporating organic disciple making tactics with the organized disciple making strategy
iii. Gather
    1. The third pillar is worship. The DXD model includes attendance and participation in weekly worship services as integral to the strategy
    2. Outside of taking attendance in the small group setting, in a large congregation there is no way to measure whether a person is engaged with this part of the model

iv. Going
    1. This fourth pillar is mission minded. The local church is engaged with both domestic and international mission efforts and does encourage involvement of all members and non-members alike.

c. Groups: There is an organization strategy for this aspect of the DXD discipleship strategy that could possibly be enhanced with the integration of organic disciple making tactics to achieve the goal of disciples making disciples
    i. This strategy provides a time and a place for leaders to engage in discipleship with young adults categorized as an organized discipleship strategy
    ii. A strength or success in the groups component of this model is connecting unassociated or unconnected Christians with a small group where the intent is to engage them in Christian community for the purpose of discipleship
    iii. Matt Purdom, DMin published his ministry project on young adult discipleship introducing a concept he described as “Proxemics” in 2020, Matt proposed and implemented a modification of the DXD organization srategy at Brentwood Baptist Church by introducing what is referred to in this course as the proxemics inverse.
        1. In short, the greater the number of people in a group, the less likely there is to be honest and open when discussing their personal impediments to faith formation and spiritual growth
            a. Most young adults have a desire to speak openly and honestly about intimate and personal spiritual struggles, failings, and successes.
            b. This dialogue however cannot necessarily be constructive in a coed group which most single

young adults desire when it comes to Christian community

iv. The groups that meet on campus at Brentwood Baptist Church do so autonomously for the most part with resources and recommendations made available through departmental staff.
    1. One of the unfortunate by-products of this kind of discipleship approach is that there may be a loss of young adult leadership community
    2. In a church with more than one large young adult discipleship group there can be interdependency cultivated so as to guard against leadership "burn-out".

2. Conclusion
    a. Some local church discipleship models may be outmoded as the cultural context of young adulthood has evolved in Western society
    b. An organizational strategy in-and-of itself as the base of a discipleship strategy for young adults may not accomplish the goal of disciples making disciples

IV. The Perceived Need for a Multilevel Discipleship Model

a. Lesson #4 will respond to the details outlined in lesson #2 regarding the trends in engagement/disengagement of young adults in the local church a review of how the organizational strategy of young adult discipleship can be augmented with an organic disciple making aspect.
b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will be given opportunity to discuss the possible augmentation of current disciple making strategies with adding organic disciple making tactics.***

1. Outline
    a. Introduction
        i. Review of the stated disengagement trends of young adults discussed in lesson #2
        ii. This lesson will then begin the process of addressing the perceived need for transition to a different discipleship model
            1. Romans 8:11 speaks of the enlivening of the body through the Holy Spirit dwelling in all believers.
            2. Routines can become too comfortable leading to resistance to change even when one's spiritual needs are no longer being addressed
            3. Cultural trends are always changing and while the Gospel message of salvation does not change, means of application and sanctification often do not keep pace with the cultural context of young adults
                1. Since inaccurate interpretation of Scripture can lead to improper conduct, one must be sure he is interpreting properly. A distorted meaning of a Bible verse or passage may result in misguided living

iii. We have identified contextual trends of young adults and the typical discipleship strategy in the local church. It's now time to work out a solution
    1. Hold traditions loosely
    2. Seek feedback from your current discipleship leaders

c. How do the factors identified as trends among young adults affect discipleship?
    i. There is a simple answer to this question... they are a barrier to Christian community.
        1. Foundational to a critical analysis of an existing discipleship strategy is the identification of where the limitations to change exist. Are these limitations "baked-in" to the local church's DNA or is there opportunity for a discussion?
        2. What "traditions" need to be dropped from the young adult discipling strategy?
        3. Honest self-assessment by current young adult leaders to identify what, if any' limitations are inherent in my current leadership preferences?

c. Analysis of organizational discipleship strategies
    i. Does the organized structure have anything to do with "church drop-outs?
        1. Where to begin? Taking some of the factors identified by previous local church attendees perceived needs were "a sense of acceptance and belonging have long been a prerequisite to faith formation with relationship building coming before creedal affirmation." According to David Seel
        2. Flexibility is often what is needed in young adult discipleship. Organized discipleship strategies may provide a place and time but no accommodation for those unable to make that work
        3. Often secondary group social events scattered throughout the week become an entry point to interest in the discipleship strategy
    ii. Often, a weekly 45-minute small group Bible study does not allow for the development of an in-depth dialogue into spiritual matters. Certainly, may be adequate for a topical or Scripture discussion but this may leave that discussion hanging in abstract instead of application
    iii. Young adults tend to be a mobile demographic with men and women entering and exiting at different times throughout the teaching cycle. Rigidity of curriculum does not allow for review or redressing issues that have already been covered further making a new member feel further alienated

d. Where does the "typical" discipleship strategy benefit from organic discipleship tactics?
    i. We have answered the question of why young adults are disengaged from typical discipleship strategies, but can it be fixed?
    iv. Organized structure and a linear teaching strategy of the current approach may not be adaptable to the changing cultural context of young adults and need to be replaced.
    v. If young adults are seeking acceptance and belonging and not finding it in the current approach, then identify what within current discipleship approach inhibits these needs fulfillment and does it allow for change. If not, then current discipleship approach has become ineffective
    vi. Over the past several years many churches have begun adopting discipleship spaces that have the highest stated value of community while eliminating spaces that have the highest stated value of learning. Put simply, many churches are abandoning Sunday school and adopting groups. We have given an either/or answer to a both/and question
e. What changes are needed to meet the spiritual needs of young adults seeking Christian discipleship?
    i. The reliance on an organizational discipleship strategy alone can inhibit whole person discipleship
        1. This is inclusive of the teaching of sound biblical doctrine but also addressing the desire for young adults to find Christian community. Current discipleship strategies applied to the gamut of age and stage of life local church attendees are often unable to be modified to adapt to the unique culture of young adults. it is generally a strategy of "one size fits all".
        2. What may have been effective for the previous generation has become outmoded or archaic a generation later.
        3. The provision of space for new and maturing Christians to seek and find accountability within a small group of their peers in the context of Christian community. This also allows small group members to experience the modeling of Christian spiritual practices and attitudes by leaders of these small or Elemental groups
    ii. A fluid coherent structure that can adapt to both the individual and corporate young adult demographic's needs are key
f. Multilevel Discipleship for Young Adults: What is it and how does it work?
    i. Creates space for Christian community and an entry point to the whole discipleship model at different points; either at the Large group, Gender-specific group, or Elemental group
    ii. Provides for more opportunity to cultivate peer-to-peer relationships and the organic disciple making that is intent on modeling Christian habits and practices along with the organized structure within their own cultural context and engage in

meaningful discussions with opportunity to bring sound biblical doctrine into the discussion of spiritual impediments to growth

iii. Provides for both acceptance and belonging of young adults as the multilevel format creates opportunity develop and be a part of a community

g. Nonlinear flexible curriculum

i. The flexibility of Young Adult leaders to incorporate a teaching or leading approach that is accommodating to new members while still accomplishing the goal of faith formation

ii. Issues of faith formation and spiritual struggle can be derived from the other levels and brought into the Large group format where appropriate so that everyone will benefit from a discussion of what may be common among young adults so that everyone benefits and grows in their faith.

2. Conclusion

a. This lesson serves to detail the deficiencies of a typical discipleship strategy within the context of the local church. Combining what has been identified within current cultural trends of the young adult demographic with the need a revised discipleship for young adults will be beneficial in updating the current strategy.

b. Multilevel discipleship offers answers to the perceived spiritual needs of young adults in the context of discipleship in the local church.

V. **Presentation of the Multilevel Discipleship Model for Young Adult Discipleship**

a. Lesson #5 will include a thorough presentation of the multilevel discipleship model with breakdown of the groups' dynamics and relationship within the model. A discussion of the inverse relationship between group size and transparency leading to spiritual community and growth.

b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will have become familiar with Multilevel Young Adult Discipleship as well as its dynamic function with regard to group size and group member engagement.***

1. Outline

a. Introduction:

i. The goals of young adult discipleship will be established

ii. The Multilevel Discipleship Model will be presented and contrasted with an organized discipleship model representative of many local church strategies with the introduction or organic discipleship tactics

iii. The model consists of the Large group, Gender-specific group, and Elemental group

iv. Will also begin to detail integrated function between these groups to accomplish discipleship goals of young adult discipleship

b. Goals of Young Adult Discipleship
    i. The ultimate purpose of multilevel discipleship is to glorify God through the pursuit of knowledge, understanding, and wisdom and a life lived that honors the person and work of Jesus Christ
c. Large Group
    i. young adult discipleship at the Large group level should anticipate a gender heterogenous group with particular purpose and expectations
    ii. should be considered the entry point to young adult discipleship and not the endpoint.
    iii. The pursuit of identity apart from and independent of that which is revealed through a personal and transformative relationship with Jesus Christ will only lead to empty idolatry. The large group discipleship is where this issue begins to be addressed with the progressive presentation of the whole counsel of Scripture in a way that gives the right perspective of a person's identity and purpose
    iv. an invitation for inclusion into Christian community leads to opportunities and encouragement to participate in smaller gender specific groups and the elemental small groups. Mike Breen rightly characterized the disciples whom Jesus called as "learners." The Large group level serves to cultivate this posture of learning, which leads to faith formation and spiritual growth
d. Gender-specific Group
    i. In large co-educational young adult discipleship, challenges to faith formation often arise that could be more appropriately considered in a gender homogenous discussion group setting
    ii. functionally placed between the gender homogenous small or elemental groups and the large gender heterogenous or coed young adult ministry group.
    iii. Gender specific discipleship groups allow men and women to have open and honest discussions on these sensitive issues without fear of embarrassment or judgement of group members of the opposite sex
    iv. this level of discipleship is an intersection of sound biblical doctrine taught at the Large group level and culturally relevant issues that affect faith formation revealed at the Elemental small group level
    v. David Kinnaman comments that young adults have a shallow understanding of God's truth, and their faith roots cannot survive life's episodic tumults. The goal of the of young adult discipleship is, in part, to lead men and women respectively into biblical manhood and womanhood
e. Elemental Group
    i. Consists of 4-5 members
    ii. At the elemental level, there is a small number but a greater opportunity to discuss in depth specific issues or challenges to faith formation

iii. At this level, in depth discussions, confessions, and repentance become the substance in place of lecture or program
iv. The cultivation of habitual spiritual disciplines can and should be an integral part of elemental level discipleship inasmuch as accountability can be much more effective
v. With an openness and acceptance within this smaller group, individuals are more likely to ask for guidance from the leader and each other as trust between the members eliminates critical judgment or embarrassment

f. Integrated function between these groups
   i. The Large group functions as the primary setting where sound biblical doctrine is brought from abstract principle and put in motion in the lives of young adult Christians.
      1. Bible study addresses the problem of biblical illiteracy
      2. Larger Christian community for the purposes of acceptance, involvement, and a sense of belonging is cultivated
   ii. As issues affecting faith formation and maturity are encountered at the Elemental or Gender specific group level, that are felt to be common among all young adults can be brought into the Large group as a nonlinear, flexible curriculum teaching approach can facilitate

2. Conclusion
   a. Small Group Discussion: Depending on class size, the class will break up into groups of 4-5 and discuss the perceived limitations of current discipleship in each student's context/experience and the benefits and application of a Multilevel Discipleship model

VI. Discussion of *Traditional* Curriculum Approach in Discipleship

1. Lesson #6 will be a presentation of a typical linear curriculum familiar to many young adults with Scripture study and prepared curriculum resources. The limitations of a progressive linear curriculum that can be inflexible becoming a barrier to community and Bible literacy.
2. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will become familiar with the Traditional approach to curriculum and its potential limitations in Young Adult Discipleship.***

1. Outline
   a. Introduction
      i. A typical discipleship strategy or approach will include some format of Bible study if one or the whole purpose of the group is to study Scripture together
      ii. Many curricular choices are available either from professional publishers or internally derived from local church resources
      iii. Many if not all of these prepared resources require linear progression as the study proceeds

1. Linear curriculum is any teaching resource that, much like reading a book. There is a beginning and the progression toward an end. These may come in the format of a topical study, chronological study, character study, or book study
2. Usually, lessons are linked together in succession but meant to progress in one direction

b. What is the purpose of Bible study? From a biblical perspective, the outcome of teaching is to help the learner to love the Lord with all one's heart, soul, and strength (Deut 6:5). The secondary aim is to promote the development of the pilgrim until we attain the whole measure of the fullness of Christ
    i. Theoretical knowledge of the content of the Bible, while absolutely indispensable, does not in itself automatically guarantee spiritual development.
    ii. The pilgrim is on a lifetime journey with a visionary purpose, and the task of the teacher in any culture is to help guide that expedition.
c. Definition and review of *Traditional* curriculum approach
    i. A Traditional curriculum goal is communication of the divine message
        1. Much preaching [teaching] consists of thirty-five minutes of Scripture exposition and five minutes of application
        2. Michael Lawson describes the different goals of Christian education [discipleship] that includes Perennialism, Essentialism, Pragmatism, and Existentialism with Perennialism as the main focus of typical or *Traditional* teaching approaches
            a. the goal of Christian education is to impart biblical knowledge. 2 Tim. 3:15-17 (13)
        3. Essentialism: the goal CE is to provide spiritual life-skills. 2 Tim. 2:15 (13)
            a. Can often be relegated to a secondary level importance if the main goal is biblical literacy
        4. Pragmatism: the goal of CE is to stimulate corporate ministry. James 1:22-25 (14)
            a. Christian community and service again can be subordinated if the main goal is Bible study
        5. Existentialism: the goal of CE is to facilitate personal health. Hebrews 12:12-13 (14)
            a. Accountability and space for transparency is often not available in typical structure of discipleship
d. Application of *Traditional* curriculum approach for discipleship
    i. Increases Biblical literacy
        1. Typical of children's and teen discipleship strategies
    ii. If the discipleship strategy is reliant on rigid structure to accomplish its goals, the *Traditional* approach facilitates the achievement of the goal well

e. Limitations in Young Adult discipleship
    i. Does not allow for holistic discipleship that is inclusive of introduction of young adults into personal and social experiences; growth and development; and the enablement of Christian living
    ii. Only when both the content of Scripture and the proper use of Scripture are equally emphasized is education genuinely Christian
    iii. More is needed – a responsive heart with a willingness to appropriate the truths of the Scriptures into one's own experience. Therefore, the goal of Christian teaching, while it certainly includes the communication of Bible facts, must extend beyond that

2. Conclusion
    a. Young Adult discipleship should not be an extension of children's or teen discipleship strategies where the *Traditional* approach is well suited
    b. Along with Perennial goals of Christian education [discipleship], young adults benefit and seek the essential, pragmatic, and existential components need for holistic discipleship

VII. Nonlinear and Flexible Curriculum for the Proposed Discipleship Model

a. Lesson #7 will be a discussion of Pludemann's Top Rail, Bottom Rail, and Rail Fence Curriculum approach that leads to holistic disciple making. Establishment of the goals of young adult discipleship including Bible literacy, spiritual growth/maturity, Christian community, and cultivation of a discipleship culture as the foundation for the teaching approach in the Multilevel Discipleship Strategy.

b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will become knowledgeable of the "Rail-Fence" curriculum approach that will aid in the development of the goals of Young Adult Discipleship within this model***

3. Outline
    a. Introduction
        i. The best curriculum is one that considers the needs of the learner, the church, and the goals of the kingdom
        ii. Curriculum is to serve as a roadmap for discipleship, then the "curriculum", as a key or instrument of education, must guide the learner to be and become a 'responsible disciple of Christ
    b. Presentation Top Rail, Bottom Rail, and Rail Fence Curriculum approach
        i. Top Rail
            1. Represents subject matter
                a. In this mode, material or information is presented
                b. In many discipleship strategies, the goal discipleship is teaching Scripture along with sound Biblical doctrine

c. This may work well with children's discipleship in that they may have limited life-experience in which to apply Scripture or to understand the world around them
d. In emerging and young adults however, the mere intellectual mastery of Bible truths does not guarantee spiritual living. The truth must become a part of the student's lives.

ii. Bottom Rail
1. Represents the needs and interests, and struggle of the learner
a. In some discipleship groups, the focus of time and energy may be on cultivation of a Christian community of peers for the purpose of providing acceptance and belonging
b. Dialogue on spiritual struggles, social and moral failures, and/or the search for balance between a spiritual life and secular vocation without the benefit of sound biblical teaching may fail to address the root of these impediments to faith formation

iii. Rail Fence
1. Envision a two-rail fence. There is a top rail and a bottom rail connected by a fence post
2. Harmonizes two competing educational ideologies: teaching subject matter or teach students
3. In good teaching, the teacher is more than a "presenter" of truth; he is concerned about doing all he can to develop lives, to lead students to Christ-like living, all by means of the Holy Spirit.
4. The bottom rail informs the top rail as to what Scripture is applicable in a given situation
5. The rail-fence model brings together student-centered and content-centered ideologies of education. Mastering bodies of knowledge is absolutely necessary in the model, but not in isolation from experience of the learner

c. What is a non-linear curriculum approach for discipleship?
i. Nonlinear Models of Curriculum allows educators to enter the processes at any point, skip components or reverse their order as well as work on two or more of the components at the same time
1. Much like picking up a particular book or curriculum resource and begin a series of lessons at the middle. There is discontinuity between material already covered and what is being presented. This may be how men or women who join your group in the midst of a lesson series may feel.
2. Or perhaps in the midst of lesson #7 of a particular teaching curriculum, questions arise about what was covered in

lesson #2. Without an ability or flexibility to pivot and review, its not the teaching that is disrupted but rather someone's faith formation is

ii. Sociocultural diversity: As a community grows so does teaching strategy to meet the context or needs of the learner

iii. Assessing the effectiveness of the curriculum is critical, but if it does not have a specified application or benefit to the education ministry of the congregation, it is of no use

4. Conclusion
    a. Christian teaching seeks to do more than impart knowledge of the truth to the head; it seeks to transform the life, by means of the Holy Spirit and the Word
    b. The Holy Spirit does apply the truth that has been taught. But He does so only with truth that has been carefully chosen with relation to life-needs and in cases where the heart soil has been prepared to receive the seed of God's Word.
    c. Small group discussion: Depending on class size, the class will break up into groups of 4-5 and discuss the application of a Rail Fence approach to teaching curriculum and application of a nonlinear flexible teaching method

VIII. Evaluating and Modifying this Proposed Model that is Responsive to the Evolving Spiritual Needs of Young Adults

a. Lesson #8 will present a mechanism for leaders of the Large, Gender-specific, and Elemental groups to evaluate young adult participants as to their position on spectrum leading to spiritual growth, Bible literacy, and engagement in the Discipleship culture at Brentwood Baptist Church. Permission to modify this approach in response to the needs of young adult Christians.

b. ***Learning Outcome: By the end of this session, the student will have an overall understanding of the structure and function of the Multilevel Discipleship Model for Young Adults as well as the means to evaluate and modify this model moving forward that keeps pace with the contextual changes among Young Adults.***

1. Outline
    a. How to implement the Multilevel Discipleship model
        i. The first step to implementing this model is to evaluate the young adult demographic in your context as well as available leader resources
            1. What are your discipleship goals?
            2. Are these goals being met? What is the metric used to answer this question?
                a. Reference Lesson #5 1 b

ii. With this in mind, begin to strategize formation of Large group, Gender-specific group, and Elemental groups
iii. Does the number of young adults engaged or that can be engaged in this discipleship model require one or more Large Groups
    1. There is no prescribed or limit to the number of people who can be considered as constituting a Large group
        a. The limit may organically develop based on how the Large group functions and the felt spiritual needs are being met. A group that is too large will begin to exhibit disengagement
    2. The local church facilities may determine this based on space availabilities if the group will meet "on campus"
    3. Available leaders may also impact the number of Large groups to begin
        a. Can plan for additional Large groups as the numbers of young adults and/or leaders increase
iv. Does it consist of both male and female? If yes, then you will need both male and female Elemental groups and respective leaders
    1. At this level, would limit to 4-5 total per Elemental group to maximize the Proxemics inverse
    2. If no, then the Large group can serve as both Large and Gender-specific group level
v. Are there more than one male and/or female Elemental groups respectively? If yes, then a Gender-specific group can be implemented so as to build constructive dialogue between Elemental groups
    1. Topics for discussion are derived from the Elemental groups where the Elemental leaders have identified barriers to faith formation specific to gender
    2. If there is a deficiency in biblical instruction that has contributed to spiritual struggles that seems to be more than an isolated situation, the Large group leader can be advised to consider for upcoming curriculum or if needed, can generated an interruption of current curriculum to address what may be more urgent topics or issues
    3. This is where built-in flexibility is needed regarding the discipleship teaching approach
    4. Is there a size limit for Gender-specific groups? Structurally no but functionally just as in the Large groups, if there is exhibited disengagement by those at this level, then perhaps size is the reason.
        a. More than one Gender-specific group is not out of bounds but caution should be exercised as a decision to form another Large group may be necessary with the associated subset groups may be necessary
        b. The Proxemics inverse should be observed at this level as well as the Elemental level

c. The opposite should also be recognized. If the Gender-specific group is less than 5-7, then perhaps it is really an Elemental group and no Gender-specific group is needed at that time

a. Choosing curriculum for the Large group. This is where Large group leaders need to have at least baseline knowledge of the group as a whole. Where are they in terms of biblical knowledge? Where are they in terms of spiritual formation and maturity?
    i. The answers to these questions can be derived either from one-on-one introductions and interviews outside of class or from feedback from the Gender-specific and Elemental leaders about common spiritual questions, struggles, and maturity
    ii. Having a conduit of communication between the Elemental and Gender-specific group leaders helps to guide choices that would seem most useful including topical studies, Bible studies, or even special series discussions
    iii. If there are more than one Large groups, having a collaborative relationship with other leaders can also guide curriculum choice
b. Establish the Large group goals for discipleship – should include both sound biblical instruction and application of sound doctrine leading to the enablement of Christian living
    i. Flexibility in the course of discipleship will accommodate the need for review based on class discussion. The goal is to meet the Matthew 28:19-20 and not the accumulation of knowledge
    ii. In discipleship much like Christian education, the main is the lack of integration between ideas and practice, between truth and life, between the biblical content and the cultural context.
b. Modifications
    i. This entire model of Multilevel discipleship should always be adaptable to either the numbers of young adults and the spiritual needs of the individual and demographic as a whole
        1. From time-to-time the efficacy of either Gender-specific or Elemental groups should be evaluated. With a conduit of communication between the leaders of all levels, this should help maintain a sense of responsiveness to young adults as the context of culture evolves
    ii. The teaching approach should likewise be evaluated to ensure that the discipleship strategy remains relevant to young adults. There may be seasons where biblical literacy is in need of improvement while in others application for enablement of Christian living is the foremost need.

2. Conclusion
    a. A Multilevel Young Adult discipleship model seeks to address the inherent limitations of *Traditional* teaching approaches when seeking to achieve young adult relevant discipleship needs

b. The model uses structure but not reliant on rigidity. The model should be modified to meet the faith formation needs of young adults as they are encountered.

APPENDIX 6

MINISTRY PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF A
MULTILEVEL YOUNG ADULT DISCIPLESHIP MODEL

Purpose:

The purpose of this multilevel young adult discipleship model (MLYAD) for young adults seeks to build upon the existing foundations of the Disciples Multiplying Disciples (DXD) already in place at Brentwood Baptist Church. The goal is to close the discipleship gap between expected disciple making and achieved disciple making.

Plan:

1. To implement this discipleship model, leaders and candidate leaders in young adult discipleship will be identified. A preliminary meeting between discipleship leaders and MLYAD trainers is scheduled to detail the need for modification of the existing DXD discipleship strategy and intended goal of closing the discipleship gap among young adults.
2. MLYAD training is scheduled to present the curriculum as provided in Appendix 5 either in one continuous seminar or over a series of eight training sessions. MLYAD in consultation with the pastoral staff can determine the best plan for presentation of the curriculum. All eight lessons will be presented to the young adult discipleship leaders.
3. For each Large group that will be implementing this model, the Large group leader will need to designate a male and female Gender-specific leader(s) if the Large group is coed, as well as Elemental leader(s) to receive the MLYAD training alongside the Large group leader. Depending on the size and male-female

involvement of the Large group, a minimum of three leaders should be anticipated for each designated Large young adult discipleship group or class.

4. MLYAD will be available to assist leaders as they begin to implement this new model to help troubleshoot and provide input on creating the multilevel organization. Gender-specific and Elemental sub-group leaders within the structure of the model will also have access to input from the MLYAD trainer.

Obstacles

With any new format or education model, there may resistance to change. By presenting the need to close the discipleship gap within the context of young adult discipleship, the reluctance to implement this model will be overcome. For this model to function, the pool of young adult leaders must be sufficient to fill the leader rolls. A minimum of three young adult discipleship leaders would be required to implement this model. The number of young adults in a given local church engaged in discipleship will also determine efficacy of this model. Brentwood Baptist Church is well situated within the context of the young adult community as detailed in chapter one to implement this model.

Unanticipated Obstacle Response

This young adult discipleship model should not be considered and end point in young adult discipleship but rather a next step. Just as the DXD discipleship model was the next step from what it replaced, Teaching Lesson #8 anticipates the need for adjustment and/or modification as the spiritual needs and dynamics within young adult discipleship shift. Although an institution via the local church may adopt this model, it should not become institutionalized to the point where the model is no longer functionally relevant to young adults in making disciples. Part of the Ministry Plan on implementation is a recommendation the efficacy of MLYAD be critically reviewed periodically as the local church and discipleship team determines.

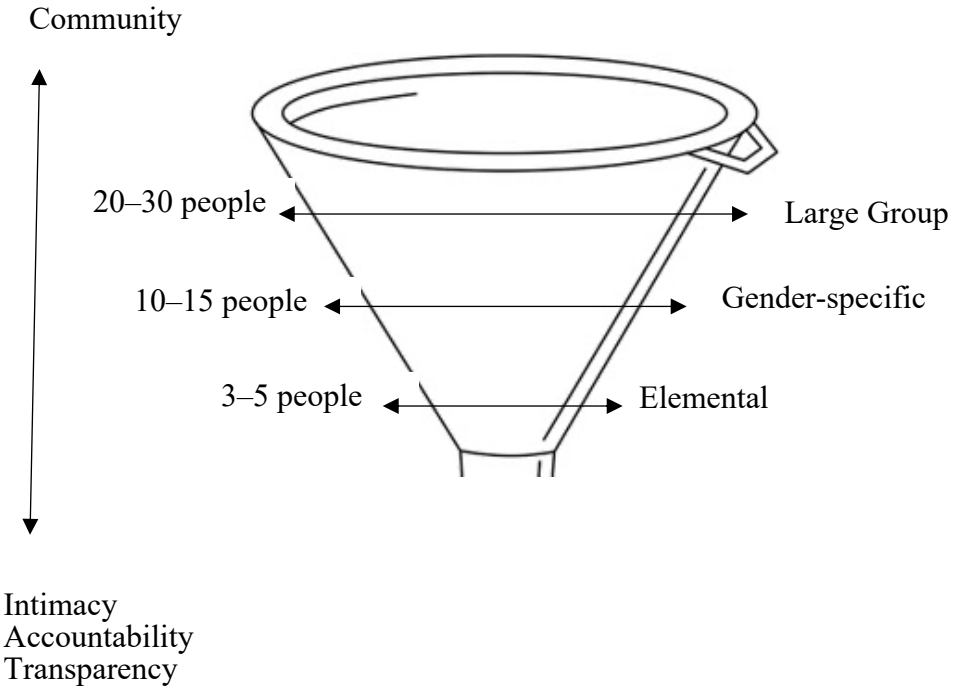

Figure A1. Multilevel discipleship funnel

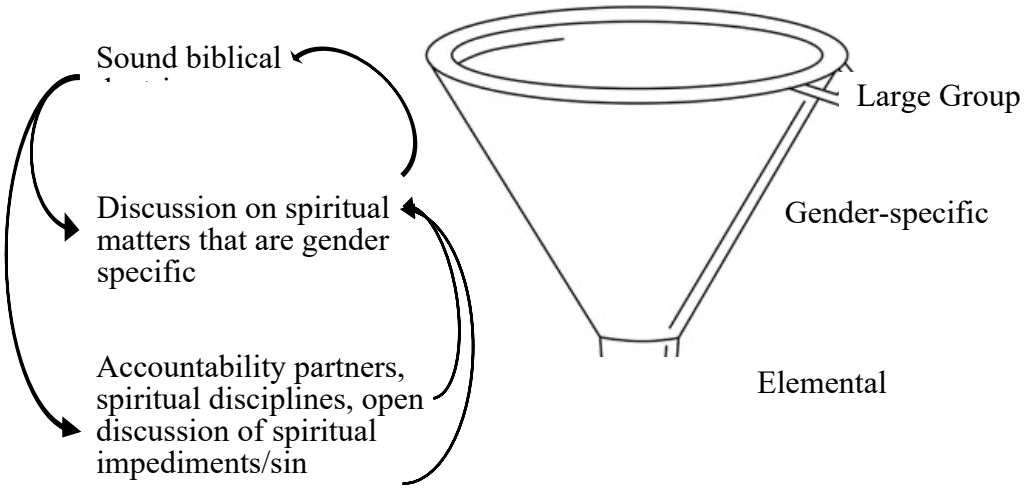

Figure A2. Functional aspect of multilevel discipleship

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS AT BRENTWOOD BAPTIST CHURCH IN BRENTWOOD, TENNESSEE

Mardon Randall Day, DEdMin
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, December 2025
Faculty Supervisor: Jeffrey W. Hunter, PhD

The purpose of this project was to develop a discipleship process for young adults at Brentwood Baptist Church in Brentwood, Tennessee, by developing and teaching a four-session class on multilevel discipleship that addresses the unique spiritual necessities of young adults. Chapter 1 provides the contextual basis for this ministry project. Chapter 2 outlines the biblical and theological basis for the project. Chapter 3 outlines the practical theological basis for this young adult discipleship process. Chapter 4 reviews the curriculum implemented to train members/leaders in this young adult discipleship process, and chapter 5 is an overall evaluation of the ministry project.

VITA

Mardon Randall Day

EDUCATION

BS, Trevecca Nazarene University, 1990
DPM, Des Moines University, 1994
MATS, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2022