

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Problem

The church is called to make disciples of people who will repent of their sins, be born again, and follow Jesus Christ with increasing maturity. God transforms lives through Christ-led discipleship that has biblical and relational depth. This ministry project addressed the problem of designing and implementing discipleship at First Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, Michigan. The specific area of discipleship addressed was that of developing "triads" which are intimate discipleship groups composed of three people. Triads meet together regularly for Christian faith sharing and friendship building. The definition of a triad for this project is:

A group of three people who will grow together in the Christian faith by walking alongside one-another in life's journey, learning and growing spiritually from God and His Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ Triad is defined by the project director, Scott Arnold.

Evangelistic and outreach activities needed the support of a discipleship strategy. Triad groups allowed for personal discipleship with structural strength in accountability and commitment. A triad discipleship ministry was planned and implemented for greater faith development, assimilation of visitors to the church, and friendship building.

In addition to Sunday school and occasional weekday Bible studies, ministries of personal discipleship were needed. These discipleship triad groups were designed to help equip and encourage new believers, seekers, and existing church members. To facilitate spiritual growth, the triad discipleship approach was utilized. Triads offered interpersonal support, study, and prayer for people at various stages of faith development.

The need for discipleship became even more evident after evaluating several outreach events. While the church experienced an influx of seekers, few became serious disciples. Of those who made faith decisions to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, most of those new believers struggled to grow spiritually. Discipleship was not well-organized, presented, or initiated; furthermore, established believers who recommitted to following Jesus were

also not given the guidance and support they needed for deeper discipleship. The conclusion was that unless the church became more effective in both reaching people with the gospel and teaching people to follow Jesus as true disciples, it would not experience the qualitative and quantitative growth that God desires. In turn, the church needed to develop more spiritually fruitful Christians. Fruitfulness is to be evidenced in Christians who mature through evangelism, disciple-making, and service.

The church had planned evangelistic events, often without a sufficient follow-up discipleship ministry in place. Visitors were not assimilated into the church family effectively. When a visitor did remain, there was no formal strategy to help them become part of a discipleship ministry. The result of not having a strategic plan in place was that not enough vital faith-building, supportive relationships were made. Informal contacts and relationships between people did bring about a limited degree of growth and mutual support for casual discipleship. New people who came to church often remained disconnected from intimate, faith building fellowship. Decisions for Christ were not often matched by a significant ministry of discipleship. Given these factors, the

church struggled to sustain growth because it did not have a vital discipleship ministry.

The Great Commission to "make disciples" needed to be embraced by the entire church body and be extended as a calling for more than just the pastor, staff, key leaders, and Sunday school teachers. Disciple-making, as a mandate of Christ, could then be envisioned, clarified, and embraced as a key biblical model critical for church growth. While the problem included many dimensions of church life, the focus of this ministry project involved developing small groups for intimate and effective discipleship.

Description and Evidence of the Problem

The concern about discipleship ministries needing improvement has been the focus of the evangelism committee of First Baptist Church of Grand Blanc for the last six years. This problem has been documented from the church's experience of starting a mentoring discipleship ministry and hosting several evangelistic events to win souls and make disciples. Significant long-term growth in membership and worship attendance did not result from these efforts.

Six years ago (1999) a discipleship training program was initiated. Twenty people met in mentoring pairs. The

objective was to train people to become disciple makers. Only five people went on to disciple someone after their training, and only three people are actively discipling at the present. Participants indicated that the curriculum used did not help them advance to the next level because it was difficult to use. Further questioning revealed that people were quick to match up with someone they knew well or were somewhat familiar with, but they were uncomfortable initiating a mentoring discipleship relationship with someone that they did not know.

In a time of recommitment two years later, thirty people responded to an invitation one Sunday morning to become active in sharing their faith and making disciples. While all of those who came forward were involved in the ministries of the church, ten committed themselves toward spiritual growth in a small discipleship group.

Another initiative involved a preacher/musician who helped encourage people to grow in their faith. This event focused on renewal of believers as a prelude to revival. Following this event, the church studied a book by Darrell Robinson on evangelism and personal witness.² The spiritual climate in the Sunday school classes and worship services

²Darrell Robinson, *People Sharing Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1995), 109.

provided biblical training on the relation of evangelism to discipleship. In addition, discussion and strategy moved toward calling a full-time associate pastor and implementing a second "contemporary" worship service. This staff person was assigned to assist in discipleship.

One month following this evangelistic study, the church hosted its first "Power Team" event in the spring of 2003. (The "Power Team" is an evangelistic ministry that uses feats of strength in presenting the gospel.) Since the church was approached about sponsoring this event six weeks before this opportunity, there was little time for training or organization. The five day evangelistic event drew over three hundred visitors to the church. Over one hundred twenty people (mostly children and youth) made a first-time decision to receive Jesus Christ as Savior. The counselors were prepared to lead them to salvation, but the structure was not in place to guide converts into discipleship support groups. Half of those who came forward attended other churches. These churches were blessed to have new converts and renewed believers. Eight new people came to faith in Christ and joined First Baptist Church through this event. Seven people who had not yet become members, but who participated as stage hands, became

members within a year. Through these experiences, there was a growing realization that evangelism alone was only part of the picture; a supportive structure was needed for assimilation and discipleship.

Further evidence of the need for discipleship in order to assimilate people into the life of the church came from those who visited the church. Visitors came because they saw the church sign, heard about the church through a friend, noticed it advertised on cable television, or saw it advertised in the newspaper. Within the past five years, the church has averaged twelve visitors each month. Of these, fifty percent returned to attend worship services again; thirty percent returned to attend worship services more than twice; and about nine percent became active members of the church. One may conclude that the church does well to have people return once. Initial friendliness, however, did not translate into the assimilation of visitors into active membership. The church is comparable to other churches which average having ten percent of their visitors become members.³ Based on attendance figures for the last three years, the church is growing at a rate of

³ Charles Arn, *How to Start a New Worship Service*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 84.

five percent a year in worship attendance. In considering the percentage of visitors who stayed to become members, one new member each month represented nine percent of those who have visited. Compared to studies of congregations in which the average was ten percent of visitors becoming members, this church was typical. Therefore, the need for a plan of discipleship which encourages follow-up and assimilation was identified.⁴

Table 1					
Worship Attendance, First Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, MI					
Year	2003		2004		2005
Average	162		170		180
Increase		4.94%		5.88%	
These statistics are from usher head counts.					

Importance of Addressing the Problem

Undefined and unintentional approaches to discipleship can lead many church members to become weak in biblical knowledge, theology, evangelism, and missions. Disciple-making helps people to grow in their relationship to one

⁴ Win and Charles Arn, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), 137-156. The author notes that people who visit will assimilate into the life of the church only as they establish close ties with three or more people.

another in the fellowship of the church. For the body of Christ to be strong, discipleship must also build up the vitality of Christ-centered marriages and families.

Without a planned strategy for discipleship, a church may become less effective and fruitful in fulfilling its mission. New visitors and members should be welcomed and encouraged through discipleship development opportunities. These ministries equip and empower people to grow spiritually in Christ through active support, study, and service.

Long term members may become stagnant if they are not involved in helping new members and visitors assimilate into the Christian faith and the supportive fellowship of the church. Long term members should be encouraged to broaden their friendships in the church in order to assimilate newcomers. Ultimately, a church will not grow without discipleship that leads to maturity in Christ and fruitful disciple making by its members. Jesus calls His church to be committed to go and make disciples:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matt 28.19-20, NIV)⁵

The research and documentation of George Barna indicat-

⁵ The New International Version will be used throughout this paper for reference, unless otherwise noted.

ed that of 417 born-again believers surveyed, 18% said that spiritual growth (or discipleship) was their most serious commitment in life; 52% said they gave this consistent effort with limited results; 20% said they were inconsistent with limited results; and 10% said they gave this no effort because they lacked interest.⁶

Churches are missing a significant opportunity in that of the born-again Christians who were surveyed by Barna 95% said that their church encouraged spiritual growth; yet only 50% of Christians surveyed felt that discipleship is one of the two or three highest ministry priorities of their church. Barna concluded, "Clearly, the spiritual growth of millions of Christians is being hindered by the lack of detailed assistance and guidance from their churches."⁷

Evidence of the lack of Christian maturity and the need for more effective discipleship are two concerns raised by Barna's research. According to the Barna Research Group, in morality and values (as indicated through lifestyles) Christians are almost indistinguishable

⁶ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: Water Brook, 2001), 43.

⁷ Ibid., 43.

from the secular world. Barna's survey showed that in belief and doctrinal understanding, most Christians have a high view of Scripture; but there was a growing heretical trend in interpreting the Bible.⁸ Christians surveyed were vacillating from the basic doctrinal truths of Scripture. Survey respondents were allowing secular thinking and the assimilation of other religious ideas to diminish their orthodox biblical faith and theology. To combat heresy, Barna suggested that the church must implement a biblical strategy for growing healthy, multiplying disciples.⁹

Problem Explored in a Biblical Context

Jesus set forth the primary model of discipleship for the church; however, examples of mentoring, small groups, and personalized teaching are also found prior to Christ's ministry. In the Old Testament, this study focuses upon a group of three faithful disciples of God who stood the test of fire (Dan 3.13-27) and the prophet Elijah who discovered God's call in mentoring Elisha (1 Kgs 9.9-19). In the New

⁸ George Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 66-67. Barna indicated that churches have struggled to help members mature in their faith. The evidence of Barna showed that churches have not significantly affected their culture, and in some ways churches have compromised biblical standards by accepting worldly values.

⁹ Ibid., 67.

Testament this study focuses upon Jesus and His disciples, particularly His inner circle (Matt 17.1). Additional study considers how the apostles developed triads in the context of evangelism, mission work, and church planting (Acts 11-21).

Old Testament

One spiritual support group that stood the test of faithfulness through fire was that of Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (better known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Dan 3.13-27). They are remembered for their unwillingness to bow before the idol made by King Nebuchadnezzar; consequently, they were cast into a fiery furnace because they disobeyed the king and would not compromise their allegiance to Yahweh. Their trust in God's sovereignty and power kept their alliance of faith intact in the crucible of testing. Upon watching these three men who had been cast into the blazing furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar observed four men walking inside it, unharmed by the intense heat. He noted that the fourth one looked like "a son of the gods (Dan 3.25)."¹⁰ The intervention of God was evidenced by the appearance of one who came to save Yah-

¹⁰ The King James Version of the Bible translates Dan 3.25 as "the son of God."

weh's faithful disciples. A great truth was revealed: God abides with, blesses, and protects His people. God is at work to reveal His redemption. These three men were willing to die for their faith. They accepted this trial as an opportunity to bear witness of God's sovereignty and ultimate power. The Kingdom of God has precedence over the kingdoms of this world, and belief in God's eternal power is paramount over the threats and edicts of ungodly kings.

Even as God has ordained that believers stand together for witness and support, God brought these three men together through adversity. Their spiritual training began before the fiery trial when Daniel joined them and God developed their faith and character (Dan 1.11-20). They grew in faith, along with Daniel, through prayer, fasting, and academic study (Dan 1.11-17). Daniel's leadership was effective to prepare this intimate circle of prayer for the fiery trial they faced. When the time of testing came, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were spiritually ready to obey God because they were spiritually mature. Discipled and trained in God's ways, they were equipped to face their adversaries with faithfulness and courage.

Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah came to experience reliance upon God in the crucible of pressure. Daniel had

given them inspiration on a previous occasion. King Nebuchadnezzar was going to kill all the prophets and servants in the land if no one could interpret a dream of which the king did not reveal any details (Dan 2.1-47). Daniel asked them to pray with him for God's help. Together they fasted and prayed to discover the will of the Lord. They grew to rely upon God and trusted that the meaning of the king's dream would be revealed to Daniel. God faithfully answered their prayers in revealing the dream to Daniel and helping him to interpret it for the king. God showed mercy and justice by delivering them from death. Their shared faith and prayers were substantiated by God's intervention.

Through their own moment of witness by not bowing down to the golden idol made by the king, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah showed the same kind of boldness that Daniel had demonstrated. They stood as one in faith and courage (Dan 3.4-29). Their devotion to Yahweh formed the strength of their unity and was answered by God's intervention. Another passage in Scripture also affirms the strength of unity: "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Eccl 4.12, NIV)." These three servants of God were not swayed or afraid. Willem Van Gemeren wrote in the *Baker*

Commentary on the Bible:

The contest is actually between Yahweh and the god of Nebuchadnezzar. The Jews express their conviction that their God is able to deliver them. Their faith is so strong that they are determined not to submit to this act of state worship, even if the Lord does not miraculously deliver them. . . . The narrative portrays the transformation of a powerful and rational emperor into an irrational and overzealous monomaniac. He has to recognize that these men are servants of the Most High God.¹¹

This example shows that a group of three or four committed believers can make a strong stand in the world for God. God's intervention and faithfulness were revealed and reinforced in their witness. John Walvoord has interpreted the fourth man in the fiery furnace as being the pre-incarnate Christ.¹² This fourth man represented God at work in the midst of His people, especially among His disciples who were closely bound together for dedicated service and humble witness.

Another example of discipleship in the Old Testament is the prophet Elijah and his disciple Elisha. The Lord came to Elijah and instructed him to make Elisha his successor. God initiated this mentoring relationship (1 Kgs 19.9-16). Prior to this pair being brought together, the Lord had

¹¹ Willem A. Van Gemeren. *Baker Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 594.

¹² John Walvoord and Roy Zuck. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 1340.

worked through Elijah in so many powerful ways. The death threat of Jezebel; however, brought Elijah to a crisis of physical, mental, and spiritual health (1 Kgs 19.3-5). Elijah thought that he alone was serving God. God came to Elijah while he was hiding in a cave and spoke to him in a still small voice (1 Kgs 19.9, 12-13). The Lord redirected Elijah to consider that there were those who were ready to be equipped to carry on the prophetic witness if he were to die (1 Kgs 19.16). Elisha was mentioned by name, and Elijah left his self-pity behind to accept God's renewed purpose. Elijah was called upon by God to disciple (or mentor) Elisha, who would continue God's prophetic witness and work into the future. Through obedience to God's direction, Elijah found and anointed Elisha. In doing so, he discovered the vision, joy, and hope of discipleship. The account from Scripture reveals how God directly and providentially guided Elijah to choose Elisha as his successor (1 Kgs 19.13-16):

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He replied, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." The LORD said to him, "Go back the way you came, and go to the Desert of Damascus. When you get there, anoint Hazael king over Aram. Also, anoint Jehu son of Nimshi king over Israel,

and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet.

The faithful Elisha was made Elijah's disciple, and came to view him as a father (2 Kgs 2.11-12). Elijah was renewed in his ministry as God worked mightily through their partnership (1 Kgs 21.17-27). When the time came for Elijah to be swept up to heaven, Elisha stood by his side, unafraid, prepared, and faithful to take the mantle of leadership (2 Kgs 2.13-14). God then affirmed and empowered Elisha to carry on, symbolized by receiving the cloak of Elijah. With the cloak, Elisha repeated the miracle of parting the Jordan River as a sign to a group of prophets who were eyewitnesses. Indeed, Elisha was chosen and affirmed by God as Elijah's successor. God provided prophets from Jericho who could testify to Elisha's installation and Elijah's departure (2 Kgs 2.15-16). The key principle revealed through Elijah and Elisha is that God calls His servants to make disciples for the continuance of His work. Discipleship is not simply the passing on of knowledge. Discipleship involves character training for leadership. God initiated the plan for training and prompted Elijah through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Elijah responded faithfully to God's voice and leading.

Then in fruitful obedience and renewed service to Yahweh, Elijah fulfilled God's calling in his life once again by training Elisha. Though the Scriptures do not speak of Elisha's involvement during Elijah's renewed ministry, likely Elisha learned much while watching as his attendant. Elisha is presumed to have learned character and faith through his mentor's example and renewed courage (2 Kgs 1.3-18). In time, Elisha stood respected as a man and prophet of God (2 Kgs 3.11-12).

New Testament

The pattern of prophetic discipleship continued into the New Testament. John the Baptist attracted many interested listeners and repentant followers. Those who stayed in the wilderness by his side for periods of time came to learn as much as they could. Although others wanted to exalt him, John was adamant about his limited authority and role. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for "One" greater than himself:

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come One who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matt 3.11-12)

John's reference to the "Christ" coming after him shifted toward affirmation as he encountered the Lord. In recommending Jesus, the Baptizer understood his own purpose of introducing people to the "Lamb of God" who is the Christ (John 1.29). John was faithful to baptize the repentant to help prepare the way for their future discovery of a greater baptism, that of the Holy Spirit (John 1.33). Through faith in Jesus Christ, a person may be born-again in the Spirit (John 3.5-7). The baptism of Jesus revealed the righteous plan of God for salvation involving Christ's death and resurrection. In Christ's death the sins of repentant souls are forgiven. (The grace of God in Christ washes our sins away.) In Christ's resurrection, believing souls are redeemed for eternal life with God; they are a new creation in Christ (2 Co 5.17).

The power of God for salvation was revealed in Jesus Christ and foretold through Jesus' baptism. John the Baptist suggested sacrificial atonement in his reference to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1.29). Only Jesus Christ was empowered to bring forgiveness and true purification. Only Jesus Christ can take the sins of the world upon Himself, making effectual the gift of God's saving grace to reconcile and redeem

lost humanity:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel." (John 1.29-31)

John the Baptist's response of faith was to entrust two of his own disciples to Jesus (Andrew and John the beloved). Whether John the Baptist had developed a small discipleship group with these two men from Galilee is not discernible from the evidence of the text. The important matter was that John realized that his ministry was not an end in itself, but a starting point for introducing his own disciples to the Christ. John affirmed the principle of discipleship in which the key leader was Jesus Christ. He encouraged them to follow Christ:

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" "Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and spent that day with him. (John 1.35-39)

From this moment of initial friendship formation, a close bond began between Jesus and these two new disciples. From the tenth hour (4:00 p.m.) until the next day's dawn-

ing, they were together (John 1.39). Jesus modeled how quality time with others can generate interest in spiritual growth and discipleship. The journey of discipleship for Andrew and John (the beloved) began with a recommendation from John the Baptist. This was followed by a day's encounter with Jesus, which led to the testimony by Andrew and John to their family and friends that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ:

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. (John 1.40-42)

This passage explains that upon their return from a day with Jesus that they told their brothers and friends that they had found the Messiah. Indeed, the disciples claimed to have found Jesus. More likely, Jesus found them along the Jordan and chose to welcome Andrew and John as they followed Him. After leaving the Jordan region, Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee. There He found Andrew and John, and their brothers Peter and James. Jesus called them to a journey of faith and service:

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. (Matt 4.19-20)

The path of discipleship involved an initial and

immediate response to Jesus. Throughout the course of following Jesus, the disciples were tested. Yet there was something special about Jesus: His identity, ministry, and destiny would take them time to understand and appreciate. As disciples, they were blessed with the joy of knowing and following Jesus and receiving His direct instruction and training (Matt 13.11-17). The disciples saw God at work through Jesus' healing and other miracles (Lk 6.17-19). They heard the truth of God in Jesus' teaching (Matt 24.32-35); and they experienced the power of God that changed people's lives when Jesus sent them out ministering in His name (Matt 10.1-7). Jesus bestowed joy and courage upon His disciples (John 15.9-12). The cost of being a disciple increased as they followed Him (John 15.8-22). The disciples grew to accept Jesus' suffering service (John 16.16-30). They came to identify with Jesus' ministry of reconciliation which was based on His sacrifice on the cross for the atonement of sinful humanity (John 17.20-23). They grew to accept their own sacrifice which was symbolized in picking up their own crosses in order to follow Christ, the triumphant, risen, and glorified Lord (Mark 8.34-36). Jesus had prepared them to accept their mission of making disciples among the nations (Matt 28.19-20).

What had first attracted the disciples to follow Jesus was transformed as the disciples matured in their faith. Ultimately they realized that Jesus had come to establish God's Kingdom through discipleship and sacrifice. Jesus was the Messiah, yet He was also the foretold suffering servant who would offer His life for God's purpose of saving and redeeming lost humanity (Is 53.4-5). On Palm Sunday, immediately after Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus lifted up His head and spoke to heaven: "Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again (John 12.28)." Jesus explained to the crowds what God had revealed:

Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12.30-33)

In this revealing moment Jesus clarified that He came to judge the sin in this world, to drive out evil, and to draw believers to Himself, thus establishing the Kingdom of God. The key ministry of Christ was to make disciples. Those drawn to Jesus are redeemed by faith and are compelled by God's grace to become disciples who participate as disciple-makers in God's work of salvation and trans-

formation. Jesus commanded His disciples to preach the good news of salvation; He enabled them to apply the gospel in their lives by the way He ministered to them and modeled spiritual maturity (John 17.13-20). This growth in spiritual maturity had prepared them to rely upon God through trials and suffering. Christ's death and resurrection prepared them to understand and appreciate the powerful reality of the gospel that they were called to preach. Consequently, they became bold in their witness and fruitful in making disciples.

The disciples learned that salvation had a continual aspect. Given an enormous commission that was overwhelming, the disciples had moments when they desired to return to their old occupations. Once when Peter led the others to go out fishing following the resurrection, Jesus appeared to them along the Sea of Galilee. After they came ashore, Jesus challenged Peter (who was to lead the other disciples) to be faithful in the ministry of discipleship:

"Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would

glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"
(John 21.17b-19)

Following Christ's command, Peter and the other disciples were faithful to share the bread of life, the gospel. The analogy of picking up their own cross helped them to understand God's greater purpose that comes through personal sacrifice. In following the risen Christ, they came to rely upon His presence and power. The symbol of the cross became the central teaching point for new disciples. The cross was looked upon as the example and reminder of Jesus Christ's work of salvation and His continuing invitation for repentant sinners.

Those who come in faith to believe in Jesus Christ, surrender to Him, and follow Him will find God's perfect forgiveness and redeeming grace. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, willingly laid down His life for the salvation of lost and sinful humanity. Each person who responds in faith to the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ may receive the gift of God's grace and become a disciple.

Jesus' method of discipleship warrants further study. In-depth discipleship did not take place until Jesus chose twelve from among the many who were following him (Luke 6.13-18). Jesus initiated a method of intimate, trans-

forming discipleship. Jesus narrowed His training to twelve men by clarifying the cost of commitment:

Then a teacher of the law came to him and said, "Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus replied, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Another disciple said to him, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." But Jesus told him, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead." (Matt 8.19-22)

From these twelve Jesus developed an inner circle of disciples (Peter, James, and John). The wisdom of Jesus' method was confirmed in that His disciples followed the multiplication principle of the Great Commission. Carl Wilson outlined seven steps that Jesus employed in building disciples.¹³ These steps are helpful in understanding the transformation of the disciples and the process by which Jesus guided them. (See table 2 on page 28.) Wilson's "Outline of the Seven Steps of Discipleship" affirms that discipleship is a process. Applied to the church today, Wilson's outline of discipleship steps is beneficial in the development of discipleship strategies, ministries, and programs. Systematic approaches are helpful in providing order and progression. Discipleship involves the work of God to help people mature spiritually. Discipleship also includes the organized participation of people in training,

¹³ Carl Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* (Fayetteville, GA: Christian Growth, 1976), 66.

account- ability and support. The Holy Spirit of God is at work in Christians for the purpose of making disciples and building up the church.

Table 2		
OUTLINE OF THE SEVEN STEPS OF DISCIPLESHIP		
Step	Trust Objective	Theme of Truth
1. Repentance and Faith	Conversion - trust God to forgive sin and give new life.	Sin, judgment, love, forgiveness.

Table 2		
2. Enlightenment And Guidance	Understand who Jesus is and trust Him as leader.	Deity, power, glory of Christ, continued forgiveness by the Lamb of God.
3. Ministry Training and Appreciation of Benefits	Trust God in public identification to win people to Jesus.	Nature of Christ's kingdom; ministry of forgiveness, new life, healing and freedom from law through the Son; divine guidance.
4. Leadership Development and Government Under God	Trust Christ in assuming a responsible place of leadership in family or movement, and trust Him to govern our lives.	The blessings and new righteousness of the kingdom; contrast of two kingdoms, Christ's and Satan's; growth and instructions to leaders
5. Reevaluation and Separation	Trust God for the eternal above the temporal matters, and separation to Christ from the world.	Greater value of eternal over temporal; challenge to the status quo; heavenly bread over earthly; divine authority over man's; this life for eternal life and glory; separation to Christ and from the world.
6. Participation and Delegation	Trust Christ to work in other members of the Body.	Review of basic truths, teach relationships to others, priorities, warnings.
7. Exchanged Life and Worldview Challenge	Rest in sufficiency of the risen Christ and begin to trust Him to use you to reach the world.	God's sovereignty, crucifixion of the flesh, the sufficiency of Christ through the Holy Spirit; resting in truth about the Holy Spirit learned earlier but not fully appreciated; challenge of worldwide outreach.

Wilson further details how these seven steps are worked out in changes of associations and relationships.¹⁴

¹⁴ Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building*, 174.

Table 3	
Discipleship Steps in Associations and Relationships	
1. Repentance and Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Casual association to reach the most people - In mass public meetings, in home meetings, or in person-to-person evangelism
2. Enlightenment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An open, small, intimate group - Growing, with people coming or going - A friendship relationship without commitment by disciple or teacher
3. Ministry Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A small, intimate, select group with others being selected and added - A team committed to learning and helping the leader
4. Leadership Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A select group of Twelve, closed to others - Permanent, intimate, daily Association
5. Reevaluation & Separation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A team committed to the leader to continue to learn and to help in the responsibility of leading the people
6. Participation & Delegation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Same select group of Twelve - Less intimate association since leader is involved with the Seventy - Helping leader instruct and direct the Seventy
7. Exchanged Life and Worldwide Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Select group of Twelve now over the Seventy - Being weaned from a personal association to the leader to a dependence on the Lord through the Spirit alone

Greg Ogden is another scholar who has outlined Jesus' method of making disciples. Ogden points out that Jesus first dealt with people on a "pre-disciple" basis. Following their decision to accept His invitation, Jesus led them

through four stages of discipleship. Compared to Wilson's outline, which is focused on the selected twelve disciples, Ogden's outline includes the seventy other disciples, plus others inspired by Jesus' ministry.¹⁵

Table 4					
JESUS' PREPARATORY EMPOWERMENT PROCESS					
	Pre-disciple	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Jesus' role	The inviter	The living example	The provocative teacher	The supportive coach	The ultimate delegator
The Disciples' role	Seekers	Observers and imitators	Students and questioners	Short-term missionary assignments	Apostles
Readiness level	Hungry to know whether Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah	Ready to observe who Jesus is and the nature of His ministry and mission	Ready to interact with Jesus and publicly identify with Him	Ready to test the authority of Jesus to work through them	Ready to assume role of making and reproducing disciples.
Key questions	Is Jesus the Messiah?	Who is Jesus, and what is His ministry and mission?	What is the cost of following Jesus?	Will the power of Jesus work through us when we take on His ministry?	Will I give my life entirely to the mission of making reproducing disciples?

The strength of Ogden's analysis is that it looks at discipleship stages with a simultaneous view of the roles of Jesus and the roles of His disciples. The inclusion of the "pre-disciple" (interested) stage is helpful. Jesus spent much of His public ministry interacting with people

¹⁵ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 82.

who asked questions and looked for proof in order to believe in Him and become disciples. Ogden's analysis focuses on the Twelve disciples and the way that other people related to Jesus.

There are two other biblical studies worth comparing concerning Jesus' method of making disciples. One is from Bill Hull who outlined four key movements of Jesus' discipleship: "come and see; come and follow me; come and be with me; go into the world and make disciples."¹⁶ Jesus first gained the interest of people. Then Jesus chose a small group of disciples who followed Him. These disciples responded to Christ's call, received direct practical training, accepted responsibility, and made decisions involving deeper commitment. Finally, the trained core group of disciples was called to go out to evangelize; they continued to mature in ministry and mission.

The second biblical study is from Leroy Eims. He simplified Jesus' disciple making into three progressive principles: "the selection principle, the associational principle, and the instructional principle."¹⁷ This approach affirms three of Jesus' underlying discipleship

¹⁶ Bill Hull, *Jesus Christ Disciplemaker* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 238.

¹⁷ Leroy Eims, *The Lost Art of Disciple Making* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 29-36.

principles, but it does little to affirm the principle of leadership development and the delegation of responsibility. The emphasis of this model is that Jesus came to call and befriend disciples so that they could receive knowledge and training. The shortcomings of this view of Jesus' method are two. First, it does not take into account everything that transformed the lives of the disciples. Second, the relational details and process that made Christ's principles a reality are minimized.

Further scriptural study reveals certain details about the strategy that Jesus used for discipleship. The first example (referred to earlier in this paper) was Jesus' first call in which He revealed an extraordinary vision to ordinary fisherman:

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." At once they left their nets and followed him. Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him. (Matt 4.18-22)

The immediate response of the disciples was influenced by having already met Jesus (John 1.39-40) and by having heard Him preach (Matt 4.17). Since they suspected that He

was the Christ (Matt 4.41), they wondered what His mission was and pondered whether they could be a part of it. Jesus did not call for a formal meeting; He met them unannounced (John 1.47-48). He led by initiative and personal invitation (John 1.43). Their response needed to be immediate and decisive. Otherwise, they would have forsaken the opportunity presented by Jesus (Luke 5.4-11). The opportunity was attractive because Jesus was already stirring their hopes and showing interest in them. Peter was influenced by the preaching of Jesus along the Sea of Galilee, which was followed by Jesus leading them to cast offshore for a large catch of fish after a whole night of fishing with no success (Luke 5.4-11). The stage was set for the disciples to follow God's will for their lives, to live for God's purposes that transcend mere existence (Matt 4.17-23). For the sake of the God's Kingdom, the imagery of being "fishers of men" was daunting and wonderfully adventurous. The fishermen had been caught by the great "Fisher" of men. Jesus' disciples were called to assist in the great catch of saving humanity for God's Kingdom.

Jesus taught His disciples throughout His ministry about the values of God's Kingdom. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) expressed the core of what Jesus wanted His

disciples to understand and apply in their lives. The Beatitudes of Jesus (Matt 5.1-12) expressed the blessings of knowing God that help disciples triumph over life's trials. Going further, Jesus clarified their identity and purpose in following Him as disciples:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matt 5.13-16)

Jesus taught the principles of life as a disciple, and that which constitutes righteousness in God's sight (Matt 5.17-6.4). He taught them to pray by modeling a prayer. The Lord's prayer (or disciple's prayer) gave guidance in adoration, priority in seeking God's will and Kingdom, focus upon forgiveness and grace, and trust in the power of petitioning God for help in overcoming sin and evil (Matt 6.5-15). Jesus instructed them in godliness through a rich array of practical wisdom and spiritual guidance (Matt 6.16-34, 7.6-27). Jesus taught them about the importance of humility:

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with

the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Matt 7.1-3)

Jesus demonstrated the need to correct His disciples about certain things that they should avoid (corrective discipleship). Moreover, He guided them to positive behavior (directive discipleship): "First take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matt 7.5).

Jesus was actively engaged in teaching His disciples, and He expected intentional effort from His disciples. Disciples grow in relationship to God and His kingdom when their priority is right:

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matt 6.33)

Furthermore, Jesus expected them to be persistent:

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. (Matt 7.7-8)

In addition, Jesus commanded His disciples to care for others:

So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets. (Matt 7.12)

The primary literary position of the Sermon on the

Mount in both the gospels of Matthew (Matt 5-7) and Luke (Luke 6.17-49) is noteworthy. These teachings were pivotal in the disciple's development of faith. Disciples are to "enter the narrow gate" that leads to life (Matt 7.13). Disciples are to follow the Lord upon the "narrow road" (Matt 7.14). Disciples are to watch out for "false prophets," and for "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matt 7.15). Disciples are to build their lives upon Jesus, not upon the ways of the world (John 14.27; 15.18-19; 17.13-19). Disciples are to do the will of God the Father through faith and obedience to Jesus (Matt 7.21). Without Christ, the foundation for life is comparable to sand (not stable or secure). With Christ, the foundation for life is like a solid rock (stable and secure). The Lord Jesus concluded His sermon:

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.
(Matt 7.24-27)

Being a disciple meant being clear about where one stood in relationship to God (Matt 13.9-11). Being a

disciple of Jesus Christ called for following the Son of God as Lord. Jesus is the rock of salvation; His words are reliable and steady no matter life's storms. Jesus is worthy of complete trust and devotion.

Throughout His life and ministry, Jesus exemplified what He taught them in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus knew that His own discipleship as God's Son would eventually lead Him to Jerusalem to offer the ultimate sacrifice of love. Jesus was faithful in accomplishing the will of His Father (Matt 26.39). The need for salvation and redemption could only be imparted through God's gift of grace. The way toward a new life for humanity (an exchanged life) was clarified by the Lord Jesus Christ as He looked ahead to the crucible of His ministry that would bring salvation, the cross:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. (Matt 16.24-25)

Jesus taught that the cross was foundational to His obedience to God and His own disciple's understanding of His ministry (Matt 16.21-23). Furthermore, the cross became an example of sacrifice by the Good Shepherd to His

disciples to labor for those who are lost (John 10.14-18). Following Jesus as a disciple involves self-denial for the sake of God's greater good so that God's grace can be imparted to others (Rom 1.5; 5.15; 6.8-11). Sinners, alienated from God, can be reconciled through faith in Christ (2 Cor 5.18). A great work of God began as redeemed disciples of Jesus Christ became ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5.19-20).

Finally, consideration is given to understanding discipleship in the New Testament church. The context of ministry for the early church involved elements of dealing with persecution, spiritual warfare, and ignorance. The profound experience of discipleship for Jesus' followers had been instrumental in changing their lives and sustaining their call and ministry. Their direct encounter of knowing the Lord (pre and post resurrection) had partially equipped them to lead and disciple others. Yet something more was necessary, their maturity of discipleship needed to be combined with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). Jesus commanded disciple making for the sake of God's Kingdom and His church; therefore, God moved and worked through the Holy Spirit who came upon the disciples to accomplish His purposes. Those who were

called to follow Christ were empowered to witness through spiritual transformation (Rom 12.1-2; 2 Cor 3.18). The Holy Spirit guided and counseled the disciples to disciple others who believed and followed Christ (Acts 8.29-39). God was fulfilling His plan of redemption by involving saved humanity in the work and process of redemption (Rom 8.22-25).

Peter, the disciple, called people to repentance and led people to trust Jesus Christ as the living Savior and Lord (Acts 2.38-39). The disciples were strengthened as they communed with the risen Lord (Luke 24.30-32; John 20.19-23). The disciples, and those who were reached with the gospel, came to understand that Jesus continued to intercede for them before God's throne (Rom 8.34-35; Heb 7.23-25). To fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28.19-20) the disciples combined evangelism and discipleship. The ministries of discipleship and evangelism were not separate, but complementary. Immediately after people were converted, they were disciplined through teaching and supportive personal relationships:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 3.42-47)

The picture of the church in Acts 3 shows a dynamic, multi-layered, truth-centered, worshipful, unselfish, sacrificial, compassionate, and consistent fellowship of God-glorifying believers who were active in making disciples every day. The work of discipleship involved larger fellowship meetings, classes led by the apostles, gatherings in people's homes, times of close conversation around tables, and friendships in which direct faith sharing occurred.

A New Testament church model of a small group of three or four disciples (useful in this ministry project) can be found in mentoring and mission groups. Barnabas mentored Paul. They joined together with John Mark as the first mission team supported by the Antioch church (Acts 12.24-25). The church of Antioch had five leaders who met for prayer, worship, and strategic planning led by the Holy Spirit:

In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the

tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13.1-3)

Paul, Barnabas, and John Mark were commissioned with prayer as they went to bring the gospel to Cyprus, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Acts 13.4-5). In order to make disciples for Jesus Christ and establish new churches, they began by preaching and teaching in the synagogues (Acts 13.6-14, 26). God performed miracles; converts were made. As a result, opposition mounted in resistance to the gospel (Acts 14.1-5). Most of the churches that started from this mission of Paul and Barnabas began with leaders who initiated small groups in which prayer and instruction in God's Word was supported (Acts 14.21-23). The pattern of multiplying disciples within small groups of worship and support was set in motion by these apostles, by the churches they established, and by newly converted followers of Jesus Christ who shared in the work of the gospel (Phil 1.1-7).

Discipleship in the New Testament church was not always effective. In fact, some churches had intense persecution to endure, divisions to heal, and heresies to confront. The church in Corinth faced division among those who vied

for leadership or claimed allegiances. The Apostle Paul declared that this was unacceptable (1 Cor 1.10-17). Furthermore, the church faced several heresies that challenged its theological foundation and unity. First, the circumcision party wanted to mandate that Gentiles follow all the regulations of the Jewish law. Paul responded by clarifying that the purpose of the law was to validate that salvation is through faith, not by keeping the law (Gal 2.12-16). Second, the libertines wanted to abuse the teaching of God's grace in Christ to rationalize continuing in sinful behavior (1 Cor 5.9-6.17). Paul addressed this by giving direct moral guidance (1 Cor 6.18-20). These challenges to the early church made discipleship training essential in order to help believers grow strong in faith, hope, love, knowledge, and service for Christ (1 Cor 13).

The strength of the model of disciple making that Jesus initiated was passed on by the apostles, this was in part the reason the church grew. The primary reason the church grew was that discipleship and growth occurred because God's hand was at work (Acts 2.47). People were being transformed through faith in Jesus Christ. People discovered the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; His living Lordship through the power of the resurrection. The gift

of God's abundant love and saving grace in Christ was manifested in and through the church.

The Apostle Paul implemented one other model of discipleship, that of mentoring. Paul saw his overseeing role to be like that of a parent or coach (1 Cor 4.14-17). He spoke of "running the race" (Heb 12.1) and "fighting the good fight" (1 Tim 1.18). To those just starting their discipleship training, Paul spoke to them as "his own children":

For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe.
(1 Thes 2.11-13)

Paul actively encouraged those that he disciplined. Timothy exemplified one who was blessed by Paul's mentoring (2 Tim 1.3-7). Timothy became a responsible leader in the early church (1 Tim 2.1-7). Paul affirmed the power of God's word at work in Timothy's ministry (1 Tim 4.11-14). This teaching of being equipped with the word of God was essential in Paul's theology of transformation (1 Tim 4.1-5). To be centered and grounded in Christ was to be

strengthened and equipped for spiritual battle by God's word (2 Tim 1.8-14). The Holy Spirit speaks through God's word, giving empowerment to those who believe and obey (Rom 16.25-27). Jesus is the Word of God who appeared to man (John 1.14); His teaching and very presence gives light and salvation (Phil 2.8-11). Greg Ogden views Paul's goal (in writing to the church in Colossae) as being that of empowerment for the church to fulfill the Great Commission of Christ to make disciples:

We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me. (Col 1.28-29)

Ogden has developed a helpful way of understanding Paul's empowerment model. In table 5 the stages of development are progressive. The needs of disciples change with growth, along with corresponding roles that adjust for both the disciple and disciple maker throughout the process.¹⁸

Table 5			
Stages of Discipleship, Greg Ogden			
LIFE STAGE	LIFE STAGE NEED	DISCIPLE'S ROLE	PAUL'S ROLE
Infancy	Modeling and direction	Imitation	Model

¹⁸ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 105.

Table 5			
Childhood	Unconditional love and protection	Identification	Hero
Adolescence	Increased freedom and identity formation	Exhortation	Coach
Adulthood	Mutuality and reciprocity	Participation	Peer

In summary, the New Testament biblical model for disciple making started with Jesus' method that combined public preaching with the formation of intimate support groups for discipleship. Jesus taught in public and private, speaking in sermons and parables to the broader audience and teaching with more informal dialogue to the twelve disciples He focused upon. Jesus' method of intimate discipleship involved significant transformation; the disciples grew in faith in order to participate in God's greater work:

I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father. And I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Son may bring glory to the Father. You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it. If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever--the Spirit of truth. (John 14.12-17a)

Jesus envisioned a great future with glory being given to God for what the disciples could accomplish in His name. Jesus sent the Holy Spirit from God to counsel, equip, and empower the disciples to fulfill God's Kingdom purposes. This purpose included public proclamation and personal evangelism/discipleship as a means to bring the gospel of Jesus Christ to the utmost parts of the world (Acts 1.8). Jesus' pattern of balancing public proclamation and small group discipleship was repeated by the early church (Acts 2.40-47). Today's ministries of discipleship should follow this pattern and avoid impersonal programmatic approaches.

Problem in Contemporary Thought

According to the Barna Research Group, "a church engaged in effective discipleship is a church that will grow steadily and solidly."¹⁹ Barna's research has been extensive in the area of analyzing the church and its relationship to cultural trends and influences. Barna concluded that discipleship ministries are essential for healthy churches. In Barna's survey, Christians said that their faith matters, yet only 20% took action toward spiritual growth:

¹⁹ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 107.

Three out of every five we surveyed told us they want to have a deep commitment to the Christian faith, but they are not involved in any intentional effort to grow spiritually. They view their challenge as one of spiritual maintenance rather than spiritual development. They contend that because they have embraced Jesus, learned the core lessons from Scripture, and implemented those lessons, all they need to do in the future is continue doing what they're already doing. The one out of five believers who are actively engaged in some type of personal spiritual development activity, besides attending church services, are involved in concerted efforts to learn new insights, live in a more obedient manner, and apply their newfound wisdom in unique and expanding ways.²⁰

The problem is heightened as only 66% of born-again believers say that they have no plan or specific goals for growing spiritually.²¹ The study revealed that believers identified many factors other than spirituality as being a key measure of success in life. Respondents were asked: "What makes for spiritual success?" Twelve percent responded that making disciples or doing evangelism was important to spiritual success.²² In fact, only two percent said that "teaching other people about Jesus" or "helping others to grow spiritually" made for spiritual success. What are the obstacles to Christian growth? (Table 6 summarizes the answers of Christians to the question: "How

²⁰ Ibid., 35.

²¹ Ibid., 36.

²² Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 41.

serious are you about spiritual growth?")²³

Table 6	
HOW SERIOUS ARE BELIEVERS ABOUT SPIRITUAL GROWTH?	
Most serious commitment in their life	18%
Consistent effort, limited results	52%
Inconsistent effort, limited results	20%
No effort, no interest	10%

Table 6 identifies the difficulty in implementing a discipleship ministry. The results indicate that much of what churches have done for spiritual growth has not succeeded. The fifty two percent who had tried, but experienced limited results from their efforts, were questioned as to what hindered them. The response of many Christians interviewed was that their life was too busy for spiritual pursuits. Participants in the survey were asked: "If the church matched you with a spiritual mentor or coach, would you be more likely to pursue the changes suggested?" The majority of Christians surveyed responded favorably to this idea.²⁴

Another part of Barna's survey (see table 7 on the following page) supports the idea of having coaches who can

²³ Ibid., 43.

²⁴ Barna, *Growing True Disciples*, 47-49.

help people find God's path of spiritual formation and service. There is also support from Barna's survey for developing a closer tie between the sermon/worship theme and small group Bible studies. The desire for more worship and prayer experiences is noteworthy and may indicate a growing hunger for God. This survey identified the need of helpful devotional guides for the personal spiritual discipline of believers.

Table 7	
THE SPIRITUAL GROWTH ACTIVITIES IN WHICH BELIEVERS WOULD "DEFINITELY" PARTICIPATE (465 PEOPLE ASKED)	
Using a monthly devotional guide for inspiration	34%
Participating in a weekly church prayer meetings	26
Using an outline of the sermon for Bible study	25
Participating in a monthly community service project	24
Attending an additional worship service	22
Attending a teaching event in the church, once a week	19
Having a weekly meeting with a mentor and 3-4 people	18
Having an accountability partner, meeting regularly	17
Participating in an on-line chat room about the Bible	14
Participating weekly in a class on the Bible long term	14
Enrolling in a seminary-level Bible teaching course	12

What is interesting, pertaining to this ministry project, is that Barna's survey showed that there was only moderate interest in small discipleship groups. Barna explained this result as reflecting the high level of commitment required for such groups and a lack of experience many people have in small discipleship groups.

According to Barna's research, many growing churches have discovered that by having groups of six or more people meet in homes there can be significant discipleship.²⁵ These groups are promoted to grow to twelve or fourteen members and are then encouraged to divide to become two new small groups. Barna identified the Pantego Bible Church in Dallas, Texas, as one example of a church with discipleship as its overall goal. The Pantego church structures its entire ministry for discipleship, from the large gathered worship meetings to house groups and small discipleship groups. This ministry trend has been a common and successful approach among church strategists using the models of Saddleback Church, Willow Creek Church, Harvest Bible Chapel, and others. Are these churches and their small

²⁵ Barna, *Growing True Disciples of Jesus*, video (Ventura, CA: Issachar Productions, 2000).

groups achieving a high level of effectiveness in making and maturing Christian disciples? Barna Group concluded:

Discipleship takes many forms, but by far the most common in use today is through small groups. Currently, seven out of every ten people involved in discipleship (69%) seek their spiritual development through participation in a small group that meets to study the Bible and consider spiritual realities together. Less common discipleship activities include involvement in a Sunday school class (undertaken by 20% of those involved in discipleship); a one-to-one mentoring relationship (14%); a special faith-oriented class (11%); and online training and interaction geared to discipleship (3%).²⁶

Christians are aware of the need for spiritual growth and discipleship. As a result, some implementation of strategic small group ministry has taken place. How effective have churches been in the ministry of small group discipleship? According to Greg Ogden, churches have the unhealthy tendency to become program driven. Essentially, Ogden is concerned that programmatic approaches to forming small discipleship groups are unproductive and loosely connected to long-term goals. Ogden points out four downsides of a program centered approach to discipleship:

1. They tend to be information or knowledge-based. This assumes right knowledge will produce right living.
2. Programs are often a few people preparing for the many. This means that the few core people will do the hard work, and the rest will come, to a greater or

²⁶ George Barna, *www.barna.org*. Accessed 1-10-2006 statistics are based on a study done in 2000. The Barna Group updated this study in 2005.

lesser extent, as passive recipients of their work.
3. Programs are characterized by regimentation or synchronization.
4. Programs generally have low personal accountability.²⁷

Programs in discipleship may be well intentioned, but often they fail to meet people's specific needs. Further, programs of discipleship tend to be deficient in responding to variations of personality, pace, and perspective. Therefore, people drop out because they do not fit a particular mold. They may even feel they are being processed in a production line. In his fourth point Ogden argues that a program centered approach is weak in the area of relational accountability:

Programs of discipleship often give the illusion of accountability. But on closer examination the focus is on completing the assigned study curriculum rather than committing to life change.²⁸

Ogden has touched a sensitive nerve of church leaders and pastors. Church leaders and pastors may need to place less emphasis on programs for discipleship and entrust the role of discipleship to laypeople. This less-centralized control will require more time for training and equipping of emerging leaders. The problem of churches trying to

²⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 42-46.

²⁸ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 45.

rush the process of discipleship through programs typifies short-term thinking. Ogden supports his conclusion by appealing to the findings of Barna, who writes: "Few churches intentionally guide their people through a strategic learning and developmental process that has been customized for the student."²⁹

One church model that is worth noting is that of Harvest Bible Chapel in suburban Chicago. Their pastors, James MacDonald and Joseph Stowell, expressed their philosophy at a leadership conference: "Everything we do in worship and ministry is focused upon getting people to commit to discipleship in a small group."³⁰ Their worship services have grown rapidly as their small group ministry has stayed vibrant. People are reached; and as new converts to Christ, these people are immediately given the vision of being part of a small group for discipleship. The pastors have their sermons put into a format that small groups can use for study. Sermons are available on DVD, CD, and audiotape. The result of their overall disciple-

²⁹ Barna, *Making True Disciples*, 79.

³⁰ James MacDonald spoke to pastors at a leadership Conference. This strategy for small groups is an unpublished quote from James MacDonald's talk with pastors, it was noted by Scott Arnold during the "Straight-up" conference in October of 2005.

ship strategy is that they have multiplied their ministry to create three additional campuses in the last five years. One of these campuses in metro Chicago is larger than the home campus. The message is evangelical; the discipleship is intentional and strategic; the worship is contemporary; and the ministry is creative and dynamic.³¹ Ministry gifts are affirmed and activated in the life of Harvest Bible Chapel church, primarily through the small group ministries that help to foster the growth of healthy disciples.

Books

There are many programs, books, and resources that address the ministry of discipleship. Most books on discipleship are either designed to build people's knowledge of the Bible or designed to help people experience short-term Christian fellowship. The most practical resources are those in which fellowship groups combine these two elements, Bible study and relationship building. There are also a few good resources that focus on one-on-one mentoring. An approach is needed that combines a ministry of friendship building with a greater depth of discipleship that is biblical, personal, accountable, and practical for

³¹ Observations are based upon five personal visits by Scott Arnold to Harvest Bible Chapel and through his participation in a three day leadership workshop at this ministry site in October 2005.

training people for specific ministry. Growth involves spiritual transformation which should be an attainable goal in discipleship. Many of the small group resources that focus on the making and multiplication of groups of three or four people use this combination of approaches and share this goal of spiritual transformation in discipleship.

The following review of books focuses on the best resources in the various areas outlined in the paragraph above. These reviews are followed by a rationale for the books which were selected for the initial trial of this ministry project. All books referred to are included in the annotated bibliography at the end of this ministry project report. Those which are underlined have been used in this project.

For an overview of the church's status and health in fulfilling the Great Commission of making disciples, the following two books are useful: *Growing True Disciples* by George Barna and *Transforming Discipleship* by Greg Ogden.

For a detailed philosophy of the ministry of "triad" or "cell group" discipleship, the following books are essential: *Transforming Discipleship* by Greg Ogden, *The Master's Plan for Making Disciples* by Charles and Win Arn, *Making Small Groups Work* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Town-

send, *With Christ in the School of Disciple-Building* by Carl Wilson, and *The Disciple-Making Church* by Bill Hull.

For a direct and useful curriculum study on "triad" or "cell group" discipleship, the following books are useful: *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden, *CORE - Following the Master's Plan for Discipleship* by Doug Morrell, *Transforming Lives* (from Harvest Bible Chapel) by James MacDonald, and *Experiencing Discipleship* by Clarence Shuler.

For an extensive, in-depth, biblical-training approach to discipleship, the following resource is suggested: *Masterlife: a Biblical Process for Growing Disciples* by Avery Willis, Jr. The *Masterlife* book set is one of the most comprehensive approaches to discipleship. *Masterlife* is useful as a long-term curriculum with excellent teacher aids and student books.

For an understanding of the way that people develop spiritually and for the psychology of spiritual development and small groups, the following resources are helpful: *How People Grow: What the Bible Reveals about Personal Growth* by Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *Soul Shaping* by Douglas Rumford, and *The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Williard.

For a set of tools useful in developing a mentoring

ministry of discipleship, the following books are helpful: *A Call to Joy* and *A Call to Growth* by Billy Hanks, Jr.

For insightful personal study of discipleship, the following books are helpful: *Gripped by the Greatness of God* by James MacDonald, *Following Christ* by Joe Stowell, *Don't Waste Your Life* by John Piper, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple* by Stephen Macchia, *A Way in the World* by Ernest Boyer, Jr., *True Discipleship* by John Kessler, *The Discipline of Grace* by Jerry Bridges, *Experiencing Spiritual Breakthroughs* by Bruce Wilkerson, and *The Good Life* by Charles Colson.

For help connecting discipleship to evangelism, *Church Evangelism* by John Mark Terry and *People Sharing Jesus* by Darrell Robinson are good resources. For help connecting disciples to a balanced biblical understanding of spiritual gifts, the book *Incredibly Gifted* by Darrell Robinson is recommended. For giving disciples a set of tools for evaluating their personality type, spiritual gifts, God-given abilities, passions for ministry, and life experiences in one integrated workshop, the *PLACE Ministry Workbook* (and accompanying video training DVD) by Jay McSwain is very well organized and useful. For developing a tool that measures and maintains spiritual growth among

committed disciples, *A Model for Strategic Disciple Building* by Bob Dukes is thorough and useful. For building friendships in the church that may lead to small groups, *Friendship First* by Group Publishing is recommended. For bringing prayer and evangelism together, *That None Should Perish* by Ed Silvoso is highly recommended. To bring a small study group together through prayer, *Prayer the Great Adventure* by David Jeremiah is very good. To form a support group for people grieving or going through illness, *A Bend in the Road* by David Jeremiah is excellent. The author shares from His experience of battling cancer.

Of all these resources recommended, four books were primary resources for the development of a triad discipleship ministry: *Developing True Disciples* by George Barna, *Transforming Discipleship* and *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden, and the *PLACE Workshop* book and videos by Jay McSwain. Barna's book provided helpful statistics and analysis of discipleship that gave guidance in developing an effective discipleship ministry. Ogden's books helped provide a philosophical and practical framework from which to implement a triad discipleship strategy. Bob Duke's workbook *A Model for Strategic Disciple Building* was used as an intensive guidebook for organizing discipleship. To

go with this workbook, Duke developed the *Equipping Spiritual Growth Inventory*. This inventory was used as an assessment tool in this project to determine levels of faith, growth of disciples through the experience, and identification of growth potential for disciples and those who coach them. The *PLACE Workshop* material equipped disciples to better understand how they and other people are uniquely created and entrusted with God-given personality and potential. This is important for engagement in ministry and service in the church. The PLACE materials and workshop are an ongoing discipleship tool. Moreover, the church used the *Friendship First* curriculum to build informal relationships of support in the fellowship. This study of friendship has contributed to the formation of small groups (triads); moreover, stronger friendships in the church have resulted from using this curriculum.

Articles

Discipleship Journal, by NAVPRESS, offers the best periodical resource for discipleship ministries. Recently, a compilation of the last twenty years of this periodical became available on a computer CD, with a license to use the curriculum and forms shared in the various issues.³²

³² NAVPRESS. *Discipleship Journal*. Twenty-year

Youthworker magazine by Youth Specialties Ministries has many articles on discipleship. Mike Yaconelli wrote in his column "The Dangerous Wonder":

Youth-oriented discipleship programs have reduced disciples to cheerleaders and political organizers. Discipleship has been turned into a measurable, external activity instead of an immeasurable, internal lack of activity. Spending time evangelizing has replaced spending time with Jesus, and sharing our faith with others has replaced growing in our faith with Jesus. . . . Simply put, discipleship is a lifelong process, not a youth activity.³³

In another article, Mike Yaconelli addressed youth ministers concerning discipleship becoming too programmed and impersonal:

Youth ministers talk too much. Most youth ministries are more like seminars than workshops, platforms than forums, lectures than discussions. The result? Discipleship by talking. Youth ministries by indoctrination. The model is something like this: Tell them what to believe. Then tell them what to believe again. Invite in a guest speaker to tell them what to believe, or a musical group. Most musical groups talk most of the time anyway. The difference is they sing and then tell young people what to believe. What do we tell them to believe? Read your Bible every day. Pray every day. Go to church often. Oh . . . and don't have sex. Who decided that students reading their Bibles on a regular basis, praying, refraining from sexual activity, and going to church will result in dedicated, committed, long-term Christians? Who reduced the Christian faith to a to-do list? I hate to say this; it sounds so

anniversary collection of periodical resources on computer CD. Visit www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/

³³ Mike Yaconelli, "Dangerous Wonder," *Youthworker Magazine*, September 2001, 39.

obvious, but isn't the Christian life about our relationships with Jesus? Isn't youth ministry, then, about connecting young people to Jesus Christ? Experiencing Jesus Christ? Following Jesus Christ? Notice I didn't say hearing about Jesus, talking about Jesus, cheering about Jesus, learning about Jesus; I said being with Jesus. Youth ministry is about young people being intimate with Jesus.³⁴

Another insightful article was found at Dallas Williard's website entitled: *Why Bother with Discipleship?* Here, Williard presented his concern for a "heresy" of evangelical Christianity that trusts Jesus as Savior, but denies Christ as Lord. The apparent lack of commitment and transformation among Christians today (addressed in the following article by Williard) may be due in part to the following theological root problem:

Some years ago A. W. Tozer expressed his "feeling that a notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles--the widely-accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to!" (*I Call It Heresy*, Harrisburg, PA.: Christian Publications, 1974, p. 5f) He then goes on to state that "salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred scriptures." This 'heresy' has created the impression that it is quite reasonable to be a "vampire Christian." One in effect says to Jesus: "I'd like a little of your blood, please. But I don't care to be your student or have your character. In fact, won't you just excuse me while I get on with my life, and I'll see you in heaven." But can we really imagine that this is an approach that Jesus finds acceptable? And when you stop to think of it, how could one actually trust him for

³⁴ Mike Yaconelli, "Dangerous Wonder," *Youthworker Magazine*, February 2002, 37.

forgiveness of sins while not trusting him for much more than that. You can't trust him without believing that he was right about everything, and that he alone has the key to every aspect of our lives here on earth. But if you believe that, you will naturally want to stay just as close to him as you can, in every aspect of your life.³⁵

One of the most honest admissions by a pastor came from Bill Hull. He realized that his ministry to help people in their spiritual development as disciples was not working. He had authored three books on discipleship; yet God gave him a new perception about discipleship:

I recognize now that discipleship is a way of life, not a program. It is about community and relationships and an environment of grace. So those who did not "choose the life" were not to be devalued. As their pastor I was called to love them as well. Part of the transformation in our church included extending and receiving this kind of acceptance. Through brokenness and honesty, the icy barrier in our church began to melt, and the life of spiritual transformation we had longed for began to be seen. Some of us have made significant progress as committed disciples of Christ, others are still just beginning the journey.³⁶

The positive outcome of people's experiences in discipleship is encouraging. One article, *Mentoring that Produces Mentors* by Rick Lowry gives a wonderful personal story of how he was mentored and is now leading a mentoring

³⁵ Dallas Williard, *Why Bother With Discipleship?* Article accessed at website: www.dwillard.org/articles/.

³⁶ Bill Hull, *It's Just Not Working*. (Leadership Journal), accessed 1/2006 at the website address: www.christianitytoday.com/le/2005/003/6.26.html.

ministry. Discipleship in Lowry's experience will produce several generations of disciples. These disciples will in turn impact many people's lives as they make disciples through mentoring. This model is a strong approach that is informal, intentional, and influential:

My three-year plan: In our first year together, I focus on building community in the group. In the early weeks, I say to each man at our meetings, "Tell us your life history." Then, I take the first turn, modeling permission to admit both success and failure along the way. Sometimes, we take additional time recounting our spiritual history. If we're going to build a band of close friends who can trust each other as deeply as a discipleship group must, extended relationship building is essential. Then I lead the group in a four-week introduction to discipling, including what discipling means and what they should expect to both give and receive from the group. *Year one:* In that first year, we focus on basics of the Christian walk: prayer, spiritual gifts, and studying the "one another" texts. We discuss challenging articles from Christian periodicals, and sometimes read a book together. I've found Bill Hybels' Too Busy Not to Pray and Gordon MacDonald's Ordering Your Private World good for the first-year discipleship group. *Year two:* The second year is the year of depth. By this time, we've grown to trust each other, allowing the possibility of accountability, in-depth study, and intimate prayer. This is the heart of discipleship, when a kind of deep growth occurs that may not be possible in the average small group. *Year three:* The third year is the year of outreach. We focus on how to multiply the discipleship group experience so others can get in on it. I don't lead many meetings during the third year, but step back to allow these other men opportunities for leadership. I also expose the men to every type of small group leadership, from planning, to discussion, to handling conflict.³⁷

³⁷ Rick Lowry, *Mentoring that Produces Mentoring*, accessed 1/2006 at website: www.christianitytoday.com/biblestudies/areas/biblestudies/articles/050302.html.

Church leaders help each other by sharing their experience of discipleship. Rob Zins writes about "Trauma in the School of Discipleship":

The Lord has given us a school of discipleship in the life of the local church. It is with others, in corporate assembly, that we learn spiritual truths and attain unity. Christ has given in the church various gifts to be used for the edification of the body: "according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love" (Eph. 4:16). In many respects, the church is our lifetime school of discipleship where we work together for the glory of Christ. Within the body, Christ gives some to be overseers (elders/bishops/pastors). These men give time to the direction and correction of the church. Such men have been recognized in the local church as men of maturity and wisdom. These men are given charge to shepherd the flock and "hold fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict" (Titus 1:9). In our culture today--with a church on every corner--the local assembly agonizes over a major hindrance to corporate discipleship. This agony centers around the inner terror and guilt associated with *unilateral attrition*. By unilateral attrition I mean an *abrupt abandonment of the local church by parties without any attempted explanation or reconciliation*. This breach, in effect, is one where everything upon which the previous relationship was grounded is undone, and it is harmful to the discipling function of the entire body.³⁸

In summarizing the findings of articles related to a discipleship ministry, there are clearly many good insights to be gained from direct ministry experiences. The pre-

³⁸ Rob Zins, *Trauma in the School of Discipleship*, (Searching Together. Vol. 2.4 p.24-26), battereddsheep.org.

vious articles have addressed a few key concerns. First, discipleship needs to be real and personal. Second, discipleship is often over-programmed and misapplied as a short-term objective and not as a long-term life process. Third, discipleship is not often understood in the church. Fourth, leaders need to be honest with their congregations and themselves when discipleship does not produce lasting transformation and spiritual fruit. Fifth, discipleship requires personal investment. Sixth, discipleship ultimately involves training others to make disciples, thus fulfilling the Great Commission.

Internet Sites

In reference to Internet sites on discipleship, awareness of websites that have many articles, audio files, and databases of resources is invaluable. Smaller websites that have a specific discipleship focus give practical church models and examples of ministry. Some ministries offer downloadable curriculum resources for churches and individuals to use.

A website has been created for this ministry project with the name and address www.comefollowjesus.com. Currently, this site has a list of resources and ideas for

discipleship ministry, including new curriculum for download, sermons, articles, poems, a Jesus picture gallery, and some original praise songs. Curriculum that is specifically tailored for short and long-term discipleship triads is available, and new curriculum will be added regularly. This ministry website will develop over time to include further support and ideas for personal, triad, and small group discipleship. (The table on the following page (table 8) gives a list of websites for discipleship ministry. Regular searches of the internet will prove helpful for new sites and ideas.)

TABLE 8			
WEBSITES FOR DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRY			
	NAME/ADDRESS	CONTENT/STRENGTHS	Rating 1 to 5 5 high
	Authentic Walk Ministries www.authenticwalk.com	Excellent, free, personal discipleship training, via e-mail.	5
	Barna Church Consultants www.barna.org	Great research, video tools, books	5
	Christianity Today/Leadership Journal www.christianitytoday.com/leaders/features/discipleship.html	Articles from leaders and ideas. Archive of many ministry topics.	4
	Come Follow Jesus First Baptist Church, Scott Arnold www.comefollowjesus.com	Ideas, resources, music, sermons, Jesus picture gallery.	4
	CORE Discipleship Ministries www.coregroups.org	Ideas and curriculum for Triads and small CORE groups Free Discipleship training E-Letter	5

TABLE 8			
	Discipleship Journal www.navpress.com/Magazines/DJ/	Archived magazine articles and curriculum from the Magazine.	5
	Cross Daily Web Site www.crossdaily.com	Articles, study tools, referencing, chat room, clipart, ministry connections, e-cards, Bible study	5
	Harvest Bible Chapel www.harvestbible.org	A growing, dynamic church.	4
	Lifeway Ministry Site www.lifeway.com/growingdisciples	Ideas for starting a discipleship ministry and Curriculum	4
	Navigators Discipleship Ministry www.home.navigators.org	Many articles, ideas, curriculum, features, seminars, conferences	5

Other Resources

There are many types of resources utilizing various forms of media. Participation in workshops or training events is recommended. This section covers only a few resources that this discipleship ministry has found helpful. There are a variety of conferences and training seminars worth attending. Some sessions are recorded on audio, video, or printed formats.

The leadership conference called "*Straight-up*" (an annual event) at Harvest Bible Chapel, Rolling Meadows, Illinois, was held in October 2005. This conference highlighted workshops, worship, and guest speakers. In 2005 the conference included Dr. David Jeremiah, Joe Stowell, James MacDonald, and Dr. Crawford Loritz. (This conference

was attended by the ministry project director.)

Lifeway National Discipleship Conference is a good resource for in-depth training and exposure to various strategies of small group leadership and curriculum selection.

Workshops and national conferences of Youth Specialties Ministries are offered regularly. These gatherings help to support youth ministry and equip people with tools for understanding the unique challenge of youth discipleship. This ministry project director has attended some of these youth workshops and conferences several years ago.

The Willow Creek Church in suburban Chicago started *Willow Creek Association Leadership and Training Conferences*. These are offered on location and at many regional workshops and conferences around the country. Willow Creek designs these workshops for churches that want to form small group ministries to reach seekers and newly converted Christians (www.willowcreek.com).

The Navigators offer a one-day retreat, *How to Experience God More Deeply*. This is a workshop that is designed to "refresh and encourage those who attend." The Navigators' website indicates various places and times of this retreat (www.home.navigators.org).

Master's Commission held a discipleship conference in 2005 entitled: *Uncharted Territory*. Audio (MP3) file downloads and printable downloads are available online (www.mcin.org).

There is one resource that this ministry project used for helping people who were both involved in the project and not involved in the project. Called *PLACE*, this do-it-yourself workshop kit enables leaders to help each workshop participant discover their personality type, learn about their spiritual gifts, assess their abilities, confirm their areas of passion for ministry, and evaluate their experiences of life. This tool was used as a supplemental resource and was appreciated by those who participated. During this workshop, people met for three to four hours of sharing, reflection, and video DVD presentation by Jay McSwain. This tool was presented and facilitated by the church pastor several times and once by another trained church leader. The *PLACE* kit has promotional tools, workbooks, a coach training video tape and manual, and participant workbooks that coordinate with lively video training.

For developing a growing sense of friendship in the church, *Friendship First* (by Group Publishing) is a very

good training tool for building relationships. This curriculum creates fellowship with food, small group discussion, Bible study, and social mixers to build small groups on the theme of friendship.

Many churches have utilized *The Purpose Driven Life* by Rick Warren. Churches indicate that while interest in small groups had begun, a bridge to what came next was needed. Pastors who were interviewed by this ministry project researcher said that it was more of a program with a defined time period. Warren's book has helped churches plan and implement a forty-day comprehensive study to help people identify their God-given purpose in life. Small groups benefited from discussions in small groups. The topic of affirming and exploring God's leading in purposeful ministry was uplifting. One pastor noted: "Purpose Driven Life has been more of a platform from which future discipleship ministries could be launched."³⁹

Summary of the Project

Movement toward improving the process of discipleship at First Baptist Church, Grand Blanc, was initiated by this project. The focus was upon building a foundation for a

³⁹ Paul Arnold, Crossroads Community Baptist Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan. November, 2005.

ministry that developed leaders and small groups (triads) for discipleship. Triad participants worked with the pastor and church staff in interpersonal care and personal spiritual growth. The long-term strategic goal was that initial triads should multiply into new triads, encouraging the formation of new triads.

Initially, this plan called for establishing a framework and design to be field tested. Ongoing development and growth continued from this initial phase of vision establishment; which included defining a purpose, designing a paradigm, and determining a leadership core. A key objective was to establish a foundation on which a long-term discipleship ministry could be built. Previous programs of discipleship lasted a short time, not continuing past the initial groups who met.

The method of discipleship selected in this proposal was that of small cell groups (three or four people). This was known more specifically as a "triad" discipleship ministry.⁴⁰ This method was approved by the church for implementation upon being studied and compared.

⁴⁰ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 54. The author introduces the idea of a triad being a group of three or four who covenant for discipleship.

Description of the Ministry Project

Four groups of three met in covenant with one another for six to twelve months of in-depth Bible Study, prayer, and supportive friendship. These groups (for the most part) met regularly and consistently. They used the book *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden.⁴¹ The groups reported their progress, findings, and concerns to the ministry project director, Scott Arnold. In addition to the regular triad group meetings, the participants were given the opportunity to participate in the PLACE Workshop (a tool useful for personal discipleship development). The participants were offered coaching from the ministry project director. A website in which discipleship resources and ideas were shared was developed for the triad discipleship ministry.

Rationale

The two key reasons that the triad approach was chosen for discipleship were that it was personal and that it offered a greater opportunity for long-term effective spiritual growth. The interpersonal dynamic of three people offered security, accountability, flexibility,

⁴¹ Greg Ogden, has also written a resource companion book to this guide for discipleship. See *Discipleship Essentials*, (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1998).

intimate sharing, friendship building, in-depth biblical and theological training, and supportive prayer. The triad discipleship groups came to value the time it took to grow spiritually. Discipleship with this patient view of transformation encouraged a long-term shared vision of fruitful support and the eventual expansion of making new triad groups. The church came to experience maturity and strength of character in those who participated in the triad discipleship ministry. In successive waves of triad discipleship group formation, Christians will mature and grow.

Goals

A triad ministry vision goal was developed: Build intimate spiritual support and growth through forming discipleship groups of three people that will multiply in time. This broad goal was supported by the following specific goals that guided and shaped the ministry project:

1. Four to five triad discipleship control groups will be established and maintained for a period of nine to twelve months. After this period of time the groups will be evaluated.
2. People will respond by meeting regularly, partici-

pating in their triad, and providing feedback for evaluation.

3. The composition of each group will involve a diverse mix of people: existing members, new members, and seekers with variation in age and life experience. The goal of having diverse members experience spiritual unity will help in evaluating the effectiveness and potential of this program as a ministry of church discipleship.

4. People will grow in their faith, in their love for God, and in their friendships with one another. This goal is in line with the vision of First Baptist Church: "Worshiping God, Loving One Another." Use of a spiritual assessment indicator will supplement the measurement of this goal.

5. The gospel will become a reality to seekers as they accept the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

6. People will be enabled, upon completion of this triad experience, to start new triad groups in which they can share a meaningful ministry of mutual discipleship with others.

7. Discipleship will become a primary evangelistic ministry of the church.

8. People will be able to identify their stage of discipleship and take steps to grow as disciples of Jesus

Christ.

9. New curriculum for future discipleship triads will be developed for the church's ministry based on the evaluation of this experience.

Strategies

For each goal, a detailed implementation strategy will be described in the following paragraphs. A general philosophy for each goal is included with the descriptions. The overall vision goal reads: "Build intimate spiritual support and growth through forming discipleship groups of three people that will multiply in time." This overall vision goal has implications for pursuing spiritual transformation, biblical/theological training, personal support, faith development, and friendship building. The strategy of having an overall vision goal was to construct a foundation from which triad ministry could be built. The triad ministry project was designed to coordinate with the church's overall mission statement: "Worshiping God, loving one another."

The nine specific ministry project goals mentioned previously are described as they were implemented:

Goal 1: Four to five triad discipleship control groups will be established and maintained for a period of nine to

twelve months. After this period of time, the groups will be evaluated.

Records and notes were kept monthly for recording the participation of triad members and how often triads met. The triad discipleship ministry registration was planned for a two month time period. After this, for purposes of having a control group to be evaluated, no other triad discipleship groups were formed that were used for this study. Limiting the initial number of triad groups allowed for project research that was defined, manageable, and measurable. Participants received more personal attention and coaching.

A one year time period for the project was necessary for meaningful relationships to be developed. This length of time allowed for strengths and weaknesses in the triad discipleship experience to be discovered. Findings gave input for adjustment to future discipleship ministries.

Goal 2: People will respond by meeting regularly, participating in their triad, and providing feedback for evaluation.

Triads met regularly, weekly or biweekly. The purpose was to encourage accountability, continuity of commitment, and a sense of momentum. Triads reported to the project director monthly about their meetings and attendance. Each

participant was interviewed monthly by the project director in person, or by phone, to determine progress or identify concerns.

Goal 3: The composition of each group will involve a diverse mix of people: Existing members, new members and seekers with variation in age and life experience. The goal of having diverse members experience spiritual unity will help in evaluating the effectiveness and potential of this program as a ministry of church discipleship.

Triads were formed, as much as possible, with people of diverse ages, faith maturity, and cultural backgrounds. The means to consider (or document) the diversity of group members was done by comparing individual profiles of triad participants. The director observed each group to assess the role of diversity in support, commitment, communication, and progress. The project director developed individual personal profiles in the first month of the triad discipleship ministry. The profiles were based upon prior knowledge and were updated through interviews with individuals. The personal profiles included observations of how participants learned from one another's diversity while discovering and affirming their spiritual unity. This approach increased faith-based self-awareness and growth within the context of their group exchange.

Personal profiles helped the project coordinator to

monitor and pray about concerns of the participants and their groups. Coaching and counseling of participants was provided by the project coordinator and trained leaders.

Goal 4: People will grow in their faith, in their love for God, and friendships with one another. This goal is in line with the vision of First Baptist Church: "Worshiping God, Loving One Another." The use of a spiritual assessment indicator will supplement the measurement of this goal.

The design of the triad discipleship ministry was conducive for participants to grow in the Christian faith and in their Christian friendships. Groups larger than three or four were considered; however, the intensity, depth, and accountability of triads made it a preferred approach. The "Equipping Christian Growth Inventory" was chosen as an instrument to help participants identify and understand their stage of faith maturity. Using this tool they could develop a plan for spiritual growth.⁴² A survey at the end of the triad experience asked participants to respond to the question: "Has this been an experience that has helped you grow in your faith?" Respondents gave a scaled numeric rating and also wrote subjective written remarks. The participants shared discoveries, personal insights, observations, creative ideas, and concerns.

⁴² Bob Dukes, *Equipping Spiritual Growth Inventory* (Fayetteville, GA: World Discipleship Association, 1997).

Goal 5: The gospel will become a reality to seekers as they accept the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

The strategy of the triad discipleship group ministry was twofold in that it provided a breeding ground for faith decisions and supportive teams for faith development. The gospel of Jesus Christ is often received in the context of a personal caring community, more specifically among a few close friends. This intimate environment of study strengthened foundational biblical beliefs and opened dialogue on life and faith issues.

Goal 6: People will be enabled, upon completion of this triad experience, to start new triad groups in which they can share a meaningful ministry of mutual discipleship with others.

Participants were introduced to the goal of multiplication as part of the promotional, envisioning phase. The church supported the multiplication of discipleship groups and looked forward to further discipleship group formation. During the initial formation phase each triad affirmed the principal of growth at its first meeting. Members were encouraged to fulfill this goal of multiplication. In the evaluation survey at the end, participants were asked to express commitment toward starting a new discipleship triad after this experience.

The philosophy of triad discipleship ministry envi-

sioned spiritual and numeric growth. Disciples learn to disciple one another and continue to form new groups following this experience. The principle of multiplication has great potential for significant growth and support. More than a program to be completed, this was a ministry that nurtured a discipleship movement. Training was practical through direct involvement of core participants who were equipped to become future triad leaders, participants, promoters, coaches, or supporters.

Goal 7: Discipleship will become a primary evangelistic ministry of the church.

The strategy was for triad discipleship groups to become a center point of ministry, coordinated with the evangelistic ministry of the church. When people visited, made a decision of faith, or attended an evangelistic event, follow-up discipleship ministries were not effective. This seventh goal was for a triad ministry to provide a non-threatening evangelistic environment for seekers or newcomers in the context of a small group.

The other part of this goal was that those involved in a triad were to be renewed and strengthened in their faith. Evangelism is ignited by the Holy Spirit as believers apply their passion for reaching the unsaved. These triads were

designed to help kindle faith, promote spiritual transformation, and nurture the ministry of evangelism.

Goal 8: People will be able to identify their stage of discipleship and take steps to help them grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

For people to understand their Christian faith development, the "Equipping Spiritual Growth Inventory" was used. This tool enabled participants (and the project director) to identify the stages of discipleship that the participants started at and were growing toward. The inventory acquainted participants with a broader understanding of the various stages (or phases) of discipleship. Participants did gain a better understanding of spiritual transformation in the Christian faith. The inventory gave affirmation and encouragement, as well challenging the participants to grow spiritually.

Goal 9: New curriculum for future discipleship triads will be developed for the church's ministry based on the evaluation of this experience.

The curriculum "Discipleship Essentials" by Greg Ogden was chosen to provide the first step for the triad ministry experience, this leading to evaluation and refinement. In turn, the use of this curriculum helped in the planning of future curriculum appropriate to the needs of triad discipleship groups. The project director created curriculum

for short and long-term triad groups from this evaluated experience. The philosophy of testing this project with established curriculum helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of what had already been developed. From this controlled trial, additional resources were developed or found. In refining the discipleship ministry for future groups, a long-term process of trial and evaluation is suggested. The ministry of discipleship has the foundation of Scripture, but it is not fixed or static in application.

Demographic Profiles of the Project

Three demographic areas of concern are highlighted. First, the community and church profile is presented; the place and context of this ministry project is generally described. Second, the project director is introduced; his experiences, interests, and ministry gifts are summarized. Third, the project participants are described anonymously using a summary from the notes of the project coordinator.

Ministry Context Profile

The First Baptist Church of Grand Blanc was founded in 1833 and is geographically situated at the southeastern quarter of the lower peninsula of Michigan. The early settlers from New York State began with a barn that was

used for Sunday school and worship services. The church has maintained biblical core values and evangelical beliefs during its long history.

The church is located in a growing suburb of Detroit (which is forty miles South) and Flint, Michigan (which is five miles North). Hundreds of new homes have been built in just the last three years.⁴³ Schools have been stretched beyond capacity and new school buildings are nearing completion. Churches in the area have had moderate growth. Many people who are new to the community are in the midst of determining church interest or affiliation. Approximately 45% of those in the community are involved in a Christian religious organization; 5% of those are involved in a non-Christian religion.⁴⁴ This leaves at least thirty thousand people unchurched in a community of sixty thousand (with many more in neighboring communities).

The church has a strategic location in the community, it is adjacent to a large General Motors production plant and a large new shopping center. The church is on the primary main street in town. The church has a readable new sign, parking, and handicapped building access. Traffic

⁴³ Grand Blanc Chamber of Commerce statistics, 2005.

⁴⁴ Grand Blanc Clergy Association Survey, 2005.

along this main street has increased along with a greater awareness and exposure of the church due to its location.

The church was small until the early 1990s. At that time the church started to grow and added a new sanctuary. The church was at a plateau in attendance for over ten years, and it is now growing steadily at 6-8% per year.

The strengths of the church are in its caring and committed members, their evangelical faith, and the personal informal fellowship they share. The Sunday school is attended by over 70% of those who come to worship. The attendance on Sunday morning for each of the worship services averages 95-110 people. Two years ago a contemporary worship service was added at 9:00 A.M., with Sunday school at 10:10 A.M.; a traditional worship service at 11:15 A.M. was maintained. Youth ministries and music ministries have expanded with the addition of new staff and volunteers. The Wednesday "Word of Life" Bible club is a vibrant ministry to children and youth in which many adult leaders are involved in a discipleship/mentoring role.

The church has a vision for future facility expansion to include a family life center, but this vision cannot happen until the church reaches another level of growth and financial strength. Current focus is on being ministry

driven, not on being building driven. Facilities for Sunday school and Wednesday Bible clubs are becoming inadequate as the church grows.

Volunteers are highly committed and encouragement is given for people to become involved. There are many with management skills and leadership qualities who are engaged in the life of the church. Service in the church requires sensitivity to support the many generations that compose the fellowship.

The weaknesses of the church (and the community) relate to the busy schedules and lifestyles that people try to maintain.⁴⁵ There is a high level of competition for children's programs and youth programs. Sporting activities and a host of other clubs and educational opportunities are scheduled on weekday afternoons, evenings, and Sundays. The average daily commute of workers is thirty miles.⁴⁶ Time usage is deeply affected by the limited availability, high activity level, and conflicting commitments of persons in the community and church.

⁴⁵ This conclusion was reached from interviews with people in the church and community. A community forum initiated by the Grand Blanc Character Council brought forth this concern as raised by parents, teachers, educational leaders, clergy, a community newspaper columnist, and various human service providers.

⁴⁶ Grand Blanc Chamber of Commerce statistics, 2005.

The diversity of generations is sometimes a cause of conflict, especially with respect to worship and music preference. Combined worship times are scheduled quarterly and during holidays to promote unity, as are Sunday evening Friendship First meetings, and a common Sunday school time.

For the most part, church members are happy and comfortable with one another. Recent envisioning workshops revealed a deeper desire in the church for spiritual growth and evangelism. People enjoy one another, but they are looking for direction and encouragement to grow together and reach people for Christ. The community of Grand Blanc is growing and steps are needed for the church to experience its God-ordained potential. If those visiting the church were better assimilated into the close fellowship that exists, then the church would grow and gain great evangelistic momentum. A recent newcomer observed that the church had a passive style of growth, that is, growing from the inside to reach those outside. By refocusing evangelism to reach those outside the church, a healthier balance may be achieved while gaining disciples for Jesus Christ. Through implementation of a discipleship triad ministry, the church can build on existing fellowship strengths. The church's evangelistic heart will be renewed if seekers

and new Christians are included in discipleship.

Project Director Profile

The project director, Scott T. Arnold, is the senior pastor of First Baptist Church of Grand Blanc. He is a 1983 graduate of Northern Baptist Theological Seminary in Lombard, Illinois. Scott has been serving the Lord in full-time Christian ministry for twenty-one years. He and his wife of twenty-two years, Marilyn Penacerrada Arnold, have three sons. Scott is committed to preaching the gospel, bringing people to salvation in Jesus Christ, being a pastor, making disciples in small groups, and facilitating the use of spiritual gifts in the church. In addition, he currently serves as chairman of the Grand Blanc Character Council. He enjoys writing music, playing guitar, and coaching basketball. His college background includes seminary training in Urban Pastoral Ministry from S.C.U.P.E. (Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education) and a bachelor degree in Urban Planning from Michigan State University.

On a personal note, Scott and his son Tom Arnold both have battled cancer in recent years. They have overcome this disease by God's grace, the help of good medical

support, and the support of people's prayers. God has taught them to rely upon His care through this experience.

Project Participants' Profiles

Each participant had a personal profile developed by the project director. From the first month of the project until its conclusion, the participant profiles were updated and reviewed monthly. They became a progressive record of how people responded to the ministry experience. Consideration was given to the uniqueness of each person and how his experience and character qualities were part of what brought positive edification or unique challenges.

The project director developed insights and understandings about each person and used journal entries to facilitate prayer and coaching for each individual and his respective triad discipleship group. The following participant profiles do not indicate people's names in order to preserve anonymity. Profiles give an indication of age, involvement in the church, levels of triad attendance, group participation, and personal growth transformation. The extent of participation in the pretest and post-test inventory is indicated along with their stage of discipleship before and after these tests. Participant involvement

in the General Evaluation Survey is indicated. Participant involvement in the PLACE workshop is also indicated. Finally, participant involvement in giving ongoing personal triad experience reports to the ministry project director is indicated. The following list of participants gives a brief biography and summarizes their specific involvement and progress:

Person 1: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; she is in her mid 30s. She was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. She rated very high (5) in personal growth transformation. She participated in the ECGI pretest (III), the ECGI post-test (IV), the General Evaluation Survey, and the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, she gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 2: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; she is in her mid 40s. She was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. She rated very high (5) in personal growth transformation. She participated in the ECGI pretest (IV), the ECGI post-test (IV), the General Evaluation Survey, and learned to lead the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, she gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 3: This person is an active participant in the church; she is in her early 80s. She was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. She rated high (5) in personal growth transformation. She participated in the ECGI pretest (III), the ECGI post-test (III), the General Evaluation Survey, and the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, she gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 4: This person was an active participant and leader in the church; she is in her early 30s, but has re-located due to employment changes. She was high (4) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. She rated very high (5) in personal growth transformation. She participated in the ECGI pretest (III) and the ECGI post-test (III). She did not participate in the PLACE workshop. She did participate in the General Evaluation Survey. She gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 5: This person is an active participant and leader in a nearby church; she is in her mid 30s. She was high (4) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. She rated moderate (3) in personal growth transformation. She participated in the ECGI pretest (III) and the ECGI post-test (III). She did not

participate in the PLACE ministry workshop. She did participate in the General Evaluation Survey. She gave few ongoing progress reports.

Person 6: This person is an active participant in the church; she is in her mid 30s. She was low (2) in triad group attendance and moderate (3) in group participation. She rated moderate (3) in personal growth transformation. She did participate in the ECGI pretest (III) and the ECGI post-test (IV). She did not participate in the General Evaluation Survey or the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, she gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 7: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; he is in his late 40s. He was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. He rated high (4) in personal growth transformation. He participated in the ECGI pre-test (IV), the ECGI post-test (V), the General Evaluation Survey, and the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, he gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 8: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; he is in his late 40s. He was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. He rated high (4) in personal growth

transformation. He participated in the ECGI pre-test (IV), the ECGI post-test (IV), the General Evaluation Survey, the PLACE ministry workshop, and gave ongoing progress reports.

Person 9: This person is an emerging leader and active participant in the church; he is in his early 40s. He was very high (5) in triad group attendance and very high (5) in group participation. He rated very high (5) in personal growth transformation. He participated in the ECGI pretest (II), the ECGI post-test (III), and the General Evaluation Survey. He did not participate in the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, he gave ongoing reports of progress.

Person 10: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; he is in his mid 40s. He was moderate (3) in triad group attendance and high (4) in group participation. He rated moderate (3) in personal growth transformation. He did not participate in the ECGI pretest, the ECGI post-test, the General Evaluation Survey, or the PLACE ministry workshop. In addition, he did give verbal ongoing reports.

Person 11: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; he is in his mid 40s. He was moderate (3) in triad group attendance and high (4) in

group participation. He rated moderate (3) in personal growth transformation. He did not participate in the ECGI pre-test, the ECGI post-test, the General Evaluation Survey, or the PLACE ministry workshop. He did not give ongoing reports of progress.

Person 12: This person is an active leader and participant in the church; he is in his early 40s. He was low (2) in triad group attendance and moderate (3) in group participation (3). He rated low (2) in personal growth transformation. He did not participate in the ECGI pre-test, the ECGI post-test, the General Evaluation Survey, or the *PLACE* ministry workshop. He did not give ongoing reports of progress.

The success of the participants was contingent upon their level of involvement in the triads. Participants who did not give ongoing reports tended to have less success.

Survey of the Project Report (Overview)

The following chapter of this project report is entitled "The Substance of the Project." It will focus on how the major ministry project on triad discipleship was prepared, activated, implemented, completed, and evaluated.

In preparation for this ministry project, the coor-

dinator studied, observed, and prayed in order to ascertain initial direction. The need for discipleship, identified through ministry experience and statistical research of churches, was supported by this church's boards and committees.

Next, the report documents and explains the activation and implementation of this ministry. Training of leaders and orientation of participants is reviewed. The "Equipping Spiritual Growth Inventory" is evaluated in more detail. The means of starting triads is presented, along with the agenda of the first meeting and covenant for the triads. The strategy for encouraging and maintaining triad groups is presented and analyzed.

The triad discipleship ministry is evaluated starting with goal clarification and expectations and continuing with an evaluation of the project tools and methods that were used. The response of informal and formal evaluation from the participants is presented, interpreted, and summarized.

The last part of the report's substance covers the need for new curriculum for further development of triad discipleship groups. New curriculum is also discussed as it has been prepared to meet the needs of future triad disci-

pleship groups. Slightly different formats and strategies have been utilized in the modified curriculum designs. Triads that meet for short and long-term reasons are presented as parallel options. Following this, a conclusion is prepared from the project's evaluation tools and analysis. Insights are presented from what was learned through this ministry project in triad discipleship group ministry. Vision and ideas for the future are shared.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SUBSTANCE OF THE PROJECT

This major ministry project involved preliminary research, prayer, and planning for two years (2002-2003). The need and idea of focusing on discipleship through triad discipleship groups became the subject of this project. The overall goal of the project was to inaugurate a movement of ministry in which discipleship in small cell groups (of three or four people) would nurture spiritual growth. These participants would then be equipped to start additional small discipleship groups. The concern was that new believers, new members, seekers, and existing church members would grow in faith and friendships. The growth of the church was enhanced and strengthened through this ministry of discipleship. These ministries have helped

people make decisions of faith in Christ, mature in Christ, and bear fruit in service to Christ. Disciple making not only benefits the triad group ministry, disciple making allows for the formation of new triads.

Preparation

Preparation for implementing the triad discipleship group ministry involved the organization and careful consideration of the following steps. First, the ministry project idea was conceived and put into a form that could be presented to church leaders and committees. This ministry project of triad discipleship and the book *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden was approved by the board of deacons. The triad discipleship ministry was promoted through personal invitation, table displays, sermons, published announcements, computer projected announcements before worship, and verbal announcements in Sunday school and worship. Dates for starting the triads were set for September and October of 2004. Promotion began in August 2004. Recruitment was initiated through formal invitations and managed through the use of commitment cards. Informal recruitment occurred through personal invitations, conversations, and telephone calls. Commitments were made to

form discipleship triads from late August and continued through mid-October.

Support of Boards and Committees

The ministry project idea for triad discipleship groups was first presented to the evangelism committee of the church. This committee had once before formed a discipleship ministry based upon mentoring. That ministry had lasted two years, but participants did not repeat the experience by discipling others. A more effective approach was desired by the evangelism committee, especially since they had plans for several evangelistic events and activities. The evangelism committee saw discipleship as a vital part of helping the church to grow and multiply its ministries (fulfilling the Great Commission). Curriculum resources were gathered for evaluation and eventual selection.

Once the evangelism committee made their decision to support this and decided upon the primary curriculum, the ministry proposal was brought to the board of deacons for discussion. The primary ministry goals and expectations were clarified. Approval from the board of deacons came a month after the initial presentation, allowing the deacons

to read over the proposal, look over the curriculum, and ask questions. The cost of this ministry was covered by the evangelism committee's budget. Upon approval of the ministry and its anticipated expense, implementation of the triad discipleship ministry project was begun. The duration of the ministry project was set at one year with the anticipation that it would continue beyond one year.

Gathering Resource Materials

The research of the ministry project director and the evangelism committee members were involved in gathering discipleship ministry resources. The focus was upon finding a curriculum that would be suitable for a triad (small cell group) discipleship ministry. The following factors were considered for curriculum selection: biblical content, organization, suitability for small group interaction, comprehensiveness, ease of use, theology, philosophy, visual layout, cost, and the ability of curriculum to be repeated for use by participants in making new triads.

Selection and Approval of Book

From the criteria of selection mentioned above, the book *Discipleship Essentials* by Greg Ogden was chosen. A companion book by the same author *Transforming Disciple-*

ship helped to provide a philosophical and practical guide for implementing the ministry of triad discipleship groups. Another supportive book that gave statistical evidence of the need for small groups in church discipleship was George Barna's *Growing True Disciples*. The *Discipleship Essentials* book was selected by the evangelism committee and approved by the deacon board.

Purchase and Planned Distribution of Book

The book *Discipleship Essentials* was purchased through Christian Book Distributors. Their online ordering service proved helpful, efficient, and reasonable. The cost of the books was fifteen dollars per book after shipping. The books were sold to people for ten dollars which allowed for a sense of ownership and commitment by participants. Books were on display in the church lobby for review. A sign-up form was placed alongside the display.

Promotion

Promotion of the triad discipleship ministry involved various means of communicating the vision. The need for discipleship and spiritual support was underscored. People were introduced to the opportunity of being part of a triad discipleship group. A display in the lobby provided a

visual presentation of the curriculum. Sermons helped present the biblical foundation for discipleship and small group spiritual support. Announcements in Sunday school and worship helped to provide information and promote interest. Website development offered a venue for people to read more about the triad ministry's development online, especially in connection with related discipleship ministry issues. Commitment cards helped people indicate their interest to participate and helped the project coordinator match people.

Display

The display was placed on a table in the lobby. The display included the title, the overall vision goal of the triad discipleship group ministry, a reinforcement of the church's mission statement, a review of the steps needed to be taken to be part of a triad, a sign-up form, several copies of *Discipleship Essentials*, the time frame of commitment, contact information, commitment cards, and appropriate graphics.

The graphics involved a sailing theme in which an ocean was portrayed with two ports; there was a port of origin on the left and a port with a lighthouse as the

destination on the right. Cutout sailboats in an envelope were placed on the port of origin and people were encouraged to form a triad so that they could write their names on the boat and start their journey of faith together. When groups formed, their names were signed on a sailboat and placed on the sea in the direction facing their port of destination. As participants progressed in their journey, they would move their sailboat closer to their destination.

Sermons

Sermons on discipleship were preached during the time of promotion. These continued into the first month of the triad discipleship ministry. Two weeks before announcements were made about this ministry, a sermon on discipleship introduced the vision and need for this ministry. This sermon focused also on the essence of the Great Commission. The title was "Kingdom Care: Discipleship." The primary text was John 15.1-8, in which Jesus clarified His command to the disciples: "to love one another." This was reinforced with the Great Commission text of Matthew 28.19-20.

Two weeks later, a sermon series "Seeking to Know God" was started. This series highlighted the need for people

to grow in relationship to God and support one another in life's faith journey. Conducted in August and September, this series featured the following messages and scriptures: "Knowing God's Character and Love" (1 John 4.7-12); "Knowing God's Counsel and Presence" (Ps 16); "Knowing God's Discipline and Provision" (Deut 8.1-10); "Knowing God's Grace and Peace" (Rev 1.1-8); "Knowing God's Faithfulness and Wonders" (Ps 89.1-37); and "Knowing God's Purpose and Power" (Eph 1.3-14).

Following this sermon series, the church held a week long evangelistic event featuring the Power Team in late September 2004. This was the second time the church had held this event. From the experience of 2003, the church sought to expand its outreach into the community once more. During the 2004 events, feats of strength were performed at seven schools during the day and in the church at night. Invitations to receive Christ were given each night and at the two Sunday services also. After the week of the Power Team, a new series of sermons were preached with the intent of providing the basics of the Christian faith for those who had come to the church from this event. These sermons reinforced a biblical foundation for church relationships and helped to generate interest in triad discipleship

groups. The overall theme was "Growing in Relationship to God." The individual sermon titles and scriptures were "Growing in God's Love" (1 John 2.1-6); "Growing in God's Grace" (Eph 3.17-21); "Growing in God's Truth" (Rom 1.16-25); and "Growing in God's Joy" (Heb 12.1-3).

Announcements

There were several formats for announcing the triad discipleship group ministry. The first format for verbal announcements was in Sunday school. The project director was invited to come to each adult class to share information, answer questions, and provide commitment cards. The second format was that of worship service announcements involving a verbal announcement from the pulpit, written announcements in the bulletin, and computer-generated visual announcements on the projection screen. Written announcements were printed in the church newsletter; detailed information was published in each of three consecutive monthly issues.

Website Development

The website that was developed for this ministry project has the address: www.comefollowjesus.com. The project director is the developer and manager of this site.

The site has included online curriculum, insights, sermons, links, resources, and tools for discipleship ministry. The purpose of this site was twofold: to assist the ministry of discipleship at First Baptist Church and to assist the ministry of discipleship for other Christians and churches.

Commitment Cards

Commitment cards were three by five inch blank yellow index cards with a printed message and questions. Open lines gave room for name, address, phone, email, and age group. Several boxes were placed below this that could be checked according to levels of interest and commitment. These were stapled to a sheet that explained the triad discipleship ministry in detail. They were handed out in Sunday school, given out during worship for one month, and made available at the display in the lobby.

Recruitment

People signed a commitment card or indicated an interest verbally to the project director who worked with them to verify and establish commitment. The project director then started working with recruits as they began to form triads. People formed these groups themselves or asked for assistance from the project director. People

became interested as they became aware of others who would be involved. Therefore, it became essential that the formation of the triads was not random or simply imposed on participants. Ownership in the decision of whom they could trust in a triad group was very important.

Activation and Implementation of Triads

Triad leaders needed a sense of how and when to begin, and what the meetings would be like once they had solidified their group. To activate this ministry, verbal and written instructions were necessary. All triad leaders and participants were oriented to the philosophy of triads, the goals to be pursued, the book to be used, the ways to function as triad participants, and the expectations and procedures of evaluation.

Training of Triad Leaders and Participants

The project director trained the triad leaders directly, one-on-one. During this training, the curriculum was reviewed with each triad leader, and the two triad participants completing their group were affirmed or changed accordingly. The goals of the triad groups were reviewed at this time, and the leaders were asked to give monthly verbal or written reports to the project director.

The project director met with each triad at their first meeting. The triad leader presented both the overall goal and the specific goals of the triad discipleship group ministry. The project director then affirmed the group, handed out the Equipping Christian Growth Inventory (ECGI) as a pretest, gave instructions, and answered questions.

At the first meeting each triad read the covenant for the triad group. Following discussion each group agreed to abide by the covenant. This helped to verify continuance and strengthen consistency. The signed covenant was then given to the project director. (See appendix 5.)

Administration of Pretest: "E.C.G.I."

The "Equipping Christian Growth Inventory" was used for measuring the spiritual growth of those who participated in the triad discipleship experience. (See appendix 1.) The test had one hundred questions that were to be answered true or false. The questions covered many aspects of Christian maturity including beliefs, behavior, attitudes, theology, disciplines, service, and growth. The ECGI is introduced by the author Bob Dukes:

The test focuses on knowledge and skills gained concerning God and His Kingdom, and measures the roles and responsibilities assumed in God's Kingdom.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Bob Dukes, *Equipping Christian Growth Inventory*, test

This inventory was designed to measure people's development in relationship to a biblical philosophy of ministry referred to as "Jesus' Progressive Model."⁴⁸ There are five phases outlined, described, and developed in this model. The inventory was designed to help people discover what phase of discipleship they have grown to and what phase they are moving toward.

As a means to determine the level people started with and concluded at in the triad discipleship ministry, the five phases of spiritual maturity from Bob Dukes were used:

Phase One: *Establishing Faith*. John the Baptist and Jesus called people to change their minds about their life of sin and begin a new life through faith in God. Many were converted and turned from their selfish, sinful lives to trust God and the promised Messiah.

Phase Two: *Laying Foundations*. "Jesus called a group of disciples to be with Him and helped them understand His supernatural and heavenly origin evidenced by His miracles. He taught them that He was the Messiah and showed them His deity and power - that of the glorious Son of God. They learned that there was continued acceptance and forgiveness through Him. They shared their new faith with others and learned to follow Him obediently. They began to relate to each other as fellow believers.

Phase Three: *Equipping for Ministry*. Jesus called some of His disciples to be "fishers of men." They com-

booklet (Fayetteville, GA: Worldwide Discipleship Association, 1998).

⁴⁸ Bob Dukes, *A Model for Strategic Disciple Building* (Fayetteville GA: Worldwide Discipleship Association, 1997), 3.

mitted themselves to minister with Him publicly and were involved in His evangelism. Jesus showed them His love for the sinner and demonstrated His power to forgive sin and give new life. He established His power over physical evil and His authority to judge all men and to justify the believer at the resurrection. He taught them about the differences between the two spiritual kingdoms, preparing them for the realities of spiritual warfare.

Phase Four: *Developing New Leaders*. Jesus chose the Twelve as leaders. He organized His kingdom around this new group, instructing them and giving them authority. His teaching focused on His new kingdom: its blessings and the new law of inner righteousness. He contrasted the kingdom of heaven with Satan's and used parables to teach the Twelve how God's kingdom would grow. Jesus showed His disciples that He was not offering merely a better life in this world, but eternal life - everlasting life of the highest quality. At one point He precipitated a faith-crisis, causing them to trust God for the eternal things of life above the temporal. Jesus challenged the status quo, revealing Himself again as the Lord from Heaven. He taught divine authority over human authority and proclaimed assurance of eternal life and future glory.

Phase Five: *Deploying Mature Leaders*. As His fame and ministry grew, Jesus appointed seventy other leaders to assist Him. The original Twelve assumed increased responsibility and ownership of the mission. They learned to trust Him to work in other members of the body and to cope with outside opposition. He taught them about setting correct priorities and warned them about evils that would harm the Christian life. As the Twelve assumed new responsibilities, they became self-reliant. They discovered through the crucifixion and resurrection that human flesh was inadequate for the Christian life. They learned of God's sovereignty and the all-sufficiency of Christ in and through His Holy Spirit . . . They learned that His Kingdom was not confined to Israel, but extended world-wide. He commissioned them to make disciples of all nations. They were to transfer the same training they had received to others, urging these new disciples to obediently follow Him.⁴⁹

⁴⁹

Bob Dukes, *Strategic Disciple Building*, 3-4.

From this initial pretest, participants became aware of their current discipleship phase and one or the other phases of discipleship. Upon review, these pretests were affirmed, compared, and discussed in the triads and with the project director.

Encouraging and Maintaining Triad Groups

Throughout the months of the triad group meetings, the project director encouraged triad leaders and participants. Regular conversations, monthly reports, and ongoing shepherding of these groups were recorded and noted. Two of the groups were more open to reporting and met regularly, while two of groups were more guarded in reporting and met less regularly. The project director learned about each group's uniqueness, strengths, and weaknesses. Increased understanding helped the project director identify concerns in order to encourage and challenge participants accordingly.

Reporting of Triad Group Dynamics

Included here is a summary of each triad group as observed and recorded by the project director:

Group 1: This group had a very good experience.

Participants valued commitment and attendance. They grew spiritually from the triad experience, formed strong friendships, and finished the book. They were committed to making new triad groups in the future. This group had a mixture of people of different ages who interacted well.

Group 2: This group had a good experience overall. Two of the three participants were highly committed and were faithful in attendance. This group started well and grew spiritually from the experience, yet one of the three dropped out of the group. The other two continued and finished the book. This group's leader had several difficult issues that required counseling.

Group 3: This group had a very good experience. Participants were highly committed and attendance was very good. Meeting bi-weekly, the participants occasionally struggled with keeping regular times and having enough time when they did meet. They grew spiritually, formed strong friendships, used several books, and were committed to making new triad groups in the future. One triad member started as a seeker yet dedicated his life to Jesus Christ and was baptized. Subsequently, he has grown through the support of this triad and the church.

Group 4: This triad had a good, yet limited, experience

as a group. For the first three months, they met regularly. When one of the triad members stopped coming, the other two met only twice in the next three months. Participants said that their sharing, study, and prayer was meaningful as they met, but that at a certain point they lost interest. Triad members were leaders in the church of the same age, and their group did not have a seeker. The group's interaction during meetings was lively at first, but diminished and became less interesting to the members after several months. The project director concluded that the members of this group were all strong leaders who needed a mentoring role to sustain interest and enthusiasm. If a member of the group were a new believer, or a seeker, the group members could have sustained interest and zeal.

Coaching of Triad Leaders and Participants

Throughout the project the director met with the leaders and participants individually to determine how they were doing. He provided assistance and encouragement. Coaching was available also from the chairman of the evangelism committee and one of the triad group leaders. Each triad leader was encouraged to do a basic level of coaching in their triad. Following the example of their leader,

triad members also began to encourage one another. (With more triad groups meeting in the future, an increase of trained coaches and leaders will be needed.) Coaching for individual triad participants incorporated the insights and findings of the PLACE ministry. During the project the director attended a denominational minister's training conference on coaching sponsored by the North Area of American Baptist Churches in Michigan. This workshop proved to be instructive and insightful as well as applicable to coaching triad leaders and participants.

Answering Questions or Concerns of Triads

Throughout the triad ministry project the director responded to questions and concerns from triad leaders and participants. Availability and alertness were required by the director to provide answers and offer assistance. Since this was a new ministry, participants often appreciated communication and open dialogue with the ministry project director about progress or concerns.

Evaluation of the Triad Experience

The evaluation of triad groups was narrowed to the four groups that were actively engaged in the project. In four control groups there were twelve participants in all.

Evaluation involved the project director clarifying the goals and expectations, the development of evaluation tools and methods, and the procedures of meeting with triad participants. The results of the surveys and the post-test (ECGI) were received and processed by the discipleship ministry project coordinator.

Clarifying Goals and Expectations of Evaluation

Questions in the "Triad Ministry Evaluation Form" arose from the primary goals of the project. While the plan was for every participant to respond to the survey, two of the twelve did not respond. One of the four groups was mostly unresponsive to survey and reporting responsibilities. The goal of the evaluation was for this ministry to learn from the experience in order to improve and expand discipleship in the future. Furthermore, the insights this church learned could be then be shared with, and compared to, the discipleship ministries of other churches. In-depth analysis helped to refine the discipleship ministry.

Developing Evaluation Tools and Methods

The three primary evaluation tools were the "ECGI," the "Triad Ministry Evaluation Form," and the "Triad Group and Participant Profiles." (These profiles came from formal

group reports and informal journals kept by the project director.) Of these tools the most valuable information for analysis came from the "Triad Ministry Evaluation Form." (See appendix 2.)

Meeting with Triad Groups: Informal Evaluation

The triad groups were to meet with the project director four times; three of the four groups accomplished this. The one triad group that dissolved after seven months (and did not complete their journey through the curriculum) found it difficult to meet with the project director more than once because of scheduling. After being evasive in scheduling a formal feedback/evaluation meeting, personal interviews of these triad participants were conducted.

Receiving and Processing Surveys

Formal Evaluation Paper

The survey at the end of the triad experience (the Triad Ministry Evaluation Form) allowed for assessment using a Likert Scale, combined with open questions for comment and observation. Seven questions were formulated (with a scale of 1 - 5 given for a response):

One: How would you rate this experience for Christian support? (This related to the two goals of friendship

and relationship building.)

Two: How well did your group interact with one another?

(This related to the goal of attendance/participation.)

Three: Has this been an experience that has helped you

grow in your faith? (This related to the goal of

spiritual development in discipleship.)

Four: Do you find the guidebook, "Discipleship Essen-

tials," to be helpful? Strengths or weaknesses of the

book could then be identified. (This related to the

goal of spiritual growth as it pertained to biblical

and theological understanding.)

Five: Would you recommend this experience to others?

(This related to the goal of replicating this exper-

ience for future discipleship.)

Six: How likely would you be toward starting a new

discipleship triad after this experience? (This

related to the goal of multiplying discipleship.)

Seven: Do you have a better understanding of disciple-

ship as a result of this? (This related to the goals of

personal understanding of discipleship and discipleship

becoming a stronger church ministry.)

Please note the Triad Ministry Evaluation Form results

on the following page (table 9).

TABLE 9				
TRIAD MINISTRY EVALUATION FORM RESULTS				
Question	Very High	High	Moderate	Low
1. How would you rate this experience for Christian support?	50%	50%		
2. How well did your group interact with one another?	80%	10%	10%	
3. Has this been an experience that has helped you grow in your faith?	50%	50%		
4. Do you find the guidebook, <i>Discipleship Essentials</i> , to be helpful?	30%	50%	20%	
5. Would you recommend this experience to others?	60%	40%		
6. How likely would you be toward starting a new Discipleship Triad after this experience?	30%	40%	30%	
7. Do you have a better understanding of discipleship as a result of this?	60%	20%	20%	

Post-Test (E.C.G.I.)

After triads met for six months, the project director administered the "Equipping Christian Growth Inventory" to

participants. The project director received and evaluated these inventories, then he met with the triads to discuss the phases of discipleship and resulting growth. These results were recorded on their personal profiles.

As indicated before, the use of the ECGI was the key objective indicator for evaluating the growth of participants. The success of having people participate in this was limited, and the response to completing the survey was slow. Therefore, while the findings of this objective tool were helpful for analysis, improved strategies are needed to promote and incorporate this or any other assessment tool in the future.

For those who did take the ECGI, there arose an awareness of faith developmental phases and an affirmation for desired continued growth. Of the twelve who started, seven completed the ECGI (note table 10).

TABLE 10				
EQUIPPING SPIRITUAL GROWTH INVENTORY RESULTS				
Participant # and Group #	Pretest Result Phase	Post- test Phase	Leaning Toward Phase #	Rate the E.C.G.I. 1-5 (high)
#1, Group 1	III	IV	IV	4
#2, Group 1	IV	IV	V	4
#3, Group 1	III	III	IV	3

TABLE 10				
#4, Group 2	III	III	IV	3
#5, Group 2	III	III	IV	3
#6, Group 2	III	IV	IV	4
#7, Group 3	IV	V	V	4
#8, Group 3	IV	IV	V	4
#9, Group 3	II	III	IV	4

Developing a Triad Discipleship Ministry Summary

The triad discipleship group ministry was effective in accomplishing the first part of the overall vision goal of the project, that is, to build intimate spiritual support and growth through forming discipleship groups of three people that will multiply in time. The building of this ministry and the supportive elements needed for the triad project were accomplished on a small scale. The multiplication part of the vision will come following this ministry project's re-invention in the next year. The concern about there not being many initial groups was eclipsed by the quality of experience that most groups enjoyed. The primary positive elements of this triad experience were in group support and interaction. Most participants would recommend this experience to others. Though not all would feel comfortable leading or starting a new group, eleven out of twelve indicated an interest in being part of a new group in the future.

In assessing the surveys and interviews, there were many who felt the topics and Bible study were very good. The use of the ECGI for assessment had mixed response. The development of the personal and group pro-files was a good idea; this tool could be used even more in coaching triad participants. Participants were skeptical about how spiritual growth could be quantified in an objective test. The administration of the test suffered from its being given to the participants to fill out at home. Subsequent use of tests will benefit from administration under a controlled environment.

Table eleven summarizes the attainment of triad ministry goals. The project director prepared this summary through observations, notes, discussion with participants, and review of the project's results.

TABLE 11				
SUMMARY OF TRIAD MINISTRY GOAL ATTAINMENT				
Goal	Was it Attained?	How well? 1-5	What went well?	What could be improved?
1. Develop 4-5 groups that meet 9-12 mo.	Yes	Well 4	Four groups were started, three thrived	Establish a stronger vision and improve promotion

2.High level participation	Yes	Well 4	Good interaction	Develop various types of groups
3.Diversity of Triad group members	Yes	Well 3	In two groups this worked well	In two other groups more diversity may have helped
4.Growth in faith and friendships	Yes	Very well 5	Spiritual and relational support	Provide additional coaching
5.Seekers develop faith	Yes	Very well 4	Faith development Nurtured	Needed more seekers and new believers
6.Triad participants start new triad groups	Partly	Well 3	People are ready, trained.	Results and vision need to be shared. Promote anew.
7.Discipleship gained primary role in church	Partly	Not well 2-3	Discipleship moved forward only a little	Need for more triad groups
8.Identify growth steps	Yes	Well 4	Awareness of discipleship increased	Explain inventory Better
9.Develop new curriculum	Yes	Well 5	Field tested Defined needs Refined use	More choices of time format needed

The following conclusions summarize the effectiveness of the proposed ministry goals that were accomplished by this project (from table 11). Eight of nine ministry goals were attained. Two of these were accomplished very well: Triad participants will grow in faith and friendships and seekers will develop a faith in Christ. Six of the pro-

posed ministry goals were accomplished well, to develop four to five triad groups that meet nine to twelve months, to maintain a high level of participation, to promote the diversity of triad participants, to inspire and train triad participants to start new triad groups, to identify growth steps for participants, and to develop new curriculum for future triad groups. One proposed ministry goal was not accomplished very well, namely, discipleship will gain a primary role in the church. With the development of new triad groups, the indication is that this will be accomplished over a period of time longer than one year.

Developing New Curriculums for Triads

One of the goals of this ministry project was to develop new curriculum choices for triad discipleship groups. Starting with an established curriculum allowed for a benchmark of experience to be set that would be helpful for evaluation. After using *Discipleship Essentials*, feedback revealed that this book was good, but new curriculum choices may be needed to offer topics and approaches appropriate to different groups. The project director has developed several new curriculum choices through the evaluation and suggestions of the participants

who used the *Discipleship Essentials* book.

The purpose of this section is to summarize the new curriculum choices developed by the project director. The philosophy, approach, structure, and content of the curriculum are briefly reviewed. The curriculum itself is located in several appendices of this ministry report.

Short-term Triad Curriculum

One of the biggest adjustments in designing new curriculum was for the provision of short-term triad groups. These short-term triad groups allow for a trial experience. They may be brief thematic studies, and prayer focus studies. People have expressed a need for such focused studies in which there is quality sharing without a long-term weekly commitment. These short-term triads might meet several times a year, and may be composed of the same group of three or be varied in composition. The following two types of short-term triad groups were considered in new curriculum development: Triad Bridge Curriculum and Triplet Prayer Curriculum.

Triad Bridge Curriculum

A triad bridge curriculum is a short (four to six week) discipleship study. This curriculum can be used by three

or four people as a way to have a brief thematic study. The experience of being part of a short-term triad group may encourage participants to make a long-term commitment as a triad discipleship group.

The goal of such short-term groups does not have to be the development of long-term triad groups. Indeed, some people may want a shorter commitment in between long-term triad group experiences. The advantage of having such groups is that they provide openness and flexibility. The disadvantage is that they do not allow for a depth of trust, consistent support, and study. Yet for many people who consider a long-term triad too long of a commitment, this may help give them a taste of the triad experience. Through the short-term experience, they may be encouraged to make a commitment to a long-term triad discipleship group.

Triplet Prayer Curriculum

A triplet prayer group is a triad group that meets primarily for prayer and Scripture reading. The time of Bible study in these meetings will prepare participants for their time of meaningful prayer. While these groups could continue to meet long-term, the initial design of this

curriculum is short-term. These groups could become long-term triad discipleship groups, or they could meet several times a year for focused prayer and biblical study with the same small group of three or four people. This approach offers mature believers the opportunity for sharing and prayerful communion with God and one another. Prayer triplets help to support faith, personal sharing, healing, direction, and openness to the empowerment of God's Holy Spirit.

The project director has prepared two triad (triplet) prayer group curriculum studies. The first is "Healing, Peace, and Joy." Focus is placed upon people seeking God's healing, guiding, and comforting presence when praying. Participants are encouraged to consider the importance of listening to God as a way to discover God's abiding love, peace, and joyful presence. During the four meetings, triad members share prayer (with the support of Scripture) for one another, trusting Jesus to minister to their souls. This study will be encouraging for those grieving, going through illness, or struggling with pain and disappointment in life. The second triplet prayer group curriculum is "Prayer Evangelism." Through this four-week prayer/study, participants will discover how prayer is the foundation for

fulfilling the Great Commission. Starting with biblical study pertinent to evangelism, and leading into a time of prayer, a scriptural foundation is developed for how to pray for people to come to know the Lord. Stories and prepared reflections add life to this topic and help encourage discussion. At the conclusion of this focused study of how prayer relates to evangelism, a time of prayer will focus on those who need God's salvation in Jesus Christ.

Long-term Triad Curriculum

The project director has developed a new long-term triad discipleship curriculum. The design of this curriculum is multi-layered, with a variety of activities to sustain interest. The content will cover a spectrum of key biblical and theological fundamentals. The questions employed within the curriculum will promote analytical thinking, sharing of experiences, and creative application. This triad discipleship curriculum will give a foundation for discipleship over a course of five to ten months. The pace of each triad discipleship group is dependent upon how regularly they meet and how quickly they decide to proceed. People can commence their group at any time as long as the

leader is trained and the project director has affirmed their group.

Weekly meetings are good for people who want high commitment, high support, and high spiritual growth. Biweekly meetings are good for people who have many commitments, but value a small group in which they can find support and growth. The key understanding here is that the ministry of triads should be considered as a movement, not just another program. Triad development is to be an on-going process that multiplies discipleship in the church. For qualitative spiritual growth and numeric growth in the church, it is essential that new people become part of a long-term discipleship group.

The name of the new triad discipleship group curriculum developed by the project director is "Faith, Friendship, and Fruitfulness." Each of these three sections (faith, friendship, and fruitfulness) is covered in seven meetings, for a total of twenty-one meetings. Meetings involve Bible study, a teaching on an important element of the Christian faith, discussion to promote friendship, and activities that promote fruitfulness in serving God. Some of the meetings and activities will be unconventional such as having a retreat, enjoying a picnic/cookout, and becoming

involved in a meaningful service project. This curriculum seeks to make the triad discipleship group experience well rounded, relationally sustaining, and life changing for those who participate. The need for updated curriculum will be ongoing. This will allow for continued improvement and the option of choosing from several different studies. New curriculum will be important for successive waves of triad group development. The issue of curriculum development is important; however, people's total commitment to Christ and faithfulness to God's Word is of utmost priority.

Chapter Three

CONCLUSION

What Was Attempted?

The ministry project attempted to accomplish the overall vision which was to "build intimate spiritual support and growth through forming discipleship groups of three people that will multiply in time." In the course of a year, specific triad discipleship ministry goals were attempted. The following were the goals (these were stated before in the project):

1. Four to five triad discipleship control groups will be established and maintained for a period of nine to twelve months. After this period of time the groups will be evaluated.

2. People will respond by meeting regularly, partic-

icipating in their triad, and providing feedback for evaluation.

3. The composition of each group will involve a diverse mix of people: existing members, new members, and seekers with variation in age and life experience. The goal of having diverse members experience spiritual unity will help in evaluating the effectiveness and potential of this ministry for Christian discipleship.

4. People will grow in their faith, in their love for God, and in their friendships with one another. This goal is in line with the vision of First Baptist Church: "Worshiping God, Loving One Another." Use of a spiritual assessment indicator will supplement the measurement of this goal.

5. The gospel will become a reality to seekers as they accept the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

6. People will be enabled, upon completion of this triad experience, to start new triad groups where they can share a meaningful ministry of mutual discipleship with others.

7. Discipleship will become a primary evangelistic ministry of the church.

8. People will be able to identify their stage of

discipleship and take steps to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

9. New curriculum for future discipleship triads will be developed for the church's ministry based on the evaluation of this experience.

What Was Accomplished?

The ministry project was accomplished within a period of a year and was narrowed to a field of twelve participants in four triad control groups. Formation of discipleship triads was limited after the starting date. This gave focus for the church to implement, evaluate, and refine this ministry on a small scale. While helpful and manageable, the small number of initial triad groups will in some way limit the number of new triads that will develop immediately following this project. Furthermore, insights are limited in accuracy with less statistical evidence.

The use of one specific book for the triads maintained uniformity of experience for comparison between individuals and groups. Feedback throughout the experience, along with coaching, provided for a time of interactive learning. Participants were generally committed and attendance was good overall; only one group stopped meeting after six

months. The Equipping Christian Growth Inventory (ECGI) was thought to be a useful tool with a numerically scored assessment, but it was not universally accepted or completed by all participants. Additional means for measuring spiritual maturity should be discovered and compared.

Staff support in the church changed during the time of the project. Consequently, the responsibilities of the project director increased to cover youth ministry and music leadership in the church. The result of this was less time for the project director to coach participants and encourage triad groups. These duties were still accomplished, but with less depth and overall effectiveness. Added to this, in the last four months of the project, the project director's son became ill with cancer and was treated in the hospital. To the credit of the triad groups and participants, those groups that had been active stayed active and committed during the time of the project director's increased responsibility.

The triad discipleship ministry was supported by a variety of ministry experiences, sermons, workshops, a weeklong evangelistic crusade with the Power Team, and coaching for participant development. A church website on discipleship was created also, giving support for triad

participants and offering a forum for resources and ideas to be shared beyond the church.

The following goals are now assessed in terms of what was accomplished specific to what was attempted in the triad discipleship ministry project:

Goal 1: Four to five triad discipleship control groups will be established and maintained for a period of nine to twelve months. After this period of time the groups will be evaluated.

Five triad discipleship groups were started. Of these five groups, four participated significantly and were considered viable for the project. Three were maintained for the duration of the program. Two of the groups dissolved in part after losing one of their members. One group dissolved after two months and the other group after six months.

Goal 2: People will respond by meeting regularly, participating in their triad, and giving feedback for evaluation.

For the first four months all groups met regularly and participated in their triad discipleship group. After four months one triad had a member lose interest; another triad had a member lose interest after six months. Two other two triads maintained high levels of interest and provided continual feedback to the project director. For groups

that maintained a high level of commitment and regularity in meeting, evaluation was more positive, consistent, and constructive. For the two groups that struggled with commitment and regularity, greater initiative was required to obtain evaluation.

Goal 3: The composition of each group will involve a diverse mix of people: existing members, new members, and seekers with variation in age and life experience. The goal of having diverse members experience spiritual unity will help in evaluating the effectiveness and potential of this program as a ministry of church discipleship.

The composition of triads was not as diverse as initially desired. Of the four groups, one was diverse in age range, another group was diverse in cultural background, and one group was diverse in faith development and membership status. From all the participants, there was only one seeker. There was difficulty in persuading seekers to make such a long-term commitment. The groups that had a diversity of age and faith experience tended to meet more regularly, and they responded more affirmatively to the triad ministry than the two groups in which people of the same age, or faith stage development, met. Group dynamics were better sustained with diversity.

Goal 4: People will grow in their faith, in their love for God, and in their friendships with one another. This goal is in line with the vision of First Baptist Church: "Worshiping God, and loving one another." Use of a spiri-

tual assessment indicator will supplement the measurement of this goal.

The idea of making this a goal that could be measured involved the use of a faith/discipleship growth inventory (the aforementioned ECGI) to monitor the development and effectiveness of triads. The difficulties of trying to measure faith objectively became apparent in several ways. First, faith/discipleship growth assessment involves subjective analysis that is dependent upon accurate and honest personal assessments. Second, assessment tools are often lacking in clarity and usability which in this case was a hindrance to the triad ministry participants. Third, faith developmental assessments often assume that those taking them have a clear understanding of theological and biblical terms.

With these limitations in view, a final evaluation tool was needed to allow for another form of analysis and comparison. Therefore, a simple questionnaire using the Likert Scale (a 1-5 scaled response) was employed to allow participants to rate their experiences. (The results of this triad evaluation form were presented earlier in table nine of this project report.) While objective measurements were difficult to obtain for spiritual growth and disciple-

ship; growth, attitudes, opinions, and observations were gathered and compared as objectively as possible.

Goal 5: The gospel will become a reality to seekers as they accept the gift of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

This goal was specifically realized as one individual, who started as a seeker in a triad discipleship group, came to a personal, life-changing relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. An essential goal of discipleship was accomplished. A disciple of Jesus Christ was made and strengthened in his early walk of faith by a small group of supportive believers. Triads formed in the future should include more seekers and new believers; this will allow for evangelism to be supported with discipleship.

Goal 6: People will be enabled, upon completion of this triad experience, to start new triad groups where they can share a meaningful ministry of mutual discipleship with others.

This goal has been partially realized through people who have been trained to lead a triad in the first round of participation. Further leadership training will be expanded along with new curriculum that will be used for successive triad multiplication and development. Of the twelve who participated in the triad experience, eight expressed interest in starting another triad, two moved to another area of the country, one was not interested in further

participation in a triad discipleship ministry, and one was a member of another church who wanted to learn how to apply this ministry to her own church.

Goal 7: Discipleship will become a primary evangelistic ministry of the church.

The evangelism committee and deacon board of the church sponsored this ministry project. There was agreement about the validity and merit of the triad approach to discipleship, but the overall level of interest did not initially pass far beyond the level of curiosity and awareness. After the conclusion of these first four triad groups; however, over five new triads were being formed. Three of these emerging triads wanted to use something other than *Discipleship Essentials*. The need for new curriculum options was clear.

Interest in triads has increased during the time that this ministry project report was written. Special interest has been generated through use of new long-term and short-term curriculums. Further triad involvement and lay leadership development is being promoted through the church's envisioning workshops. With interest being generated from the findings of this triad discipleship project and the enthusiasm generated from those who participated in the

triads, further ministries of triad discipleship are expected to expand.

Testimonies by participants have raised interest and will continue to be instrumental in further promotion. Those who completed the triad ministry experience look forward to starting new triads. As the purpose of triads has been clarified to more people in the church and new curriculums specific to the needs of the church have been developed from this experience, the triad ministry has started to gain momentum for achieving the mandate of the Great Commission.

Goal 8: People will be able to identify their stage of discipleship, and what steps will help them to grow as disciples of Jesus Christ.

The achievement of this goal was dependent upon the discipleship assessment tool being used and understood by the participants. For those who took the time and effort, this assessment tool helped them to understand where they were in spiritual maturity and what areas of growth would be worth pursuing. Unfortunately, only seven of the twelve triad participants completed, and benefited from, this tool. Evaluation interviews with the seven who used the Equipping Christian Growth Inventory revealed that it reinforced what they knew about themselves, allowed them to

discover new areas of potential, and helped them to understand their own level of discipleship maturity. The goal was to help disciples mature to become faithful and fruitful disciple makers. This assessment tool did help to highlight discipleship development, and it did give specific indicators of what developmental steps lead to fruitful maturity. This assessment tool was also designed to be used by coaches of triad participants. Triad participants could then have an advocate to help them pursue and fulfill their potential. Because there was not enough time for in-depth long-term personal coaching, this remains an area for future ministry exploration. The project director has enlisted two lay leaders and one new ministry staff member to be coaches to triad participants.

Goal 9: New curriculum for future discipleship triads will be developed for the church's ministry based on the evaluation of this experience.

The development of new curriculum was not an initial goal of this project. New curriculum became an apparent need as participants had mixed responses to the *Discipleship Essentials* curriculum by Greg Ogden. The strength of the curriculum used was that it was thorough and extensive, with good topics and readings. The weakness of the curriculum was that it was redundant in questioning, lacked

creative activities for participants, and was too lengthy. The development of the new curriculum by the project director incorporated the triad participants' evaluations as well as the needs expressed by those desiring to start new triads. Consideration was given to several ways that triads may start. For groups that want an initial trial experience, a short-term "triad bridge" curriculum was developed. The project director has developed a six to ten month curriculum for groups that are ready (in which commitment is strong) for a long-term triad experience. This new long-term curriculum is designed to hold interest, encourage accountability, and utilize engaging, faith-building activities. Future curriculum will be available for long-term triad groups as they will be identified and affirmed by the project director and deacon board.

Beyond what was immediately accomplished, people grew in their witness for Christ. One participant discovered that God had given him a new attitude in his place of work. His co-workers commented on his changes and asked him whether something had happened. He shared how his faith in Christ had given him a new way of living. Results like this are a witness of how a small discipleship group can nurture faith and spiritual transformation. Consequently,

triad participants have a desire to share their experience and apply their faith discoveries to life.

What Was Learned?

The ministry project of triad discipleship groups offered insight on the workings of small groups. Insight was also gained into ways that small groups can break down and become ineffective. There is seldom any middle ground when it comes to people gathering together in a small group. People either learn to relate well, or barriers to communication develop. If the needs of a participant are not being met, their commitment to the group may lessen. Groups may also break down if there is not a sense of mission or purpose. The triad ministry's success is contingent upon people's view of the ministry and the goals that are set. Likewise, expectations of what they are willing to invest in sharing and support will either expand or limit the level of participation.

Triads can experience a high level of spiritual growth as participants can overcome aspects of relational risk and trust building. Even for Jesus in His disciple-making there were a few disciples who were not prepared to go deeper in their commitment or face up to their own fears

and inadequacies. Nonetheless, as in the case of Peter, Jesus came back to restore him (John 21.17): "Peter, do you love me more than these?" Peter responded, "Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus then called him to discipleship that is worked out in nurturing other disciples: "Then feed my sheep." Peter responded in faith and honesty. He had a deeper commitment to the risen Lord who called him to disciple others.

Things that Worked

Triad discipleship groups offered a crucible for faith formation and growth. Interpersonal support was possible for those who were willing to be open and committed. Diversity within groups worked positively in those groups which had people who differed in spiritual maturity, age, and personality. Groups that had more similarities in these areas were often less dynamic, and in time some of those participants lost interest. The triad discipleship ministry was an experience that can be refined, replicated with changes, and built upon as a foundation for discipleship ministry. People have grown to understand and experience the ways Christ calls them to follow Him, to grow spiritually, and to make disciples.

Things that Could Be Done Differently

The triad ministry, or any high commitment small group ministry, is likely to encounter a few challenges. Busy schedules compete with assignments and meeting dates, and individuals may not always bond together easily. The formation of triad groups remains a challenging art, but one that potentially has great benefits. Care needs to be given to personalities and stages of spiritual maturity. Care needs to be given to strategic plans that will encourage triad formation and growth.

For promotion, the concept of this ministry could have been better explained. If promotion were more effective and persuasive, people would come to understand triad groups as supportive rather than another responsibility. The new curriculum promotes a more dynamic group-learning process, involving a mix of coordinated activities that support friendships while building faith.

Another challenge involved the completion of the assignments and readings. This required unwavering commitment by the triad participants. The curriculum resource, *Discipleship Essentials*, had limited effectiveness. The concern expressed was that participants should be given

more options for what they may use. Curriculum is a tool for a process; hence, a degree of freedom needs to be encouraged after groups have studied basic beliefs and theology. Curriculum choices, therefore, can include additional resources that will still follow a format conducive for discipleship within a small cell group. (New curriculum has been formulated; outlines and samples are included in the appendices of this ministry report; see appendices 3 and 4.)

When promoting the triads, the prevailing conceptual challenge was to help people to understand triads as assisting in a spiritual growth process shared among friends rather than just another program. Therefore, further clarification will help in future triad development and deployment. Instead of seeing themselves as participants in a program, people should envision themselves as partners in a pilgrimage.

In hindsight, this project would have benefited by more people promoting it in the congregation, specifically through greater ownership by key lay advocates. The ministry design of triads is good, but the level of commitment required for the long-term groups is high.

For leaders of triads, more advanced training would

have helped them to deal with difficulties and challenges. Follow-up with potential leaders could have been better, and subsequent training of leaders should have been done as a group, not with leaders individually. Furthermore, the need for coaching each triad should not rest solely upon the project director, but upon several well-trained coaches who would work in concert with the director and the triad group leaders. The use of the Equipping Christian Growth Inventory is worth considering if coaches are in place to help. Otherwise, assessment tools are pointless without a supportive coaching team in place.

The biggest obstacle to overcome when forming the triads was that people were hesitant to make long-term commitments. Providing several levels of entry into a triad group may prove to be helpful for raising interest and participation.

What More Can Be Done?

The following suggestions may help to promote the continuance and growth of this triad ministry. First, the development of new triad discipleship groups should be continual using those who have been trained during this project and from those who are willing, called by God, and

ready to be trained as leaders. Second, leaders and disciple makers should be trained more thoroughly in the vision, philosophy, and practical functioning of triad groups. Third, various types of triads would be formed with several curriculum options. (Utilize curriculum developed from this project.) Fourth, more personal tools for discipleship development will be offered, including a trained team of coaches. Fifth, the website would be improved by offering more online support, guidance, curriculum, testimonies, and links. Sixth, a training workshop could be hosted by the church and led by Greg Ogden (or another outside trainer) that would inspire and equip the development of triads and small groups. Seventh, small cell groups could expand to include up to four people (Quads). Eighth, triads whose specific focus is intercessory prayer (Triplets) could be developed. Ninth, some groups could be developed who would meet together for a short period of time in order to determine if they are interested in the triad small group experience (Bridges).

The possibilities for serious Christian discipleship are great if the church responds to God's call. Many discipleship and church growth programs are tried and found to be wanting in long-term effectiveness.

Developing small core groups for discipleship is not new. Jesus started an inner circle in His ministry. The time to recapture the vision of being "fishers of men" is upon the church once more. Will the Lord find His church faithful, strong in fellowship, and fruitful in service? In appearing before God, each believer must give account to the way they followed Jesus Christ in faith and obedience, and to the way they shared their faith and made disciples. May it be that God will bless and guide the church in its Great Commission so that the lost will be saved and those who accept Christ may be strong in the Lord. The words of the Apostle Paul still speak to the church today about fulfilling the ministry of discipleship:

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4.14-16)

