

BLENDDED ONLINE LEARNING AS AN EFFECTIVE TOOL
FOR MAKING DISCIPLES IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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DAVID S. HAMPSON

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Dave Hampson
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All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me. Therefore go and
MAKE DISCIPLES...

—Matthew 28:18-20

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis-project is to challenge the Christian Church of the 21st century to consider a new paradigm for making disciples called blended online learning. Over the centuries the Church has done a good job of preaching and teaching the truths of the Gospel. However, the world is changing. The Internet has brought an infusion of information and knowledge beyond anything the world has ever known. People are less and less content to sit and listen to lecture-based teaching, when they can find the specific information they are looking for with the click of a button. It is the belief of this author that the time is now for the church to harness the learning capabilities of the Internet. Blended online learning offers unique and timely possibilities for making effective disciples in the 21st century. By examining three small groups who used blended online learning and speaking with a variety of individuals with experience in blended online learning, this thesis-project shows the viability of using this unique learning style to make effective disciples for Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 1

THE PROBLEM AND THE SETTING

The Struggle to Make Disciples

In Matthew 28:18-20¹ Jesus instructed his disciples to go, teach and baptize when He gave them the Great Commission to make disciples. Today, the Church is “going.” Short-term and long-term missionaries have taken the message of Jesus Christ and His present Kingdom to every nation on earth. Today, the Church is “teaching.” Hundreds of thousands of sermons are preached every Sunday, and throughout the year the Bible is presented, explored and studied in Bible Studies, Sunday Schools, small groups and topical classes. There is no lack of in-depth teaching for all ages throughout every week of the year. Today, the Church is also “baptizing.” Through immersion, sprinkling and pouring in baptismals, lakes, rivers, swimming pools and even hot tubs, millions of believers in Christ around the world have experienced water and Spirit baptism. All this has happened as a result of Jesus giving the command to, “...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”²

In the midst of all this, “going,” “teaching,” and “baptizing,” questions are being raised about the effectiveness of the disciples being made. Are the methods used to make

¹ “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” (New International Version). All scriptures and scripture references for this thesis are in the NIV unless otherwise noted.

² Matthew 28:19-20.

disciples working? Do the disciples made today resemble Jesus? According to the Barna Group³ in a national study of people who call themselves Christians, the actions and attitudes of a majority are more similar to the beliefs and behaviors of the Pharisees.⁴ In order to get improved results, the Church must be open to new possibilities when it comes to discipling new and maturing believers. The thesis of this paper is: Blended online learning offers unique and timely possibilities for making effective disciples in the 21st century.

Blended online learning is a medium for learning. In and of itself it is not good or bad. Like any channel of delivery such as print, cell phones or even face-to-face communication, the way blended online learning is used is critical to its success. Its main benefit is the variety of learning methods it presents to instructors and students. Not all people are convinced of its effectiveness, partly because its connection to the Internet gives rise to valid questions about distractions and loss of focus.⁵ However, blended online learning is used widely in schools and corporations and as a result the church should, at the very least, consider its vast possibilities.

The problem with disciple-making in the world today is definitely not related to a belief in God. One Gallup Poll reported that 92% of Americans say they believe in God

³ The author is aware the Barna Group has been questioned at times for their identification methods which sometimes produce shocking numbers. The point of using the Barna surveys is to reveal Christianity's decreasing influence. Gallup polls included in this thesis-project confirm this sobering reality.

⁴ "Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees?," Barna Group, April 30, 2013, accessed July 7, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/611-christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees#.Uieb0D969vh>. (All URL's in this thesis have been checked for accuracy. Some require https and some will not work if that is a part of the address).

⁵ Nicholas Carr, "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" *The Atlantic*, July 1, 2008, accessed March 2, 2014, <http://m.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/>.

and “78% of American adults identify with some sort of Christian religion.”⁶ This is evidenced in the Barna poll which says, “although most Americans consider themselves to be Christian and say they know the content of the Bible, less than one out of ten Americans demonstrate such knowledge through their actions.”⁷ Even more startling are half of all adults participating in church on any given Sunday are

more likely to behave in ways that characterized non-Christians than to reflect the behavior of born again adults. In other words, their faith does not seem to be a defining factor in many of their lifestyle choices. For instance, this group is more similar to born again Christians on matters such as recycling and the likelihood of discussing political matters. However, they are more similar to non-Christians on matters such as the likelihood of discussing faith matters, volunteering, turning off offensive television programs, discussing moral issues, gambling, using tobacco, having sex outside of marriage, getting drunk, and passing on encouragement to others.⁸

This poor imitation of Jesus is impacting the younger generation in disturbing ways. One study revealed that only 3% of 16-29 year old non-Christians hold the beliefs of evangelical Christians in a positive light. This is eight times lower than the youth of the Baby Boomer generation. The same study also revealed that the age group of 16-29 year olds is much more skeptical and inclined to resist Christianity than were their counterparts just a decade ago.⁹

When young people were asked to identify their impressions of Christianity, one of the common themes was "Christianity is changed from what it used to be" and

⁶ Frank Newport, “Christianity Remains Dominant Religion in the United States,” Gallup Inc., December 23, 2011, accessed July 1, 2013, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/151760/christianity-remains-dominant-religion-united-states.aspx/>.

⁷ “Barna Survey Examines Changes in Worldview among Christians over the Past 13 Years,” Barna Group, 2009, accessed June 16, 2013, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/21-transformation/252-barna-survey-examines-changes-in-worldview-among-christians-over-the-past-13-years>.

⁸ “Faith Has a Limited Effect on Most People’s Behavior,” Barna Group, May 24, 2004, accessed June 20, 2012, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/188-faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior>.

⁹ “A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity,” Barna Group, September 24, 2007, accessed June 22, 2012, <http://www.barna.org/teens-next-gen-articles/94-a-new-generation-expresses-its-skepticism-and-frustration-with-christianity>.

"Christianity in today's society no longer looks like Jesus." These comments, mentioned by one-quarter of both young non-Christians (23%) and born again Christians (22%), were the most frequent unprompted images that young people called to mind.¹⁰

Observations like this give an indication that something is desperately wrong in the way the church is making disciples. People believe in God, but they are less and less likely to look like Jesus. Instead of the Church being known for the love and grace of God, 91% of young non-Christians and 80% of those in the church say the phrase "anti-homosexual" is what they think of when they think about Christianity. The most revealing part of that observation is that young people "claim that the church has not helped them apply the biblical teaching on homosexuality to their friendships with gays and lesbians."¹¹ In other words, the teaching about love and care for all people, which is so prevalent in the church, is not translating adequately into daily life. The essence of being a disciple is being lost at a time when it is desperately needed. There is an abundance of preaching and information shared from the pulpits, but according to the polls, in a majority of cases, it is not connecting with daily life in a manner which is able to impact the world where believers and non-believers live. Young people in the church say they find Christianity to be, "judgmental, hypocritical, and too political. One-third said it (Christianity) was old-fashioned and out of touch with reality."¹²

In July 13, 2012, Gallup conducted a poll which revealed that Americans have less confidence in the organized church than they have ever had in any previous Gallup

¹⁰ "A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity."

¹¹ "A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity."

¹² "A New Generation Expresses its Skepticism and Frustration with Christianity."

poll.¹³ Based on the hundreds of thousands of sermons and teachings which are being presented weekly in churches across the country, broadcast on television and radio and shown 24/7 on the Internet, this seems almost incomprehensible. The reality is the poll numbers reveal a disconnect between all the Christian information being disseminated on a weekly basis and the making of disciples who look, sound and act like Jesus.

Are Better Sermons the Answer?

One way theological seminaries and Bible schools have tried to rectify this situation is by teaching pastors how to preach and teach more effectively. Theological libraries are filled with book after book of instruction on preaching and teaching. There is certainly nothing wrong with this, but what if the make-up and the proclamation of the sermon and teachings are not the only issue? What if in this technological, interactive age, the issue is that people need more than what monologue sermons or teaching lectures are able to provide on their own?¹⁴ John Byron, Professor of the New Testament at Ashland Theological Seminary, does not advocate doing away with sermons, but he does question whether preaching—as done throughout history—is the most effective way today to communicate the Good News on a weekly basis. He observes that sermons are sometimes more of a performance than they are a tool to draw hearers into the text. He concludes his thoughts by asking, “Are we teaching them (church goers) to read and study the Bible for themselves? Or are we merely being the person who hands out a

¹³ Stoyan Zaimov, “Gallup: American Confidence in Religion at All-Time Low,” Gallup Inc., July 13, 2012, accessed July 12, 2013, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/gallup-american-confidence-in-religion-at-all-time-low-78213/>.

¹⁴ The purpose of the author is not to discredit biblical preaching, but rather to critically evaluate it and consider ways to complement it—thus enhancing its effectiveness.

weekly ration of Bible sprinkled with just enough guilt to make them come back for more?”¹⁵

Paul Windsor of Carey Baptist College disagrees with Byron’s conclusions, especially concerning the effectiveness of preaching. He responds by saying,

It matters not one whit to me if someone was to create a diagnostic test which demonstrated that over a specific period of time my preaching had led neither to quantifiable growth nor measurable success and was therefore a total waste of money. My response would be to find ways to become more prayerful and more dependent on God and to keep giving it my best and expect God to do the rest simply because my understanding of the Bible and theology and history demonstrates that God chooses to use the foolishness of preaching to achieve his purposes in his own way and at his own pace. There is a time to be faithful to something received and revealed and not just be innovative with something new and improved. In the New Zealand setting biblical preaching has not been tried and found wanting, it has been wanted and not tried often enough. We are too impatient.¹⁶

Certainly becoming more prayerful and dependent on God is a good thing, but pleading for more patience when it comes to sermon effectiveness seems to be quite a stretch. With more resources, training and opportunities for preaching and hearing sermons than ever before in history, the time is now for Christianity to be making more of an impact on individual lives and the culture in general. As previously shown, this is not happening. Based on Christianity’s growing lack of influence, it seems there is no better time than the present to evaluate what has “always been done.” David Allis in his article on, “The Problem with Preaching” points out that there are other forms and ways to communicate effectively, in addition to preaching. According to Allis, “Educational studies repeatedly demonstrate that people learn more through interactive teaching and

¹⁵ John Byron, “Are Sermons Still an Effective Means of Communication?,” *The Biblical World Blog*, October 25, 2010, accessed July 30, 2012, <http://thebiblicalworld.blogspot.com/2010/10/are-sermons-still-effective-means-of.html>.

¹⁶ Paul Windsor, “The Problem with Preaching: a personal response,” Carey Baptist College, accessed July 21, 2012, <http://kiwimadepreaching.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/aresponse.pdf>.

self-learning. Rather than just trying to pass on information, we should be creating life-long spiritual learners.”¹⁷

Pedagogical Studies and Monologue Lectures

Pedagogical studies done over the last fifty years have shown that monologue lectures lose their effectiveness in the middle¹⁸ and after the first 15 minutes the rate of comprehension drops appreciably.¹⁹

There is no simple relationship between what is taught and what is learnt. Meaning cannot simply be transferred to students (even by dictation!). Students make their own meaning. The construction of personal knowledge is a personal activity. What students manage to construct out of a lecture will depend on what they already know and can bring to bear in constructing new knowledge.... Lecturing is just about the least flexible resource students have if they bring to bear what they know to construct knowledge. The lecturer cannot easily adjust to individuals' existing ways of seeing things, in the content, pace or manner of treatment of the content of the lecture. There is simply too little scope for the negotiation and construction of meaning for much development of understanding to take place.²⁰

Is it possible this same critique of a lecture has application to sermons and teaching done in the church? Some may say this critique disregards the anointing of God, and certainly that is critical, but just because a message is anointed does not mean it will automatically break into the heart of a listener and result in a transformed life.

Pedagogical research says in order for people to grasp the meaning of the information they have been taught and make application of it in their lives, they must develop their own understanding. In order for this to happen, they must interact with the material. “If

¹⁷ Kenton Anderson, “The Problem with Preaching,” Northwest Baptist Seminary Faculty Blog, August 1, 2007, accessed July 24, 2012, <http://www.nbseminary.ca/archives/the-problem-with-preaching>.

¹⁸ James O. Johnston and Jo Anne P. Calhoun, “The Serial Position Effect in Lecture Material,” *Journal of Educational Research* 62, no. 6 (February 1969): 255–258.

¹⁹ “Twenty Terrible Reasons for Lecturing,” Oxford Brookes University, Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, 2011, accessed September 22, 2012, www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsltd/resources/20reasons.html.

²⁰ “Twenty Terrible Reasons for Lecturing.”

you want students to think and discuss then the best preparation involves thinking and discussion.”²¹ This is precisely why blended online learning can help increase the effectiveness of sermon and teaching times in the church. Online tools connect people to the subject by providing more opportunities to reflect and process what they have heard and learned. Everything is accomplished at their own pace, in the comfort of their own homes, by themselves and with others, through a discussion thread or chat room or interactive wiki. Blended online learning also sets the stage for deeper discussion in face-to-face small groups which allows the learned information to more deeply impact individual’s lives.²²

The Technological Connection

The Bible is clear: we are to preach (Matthew 24:14) and teach (Matthew 28:20) the Gospel. The Bible is also clear: we are to preach and teach by touching people where they live. That is what God did for humanity in His Son Jesus. That is what Jesus did when He got in the boat with the fisherman, when He stooped down and was quiet with the woman caught in adultery, and when He ate with Matthew the tax collector. Today, one of the greatest ways we can touch people where they live is by using the technology they have with them on a daily basis. Smart phones, tablets and computers are no longer just the property of a few early adopters. Although the younger generations are more attuned to the latest technological gadgets, people of every age are using computers. No matter the generation, people are accessing email and Internet search engines on a weekly basis. David Kinnaman, president of The Barna Group points out that every generation is

²¹ “Twenty Terrible Reasons for Lecturing.”

²² Terry Anderson, ed., *The Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, (Edmonton: AU Press Athabasca University, 2008), 49.

relying more and more on the Internet. Each segment has different technologies they use more frequently, but all are using it. The younger adults are more into content creation, while the Boomer and Buster groups are downloading music, interacting with blogs and involved in social networking web sites.²³

All Americans are increasingly dependent on new digital technologies to acquire entertainment, products, content, information and stimulation. However, older adults tend to use technology for information and convenience. Younger adults rely on technology to facilitate their search for meaning and connection. These technologies have begun to rewire the ways in which people - especially the young - meet, express themselves, use content and stay connected.²⁴

One key question that must be asked is: How can the church touch people in the midst of a technological world? Should we use the technology simply because it is there? As long as the message is not compromised, does it matter how the technology is used? Not everyone would answer “Yes” to these questions. Some say the technology has a message of its own. Using the example of the technology of the printed word, Shane Hipps points out that using print led to linear thinking and rational argument:

The relentlessly linear, sequential, uniform medium of print inevitably gave rise to the same patterns in our thinking-- we become what we behold. Thus modernity celebrated syllogism, systematization, and reason above all else. And the modern church followed suit by unconsciously offering an "unchanging" gospel pressed into a linear, sequential, and reasonable formula.²⁵

The importance of guarding against the negative impact of technology, while participating in the good it can offer, is not a new concern. Basil the Great, who lived in the 300s, outlined two criteria for the use of technology:

²³ “New Research Explores How Technology Drives Generation Gap,” Barna Group, February 23, 2009, accessed June 24, 2012, <http://www.barna.org/media-articles/212-new-research-explores-how-technology-drives-generation-gap>.

²⁴ “New Research Explores How Technology Drives Generation Gap.”

²⁵ Shane Hipps, “The Gospel According to Electronic Culture: What if the medium really is the message?” Parse, Leadership Journal, May 30, 2006, accessed June 6, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2006/may/gospel-according-to-electronic-culture-what-if-medium.html>.

Restraint - Technology is necessary in itself to life and provides many facilities. It is not harmful to peace and tranquility, unity, and undistracted devotion to the Lord, provided it is used with 'moderation and simplicity.' Spiritual vigilance - Spiritual vigilance, taking time to 'pray, to concentrate and cast off the cares of the world' helps people 'stave off the disastrous effects of the technological society' in which they become "consumers and slaves to images and information, which fill their lives."²⁶

Those same guidelines apply today 1700 years later, as the church uses technology for the purpose of expanding the Kingdom of God. In agreement with Basil the Great, Brian McLaren personally advises caution when it comes to the use of technology. Drawing from the thoughts of Marshall McLuhan, the philosopher of technology, McLaren observes that every positive technology has a negative side. McLuhan says "every innovation is an amputation. For example, when you invent the wheel, your legs become weaker. When you invent the television, your ability to become present becomes weaker. When you invent the amplifier, your voice becomes weaker."²⁷ McLaren observes that all use of technology should be done with great care. He concludes by saying,

I don't know exactly what impact the Internet will have on the local church...but it will have an impact in many areas, including education. Internet-based people know that information is ubiquitous, and they feel empowered to seek it out. They don't need you to spoon-feed them information in lectures like they used to; they can Google it way faster. They need you to do other things...to help them sift through the information, integrate it, incarnate it, reflect on it, model it.²⁷

²⁶ Rosie Perera, "Insights from Orthodox Spirituality on Technology," Faith and Technology. November 20, 2011, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://faithandtechnology.org/blog/2011/11/20/insights-from-orthodox-spirituality-on-technology/>.

²⁷ Brian McLaren, interview by Becky Garrison, *Rising From the Ashes: Rethinking Church* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007) 158. (The author understands some readers may question Brian McLaren's theological views. His thoughts on technology were deemed to be helpful for this thesis-project and including them is not an affirmation of his theology).

The Essence of Discipleship

Pastor Bill Hybels agrees with the general direction McLaren is heading. After 30 years of ministry—pastoring one of the largest churches in the United States and heading up the entire seeker sensitive movement, which has involved thousands of churches—Pastor Hybels agrees people need more than what the church has been offering. After Willow Creek Community Church completed a multiple year qualitative study of its ministry, he concluded that teaching people to be self-feeders is critical to making disciples. In the study, they were interested in discovering what programs in their church were most effective in leading people into maturity with Christ. The results were not what they had anticipated. They discovered that involvement in programs, which had been their main focus of ministry, was not directly connected to people’s spiritual growth. Hybels response to the study was,

We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become ‘self-feeders.’ We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their Bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.²⁸

The problem was people had received the message that if they were going to grow in their faith it was the church’s responsibility to feed them:

Too many Christians think that their growth is dependent upon the church rather than recognizing that it’s the church’s job to equip them for maturity so that they transition from dependence on the church to investing in the church or from consumer to key contributor. As Jesus modeled, the ultimate mark of a follower of Jesus is unquenchable servanthood not an endless accumulation of facts.²⁹

²⁸ “Willow Creek Repents?” *Leadership Journal*, Parse, October 18, 2007, accessed June 6, 2013, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/parse/2007/october/willow-creek-repents.html?start=2>.

²⁹ “Out of Ur,” *Following God’s Call in a New World*, Conversations hosted by the editors of *Leadership Journal*, October 18, 2007, accessed September 8, 2013, Quote taken from comments section, posted by Brian Rudisell, <http://old.westerfunk.net/archives/christianity/Willow%20Creek%20Repents/>.

The point is this: the responsibility for spiritual growth is not the responsibility of the church. Each person must rise up and put forth the effort to grow. This revelation is critical for Christians to take hold of and understand. As long as the focus in the church is the next great speaker or preacher or the next great revelation of truth, believers will not learn to train themselves. Ultimately, people's growth must not be largely connected to their pastor or even their church. Both of these are important, but they make an unstable foundation for growth. Time alone with God in a daily relationship with His Son is the critical foundation to discipleship.

The busyness of life works overtime to impede this reality. With both parents working to pay the bills, children involved in a multitude of activities, Hollywood and Madison Avenue bombarding culture with the next latest and greatest fad, and businesses sending workers all over the world—finding quiet time with God is not an easy task. When people do find time, the studies say they are reading less and less. A study by the National Endowment for the Arts reveals this is especially true of young people. This, “99 page compendium of more than 40 studies by universities, foundations, business groups, and government agencies since 2004—paints a dire picture of plummeting levels of reading among young people over the past two decades.” One of the reasons stated for the decline is that there are a multitude of gadgets cluttering people's lives.³⁰ However, on a positive note, there is a definite rise in e-reading. Even though not everyone has an interest in e-devices, there are studies which reveal that those who read in digital form have an increasing appetite to read more. “And 30 per cent of those downloading books,

³⁰ David Mehegan, “Young People Reading a Lot Less,” *Boston Globe*, Boston.com, November 19, 2007, accessed September 9, 2012, http://boston.com/news/nation/articles/2007/11/19/young_people_reading_a_lot_less/.

newspaper articles and other written material say they now read more often. Only 7 per cent read less.”³¹

Since technological gadgets do not appear to be going away any time soon, it seems best to use them in a constructive manner. Biblical courses and training material, infused with Internet technology, provide the resources to teach, equip and encourage people to become ‘self-feeders.’³² When this type of learning is combined with Sunday morning preaching or any type of small group teaching, the potential for making devoted disciples of Jesus Christ is greatly enhanced. The key is helping people process, reflect and interact with what they are learning on an ongoing basis.

Discipleship and Technology

It is absolutely possible to make devoted disciples without the latest and greatest technology. People can take notes while listening to lectures, highlight while reading books, study printed outlines and discussion questions, and reflect upon and process what they have been taught without the Internet. Computers, tablets and smart phones are certainly not needed to become a disciple of Jesus Christ. But, as previously shown, disciple-making in the church needs all the constructive help it can get. Using technology wisely has the ability to reach people where they live and work, within the hectic lifestyles of the 21st century in developed nations.

As of February 2012, 46% of all American adults owned a smartphone. That is a 31% increase over May of 2011 (just 10 months previous) when 35% of American adults

³¹ “E-readers rise, but less people reading,” *Herald Sun News*, April 5, 2012, accessed September 9, 2012, “<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/breaking-news/e-readers-rise-but-less-people-reading/story-e6frf7jx-1226320067439>.”

³² Terry Anderson, ed., *The Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, 22.

owned a smartphone.³³ According to the US Census bureau in 2010, over 145 million Americans reported using the Internet. 11.4 percent or over 15 million said they were enrolled or had taken an online course.³⁴ Every month, more and more people are accessing information by using technology. No longer do we question whether e-books will pass print books, but rather when. Amazon—which holds over 70% of the e-book market—reported in May of 2011 that its digital books were outselling its print books. In the larger picture, in 2010 e-books were under 10% of the whole book market, but in the first 5 months of 2011, e-books rose to 20%. In the context of the entire market, that is an increase of 160% in comparison to hardcover and paperbacks which dropped nearly 20%. One example of the way things are progressing in the publishing world is the bankruptcy of the national Borders bookstore chain.³⁵

The question becomes: How should the Church respond? History teaches that the Church has often been open to new technologies. The first book printed by Johannes Gutenberg on his moveable wooden or letter printing press was the Bible. Many scientific and technological discoveries were made by monks within the church. Robert Grosseteste was a scholastic philosopher and theologian who did his research in geometry and opened the world to the importance of experiments. Roger Bacon who was a Franciscan monk revealed the “laws of nature” behind the universe.

There were certainly some times in history when the church did not respond well to the discoveries of science. The discovery by Nicolaus Copernicus that the earth

³³ Aaron Smith, “Nearly half of American adults are smartphone owners,” Pew Internet and American Life Project, March 1, 2012, accessed September 9, 2012, <http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Smartphone-Update-2012.aspx>.

³⁴ “Computer and Internet Use,” United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010, accessed September 12, 2012, www.census.gov/hhes/computer/publications/2010.html.

³⁵ Jay Alabaster, “E-Books vs. Print Books,” TechHive, IDG News Service, November 3, 2011, accessed September 11, 2012, http://www.pcworld.com/article/243129/ebooks_vs_print_books.html.

revolved around the sun was definitely not appreciated. Even the well-respected scientist Galileo was put under house arrest for the last 8 years of his life because of his scientific views. It is important to note, however, that both of those men were later vindicated. Overall, the church has been open to technological advancement and has benefitted from its use.

The key to using technology is overcoming the fallacy that the way it has always been done in the past is the best way. This is especially true with discipleship ministry in the church. Lecture-style preaching and teaching have been the standard for centuries. Experiencing the teaching first alone and having access to asynchronous and synchronous discussion by using the technology of the Internet—before one meets in a group setting for discussion—is a paradigm shift. Over the last decade, universities around the world have rapidly become involved in online teaching and training by accessing the power of the Internet.³⁶ A 2009 meta study from the United States Department of Education reported, "Students who took all or part of their class online performed better, on average, than those taking the same course through traditional face-to-face instruction."³⁷

Benefits of Online Learning

Online learning is not only effective, it is also growing exponentially. 6.7 million students took at least one online course in 2012 which is an increase of over 570,000 students from 2011. 70% of all accredited colleges offered some form of online

³⁶ I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman, "Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States," Babson Survey Research Group, Pearson, January 2013, accessed September 9, 2013, <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/changingcourse.pdf>, 18.

³⁷ Barbara Means, Yukie Toyama, Robert Murphy, Marianne Bakia and Karla Jones, "Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies," U.S. Department of Education Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development Policy and Program Studies Service, September 2010, accessed July 7, 2013, www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/tech/evidence-based-practices/finalreport.pdf, ix.

learning.³⁸ Online learning uses the technology of today and a variety of learning styles, to teach material in a creative and student-focused manner. It gives the student access to unlimited amounts of content on every subject imaginable.³⁹ Blended online learning uses the technology of the Internet and involves face-to-face group meetings to discuss the lesson once individuals have gone through the material on their own. Many consider it the best of both worlds.⁴⁰

Numerous studies have shown blended online learning to be more effective than traditional learning.⁴¹ “In recent experimental and quasi-experimental studies contrasting blended courses with traditional face-to-face classes, blended learning has been more effective, providing a rationale for the effort required to design and implement blended approaches.”⁴² Students who took all or part of their class online performed better than those taking the same course through conventional face-to-face instruction. It is also indicated that instruction combining online and face-to-face elements has been shown to give students a learning edge over simply learning with the face-to-face lecture method.⁴³

In order to fully understand blended online learning, it must be noted that just uploading a 45 minute lecture online is not considered online learning. That is referred to as hosting a video online. Online learning involves short video and audio clips presented

³⁸ Allen and Seaman, “Changing Course,” 4.

³⁹ Terry Anderson, ed., *The Theory and Practice of Online Learning*, 273.

⁴⁰ John R. Bourne and Janet C. Moore, eds., *Elements of Quality Online Education: Engaging Communities* (Needham, MA: Sloan Consortium, 2006) 88.

⁴¹ C.H. Liu, T.C. Chiang, and Y.M. Huang, “Assessment of Effectiveness of Web-based Training on Demand,” *Interactive Learning Environments*, 15, No 3 (December 2007) 217-235.

⁴² Barbara Means, Yukie Toyama, Robert Murphy, Marianne Bakia and Karla Jones, “Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies,” xviii.

⁴³ Barbara Means, Yukie Toyama, Robert Murphy, Marianne Bakia and Karla Jones, “Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies,” ix.

by a content specialist combined with concisely written text, supplemented with images, hyperlinked Internet resources, and a variety of other interactive material designed for study by an individual learner. One of the great benefits of online learning for disciple-making is that online learning is designed for a student to initially experience the teaching alone. Instead of hearing a teaching in a sermon or a lecture where the student is expected to listen and take notes at the same time, online learning gives the student the opportunity to learn the material at their own pace in the environment of their choice. This allows the student to stop the video clip and replay it or take notes by cutting and pasting from the text. Therefore, none of the teaching is lost, and the student is able to fully focus on the material without any distractions. If the student's attention is waning, he can take a break and come back when he is more focused. Instead of just reading a book and trying to understand what is being said, the student is able to hear the teacher's explanation on video tape and read about it in the text. As a student is going through the lesson and has questions or comments, he can type them on the discussion thread at the precise moment he is hearing the teaching. Other students and the teacher can then respond immediately or asynchronously. No matter how outgoing or shy students may be, all students have an equal ability to enter the discussion because questions can be edited or thought about before they are posted for online consumption.

In addition to having the opportunity to thoroughly learn the material, another benefit of blended online learning is that students can process the material and develop community in a small group setting. Although the current model of church small groups would seem to be a natural arena for life application and community to develop, this is not always the case. Tony Jones, in his book, *Post Modern Youth Ministry*, reveals the

church did not help him make lasting connections with others in groups. He found there was a valuing of head knowledge over community. He believes that building community should be the church's highest value,⁴⁴ especially if the church is planning on reaching Post moderns who are, "longing for relationship, mystery, experience, passion, wonder, creativity and spontaneity."⁴⁵ The key in today's culture is helping people work out their faith in the context of community.⁴⁶

In the book *The Search to Belong*, Joseph Myers shares, "with the erosion of the geographically close family and the heightened mobility of our culture, many people struggle to learn healthy competencies for community."⁴⁷ Lyle Schaller says one of the greatest obstacles the church must overcome in the 21st century is the "discontinuity and fragmentation of the American lifestyle."⁴⁸ The church's solution is often to have small groups, but just meeting together for a time of teaching out of a book or a video with some light discussion and a short time of prayer, before everyone rushes back out to their busy lives, is not what builds community. Community cannot be forced. It comes from being in environments where people connect naturally. Real community happens on different levels for different people. That is evidenced in the way Jesus connected with people. He had the intimate connection with Peter, James and John and a broader community relationship with the other nine disciples and a different relationship with the

⁴⁴ Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2001), 82.

⁴⁵ Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community*, 90.

⁴⁶ Tony Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry: Exploring Cultural Shift, Creating Holistic Connections, Cultivating Authentic Community* 119.

⁴⁷ Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups* (Grand Rapids, MI: Youth Specialties, 2003), 11.

⁴⁸ Lyle Schaller speaking to a group of pastors. Quoted in Joseph Myers, *The Search to Belong: Rethinking Intimacy, Community, and Small Groups*, 27.

crowds and the multitudes. One of the benefits of blended online learning is how it gives people the opportunity to connect in community on a variety of levels.

The God Connection

When using blended online learning for discipleship, the first connection a person has the opportunity to develop is with God. In contrast to a classroom lecture, blended online learning is taught first to an individual. During the teaching, the learning experience can be stopped so the individual has time to reflect upon what is being shared in light of the heart of God. The opportunity is always there to stop and listen for God's voice in the midst of the teaching session. Knowledge which is taught separate from God can lead astray as seen in Isaiah 47:10 (NLT): "You felt secure in your wickedness. 'No one sees me,' you said. But your 'wisdom' and 'knowledge' have led you astray, and you said, 'I am the only one, and there is no other.'" Knowledge outside of God can also puff up⁴⁹ or even destroy.⁵⁰ According to the Apostle Paul, knowledge not based in the love of God is nothing.⁵¹ The early chapters of Genesis teach that all knowledge was designed to be rooted in an intimate relationship with God. Everything changed when Adam and Eve sought the knowledge of good and evil outside the context of God's heart.⁵² It is important to note that even the "knowledge of good" was a part of the curse when it was removed from relationship with God. In blended online learning, the student has the ability to study at his own pace and stop and start the video or text teaching

⁴⁹ I Corinthians 8:1-3 (NLT).

⁵⁰ I Corinthians 8:8-12.

⁵¹ I Corinthians 13:2 (NKJV).

⁵² Genesis 2:15-17.

whenever they desire. Throughout the learning process, the learner can maintain constant communication with God so the knowledge can be received in the context of His heart.

Intimacy with God prepares learners to have real intimacy with others which then provides the foundation for real community. Even a secular research book on intimacy acknowledges, "True intimacy with others is one of the highest values of human existence. There may be nothing more important for the well-being and optimal functioning of human beings than intimate relationships."⁵³ God created humanity to first have intimacy with Him, so from that relationship, intimacy could then be experienced with others. Jesus perfectly demonstrated this truth in His life. He rose up early and stayed up late—and at times He spent His entire night with the Father. These times of intimacy with His Father surely fueled His ability to develop and live in community with His disciples.

As students spend the time learning from the Father in the solitude of their own online study, they can be prepared to benefit most fully from the face-to-face small group meetings with others. Because the teaching has already been received online, group members have more time to build relationships. Even the initial reflecting and processing has already been done by the student, with God and with others, through the discussion thread. Therefore, the group is free to begin exploring the subject on a deeper level than if they had just heard the teaching a few minutes previous. Since teaching is not the focus of the group, there is more opportunity for the natural building of relationships which can lead to deeper and more penetrating discussion. In addition, blended online

⁵³ Debra J. Mashek and Arthur Aron, eds., *Handbook of Closeness and Intimacy*, (Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004), 43.

small groups have more time for prayer and ministry, opening the way to build close knit relationships which have the potential to be life changing.

The Discussion Thread

An additional instrument to build relationships in online learning is the use of a discussion thread. A common occurrence in many onsite church classes is when a teacher has a full class at the beginning of the quarter, only to see the attendance drop to half or less by the end of the session. Many things factor into this phenomenon, but one prominent cause is related to the busyness of life. People have business trips, activities, vacations, illnesses and many other things which prevent them from attending every class. After missing a few classes, it is easy to feel disconnected and lose interest in continuing to participate in the course. In contrast, blended online learning provides a way to keep a class connected no matter where people are located in the world. Even missionaries and deployed military members can be a part of an online classroom and can be incorporated into a blended class by using video chat. When a person in a blended online group is not able to be involved in the face-to-face group meeting, the discussion thread is the vehicle to maintain connection and to contemplate the material with the other group members. Whenever they are able to be back in town, they can join in the group without feeling lost or left behind.

Additional Opportunities

Another benefit of using blended online learning to make disciples is having immediate access to Internet resources for further study. When listening to a traditional

onsite lecture, a student may have his interest spurred by a specific subject or comment, but he has no ability in that moment of inspiration to pursue deeper study. Even when reading a book, a person has to close the book and access a computer in order to research the topic online. In an online course scenario, students can pause the video or stop reading the text and instantly research a topic using an Internet search engine. Additionally, a person could use a range of Bible study software to research any subject in greater depth. As previously mentioned, additional study could still be accomplished when a person reads a book or after listening to an onsite lecture; however, additional research is much more easily and instantly accessible when the student is already online studying an online course.

An additional benefit to making disciples through blended online learning is having a safe environment in which students interact with a teacher or other group members without fear or embarrassment. In a classroom or group setting, students with outgoing personalities can tend to monopolize class discussions. A majority of students may find themselves locked out of the discussion. Either from lack of opportunity or a lack of boldness or the size of the classroom, students can be left with unasked or unanswered questions. In the online learning discussion thread, students can take their time to form their questions fully before posting them to the forum. They can also take time to think about what is being discussed on the discussion thread and formulate their thoughts over hours or even days before posting replies. The ability for this type of asynchronous discussion, which is provided in online learning, provides students with a level playing field in every class discussion and enables all students to be heard. This type of discussion also allows the teacher or facilitator to challenge people about what

they are thinking and encourage them to look at their conclusions in a variety of ways.

This type of learning tool has the potential to take discussion beyond the clichés and into the depths of life where people live. This type of penetrating conversation can help people become mature disciples of Jesus Christ who are empowered to journey through the struggles and joys of life victoriously.

Low-cost self-publishing is another benefit of online learning. While there are several free learning management systems which require some coding knowledge to put a course online, there are also a few low-cost systems which help you publish your own material online without any computer programming knowledge. Once the content is put online in a course format, it can be updated instantly and the material becomes immediately available for use without any additional printing costs. Course content can always be up-to-date and relevant without additional time and expense of reprinting. With tight budgets and a vision to reach more and more people, churches may find online learning a very attractive and cost effective alternative to traditional discipleship materials and methods.

Connecting with people is also a frequent difficulty for churches. Business travel and the conflict of schedules in today's busy world, as well as the problem of staying connected with missionaries, shut-ins and those involved in the military, can create discipleship challenges. Online learning is a creative option for staying connected to people wherever they are located throughout the world. As long as a person can access the Internet, location is not a hindrance. Online studying can be done anywhere, and observations and reflections can be posted on the course discussion thread. It is not hard to imagine the impact of the cultural insights of a missionary or someone in the military

can have to a weekly church group discussion. Although it is ideal if online participants can also meet together in a face-to-face group, courses can be fully experienced without the blended aspect of group meetings.

Online study also provides the benefit of being able to hold group members accountable throughout the week. Without an additional data entry in a data base, a mentor or group leader is able to view a person's involvement in a course and follow their progress all the way to completion, because of the innate tracking abilities of learning management systems. This allows for accountability which is not intrusive. A leader could say to someone who appears to have stopped their study: "I see you are studying in this lesson of the course, Do you have specific questions?" or "What can I do to help you continue through to completion?" This type of communication has the potential to keep people moving forward in the course and stay committed to the goal of maturing as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

There are some who believe the Internet has impacted pedagogy in a way that has not been rivaled since the invention of the printing press over 500 years ago.⁵⁴ This type of radical change has brought challenges to the educational system which will also be faced by churches using blended online learning in discipleship ministries. First and foremost, it is hard to change what has always been done. The focus of learning in churches has been centered on people gathering together in a sanctuary, a classroom or in a home. Reflection on what has been learned is usually accomplished immediately after the teaching. Casting a vision for reversing or flipping the process is essential. Helping pastors and church participants see the value of people learning at their peak time, at their

⁵⁴ William A. Draves, "How the Internet Will Change How We Learn," draves@lern.org, September 9, 1997, accessed January 19, 2013, http://www.williamdraves.com/works/internet_change_report.htm.

own speed, in their own location and having individual interaction with the teacher—all before they meet face-to-face—is critical to the success of blended online learning. The effort is worth it because “the Internet allows the cognitive information to be delivered faster, cheaper, and better, thus allowing more time and resources to be devoted to facilitative in-person learning.”⁵⁵

Online content also requires planning by presenters. Instead of simply preaching a sermon and expecting people in the church to apply the message to their lives, pastors must begin to think how learners can re-connect with material before or after they hear a sermon. Teachers of classes must begin to construct their thoughts so they can be presented interactively online. Instead of teaching in a classroom setting, they become facilitators focused on helping students connect with the material to make it their own.

The greatest challenge of blended online learning in churches beyond putting the content online is motivating learners to go through the material prior to the preached sermon and the gathered class or group. This is not an easy sell for people who have been used to coming to a church and being fed with little or no preparation time. Teaching people to be self-feeders so they can gain more out of the face-to-face congregational and group times will require much encouragement and vision casting. In the end, great fruit will be the reward.

The Research

The research for this thesis will be based on a mixed methodology. Pre-test and post-test surveys will be given to people involved in three different small groups who will

⁵⁵ William A. Draves, “How the Internet Will Change How We Learn.”

be using various models of blended online learning. Two of the groups will participate in online courses written by the author of this thesis. Research will also include interviews with pastors who have used blended online learning in their respective churches and with a professor who has taught blended online learning classes on the university and doctoral level. There will also be a focus group of Christian individuals involved with the formation of blended online learning systems and courses. The group will be asked questions about discipleship in the church and about their thoughts on the potential of using blended online learning for making disciples. By combining the results of the surveys with the insights gained from the interviews and the focus group, conclusions will be formed about the effectiveness of using blended online learning to make disciples.

CHAPTER 2
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Introduction

It has been two thousand years since Jesus gave the Great Commission to His disciples saying in Matthew 28:18-20, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Although the Great Commission contains only one command, it is often referred to in a manner which sounds like it has four imperatives. In the original language only the phrase “make disciples” is a command. In the Greek all the other main points are participles of extended circumstance, which means they take on the imperative of the command to “make disciples,” but they are not to be singled out or elevated as the main focus. The “going,” “teaching” and “baptizing” are always to be done with the purpose and intention of the main directive which is disciple-making.

Discipleship Methods

Making effective disciples of Jesus Christ who live for the glory of God is not an easy undertaking. This is evidenced by Jesus’ own struggle to make disciples of His followers. There are not ten easy steps for making disciples in the Bible. Even throughout church history there has never been a set procedure which has evolved over time and is agreed upon by all for making disciples. It is clear that in the book of Acts,

discipleship was largely built through relationships. Christians living together as seen in Acts 2:42-47 influenced each other to live in a Christ-like manner. This type of discipleship is also seen in the relationship the Apostle Paul had with Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2.¹ Paul's letters reveal the early church was not the perfect model of Christian community, but it was a welcoming community. Families were valued as well as women and children. "The Christian community offered an array of social services too. Christians cared for widows and orphans, visited prisoners, fed the poor, nursed the sick and buried the dead."² Today, relational discipleship models are practiced in small group ministries and one-to-one discipleship and mentoring relationships.

With the rise of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions, a more experiential form of discipleship came into being. This method of discipleship is "reflected in their architecture, incense, music, iconography and art."³ "In experiential discipleship, people were taught about Christ and grew in their relationship to Him through a full immersion into a medieval-media experience."⁴

Gothic cathedrals thus functioned like a stage where the drama of salvation was played out. They displayed works of art, like stained glass windows, that told the story of salvation and the lives of the saints; they housed relics and reliquaries and tombs that allowed laypeople to brush up against the holiness of the saints; they provided the proper setting where the clergy could administer the sacraments. Churches absorbed the power of the realities they housed, thus helping people know Christ, participate in His story and receive His life."⁵

¹ 2 Timothy 2:2 (NIV), "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

² Gerald Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007) 55-62.

³ Heather Zempel, "Models of Discipleship Throughout Church History," *Wineskins for Discipleship: Creative Discipleship for Emerging Generations Blog*, February 1, 2006, accessed September 12, <http://discipleshipgroups.blogspot.com/2006/02/models-of-discipleship-throughout.html>

⁴ Heather Zempel, "Models of Discipleship."

⁵ Gerald Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well*, 158.

This type of discipleship focus is evidenced today in a wide variety of worship experiences. There are high tech worship services in many mega churches involving loud music, large video screens, moving backgrounds, congregational and platform lights and smoke machines which are all designed to create an atmosphere in which to encounter God. Some post-modern and emerging churches are reacting in the other direction by having a more contemplative and simple service of worship. Either way, the desire is the same; to help people experience God through the environment around them, much in the same way the Israelites worshiped, following God's detailed instructions regarding the tabernacle and the temple.

The Age of the Enlightenment combined with the Protestant Reformation to influence the church into a more educational and academic discipleship model where people could study individually. Before that time, the church relied mainly on lecture as their means of discipleship. The etymology of the word lecture comes from the Latin word for "read."⁶ Prior to the printing press, a person would read one book to others so they could learn the content. Once Guttenberg invented the printing press, it did not take long for the masses to have access to Scripture. Everyone was then able to study their own copy of the Bible which deemphasized relationship and experience.⁷ Systematic study was much more prevalent and the focus of discipleship had a more cognitive focus centered on the renewal of the mind. The present emphasis on Bible studies, Sunday School and the variety of classes taught by the church is a fruit of this type of discipleship.

⁶ Emily Hanford, "Rethinking the Way College Students are Taught," American Public Media, accessed October 4, 2013, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/tomorrows-college/lectures/rethinking-teaching.html>.

⁷ Heather Zempel, "Models of Discipleship."

In the last 200 years, evangelicalism, with its emphasis on a personal conversion to Jesus Christ, has encircled the globe. “At the heart of evangelical spirituality is the conversion of the whole of one’s life to God.”⁸ This movement has spawned an emphasis on personal Bible study and prayer and the belief in the authority of the Bible. It has fueled a variety of scriptural translations and the multitude of study Bibles designed for every age and gender. The vast amounts of study resources have enabled people to pursue their knowledge and relationship with God more personally in line with their calling.

In the 20th century, the liberal end of the church stressed a more incarnational approach to growing Christian disciples. To follow Jesus was to be His hands and feet. Feeding the hungry, caring for the poor and reaching out to the dispossessed is not an option if one is going to be a disciple of Jesus in that segment of the church.

Each of these approaches to discipleship, (and there are many more beyond those listed⁹) reveals how diverse Christian discipleship has been throughout history. No single method has proven to be the one and only best way to make disciples. That does not mean, however, the Bible lacks underlying principles which are foundational to the essence of what disciple making is all about.

The Underlying Principles

In order to identify those principles, it is important to search the whole counsel of God. God’s desire to make disciples did not start with the ministry of Jesus. All

⁸ Gerald Sittser, *Water from the Deep Well*, 231,232.

⁹ Gary Thomas mentions nine sacred pathways in his book *Sacred Pathways* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000) and Richard J. Foster writes of seven different traditions in his book *Streams of Living Water* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998).

throughout the Old Testament, God reveals His heart to be in relationship with His people. The book of Job, which was the first Old Testament book to be written down, gives a unique perspective of what that relationship is designed to look like. In the first two chapters of the book, God and Satan have a conversation about Job which Job never hears. In the conversation, Job is defended by God as a, “blameless and upright man who fears God and shuns evil.”¹⁰ Satan challenges that assertion by God, and God responds by giving Job permission to attack everything Job has except his life. Job then spends 20 chapters proclaiming that he is “blameless” (9:21), “not guilty” (10:77), “certain of his goodness” (13:8), “righteous” (27:6) and innocent (31). Job’s friends spend the entire time proclaiming that if Job was all those things, none of the problems Job was experiencing would be happening to him. In chapter 38, God answers Job from the midst of a storm with the following words. “Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge?”¹¹ God then spends the next 4 chapters asking Job questions about the creation of the world and beyond.

It is note-worthy that although God was impressed with Job’s blamelessness in the first two chapters of the book, God was not impressed with Job’s defense of himself. God wanted Job to understand that He knew far more than Job would ever be able to comprehend on his own. Just like Job did not know anything about how to create the world, Job also did not know anything about God’s conversation with Satan that precipitated his struggles. Job needed to learn about God’s omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. God had a plan all along and had reasons for things that were happening—reasons beyond Job’s understanding. God was teaching Job the explanation

¹⁰ Job 1:8.

¹¹ Job 38:2.

for what had taken place was not due to his goodness or his blamelessness. God's purpose was to teach people on earth they cannot possibly understand all He does, so the only right response in every situation is to trust Him.

After God's questioning of Job, Job acknowledged that God, "spoke of things I did not understand."¹² Job admitted he had only partial knowledge (he had heard but not seen). His response was to repent which, "denotes that inward change of mind, affections, convictions and commitment rooted in the fear of God and sorrow for offenses committed against Him..."¹³ God then commended Job for speaking what was right, in contrast to his friends who were chastised for not doing the same.

The difference in what Job and his friends were saying is no small matter. Job spoke truth about himself, but he lacked a complete understanding and trust until he saw God more clearly. His friends, on the other hand, spoke words that made sense according to human wisdom, but were absolutely wrong when compared with what God was really doing. On the surface, Job's friends appeared to be defending God by saying that God would never do anything unjust. This led to their conclusion that Job must have done something wrong. In a general sense, this is the basis of the Jewish understanding of the law throughout the entire Old Testament. That is, if you follow the law and do what it says, you will be blessed. This thought process is even alive in the church today. It is reflected in statements such as, "If you just had enough faith, you would be healed."

The result of this thought process is that the entire responsibility for what happened was placed completely on Job himself. However, the truth was revealed that it was not Job's sinfulness that caused his struggle; it was his blamelessness. Actually,

¹² Job 42:3.

¹³ Walter A. Elwell, ed., *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1985), 936.

everything that happened to Job had nothing to do with Job at all. In the end, there was no way for Job to understand the “why” for what was happening. God was at work and all the attempts to explain what was transpiring were going to fall short, because only God and Satan knew the truth (and only God tells the truth). The best response was to trust God and to forsake trying to figure everything out. That is the conclusion Job finally came to when he repented.

The importance of the story of Job in the context of discipleship is how God brought Job to his understanding of trust and his acknowledgement that he did not have the knowledge or resources of God. The entire book of Job is based on questions, discussion, processing and reflection between friends and then with God Himself. God’s challenge to Job is to look at the world in which he lived and reflect on what it means in light of his relationship with God. This reflection and processing with others and with God is the foundation of true discipleship.

Trust and Rely on God

This principle of reflection and processing with others and with God in order to arrive at a relationship of trusting in God (and not relying on one’s own understanding) is found throughout the Bible. First and foremost, it is seen at the very beginning of the biblical story. Adam, the first created man, had been instructed by God to “not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁴ In this instruction, it is important to note that God was not just trying to keep Adam from “evil” knowledge. God was directing him to a proper understanding of all knowledge—both evil and good. The only explanation given for that command came from the serpent when he tempted the woman.

¹⁴ Genesis 2:17.

He said to her, “God knows that when you eat of it (the tree of the knowledge of good and evil) your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”¹⁵

The serpent who has been known from the beginning to not hold to the truth and is the father of lies,¹⁶ neglected to mention God’s desire to guide and instruct men and women so they would understand knowledge through His eyes and from His heart. Without a relationship with God, men and women could not and would not understand how to handle knowledge correctly. God—who knows all things—created man and woman to be in an intimate relationship with Him and to rely solely upon Him. God walked in the garden He had created for them.¹⁷ There is some indication that while God walked in the garden, He instructed Adam and Eve and processed with them about the world He had created for them.¹⁸

God did not create men and women to formulate a perception of the world out of their own resources. They were created to trust God and not lean on their own understanding. God had made Himself available to walk and talk with them, right where they lived, in the garden. But they chose to make their own decisions, regardless of God’s instruction. Their determination to lean on themselves opened a door of separation from God which they could not shut. Instead of seeing the world through the omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient fullness of God’s eyes, God’s heart and God’s understanding, they saw the world through their own limited eyes, heard it with their own limited ears and thus they had limited understanding. God had put the ability in the garden for man to

¹⁵ Genesis 3:4.

¹⁶ John 8:44.

¹⁷ Genesis 3:8.

¹⁸ Genesis 2:15-17.

live forever,¹⁹ but because man and woman had opened their lives to knowledge they were not created to have, God blocked them from eternal life by banishing them from the garden.²⁰ Adam and Eve were created to have knowledge, but it was intended for the knowledge of God to guide them into all other knowledge. The more they knew God through reflection and processing with Him, the more they would understand His creation. Herein is described the essence of God's call to discipleship. Reflect with Him, discuss with Him, process thoughts and observations with Him until one is able to trust Him, lean on Him, and perceive the world through His eyes, His ears, His heart, and walk accordingly. Unfortunately, Adam and Eve chose to turn away from conversing with God about life.

Pharaoh: The Anti-Disciple

Pharaoh, in Egypt during the time of Moses, was a classic example of what happens when one does not know God and does not take time to reflect upon Him and converse with Him. In Exodus 5:2 he proclaimed, "Who is the Lord that I should obey Him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go." He proceeded to make decisions that revealed to the world both then and now the fruit of not knowing God, even though over and over again God sought to make Himself known to the Egyptians through the plagues and His deliverance of the Israelites.²¹ At the same time, God was also revealing Himself to the Israelites in order that they would know Him as

¹⁹ Genesis 3:22.

²⁰ Genesis 3:23.

²¹ Exodus 7:5, 7:17, 8:10, 8:22, 9:14, 9:29.

their God.²² This knowledge was revealed to the people through their deliverance, and also through the supply of their needs, in spite of their grumbling.²³

Discipleship and the Law

The ability to learn knowledge within an intimate relationship with God was the underlying context into which God gave the 10 commandments and all of the law. Within months of delivering the Israelites from Egypt, God told Moses to tell the people, “You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself.”²⁴ These words reveal the same intimacy in which God originally created for man and woman in the Garden of Eden. It was out of this intimate relationship that God called the Israelites to obedience by saying in Deuteronomy 19:5, “Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.” It is important to note God gave the call for the Israelites to obey in connection with His loving commitment to them as His people. The result was to be a greater ability for the Israelites to enter into His love. The obedience was not a weight put on the Israelites that they had to bear in order to be in right relationship with God. This is evident in that the people’s response was unanimous in its acceptance of God’s word to them.²⁵

However, immediately after receiving the commandments, the people pulled back from God in fear, preferring instead to have Moses speak and listen to God.²⁶ It is very revealing in verse 18 of Exodus 20, “when the people saw the thunder and lightning and

²² Exodus 6:7, 10:2, 16:6.

²³ Exodus 16:8, 12.

²⁴ Exodus 19:4.

²⁵ Exodus 19:8.

²⁶ Exodus 20:19.

heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear, *they stayed at a distance.*” The bottom line is they were not able to be in intimacy with God because of their sinfulness, and as a result they were not able to converse with Him, process life with Him and reflect upon what they were learning. This resulted in them not being able to lean on Him. This struggle is reflected throughout the entire Old Testament, and it is why God gave them the sacrificial system.

It was to these stubborn and obstinate people God gave His law. Not a cold, rigid law, but rather one that reflected the heart of God who yearned for His people to experience the best of life even though they were separated from Him. This is revealed in the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 4: 5-8:

See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

As shown in the Garden of Eden, God’s first desire with humanity was an intimate relationship with Him in which man and woman would listen to His voice and do what they saw Him doing. Because humanity chose its own way, God did the next best thing. He gave the law which revealed life at its best for His people. In Hebrew, the word law is *torah*. “*Torah* is God’s gift, intended to show Israel how to live a holy and happy life in this world.”²⁷ God’s heart was so filled with love for humanity that He even entered covenants with them. These agreements became the basis for God’s relationship with Israel.

²⁷ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 390.

Some of the Israelites, like King David, understood the preciousness of the law.

In Psalm 19:7-14 David wrote,

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous. They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb. By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. Who can discern his errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then will I be blameless, innocent of great transgression. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

Verses like these give a glimpse as to why God called David a man after the Lord's own heart. These are the words of a man who had reflected upon God. He had thought about the ways of the Lord and he relied upon the Lord and not his own understanding.

Dangerous Knowledge

Without God's will, purpose, guidance, wisdom and understanding—without God's heart—knowledge has the potential to be used in extremely hurtful ways. In Isaiah 47:10 in a prophetic word to Babylon, Isaiah says to them, "You have trusted in your wickedness and have said, 'no one sees me.' Your wisdom and knowledge mislead you when you say to yourself, 'I am, and there is none besides me.'" The Babylonians had great knowledge but it was totally outside the realm of any type of relationship with God, and therefore it was misleading and even destructive.²⁸ The Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 8:1 spoke of knowledge as that which "puffs up" in contrast to love which "builds up." In the very next verse he points out, "the man who thinks he knows something does not

²⁸ Isaiah 47:11 says, "Disaster will come upon you and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you."

know as he ought to know.” Paul concludes the thought by saying, “But the man who loves God is known by God,” which clearly reveals that the proper context for knowledge is only found in relationship with God. Later in that same chapter Paul continues to point out the danger of knowledge outside a relationship with God by referring to how “the weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.” Knowledge on its own, outside the context of love—which is the essence of who God is²⁹—is nothing.³⁰

In the Old Testament, the connection between knowledge and relationship with God is seen most clearly in the book of Proverbs. Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.” It is important to recognize that the beginning of knowledge—not just spiritual knowledge, but all knowledge—is related to God. Proverbs 2:6 says, “For the Lord gives wisdom, and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” This knowledge is obtained in Proverbs by listening,³¹ understanding,³² not ignoring God’s advice,³³ and applying one’s heart.³⁴

Close But...

Solomon clearly laid out the heart of what it takes to walk in the knowledge of God when he wrote,

my son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you, turning your ear to wisdom and applying your heart to understanding and if you call out for insight and cry aloud for understanding and if you look for understanding and if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure, the you will

²⁹ 1 John 4:8.

³⁰ I Corinthians 13:2.

³¹ Proverbs 1:5, 33.

³² Proverbs 1:6.

³³ Proverbs 1:25.

³⁴ Proverbs 2:2.

understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God. For the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.³⁵

In those words a wise person is revealed as one who presses into God with a single focus, for understanding and knowledge. In the Hebrew, “the basic word group expressing the idea of wisdom includes *hakam* and its cognate’s *hokmah* and *hakam*.... The *hakam* stem expresses a person’s approach to life. Wisdom to master life’s challenges can be found only in one’s relationship to God.”³⁶ This wisdom describes the heart of a disciple.

The single most concise definition of how a disciple is called to live a life of wisdom is found in Proverbs 3:5, 6 which says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.” This verse summarizes the main points of discipleship God has been calling His people to since the Garden of Eden. Instead of seeking knowledge on their own, disciples are to trust God because God alone knows all things. God explains this through the prophet Isaiah by saying, “...My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways.... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”³⁷ This is why disciples are not to lean on their own understanding. As God is acknowledged in all situations, He will direct and guide. In the beginning of the book of Isaiah, God lays out how His followers can come to trust Him and lean on Him, when He says, “Come now,

³⁵ Proverbs 2:1-6.

³⁶ Lawrence Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 62.

³⁷ Isaiah 55:8, 9.

let us reason together.”³⁸ It is through reflection and encountering God’s heart that disciples are made.

Solomon seemed to understand this more than anyone in the Old Testament. When God told Solomon He would give him anything he asked for, Solomon’s response was, “Give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may lead this people, for who is able to govern this great people of yours?”³⁹ God answered Him by giving him, “wisdom and knowledge” and “wealth, riches and honor.”⁴⁰ Although Solomon had the knowledge and wisdom, he did not maintain an intimate relationship with God. I Kings 11 reveals that he loved many foreign women. In spite of what God had said to the Israelites about wives from foreign nations turning their hearts after other gods,⁴¹ “Solomon held fast to them in love.”⁴² His great knowledge became bankrupt for him, because he was unable to maintain an intimate relationship with God. He experienced “...much of wisdom and knowledge. Then (he) applied (himself) to the understanding of wisdom...but (he) learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.”⁴³ It was only at the end that Solomon came to the realization that the point of life is to “fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man.”⁴⁴

Is True Discipleship Possible?

There is much to be learned from Job, Adam, David and Solomon, but their lives force a question. If Job—who was called blameless by God—missed the point of what

³⁸ Isaiah 1:18.

³⁹ 2 Chronicles 1:10.

⁴⁰ 2 Chronicles 1:12.

⁴¹ I Kings 11:2.

⁴² I Kings 11:2.

⁴³ Ecclesiastes 1:16:17.

⁴⁴ Ecclesiastes 12:13.

God looks for in a disciple, and Adam—who even walked with God—fell away from God, and David—with all of his love for God—found Himself unable to fully live a life that reflected the heart of God, and Solomon—with all His wisdom and knowledge—fell short of the glory of God; what hope is there for any who seek to be a disciple of the Holy One of Israel? The answer is there is no hope outside of the provision God provided in His own Son Jesus and His Holy Spirit.

Jesus and the Discipled Life

God wanted more for His creation than His people were able to experience in the Old Testament. Therefore, “God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son.”⁴⁵ Jesus came to this world to reveal how to live as a disciple, to show how to make disciples and to empower all to be disciples. His entire life reveals the essence of discipleship. The birth of Jesus is an early example from His life of the importance of not leaning on one’s own understanding. From the pregnancy of Jesus’ mother Mary by the Holy Spirit before her marriage to Joseph, to His birth in a manger, to the angelic welcome by the shepherds, to the killing of the babies in Bethlehem, God revealed that those who follow Him must trust Him because His ways do not always make sense according to the world’s ideas.

As a twelve year old, Jesus revealed His heart for intimacy with His Father. Luke 2:49 revealed He had to be in His Father’s house. While Jesus was there He amazed the teachers with “His understanding and His answers.”⁴⁶ At this young age, Jesus was not showing off His intelligence. He was demonstrating what happens when one trusts in the

⁴⁵ John 3:16.

⁴⁶ Luke 2:48.

Father and does not lean on His own understanding. It is a good example that no one of any age is excluded from the possibility of being a disciple.

Jesus' intimate relationship with His Father was also revealed in His baptism in Luke 3. It is significant that the very first words the Father spoke about His Son were words of love. "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."⁴⁷ God was not pleased because Jesus was a great student who had studied hard. This is revealed by the fact that Jesus had never been officially educated. This is stated in John 7 as Jesus was teaching in the temple courts, "The Jews there were amazed and asked, 'How did this man get such learning without having studied?' Jesus answered, 'My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me.'"⁴⁸ In other words, Jesus had listened to His Father, He had reflected long and hard on what His Father had taught Him and He had processed it well.

From the very beginning of His ministry, Jesus shows His reliance on the knowledge of His Father. When the devil tempted Him, every answer Jesus gave revealed He was not leaning on man's understanding. If He was relying on man's understanding, it would have made sense to turn the stones into bread after fasting for 40 days.⁴⁹ It certainly would have been easier to get the authority and splendor of the world back by simply worshiping the devil, and it would have made the headlines of the day if Jesus had thrown Himself off the temple and been caught by angels. But Jesus did not say or do what would have been acceptable according to the thoughts of the world. He was leaning on His Father's knowledge and focused on His Father's heart. As a result, God's word was more important than bread to sustain the body, the worship of God was

⁴⁷ Luke 3:22.

⁴⁸ John 7:15, 16.

⁴⁹ Luke 4:3.

more important than a shortcut around the cross, and trusting God was more important than creating a show.

In addition, Jesus demonstrated the intimacy of a disciple's love for God through His prayer life. He rose up early to pray in order to spend time with the Father, even though everyone was looking for Him.⁵⁰ In Matthew 14, Jesus encountered a large crowd and "had compassion on them and healed their sick."⁵¹ He then fed the crowd of over 5,000. After an exhausting day of healing and dealing with massive crowds, Jesus "went up on a mountainside by himself to pray."⁵² In Luke 6, before Jesus selected His 12 disciples, the scripture says, "Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God."⁵³ Jesus was consumed with the desire to spend time with His Father no matter how popular or tired He was. It is note-worthy that while He rose up early and stayed up late and sometime spent all night in prayer, He never put those prayer times as a law upon His disciples. He simply loved to spend time with His Father. By example, He was showing His disciples the intimate foundation of all true discipleship—a discipleship that does not come from being forced or following rules, but rather from a love relationship of trust and reliance upon the Father which comes from contemplating His heart.

It is instructive that after watching Jesus boldly confront the religious leaders,⁵⁴ drive out evil spirits,⁵⁵ heal many,⁵⁶ raise a young man from the dead,⁵⁷ teach with

⁵⁰ Mark 1:35.

⁵¹ Matthew 14:14.

⁵² Matthew 14:23.

⁵³ Luke 6:12.

⁵⁴ Luke 4:21.

⁵⁵ Luke 4:35.

⁵⁶ Luke 4:40.

⁵⁷ Luke 7:14.

parables,⁵⁸ calm a storm,⁵⁹ and do a variety of other miraculous things,⁶⁰ the disciples never asked Jesus to teach them how to do those things. What they did ask in Luke 11 was for Jesus to teach them how to pray.⁶¹ It seems clear the disciples were making a connection. If they could pray like Jesus prayed—connecting with the heart of God—perhaps they could do what Jesus did.

Jesus' prayer is very instructive.⁶² The focus is on the Father: on His holiness, His kingdom, His ability to provide for daily needs, His forgiveness of sin and His power over temptation. Jesus was teaching the disciples that prayer is all about the Father—who He is and what He can do in them as they spend time with Him. The emphasis of the prayer was not simply to present His Father a list of needs as if God was some kind of butler who existed only to cater to the requests of those who pray. The prayer is an example of what it means to be a disciple of the Father. Through the prayer Jesus revealed that prayer is about leaning on the Father's righteousness, wisdom and strength and trusting in the Father to do what is right.

All throughout the three years Jesus was with His disciples, He demonstrated to them the benefits of not leaning on their own understanding by talking with them and reflecting on the events of the day in light of the kingdom of God. That is the essence of what faith in God is all about. Faith in God supersedes the knowledge of what is possible in this world. Jesus explains this when He teaches the disciples about a rich man entering the kingdom of God. He says, "What is impossible with men is possible with God."⁶³

⁵⁸ Luke 8:10.

⁵⁹ Luke 8:24.

⁶⁰ Jesus drove out more demons in Luke 8:27ff. He healed a dead girl and a sick woman in Luke 8:40ff. In Luke 10:25ff Jesus challenged an expert in the law.

⁶¹ Luke 11:1-4.

⁶² Luke 11:2-4.

⁶³ Luke 18:27.

Luke expands on that by saying, “nothing is impossible with God.”⁶⁴ When the wine ran out at the wedding in Cana, instead of relying on His own understanding that wine takes time to ferment, Jesus relied on the Father’s understanding and knowledge, and proceeded to make wine instantly out of water. We know Jesus relied on the Father because He said in John 5:19, “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; He can do only what He sees his Father doing.” Whether it was walking on water, catching fish in the daytime, feeding thousands of people with some bread and a few fish, Jesus revealed the possibilities of what the life of a disciple can be when one trusts in the Lord and does not lean on one’s own understanding. He helped the disciples come to that understanding by processing with them what life looks like when it is lived through the heart of God.

Discipleship in the New Testament: What It Is Not and What It Is

Before examining how Jesus made disciples, consider for a moment some things which are absent in the New Testament. There is no record of Jesus or Paul telling their followers to have a quiet time, to journal, to read daily devotions, to go to Sunday School or even Bible Study. There is no record of instruction to have a prayer list or go to a men’s group or even be a part of a new believer’s class. All of those things can be good, but none of them is critical to being a disciple. They can and sometimes do just become a New Testament version of the law. In speaking about some basic principles the church in Colossae focused on (as recorded in Colossians 2:20-23), the apostle Paul said they have the appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.”

⁶⁴ Luke 1:37.

It is clear in the New Testament that making disciples is not about self-imposed religious practice.

Paul clarified what discipleship is about in the next verses he wrote (which are the first verses of Colossians 3). In verses 1-3 he said, “Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.” In focusing on setting one’s heart on God (which is intimacy) and one’s mind on God (which is not leaning on one’s own understanding), Paul demonstrated the essence of what it means to be a disciple. Paul concludes his thought by saying the only way for that to happen is to die to oneself and find one’s life in Christ.⁶⁵ In other words, discipleship is not trusting in oneself or leaning on oneself. To walk in obedience to the heart and the ways of God requires trusting in Him and leaning on Him. To attempt to follow Christ in any other way is not the path of biblical discipleship and will not lead to biblical obedience.

Discipleship is an interesting word which is expressed by several Greek words in the New Testament:

In the NT the words connected with discipleship are applied chiefly to the followers of Jesus and describe the life of faith, *akolutho* (follow) denotes the action of a man answering the call of Jesus whose life is redirected in obedience. A *mathetes* (disciple) is one who has heard the call of Jesus and joins Him. *Mimeomai* (imitate) can be distinguished, in so far as it mainly emphasizes the nature of a particular kind of behavior modeled on someone else.⁶⁶

In all three instances of the word “discipleship” in the Greek language, the emphasis is always on applying what is being learned to life. In John 8:31, Jesus reveals the

⁶⁵ Colossians 3:3.

⁶⁶ Colin Brown, ed., *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 484.

connection between learning (*manthanein*) and being His disciple (*mathetes*) when He says, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.” He was always looking for the disciples to continue in His word by applying His word to their lives. Throughout the Gospels, focus is never on just imparting information. Jesus is always looking to “awaken commitment to Himself.”⁶⁷ This is clearly revealed in Matthew 11:28-30 when Jesus says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” The learning in that passage is not about having more information or gaining knowledge—it is about coming to Jesus, receiving rest, and taking His easy yoke and light burden. The essence of what Jesus is saying is: come and allow My heart to become yours. It is an invitation to intimacy through reflection on what Jesus taught.

Yet in the church, discipleship is often related to the acquiring of knowledge. The main gathering of Christians in most churches happens on Sunday morning, and it is centered around a lecture style sermon. This academic, educational model has its roots in the Enlightenment which heavily influenced the Protestant Reformation. As a result of the printing press, the multitudes began to have access to the Bible. “New forms of thinking, based on logic and reason influenced the way Scripture was read and applied”⁶⁸ and studied. There is certainly nothing wrong with renewing the mind and striving to have the mind of Christ, but the pursuit of knowledge alone or for its own sake is not the key to discipleship.

⁶⁷ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Abridged in one Volume, translated by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), 554.

⁶⁸ Heather Zempel, “Models of Discipleship.”

Outside of a relationship with God, knowledge—even good knowledge—can be harmful as was seen in the Garden of Eden. Humanity was created from the very beginning to be taught by God and to receive guidance and understanding from His heart. Knowledge not filtered through the heart of God was and still is beyond human capacity to handle correctly. The apostle Paul, who was one of the most intelligent men who ever lived, understood that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ.”⁶⁹

What Did Jesus Do?

How, then, did Jesus make disciples? How did He form them into men who trusted the Father and did not lean on their own understanding? First, He reached out to people individually and gave them the opportunity to follow Him. The call Jesus gave was not focused on education or even on becoming better men. Jesus’ call was focused on Himself (“follow Me”) and on equipping these men to draw others to Him as well (“make you fishers of men”).⁷⁰ This focus on the person of Jesus is critical in disciple-making. Jesus taught the disciples from the very beginning to lean on Him. In the midst of a storm, Jesus gave them peace.⁷¹ When they were at work providing for their families, Jesus brought the fish into their net.⁷² When they were ministering and trying to help others, Jesus multiplied the food.⁷³ When they were arguing along the road, Jesus provided the insight.⁷⁴ Discipleship for Jesus was never simply having knowledge about

⁶⁹ Colossians 2:3.

⁷⁰ Matthew 4:19.

⁷¹ Luke 8:24.

⁷² John 21:6.

⁷³ Matthew 14:13-21.

⁷⁴ Mark 9:33-36.

Him—it was knowing Him. He pointed people to the word of God, but it was not simply to know about God. It was always to know God. Certainly, studying God’s word is good, knowing one’s way around the Bible is good and doing miracles is good, but the true purpose of all those things is to know Christ and know the Father. Without that focus those things lose their purpose and become just one more thing for Christians to do.⁷⁵

Discipleship is about following Jesus. Jesus knew that in order for disciples to live as God designed, their own cognitive knowledge (even if it was about God) would not suffice. Disciples were going to have to see God’s life in Jesus and reflect and process on it until they came to desire that life more than anything else. The same is true today. Could it be that one of the main issues with making disciples in the church is—there is so much concentration on God’s Word in sermons, Bible Studies and teachings—that the essence of who He is and what it means to trust Him is missed.

Jesus not only called individuals to Himself so they would know His Father and He would know them, He also related to the disciples as individuals so they would know Him. Jesus confronted Peter, He loved John, and He challenged Thomas. For Jesus, the process of being a disciple involved a commitment to a personal relationship.⁷⁶ Jesus understood something that pedagogical experts are now verifying as true: “Frequent student contact in and out of classes is the most important factor in student motivation and involvement.”⁷⁷ “Repeatedly one of the overriding differences found between faculty and students who engage in effective teaching and learning and those who do not,

⁷⁵ Matthew 7:21-23.

⁷⁶ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 560.

⁷⁷ Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Garmson, “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.” AAHE (*American Association of Higher Education*) Bulletin, March 1987, 4.

was the amount of interaction—both inside and outside the classroom.”⁷⁸ Jesus understood the importance of heart-to-heart connection in learning. Educators have long recognized that teachers who establish personal relationships with their students and model their teaching by their character will encourage learning. “It is a pedagogical truism that we teach more by what we are than by what we say. We learn by association with persons.”⁷⁹ This is a critical aspect of disciple-making which is missing when contact with disciples is relegated to Sunday morning, perhaps Sunday evening, and maybe one small group during the week.

Another feature of Jesus’ disciple-making was His focus on being an example. Once the disciples began to follow Jesus, the Lord did not immediately give them a teaching lecture. This is evidenced in all the Gospels. Specifically in Matthew, Jesus first taught in the “synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.”⁸⁰ His primary concern seems to be for the disciples to watch what He did. He wanted them to see what His life was about and how he related to people. Only after that does the Bible say that Jesus began to teach the disciples.⁸¹ This teaching is now called the Sermon on the Mount and it is understood by many to be a compilation of many of His teachings. This teaching begins in the book of Matthew with nine statements that totally contradict the wisdom of this world. Jesus is clearly challenging the world’s understanding and preparing His disciples to not lean on what they have always understood to be true.

⁷⁸ Robert C. Wilson et al., *College Professors and Their impact on Students* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1975) 167.

⁷⁹ Herman Harrell Horne, *Jesus the Master Teacher* (New York: Association Press, 1920) 143.

⁸⁰ Matthew 4:23.

⁸¹ Matthew 5:1.

Within the teaching, the Lord gives the disciples a series of statements about the law saying, “You have heard it said...but I tell you...”⁸² He wanted to take them beyond their own knowledge and help them see life through the heart of God. He concludes this line of teaching by saying, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” It seems at this point that Jesus is planting a seed and foreshadowing that all He is teaching is beyond their ability to understand on their own. They must trust in the Father and lean on Him. They must seek Him and press into His heart.

One of the most well-known aspects of Jesus’ disciple-making was the way He taught. He used parables that related specifically to the lives of those He was teaching. Whereas today many who preach and teach share stories and examples from their own lives, Jesus used a different approach. He never used a woodworking or carpentry illustration and He never shared a story from His childhood. His focus was on the lives of the people He was trying to reach. They understood farming and burying treasure and wayward children. The teaching of Jesus was designed to enter into the hearts of those He was trying to reach.

The way Jesus shared stories raised questions.⁸³ Sometimes Jesus would pose questions to His disciples.⁸⁴ In all four Gospels, Jesus answered over 100 questions and the disciples themselves asked him over thirty questions.⁸⁵ Some of Jesus’ questions created more questions.⁸⁶ One thing is certain, Jesus wanted His disciples and the crowds around Him to think and reflect and process. Pedagogical experts reveal again that Jesus

⁸² Matthew 5:17-47.

⁸³ Mark 4:10, 7:17.

⁸⁴ Matthew 14:31, 18:1.

⁸⁵ Taylor Holmes, “How Many Questions Did Jesus Answer?,” Taylor Holmes Inc. Blog, August 4, 2011, accessed September 5, 2013, <http://taylorholmes.com/2011/08/04/how-man-questions-did-jesus-answer/>.

⁸⁶ John 6:35-68.

knew what He was doing. A number of modern educators believe that “creating perplexity, unrest, and doubt in the students is essential as a prelude to learning.”⁸⁷ One authority expanded on that thought by saying, “learning involvement is at its best when learner perplexity is just short of frustration. When people feel a positive sense of dissatisfaction, they will think harder to reflect more deeply.”⁸⁸ Jesus was very much into challenging people to think about what they were experiencing. In Matthew 16:5ff, Jesus led the disciples to think about the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. In Matthew 16:13, Jesus challenged them to think about who the Son of Man is, and in Matthew 17:24, the subject was the temple tax. Jesus knew what the church today must learn again. “Students do not learn much just by sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing pre-packaged assignments and spitting out answers. They must make what they learn part of themselves.”⁸⁹ Lois LaBar observes, “Just about half the teaching incidents in the gospels were initiated by the learners themselves.”⁹⁰ This was not learning relegated to only Sunday morning or Wednesday nights. This was learning when the learner was ready to learn.

Personal relationships with those being disciplined are critical to this type of learning. As Phillip L. Kirsch notes, “A personal relationship with the student is the only thing that will allow the Christian teacher to have any influence beyond the cognitive level. Students will never treasure and obey the truths of Scripture unless they are taught

⁸⁷ William A. Reinsmith, “Educating for Change: A Teacher Has Second Thought,” *College Teaching* 35, no. 3 (summer 1987): 83, accessed September 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27558216>.

⁸⁸ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, A Wiley Imprint, 2008) 168.

⁸⁹ Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Garmson, “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education.” 5.

⁹⁰ Lois E. LeBar and Jim Plueddemann, *Education That is Christian*, (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub, 1995), 81.

by people whose opinions they value.”⁹¹ Jesus gave that example in the time He spent with the disciples. The importance of personal relationship is also evident in the relationship Paul had with the church of Corinth when he said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.” In addition, he exemplified this understanding of discipleship in his relationship with Timothy. Not only did Paul give Timothy his teaching, he also gave him his conduct, his purpose in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness and his perseverance in trial.⁹² There is no biblical example of discipleship outside of a personal relationship. Even when Paul was apart from the churches he planted, he wrote personal letters and spoke of his desire to visit and spend time with them. The letters included many personal details which revealed how intimately he knew those in the churches.

In making disciples, Jesus also demonstrated the importance of teachable moments. In fact, “anytime, anyplace” teaching was the cornerstone of the ministry of both John the Baptist and Jesus. John taught in the wilderness and at the river Jordan. Jesus taught on the mountainside, He taught at night, He taught at a well, by a pool, on the beach, in a boat, in the middle of a storm, at the foot of a tree, at a funeral, in the temple, in a garden and even hanging on a cross. Jesus took advantage of teachable moments.

In addition, Jesus trusted in the power of the Holy Spirit to teach. He was not overly concerned when the disciples did not understand what He was teaching.⁹³ Jesus

⁹¹ Phillip Kirsch, “Personal Interaction: The Missing Ingredient in Christian Education,” *Journal of Christian Education* 3 (Fall 1982): 50.

⁹² 2 Timothy 3:10-15.

⁹³ Luke 2:50, 9:45, 18:34.

trusted that He was not alone in His quest to make disciples. He was confident the Holy Spirit would teach and bring to the disciple's remembrance what they had been taught.⁹⁴

Jesus also connected the knowledge He was imparting to obedience. Knowledge alone was never the key. The key was knowledge that led to action. Action that was based on trusting Jesus and the love of the Father and was the result of not relying on one's self, but rather relying upon God. The apostle Paul explained this in Romans 1:25: "Through him (Jesus) and for his name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith." He continued in Romans 5:19, saying, "...through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." Obedience that comes through faith in Christ's work is the point and purpose of knowing what Christ has done.

The Apostle Paul's "Discipleship" Approach

One of the most intriguing aspects of discipleship in the New Testament is that the Apostle Paul, who wrote over half of the New Testament, never used the word "disciple." He never called on any of the churches he founded to make disciples, even though Jesus left that as His final command. Paul never explains why, but he does stress the work of the body of Christ. Perhaps he wanted to keep the focus away from teachers gathering people around themselves because he knew the danger of people becoming followers of those who lead them.⁹⁵ Paul's focus was always on what God was doing,⁹⁶

⁹⁴ John 14:26.

⁹⁵ I Corinthians 3:1-4.

⁹⁶ I Corinthians 3:5-7.

and on putting no confidence in his own abilities.⁹⁷ He wanted to know Christ⁹⁸ and he wanted those around him to know Christ through the power of His Spirit.⁹⁹

The Apostle Paul also used distance learning by writing letters to the churches he had planted. His letters addressed the various issues the churches were facing and challenged those churches to prayerfully deal with the situations. Because Paul was not present, the people he wrote to had time to reflect and process his thoughts and prayerfully ask God to give them the wisdom they needed in order to proceed. When Paul did visit, he was able to build deeper relationships and speak into the lives of those in his care so they could obey the truth. His thrust was not to draw them into reliance upon himself, but rather for those receiving His letters to seek understanding through the Spirit of God,¹⁰⁰ so they could live in a way that is “wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil.”¹⁰¹

The Blended Online Learning Connection

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, there is no one way to make disciples. Whenever a method is formulated, there is always the chance that discipleship will fall into the crevice of legalism and man-made laws. There are, however, principles of discipleship that are consistent throughout scripture. Disciples trust God and do not lean on their own understanding. Disciples know God’s heart and reflect His heart to those around them. Discipleship is not about how much you know, but rather who you know and who knows you. Jesus and Paul both exemplified patterns of how to make disciples

⁹⁷ Phil. 3:7.

⁹⁸ Phil. 3:8.

⁹⁹ Phil. 3:3.

¹⁰⁰ I Corinthians 2:12.

¹⁰¹ Romans 16:19.

which can be emulated today. They spent time pouring into those under their care, building relationships, asking questions, encouraging ongoing discussion, reflecting and processing. They taught in the moment when people were most likely to learn. They allowed the learning to be done at the learner's pace, and they took advantage of teachable moments. Most importantly, they encouraged sensitivity to the Spirit's leading and God's voice with the goal of helping people cultivate the heart of God, so they would trust Him and not lean on their own understanding.

Many of those aspects of disciple-making, as done by Jesus and Paul, are difficult in today's world. In the busyness of life, ongoing and deep relationships are hard to develop, time for reflection and processing on transformative issues is hard to find, and learning is expected to be done only when onsite church classes are in session. Technology offers opportunities for learning that reverses the trend in the world today. By using blended online learning, issues can be discussed every day of the week and at any time of day through the use of smart phones, laptops and tablets. People can stay connected, and teaching can be done before groups meet, so there is more time in face-to-face groups for relationship-building, ministry and prayer. Since the teaching is delivered by content specialists prior to group meetings, using proven online learning pedagogies, there can be less emphasis on the teacher in the face-to-face meetings. Lay people can facilitate the discussion, allowing for more lay interaction and a greater emphasis on applying the content to life. In addition, using technology allows people the opportunity to learn at their own pace, in their own time, wherever they find themselves. This type of learning enables students to take time to listen to God's voice while they learn.

Implemented in light of God's heart, blended online learning increases the possibilities of making effective disciples of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 3

LITERARY REVIEW

Introduction

The church has made disciples of Jesus Christ for the last 2,000 years. Schools and corporations have successfully used blended online learning for over a decade. The survey's referred to in the first chapter of this thesis reveal that the church is presently struggling to make disciples who are capable of impacting the world. The main question examined in this thesis is: Can blended online learning help? There is currently no known research on this subject which relates specifically to churches. This literature review will look at additional surveys on discipleship effectiveness and review a variety of literary sources relating to disciple-making (including the biblical record on how Jesus made disciples). The research will also include articles, studies and dissertations on effective pedagogy, and the effectiveness of using those pedagogies in blended online learning for teaching in the world of the 21st century.

The Need

The research began with the polling data of Gallup and the Barna Group which revealed Christianity's lack of impact upon society. According to the Barna Group's examination of the five faith groups in the United States (evangelicals, non-evangelical born-again Christians, notional Christians, adherents of non-Christian faiths, and atheists/agnostics), the agnostics and the atheists have grown more over the last decade than any other group. The sobering truth is the Christian faith is not making as much

difference as Christians might like to believe. Less than 10% of the adult population is living their faith in a manner that stands out from the norms of the culture around them. Over half of all people attending church are more likely to live in ways that characterize non-Christians. According to George Barna, many Christians are simply “hard-pressed to convert their beliefs into action.”¹

This was confirmed again in a Barna Group survey conducted in April of 2013 for the purpose of determining whether self-identified Christians have the actions and attitudes of Jesus or the beliefs and behaviors of Pharisees as they relate to others:²

The findings reveal that most self-identified Christians in the U.S. are characterized by having the attitudes and actions researchers identified as Pharisaical. Just over half of the nation’s Christians—using the broadest definition of those who call themselves Christians—qualify for this category (51%). They tend to have attitudes and actions that are characterized by self-righteousness.³

Only 14% of people who call themselves Christian exemplified the actions and the attitudes that the Barna researchers found to be similar to Jesus. Even more disturbing was the breakdown of the evangelical believers. 23% of the evangelicals identified with Jesus’ actions and attitudes, but 25% had Christ-like actions and pharisaical attitudes.⁴ In other words, many evangelical Christians do the right thing with the wrong motive. They know what to do and even have a willingness to obey, but a connection with the heart of God is shown to be lacking in the process. The church needs different results than what

¹ “Faith Has a Limited Effect on Most People’s Behavior,” Barna Group, May 24, 2004, accessed June 2, 2012, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/188-faith-has-a-limited-effect-on-most-peoples-behavior>.

² “Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees,” Barna Group, April 30, 2013, accessed August 15, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/faith-spirituality/611-christians-more-like-jesus-or-pharisees#.UkSsbRAILYo>. A series of 20 statements were used in the survey with five questions each relating to the actions and attitudes of Jesus and the self-righteous actions and attitudes of the Pharisees. Agreement was rated on a 4 point scale.

³ “Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees,” Barna Group.

⁴ “Christians: More Like Jesus or Pharisees,” Barna Group.

is now being done in the name of discipleship. If different results are to be achieved, discipleship must be done differently. Cal Thomas, a Christian syndicated columnist and social commentator, challenges Christians to look within before speaking out. In an interview with Christianity Today he said, “The problem in our culture... isn’t the abortionists. It isn’t the pornographers or drug dealers or criminals. It is the undisciplined, undisciplined, disobedient and biblically ignorant Church of Jesus Christ.”⁵

Lecture and Knowledge

This observation agrees with Dr. Greg Ogden’s statement in his book, *Transforming Discipleship*. He points out, “There is an evident discipleship deficiency in our churches and ministries that we know needs to be addressed, but we are not sure how to do so.”⁶ Ogden shares clearly throughout his book that the solution to discipleship in the church is not another program, and it is not in traditional lecture style classes where many students listen to one person speak on a subject and then try to remember to live out what was taught. Disciple-making is about relationship.⁷ Ogden points out that programs and lecture-style teaching lack in their ability to direct attention toward the uniqueness of each individual, who has specific areas they need to deal with in order to effectively live their faith in a manner that reflects the heart of God.⁸ Teaching or

⁵ Cal Thomas, interview in *Christianity Today*, April 25, 1994, quoted by Greg Ogden, *Transforming Discipleship: Making Disciples a Few at a Time*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003) 23. .

⁶ Ogden, *Transforming Disciples*, 16.

⁷ Ogden, *Transforming Disciples*, 17.

⁸ Ogden, *Transforming Disciples*, 43.

preaching within groups can be useful in giving information to groups of people which can enhance people's development, but knowledge alone does not produce disciples.⁹

In *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, Lawrence Richards states the Bible reveals specific knowledge which produces both individualistic and experiential change. This is conveyed by the Hebrew word *Lamad*, which in the Bible “conveys the sense of training as well as education. Teaching and learning are not academic but are focused on knowing and responding to the will of God.”¹⁰ According to Richards, the whole point of biblical learning is not to obtain cognitive knowledge. The point is always for the hearts of learners to have the heart of God in order that the lives of Christians reflect the life of Jesus.¹¹ Practical application is central to the purpose of all Christian instruction. Cognitive mastery of information was not the biblical focus.¹² As Ogden says, “Right knowledge does not produce right living.”¹³ Discipleship teaching needs the dynamic of community so there can be discussion and application which translates into the lives of the hearers. It is in community that followers of Christ are formed by solid, accountable relationships.¹⁴ Richards observed that when teachers taught and understood truth within the context of community, faith connected with life.¹⁵

⁹ David A. DeWitt, “Seven Principles of Biblical Discipleship,” *Relational Concepts*, 2010, accessed September 8, 2013, <http://www.relationalconcepts.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=vk8IFGdozJ4%3D&tabid=73>.

¹⁰ Lawrence O. Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1985), 588.

¹¹ DeWitt, 590.

¹² Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 590-591.

¹³ Ogden, *Transforming Disciples*, 43.

¹⁴ Ogden, *Transforming Disciples*, 49-55.

¹⁵ Richards, *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words*, 590.

Online Community Formation

In the busyness of today's society the problem is how to form learning communities. In their study, "How Christianly is Christian Distance Higher Education," Rovai, Baker and Cox concluded that courses designed in a blended fashion are extremely effective in providing strong community relationships between students and professors. In fact, their conclusion was "that blended courses can produce a stronger sense of community among students than either traditional or fully online courses."¹⁶ Community is defined by Rovai, Baker and Cox as having "homogeneity, interdependence, shared responsibility and common goals and values."¹⁷ Their definition of a blended course included 14 face-to-face hours combined with an online course that was spread over a 16-week semester. They suggested the blended model was similar to the methods used by the Apostle Paul who instructed churches by mixing face-to-face ministry with distance correspondence.

In the study, "Facilitating Holistic Growth in a Blended Program: Student's Reflect on What Worked and Why," author Ruth Smith agrees that community is essential for transformative education to fulfill its purpose. She writes, "a careful blend of on-campus and online learning can bring together the best of both worlds."¹⁸ Online discussions, if employed with a small group, can be used to create intimate discussions. Smith noted that when online discussions work well, they have the potential to be "much deeper and richer discussions than are possible face-to-face."¹⁹ This is especially true in

¹⁶ Alfred P. Rovai, Jason D. Baker, and William F. Cox Jr, "How Christianly is Christian Distance Higher Education?" *Christian Higher Education* 7, no. 1 (2008): 16.

¹⁷ Rovai, 5.

¹⁸ Ruth Smith, "Facilitating holistic growth in a blended program: Students reflect on what worked and why," Counselling and Family Studies Programme, Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Tauranga, NZ (2009): 994, accessed August 4, 2013, <http://ascilite.org.au/conferences/auckland09/procs/smith.pdf>.

¹⁹ Smith, 995.

an asynchronous discussion where a more thought-out, reflective response becomes possible because the person can think more thoroughly about what he desires to say before posting it publically. This extra processing time also led to more open sharing than free-flowing face-to-face discussion according to Smith's experience. Quieter students who might not have taken the initiative to speak in class had equal opportunity to share online at their own pace. "For many, these discussions provoked a level of engagement with, and challenge to, their faith perspectives that they had not previously encountered."²⁰

Equally important to the students in Smith's study were the on-site experiences. The students found it very meaningful to see the theory in the online discussions, fleshed out in the face-to-face conversations with others as they built trust and challenged one another. Being able to practice together in person, they found the vulnerable sharing they initiated online was especially important.

The lecturers' involvement in the online and on-site discussion was also noted to be a significant encouragement in the student's growth and development. Their feedback and added insights were perceived to be very valuable. Lecturers also contributed to the biggest disappointment in the online portion of the course when they did not respond to the student's comments within what the students considered to be a reasonable amount of time.

Blended Online Benefits

Smith did observe that while many of the dynamics of online interaction could happen in a traditional classroom, one of the unique benefits of the online experience was

²⁰ Smith, 997.

the depth of reflection that came from the student's reading assignments and online journaling. As students read the assignments at their own pace and discussed and developed their ideas online with others, there was a processing that was rare and even absent from face-to-face discussions in a traditional setting. Students related they felt,

a sense of safety in sharing at deep and vulnerable levels in online forums as well as during onsite time. This is a key factor in the ability of students to engage with ideas and more personal issues that affect transformation potential. The blended nature of the program seemed to build helpfully in this regard, with the onsite experiences fostering genuine trust, relationships, personal interaction and sharing which then continued and was enhanced in their online community.²¹

In the end, while some students were impacted more by the online input from other students and the lecturers, others were encouraged by the on-site experience. The combination of both proved to be beneficial to all.

Robert Gutteridge, in his dissertation "The Impact of Socio-Cultural Factors on Blended Learning in the Development of Academic Literacy in a Tertiary Vocational Context," agrees with Smith's findings on the effectiveness of blended online learning, especially in the area of providing a level playing field for all students. More aggressive students who had a tendency to monopolize discussions in a traditional setting were not able to dominate online discussions. All students were heard equally and had equal opportunity to connect with the teacher. Requiring students to write out their responses, which were read by all students, also encouraged more thought and effort to be incorporated into each student's post. Gutteridge also mentions that the emphasis in online learning is placed upon the student rather than the teacher. "The traditional face-to-face classroom engenders a teacher centered learning environment where the sage on a stage, through chalk and talk, attempts to impart information to the class. Facts are not

²¹ Smith, "Facilitating Holistic Growth," 999.

necessarily translated into competencies, however, and thus this teaching method does not necessarily empower the learners.”²²

New Pedagogies

In “Teaching Generation NeXt: A Pedagogy for Today’s Learners,” Mark Taylor agrees that the way education has been delivered in the past—relying on lecture to passive listeners—is proving to be less effective in accomplishing the desired results. He concludes the traditional type of educational pedagogy may actually be affecting a student’s ability to perform critical analysis. His solution is to find better approaches to education which includes engaging students through technology. He observes that traditional class time is consumed with delivery of content; that time would be more effective if it was used to apply what has been learned and to determine why the information learned is important. “This model moves faculty from the traditional pedagogy of delivering content in class and expecting students to apply it out of class, toward moving the content out of class and facilitating the application of content under the guidance of the professor during class.”²³ The main reason for moving away from the lecture format is that in this digital age, all the content is accessible outside of class. No longer are students reliant upon the teacher for information.

The Center for Digital Education refers to this type of learning as “The Flipped Classroom.” They advocate a classroom to be a place of active learning and not a place of

²² Robert Geoffrey Gutteridge, "The impact of socio-cultural factors on blended learning in the development of academic literacy in a tertiary vocational context" (PhD dissertation, Durban University of Technology, 2009), 14.

²³ Mark Taylor, "Teaching Generation Next: A Pedagogy for Today’s Learners," A collection of papers on self-study and institutional improvement 3 (2010):193, accessed June 9, 2013, https://sharepoint.estrel.lamountain.edu/selfstudy_2009_11/HLC_Conf/Shared%20Documents/Conference%20Documentation/Papers/G-SUN-0115-h.pdf.

passive, one way communication. Students are looking for a classroom experience that will equip them to formulate knowledge for themselves. They are looking to do something with the content they are learning by working with others to apply the information they have learned from the expertise of the content specialists. The main benefit of a flipped classroom is the additional time a teacher has to work with students in order to assist them in making the content their own. Students are able to use technology to review the content so teachers spend less time answering repetitive questions. Keeping the material updated online is easier and instantaneous with no republishing time or costs. Face-to-face time in the classroom with the teacher assisting students was deemed by the students to be more valuable than a lecture. The article's conclusion was that flipped learning provides a way to "improve instructional delivery and enhance student achievement and satisfaction."²⁴

Blended Online Potential

According to the Herff Jones Achievement series, "Boosting Achievement Through Blended Learning," the question schools are asking about blended online learning is not if it is coming but when. The sense is that the potential for this type of learning is greater than any model so far, but the tools must be used appropriately. It is essential for the instructor to evaluate what aspects of the course are best delivered online and which are more appropriate for the face-to-face time.²⁵ According to Gray Harriman

²⁴ "The Flipped Classroom: Increasing Instructional Effectiveness in Higher Education with Blended Learning Technology," Center for Digital Education, February 16, 2012, accessed August 6, 2013, <http://www.centerdigitaled.com/paper/The-Flipped-Classroom.html>.

²⁵ Boosting Achievement through Blended Learning, October 2012, accessed July 9, 2013, The Herff Jones Achievement Series, <http://innovativesolutionsnmped.wikispaces.com/file/view/Boosting+Achievement+through+Blended+Learning.pdf>.

in his article on blended learning, the classroom is best used for the coaching, feedback, collegial connections, and role modeling, while the online segment can contain content specialists teaching learning modules, simulations, scenarios, online self-assessments and online bulletin boards or discussion threads.²⁶ Correctly applied, blended online learning empowers teachers to spend more time with students than in a traditional classroom experience. The Herff Jones article refers to a six-month's experiment "in which five high school teachers were trained in the curriculum, and their classes were compared with five others that weren't. After six months, students using the program outperformed those who were not involved in factual knowledge, reading comprehension and 'historical thinking,' which combines analytic and strategic skills."²⁷

Pedagogies and the Online Connection

In an article entitled, "Emerging Theories and Online Learning Environments for Adults," Debbie Wicks writes about three modern pedagogical theories which work well in an online learning environment. "Social constructivist, connectivism and transformative learning theories all have components of building communities through dialoging, discussing and reflecting to allow learners to develop deeper understandings and gain knowledge."²⁸ She admits that technology in and of itself is not the end-all to these technologies, but it provides tools for these pedagogies to flourish. Constructivism, for instance, relies heavily on constructing meaning in the midst of community. Blended

²⁶ Gray Harriman, "Blended Learning," E-Learning Resources, accessed September 10, 2013, http://www.grayharriman.com/blended_learning.htm#1.

²⁷ "Boosting Achievement through Blended Learning," The Herff Jones Achievement Series.

²⁸ Debbie J. Wicks, "Emerging Theories and Online Learning Environments for Adults," Theories of Educational Technology, accessed July 10, 2013, <https://sites.google.com/a/boisestate.edu/edtechtheories/emerging-theories-and-online-learning-environments-for-adults-1>.

online learning has the ability through discussion threads, chat rooms and email to complement and enhance community formed within a face-to-face class or group. Connectivists look to make connections between previously learned knowledge and knowledge in the present. The speed of knowledge development in the world means that learners must be able to access information and determine what applies in a time-efficient manner. Blended online learning makes those resources instantly available at learners' finger tips. Transformative learning theory challenges learners' assumptions through critical reflection. The access to ongoing discussion in blended online learning provides a platform for online and offline discussion upon which to build thoughtful interaction.²⁹

Blended online learning puts the emphasis on learners to take responsibility for their learning outside of class and shifts the focus away from teachers. For the learning community to be most effective, it is important for all the students to be active in the sharing and the reflection in the online discussions. This paradigm shift in education can be difficult initially for learners, but, according to Wicks, if teachers cast vision properly there are many benefits in store. "Interactive learning, collaborative learning, facilitating learning, authentic learning, learner-centered learning and high quality learning" are just some of the potential advantages.³⁰ Blended online learning also has the ability to involve audio, visual and kinesthetic learners and even create virtual worlds which provides "opportunities for students and instructors to interact synchronously, providing a richer social interaction for learning."³¹

²⁹ Debbie J. Wicks, "Emerging Theories and Online Learning Environments for Adults."

³⁰ Debbie J. Wicks, "Emerging Theories and Online Learning Environments for Adults."

³¹ Debbie J. Wicks, "Emerging Theories and Online Learning Environments for Adults."

The Pedagogy of Jesus

In addition to the unique connection these pedagogies have with blended online learning, they also connect with the teaching style of Jesus. In *Christian Perspectives in Education*, William Robertson wrote an article entitled, “The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever; The Pedagogy of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew in the Context of the 5Es.” In the article, Robertson identifies the teaching style of Jesus as constructivist pedagogy. By that he means “Jesus continually challenged his disciples and followers through the use of experiences, parables, and questions in order to relate the context of his eternal message to their practical and daily lives. In this way, He centered His instruction on developing conceptually correct understandings that had to be discovered and personalized by the learner.”³² An example of this is found in the parable of the sower. Jesus’ listeners were living in an agrarian society, so it was natural for them to apply what He said to their experience, and in the process, construct a new understanding of personal salvation. The essence of constructivism is that it builds on learner’s knowledge base and experience. “Learners construct meaning while continually assessing their understandings of concepts.”³³

The role of a teacher in constructivism is to guide students’ understanding and encourage critical thinking until students are able to connect what they are learning to the experience of their daily life. Open-ended questions are a key part of the learning strategy because they enable the teacher to challenge the students to be inquisitive and not be satisfied with surface answers. In this learning theory, learners have a

³² William H. Robertson, "The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever: The Pedagogy of Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew in the Context of the 5Es," *Christian Perspectives in Education* 1, no. 2 (2008): 1. Accessed September 10, 2013, <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cpe/vol1/iss2/5>.

³³ Robertson, “The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever,” 2.

predominate role in the process. In a very real sense, the teacher becomes a facilitator who keeps the learner focused and progressing in the right direction. Ongoing discussion that probes and leads to reflection is a critical element in this learning theory. “This technique aids students in discovering their own thought structure and helps them develop clarity, accuracy and relevance in their thinking. Learners search for evidence and reason, recognize and reflect upon assumptions, discover implications and consequences and extrapolate from what is really known versus merely believed.”³⁴ The foundational principle of constructivism is the learner learns by doing. It is through the doing that learners realize the inadequacy of their assumptions and develop new ones. Jesus was a master of guiding His learners to reevaluate their previous beliefs and construct new ones based on His teaching as He taught on the mountainside, in a boat, as He walked and in a storm.³⁵ This type of “hands-on learning plays a valuable role in the constructivist paradigm, as it is the process of experiencing learning that is utilized in the exploration phase.”³⁶

A fixed classroom setting can provide some of the same learning dynamics the disciples experienced with Jesus as they traveled. Certainly teachers in classrooms can challenge students with open-ended discussions about their life experiences. However, combining the classroom experience with the communication technology of the Internet takes discussions out of the classroom and into the world where learners live. This enhances the impact of the interaction. As learner’s journal online about their life situations, teachers can also interact as the students reflect and help them connect what they are learning with what they encounter in life on a daily basis.

³⁴ Robertson, “The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever,” 3.

³⁵ Robertson, “The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever,” 6.

³⁶ Robertson, “The Greatest Constructivist Educator Ever,” 7.

Discipleship and Transformative Learning

Transformative learning, based on the studies of Mezirow, is also seen as an effective way to bring about transformation in the lives of learners. In his dissertation on “Transformative Learning in Online Theological Education: A Case Study of an Online Program at a Theological Seminary,” Nghi Tran writes the central focus of Transformative learning theory is “critical reflection, rational discourse and experience.”³⁷ Mezirow states an individual must learn to “negotiate meanings, purposes and values critically, reflectively and rationally instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others.”³⁸ Tran writes how this relates to the foundation of theological transformation. Learners must become aware of their ingrained beliefs and begin to see them differently through critical reflection, discussion and daily experience.³⁹ Tran connects, in his thought process, the key elements of transformative learning and theological education with the tool of online learning. He believes,

Transformative learning theory provides a theoretical framework to describe and possibly explain the learning experience for students in online instruction. The discipline in which their learning experience is examined is theological education and the means through which this learning takes place in the online environment. The marriage of transformative learning theory and theological education is not new nor is the exploration of this theory in the online setting.⁴⁰

³⁷ Nghi Tran, “Transformative Learning in Online Theological Education: a Case Study of an Online Program at a Theological Seminary” (PhD diss., University of North Texas, 2011), 3, accessed September 15, 2013, http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc68056/m2/1/high_res_d/dissertation.pdf, 3.

³⁸ Jack, Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1991), 3.

³⁹ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions*, 3, 4.

⁴⁰ Nghi Tran, “Transformative Learning in Online Theological Education: a Case Study of an Online Program at a Theological Seminary” 4, 5.

Jesus' Discipleship Methods

Although Jesus did not have access to computers and online learning, many of the strengths of blended online learning can be seen in His disciple-making. According to Roy Zuck in the Book *Teaching as Jesus Taught*, Jesus was a master at challenging His disciples to think. He involved His students in His lessons, worked with them to apply truth and He took time to pour into their lives individually. His teaching was done as they went through life, outside a classroom. Although He did use some lecture, the main focus of Jesus' teaching was at the moment it was needed or when the circumstances provided an avenue for it. Teachable moments were key to His ministry.⁴¹

One of the most important aspects of Jesus' teaching ministry was the time He spent with the disciples outside of any official class time. Jesus' focus was always on His disciples and never on Himself being the center of attention. He experienced life with His disciples and challenged them in those times to evaluate life in light of God's kingdom on this earth. He did this—not by filling them with facts about God—but rather by asking them questions which caused the disciples to also ask questions. Jesus did not give answers before the questions were asked, and He seemed to relish leaving the disciples to think about their questions. Jesus was certainly not into giving pat answers. At times, He did teach directly about who His Father was,⁴² but mostly the revelation Jesus gave about His Father was through various parables⁴³ which were only able to be understood by those who had ears to hear.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Roy Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 69-82.

⁴² John 3:16, 17:26; Matthew 5:45.

⁴³ Matthew 18:23-35, 20:1-15, 21:33-43.

⁴⁴ Luke 8:8, 9.

According to Zuck, Jesus seemed to want the disciples to think, process and reflect on what they were seeing daily before their eyes. In order to bring the disciples to that place of learning, Jesus combined lecture with discussions, questions, brief statements, stories and parables, rebukes, comments, arguments and even silence. Jesus was definitely into using diversity to help the disciples construct knowledge that would lead them to understanding which they could base their life on. Using problem solving, discussion and many live visuals, Jesus captured their attention and drove the truths He was teaching deep into their hearts.⁴⁵

Zuck stressed how the essence of Jesus' teaching was getting the disciples to ruminate on what they were seeing and hearing. He did this by teaching at the learner's pace. He taught learning as a matter of the heart for the purpose of obedience, and He was never content just to fill the disciples with knowledge about God. He was always focused on bringing the disciples into an experience of the presence of the kingdom of God so they would come to reflect the heart of God.⁴⁶ Jesus was not disturbed when the disciples did not understand,⁴⁷ because in the end Jesus knew His Spirit would teach them all things.⁴⁸ Only at the feeding of the five thousand and the four thousand did Jesus address the disciples' lack of understanding.⁴⁹

Web 2.0

In the book, *Netcasters*, Craig Buseck writes about the convergence that is possible when the Internet is used to make fishers of men. No longer is the Internet made

⁴⁵ Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught*, 160-165.

⁴⁶ Zuck, *Teaching as Jesus Taught*, 86-109.

⁴⁷ Luke 18:34; John 8:27, John 10:6.

⁴⁸ John 14:26.

⁴⁹ Matthew 16:9; Mark 8:21.

up of standalone, unchangeable web sites that offer information. The technology is now available to communicate, build relationships and establish real community. According to Buseck's research, "most people who received Christ online (came) to the point of praying a prayer of salvation through one-on-one relationships that (were) built naturally (online). These kinds of personal relationships and conversations have exploded in growth through the advent of Web 2.0⁵⁰ and all the interactivity it encourages."⁵¹ Web 2.0 has unleashed a combination of powerful tools for relationship building which include "e-mail, chat, forums and message boards, individualized content creation, social networking, microblogs, blogs, vlogs, mobile digital devices and podcasting."⁵² Web 2.0 empowers people to connect and stay connected and gives people the ability to collaborate and communicate in creative ways. It is especially effective in giving people the ability to engage in content and interact with what is being communicated wherever they are and whenever they want. When students are most ready to learn they can enter this "modern day forum for ideas and relationships."⁵³

The Web 2.0 revolution has allowed the Internet to go from content creation to community interaction.⁵⁴ The foundational principle about Web 2.0 is that it is all about conversing with others. Buseck says his experience in conversing with people in 197 countries found that "people open up usually earlier and more intimately in an online environment than they would face-to-face and then they get, as it were, tricked into a

⁵⁰ Defined in the Glossary.

⁵¹ Craig Buseck, *Netcasters: Using the Internet to Make Fishers of Men* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 27.

⁵² Buseck, 27, 28.

⁵³ Buseck, 28.

⁵⁴ Buseck, 30, 31.

genuine friendship, because as they develop a level of trust, the relationship can segue from online to real time face-to-face.”⁵⁵

The world of today is one in which people are turning from the church, but they are interested in God and they are searching the Internet looking for Him. According to Buseck, many who have exited the church are searching for God outside the church, and the web has become their source of information. It is also a place where many have become “comfortable sharing their innermost thoughts.”⁵⁶ George Barna states, “within this decade, as many as fifty million will rely solely on the Internet to provide all their faith-based experiences.”⁵⁷ Buseck states in response, churches are creating opportunities on the Internet for evangelism and discipleship. They are linking to social networking sites and featuring forums and chat rooms for discussion and interaction which complement their face-to-face church experiences.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The 21st century is a time of cataclysmic change for knowledge and learning. The digital age has arrived, claimed its place in history and has extended its tentacles into every segment of society. The way many people learn, the way information is delivered, the ways relationships are formed and community built have all been affected by digital advances. Research clearly reveals that a majority of people are no longer turning to the churches on Sunday morning and Wednesday night for answers to their spiritual hunger.

⁵⁵ Buseck, *Netcasters*, 49-56.

⁵⁶ Buseck, *Netcasters*, 108.

⁵⁷ “More Americans seeking net based faith experiences,” Barna Group, May 21, 2001, accessed July 9, 2013, <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/48-more-americans-are-seeking-net-based-faith-experiences#.UpQmrcQgeSo>.

⁵⁸ Buseck, *Netcasters*, 109.

To reach them, the church must be willing to do things differently. The literature reveals that blended online learning is a “new way” to disciple in the “old way” Jesus did 2,000 years ago. Blended online learning is not THE answer to making effective disciples, but it is certainly AN answer that should not be ignored.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to show how blended online learning can complement the traditional small group church discipleship model and enhance a church's ability to make effective disciples for Jesus Christ. Jesus made disciples by building relationships with a few individuals over the course of a sustained period of time. He did not meet with His disciples just once or even twice a week. Jesus spent moment by moment, day after day pouring into the lives of those He was seeking to influence. He taught them when they were most ready to learn, in teachable moments when they were most likely to remember and be impacted by what He said and did.

The world of the twenty first century is a time of busyness. Work, business travel, family and church obligations, classes and extra-curricular activities for children and adults all create a lack of time to develop relationships and community which are the basis of biblical discipleship. People find it almost impossible to attend ten, five or even three church classes or meetings in a row. As a result, churches are being forced to arrange mandatory extended church classes into a single session so they can make sure people who attend do not miss any content. This drastically reduces the ability for relationships and community to be developed, and in the process, negates the key element in the disciple-making method of Jesus.

The need is great for churches to be creative in the way they are forming relationships and developing community in order to make disciples for Jesus Christ. In

this sound-bite world, where people can access Christian information 24/7 at their fingertips, individuals are looking for relationships and community where they can find help to process and apply what they are learning. Lecture style sermons and teachings, where one person tells a crowd what to do, are no longer proving fully sufficient for producing disciples who reflect the actions and attitudes of Jesus.¹

This project seeks to show how blended online learning can be a missing link in the formation of making effective disciples for Jesus Christ in the world of the 21st century. The research is drawn from a mixed methodology involving small groups taking blended online courses, interviews of pastors and a Christian educator, each of whom have facilitated blended online groups, and a focus group discussing the benefits of using online learning to make disciples in churches. Pre-test and post-test surveys were given to the three small groups who took various types of blended online courses.

The research of this project examined how blended online learning and its connection to technology and different teaching paradigms enhances the Church's ability to make effective disciples for Jesus Christ. It is the belief of this author that blended online learning can be a valuable tool in making disciples who reflect the heart of God.

Research Questions

The research questions which provide the foundation for this discipleship and blended online learning study are: What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? What are the keys to making disciples of Jesus Christ? What is blended online learning? How can blended online learning be used to make disciples of Jesus Christ? How can the keys to making disciples be accomplished through blended online learning? What are the

¹ See Chapter 1.

benefits to using blended online learning for making disciples of Jesus Christ in the local church? Additional questions to be answered about blended online learning are: How can blended online learning facilitate the building of relationships and community in small groups? How can the experience of blended online learning influence how biblical truths are applied to life? How can blended online learning encourage students to reflect, think creatively, and process the presented material? How can blended online learning help students take responsibility and initiative for their Christian growth? How can the online discussions in blended online learning impact small group face-to-face discussion, relationship development, and prayer ministry?

Small Group Segment

The small group segment of the project is based on two online learning courses written by the author and one offline book study which used an online group study planner tool.² All the courses and group study plans were constructed using the Arkeo Online Discipleship Learning Management System. There is a variety of learning management systems available for online course development. Arkeo was chosen because it is specifically designed for use in church discipleship and training, and it provides a wide variety of formats for online learning. The system includes a “what you see is what you get” (WYSIWYG) editor which enables complete online course development without the author having to know any HTML code. This system can be used by any pastor who has entry level knowledge of computers. The courses include video segments which were filmed with a standard video camera (a smart phone could be used to film the videos). The videos were uploaded through youtube.com and

² The online group study planner tool was developed by Arkeo Online Discipleship and Training.

vimeo.com, which are very intuitive and user friendly sites. A variety of visual images and concisely written text are also an integral part of the course design. Screenshots of course page samples are included in the Appendices.³ These courses have been developed using the best practices in online course design and delivery.⁴ In addition to the course content they include course descriptions, learning goals, learning objectives and asynchronous discussion opportunities, all placed within self-paced modules which have been built using instructional design for online learning.

How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses

One of the courses is entitled, “How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses.” The course teaches about the paradigm shift online learning brings to the ministry of disciple-making.⁵ The intent of the course is to equip leaders to gain and implement knowledge in the context of intimacy with God, for the purpose of preparing the leaders to be vessels of God’s wisdom and understanding as they live life with their group members. The three lesson course centers around “Intimacy with God—the Online Connection,” “Insights for Online Course Leaders,” and “Advantages for the Online Student.”

The first lesson focuses on the importance of leaders developing an intimate relationship with God. The lesson draws on the example of Jesus⁶ and a variety of stories from the Old Testament involving Jacob,⁷ Joseph,⁸ Gideon,⁹ and David.¹⁰ The emphasis

³ Appendices 1 and 2, 122-130.

⁴ “Best Practices in Online Course Design and Delivery,” Southern Oregon University, September 10, 2009, Provided by the SOU Distance Education Center, accessed September 10 20012, <http://www.sou.edu/distancelearning/SOU%20DEC%20Best%20Practices.pdf>.

⁵ The paradigm shift involves transitioning from teacher focused instruction to learner centered discussion. The discipler facilitates the discussion of the content presented online before face-to-face meetings.

⁶ John 5:19, 8:28, 29.

⁷ Genesis 28:10-15, 32:22-30.

is on leaders developing the humble, loving heart of God and having the mind of Christ controlled by the Spirit of Christ. The goal is for leaders of blended online discipleship courses to impart their lives more than their knowledge. The reason is leaders in blended online discipleship courses function more as facilitators than as teachers who are content specialists. The content in blended online discipleship is presented in the online course itself by a pastor or teacher who is the content specialist. Group members are assigned to study the material and reflect upon it in the discussion thread before they meet with their group leader.

One of the key points in the first lesson is on solitude which Henri Nouwen observes is the place where the old dies and the new lives. It is the place where Christ reworks those who would follow Him. Nouwen calls it the “furnace of transformation.”¹¹ Solitude is the place where Christ remodels disciples into His image. Blended online learning gives opportunity for solitude because the lessons are taught by content specialists in the learner’s own time, at their own pace and in their own location. Wherever and whenever students learn best, they can access the course on their laptop, tablet or smart phone. Because the course is online, students have opportunity to stop the video segments as often as they desire and replay them or just reflect upon them. Notes from the online text can be easily captured and entered into a personal document using a copy-and-paste computer function. The discussion thread is asynchronous which gives each student time to prayerfully consider and edit personal thoughts before posting them. The self-pacing aspect to online learning lends itself to students listening to what God is

⁸ Genesis 3:7-45.

⁹ Judges 6:11-16.

¹⁰ I Samuel 16:7-13.

¹¹ Henri J. Nouwen and Robert A. Jonas, *Henri Nouwen: Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 17.

saying to them as they learn, and the online access allows students to conveniently study wherever they are throughout their day or night.

Lesson two relates insights for the online course leader who is best described as a co-learner and servant leader. Leaders should walk alongside their group members and encourage self-discipline as they study. Because online leaders are not responsible to teach lesson content or reteach a chapter from a book or a lesson plan, they have more time to build relationships and hold group members accountable to reflect and process what they are learning.¹² Leaders are also guided to have teachable hearts and be transparent as they seek to influence group members to be open to the transforming truths God has for them.

The lesson also instructs leaders in the art of reflection. In today's fast-paced world, it is critically important to teach group members to reflect on a subject. This lesson gives direction on guiding group members how to reflect. Reflection involves going beyond learning facts and information, to setting their hearts and minds on what God wants to teach them as they listen for His still small voice. Group members are also taught to reflect creatively by thinking beyond the first thought that enters their minds so they can ultimately reflect humbly, patiently and expectantly. This equips them to prayerfully wait upon God to transform their minds and their hearts which will be manifested in their lives.

The last segment of the lesson focuses on tips for leading asynchronously. Leading in a virtual classroom can become an overwhelming experience if leaders are not adequately prepared. Sometimes the students may expect leaders to be available 24/7 on

¹² When a pastor puts discipleship content in a blended online learning format, they have the ability to multiply themselves across their congregation and involve relationally gifted lay people to facilitate discipleship groups.

the discussion thread or through email since the online course is available 24/7. Leaders are instructed to synthesize key comments and to encourage group members to build their comments off other members' posts. The leaders' comments should not become the focus of attention, but rather, leaders should encourage group commentary. It is important for leaders to cast vision about the benefit of other group members' reflections and contributions, as each person seeks to grow in their faith.

As the group members enter new places of reflection and inquiry, the leader's wisdom becomes less important. As a result, the leader decreases as the students begin to reach out to those around them and together apply the truth they are learning from their own intimate relationships with God. This leads to one of the main benefits of using blended online learning to make disciples: the learning focus shifts from the leader to the student. The test of effective online leadership is when group members receive and apply God's Word in their lives without focusing upon the leader. The decrease of the leader's influence in the students' lives leads to an increase in God's ability to form His heart in the disciples who are being made.

The last lesson involves the advantages of blended online discipleship to students. It targets the importance of self-discipline in the lives of those being disciplined. In blended online learning, group members are challenged to be focused and diligent in completing their lessons before coming to the group. Instead of just attending a group, students who participate in a blended online learning group are encouraged to take ownership of their experience. They set the schedule, they determine their study location, and they reap the satisfaction of knowing their investment will produce good fruit in their lives. Just as God instructed parents in Deuteronomy 6:6,7 to teach their children while

they were sitting, walking, lying down and getting up, blended online learning students can receive the same “anytime, anywhere” instruction and have the added benefit of learning at their own pace. Group members can also be assured that some of what they are taught will be in a learning style that most caters to their individual learning preference, because blended online learning involves every learning style.¹³ In the online learning process, no one is an observer because every student is actively involved. The skills gained in online learning prepare students to be life-long learners.

This third lesson emphasizes the opportunity in blended online learning to seek God’s anointing as the teacher. I John 2:27 says the anointing of God is able to teach all things, and that anointing should be each believer’s primary teacher.¹⁴ The lesson clarifies that in blended online learning, the teacher is secondary to the information, which is also secondary to the relationships and the learning community. This focus away from the teacher provides an avenue for the anointing of the Holy Spirit to use the video segments, the text, the images, the discussion thread and the face-to-face group meetings to plant transformational truth in the lives of the group members.

Within the lesson, the students are encouraged to function in a “teacher type” role. This is beneficial because teachers often learn the most in a classroom. The teachers are the ones who put in the research and spend time developing their subject, by critically examining it from many angles, so they can share what they find with others. In blended online learning, students take on the teacher role as they study alone, reflect, discuss with others and finally meet face-to-face in a group where the discussion can continue on a

¹³ Audio, visual and kinesthetic learning styles are all used in blended online learning.

¹⁴ The tendency in Christianity is often to seek after and follow great leaders and teachers. This was the case in the church in Corinth with Paul and Apollos in 1 Corinthians 3:4. It continues to be the case today as people easily move from one church to another seeking to find a church where they like the pastor. It is rare to hear someone say they are seeking the anointing of God to teach them.

deeper and richer level. Because the core content is studied online, the students even have the opportunity, as they proceed through the course, to use the readily available resources of the Internet to enhance their study. For the student who takes the online learning opportunity seriously, blended online discipleship gives immeasurable possibilities for growth and learning.

On Your Mark

The course “How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses” (written by the author of this thesis-project) was constructed using the course creator tool in the Arkeo Online Learning Management System. The same tool was used to build the second course entitled “On Your Mark” (also written by the author) which was accessed online by a second small group. This course is a verse by verse devotional study of the book of Mark. Video segments filmed by Dr. George Wood, General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, were used as the basis for the course. The author wrote devotional studies based on the video segments and added images to enhance the message Dr. Wood shared. Both of these courses are able to be studied by themselves as an online course, but each was designed to be taught in the blended online format. The Arkeo Online Discipleship and Training System allows group application through its Group Study Planner Tool, which includes the ability for a course to be assigned to a specific small group. The Group Study Planner Tool provides a variety of component choices, which allow a leader to create a group study plan. This includes an online discussion thread which provides for group discussion and reflection.

A third small group used the group study planner tool to participate in an online discussion thread while they studied an offline book. Although they did not participate in an actual online course, they did access the online benefits of staying connected through the discussion thread and online group announcements, prayer requests, assignments and emails. All three groups met weekly in face-to-face group meetings.

Research Population and Sampling Measures

There were several different small group formats used for this study. The first group was comprised of individuals located throughout the United States. The face-to-face aspect of the group was facilitated by video chat through Google+. All the participants were personal friends of the author who were interested in blended online learning. They were located in Phoenix, Arizona; Franklin, Pennsylvania; Tulsa, Oklahoma; Grand Prairie, Texas; Keller, Texas; and Roanoke, Texas. The author was the only person who knew all the participants. One of the participants was a businessman who participated each week from his hotel room. Five of the participants attended a mega church, one attended a medium-sized small country church and one pastored a small urban church. The group was made up of one woman and six men. They were each given a pre-test survey before taking the course and a post-test survey after completing the course. The survey questions and results are included in the Appendices.¹⁵

This group participated in the online course written by the author entitled, “How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses.” The pre-test survey revealed that the overall Christian commitment and maturity level of the group was strong. They believed in the truth of God’s Word and were committed to growing in their faith. The group was not

¹⁵ Appendices 3 and 4, 131-145.

quite as strong in their accountability relationships with others, but as a group, they were above average in that area and they reported having experienced good community life in small groups. The survey revealed that no one in the group spent more than 30 minutes a week reflecting upon their pastor's sermon although they did report that sermons and small groups had an impact on their lives. None of them acknowledged that lecture style teaching was their preferred method of learning. They all agreed they were responsible for what they learned in their walk with God. Three of the group had never taken an online course. Three had never gone through a discipleship training program. They all rated above average in their comfort level with using computers.

The post-test survey revealed six of the group grew in their relationship with God as a result of participating in this course and five agreed or strongly agreed they were more equipped to study God's Word after taking this course. All the group agreed this course encouraged them to spend more time listening for God's voice. Seven agreed or strongly agreed the online format encouraged deeper study of the content. When asked about the advantages of using blended online learning, they cited convenience, connection, one person mentioned it challenged the way they viewed discipleship, and another talked about the appeal to every learning style. Seven reported they completed all the online assignments, all participated in the face-to-face group discussions, and all were involved in the discussion thread at least one to five times during the week. When asked about the disadvantage of blended online learning, one person cited they were technologically challenged, and another mentioned they felt technology made it impersonal at times. As far as unanticipated outcomes from the blended online experience, one person shared they received more than they anticipated from the

discussion thread. Six felt the online course helped them learn better than a traditional classroom setting because it was a better fit for their learning style. All the group said they grew in their relationship with God through the course and expressed interest in signing up for another online course.

The second group was a men's group which had been meeting weekly for two years prior to taking the blended online learning course. The group had an attendance of eight men, all of whom attended the same mega church. The men studied the online course written by the author on the book of Mark. They also met in a face-to-face group once a week. During the week, they studied the course and participated in an asynchronous discussion thread. Their pre-test survey revealed strong spiritual commitment and maturity among the men in the group. All of the men said the study of scripture impacts their beliefs and their behavior, but four were limited in their accountability relationships with others in their small group. The group members did report experiencing supportive community life within their small group, and they did spend time outside of worship services reflecting on their pastor's sermon. They also report being good time managers and able to set their own schedule. Three of the group had never taken an online course but over five had participated in a discipleship program.

The post-test survey showed that 100% reported growing in their relationship with God through their involvement in the course, and seven reported being more equipped to study God's Word. All agreed or strongly agreed they were more motivated to pray and study the Bible after taking this course. There was also a consensus that the blended online format provided a greater ability to develop relationships with group members and listen to God's voice. Five of the men contributed to the weekly discussion

thread, and over seven of them worked on the course at least three times during the week. When asked about the advantages of blended online learning, convenience was listed several times. The guys liked the ability to read each other's posts, review the material on their personal devices and work at their own pace. Staying connected was also seen as important. One of the disadvantages mentioned was that convenience can also lead to procrastination. Another person shared that they saw blended online learning as a complement to what takes place in person but never a replacement. One person stated the experience exceeded his expectations, and another was surprised how intimate and helpful the online discussion was. 100% said they would sign up for an online course again and five said the blended online learning style was better for them than a traditional classroom.

The third group was an all-women's group comprised of ten participants (only eight filled out the pre-test survey). All the women attended the same mega church and had been in the same small group before they participated in the research. They studied an offline book and used an online asynchronous discussion thread to complement their face-to-face group meeting. They took the same pre-test and post-test survey as the previous groups. The pre-test survey revealed a strong spiritual commitment in their life to live in ways that please God. Seven of the women in the group said they developed relationships with small group members, but only three of the women said it was mostly true that they had accountability relationships with others in their small group. Only two share their personal joys and struggles in their small group. Five of the women agreed or strongly agreed they learn best through discussion. Four of the women said this was their first online course.

Their post-test survey revealed that nine of the woman agreed their relationship with God had grown through participation in this course, and eight felt better equipped to study God's Word. 100% of the women said it was mostly true or totally true that the blended online format provided a greater ability to develop relationships with their group members and encouraged them to spend more time listening to God's voice. Six said the online format spurred them to deeper study of the materials. When asked about the benefits of the course being online, one person stated she felt it helped her to stay the course because of the encouragement of others. Several shared about the benefit of touching base with others between the group meetings. One person shared she felt like the presenter was present with her, and the study was life-changing. When referring to the disadvantages, several felt the online interaction allowed them to stay in their comfort zone, and one person said technology might be an issue for some. Along that same line, those who are online all day at school and work did not want to get online anymore when they were at home. All the women participated in the discussion thread and in the face-to-face discussion, and each one did additional online research as they went through the course. Five of the women said they believed the online format of the course helped them learn better than a traditional classroom because it was a better fit for their learning style. Eight of the women said they would sign up for another blended online course.

Focus Group

Another aspect of the research involved a focus group comprised of people who have committed their lives to Christ and have been involved in online learning either as course writers, online instructional designers, coders, IT support and course participants.¹⁶ The group discussed questions about discipleship and blended online learning in the church.

The first question asked was: “What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ?” The discussion centered on learning about Christ, following His instruction, hearing God’s voice and obeying His Word so the person disciplined can become one with Jesus. The action of submission was mentioned as well, in terms of dying to self and allowing iron to sharpen iron, as one imitates the discipler as they imitate Christ. Discipleship was also related to being a witness to others as one follows through with sharing what he is learning.

The second question posed was: “What are the keys for making disciples?” The first comment concerned vision casting and helping people own the desire to be a disciple. The discussion centered on making the process of being a disciple an attractive one. Another key mentioned was the importance of relationships and journeying with others. This spurred conversation about discipleship being a lifelong journey within the context of a church community where people are sharing life with other disciples. One person’s church facilitated this through their vision statement which emphasized equipping, healing, being set free and serving. They saw discipleship as being all encompassing—involving one’s spirit, soul and body.

¹⁶ Focus Group conducted with seven individuals on December 23, 2013.

Another participant mentioned one of the churches they attended had specific Christian foundation classes that all adults in the congregation were encouraged to take. These classes functioned as a pathway to discipleship, but there was no “next step” outside of volunteering in the children’s department. As a side note, others also shared that they could not remember any of the other churches they attended as having an intentional emphasis on how to become a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Small groups were also brought up, especially groups that have accountability dynamics to them. One person spoke about a church’s mentoring ministry in which one person meets with another for a specific period of time. It was in that context that the importance of relationships and community were emphasized as being critical elements in the process of making disciples of Christ.

The next question asked was: “How does the way the church makes disciples compare with the way Jesus made disciples?” The first comment made was the word “limited.” The person shared that in his church, discipleship was limited in its scope. There was no lifelong process for making and developing disciples. People go to a few classes and then are told to serve, whereas with Jesus, the comment was made, “He was everything, all the time, 100% hands on.” The next input by one of the participants was, “that does not work in our society.” Someone observed that no one has that kind of time. As a result another person pointed out that discipleship today tends to be something people compartmentalize, and it is expected to just passively happen as one attends the church.

At this point, blended online learning was brought into the discussion and this question was asked: “What are the potential benefits for using blended online learning in

making disciples in a church setting?” One participant commented that in American history when churches first started in small communities, people’s lives centered around the church where people knew one another and had relationships together. Now the church is no longer the center of the life in communities and people are often spread out geographically and not inclined to be part of each other’s lives outside of Sunday. It was noted in response to this cultural change how the online aspect of blended online learning gives the opportunity to those being disciplined to stay connected and discuss and interact on various topics. One person added from their experience that some people are inclined to share things online that they might not share in person. A participant described the reason being that some people find it easier to sit down and compose thoughts in writing rather than share them in the midst of a back and forth face-to-face discussion. One person mentioned a marriage and family therapist who researched ways to help couples communicate. He discovered great benefits in using text messaging to communicate when people have trouble face-to-face because it removes emotion, facial expressions, and tone of voice, which helps to avoid miscommunication.

During the discussion, one of the group members shared about how the men in his small group are using accountability software to monitor each other in their Internet usage. He noted that in the world today, people spend a lot of time online and this tool has helped them stay accountable 24/7. Another person then shared about a pastor who noticed his church people were connecting together on Facebook. They were not only sending messages, they were using Facebook to connect with each other throughout their day. These were people who were not willing or able to commit to group meetings in the church. The more the pastor saw the interaction online, the more he began to wonder

how he could use the resources of the Internet, which they were already using, in ministry to them.

Another benefit mentioned about blended online learning was the ability to read, study and reflect individually before meeting together face-to-face, so that when face-to-face meetings happened, people were able to spend time building intentional community. Blended online learning's use of multiple learning styles was referred to as well. In addition, one person talked about the ability to connect instantly with someone on the Internet, when that same person might not return a phone call.

The "anytime, anywhere" feature of online learning also was highlighted as a great way to instruct people when they are most ready to learn and most willing to interact. A participant affirmed that Jesus taught in that manner, using teachable moments at times which were most meaningful to the learner. One person shared they knew a college student who was taking two thirds of her courses online because she was able to do them in the middle of the night when she was most alert and awake.

Another observation about the advantages of online learning for discipleship was shared by a group member who spoke about a friend who was a part of an online group discussion. She was a deep thinker, but not one who would speak up in a group. She was one who would wait for a very long pause in a group discussion because it took her a while to form her thoughts. This resulted in her often not speaking at all in a face-to-face group. However, she was able to share in a discussion thread because she had time to think and process and interject at her own pace. In response, another group member relayed that blended online learning provides a level playing field for all the group members, no matter their personality or confidence level.

The next question asked about the group's response to the Apostle Paul being called one of the first innovators of distance learning. He often taught in letters which were read, reflected on and processed before he arrived in a city, so those he was teaching were ready to deal with his subject matter when he arrived. Responses from the group ranged from "the more you put into something, the more you get out it," and the example of Paul reveals that correspondence learning has existed for a long time. Someone pointed out that this type of learning works best with students who have reason to be involved and who are highly motivated to participate. Another noted that any church involved in blended online learning will have to grapple with those issues.

Those responses led to the next question: "How can churches encourage group members to complete the lesson online before their face-to-face meeting, so they benefit the most from the blended discipleship process?" The first comment began with getting the youth involved since they are primarily the age-range who uses online and mobile devices the most, but someone else immediately added that youth are often not very committed. A relationship format was said to be essential. Another said, "I would start by asking what the needs of the people in the church are concerning discipleship." One person mentioned that it is one thing to get people committed to doing the work ahead when they are receiving a grade, but quite another when they are voluntarily a part of a group and the motivation required is more inward rather than outward.

Another question asked was: "What are the disadvantages with using online learning to make disciples?" The first answer was some people are technologically challenged, and even though computers are readily available, technology itself can be an issue. It was also mentioned that blended online learning requires pastors and church

leaders to put their content online, and that can be difficult for busy pastors. The learning curve for mastering a learning management system can also seem intimidating.

The focus group was then asked to complete the sentence: “The best thing I like about using blended online learning to make disciples is...” Some of the responses included: “It is ready when you are.” “It is able to appeal to different personalities and different learning strategies.” “It makes Bible Studies accessible to those who work various schedules and provides busy people with the opportunity for community.” “It is in your pocket or always close by on your smart phone, tablet or laptop.” “It gives you the ability to ponder, mull over the concepts, and discuss when you are ready just like Jesus did with His disciples.”

The last question was: “What role do you see blended online learning having in a church?” Some said it could be used effectively in small groups or with any class or training session taught in the church. It was noted that by putting the teaching content online, people would have greater opportunity to reflect on the material before the group session, so they would be much better prepared to discuss and apply the material when they met together. Someone mentioned that if churches were willing to transition from lecture-style teaching times, there would be much more opportunity for group building, accountability and community development when groups met face-to-face. It was also observed that when churches use online learning, leaders automatically have feedback on how involved their people are in discipleship and what their questions are as they go through the material. Lastly, blended online learning gives the church the opportunity to engage people on a daily basis in discipleship just as Jesus did.

Three Interviews

The last part of the project involved three interviews. One was with Pastor Jeremy Dalton¹⁷ who is the Christian Education Director of the McComb First Assembly of God Church in McComb, MS. The church averages 130 in attendance on Sunday morning. He had used blended online learning in his discipleship classes. A second interview was conducted with Pastor Bruce Gledhill¹⁸ of the Redstone Church in Redstone, CO. The church averages about 40 in worship on a Sunday morning. He had written some online courses and had involved some of his congregation in online learning. The third interview was with Dr. Chuck Wilson, PhD,¹⁹ who is the Dean of Institutional Assessment for Pan African Theological Seminary. He is also a Professor of Education, Director of Instructional Development for the School of Distance Learning and Missionary in Residence at Southwest Assembly of God University (SAGU). Dr. Wilson has managed the development of over 600 course shells, 250 of which are fully online. One of Dr. Wilson's roles at SAGU is to help faculty take the content of their courses and determine what is appropriate for online study.

The interviews focused on the meaning of discipleship, keys to making disciples and the interviewees' understanding of and experience with blended online learning. All three men had similar perceptions in their understanding of discipleship. Dr. Wilson spoke about discipleship in terms of "intentional and ongoing sharing of life." He emphasized the concept of having "authentic relationships" where accountability results

¹⁷ Interview with Pastor Jeremy Dalton of the First Assembly of God Church in McComb, MS on December 3, 2013.

¹⁸ Interview with Pastor Bruce Gledhill of the Redstone Church in Redstone, CO on December 9, 2013.

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Chuck Wilson from Southwest Assembly of God University on December 19, 2013.

in transformational learning. Pastor Jeremy mentioned the importance of relationship in forming lives that result in people walking in the way Jesus walked. Pastor Bruce talked about discipleship in the context of being a learner and equipping people to live with their focus on Christ, on His example and on His teaching. He also spoke about discipleship being the work of the Holy Spirit and how he must be open to that work in His life in order to lead his congregation into discipleship.

In sharing about discipleship, each of the interviewees mentioned they do not see a passionate desire for discipleship in their churches. Pastor Jeremy spoke of his church making converts rather than disciples. He shared there was very little relationship connections being made outside of the Sunday church experience, and he found it very difficult to involve people in church beyond the weekend. Pastor Bruce agreed with Pastor Jeremy's statement and mentioned his own struggle to get people interested in aligning their lives with the example of Christ. Dr. Wilson observed a lack of commitment to relationships and accountability. The busyness of life and a lack of intentional discipleship models hindered people in his sphere of influence from mentoring others.

When asked about the keys to discipleship, Dr. Wilson pointed out the importance of informal connections and interactions. He believes that is the fertile ground in which discipleship can begin to happen. He is also passionate that pastors must see discipleship as the dominant mandate and they must be the motivators and cheerleaders so their people will catch the vision for becoming disciples. Pastor Bruce agreed, stating that his people needed to have a vision for being disciples. He shared that in his ministry there is a lack of focus on discipleship. People seem more concerned with living in a way they

believe will bring happiness rather than basing their lives on God's Word. This resonated with Dr. Wilson's comment that people are intrinsically motivated. People in churches must see the benefit to themselves and their daily lives, and pastors must help them see it. Pastor Jeremy believes parishioners need to see the connection between their life on Sunday and their life during the rest of the week. He shared about one person who is a prison guard. This man had expressed a desire to follow Christ but said the only way he knew to get the attention and the respect of the inmates he guarded was to yell and swear at them. He was just one of several individuals the pastor knew who struggled to make a connection between the call of Christ on their life and the demand of the world.

When asked about their experiences with blended online learning, Dr. Wilson first compared blended online learning with his traditional classroom experience. He found the classroom to be a wonderful place for teaching knowledge on a cognitive level, but he found it to be lacking in terms of teaching in a manner that brought forth transformation. He believes transformative teaching requires informal connections which are beyond the scope of the traditional classroom setting. In his experience, he has found blended online learning to be a way to combine many different learning and relational dynamics. As a result of the effect of the cognitive teaching done online, the face-to-face time allowed for sharing of life and building of relationships which in turn created momentum for the online discussion aspects of the class. He believes discipleship requires a daily conversation, and blended online learning enables that type of connection.

Pastor Jeremy became interested in the possibilities for using online learning to make disciples when he noticed how many of the members of his congregation socialized together on Facebook. Dr. Wilson came to a similar conclusion about Facebook's ability

to help people stay in contact. The very people Pastor Jeremy could not bring together at the church during the week were gathering together online and planning face-to-face connections. This realization opened his mind to the question of whether he could use the Internet to encourage greater community and training for his people on a spiritual level. As he researched blended online learning, he came to see it as a way to connect people together and build accountability using the very tools already in their possession.

Pastor Bruce's experience with blended online learning came from the encouragement of a friend to write an online course. He saw the possibilities for giving his people ready access to the content he was teaching them. Developing community is key to his philosophy of making disciples, and he believes blended online learning could be a vital factor to help his people believe they are not alone in seeking to live out their Christian faith.

Both pastors applied their knowledge of blended online learning to their church setting, and they each found similar results. The people in their congregations, who took the initiative to get online, read the material and engage in the discussion had a good experience. Specifically in Pastor Jeremy's church, the discussion thread helped individuals think about how their faith applied to their life on a daily basis. Through the consistent connection and daily challenge to reflect on scriptural principles, some in his congregation found they had been in error in how they had been living their faith. Pastor Bruce had set up several online lessons based on two different sermon series he preached. The individuals who participated were excited about what they were learning and inspired to do further study.

The difficulty with blended online learning for both pastors was they struggled to motivate more than a small number of people to become involved in the online study. They found it to be difficult to inspire their congregations to follow through with the online teaching and come prepared to the group setting. In Pastor Bruce's church, part of the issue was technology. In his community in Colorado, the Internet is limited and many in his congregation are older and less inclined toward using computers. It was also difficult to motivate some in the congregation to get online and study because they were used to just coming to church and hearing the message—with no additional work on their part. Pastor Jeremy also found his people struggling with the discipline of getting online. They would come to class unprepared for discussion which would lead the teacher to do more teaching and less facilitating, which further caused the students to get online less.

Each of the men interviewed had a strong belief in the possibilities for using online learning to make disciples. This was a consistent theme with the members of the focus group as well as with many of the members of the participating small groups. However, there were issues exposed in the study which revealed possible problems with using blended online learning to make disciples. The advantages and disadvantages are both examined in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

Introduction

Making disciples for Jesus Christ in the 21st century is an extraordinary undertaking. The competition for an individual's heart, thoughts, energy, time, beliefs, desires and passions has never been greater in history. Sports, the media, the Internet, family, work, school and church are all vying for space in people's lives. In addition, information on every subject imaginable is available 24 hours a day. Schools like Harvard and M.I.T. are now offering "massively open online courses, or MOOCs, as they are known."¹ M.I.T.'s first course, "Circuits and Electronics, began in March (2012), enrolling about 120,000 students, some 10,000 of whom made it through the recent midterm exam."² Although these courses do not result in college credit, those who take them can receive a certificate and gain the benefit of the knowledge taught in the course. In the 21st century, the Internet has become an information highway with unlimited potential which is not wisely ignored.

Virtual Technology and the Church

In 2011, 6.7 million students took online courses, "seventy-seven percent of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face classes...and the proportion of chief academic leaders who say

¹ Tamar Lewin, "Harvard and M.I.T. Team Up to Offer Free Online Courses," The New York Times, May 2, 2012, accessed December 31, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/education/harvard-and-mit-team-up-to-offer-free-online-courses.html?_r=0.

² Lewin, "Harvard and M.I.T."

online learning is critical to their long-term strategy is at a new high of 69.1%.”³ The evidence clearly reveals that the Internet is a major force in the information network and its influence is growing. In 1995, the Internet had 16 million people accessing it; over the last 18 years, that number has grown to 2.7 billion people. The Internet has become a place where “people everywhere are expressing and publishing their ideas and opinions like never before.”⁴ Many churches have begun to take advantage of the Internet’s resources by building websites with streaming video, recordings and transcripts of sermons and even Bible Studies. According to the 2010 Faith Communities Today (FACT 2010) national survey of 11,077 congregations, there has been an increase over the last 10 years from 35% of churches using email to 90%. During that same time period, the amount of churches with web sites has grown from 33% to 69%.⁵ Another survey of 1,003 Protestant churches by LifeWay Research revealed that 78% of churches in America have web sites.⁶

The global embrace of Internet technologies has reconfigured the fabric of society for congregations in a contemporary context. Adaptation to these new tools of ministry in the 21st century is no longer the luxury it was in the 1990s. The use of technology is now a congregational necessity that comes with significant ministerial advantages. A congregation that does not strategically employ these technologies is likely to be perceived as out of sync with the contemporary world. More importantly, the intentional use of these technologies has become a valuable tool for congregations to expand their ability to do more with fewer resources. All faith communities in this day and age should be hybrid congregations, in other words their ministry needs to be part physical and part virtual. Nearly every

³ “Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online Education in the United States,” The Sloan Consortium, 2013, accessed December 31, 2013, http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/changing_course_2012.

⁴ “Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics,” Miniwatts Marketing Group, August 12, 2013, accessed December 12, 2013, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/emarketing.htm>.

⁵ Scott Thumma, “Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations,” Faith Communities Today, American Congregations 2010, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/Technology-Internet-Use.pdf>, 2.

⁶ David Roach, “Research: Churches Divided on Web Use,” LifeWay, 2011, accessed January 2, 2014, <http://www.lifeway.com/ArticleView?storeId=10054&catalogId=10001&langId=-1&article=LifeWay-Research-Churches-divided-web-use>.

congregation has members who interact with these technologies in their daily lives. Religious leaders who recognize this and employ these technologies to connect with and minister to their congregational members have a distinct advantage.⁷

Blended online learning is a tool which allows churches to disciple on a physical and a virtual level. This thesis project has been designed to show that blended online learning can be a viable component and complement to the discipleship ministries of churches in the 21st century. The fact that over 40% of churches are presently using Facebook, which has only been in existence since 2004, gives some indication that churches are ready to branch out beyond just using web sites to reach their constituency. In contrast to web sites, “Facebook pages have a dynamic interactive quality; they are easily updated and offer timely, relevant information to a faith community’s ‘Friends.’”⁸ This interactivity is being used by people within churches to enhance their relationships both online and offline.

Online Community

Dr. Heidi Campbell⁹ spent 4 years researching online relationship connections by examining the viability of online communities in local congregations. One community was founded by a California technology professor who sought to provide a safe place for people to build up one another in their prophetic giftings. This involved reading articles and discussing the content together online in chat rooms and by email and included real time prayer and one-on-one online sessions. A second community focused on shared religious identity. It began as an email list and evolved into a discussion group which

⁷ Thumma, “Virtually Religious,” 1.

⁸ Thumma, “Virtually Religious,” 3.

⁹ Assistant Professor of Communication at Texas A&M University where she teaches in the areas of New Media, Popular Culture and Religion, Ph.D., University of Edinburgh.

had a membership between four and five hundred members. Some found the number of postings to be overwhelming, and one person shared they quit three times, but every time they rejoined because they missed the connection they had developed with others. As a result of her research, Campbell concluded that participation in an online community created a greater desire for people to connect offline. But at the same time she also found people felt more cared for online.¹⁰ She

identified six traits people are looking for in online communities: relationship, care, value, connection, intimate communication, and shared faith. These traits 'aren't all that surprising,' she said. 'That's what most people are looking for in any kind of community.' What's surprising, or perhaps just difficult for some to hear, is that people said they found those qualities lacking in their experiences of offline congregations.¹¹

In the midst of her research, Campbell experienced the exact scenario she had been studying. During Holy Week, she went to a Good Friday service in an Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh. Even though she was fully involved in the service, she felt very alone. Afterward she went to a computer lab where "suddenly I was interacting with fourteen or fifteen people from all over the world, and we were praying together. Being there in the computer lab by myself, I felt very connected... Sometimes online and offline experiences are the difference between being together alone verses being alone together."¹²

¹⁰ Andrea Useem, "The Networked Congregation: Embracing the Spirit of Experimentation," accessed January 2, 2014, http://www.lifelongfaith.com/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/the_networked_congregation_-_useem.pdf, 27-30.

¹¹ Useem, "The Networked Congregation," 30.

¹² Useem, "The Networked Congregation," 30, 31.

Both-And

The point is not that online learning is better than offline learning, or that the reverse is true. The project of this thesis reveals that offline and online church experiences are not an either-or proposition. They are a both-and solution.¹³ The surveys of all three small groups researched in this thesis, the information gleaned from the focus group and the three interviews all revealed the importance and validity of both dynamics. They also revealed some issues in using blended online learning for making disciples in the 21st century which must be overcome.

Blended Online Learning is Not for Everyone

According to the surveys, the individuals in the three small groups that were involved in the research of this thesis project were all committed to growing in their faith. Each of the participants had previously been involved in small groups. Two of the groups had already been meeting before they took the blended online course, and the individuals in the third group had all been involved in other small groups. This was in contrast to a proposed fourth small group of individuals who had not been involved previously in a small group in their church. Twelve people interested in being a part of this group came to an introductory meeting and expressed interest in participating, but only three people came to the first group meeting, only two people accessed the online course, and only one person posted thoughts on the discussion thread. This group ended after only two weeks because of a lack of participation.¹⁴

¹³ Useem, 31.

¹⁴ The dissolution of the group seemed to be related to a lack of commitment beyond Sunday morning worship, by the participants. Those involved did not have a history of small group involvement and were new believers.

Although online learning is easily accessible on laptops, tablets and smart phones, it is obviously not for everyone. The paradigm of using blended online learning to make disciples requires more commitment and more work on the part of those being disciplined than traditional passive methods of sermons, lecture-based Bible studies and topical classes. Blended online learning requires active learning between group meetings and connecting with others outside of church walls. The surveys revealed all the members of the groups (a total of 23 individuals) who participated in the online learning course had a previous history of reading their Bibles weekly, and reported their Bible reading and prayer time had fostered a deeper relationship with God in their life. On a scale ranging from strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree, 21 of the members stated they strongly agreed or agreed they had a personally meaningful relationship with God, were equipped to study the Bible, motivated to pray regularly and lived a life that honored God. 19 strongly agreed or agreed they were motivated to study the Bible, and 21 said they applied their faith to their life on a daily basis. These findings were in contrast to the individuals in the proposed fourth group, which never materialized. They were new believers who were young in their faith and had never been committed to their church outside of Sunday morning.

Additional studies certainly need to be done with new believers and varying age groups, but from the limited sample of these four groups, it appears that individuals who were willing to participate and follow through with the commitment and work required in a blended online group were those who had previously been involved in small groups and had been influenced positively by their experience. Those who needed the benefits of blended online learning the most (new believers) appear to be less likely to participate

even though they all had access to computers. This was also the experience of the two pastors who were interviewed. Pastor Jeremy had 15-20 individuals sign up for a blended online learning course entitled “Know Your Bible.” Those who participated the most expressed benefit from the course; however, Pastor Jeremy said it was difficult to motivate the majority of the class to follow through and engage in the material and with one another online. The majority of participants came to the class unprepared which resulted in the leader teaching the material, which led to even less engagement online. Pastor Bruce also experienced difficulty in motivating his congregation to get online and review the information accessible there. The week prior to preaching, he put his sermon notes online and asked the congregation¹⁵ to come to worship prepared to discuss what they had been reflecting upon. He found very few in his congregation were willing to put forth the time and effort to access the material online and process it. He believed one of the reasons had to do with the age of his congregation and their overall lack of expertise on the computer. There were some in his congregation, who did participate, and they reported an increase in their spiritual knowledge and growth, but most of the congregation was not involved.

Casting the Vision

Dr. Wilson addressed the issue of church involvement in his interview. As a professor who deals with online learning in the university setting, and as a very involved lay person in his church, he predicted there would be a need for vision-casting when using blended online learning to make disciples in a local church. The focus group mentioned the importance of vision-casting as well, not only for using blended online

¹⁵ Pastor Bruce pastors a small congregation of 40 people in Colorado.

learning but for all disciple-making. Believers must see the attractiveness of being a disciple and the commitment required. This is especially true, as Dr. Wilson points out, when blended online learning is used because there is a paradigm shift involved in connecting with others online and requiring study between group meetings. He stressed how pastors must be motivators and cheerleaders in order to inspire congregations to use blended online learning. Dr. Wilson was not hesitant in expressing his belief that pastors need to rise up and take those roles because of the “incredible opportunity” blended online learning offers churches in their quest to make disciples. He called it the “withness” factor and shared how it provides people in churches with the opportunity to constantly encourage relationship development as they reflect together on God’s Word throughout their week and have opportunity to speak into each other’s lives online and offline. Dr. Wilson believed blended online learning allows discipleship (which according to him should be all pastors’ dominant mandate) to be a lifestyle.

Worth the Effort

One major issue both pastors had with using blended online learning for discipleship and training in their churches was the time and expertise required to put their content online. Compared to the published content, there were very few online Christian discipleship courses in a digital format at the time of this project.¹⁶ Additional courses are being added by publishers like My Healthy Church, LifeWay, Zondervan and others, but at this time if churches are going to use blended online learning to disciple and train,

¹⁶ It is important to mention that just putting 45 minute teaching or sermon videos online, is not considered online learning. This is also true with just putting a sermon or lesson transcript online. Online learning according to online instructional design best practices, involves short video segments, concise text, selected images and other types of interactive learning such as wikis, discussion threads, chat rooms, etc....

they need to be willing to put their own discipleship and training content online. Busy schedules make this difficult and may necessitate hiring staff who can facilitate this area or organizing volunteers who have technical abilities. Learning Management Systems make it possible for churches to put their material online at a nominal cost and require little or no coding experience.¹⁷

Even though blended online learning is a different paradigm which requires effort to participate in on a congregational and pastoral level, publishing trends reveal it is a model which should not be ignored. Digital publishing is not only the future—it is the present. Forrester Research reports that 112.5 million adults (over one-third of U.S. adults) expect to own a tablet by 2016. Nielsen reported in June 2012 that tablets purchased had risen 400% in one year. Pew State of the News Media in 2012 said 56% of tablet owners read the news on their device. Online Publishers Association in 2012 stated that individuals spend an average of 14 hours a week on their tablets.¹⁸ “E-books accounted for 22% of all book spending in the second quarter of 2012, only a one percentage point gain from the first quarter of the year, but up from 14% in the comparable period in 2011.”¹⁹

Balboa Press has published a blog about “Five Reasons to Go Digital.” The reasons were to stay competitive, meet reader’s demands, reach more people, be more effective and stay professional.²⁰ Each of these reasons also applies to the church.

¹⁷ Moodle, Arkeo Online Discipleship and Training, Right Now Media, Ministry Grid, E-Church Essentials.

¹⁸ Emma Gardner, “Lean Back,” The Economist Group, June 6, 2012, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.economistgroup.com/leanback/collaborators/12-stats-that-matter-to-digital-publishing/>.

¹⁹ Jim Milliot, “E-books Market Share at 22%, Amazon has 27%,” Publishers Weekly, November 5, 2012, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/retailing/article/54609-e-books-market-share-at-22-amazon-has-27.html>.

²⁰ “Five Reasons to Go Digital,” Balboa Press, 2013, accessed January 8, 2014, <http://www.balboa.press.com/WriterWisdom/Publishing/FiveReasonsToGoDigital.aspx>.

Staying competitive is especially critical for the church, not because it is competing with the world, but because it is competing for people's attention and time. Digital courses allow churches to have greater access to people right where they invest a large portion of their lives. In this busy world people need options for spiritual growth which keep their commitment to the Lord ever before them. Blended online learning courses have the potential to effectively give people instant access to opportunities to seek help and live life in Christ together between group meetings. What if Pastor Jeremy's example of the prison guard cited in chapter four had this kind of iron sharpening iron? Certainly he would be more likely to be transformed if he had consistent sources of support as Moses had when Aaron and Hur lifted his arms throughout the entire battle. The enemy does not rest Monday through Saturday and neither can disciples of Christ be left to do battle alone on those days. In addition to giving people a 24/7 connection, digital material is also cheaper than creating published material and it enables updating of the content without reprinting. The ease and cost effectiveness of digital publishing enables all churches, large and small, to be contemporary and provide a professional quality to the work of ministry.

Building Relationships Online

Perhaps the greatest reason to go digital in the church world is the ability to use technology to build community and intimate connections. It was mentioned in the focus group that these connections or relationships are key to making disciples. Creating an atmosphere where relationships can thrive is mandatory for accomplishing the goal of discipleship. At first glance, using technology for this purpose may sound preposterous.

Using the Internet—which is often associated with shallow, impersonal relationships—to build intimacy may seem like a disaster waiting to happen. However, an anthropologist named Stefana Broadbent who holds a Ph.D. in Cognitive Science from the University of Edinburgh and a degree in Psychology from the University of Geneva²¹ disagrees. She “is a social scientist who studies people’s use of digital technology at home and at work.”²² In her research, she makes the point that even though the Internet provides unlimited access to multitudes of individuals, most of the communication people have online is with less than a handful of people. According to Dr. Broadbent, Cameron Marlow (Facebook’s in-house sociologist) reports that an average user on Facebook has about 120 friends, but only communicates regularly with four to six of them. Academic research says that instant messaging buddy lists are comprised of 100 or so people, but people who use them only message two to four others. Dr. Broadbent’s own research shows 80% of mobile phone calls are made to four people, and people who Skype usually call only two contacts. Her research also shows most communication is with family and close friends who use technology to stay connected. An example would be a husband staying connected with his wife or a mother with children or extended family living in separate locations. She states the separation experienced by people today only started 150 years ago, and now people are using social networking technology to stay connected in the same manner individuals did on a daily basis in the past.²³

²¹ “Stefana Broadbent – Biography,” Digital Agenda for Europe: A Europe 2020 Initiative, European Commission, accessed January 8, 2014, <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/en/stefana-broadbent-biography-0>.

²² “Stefana Broadbent – Biography.”

²³ “How the Internet Enables Intimacy,” Science Blogs, The Primate Diaries, November 4, 2009, accessed January 8, 2013, <http://scienceblogs.com/primatediaries/2009/11/04/how-the-internet-enables-intim/>.

This desire for relationship was evidenced in each of the small groups surveyed. The leadership group participants did not know each other before the course and their face-to-face time occurred through online video chat which limited their ability to fellowship after meetings. Even so, relationships were very important to the group members. Their pre-test survey revealed six of the members valued the development of relationships in their small groups although two reported not having close accountable relationships with others in small groups. In their post-test survey, seven of the participants strongly agreed or agreed the blended online format provided a greater ability to develop relationships with group members, six said the format helped them develop close relationships, and seven said they experienced a sense of community together.

The most interesting information about relationships and community came from the other two groups (the men's group with eight members and the women's group with ten participants). They had already been meeting together before they experienced the blended online learning course. In their combined pre-test surveys, only five acknowledged having close accountable relationships with others in their small group. Twelve members believed in the importance of relationships, and twelve had experienced community in small groups, but the numbers reveal they had struggled to deepen those relationships in their present groups. In the post-test survey, eight of the men's group strongly agreed or agreed the blended online format provided a greater ability to develop relationships with group members, and six said they experienced a sense of community. In the women's group, nine felt blended online learning provided a greater ability to develop community, and nine felt a sense of community.

The relationship dynamic was also mentioned in the responses to the survey question about the advantages of an online course in comparison to a traditional discipleship course. 21 out of the total members of all three groups who filled out the post-test survey mentioned staying connected during the week as an advantage of blended online learning. Some of the comments shared were: “Connecting with others was easy,” and “Felt better prepared for the face-to-face group meetings.” Another spoke of the advantage of “being able to reflect with others during the week through the discussion thread.” The ease of connecting and the ability to stay connected was also mentioned as an unanticipated outcome of being involved in the course.

Dr. Wilson, from Southwest Assembly of God University, spoke about the relational dynamic of blended online learning in his interview. He believes that intentional and ongoing sharing of life, which was also talked about in the focus group, is essential to making disciples. Blended online learning makes that possible. According to Dr. Wilson, it creates a system for informal interaction to occur naturally. In the interview, he shared some personal stories about connecting with students through their online journals. One student related to him that he was the “only faculty member I feel like I know.” Dr. Wilson’s experience was that students often started sharing online and then continued when they were face-to-face.

Online Study and Offline Reflection

One interesting number in the survey involved the amount of group members who study outside of their small groups. Six participants in the leaders group, eight of the men’s group and eight of the women’s group studied beyond their group meetings. Five

of the women, two of the men and three of the leaders group strongly agreed the online nature of the course encouraged deeper study of the materials. This initially seemed low in light of the immediate access to the Internet, but since an overwhelming majority of the group members were already in the habit of studying outside their small groups, that number made sense.

The opportunity to reflect on the content of an online course due to the self-paced nature of the “anytime, anyplace” course access revealed some surprising numbers in the post-test surveys. None of the women strongly agreed that the online format of the course led them to greater reflection and processing of the material, and only two of the leaders group and three of the men’s group responded as strongly agreeing. Each of the individuals in the small groups showed a great appreciation for reflection and processing content in their pre-test surveys, so the online format does not appear to have influenced group members to reflect more. However, the online format does appear to have influenced a participants’ ability to discuss insights from sermons and Bible studies with others throughout the week. This was particularly evident with the women’s group. Six of the members said in the pre-test survey that they share with less than two people about sermons and Bible studies during the week. In the post-test survey, nine of the woman’s group said it was totally true that the format of the course increased their ability to discuss with others. Four of the leaders group said the same while only one of the men agreed.

The Impact of Discussions and Learning Styles

When the results of all three groups were combined, 23 of the participants in the pre-test survey stated the discussions they have in small groups are thought provoking and deep. In light of that it is interesting to note that 24 of the group participants agreed that the blended online format made the face-to-face discussion better. There was also agreement on the value of discussion for learning. Five members of the leaders group agreed they learned best through discussion, compared to seven of the men's group and five of the women's group. Five of the men and five of the women also said they learn best through lecture. None of the leader's group said they learned best that way. Whatever learning style the participants favored, six of the leaders group, seven of the women's group and five of the men's group answered "Yes" to the question: "Did you find that this online course helped you learn better than a traditional classroom setting because it was a better fit with your learning style?" Those numbers seem to suggest that the variety of learning styles offered in blended online learning makes it an attractive learning option.

The high percentage of individuals who connected with the online learning styles could have been related to the high percentage of course completion and group participation. 75% of the course work was completed by seven of the men's group, of the women's group and seven of the leaders group. All the group members participated in the face-to-face discussions and only one participant did not contribute weekly at least once to the discussion thread. It is also notable that seven of the men's group, three of the leaders group and ten of the women's group were online in the course three or more times each week. This seems to give credence to the ease of accessing the course

“anytime, anywhere” the ability to work on the course at one’s own pace and the connection people had with the variety of learning styles offered in the courses.

Smelling the Online Roses

Overall, the participants seemed to enjoy their journey into blended online learning. When asked to compare advantages over traditional discipleship models, they spoke about the ease of connecting with others during the week, the interactivity of a computer, the ability to edit thoughts before posting, the convenience of the lessons and discussion being online, the mixture of short videos and text, the ability to review material and easily take notes, flexibility to participate from different locations and the ability to process thoughts with others as they developed. Some of the disadvantages were; requiring more discipline to study, convenience can lead to procrastination, technology was impersonal at times, and it was frustrating when the technology did not work right.

Evidence of blended online learning’s effectiveness as a tool for discipleship was also revealed in an open survey question about unanticipated outcomes from the overall experience. Group members shared the online discussion brought them closer to other participants and to the Lord between meetings, the course exceeded their expectations, they received more than expected from the discussion thread, they experienced a transforming message, and the experience was dynamic and life changing.

The Demographics

Of the 23 individuals who took the pre-test survey, 14 were men and 9 were woman (two additional women and one man also took the post-test survey). Outside of the few exceptions noted above, the answers in the surveys between different genders were very similar. Only three of the course participants were under 45 years of age and only two had been a Christian for less than 11 years. For 10 of the survey participants, this was their first online course. 11 had participated in a previous discipleship training program. 20 strongly agreed or agreed they were comfortable using computers or smart phones. Out of the 26 individuals who participated in the post-test survey, 25 said they would be interested in taking another online course.

Conclusion

This project began by looking at the need for making disciples who reflect the nature and the heart of Jesus Christ. When the focus group was asked to compare how the church makes disciples with the methods of Jesus, the first participant said the church was “limited” in its approach to discipleship. This elicited further discussion that in many churches, discipleship was defined as “take these classes, do this ministry and be like Jesus.” In contrast to that approach, Jesus was said to be “unlimited” in His ability to pour into the lives of the disciples. One person commented, “He was everything, all the time, 100% with them,” and “Discipleship for Jesus was 24/7.” Another person observed that because of the busyness of life “that does not work in our present society.” Someone else mentioned that in the church he was raised, the mentality seemed to be: go to church, attend Sunday School and discipleship will just happen. The problem is, as

shown by the previously reported Gallup and Barna surveys, discipleship is not “just happening” for a lot of people attending churches.

Several weeks previous to the writing of this conclusion, the author of this thesis spoke to a man in his late twenties about his experience with Christianity. He said he grew up in a large evangelical church which he attended regularly and participated in its ministries for the first 20 years of his life. In his early twenties, he began to have questions. When he began asking those questions and refusing to accept easy answers, he felt shut down. His processing was not welcomed. “Have faith,” he was told, along with a variety of other classic evangelical phrases, which sounded more and more empty as he explored life’s difficult questions. He needed a safe place to discuss, reflect and process; he ultimately found it—with a therapist—not at a church.

Most churches are excellent at imparting cognitive knowledge through sermons, teachings, classes, courses, training and—of course—meetings. Head knowledge in church is not the problem. It would be safe to say that a majority of people attending churches today have more than enough factual knowledge to live the Christian life. The greatest need is to live what is known; that is the essence of true knowledge.

The theological reflection of this thesis reveals how Jesus taught life giving knowledge to His disciples through questions, reflection, processing, discussion and teaching, as He lived in daily relationship with them. The small groups surveyed in the project of this thesis revealed that a majority of the participants found blended online learning provided a greater ability to apply knowledge to their lives as they connected with one another. Some of the participants experienced an increased ability to reflect and process the information before them as they studied when they were most receptive and

able to proceed at their own pace. Those in the groups also confirmed the opinion of the pastors interviewed and the focus group, that the online aspects of blended online learning have the potential to increase the effectiveness of face to face group meetings by providing greater relationship connections and deeper and richer discussions. The opinion of the writer of this thesis is that the pedagogy and the strengths of blended online learning emphasize similar dynamics of the discipleship pattern Jesus used and therefore can be a viable and valuable complement to the discipleship ministries of churches in the 21st century.

Blended online learning may not be the perfect solution for everyone. However, many people benefit from its variety of learning styles, easy access on multiple platforms, ongoing discussion opportunities which enhance relationship development, cost effective technology, and proven educational paradigms—all designed to engage people where they spend a lot of time, in a way that will attract them to want more. Therefore, the conclusion of this thesis is blended online learning is a missing link in making disciples in the 21st century, which should be considered by all churches seeking to make effective disciples for Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX 1

HOW TO LEAD ONLINE DISCIPLESHIP COURSES: SCREENSHOTS

These screenshots are taken from the online course “How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses” which can be accessed at Arkeo.com. The author wrote this course for the purpose of assisting small group leaders in facilitating groups using blended online learning to make disciples of Jesus Christ.

How To Lead Online Discipleship Courses

Overview: The Intimate Connection

Course Overview

Introduction: A New Paradigm

Leading Students into Intimacy

How to Study Online

Bible References

Course Credits



Welcome

Welcome to *How to Lead Online Discipleship Courses*. Online learning presents a new opportunity for Christian education. Blended online study, which has been proven **effective**, and is **growing exponentially**, is a unique paradigm for teaching and learning. Online learning combines the technology of today with a variety of learning styles, to teach information. The blended aspect involves face-to-face group meetings to discuss the lesson—once individuals have studied it on their own.

Blended online learning involves student interaction and participation on a level beyond the normal small-group experience. The uniqueness of blended online learning is that it does not focus on the teacher or the subject, as much as it does on life application and transformation in people's lives. In this course you will find some similarities between leading an online group and small-group leading, but there are also many differences.

The purpose of this *How to Lead* course is to equip you to lead a blended online course in a way that will greatly benefit your group members. The material in this course focuses upon leading, not teaching or writing an online course. Please refer to our *How to Write* course for more information on writing an online course using carefully written text, powerful illustrations, and other interactive elements available through the technology of the internet.



David Thompson

David shares his heart about the meaning of discipleship.

The key to being a good online course leader is a love of learning and a passion to help others achieve their greatest potential. You lead by encouraging others to study and dig deeply into the knowledge before them.

Ready to be an Online Course Leader?

Online course leaders usually guide courses through email, a chat forum, or a discussion thread. In most situations *Arkēo* courses use a blended or hybrid form of online learning. This combines leading a group through a discussion thread with a face-to-face group meeting, after students have studied the lesson alone. Although there are specific skills involved in leading online courses, they are easily learned. You will be fully equipped to effectively disciple online as you complete this material.



One of the unique aspects of this *How to Lead* course is the connection between acquiring knowledge and an intimate relationship with God. Obviously, it is possible to lead an online course without having an intimate relationship with God. However, it is our belief at *Arkēo* that all knowledge comes from God. We believe if we are to use knowledge correctly, we must understand it from God's perspective and in light of who He is.

Initially, intimacy with God and online learning may seem mismatched! After all, how can a tool like the internet, often associated with **impersonal, shallow relationships**, relate to intimacy with God? The answer is in the unique nature of online learning. This course will show you the connection, and it will equip you to lead others in gaining and implementing knowledge in the context of intimacy with God for the purpose of living lives with wisdom and understanding.

Kathy shares an overview of the lessons and the journey you will take in this course.



Kathy Thompson

This course includes the following lessons:

- Lesson 1: Intimacy with God – the Online Connection
- Lesson 2: Insights for Online Course Leaders
- Lesson 3: Advantages for the Online Student

Download Your Life Application Journal for This Course

Click to download the Life Application Journal that print or save file.



[CLICK HERE to download the Life Application Journal](#) for this course. The Journal provides learning activities to help you think about and apply what you are studying. Complete each activity as it is assigned.

[INSTRUCTIONS for downloading videos or computer-written notes.](#)

To continue studying, please click the Next button below.

STOP

NEXT

How To Lead Online Discipleship Courses

Lessons 1-3

[Lesson 1](#) | [Lesson 2](#) | [Lesson 3](#) | [Conclusion](#)

Lesson 1

Intimacy With God

- The Importance of Intimacy
- The Atmosphere of Intimacy
- The Place of Solitude
- Solitude's Online Connection
- Lesson Summary

Intimacy with God and the Online Connection



Connected to the Heart of God

Authentic and effective online discipleship course leadership begins with a heart, connected to the heart of God. Leaders must know more than just how to lead, they must know how to live. A leader who abides in an intimate relationship with God, can turn leadership truths into godly wisdom and understanding which intersect life with grace-filled truth.

*** Dave shares the importance of the relationship you can have with your heavenly Father.



Plan Your Study

Plan several study periods each week of 20 minutes or more and you reach your learning goals. Actual study time will vary depending on your study pace and time spent writing journal assignments.

Jesus' life on earth was the perfect example of knowledge lived out of the intimacy of God's heart. Several years ago the **WVVA** bracelets were a popular item. The problem was no one could fully do what Jesus did. Even Jesus could not do it on His own. He admitted that He only did what He saw His Father doing. He did not live for Himself in His own strength — He lived every moment dependent upon the resources of His relationship with His Father.

- He rose early to draw near to the Father in prayer.
- He stayed up late to be alone with the Father in prayer.
- He even continued the whole night in prayer with the Father.

Divine Intimacy

Before Jesus came to the earth, sin blocked humanity from an intimate relationship with God. When Jesus died on the cross He broke the power of sin. After Jesus ascended into heaven, He sent His Spirit to dwell in all who belong to Him, so they would receive life. As God the Father loves Jesus the Son, so Jesus loves His children and calls each one to abide in intimacy with Him. All the treasures of knowledge and wisdom are hidden in the intimacy of God in Christ. Living in intimacy with God is possible for those who know and rely upon God's love for them.

Click to learn tips on how to "know and rely" on the love of God.

The focus of this lesson is to encourage you as a leader of online discipleship how to live in intimacy with God, so you can equip your group to learn from the fullness of God's heart.

Your Learning Goal

Your Learning Goal for this lesson is to demonstrate the purpose and path of intimacy with God and its connection with online learning.

Lesson 1: Intimacy with God and the Online Connection includes these topics:

- The Importance of Intimacy with God
- The Atmosphere of Intimacy with God
- The Place of Solitude

If you have not yet downloaded the Life Application Journal for this course, click to download, then print or save the file.



CLICK HERE to download the Life Application Journal for this course. The Journal provides learning activities to help you think about and apply what you are studying. Complete each activity as it is assigned.

WARNING: This file has macros, fonts or connections to other files.

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How To Lead Online Discipleship Courses

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Lesson 1

[Intimacy With God](#)

[The Importance of Intimacy](#)

[The Atmosphere of Intimacy](#)

[The Place of Humility](#)

[Intimacy's Greater Connection](#)

[Lesson Summary](#)

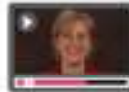
The Atmosphere of Intimacy

Learning Objective

- Recognize the atmosphere of intimacy with God

No Longer "From a Distance"

Through faith in Christ Jesus, we received the opportunity to enter into God's eternal relationship plan. The song, "From a Distance" no longer needs to be just theory. God invites us into a real-to-real, intimate love relationship like the one He had with Adam and Eve.



Kathy explains why to cultivate intimacy with God in your personal life and in your group's atmosphere.

Human "BEING"

In the *Parable on the Mount*, Jesus talks of being in the kingdom of God under the reign of the King. His opening words in the parables focused not on what we are "to do," but rather on **who we are "to be."**

According to Jesus in order to receive:

The Kingdom of heaven, combat the earth as an inheritance, righteousness, working, mercy, grace of God, and the name sons of God.

We are to BE the following:

Poor in spirit, meekness, mild, hungry and thirsty, merciful just in heart, peaceable and willing to be persecuted.

In other words, whatever we are in pursuing a close and personal relationship with God, must rise out of who we are. Who we are, must be grounded in a humble heart that is pliable, teachable, and open to God. The evidence of this is seen throughout the Bible as the lives of those who have come to the end of themselves. In the New Testament we see this in Peter's **humiliation** after his betrayal of the Lord, and in **Paul's blindness** on the road to Damascus.



Position of Humility

God's presence dwells in humble hearts. God knows what is in your heart when you are **humble**. He is able to **fill you and comfort you** when you are humble. When you are humble before God, He enables you to take your eyes off yourself and focus on His. From the **position of humility**, God is able to do above and beyond what you can **ask or think**. That is why God humbles those He loves.



Kathy discusses humility and how to walk in humility as a leader.

Humility is not about diminishing your value. This is a process, a gift created by God. Humility is about acknowledging your constant dependence upon God. It is about recognizing the ability and worth of others. It is about acknowledging God in all your ways. Humility gives you access to God's wisdom for you and His power to supply your greatest needs. Humility is where intimacy begins.

Intimacy is All About His Love

From the place of humility, God enables you to recognize His **unfailing, unconditional, amazing love**. God loves you so much, He will do whatever it takes to ensure that you always remember **His heart of love for you**. He loves you because He **chooses to love you** – not based upon anything you have done. He loved you while you were distant and far away from Him, and He loves you right now.

God loves you too much to give you a license to live anyway you want on this earth. He loves you **just the way you are**, but He loves you too much to leave you that way. He wants you to experience life as He created it, so you can **live in His best**. That is why all knowledge we acquire in this world must be interpreted through the lens of His love. This is the key to living in **God's wisdom and understanding**.

Knowledge outside of God's love is the source of law. Truth, on the other hand, is knowledge **flowed through the heart of God**. Truth teaches us there is no earning God's love. There is only a **faith response** that expresses your desire to live in the amazing freedom His love provides. God **is love** and He chooses to give His love. His love will never change because He is **unchanging**. His love enables you to be secure in His grace. His love gives you the greatest **gift**. His love is "for better or for worse" and His love is always available regardless of your attributes or actions.

[Click here to better understand what God's love empowers you to do.](#)

Life Application
KATEE KALPAGIAN

[1. My Love, I cannot Intimate](#)

See page 2 in your Journal >>>



In the rest of this lesson, we will talk about how you, as a Christian, can enter daily into this intimate love of God and live in its fullness. We will also discover how the uniqueness of online learning leads itself to the blessing of this intimacy with knowledge — resulting in a life that flows out of the unlimited resources of God's heart.

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How To Lead Online Discipleship Courses

Lessons 1-3

[Lesson 1](#) | [Lesson 2](#) | [Lesson 3](#) | [Conclusion](#)

Lesson 1

[Intimacy With God](#)
[The Importance of Intimacy](#)
[The Atmosphere of Intimacy](#)
[The Place of Solitude](#)
[Solitude's Online Connection](#)
[Lesson Summary](#)

The Place of Solitude

Learning Objective

- Demonstrate the importance of solitude and its connection to online learning.

Time Out!

Jesus knows more about teaching and living from the perspective of His Father's mean, than anyone who ever lived. While He was physically on the earth, He spoke *truth* to the masses, with great authority. He astonished the teachers of the law with His knowledge. Even as a boy, the teachers of the law were *amazed* at what He knew. How did He lead others so powerfully in the truth?

We do not know the specifics of the education Jesus received, but we do know He had a passion for being in *His Father's* house. We also know that *being alone* with His Father remained an *important part* of His life to the very end. Even in the beginning of His ministry as recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness – alone with God. Not even the pressure and the presence of the masses could keep Jesus from taking time out from ministry, in order to *spend time with His Father*.

The Bible contains many examples of being alone with God. After John the Baptist was killed, Jesus encouraged John's disciples to *have time away* – alone with God. In the wild with the sheep, a young David had time away – alone with God. In the Old Testament, the prophets chose solitude with God before they delivered God's messages. Paul also had years of alone time with God when he first surrendered to Christ. The result of time alone?

- Jesus' disciples received God's rest and His enduring love.
- *David received a heart after God*, and an intense love for God.
- Jeremiah, Elijah, Ezekiel, Isaiah and other prophets received words from God that encouraged, challenged and rebuked entire nations.
- Paul became "convicted" that *nothing could separate him* from God's love.



<<< Listen as David exhorts you to spend quality time with the Father as Jesus modeled, then see page 3 in your Journal.

Life Application
Journal Assignment

[4. Benefits of Solitude](#)

“ Solitude with the Lord allows you to discover who you are in Him. ”

Solitude

Henri Nouwen calls solitude the "furnace of transformation."¹ He continues saying, "We have to fashion our own desert where we can withdraw every day, shake off our compulsions and dwell in the gentle, healing presence of our Lord. Solitude is not simply a means to an end. Solitude is its own end. It is the place where Christ remodels us in His own image and frees us from the victimizing compulsions of the world."²

[Click to learn more about solitude](#)

Solitude with the Lord is the place where you discover your real self. Busyness and the anxiety of the world can no longer bury you when you stop and get alone with God. It is in times of solitude that you can connect fully with "Christ in you" so your heart reflects His. Times of solitude quench your thirst as you drink deeply of the *living water* Jesus spoke about with the Samaritan woman. Solitude is where the love of God can move from your head, to an intimate relationship with God within your heart.



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APPENDIX 2

ON YOUR MARK: SCREENSHOTS

These screenshots are taken from the online course “On Your Mark” which can be accessed at Arkeo.com. The author wrote this course for use in making disciples of Jesus Christ in a blended online format.

On Your Mark: Part 1

10 minutes a Day in Mark's Gospel: Chapters 1-4

[Introduction](#) | [Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#)

Introduction

Daily Devotional Series


Resources

- How To Study Online
- Bible Reference
- Course Credits



Daily Devotional Series

Welcome to **On Your Mark** with Dr. George Wood, a four-part series studying the Gospel of Mark. Start your day with just 10 minutes or more in the Word — 5 days a week — to equip yourself to make a positive difference in your world. Seize opportunities to make your mark in the lives of others for the glory of God.

 Study 1 chapter of Mark per week for the next 4 weeks.

For the next 4 weeks — 5 days a week, Dr. Wood teaches on selected Scripture from chapters 1-4 in the Gospel of Mark. Reflection questions and additional biblical references will encourage your deeper walk with the Lord.

At the end of each day's study, Dr. Wood prays with you for your encouragement and God's blessing. May you accept and apply the challenge to make your mark in the world around you for God's glory.

Part 1: Mark's Gospel Chapters 1-4

As you watch the short video segments and read the text, ask God to speak to you. He will guide you and give you revelation from His Word which will impact your daily walk with Him.

These brief 10-minute studies are designed to enable your life to be a continuation of the Good News of Jesus Christ. In Part One of this series, you will encounter life-giving topics such as:

- Extracting eleven life-changing words
- The pros and cons of atheism
- "Ins" and "outs" of your comfort zone
- Dealing with unhappy people
- Using constructive anger
- The message of THE unrepentable die
- Finding Christ when you're swamped

Expect to meet God. Trust His leading. Follow His Word and you will live each day in His fullness.



Jesus' Good News continues in you.



Dr. George H. Wood

<<< Dr. Wood introduces the devotional study with a teaching from Mark 1:3. As you listen to the Good News proclaimed in the book of Mark, become the everyday reality of your life.

“ Today, Lord, write a new chapter of Good News in my life. ”

Make Your Mark Today



Commit today to a daily walk through the book of Mark, Chapters 1-4, for the next 4 weeks.

[Click Next for Resources](#) or go directly to [Chapter 1](#).

[CHAPTER 1 >](#)

[STOP](#)

[NEXT >](#)

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On Your Mark: Part 1

10 Minutes a Day in Mark's Gospel: Chapters 1-4

Introduction | [Chapter 1](#) | [Chapter 2](#) | [Chapter 3](#) | [Chapter 4](#)

Chapter 1

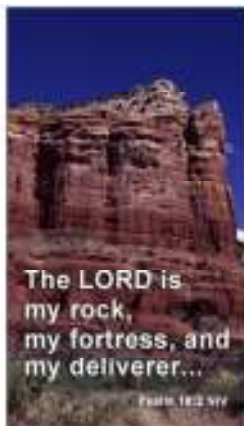
Day 1: Revival in the Desert

Day 2: [The Main Things](#)

Day 3: Life-Changing Words

Day 4: Alone in Prayer

Day 5: Checked Enthusiasm



The Main Things – Mark 1:15

The importance of the “main things” is demonstrated in Psalm 62 where David writes about taking refuge in the Lord in difficult times. Four times he uses the words “God alone” (JWMA) to describe where he finds rest and security. In the midst of severe trial David knew where he could **stand and not be moved**. Though the “**earth give way**”, David resolved not to fear because his foundation was secure. He focused on the main things.

Great sports coaches always keep the basics in front of their players. No matter how talented an athlete is, they must master the basics and continue to work on them throughout their playing career. An athlete's ability to do amazing things may win them applause, but it is performing the basics to perfection that builds the foundation for winning in every sport.

Focus on the main things and the plain things.

This is also true in Christianity. In walking with the Lord, there are bound to be exciting times of worship, anointing, and powerful moves of the Spirit, but day-to-day Christian living is not always filled with mountaintop experiences. Living consistently for God requires a solid foundation, built on the basics of the Good News.

Dr. Wood describes several important “main things” from Jesus’ teachings.



What about you? How are the basic truths of the Good News of Jesus supplying your life with a firm foundation? Reflect on this question as you review the following four points of the video.

- **“The time has come.”** – In Christ, God does not need to do something in you in the future. He has already done it. His kingdom is within you. Nothing can **separate** you from His love.
- **“The Kingdom is near.”** – God is not distant or disconnected. Let Him have your thoughts, your relationships, your joys, and your struggles. In Him, **you can do all things**.
- **“Repent.”** – This is not just something to be done once. Repentance is a daily alignment of our lives. **Let God search your heart** that you may discard the things distracting you from the life God has for you in Christ.
- **“Believe the Good News.”** – Defeat, despair, and death will never have the last word as long as you believe. When Jesus told the synagogue ruler whose daughter was dead to **“just believe,”** He was speaking words we all need to hear every day.

Remember, God knows you personally, deeply loves you, and embraces you forever. Which of these basic truths do you need to be reminded of today?



Make Your Mark Today



Recommit today to the foundational truths of God.

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On Your Mark: Part 1

10 Minutes a Day in Mark's Gospel, Chapters 1-4

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Chapter 1

- Day 1: Revival in the Desert
- Day 2: The Main Things
- Day 3: Life-Changing Words
- Day 4: Alone in Prayer
- Day 5: Checked Enthusiasm

Checked Enthusiasm – Mark 1:43-45

The word "enthusiasm" has an interesting history. Literally, it means "in God" or "possessed by a god." During the 1600's, it acquired a derogatory sense of "excessive religious emotion" under the Puritans.

In this day, when people seem to be enthusiastic about everything except God, could there be a time in your walk with the Lord to "keep your enthusiasm in check?"

Dr. Wood shares why checking your enthusiasm can sometimes be a good thing.



“ If the Lord asks you to do something that does not make any sense, do it anyway. ”

Enthusiasm in our walk with God can be a good thing – but only as it is submitted to the guidance of His Word. The Bible is filled with instruction from God that goes against what we would normally be enthusiastic about doing. For example:

- "Love your enemies."
- "Forgive those who offend you."
- "Go the second mile."
- "Do not worry."

Only God truly knows what is best.

In these commands we find good evidence that only God truly knows what is best.

In today's video, Dr. Wood revealed the "story behind the story." He explained why Jesus said, "See that you don't tell this to anyone." Jesus' reasons included the following:

- The leper's enthusiastic disobedience hindered his own ability to live a normal life, even though he had been healed.
- The leper missed an opportunity to give a testimony to the religious authorities about the work of Jesus.
- The leper also made it harder for Jesus to minister to the masses and more difficult for the people to come to Jesus.

Certainly the leper did not intend any of these situations. If he had known the reasons behind the Lord's request he probably would have done the right thing. However, the Lord did not explain the details, and that is often the way He relates to us today. He gives His direction and expects obedience not based on enthusiasm, but based on His Word.

What kinds of things could you have avoided in your life if you had just trusted and obeyed the Lord? What freedoms you miss from following His Word in your life?

Reflect on the benefits you have experienced when you have obeyed the Lord, even though you did not understand. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you an obedient heart.



Ever notice how some traffic signs describe God's work in your life?

Love your enemies.
Forgive others.
Go the second mile.
Do not worry.

Make Your Mark Today



Commit today to walk in obedience to the Lord no matter how you feel.

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APPENDIX 3

PRE-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 I have a personally meaningful relationship with God

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	5	2			
Men's Group	6	2			
Woman's Group	8				
Total	19	4			

Q2 I am equipped to study God's Word

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	4	3			
Men's Group	5	3			
Woman's Group	6	2			
Total	15	8			

Q3 I am motivated to pray regularly

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	5	1		1	
Men's Group	7	1			
Woman's Group	6	2			
Total	18	4		1	

Q4 I live a life that is honoring to God

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group		7			
Men's Group	6	1	1		
Woman's Group	7	1			
Total	13	9	1		

Q5 I am motivated to study the Bible

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	4	3			
Men's Group	2	5			
Woman's Group	3	3	2		
Total	9	11	2		

Q6 I apply my faith on a daily basis

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	2		
Men's Group	3	4	1		
Woman's Group	1	6	1		
Total	6	13	4		

Q7 I develop relationships with small group members

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	2	3		
Men's Group	1	4	3		
Woman's Group	1	6	1		
Total	4	12	7		

Q8 I spend time listening to God's voice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	4	1		
Men's Group	7	1			
Woman's Group	6	2			
Total	15	7	1		

Q9 I study our group material outside of my small group

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	2		
Men's Group	5	2	1		
Woman's Group	4	4			
Total	11	9	3		

Q10 I feel connected to a small group on a weekly basis

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	3	4			
Men's Group	2	2	3	1	
Woman's Group	4	3	1		
Total	9	9	4	1	

Q11 I have close accountable relationships with others in my small group

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	1	5	1		
Men's Group		2	2	3	1
Woman's Group		3	2	2	1
Total	1	10	5	5	2

Q12 In my small group I share my personal joys and struggles

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	2		
Men's Group	4	2	1	1	
Woman's Group	1	1	4	1	1
Total	7	6	7	2	1

Q13 I spend time in solitude with the Lord

	Totally True	Mostly True	Moderately True	Somewhat True	Not at all True
Leader's Group	4	2	1		
Men's Group	3	3	2		
Woman's Group	5	3			
Total	12	8	3		

Q14 As I go through life God is continuously in my thoughts.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	2		
Men's Group	4	3	1		
Woman's Group	3	4	1		
Total	9	10	4		

Q15 I discuss insights from sermons and Bible studies with others throughout my week, outside of small group meetings.

	I do not discuss	Discuss < 2	Share with 2 -5	Share with 5 - 10	Share with over 10
Leader's Group		5	2		
Men's Group		6	2		
Woman's Group		6	2		
Total		17	6		

Q16 Discussions in Small groups or Bible studies I participate in are thought provoking and deep

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	1	5	1		
Men's Group	4	4			
Woman's Group	2	6			
Total	7	15	1		

Q17 I learn best through lecture style teaching

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group			4	3	
Men's Group		5	2		
Woman's Group	1	4	3		
Total	1	9	9	3	

Q18 I am self-motivated because ultimately learning is my own responsibility

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	1	5			
Men's Group	2	6			
Woman's Group	3	5			
Total	6	16			

Q19 I learn best through discussion

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	2	3		
Men's Group	3	4	1		
Woman's Group	2	3	1	2	
Total	7	9	5	2	

Q20 I am a good time manager and can set my own schedule

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group		6	1		
Men's Group		6	2		
Woman's Group	2	6			
Total	2	18	3		

Q21 I find value in studying on my own

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	1	5	1		
Men's Group	2	6			
Woman's Group	3	2	3		
Total	6	13	4		

Q22 What is your gender?

	Male	Female
Leader's Group	6	1
Men's Group	8	
Woman's Group		8
Total	14	9

Q23 What is your current age?

	< 30	30 - 44	45 - 59	60 >
Leader's Group			6	1
Men's Group		2	4	2
Woman's Group				
Total		2	10	3

Q24 How many years have you been a Christian?

	< 5 years	5 – 10 years	11 – 20 years	20 plus years
Leader's Group			1	6
Men's Group	1	1	1	5
Woman's Group				8
Total	1	1	2	19

Q25 How many online courses have you taken (any topic)?

	1 st course	One previous	2 – 3 courses	More than 3
Leader's Group	3	1		3
Men's Group	4	1		3
Woman's Group	4	1	1	2
Total	11	3	1	8

Q26 Have you ever participated in a discipleship training program?

	Yes	No
Leader's Group	4	3
Men's Group	5	3
Woman's Group	2	6
Total	11	12

Q27 I am comfortable using computers and smart phones

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	1	5	1		
Men's Group	3	4	1		
Woman's Group	3	3	1		1
Total	7	12	3		1

APPENDIX 4

POST-TEST SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1 I believe my relationship with God has grown as a result of participation in this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	4	2		
Men's Group	3	5			
Woman's Group	6	3			1
Total	11	12	2		1

Q2 I believe I am more equipped to study God's word after taking this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	3		
Men's Group	2	5	1		
Woman's Group	7	2			1
Total	11	10	4		1

Q3 I believe I am more motivated to pray regularly after taking this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group					
Men's Group					
Woman's Group					
Total					

Q4 I believe I am more motivated to live a life that is honoring to God after taking this course

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	0	4	4		
Men's Group	1	5	2		
Woman's Group	3	5	2		
Total	4	14	8		

Q5 I believe I am more motivated to study the Bible after taking this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	2	4		
Men's Group	5	3			
Woman's Group	8	2			
Total	15	7	4		

Q6 This course has helped me apply my faith on a daily basis.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	3	3		
Men's Group	3	5			
Woman's Group	9			1	
Total	14	8	3	1	

Q7 The blended online format has provided a greater ability to develop relationships with my group members.

	Totally True	Mostly True	Moderately True	Somewhat True	Not at all True
Leader's Group	2	5	1		
Men's Group	3	5			
Woman's Group	3	6		1	
Total	8	16	1	1	

Q8 I believe this course has encouraged me to spend more time listening for God's voice.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	5	1		
Men's Group	2	6			
Woman's Group	5	5			
Total	9	16	1		

Q9 Due to the availability of additional resources, the online format encouraged deeper study of the materials.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	3	4	1		
Men's Group	2	4	2		
Woman's Group	5	3	2		
Total	10	11	5		

Q10 I spend more time reflecting and processing about my faith walk because of the online format of this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	4	2		
Men's Group	3	5			
Woman's Group		6	4		
Total	5	15	6		

Q11 The blended format of this course has helped me develop close relationships with others in my small group.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	2	4	2		
Men's Group	2	4	1	1	
Woman's Group	7	3			
Total	11	11	3	1	

Q12 The online discussion thread has increased my ability to share personally in my group.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	6	1		1	
Men's Group	4	4			
Woman's Group	5	5			
Total	15	10		1	

Q13 This course encouraged me to spend time in solitude with the Lord.

	Totally True	Mostly True	Moderately True	Somewhat True	Not at all True
Leader's Group	3	4	1		
Men's Group		3	3	2	
Woman's Group	6	4			
Total	9	11	4	2	

Q14 I have experienced a greater sense of community in my small group when taking this course.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group		7	1		
Men's Group		6	2		
Woman's Group	3	6	1		
Total	3	19	4		

Q15 The online format of this course has increased my ability to discuss insights from sermons and Bible Studies with others throughout my week.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group	4	2	1		
Men's Group	1	5	2		
Woman's Group	9	1			
Total	14	8	3		

Q16 The blended online format of this course enabled our discussion in the face-to-face group to be deep and rich in its content.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Leader's Group		7	1		
Men's Group		7	1		
Woman's Group	5	5			
Total	5	17	2		

Q17 Did you find that this online course helped you learn better than a traditional classroom setting because it was a better fit with your learning style?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Leader's Group	6	1	1
Men's Group	5	2	1
Woman's Group	7	1	2
Total	18	4	4

Q18 What advantages, if any, do you believe an online course has in comparison to a traditional discipleship course held at a church?

Leader's Group: (only group which did the face-to-face meetings on Google+ video chat).

- “Flexibility, options for people to participate who aren't local.”
- “It helps link people.”
- “Convenience, specifically with respect to studying and posting whenever I have time.”
- “The online course gave me the ability to easily stay connected with group members during the week. I loved being able to access it on my phone. It was also great to be able to cut and paste notes.”
- “It is really dynamic given the mix between the well prepared and presented ‘rich media’ course content, the quasi-structured interaction between participants via the threaded discussion board, and the on-the-fly interaction in the online meetings. Each medium has its unique and important value-add to the overall user experience.”
- “Being on the computer I naturally linked to the sites on the subject we were studying. The ability to stay connected was big.”
- “Appeals to every learning style, user can complete course at any time – flexible schedule, discussion thread enables people to grow together throughout the week until their next meeting, (however the current thread is not as functional as mainstream groups like Facebook, etc...) reaches more people because it is online and easier to access.”
- “Connection... I met brothers and sisters that I otherwise would have never met. I heard their stories and felt connected to them in some way. I was able to be a part of their story for a short while. The course has challenged me as a Pastor in the

way I view discipleship. It has stretched me in the area of measuring how effective we can be with this model vs. the old stand and lecture model.”

Men’s Group:

- “Keeping in contact with the group during the week. The interactivity and ability to edit my thoughts before sharing with the group.”
- “Primarily the ability to study at my own convenience and to engage in a discourse with others who may be posting at times other than when I am online. Very convenient.”
- “Very convenient and easier to connect with others via phone technology.”
- “Ability to know the group members through the discussion on the thread during the week.”
- “Accessibility on my phone whenever I was ready to study. Short videos keep my attention. Reading the comments of others and having more time to respond.”
- “I believe it is more personal plus you can work at your own pace plus go back and review the material over and over from the convenience of your personal device.”
- “I enjoyed staying in contact during the week on the discussion thread. Fit my learning style, short text and video.”
- “I think it’s a great tool to complement traditional methods and also a means to stay connected throughout the week.”

Women’s Group:

- “Connecting with others was easy. Felt better prepared for the face to face group meetings.”
- “Reflecting with group members during the week.”
- “The online discussion enabled us to touch base during the week.”
- “Being able to reflect with others during the week through the discussion thread.”
- “I think that depending on what your work schedule is being able to access your lesson online will allow you to stay the course with your group.”
- “The ability to touch base with fellow group members between studies.”
- “Process with others during the week.”
- “Flexibility and a chance to interact in between course times.”
- “This particular study made you feel like the presenter was right there with you. I don’t know if all the presenters are as effective. This was dynamic! Life changing study!”

Q19 What disadvantages, if any, do you believe an online course has in comparison to a traditional discipleship course held at a church?

Leader’s Group: (only group which did the face-to-face meetings on Google+ video chat).

- “Less opportunities for relationship building during and around the class time.”
- “The technology was impersonal at times.”
- “Much harder to have an ongoing, free flowing conversation because the face-to-face was done by video on Google+.”

- “Can’t think of any.”
- “The only one I might imagine is if the live meetings are held online and there is some advantage to being in the same room instead. But I am not convinced of this.”
- “My lack of comfortableness with the computer.”
- “I have to own a computer and have internet access. Navigation needs to be flawless or it is a hindrance and users will dismiss it easily if it is a hassle. As previously mentioned the discussion thread needs improvements and notifications.”
- “The only disadvantage with how we did the class is the lack of face-to-face. I know it is designed to be face-to-face with some video chat. The other thing is I am technologically challenged. I found the technology to be a hindrance at times.”

Men’s Group:

- “This takes a bit more discipline in that there is no requirement to be at a set place at a specific time. Therefore the convenience can also lead to procrastination.”
- “Can’t talk face-to-face with those you are close to and the need to have a live person to listen.”
- “None.”
- “I don’t think electronic discipleship can ever replace personal discipleship in a church group setting where you have one on one contact. I think it’s a tool to supplement traditional methods and also a means to stay connected throughout the week.”

Women’s Group:

- “None.”
- “Being online you tend to miss the fellowship that comes with being in a community with others.”
- “The traditional route works being for me because online the interaction is broken up and keeps me in my comfort zone. In the traditional discipleship though I am forced outside of my own comfort zone and that really helped me grow.”
- “For someone who is adverse to technology, it may be an issue. This is likely to be a non-issue within two years.”
- “None.”

Q20 If there were any unanticipated outcomes from this course, please describe some of them.

Leader’s Group:

- “None.”
- “Some technical difficulties which were less problematic as the course progressed.”
- “The benefits of having access to the material wherever I was without having to carry a book. Also the ability to have a mixture of video segments and text made the study more interactive and interesting.”

- “n/a.”
- “Enjoyed using the computer to study and connect. I am not into Facebook.”
- “I did not expect to get as much as I did out of the discussion thread.”
- “Curiosity! The what if question.”

Men’s Group:

- “I liked the variety of the lessons and the ability to reflect on the discussion thread before posting my thoughts.”
- “I am surprised that the online discussion has actually lead me to feel closer to the other participants.”
- “The ability to connect through the phone or laptop with the course and with others.”
- “Helped me stay connected with the group and the Lord during the week.”
- “It exceeded my expectations. I will take additional courses.”
- “Liked the interactivity.”
- “None.”

Women’s Group:

- “I was more connected to the group during the week.”
- “Easy to take notes and stay connected with group members during the week.”
- “Liked being able to access the material on my tablet and be able to post my thoughts at my own pace.”
- “n/a.”
- “I faced a big obstacle with the online section of our study I already spend a lot of time online as a Masters student at UT Arlington. I go full time online and spend too much time on my laptop already so I couldn’t participate much in the online part of the course.”
- “Accessing the course on my phone and being able to connect with others in the group during the week.”
- “It had such a transforming message for me. Definitely increases my desire to a closer week with God.”

Q21 To what degree did you complete all of the assignments and reading for this course?

	25% or less	50%	75%	100%
Leader’s Group	1		4	3
Men’s Group	1		4	3
Woman’s Group			3	7
Total	2		11	13

Q22 Did you participate in the face-to-face group discussions?

	Yes	No
Leader's Group	8	
Men's Group	8	
Woman's Group	10	
Total	26	

Q23 I participated in the discussion thread weekly

	0 times	1 – 5 times	5 – 10 times
Leader's Group		8	
Men's Group	1	5	2
Woman's Group		9	1
Total	1	22	3

Q24 I worked on the assigned lesson an average of _____ times during the week

	0	1	2	3	4	5
Leader's Group		2	3	3		
Men's Group		1		4	1	2
Woman's Group				4	1	5
Total		3	3	11	2	7

Q25 I completed the online lessons before the group meeting

	Yes	No
Leader's Group	7	1
Men's Group	7	1
Woman's Group	9	1
Total	23	3

Q26 I would sign up for another online course

	Yes	No
Leader's Group	8	0
Men's Group	8	0
Woman's Group	9	1
Total	25	1

Q27 Did using the computer for this course help you stay focused on the material better than a traditional classroom setting?

	Yes	No	Don't know
Leader's Group	4	2	2
Men's Group	6	2	
Woman's Group	4	4	2
Total	14	8	4

Q28 How comfortable are you using the computer?

	Very comfortable	Somewhat comfortable	No very comfortable
Leader's Group	6		2
Men's Group	8		
Woman's Group	8	2	
Total	22	2	2

GLOSSARY

Asynchronous communication – is the ability to communicate with others on one’s own time schedule, outside of real time. In online learning this is primarily accomplished on a discussion thread. Each participant can place posts on the thread at their own convenience.

Blended online learning – combines the anytime, anyplace, self-paced abilities of online learning with the face-to-face connection of the traditional classroom. In blended online learning the majority of the content is learned online before groups or classes meet. This enables more creativity and interaction during the face-to-face group meetings. It is more focused on the learner than the teacher.

Connectivism pedagogy – goes beyond learning single concepts. Connectivism is learning which connects information sources.

Constructivism pedagogy -- teaches that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world. This is done through experience and reflection. In this pedagogy the focus is on the learner.

Disciple of Jesus Christ – is a learner who is a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ. The call to be a disciple of Jesus involves a commitment to know Him, to become like Him and to give Him preeminence over every area of one’s life. This involves dying to oneself and living life by faith through the power of the Spirit of Christ.

Discussion thread – provides the ability for different comments to be posted together on a single web site. Online learning uses discussion threads to allow students to engage, reflect and process what they are learning while they are apart.

Early adopters – are the first to embrace and explore new technology.

Learning management system – provides a teacher or leader with the online ability to deliver content, track student participation and evaluate performance. Learning management systems usually provide interactive components like discussion threads and video instruction capabilities.

Online learning – is correspondence courses on steroids. It is learning outside the brick and mortar classroom. Online learning combines video, text and the vast interactive capabilities of the Internet to teach a variety of subjects.

Paradigm – is a model, theory, group of ideas or a pattern of something that should be done or considered.

Pedagogy – the art or science of teaching. This thesis mentions three different pedagogies.

Synchronous communication – is real time communication; like a conversation.

Transformative pedagogy – moves beyond memorizing or content acquisition. It involves critical reflection and a reframing of ones assumptions.

Web 2.0 – is known as the second stage of development of the Internet. Instead of simply broadcasting information over static web pages, internet users can create content on blogs and a variety of other interactive social networking elements.

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VITA

Dave Hampson

Born December 31, 1956

Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Literature New Testament from Oral Roberts University

Attended Millersville State University for first two years

Master of Divinity from Fuller Theological Seminary

Doctor of Ministry residency studies: April 2009 – May 2014

Anticipated Graduation Date: May 2014

Blessed husband of Kathy and proud father of Christina (husband John), Stephanie and Tiffany. I have been a pastor of three United Methodist Churches over the course of 25 years. For the past few years it has been my privilege to work at Arkeo Online Discipleship and Training as the Director of Ministry Relations. My wife Kathy and I live in Fort Worth, Texas with a dog named Snickers.