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Equipping and Catalyzing Disciple Makers at Front Range Christian Church

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Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

EQUIPPING AND CATALYZING DISCIPLE MAKERS AT
FRONT RANGE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Written by

JUSTIN LAUGHLIN

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:



Keith J. Matthews



Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: March 14, 2017

EQUIPPING AND CATALYZING DISCIPLE MAKERS AT
FRONT RANGE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

JUSTIN LAUGHLIN
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ABSTRACT

Equipping and Catalyzing Disciple Makers at Front Range Christian Church

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Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2016

The purpose of this doctoral project was to implement pilot discipleship groups at Front Range Christian Church (FRCC). Taking into account the mobility of both the congregation and the surrounding community, the project aimed at people development over a short period of time rather than the establishment of a new church program. Three pilot groups with varying composition, meeting logistics, and resource utilization were used for comparison in determining the most effective means of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers at FRCC.

Jesus' example with the first disciples was normative in determining the means and method of discipleship in the project. Through an examination of Scripture, four primary areas of development were extrapolated from Jesus' discipleship model: biblical worldview, integrated mission, intentional relationships, and habits and rhythms of life conducive for ongoing growth. These four areas comprised the subject matter for each pilot group to varying degrees. The project also took into account the multipliable nature of discipleship in the New Testament. Thus, the invitation to participate in the pilot groups included a full life cycle—from beginning (as disciples) to beginning (as disciple makers).

The assessment of the project consists of three distinct phases. The initial assessment took place midway through the project in order to allow for needed adjustments to increase the likelihood of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers. The second assessment will take place at the conclusion of the pilot project. It is designed to facilitate discussion amongst FRCC leadership as to the potential for ongoing church-wide discipleship efforts. The final assessment will occur over time as it becomes clear whether or not subsequent generations of disciple makers are resulting.

Content Reader: Keith J. Matthews, DMin

Words: 272

To Jody, Seth, Matthew, and Samuel, who were exceedingly gracious and supportive through countless hours of reading, study, and writing.
And to my parents, Lonnie and Debbie, who ceaselessly model and encourage lifelong learning and the pursuit of God

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Thank you, dad, for years of conversations and asking hard questions in ministry. Thank you Ben Stone and Living Hope Church for years of support and partnership in ministry. And finally, thank you Shane and Karen—our friendship will be worth remembering in eternity. Thanks for putting your lives on the line for us and with us over the years.

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PART ONE

CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

In 2009, God wove together three storylines that catalyzed a change in the direction of my life and ministry that continues unfolding today. Early that year, my wife Jody informed me that she wanted a divorce. Our years of “successful” ministry had taken a toll on her and on our marriage to the degree that she could no longer see a way forward. Throughout our years together, the cost of ministry had always been high, but we had always pressed on. So when Jody finally reached her breaking point, there was nothing that could be said that had not already been said too many times before.

One fateful afternoon during that season, I was standing at the kitchen sink washing dishes and contemplating what I might do to prevent Jody from leaving. Suddenly, God granted a moment of clarity that would change me forever: I had never really loved anyone but myself. My marriage, my ministry, my relationships, my identity, and every part of my life was tainted with self-interest. My intention since childhood had been to shape my life around loving God and loving others. Yet, in that moment of clarity, I realized that I had never loved anyone with the kind of love that shaped Jesus’ life and ministry. Despite my “success” in ministry, I had failed at the most foundational expression of Christianity. For over a year, Jody insisted on her forthcoming plans to divorce and start a new life while I learned the painstaking discipline of sacrificial love. By God’s grace, love eventually prevailed. In the years since, much healing has taken place. Jody and I have continued pursuing God’s purposes in and through our family.

Within months of my kitchen-sink awakening, I also found myself sitting around my dining table leading a bizarre small group of religious and social outcasts—four

alcoholics, two drug addicts, one notorious stripper, one Buddhist, and one who struggled with multiple-personality disorder. In a short time, God began challenging my assumptions and drastically reshaping my ministry. I found myself having almost weekly meetings with another pastor discussing God's undeniable work in my motley crew despite their questionable lifestyles and a growing discomfort in the congregation with their presence on Sunday mornings. Ultimately, God accomplished a miraculous transformation in four of the five members of that group. They were set free from substance abuse. Two couples were married in the most celebratory weddings imaginable. All four eventually became significant leaders in their local churches. Although the initial years together as a small group were gritty and difficult, they resulted in deep, transformational friendships that will be worth remembering and celebrating into eternity.

Finally, as 2009 was coming to a close, I received a late-night phone call from an old friend, Ben Stone. He invited me to accompany him on a last minute mission trip to India. Ten days later, a partnership was being forged that continues to this day. On that and subsequent trips, Stone and I witnessed God heal dozens of deaf people, several crippled children, some people dying of cancer, and numerous people possessed by evil spirits. Thousands of Hindus and Muslims turned to Jesus and filled local churches. Churches have been planted. Children's homes have been opened and unwanted children adopted who would otherwise have fallen victim to hunger and slavery.

Over the course of that year, God wove these threads together in such a way as to ruin me for the "success" I had been pursuing in life and ministry up to that point. I began reading more about discipleship and mission. My confidence continued growing in God's

capacity to transform lives and invite people to share in his ongoing mission in the world. By 2011, this personal transformation began coinciding with a leadership transition at the church where I had been serving for eleven years. As the associate pastor, I was near the center of the transition and was looked to by many as the obvious choice to lead the church into a new season. Although I did not yet have the words or understanding to express the transformation that was taking place inside of me, my enthusiasm for what God was doing was unquenchable. When the lead pastor resigned in June of 2011 to “pass the baton to the next generation,” it seemed as though everything was falling into place.

But in an all-too-familiar church story, the pastor’s resignation triggered an uprising from a vocal and powerful minority who had long sought greater influence and position in the church. In order to preserve the integrity of the congregation, I found myself resigning from the church that same October. Weary and battered, but unwilling to turn back to old pursuits and measures of success, I embraced an eighteen-month sabbatical from ministry and dove headlong into my doctorate work in pursuit of a greater understanding of discipleship and mission in the life of the local church.

A few years, my doctorate classwork, the successful planting of Beacon Church, and a move across the country later, my passion and resolve to raise up disciple makers living out God’s purposes for their lives is stronger than ever. This challenging, but unwavering pursuit stems from Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:19-20: “Go therefore

and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.”¹

While this mandate for discipleship is widely recognized by local churches, the actual making of disciples has often remained an enigma. The answer to this riddle, however, is revealed in the methods and means employed by Jesus in raising up the first disciples. Apart from his methods and means, discipleship has proven to be an elusive goal. The solution is a return to Jesus as both the founder and the perfect example of faith (Heb 12:1). People cannot faithfully or fruitfully embrace his mandate for discipleship without also submitting themselves to his methods and means.

As Dallas Willard observed, “The New Testament is a book about disciples, by disciples, and for disciples of Jesus Christ.”² Fortunately, Jesus’ holistic vision for discipleship has been preserved throughout the pages of the New Testament. Jesus provided a context for discipleship within the broader narrative of God’s story: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mk 1:15). In other words, the story that began back in the garden was reaching a point of fulfillment. God’s renewed reign over all of creation was coming about in and through Jesus Christ. Things were about to change. This change required a new way of thinking and living in response. Jesus’ announcement was accompanied by an invitation into intentional relationship. The first disciples set themselves apart from the crowds by following Jesus day by day. Their relationship with Jesus became their defining priority.

¹All Scripture citations are from The ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), (New York: Crossway), 2001.

² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), 3.

In this relationship, the disciples learned a way of life from Jesus that was conducive for living out his calling and purposes. This lifestyle consisted of various spiritual disciplines—daily habits and rhythms of living—that were needed to undergird and support the phenomenal ministry that resulted. Finally, the disciples increasingly shared in the ministry and mission which Jesus himself initiated and then passed along for them to continue. From mandate to methods to means, both explicitly and implicitly, discipleship resonates through the pages of the Gospels and then continues throughout the remainder of the New Testament.

The need for discipleship at Front Range Christian Church (FRCC) is great. Not surprisingly, it is also a very challenging endeavor. FRCC is located in Castle Rock, Colorado (just south of Denver). There is significant potential for ministry in this largely unchurched, rapidly growing community. This potential is held in check by organizational and discipleship challenges. The “Good News” for most Castle Rock residents is that they live in a prosperous, growing community just outside a beautiful city and a short drive from the Rocky Mountains. The prevailing narratives of American culture are alive and well in Castle Rock: materialism, consumerism, and individualism. Even as people make their way into the church, the American dream typically comes with them and continues dominating their imaginations, their priorities, and their corresponding lifestyles. In many cases, Christian faith is embraced more as a veneer of morality and niceness than it is a revolutionary new life.

Adding to these cultural challenges are the organizational challenges of being a church plant in Castle Rock. The financial pressures in Castle Rock are great. Real estate costs to either rent or purchase are prodigious. Between camping in the summer, skiing in

the winter, and sixteen weeks each year of Broncos football, the average church-goer attends only once every six weeks. It has taken incredible energy and determination for FRCC to survive and thrive where most church plants die within the first year. The church consistently provides a warm welcome to the community through a talented and hardworking staff who produce high-quality Sunday worship services and attentive follow-up seeking to connect people into a strong network of Community Groups. The challenge now is to make disciples amidst the ongoing pressures of organizational survival and growth.

The discipleship challenge at FRCC begins with the establishment of a more Christian imagination defined by God's story rather than the American dream. A substantive awareness of God's story (as opposed to the American dream) opens the door to understanding the significance and implications of the Good News that Jesus proclaimed. The second part of the discipleship challenge at FRCC is the establishment of a new lifestyle in response to the Gospel: the cultivation of intentional relationships, the embrace and pursuit of God-given purpose and mission, and the adoption of habits and rhythms of life by which to reasonably expect ongoing growth in Christlikeness. This is precisely the purpose of this doctoral project: to equip disciple makers at Front Range Christian Church through increased understanding of the Gospel, clarification of personal mission, development of intentional relationships, and the cultivation of spiritual disciplines.

The following project consists of three parts. Part One examines the context and challenge of making disciples at FRCC. It begins by examining the defining story for Castle Rock residents as it is revealed through lifestyle choices and patterns. Such

patterns reveal the challenges to be faced in the course of discipleship at FRCC. It continues with a look at the context and challenges of discipleship specific to FRCC as a local church within Castle Rock. FRCC is a relatively young congregation, under the leadership of an evangelistically-oriented lead pastor operating with a multisite model and growth plan. The primary vehicle for discipleship is the network of Community Groups at FRCC which typically meet every week at various homes and locations.

Part Two consists of biblical and theological reflections on discipleship. It is founded on an underlying assumption of the integrity and wholeness of the biblical narrative spanning from creation to the new creation. It is understood that Jesus fully recognized this broader narrative as the context of his own life and ministry as he went about living into God's story and inviting the first disciples to join him along the way. Therefore, it is only within this context that the true meaning and significance of discipleship is revealed. The texts and biblical passages examined through Part Two are chosen because of their contribution in clarifying the context, the purpose, or the means of discipleship modeled by Jesus.

Part Three describes the specific disciple-making initiative to be undertaken at FRCC in response to the conclusions reached in the theological reflections. It considers the implications for ministry at FRCC and develops specific content and goals apropos to the congregation and the surrounding community. This contextual awareness results in a non-church-centered strategy for equipping disciple makers. The highly mobile and fluid nature of FRCC and its surrounding community warrants an initiative that remains viable and reproducible regardless of whether people remain in Castle Rock or continue moving throughout the country. The plan for the discipleship initiative includes timelines,

logistical details, leadership development, and a description of the primary resources to be utilized. Finally, Part Three includes an assessment of the project's effectiveness in equipping and catalyzing disciple makers along with considerations for adjustments and improvements moving forward.

CHAPTER 1

MINISTRY CONTEXT AND CHALLENGE

Front Range Christian Church is located about twenty-five miles south of downtown Denver. The church is well-suited for the community. Both are relatively young, mobile, growing, and active. Perhaps most importantly, FRCC is evangelistically motivated and organizationally adaptive—important traits in a primarily unchurched area that is experiencing explosive growth.

Castle Rock, Colorado

Money magazine ranked Castle Rock fourth in the nationwide “Best Places to Live in 2014.”¹ While there were undoubtedly numerous factors that led to that conclusion, several aspects of Castle Rock stand out that contributed to this conclusion. These are significant as factors in the ministry context and challenge of this project.

There is an old real estate adage that says, “Location. Location. Location.” This is certainly the case regarding Castle Rock. The town is located about halfway between

¹ *Money*, “Best Places to Live 2014,” time.com, <http://time.com/money/3312312/castle-rock-colorado-best-places-to-live/> (accessed November 2, 2016).

Denver and Colorado Springs along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains. With Interstate-25 running through the center of town, transportation is easy and fast. Just fifteen miles to the north is the Denver Tech Center (DTC) which is a major employer of Castle Rock residents. Yet despite its easy access to both Denver and Colorado Springs, Castle Rock retains much of the charm of smaller town life. Castle Rock's greatest locational asset is the Rocky Mountains. The western view from Castle Rock is a striking panoramic scene spanning from Long's Peak to Pike's Peak. Many world-class mountain destinations are within a two-hour drive of Castle Rock. This includes ski resorts such as Aspen, Breckenridge, and Vail along with summer favorites such as Rocky Mountain National Park.

Another unmistakable trait of Castle Rock is its explosive growth. According to the Census Bureau, Castle Rock had a population of 8,708 in 1990.² But by January 2015, its population had grown to 59,845.³ Complementing this population growth are countless new homes, many new elementary schools, and a new 166-acre shopping center dubbed the "Promenade at Castle Rock." The signs of growth are evident everywhere.

Finally, at the intersection of Castle Rock's location and its phenomenal growth, lay its economy and housing market. As the seat of Douglas County, Castle Rock finds itself in the middle of the ninth wealthiest county in the nation.⁴ According to *Forbes*, the

² Douglas County, "Demographics," [douglas.co.us](http://www.douglas.co.us/about-us/demographics/), <http://www.douglas.co.us/about-us/demographics/> (accessed November 2, 2016).

³ Ibid.

⁴ *Forbes*, "America's Richest Counties," [forbes.com](http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eddf45kjmh/douglas-county-co/#200829fbca7), <http://www.forbes.com/pictures/eddf45kjmh/douglas-county-co/#200829fbca7> (accessed November 2, 2016).

median household income in Douglas County is \$95,973.⁵ These factors converge to create a pricey and high-demand housing market. Of the 737 homes currently for sale in Castle Rock, the median price is \$525,000.⁶

These factors are all significant in reinforcing the prevailing story of life in Castle Rock—the American dream. Materialism, consumerism, and individualism are all prevalent themes in Castle Rock. Opportunities for indulgence abound. The proximity of such extraordinary opportunities combined with high incomes entrench people in selfish pursuits. Then, for far too many people, extravagant spending habits and a high cost of living amount to significant financial indebtedness.

The American dream manifests itself in Castle Rock in a clear set of values and priorities. Not surprisingly, the accumulation of goods is high on the list. The 100-store outlet mall that now finds itself within a 166-acre shopping plaza is evidence of this priority. Leisure and entertainment are also high priorities in Castle Rock. From readily available mountain adventures (skiing, camping, hiking, biking, hunting, fishing, climbing) to locally-brewed craft beer and locally-roasted coffee to extravagant little league sports (baseball runs up to \$4,000 in registration costs and includes professional trainers and coaches, use of year-round indoor facilities, turf fields for games, and out of state tournaments throughout the summer), a typical leisurely day around Castle Rock is anything but typical. Finally, personal health and image complete Castle Rock's iteration of the American dream. Colorado has the lowest rate of obesity in the United States and it

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ *Realtor*, "Castle Rock," realtor.com, http://www.realtor.com/local/Castle-Rock_CO (accessed November 2, 2016).

shows in Castle Rock.⁷ Hundreds of miles of biking and jogging trails are woven throughout the Denver metropolitan area and extend through Castle Rock. Fitness gyms are littered throughout town and proudly advertised on t-shirts and bumper stickers. Then, in addition to the normal array of beauty salons and barber shops, downtown Castle Rock supports multiple spas for those inclined toward Botox, facial injections, and other cosmetic treatments.

This is the context, with its defining story, values, and corresponding lifestyles, in which FRCC is engaged in ministry. This is the “normal” life that must be overturned in favor of discipleship. Understanding this context is where the equipping of disciple makers begins.

Front Range Christian Church

Front Range Christian Church began as a calling within the heart of Ernest Smith. The calling took shape over many years of service at Seacoast Church in Charleston, SC. During those years, Smith served at Seacoast in various capacities including student pastor, young adult pastor, campus pastor, and executive board member.

This history at Seacoast is a significant chapter in the pre-history of FRCC. First, through the years, Smith invested a great deal of time and energy mentoring students and young adults. Many of them eventually came to serve alongside him at Seacoast in various capacities. Some eventually embraced the call to move from the ocean to the mountains to be part of launching FRCC. Another significant aspect of this history at

⁷ The State of Obesity, “Adult Obesity in the United States,” stateofobesity.org, <http://stateofobesity.org/adult-obesity/> (accessed November 2, 2016).

Seacoast came about through the launch team's exposure to and experience with the multisite church model pioneered at Seacoast. This model functions well in Castle Rock with its prohibitive real estate prices and rapid growth. Finally, Smith's years at Seacoast provided strong connections with the closely affiliated church-planting organization ARC (the Association of Related Churches).

In 2013, after years of prayer and preparation, around forty friends and partners embraced the vision and calling to plant FRCC. A migration began from South Carolina to Colorado to take part in the mission to Castle Rock. Many were long-term friends. Many were young people that had grown up under Smith's leadership before being sent out from Seacoast as church planters. FRCC was also blessed early on with several partner churches and sponsoring organizations such as ARC. The church officially launched in February 2014 and held its first worship service at Mesa Middle School in east Castle Rock. Over 400 people attended the first service. After the initial flurry of guests, FRCC was off to a strong start with an average attendance of 225 over the course of its first three months.

Since that initial service, FRCC has invested a great deal of time, energy, and money into its Sunday services. Smith is highly evangelistic and values quality worship services that are accessible to first-time guests. The typical feedback from guests is one of astonishment at the friendliness and welcome received at FRCC.

Complementing the accessibility and high production quality of the Sunday services are the Community Groups (CGs). Generally, FRCC operates with a simple church philosophy and limits the number of competing ministries to Sunday mornings and Community Groups. Whereas Sunday mornings provide a phenomenal guest

experience, the CGs are where people are most likely to experience and grow in the four values of FRCC: authentic community, contagious generosity, celebrating family, and development and deployment. The FRCC strategy and values converge at this point in one of the membership commitments—ongoing participation on either a Serve Team (primarily to facilitate Sunday mornings) or in a Community Group.

In the nearly three years since launching, FRCC has experienced steady growth. Along the way, a second campus was added on the west side of Castle Rock. As of October 2016, the average total attendance each Sunday is around 525 in person with another 150 participating in the online campus. Each campus holds two services on Sunday mornings. Over 300 people are part of Serve Teams and over 400 are involved in Community Groups. Behind the scenes, the staff has grown considerably and now includes ten full-time positions and five part-time positions.

These circumstances led me to pursue a position at FRCC that was officially created in June 2016. Recognizing the strengths of FRCC within Castle Rock, the potential impact of a successful disciple-making ministry would be hard to overstate. The excellence and accessibility of worship services, the emphasis on involvement in CGs, and the incredible mobility of Castle Rock's residents means that FRCC could see a steady flow of disciple makers equipped and then sent out to multiply the work that God has done in them as they move throughout Colorado and the United States. While the rest of the FRCC team continues to excel in their various positions, I am now hard at work as the Community Director overseeing Community Groups and developing a discipleship ministry.

In the summer of 2016, FRCC also purchased its first building—an old downtown restaurant that is being renovated into the Front Range Ministry Center (FRMC). The FRMC will provide office space as well as enabling the church to host small gatherings up to 150 people. This will include most student ministry events and a monthly Wednesday night worship service. Sunday services will remain at Mesa Middle School and Academy Charter School. Fortunately, the mortgage payments are roughly the same amount that the church previously spent on facility rentals.

FRCC also faces many challenges as it presses through the liminality between church plant and established church. Not surprisingly, one major challenge remains finances. At the conclusion of 2016, most of the support from outside churches came to an end. Yet as of October, internal financing only covered about ninety-percent of the budget. Staffing also remains a financial challenge. Currently, two full-time staff work at FRCC through personal support raising. One other full-time staff member is fifty-percent financed through support raising. It seems unlikely that the financial challenge will be alleviated any time soon. Part of the challenge is that FRCC is still growing and tries to staff itself based on future growth. Therefore, the finances at any given time are lagging behind. This is combined with the fact that the cost of doing business in Castle Rock continues to escalate as property values increase.

The culture of Colorado is another challenge. The typical “committed” attendee at FRCC attends one week per month on average. Between weekend trips to the mountains, kid’s sporting activities, and a pathological commitment to Broncos football, people embrace many weekend commitments that keep them from attending worship services. This is reflected in giving patterns where the same priorities reveal themselves.

Discipleship Challenges at and through Front Range

As with most local churches, discipleship lies at the heart of the FRCC mission statement: “Becoming intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus.” And as with most local churches, the mission statement is easier said than done. Discipleship remains quite a challenge.

Mike Breen stated, “If you make disciples, you always get the church. But if you make a church, you rarely get disciples.”⁸ This observation frames the beginning of the challenge in making disciples at FRCC. The intention from the beginning was to plant a church. Discipleship is obviously part of the vision, but secondary to the launching and continued growth of the church. As with most successful church plants, the initial goal of FRCC was survival. Discipleship was disregarded in order to pursue more urgent matters of growth and survival. However, as the early survival challenges have given way to ongoing organizational demands, discipleship continues to be a neglected aspect of ministry at the church. This situation is further complicated by the challenge of metrics. While it is easy to measure attendance and giving, it is much more difficult to measure growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

The challenge at FRCC gets more complex still. Most of the staff is well versed in organizational development and metrics, but has never invested in understanding the process, means, or outcomes of discipleship. Even if viable discipleship metrics were determined, they may not be of a great enough perceived value to reprioritize time and

⁸ Mike Breen and Steve Cockram, *Building a Discipling Culture* (Pawleys Island, SC: 3 Dimension Ministries, 2011), 12.

energy. As a new staff member, there is an additional challenge of building relational equity and trust with co-workers before this reprioritization could be attempted.

In the face of these organizational challenges, there is much hope that discipleship may become a reality. This hope comes in the form of the tremendous potential for discipleship found in the Community Groups. Even as FRCC has grown, the CGs have remained central to the life of the church. In addition to the laden potential of over 400 people gathering every week in homes throughout Castle Rock as an expression of their mutual faith in Jesus, the groups are granted great flexibility in the topics and material that they work through together. If the leaders can be won over and equipped as disciple makers, they have the freedom to pursue the ongoing discipleship of their respective group members.

Yet even for Community Groups, there are some ministry-specific challenges. First, the CGs have been so autonomous for the past three years that the existing leaders are not accustomed to any outside input or guidance. They have had so little input or investment from FRCC leadership that the first step must be the development of relational equity with CG leaders. As this equity grows, so will the opportunity to encourage the leaders to invest in a specific course of action. The challenges in building such equity include the amount of time needed to personally develop relationship with over thirty group leaders and the lack of a CG leadership team who could more feasibly accomplish this task together. Furthermore, the multiple campus model eliminates the possibility of even casual encounters with many leaders at weekly worship services.

The second area of challenge in equipping disciple makers through the CGs at FRCC is in re-casting vision. To this point, the goal for CGs has been to exist. Any group

of people gathering for any reason and any regularity was considered a viable CG. In order to promote discipleship, the tedious work of re-visioning must be undertaken to try and win over as many leaders as possible to a vision and purpose of discipleship.

These constitute the organizational challenges in equipping disciple makers at FRCC from the organization as a whole down to the specifics within the CG ministry which will be the primary avenue for discipleship exercised through this project. Having examined these organizational challenges, the second layer of discipleship challenges may be considered—obstacles to life transformation. These challenges are specific to people rather than the organization.

The most foundational of these challenges is worldview. The story that people perceive themselves to be a part of is foundational to discipleship. This story (whether conscious or not, explicit or implicit) determines the perceived significance of investing oneself as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The most natural context for discipleship is the narrative of God's story. This story unfolds throughout the pages of Scripture from creation to the new creation. In this context, discipleship makes perfect sense. The challenge, however, is that another narrative is most likely holding sway in the imaginations of those residing in Castle Rock and attending FRCC.

The narrative to be overturned in favor of God's story is the American dream. Discipleship is about learning from Jesus a life of humility, submission, and self-control. These qualities are antithetical to the cornerstones of American culture: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. When these cultural values are left unchallenged within the Church, the Gospel takes on an individualistic meaning as it is assimilated into the American dream. As this happens, rather than inviting people to die to themselves and

ultimately save their lives, Jesus is misrepresented as the means by which to realize personal ambitions. Faith is reduced to mental assent. Forgiveness becomes a personal acquisition. Within this Christianized version of the American dream, there is no context for discipleship. Worse yet, serious Christians with this mindset often grow wary of discipleship, mistaking it for “works.” On the contrary, nominal Christianity flourishes as many people eagerly assent to facts about Jesus in order to ensure their places in eternal paradise without any intention of submitting to Jesus’ lordship in the meantime. Thus, the challenge to equip disciple makers begins with winning back people’s imaginations until they align with God’s story and accurately perceive themselves as characters within it.

With this worldview in place, there is a context within which discipleship makes sense. There is value in learning to live well before Jesus here and now. Priorities are brought into focus. The importance of intentional relationships with people who help bring alignment with God’s purposes is affirmed. In the context of God’s story, there is appropriate value placed on learning the habits and rhythms of life that Jesus modeled for his first followers in order to increasingly live well before him here and now.

The challenges in equipping disciple makers are considerable. They bring to mind Jesus’ admonition to count the cost before embarking on a life of discipleship (Lk 14:25ff). But, it is also wise to count the cost of not making disciples. Despite the challenges, to not make disciples is to turn away from Jesus’ commission in Matthew 28:19-20. To not make disciples is to live as unfaithful servants pursuing selfish interests at the expense of God’s purposes (Lk 19:11-27). In light of God’s story, there is no better pursuit than personal discipleship and no greater ministry than the hard work of equipping disciple makers.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews eight books that make significant contributions toward equipping disciple makers. There are complementary books for each area of discipleship addressed in this project. The first two examine aspects of Christian worldview and the Gospel as it emerges from within the biblical narrative. The second books consider topics of mission and purpose as they emerge from the biblical narrative and are refocused in the life and ministry of Jesus. The third books expound on the necessity and significance of intentional relationships in the discipleship process. Finally, the fourth books establish a foundation for the practice of spiritual disciplines and then offer specific practices by which to live and grow as disciples.

Surprised by Hope
by N.T. Wright

Modern technology provides more information at people's fingertips than previous generations would have been able to access in a lifetime. Amidst this information overload, many things are easily forgotten that are best remembered. For Christians, many today lose sight of the simple story that unfolds throughout the pages of

Scripture. In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright beckons his readers to remember this story because of its importance as the context for both orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The worldview that emerges from looking back to creation while anticipating the new creation comprises a necessary foundation for discipleship.

Wright contrasts his holistic worldview with a common alternative that interprets God's purposes and activity only in light of an individual's future in heaven or hell after death. In direct rebuttal to this perspective, Wright states, "Heaven and hell are not, so to speak, what the whole game is about. . . .The New Testament, true to its Old Testament roots, regularly insists that the major, central, framing question is that of God's purpose of rescue and re-creation for the whole world, the entire cosmos."¹ This story of renewal captures Wright's attention throughout *Surprised by Hope*. As he works through various topics along the way, Wright inspires a worldview defined by God's story and God's invitation for people to take their places within it.

A major theme in this revitalized worldview is resurrection. It is central in shifting the focus of Christian hope from being dead and "going to heaven" to the renewal and re-creation anticipated throughout the scriptures. Turning away from individualistic, postmortem interests, Wright clarifies the significance of Jesus' resurrection as "the defining event of the new creation, the world that is being born with Jesus."² He repeatedly affirms the significance of this renewal for individuals, but always keeps the new creation at the center of the story in which individuals are invited to take part.

¹ N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 184.

² *Ibid.*, 73.

Another significant aspect of Wright's emphasis on resurrection is the corresponding implication regarding death: "At the last, death will be not simply redefined (as a dead person 'going to heaven') but defeated. God's intention is not to let death have its way with us. If the promised final future is simply that immortal souls leave behind their mortal bodies, then death still rules."³ Again, the power of Wright's argument lies in its consistency with the biblical narrative: God did not create humanity to die (Gn 1). And humanity will not be dead in the end (Rev 21-22). In order to be true to God's story, a Christian worldview may not be defined by a pending death and escape from a failed creation. Instead, the imagination must be captured by the anticipation of resurrection and renewal—eternal, immortal life within the new creation.

In light of God's story, Wright clarifies the New Testament Gospel as the "good news that God (the world's creator) is at last becoming king and that Jesus, whom this God raised from the dead, is the world's true lord."⁴ With the Gospel clearly in mind, Wright states its natural implications: "Once the gospel announcement is made, in whatever way, it means instantly that all people everywhere are gladly invited to come in, to join the party, to discover forgiveness for the past, an astonishing destiny in God's future, and a vocation in the present."⁵

This concept of vocation is another key element of the worldview Wright advocates. It is the corollary to restoration and the new creation. Vocation began with creation and humanity's God-given purpose to govern and reflect God's image. The

³ Ibid., 15.

⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵ Ibid.

result of humanity's rebellion against God's purposes has been the devastation of creation. But the conclusion of the story is not failure. God's purposes prevail in the end. Creation will be renewed and humanity restored to its rightful place.⁶ Vocation is a matter of anticipating and embracing that restoration here and now. As Wright points out, "[God] has built into the gospel message the fact that through the work of Jesus and the power of the Spirit, he equips humans to help in the work of getting the project back on track."⁷

Biblical worldview and clear understanding of the Gospel are critical in creating a context for discipleship. In *Surprised by Hope*, Wright makes a significant contribution toward this end. He invites his readers to remember the story in which they are taking part, living in hope and anticipation of the renewal that lies before them.

The Divine Conspiracy
by Dallas Willard

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard does a masterful job laying a foundation for discipleship. In many ways, this book complements and expands on the worldview extrapolated from *Surprised by Hope*, but with a philosophical perspective unique to Willard. A foundational premise of *The Divine Conspiracy* is the presence and availability of God's Kingdom. Willard offers a helpful, practical philosophy on the concept of kingdom and how it plays out in everyday life. This lofty concept becomes an everyday reality through a definition of kingdom as "the range of our effective will."⁸ In

⁶ Ibid., 199.

⁷ Ibid., 207.

⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), 21.

terms of discipleship and living into God’s story, this simple definition provides a practical way forward: discipleship is the process by which people learn to submit their little kingdoms to the will of God and participate with Jesus in building for God’s Kingdom on earth as in heaven. Thus, God’s Kingdom becomes a present reality in which people can increasingly participate as disciples of Jesus Christ.

In addition to this kingdom clarification, Willard provides a critique on common reductions of the Gospel that limit its relevance to everyday life. One common reduction dismantled by Willard is what he calls the “gospel of sin management” that diminishes the Gospel to a means only of accounting for sin.⁹ He also addresses common thinking that limits the Gospel to a matter of heaven and hell after death.¹⁰ In reference to such reductions, Willard pulls no punches in noting that “what we are ‘selling’ is irrelevant to our real existence and without power over daily life.”¹¹ Even more indicting, Willard states, “Our usual ‘gospels’ are, in their effects—dare we say it—nothing less than a standing invitation to *omit* God from the course of our daily existence.”¹² Instead, Willard insists upon the power of the Gospel to impact daily life. This insistence is critical in addressing the challenges of discipleship and life transformation. It affirms the need for clarity regarding the Gospel and a biblically-sound worldview.

Willard also contributes to the development of a Christian worldview in the attention he gives to eternal life. As with the Gospel, Willard’s approach is largely a

⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹¹ Ibid., 39.

¹² Ibid., 12.

matter of returning to the simplicity of Jesus' teaching. In this case, he pays special attention to Jesus' references in the Gospel of John to the present reality of eternal life for his followers. Willard's basic premise is that "eternity is not something waiting to happen, something that will commence later. It is now here. Time runs its course within eternity."¹³ This premise comprises Willard's most forceful apologetic for discipleship. In an even more pointed statement, Willard states, "Our future, however far we look, is a natural extension of the faith by which we live now and the life in which we now participate. Eternity is now in flight and we with it, like it or not."¹⁴ It might be hard to overstate how significant this concept of continuity is in creating a context for discipleship. Willard drives the point home with this haunting question: "There is widespread notion that just passing through death transforms human character. Discipleship is not needed. Just believe enough to 'make it.' But I have never been able to find any basis in scriptural tradition or psychological reality to think this might be so. What if death only forever fixes us as the kind of person we are at death?"¹⁵

The present reality of God's Kingdom, the Gospel, and eternal life drive Willard's argument for discipleship. It shapes his understanding of discipleship itself. A disciple, or "apprentice" as Willard likes to say, is "one who has firmly decided to learn from [Jesus] how to lead his or her life, whatever that may be, as Jesus himself would do."¹⁶ Drawing together previous themes, he also states that "as a disciple of Jesus I am with him, by

¹³ Ibid., 288.

¹⁴ Ibid., xvii.

¹⁵ Ibid., 302.

¹⁶ Ibid., 291.

choice and by grace, learning from him how to live in the kingdom of God. . . .within the range of God’s effective will, his life flowing through mine.”¹⁷

This vision of discipleship invites Jesus’ followers into an intentional process toward this end.¹⁸ Without this intentionality, mere conversion and church membership are likely to displace discipleship.¹⁹ This process begins with the development of a biblically consistent worldview and the undoing of any underlying beliefs that prevent people from becoming disciples.²⁰

Bible and Mission
by Richard Bauckham

In *Bible and Mission*, Bauckham has written a masterful book that segues from worldview to mission. He begins with a discussion on the power of metanarratives and defines them as follows: “A metanarrative is an attempt to grasp the meaning and destiny of human history as a whole by telling a single story about it; to encompass, as it were, all the immense diversity of human stories in a single, overall story which integrates them into a single meaning.”²¹ This is precisely the significance of God’s story as it emerges from creation to new creation. All human life is enveloped within the same story. This realization is critical in establishing a context for discipleship. As Bauckham states, “We are given our identities by the narratives of our own lives and the wider narratives to

¹⁷ Ibid., 283.

¹⁸ Ibid., 298.

¹⁹ Ibid., 300.

²⁰ Ibid., 307.

²¹ Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 4.

which they relate.”²² As characters within God’s story, it only makes sense for people to live as Jesus’ disciples, ever growing into his likeness and purposes for their lives.

Following the opening chapters, Bauckham expounds on his primary topic—mission. He is particularly keen to the manner in which mission emerges from the story that the Bible is telling. Bauckham notes three general movements that shape mission.²³ The first is the temporal movement of the story as it presses toward God’s future for creation. For disciples then, “identity is found in the narrative of the past but also in their being turned by that narrative toward the coming of God’s kingdom in the future.”²⁴ Missional purpose takes shape within this temporal movement toward the new creation. The second movement is spatial. “The *spatial* (or geographical) movement of the biblical narrative runs from one place to every place, from the center to the periphery, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.”²⁵ Biblically speaking, then, mission must align with God’s story in an outward movement toward ever new horizons. The third and final movement according to Bauckham is social. This movement traces God’s blessing as it expands from Abraham to all nations through the life and ministry of Jesus.²⁶ The social

²² Ibid., 12.

²³ After keenly observing the flow of the biblical narrative along these various movements, Bauckham does not give much attention to them as they unfold across the whole narrative. Instead, he observes their emergence in the story of Israel according to God’s intentions for Israel. However, it is not until Jesus that they are actually fulfilled. Previous to his life and ministry, the movements actually progress in the wrong direction from the Fall, throughout Israel’s history, and climaxing in the cross of Jesus Christ. The full treatment of the trajectory of these movements as they actually play out in the biblical narrative is part of the theological development in chapter three of this project.

²⁴ Ibid., 13.

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ Ibid., 15.

implication for mission is that it must always be directed outward to impact and involve a growing number of people.

The first disciples took their place in God's story as it exploded out from the empty tomb toward the ends of the earth. Acts concludes even as the story continues unfolding and invites every subsequent generation to take its place. Disciples today are taking their places as both the product and ongoing agents of God's mission.²⁷ The mission continues to the degree that disciples align themselves with the trajectory of God's story and retain a focus beyond themselves.

Having considered the nature and trajectory of mission within God's story, Bauckham turns to the history of Israel for clarification on the specific aspects of mission.²⁸ The first missional purpose to emerge from Israel's history is the propagation of God's blessing. This takes place in Genesis when God chooses Abraham as the man through whom blessing will go forth to the nations (Gn 12). Regarding this calling, Bauckham notes, "Genesis creates a strong expectation that the blessing of the nations through Abraham's descendants is to be the goal of the rest of the biblical story."²⁹ With this in mind, the full meaning of salvation emerges as "the fulfillment of God's good purposes for his creation."³⁰

²⁷ Ibid., 17.

²⁸ Again, these observations are limited to their origination in Israel's story and then applied to the church. This argument is far more powerful when applied across the entirety of the biblical narrative. From a broader perspective, Israel takes its place within the story and greater insight is available as to the significance of these missional purposes. Chapter 3 will include an examination of the story and will give specific attention to Israel's place in the story along with their God given purpose and mission.

²⁹ Ibid., 30.

³⁰ Ibid., 35.

The next missional purpose revealed in Israel's history is that of making God known.³¹ This revelation takes place through God's interaction with the nation, specifically in his supernatural acts of salvation. This purpose was intended to continue as Israel lived among the nations as a priestly kingdom and holy nation (Ex 19:6). While Israel struggled throughout its history to play an active role in making God known, this purpose was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.³² In this way, the first two aspects of mission are intricately intertwined through salvation—the blessing of God came forth through God's self-revelation in Jesus.

The final aspect of mission revealed in Israel's history concerns governance and rule. This nuanced aspect of mission emerges as Israel rejects God as their king. God subsequently appointed David and his descendants to rule Israel on God's behalf. Again, the aspects of mission are intertwined as the godly rule of Israel serves as a witness to make God known among the nations. The tension created in David's appointment as the people rejected God's rule is ultimately resolved in Jesus Christ—the descendant of David and Son of God who became king over Israel and all creation.³³

While Israel struggled throughout its history to live into these God-given purposes, they were each fulfilled in Jesus. "He is the descendant of Abraham through whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. He assumes for himself his nation Israel's own destiny to be a light to all the nations (Lk 2:31-32). He is the new, the ideal,

³¹ Ibid., 36.

³² Ibid., 40.

³³ Ibid., 45.

David, the only one truly able to be the human embodiment of God's rule over all."³⁴

This is the mission that Jesus' people in the earth today inherit from him and continue to proclaim and manifest.

The Mission of God's People
by Christopher J. H. Wright

The Mission of God's People offers a clear and convincing theology of mission. As the book progresses, Wright remains attentive and submitted to the biblical narrative and allows his missiology to emerge from within it. Consistent with the purpose and approach of this project, Wright states, "We must make sure that our own missional goals—long term and more immediate—are in line with God's. For that purpose, we need to know the story we are part of, the great story that the Bible tells that encompasses the past and the future."³⁵ Wright summarizes this story as follows: "the Bible's story is that the God who created the universe, only to see it ravaged by evil and sin, has committed himself to the total redemption and restoration of the whole creation, has accomplished it in advance through the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and will bring it to glorious completion in the new creation when Christ returns."³⁶ This is precisely the awareness of God's story that is needed to shape the context for discipleship and mission.

³⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁵ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 26.

³⁶ Ibid., 48.

With God's story in mind, Wright advocates an understanding of mission that goes far beyond the Christian religion. Rather, alignment with God's redemptive mission is a matter of being more genuinely human. In Wright's words, "the Christian life, far from transforming us into super-spiritual, quasi-angelic beings, is actually a quest to recover our humanity."³⁷ This missional vision of humanity traces back to creation. First, humanity was to reflect God's image throughout creation. Wright adds historical meaning to this inherently missional attribute by observing that "Kings and emperors in ancient times (and even dictators in modern times) would set up an image of themselves in far flung corners of their domains. These great statues proclaimed their sovereignty over that territory and its people."³⁸ As such, part of the human mission is to live in such a way as to remind the world of its true God and King by reflecting his intentions and character everywhere. This image-bearing coincides with a second aspect of God's purposes for humanity: "God created [humanity] to rule over the rest of his creation by serving and keeping it."³⁹ Humans were created to be neither passive spectators nor opportunistic abusers of creation. They were set in place as governors to serve creation and bring order within it. Finally, Wright adds his third and most primal aspect of the human mission: propagating God's blessing throughout creation. This purpose is addressed repeatedly throughout *The Mission of God's People*. Wright goes so far as to state that "the history of mission is the history of the spread of God's blessing."⁴⁰ He clarifies the nature of this

³⁷ Ibid., 49.

³⁸ Ibid., 50.

³⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 69.

blessing as “fruitfulness, abundance and fullness on the one hand, and by enjoying rest within creation in holy and harmonious relationship with our Creator God on the other.”⁴¹

Given the participatory nature of mission and its centrality in the biblical story, Wright devotes a great deal of attention to the topic of obedience. Yet, he makes clear that receiving God’s grace is not contingent on participation in God’s mission. It is not something that is earned through any missional endeavor. Instead, obedient participation in mission is a response to God’s grace.⁴² Wright points out that the experience of God’s blessing often comes through another person’s obedience as an agent of God’s blessing. Thus, obedience is always an integral aspect of mission. They are complementary aspects of redemption—the renewal of human identity and purpose.

Finally, Wright juxtaposes mission and the Gospel. He begins by reframing the Gospel within the same context as mission—God’s story.⁴³ Only within this context can the meaning and implications of Jesus’ death and resurrection be understood. Far from an individualistic experience of forgiveness, the Gospel is about restoration and renewal. As Jesus stated, the good news is that God’s reign is within reach. This reign brings “wholeness and fullness of life, when all things are as God intended them to be, when we are at ease with God, with ourselves and with the world.”⁴⁴ The Gospel, then, is about the fullness of God’s redemptive mission in creation. It invites humanity to become the men and women that they were created to be through the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. As

⁴¹ Ibid., 67.

⁴² Ibid., 69, 117.

⁴³ Ibid., 179.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 182.

restored humans, they are then invited to participate in God’s redemptive work as it continues unfolding in those around them. Drawing together both Gospel and mission in the context of God’s story, Wright summarizes mission as “to live as those who have experienced that redeeming power of God already, and whose lives—individual and corporate—are signposts to the ultimate liberation of all creation and humanity from every form of oppression and slavery.”⁴⁵

Transforming Discipleship
by Greg Ogden

Perfectly in line with the purpose of this project, in *Transforming Discipleship*, Ogden examines a strategy and process of discipleship specifically with the goal of equipping disciple makers. He claims a reproduction rate of seventy-five percent over two decades for those who have gone through his discipleship process.⁴⁶ The core of his argument throughout the book is the need for thoughtful, intentional discipling relationships.

According to Ogden, “discipleship is fundamentally a relational process.”⁴⁷ Throughout the book, this relational emphasis is set in direct contrast to the programmatic strategies more commonly adopted by local churches. Ogden stereotypes programmatic strategies as follows: Committee → Program → Disciples.⁴⁸ On the contrary, he

⁴⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁴⁶ Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time* (Madison, WI: IVP Books, 2003), 148.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 123.

advocates for what he deems to be the biblical (and infinitely more effective) strategy:
Covenantal Relationship → Time → Disciples.⁴⁹

This reveals another foundational underpinning of *Transforming Discipleship*: the Bible “is not only a message book, but a method book.”⁵⁰ For Ogden, Jesus’ relational methodology with his first disciples as recorded in the canonical Gospels is the normative example for discipleship. This relational emphasis is contrasted with an intellectualized approach that is prevalent in the Church today. Combating this intellectual approach and pointing back to Jesus’ example, Ogden states, “Discipleship training is not about information transfer, from head to head, but imitation, life to life.”⁵¹

Inherent to Jesus’ example with the first disciples was the aspect of relationship with Jesus himself. But from the second generation forward, part of the intentionality in discipling relationships must be in cultivating relationship both among disciples as well as between disciples and Jesus. As a result, it is a mutual fascination with Jesus that forms the basis for relational discipleship.⁵²

Another layer of Jesus’ example in discipleship was in leadership. Early in the process, Jesus led the disciples through three stages: come and see, follow me, and come and be with me.⁵³ These stages are still relevant for discipleship strategy today to allow for some initial observation and then progression toward life-shaping commitment. Jesus

⁴⁹ Ibid., 124.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 60, 121.

⁵¹ Ibid., 86.

⁵² Ibid., 85.

⁵³ Ibid., 62ff.

also modeled various styles of leadership as the disciples progressed and grew: living example, provocative teacher, supportive coach, and ultimate delegator.⁵⁴ Once again, these variations affirm the relational dimension of discipleship that allows it to be customized to the ongoing development of each individual.⁵⁵ However, these aspects of Jesus' leadership style must always be held in tension with the awareness that people are all today co-disciples of Jesus. Discipleship must remain a side-by-side effort rather than a hierarchical one.⁵⁶

Finally, there are specific points of intentionality within a discipling relationship. First, discipleship is inherently missional.⁵⁷ Becoming like Jesus is inseparable from embracing and continuing his mission.⁵⁸ Discipling relationships must retain this purpose. Second, "to train a disciple is to train a reproducer."⁵⁹ In other words, disciples make disciples. As they take their places within God's story, disciples must always keep an eye toward the future and work to ensure that the mission advances under the care of forthcoming generations. Finally, this missional participation includes focused accountability for transformation as disciples learn to increasingly obey Jesus in fulfillment of the Great Commission.⁶⁰ In each area, disciples must continue growing

⁵⁴ Ibid., 81-82.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 142.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁵⁸ This inevitability of "missional discipleship" is reflected in the broader focus of this project to include both the awareness of the Gospel within the biblical narrative and the missional purposes of God as they emerge and clarified throughout the scriptures.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 126.

both qualitatively and quantitatively.⁶¹ In doing so, they live faithfully into God’s story and bring him glory.

Transformational Groups
by Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger

In *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups*, Stetzer and Geiger offer a great deal of practical wisdom regarding small groups as the primary context for disciple making. Their underlying premise is that groups are essential in discipleship and life transformation. This emphasis emerges early in the book in statements such as “No believer is transformed alone” and “Doing life together is an unquestionable essential in the disciple-making process.”⁶² It is then revisited throughout the book as the authors discuss a variety of other sub-topics.

Another foundational premise of *Transformational Groups* is that groups, although essential in the discipleship making process, do not conform to any specific pattern or formula. According to their research, transformational groups are both adaptable and diverse. “*There is never a one-time, final group solution for everything. There is, however, a constant cycle of learning, trying, and changing.*”⁶³

Having established a foundation of varied, yet essential groups in the disciple making process, Stetzer and Geiger return to two themes throughout the book.

Intentionality is critical in making disciples in transformational groups. Small groups are

⁶¹ Ibid., 97.

⁶² Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2014), 6-7.

⁶³ Ibid., 9.

found in churches of all shapes and sizes throughout the American church. Yet the authors are quick to note that “believing in community and establishing transformational communities is not the same thing.”⁶⁴ “Groups and classes can be missed opportunities if they merely exist.”⁶⁵ Churches must be specific and explicit about the purpose of groups if they are to be successful in making disciples and bringing about life transformation.

Clarity is an important factor in intentionality. “It is vital for churches to provide a clear target explaining the attitudes and behaviors of a disciple; you must have a clear definition of *disciple*.”⁶⁶ This insistence on intentionality does not at all negate the significant role of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the process, the authors remind readers that “God can help us design systems with the purpose of giving Him space to make transformed disciples. Disciple making is the Spirit’s work, but our work is to develop an intentional plan to allow the Spirit’s work to be most effective.”⁶⁷

Along with intentionality, the theme of leadership recurs throughout *Transformational Groups*. This theme emerges with three emphases: church leadership, group leadership, and leadership development. Church leadership must provide vision and focus through intentional communication and example setting. Research shows that “[group] leaders need clarity, and if the church leadership doesn’t clarify precisely what needs to happen and equip the leaders to do that, the group leader will do whatever seems

⁶⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 48.

most natural and demands the least of them.”⁶⁸ Part of the vision for transformational groups must focus on the equipping and inspiring of group leaders rather than program development. As Stetzer and Geiger note, “Church leaders are going to have to redirect their focus of attention from the oversight of programs to the transformation of individual people.”⁶⁹ This emphasis does not diminish the significance of church leaders, however. Research indicates that the success of transformational groups is “in direct proportion to the support, encouragement, and empowerment of church leaders.”⁷⁰

The leadership focus extends from the role of church leadership to the group leaders themselves. Similar to healthy church leaders, the role of a transformational group leader is that of the equipper.⁷¹ The authors warn repeatedly that this type of leadership may not be for everyone. They note, “you need to identify a group leader who is a person of character and who has the leadership DNA that best matches your group strategy. This cannot be stated firmly enough. Matching leadership qualities with the strategy you have selected for your church can make or break your group strategy.”⁷² Thus, group leaders should be carefully identified and intentionally supported and equipped to lead their groups through life transformation.

Ongoing leadership development and multiplication, rather than ministry itself, is key to the success of transformational groups. Emphasizing this point, Stetzer and Geiger

⁶⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 130.

⁷² Ibid., 119.

warn that “pastors and staff who spend all their time doing the work of the ministry, while not equipping others, are not fulfilling a biblical role; they are simply being biblical Christians.”⁷³ This leadership development challenge is matched with important reminders that not everyone is called to be a leader and that even those who are called as leaders may not fully embrace God’s call on their lives.⁷⁴ Yet ultimately, regardless of the details or the magnitude of the vision for disciple making, “No matter the number needed or the size of your vision, finding enough of the right leaders is everything.”⁷⁵

Relationships are the context of life transformation. They are as diverse as the people in them. They must be intentional in order to realize their potential. Seeing such relationships flourish in the church requires strong leadership. Intentional relationships result in transformational groups through which the church may effectively equip its people as disciple makers.

The Spirit of the Disciplines
by Dallas Willard

The entirety of this doctoral project is about people becoming the men and women that they were created to be. It is about what it means and what it takes for people to be like Jesus. This is also precisely the scope of *The Spirit of the Disciplines*. From the outset, Willard makes clear his approach to discipleship: “We *can* become like Christ by doing one thing—by following him in the overall style of life he chose for himself.”⁷⁶

⁷³ Ibid., 162.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 134, 167.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁷⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: HarperOne, 1988), ix.

Jesus' life was defined by intentionality and discipline. With discipline, embracing the manner of life modeled by Jesus, people may set themselves apart as a those "able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done."⁷⁷ Such a life is certainly not natural. A quick glance at the evening news reveals that this world naturally forms people toward much different ends.

Willard reminds his readers that the anemic faith too often accepted as "normal" contrasts sharply with God's purpose and plans. "We were *not* designed just to live in mystic communion with our Maker. . . .we were created *to govern the earth* with all its living things."⁷⁸ With this in mind, Willard offers a great metaphor for the life of discipleship: "The light bulb is dead when disconnected from the electrical current, even though it still exists. But when connected to the current, it radiates and affects its surroundings with a power and substance that is *in it* but not *of it*."⁷⁹ *The Spirit of the Disciplines* is an examination of how to live a disciplined life in which the light is on and shining brightly. It is about learning to live according to God's purposes for humanity. Willard states, "The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us."⁸⁰

Central to Willard's holistic approach is the often neglected role of the human body in the life of faith. Willard states, "The human body was made to be the vehicle of

⁷⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 48.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 64.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 68.

human personality ruling the earth for God and through his power.”⁸¹ In other words, the body is the resource God has given people to accomplish his purposes throughout creation.⁸² Not surprisingly then, bodies need training in order to reach their potential and accomplish God’s purposes. This is no less the case than with much lesser tasks such as athletics or playing a musical instrument. The need for training is accentuated further in light of the inevitable habits that become ingrained in people over the course of their lives that set them at odds with God’s purposes. Thus, Willard directs his readers to the spiritual disciplines as “time-tested activities consciously undertaken by us as new men or women to allow our spirit ever-increasing sway over our embodied selves. They help by assisting the ways of God’s Kingdom to take the place of the habits of sin embedded in our bodies.”⁸³ They are the means of training the body to increasingly cooperate with God’s purposes.

This disciplined life is one of ongoing preparation. As every Christian discovers, becoming like Jesus requires more than affection and good intentions. Christlikeness must not be something a person tries to generate “on the spot.”⁸⁴ Rather, “we must learn how to follow his preparations, the disciplines for life in God’s rule that enabled [Jesus] to receive his Father’s constant and effective support while doing his will.”⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ibid., 42.

⁸² Ibid., 92.

⁸³ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 9.

Willard's approach toward discipleship is shaped by the concept of indirection. He summarizes it as follows: "*The entire question of discipline, therefore, is how to apply the acts of will at our disposal in such a way that the proper course of action, which cannot always be realized by direct and untrained effort, will nevertheless be carried out when needed.*"⁸⁶ Thus, spiritual disciplines are never an end unto themselves. They are merely means to an end that cannot be reached by direct effort.

After a convincing philosophical and theological apologetic for the disciplines, Willard goes on to discuss several options for engaging discipline in the Christian life. He breaks the disciplines into two categories: disciplines of abstinence and engagement.⁸⁷ These categorical disciplines work together like breathing in and out.⁸⁸ He notes that the best combination of disciplines, those most effective and appropriate for any given individual, may be very diverse. However, he does describe some of the most tried and true disciplines in each category and their respective roles in the life of the disciple. For the disciplines of abstinence, Willard includes solitude (the primary discipline of abstinence), silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. Those of engagement include study (the primary discipline of engagement), worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. Regarding these two categories in the process of discipleship, Willard says that "disciplines of abstinence counteract

⁸⁶ Ibid., 151-152.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 175.

tendencies to sins of commission, and the disciplines of engagement counteract tendencies to sins of omission.”⁸⁹

Overall, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* is very hopeful in that it calls the reader back to God’s grand purposes while providing a path by which to become the kind of person for whom such a life comes naturally. Willard provides a convincing argument for change from the status-quo of intellectual and emotional faith to one that is extremely practical. This practicality allows for the pursuit of an intentional life of discipleship.

Surprise the World!
by Michael Frost

Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as discipleship that is not both transformational and missional. Much of Willard’s acclaimed contribution to the Church was awakening Christ-followers to the possibility and means of transformational discipleship. While such transformation ultimately results in a more missional life, this project of equipping disciple makers also invites a clearer, more direct approach to missional development. In *Surprise the World*, Frost offers five practical habits by which to reasonably equip disciple makers in missional living.

Frost begins his book with a balanced and helpful approach to evangelism. “Evangelistic mission works effectively when we are living generous, hospitable, Spirit-led, Christ-like lives as missionaries to our own neighborhoods—and when the gifted evangelists in our midst join us in sharing Christ with our neighbors.”⁹⁰ This idea of

⁸⁹ Ibid., 176.

⁹⁰ Michael Frost, *Surprise the World: The Five Habits of Highly Missional People* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2016), 1.

living “questionable” lives as missionaries within neighborhoods is the heart of *Surprise the World*.⁹¹ To do so successfully, Frost calls for a threefold movement in the development of missional habits: “we need to be propelled *outward*, into the lives of our neighbors, but also *upward*, into deeper intimacy with Jesus. . . .we also move *inward* into a self-consciously Christian community.”⁹² In other words, “we need to become a godly, intriguing, socially adventurous, joyous presence in the lives of others.”⁹³ A significant impact will be made on neighborhoods neither through sentimental beliefs nor short-term church programs. Rather, Frost calls for an ongoing way of life defined and shaped by habits and rhythms consistent with the mission of God’s people to announce and demonstrate the reign of God through Christ.⁹⁴ These habits are described as follows:⁹⁵

Table 1: Habits of Life

Habit	Practice	Value
Bless	I will bless three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.	Generous
Eat	I will eat with three people this week, at least one of whom is not a member of our church.	Hospitable
Listen	I will spend at least one period of the week listening for the Spirit's voice.	Spirit-led
Learn	I will spend at least one period of the week learning Christ.	Christ-like
Sent	I will journal throughout the week about all the ways I alerted others to the universal reign of God through Christ.	Missional

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

⁹² Ibid., 14.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

The first missional habit is to bless others. Frost defines this as an effort toward others “to build them up, to fill them with encouragement, for them to increase in strength and prosperity.”⁹⁶ The recommended means of such blessings include words of affirmation, acts of kindness, and gifts.⁹⁷ To these parameters, Frost adds, “The key to successful blessing is that the recipient must *feel blessed*. . . .If people feel manipulated or used by our blessings, those blessings can hardly be considered as such.”⁹⁸

Such a habit is also helpful in the underlying requirement for the person blessing others to be both considerate and attentive to those around them.⁹⁹ Frost’s first habit fits squarely within the broader mission of God’s people to be a blessing as it emerges in the creation narrative, continues through Abraham’s calling, reaches its fulfillment in Christ, and then continues through Christ’s followers. It also provides a practical exercise to cultivate a love for others in fulfillment of the Great Commandment.

Frost’s next habit is to eat with others—a central Christian practice since the beginning of the Church.¹⁰⁰ Eating together demonstrates several Christian values including hospitality, inclusivity, generosity, and grace.¹⁰¹ It is also a convenient way to engage in mission amidst busy lives because eating is something people are already doing. This discipline is simply for people to invite others to join them. Frost further

⁹⁶ Ibid., 30.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 31-33.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 43.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 46.

encourages people to respond affirmatively to unbelievers who reciprocate hospitality with invitations of their own.¹⁰²

As people engage their neighbors through blessing and eating, the Holy Spirit's wisdom and guidance become increasingly important. This need is addressed in the weekly practice of setting aside time and space to listen for the Holy Spirit's voice. This habit is best engaged through a period of silence and solitude lasting at least twenty minutes. During this time, opportunity is given for the Holy Spirit to affirm a love for others and grant wisdom for how to continue engaging them.¹⁰³

In addition to listening, missional disciples are exhorted to cultivate the habit of learning Christ. This learning takes place primarily through reading the Gospels or other books about Jesus Christ.¹⁰⁴ As a missional people, everything should be done in the name of Jesus in response to his calling. This cannot happen without an increasing knowledge of Jesus. As Frost states, "When we live questionable lives, people should see our strange behavior and ask us about our motivations. And when they do, we should be able to speak about Jesus. . . .with energy and enthusiasm, with reverence and awe, with delight and wonder."¹⁰⁵

¹⁰² Ibid., 52.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 60-61.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 78-79.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 83.

Frost's final habit is to be "sent." In this habit, people journal all the ways that they alert others to the universal reign of God through Christ. This alert takes place through announcing and demonstrating reconciliation, justice, beauty, or wholeness.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 87-91.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLE MAKING

In the Church today, discipleship means many different things to many different people. For some, discipleship is synonymous with heightened morality. For others, it is an extreme and legalistic expression of Christian faith. Some Christians even equate discipleship with leadership development and organizational proficiency.

Amidst these diverse (and unbiblical) understandings, a clear theology of discipleship is a necessary prerequisite to equipping and catalyzing disciples in the local church. Such a theology is available through careful observation of Jesus' example throughout the Gospels. Willard summarizes his observations and describes disciples simply as “students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”¹ Confirming the centrality of Jesus' example, Ogden adds, “Scripture is not only a message book but also a method book.”² Turning to the Gospels for both message and method, a theology of discipleship emerges that is both clear and accessible for those

¹ Willard, *The Great Omission*, xv.

² Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 60.

who would set themselves apart as disciples of Jesus Christ. Quite simply then, discipleship is about becoming more like Jesus in the manner he taught and modeled with the first disciples. In the Gospels, the message and method of discipleship intertwine in four primary areas: worldview (learning to think like Jesus), mission (embracing Jesus' ministry and purpose), intentional relationships (submitting to God's work in and through each other), and lifestyle (learning the habits and rhythms of living conducive for ongoing growth in Jesus Christ).

Worldview

To the degree that discipleship is about following Jesus and becoming like him, it must begin with an understanding and embrace of Jesus' worldview. The Gospel writers note that when Jesus started his ministry, he did so with proclamation, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk 1:15). Some observations are worth noting about this inaugural proclamation.

First, in Jesus' own thinking, he did not appear out of nowhere. His coming represented the fulfillment of something that began well before his incarnation. This broader context must be understood and accounted for in a biblical theology of discipleship.

While his life and ministry have significant implications on individual sin and status before God, even these important issues fell within the greater context of God's Kingdom. People are invited to take part in the story of God's Kingdom because of the forgiveness and redemption found in Jesus Christ. But it is always God's Kingdom in

which people take their places rather than vice versa. This perspective must be understood and embraced in the worldview of Jesus' disciples today.

Additionally, the reality Jesus proclaimed demanded a new way of thinking and living in response. This is no less true today than in the first century. Disciple making requires an understanding of how to think and live appropriately in response to and in anticipation of God's reign as it continues unfolding here and now.

Finally, implicit in Mark 1:15 and consistent throughout the remainder of Jesus' ministry, there is an inclusivity and universality to Jesus' worldview. There is only one story that is unfolding regardless of whether or not people believe themselves to be part of it. The story is about God's reign over all creation. It encompasses all of human history. Within this story, every person will ultimately take their place whether in conjunction with God's purposes or contrary to them.

Parameters of a Biblical Worldview

God's story, the ultimate context of every disciple and every human, does not begin with Matthew. It extends much further back to the dawning of creation in the first two chapters of Genesis. In the beginning, creation was whole. There was no separation between the heavenly and earthly realms of creation. God dwelt among humanity.

In the beginning, humanity existed with God as cooperative participants and governed creation on God's behalf and according to his purposes (Gn 1:26, 28). Through humanity, God's blessing was to be perpetuated throughout creation (Gn 1:28). God was to be known throughout creation as humanity reflected his image and likeness before every creature and into every corner of creation (Gn 1:26-27).

After many twists and turns, God's purposes for creation will be realized. This is the scene that unfolds in the final two chapters of Revelation. Creation is once again made whole. The heavenly and earthly realms are united once again like the metaphorical union of a bride and groom (Rev 21). As was always intended, God dwells with humanity. Creation is liberated from the curse of pain and death and defined once again by the blessing of God. Faithful disciples of Jesus Christ take their places in reigning over creation (under the Lordship of Jesus) as God always intended (Rev 22:5).

These are the parameters of a biblical worldview. These are the parameters of the story into which Jesus emerged in the first century. They make sense of the story that Jesus was telling and the Gospel he proclaimed and manifested. They must define the worldview of Jesus' disciples here and now as they continue taking their places in this story during the time allotted to them by God.

Life Within the Biblical Narrative

Creation and new creation provide the parameters of the worldview of Jesus and his disciples. They provide a very broad perspective and remind people that they are living within a story that is still unfolding. Fortunately, Jesus' life and teachings also provide a perspective of life from within the story. One of the greatest examples of this perspective is found in Luke 19:11-27. In this parable, Jesus warns the disciples of an impending delay in the full manifestation of his reign. While his delay is no surprise for people still living in anticipation of his return, the parable is equally applicable for

disciples of all generations: the lives that people live as they await Jesus' return determine their places in his eternal kingdom.³

In the parable, the king has made his claim of lordship over a people who have yet to see the full manifestation of his reign. There are three stereotypical responses to the king's claim that ultimately determine people's places in the kingdom. First, there are citizens that are insulted at the king's claim. They live in outright rebellion and directly oppose the king's reign. Second, there are servants of the king who seem uncertain about the king's claims. They risk neither outright rebellion (should the king return) nor association with the king and the corresponding animosity of their fellow citizens (should the king not return). These "servants" simply go about their own business and wait to see what will happen before revealing their allegiance. Finally, there are faithful servants of the king who go about the king's business during the delay in his coming.

The decision about how to live during the delay in the king's return is still before people today. Jesus has claimed to be the king over all creation. People are defining themselves before him in the meantime. This is no less true today than in the first century. By understanding Jesus' perspective and embracing it as their own, people arrive at the true context of discipleship. Far beyond heightened morality and having nothing to do with organizational proficiency (even at a local church), discipleship is about

³ This same emphasis is central in many of Jesus' parables. In the parable of the sower, Jesus insists that it is the response to his word revealed by the fruit of people's lives that distinguishes them before him (Matt. 13; Mark 4; Luke 8). While John 15 reveals Jesus as the only source by which people bear fruit for God's glory, it remains consistent in the assertion that it is the fruit of people's lives that defines them before God. This same expectation is revealed in a negative sense through the judgment parables addressed to the Pharisees who have failed to bear the fruit expected of them by God (Luke 20:9-19).

allegiance to the king. It is the only appropriate response of those living in anticipation of the king's return.

The Gospel in Context

The Gospel is an integral aspect of the Christian worldview. Jesus began his ministry with the proclamation of the Good News that God's kingdom was at hand. The breadth of this Gospel meant that nothing in creation lay beyond its purview. Unfortunately, the scope of the Gospel is today perceived to be much smaller. Rather than God's ultimate victory, restoration, and reign over creation, the Gospel is often presented as a means of individually escaping from a failed creation after death.

In the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul offers a contextualized Gospel presentation. The significance of this chapter in developing a biblical worldview conducive for discipleship is that in this single passage, various aspects of the Gospel are presented within the larger context of God's story. The chapter begins with these Gospel elements: Christ died for people's sins, he was buried, he was raised from the dead, and appeared before various disciples. Then, after a brief tangent, Paul returns to the Gospel and its implications: resurrection from the dead for all those in Christ, inheriting God's eternal kingdom, immortality, and working for the Lord in the meantime.

For Paul, the Gospel is contextualized within God's story. It is the Good News that God's plans will not be thwarted in the end. It is the Good News that God wins in the end. Obviously, there are profound personal implications in this Gospel. God's desire is for all people to be swept into the renewal and restoration that will one day define all of creation. Through Christ, all people are invited to take their places as participants in

God's story. This is the Gospel that Jesus proclaimed and set in motion through his life and ministry. This is the Gospel that lies at the heart of a biblical worldview and provides a sure foundation for discipleship.

Mission

An accurate worldview is foundational for discipleship. But discipleship goes well beyond how a person thinks. It is also about the mission that defines God's people. It is about the purposes of God that are consistently manifest through their lives regardless of their various occupations (or lack thereof).

Mission as God's Creative Intention for Humanity

Missiology emerges early within God's story.⁴ From the very beginning, Scripture makes clear that God created humanity to live according to specific purposes. Three creative intentions of God are inherent in the creation narrative of Genesis. As God's people in the earth today, they are central to the mission of discipleship.

God created humanity in his own image and likeness (Gn 1:26). Part of humanity's inherent purpose was to make God known throughout creation as they reflected God's likeness everywhere. Humanity was also created by God to participate in the governance of creation (Gn 1:27). In this way, God's will would be accomplished by his image bearers throughout creation. Finally, humanity was blessed by God to be fruitful and multiply and thereby propagate God's blessing throughout creation.

⁴ That clarity and significance of mission are contingent on correct perception of people's context in God's story is a primary point made by Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 26.

These purposes were corrupted at the fall and consequently passed on to the nation of Israel as a chosen people through whom God's purposes for the world would be restored. God promised Abraham that he would be a blessing to all nations (Gn 12:2-3). Many generations later, Israel was set apart as a nation of priests to serve as a witness. They were to make God known and reflect his holiness into the surrounding nations (Ex 19:5-6; Dt 4:5-8). Finally, God promised David and his descendants an everlasting reign over the nation of Israel (2 Sm 7:16). Yet despite their high calling, Israel failed to live according to God's purposes. Like humanity before them, they succumbed to rebellion and idolatry.

Then, when all seemed lost, everything changed with Jesus. He came as the perfect representative and redeemer of both Israel and humanity. Through him, God's blessing has been perpetuated throughout creation. In him, God has been made known (Jn 14:9; Col 1:15, 19). Finally, Jesus submitted to the will of the Father and was thereby granted the kingdom that will never end (Phil 2:6-11). Disciples in the world today embrace these same purposes as a result and an extension of the redemption accomplished in and through Jesus Christ. This mission—to be a blessing, to make God known, and to proclaim and manifest the reign of God—is lived out not just as religious activity, but as an expression and reminder of what it truly means to be human before the rest of humanity.

The GREAT Mission

To help those who would follow in his footsteps, Jesus provided some additional lenses by which to bring God's ongoing mission into greater focus. These foundational

teachings are referred to as the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. In them, Jesus reframed and refocused God's mission for his disciples who live in remembrance of his death and resurrection and in anticipation of his return.

The Great Commission

Before his ascension, Jesus' final words constitute what subsequent generations have recognized as the Great Commission: "All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt 28:18-20).

The Great Commission calls for a twofold response. First, disciples of Jesus must live as the fulfillment of this commission. They must submit to the authority of Jesus in their lives, holding nothing back from his lordship. They must submit to baptism and pursue life in the presence of God each and every day. They must also commit themselves to understanding Jesus' teaching in order to increasingly live in obedience. In doing so, they take their places among many generations of disciples continuing the fulfillment of Jesus' commission for his people.

Second, Jesus' disciples must learn to live as disciple makers. Even as they grow as disciples themselves, they must increasingly learn to make disciples of others. They must learn to proclaim and manifest the reign of God both in the lives of those with whom God has surrounded them. They must walk alongside others as they are baptized and learn to live each day in the presence of God. They must teach others how to actually

obey Jesus and live as his disciples. They must disciple others and see them become disciple makers in their own right.

Bringing God's purposes for humanity into focus through the Great Commission, disciples bless others by inviting them to share in the forthcoming reign of Jesus over all creation. They make God increasingly known by those around them. Finally, they learn to proclaim and manifest the reign of God here and now in joyful anticipation of his impending reign over all creation.

The Great Commandment

In Matthew, Jesus provides another critical lens in bringing God's mission into focus for his disciples: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39).

The Old Testament provides a long saga of God's people misappropriating his purposes for them as a people. Israel relished their identity as a chosen people, but went through repeated cycles of loving themselves (and their identity as a chosen people) at the expense of loving either the God who called them or the neighbors to whom they were called. As the faithful Israelite, Jesus stepped into the midst of this ongoing failure and clarified God's mission for subsequent generations of his disciples.

Embracing God's mission must remain a response to his love and an expression of love for him in return. In this way, disciples may rest in God's blessing even as they seek to be a blessing to others. They continue coming to know God even as they seek to

make him known. And disciples increasingly learn to submit themselves to him as they proclaim and manifest his reign to others.

This missional response is also an expression of love for others. Rather than hoarding God's blessing, keeping secret the knowledge of God, or relishing the invitation to participate in God's reign over others, disciples express God's purposes through a love for others. Love serves as the filter and motivation by which to embrace God's mission.

Along with worldview, mission is an essential aspect of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers in the local church. Discerning God's mission is critical for those who would live faithfully and fruitfully before the King (Luke 19; John 15). It defines the manner in which disciples learn to live beyond themselves. Such a life is shaped by love for God and others. This love motivates disciples to raise up future generations who will effectively carry on the mission of God in anticipation of Jesus' return. It expresses itself as disciples bless others, make God known, and proclaim and manifest the reign of God. In living such missional lives, disciples serve as an ever-present witness before all people of what it truly means to be human.

Relationships

One of the major obstacles to discipleship today is individualism within the church. This prevailing disposition is directly confronted by a biblical worldview. It is further challenged by the mission of disciples to live beyond themselves for the sake of others. In the pursuit of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers, individualism must be abandoned as an illegitimate and unbiblical context for discipleship. From Jesus' initial invitation through the remainder of the New Testament, discipleship takes place in the

context of relationships. This relational context is critical to a theology of disciple making.

Jesus' Relational Model of Discipleship

From the beginning, Jesus' invitation to discipleship was highly relational. He invited those around him simply to follow (Mk 1:17). He offered disciples access to himself. He allowed them to learn from him a way of seeing the world, a way of relating to others, a way of living, and a purpose beyond themselves. Although each of the disciples had a unique relationship with Jesus, they held in common relationship both with him and with each other. They accepted the invitation to follow Jesus alongside one another. In a day in which individualism is often unchallenged within the church, the biblical precedent for relational discipleship must not be overlooked. As it has always been, discipleship remains a relational commitment and must be embraced in the company of one another.⁵

In Jesus' model of discipleship, there were various layers of relationship. In a number of instances, three disciples were set apart to be with Jesus during some of the most intense and intimate times of ministry. Beyond those three, there were the twelve apostles that Jesus set apart to be with him throughout his ministry. Luke also references seventy-two followers invited to take part in Jesus' ongoing mission (Lk 10). After being called out for the mission, they were sent out two by two in relationship with one another. Throughout Jesus' ministry, discipleship was a relational invitation and process. The same must be true in equipping and catalyzing disciples today.

⁵ Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship*, 123.

“Imitation” in the New Testament

Jesus’ example of relational discipleship is continued throughout Paul’s ministry. From Barnabus to Silas to Timothy and others, Paul was faithful to embrace a life of ministry in the company of others whom he could disciple along the way and raise up as partners in ministry. This relational emphasis also emerges in Paul’s teaching. He assumes a highly relational model of discipleship as he repeatedly charges his readers to “imitate” Jesus, himself, and other godly leaders. Such imitation is not possible by sitting through a sermon series or discipleship lecture. It is contingent upon genuine relationship amongst people. It requires commitment and access to one another over significant periods of time. Too often today, there would be no chance of imitating a leader because today’s leaders are merely public speakers whose lives church attenders would have no idea how to imitate even if they wanted to.

One of Paul’s most notable “imitation” scriptures comes in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.” In this verse, an important aspect of discipleship is reaffirmed. The essence of discipleship is learning to be like Jesus. The example of the first disciples always holds true. They were learning to think like Jesus, to act like Jesus, to relate like Jesus, and to love like Jesus. This is no less true for disciples today.

However, as was already the case for Paul’s readers, people no longer have direct, physical access to Jesus and his manner of living. Like Paul’s readers, people must embrace relationships with the godly men and women around them whom they can begin to imitate even as they all learn to imitate Jesus together.

In Philippians, one of Paul’s more intimate letters, the emphasis on imitation emerges more than once and with multiple relational connections in mind: “Brothers, join

in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us” (Phil 3:17). In this reference, Paul again commends people not just to relate well to him, but also to one another. Such a principle holds true today for disciples of Jesus. Then, as he concludes his letter, a vision of Paul’s “imitation” emerges a little more clearly, “What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things” (Phil 4:9). Paul’s discipleship of the Philippians was founded on genuine, authentic relationship. Only with such relationship would imitation be possible. This degree of relationship greatly exceeds what is available through attending a worship service. It is the whole life that is to be imitated and practiced, rather than just a sermon to be implemented.

In both Hebrews and 3 John, the New Testament emphasis on “imitation” is revealed beyond the writings of Paul. The author of Hebrews exhorts his readers to be “imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promise” (Heb 6:12). Again a few chapters later, the reader is encouraged to “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith” (Heb 13:7). John continues the emphasis on imitating one another in his own words when he states, “Beloved, do not imitate evil, but imitate good” (3 Jn 11). These and other verses make apparent a widespread assumption throughout the New Testament of a very relational model of discipleship. The authors assume that such leaders are accessible and that their disciples would know enough of them to “imitate” their faith and their way of living.

From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry and throughout the New Testament, there is strong precedent for relational discipleship. The assumption was that people were

learning to follow and imitate Jesus together. While this same assumption cannot be made today, relational discipleship can be taught and modeled. Rather than reducing discipleship to an individual pursuit, the church can align itself with the biblical precedent and make discipleship a relational endeavor once again.

Habits and Rhythms of Discipleship

Watching a few minutes of the evening news makes it clear that “normal” life does not result in Christlikeness. If people are to accept Jesus’ invitation to become his apprentices and grow to be more like him, it will require intentionality, perseverance, and effort. This has always been the case. Following Jesus was a decision that the first disciples made in response to his invitation. It was a decision that they continued to make day after day. It was a new way of living that included a new worldview, new mission, new relationships, and new habits and rhythms of life. Although it is less obvious today, this new, intentional lifestyle would have been a natural development as the first disciples followed Jesus.

Unfortunately, Jesus’ way of life with the disciples is often overlooked. As a result, even well-intentioned Christians are left frustrated and confused as to why their efforts at Christlikeness fall so short of the life promised in the New Testament. They are too often like adoring fans who show up for the Olympic trials hoping to participate in the games without ever having adopted the lifestyle and training regimen that sets Olympians apart from the masses.

A theology of discipleship must take Jesus’ lifestyle into account. It must be intensely practical. It must provide not only vision and context, but also the means of

becoming like Jesus. It must be attentive to the habits and rhythms of life that Jesus modeled and taught the first disciples—those that undergirded his phenomenal ministry.

A New Way to Live

“New life” is a regular topic in the New Testament. But while the promise of new life sounds appealing to many people, most fail to make any real lifestyle change when they come to know Jesus. Like the multitudes who followed Jesus in the interest of healing or a meal, they are intrigued by what Jesus offers, but unwilling to part with the life they are already living. They are not interested in submitting to his lordship and becoming his disciples. As a result, the new life promised in the Bible remains alluring, but unrealized.

In the fifteenth chapter of John, Jesus offers a vision of new life that is both appealing and accessible. It serves as a helpful segue from life in the adoring multitude to life as a disciple. As with most of Jesus’ teaching, there is an emphasis on productive living for the sake of God’s kingdom: “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit...By this my Father is glorified, that you bear fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (Jn 15:2, 8). However, it is the corollary that provides an essential clarification as to the nature of life as a disciple of Jesus: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:4-5).

The invitation to discipleship is an invitation to a new life of productivity and meaning. But it is not a burden that Jesus intends for people to carry by their own strength or determination. Through this passage, Jesus makes clear that the lifestyle of discipleship is a matter of learning practical habits and rhythms by which he becomes the source of life. It is about discovering a lifestyle conducive for living in the Vine. As such practices are embraced, disciples then do what comes naturally for branches of a vine—they bear fruit.

Investing Daily Lives Well

Romans contains one of Paul's most famous expositions on new life. At its center, Paul includes some intensely practical wisdom on the life of discipleship. "Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness" (Rom 6:13). In other words, people are to leverage their physical bodies as instruments of discipleship. This undoubtedly includes making good moral decisions about how to live. But more significantly, it leads people to consider what it might look like in practical terms to present their physical bodies on a daily basis as instruments of righteousness. New life predictably emerges as disciples learn to proactively leverage their physical bodies in training and preparation for Christlikeness.

Even in Paul's most adamant rebuke of self-righteous works in his letter to the Galatians, he still concludes his letter with the following thoughts, "Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit

will from the Spirit reap eternal life” (Gal 6:7-8). Again, this is a practical matter of discipleship that too many believers fail to recognize. If people come to faith in Jesus but remain tethered to their old lifestyle in all its habits and rhythms, they unintentionally continue investing in the flesh and, quite naturally, continue reaping the fruit of “normal” life. Discipleship, however, is a matter of learning to invest in the spiritual life so that people may, over time, increasingly bear the spiritual fruit that they so greatly desire and that is promised to Jesus’ disciples throughout the New Testament.

Habits and Rhythms of Modeled by Jesus

Having established a foundation for practical, daily habits and rhythms of discipleship, it now remains to examine the means by which people may engage such a lifestyle. Such means are clearly evident in the life of Jesus with his first disciples. To begin with, it is clear that Jesus knew the scriptures. He had obviously read and studied them extensively. He had invested himself in memorizing many of them. These underlying practices became evident when Jesus drew upon Scripture as needed for guidance and direction in the moments it was needed. Jesus also exhibited a lifestyle of prayer that provoked the disciples to ask him to teach them to pray like he did (Lk 11). He maintained regular rhythms of silence and solitude even amidst a pressing schedule of extraordinary ministry. He fasted. He submitted to the needs of others and to the will of God. He practiced corporate worship. He fellowshiped with those around him. He practiced frugality and simplicity. He served others. These are just some of the lifestyle habits and rhythms Jesus modeled and taught the first disciples that are evident in the Gospels.

In his overall lifestyle, Jesus modeled a way of living in which he was able to maintain fellowship and continuity with the Father. As a man, his habits and rhythms of life were such that he was constantly “sowing to the Spirit” and reaping spiritual fruit. This lifestyle was modeled and taught to the first disciples. The same habits and rhythms of life are available and appropriate for disciples today.

Multiplication

The concept of multiplication is woven throughout the various elements of discipleship. But it is worth noting explicitly as an inherent element of discipleship. Multiplication aligns discipleship with the trajectory of God’s story between Jesus’ resurrection and the renewal of all creation. God’s story began with all of creation in view. All of humanity was created to govern creation in eternal rhythms free from decay and death. After the fall, the story collapsed down to a focus on the people of Israel, the land of Israel, and the history of Israel. Then, as Israel fell to the same rebellious fate as humanity, the story finally collapsed onto one man, and the point of his death on a solitary cross.

However, just as all seemed lost, the story exploded back out from that same man, his resurrection, and an empty tomb. It now presses outward in anticipation of the renewal of all creation and the restoration of all God’s people into their rightful places. Disciples of Jesus align with the outward trajectory of God’s story as they live beyond themselves and multiply God’s work in the lives of others.

Multiplication is also an explicit aspect of the Great Commission. Jesus’ instructions were for disciples to make more disciples. Multiplication can also be seen as

an expression of love and the restoration of humanity. There is no greater blessing than discipling someone and helping them know God and find their place in God's eternal kingdom. There is no greater expression of love for God and others than walking alongside others as they realize God's purposes for their lives.

Finally, multiplication is part of the relational dynamic of discipleship. Every disciple is the result of someone else's willingness to multiply God's work into the life of another. The natural progression as people continue to live in relationship with others is to reciprocate the blessing that was once received by discipling another.

PART THREE

PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4

EQUIPPING AND CATALYZING DISCIPLE MAKERS AT FRONT RANGE CHRISTIAN CHURCH AND BEYOND

It is unlikely that many serious Christians would argue against the significance of discipleship as part of the ministry of a local church. The conclusions drawn from Chapter 3 give substance and practicality to such a ministry endeavor. The essential elements in discipleship as examined above are worldview, integrated mission, intentional relationships, and habits and rhythms of life conducive for growth. Inherent to these, but worth noting, is also the element of multiplication. These elements constitute life as a disciple today and have since the first generation of disciples followed Jesus around the Middle East in the first century.

Theological Implications

As ongoing features of life, these aspects of discipleship are not to be learned, mastered, and then moved beyond. Rather, they are to be learned, internalized, and grown into over a lifetime. The challenge of this project, then, is to equip participants with a competence and confidence in discipleship that will reasonably enable them to continue growing, bearing fruit, and discipling others over their lifetimes. Therefore, this project

has in view both the people of FRCC (as the most likely group from which to begin) and those who may be subsequently reached who will never attend a service there. It is about equipping and catalyzing disciple makers that will continue their ministry over a lifetime regardless of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

With this purpose in mind, three pilot groups will be engaged as part of this project in order to compare and evaluate their respective effectiveness in equipping and catalyzing disciple makers. The groups will vary in size, composition, meeting frequency, intensity, and emphases. They will be designed as follows:

Table 2: Pilot Group Comparison

Size	Composition	Frequency	Intensity	Emphases
3	Out-of-state Community Leaders	Check-ins every 2-3 days	High	Worldview, Spiritual Formation
8	FRCC Community Group	Weekly	Low	Integrated Mission
15	CG Leaders	Monthly	High	Worldview, Spiritual Formation

Each group utilizes a slightly different approach while remaining viable expressions of discipleship. In each case, the various elements of discipleship are managed, but with greater or lesser emphasis. The most notable variations are the emphases on either worldview and spiritual formation or integrated mission. Although the relational aspect remains consistent in each pilot group, the group size and meeting frequency obviously create different relational dynamics within each group. Disciple making is the intentional pursuit in each case, although the intensity/commitment level of individual engagement is significantly less for the Community Group.

Goals

The overarching goal of this project is twofold. First, it is to equip competent and confident disciples. An appropriate parenting metaphor for this goal would be the successful establishment of healthy, productive, adult children. Once a child leaves home and successfully establishes their own household, life is not over. In fact, in some sense it is only just beginning. This is the goal regarding discipleship. Not that the process of discipleship is completed or perfected at the conclusion of the pilot, but that people would be competent and confident disciples in their own right and able to continue in what they have learned. Second, the goal is to equip and catalyze disciple makers. This second aspect is contingent on the first being done well. It also necessitates a challenging degree of simplicity and clarity in the discipleship process in order to make it readily multipliable in the lives of others.

Underneath these primary goals lay various sub-goals related to the essential elements of discipleship. Participants should gain a working understanding of the biblical narrative as the basis of their own worldview. Closely related to this is a contextualized understanding of the Gospel and the ability to communicate it clearly and effectively. Participants should also embrace intentional discipling relationships both as part of the pilot groups and also as an ongoing way of life. They should gain practical experience with various habits and rhythms of life that are conducive for ongoing growth. These experiences in spiritual practices may initially extend beyond what is ideal for any given individual. But experience with diverse practices may increase a participant's competence in discipling another person later on. Finally, participants should gain a workable understanding of God's missional purposes for their lives and increasingly

learn to integrate that mission into the regular rhythms of life. With each of these elements in place, participants should be adequately equipped as disciple makers in their own right.

Content of Strategy

As indicated above, three different pilot groups will be initiated as part of this project to compare their respective effectiveness at accomplishing the ultimate goal of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers. The groups will utilize two different primary resources. *Reimagining Discipleship* will be used for both the triad and the CG leaders group. *Surprise the World* will be used for the Community Group. Both are interactive group resources that include various spiritual practices emphasizing different elements of discipleship. Their respective nuances will be discussed below as the content for each element of discipleship is examined.

Adopting a Biblical Worldview

Biblical worldview as it pertains to discipleship was discussed at length in chapter three. Much of that previous content doubles as the content to be understood by the participants in the pilot groups. *Reimagining Discipleship* is a strong resource for two of the groups regarding the development of a biblical worldview. Part One of the book simplifies and clarifies the biblical narrative extensively in order to make it understandable and accessible for readers. The subsequent parts then establish Christology and Ecclesiology in the context of God's story before the Part 4 ends with a practical Anthropology for disciples taking their places in God's story between Jesus' ascension and his return.

Surprise the World makes much less contribution toward the development of a biblical worldview. Its use as the primary resource for the Community Group pilot necessitates additional teaching by the group leader. Fortunately, the brevity of *Surprise the World* allows for such teachings. Once the study of *Surprise the World* is finished and as the practices continue, *Reimagining Discipleship* will be utilized as a supplemental teaching resource for the CG pilot.

Intentional Discipling Relationships

Each pilot group includes a relational aspect. The triad pilot is the most relationally intimate of the groups. Although the participants live in different parts of the country, they will maintain the most regular communication with one another through email, messaging, and phone calls. Included in this group will be the specific relational endpoint of officially concluding the group process with the launching of each member as a disciple maker with another person or two of their choosing.

The Community Group is the most common relational setting at FRCC. This particular group was accustomed to weekly gatherings before the discipleship pilot began. The group is comprised of young families whose children range from one to thirteen years of age. The longest standing families in the group have been meeting for almost two years and two families joined only recently. The relational aspect of the Community Group pilot consists primarily of the weekly meetings.

The CG leaders pilot consists of various Community Group leaders who were chosen to participate in the pilot because of a previously expressed interest in discipleship. Many of the participants in this group did not previously know one another.

This pilot only meets monthly for a total of five gatherings over the course of the pilot. The leader maintains a schedule of almost weekly emails to the group to encourage and inspire the participants along the way. Like the triad, this group includes a concluding expectation that each of the participants will continue the discipling process with another person to be identified and recruited over the course of the initial pilot.

Habits and Rhythms of Discipleship

Each resource includes interactive spiritual practices to be engaged over the course of the project. *Reimagining Discipleship* is the more intensive of the two resources. Over the course of the first several weeks, participants build into several rhythms to be practiced over the course of the pilot. These include reading forty chapters of the Bible each week, three weekly entries in a prayer journal, and memorizing and meditating on a particular passage each month. As these rhythms are engaged, participants will also abstain from some typical activities. These rhythms of abstention include self-determined limits on technology and social media, a weekly fast, and twenty daily minutes of silence and solitude.

Reimagining Discipleship places a great emphasis on the development of a biblical worldview both in its weekly content and its corresponding practices. It is also intensive in its daily habits and rhythms by which to create margin for God to work in the life of the participant. It is lighter on both the missional and relational aspects of discipleship practices.

Surprise the World includes a different set of practices to be adopted by the Community Group. As with *Reimagining Discipleship*, these weekly practices are to be

continued over the course of the pilot. They include three intentional acts of blessing others, three meals shared with others, one period of listening prayer, learning about Jesus, and a weekly journal entry regarding the proclamation of God's Kingdom.

Surprise the World is much stronger in its missional and relational emphases. The majority of the weekly rhythms are directed outward toward others. However, it includes almost no focus on the development of a biblical worldview. With a majority of the commitment being weekly engagements contingent on encounters with other people, there is also a lack of daily structure and rhythm.

Integrating Mission

Regarding the integration of mission, the two resources make unique contributions. *Reimagining Discipleship* makes the stronger theological contribution toward the participant's missiology. In its attention to the biblical narrative and the unfolding purposes of God within it, a strong missiology is established that is consistent with that examined above in chapter three. This includes teaching on the purposes of humanity: to bless, to make God known, and to proclaim and manifest the reign of God. It also includes Jesus' clarifications of mission in both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

However, the actual integration of mission is not built in to the regimen of practices. Due to the intensity of the practices already involved, there is also not a great deal of margin for the group leader to introduce additional practices of a more specifically missional nature.

Surprise the World takes the opposite approach toward integrating mission. It makes very little theological contribution toward missiology. However, what it lacks in theology is made up for in practicality. Three of the five weekly practices are missional in nature. Frost provides helpful and clear guidance for both blessing and eating with others over the course of the week. “Sent” is much less clear, but includes some important missional concepts to be integrated into the lives of the participants: reconciliation, justice, beauty, and wholeness.

Multiplication

As countless practitioners and theologians alike have discovered, multiplication can be a profoundly challenging aspect of discipleship. For multiplication to take place, participants must be adequately equipped and catalyzed. The discipleship process must be clear and simple enough to naturally result in the competence and confidence to disciple others.

The contribution that the resources and pilots in this project have to make toward equipping and catalyzing disciple makers has yet to be revealed. Done well, each pilot group contains the potential to make discipleship compelling and imitable. Each pilot emphasizes slightly different elements of discipleship in pursuit of the same goal. What remains to be seen is which combination of variables proves to be the most effective at accomplishing their goal.

Target Population and Leadership

Leadership for each pilot group will be provided by the Community Group/Discipleship pastor at FRCC. The CG leaders pilot group consists of leaders

recruited from among the CG ministry at FRCC. These leaders comprise a target group in and of themselves while also representing a much larger target population of CG participants at FRCC. These leaders were identified over a period of months in the fall of 2016 based on an interest in discipleship, personal strength of character, and effective group leadership. Twenty-one participants were initially invited to take part in the pilot group. Fifteen leaders responded affirmatively to participate in the group.

The Community Group pilot was selected for slightly different reasons as an example of how discipleship might unfold with an established CG at FRCC. This CG is highly valuable as it represents a target population that has grown to over 400 people at FRCC. At the conclusion of the project, the CG pilot will provide a good starting point for discussion with many CG leaders about how they might engage the process of discipleship in their respective CGs.

Finally, the triad was selected to begin ascertaining how the discipleship process might unfold through the use of technology when circumstances prohibit face-to-face gatherings. The triad also represents the ultimate target population that exists beyond the CG ministry at FRCC. The success of this group would represent profound potential for the project as a whole.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION, PROCESS, AND STRATEGY

The pilot groups for this doctoral project will take place over an intentionally confined time frame of four months. Whereas discipleship itself is an indefinite undertaking, the ultimate goal of these pilot groups is to equip and catalyze disciple makers. The four-month duration, then, spans not from the beginning to the end for the participants. Instead, it spans from beginning to beginning, with each participant concluding the initial process by inviting others to share with them in the same discipleship journey. The initial groups will undoubtedly uncover many areas to be improved upon, but will hopefully maintain adequate momentum to endure the initial learning curve and result in a second cycle of disciple making.

Timeline

As noted above, the timeline for the pilot groups has been limited to four months. This brevity allows for momentum to continue as participants transition from disciple to disciple maker. It also reinforces a culture in which all disciples are learning and growing together, rather than promoting a hierarchy between disciple and disciple maker.

Advanced Preparation and Recruitment

The first concrete steps of preparation for this project began in the fall of 2015. At that point, the author began writing *Reimagining Discipleship* as a resource to use in the equipping and catalyzing of disciple makers. After several months of writing and editing, the book was published in April 2016.

Recruitment for the CG leaders pilot group began in June 2016. This large group of leaders required a great deal of advanced work to identify and coordinate. Over the course of five months, the author spent many hours meeting with various CG leaders serving at FRCC. These meetings allowed for a natural process of relationship building as well as providing opportunity to ascertain the leaders' interest in and previous experience with discipleship. During this time, the final plans for the pilot group took shape in response to the meetings with potential participants.

Gradually, a list of twenty-one leaders was prayerfully compiled. In November, these leaders were formally invited to take part in a pilot group with the goal of growing as disciples and disciple makers at FRCC. The kick-off gathering for the group was held in the beginning of December 2016. By that time, fifteen leaders had committed to take part in the pilot.

The smaller pilot groups required much less advanced preparation. The triad was simply a matter of prayerfully identifying two other men to take part. Both were chosen because of their love for the Lord and other people along with their high capacity to influence others. Once the timeline for the project was set, the men were officially invited to take part in the triad. Both men agreed to participate.

The Community Group chosen to take part in the pilot was pre-existing. The challenge was in determining the best primary resource to use for such a group. *Surprise the World* was ultimately chosen to provide a less intensive option with a more missional focus. While consistent with the overarching goal of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers, *Surprise the World* seemed more viable for potential implementation across the entire CG ministry. The remaining step was to simply coordinate the timing of *Surprise the World* in the Community Group with the start of the other two pilots.

Initial Assessment and Adjustments

As the three pilots progressed, there was much to observe and learn. The variations in group composition, meeting regularity, and resource utilization provided prompt and helpful perspective in comparing the pilot groups and evaluating their progress in equipping and catalyzing disciple makers. Where possible, adjustments were made to increase the likelihood of the participants ending the project with a transition into discipling others.

CG Leaders Pilot

The monthly interval of meetings for the CG leaders pilot proved to be detrimental. While the individual meetings went well, there was a significant loss of momentum and enthusiasm over the course of each month for many of the participants. The intermittent emails were ineffective at encouraging and inspiring the participants between meetings. More importantly, although the participants were encouraged to maintain regular communication with each other throughout the pilot, the sporadic schedule of gatherings stalled any genuine relationship development within the group that

would have made such communication more likely and beneficial. Unfortunately, the size of the group and the busyness of the individual participants did not allow for an adjustment to more frequent gatherings.

Another interesting challenge of the CG leaders pilot was the composition of the participants. Although the gatherings went well, there was a recurring pattern of some leaders approaching the process more like a potential program to implement than an effort to provide examples worth imitating and following. This challenge has both good and bad implications for the overall project. Fortunately, the goal of equipping and catalyzing disciple makers is not contingent on positional leadership and is even intended to equalize participants as co-disciples who are mutually submitting their lives to Jesus and learning to follow him. Unfortunately, the subsequent implementation of such discipleship efforts into the wider CG ministry through individual leaders may be hampered to the degree that the “leaders” seek to point the way for others rather than modeling and exemplifying it themselves.

In addition to these challenges, the meetings provided much encouragement. There was some great conversation amongst the leaders, especially those who have remained diligent in their practices between gatherings. *Reimagining Discipleship* proved to be a helpful resource in disciple making for those who engaged it regularly. By the end of the first month, two leaders were already discussing how they might utilize the resource within their own CG following the pilot group. Their assessment was very favorable regarding their growing competence as disciples and their preparedness to disciple others as a result of having worked through *Reimagining Discipleship*.

Another couple shared with the group a significant breakthrough they had in sharing the Gospel with an agnostic family member. Neither had previously engaged in such evangelism, but the content of *Reimagining Discipleship* had provided them with the confidence and context to share the Gospel effectively even with someone who was previously known to be antagonistic toward Christianity.

The CG leaders group also catalyzed both a new local triads and two new discipling Community Groups through the participants. Fortunately, the format of *Reimagining Discipleship* allowed for concurrent yet staggered groups. These new groups are a promising result of the initial pilot.

Although outside the purview of the project, the CG leaders pilot has also sparked several conversations amongst other leaders about discipleship at FRCC. Two other discipleship groups have begun partly as a result of the emphasis on discipleship that the project has brought about. The first stemmed from early conversations with an elder in the months leading up to the official start of the project. The second is a new men's discipleship group the lead pastor is launching as a result of the ongoing discipleship discussions now taking place.

Triad

The triad pilot proved to be somewhat challenging through the holiday season. One of the participants opted for a two week break from the practices around Christmas and into the new year. Due to the limited size of the group, the other two participants opted to halt their progress through *Reimagining Discipleship* as well in order to remain coordinated when they all resumed in January.

Since resuming, the group has gone smoothly. Communication amongst the triad has been consistent. Each participant has noted the effectiveness of the practices at creating regular connection with God. Compared with the CG leaders group, the conversation has centered much more around the practices than the content of the resource.

Beginning in January, one member of the triad also adjusted his reading practice somewhat to accommodate another group that he is leading in his home church. The second group is reading the bible together over the course of 2017. So the Old Testament reading schedule was modified by that participant in order to keep his readings coordinated with the group from his home church. However, since *Reimagining Discipleship* is more about the practice of regular reading than maintaining continuity in what is being read, the triad has not been affected.

Other than these minor adjustments, the triad has been very effective. The ongoing communication through texting and phone calls has facilitated relationship and camaraderie better than either the monthly CG leaders meetings or the weekly CG meetings. Nearing the end of the pilot project, it seems as though using *Reimagining Discipleship* in the context of a triad is the most likely format to successfully equip and catalyze disciple makers within the targeted timeframe.

Community Group

The Community Group pilot required the greatest degree of adjustment. *Surprise the World* proved to be completely ineffective for the group. While the practices it advocates seem very effective for missional engagement, the book itself failed to capture

the interest of the participants. Apart from one cul-de-sac dinner party hosted by a participating couple, there was almost no effort put into the missional habits through the initial six weeks of the *Surprise the World* book study.

What did surface following the completion of *Surprise the World* was a genuine interest among several group members in discovering a workable rhythm for regular Bible reading and prayer. As the group continues to discuss and implement these practices, the leader will look for an opportunity in the coming weeks to reintroduce the more missional practices of *Surprise the World*.

At the conclusion of the initial CG pilot, consideration will be given as to the future use of *Surprise the World* as a suggested resource for encouraging missional engagement. Two additional resources have already been recommended by this project's reader, Keith J. Matthews: *You are What You Love* by James A.K. Smith and *Faithful Presence: Seven Disciplines That Shape the Church for Mission* by David E. Fitch. Both will be considered in replacing *Surprise the World* as recommended resources for practical missional discipleship.

Leadership Development

The approach to leadership development was very specific to the goals of the project—to equip and catalyze people as disciples who make disciples. Participation included a full life cycle from beginning (as disciple) to beginning (as disciple maker). In leadership terms, the goal was for every participant to become a leader. With this in mind, the leadership development goal was essentially to equip participants with

competence as disciples that would generate the confidence and inspiration to continue on as disciple makers.

The emphasis on competence may be contrasted with a more common leadership standard of expertise. But in the case of this project and the goal of making disciples who make disciples, competence is more compatible both theologically and practically. Where expertise tends to communicate a sense of completion and promote a hierarchy between novice and expert, competence communicates the expectation of ongoing growth in both leader and participant while promoting healthy relationship between the two.

Effective leadership development of this sort is contingent on communicating and practicing discipleship in a manner that is both clear and simple while remaining effective at promoting growth in Christlikeness. The four aspects of discipleship examined throughout this project provide such a methodology. In what follows, the basic competencies for each aspect of discipleship are described. These competencies constitute the threshold through which a participant transitions into a disciple capable of making other disciples.

Communicating the Gospel and the Biblical Narrative

It is not possible to equip and catalyze disciple makers apart from the guidance and direction of the scriptures. This presents an immediate and obvious challenge to any hope of making disciples who make disciples over the course of a four-month period. If any degree of scriptural expertise is required, the timeline would render the goal impossible. The question, then, is to determine what might constitute an appropriate

competence regarding the scriptures that would be both adequate and transferable within such a limited timeframe.

Such competence comes with a clear understanding of the biblical narrative. This understanding of the biblical narrative has been described above in Chapter 4 in detail. Disciple makers must be equipped with this understanding. Over the course of four months, it must be internalized to the degree that it defines the worldview of the leader and may be effectively discussed and communicated to subsequent generations of disciples.

With this understanding of the biblical narrative in place, the Gospel is also brought into focus. This, too, is described in detail in Chapter 4. As with the biblical narrative, the Gospel should be understood, internalized, and central to the worldview of a disciple maker. A leader should also be able to communicate the Gospel to other disciples in the context of the biblical narrative and include important sub-topics such as sin, forgiveness, and heaven.

These competencies are essential for leadership because they are foundational in accurately inviting others into a life of discipleship. They provide a context of anticipation and restoration rather than moral perfection and escape. They accurately frame discipleship as a means of taking one's place in God's story and his eternal Kingdom. Finally, they provide an adequate foundation by which to continually cultivate the lifelong practices of reading, studying, memorizing, and meditating upon Scripture.

Developing Intentional Relationships

As has been previously noted, discipleship is inherently relational. Therefore, becoming an effective leader in making disciples includes some competencies in developing relationships. The foundational competency is in learning to become intentional in relationships while remaining genuinely relational. The sought after balance avoids the pitfalls of reducing people to projects on one hand and relational insignificance on the other. As with other leadership competencies, developing intentional relationships is a skill to be learned rather than assumed.

Developing intentional relationships requires proximity. Leaders must learn to create time and space to be with others. This practice puts the leaders in a position to discern and cultivate God's work in those around them. Then, when the timing seems right, an invitation into an intentional discipling relationship may be made.

Leaders must also learn to communicate their invitation clearly. There should be no question as to the vision, goals, and expectations of the discipling relationship as it moves forward. This must be true for both the leader and the disciples. The initial invitation should be clear about the hope and expectation of the participant's involvement through the entire life-cycle from beginning to beginning. Competence and multiplication must be communicated from the initial invitation.

Finally, leading others as a disciple maker calls upon some basic character development. Leaders must remain humble learners of Jesus' way, inviting others to join them along the same journey they are themselves taking. They must also be willing to embrace a degree of selflessness and submission to the needs of those they are discipling. Genuine relationships will not always be easy or convenient. Leaders must be willing and

prepared to make themselves accessible to others. These leadership demands reveal and hone character as both the challenge and the product of ongoing discipleship.

Modeling Habits and Rhythms of Life of Growth

The third leadership competency concerns lifestyle. Leaders must develop habits and rhythms of life that are conducive for ongoing growth in Christlikeness. Their lifestyle should be worthy of imitation as they competently communicate and exemplify the kind of habitual spiritual practices modeled by Jesus in the Gospels.

Even the most effective set of spiritual practices changes over time and circumstances. In addition to learning habits and rhythms most conducive to their own growth, leaders should develop a basic familiarity with other practices modeled by Jesus in order to best equip others. This may involve experimenting with various practices as each disciple finds the best combination of habits and rhythms suitable for alignment with God's ongoing work in and through them.

Integrating Mission

Mission is an integral part of discipleship. Therefore, leaders must develop a basic competence regarding their understanding and integration of mission. It must be clearly understood as it emerges from within the biblical narrative and the teachings of Jesus. This understanding must be complemented with the corresponding ability to communicate mission as the means by which people live faithfully as the men and women God created them to be. Rather than confining mission to specifically religious activity, it must be internalized as a framework by which to live faithfully in response to what Jesus has done and in anticipation of his return.

As always, leadership is by example as much as by word. Leaders must work to exemplify the integration of God's mission into their everyday lives. They should model intentionally missional habits and rhythms of life. It should increasingly become a spontaneous manifestation resulting from the inner transformation taking place as leaders become more like Jesus Christ.

Resources

The resources needed for this doctoral project are simple, accessible, and inexpensive. Two books will be used as teaching material and to provide structure to the spiritual disciplines that will be engaged throughout the project. Both *Reimagining Discipleship* and *Surprise the World* are available through Amazon (as well as other retailers) at a nominal cost. The spiritual disciplines engaged also include the need for a bible, a journal, time, and resources used to bless others to be determined at the participant's discretion.

The resources needed to facilitate group interaction are also quite simple. The weekly meetings for the CG pilot group as well as the monthly gatherings for the CG leaders pilot can be easily accommodated in homes. Additional meetings between the leader and participants will take place at various coffee shops and restaurants at the discretion of those involved. Finally, technology (both smart phones and computers) will facilitate weekly correspondence amongst participants in the CG leaders pilot as well as all communication within the triad.

Assessment Plan

The project will include three distinct phases of assessment. The initial assessment will take place midway through the project. This allows for any necessary adjustments to the pilots by the leader in order to increase the likelihood of successfully equipping and catalyzing disciple makers by the project's conclusion. The second assessment will be more formal in nature in order to create an apologetic for discipleship at FRCC meaningful to other church leaders and staff members. Finally, the third phase of assessment will examine the long-term results of the project. This will only be possible over time as multiple generations of disciple makers emerge (or fail to emerge). It will take place amongst the leader and other future leaders in the disciple making movement.

The initial assessment took place midway through the project. This timeframe was sufficient to discern the initial effectiveness of each pilot group. As stated above, it allowed for some adjustments to be made in order to maximize the likelihood of the project's success. Since the goal is for the project to span from beginning (making disciples) to beginning (disciples making disciples) without a definite ending, this initial assessment was critical to the project's ongoing success.

The initial assessment evaluated the variables unique to each pilot group in comparison with each other. These variables were primarily matters of group composition, meeting logistics, and resources. The primary consideration at that point was regarding the plausible sustainability of the chosen method. The intention was to assess whether or not the pilot participants were on a trajectory likely to result in their growth into disciple makers in their own right. The details of the initial assessment are described above in "Progress and Adjustments."

The second assessment will take place in April 2016 as the participants are preparing to begin a new life cycle as disciple makers. Whereas the initial assessment is primarily aimed at accomplishing the goals of the project, this second assessment is designed largely to facilitate conversation about the importance of discipleship among other ministry leaders at FRCC. To accomplish this, participants in each pilot group will be emailed an assessment form. (See Appendix A.) Time will also be set aside during a concluding group meeting to allow anyone to complete the survey who did not do so in advance. The assessment form is written to measure both the effectiveness of each pilot as well as to provide guidance as to how future groups might be improved for greater effectiveness in equipping and catalyzing disciple makers. The form includes questions pertaining to each aspect of discipleship: worldview, mission, relationships, and spiritual practices. There is a mix of content questions (What did you learn?), perception questions (What was the effect on you?), and qualitative questions (How could things be improved?).

Once the assessment results have been compiled, a meeting will be set to discuss them with various CG leaders and the church elders who oversee both CGs and discipleship. Ideally, this formal assessment will provide feedback regarding the integration of intentional discipleship efforts into the Community Group Ministry as a whole. Additionally, consideration may be given as to the validity of including discipleship training as part of the leadership expectations for CG leaders in the future.

Beyond the CG Ministry, another meeting will take place in April between the author and the lead pastor of FRCC to discuss the results of the pilot groups. The goal of this meeting will be to discuss the future shape and implementation of church-wide

discipleship efforts at FRCC. The discussion with the lead pastor will also include an ideological component. Typically, FRCC has sought after and promoted high-production-value and ease-of-use resources exemplified by RightNow media. However, the use of these types of resources has left the mission of FRCC “to be intentional neighbors through knowing and following Jesus” at a virtual standstill.

The pilot groups, on the other hand, were designed around a much different ideology centered around spiritual formation and people development. Production value was not taken into consideration. Ease-of-use was considered only in deference to what resources and methodology was most likely to result in equipping and catalyzing participants as disciple makers. The direction of the discussion with the lead pastor will largely be determined by the results of the assessment. If the results indicate that this project’s approach to discipleship may significantly impact the FRCC mission, a vital discussion may ensue about how such discipleship could expand beyond the confines of the CG ministry and impact the whole of the church.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This doctoral project focused on equipping and catalyzing disciple makers at FRCC and beyond. This challenge required clarity and simplicity in establishing participants in a life of discipleship. The four discipleship elements in focus were worldview, mission, intentional relationships, and habits and rhythms of ongoing growth. The goal in the project was to equip participants with competence in each area to allow for both ongoing growth and confidence in inviting others to join them along the same journey as disciple makers.

The project took the form of three different pilot groups varying in size, composition, frequency of meeting, and teaching resources. Each pilot group engaged in spiritual practices according to the primary teaching content. Overall, the pilot was aimed at the development of people rather than a church program. This emphasis was specifically revealed in the triad composed of out-of-state participants. This people-centered approach allows for ongoing growth and multiplication amidst a fluid congregation in the highly mobile population of Castle Rock.

The first essential for discipleship targeted in the project was the development of a worldview consistent with the biblical narrative. Such a worldview contrasts significantly with the prevailing worldview of Castle Rock which is heavily shaped by the individualism, materialism, and consumerism that comprise the American dream. Even for church-attending Christians, the American dream eliminates any reasonable grounds for discipleship. The process for establishing such a worldview was an examination of the biblical narrative as it emerges from Genesis to Revelation. With this

story in view, participants were then invited to understand their lives as characters in God's story taking their places between Jesus' ascension and the culmination of his reign over the new creation. This worldview also brings needed clarity in understanding the Gospel as Jesus proclaimed it: the nearness of God's reign.

Within this story, God also has specific plans and purposes for his people. This mission is consistent from Genesis to Revelation: to be a blessing, to make God known throughout creation, and to proclaim and manifest God's reign. These purposes run in stark contrast to the American dream. They demand a genuine renewal of the mind and redirection of life that Jesus said was the only appropriate response to the anticipation of God's reign (Mark 1:15). Attention was also given to Jesus' clarification of mission in both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment. The realization of God's mission represents not just religious activity, but the expression of genuine humanity. Understanding and integrating these missional purposes is essential for making disciples.

As they embrace God's mission, disciples must do so in intentional relationships with one another. Such relationships are consistent with what Jesus modeled and taught throughout his earthly ministry. Individualism simply has no place in discipleship. Disciples must cultivate relationship with God, with one another, and with those who are not-yet disciples.

Finally, disciples must follow the example of Jesus by learning habits and rhythms of life by which to increasingly cooperate with God's work in and through them. Such spiritual practices are evident throughout the New Testament. Such a lifestyle runs in stark contrast to the status-quo in Castle Rock where normal life includes the frantic pursuit of self-interests from dawn to dusk. The project introduced several practices as

examples of the intentional adoption of Jesus' way of life. They promote growth in discipleship all the way from the development of worldview down to daily time management.

Moving forward, there is great hope for equipping and catalyzing disciples at FRCC. There is undoubtedly much to learn. There are many other options to explore in facilitating the various circumstances of people's lives as they pursue Christlikeness. But a foundation for growth and learning has been established. The number of disciples working together to see the vision accomplished is growing. By the grace of God, the work will continue and groups of disciples making disciples will begin emerging as far and wide as God sends his people out from FRCC to continue their mission as a people living faithfully before him in anticipation of Jesus' return and the culmination of his reign over the new creation.

APPENDIX A

Assessment / Feedback Form: Discipleship Pilot Groups

Thank you for taking some time to fill out this form. Your feedback will be of great value in evaluating the effectiveness of this group and improving future efforts to equip disciples at Front Range. Your feedback will only be shared anonymously with the church leaders to whom the information pertains.

What was the primary resource used in your group? (Circle one.)

Reimagining Discipleship

Surprise the World

Worldview

Briefly describe God’s story as it emerges from Genesis to Revelation:

On a scale of 1-10, how confident would you be communicating this story to others? ____
(1 = Not at all. 10 = Very confident.)

Briefly describe the Gospel:

On a scale of 1-10, how confident would you be communicating the Gospel to others?

How has learning about these things affected you as a disciple/disciple maker?

Relationships

What were the strengths of this group format for growing as disciples?

What could be improved about the format of this group for growing as disciples?

Spiritual Practices

Which practices helped you grow the most as a disciple? Which had the least effect?

Which practices will you continue? What other practices would you like to try?

How would you describe the significance of daily spiritual practices in discipleship?

Mission

Biblically speaking, how would you describe the mission/purpose of God's people?

How are you learning to integrate mission into your life?

Overall

How would you describe the effect of this experience on your personal discipleship?

How would you describe the effect of this experience in preparing you to disciple someone else?

Are you prepared to lead someone through this same type of experience? _____

What were the strengths of this experience?

What would help make it more beneficial?

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