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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CHURCH'S DISCIPLESHIP  
PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
MATURING DISCIPLES

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

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

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by  
Eric Richard Erskine

May 2004

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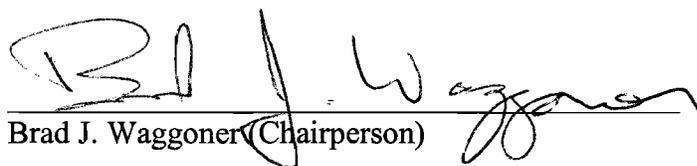
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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CHURCH'S DISCIPLESHIP  
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MATURING DISCIPLES

Eric Richard Erskine

Read and Approved by:

  
Brad J. Waggoner (Chairperson)

  
Hal K. Pettegrew

Date May 14, 2004

**THESES Ed.D. .Er85r  
0199701833162**

To Teresa

My faithful wife and companion  
whose loving support and encouragement  
strengthened me along the way.

I love you babe!

And to

my wonderful children,

Amanda Nichole, Cody Alexander

Rebekah Grace, Conrad Alan, and

Christopher Anthony,

Daddy loves you!

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- BAG Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F Wilber Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*
- DOM Director of Missions for an association of Southern Baptist Churches.
- FBA Florida Baptist Association
- FBC Florida Baptist Convention
- SBC Southern Baptist Convention
- TDNT* *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*

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## PREFACE

This study grows out of a passion for the souls of men and women who are limping through the Christian life when Christ provided a way for them to leap.

Discipleship is the cornerstone of the ministry of the church. Without strong disciples the church will not have strong evangelism. Without strong disciples the church will not have a strong educational ministry. Without strong disciples the church will not have genuine worship. Discipleship provides the church with a team of committed and capable servants who are ready to serve others in the name of Jesus.

The hand of God is often invisible to the eye in the midst of life's journey. It is not until one has progressed far down the path that he is able to look back and see God's sovereign hand shaping his spiritual character. Such was and continues to be the case in my spiritual journey of growth and ministry. God has been gracious to me in both salvation and the spiritual growth process. He has used circumstances as well as strategically placed people to help me move from a twelve-year-old spiritual infant to a growing disciple who deeply desires to know God more intimately.

Many people have been used by God to make a difference in my spiritual journey. Mr. Barry Banther and his *Spiritual Life* course at Trinity College of Florida had a profound impact on awakening me to the question of God's will and how that related to my life (Rom 12:1-2). Dr. Gary Williams at Trinity College of Florida, and Drs. Thomas Constable and Stanley Toussaint at Dallas Theological Seminary modeled a passion and a

mastery of Bible exposition that has greatly impacted my love for Christ and His Holy Word. Dr. Lanier Burns at Dallas Theological Seminary challenged me to think theologically and to translate my theology into every day language and that has made a difference in my daily walk with Christ.

The challenges presented by the faculty of the LEAD School of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary have strengthened my ministry as a pastor and a discipler. A special thanks is expressed to Dr. Brad Waggoner whose development of the *Discipleship Inventory* made it possible to pursue this passion of developing fully devoted followers of Jesus. His guidance and input have served as a light in a sometimes dark and challenging process.

Pastoral ministry is one of the most challenging and exciting ventures of faith in which one can be involved. I am grateful for the growing saints at First Baptist Church of Havana, Florida, who have graciously allowed me to pursue this course of study. Their passion for God and His Word continues to grow as our years together increase. Thank you for walking on this journey of faith with me. Your willingness has strengthened us both!

To my wife, Teresa, who is a blossoming rose in the garden of faith, may our journey together continue to take us deeper into God's amazing love. Your life too is a testimony of God's sovereign work of grace in one who was not actively discipled as a young Christian. Praise Him who is patient with late bloomers.

Most importantly, all praise and glory belong to my gracious Savior! Without His work of saving grace and spiritual transformation I would be lost and far removed

from the process of becoming a fully devoted follower. May my life reflect the glory of  
the Glorious One!

Eric Richard Erskine

Havana, Florida

May 2004

## CHAPTER 1

### RESEARCH CONCERN

The question of success plagues our society and has infiltrated the ministry of the church. Success is now measured by external factors that are cheap imitations of a ministry that is truly reaching people with the gospel message and then helping them grow into fully devoted followers of Jesus. Bill Hull, in his book *The Disciple Making Pastor*, indicates that the church is facing a crisis as a result of the forgotten mission of reaching and teaching them to obey. “The crisis at the heart of the church is a crisis of product” (Hull 1988, 14).

In the gospels, Jesus clearly portrays His plan for the church and the intended product of the gospel message. His plan is clear: Go into your neighborhoods, your nation and your world and make disciples . . . baptizing them . . . and teaching them to obey (Matt 28:19-20). His product is transformed people who reflect His glory to a watching world. The question that must be wrestled with from time to time pertains to the impact that the church is having on producing growing and maturing disciples.

George H. Gallup, Jr. and Timothy Jones, in their book *The Saints among Us*, conducted a study in which they set out to “find Americans for whom God is a vibrant reality” (Gallup and Jones 1992, 11). This national study spanned generational, ethnic, denominational and regional boundaries, asking twelve questions of 1,052 Americans. This study revealed that those who responded “strongly agreed” or “agreed” made up

13% of the sample (Gallup and Jones 1992, 12). The Gallup and Jones study looks with optimism at this figure, “extrapolating and suggesting that the saints among us are 24 million strong out of an adult U.S. population of 182 million” (Gallup and Jones 1992, 15).

These numbers are encouraging if they represent individuals with a faith that represents life transformation reflected in daily behavior. The weakness of such a study rests in the fact that it focuses on self-perception of the respondents and not on actual behavior. Gallup and Jones also recognize that those who have a stronger self-esteem would have a higher view of themselves than those with a lower self-esteem (Gallup and Jones 1992, 14). Therefore, though this study is national in scope and varied demographically in region, ethnicity, and denomination, more is needed to help us evaluate the impact that the church is having on life transformation. What type of “product” is the church producing?

Another national study which began in 1988 and lasted three and a half years was conducted by *The Search Institute* (Benson and Elkins 1990). This study, which was conducted by Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Elkins, sought to measure the effectiveness that Christian education was having upon the faith maturity of believers. The purpose of this study was:

to provide baseline, descriptive data on the vitality of faith among adults, adolescents, and congregational leaders; to understand the relative contribution of demography, personal biography, and congregational dynamics to faith development; and to function as the primary criterion variable for evaluating the impact of religious education and its many separate dynamics. (Benson, Donahue and Erickson 1993, 3)

The power of this study resides in the identification of the church’s purpose and the need to quantify the effectiveness the church is having on fulfilling that purpose.

The primary aim of congregational life is to nurture . . . a vibrant, life-changing faith, the kind of faith that shapes one's way of being, thinking, and acting. It is this concept of faith maturity that is at the heart of the study. It is the benchmark against which we evaluate the impact and potential of Christian education.

Secondly, we seek to understand the role of congregational life in promoting loyalty to one's congregation and denomination. (Benson and Elkin 1990, 9)

The church is called to "make disciples." She must not become distracted by any other activity, no matter how noble it may be. "Job one of the Church is not pastoral care, or helping the needy, or changing societal/governmental structures, or missions. The first business of the Church is to help people connect with God and grow spiritually" (Miller 1994, 34). The glory of God, achieved through both genuine worship and a life fully devoted to Him, must be the goal for every believer and every church. This task is far too important not to evaluate.

The focus of the Search Institute study centered around five mainline denominations: the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the United Church of Christ, and the United Methodist Church. The Southern Baptist Convention was also invited to participate in this study due in part to their success in educational programming. The study included more than 11,000 individuals in 561 randomly chosen congregations. The study was also enhanced by teams of trained observers who visited 52 congregations with strong educational programs to provide insights into the nature of their Christian educational program.

This study provides valuable insights into the spiritual dynamics of believers but is limited by the origin with which it derived the core dimensions of spiritual maturity. "In early 1987, a convenience sample of 410 mainline Protestant adults was asked to respond to a series of open-ended questions about how one can tell, in word and

deed, whether a person has a deep, vibrant, and mature religious faith” (Benson, Donahue, and Erickson 1993, 5). Additional insight was gleaned from an advisory panel as well as a systematic review of the theological and social-science literature (Benson, Donahue, and Erickson 1993, 5). Caution must be used with this approach because it easily leads to eisegesis, the hermeneutical error that reads “meaning into the text” (Virkler 1981, 18). People are asked what they consider to be the qualities of a mature person, rather than determining from Scripture the biblical qualities of an individual who possesses a vibrant and mature faith,. This methodology has the potential of radically influencing the definition of a disciple.

Therefore, though the purpose of the Search Institute study is extremely important, its usefulness is weakened by the means in which the functional characteristics were derived. The research of this current study sought to understand the relationship between a church’s discipleship practices and the Christian spiritual maturity of a believer. The foundation of this study is the biblical definition of a disciple as well as its description of behavioral characteristics that are consistent with a maturing disciple.

There are many concerns raised by such studies. One such concern revolves around the theological understanding of justification and sanctification. If it is true that an individual is a new person in Christ, then what is the relationship between his slow to almost no spiritual growth and his profession of faith in Christ? And if it is true that God in His sovereign plan has predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), then how does one square this with the reality that there is a great deal of carnality and ungodliness among church members? A biblical theology of discipleship helps to

answer these types of questions while at the same time acts as a challenge to spur on righteousness and godliness.

Another concern that is raised by such studies revolves around the educational techniques that are employed in various discipleship practices. The goal of all Christian education is life change. Yet if minimal life change is taking place, what impact is a Christian educator's teaching having upon the discipleship of church members? What educational techniques are helping us impact people for Christ and what educational techniques are only filling time?

These and many other questions lie at the root of a Church's discipleship practices. Spiritual growth and life transformation are the goals of every Christian educator. It is these goals that drive this study as we seek to evaluate the relationship between what Christian educators are doing and the influence these practices are having upon the spiritual development of believers.

### **Research Problem**

The typical church is a very busy place: worship services, Bible studies, youth activities, outreach ministries, church-wide fellowships, and mission trips. The list could go on and on. The issue one must wrestle with is the impact that all this activity is having upon the spiritual transformation of those involved. With the wide-range of discipleship practices engaged in on a weekly basis, as well as the vast financial resources that are expended to engage in these practices, one must evaluate the relationship between what we are doing and the main objective of making disciples.

### **Research Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to seek to understand the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the impact these practices have upon the spiritual maturity of disciples.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Discipleship is a broad topic of interest that focuses upon many different aspects of the spiritual development and nurture of individuals who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ. This study was therefore delimited to five major discipleship practices, identified through the precedent literature study, which churches utilize to help individuals grow in their personal relationship with the Lord. It was therefore not the intent of this study to explore every discipleship practice, nor was it the intent of this study to make an evaluative judgment upon the specific practices that churches utilize in fulfilling the Great Commission.

This study was also delimited to the exploration of the possible relationship of five discipleship practices utilized by churches and spiritual maturity of individuals within those churches. This study did not propose to evaluate individual churches in order to offer specific suggestions for improvement. Nor was it the intent of this study to evaluate churches using similar curriculum or discipleship programs. Rather, it was the intent of this study to assess the relationship between general practices and the spiritual maturity of believers.

This study was further delimited to the topic of Christian spiritual growth and maturity. This study does not deal with faith maturity from an educational psychology point of view. Thus, it was not intended to deal with the issue of faith maturity discussed

by authors such as James Fowler. Nor did it deal with the issue of moral development discussed by authors such as Lawrence Kohlberg.

### **Research Questions**

Seven research questions were developed to help evaluate the relationship between discipleship practices and spiritual maturity:

1. What is the relationship between Sunday school as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
2. What is the relationship between discipleship courses as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
3. What is the relationship between small group ministry as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
4. What is the relationship between preaching as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
5. What is the relationship between missions/ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
6. What is the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the identification by individual disciples of practices that influenced their level of spiritual maturity?
7. What are the major differences, as they relate to discipleship practices, between the churches that had a higher percentage of spiritually maturing disciples and churches that had a lower percentage of spiritually maturing disciples?

### **Terminology**

The topic of discipleship provides a wide variety of definitions for some very common terms. One of the challenges faced in the study of this discipline is the need for a uniform definition to be universally accepted and used. Unfortunately, theological and educational differences prohibit this from being realized. Many of these terms are defined

in the body of this dissertation, but for the purpose of clarity, the following definitions have been provided.

*Disciple.* “A disciple is a person-in-process who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christlike lifestyle” (Adsit 1996, 35).

*Disciplemaking.* “Disciplemaking is seeking to fulfill the imperative of the Great Commission by making a conscientious effort to help people move toward spiritual maturity – drawing on the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, utilizing the resources of the local church, and fully employing the gifts, talents and skills acquired over the years” (Adsit 1996, 40).

*Discipleship.* “Discipleship involves both becoming a disciple and being a disciple. At times the focus is on the entrance into the process (evangelism), but most often the focus is on growing in the process (maturity); it includes both teaching and life transformation. Therefore, it is best to think of discipleship as the process of becoming like Christ” (Samra 2003, 220).

*Discipleship courses.* Discipleship courses such as *Experiencing God*, *Master Life*, and the *Navigators 2-7 Series*, are designed to “enable churches to disciple and mobilize the laity” (Sabo 2001, 501).

*Discipleship practices.* Discipleship practices are those practices churches engage in to help them fulfill the Great Commission. Though there are many practices churches employ, five main discipleship practices are examined in this study: Sunday school, small group ministry, discipleship courses, preaching, and ministry/missions opportunities.

*Influence score.* Influence score refers to the respondents' Likert response ranking on the *Discipleship Inventory Addendum* of the self-perceived influence that a discipleship practice has had upon their spiritual growth. Influence scores were determined using a Likert-type response scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Respondents were also allowed to mark "N/A" if they considered a specific discipleship practice to have had no influence on their spiritual development or they have not had any exposure to a practice.

*Ministry/missions opportunities.* Ministry and missions opportunities are service opportunities provided by a church as an outward expression of its inward devotion. These service opportunities, whether around the block or around the world, have the potential of significantly shaping the lives of those involved.

*Preaching.* "Preaching is the proclamation of God's message by a chosen personality to meet the needs of humanity" (Broadus 1979, 3). There are three basic types of preaching: topical, textual, and expository. Topical preaching usually combines a series of Bible verses that connect to address a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that serves as an introduction to the subject being addressed. Expository preaching focuses predominately on the text(s) and seeks to convey the Biblical intent derived from the scripture to the listeners in a manner that helps them apply it to their daily life. (Mayhue 1992, 9)

*Small group ministry.* Small group ministry, also called cell groups or home bible study groups, are implemented in churches in a number of different ways. Ron Bennett identifies two basic strategies used by those with small group ministries. "The first involves forming a small group that grows toward spiritual maturity together over

the long haul. . . . The second small-group strategy uses a more academic model of progression. Each small group focuses on a particular need or stage of spiritual growth. Members move through the growth environments – from group to group – as they are able” (Bennett 2001, 76-77).

*Spiritual formation.* Spiritual formation describes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer which conforms the child of God more and more to the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:18) (Lightner 1994, 39).

*Spiritual maturity.* “[The] quality of being fully developed in spirit. For the Christian this development entails, more specifically, being conformed to the image of Christ. Christian spiritual maturity must be understood paradoxically; it is something we are, while being at the same time something we are not. It is a gift of grace given at our new birth, and yet we are called to grow into maturity through sanctification” (Steele 2001, 659).

*Spiritual maturity level.* Spiritual maturity level refers to the score received on the *Discipleship Inventory: revised edition*, which measured the functional characteristics of a disciple. There were five spiritual maturity levels: 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, 3.5-3.99, 4.0-4.49, and 4.5-4.99. Spiritual maturity levels were utilized to allow the researcher to analyze the influence discipleship practices had on the maturity level of respondents.

*Sunday school.* Sunday school is the agency the church has designed to teach the Bible to children, youth, and adults in local church ministries (Garland 2001a, 671). “Sunday school is the foundational strategy in a local church for leading people to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and for building Great Commission Christians through Bible study

groups that engage people in evangelism, discipleship, fellowship, ministry, and worship” (Lumpkin et al.1999, 8).

### **Procedural Overview**

This study looked at the functional characteristics of a disciple that have become a part of the lives of members of Southern Baptist Churches in the Florida Baptist Association. After exploring the biblical definition of a disciple as well as the biblical foundation for discipleship in and through the local church, the research focused on measuring the presence of these characteristics in the lives of individual members. This research utilized *The Discipleship Inventory: revised edition* created by Brad Waggoner in order to measure functional characteristics. Included with this inventory several demographic questions were asked that allowed the researcher to evaluate the relationship between an individual’s spiritual maturity and the discipleship practices with which he has been involved in his Christian journey.

The research was conducted in the Florida Baptist Association, which includes churches in Leon, and parts of Jefferson, Franklin, and Wakulla Counties in North Florida. There are forty-seven churches that are included in this study, representing a total worship attendance of 10,123. This study employed a proportional stratified sampling of randomly selected churches in this Association. The stratification sampling was based upon the total worship attendance recorded in the *Year 2001 Annual of the Florida Baptist State Convention*, and was categorized as follows: small = 0-199, medium = 200-799, and large = 800+. Of these forty-seven churches, a proportional stratified sampling of 50% of the churches was involved in this study for a total of twenty-four churches involved in this study. There were some churches that did not

participate in the study. One church that was selected for participation was no longer a member of the FBA. One church disbanded during the enlistment period. Four other churches when contacted chose not to participate. The final number of churches that participated in this study was eighteen. Twenty-five percent of the worship attendees were targeted for this study, but an additional number of surveys were included for each church in case some surveys were distributed to individuals who were not properly informed of the contents of the envelope. These additional surveys resulted in a distribution rate of 37% of worship attendance for chosen churches, for a total of 1,580 surveys.

After administering this instrument to the randomly selected churches and members of those churches, the researcher conducted a detailed analysis of the findings. This analysis explored the data in order to see if any relationships between the discipleship practices of churches and the spiritual maturity of members could be determined.

### **Research Assumptions**

In developing the idea and research questions for this study, the researcher has taken into account his role as Senior Pastor. As a pastor, it is my desire to see all whom God has entrusted to my care become spiritually maturing disciples.

1. It is assumed that churches are engaged in discipleship practices for the expressed purpose of producing spiritually maturing disciples.
2. It is assumed that Christian spiritual maturity can be measured, but that this measurement is only a snapshot of that point in time in that individual's life and not indicative of one's future spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER 2

### PRECEDENT LITERATURE

Understanding the task and purpose of the church is crucial for church health as well as effectiveness in ministry. The Scripture is clear as to the purpose of the church: “It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13 NIV). This purpose is reiterated by Paul in Colossians one: “We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present every one perfect in Christ” (Col 1:28 NIV). But as clear as that purpose may be, it is easy for the church to become distracted and lose sight of God’s intended purpose.

The church, whether small or large, is a complex body. It has one purpose but many activities. Its purpose is to be a divine-human community in and through which the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit may work in persons for their salvation and spiritual growth, and which may be a witness to the world to call it to repentance and faith. Its activities – such as worship, preaching and teaching, fellowship, and missions – are the means through which this purpose may be achieved. The total of such activities, properly conceived, interrelated, and conducted constitute the church’s program. (Vieth 1960, 247)

With many activities, distraction from what is essential often causes us to lose sight of the eternal. Though discipleship stands at the heart of the Great Commission, it is

often neglected for activities that produce faster and more visible results. That is why the church must maintain a sharp focus on God's intended purpose for His church.

Gene Mims identifies the Great Commission as the one driving force behind every aspect of the church (Mims 2001, 19-32). Shortly before His ascension on an appointed mountain in Galilee, Jesus met with His disciples to place before them the purpose of their calling: "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" (Matt 28:18-20 NIV).

The great commission in Matthew 28:18-20 has a magnificent structure. It starts with a declaration of power: 'All authority . . . has been given to me'. It sounds like the enthronement of a king. This powerful king has an important message to his people the message consists of two sentences. The first is an order: 'Go therefore and make disciples . . . .' The second is a promise: 'And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.' (Kvalbein 1988, 48)

The grammatical structure of verses 19 and 20 provides great insight and instruction, not only for the eleven disciples but for all disciples of all time. In these verses there are one main verb and three participles. Though one may be tempted to focus the interpretation of these verses around the word "go," it is not the main verb. Therefore, it is not the main focus of interpretive attention.

Verse 19 begins with the first of the three participles: "Therefore go . . . ." This is an aorist participle, which carries with it the imperatival force of the main verb (Carson 1995b, 595). Though there are some who view the "go" as a secondary status in this statement, Rogers points out that grammatically the imperative is to be preferred: "Although it is true that the participle does not have mood in and of itself it is also true

that “its modal junction will be apparent only from the context” (Rogers 1973, 259). Rogers extensively discusses this grammatical point, providing numerous examples of the circumstantial participle taking the imperatival force from the main verb that follows (Rogers 1973, 259-62). This circumstantial participle can be translated “As you are going” (Hull 1988, 51), but this translation should not limit the scope of one’s outreach effort to one’s current location. The mission of the church as seen throughout the scripture is to spread the gospel to all people, tribes and nations (Mark 16:15, Luke 24:45-49, Acts 1:8), and therefore the translation of the participle should include and encourage missionary endeavors that reach all nations.

The main verb in this sentence is “make disciples,” which is Christ’s directive for His disciples. This verb is an aorist imperative, serving as the command and commissioning from which all activities of the church should emanate. Jesus was commanding them to do in the lives of others what had been done in their own lives (Carson 1995b, 596). Terence L. Donaldson points out that through this command the disciples were to function as both the means and the model for other disciples.

For the extent that they are the means by which the new community is brought into being, their role is unrepeatable; the story of the disciples is the story of their preparation as the founding missionaries. But to the extent to which they are the model of community membership, their portrait in the Gospel is of ongoing significance. (Donaldson 1996, 41)

Jesus had poured His life into the lives of these disciples, and now they served as the link between Jesus and future generations (Klaus 2001, 318). They were called to make disciples, but they also served as models, both positively and negatively, of what a disciple was to be both in character and in conduct (Donaldson 1996, 41). All future

disciples were to follow the example of these eleven men in ministry, but they were also to model their commitment to Christ as followers.

The other two present participles, baptizing and teaching, are subordinate to the main verb “make disciples” (Bloomberg 1992, 431). Rogers views the relation of these two participles as non-problematic, “intended to indicate the means by which the making disciples is to be accomplished” (Rogers 1973, 262). D.A. Carson cautions that “the syntax of the Greek participles for “baptizing” and “teaching” forbids the conclusion that baptizing and teaching are to be construed solely as the *means* of making disciples; but their precise relationship to the main verb is not easy to delineate” (Carson 1995b, 597). Carson states that “baptizing and teaching are not the *means* of making disciples, but they characterize it” (Carson 1995b, 597). Therefore, these two present participles should be viewed as the result of the main verb, making disciples. The present tense indicates that this is to be the expected path of all disciples: they will be baptized, and they will be taught to obey. There is no sense in this commissioning of a disciple who would not be identified with Christ through baptism and then continually taught to obey Christ’s commands (Bloomberg 1992, 431).

This command continues to direct the activity of the church in the twenty-first century. Just as the church was called by the voice of Christ to go and make disciples, individuals who personally identified with Christ publicly and devoted themselves to learning to obey, so the church today is called to the same high task: make disciples!

### **A Biblical Analysis of Discipleship**

Jesus has commanded His disciples to reproduce themselves in others. He has called them to make disciples. But what is a disciple? There are many different

definitions offered for the word “disciple.” J. Dwight Pentecost defines disciple as “a true disciple is one who has a love for the person of Christ, confidence in the word of Christ, and is completely committed to Christ in service and obedience” (Pentecost 1971, 20). James Montgomery Boice in discussing discipleship says, “True discipleship means forsaking everything to follow Christ” (Boice 1986a, 13) which in turn leads to the understanding that one is not a disciple if one does not follow (Boice 1986b, 37). The definitions of a disciple range from “a follower of Jesus” to “one who is completely committed to Jesus in every area of his life.” That is why understanding the product which the church is called to “make” is crucial for obedience to this command.

There are three reasons for this confusion. First, the word “disciple” (μαθητής) and its related verbal form (μαθητεύω) sometimes have an educational, intellectual sense (Matt 10:24; 13:52), in which case “discipleship” is simply the process of being educated by a teacher. At other times (and more frequently) discipleship seems to involve life transformation (16:24; Mark 8:34; cf. 1:17-18), in which case discipleship is seen as the process of becoming like one’s master. Second, at times the focus is on the beginning of the process (Matt 27:57; Acts 14:21), in which case discipleship is *becoming* a disciple. At other times (and more frequently) the focus is on *being* a disciple (Luke 14:26-27), in which case discipleship is the process of becoming like one’s master. Third, there are different referents for the word “disciple.” Sometimes the word speaks of those who occasionally followed Christ (Matt 8:21). In this case discipleship was a process whereby the masses learned more about Christ. Sometimes the word “disciple” is used of those select few who were being trained to be leaders of the church (17:1). In this case discipleship is the process of selecting a specific few to become as much like Christ as possible through concentrated, focused life transference. (Samar 2003, 219-20)

Therefore, the process one employs for defining the meaning of “disciple” and “discipleship” is of critical importance. Christopher Adsit suggests that one go back to the Greek, Aramaic or Hebrew and find out the literal definition. Then, one should look at how the term is used within the context of the biblical text (Adsit 1996, 35). This

methodology will be utilized in the formulation of a biblical understanding of the meaning of Jesus' command to "make disciples."

***Defining Discipleship: A Biblical Word Study  
of Key Terms***

Developing a biblical understanding of discipleship cannot be limited to a definition of the words "disciple" and "discipleship." In order to achieve a complete understanding of the biblical meaning of "make disciples," it will be necessary to define several other key words.

**"Disciple"/"Discipleship"**

The basic lexical definition of the word μαθητής (disciple) is "learner, pupil, disciple, adherent" (Bauer et al. 1979, 485). "The noun *mathetes* occurs 264 times in the NT, exclusively in the Gospels and Acts" (Müller 1975, 486). The word μαθητής is not found in the epistles.

***"Disciple" in the Old Testament***

The word μαθητής has been used in reference to an individual who has attached himself to a teacher. In Scripture, μαθητής is often used of an individual who has identified with a person or group: "the disciples of John the Baptist," "the disciples of the Pharisees," "the disciples of Moses," as well as "the disciples of Jesus."

The use of μαθητής in the Old Testament is minimal. "The term μαθητής does not occur in the established LXX tradition. . . . These verses add nothing to the history of the word" (Rengstorf 1965, 426). Three passages are found in the book of Jeremiah and all involve variant readings that are not very strongly attested. Wilkins

contends that the fact that the term μαθητής is not used in the Old Testament does not mean that the concept of disciple/discipleship is not to be found. “Evidence for the existence of master-disciple relationships in the Old Testament is found in a limited way in the terms *talmîdh* and *limmûdh* and in the social structures of the prophets, the scribes, and the wise men” (Wilkins 1988, 218). These teacher/student relationships are seen in the Old Testament in the lives of people such as Moses and Joshua, Elijah and Elisha, the School of the Prophets, and others. Wilkins provides strong support for the Old Testament concept of discipleship and mentoring relationships in his book *The Concept of Disciple in Matthew’s Gospel* (Wilkins 1988, 43-91). “Each of these institutions was involved in the process of communicating the revelation of Yahweh (prophecy, law, wisdom) and the suggested intimacy of the relationship indicates mutual support in the task of revealing the word of the Lord to the nation” (Wilkins 1992a, 176).

#### ***“Disciple” in Extra-Biblical Literature***

The use of μαθητής in extra-biblical literature provides insights into the influence of this meaning on the use in the days of Jesus. “In the earliest classical Greek literature, *mathetes* was used in three ways: in a general sense . . . of ‘learner’ . . . ; with a technical sense of ‘adherent’ to a great teacher, teaching or master . . . ; and with a more restricted sense of an ‘institutional pupil’ of the Sophists” (Wilkins 1992a, 176). The term “disciple” was used in the classical writings to refer to the teacher/learner relationship, but this relationship was very academic and impersonal. Usually, an individual attached himself to a teacher for pay and studied under him. The focus of this relationship was on the learner gathering information from the “teacher/master.” Socrates did not want to be viewed as a διδάσκαλος (teacher); rather he wanted to offer individuals the opportunity

to learn alongside him, choosing to emphasize the relational aspect of the process rather than the acquisition of information: “The basis of the relation is Socrates himself rather than the knowledge at his disposal. He is the master around whom disciples gather. Young and old become his disciples because he grants to them his fellowship, allowing them a share in his intellectual life” (Rengstorf 1965, 420). His goal in these relationships was the “development of moral judgment, which is the basis of moral action” (Rengstorf 1965, 394).

### ***“Disciple” and Rabbinic Tradition***

The Rabbinic tradition’s focus was upon the training of individuals in the Jewish tradition: “According to Shammai, this was the written Torah (the biblical writings of the OT) and the oral Torah, the *paradoseis ton presbyteron* (the tradition of the fathers) which includes the Mishnah, Midrash, Halachah and Haggadah” (Müller 1975, 485). The relationship between the Rabbi and the learner/disciple soon became a relationship of master/servant. The Jewish tradition was held in high esteem and since only those who had endured the rigors of formal training were “qualified” to teach that tradition, it bred an atmosphere of elitism. “Only those who had studied and served under a *hakam* (a Jewish scholar) for an extensive period, and had thus concluded his essential study, could later become a *hakam* with authority to teach his own tradition in his own school” (Müller 1975, 486). Jesus’ encounter with this religious tradition brought about great rebuke and chastisement because the teachers of the law were making disciples of themselves rather than disciples of God (Matt 23, Mark 12:38-39, Luke 11:37-54).

### ***“Disciple” in Jesus’ Ministry***

By the time of Jesus, the meaning and usage of the term μαθητής had developed in three specific ways: “It was used with a general sense . . . to refer to a ‘learner’; it was also used quite early with a technical sense to refer to an ‘adherent’ of a great teacher, teaching, or master; and it was also used somewhat more restrictedly by the Sophists to refer to the ‘institutional pupil’ of the Sophists” (Wilkins 1988, 217). This wide range of usages allowed Jesus to use the term to designate His followers because of the emphasis on “adherence to a great master” (Wilkins 1988, 217).

Within the specific usages of the term μαθητής, an interesting contrast seemed to be developing. The focus of Socrates was upon the individual development of moral reasoning (Müller 1975, 483), while the rabbinic tradition sought merely to process people through a traditional regimen of information. Their goal was passing the tradition, not changing lives. It is interesting to note that Jesus, as a young Jewish boy, passed through the rabbinic schools. He astonished His teachers who wondered where a young boy of twelve received such wisdom (Luke 2:46-47). Over time this astonishment turned to frustration over the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

Jesus’ relationship to the term μαθητής indicates a technical use of the term. Unlike the Greek pupils or the Rabbinic *talmid* who “bound themselves personally to their master and looked for objective teaching with the aim of themselves becoming a master or Rabbi” (Müller 1975, 488), the disciples of Jesus were called by Jesus to join Him. The goal of Jesus’ call was not that these individuals would themselves become a master or teacher, but that they would be a minister of the will of God (Matt 23:8-10).

They were called to “follow me” which was a call to identification and commitment to Him (Rengstorf 1965, 445), as well as a call to service (Müller 1975, 489).

Here, then the fundamental difference between Jesus and representatives of the Rabbinate is to be seen in the disciples on both sides. What leads  $\text{לְמַדְרַשׁ}$  in swarms to a man like Akiba is his knowledge and method. Moreover, the  $\text{לְמַדְרַשׁ}$  is welcomed by the rabbi so long as he is ready to accept what the rabbi has to offer with all the concern and faithfulness at this command. In the case of Jesus, however, everything depends on His person. If on the one side respect for the knowledge and ability of the teacher determines the relation of the  $\text{לְמַדְרַשׁ}$  to him, faith is the controlling factor in the relation of the disciples of Jesus to their Master. (Rengstorf 1965, 447)

And so even though  $\text{μαθητής}$  is used generally to refer to a learner or adherent, Jesus used the term with the expectation of commitment to Him and obedience to Him. This is seen in his expectation of “the twelve” (Matt 10), but it is also seen in His description of the cost of discipleship to the “crowd” (Matt 8:18-22). Being a disciple referred to more than just learning from Jesus; it was an expectation to follow Him.

### “Follow”

The technical usage of the term  $\text{μαθητής}$  surfaces another key term that helps to uncover the biblical meaning of the concept of a disciple. Jesus came to His “disciples” and He said to them “Follow me” (Matt 4:19). When the disciples heard this call, they immediately left everything and followed Him. What does the word follow mean and what is its relationship to the word disciple?

The Greek word for follow is  $\text{ἀκολουθέω}$ . The basic lexical definition given by BAGD for  $\text{ἀκολουθέω}$  is: (1) literally to “come after,” (2) “accompany, go along with,” (3) figurative meaning “follow” someone as a disciple, and (4) general, “follow, obey” (though there are no NT uses of this idea – only extra-biblical uses) (Bauer et al. 1979, 31).

### ***“Follow” in the Old Testament***

The use of ἀκολουθέω in the Old Testament is lexically and theologically insignificant (Kittle 1965, 211; Blendinger 1975, 481). The uses of this term in the Old Testament are consistent with the uses of μαθητής, in the sense that they refer to individuals who follow after another, such as the relationship of Elijah and Elisha. Kittle suggests that the “following of Elijah and Elisha expresses little more than a relationship of respect” (Kittle 1965, 213), but there is a fundamental foundation being established as it pertains to the concept of discipleship and mentoring as noted in the prior discussion of μαθητής.

### ***“Follow” and the Rabbinic Tradition***

The relationship between the Rabbi and his students is seen closely in the use of ἀκολουθέω, just as it was with μαθητής. “The words describe the relationship of a pupil to a teacher of the Torah. The pupil (the *talmid*) who chooses to subordinate himself to a Rabbi follows him everywhere he goes, learning from him and above all serving him” (Blendinger 1975, 481). The student who attached himself to a teacher would literally follow behind him wherever.

### ***“Follow” in the New Testament and Jesus’ Ministry***

The Greek word ἀκολουθέω occurs almost exclusively in the gospels: “56 times in the Synoptics and 14 times in Jn; only 3 times in Acts, once in Paul and 6 times in Rev” (Blendinger 1975, 481). “The distinctive statistical evidence shows that the

special use of ἀκολουθέω is strictly limited to discipleship of Christ” (Kittle 1965, 213) apart from the usages in the book of Revelation.

The use of ἀκολουθέω by Jesus indicates a close relationship between being a disciple and following Jesus. Though the term ἀκολουθέω does not always involve being a disciple, the use of this term by Jesus implies “self-commitment in a sense which breaks all other ties (Matt: 8:22, Luke 9:61ff)” (Kittle 1965, 213). When one compares the “followers” of a Rabbi and the “followers” of Jesus, there would appear to be no obvious difference: both are physically following a teacher. The difference is seen in the personal commitment to Jesus made by His disciples (Kittle 1965, 213-14). The word has special significance where it refers to individuals.

On Jesus’ lips it often appears as an imperative, as when he calls the disciples (Matt 9:9 par.; 19:21 par.; 8:22 par.; Jn. 1:43; 21:19ff; cf. Mk. 1:16ff. par. with → *opiso*). The response of those called is described as following. ἀκολουθέω is always the call to decisive and intimate discipleship of the earthly Jesus. It always points to the beginning of discipleship. (Blendinger 1975, 482)

The call to follow Jesus is a call to walk the same path He walked. Though disciples will not be called on to give their life as a ransom for the world, a disciple must expect to face the same struggles as his Master faced in this world. Those who choose to follow Jesus must not merely accept the salvation He offers. They must also be prepared to accept the suffering that is a part of being a disciple (Blendinger 1975, 482-83; Kittle 1965, 214). Following Jesus is not only filled with the blessing of relationship; it is also filled with ridicule and rejection.

### **“Imitator”**

Though the word “disciple” is not used outside of the Gospels and the book of Acts, the concept of a disciple and discipleship is clearly evident. One of the clearest

expressions of this concept is seen in the Greek word μιμέομαι, “imitate.” The basic lexical meaning of μιμέομαι is “imitate, emulate, follow, use as a model (Bauer et al. 1979, 521-22).

***“Imitate” in the Old Testament and Extra-biblical Literature***

The use of these terms is minimal in both the Old Testament and extra-biblical literature. Μιμέομαι and μίμημα occur in the LXX but only within the Apocryphal writings (Michaelis 1967, 663; Bauder 1975, 491). Michaelis states: “On the whole the idea of imitation is foreign to the OT. In particular, there is no thought that we must imitate God” (Michaelis, 1967, 663). But Bauder identifies in the rabbinic tradition the thought of an imitation of God: “The Rabbis were the first to speak of imitation of God in the sense of developing the image of God in men” (Bauder 1975, 491).

***“Imitate” in the New Testament***

The word “imitate” is used only eleven times in the New Testament, but these eleven uses provide clarification on the teaching of the New Testament concerning the believer’s life and action as a disciple of Jesus Christ. There are three terms used in relationship to the word “imitate”: “μιμέομαι used four times (2 Thess 3:7,9; Heb 13:7; 3 John 11), μιμητής used six times (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Eph 5:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; Heb 6:12), and συμμιμητήσ used once (Phil 3:17). All are used with an ethical-imperative aim and are linked with obligation to a specific kind of conduct” (Bauder 1975, 491). Vine notes that “the verb is always used in exhortations, and always in the continuous tense, suggesting a constant habit or practice” (Vine 1981, 319).

An examination of these uses provides three categories which help clarify the meaning. Michaelis provides a good summary of these uses:

First, there is simple comparison. . . . This type occurs in 1 Thess 2:14 and possibly 1 Thess 1:6. Then there is the following of an example. This use is found in 2 Thess 3:7, 9; Phil 3:17, and Paul is always the example . . . . In the third group obedience is predominant, so exclusively so in 1 Cor 4:16 that the thought of an example is quite overshadowed, and in 1 Cor 11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; Eph 5:1 it is quite obvious that the main stress falls on the element of obedience. (Michaelis 1967, 671-72)

The call for a believer to “imitate” Paul must be not be misunderstood. Paul directs attention to himself as an example based upon his apostolic authority (Michaelis 1967, 667-668), and not based upon his own personal perfection: “He does not think of himself as the personal embodiment of an ideal which must be imitated” (Bauder 1975, 491). Philippians 3:12 clearly demonstrates that Paul understood his imperfections as a model to follow. “To be an imitator of the apostle accordingly means laying hold of Christ in consciousness of one’s own imperfection and letting one’s life be continually re-moulded by Christ in obedience to him” (Bauder 1975, 491).

Paul’s use of the term imitate also emphasizes obedience to Christ. Paul is not calling his readers to imitate every activity in which he was involved. He is not calling people to become “tentmakers” as he was (Fowl 1993, 430). He was drawing their attention to an imitation of his attitude and actions as it relates to his obedience to Christ. Since Christlikeness is God’s intended goal for the life of a believer (Rom 8:29), Christ naturally is the subject of one’s imitation: His attitude, submission, and humility to the will of the Father. “What is to be imitated is Christ’s obedient adherence to the Father’s will, shown in love and forgiveness” (Bauder 1975, 492).

“Imitation” in the NT is consequently not conceived as the reproduction of a given pattern. It is the way of life of the man who derives his being from the

forgiveness of God. It is not the way to salvation through pious achievement, but an attitude of thanks in response to the salvation that has been given to us. The summons to discipleship can only be fulfilled, when a man is grasped by Christ and undergoes the transformation which existence under the Lordship of Christ involves. (Bauder 1975, 492)

And so, when Paul discusses our need to imitate Christ, he has in mind our imitation of Christ's attitude rather than the earthly actions. Paul exhorts the believers in Philippi to let this "mind/attitude" be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (Phil 2:5). The humility of Christ to the cross provides the example of submission and humility that must characterize the lives of believers (Best 1988, 59-60; Fowl, 1993, 431).

### **Summary of Terms**

Developing a biblical understanding of the term disciple provides a framework for the process in which Jesus has commanded the church to be involved. A study of the usage of these three key terms reveals an accurate picture of a disciple of Jesus Christ. A disciple is an individual who is more than an adherent who makes an intellectual connection with Jesus. A disciple is more than an individual who is intrigued by the message of Jesus and therefore follows Him from a distance. A disciple is a committed follower of Jesus Christ who desires Christ to be fully formed in every area of his life. Being a disciple is not a position. It is a process one enters into at salvation and completes at the moment of glorification, and it includes every believer, not a select few.

These three terms, "disciple," "follow," and "imitate," help us to understand the biblical concept of a disciple. The relationship between these words is clear.

When we come from the usage outside the NT to the NT itself, it is with some astonishment that we find only 25 occurrences of *μανθάνω* in the whole of the NT. The word plays a comparatively minor role. *διδάσκω* is four times as frequent, and this is the more surprising in view of the close material connection between the two terms. But the most instructive aspect of the statistics is that Mt. uses the word only

3 times Mk. Once, and Jn. Twice, while it is not found at all in Lk. And only once in Ac (23:27). In other words, whereas more than half the instances of διδάσκω are in the gospels, we find here only one fifth of the occurrences of μανθάνω. Obviously the term is only weakly related to the true concern of the Gospels; otherwise it would be more common. This needs the more emphasis in view of the fact that μαθητής is the most common word to denote men whom Jesus associated with Himself. The linguistic findings, and investigation of the various passages, show that ἀκολουθεῖν rather than μανθάνειν is the true mark of the μαθητής. This is what corresponds to the preaching of Jesus. His concern is not to impart information, nor to deepen an existing attitude, but to awaken unconditional commitment to Himself. That the μαθητής as ἀκολουθῶν is also μανθανῶν is self-evident. (Rengstorf 1965, 406)

Not only is there a connection between the words “disciple” and “follower,” there is a connection between the words “follower” and “imitator” as well as “imitator” and “disciple.” The meaning of the word μιμέομαι, is “imitate, emulate, follow,” which calls the disciple to imitate the Christlike character seen in the disciplemaker. Michaelis also draws a clear connection between the word “disciple” and the word “imitate” when he says: “Paul does not speak of true imitation of Christ or God. His reference is simply to obedient following as an expression of fellowship of life and will. The μαθητής (Paul does not use this word) and the μιμητής are one and the same” (Michaelis 1967, 673).

Christopher B. Adsit offers a clear and concise definition of disciple: “A disciple is a person-in-process who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christlike lifestyle” (Adsit 1996, 35). Unlike many definitions of the word “disciple,” Adsit’s definition emphasizes an ongoing process rather than a certain level that is achieved in order to be characterized as a disciple.

### *Defining Discipleship: An Examination of Key Discipleship Passages*

The word “disciple” is a biblical term that is used throughout the Gospels and

the book of Acts, but the word “discipleship” is not found in the New Testament.

Although this word is not found in Scripture, the essence of the word “discipleship” is captured in the Great Commission: “Go and make disciples” (Matt 28:19).

Defining the word “disciple” provides the basis upon which a definition of “discipleship” can be built. Unfortunately the application of “discipleship” has not always been derived from a biblical understanding of the meaning of “disciple.” A discussion of the meaning of discipleship must not be confused with discipleship programs.

Historically within the SBC, discipleship has been associated with membership training: “When Church Training began in 1895 as the Baptist Young People’s Union, Auxiliary to the Southern Baptist Convention, its theme was “Training in church membership” (Beasley 1988, 3). This emphasis was far from the emphasis given to us in Scripture. Over the years, the focus has shifted away from Church Training and in 1989 became known as Discipleship Training (Hardee 1995, 19), providing a more biblically focused approach to the process of making disciples.

Developing a definition of “discipleship” must flow from the biblical meaning of the word “disciple.” A disciple is a person who is in the process of growing in Christlikeness. We see this process in the gospels as Jesus chose twelve men to be His disciples. His goal: “A student is not above his teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). Jesus walked with and taught his disciples with the goal of sending them out fully trained to touch other people’s lives (Richards 1987, 223). Therefore, any definition of discipleship must involve a process of helping individuals grow in their Christlikeness. Rick Warren defines discipleship as “the process of helping people become more like Christ in their thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Warren 1995,

106). Michael J. Wilkins suggests that true discipleship means helping people walk with Jesus in the real world (Wilkins 1992c, 22). Christopher Adsit uses the term “disciplemaking” and offers this definition: “Disciplemaking is seeking to fulfill the imperative of the Great Commission by making a conscientious effort to help people move toward spiritual maturity – drawing on the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, utilizing the resources of the local church, and fully employing the gifts, talents and skills acquired over the years” (Adsit 1996, 40).

This section will examine key discipleship passages found in both the Gospels and the Epistles. First we will explore the cost of discipleship as discussed by Jesus in the Gospels. We will consider the various usages of the term disciple in the gospels by exploring the biblical text and the various passages that call individuals to “follow me.” Then we will explore the call to Christlikeness in the Epistles as we look at the emphasis placed upon growth and maturity in the Epistles.

### **The Cost of Discipleship: The Use of “Disciple” in the Gospels.**

The use of the word disciple in the Gospels and the book of Acts provides insight into the discussions of discipleship, particularly in reference to the disciples of Jesus. Rengstorf indicated that in reference to the call of His disciples, Jesus took the initiative. Some disciples were not personally called, which raises the question about their legitimacy as disciples (Rengstorf 1965, 444-45). Within the occurrences of the word “disciple” in the Gospels and Acts, different usages are found. In a non-technical sense, it is used of one who follows a teacher or teaching. In this sense, it is used of the disciples of John the Baptist, or disciples of Moses, or the disciples of the Pharisees. J. Dwight

Pentecost has categorized the disciples of Jesus into three categories: the curious, the convinced, and the committed (Pentecost 1971, 13-21). John P. Meier offers a similar categorization of disciples, but he utilizes three concentric circles:

the “crowds” form the outer circle, the “disciples” the intermediate or middle circle, and the “Twelve” the inner circle. . . . the boundaries between these various groups were hardly set in stone, and not everyone fit neatly into one or the other group. For example, certain committed adherents of Jesus, while generously supporting his movement with hospitality or money, did not follow him around Galilee. Accordingly, they do not appear to have been classified as “disciples” by the Gospels, even though they formed a kind of “support group” for the middle circle. Thus, with the exception of the Twelve, the borders between these groups were probably quite fluid. (Meier 2001, 21)

The “curious” or “crowds” are identified as the multitude that followed Jesus. On several occasions they were identified as “disciples” (Matt 8:21; John 6:60). These disciples were intrigued by the teaching of Jesus. They were “learners” who were interested in what He had to say. As news spread about Jesus’ popularity, the curious disciples increased. They were interested in finding out what this new teacher was going to do or say. The level of attachment was very shallow and often centered around the physical benefits that were afforded by attachment to Jesus. A decisive passage that exposes the motives of the curious disciples is John 6, specifically verses sixty and sixty-six.

‘Disciples’ must be distinguished from ‘the Twelve’ (*cf.* vv. 66, 67). More importantly, just as there is faith and faith (2:23-25), so are there disciples and disciples. At the most elementary level, a disciple is someone who is at that point following Jesus, either literally by joining the group that pursued him from place to place, or metaphorically in regarding him as the authoritative teacher. Such a ‘disciple’ is not necessarily a ‘Christian’, someone who has savingly trusted Jesus and sworn allegiance to him, given by the Father to the Son, drawn by the Father and born again by the Spirit. Jesus will make it clear in due course that only those who *continue* in his word are *truly* his ‘disciples’ (8:31). The ‘disciples’ described here do not remain in his word; they find it to be *hard teaching* and wonder *who can accept it*. The adjective rendered ‘hard’ in the NIV (*skleros*) does not mean ‘hard to

understand' but 'harsh', 'offensive'. These 'disciples' will not long remain disciples, because they find Jesus' word intolerable. (Carson 1991, 300)

The "convinced" are "those who gave themselves perhaps out of curiosity to the Word of God, who had an intellectual curiosity as to what Christ would say and teach, and as they listened to His words and beheld His works, they were convinced of the truth of His word and the truth of His person" (Pentecost 1971, 17). Those individuals who attended the wedding at Cana saw Jesus turn the water into wine and "believed in his name" (John 2:23).

The "committed" were those who not only recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, they recognized that He was the only one they should follow. When the curious started leaving Jesus in John 6:66, Jesus turned to the twelve and asked them if they too wanted to abandon following Him. Peter announced: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the world of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Nearing the time of His death, Jesus again questioned His disciples: "Who do men say that I am . . . but what about you, who do you say that I am?" Again, speaking for the disciples, Peter declares: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt 16:16).

Pentecost's categories raise a major question: what constitutes a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ? An examination of the biblical texts in the Gospels and Acts related to the call to discipleship or being a disciple provides a foundation for differentiating between a curious disciple, a convinced disciple and a committed disciple. Though different scholars produce different category titles, each provides a framework for understanding the marks of a genuine disciple of Jesus. Ron Bennett, in his book *Intentional Discipleship*, states that "an overview of the Gospels reveals that Jesus

specifically gave points of reference as to what makes someone His disciple” (Bennett 2001, 14).

Bennett utilizes four categories as his points of reference to describe an individual who is a disciple: commitment (Luke 14:26-27, see also 9:23-24), competence (John 15:7-8), character (John 13:34-35), and conviction (John 8:32).

John MacArthur Jr. describes a disciple in three major categories. His first category revolves around the concept of confessing Christ before others, which reveals the commitment of an individual and the heart of real discipleship. His second category revolves around the concept of getting one’s priorities straight, which is seen through one’s love of Christ more than one’s own family. His final category revolves around the concept of taking up the cross and focuses on one’s willingness to forsake everything in order to follow Him (MacArthur 1994, 221-28).

James Montgomery Boice has five categories that he uses to discuss the elements of discipleship: obedience, repentance, submission, commitment, and perseverance (Boice 1986, 17-22).

Bill Hull discusses the disciple’s profile, derived from John 15:7-17, in which he provides six characteristics that a disciple exhibits: a disciple remains in Christ (15:7), a disciple is obedient (15:9), a disciple bears fruit (15:8, 16), a disciple glorifies God (15:8), a disciple has joy (15:11), and a disciple loves as Christ loves (15:12-14, 17) (Hull 1988, 60-73)

Though discipleship is a major theme found throughout Jesus’ ministry, there are several key passages that enlighten this discussion. This writer has chosen three major categories with which to categorize these key passages. Certainly these categories are

broad in scope and could be refined and placed into more specific categories, but these broad categories allow one to grasp Jesus' emphasis on discipleship in the Gospels.

### ***Confession of Christ***

There is a clear distinction in the Gospels between those who were followers of Jesus in a broad sense, and those who were truly convinced that He was the Messiah of God. Early in His earthly ministry, Jesus' disciples were in awe of the miraculous powers that He possessed. Though they placed their faith in Him (John 2:11), they were at times baffled by the man who had such incredible power (Mark 4:41). Nearing the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus' disciples were convinced as to His Messianic role. Wilkins traces Jesus' movement through the Gospels as it relates to the use of the term "disciples" and notes that when the expectations of some disciples were different from the purposes of Jesus, those disciples usually stopped following Him (Wilkins 1992c, 100-19). As Jesus refined His message, the gap between the curious and the committed continued to become more apparent. It is clear that Jesus' use of the term *disciple* was used in a more specific sense the closer He got to the cross.

After the Resurrection we do have one special use of *disciple* by Jesus himself, which makes it clear that the weaker general senses of the word are irrelevant to Christian faith today. The living Christ told his followers, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). In defining his term, Jesus forever dismissed the notion that a disciple can be nothing more than a loose adherent to Christ and his church. For Jesus said that disciples were to be taught "to obey everything" that he had commanded (v. 20). Discipleship today is a matter of full commitment and obedience to our Lord. (Richards 1987, 222)

One of the definitive encounters between Jesus and His disciples recorded in all three synoptic gospels revolves around Jesus' question, "Who do men say that I am?" (Matt 16:13-16, Mark 8:27-29, Luke 9:18-20). This question probed the personal

understanding of and commitment to the person of Christ. Peter, speaking for the twelve (Carson 1995b, 365), confessed “You are the Christ,” indicating their shared belief that Jesus was the Son of God and the Messiah of God. Lightfoot suggests that “St. Peter’s reply, ‘Thou art the Messiah’, should perhaps be taken rather as his and his fellow disciples’ acknowledgement and confession of their Master’s person and office, owing to their inner *knowledge* of Him, in contrast to the *opinion* of the world about Him, than as a first and unrelated discovery, at that moment, by St. Peter” (Lightfoot 1958, 34).

Jesus indicated in Matthew 10:32-33 that confession was an important aspect of being a disciple: “Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” MacArthur indicates, “Confess means to affirm, to acknowledge, to agree. It is a statement of identification, faith, confidence, and trust” (MacArthur 1994, 224). W.E. Vine notes that confess means “to declare openly by way of speaking out freely, such confession being the effect of deep conviction of facts” (Vine *n.d.*, 226).

In Matt. 10:32 and Luke 12:8 the construction of this verb with *en*, in, followed by the dative case of the personal pronoun, has a special significance, namely, to confess in a person’s name, the nature of the confession of being determined by the context, the suggestion being to make a public confession. Thus the statement, “every one . . . who shall confess Me (lit., in Me, i.e., in My case) before men, him (lit., in him, i.e., in his case) will I also confess before My Father . . .,” conveys the thought of confessing allegiance to Christ as one’s Master and Lord, and on the other hand, of acknowledgment, on His part, of the faithful one as being His worshipper and servant, His loyal follower; this is appropriate to the original idea in *homologeō* of being identified in thought or language. (Vine *n.d.*, 226)

McNeile indicates that the word “confess” has various meanings depending upon the context in which it is used. In reference to how it is used in 10:32 he states: “as to here, to ‘acknowledge him,’ *i.e.* to endorse his claims, to declare agreement with, or adherence to,

him (Rom. x. 9, 1 Jo. ii. 23)” (McNeile 1965, 146). “A necessary criterion for being a disciple of Jesus is to acknowledge him publicly (cf. Rom 1:16, 10:9). This will vary in boldness, fluency, wisdom, sensitivity and frequency from believer to believer (cf. Calvin); but consistently to disown Christ (same verb as in 26:69-75) is to be disowned by Christ” (Carson 1995a, 256).

### ***The Priority of Following Christ***

An essential theme that permeates the discipleship passages found in the Gospels pertains to the priority of following Christ. As a disciple grows in his or her relationship with Christ, he or she also grows in his commitment to Christ.

With the first act of disobedience, innocence was lost. In today’s tangled world, a host of attractions appeal to people’s sin-warped nature, tugging and pulling at everyone. Yet, believers today are called to hold fast the Lord in a commitment that is to be at once complete and challenging. Today too a word from God is heard, directing us to follow what is right and warning us to avoid what is wrong. But today, strangers to innocence, we find the choice of commitment to God’s way is far more difficult. (Richards 1987, 219)

A discussion of the issue of priorities reveals a wide range of perspectives. Some scholars argue for absolute surrender as being indicative of genuine saving faith and true discipleship (MacArthur 1994, 147-48, 222; Boice 1986, 13). Others take the position that surrender is not a part of saving faith and not necessarily a requirement of all Christians (Ryrie 1997, 93-104). Christopher Adsit offers a balancing reminder of the process of discipleship:

As we examine New Testament usage of the word *disciple*, we’ll find some confusing facts. On the one hand, we read about Jesus placing some pretty high standards on people who want to be called His disciples – things like: taking up your cross, following Him, and taking all the criticism and persecution He endured (Matthew 10:24-38); giving up all of your possessions (Luke 14:33); being so much in love with Him that your relationship with your family looks like *hatred* in comparison (Luke 14:26); and being willing to die for Him (Matthew 10:39).

One the other hand, sometimes people who are called disciples in the Bible behave in very “un-disciple-ish” ways. They appear to be : spiritually dull (Matthew 13:36; 16:6-11; John 14:5-10; 16:16-20); used as patsies by Satan (Matthew 16:21-23; 26:14-16); full of spiritual pride (Mark 10:35-45; John 13:36-38); uncommitted (John 6:66); lacking in compassion for others (Mark 10:13,14); violent and wrathful (Luke 9:54,55; John 18:10,11); secretive about their devotion to Jesus (John 19:38); opposing Jesus’ intentions (John 13:5-11); deserting Jesus in his greatest hour of need (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:43-46,50). (Adsit 1996, 33-34)

Both Ryrie and MacArthur acknowledge that their position views surrender as the product of salvation. “Great Commission disciples are believers who are learning and obeying. But learning and obeying are not *prerequisites* for believing; they are *products* of believing” (Ryrie 1997, 95). MacArthur, in discussing the need to take up the cross states: “this teaching is not absolute in the sense that it disallows temporary failures like that of Peter. But even Peter did ultimately prove himself to be a true disciple, didn’t he? The time came when he willingly gave his life for Jesus’ sake” (MacArthur 1994, 227). Being a disciple is not a position one achieves; it is a process one is involved in. “Discipleship involves both becoming a disciple and being a disciple. At times the focus is on the entrance into the process (evangelism), but most often the focus is on growing in the process (maturity); it includes both teaching and life transformation” (Samra 2003, 220). The process for every believer leads to the same product: “spiritual formation for the Christian basically refers to the Spirit-driven process of forming the inner world of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself” (Willard 2002, 22).

Though there are a wide variety of perspectives related to the issue of priorities, there is a general consensus that a disciple of Jesus Christ must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Christ. Where this level of commitment begins or what it actually entails is a matter of great debate, but an individual who is a genuine disciple is

one who will be progressing on the path of transformation. “The heart of real discipleship is a commitment to be like Jesus Christ” (MacArthur 1994, 224).

The issue of priority is often addressed in the area of relationship. It focuses on the issue of relationship with one’s family (Matt 10:34-37, Luke 14:26) as well as one’s relationship to himself (Matt 10:38-39, 16:24-26, Luke 9:23-26). Disciples are called to love God with all their heart and to hate their families and their own selves. The use of the term “hate” does not refer to an emotional hatred of one’s family or oneself. “The Lord is saying we must be unquestioningly loyal to him, even above our families – and especially above ourselves” (MacArthur 1994, 226). The goal for a disciple is fulfillment of the Great Commandment: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all mind” (Matt 22:37). One’s relationship with God is to be the most important of all relationships.

A second area that relates to the issue of priority relates to the area of sacrifice. “Discipleship is not a casual affair to Jesus, as (Luke) 9:57-62 certify” (Bock 1996, 284). As individuals approached Him “as ‘would-be’ disciples” (Kingsbury 1988, 48), Jesus identified sacrifices that His disciples would be expected to make. Luke records three encounters that Jesus had with potential disciples (9:57-62), while Matthew records only two such encounters (8:18-23). In Luke’s gospel, two encounters were initiated by the potential disciple, while the third encounter involved an invitation by Jesus to a potential disciple. The central theme in each of these encounters emphasizes the sacrifice involved in being a disciple of Jesus: “Those who would follow him wherever he goes must be ready to share the homeless lot of the Son of man, to place discipleship above the claims of family and duty, and to persevere to the end” (Marshall 1978, 408). Being a disciple of

Jesus meant more than simply walking behind a Rabbi; it suggests “the student’s submission to the teacher” (Bock 1996, 284). Sacrifices would certainly be expected of all who would answer the call to follow Christ.

The third area related to the issue of priority, which is closely related to the expectancy of sacrifice, focusing on two things: counting the cost of following Christ and denying self. In Luke 14:28-35, Jesus equates counting the cost of discipleship to considering the cost of constructing a home or going to war.

The parables emphasize the complete dedication of resources one must make in order to complete a task or win a battle. The discipleship saying emphasizes the complete dedication of oneself that a person must make to Jesus. There seems to be a twofold teaching. First, when looking ahead at the long path of discipleship, one must recognize that complete dedication is required for the long haul. Those who are only half-hearted will abandon the task. Second, when a person gives away the right of ownership to all one has, he or she is utterly dependent upon Jesus to supply the necessary resources to accomplish the tasks to which Jesus calls his disciples. (Wilkins 1992c, 215)

Jesus’ comments about counting the cost were made to a large multitude rather than to the twelve (9:18-26). Bock notes:

He (Jesus) has no desire to hide his requirements from those who want to follow him, as if he wants to get our decision first and then tell us the rest of the story. Jesus makes it clear to everyone just how much following him requires. He must be first, and they must be ready to identify with him in his suffering. That may mean persecution. Discipleship is a tough road to walk. To trust him is to embrace him as the answer to the journey of salvation, including the rough patches that come with discipleship. (Bock 1996, 401)

The purpose of Jesus’ statements was to identify the cost upfront, helping potential disciples know the cost that conversion will require. Luke 14:33 must be understood in light of counting the cost, lest it be interpreted as an addition to the message of salvation by grace through faith alone. When Jesus said “any who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple,” He was indicating the potential cost

that dedication to Christ would require. “The giving up ‘everything’ means recognizing that God has claim on all areas of our lives. Part of discipleship is learning from God what he desires in these areas” (Bock 1996, 402). Marshall adds, “The disciple must be continually ready (present tense) to give up all that he has got in order to follow Jesus” (Marshall 1978, 594). “Nothing else must be a substitute for Jesus as the focus of allegiance: neither family (v. 26), nor wealth (12:13-21, 16:10-13, 14-15, 19-31), nor one’s own life (14:26), nor anything at all (v. 33)” (Wilkins 1992c, 216). Giving up everything does not save, but one must be aware that salvation brings with it the call to be willing to place one’s relationship with Jesus as top priority in life.

Counting the cost also brings a call to deny oneself, take up one’s cross and follow Christ. On a number of occasions, Jesus indicated that those who wished to follow Christ must also be willing to deny themselves (Matt 10:38-39, 16:24-26; Mark 8:34-38; Luke 9:23-26, 14:27). The goal of a disciple is to be like his teacher (Matt 10:24; Luke 6:40), and Christ sets forth two areas in which a disciple will be like his teacher. First, a disciple is called to deny himself. “We must be careful not to confuse the call for self-denial with some kind of asceticism – denying things to oneself that delight one – or with self-discipline” (Garland 1996, 333). “To deny oneself is to be aware only of Christ and no more of self, to see only him who goes before and no more the road which is too hard for us” (Bonhoeffer 1995, 88). This is not an isolated event that takes place, but a continuous and ongoing denial of one’s will and instead an acceptance of His will. “Jesus stipulated that those who wish to follow Him must be prepared to shift the center of gravity in their lives from a concern for self to reckless abandon to the will of God” (Lane 1974, 307).

Second, a disciple is called to take up his cross. Jesus made these statements prior to His crucifixion, so the disciples did not yet fully understand that this would be the method of His impending death. They were, however, acquainted with crucifixion and the requirement of the condemned to carry their own cross through the streets (Carson 1995b, 379): “Let the disciple take up the position of the man who is already condemned to death. Hence the saying refers not so much to literal martyrdom as to the attitude of self-denial which regards its life in this world as *already finished*” (Marshall 1978, 373).

Unlike some contemporary peddlers of the gospel, Jesus does not offer his disciples varieties of self-fulfillment, intoxicating spiritual experiences, or intellectual stimulation. He presents them with a cross. He does not invite them to try the cross on for size to see if they like it. He does not ask for volunteers to carry one for extra credit. This particular demand separates the disciples from the admirers. Disciples must do more than survey the wondrous cross, glory in the cross of Christ, and love the old rugged cross, as beloved hymns have it. They must become like Jesus in obedience and live the cross. (Garland 1996, 334)

Having denied self and taken up one’s cross, Jesus then invites those disciples to follow Him.

Luke 9:23 has an interesting sequence of tenses. All three verbs are imperatives, but the call to “deny” [one]self” and “take up [one’s]cross” are in Greek aorist tenses, while the call to “follow [Jesus]” is in the present tense. This means that discipleship involves the fundamental commitment of self-denial and bearing one’s cross, while the call to follow Jesus is constant, growing out of the base commitments. Discipleship therefore requires a basic shift of orientation as we align ourselves with God’s will through a humble renunciation of our own agenda. (Bock 1996, 265)

Though the Greek tense for “take up one’s cross” is aorist, Bock indicates in a footnote that “Only Luke adds the word ‘daily’ to the idea of taking up one’s cross” (Bock 1996, 265). Though one makes an initial decision to deny oneself and take up one’s cross, it is a decision that has continuing results. As a disciple follows Jesus and

matures in this relationship, there will be continuing areas of refinement that will require renewed commitment of dying to self and obediently following the will of the Father.

Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself [i.e., the old self] and take up his cross and follow me." I note that Jesus does not call for us to take up *Christ's* cross. Christian discipleship does not mean martyrdom. Jesus calls on his followers to take up *their* cross. In Christian theology Christ's cross is the key to our salvation. It is the focus of history, representing the moment that the sins of history, representing the moment that the sins of all ages crushed life from the Son of God. But the cross had an additional significance to Jesus. To Jesus, living his human life in union with God, the cross was the ultimate test of self-denial and of surrender to the Father's will. In Gethsemane Jesus looked ahead with dread and yet prayed, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matt 26:39). In that moment of ultimate stress, Jesus models the disciple's choice. He took up the cross of the Father's will when that will called for self-denial.

The issue remains the same for each of us. As we live our human life, we reach crossroad after crossroad. All too often the desires and motives of the old self tug and pull at us. At such moments the disciple says, with Jesus, "Not as I will," and in this way takes up his or her cross. With each daily cross we choose to bear, we take another step away from an old self we yearn to lose toward that new and Christlike self we yearn to become.

The disciple's choice is a choice to do the will of God when our will and his will conflict. The choice to bear the daily cross brings us closer and closer to the disciple's goal. (Richards 1987, 226)

### ***Implications Impacting Exposition***

The discipleship passages that are presented within the Gospels are challenging to the present day expositor. They contain many hard sayings that stretch an individual's thinking as well as commitment to Christ. Michael J. Wilkins discusses several key implications that Jesus' teachings on discipleship have for disciples today. He identifies three major implications that one must be aware of in developing a biblical theology of discipleship: semantical, theological, and practical (Wilkins 1992c, 42-46). The semantical implications refer to the varied uses of the term "disciple."

Our choice of terminology determines the kind of experience that we communicate to people. Since all true Christians are disciples, the ministry of the church may be seen in its broadest sense as "discipleship." Various ministries within

the church should be seen as specialization, aspects, or stages of discipleship training. If we incorrectly use discipleship terminology, we run the risk of communicating that the uncommitted have the option to remain that way if they so desire, or else we place unrealistic expectations upon the committed ones. Discipleship teaching is applicable to all Christians. (Wilkins 1992c, 44)

Wilkins also discusses the theological implications that arise from a detailed study of discipleship. The major theological implications revolve around what has been termed the “Lordship Debate.” This debate revolves around the issue of commitment necessary at the point of salvation. Expositors have used the discipleship passages of Jesus to defend two opposite ends of the theological spectrum. He notes: “Our study of his [Jesus] discipleship teachings will have profound theological implications, but we need to allow Jesus to inform our theology rather than our theological agendas to determine our interpretation” (Wilkins 1992c, 46).

Finally, Wilkins also discusses the practical implications of discipleship studies. His emphasis is placed upon the misunderstanding of the topic of discipleship by many Christians who view discipleship for the extremist: “Rather, we need to recognize that when Jesus spoke of disciples he had in mind what would be the *normal* Christian, not the abnormal” (Wilkins 1992c, 46).

One other implication that Wilkins does not elucidate could be called the hermeneutical implication. This implication would challenge the expositor to maintain sound hermeneutical principles in the interpretation and application of these discipleship practices. One of the elementary hermeneutical laws is the matter of context. When interpreting these passages, one must consider the context in which these discipleship statements are being made. At times the audience is the twelve disciples; at other times the audience is the multitude. In each of these cases, the content of the passage must be

interpreted based upon the intended audience. A passage spoken to the disciples must not be applied today to lost individuals. Likewise, a passage that is delivered to the multitude should not be limited to only committed disciples. Applying sound hermeneutical principles will allow the expositor to develop a biblical understanding of discipleship that accurately reflects scripture's teaching on this subject.

### **The Call to Christlikeness: The Emphasis of Growth/Maturity in the Epistles**

The word "disciple" is used frequently in the Gospels and the book of Acts, but it is not used one time in the Epistles. Some suggest that the reason the term "disciple" is not found in the Epistles is because:

It was not so easy for the Greek communities to take over μαθητής . . . because this might give rise to the idea that Christianity was simply a philosophical movement. It may thus be seen why the usage did not make its way in the Greek world, and why μαθητής for disciple of Jesus or Christian declined in primitive Christianity. (Rengstorf 1965, 459)

Others suggest that the term "disciple" is not used in the Epistles because it was so closely attached to the person of Jesus; thus they contend that it is less appropriate to use the term because of the lack of the physical presence of Christ (Hawthorne 1975, 130). Even though the term "disciple" is not used in the Epistles, it is clearly present in meaning and purpose. "In the terminology, teaching, and metaphorical language of the Epistles and Revelation, the apostles give a restatement of discipleship for our day" (Wilkins 1992c, 294). Wilkins then goes on to discuss a list of related terms used in the Epistles that relate to the concept of discipleship and a disciple: believers, brothers/sisters, servants, church, Christians" (Wilkins 1992c, 294-301).

After Jesus ascended to heaven, He was no longer physically present with His disciples, which necessitated a change in the idea of discipleship. This change

manifests itself in a change in terminology. The word “disciple” is not used outside the Gospels, except in Acts where it is a technical term referring to all believers. Yet the goal of the Christian life is to become like Christ, just as this was stressed in the Gospels (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 4:13-15; Col 3:9-10; 1 John 3:2). (Samar 2003, 222-23)

Lawrence O. Richards states that “it is clear from the whole New Testament that the goal of discipleship – transformation of the old into the new – is a major Christian theme” (Richards 1987, 228). And so even though the word “disciple” is not used in the Epistles, the concept of an individual forsaking all and following Christ is clearly present.

### ***God's Predestined Plan***

The process of discipleship has as its goal a life transformed into the image and likeness of Christ. Paul expressed this clearly in Romans 8:29 when he stated that “Those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” Clearly, God’s eternal goal “is to make us an innumerable company of Christ’s brothers and sisters who are fully like His Son and thus fully like Himself” (Hoekema 1987, 67). The purpose of salvation is clearly more than simply obtaining “fire insurance” (MacArthur 1994, 222). “God’s purpose for us . . . is not just future happiness or a guaranteed entrance into heaven but perfect likeness to Christ and therefore to Himself” (Hoekema 1987, 90).

### ***Follow Me as I Follow Christ***

In a previous section the term μιμέομαι was discussed in length. Michaelis concludes rightly that the term disciple and imitator are one in the same (Michaelis 1967,

673). This term provides both a conceptual and a theological link between the term “disciple” in the gospels and a Christian as a follower of Jesus in the Epistles.

Paul gives himself as an example for imitation (1 Co 4:16; 11:1; Php 3:17, 2Th 3:7, 9), but he does not hold himself up as the ideal of mature perfection. On one occasion he deliberately confesses his own imperfection before he gives the call to imitate him (cf. Php 3:13, 17). Imitation of Paul’s ways (1Co 4:16-17) should bring believers to an appropriate understanding of the message of the Cross and its implications for their life as a community.” (Wilkins 1992c, 307-08).

That believers were expected to imitate one another is clearly seen in the plentiful examples provided in Scripture. Hebrews 11 clearly holds forth an example of faith for all to imitate, even though the term “imitate” is not specifically used (Michaelis 1967, 666). Christ is the object of the believer’s imitation, but an individual’s walk with Christ can serve as an example for others to follow. The goal of imitation is still the same: Christlikeness.

### *The Expectation of Maturity*

When a child is born into this world, no one wonders if that child will grow and become a mature adult. In fact, if a child does not grow, the doctors become very concerned and begin to examine the child to see why he or she is not growing. The reason for the doctor’s concern is simple: a new born baby is expected to grow from infancy to childhood, to adulthood and maturity.

The same is true of God’s expectation for His people. “The transformational goal of discipleship has never changed, nor has the challenge of discipleship to reject the old in favor of doing God’s will, even when His will can be characterized as a daily cross” (Richards 1987, 229).

Jesus meant more than “make converts.” While every true believer is a disciple, Jesus meant more than just “go and do evangelism.” Believers are to be

baptized, openly identified with Christ, and taught to obey all that is commanded, that is, to be trained and built into mature, reproducing disciples. (Hull 1988, 58)

The Epistles clearly present maturity as the goal for every believer. Paul explained to the Ephesian church that God gifted individuals in the church so that they would be built up with the goal that “we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13 NIV). James indicates that the trials that a believer goes through are used by God to develop perseverance. “Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything” (Jas 1:4 NIV). The word “mature” or “perfect” in the KJV captures God’s goal for Christians:

The term does not imply absolute perfection (cf. 3:2), but rather the ethical character of the mature believer. It denotes that which has attained its proper goal. In connection with animals or people, it indicates adult growth and maturity – the opposite of babyhood. Thus James is thinking of a personality that has reached full development. (Hiebert 1979, 77)

Spiritual growth and maturity are the goal, but struggles with sin are a reality. “Unfortunately, many believers succumb to spiritual infantile paralysis and remain in a state of childish backwardness in their spiritual life” (Hiebert 1979, 77). The author of the book of Hebrews laments that his readers had stalled in the spiritual development, wanting to discuss the deeper truths of God’s Word but not being able to because they were spiritually immature (Heb 5:11-14). Peter warns his readers not to become ensnared in the web of sin because it will affect their spiritual development (1 Pet 2:1-2). “It follows, therefore, that Christian experience can appropriately be described, with Peter, as a process of growth. But equally it can also be described as a process of education” (Hodges 1989, 70).

Care must be taken in understanding the believer's relationship with sin. J.I. Packer, as quoted by John MacArthur, states: "The form that sanctification takes is conflict with the indwelling sin that constantly assaults us. The conflict, which is lifelong, involves both resistance to sin's assaults and the counterattack of mortification, whereby we seek to drain the life out of this troublesome enemy" (MacArthur 1993, 123). The believer has been freed from slavery to sin (Rom 6:1-14), from a lifestyle of habitual sin. But the struggles with sin are an ever present temptation (Rom 7:7-25, 1 John 2:15-17) that the believer must learn to deal with (Enns 1989, 313-14).

Being a disciple does not indicate arrival at the goal. Rather, it indicates that an individual is progressing on the path toward the goal of maturity. "No disciple will fail to learn something . . . . But how much he will learn, no one can say. No disciple will fail to bear fruit, but how much and how visible and how long, no one can say" (Ryrie 1997, 95). Growth, purity and holiness are goals, not prerequisites, for discipleship. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, indicated that a genuine believer would "hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt 5:6). D. Martin Lloyd-Jones states that a believer will "long to be free from the power of sin," and will possess a "longing to be positively holy" (Lloyd-Jones n.d., 78-79). Every Christian is a disciple, and every disciple is in the process of being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.

### **Christian Maturity: An Evaluation of the Theological and Educational Assumptions of Discipleship**

Biblical evidence clearly points to discipleship as a process of transformation that begins at salvation and continues until glorification. The period between salvation

and glorification is itself a lifelong process of being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Salvation, as the word is used in Scripture, is wider than justification. There is a past, a future, and just as really, a present. The infinite work of Christ upon the cross brings to the Christian more than justification. In the *future*, there is glorification. When Christ returns, there will be the resurrection of the body, and eternity. But there is also a *present* aspect of salvation. Sanctification is our present relationship to our Lord, the present tense. (Schaeffer 1984, 73-74)

Wilkins identifies this as the “already and the not yet” tension. At salvation an individual is already a disciple, but during his life he is not yet a complete disciple (Wilkins 1992c, 42). Spiritual maturity is the goal for every believer and the challenge every church faces as it seeks to fulfill the Great Commission.

This section will explore three aspects of Christian maturity. Spirituality is an ancient word that is embroiled in a great amount of contemporary confusion. The first section will discuss the issue of Christian spirituality in contrast to the many counterfeits that are invading Christianity. After spirituality is defined, a discussion of the goal of Christian discipleship will be explored. This section will discuss the functional characteristics of a maturing Christian disciple. The final section is a discussion of the role of active involvement in discipleship practices in the lives of a Christian disciple. This section will discuss the various discipleship practices in which churches are engaged for the purpose of fulfilling the Great Commission’s command to “make disciples.”

### ***Christian Spirituality and Its Counterfeits***

The topic of spirituality is quite popular. A quick search on Amazon.com using the word “spirituality” produced 20,477 books and over 300 magazines. Compare that to a similar search using the words “Christian Spirituality” and you discover only 5,025

books and only 21 magazines committed to this subject. With such a flood of books and magazines committed to discussing the issues of Spirituality, there is no wondering why there is so much confusion in the church as it relates to this topic.

People who discuss spirituality are not always talking about the same thing. Your viewpoint regarding the definition of spirituality depends on your point of view. Shirley MacLaine types, for example, seem to define spiritual maturity in terms far broader than the classic Christian view. For New Agers, spirituality relates to “human potential, ultimate progress, well-being, higher entities, wholeness, or openness to the infinite.” This view tends to deemphasize, redefine, or totally abandon the classic, centuries-old concept of God, and urges us to look within ourselves to find transcendent powers.

Christians, however, usually work from a more biblical perspective. They tend to build their definitions of spiritual maturity on foundations similar to those of the apostle Paul: “Have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16); “Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5). Thus, for Christians, spirituality concerns the movements of God’s Spirit in personal life, in churches, and in the cosmos. (Miller 1994, 11-12)

The specific term “spirituality” is not used in the scripture, but the terms “spirit” and “spiritual” are used quite frequently. “When Paul uses the term *spiritual* he is describing that which is guided by the Holy Spirit” (Peace 2001, 658). One of the main roles of the Holy Spirit is to guide one into a deeper relationship with the Father (John 16:5-15). Man was created as a spiritual being, with the ability to have a personal relationship with God: “The physical human frame as created was designed for interaction with the spiritual realm” (Willard 1988, 77). Though this relationship was broken by sin, the personal ability and desire for intimacy with God was never removed. “Spirituality is simply the holistic quality of human life as it was meant to be, at the center of which is our relation to God” (Willard 1988, 77). “Spirituality is understood to be an innate characteristic of human beings. At our core, in the depths of our being, at the place where our true self exists we can and do meet God” (Peace 2001, 658).

A distinction can be clearly made between spirituality in general and Christian spirituality.

Generally, “spiritual” refers to what transcends materialism or exceeds preoccupation with self-maintenance. Positively, it is the human capacity for self-transcendence in love, in fidelity to truth whether or not it agrees with me, in free commitment to a worthy cause, in imaginative appreciation for art and music, in a sense of unity with the cosmos. (Conn 1999, 86)

“Spirituality is a matter of *another reality*” (Willard 1988, 67). It deals in the realm of the spiritual, focusing on an individual’s personal relationship with the transcendent God of heaven. This relationship is a relationship of the soul but is manifest clearly in the outward actions of an individual living by faith. “Every Christian’s spirituality is her or his own total life embedded in the divine self-donation and human response to that gift. It is, in faith, a relationship to God revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit lived in community of mutual giving and receiving” (Conn 1999 86).

The terms “spirituality” and “religious” must not be confused. Spirituality relates to one’s internal/personal relationship with God, while religion relates to one’s external relationship with the rules of God. Francis A Schaffer states that “true spirituality is inward” (Schaffer 1984, 7). Jerry Bridges, in discussing holiness which is an aspect of spirituality, states: “In some circles, holiness is equated with a series of specific prohibitions – usually in such areas as smoking, drinking, and dancing . . . . When we follow this approach to holiness, we are in danger of becoming like the Pharisees with their endless lists of trivial do’s and don’ts, and their self-righteous attitude” (Bridges 1978, 19). Spirituality is not measured in one’s ability to keep a set of Laws; spirituality is measured by the motivation for obedience to those Laws.

I can take lists that men make and I can seem to keep them, but to do that, my heart does not have to be bowed. But when I come to the inward aspect of the Ten

Commandments, when I come to the inward aspect of the Law of Love, if I am listening even in a poor fashion to the direction of the Holy Spirit, I can no longer feel proud. I am brought to my knees. In this life I can never say, “I have arrived; it is finished; look at me – I am holy.” When we talk of the Christian life or true spirituality, when we talk about freedom from the bonds of sin, we must be wrestling with the inward problems of not coveting against God and men, of loving God and men, and not merely some set of externals. (Shaffer 1984, 9)

Therefore, spirituality must not be viewed as something we do; rather it should be viewed as something we are, as well as something we become.

Christian spirituality, therefore, seeks to develop a deeper personal relationship with God, through faith in Christ, and the empowering work of the Holy Spirit. The goal of this divine/human relationship is a heart and life fully devoted to God, which in turn influences every aspect of one’s life. Spirituality is not about a list of “do’s” and “don’ts.” Spirituality is about a disciplined life lived with God that results in the transformation of that life.

### ***Spiritual Maturity and Completeness: The Goal of Christian Discipleship***

The goal of Christian discipleship is maturity. The Epistles paint a picture of growth from infancy to maturity or completion that sets a clear target for all Christians (1 Pet 2:1-2; Jas 1:4; Eph 4:12-13). Spiritual maturity in scripture is consistent with physiological maturity that humans go through from infancy to adulthood with the exception being that spiritual maturity is not always consistent with the chronological spiritual age. An individual may have been a Christian ten years and still be a spiritual infant. This was the heart breaking reality Paul faced with the Corinthian believers (1 Cor 3:1-3), and the author of the book of Hebrews faced with his readers (Heb 5:11-6:3). Maturity is the goal, but maturity is not automatic.

Capturing a picture of a spiritually mature believer is a daunting task for any researcher. The intensely personal nature of one's relationship with God, along with the challenges of language and theological perspectives, cause many to question the reliability of the findings (Salter, Hall, and Edwards 2001, 4). These challenges, however, should not keep researchers from pursuing these lines of inquiry because the insights obtained from the data collected provide a wealth of information for Christian educators and church leaders.

Many of the measurement tools used in evaluating spiritual maturity approach the topic from a psycho-religious perspective. Therefore, care should be taken in understanding the biblical and theological assumptions that serve as the foundation of the instrument. In assessing the measurement tools used to measure spiritual maturity, Sappington and Wilson provide a lens through which analysis of specific instruments should be filtered. "Thus, from a theological and biblical analysis, faith must be further clarified as involving at least a three-dimensional perspective. First, faith involves a relationship. Second, the author of James points to the use of "pistis" faith as a creed or body of knowledge that a person holds (2:14-16, 19). Third, faith is behavioral" (Sappington and Wilson 1992, 46, 51).

These aspects of biblical faith (relationship, content, and behavior) provide a backdrop by which to begin evaluating the respective theoretical positions represented in the measuring tools. While each aspect of faith is important the various researchers have tended to focus on one or two rather than all three. (Sappington and Wilson 1992, 51-52)

Basinger issues a similar list of qualities related to the measurement of religiousness: measurement of some observable religious behavior, measurement of cognitive beliefs about religious matters, and measurement of actual behavior that is

based on beliefs (Basinger 1990, 6) It is important to note that the scope of Basinger's analysis focuses on the psycho-social research that is seeking to determine religiousness, which is inclusive of much more than seeking to measure Christian spiritual maturity.

When one considers the issues related to spiritual maturity, one must be aware of some of the complexities that face the researcher as well as those seeking meaning from the data. Slater, Hall, and Edwards provide a cautionary list of important issues one should consider when seeking to measure "religion and spirituality": the lack of precision in definitions of various constructs, the issue of illusory spiritual health, ceiling effects, social desirability, and bias (Slater, Hall, and Edwards 2001, 5). Basinger raises two philosophical concerns that surround an attempt to measure "religiousness." The first focuses on linguistic concerns and raises questions about the ambiguous nature of religious language, the inherently private nature of internal states of mind, and the potentially equivocal nature of observable religious behavior (Basinger 1990, 5-9).

The researcher must keep in mind that even the best constructed instruments for measuring doctrinal belief and internal states of mind are subject to linguistic limitations. Some instruments, of course, are more problematic than others. Those that simply ask an individual to respond to a term or a brief phrase are most affected. Those that utilize personal interviews are least affected. But the inherently ambiguous nature of religious language will *always* make it very difficult for the researcher to determine what he or she really wants to be asking and what those being approached really mean to be saying in response and, accordingly, will always make it difficult to determine what the study really demonstrates about religiousness. (Basinger 1990, 8)

In discussing the potentially equivocal nature of observable religious behavior,

Basinger states:

As I see it, the primary reason we normally consider such things as church attendance and prayer to be religious activities is not because there is anything intrinsically religious in sitting in a certain building or saying certain words. Rather, these activities are considered religious primarily because they are forms of behavior normally exhibited by *individuals* who are considered religious. However,

agnostics and even atheists sometimes attend church on a consistent basis or read the Bible and pray publicly, while some who are obviously committed to God refuse to enter any building in which an organized religious service is taking place. Moreover, much of the behavior exhibited by individuals considered religious is also exhibited by individuals considered nonreligious. Those in both groups give assistance to those in need, care for their children, etc. Often the only difference is the reason for which such activity is undertaken.

Accordingly, it seems to me that researchers must clearly distinguish between the measurement of the number of individuals who behave in ways that have traditionally been considered religious and the measurement of how individuals who consider themselves religious actually behave – which may or may not be consistent with “traditional religious behavior.” (Basinger 1990, 9)

The second philosophical concern that Basinger raises focuses on interpretative concerns. He discusses the “is/ought” fallacy that focuses on the descriptive and prescriptive analysis.

Descriptive statements tell us what *is* the case; prescriptive statements tell us what *ought* to be the case. To say that Jim has two wives is descriptive; to claim he should or should not have two wives is prescriptive. However, an “ought” does not follow necessarily from an “is.” It does not automatically follow from the fact that Jim *has* taken two wives that he *ought not* to have done so. We normally need to appeal to some set of basic ethical principles (value assumptions) to determine whether what *is* the case *should* be the case. (Basinger 1990, 10)

The philosophical assumption that an *ought* is relative to an individual must be rejected. Basinger, in talking about the work of James Fowler states:

Anyone doing work in faith development represents his or her own theological perspective on a very debatable issue, we can more clearly see the necessity of separating the important descriptive question of when (or under what conditions) individuals can develop the *capacity* to practice their faith in a certain fashion from the prescriptive question of whether doing so actually represents an ideal, mature or even acceptable outworking of faith. (Basinger 1990, 12)

Spiritual maturity is not subjectively based upon what one perceives as maturity. Spiritual maturity is objectively based upon the authority of God’s Word. Therefore it is possible for one to state what a maturing spiritual disciple *ought* to be: in belief, action, and attitude.

Spiritual maturity is the goal of the Christian life. The moment we, by faith, trust Christ as our savior we become a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It is at that point the Holy Spirit begins transforming us into the image of Christ. In defining spiritual maturity, Les Steele says:

**Spiritual Maturity:** Quality of being fully developed in spirit. For the Christian this development entails, more specifically, being conformed to the image of Christ. Christian spiritual maturity must be understood paradoxically; it is something we are, while being at the same time something we are not. It is a gift of grace given at our new birth, and yet we are called to grow into maturity through sanctification. (Steele 2001, 659)

In responding to the question by one of the teachers of the Law, Jesus provided a snapshot of one who was spiritually mature: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37-40 NIV). A disciple of Jesus is in the process of “learning to obey” everything Jesus commanded which begins with one’s love for God and then extends toward one’s love for others.

Les Steele indicates that spiritual maturity is characterized by several features. First, it manifests itself in cognitive, emotional, and behavioral change. Second, maturity in the Christian life is characterized by both personal and social holiness. Third, maturity in the Christian life is understood developmentally (Steele 2001, 659-60). In discussing this third characteristic, Steele addresses the influence that psychology and social sciences have had in defining spiritual maturity and offers a cautionary note for Christian educators and leaders:

One of the dangers of incorporating the insights of psychology into our understanding of spiritual maturity is the possibility of importing non-Christian views of human nature into that understanding. Some popular psychological models

assert that the goal of human maturity is self-actualization while the Christian view seeks to move beyond preoccupation with the self. . . . Nevertheless, our understanding of maturity in the Christian life has been helped greatly by these insights. (Steele 2001, 660)

Pentecost, in discussing Hebrews 5:11-14, distills three character qualities of individuals who are still spiritual infants and three character qualities of individuals who are spiritually maturing disciples. In a summary of his discussion, Pentecost states:

Now let us contrast the spiritual babe and the mature man. First, the babe is characterized by his lack of knowledge, and the mature man is characterized by his full and complete knowledge so that he can impart knowledge to someone else. Second, the babe is marked by his dependence upon someone else, and the mature man is marked by his independence. Of course, it goes without saying that the mature man is not independent of the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit. But the mature man does not have to depend upon someone else, like a child depends on a parent, for his knowledge of his spiritual discernment. Third, the baby is marked by his lack of judgment, and the mature man is marked by his judgment. He is able to discern both good and evil because of his knowledge of the Word of God. Thus the apostle, in a very practical and simple way, has put three tests before us by which you and I may determine which of two stages of spiritual development we fit into – maturity or immaturity. Is your life characterized by knowledge or lack of knowledge? Is your life characterized by independence or by dependence? Is your life characterized by ability to use the Word of God or by complete inability to apply the principles and precepts of Scripture to your daily conduct? As you and I evaluate our lives in light of these questions, we can determine whether we fit into the category of a spiritual babe or into the category of one who is maturing in his spiritual experience. (Pentecost 1966, 274-75)

As disciples of Jesus Christ, Christians are to be continually growing and maturing in their love relationship as well as their knowledge of Christ and their dependence upon Him. “Spiritual maturity means giving all I know of myself to all I know of God. This is a lifelong process of growing with God that is drawn forward by God’s grace” (Steele 2001, 660).

And understanding of the commissioning as well as the goal leads back to the purpose of this study: to seek to understand the relationship between a church’s discipleship practices and the impact these practices have upon the spiritual maturity of

disciples. The heart of this research study revolves around *The Discipleship Inventory* developed by Brad J. Waggoner (Waggoner 1991). This inventory was designed to “accurately measure the degree to which a given church member manifests the functional characteristics of a disciple” (Waggoner 1991, 4). Waggoner defines a functional characteristic as “an observable and measurable attitude or attribute of a disciple as described in scripture” (Waggoner 1991, 9). This instrument is designed to provide a “snapshot” of a disciple’s life in order to help assess where he/she is in his/her journey with Christ. Assessing spiritual maturity is accomplished by examining the functional characteristics of a disciple as described in scripture and comparing those characteristics with the lives of members in a given church

In developing this instrument, Waggoner categorized the functional characteristics of a disciple into five domains: attitudes, conduct/behavior, relational/social, ministry involvement/skills, and doctrine/beliefs (Waggoner 1991, 66). These characteristics are imbedded in the discussion in earlier sections of this chapter. Therefore discussion of each characteristic will not be included. Waggoner’s discussion of these functional characteristics can be found in chapter 3 of his Ph.D. dissertation (Waggoner 1991, 65-81).

In discussing the twenty-three functional characteristics of a disciple, Waggoner lists seven attitudes that a disciple possesses.

1. A disciple possesses a desire and willingness to learn.
2. A disciple has conviction regarding the necessity of living in accordance to biblical principles and guidelines.
3. A disciple evidences a repentant attitude when a violation of Scripture occurs.
4. A disciple possesses a willingness to forfeit personal desires and conveniences, if necessary, in order to seek the interests of others.

5. A disciple possesses and demonstrates the character trait of humility.
6. A disciple possesses and demonstrates the character trait of integrity.
7. A disciple is willing to be accountable to others.

Waggoner also discusses conduct or behavior that should characterize a disciple.

8. A disciple manifests a lifestyle of utilizing time and talents for God's purposes.
9. A disciple possesses a lifestyle depicted by intentional compliance with the moral teachings of the Bible and a practice of adapting attitudes and actions in accordance with biblical standards.
10. A disciple maintains appropriate behavior toward those of the opposite sex.
11. A disciple actively seeks to promote social justice and righteousness in society as well as to individuals.

Waggoner lists relational or social skills that characterize a disciple.

12. A disciple values and accepts himself as created in the image of God.
13. A disciple has an awareness of the reality and presence of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.
14. A disciple experiences trust in God in times of adversity as well as in times of prosperity.
15. A disciple seeks to commune with and learn about God through the means of meditation upon Scripture and prayer.
16. A disciple is consistently involved in fellowship with other believers in the context of a local church.
17. A disciple applies oneself to building meaningful relationships with other believers.
18. A disciple maintains a forgiving spirit when wronged.
19. A disciple confesses or seeks forgiveness when guilty of an offense.

Finally, Waggoner lists four skills or ministries in which a disciple possesses or engages.

20. A disciple publicly identifies with Christ and the Church when provided an opportunity.
21. A disciple seeks and takes advantage of opportunities to share the Gospel with others.
22. A disciple is involved in ministering to other believers.
23. A disciple seeks the good of all men with a willingness to meet practical social needs such as food, clothing, and the like.

Waggoner also includes Doctrine/Beliefs in his list of domains. He lists five doctrinal issues that were measured in this study: (1) Eternal security; (2) Salvation; (3) The Holy Spirit (the nature and role of); (4) The Eternal State (the literal existence of heaven and hell); and (5) Scripture (the authority and reliability of).

Just as caution that is used in guarding one's heart against outward conformity to a set of rules as a measure of one's relationship, so caution must also be applied in developing a list of functional characteristics that describe a spiritually maturing disciple. Schaffer offers a clear warning: "I can take lists that men make and I can seem to keep them, but to do that, my heart does not have to be bowed" (Schaffer 1984, 9). A list of functional characteristics allows us to view the fruit of a disciple's life (Matt 7:16-20, John 15:8), but only God knows the sincerity and genuineness of a person's heart.

### ***Equipped and Expected to Grow: The Call to Involvement in Christian Education***

Based upon the theological foundation that all believers are expected to grow toward maturity, this section will both explore the biblical foundation for involvement in Christian education and discuss the importance of involvement in Christian education in the local church.

## **Discipleship Practices: How Churches Are Fulfilling the Great Commission**

God's purpose for His church is very clear. He expects her to make disciples. As has been demonstrated in earlier sections of this chapter, a disciple is an individual who is in the process of being transformed into Christ's likeness. "After people become Christians, the goal is for them not only to *learn* how to live like Christ, but actually to *live* like Christ. This involves nothing less than radical life change. If this is not happening, then discipleship is not happening" (White 1997, 54-55). Bill Hull contends that disciple making is the natural and expected purpose in which churches engage:

I believe the discipling church is the normal church and that disciple making is for everyone and every church because:

1. Christ instructed the church to take part in it.
2. Christ modeled it.
3. The New Testament disciples applied it. (Hull 1990, 10)

Hull also contends that discipling within the local church must be intentional to be truly effective. He offers a definition of discipling that succinctly captures the process in which churches are to be engaged: "*Discipling*: The intentional training of disciples, with accountability, on the basis of loving relationships" (Hull 1990, 32).

Rick Warren, in an article on the Baptist Press web site, articulates the misnomer that spiritual growth automatically happens within the ministry of a local church:

Many churches act as though spiritual growth is automatic once a person is born again. They operate with no organized plan for following up new believers and no comprehensive strategy for developing members to maturity. They leave it all to chance.

They assume that Christians automatically will grow to maturity if they attend church services. All we need to do is just encourage people to show up at meetings, they think, and the job will get done.

Obviously, this isn't true. Spiritual growth does not just happen once you are saved, even if you attend services regularly. Churches are filled with people who've

attended for their entire lives yet they are still spiritual babies. An assimilated member is not the same as a mature member. (Warren 2003, bpnews.net)

James Emery White identifies four assumptions commonly made about life change: (1) It happens at salvation; (2) It continues naturally over time; (3) It is achieved largely by an act of the will; and (4) It is best accomplished alone (White 1997, 56). In examining these assumptions, White exposes the “old math” or what might be considered an old paradigm of discipleship: “Salvation + Time + Will + Individual Application = Life Change” (White 1997, 55).

Hull also challenges the old paradigm of discipleship on a different level. He identifies the pattern that many churches follow as being “Christocentric” which he defines as “a model which relied on Christ’s leadership alone (Hull 1990, 12). Hull’s Christocentric concept of discipleship focuses on following the pattern of Jesus in discipling people, with the one major difference being that Christ Himself is not physically present any longer to personally disciple individuals.

In the Christocentric model, Jesus was the master and the disciples the learners. Because He was God, Jesus was enough for the twelve: He could lead them, meet every need, and develop each follower. No one had to make guesses about God’s will or decide where to do outreach. Just ask Jesus. (Hull 1990, 30)

Hull demonstrates through an examination of the New Testament that it was Jesus’ intention to transfer discipleship from Himself to His church after His resurrection. He demonstrates that the church practiced “Churchocentric” discipleship which utilized the spiritual giftedness of all believers in the spiritual development of other believers.

The churchocentric model recognizes the rich diversity and giftedness of the body of Christ and the way it works together as a team to create a discipling environment. When the narrow corridors of the Christocentric model are torn down and replaced by the large rooms of the churchocentric model, many who have rejected discipling as a viable church priority will take a second look. (Hull 1990 32)

White offers four truths about life change to counteract the four assumptions:

(1) It begins at salvation; (2) It takes more than just time; (3) It is about training not trying; and (4) It is a team event (White 1997, 58). Based upon these four truths about life change, he offers a new “math equation” that reflects the “churchocentric” model which Hull proposes: “Salvation + Intentionality + Training + Community = Life Change” (White 1997, 63).

Intentionality is the mark of a church that has a serious commitment to making disciples. In 1999 George Barna released the findings of a study which looked at nine habits of highly effective churches. Intentionality was one of the pillars of these churches: “A ministry effort that is unintentional is not one that we can rely upon to help people become more Christlike or to enable a church to become highly effective” (Barna 1999, 22-23). Intentionality is seen most clearly in the discipleship practices of these churches.

These churches do not undertake Christian education, discipleship and faith development simply because they are traditional activities of a church. Their educational efforts are designed to produce personal spiritual growth that reflects a well-conceived and carefully developed philosophy and practice of Christian maturity. . . . Highly effective churches intentionally provide systematic theological education to all their people. There is a model desperately needed by the American Church as an antidote to the spiritual ignorance and biblical illiteracy of our nation’s believers. These churches implement a systematic educational approach to address two primary ends to ensure that each person has a realistic opportunity to become a complete believer (a comprehensively mature Christian), and to facilitate the development and use of a biblical worldview for decision-making. (Barna 1999, 131-32)

Hull emphasizes that churches must be committed to the process of life transformation rather than a program that perpetuates tradition: “Discipling is not an event; it is a process. No system can make a disciple because discipleship requires that a person’s will be activated by the Holy Spirit. The church has the responsibility to provide the clear vision and the vehicles that bring Christians into mature discipleship” (Hull

1990, 33). Intentionality on the part of the church as well as the individual Christian is necessary if life transformation is to occur.

Ron Bennett identifies three major categories in which a church's discipleship practices can be categorized. In identifying these three major categories, Bennett uses a wonderfully creative metaphor that captures the essence and dynamic of discipleship.

There are three types of clubs in the golf bag that need to be mastered to develop an intentional discipling church. Roughly speaking, there are the drivers, the irons, and the putter. Each club has advantages and limitations. Skilled golfers not only know how to use each club, but also know how to select the right club for each shot.

The drivers or "woods" – so called either due to the historic wooden head and shaft or because that's where most people wind up when they use them – give the golfer the greatest opportunity to achieve distance. Unfortunately, a small degree of initial inaccuracy produces an exaggerated error at the end of the shot, so using drivers typically means sacrificing accuracy for distance. The irons, on the other hand, provide increased control in lieu of respectable distance. Finally, the most accurate club available is the putter, but it works best only within very short distances.

Jesus mandated discipling making, something that always happens within three relational dynamics – large group, small groups, and life to life. These relational dynamics parallel golf clubs in that each one has strengths and limitations. And, like a skilled golfer, the intentional discipling making community benefits from learning when and how to use each one most effectively. Some ministries favor one and ignore the others. But for maximum impact, it's important to understand and play with all three. (Bennett 2001, 72)

Randy Frazee is the pastor of Pantego Bible Church in Arlington, Texas.

Pastor Frazee, by his own admission, states that his main objective at one point in his ministry was to fulfill the ABC's (attendance, buildings, and cash) (Frazee 2001, 88). Then he was challenged by a friend to develop a biblically based standard by which he determined the real impact the church's ministry was having upon people. Frazee soon discovered his "ABC's" were woefully inadequate. This led to the development of an intentional assimilation strategy that sought to build community which stimulated real

spiritual growth and transformation. In Frazee's model, there are four divisions, each with a specific target audience and purpose.

1. **Worship Service: (Large Group/Inspiration)** The purpose of the worship service is to inspire people to become fully developing followers of Christ.
2. **Community Group: (Midsize Group/Instruction)** The purpose of the community group is to instruct people to become fully developing followers of Christ.
3. **Home Group: (Small Group/Involvement)** The purpose of home group is to involve people in the Seven Functions of Biblical Community (see pages 82-83).
4. **Individual: (1 Person/Introspection)** The purpose for each individual is to be introspective about his or her personal growth as a fully developing follower of Christ. (Frazee 2001, 91-103)

Within these major categories a foundation for discipleship practices of a church can be established. Since the spiritual transformation process is a dynamic process with many variables, the approaches that churches implement may not always fall neatly within a specific discipleship practice. George Barna's research of highly effective churches in the area of growing true disciples discovered some common methods utilized, but noted that "no two (churches) had exactly the same delivery methods in place" (Barna 2001, 117).

1. Small groups
2. Sermons tied to practical applications and long-term plan of specific content to be delivered
3. New-believers classes
4. Leadership training programs
5. One-to-one mentoring
6. Bible memorization
7. Sunday school classes (classes that progressively help people develop a more comprehensive and integrated worldview)
8. Community service ministry groups

9. Outline curriculum
10. “Mini-church” events
11. Two- and three-year classes on worldview foundations
12. Daily Bible reading programs
13. A wide variety of ministry events
14. Book discussion groups
15. Life plan development
16. Spiritual gift assessment and activation
17. A large-group discipleship training process (that is, a typical classroom instruction approach)

These discipleship practices are utilized by churches in order to bring about life change. Barna provided a window through which to see how these seventeen practices are implemented the life of a local congregation. Delineated from these practices, Barna provides five models which demonstrate varied approaches churches can implement to fulfill this one common goal of making disciples (Barna 2001, 133-60). Two common threads that each of these churches shared were an intense burden to see people grow in Christlikeness and their intentionality in accomplishing this purpose.

“The most important elements of congregational life occur . . . where people connect with God and experience spiritual growth. Yet, several scientifically conducted opinion polls indicate that Americans think most churches are failing at this, their most important role (Miller 1994, 19).

Discipleship is the responsibility of the church, but it is also the responsibility of the individual. “Those who come to Christ must commit themselves to grow in their inner life. No baby can be “force-fed.” We all must long for the pure milk of the word so that we may “grow up” in terms of our salvation (1 Pet 2:2) (Bowland 1999, 249). From this initial desire for the “milk of the word” comes the need for churches to provide the

spiritual nurture and guidance for new believers. Herb Miller identifies 14 different ways in which churches can help people connect with God and grow spiritually.

The research on which I have based this book began during several years of developing spiritual-growth programs across North America. A basic list of seven spiritual-growth factors increased to twelve as the items were tested with various lay and clergy workshop groups. From that point, a questionnaire evolved, which brought responses from several thousand people, in hundreds of congregations of various denominations. Write-in comments added two new items to the list of factors bringing the total to fourteen. (Miller 1994, 25)

1. *Worship* – focusing on God and sensing God’s presence.
2. *Music* – feeling moved to give God greater attention.
3. *Prayer* – relating to God.
4. *Fellowship* – receiving God’s love through others.
5. *Preaching* – hearing God speak to me.
6. *Service* – giving God’s love to others through time and talent.
7. *Stewardship* – giving money to help with God’s work in the world.
8. *Bible study* – trying to obtain God’s guidance for daily living.
9. *Books* – receiving inspiration, information, and motivation.
10. *Encouragement* – helping others grow spiritually through affirmation, counseling, inclusion, and spiritual mentoring.
11. *Leadership* – providing vision that helps Christians set goals consistent with God’s will, and working together to accomplish God’s work in the church and the world.
12. *Administration* – carrying out and helping others to carry out one or more of the church’s ministry tasks.
13. *Retreats* – experiencing inspiration and insights in a physical setting apart from my daily life and the local church.
14. *Evangelism* – helping others find God. (Miller 1994, 26-27)

These 14 spiritual growth opportunities identify practices that have helped people to connect with God. Discipleship practices are varied and the dynamics that help

people connect with God are very much individualized based upon individual personalities and experiences. There are some discipleship practices, however, that a majority of churches employ in their discipleship efforts, though some of the traditional methods are being revised or replaced:

Until recent years the programs of evangelical churches shared common elements – Sunday morning service, Sunday school, youth fellowship meetings, Sunday evening service, and Wednesday prayer service. But times have changed. No longer do many churches view Sunday school as the primary educational agency. And there is a low level of commitment to staying with traditional programs and making them work. (Willis 1991, 75)

“Sunday school has been the agency of the church designed to teach the Bible to children, youth, and adults in local church ministries” (Garland 2001a, 671). This ministry has provided opportunities for spiritual nurture and growth for nearly two centuries. Garland indicates that the strength of Sunday school today “is a shell of its former self” (Garland 2001b, 674). In SBC churches, though, it is still one of main ministries of the church for reaching people with the gospel and teaching them the Bible (Beasley 1988, 3).

Some allow their Sunday school to be the primary small group discipleship practice, but others employ a variety of discipleship practices to nurture spiritual growth. An additional discipleship practice that is employed is the use of discipleship courses, or what is referred to in SBC churches as Discipleship Training. The discipleship strategy of the SBC has undergone significant changes in recent years. Individual discipleship courses, such as *Experiencing God*, *Master Life*, Beth Moore Studies, and Precept Courses by Kay Arthur have replaced the Discipleship Training quarterlies. But the goal of spiritual transformation remains at the heart of these discipleship practices. “A balanced program of discipleship training will involve planned growth experiences that

help Christians grow in Christlikeness, in their ability to apply biblical truth to every area of life, in responsibility for sharing the Christian faith, and in responsible church membership” (Edgemon 1990, 11).

Small group ministry has been effectively used by many churches to cultivate deep relationships and stimulate discipleship. “In 1982 the Lilly Foundation first reported that more people participate in some form of religious small group than attend Sunday school” (Davies 2001, 644). Ron Bennett identifies two basic strategies used by those with small group ministries. “The first involves forming a small group that grows toward spiritual maturity together over the long haul . . . . The second small-group strategy uses a more academic model of progression. Each small group focuses on a particular need or stage of spiritual growth. Members move through the growth environments – from group to group – as they are able” (Bennett 2001, 76-77). Small group ministry provides the intimacy and accountability that is needed in the spiritual maturity process. Adopting a small group ministry does not guarantee spiritual growth in the lives of participants. Frazee points out: “You can have 100 percent participation in church-sponsored small groups, but it doesn’t necessarily mean that the people in these groups are becoming more like Christ” (Frazee 2001, 89). However, if small groups are well organized and the leaders are provided the training and support they need, a small group ministry is a powerful discipleship practice for life transformation.

The power of the spoken Word has marked many lives. “For the average layperson, preaching ranks above Bible study as a spiritual growth influence” (Miller 1994, 86). That is why biblical preaching, and specifically expository preaching, is such a powerful tool in the spiritual growth process of believers. The Apostle Paul stated in 2

Timothy 3:16 and 17 that “all scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” And that is why in 2 Timothy 4:2 Paul charged young Timothy to “preach the Word.” Biblical preaching is the natural response to an inspired and inerrant Word given by God for our spiritual transformation.

The only logical response to inerrant Scripture, then, is to preach it *expositionally*. By *expositionally*, I mean preaching in such a way that the meaning of the Bible passage is presented *entirely* and *exactly* as it was intended by God. Expository preaching is the proclamation of the truth of God as mediated through the preacher. (MacArthur 1992, 23-24).

Preaching to convey information is predictable and unthreatening. Preaching to effect transformation is hard work and risky business. Yet that is the whole point of preaching. An effective sermon is measured not by its polished technique but by the ability of the preacher to connect the Word to the reality of the listener’s life. Preachers and sermons can be funny, entertaining, enthralling, intriguing, intellectually stimulating, controversial, full of impressive theological and doctrinal footpaths, and authoritative. But if ultimately the outcome does not result in a changed life because of an encounter with truth, then it has not been what God intended preaching to be. (Stowell 1998, 125)

There are three main approaches used in the preaching of God’s Word: topical, textual and expository. Though each of these has a role in the preaching ministry of a pastor, only one has the full power of God’s inspired and inerrant Word behind it to effect life transformation.

Topical messages usually combine a series of Bible verses that loosely connect with a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that generally serves as a gateway into whatever subject the preacher chooses to address. Neither the topical nor the textual method represents a serious effort to interpret, understand, explain, or apply God’s truth in the context of the Scripture(s) used.

By contrast, expository preaching focuses predominately on the text(s) under consideration along with its (their) context(s). Expository normally concentrates on a single text of Scripture, but it is sometimes possible for a thematic/theological message or a historical/biographical discourse to be expository in nature. An exposition may treat any length of passage. (Mayhue 1992, 9)

Discerning the differences in types of preaching is important to the discipleship process. If it is true the Bible is God's inspired Word for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (2 Tim 3:16), then how we approach the proclamation of His Word is of great importance. There is a distinction that needs to be maintained when considering textual preaching and expository preaching. Ramesh Richard blends these two together when he states, "Biblical exposition expounds, expresses, and exposes the Bible to an audience and the audience to the Bible. Textual exposition expounds the meaning of a biblical text and its significance to the present context" (Richard 1995, 19). The focus of Richard's book is on expository preaching, which is what he is describing here, but his description of expository preaching uses the term textual preaching interchangeably. Haddon Robinson maintains the distinction between textual preaching and expository preaching that Mayhue articulated: "the thought of the biblical writer determines the substance of an expository sermon. In many sermons the biblical passage read to the congregation resembles the national anthem played at a football game – it gets things started but is not heard again during the afternoon" (Robinson 1980, 20). The main distinction between textual preaching and expository preaching is the use of the biblical text. Textual preaching uses the text as a starting point, but the message does not find its roots in the text. Expository preaching communicates "the biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, literary study of the passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers" (Robinson 1980, 20). This makes God's Word primary rather than the preacher's word. And it is the Word of God which brings about the renewed and transformed minds (Rom 12:2) that leads to spiritual maturity.

Spiritual growth and maturity are superficial as long as people remain on the “sidelines” in their service. Service is the outward expression of an inward devotion. It provides an experience with God that cannot be replicated in a classroom setting or through a small group discussion. Mission and ministry opportunities, whether around the block or around the world, significantly shape the lives of those who participate. “Laypeople usually rank service ahead of Bible study when they list the experiences that have facilitated their spiritual growth” (Miller 1994, 97). The ultimate expression of effective discipleship is the reproduction of oneself in the lives of others. Jesus poured his life into twelve men and then sent them out to change the world by making disciples. Paul challenged those who were receiving his spiritual instruction to pass these truths along to “reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Tim 2:2 NIV).

Having the mind of Christ results in living the actions of Christ. People who have Christ in their heads give Christ through their lives. Few Christians become a Mother Teresa, and not too many become pastors. But every Christian has opportunities every day to serve – and by that service, to grow spiritually closer to the mind of Christ. (Miller 1994, 107)

### **Profile of Current Study**

The task of making disciples is the top priority of the church. Any other priority will produce a church that will eventually outgrow itself, making it weakened and vulnerable to decline and death. Therefore, the church can no longer afford to casually approach disciple making with the hopes that people will grow as followers of Jesus Christ. Rather, the church must actively and intentionally pursue the process of making fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ who bring glory to God through their holy lives and a lived out faith that proclaims the life changing message of the gospel. This study seeks to investigate the relationship between the discipleship practices in which churches

engage and the spiritual maturity of individual disciples. What practices are identified by the individuals as being most influential in their spiritual maturity, and what practices are identified as being least influential? An understanding of what intentional discipleship practices are identified as being most influential in the lives of spiritually maturing disciples will assist churches in fulfilling the mission Christ gave His church.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

This study sought to understand the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the influence these practices have upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. Churches spend thousands of dollars each year on a multitude of educational ministries designed to help nurture the spiritual growth of individuals. The question that is often left unanswered is the question of influence or relationship: Are these practices helping people become fully devoted followers of Jesus? Since quantifying spiritual growth is often seen as deeply personal as well as illusive and immeasurable, answers for this type of question often go unexplored. This study sought to examine the relationship between the discipleship practices common in churches and spiritual maturity of individuals involved in those ministries in order to see if these discipleship practices are helping them fulfill the Great Commission.

#### **Research Question Synopsis**

Seven research questions were developed to help evaluate the relationship between discipleship practices and spiritual maturity.

1. What is the relationship between Sunday school as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
2. What is the relationship between discipleship courses as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?

3. What is the relationship between small group ministry as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
4. What is the relationship between preaching as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
5. What is the relationship between missions/ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
6. What is the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the identification by individual disciples of practices that influenced their level of spiritual maturity?
7. What are the major differences, as they relate to discipleship practices, between the churches that had a higher percentage of spiritually maturing disciples and churches that had a lower percentage of spiritually maturing disciples?

### **Design Overview**

The research design was a descriptive survey developed to measure the presence of functional characteristics of growing disciples and examine the relationship between the spiritual maturity of an individual and the discipleship practices employed by his church. This research was conducted in two phases of data collection. The first phase collected data from senior pastors or ministers of education concerning the most common discipleship practices employed by their church (Appendix 1). The second phase collected data from worship attendees of individual churches within the research sample population. This phase of the research utilized a two part instrument (Appendix 2). The first part of the instrument to be administered was the revised edition of *The Discipleship Inventory* created by Brad Waggoner. Permission was granted by the author of this instrument to utilize it as part of this research (Appendix 3). This instrument is a Likert Response Questionnaire designed to measure the presence of key functional characteristics of a disciple in seven key areas: learning the truth, obeying God/denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, and building

relationships. The second part of the instrument for this phase was the administration of a simple questionnaire developed by the researcher to identify the discipleship practices that an individual identifies as having influenced his spiritual growth most profoundly.

### **Population**

The population of this study consists of Southern Baptist Churches (SBC) in the state of Florida.

### **Sample**

A sample of twenty-three Florida Baptist Convention (FBC) churches in this study were selected from the forty-six churches that make up the Florida Baptist Association (FBA) (Leedy 2001, 221). The Florida Association is located in North Florida and includes churches located in Leon, Jefferson, Franklin, and Wakulla counties. The total membership of these churches is 22,104, and their total worship attendance is 9,938 (Florida Baptist Convention 2003, 412-413).

This study employed a proportional stratified sampling technique. Churches were categorized into groups based upon worship attendance: small church = 1-199, medium church = 200-799, and large church = 800+. A randomly selected proportional representation from each stratum, based upon 50% of churches in each stratum, was surveyed. The number of people surveyed from each church was based upon 25% of the church's average worship attendance, but an additional number of surveys were included for each church in case some surveys were distributed to individuals who were not properly informed of the contents of the envelope. These additional surveys resulted in a

distribution rate of 37% of worship attendance for chosen churches, for a total of 1,580 surveys.

### ***Delimitations***

1. The population sample was delimited to churches affiliated with the SBC and the FBC.
2. The population sample was delimited to the fifty FBC churches and the worship attendees eighteen years of age and older of those churches that comprise the FBA.
3. The population sample was delimited to the FBA based on convenience of access.

### **Limitations of Generalization**

1. The data does not necessarily generalize to all SBC and FBC churches, just those in the FBA.
2. The data does not necessarily generalize to non-SBC churches.
3. The data does not necessarily generalize to all discipleship practices, just those explored in this study.

### **Instrumentation**

Three instruments were administered to two different groups within a given church. The main instrument used was a revised version of *The Discipleship Inventory* created by Brad Waggoner. This instrument was administered to those attending worship at selected churches. This instrument was created to measure the functional characteristics of a disciple in relationship to seven main areas: learning the truth, obeying God/denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, and building relationships.

An additional instrument was developed as an addendum to *The Discipleship Inventory* by the researcher and administered to worship attendees as part of *The*

*Discipleship Inventory*. This questionnaire was designed to provide information concerning what discipleship practices the individual identified as having most profoundly influenced his personal spiritual development.

A third instrument entitled the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* developed by the researcher was administered to senior pastors or ministers of education (or like position). This brief survey asked specific questions concerning the most common discipleship practices employed by their church, and asked the ministers to indicate what they perceive to be the discipleship practices most influential on the spiritual maturation of their members.

### **Procedures**

The research design was a descriptive survey developed to measure the presence of functional characteristics of growing disciples. After determining the spiritual maturity level of an individual, the self-perceived influence of the discipleship practices was examined to see what the relationship if any existed between the discipleship practices employed by churches and the spiritual maturity level of an individual disciple. The research consisted of a study of five major discipleship practices employed by churches; Sunday school, discipleship courses, small group/cell group ministry, preaching, and ministry/missions opportunities.

### ***Development of Instruments***

The main instrument used in this study was the revised edition of *The Discipleship Inventory*. This revision was based upon a previously validated instrument which had been proven statistically reliable (Waggoner 1991) and had been previously

approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The revisions to *The Discipleship Inventory* involved the deletion of some related questions in order to shorten the length of the instrument. A few questions were reworded for clarity, but the majority of the questions were left unchanged. Though the revised instrument was not scientifically validated, the author of the instrument followed similar procedures used in the development of the original instrument and consulted a panel of experts in the revision process.

Two other survey instruments were used. *The Church Discipleship Survey* was used with the senior pastors or the education ministers in the participating churches. This survey collected data that pertained to the discipleship practices employed by the churches as well as the pastor's perceptions of the discipleship practices most influential in the spiritual maturation of believers. This instrument was field tested in July of 2003 for clarity with a group of Baptist pastors from Gadsden County, Florida, at a monthly fellowship meeting. Revisions were made on this instrument based upon analysis of the surveys and feedback received from participating pastors. An addendum to *The Discipleship Inventory* was used to collect demographic data that pertained to the discipleship practices members identified as being most influential in their spiritual maturation. This instrument was field tested in July of 2003 for clarity with two Sunday school classes at the researcher's church. Revisions were made on this instrument based upon analysis of the survey and feedback received from the participating students. These two instruments were both approved by the Research Ethics Committee in July of 2003. They were assessed as medium risk to human subjects involved in research, and proper guidelines established by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary were followed.

### ***Sampling Procedures***

A proportional stratified sampling of churches was randomly selected from the Florida Baptist Association. These churches were divided into three groups, small churches from 0-199 in worship attendance, medium churches from 200-799 in worship attendance, and large churches from 800+ in worship attendance. Fifty percent of the churches in the FBA were chosen, and 25% of the worship attendance of these selected churches was targeted to receive the surveys. It should be noted that the researcher included an additional number of surveys for each church in case some surveys were distributed to individuals who were not properly informed of the contents of the envelope. These additional surveys resulted in a distribution rate of 37% of worship attendance, for a total of 1,580 surveys.

### ***Participation Selection Procedures***

Churches were randomly selected to participate in this study. Each church was alphabetically placed into one of the three categories based upon worship attendance, assigned a number, and then randomly selected until the number of churches needed for the study was obtained. The random selection of the churches involved in the study was based upon the random number selection chart provided by Leedy and Ormrod (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 213). The first church's number was determined by taking the first two digits of the serial number from a dollar bill and using those two numbers with the random numbering table in the Leedy and Ormrod text to make the selection (Leedy and Ormrod 2001, 212). After the first church was selected, subsequent churches were chosen based upon the next number on the random selection table until the necessary number of churches was obtained.

The nature and sensitivity of this research required that a measure of anonymity and confidence be granted to participating churches. Therefore, names of selected churches remained anonymous using pseudonyms. Each participating church was identified using a letter of the Greek alphabet. Summary findings of their church were provided to each participating church that had a sufficient response rate to generate statistically valid data, but findings for other participating churches were not provided to them. A final summary of the findings was provided to the Executive Director of the FBA, but no church names were included in this summary.

### *Enlistment Procedures*

In seeking the highest rate of return, the researcher contacted the Executive Director of the FBA and enlisted his support in this study. The researcher was provided opportunities to share the research study with the churches in the association through formal meetings and one on one conversations. The researcher also sought to network with individual members known personally to the researcher who might serve as a contact person with their church and pastor in hopes of increasing participation in their church. These personal contacts proved to be an invaluable asset in the distribution of the surveys.

The researcher solicited a letter from the Executive Director of the FBA. Rev. David Southerland, Executive Director of the FBA, wrote a letter to the participating churches soliciting their support, emphasizing the benefit this study will provide to both the participating church and the association. The senior pastor and the minister of education of those churches chosen received a letter from the researcher explaining the research being done and the benefit that this research will have for their church and

association (Appendix 4). They were asked to provide public support and encouragement to the church members, encouraging them to participate on the selected Sundays when the surveys were made available.

### ***Publicity Procedures***

Prior to the distribution of the surveys, churches were encouraged to conduct an advertising campaign to inform and prepare the church for the upcoming research being conducted at their church (Appendix 5). A publicity packet was sent to each participating church, and churches were encouraged to use this information to promote the research. The publicity pack included public announcements which the church was encouraged to use for two consecutive Sundays prior to the study. It also included bulletin inserts explaining the benefit of this study to the individual churches participating, the benefit to the FBA, and information on the two possible ways to participate in the survey. Flyers were also provided so that churches could post them in Sunday school classrooms, on bulletin boards and in other high traffic areas inviting individuals to participate in this study. The advertising campaign was extremely important to reduce volunteer bias (Gall, Borg, and Gall 1996, 240-41). Though churches were encouraged to advertise before the distribution date, it is uncertain how many churches utilized this option. Advertising decisions were out of the researcher's scope of influence.

### ***Distribution Procedures***

Surveys were distributed to participating churches by research assistants or by delivery to the churches in person or through the US Postal Service. Survey distribution

was conducted during the months of October, November, and December 2003. Survey packets included a cover letter, a copy of *The Discipleship Inventory*, a coupon for a free chicken biscuit at a local *Chick-fil-A* restaurant, a *Guidelines for Growth* card compliments of Insight for Living Ministry, and a self-addressed stamped envelope. Participants were encouraged to fill out the survey and mail it back to the researcher in the envelope provided. The senior pastor or minister of education was encouraged to complete the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* the week the surveys were distributed.

The collection of data from this survey was done in complete anonymity. The surveys were not signed, and all other demographic information was general and non-identifiable. A code was used on the surveys to identify the church that participants attend so the relationship aspect of the study could be completed. Each survey was numbered to ensure accuracy in the analysis of the data.

The use of research assistants provided trained point persons to help distribute the survey during the data collection process. Recruitment of research assistants was from the researcher's church (Appendix 6) and from personal acquaintances of individuals in churches that were selected for this study. Training of these assistants included instructions on distribution of surveys, how to answer questions, and other skills needed in the data collection process. A *Distribution Guideline* instructional sheet was developed and provided to each research assistant prior to his first date of distribution (Appendix 6). After training, these assistants attended a worship service at a given church and distributed surveys before or after the morning service.

### *Compilation and Analysis Procedures*

Data from all three inventories were collected to see if there were any relationships between the discipleship practices a church employed and those practices that were identified by respondents as being of significant influence to their spiritual growth. Data were analyzed to determine what discipleship practices were most frequently identified as being of greatest influence in the spiritual growth process of an individual. The researcher explored the findings to see if there were any patterns that appeared in the lives of those individuals whose inventories indicated that they were spiritually maturing. He also explored the findings to see if there were any patterns that appeared in the lives of those individuals whose inventories indicated that they were spiritual infants or children. Finally, the researcher explored the data to see if any relationship existed between what churches were doing in fulfillment of the Great Commission and what individuals identified as being the most influential in their spiritual growth.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the impact these practices have upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. To achieve this purpose an instrument comprised of the revised edition of the *Discipleship Inventory* and an addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory* developed by the researcher to obtain information concerning the influence specific discipleship practices have had upon their spiritual growth. An additional instrument was distributed to senior pastors or ministers of education concerning the discipleship practices their church employs.

This chapter contains three sections that will analyze the data received from the research. The first section will discuss the compilation protocols. The second section provides a descriptive analysis of the data received through these instruments. Data obtained through this study will seek to answer the seven research questions that served as the foundation and motivation of this study. The first five research questions looked at the relationship between an individual's discipleship practices and the spiritual maturity of disciples. The five discipleship practices that were explored in this study were Sunday school, discipleship courses, small group ministry, preaching, and missions/ministry opportunities. The sixth research question looked at the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the identification by an individual disciple of practices that

influenced his level of spiritual maturity. A comparison of the churches' discipleship practices and the discipleship practices identified by disciples was made to assess the influence these practices have upon the spiritual development of individual disciples. The final research question explored the major differences, as they relate to discipleship practices, between churches that had a higher percentage of spiritually maturing disciples and churches that had a lower percentage of spiritually maturing disciples. The mean score of the maturity level of various churches was compared with the discipleship practices employed by these churches to see if there were any significant differences. The final section of this chapter evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the research design.

### **Compilation Protocol**

Data were collected through the use of two instruments. The first instrument was comprised of the revised edition of the *Discipleship Inventory* and an addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory* that sought to gather demographic information and information pertaining to the influence of discipleship practices on spiritual development.

This instrument was distributed to worship attendees at the randomly selected churches in the Florida Baptist Association. Research assistants were enlisted to help in the distribution process. Research assistants were given instructions by the researcher and a distribution guideline sheet outlining the proper approach to distribution (Appendix 6). In some of the churches the pastor agreed to enlist ushers or other church members to help distribute the survey packets for the researcher. In these cases, adequate copies of the same distribution guideline sheet were provided to these pastors to use in preparation for distribution. A total of 1,515 survey packets were distributed of which 553 surveys

were returned. This provided the researcher with a 37% return rate (see Figure 1 and Table 1).

Table 1. Survey distribution and return data

	<i>Distributed</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Returned	553	37
Not Returned	962	63
Total	1,515	100

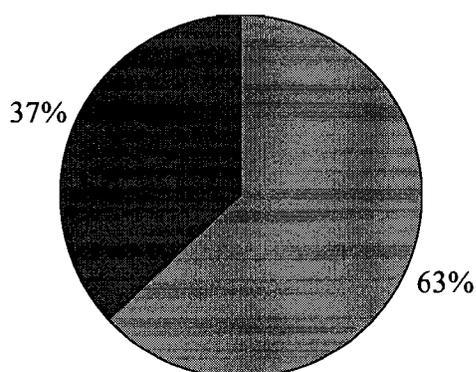


Figure 1. Percentage of surveys returned based upon distribution

Legend: Dark Gray = Returned; Light Gray = Not Returned

Survey packets were distributed in 18 FBA churches either before or after the morning worship services during the months of October and November, 2003 (Appendix

2). Each packet contained the following items: a cover letter, a copy of the survey, a self-addressed stamped envelope, a *Spiritual Growth Guide* card compliments of Insight for Living Ministry, and a coupon for a free Chick-fil-A chicken biscuit compliments of Mr. Terry Weidner of the North Monroe Chick-fil-A in Tallahassee, Florida. The cover letter discussed the purpose of this study and invited individuals to voluntarily participate. The survey was a six-page instrument, three pages front and back, stapled together which contained (1) an instruction sheet and agreement to participate statement in accord with The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's informed consent protocols for medium risk assessment of research with human subjects, (2) the revised edition of the *Discipleship Inventory*, which contained 88 questions focusing on seven functional characteristics of a disciple, and (3) an addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory*, which contained three demographic questions, a Likert response question about the influence of nine common discipleship practices, and a free response question concerning the top three events, activities, or relationships that have been most influential in the respondent's walk with Christ.

*The Church Discipleship Practices Survey* (Appendix 1) was distributed to senior pastors or ministers of education of the randomly selected churches in the FBA to obtain pertinent information concerning specific discipleship practices employed by their church. A survey packet similar to the packet distributed to individual disciples was developed for distribution to each senior pastor or minister of education. This packet contained (1) a cover letter explaining the study and expectations of their church as a participant, (2) an agreement to participate statement in accord with The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's informed consent protocols for medium risk assessment of

research with human subjects for the pastor's survey, (3) a ten question survey that asked about specific information concerning discipleship practices employed by the church, and included a Likert response scale which the minister was asked to mark which practices had the most influence on the spiritual maturation of adults in his congregation, and (4) a *Guidelines for Growth* card, and a coupon for a free Chick-fil-a chicken biscuit.

All data received from these two instruments were tabulated by hand and entered into Microsoft Excel for data analysis.

### ***Scoring Protocols and Inclusion Criteria***

There were 1,515 survey packets distributed to eighteen churches in the FBA, of which 553 surveys were returned (Table 2). Those surveys that were received were

Table 2. Inclusion data for returned surveys

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Included	503	91
Excluded	50	9
Totals	553	100

hand scored by the researcher and a research assistant. The sum of the Likert responses was determined and divided by 83. The following protocols determined the inclusion of surveys in the study: all questions must be answered, and all answers must be clearly marked. Of the 553 surveys that were returned, 503 were included in the study according to these protocols and 50 were excluded, for an inclusion rate of 91% (Table 2 and Figure 2).

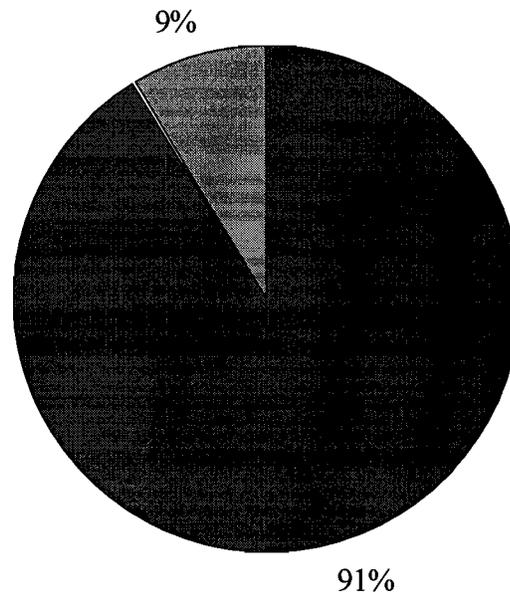


Figure 2. Percentage of included and excluded surveys

Legend: Black = Included; Gray = Excluded

### **Quantitative Characteristics and Relationships within the Research Sample**

After a description of the general demographic characteristics of the research sample, the researcher examined each of the seven quantitatively oriented research questions.

#### ***Demographic Characteristics***

Of the 503 surveys used in this research, 297 were from females (59%), 177 were from males (35%), and 29 (6%) had no response for gender. Three of the middle age ranges made up 58% of the respondents, with those in the 45-54 age range comprising the largest percentage at 22% (see Table 3 and Figure 3).

Table 3. Distribution of chronological age groupings in research sample

<i>Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
18-24	39	8
25-34	59	12
35-44	96	19
45-54	108	22
55-64	87	17
65-74	77	15
75+	35	7
No Response	2	0
<i>Total</i>	503	100

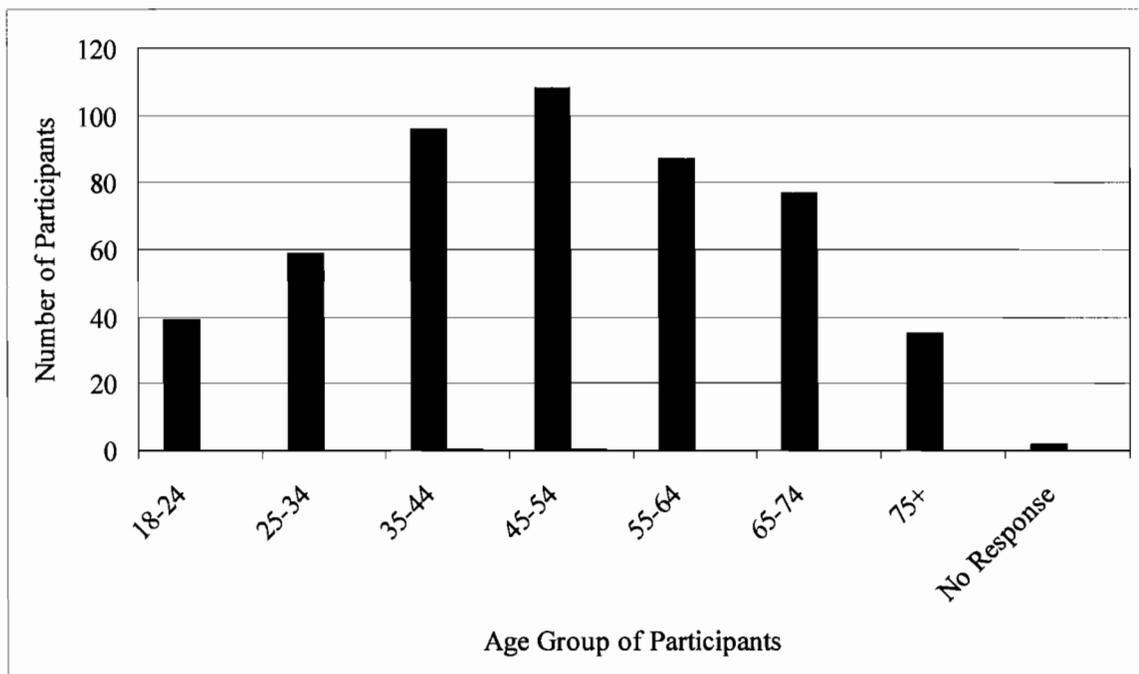


Figure 3. Distribution of chronological age groupings in research sample.

Demographic questions also included the number of years the respondent had been a Christian (see Figure 4 and Table 4). The largest two age groupings, 45-49 years and 50+ years, comprised 40% of all respondents. Eighty-eight percent of all respondents

Table 4. Distribution of spiritual age in research sample

<i>Spiritual Age</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
No Response	5	1%
0-3 yrs	23	5%
4-6 yrs	18	4%
7-9 yrs	15	3%
10-14 yrs	37	7%
15-19 yrs	34	7%
20-24 yrs	39	8%
25-29 yrs	42	8%
30-34 yrs	52	10%
35-39 yrs	38	8%
40-44 yrs	0	0%
45-49 yrs	83	17%
50+ yrs	117	22%
<i>Total</i>	503	100%

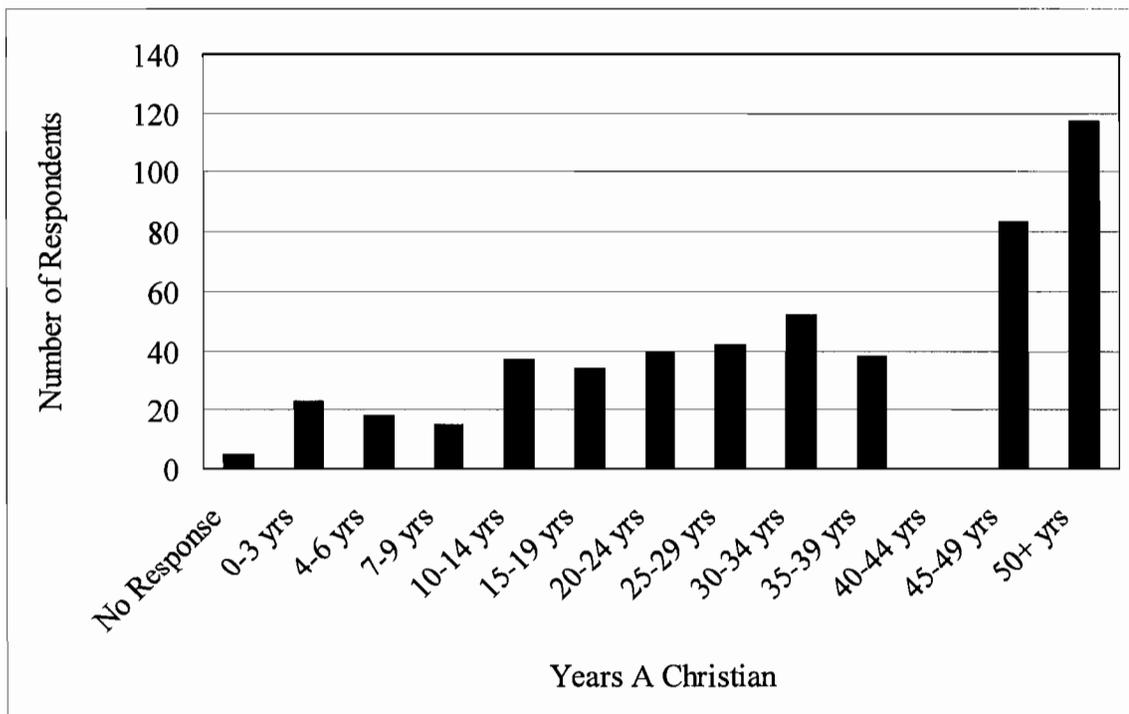


Figure 4. Distribution of Spiritual age in research sample

have been a Christian for more than ten years. This accounts for the large number of individuals who scored higher on the *Discipleship Inventory*.

The research methodology used in this study employed a proportional stratified sampling technique that allowed for an equal percentage of churches within a stratum to be surveyed. There were forty-eight churches in the FBA based upon data provided in the 2002 FBC Annual. In preparation for this study the researcher talked with the Executive Director of the FBA and discovered that there were two churches in the 2002 FBC Annual that were no longer a part of the FBA. These two churches were not included in the forty-six churches used to randomly select churches that would be included in the study. There were twenty-three churches chosen to participate in this study using this technique. Five small churches chose not to participate in the study and 1 small church that agreed to participate was excluded from the data analysis portion of the study due to insufficient church participation. This resulted in seventeen participating churches that were included in the data analysis portion of this study (see Table 5).

Table 5. FBA church demographic information and church participation information.

<i>Number of Churches</i>	<i>Information on Selection and Participation</i>
48	Churches & Missions in the 2002 FBC Annual
2	Churches not included based upon information received from FBA Executive Director
46	Churches included in possible churches included in the study.
23	Churches selected to be in the study.
5	Churches that chose not to participate in the study.
18	Churches that participated in the study.
1	Church that participated but was excluded due to insufficient church participation.

Churches were divided into three strata based upon average worship attendance reported in the FBC 2002 Annual. Small churches were those that had 1-199 in worship attendance. Churches in this category were given a number in the one hundreds for identification purposes. Medium churches were those that had 200-799 in worship attendance. Churches in this category were given a number in the two hundreds for identification purposes. Large churches were those churches that had 800+ in worship attendance. Churches in this category were given a number in the three hundreds for identification purposes. Based upon these strata, there were eight smaller churches, seven medium churches, and two large churches, representing 47%, 41%, and 12% of the total number of participating churches respectively (see Table 6 and Figure 5). Of the respondents, 21% were from smaller churches, 41% were from medium churches, and 38% were from larger churches (see Table 6 and Figure 6). For purposes of anonymity, churches were given a pseudonym using a letter of the Greek alphabet in place of their proper name. The number of surveys distributed was based upon 25% of the worship attendance. An additional number of surveys were provided to each church to ensure sufficient return rate and to account for individuals who may have received a survey at church without being properly informed as to the contents of the survey packet. This resulted in a distribution rate of approximately 37% of a church's worship attendance receiving a survey packet (see Figure 7 and Table 7).

***The Relationship between Discipleship Practices and the  
Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The first five research questions examined the relationship between common discipleship practices utilized by churches in the spiritual maturation process and the self-

Table 6. Church participation and response data

	<i># of Churches</i>	<i>% Participants</i>	<i># of Respondents</i>	<i>% of Respondents.</i>
<i>Small</i>	8	47%	106	21%
<i>Medium</i>	7	41%	208	41%
<i>Large</i>	2	12%	189	38%
<i>Total</i>	17	100%	503	100%

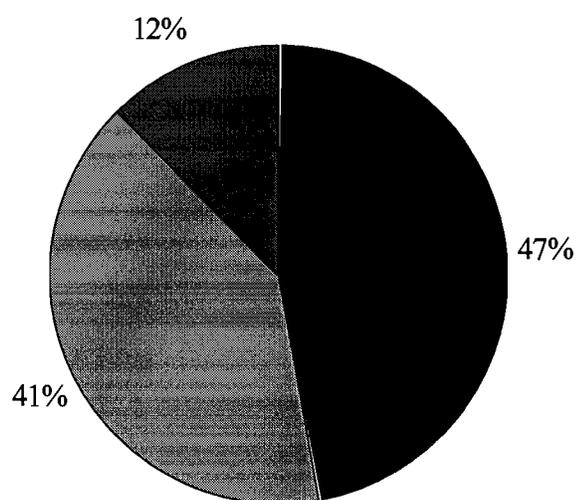


Figure 5. Percentage of the total number of participating churches by church size

Legend: Dark Gray = Small Church; Light Gray = Medium Church; Gray = Large Church

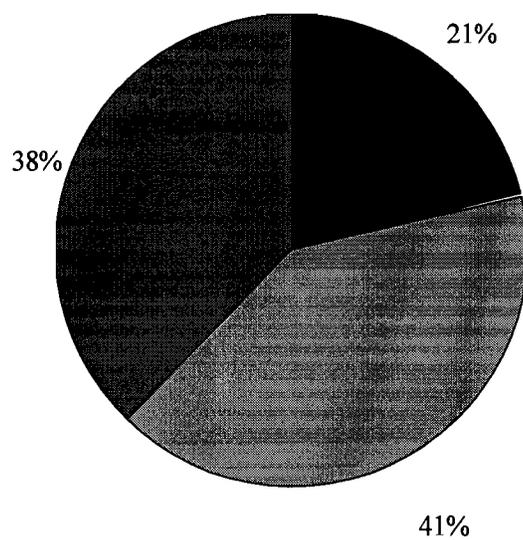


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents based upon church size

Legend: Dark Gray = Small Church; Light Gray = Medium Church;  
Gray = Large Church

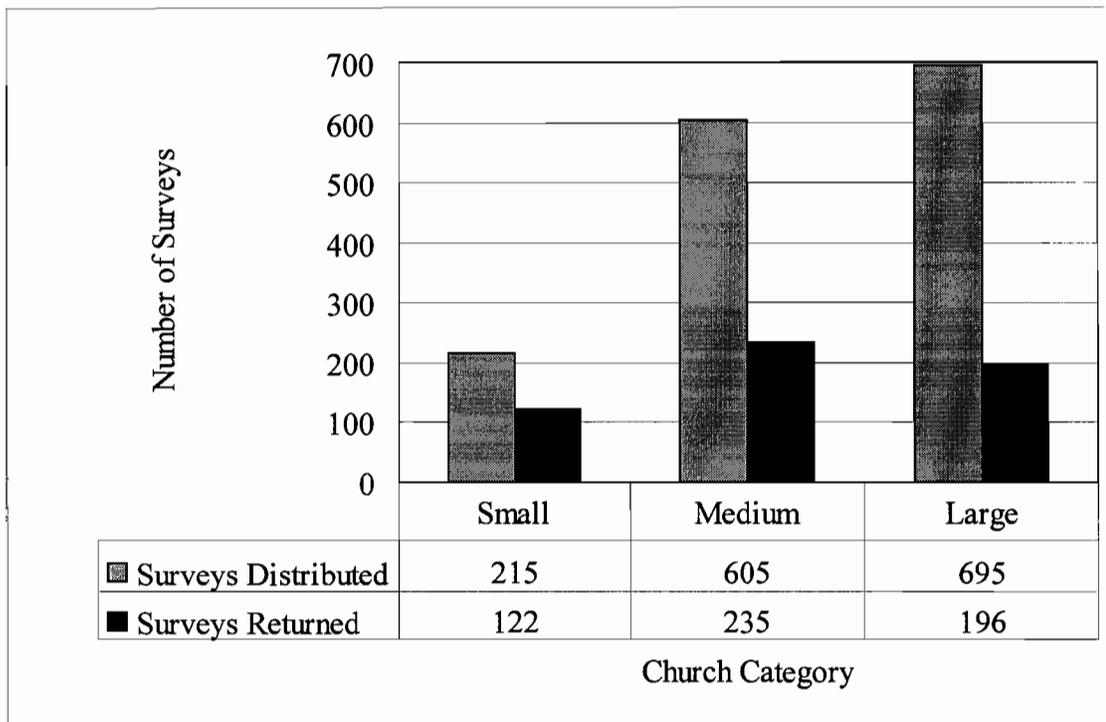


Figure 7. Survey distribution and return data based upon church size

Table 7. Participating church distribution and return data.

Ch. #	Church	Wor. Atten.	Dist.	Ret.	% Ret.	# Incl.	% Incl..	# Excl.	% Excl.
107	Omega Bapt.	68	25	12	48%	8	67%	4	33%
109	Mu Bapt.	138	50	34	68%	33	97%	1	3%
111	Psi Bapt.	45	15	10	67%	10	100%	0	0%
116	Upsilon Bapt.	50	20	14	70%	12	86%	2	14%
117	Xi Bapt.	100	35	12	34%	10	83%	2	17%
119	Tau Bapt.	24	10	10	100%	9	90%	1	10%
126	Omikron Bapt.	30	10	7	70%	5	71%	2	29%
129	Pi Bapt.	145	50	23	46%	19	83%	4	17%
204	Eta Bapt.	200	75	29	39%	23	79%	6	21%
205	Gamma Bapt.	250	95	35	37%	30	86%	5	14%
206	Theta Bapt.	244	90	38	42%	35	92%	3	8%
208	Epsilon Bapt.	250	95	30	32%	28	93%	2	7%
210	Iota Bapt.	210	80	55	69%	47	85%	8	15%
212	Delta Bapt.	233	85	33	39%	30	91%	3	9%
214	Zeta Bapt.	222	85	15	18%	15	100%	0	0%
301	Alpha Bapt.	1,000	320	95	30%	90	95%	5	5%
304	Beta Bapt.	850	375	101	27%	99	98%	2	2%

perceived influence those practices have had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples.

*Discipleship Inventory* scores and an individual's Likert response ranking of the influence of specific discipleship practices were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score.

### **Analysis Procedures**

The descriptive analysis of this research focused on utilizing techniques that helped to examine relationship rather than cause. In discussing the various types of research techniques utilized by researchers, Merriam and Simpson elucidate the purpose of using descriptive statistics in educational research:

Its purpose is not to give value to sets of relationships between events, but simply to draw attention to the degree two events or phenomena are related. Because social science researchers find arranging subjects into experiments for manipulation or treatment to be artificial, and often not possible, descriptive research is a common choice of method. In descriptive research, the researcher does not manipulate variables or control the environment in which the study takes place. Its purpose is to systematically describe the facts and characteristics of a given phenomenon, population, or area of interest. (Merriam and Simpson 2000, 61)

Analysis of the data focused on examining trends based upon the maturity score of an individual and the influence score given to a specific discipleship practice. Individual maturity scores were categorized in spiritual maturity levels (2.0-2.49, 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, 3.5-3.99, 4.0-4.49, and 4.5-4.99) based upon the score received on the *Discipleship Inventory*. Influence score refers to the respondents' Likert response ranking of the self-perceived influence that a discipleship practice has had upon their spiritual growth. Influence scores were determined using a Likert-type response scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest. Respondents were also allowed to mark

“N/A” if they considered a specific discipleship practice to have had no influence on their spiritual development or they have not had any exposure to a practice.

The first five research questions all sought to explore the relationship between specific discipleship practices and the spiritual growth of believers. Analysis of these relationships all followed the same procedures. Descriptive statistics were calculated using Microsoft Excel Data Analysis Tools. The z-scores were calculated to explore possible relationships (Figure 8). The z-score for each practice was determined by subtracting the *m* of the practice spiritual maturity level from the *m* of the whole sample practice and dividing the difference by the *sd* of the whole sample practice. The z-score was calculated for the maturity score of the *Discipleship Inventory* in like manner: subtract the *m* of the maturity score level from the *m* of the whole sample maturity score and divide the difference by the *sd* of the whole sample maturity score. Finally, the z-

$$\text{z-score} = \frac{m \text{ of practice class range} - m \text{ of the whole sample practice}}{sd \text{ of the whole sample practice}}$$

$$\text{z-score} = \frac{m \text{ of mat. scr. class range} - m \text{ of the whole sample mat. scr.}}{sd \text{ of the whole sample mat. scr.}}$$

$$\text{z-score} = \frac{m \text{ of whole sample practice} - m \text{ of the whole sample mat. scr.}}{sd \text{ of the whole sample mat. scr.}}$$

Figure 8. Z-score calculation equations

score was calculated for the  $m$  maturity score of the whole and the  $m$  influence score of the whole to examine the relationship between the practice and the spiritual maturity of believers.

“The z-score is a type of standard score frequently used in educational research” (Gall, Borg, and Gall 1996, 173). The z-score translates a value into a standardized score so that values can be easily compared. “A standard score, or z-score, is the number of standard deviations that a given value  $x$  is above or below the mean” (Triola 2001, 100). If a z-score has a value less than  $-2$  or greater than  $+2$  then that is considered an unusual value (Triola 2001, 100-101). The z-score is always rounded to two decimal places (Triola 2001, 100). Utilizing the z-score will help evaluate the nature of the relationship between a spiritual maturity level’s mean score and the mean score of the whole sample. A positive z-score indicates a greater influence within that spiritual maturity level than the mean of the whole; a negative z-score indicates a lesser influence for that spiritual maturity level than the mean of the whole. This would indicate a stronger than normal relationship.

After this data were compiled, a comparison was made between the mean maturity score of a spiritual maturity level and the mean score of a discipleship practice for that spiritual maturity level. This was done to see what relationship, if any, existed between the maturity score and the practice influence score for each spiritual maturity level. This analysis sought to discover trends within spiritual maturity levels to see if there was evidence of relationship between the discipleship practices and influence that practice had upon the spiritual growth of disciples.

The sample population ( $n$ ) for data calculation was 503, but because not every individual has had exposure to all six discipleship practices the  $n$  for each practice varied. It should be noted that there was only 1 respondent who was in the 2.0-2.49 spiritual maturity level. This individual indicated on her survey that she was not yet a Christian, and so had minimal experience with these practices. This individual scored all of the practices a 1 on the Likert-type response scale with the exception of worship, which was scored a 2. This 1 individual was included in the analysis of findings when the whole group was analyzed but was excluded from the analysis of the first five research questions that explored the individual discipleship practices. It should also be noted that the sample population for the 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level was very small ( $n = 7$ ). Caution should be used in making conclusions based upon such a small sample.

### ***The Relationship between Sunday School and the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The first research question examined the relationship between Sunday school as a discipleship practice and the self-perceived influence this practice has had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. Scores received on the *Discipleship Inventory* and an individual's ranking of the influence of Sunday school were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score. Of the 503 respondents, 478 gave a response between 1 and 5. Table 8 provides the mean, standard deviation, and z-score for both the maturity score and the influence score for Sunday school based upon maturity level.

Respondents were categorized into spiritual maturity levels based upon the maturity score they received on the *Discipleship Inventory*. Using Excel, the descriptive

Table 8. Descriptive analysis of Sunday school based upon spiritual maturity level

Whole Sample		Maturity Score	Sunday School
	Mean	4.131	4.351
	Median	4.228	5
	Mode	4.325	5
	N	503	478
	SD	0.385	1.027
	Z-score	0.57	
Spiritual maturity level		Maturity Score	Sunday School
2.5-2.99	Mean	2.762	2.667
	Median	2.795	3
	Mode	--	--
	N	7	3
	SD	0.107	1.528
	Z-score	-3.56	-1.64
	3.0-3.49	Mean	3.358
Median		3.385	5
Mode		3.421	5
N		27	24
SD		0.116	1.274
Z-score		-2.01	-0.18
3.5-3.99		Mean	3.796
	Median	3.825	5
	Mode	3.975	5
	N	116	110
	SD	0.146	1.121
	Z-score	-0.87	-0.25
	4.0-4.49	Mean	4.271
Median		4.289	5
Mode		4.325	5
N		285	274
SD		0.136	0.963
Z-score		0.36	0.07
4.5-4.99		Mean	4.602
	Median	4.578	5
	Mode	4.566	5
	N	67	65
	SD	0.088	0.717
	Z-score	1.22	0.29

statistics were calculated for each spiritual maturity level for both the maturity score and the discipleship practice. The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to Sunday school as a discipleship practice was 4.351 ( $n=478$ ). The mean influence score for Sunday school varied from 4.167 to 4.646 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 3). The z-scores for each of the spiritual maturity levels indicate the close proximity to the mean (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the  $m$  of the whole unit: 2.5-2.99 = -1.64, 3.0-3.49 = -0.18, 3.5-3.99 = -0.25, 4.0-4.49 = 0.07, and 4.5-4.99 = 0.29). This represents a close range of responses, indicating that though Sunday school is not equally influential in the lives of those who scored in the 3.0-3.49 spiritual maturity level compared with those in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level, it was a significant practice. Figures 9 and 10 illustrate the close proximity of influence scores for each spiritual maturity level, with only a slight increase as one moves up the maturity scale. This would seem to indicate that Sunday school is equally important in the life of a believer regardless of his level of maturity (see Figure 9 and Figure 10).

### ***The Relationship between Discipleship Courses and the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The second research question examined the relationship between discipleship (specifically discipleship type courses, but this also could refer to discipleship training that is a weekly program in many SBC churches) as a means of developing disciples and the self-perceived influence this practice has had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. *Discipleship Inventory* scores and an individual's ranking of the influence of discipleship were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score (see Table 9). Of the 503 respondents, 380 gave a response between 1 and 5.

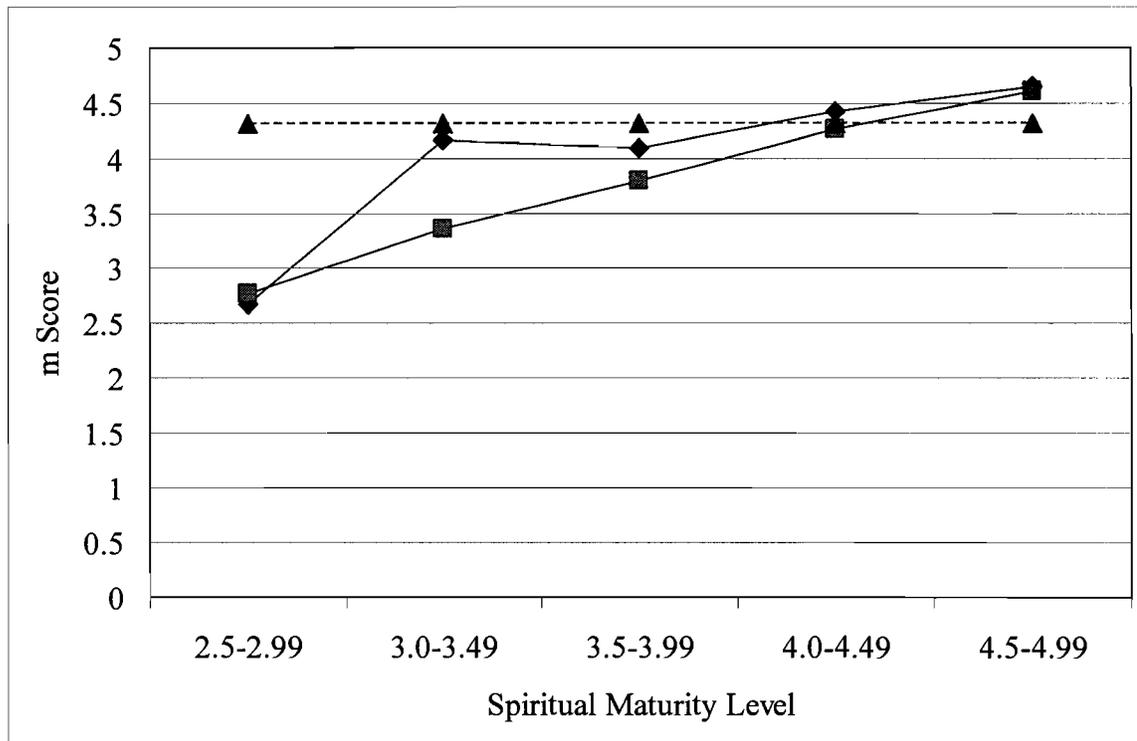


Figure 9. Relationship between maturity score and Sunday school influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of SS;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of SS for Spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of SS for whole

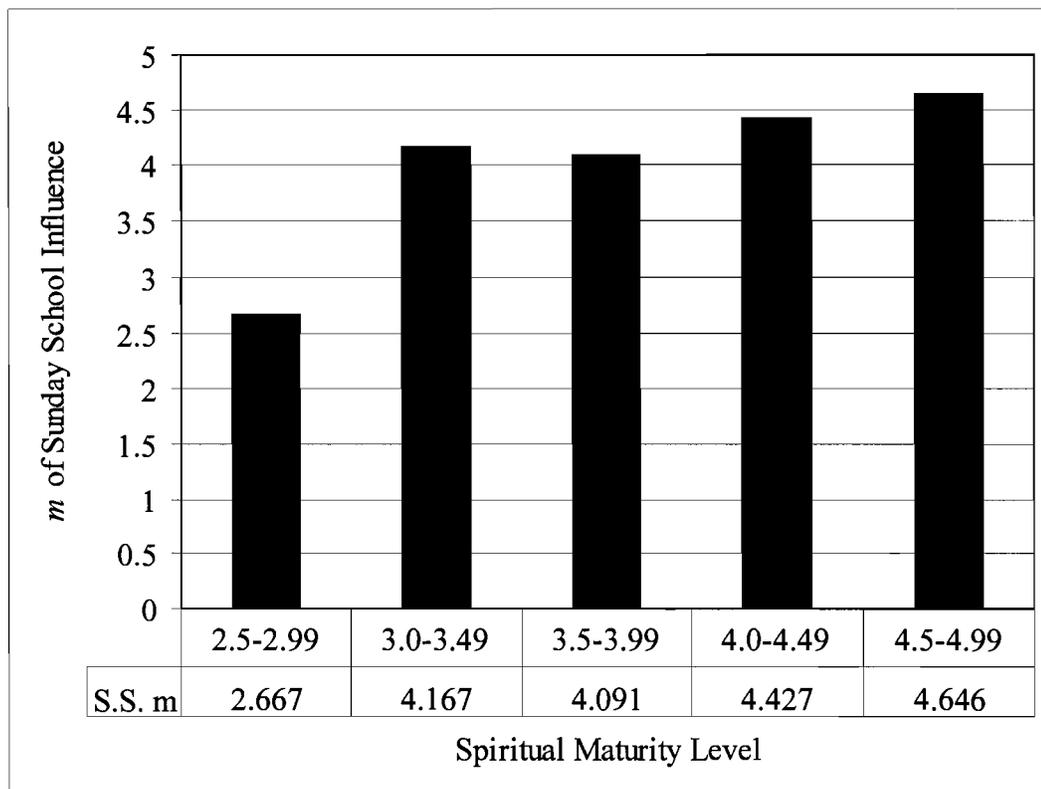


Figure 10. Comparison of Sunday school influence based upon *m* influence score by spiritual maturity level

Table 9 provides the mean, standard deviation, and z-score for both the maturity score and the influence score for discipleship based upon maturity level.

The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to discipleship courses as a discipleship practice was 3.605 ( $n=380$ ). The mean influence score for discipleship courses varied from 2.5 to 4.224 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 3). The z-scores for each of the spiritual maturity levels indicate the close proximity to the mean (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the *m* of the whole unit: 2.5-2.99 = -1.25, 3.0-3.49 = -0.86, 3.5-3.99 = -0.58, 4.0-4.49 = 0.10, and 4.5-4.99 = 0.48). Though the z-scores did not indicate a strong influence statistically

Table 9. Descriptive analysis of discipleship based upon spiritual maturity level

Whole Sample		Maturity Score	Discipleship
	Mean	4.131	3.605
	Median	4.228	4
	Mode	4.325	5
	N	503	380
	SD	0.385	1.279
	Z-score	-1.37	
Spiritual maturity level		Maturity Score	Discipleship
2.5-2.99	Mean	2.762	2
	Median	2.795	2
	Mode	--	--
	N	7	3
	SD	0.107	1
	Z-score	-3.56	-1.25
3.0-3.49	Mean	3.358	2.5
	Median	3.385	3
	Mode	3.421	3
	N	27	18
	SD	0.116	1.043
	Z-score	-2.01	-0.86
3.5-3.99	Mean	3.796	3.026
	Median	3.825	3
	Mode	3.975	2
	N	116	77
	SD	0.146	1.277
	Z-score	-0.34	-0.58
4.0-4.49	Mean	4.271	3.736
	Median	4.289	4
	Mode	4.325	5
	N	285	220
	SD	0.136	1.203
	Z-score	0.36	0.10
4.5-4.99	Mean	4.602	4.224
	Median	4.578	4.5
	Mode	4.566	5
	N	67	58
	SD	0.088	0.974
	Z-score	1.22	0.48

because they were in close proximity to the *m* of discipleship as a practice, the level of influence was positive for only the two highest spiritual maturity levels. It should also be noted that the influence score rose consistently as the individual score on the *Discipleship Inventory* rose, indicating a positive influence that helps people mature. Figures 11 and 12 illustrate this consistent rise of the influence *m* as the individuals matured in their faith (see Figure 11 and Figure 12).

### ***The Relationship between Small Group Ministry and the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The third research question examined the relationship between small group ministries (also called cell groups and home Bible studies) as a discipleship practice and the self-perceived influence this practice has had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. *Discipleship Inventory* scores and an individual's ranking of the influence of small group ministries were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score. Of the 503 respondents, 389 gave a response between 1 and 5. Table 10 provides the mean, standard deviation, and z-score for both the maturity score and the influence score for small group ministries based upon maturity level.

The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to small group ministries as a discipleship practice was 3.650 ( $n=389$ ). The mean influence score for small group ministries varied from 2.737 to 4.056 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 5). The z-scores did not statistically show a strong relationship for any of the spiritual maturity levels (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the *m* of the whole unit: 2.5-2.99 = 0.11, 3.0-3.49 = -0.67, 3.5-3.99 = -0.15, 4.0-4.49 = 0.02, and 4.5-4.99 = 0.30). Three of the five spiritual maturity levels had a positive z-

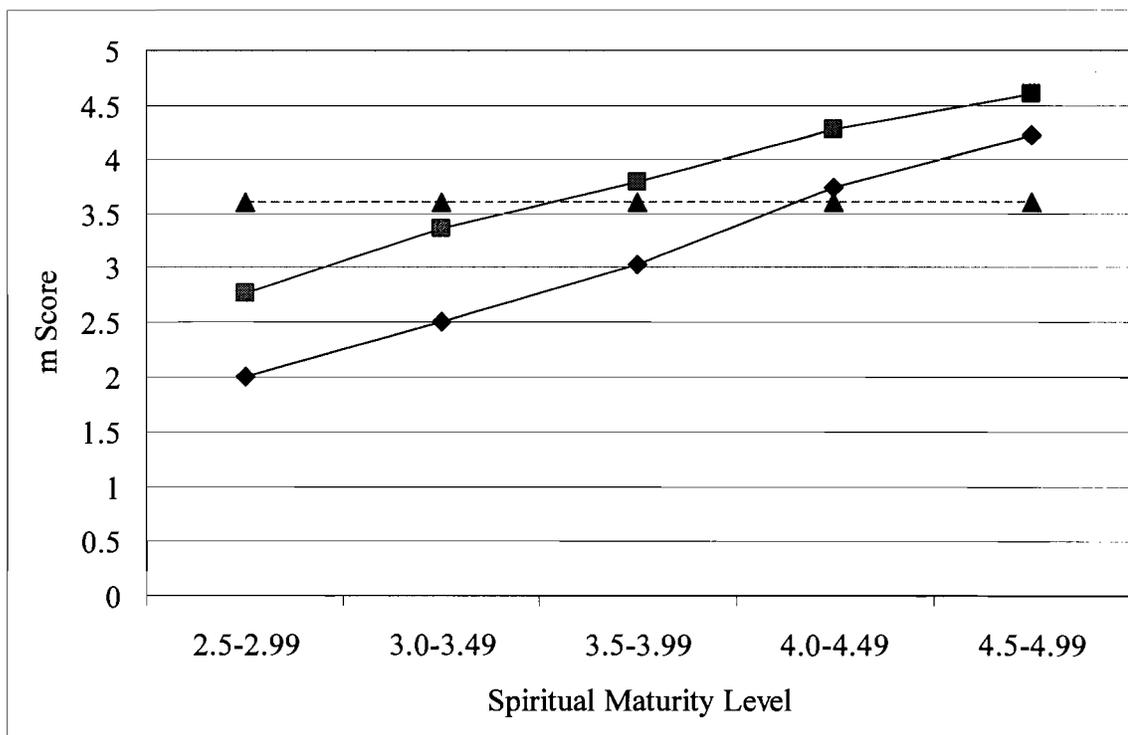


Figure 11. Relationship between maturity score and discipleship influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of Discipleship;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of Discipleship for Spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of Discipleship for whole

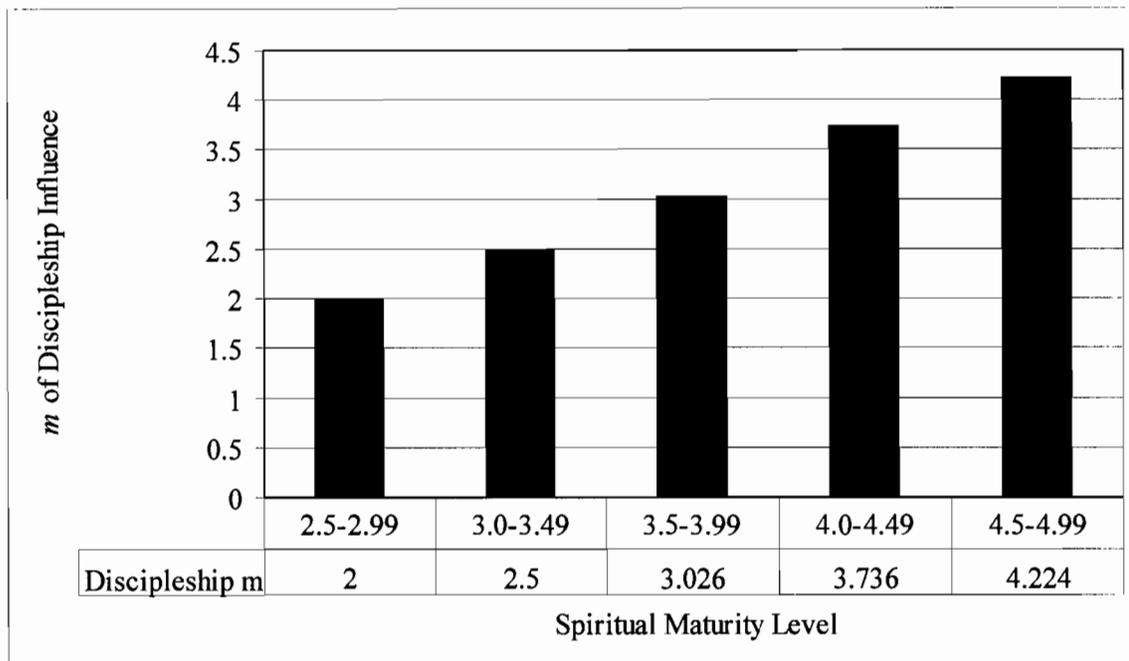


Figure 12. Comparison of discipleship influence based upon  $m$  influence score by spiritual maturity level

score (1 being the 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level). All but 1 of the negative z-scores was very small, but none showed a significant negative relationship. Though the influence of small group rose consistently for each spiritual maturity level, the level of influence given to small group was much lower than influence scores given to Sunday school and discipleship. Figures 13 and 14 illustrate steady increase of influence, but unlike Sunday school and discipleship which had the influence score above the  $m$  maturity score for their spiritual maturity level (see Figure 9 and Figure 11), the influence score of small group is below the  $m$  maturity score in each spiritual maturity level (see Figure 13 and Figure 14) with the exception of 2.5-2.99 which had a  $n$  of only 5.

Table 10. Descriptive analysis of small groups based upon spiritual maturity level

Whole Sample		Maturity Score	Small Group
	Mean	4.131	3.650
	Median	4.228	4
	Mode	4.325	5
	N	503	389
	SD	0.385	1.353
	Z-score	-1.25	
Spiritual maturity level		Maturity Score	Small Group
2.5-2.99	Mean	2.762	3.8
	Median	2.795	4
	Mode	--	5
	N	7	5
	SD	0.107	1.643
	Z-score	-3.56	0.11
	3.0-3.49	Mean	3.358
Median		3.385	3
Mode		3.421	2
N		27	19
SD		0.116	1.046
Z-score		-2.01	-0.67
3.5-3.99		Mean	3.796
	Median	3.825	4
	Mode	3.975	4
	N	116	86
	SD	0.146	1.325
	Z-score	-0.87	-0.15
	4.0-4.49	Mean	4.271
Median		4.289	4
Mode		4.325	5
N		285	220
SD		0.136	1.314
Z-score		0.36	0.02
4.5-4.99		Mean	4.602
	Median	4.578	5
	Mode	4.566	5
	N	67	54
	SD	0.088	1.338
	Z-score	1.22	0.30

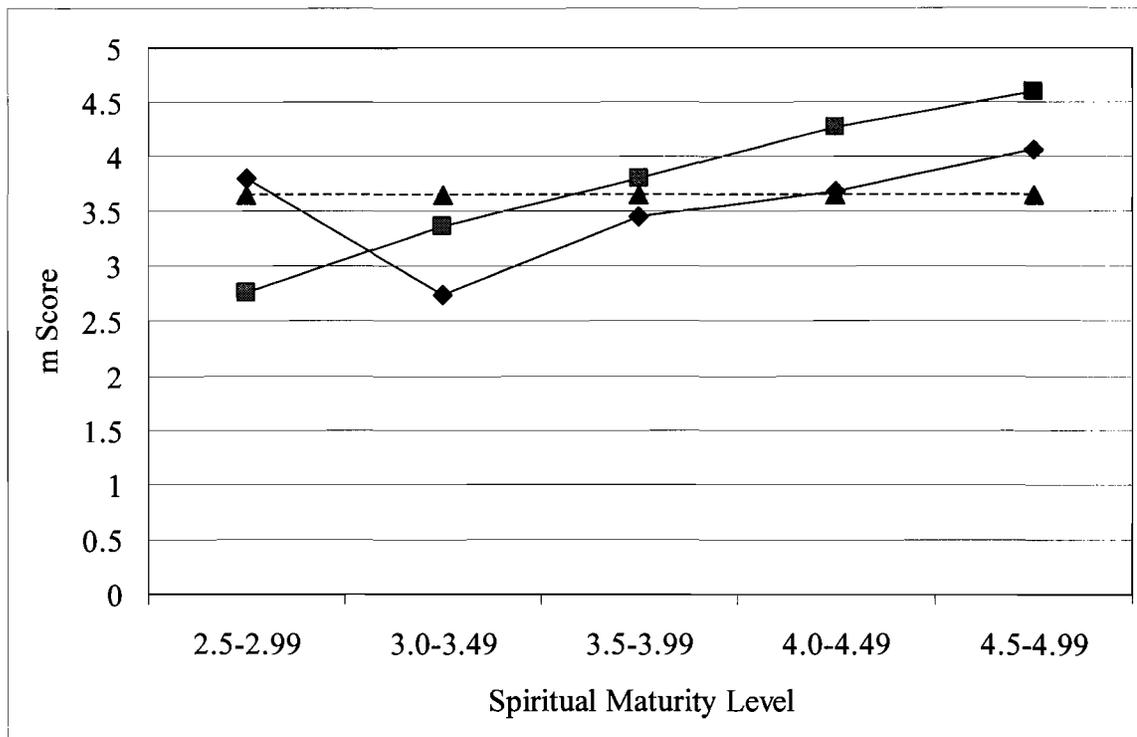


Figure 13. Relationship between maturity score and small groups influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of Small Groups;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of Small Groups for Spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of Small Groups for whole

### *The Relationship between Preaching and the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples*

The fourth research question examined the relationship between preaching as a discipleship practice and the self-perceived influence this practice has had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. Scores received on the *Discipleship Inventory* and an individual's ranking of the influence of preaching were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score. Of the 503 respondents, 433 gave a response between 1 and 5. Table 11 provides the mean,

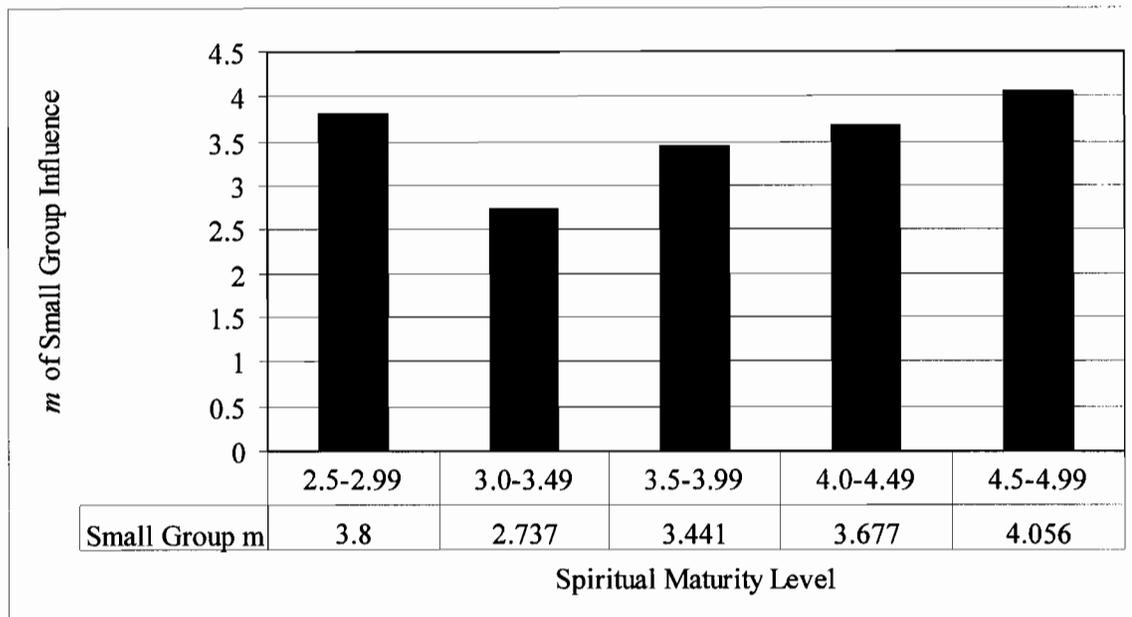


Figure 14. Comparison of small group influence based upon *m* influence score by spiritual maturity level

standard deviation, and z-score for both the maturity score and the influence score for preaching based upon maturity level.

Respondents were categorized into spiritual maturity levels based upon the maturity score they received on the *Discipleship Inventory*. Using Excel, the descriptive statistics were calculated for each spiritual maturity level for both the maturity score and the discipleship practice. The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to preaching as a discipleship practice was 4.274 ( $n=433$ ). The mean influence score for preaching varied from 4.057 to 4.541 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 3). The z-scores for each of the spiritual maturity levels indicates a close proximity to the mean (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the *m* of the whole unit: 2.5-2.99 = -1.21, 3.0-3.49 = -0.03, 3.5-3.99 = -0.21, 4.0-4.49 = 0.02, and

Table 11. Descriptive analysis of Preaching based upon spiritual maturity level

Whole Sample		Maturity Score	Preaching
	Mean	4.131	4.274
	Median	4.228	5
	Mode	4.325	5
	N	503	433
	SD	0.385	1.057
	Z-score	0.37	
Spiritual maturity level			Preaching
2.5-2.99	Mean	2.762	3
	Median	2.795	3
	Mode	--	4
	N	7	5
	SD	0.107	1.225
	Z-score	-3.56	-1.21
	3.0-3.49	Mean	3.358
Median		3.385	4
Mode		3.421	5
N		27	21
SD		0.116	0.99
Z-score		-2.01	-0.03
3.5-3.99		Mean	3.796
	Median	3.825	4
	Mode	3.975	5
	N	116	88
	SD	0.146	1.021
	Z-score	-0.87	-0.21
	4.0-4.49	Mean	4.271
Median		4.289	5
Mode		4.325	5
N		285	252
SD		0.136	1.045
Z-score		0.36	0.02
4.5-4.99		Mean	4.602
	Median	4.578	5
	Mode	4.566	5
	N	67	61
	SD	0.088	0.905
	Z-score	1.22	0.25

4.5-4.99 = 0.25). This represents a close range of responses which does not indicate a strong statistical relationship. The close range of responses does seem to indicate that preaching was a significant practice to individuals in each spiritual maturity level, even though it was not ranked as influential in the lives of those who scored in the 3.0-3.49 spiritual maturity level compared with those in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level. Figures 15 and 16 illustrate the close proximity of influence scores for each spiritual maturity level, with only a slight increase as you move up the maturity scale. It should be noted that there is a slight drop in influence score for the 3.5-3.99 spiritual maturity level, but the z-score indicates that it still is in close proximity to the  $m$  of preaching for the whole sample. Much like the influence of Sunday school, the data seem to indicate that preaching is equally important in the life of a believer regardless of ones level of maturity (see Figure 15 and Figure 16).

#### ***The Relationship between Missions/Ministry Opportunities and the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The fifth research question examined the relationship between missions/ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice and the self-perceived influence these practices have had upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. The nature of this question required that data be collected on the influence of mission involvement and the influence of ministry opportunities separately. These two practices are similar in nature, but the researcher gathered data on these two practices separately. Data collected indicated that this was the proper approach since the  $n$  for mission involvement was significantly smaller than the  $n$  for ministry opportunities. Scores received on the *Discipleship Inventory* and an individual's ranking of the influence of missions/ministry

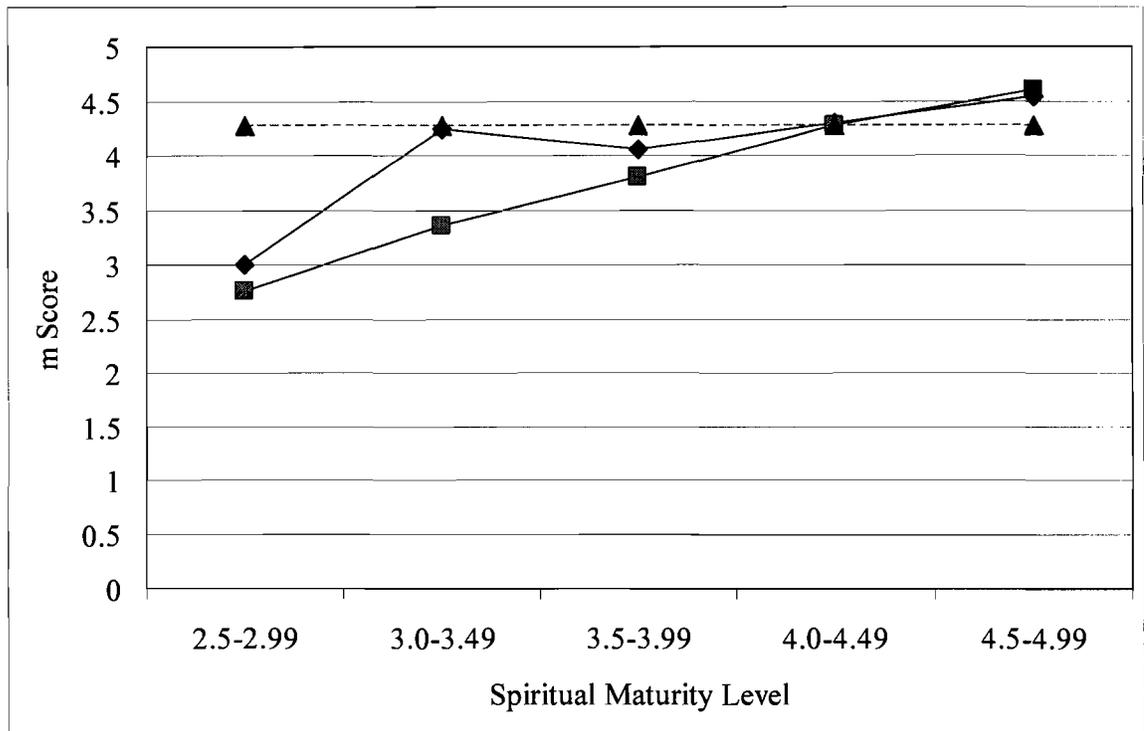


Figure 15. Relationship between maturity score and preaching influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of Preaching;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of Preaching for Spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of Preaching for whole

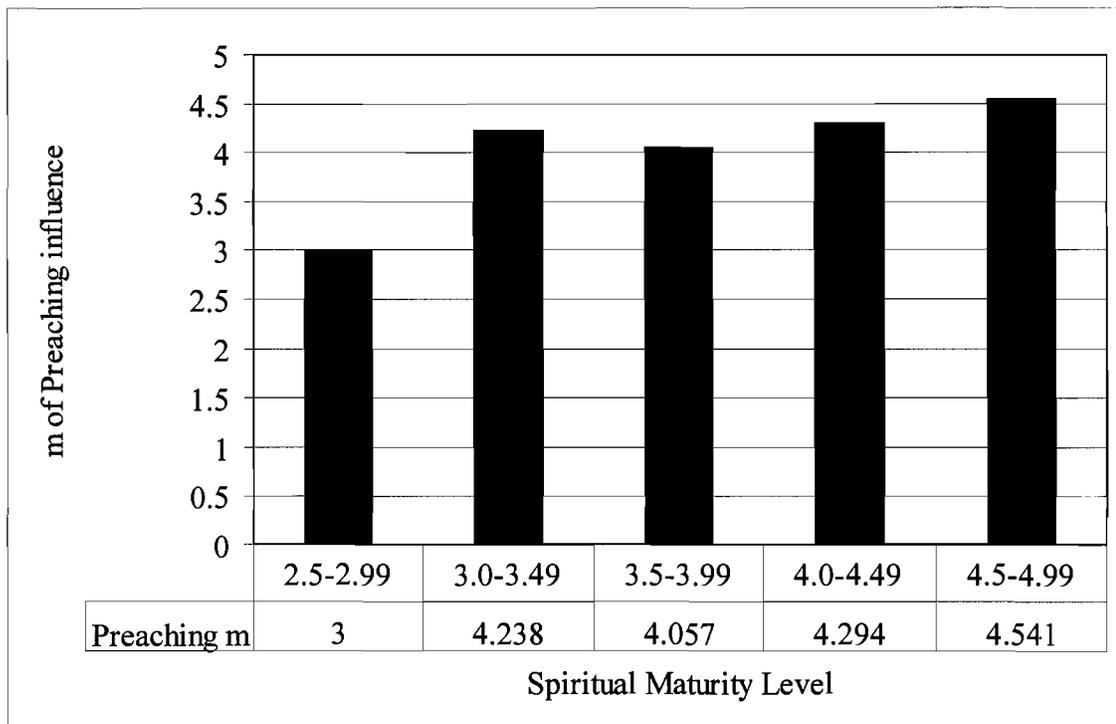


Figure 16. Comparison of preaching influence based upon  $m$  influence score by spiritual maturity level

opportunities were compared based upon mean, median, mode, sample population, standard deviation, and z-score. Of the 503 respondents, 245 gave a response between 1 and 5 for mission involvement and 399 gave a response between a 1 and 5 for ministry opportunities. Table 12 provides the mean, standard deviation, and z-score for both the maturity score and the influence score for both mission involvement and ministry opportunities based upon maturity level.

#### **Analysis of Mission Involvement Data**

Respondents were categorized into spiritual maturity levels based upon the maturity score they received on the *Discipleship Inventory*. Using Excel, the descriptive

Table 12. Descriptive analysis of mission involvement and ministry opportunities based upon spiritual maturity level

Whole Sample		Maturity Score	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
	Mean	4.131	2.947	3.749
	Median	4.228	3	4
	Mode	4.325	1	5
	N	503	245	399
	SD	0.385	1.642	1.245
	Z-score		-3.08	-0.99
Spiritual maturity level			Miss. Trip	Min. Opp.
2.5-2.99	Mean	2.762	1	1.667
	Median	2.795	1	2
	Mode	--	1	2
	N	7	2	3
	SD	0.107	0	0.577
	Z-score	-3.56	-1.19	-1.67
	3.0-3.49	Mean	3.358	2.364
		3.385	1	2
		3.421	1	2
N		27	11	17
SD		0.116	1.629	1.228
Z-score		-2.01	-0.36	-0.93
3.5-3.99		Mean	3.796	2.318
	Median	3.825	2	3
	Mode	3.975	1	3
	N	116	44	80
	SD	0.146	1.491	1.197
	Z-score	-0.87	-0.38	-0.52
	4.0-4.49	Mean	4.271	2.959
Median		4.289	3	4
Mode		4.325	1	5
N		285	148	236
SD		0.136	1.493	1.164
Z-score		0.36	0.01	0.10
4.5-4.99		Mean	4.602	3.923
	Median	4.578	4	5
	Mode	4.566	5	5
	N	67	39	57
	SD	0.088	1.109	0.683
	Z-score	1.22	0.59	0.57

statistics were calculated for each spiritual maturity level for both the maturity score and the discipleship practice. The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to mission involvement as a discipleship practice was 2.947 ( $n=245$ ). The mean influence score for mission involvement varied from 2.318-3.923 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 2). The  $z$ -scores for each of the spiritual maturity levels did not indicate a strong relationship statistically because of the close proximity to the mean (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the  $m$  of the whole unit: 2.5-2.99 = -1.19, 3.0-3.49 = -0.36, 3.5-3.99 = -0.38, 4.0-4.49 = 0.01, and 4.5-4.99 = 0.59). The first three spiritual maturity levels (2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49) had a negative  $z$ -score, and 4.0-4.49 had a  $z$ -score extremely close to 0, indicating that mission involvement has not had as significant an influence on individual disciples as other practices. The one spiritual maturity level that had a positive  $z$ -score had a score of only +0.59, which is considered statistically normal and does not indicate a strong relationship. Figures 17 and 18 illustrate that the influence of mission involvement in the 3.0-3.49 spiritual maturity level is greater than the influence in the 3.5-3.99 spiritual maturity level. There is a steady increase of influence when one looks at the top two spiritual maturity levels. The influence of mission involvement is greatest among those with a higher maturity score, indicating that though the relationship is not statistically strong, there is a noticeable relationship. This indicates that those who have been exposed to mission experiences also rate the influence of this practice higher than those in lower spiritual maturity levels. A comparison of the mode for each spiritual maturity level validates this statement, with a mode of 5 for the highest spiritual maturity level and a mode of 1 for all other spiritual maturity levels (see Figure 17 and Figure 18).

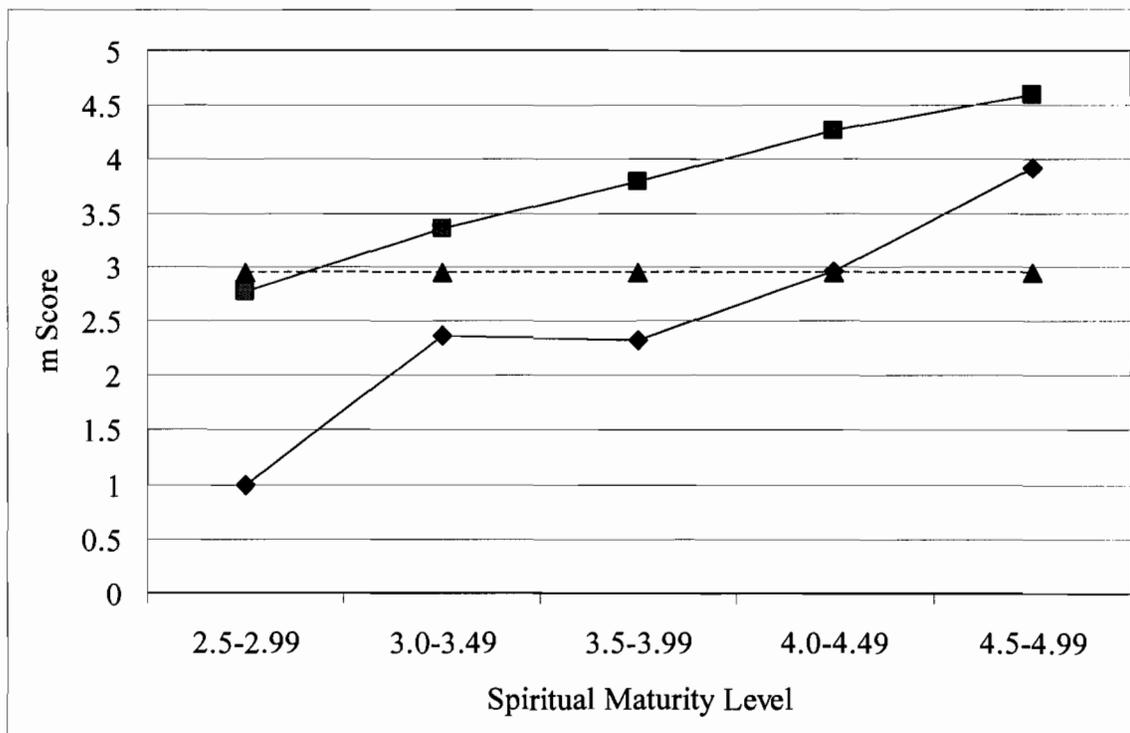


Figure 17. Relationship between maturity score and mission involvement influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of Mission Involvement;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of Mission Involvement for Spiritual maturity level; Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of Mission Involvement for whole

### Analysis of Ministry Opportunities

Respondents were categorized into spiritual maturity levels based upon the maturity score they received on the *Discipleship Inventory*. Using Excel, the descriptive statistics were calculated for each spiritual maturity level for both the maturity score and the discipleship practice. The mean influence score for all respondents who were exposed to ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice was 3.749 ( $n=399$ ). The mean influence score for ministry opportunities varied from 2.588 - 4.541 (excluding 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level which had an  $n$  of 3). The z-scores for each of the spiritual

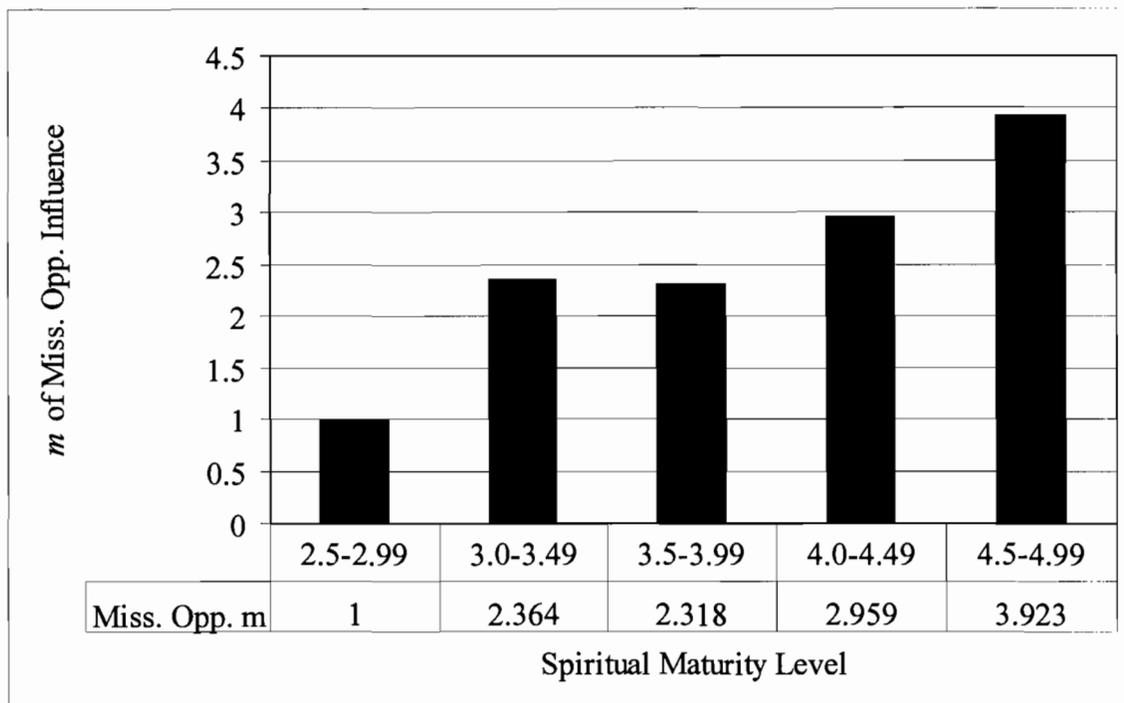


Figure 18. Comparison of mission involvement influence based upon *m* influence score by spiritual maturity level

maturity levels indicate that ministry opportunities had a stronger influence on those in the higher spiritual maturity levels than on those in the lower spiritual maturity levels, but none showed a statistically significant relationship since all were close to the mean (all  $> -2$  to  $< +2$  of each spiritual maturity level to the *m* of the whole unit:  $2.5 - 2.99 = -1.67$ ,  $3.0 - 3.49 = -0.93$ ,  $3.5 - 3.99 = -0.52$ ,  $4.0 - 4.49 = 0.10$ , and  $4.5 - 4.99 = 0.57$ ). The first three spiritual maturity levels (2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49) had a negative z-score, and 4.0-4.49 had a z-score extremely close to 0, indicating that statistically ministry opportunities have not had as significant an influence on individual disciples as other practices. The one spiritual maturity level that had a positive z-score had a score of only  $+0.57$ , which is considered statistically normal and does not indicate a strong relationship. Figures 19 and 20 illustrate the influence of ministry opportunities for each spiritual maturity level. It

should be noted that there is a steady increase following the increasing pattern of the  $m$  maturity score, which indicates that, though there is not a statistically significant relationship, the influence of ministry involvement increases as an individual matures spiritually. This indicates that those who have been exposed to ministry opportunities also rate the influence of this practice higher than those in lower spiritual maturity levels. (see Figure 19 and Figure 20)

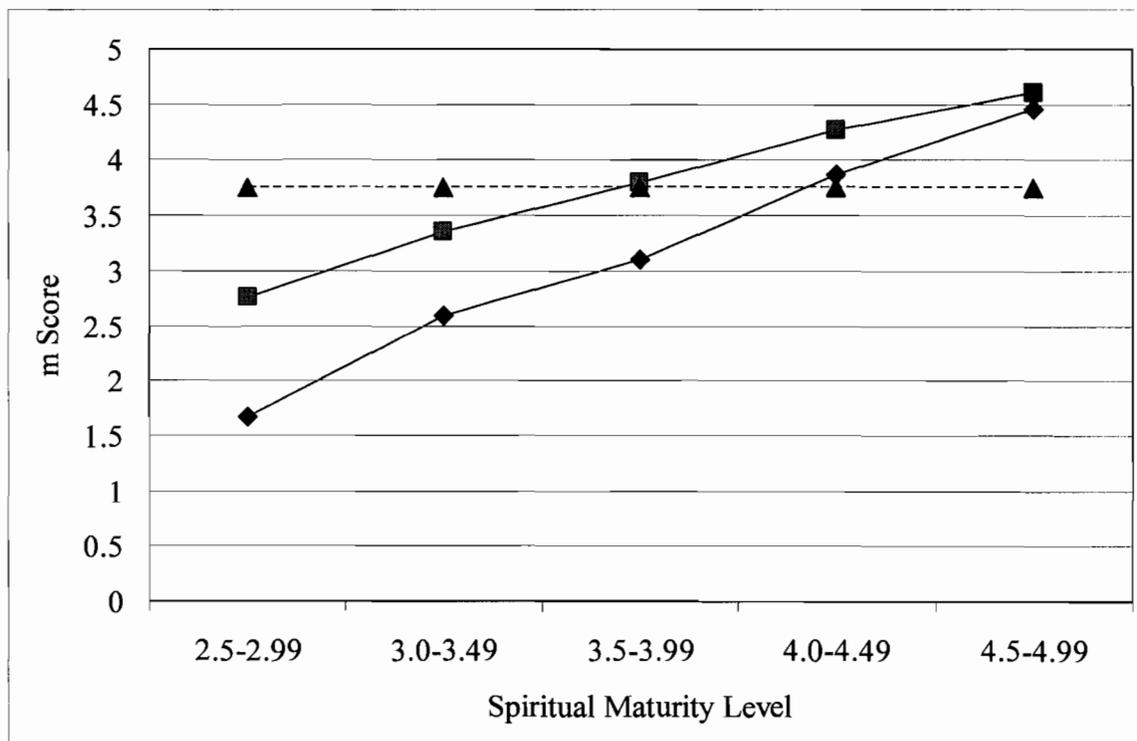


Figure 19. Relationship between maturity score and ministry opportunities influence

Legend: Black Diamond =  $m$  influence of Ministry Opportunities;  
 Light Gray Square =  $m$  Maturity Score of Ministry Opportunities for Spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray Triangle =  $m$  Influence Score of Ministry Opportunities for whole

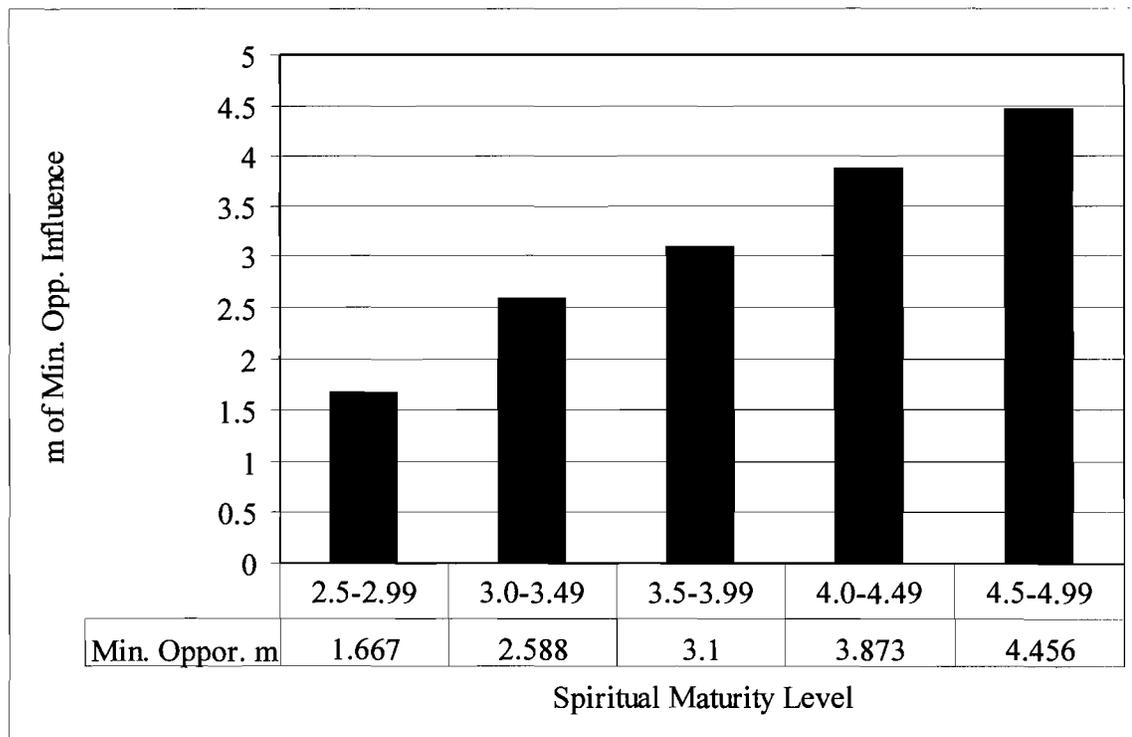


Figure 20. Comparison of ministry opportunities influence based upon  $m$  influence score by spiritual maturity level

### ***Summary of Research Questions 1 through 5***

Analysis of the data does not indicate a strong statistical relationship between the discipleship practices and the spiritual growth of believers. But the lack of statistical support does not negate the influence that these discipleship practices have had upon individual believers. The statistical evidence demonstrates that the responses were close to the mean influence score for each spiritual maturity level. When the  $m$  influence scores for each spiritual maturity level were compared against the other spiritual maturity levels, trends appeared that demonstrated a relationship between higher maturity scores and higher influence scores. Table 13 and Figure 21 present the  $m$  influence score for each maturity spiritual maturity level, and illustrate the increasing influence that each practice

had upon individuals within that maturity level. In almost every case, there is an incremental increase for each spiritual maturity level. This increase indicates increasing influence upon an individual's spiritual maturation. Sunday school and preaching had both the greatest influence and consistently equal *m* influence score of all of the practices. Examination of the influence scores for individuals within the 4.5-4.99 maturity spiritual maturity level demonstrates that in all cases each practice had a greater influence upon their growth than those in the other spiritual maturity levels.

Table 13. Comparison *m* influence score by spiritual maturity level

	m of 2.5-2.99	m of 3.0-3.49	m of 3.5-3.99	<i>m</i> of 4.0-4.49	<i>m</i> of 4.5-4.99
Sunday School	2.667	4.167	4.091	4.427	4.646
Discipleship	2	2.5	3.026	3.736	4.224
Small Group	3.8	2.737	3.441	3.677	4.056
Preaching	3	4.238	4.057	4.294	4.541
Mission Involvement	1	2.364	2.318	2.959	3.923
Ministry Opportunity	1.667	2.588	3.1	3.873	4.456

***The Relationship between a Church's Discipleship Practices  
and the Influence They Have Had on  
the Spiritual Maturity of Disciples***

The sixth research question examined the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the identification by an individual disciple of practices that influence his level of spiritual maturity. This question was examined using two approaches.

The first approach to answering this question focused upon comparing 2 sets of data: data derived from the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* and data derived from

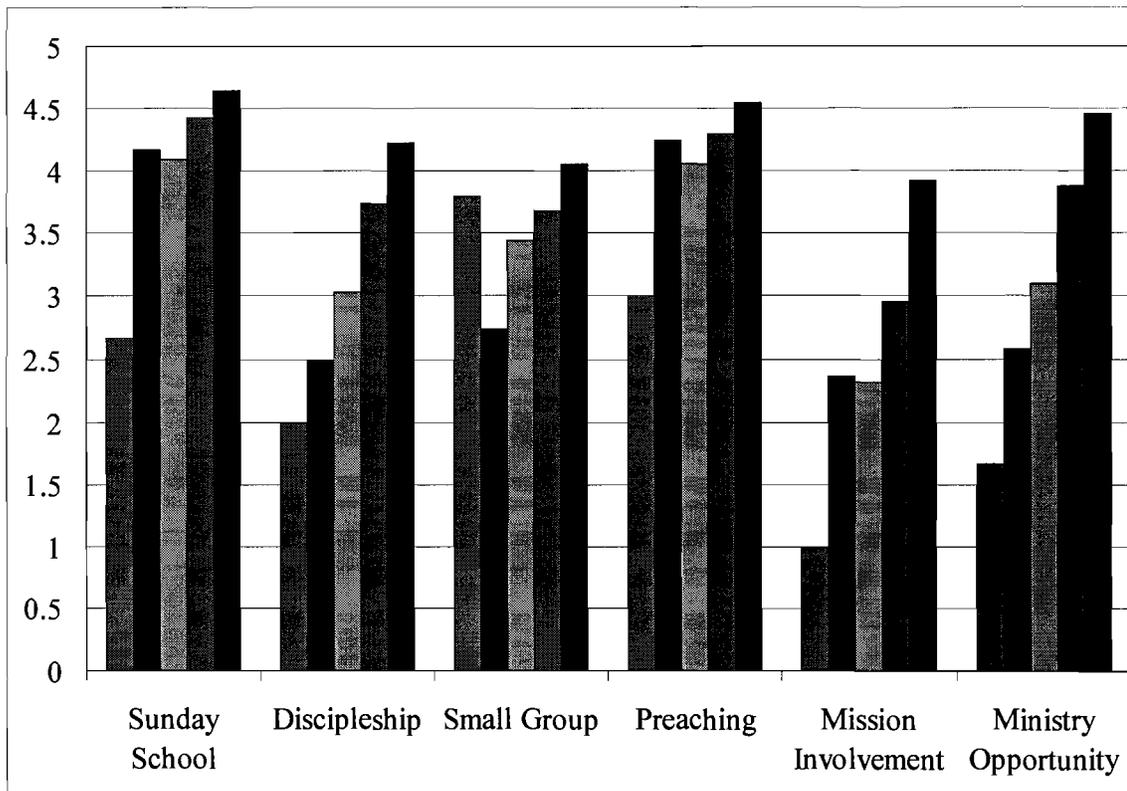


Figure 21. Comparison of  $m$  influence score by spiritual maturity level

Legend: Medium Gray =  $m$  influence score of 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level;  
 Black =  $m$  influence score of 3.0-3.49 spiritual maturity level;  
 Light Gray =  $m$  influence score of 3.5-3.99 spiritual maturity level;  
 Medium Dark Gray =  $m$  influence score of 4.0-4.49 spiritual maturity level;  
 Dark Gray =  $m$  influence score of 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level

the addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory*. Pastors and ministers of education were provided the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* and were asked to identify the practices their churches employ as they attempt to fulfill the Great Commission. Individual disciples were asked on the addendum to identify the influence specific discipleship practices have had on their Christian spiritual growth. Respondents were asked to indicate the influence of these practices using a Likert response scale from 1 to

5, 1 being low influence and 5 being high influence with an opportunity to mark N/A if they did not have any exposure to a practice.

The second approach to answering this question focused upon grouping respondents by chronological age and spiritual age and calculating the  $m$  influence score for each discipleship practice. An important note should be made concerning the calculation of  $m$  for this portion of the study. The researcher included all “N/A” responses in the calculation of  $m$ . In order to do this, the researcher valued the “N/A” response as a zero, which will naturally lower the mean. The researcher chose to include the “N/A” responses and represent them with a 0 in order to determine if the mode for any given age group for a particular practice would be 0. All previous calculations of  $m$  influence scores have excluded the “N/A” responses. Therefore the  $m$  influence score for each practice discussed in the first approach was different from the  $m$  influence score discussed in the second approach.

Analysis of the data for this section focused upon examining the influence scores for the specific discipleship practices with the practices churches employed. This section examined each practice separately.

### **Influence of Sunday School**

Question 1 on the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* focused on Sunday school as a discipleship practice: “Does your church have a time designated for Bible Study each week (i.e., Sunday school, or other times of Bible Study)?” There were seventeen churches involved in this research, and all seventeen churches offer Sunday school or Bible study every week. Of all the discipleship practices, Sunday school was

ranked as the most influential discipleship practice with a mean score of 4.351 and a mode of 5.

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of Sunday school was highest among those who were older, but the mode for each age group was still 5. This indicates that though Sunday school is slightly less influential among younger adults, it is still a significant influence in the process of spiritual maturation (see Figure 22 and Table 14). The data related to the spiritual age revealed the same trend. There is a steady increase upward the longer a person is a Christian (see Figure 23 and Table 15).

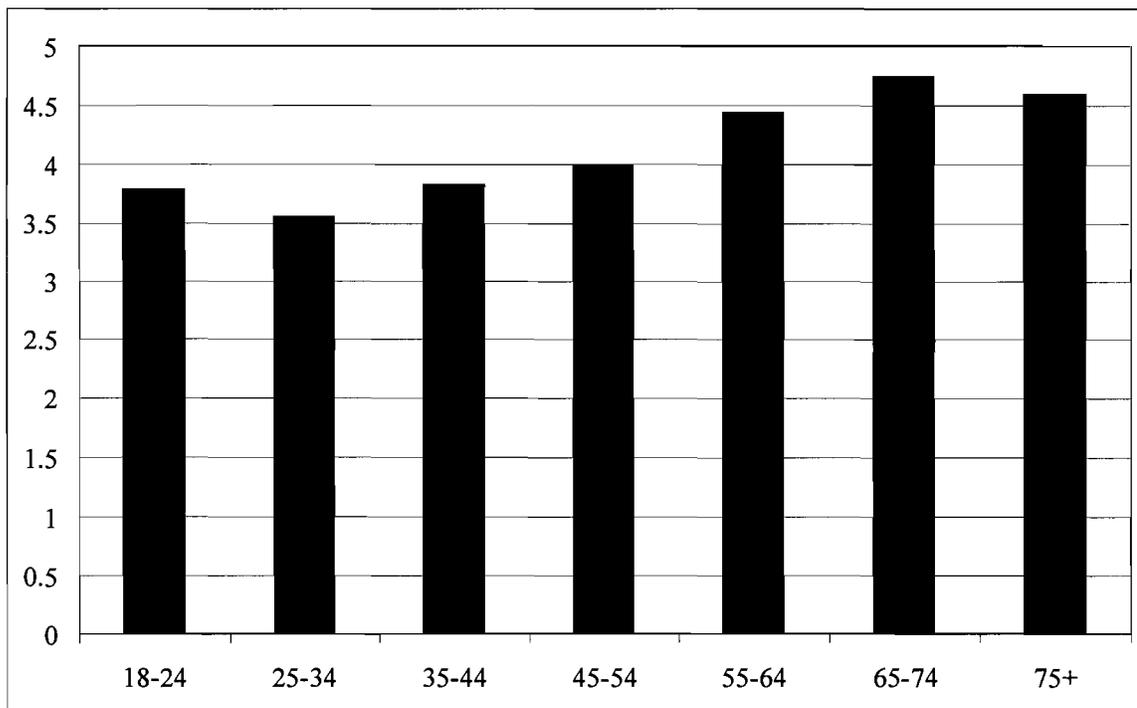


Figure 22. *m* influence score for Sunday school based upon chronological age of respondents

Table 14.  $m$  influence score and  $n$  of respondents for Sunday school based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	$m$	mode	$n$
18-24	3.795	5	39
25-34	3.559	5	59
35-44	3.833	5	96
45-54	4.000	5	108
55-64	4.437	5	87
65-74	4.740	5	77
75+	4.600	5	35

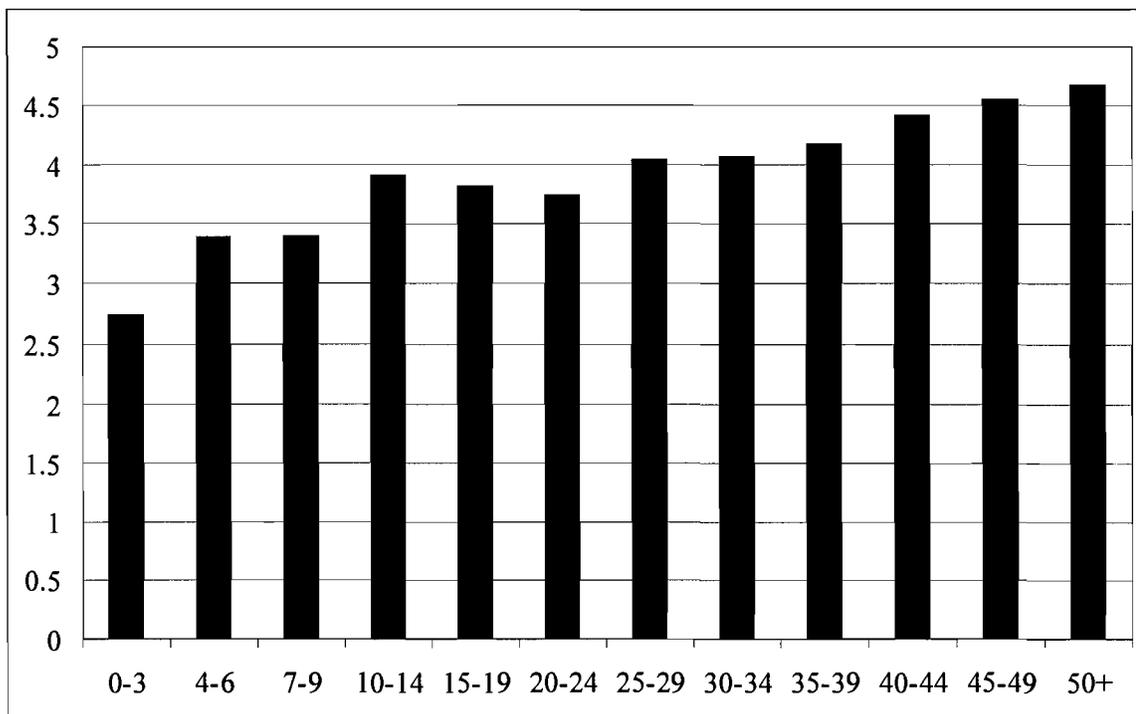


Figure 23.  $m$  influence score for Sunday school based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 15. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for Sunday school based upon spiritual age

Spiritual Age	<i>M</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	2.739	5	23
4-6	3.389	5	18
7-9	3.4	5	15
10-14	3.919	5	37
15-19	3.824	5	34
20-24	3.744	5	39
25-29	4.048	5	42
30-34	4.077	5	52
35-39	4.184	5	38
40-44	4.42	5	50
45-49	4.545	5	33
50+	4.684	5	117

### **Influence of Discipleship**

Question 3 on the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* focused on discipleship classes as a discipleship practice: “Does your church offer specific courses to help members grow in their faith?” Discipleship classes in churches are presented in a variety of ways. Some churches have classes every week, either following the church training model utilized by many SBC churches for years or offering various discipleship courses of varying lengths throughout the year. Other churches might not have offered discipleship courses every week of the year, but they did offer them throughout the year on several occasions.

The *Church Discipleship Practice Survey* revealed that 5 churches (29%) offer discipleship classes every week. One of the churches that offered classes every week also offered them several times a year. Ten churches, 59% of the churches, offered them several times a year, and two churches, 12% of the churches, did not offer discipleship

classes (See Table 16). The influence of discipleship classes was considered by respondents as moderately influential on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being high. The z-scores indicate a close proximity to the *m* as indicated on Table 16. Even though there were two churches that did not offer discipleship classes, there were individuals who indicated that discipleship had some influence on their spiritual maturation. This could be a result of exposure to this practice at another church or through personal or one-on-one discipleship using a discipleship course.

Table 16. Influence of Discipleship based upon church involvement in the practice

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% Churches Involved</i>	<i>m Influence Score</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Count</i>
Every Week	5	29%	3.494	-0.09	<i>n</i> = 154
Several Times/Year	10	59%	3.650	0.04	<i>n</i> = 214
None Offer	2	12%	3.667	0.05	<i>n</i> = 9

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of discipleship was moderately influential in all age groups. Those ages 35-64 and 75+ had a mode of 5, while all of the other age categories had a mode of 0. The mean influence score ranged from 1.923 to a high of 2.966 (see Figure 24 and Table 17). The data related to the spiritual age indicated that discipleship courses were most influential on the lives of those individuals who had been a Christian for more than 10 years. The *m* influence score for those who have been a Christian for 0-3 years is very low, revealing that new

believers were not strongly influenced by these types of courses (see Figure 25 and Table 18).

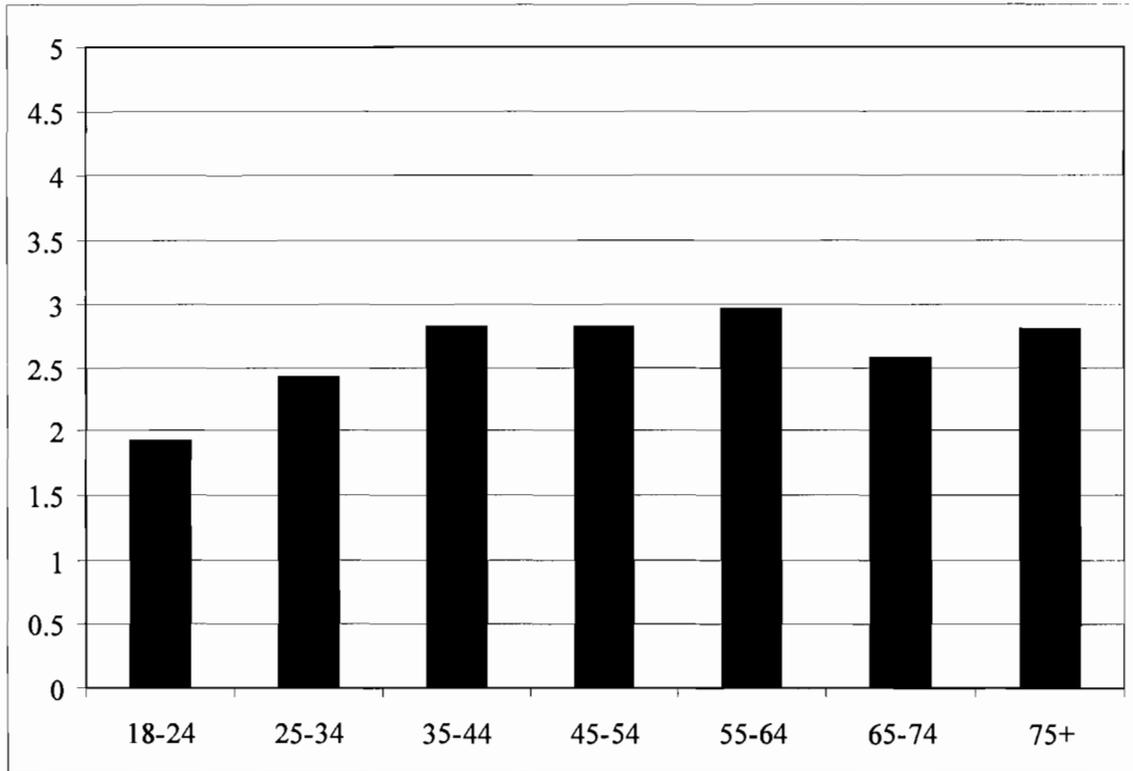


Figure 24. *m* influence score for discipleship based upon chronological age of respondents

Table 17. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for discipleship based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
18-24	1.923	0	39
25-34	2.424	0	59
35-44	2.823	5	96
45-54	2.824	5	108
55-64	2.966	5	87
65-74	2.571	0	77
75+	2.800	5	35

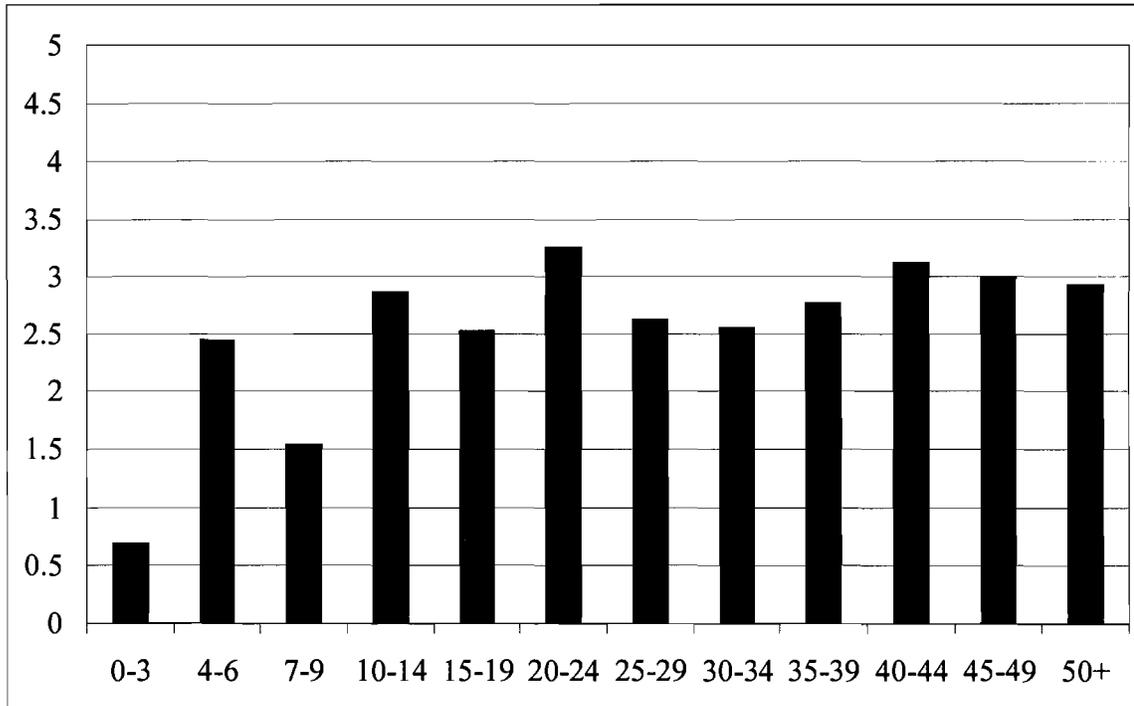


Figure 25. *m* influence score for discipleship based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 18. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for discipleship based upon spiritual age

Spiritual Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	0.696	0	23
4-6	2.444	0	18
7-9	1.533	0	15
10-14	2.865	5	37
15-19	2.529	0	34
20-24	3.256	5	39
25-29	2.619	0	42
30-34	2.558	0	52
35-39	2.763	3	38
40-44	3.120	3	50
45-49	3.000	5	33
50+	2.932	5	117

## Influence of Small Group

Question 2 on the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* focused on the utilization of small groups as a discipleship practice: “Does your church participate in small group, cell group ministry, or home group ministry (other than Sunday School)?” Though the definition and application of small group ministry varies between churches, the basic concept of a group of believers gathering together outside the church facilities for the purpose of spiritual encouragement and enrichment remains relatively the same. Church leaders were given the opportunity to share some specifics concerning their approach to small group ministry in their church. This revealed that several churches utilize these group meetings for support groups, discipleship groups, ladies’ and men’s groups as well as Bible study groups.

The *Church Discipleship Survey* revealed that eleven churches (65%) had some form of small group ministry, while six churches (35%) did not offer small group ministry as a discipleship practice (Table 19). The *m* influence score for small group was

Table 19. Influence of small group based upon church involvement in the practice

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% Churches Involved</i>	<i>m Influence Score</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Count</i>
Yes	11	65%	3.661	0.01	n=333
No	6	35%	3.404	-0.18	n=52

3.650, and those churches that offered small group ministry were slightly above the *m* of the whole with a z-score of 0.01, while those churches that did not offer small group ministry were slightly below the *m* of the whole with a z-score of -0.18. Even though

there were six churches that did not offer small group ministry, there were individuals who indicated that small group ministry had some influence on their spiritual maturation. This could be a result of exposure to this practice at another church or that their church previously offered small group ministry and then ceased to offer this as an ongoing discipleship practice. It could also be a result of a misunderstanding of what “small group (home Bible study, cell group, etc.)” on the addendum referred to.

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of small group ministry was moderately influential in all age groups. Those individuals ages 18-34 ranked small group ministry higher than all of the other age groupings. The influence scores for small group ministry decreased with age. The oldest two age groupings had a mode of 0 for small group ministry (see Figure 26 and Table 20). The data related to the spiritual age indicated this same trend, indicating that those who had been a Christian a long time were not influenced by this practice as much as those who had been a Christian for less than 30 years (see Figure 27 and Table 21).

### **Influence of Preaching**

Question 5 on the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* focused on preaching as a discipleship practice: “What preaching style would you say predominately characterizes you (or your pastor): Topical, textual, expository, or other?” A note placed at the bottom of the page defined for the pastor the meaning of these three homiletical styles: “Topical preaching usually combines a series of Bible verses that connect to address a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that serves as an introduction to the subject being addressed. Expository preaching focuses predominately

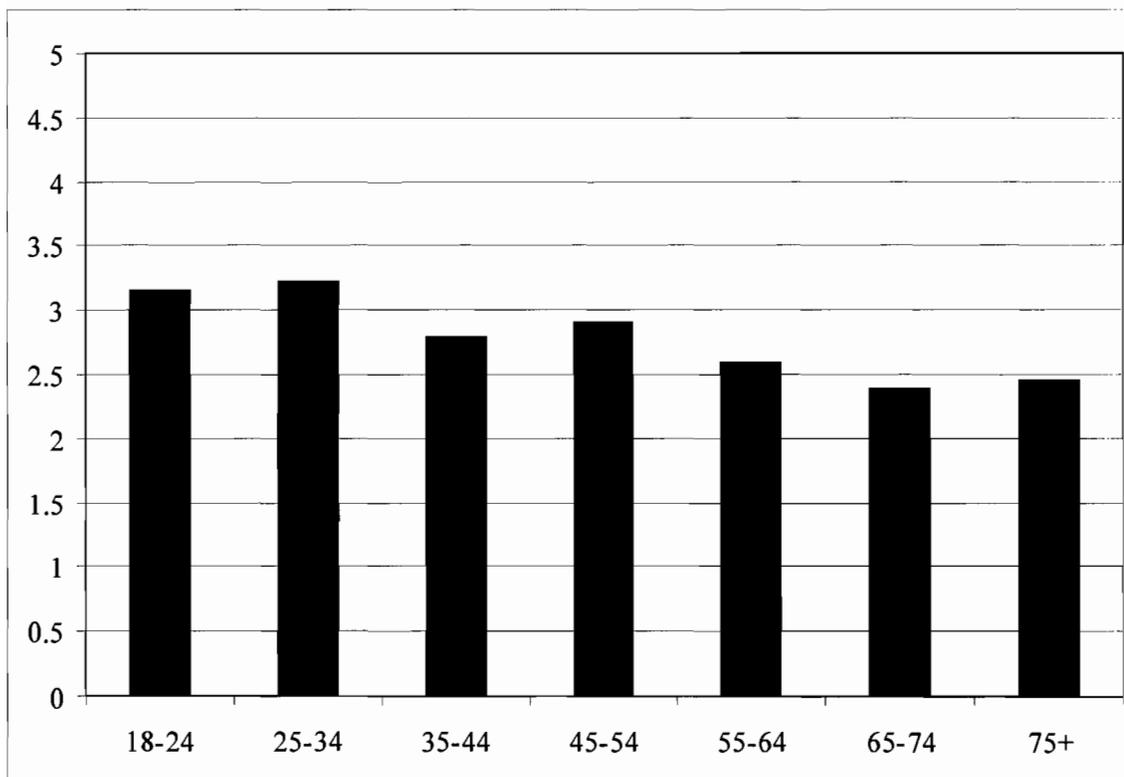


Figure 26. *m* influence score for small group ministry based upon chronological age of respondents

Table 20. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for small group ministry based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
18-24	3.154	4	39
25-34	3.22	5	59
35-44	2.802	5	96
45-54	2.907	5	108
55-64	2.586	0	87
65-74	2.39	0	77
75+	2.457	0	35

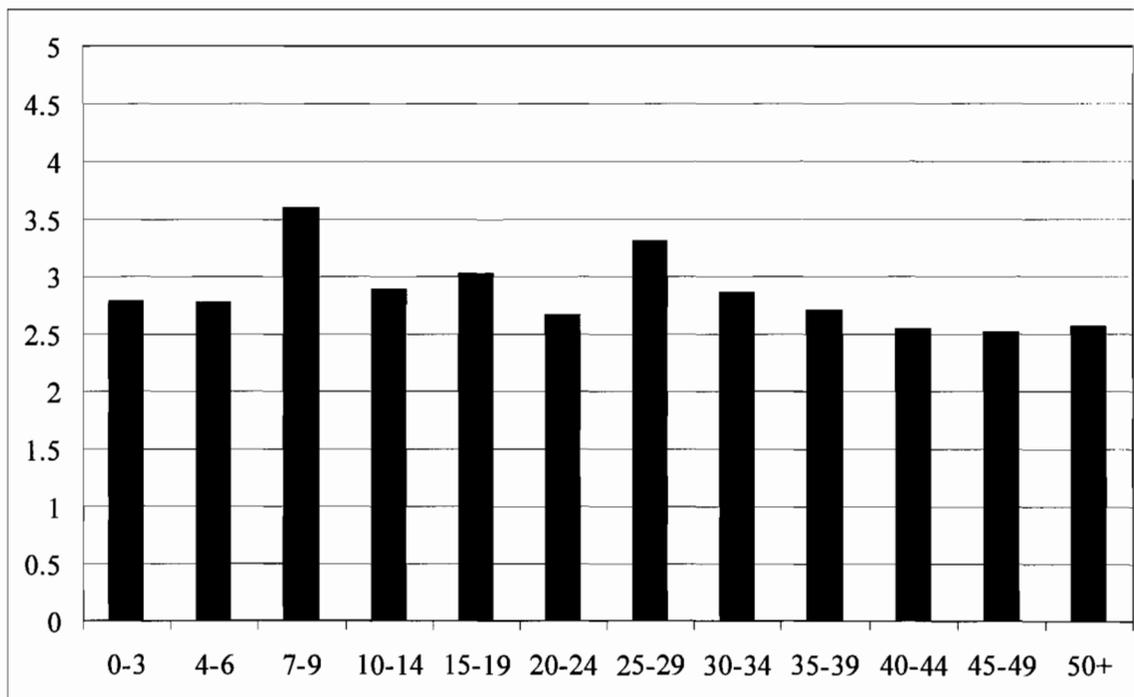


Figure 27. *m* influence score for small group ministry based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 21. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for small group ministry based upon spiritual age

Spiritual Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	2.783	5	23
4-6	2.778	4	18
7-9	3.600	5	15
10-14	2.892	4	37
15-19	3.029	5	34
20-24	2.667	0	39
25-29	3.310	5	42
30-34	2.865	5	52
35-39	2.711	3	38
40-44	2.540	0	50
45-49	2.515	4	33
50+	2.564	0	117

on the text(s) and seeks to convey the Biblical intent derived from the scripture to the listener in a manner that helps him apply it to his daily life.”

The underlying assumption for this question was that every church has preaching as a major emphasis in their worship, though churches approach this discipline in a different manner. Therefore, the researcher sought to identify the type of preaching most frequently utilized by the pastor in his presentation of the Word. As Table 22 demonstrates the predominant preaching style was expository preaching with eleven pastors (65%) indicating that this was their predominant style. One pastor (6%) indicated his predominant preaching style was textual and another (6%) indicated his predominant preaching style was topical. Four pastors indicated a combination of styles: one utilized topical and expository preaching; a second utilized textual preaching 70% of the time and expository preaching 30% of the time; a third indicated he used topical preaching and textual preaching; a fourth simply stated that his preaching style varied.

Table 22. Influence of preaching based upon preaching style of the pastor

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% Churches Involved</i>	<i>m Influence Score</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Count</i>
Topical	1	6%	4.304	0.027436	92
Textual	1	6%	4.4	0.118259	30
Expository	11	65%	4.322	0.044465	183
Combo.	4	24%	4.081	-0.18354	123

The *m* influence of preaching was 4.274, the second highest of all influence scores with a mode of 5. This would indicate that preaching was still a very influential

method of communicating biblical truth. The z-scores of all four styles of preaching indicated that they were closely related to the *m* of the whole and equally influential.

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of preaching was influential in all age groups, though more influential in the older age groups than the younger. The mode for each age group was 5 with the exception of those respondents ages 18-24 who had a mode of 4 (see Figure 28 and Table 23). The data related to the spiritual age indicated that there was a drop in preaching's influence in individuals who have been Christians for 10-14 years. Preaching was the most influential practice in the lives of individuals who had been a Christian for 0-3 years. Preaching was strongly influential in the lives of individuals who had been a Christian for 40+ years (see Figure 29 and Table 24).

### **Influence of Mission/Ministry Opportunities**

Questions 6 and 7 on the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* focused on mission involvement and ministry opportunity. Question 6 related to mission involvement as a discipleship practice: "Has your church offered mission opportunities beyond the local level (i.e., state, national, or international mission opportunities) at least once a year for the past three years?" The question asked of the pastors specifically focused on their consistent offering of mission opportunities for members of their church. This provided a base of evaluation of the nature of the relationship between mission involvement and the spiritual growth of disciples. This underlying assumption permeates the exploration of this question. Therefore, caution must be taken in evaluating this question because individuals were not asked the nature and length of their mission

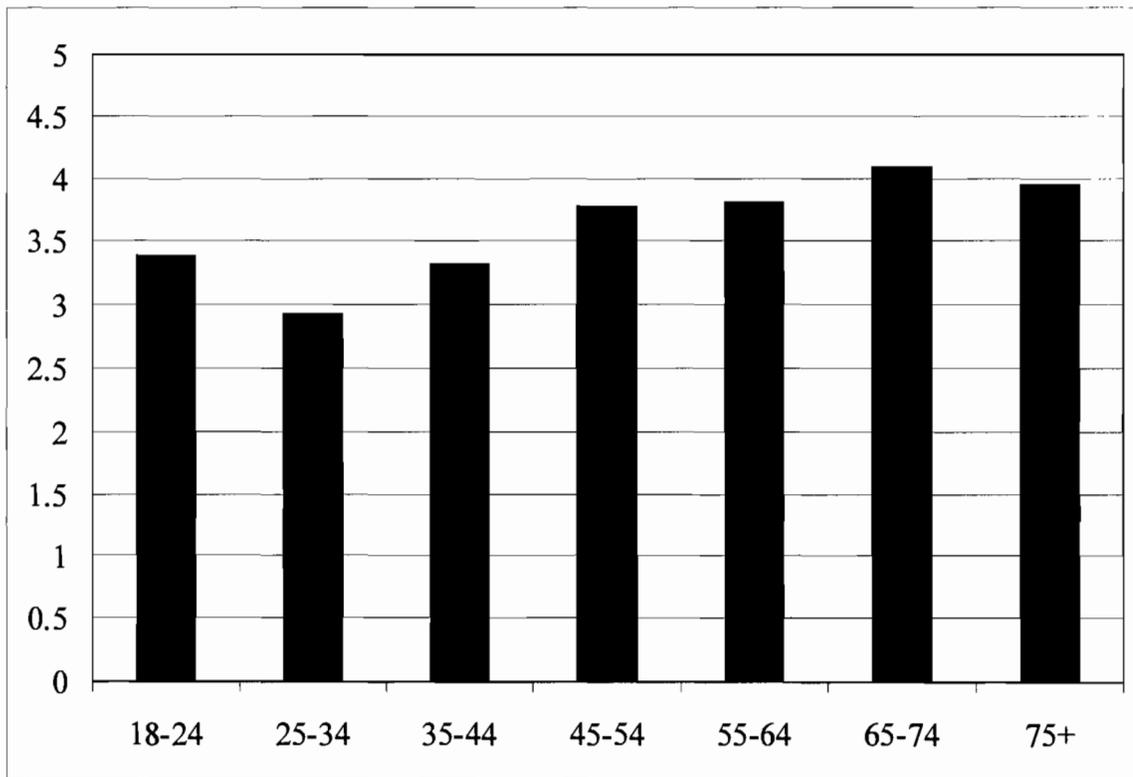


Figure 28. *m* influence score for preaching based upon chronological age of respondents

Table 23. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for preaching based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
18-24	3.385	4	39
25-34	2.932	5	59
35-44	3.323	5	96
45-54	3.778	5	108
55-64	3.805	5	87
65-74	4.091	5	77
75+	3.943	5	35

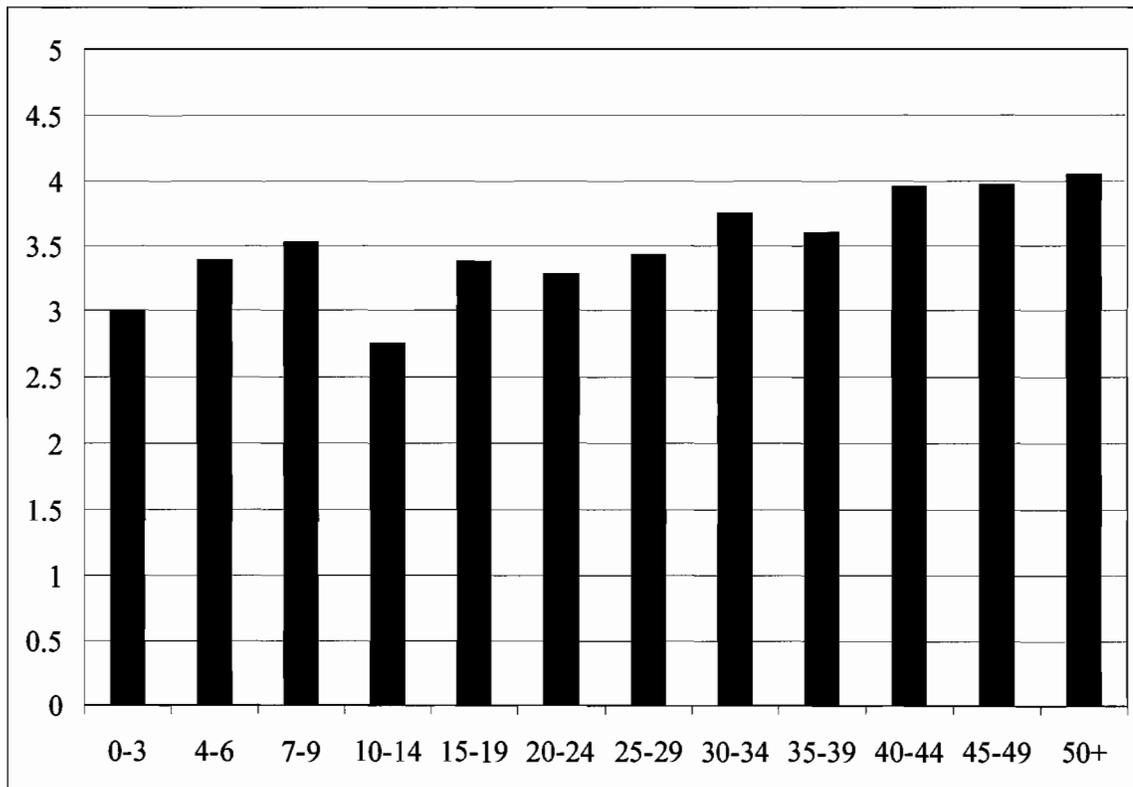


Figure 29. *m* influence score for preaching based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 24. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for preaching based upon spiritual age

Spiritual Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	3.000	5	23
4-6	3.389	5	18
7-9	3.533	4	15
10-14	2.757	4	37
15-19	3.382	5	34
20-24	3.282	5	39
25-29	3.429	5	42
30-34	3.750	5	52
35-39	3.605	5	38
40-44	3.960	5	50
45-49	3.970	5	33
50+	4.051	5	117

involvement on the addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory*. Therefore, it is uncertain if their response is based upon one mission opportunity or multiple opportunities.

Of the seventeen churches, eleven indicated that they had provided mission opportunities on the state, national, or international level each year for the past three years. There were six churches that indicated that they had not offered mission opportunities, or at least had not offered them on an annual basis for the past three years (see Table 25).

Table 25. Influence of mission involvement based upon the church involvement in the practice

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% Churches Involved</i>	<i>m Influence Score</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Count</i>
Yes	11	65%	2.979	0.02	188
No	6	35%	2.842	-0.07	57

There were 245 individuals who responded with *m* influence score for mission involvement of 2.947 and a mode of 1. Of the churches that indicated an annual offering of mission opportunities for the past three years, the *m* influence score for mission involvement was 2.979, with a z-score of 0.02. The *m* influence score for mission involvement of those churches who did not provide opportunities on a consistent basis was 2.842 with a z-score of -0.07. Both z-scores are close to the mean which shows no significant difference between those churches that offered annual mission opportunities and those that did not offer annual opportunities.

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of mission involvement was minimally influential in all age groups with the exception of those ages

55-64. Individuals in this age group indicated that mission involvement was moderately influential with a *m* influence score of 2.828 and a mode of 5. All other age groups had a *m* influence score of 2.026 or less and a mode of 0. (see Figure 30 and Table 26). The data related to the spiritual age indicated that mission involvement was moderately influential in the lives of individuals who had been a Christian for 15-19 years, but all twelve age groupings had a mode of 0. (see Figure 31 and Table 27).

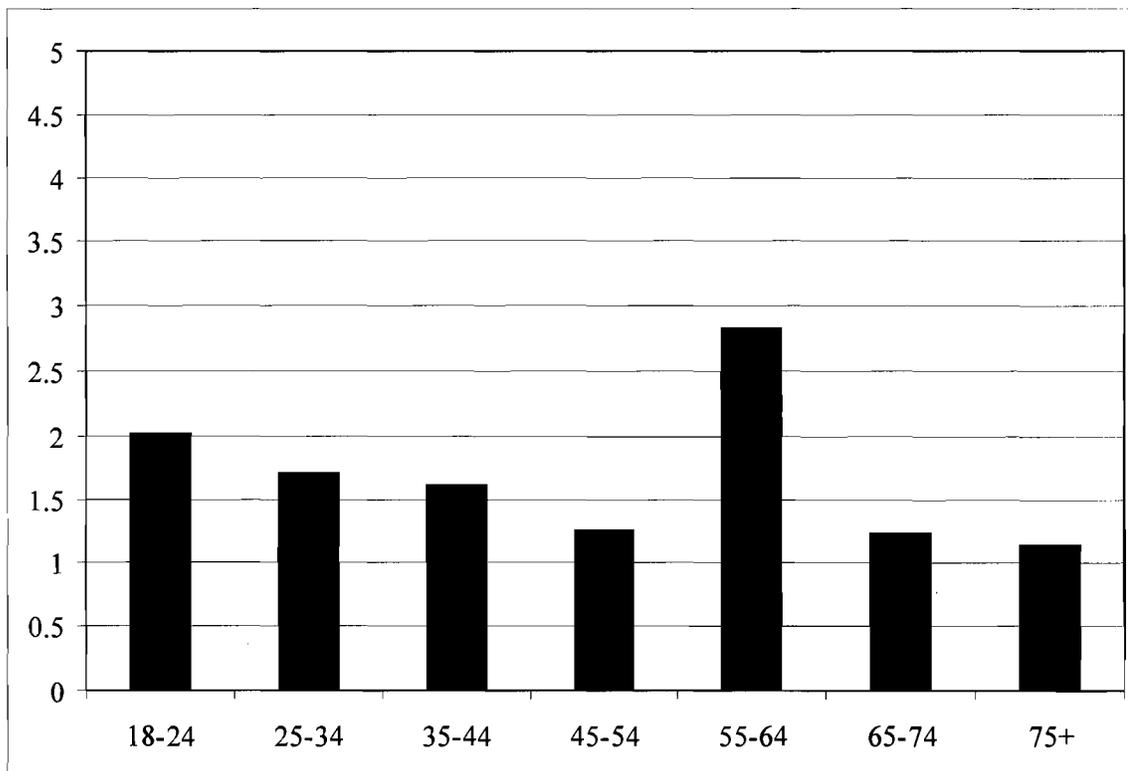


Figure 30. *m* influence score for mission involvement based upon chronological age of respondents

Question 7 related to ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice: “Does your church offer ministry opportunities locally to minister to and reach the community (i.e., block parties, food pantries, recreational leagues, etc.)?” There was an underlying

Table 26.  $m$  influence score and  $n$  of respondents for mission involvement based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	$m$	mode	$n$
18-24	2.026	0	39
25-34	1.712	0	59
35-44	1.615	0	96
45-54	1.259	0	108
55-64	2.828	5	87
65-74	1.234	0	77
75+	1.143	0	35

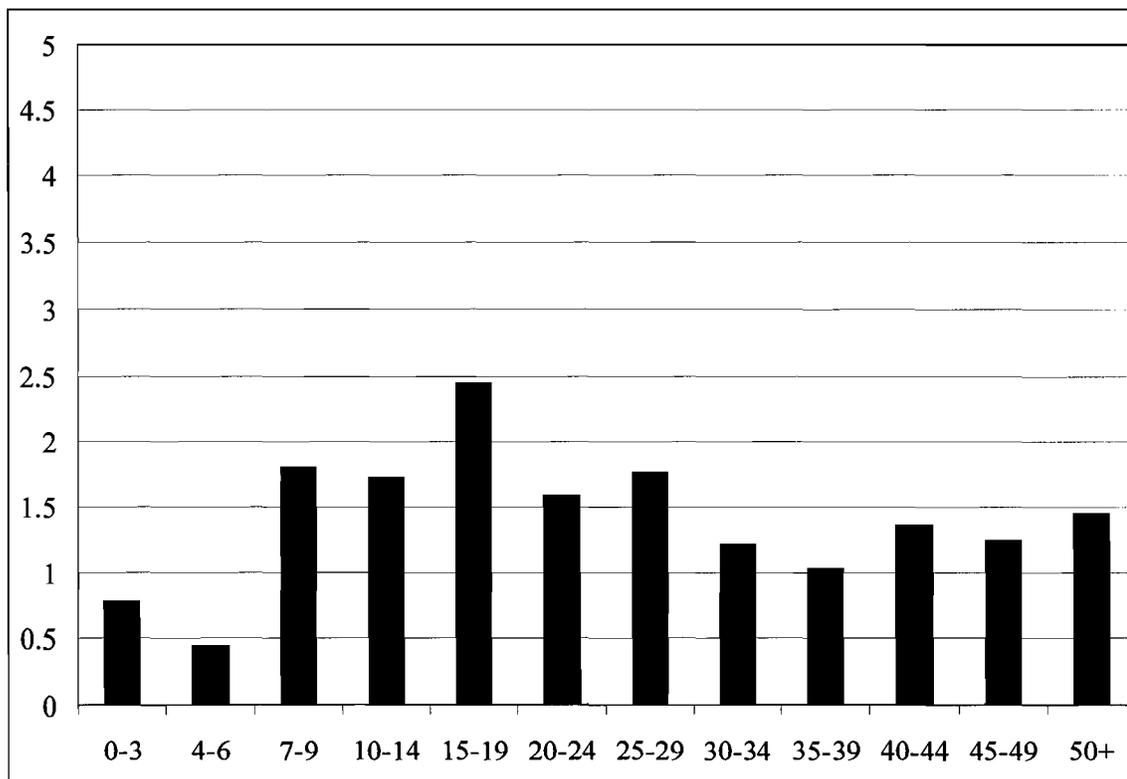


Figure 31.  $m$  influence score for mission involvement based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 27. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for mission involvement based upon spiritual age

Miss. Inv.	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	0.783	0	23
4-6	0.444	0	18
7-9	1.800	0	15
10-14	1.730	0	37
15-19	2.441	0	34
20-24	1.590	0	39
25-29	1.762	0	42
30-34	1.212	0	52
35-39	1.026	0	38
40-44	1.360	0	50
45-49	1.242	0	33
50+	1.453	0	117

assumption that every church provides ministry opportunities in which individuals may participate: Sunday school teachers, choir participation, serving on a committee or ministry team, hospital visitation, evangelism/outreach, and prayer ministries are just a few examples of the many ministry opportunities in which individuals regularly participate. With this specific question, churches were asked to respond to specific ministry opportunities in which individuals were involved in a ministry that reached out to the community. Therefore, caution must be taken in evaluating this question because individuals were not asked about the nature of their ministry involvement on the addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory*. Therefore, it is uncertain if their response is based upon involvement in outreach ministries or other ministries.

Of the seventeen churches, twelve (71%) indicated that they provided ministry opportunities that sought to specifically minister and reach out to their community. Five

(29%) churches indicated that their church did not offer any ministry opportunities that sought to specifically minister and reach out to their community (see Table 28).

Table 28. Influence of mission involvement based upon the church involvement in the practice

<i>Response</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>% Churches Involved</i>	<i>m Influence Score</i>	<i>z-score</i>	<i>Count</i>
Yes	12	71%	3.776	0.02	335
No	5	29%	3.407	-0.27	59

There were 399 individuals who responded with *m* influence score for ministry involvement of 3.749 and a mode of 5. Of the churches that indicated an annual offering of ministry opportunities specifically focused on ministering to and reaching out to the community, the *m* influence score was 3.776, with a *z*-score of 0.02. For ministry involvement of those churches who did not provide ministry opportunities to minister to and reach out to their community, the *m* influence score was 3.407, with a *z*-score of -0.27. Both of these *z*-scores were close to the mean and show no statistically significant difference between the 2 scores.

Based upon chronological age, the data revealed that the influence of ministry opportunities were moderately influential in all age groups. The *m* score for all age groupings ranged from 2.600 to 3.185. The mode of the influence score was not as consistent, with 3 that had a mode of 5, 2 that had a mode of 0, 1 that had a 3, and another that had a 4 (see Figure 32 and Table 29). The data related to the spiritual age indicated the same fluctuation seen in the chronological age groupings. The first two age groupings

that represent individuals who have been Christians less than 6 years are the lowest with a  $m$  of 2.056 or less (see Figure 32 and Table 30).

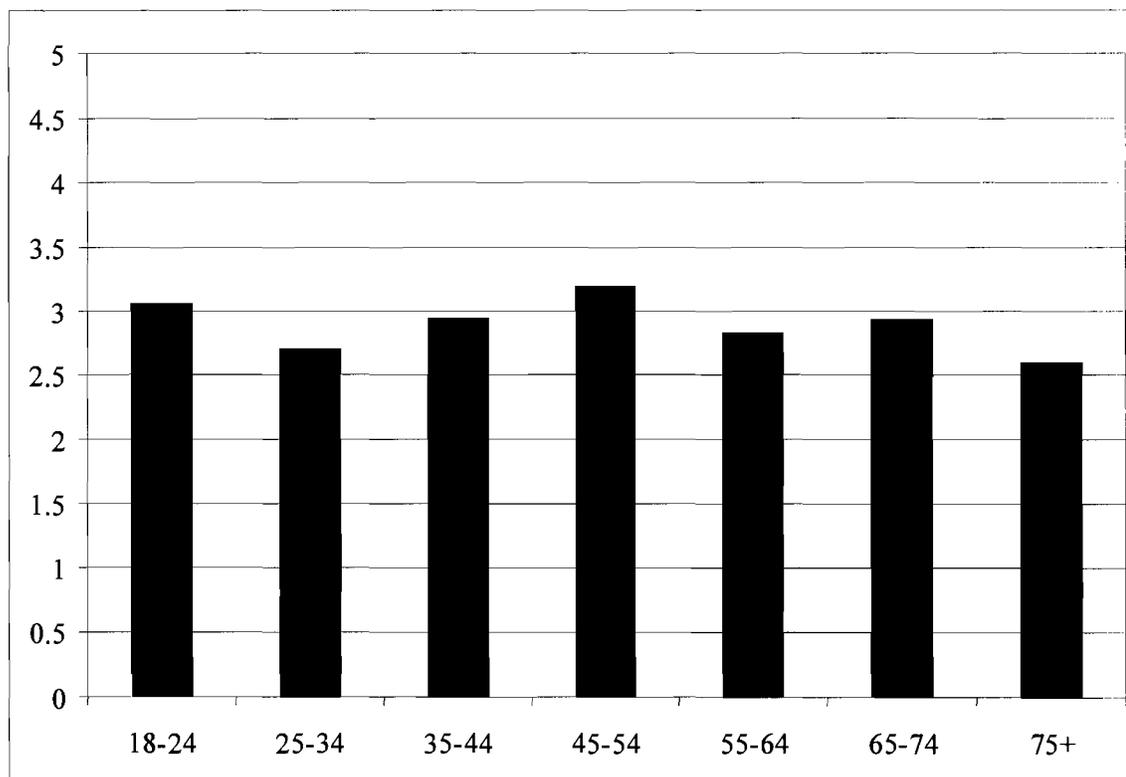


Figure 32.  $m$  influence score for ministry opportunity based upon chronological age of respondents

### Summary of Discipleship Practices Influence

Table 31 and Figure 34 present in a visual form the data illustrating the  $m$  influence score of each discipleship practice from greatest to least. The data indicated that Sunday school had the highest  $m$  influence of the six practices investigated in this study, with a  $m$  of 4.351 and a mode of 5. Close behind the influence of Sunday school was the influence that preaching had upon the spiritual growth of believers, with a  $m$  of 4.274 and

Table 29. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for ministry opportunity based upon chronological age

Chronological Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
18-24	3.051	3	39
25-34	2.695	0	59
35-44	2.938	5	96
45-54	3.185	4	108
55-64	2.828	5	87
65-74	2.922	5	77
75+	2.600	0	35

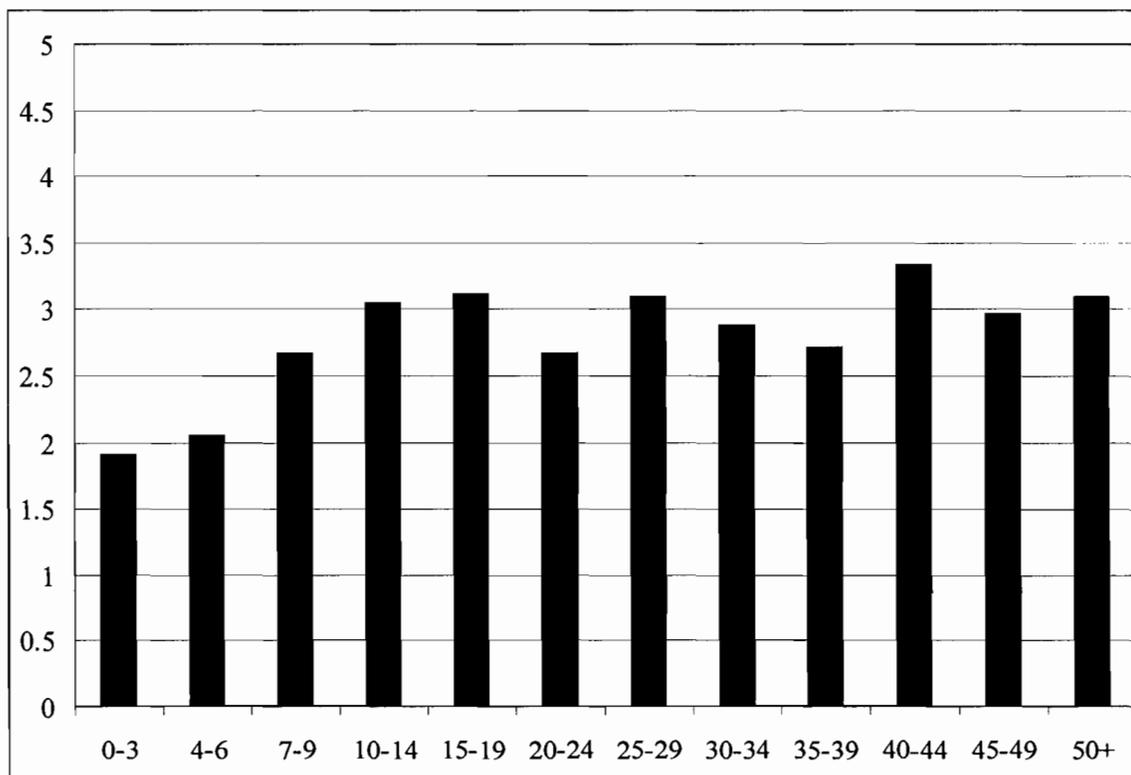


Figure 33. *m* influence score for ministry opportunities based upon spiritual age of respondents

Table 30. *m* influence score and *n* of respondents for ministry opportunities based upon spiritual age

Spiritual Age	<i>m</i>	mode	<i>n</i>
0-3	1.913	0	23
4-6	2.056	0	18
7-9	2.667	3	15
10-14	3.054	5	37
15-19	3.118	5	34
20-24	2.667	0	39
25-29	3.095	5	42
30-34	2.885	3	52
35-39	2.711	4	38
40-44	3.340	5	50
45-49	2.970	4	33
50+	3.094	5	117

a mode of 5. Ministry opportunity was the third most influential practice with a *m* of 3.749 and a mode of 5. Small group and discipleship courses were almost tied: small group having an influence *m* of 3.650 and discipleship having a *m* influence score of 3.605. Small group and discipleship both had a mode of 5. Statistically, mission involvement with a *m* influence score of 2.947 and a mode of 1 was considered the least influential of all of the practices examined.

### ***The Major Differences between Churches***

The seventh research question examined the major differences, as they related to discipleship practices, between the churches that had a higher percentage of spiritually maturing disciples and churches that had a lower percentage of spiritually maturing disciples. The data obtained from the *Discipleship Inventory* and the addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory* for each church was analyzed to determine the percentage of respondents each church had in the six spiritual maturity levels (see Table 32). Data

Table 31. *m* influence score for discipleship practices from greatest to least

Practice	<i>m</i> influence Score
Sunday School	4.351
Preaching	4.274
Ministry Opportunity	3.749
Small Group	3.650
Discipleship	3.605
Mission Involvement	2.947

Figure 34. Comparison of *m* influence scores for discipleship practices from greatest to least

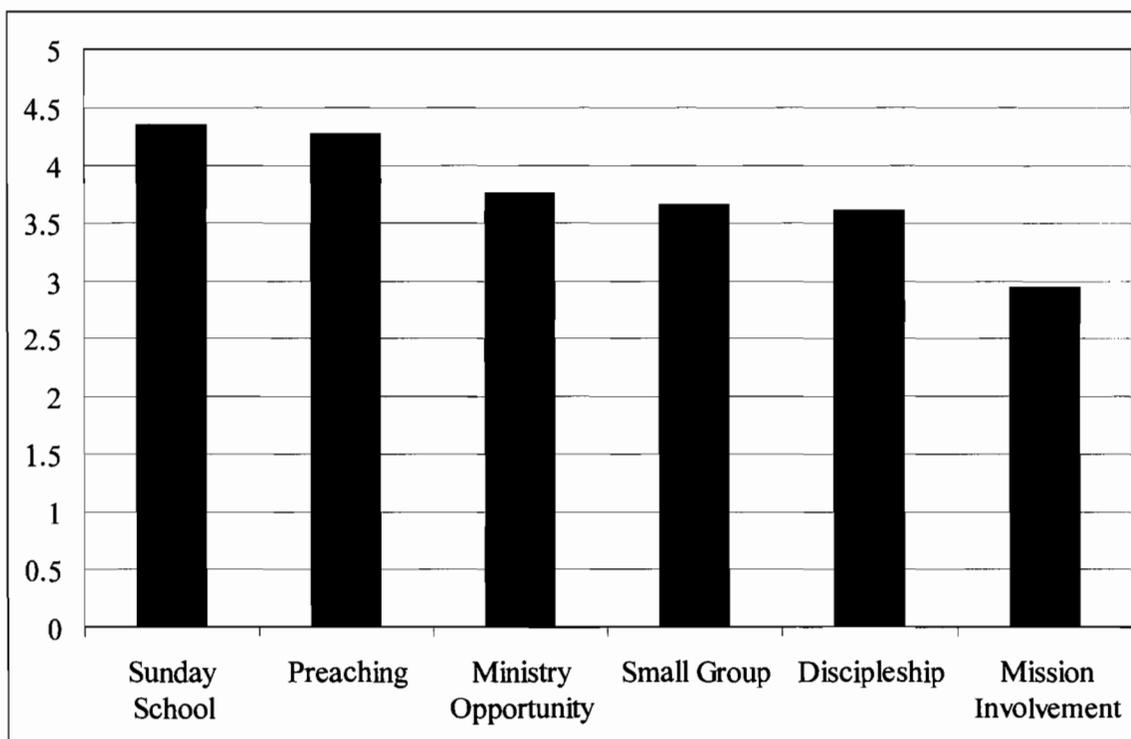


Table 32. Percentage of respondents for each maturity level based upon church affiliation

<i>Church Name</i>	<i>Church #</i>	<i>2.0-2.49 Mat. Level</i>	<i>2.5-2.99 Mat. Level</i>	<i>3.0-3.49 Mat. Level</i>	<i>3.5-3.99 Mat. Level</i>	<i>4.0-4.49 Mat. Level</i>	<i>4.5-4.99 Mat. Level</i>	<i>n</i>
Omega	#107	x	x	X	25%	63%	13%	8
Mu	#109	x	x	x	12%	70%	18%	33
Psi	#111	x	x	30%	30%	20%	20%	10
Upsilon	#116	x	x	8%	8%	67%	17%	12
Xi	#117	x	x	10%	x	50%	40%	10
Tau	#119	x	x	11%	x	89%	x	9
Omikron	#126	x	20%	x	20%	40%	20%	5
Pi	#129	x	x	5%	20%	60%	15%	20
Eta	#204	x	x	22%	35%	39%	4%	23
Gamma	#205	x	x	10%	17%	67%	7%	30
Theta	#206	x	x	x	34%	54%	11%	35
Epsilon	#208	4%	15%	7%	22%	37%	15%	27
Iota	#210	x	2%	6%	23%	60%	9%	47
Delta	#212	x	x	10%	10%	63%	17%	30
Zeta	#214	x	x	x	33%	53%	13%	15
Alpha	#301	x	1%	1%	34%	53%	10%	90
Beta	#304	x	x	3%	20%	60%	17%	99

obtained from this analysis determined the churches that would be included in the examination of this research question. The three churches that had the highest percentage of respondents in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level and the three churches that had the lowest percentage of respondents in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level were selected for analysis. The inclusion protocol for this research question limited examination to those churches that had an *n* of 20+ respondents. This protocol was applied to ensure an adequate number of respondents for the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level. Based upon this inclusion protocol, Mu Baptist Church (18% with an *n* of 33), Delta Baptist Church (17% with an *n* of 30), and Beta Baptist Church (17% with an *n* of 99) had the highest

percentage of respondents in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level (see Table 33). Eta Baptist Church (4% with an  $n$  of 23), Gamma Baptist Church

Table 33. Churches with the highest percentage of respondents in 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level

<i>Church name</i>	<i>Church #</i>	<i>4.5-4.99 Spiritual maturity level</i>	<i>n of 4.5-4.99 Spiritual maturity level</i>	<i>n of church</i>
Mu	#109	18%	6	33
Delta	#212	17%	5	30
Beta	#304	17%	17	99

(7% with an  $n$  of 30), and Iota Baptist Church (9% with an  $n$  of 47) had the lowest percentage of respondents in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level (see Table 34).

Table 34. Churches with the lowest percentage of respondents in 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level

<i>Church name</i>	<i>Church #</i>	<i>4.5-4.99 Spiritual maturity level</i>	<i>n of 4.5-4.99 Spiritual maturity level</i>	<i>n of church</i>
Eta	#204	4%	1	23
Gamma	#205	7%	2	30
Iota	#210	9%	4	47

An examination of the chronological age of respondents in each church does not reveal an uneven distribution of individuals in each of these categories. The

chronological age of respondents does not show a heavy bias toward one age grouping though some churches are not as evenly distributed as others (see Table 35).

Table 35. Chronological Age of respondents in higher and lower percentage churches

<i>Chron. Age</i>	<i>Churches with Lower Percentage of Maturing Believers</i>			<i>Churches with Higher Percentage of Maturing Believers</i>		
	<i>Church #204</i>	<i>Church #205</i>	<i>Church #210</i>	<i>Church #109</i>	<i>Church #212</i>	<i>Church #304</i>
18-24	0%	7%	9%	17%	0%	3%
25-34	9%	20%	9%	10%	10%	13%
35-44	17%	13%	15%	13%	17%	13%
45-54	13%	33%	21%	30%	20%	23%
55-64	17%	10%	28%	17%	17%	21%
65-74	22%	3%	11%	10%	30%	20%
75+	22%	13%	9%	3%	3%	6%
No Resp.	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%

An examination of the spiritual age of respondents in each church does not reveal an uneven distribution of individuals in each of these categories. A natural question arises when considering the percentage of spiritually maturing believers within a church: “How long have these individuals been a Christian?” One might assume churches with a higher percentage of maturing believers to have a higher number of individuals who have been a Christian for a number of years. And conversely, one might assume churches with a lower percentage of maturing believers to have a higher number of individuals who have been a Christian for a relatively short period of time. Examination of this question reveals that both of these assumptions are not strongly supported by the data (see Table 36). An average of 46% of the individuals within the churches that had a

higher percentage of maturing believers had been a Christian for 40 years or more, compared to an average of 36% of the individuals within the churches who had a lower percentage of maturing believers that had been a Christian for 40 years or more. Conversely, an average of 13% of the individuals within churches that had a higher percentage of maturing believers had been a Christian for less than 15 years, compared to an average of 10% of the individuals within churches who had a lower percentage of maturing believers had been a Christian for less than 15 years.

Table 36. Spiritual age of respondents in higher and lower percentage churches

# of Years a Christian	<i>Churches with Lower Percentage of Maturing Believers</i>			<i>Churches with Higher Percentage of Maturing Believers</i>		
	<i>Church #204</i>	<i>Church #205</i>	<i>Church #210</i>	<i>Church #109</i>	<i>Church #212</i>	<i>Church #304</i>
0-3	0%	7%	6%	6%	3%	2%
4-6	0%	3%	6%	6%	0%	0%
7-9	0%	3%	0%	6%	0%	2%
10-14	0%	3%	2%	3%	3%	7%
15-19	9%	3%	6%	6%	7%	2%
20-24	4%	10%	2%	9%	7%	6%
25-29	4%	10%	11%	12%	10%	7%
30-34	9%	20%	13%	6%	0%	7%
35-39	9%	3%	4%	9%	7%	5%
40-44	9%	13%	13%	12%	23%	8%
45-49	0%	7%	6%	9%	10%	9%
50+	57%	17%	28%	12%	30%	25%
No Resp.	0%	0%	2%	3%	0%	1%

The *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* distributed to pastors or education ministers obtained basic information about the discipleship practices employed by the church in its attempt to fulfill the Great Commission. Evaluation of this information must

be done in a general manner due to the unique implementation of discipleship practices in various churches. Table 37 provides an overview of the discipleship practices employed by these six churches.

Table 37. Discipleship practices employed by churches with higher and lower percentage of maturing disciples

Church	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preach	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>Churches with highest percentage of maturing disciples</i>						
109	Yes	STY	No	EXP	Yes	Yes
212	Yes	STY	Yes	EXP	No	No
304	Yes	STY	Yes	COMBO	Yes	Yes
<i>Churches with lowest percentage of maturing disciples</i>						
204	Yes	STY	Yes	COMBO	Yes	Yes
205	Yes	Weekly	Yes	COMBO	Yes	Yes
210	Yes	Weekly	Yes	EXP	No	Yes

Note: STY = several times a year; EXP = expository;  
COMBO = combination of styles

The focus of this research question sought to explore the major differences, as they related to discipleship practices, between churches with a higher percentage of maturing believers and those with a lower percentage of maturing believers. A simple comparison of the practices employed by these six churches does not indicate that there are any major differences. All of the churches provide Sunday school as a discipleship practice and all offer some form of discipleship courses. Only one of the six churches (Mu Baptist Church) did not offer a small group ministry. One of the notable differences between the higher percentage churches and the lower percentage churches was in the area of preaching. The pastors of two of the three churches that had the highest

percentage of maturing disciples described their preaching style as expository, while the pastor of one of the three churches with the lower percentage of maturing disciples described his preaching as expository. In both groups two churches indicated providing mission opportunities for their members at least once a year for the past three years. And all but one church (Delta Baptist Church) did not provide ministry opportunities that sought to specifically reach out to and minister to their community. As stated previously, the assumption underlying this question was that all churches employ various forms of ministry opportunities for individuals to engage in (i.e., teachers, choir members, committee or team members, etc.), so the comparison on this question is explicitly related to ministry opportunities that specifically relate to reaching out to the community.

Assessment of the influence of these discipleship practices as stated by individuals in each of these churches sought to expose possible differences between these discipleship practices. Analysis of the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and z-score revealed a positive influence in almost every practice for the churches that had the highest percentage of maturing disciples. Though none of the z-scores were greater than +2, the positive nature of these scores indicates that these churches' implementation of this practice has had a stronger perceived influence on the maturation of disciples (see Table 38). Conversely, in analyzing the mean, median, mode, standard deviation and z-score for the churches that had a lower percentage of maturing disciples, the z-scores indicate less perceived influence on the maturation of individuals in these churches. There were considerably more negative z-scores in the churches with a lower percentage of maturing disciples, but none of them came close to -2 which would indicate a strong negative influence (see Table 39).

Conclusions based upon the data must be made with caution. The major differences between the discipleship practices employed in these churches are statistically inconclusive based upon the data obtained in this research. The data do indicate that there are some differences between these churches in the implementation of these practices, but determining these differences is not possible.

Table 38. Descriptive statistics for the churches with highest percentages of maturing disciples

<i>Mu Baptist Church - #109</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	4.275	4.394	3.667	3.292	4.345	3.333	3.839
Median	4.24	5	4	3	3	4	5
Mode	4.192	5	5	3	5	3	5
<i>sd</i>	0.261	1.029	1.422	1.367	1.528	1.036	1.233
<i>n</i>	33	33	30	24	21	31	29
z-score	0.371	0.042	0.048	-0.265	0.066	0.253	0.072
<i>Delta Baptist Church - #212</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	4.177	4.690	3.630	3.423	4.600	2.467	3.720
Median	4.259	5	4	4	5	3	4
Mode	4.325	5	5	5	5	3	5
<i>sd</i>	0.375	0.806	1.275	1.419	0.866	1.356	1.429
<i>n</i>	30	29	27	26	25	15	25
z-score	0.118	0.330	0.019	-0.168	0.308	-0.315	-0.023
<i>Beta Baptist Church - 304</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	4.209	4.510	3.667	3.899	4.304	3.051	4.011
Median	4.277	5	4	4	5	3	4
Mode	4.481	5	5	5	5	5	5
<i>sd</i>	0.335	0.840	1.178	1.319	0.980	1.513	1.094
<i>n</i>	99	98	75	69	92	59	87
z-score	0.199	0.155	0.048	0.184	0.028	0.068	0.211

Table 39. Descriptive statistics for the churches with the lowest percentages of maturing disciples

<i>Eta Baptist Church - #204</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	3.893	4.565	3.600	3.632	3.909	3.400	3.381
Median	3.975	5	4	4	4	4	4
Mode	3.638	5	5	5	4	5	4
<i>sd</i>	0.402	0.843	1.465	1.300	1.109	1.724	1.322
<i>n</i>	23	23	20	19	22	15	21
z-score	-0.62	0.21	0.00	-0.01	-0.35	0.30	-0.30
<i>Gamma Baptist Church - #205</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	4.141	4.345	3.571	2.960	4.200	2.471	3.864
Median	4.247	5	4	3	5	2	4
Mode	4.373	5	5	5	5	1	5
<i>sd</i>	0.361	1.111	1.469	1.567	1.118	1.663	1.082
<i>n</i>	30	29	21	25	25	17	22
z-score	0.02	-0.01	-0.03	-0.51	-0.07	-0.31	0.09
<i>Iota Baptist Church - 210</i>							
	Mat. Scr.	S.S.	Discp.	Sm. Grp.	Preaching	Miss. Inv.	Min. Opp.
<i>m</i>	4.124	4.426	2.906	3.447	4.244	3.038	3.657
Median	4.301	5	3	4	5	3	4
Mode	3.698	5	3	4	5	4	5
<i>sd</i>	0.398	0.950	1.279	1.350	1.338	1.371	1.327
<i>n</i>	47	47	32	38	41	26	35
z-score	-0.02	0.07	-0.55	-0.15	-0.03	0.06	-0.07

### Evaluation of Research Design

This section will examine the research design implemented for this descriptive research study. An evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses will focus on ways this study and others like it can be enhanced for greater effectiveness and improve the quality of information received.

This descriptive research study sought to examine the relationship that exist between the discipleship practices that churches employ and the spiritual development of maturing believers. The topic of study was of great interest to those pastors who participated, a fact which helped in their willingness to encourage church participation.

The research design utilized a proportional stratified sampling technique applied to a randomly selected group of churches in the FBA. The outcome of the data demonstrated that this design greatly aided the implementation of this research and would be recommended to others considering similar studies. The researcher received a good representation of the diverse makeup of the FBA: traditional churches, mission churches, ethnic churches, and contemporary churches were included in this sampling.

This research was carried out in two phases: research among the senior pastors or ministers of education and research among the worship attendees of the selected churches. Phase one of this research design included enlistment and participation of pastors or ministers of education in the completion of the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey*. The letter that was written to participating pastors did not produce the awareness to this study that was intended. The researcher found that some of them did not remember receiving the letter, while others received it but were uncertain of their participation. Those pastors who were aware of the study from the FBA meetings that the researcher was privileged to attend were more receptive of the letter and understanding of the intention of the research. Therefore, the follow-up phone call to enlist the pastors' support in this study was crucial and would not have been accomplished simply through written correspondence.

The *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* accomplished its purposed design.

There were a few minor changes the researcher would make in regards to this instrument in the future. First, the researcher would have sought to obtain more specific information on the nature of the discipleship practices employed by the church. Question 6 simply asks “*Has your church offered mission opportunities beyond the local level (i.e.: state, national, or international mission opportunities) at least once a year for the past three years?*” An improvement to this question would be an inclusion of a place to describe the specific types of mission opportunities the church provided. Question 7 asked the pastors about ministry opportunities specific to reaching out and ministering to their community. Though this was helpful information, it was somewhat inconsistent with the nature of the question asked of the individuals who filled out the worship attendee’s survey.

Phase 2 of the research design focused on surveying worship attendees at participating churches. Rather than surveying Sunday school participants, which would have provided a good and reliable sample base, the researcher sought to broaden the sample base to include others who might not attend Sunday school. Though it was more difficult to survey worship attendees, this methodological design proved to be extremely beneficial. The researcher was able to obtain data from a wider spectrum of the church body, increasing the application of the findings to the whole church rather than to a select few.

The revised edition of the *Discipleship Inventory* proved to be a good tool for providing a “snap-shot” of the spiritual maturity of an individual at a point in time. This instrument was not designed to be predictive in nature, nor was it designed to limit an individual to a certain level of maturity. Instead, it allowed the researcher to take the spiritual vital signs of the church at a given moment in their journey with Christ.

The researcher discovered an area of concern with this instrument that may need to be explored in future uses of this instrument. The instrument was designed to measure the functional characteristics of a disciple in seven areas: learning the truth, obeying God/denying self, serving God and others, sharing Christ, exercising faith, seeking God, and building relationships. There were also doctrinal questions included in this instrument that sought to examine a knowledge base for the respondents. The survey design was somewhat weakened by the predictable pattern that the questions fell into, particularly as they related to the doctrinal questions. Table 40 demonstrates a frequency chart that shows the number of questions for each of the characteristics. This chart shows that a heavy weight was given to the doctrinal questions. Added to this concern was the location of these doctrinal questions. The seven characteristics were not grouped together by question, but the doctrinal questions all came in one section (questions 37-53). The researcher noticed when scoring the instruments that a majority of respondents answered 5 for every one of these questions. No doubt this was a result of genuine belief, but there was also the possibility of a pattern the respondents could have easily gotten into, answering 5 repeatedly. This study was not involved in evaluating the individual characteristics and, therefore, did not focus on examining the individual scores for each characteristic. Therefore, though it is difficult to determine if this weighted the respondent's final score, it does raise some questions in the mind of the researcher.

The methodological design originally called for the surveys to be completed by respondents in a room at the church or to be taken home and filled out and returned the next week to the church. This design was considered based upon a conversation with one of the pastors in the FBA. But concerns were raised in the researcher's mind about this

Table 40. *Discipleship Inventory* question frequency and percentages

<i>Discipleship Characteristics</i>	<i># of Questions for Characteristics</i>	<i>% of Questions for Characteristics</i>
Learning the Truth	7	8%
Obeying God/ Denying Self	12	14%
Serving God & Others	8	10%
Sharing Christ	10	12%
Exercising Faith	7	8%
Seeking God	13	16%
Building Relationships	9	11%
Doctrinal Questions	17	20%

Note: These figures are based on questions 1 through 83.

approach after talking with the pastors who were actually involved in the study. None of the first few churches contacted had an additional room adjacent to the worship center that could be utilized for this approach. These pastors also were concerned that the surveys would not be returned if they needed to be brought back to the church. The researcher decided to utilize self-addressed stamped envelopes included in the survey packet for the convenience of the respondent as well as to increase the return rate. This proved to be a wise adjustment, providing the researcher with a 37% return rate.

The use of research assistants also expedited the distribution of the instruments. Sunday morning was the only day and time the surveys could be distributed which severely limited the rapid distribution of surveys. The utilization of research

assistants allowed for distribution in multiple churches on the same Sunday, expediting the process.

The use of the publicity pack provided information for participating churches to use in advertising the approaching study in their church. Publicity information was provided to encourage the widest spectrum of respondents possible. The researcher does not know if the churches utilized this information, but the provision of this information allowed for the possibility of its utilization. The researcher did discover from the reports received from the research assistants that, in the churches where the pastor publicly promoted and encouraged participation in the study, the distribution of the surveys was much easier. Future studies that are similar in design would be wise to personally contact the pastor the Thursday or Friday before the distribution of the survey to encourage his public support during the announcement portion of the service.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS

Making disciples is the heart beat of the church. This is the foundational purpose for her existence. Therefore, an evaluation of the practices most frequently employed by churches provides an objective evaluation of the influence these practices have had upon the individual lives of disciples. This final chapter examines the research findings as they relate to the research purpose and research questions and explores the implications and applications of these research findings as they relate to the purpose.

#### **Research Purpose and Questions**

In an attempt to understand what influence discipleship practices have had upon the lives of individuals within the seventeen FBA churches, an underlying research purpose and seven research questions guided this study.

#### ***Research Purpose***

This study sought to understand the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the impact these practices have upon the spiritual maturity of disciples.

The six discipleship practices that were explored were Sunday school, discipleship courses, small group ministry, preaching, mission involvement, and ministry opportunities.

### *Research Questions*

Seven research questions were developed to help evaluate the relationship between discipleship practices and spiritual maturity:

1. What is the relationship between Sunday school as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
2. What is the relationship between discipleship courses as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
3. What is the relationship between small group ministry as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
4. What is the relationship between preaching as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
5. What is the relationship between missions/ministry opportunities as a discipleship practice and the spiritual maturity of disciples?
6. What is the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the identification by individual disciples of practices that influenced their level of spiritual maturity?
7. What are the major differences, as they relate to discipleship practices, between the churches that had a higher percentage of spiritually maturing disciples and churches that had a lower percentage of spiritually maturing disciples?

The first five research questions sought to explore the relationship that each of the individual discipleship practices has upon the spiritual maturity of disciples. These questions were answered through the use of an instrument that measured spiritual maturity and an instrument that asked the individual to rate the self-perceived influence specific practices have had upon his spiritual growth.

The sixth research question sought to examine the various discipleship practices churches employ as they relate to the disciple's self-perceived influence these practices have had upon his spiritual growth. The researcher sought to compare and contrast the influence various discipleship practices had upon the spiritual growth of

believers in order to see which practices were considered by disciples to be the most influential.

The final research question compared the three churches with the highest percentage of spiritually maturing disciples with the three churches that had the lowest percentage of spiritually maturing disciples to see if there were any identifiable differences between these two groups. An examination of the differences between the discipleship practices employed by both groups of churches was done to accomplish this objective.

### **Exploring the Influence of Discipleship Practices on Spiritual Growth**

The first five research questions pertained specifically to the individual discipleship practices and their relationship with the self-perceived influence on the spiritual growth of believers. The sixth research question also dealt with the discipleship practices, looking at the self-perceived influence a disciple assigned to a practice. Questions 1 through 5 and question 6 are closely related because both sets of questions are seeking to evaluate the influence the discipleship practices have upon the lives of the individual disciples. Discussion of all six of these questions will be dealt with together for the sake of clarity and concision.

The exploration of the influence of Christian education is not new. In 1987 Peter L. Benson and Carolyn H. Elkin, under the direction of the Search Institute, conducted a major study that lasted three-and-one-half years and included six denominations. The focus of the study was to examine the educational programs of the church in order to help mainline churches regain lost ground. "Of particular concern here

are the failure to attract young adults and young families, inactivity in congregational life, the loss of members, and the loss of denominational loyalty” (Benson and Elkin 1990, 1). The approach of the Search Institute study was somewhat different from this current study, but the studies share the same purpose: exploring the influence and impact that churches are having upon the fulfillment of the Great Commission.

Though it is always difficult to quantify such a personal and supernatural relationship, this current study sought to capture a snapshot of individual disciples as they walk in relationship with Christ. Using a revised version of the *Discipleship Inventory*, which flowed from an in-depth biblical study of the functional characteristics of a disciple, this current study sought to measure the maturity level of individual respondents and then evaluate the self-perceived influence discipleship practices have had upon their spiritual maturity.

The *Discipleship Inventory* utilized a Likert response scale of 1 to 5, 1 being low and 5 being high. Respondents were asked 83 questions, and the total of all responses was divided by 83 to arrive at the maturity score. For purposes of evaluation, respondents were placed into spiritual maturity levels (2.0-2.49, 2.5-2.99, 3.0-3.49, 3.5-3.99, 4.0-4.49, and 4.5-4.99) based upon their maturity score. No attempt was made by the researcher or the author of the instrument to indicate the exact level of maturity a given score represents, although Jim Slack and others at the International Mission Board of the SBC did develop a guide to score the original *Discipleship Inventory*. This guide can be found in the *Master Life: Leaders Guide* (Willis 1997, 67). This researcher utilized the top spiritual maturity level as a reference point for the most mature individuals in the research sample.

### ***Exploring the Influence of Sunday School***

Sunday school received the highest *m* influence score of all of the discipleship practices (4.351). All 17 churches involved in this study offered Sunday school or Bible study weekly as a discipleship practice. The data indicated that the influence of Sunday school on all levels of maturity was high regardless of the level of maturity. The data did show that the influence of Sunday school was higher among individuals who were 55 years or older, but this was only a slight increase. The data also showed that among individuals who have been a Christian for less than 3 years, the influence of Sunday school was not very strong (2.739), perhaps indicating non-participation in Sunday school and a need for assimilation into the ministry of Sunday school. Overall, the influence and strength of Sunday school seems to continue to mark the lives of believers in a powerful way.

### ***Exploring the Influence of Discipleship Courses***

The influence of discipleship courses was strongest among those who were spiritually maturing. The *m* influence score for all spiritual maturity levels was only 3.605, a score that places discipleship courses fourth in strength of influence. There is an indication that individuals who scored higher on the maturity score also indicated that discipleship courses were very influential in their spiritual growth. The *m* influence score of respondents in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level was 4.224, the highest influence score for all spiritual maturity levels. Another indication of the influence of discipleship courses is seen in the data that relate to the chronological and spiritual age of respondents. New believers did not find discipleship courses influential in helping them

mature ( $m = 0.696$  and a mode of 0). In contrast, individuals who have been Christians for 20-24 years had a  $m$  influence score of 3.256 and a mode of 5. The influence scores seem to build up to this point and then begin to decline downward slightly, indicating that there is a specific attraction to discipleship courses for individuals at this stage in their walk with Christ. The data did not indicate that there was much difference between churches that offered discipleship courses every week and those that offered them several times a year. The data also did not show any difference in  $m$  influence score for discipleship among respondents whose churches do not offer discipleship courses.

### ***Exploring the Influence of Small Group Ministry***

The influence of small group ministry increased incrementally with each spiritual maturity level, with the exception of the 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level. This spiritual maturity level had a  $m$  influence score of 3.8 ( $n = 5$ ), the second highest next to 4.5-4.99, which had a  $m$  influence score of 4.056. The influence of small group on those in the highest spiritual maturity level indicates that small group ministries are helpful in helping people grow in their relationship with Christ. The data reveal that small group ministry has been most influential among individuals who are younger than 55 years old. Small group ministry was most influential in the lives of individuals ages 18-34. Small group ministry was also most influential among those individuals who have been a Christian for 7-9 years and those who have been a Christian for 25-29 years.

Eleven of the seventeen churches in the sample population offered some form of small group ministry. There was a slight increase in the  $m$  influence score between

churches that offered small group ministries ( $m$  of 3.661) and those that do not ( $m$  of 3.404).

### ***Exploring the Influence of Preaching***

Preaching was considered the second most influential practice ( $m$  of 4.274) just slightly below Sunday school ( $m$  of 4.351). The influence of preaching was consistent among the spiritual maturity levels, with a slight drop in influence score in the 3.5-3.99 spiritual maturity level. Among new believers, preaching was considered the most influential of all practices with a  $m$  influence score of 3.000. This influence score may be highest among new believers because this is the only discipleship practice many are exposed to. Though the preaching influence score is lower among new believers than most of the other spiritual age categories, with the exception of those who have been a Christian for 10-14 years, this is significant because it indicates the important role preaching holds for the establishment of new believers in the Word and encouragement toward participation in other practices. Chronologically, the influence of preaching was lowest among individuals who were 25-34 years of age, possibly indicating the need for relevant preaching that maintains biblical integrity. The data received from this study did not provide strong evidence relating to the style of preaching most influential in cultivating mature disciples. What this research does indicate is that preaching has been influential in the lives of people, and pastors should not relinquish this medium of communicating God's Word.

### ***Exploring the Influence of Mission/Ministry Opportunities***

Mission/ministry opportunities both relate to the expression of one's faith in

outward service to others. Involvement in these opportunities is different for each individual. This study therefore chose to explore these two practices separately in order to best understand the influence each has upon an individual disciple's life.

**Exploring the influence of mission involvement.** The influence of mission involvement was the lowest of all of the discipleship practices ( $m$  of 2.947). The amount of difference between the spiritual maturity levels was much greater than in any other practice, though the pattern of incremental increases for each spiritual maturity level continued with the exception of the 3.0-3.49 spiritual maturity level, which had a  $m$  influence score (2.364) slightly greater than the  $m$  influence score of the 3.5-3.99 spiritual maturity level (2.318). Though mission involvement had the lowest  $m$  influence score, the influence of mission involvement upon the highest spiritual maturity level should be noted. Those in the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level indicated that mission involvement influenced their spiritual growth, with a  $m$  of 3.923 and a mode of 5. The chronological age of respondents revealed that mission involvement was most influential in respondents who were 55-64 years old ( $m$  of 2.828 with a mode of 5). The spiritual age of respondents revealed that participation in mission opportunities seems to begin after one is a believer for 7 or more years.

Twelve of the seventeen churches indicated that they had offered mission opportunities at least once a year for the past three years. The influence scores indicate that churches that offer mission opportunities had a slightly greater influence score (3.776) than those churches that did not offer mission opportunities on a regular basis (3.407).

**Exploring the influence of ministry opportunities.** The influence of ministry opportunities was the third most influential practice based upon the *m* influence score (3.749). The increase in influence scores was consistent with each spiritual maturity level, moving from those in the 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level, who indicated that ministry opportunities had minimal influence (*m* of 1.667), up to the 4.5-4.99 spiritual maturity level, who indicated that ministry opportunities had a strong influence on their spiritual growth (*m* of 4.456). This steady increase in spiritual maturity as involvement in ministry opportunities increased seems to indicate that either the more mature an individual is the more involved he is in ministry or an individual's involvement influences his relationship with Christ. The data related to the chronological age indicated that the influence of ministry opportunities was consistently the same for each age group. Influence scores all fell between 2.5 and 3.2. The data related to a respondent's spiritual age indicate a steady increase the longer an individual is a Christian, but there was a considerable drop in the influence scores for individuals who had been a Christian for 20-24 years and those who had been a Christian 35-39 years. Those who had been a Christian for 20-24 years had a *m* influence score of 2.667 and a mode of 0. It should be noted that those who had been a Christian for 40-44 years had the highest *m* influence score (3.34) and a mode of 5.

***Summary of the Influence of Discipleship Practices***

The data revealed that each discipleship practice was influencing one area of the church family or another. Sunday school and preaching were consistently influential no matter where respondents were in their relationship with Christ. Small group ministry

seems to connect more with younger adults than with older adults. For those individuals in the highest spiritual maturity level, Sunday school, preaching and ministry opportunities were most influential in their spiritual growth. The charts illustrating the *m* influence score for each spiritual maturity level provided in Appendix 7 provide a visual display of the increasing influence of each discipleship practice. Sunday school and preaching appear to act as the pillars of a church's discipleship practices with all the other practices in between these two pillars. The influence of the other four discipleship practices increased incrementally for each spiritual maturity level.

### **Exploring the Differences between “Higher Percentage Churches” and “Lower Percentage Churches”**

The seventh research question focused on exploring the major differences between churches with higher percentages of maturing believers and those churches with lower percentages of maturing believers. The demographic data showed no significant differences between churches with a higher percentage of maturing believers and those with a lower percentage of maturing believers. The chronological and spiritual ages of respondents in both groups of churches were relatively the same and showed no major differences between these two groups of churches.

In analyzing the types of discipleship practices employed by these churches, no major differences were discovered. All of these churches offered Sunday school or Bible study weekly. All of these churches offered discipleship courses. The only difference between these two groups of churches was the fact that two of the lower percentage churches offered discipleship courses weekly while all three of the churches that had a higher percentage of maturing believers offered discipleship courses several times a year.

Small group ministries were offered by all churches in both categories except by one of the higher percentage churches. There was some difference in approaches to preaching between these two groups. Two of the three churches that had a higher percentage of maturing believers utilized expository preaching as the main preaching style; the other church in this group utilized a combination of preaching styles. Conversely, two of the three churches that had a lower percentage of maturing disciples utilized a combination of preaching styles; the other utilized expository preaching as the primary preaching style. There were no major differences in the utilization of mission involvement or ministry opportunities between these two groups of churches.

The differences between those churches with a higher percentage of maturing believers and churches with a lower percentage of maturing believers were seen in the *m* influence score for each of the discipleship practices. Though none of these differences were statistically significant, there were some differences that were notable. In churches with a higher percentage of maturing believers, the *z*-score for almost every one of the discipleship practices was positive. The opposite can be found among churches with a lower percentage of maturing believers. The majority of their *z*-scores were negative. Though none of the *z*-scores were greater than +2 or less than -2, these lower scores, along with the lower *m* influence score, indicate that individuals in these churches do not rate the influence of these practices as high as individuals in churches with a higher percentage of believers. This may indicate that the differences between these churches lie in the area of implementation of these practices. The scope of this study did not allow verification of this possibility.

## **Research Implications**

This section discusses the implications of the research findings upon the discipleship practices that churches employ in their quest to obediently fulfill the Great Commission. Many of the implications that arise from this study also serve as the platform for more in-depth study of a particular discipleship practice and that practice's influence upon the spiritual growth of believers.

Sunday school has historically been the cornerstone of Christian education in churches for more than two centuries (Garland 2001, 671). This study has demonstrated that more people are involved in Sunday school than in any other discipleship practice. The influence of Sunday school was very high among all spiritual maturity levels, indicating that the strength of Sunday school's influence has not diminished over time. This should challenge Christian educators to continue efforts to strengthen the ministry of Sunday school and to encourage active participation of all worship attendees.

The data indicated that the influence of Sunday school was weakest among those individuals who have been a believer for less than three years. Thom Rainer's research discovered that new believers who became immediately involved in Sunday school "were five times more likely to remain in the church five years later than those who were active in worship services alone" (Rainer 2001, 118). The findings of this current study indicate a need for churches to strengthen their assimilation efforts in order to increase the opportunity for spiritual impact.

The data indicated that the influence of discipleship courses was weak among the less mature believer. Tom Wilkes' dissertation study revealed that individuals involved in a discipleship course that introduced the basics of Christianity also

participated later in a more intense discipleship course designed to deepen their relationship with Christ. In his study, Wilkes found that 42% of respondents had participated in *Survival Kit*, an eleven week discipleship course for new Christians, before participating in *Master Life*, a twenty-four week study designed to develop committed disciples (Wilkes 2003, 56). The high participation in *Survival Kit* indicates a possible connection between introductory discipleship courses and more in-depth courses later in their spiritual journey.

The data related to small group indicate that the influence of small group ministry is growing. The regional differences noted by George Barna were supported in the findings of this study. Barna noted that “adults in the South remain somewhat less likely to rely on small groups for spiritual growth” (Barna 2000, 1). The self-perceived influence of small group ministry was lower among older respondents than younger respondents. This may indicate that older respondents have had no exposure to small groups or they have chosen not to participate. The opposite is true concerning the self-perceived influence of small group ministry among younger adults. The influence score of small groups was greatest among individuals who had been a Christian for 7-9 years and for those who were 18-34 years of age. As a result, it may be more difficult to implement a small group ministry in more traditional southern churches or in churches with a higher percentage of older attendees. But churches should consider the influence small group ministries are having among younger adults and in other regions of the country. Small groups may be a point of entry for new believers or college age students, who are at a critical point in their spiritual development.

Preaching has been disparaged as an ancient relic that is ineffective in modern society. David L. Larsen, in delivering the Hester Preaching Lectures at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in February of 2003, addressed this claim as unfounded and unbiblical (Larsen 2004, 138-45). The data from this current study supports Larsen's biblical and theological case, indicating that preaching is still a strong avenue through which pastors as Christian educators can influence the spiritual development of believers. In every spiritual maturity level, with the exception of the 2.5-2.99 spiritual maturity level (which had a *n* of 5), the *m* influence score for preaching was above 4.0.

It was also helpful to note that among individuals who have been a believer for less than ten years, the influence of preaching was 3.0 and higher. Thom Rainer's research among individuals who were recently unchurched indicated that 90% of them chose to enter the ranks of the church because of the pastor and his preaching (Rainer 2001, 56). When asked about what issues related to the pastor influenced their decision, 211 of 353 respondents said that preaching that teaches was what attracted them, and 147 of 353 said that preaching that made life applications influenced their decision (Rainer 2001, 57-60).

The data indicated that ministry opportunities were a very important practice in the spiritual development of believers. Rainer's research indicated that 62% of individuals interviewed indicated that ministry involvement was "the glue that held them to the church" (Rainer 2001, 123). The current study showed that not only was it the glue that kept people involved, it was also a catalyst for spiritual growth. As an individual grew in his/her faith so did the influence that ministry involvement had upon his spiritual growth.

Finally, an examination of the data indicates that the role that the church plays in the spiritual maturation process of believers is critically important. The data for each maturity level related to the influence scores of the discipleship practices indicated that discipleship practices employed by churches do play a significant role in the spiritual growth process of a believer. Barna's research supports the findings of this current study, indicating that 95% of born again adults "acknowledge that their church encourages spiritual growth" (Barna 2001, 46). But in that same study, Barna discovered that only half of them felt discipleship was one of the two or three highest priorities of their church's ministry (Barna 2001, 46). In Appendix 7 the bar graphs demonstrate visually the increasing influence that their church's discipleship practices had on the lives of believers as they grew in their relationship with Christ. For individuals in the lower spiritual maturity level, Sunday school and preaching were strong but the other discipleship practices were lower. For individuals in the highest spiritual maturity level (4.5-4.99) the *m* influence score is consistently higher. This trend indicates that exposure to multiple practices impacted in some way the spiritual growth of an individual.

### **Research Applications**

The church is entrusted with the task of making disciples. A disciple is not just simply a convert. A disciple is "a person-in-process who is eager to learn and apply the truths that Jesus Christ teaches him, which will result in ever-deepening commitments to a Christlike lifestyle" (Adsit 1996, 35). Therefore, the process of making a disciple is multifaceted and purposeful. There are three specific points of application that flow from this study.

### *The Church: An Important Factor*

Trying to examine the variables that influence the spiritual growth of an individual is challenging. The challenge is compounded by the divine nature of this process. As a result, it is impossible to dogmatically say that any one practice is the golden key to the burden that weighs on the heart of a Christian educator concerned about the spiritual development of the sheep entrusted to his care.

Scripture itself indicates that there are many factors that influence the spiritual development of an individual. The Bible emphasizes the role of parents and family in passages like Deuteronomy 6:1-8, 11:19-21, Proverbs 4:1-27, and 2 Timothy 1:5. Relationships with others are also essential to the spiritual development of individuals (Prov 27:17, Eccl 4:9&10). The scripture also indicates that the church occupies a significant role in helping equip believers for works of service (Eph 4:11&12) in order to present them “mature and complete, lacking nothing” (Eph 4:13-14). This study indicated the church is still an important factor in the spiritual development of individuals. This should serve as a call for all churches to understand the influential role they occupy in the lives of disciples and for them to seize this God given opportunity and responsibility with deepened commitment and renewed fervor.

This study revealed that the two practices that serve as the foundation for most churches were the most influential practices in the lives of believers. Sunday school and preaching, despite being considered by some to be ineffective, were the most influential practices in the lives of disciples regardless of the spiritual maturity level of the individual. Appendix 7 illustrates the two pillars of Sunday school and preaching and the high influence these two practices have upon each spiritual maturity level.

Respondents considered Sunday school to be the most influential practice their church employed to help them grow spiritually. Churches must respond to this tremendous opportunity and intentionally use Sunday school for greater impact rather than simply offer a “program” that may or may not meet the spiritual hunger and needs of her people. Being the most influential practice for a long time does not guarantee continued influence. Great care must be taken to continually evaluate the quality of transformational learning that is taking place in the classrooms.

The twin pillar that continues to influence believers is preaching. Preaching should be considered an opportunity to encourage believers in their spiritual journey. Pastors should seek to translate the timeless truth of God’s word into relevant messages that connect with the daily lives of God’s people. Pastors should consider themselves to be more than preachers; they should also consider themselves teachers given the task of exposing biblical truth to God’s people. With preaching having such a major influence on the spiritual maturity of individuals, pastors should seize this opportunity for discipleship at the congregational level.

When one considers the increasing influence that discipleship courses, small group ministry, ministry and missions opportunities had upon individuals as they grew in their relationship with Christ, it is essential for Christian educators to consider ways to get more people involved in these practices. Again, appendix 7 provides an illustrated look at the incremental increase in practice influence with each succeeding maturity level. If our goal is to help individuals move from spiritual infancy to maturity, then moving them beyond the two pillars to involvement in multiple practices increases the likelihood of their spiritual growth.

### ***Small Group Ministry: A Potential Pillar***

Though the influence of small group was not as great at Sunday school and preaching in this current study, the data indicate that small group ministry has the potential of being a powerful pillar in the discipleship strategy of churches. The research of George Barna already indicates that participation in small group ministry is stronger than Sunday school (Barna 2001, 35). The data in this study indicated that the influence of small group ministry was strongest among those 18-34 years of age. This provides Christian educators with a window of opportunity to connect young adults to the life of the church and influence their spiritual development. This also requires that Christian educators utilize this as an opportunity to develop disciples and not simply a social time void of spiritual benefit.

Though small group ministry has the potential of being a pillar among a younger generation, Christian educators should note that individuals older than 55 years of age did not consider small group ministry to be very influential to their spiritual development. This may be the result of low or no exposure or the unwillingness to be open to “something new.” A slower and more deliberate approach to introducing older members to the benefits of small groups may produce greater results.

### ***Service is a Source of Growth***

God has gifted individuals to be pastors and teachers “*to prepare God’s people for works of service*” (Eph 4:12). This current study revealed that these “works of service” were very influential in shaping the spiritual development of individuals. This influence increased as individuals matured in their faith.

This study also discovered that mission involvement was the least influential of all practices. This does not suggest that involvement in mission opportunities has little to no spiritual benefit. Instead, it may indicate that fewer people have had the opportunity to be involved in mission opportunities since the mode was 0 (N/A). The influence of mission involvement increased incrementally as an individual grew in his relationship with Christ. Therefore, involvement in mission opportunities does have a powerful influence on the lives of individuals who participate in this practice. It not only exposes individuals to the spiritual needs of people in other contexts, it also challenges them to obedience to the command of Christ to “go into all the world,” as well as calls them to “deny themselves.”

Since exposure to ministry opportunities was influential in the spiritual development of believers, churches should provide a variety of opportunities for individuals to become involved in service. This will require various and creative approaches that allow for greater involvement by a larger number of individuals. But the multiple approaches may capture the heart of one who might not have responded if week long mission trips were the only option. Anything that can be done to get individuals to touch someone outside their normal sphere of influence has the potential of spiritual growth and life transformation.

### **Further Research**

Further research as a result of the current descriptive research into the influence of discipleship practices on the spiritual growth of believers is suggested as follows:

1. A replication of the current methodological design could be done in a different context or with a wider sample population.
2. A replication of the current methodological design could be done including churches of other denominations in the communities of the FBA churches to explore the influence these discipleship practices have upon the spiritual growth of believers.
3. An additional research question could be added to the current study to explore the discipleship influence and participation in that practice based upon the chronological age, the spiritual age of individuals and the maturity level to see the influence each practice had upon each demographic grouping.
4. Sunday school is considered the most influential of all the discipleship practices considered in this study. Further study should be done on the various ways Sunday school has influenced the spiritual growth of believers. Specific to this suggestion is an exploration of the role and impact that an individual Sunday school teacher has on the growth of individual disciples.
5. Discipleship courses had a stronger influence on those in the highest spiritual maturity levels but not as strong an influence on those less mature. Further study should be done into the various ways discipleship courses influence the spiritual growth of believers and how those individuals became involved in taking these courses.
6. Small group ministry is implemented in many unique ways in churches. A study should be done on which method of small group ministry has the greatest influence on the spiritual growth of believers.
7. Preaching still has a strong influence on the spiritual growth of believers. Further study should be done on the influence a specific preaching style has upon the spiritual growth of believers.
8. Mission involvement has been influential in the lives of those in the highest spiritual maturity level. Further study should be done among those individuals who have had experience to see in which ways mission involvement has influenced their spiritual growth. Specific to this question should be an exploration to see if mission involvement influenced their spiritual growth or if because of their spiritual growth they participated in a mission trip.
9. Ministry opportunity had a strong influence on the lives of individuals. Further study needs to be done to investigate what types of ministry opportunities influenced their spiritual growth and in what ways ministry opportunities influenced their spiritual growth.

## APPENDIX 1

### CHURCH DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES SURVEY

Pastors and ministers of education received a survey packet containing a copy of the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey*, a *Guidelines for Growth* card, compliments of Insight for Living Ministry, and two coupons for a Chick-fil-A chicken biscuit at the North Monroe Chick-fil-A restaurant in Tallahassee, Florida.

The purpose of the *Church Discipleship Practices Survey* was to obtain data concerning the discipleship practices employed by churches in the fulfillment of the Great Commission. This instrument was distributed to the senior pastors or ministers of education of randomly selected churches involved in this study.

## Church Discipleship Practices Survey

**Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to study the relationship between your church's discipleship practices and the influence those practices are having upon the spiritual development of your church. This research is being conducted by Eric R. Erskine for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked to share information about your church's discipleship practices and your opinion as a minister on which practices are most influential in the spiritual development of believers. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey, and **checking the appropriate box below**, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this study.

- I agree to participate  
 I do not agree to participate

***For Office Use Only***

ID # - \_\_\_\_\_

Categ. - \_\_\_\_\_

**Instructions:** Please fill out this brief questionnaire about the discipleship practices your church is engaged in. Your participation in this aspect of the study is critically important in helping evaluate the relationship between your church's discipleship practices and the influence those practices are having upon the spiritual development of your church. Please use ink and please print.

1. Does your church have a time designated for Bible Study each week (i.e. Sunday school, or other times of Bible Study)?      Yes      No

If yes, please specify the type of Bible Study offered: \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Does your church participate in a small group ministry, cell group ministry, or home group ministry (other than Sunday School)?      Yes      No

If yes, please specify the type of small group ministry offered: \_\_\_\_\_

---

3. Does your church offer specific courses to help members grow in their faith?

Every week \_\_\_\_\_      Several times a year \_\_\_\_\_      None offered \_\_\_\_\_

4. What style of worship would characterize your church?

Traditional    Blended    Contemporary    Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. What preaching style would you say predominately characterizes you (or your pastor)\*?

Topical    Textual    Expository    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Has your church offered mission opportunities beyond the local level (i.e.: state, national, or international mission opportunities) at least once a year for the past three years?

Yes                  No

7. Does your church offer ministry opportunities locally to minister to and reach the community (i.e.: Block parties, Food Pantries, Recreational Leagues, ect.)

Yes                  No

If yes, please specify the types of ministry opportunities your church offers: \_\_\_\_\_

---

8. Does your church provide one on one mentoring relationships for new believers?

Yes                  No

If yes, what percentage of new believers take advantage of this opportunity? \_\_\_\_\_%

9. What other discipleship practices does your church engage in to help members mature in their relationship with the Lord?

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10. On the scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest, mark the response that best represents what **you feel as a minister** (*not necessarily what your*

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\* Topical preaching usually combines a series of Bible verses that connect to address a theme. Textual preaching uses a short text or passage that serves as an introduction to the subject being addressed. Expository preaching focuses predominately on the text(s) and seeks to convey the Biblical intent derived from the scripture to the listeners in a manner that helps them apply it to their daily life.

*church is currently doing*) has the greatest influence on the spiritual maturation of adults in your congregation.

<b>Discipleship Practices</b>	<b>Low</b>				<b>High</b>
Sunday School	1	2	3	4	5
Discipleship Classes	1	2	3	4	5
Small Group Ministry (i.e.: Home Bible Study, Cell Groups, ect.)	1	2	3	4	5
Mission Trips	1	2	3	4	5
Ministry Opportunities	1	2	3	4	5
Camping or Retreat Ministries	1	2	3	4	5
Preaching	1	2	3	4	5
Worship	1	2	3	4	5
One-on-One Discipleship Relationships	1	2	3	4	5

**Thank you so much for investing your time in answering this questionnaire. Your input is valued greatly and appreciated deeply.**

APPENDIX 2  
DISCIPLESHIP INVENTORY

Worship attendees of the randomly selected churches received a survey packet before or after a morning worship service at their church. The survey packet contained a cover letter introducing them to the study and expressing thanks for their participation, a copy of the *Discipleship Inventory*, a *Guidelines for Growth* card, compliments of Insight for Living Ministry, and a coupon for a Chick-fil-A chicken biscuit at the North Monroe Chick-fil-A restaurant in Tallahassee, Florida.

The purpose of the *Discipleship Inventory* is to obtain data that relate to the Christian spiritual growth of an individual. The revised *Discipleship Inventory* was developed by Dr. Brad Waggoner to help identify functional characteristics of individual disciples.

## **Eric Richard Erskine**

302 East Fifth Avenue  
 Havana, Florida 32333  
 (850) 539-7493 (Home)  
 (850) 539-6246 (Office)  
 eete2@lwol.com (e-mail)

September 2003

Dear Brother and Sister in Christ;

The Apostle Paul had a shepherd's heart! This is seen in the many prayers that he prayed on behalf of the believers in the churches with which he worked. His prayer was simple: that they may know Christ, grow in Christ, and become more like Christ (Eph 1:15-23, 3:14-21, Phil 1:9-11, Col 1:9-14). This was Paul's passion, and as a pastor it is a passion that I share. I deeply desire for God's people to know Him and experience Him on a daily basis.

Hi, my name is Eric Erskine. I am the pastor of First Baptist Church of Havana and a doctoral student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, KY. I am conducting dissertation research on the relationship between the discipleship practices of churches and the spiritual growth of believers. My research is being conducted in your church as well as twenty-two other Florida Baptist Association churches.

If you are eighteen years or older, I would like to invite you to take twenty minutes and fill out the enclosed survey and return it to me by either placing it in the survey return box in the foyer of your church or in the postage paid envelope. As a way of saying thank you for your participation I have enclosed two gifts. First, a coupon for a free chicken biscuit at Chick-fil-A on North Monroe, compliments of Terry Widener. Second, a "*Guidelines for Growth*" card that provides five essential disciplines that will help you continue growing in your walk with Christ. The "*Guidelines for Growth*" card is provided by Insight for Living and Dr. Charles Swindoll.

Your participation will provide valuable insights for pastors and church leaders on ways to help Christians become more like Jesus. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me by telephone or e-mail. Thanks in advance for the gift of your time; it is greatly appreciated.

In Christ's Service,



Rev. Eric R. Erskine

## Discipleship Inventory

© 2003 Dr. Brad Waggoner, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY  
*Revised Edition*

**Agreement to Participate:** The research in which you are about to participate is designed to study the relationship between your church's discipleship practices and the influence those practices are having upon your spiritual development. This research is being conducted by Eric R. Erskine for purposes of dissertation research. In this research, you will be asked to share information about your spiritual maturity level and on which practices have most influenced you in your spiritual development as a Christian. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or your name identified with your responses. Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

By your completion of this survey, and checking the appropriate box below, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this study.

*For Office Use Only*

ID # - \_\_\_\_\_

Surv.# - \_\_\_\_\_

Categ - \_\_\_\_\_

Score - \_\_\_\_\_

I agree to participate

I do not agree to participate

- \* Your answers to this survey will be strictly confidential. We do not ask for your name. No one will be able to connect your answers to your name.
- \* It is very important that you answer all questions as honestly as possible. Select answers which most clearly reflect your life as it is, and not as you would like it to be.
- \* Pay close attention to the type of response required in each section of this survey. As you move from one section to another, the type of answers will vary.
- \* Most questions will be answered by filling in the number which most accurately describes your life.
- \* Do not spend much time on any one question. Give every question your best and first reaction, then move quickly to the next.

THANK YOU very much for your time and assistance!

How true is each of the following statements of you? Choose from these responses:  
 1 = Not True 2 = Rarely True 3 = Somewhat True 4 = Often True 5 = Very True

1. I have made a serious attempt to discover God's will for my life. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
2. I strive to live by the moral and ethical teachings of the Bible. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
3. I have sought to identify my primary spiritual gift so that I can be more effective in serving God and others. . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
4. I freely speak with other people about my beliefs in Christ. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
5. I am able to remain confident of God's love and provision for my life even during very difficult circumstances. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
6. I routinely memorize verses from the Bible. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
7. I accept constructive criticism and correction from other Christians. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
8. I avoid situations in which I might be tempted in the area of sexual immorality. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
9. I regularly use my gifts and talents in serving others. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
10. While interacting with others, at work or through ordinary types of contact, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus Christ. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
11. I would say that often my life is filled with anxiety and stress. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
12. I regularly study the Bible on my own. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
13. Because God has forgiven me, I typically respond with a forgiving attitude when I am wronged by others. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
14. I am open and responsive to those in my church who teach the Bible. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
15. Reading and studying the Bible has made significant changes in the way I live my life. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

16. I regularly pray for fellow Christians. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
17. My neighbors and the people I work with know that I am a Christian. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
18. I often act on, or step out in faith in an attempt to obey or follow God. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
19. I share personal feelings and needs with some of my Christian friends. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
20. I regularly study the Bible to learn more about God and His ways. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
21. With reference to my values and priorities, I can honestly say that I am seeking God first in my life. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
22. I know how to explain the Gospel clearly to another person without relying on an evangelistic tract. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
23. My friends would probably say that I worry about a lot of things in life. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
24. I often sense that God, through the Holy Spirit, convicts me of sin. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
25. It is my desire to worship God both privately and at church worship services. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
26. When I become aware that I have offended someone, I go to this person to admit and correct my wrongdoing. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
27. I pray with other Christians other than during church services. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
28. I seek to attend discipleship classes or Bible studies for the purpose of learning and becoming more equipped to serve God and others. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
29. When convinced of sin in my life, I readily confess it to God as sin. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
30. I regularly pray for my pastor and my local church. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Choose from this range of responses:  
 1. Definitely Disagree, 2. Tend to Disagree, 3. Not Sure, 4. Tend to Agree, 5. Definitely Agree

31. A Christian should consider himself/herself accountable to other Christians. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
32. A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
33. It is necessary for a Christian's spiritual well being to give time on a regular basis to some specific ministry within the church. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
34. Part of my service to God is demonstrated by my giving financially to my local church. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
35. It is every Christian's responsibility to share the gospel with non-Christians in and around their lives. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
36. God will always provide for my basic needs in life. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
37. Once a person is saved, he cannot lose his salvation. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
38. If a person is sincerely seeking God, he can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
39. There is a literal place called hell. . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
40. The Bible is the authoritative source of truth and wisdom for daily living. . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
41. Without the death of Jesus, salvation would not be possible. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
42. The Bible teaches that identification with a local church is a necessity for any believer who desires to be truly obedient to God. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

43. Salvation is available by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, without any merit from personal works. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
44. Following death, an unbeliever resides eternally in a place called hell. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
45. The Bible is a completely reliable revelation from God. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
46. Baptism by immersion (being placed under water) is the only proper way to be baptized. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
47. Baptism by immersion is necessary for obedience, but not for the obtaining of salvation. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
48. Every person is born a sinner due to the sin of Adam being passed on to all persons. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
49. There is one true God who reveals himself to humanity as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (commonly referred to as the Trinity). ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
50. Jesus Christ is God's Son who died on the cross for the sins of the world and was resurrected from the dead. . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
51. Christ will return a second time to receive believers unto himself. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
52. God has a specific plan for my life that includes how and where I should serve him. . . . . ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

*Thank you for your help! You are over half way there - keep up the great work!*

Choose from this range of responses:  
 1 = Not True    2 = Rarely True    3 = Somewhat True    4 = Often True    5 = Very True

53. I believe that God has totally accepted me and has forgiven me of my sin. . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
54. Through prayer I seek to discern the will of God for my life. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
55. I am generally the same person in public as I am in private. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
56. I recognize that everything I have belongs to God. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
57. I am somewhat hesitant to let others know that I am a Christian. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
58. I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them. . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
59. Regardless of my circumstances, I believe God will always keep his promises. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
60. I have a heart that desires to please and honor Jesus in all that I do. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
61. I avoid close relationships with others who hinder my Christian values and principles. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
62. I regularly find myself choosing God's way over my way. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
63. I believe that God works through difficult circumstances for the good of those who love him. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

64. I often express praise and thanksgiving to God for who he is and for what he has done. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
65. I seek to set aside time every day to pray and read the Bible. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
66. I attend church on a regular basis, in part, for the purpose of fellowship with other Christians. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
67. When as a result of exposure to the Bible I realize some aspect of my life is not right, I make the necessary changes. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
68. I pray for the salvation of friends and acquaintances who are not professing Christians. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
69. I often sense that God, through the Holy Spirit, provides me with guidance and understanding. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
70. I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship with other believers. . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
71. I am grieved when I realize that I have sinned. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
72. I feel very connected to my fellow church members. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
73. I am aware of setting aside personal desires or wants in order to please God and follow him. . . . .	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

*Great Work! You're almost finished.*

This next section of questions has to do with "how often" you participate in certain activities. Choose from these responses:  
 1 = Never 2 = Seldom 3 = Occasionally 4 = Often 5 = Daily

74. How often would you say that you share some idea or principle out of the Bible with others. .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

75. How often do you share with someone how to become a Christian. .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

76. How often do you make decisions to obey or follow God with an awareness that your choosing his way may be costly to you in some way? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

77. How often do you invite an unchurched person to attend Church or some other event such as Sunday school, Bible study or an evangelistic event? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Choose from this range of responses:  
 1 = Seldom (1 to 2 times/year) 2 = Quarterly (4 to 5 times/year) 3 = Once/Month  
 4 = 2 to 3 times/month 5 = Weekly

78. How often do you attend worship services at your church? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

79. How often do you attend Sunday school or a Bible study? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Choose from this range of responses:  
 1 = Seldom 2 = Occasionally 3 = Once/Week 4 = 2-3/Week 5 = Daily

80. How often do you set aside time for prayer? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

81. How often do you memorize Scripture. .... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

82. How often do you read the Bible? .. ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

83. How often do you fast? ..... ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

84. How many Christians do you feel very connected to? (Circle One)  
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 More than 8

85. What percent of your income do you give to your local church and other Christian causes? (Circle One)  
 1% 2% 3% 4% 5% 6% 7% 8%  
 9% 10% More than 10%

*Only one more page ... some important information on what you attribute your growth.*

### Addendum to the *Discipleship Inventory*

**Instructions:** Please fill out this brief questionnaire about the activities or relationships that have been most influential in your relationship with Christ. If you need additional space, use the back side of this page. The information you give here is extremely important in helping your church identify how better to minister to you and other members of your church family.

1. Gender:    Male                  Female                  (circle one)
2. Age:        18-24                  25-34                  35-44                  45-54                  55-64  
                   65-74                  75+                  (circle one)
3. How long have you been a Christian?    0-3 years                  4-6 years                  7-9 years  
                   10-14 years    15-19 years    20-24 years    25-29 years    30-34 years  
                   35-39 years    40-44 years    45-49 years    50+                  (circle one)
4. On the scale of one to five, one being the lowest and five being the highest, mark the response that best represents the influence these discipleship practices have had upon your Christian spiritual growth. If you have had no exposure to any of these practices then mark N/A.

Discipleship Practices	Low					High	
Sunday School	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Discipleship Classes	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Small Group Ministry (i.e.: Home Bible Study, Cell Groups, ect.)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Mission Trips	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Ministry Opportunities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Camping or Retreat Ministries	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Preaching	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
Worship	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	
One-on-One Discipleship Relationships	1	2	3	4	5	N/A	

5. What would you identify as the top three events, activities, or relationships that have been most influential in your walk with Christ?

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

*Thank You! Your participation is greatly appreciated and will be a tremendous help in strengthening the teaching ministries of churches.*

APPENDIX 3  
PERMISSION LETTERS

Letters of permission were written to Brad J. Waggoner of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and Jim Slack of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention seeking permission to use the *Discipleship Inventory* in this dissertation research. An e-mail reminder was also sent to follow-up the first letter. Copies of permission are included in this appendix.

**Eric Richard Erskine**

302 East Fifth Avenue  
Havana, Florida 32333  
(850) 539-7493 (Home)  
(850) 539-6246 (Office)  
eete2@lwol.com (e-mail)

Dr. Brad J Waggoner  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
LEAD School  
2825 Lexington Road  
Louisville, KY 40280

July 17, 2003

Dear Dr. Waggoner:

I am student at Southern Seminary pursuing my Doctor of Education degree. I am conducting research on the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the development of maturing disciples and I feel the *Discipleship Inventory* that you created would assist me in this line of inquiry. I am writing to receive your approval to use this inventory in my dissertation research. I would gladly compensate you for the use of this inventory if that is a requirement. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

In Christ's Service,

Eric R. Erskine

**Eric Richard Erskine**

302 East Fifth Avenue  
Havana, Florida 32333  
(850) 539-7493 (Home)  
(850) 539-6246 (Office)  
eete2@lwol.com (e-mail)

Dr. Jim Slack  
International Mission Board  
P.O. Box 6767  
Richmond, VA 23230

July 19, 2003

Dear Dr. Slack;

I am student at Southern Seminary pursuing my Doctor of Education degree. I am conducting research on the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the development of maturing disciples. I am writing to receive permission to use the *Discipleship Inventory* and the scoring guide that you developed for the *Master Life* discipleship course. I feel this instrument and the scoring guide would assist me in my research. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

In Christ's Service,

Eric R. Erskine

**From:** "Slack, Jim" <JSlack@imb.org>  
**To:** 'Eric R Erskine' <fbc.hav@juno.com>  
**Date:** Wed, 13 Aug 2003 08:06:42 -0400  
**Subject:** RE: Discipleship inventory

As co-owner of the Discipleship Inventory, the International Mission Board grants permission for you, Eric R. Erskine to use the Discipleship Inventory in your doctoral work for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary as long as you do not make any copyrights of it. God bless you in your use of it.

Even though Dr. Waggoner developed the Discipleship Inventory for the IMB as part of his doctoral studies, it would be good for you to have a letter from him concerning your use of the inventory in this way. God bless and please keep me posted as to your progress, methodology and findings.

----- Original Message -----

From: Eric P, Erskine [<mailto:fbc.hav@juno.com>]  
Sent: Tuesday, August 12, 2003 II-.44 PM  
To: [jslack@imb.org](mailto:jslack@imb.org) ; [bwaggoner@sbts.edu](mailto:bwaggoner@sbts.edu)  
Subject: Discipleship Inventory

Dr. Slack and Dr. Waggoner;

I am a doctoral student at SBTS working on my EdD. My research is looking at the relationship between church discipleship practices and the spiritual maturity of believers. I desire to use the Discipleship Inventory that is in the found in Master Life Book one (or the revised instrument that Dr. Waggoner is working on). If you grant me permission to use this instrument, could you write a letter for me so that I can have your written confirmation?

Thanks in advance for your support of this study and God bless as you continue to serve Him.

Eric R. Erskine  
(850) 539-6246 (Church)  
(850) 539-7493 (Home)



The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

August 13, 2003

Eric Erskine  
302 East Fifth Avenue  
Havana, FL 32333

Dear Eric:

In response to your request to use the Discipleship Inventory, I grant you full permission to use the instrument free of charge for the completion of your dissertation research in relation to the Doctor of Education from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.

I wish you the best as you seek to complete your doctor's degree.

Sincerely,

Brad Waggoner  
Dean of the School of Leadership  
and Church Ministry  
Southern Baptist Theological Seminary  
[bwaggoner@sbts.edu](mailto:bwaggoner@sbts.edu)

## APPENDIX 4

### INVITATION LETTER TO CHURCHES

A letter was written to the senior pastor of each church explaining this research study and enlisting their participation.

## **Eric Richard Erskine**

302 East Fifth Avenue  
Havana, Florida 32333  
(850) 539-7493 (Home)  
(850) 539-6246 (Office)  
eete2@lwol.com (e-mail)

August 18, 2003

Dear Pastor;

One of the great privileges God has entrusted to us as pastors is the privilege of shepherding His people and leading them into a real and life changing relationship with Him. It is an awesome experience to see people grow and flourish in their faith! As a pastor, I often wonder what impact all of our efforts are having upon their spiritual development. I wonder if what we are doing is really helping people become fully devoted followers of Jesus.

My name is Eric Erskine, I am the pastor of 1st Baptist Church of Havana. I am also a student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary working on my Doctor of Education Degree. In preparation for my dissertation research I have been working with David Southerland, your Director of Missions, concerning research on the relationship between a church's discipleship practices and the spiritual maturity of disciples.

This research is being conducted in twenty-four of the forty-seven Florida Baptist Association churches. Twenty-five percent of worship attendees will be surveyed using the *Discipleship Inventory* and a brief addendum to the inventory. The inventory is designed to measure the functional characteristics of a disciple, and the addendum is designed to solicit information on the discipleship practices that have most influenced that individual's spiritual development. A brief survey will also be completed by the pastor or minister of education on specific discipleship practices you employ to help people grow.

Your church has been randomly selected using a random selection process (Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod, 2001, *Practical Research: Planning and design*, 212-214) to participate in this study. After the study is completed, I will provide a summary of your church's data that will help you assess your individual church's ministry of nurture and discipleship. I look forward to talking with you about your participation and scheduling a time for distribution of the surveys. If you have any questions concerning this study, feel free to contact me at the numbers or e-mail listed above. I wish to express my thanks in advanced for your help in this important study.

In Christ's Service;

Rev. Eric R. Erskine, Pastor  
First Baptist Church of Havana

## APPENDIX 5

### PUBLICITY INFORMATION PROVIDED TO PARTICIPATING CHURCHES

Churches were provided publicity information such as bulletin inserts, flyers to post around the church, and bulletin announcements. This publicity campaign sought to increase awareness to the study and decrease volunteer bias.

## Can We Count On Your Help?



An important study is being conducted in your church that will help your pastor and teachers better understand how they can help you grow closer to Christ.

Your participation in a simple survey will also help provide insights into what practices most influence a Christian's growth.

Check your Bulletin or Newsletter for more information!

## Can We Count On Your Help?

An important study is  
being conducted in  
your church that  
will help your  
pastor and teachers  
better understand how they can help  
you grow closer to Christ.

Your participation in a simple survey will  
also help provide insights into what  
practices most influence a Christian's  
growth.

### Two Ways You Can Help:

1. Fill out a survey before or after this morning's worship service and return it to the church. (approx. 20 minutes).
2. Take a survey home, fill it out and return it via the USPS using the self-addressed stamped envelope in the survey packet.

Research conducted by:

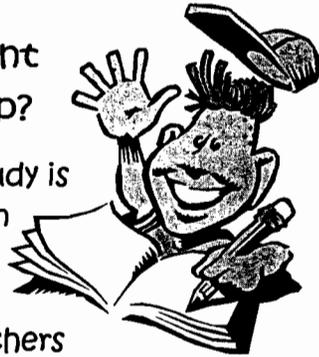
Eric R. Erskine

Edd Dissertation Research Study

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

For more information call 539-7493 or 539-6246

Participants must be 18 years or older. All participation is voluntary.



## Can We Count On Your Help?

An important study is  
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2. Take a survey home, fill it out and return it via the USPS using the self-addressed stamped envelope in the survey packet.

Research conducted by:

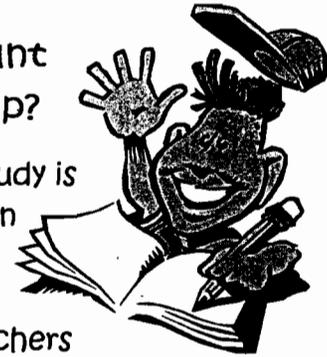
Eric R. Erskine

Edd Dissertation Research Study

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

For more information call 539-7493 or 539-6246

Participants must be 18 years or older. All participation is voluntary.



## APPENDIX 6

### RECRUITMENT OF RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

The recruitment of research assistants was done mainly in the researcher's church where he is senior pastor. Flyers were posted around the church advertising the need and inviting people to respond personally to the researcher. A distribution guideline was provided for all those who helped distribute survey packets to churches.

# Research Assistants Needed



Bro. Eric is beginning his dissertation research and is in need of some volunteer research assistants.

## Who can help?

1. You must be able to attend a Sunday service in one of the Florida Baptist Association churches in the study and administer the surveys.
2. You must be willing to attend a basic training session and administer the surveys according to the proper procedures.
3. You must be 18 years or older to be a research assistant.

The data collection portion of the research study will be conducted during the months of August and September. If you are able to help, contact Eric Erskine at 539-7493, 539-6246 or [eete2@lwoj.com](mailto:eete2@lwoj.com).

Research conducted by:

Eric R. Erskine

Edd Dissertation Research Study

The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

For more information call 539-7493 or 539-6246

Participants must be 18 years or older. All participation is voluntary.

## **Eric Richard Erskine**

302 East Fifth Avenue  
 Havana, Florida 32333  
 (850) 539-7493 (Home)  
 (850) 539-6246 (Office)  
 eete2@twol.com (e-mail)

### **Distribution Guidelines**

Thank you for your willingness to help me distribute the surveys among the Florida Baptist Association churches. Your help is vitally important to the success of this dissertation research. Below I have listed some distribution guidelines that need to characterize the distribution of the surveys. If you have any questions, please contact me for clarification.

Thanks!

Eric

1. All participation is voluntary. Never force or manipulate anyone to take a survey or fill out a survey.
2. All participants must be 18 years or older to participate. If there are doubts, please ask the individual before giving him a survey.
3. In approaching possible participants, please consider the following:
  - a. Do not intentionally target a specific type of person. Simply approach individuals as they enter or exit the worship center. Our goal is to get a snapshot of worship attendees, but don't try and figure this out. As people approach the area of distribution, ask them no matter their age or background. Be careful not to simply ask your friends.
  - b. As you approach people you can say something like this: *"Hello, a survey is being taken in your/our church today that will help us understand what influences Christians in their spiritual growth. Would you be willing to fill out a survey this afternoon (it should take you about 15 minutes). Thank you for helping."* (Even if they choose not to participate thank them anyway.)
4. A survey is to be filled out by one individual. If a couple would like to participate in the study, please give them two surveys.
5. If there are multiple entrances/exits to the worship center, please enlist some members to help cover those entrances/exits. If possible, have some surveys distributed to members of the choir. Please distribute all surveys provided for the church. If by chance there are any left, please return them to the researcher.
6. Make sure you express thanks to the pastor or church leader for his willingness to participate in this study.

## APPENDIX 7

### CLASS RANGE INFLUENCE CHARTS

These five charts displayed by class range illustrate the  $m$  influence score for each class range. These charts will allow the reader to visually see the practices that were most influential to each of the class ranges.

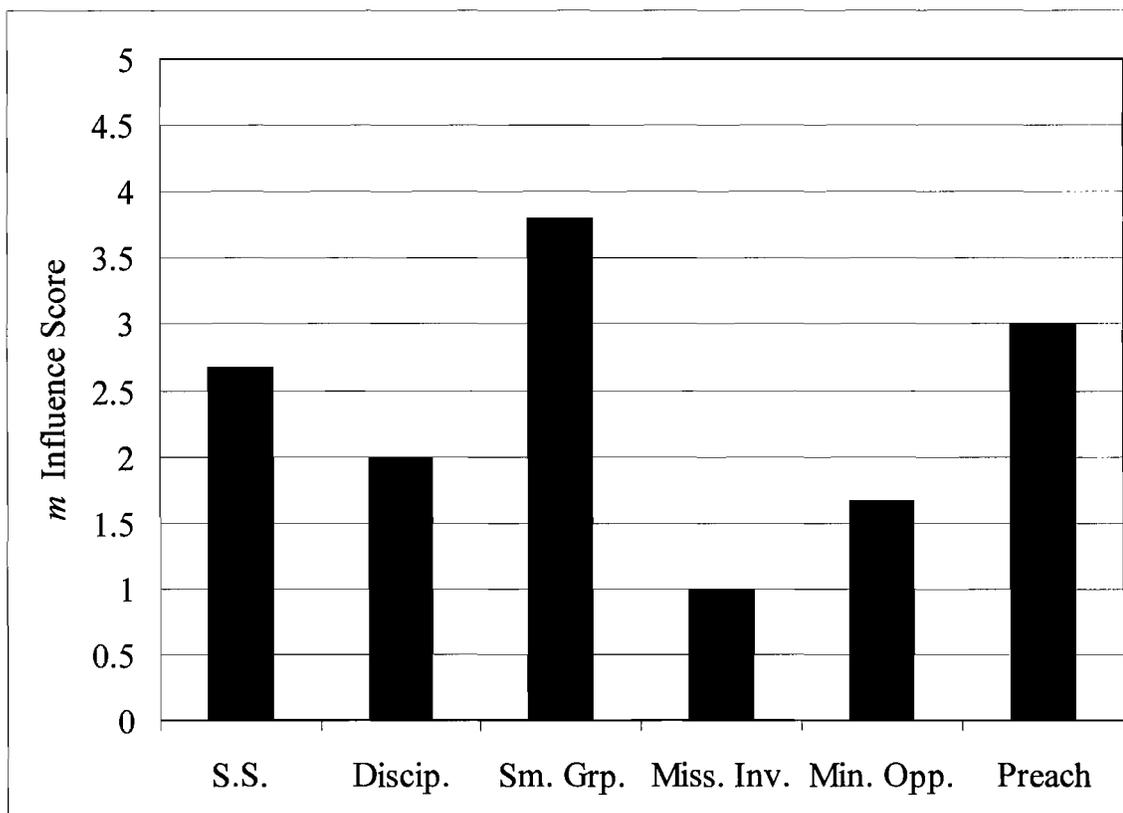


Figure A1. *m* influence score for 2.5-2.99 class range

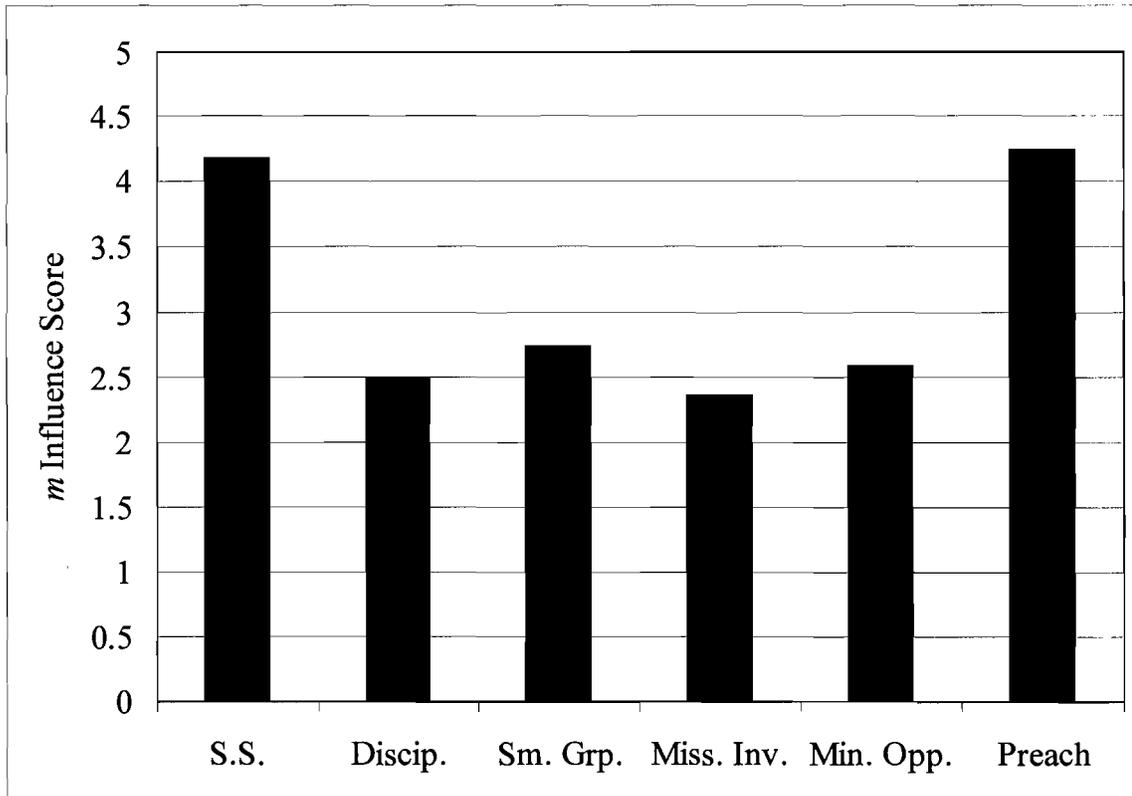


Figure A2. *m* influence score for 3.0-3.49 class range

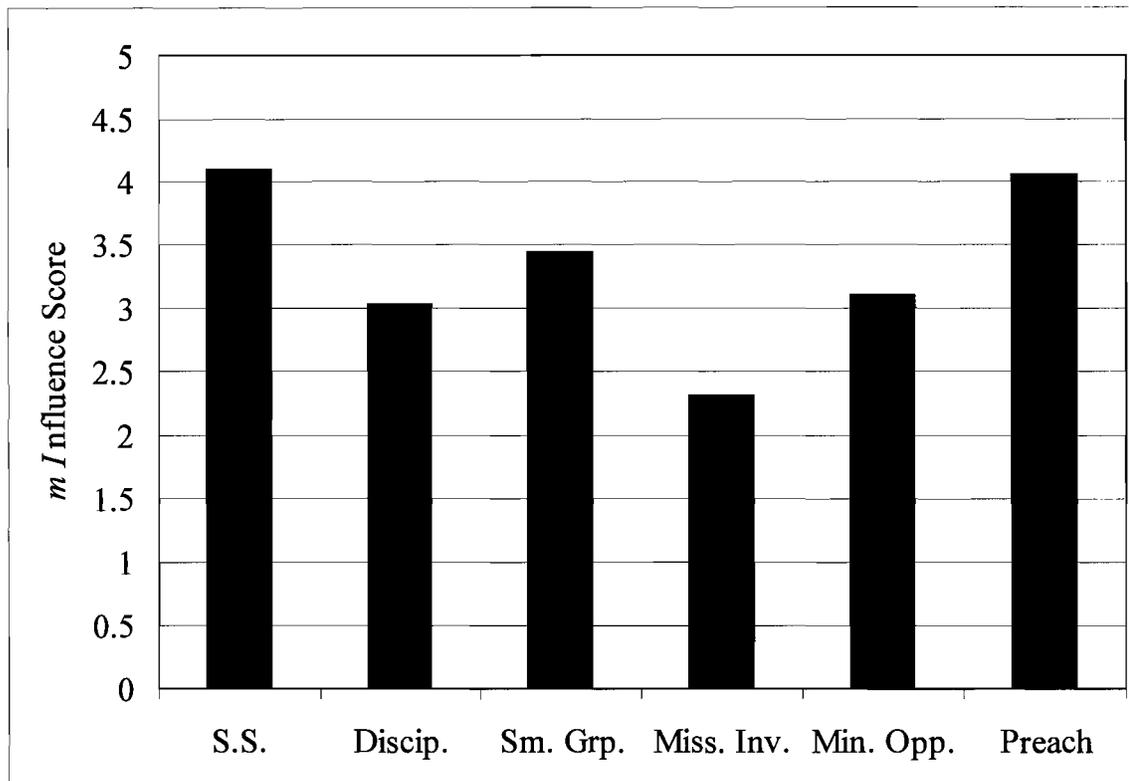


Figure A3. *m* influence score for 3.5-3.99 class range

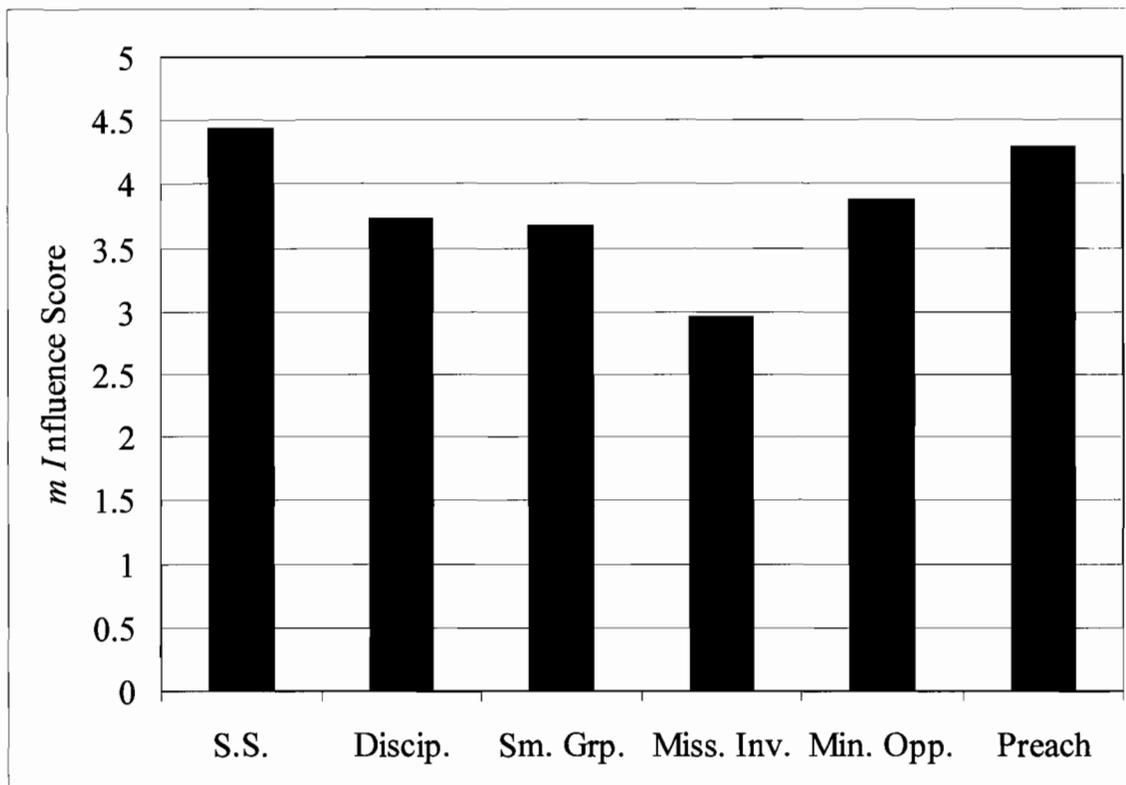


Figure A4. *m* influence score for 4.0-4.49 class range

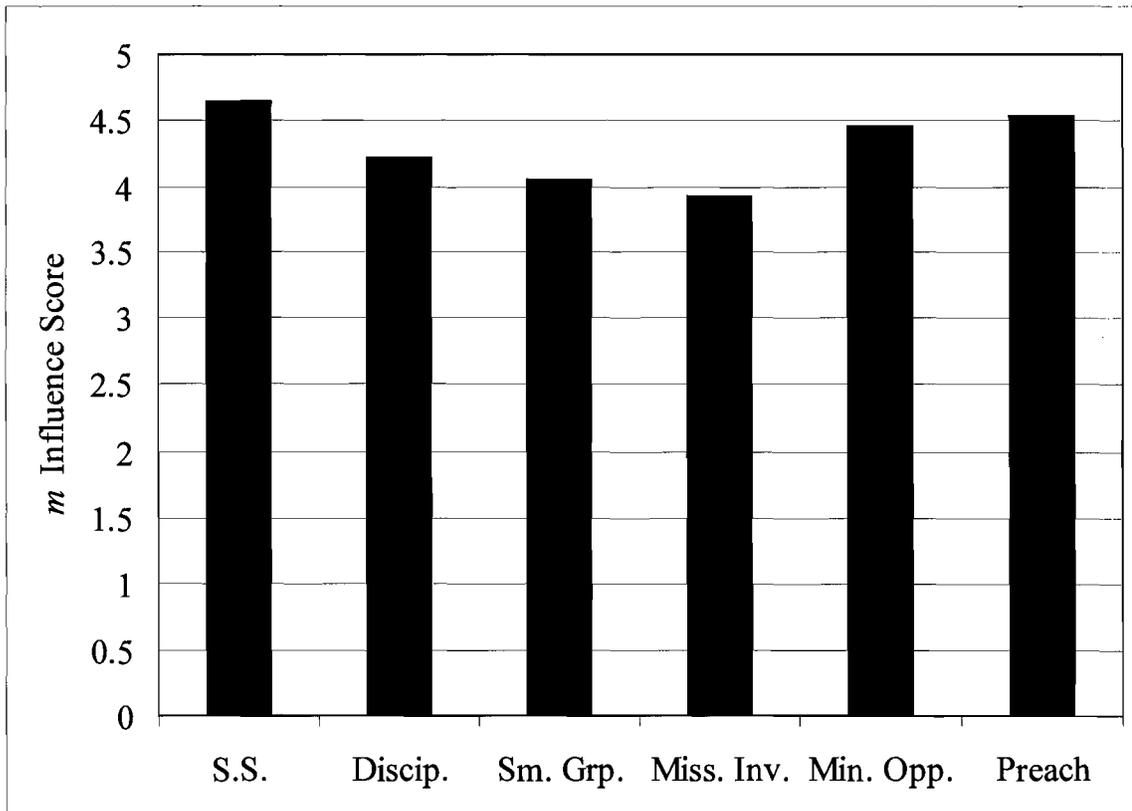


Figure A5. *m* influence score for 4.5-4.99 class range

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## ABSTRACT

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A CHURCH'S DISCIPLESHIP PRACTICES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MATURING DISCIPLES

Eric Richard Erskine, Ed.D.  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004  
Chairperson, Dr. Brad J. Waggoner

This dissertation examines the relationship between discipleship practices a church employs and the spiritual maturation of disciples. The first chapter explores the research concern and poses seven research questions that explore the relationship between specific discipleship practices and the spiritual maturity of disciples. The six discipleship practices explored in this study were Sunday school, discipleship courses, small group ministry, preaching, mission involvement, and ministry opportunities.

The biblical foundation for discipleship and discipleship practices utilized by churches is explored. A biblical definition of a disciple is developed, providing a word study of the terms "disciple," "follower," and "imitator." An exposition of key discipleship passages in the Gospels as well as in the Epistles provides the biblical foundation for interpreting Jesus' command to "make disciples." An evaluation of the theological and educational assumptions provides a contemporary look at the issues that relate to the process of making disciples. The chapter concludes with an examination of the discipleship practices that help churches fulfill the Great Commission.

This descriptive study employed a proportional stratified sampling technique of randomly selected churches in the Florida Baptist Association in North Florida. Pastors of the randomly selected churches were surveyed to determine the discipleship practices their churches employed. Worship attendees of the same churches were surveyed using the *Discipleship Inventory* and an addendum to the inventory that obtained data pertinent to the self-perceived influence of discipleship practices on their spiritual growth.

Analysis of the relationship between maturity scores of respondents and the self-perceived influence of a discipleship practice focused on exploring the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and z-score to see what relationships existed. Analysis of the influence discipleship practices had on individual respondents explored the most influential discipleship practices for each spiritual maturity level. Analysis also focused on an exploration of the major differences between the three churches that had a higher percentage of maturing believers and the three churches that had a lower percentage of maturing believers. Included in this chapter is an evaluation of the research design.

A concluding summary probes the implications and applications this study has upon discipleship practices churches employ and the influence these practices have upon the lives of disciples. Suggestions for further research are made at the conclusion of this chapter.

**KEYWORDS:** Christian spiritual maturity, disciple, discipleship, discipleship practices, Great Commission, mission involvement, ministry opportunities, preaching, small groups, Sunday school.

## VITA

Eric Richard Erskine

### PERSONAL

Born: February 14, 1965  
Parents: James A. and Nancy A. Erskine  
Married: Teresa Lynn Cone, June 14, 1986

### EDUCATIONAL

Diploma, Central High School, Manchester, New Hampshire, 1983  
BA , Trinity Bible College of Florida, Dunedin, Florida, 1987  
Th.M., Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas Texas, 1992

### MINISTERIAL

Youth Pastor, First Presbyterian Church of Safety Harbor, Florida, 1986-1989  
Pastor, Mt. Hebron Baptist Church, Cuthbert, Georgia, 1993-1996  
Pastor, First Baptist Church of Havana, Havana, Florida, 1996

### ACADEMIC

Adjunct Professor, Baptist College of Florida, Graceville, Florida, Fall 2003