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DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCIPLESHIP AT
OPEN DOOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN ELYRIA, OHIO

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DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCIPLESHIP AT
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For the glory of God

And for my wife. God's greatest gift outside of Him was to provide her to me.

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PREFACE

This project will be completed in large part due to the loving encouragement of the many people God has placed in my life. First and foremost, I am grateful to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, whose patience with me throughout the different seasons of my receptivity to Him compels me to be increasingly patient with others He has placed in my life.

Second, I thank the Lord for giving me the distinct privilege of being the father to Denver, Caleb and Halle. Much of this work has been formed over the years by conversations held in car rides, coffee shops, and our dining room table. Their patience with me in processing along with their incredible insights has only instilled a deeper passion to disciple well. I am thankful for their support, insight, and encouragement given to me by each of them. Other than being a husband to their mom, I can think of no greater blessing outside of salvation than to be called father by the three of them.

Third, the Lord has blessed me to serve with an exceptional staff at Open Door Christian Schools, who passionately desire to disciple the generations younger than them to which the Lord has entrusted us. Their passion for ministry has shaped my desire to persist in the work of Christian education and this project. The Board of Education's commitment to holding true to the Anchor of our soul has also compelled me to pursue this work. Likewise, the leadership team's desire for students to truly know and serve Jesus as King while they model to those they lead is nothing short of a blessing and has continually ministered to me through this project.

Fourth, I am thankful for the faithful ministry of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. I am in debt to the numerous faculty and specifically my supervisor, Dr. Joseph Harrod, who consistently revealed a willingness to persist in

ministering to me throughout this project. Limited time with them has not clouded my vision to see their authentic desire to minister to the student, and also to the bride of Christ as they equip students in ministry.

Finally, words fail to fully describe how the Lord has blessed me with my wife, Dawn. I am thankful for the countless times she has been content to allow me to verbally process details of this project in over twenty years of serving in ministry together. She sacrificed much to make this project a reality and no one serves as a greater model of patience and understanding extended to me than her. Dawn models the love of Christ to me better than anyone else on this planet.

My desire for this project is that our Lord would be glorified in it. He deserves more praise than my lips or keystrokes could ever share. May this project serve as a continual exaltation to Him.

Denver Daniel

Elyria, Ohio

May 2023

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The mission statement of Open Door Christian Schools (ODCS) is to equip disciples through exemplary education. The Board, administration, and staff recognize that the work of discipling students who know Christ as their personal Savior and mentoring those who do not confess salvation is conducted at ODCS through the vehicle of education and its experiences. As a result, ODCS desires to make Christ (real truth) known to students in their educational experiences (real life) by walking with them (real time). To do so, ODCS recognizes the need for an intentional methodology and theology for discipling and mentoring students.

Context

Since 1976, Open Door Christian Schools (ODCS) has partnered with Christian families in northeast Ohio to provide Christian education. The approach to discipleship at ODCS includes four components based upon Matthew 22:37-39 and Matthew 25:31-46. The first component is explicit Bible instruction in daily Bible class, weekly chapels, and events that have a clear biblical reference and focus. The second component is biblical integration where Christ is made known throughout curricular and extra-curricular offerings. The third component is service, where the second greatest command (Matt 22:39) is showcased by serving others as a testimony for Jesus Christ. Service opportunities to the local and international community routinely take place in order to model Christianity as an active pursuit for the well-being of others and as a testimony of the gospel rather than simplistic knowledge of the Bible. The fourth component of spiritual formation programming is based upon relationship—relationship

being defined as daily interactions between students and staff who serve as Christian mentors and examples to one another (1 Cor 11:1). ODCS believes that discipleship is about making Christ known, which cannot be successfully accomplished without having the Bible as the foundation for mentoring and knowing the students.

There are certainly challenges to ODCS' discipleship efforts. The primary challenge lies in the distinction of ministering to those who are walking with the Lord and those who are not. A further distinction is the continuum of maturity evident in the lives of those who have received Christ. Finally, there is a continuum of receptivity within those who have not received Christ as their Savior as well. Stages of life, maturity, and interests impact the students' willingness to receive and apply instruction. The same could be said about their parents. The covenant-based agreement at ODCS requires that at least one parent be a born-again believer, but challenges arise when students come from a family context where one parent is not. In such cases, the discipleship model is strained as it is not in accordance with the principle for parenting found in Deuteronomy 6:6-9, which commands parents to teach their children to love the Lord completely. Christian parents can and do shift priorities away from spiritual formation based upon a variety of reasons, such as college acceptance, athletic accomplishments, and safety.

Despite the staff understanding that students are on a level of receptivity, much of the programming and resourcing to staff is built upon a "one size fits all" model. Not enough effort or attention is given to address or discover the spiritual condition and maturity of each student. ODCS staff know that some students are unbelievers and that believing students are in different stages of growth. However, staff have not been given a model of discipleship that identifies and addresses a student's spiritual condition or level of receptivity to the gospel. Furthermore, students recognize that varying degrees of spiritual receptivity exist amongst the student body, yet ODCS has not provided a mechanism for students to evaluate their individual receptivity to the gospel.

Yet another issue that emerges, and the one that this project sought to address, was that students and staff alike do not have a common definition of discipleship upon which to build the spiritual formation programming. ODCS is rooted in the Bible and readily shares the gospel to students yet relies on the definition of discipleship to be formed in the home or at church as opposed to an explicit definition at ODCS of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. This project sought to rectify this critical deficiency by connecting the central message of Jesus Christ, the kingdom of heaven, to an understanding of what it means to be a disciple.

Rationale

It is imperative that the staff at ODCS understand the connection between the kingdom of heaven and following Christ. Understanding the kingdom of heaven as taught by Jesus will allow a framework of discipleship that connects the essential elements of the kingdom to the behaviors citizens in the kingdom will exhibit. ODCS will no longer assume that staff have an appropriate working definition of the kingdom of heaven or discipleship, and how the two are connected. The project will assist staff in providing a definition of the kingdom of heaven and discipleship, and how kingdom of heaven characteristics connect to the behaviors of a disciple.

Important to recognize is that all ODCS staff must have an understanding that no script leads to salvation and citizenship within the kingdom. Illumination that leads to salvation and the fruit of subsequent growth cannot occur without the Holy Spirit (John 3:3-7; 16:8; Gal 5:22, 23; Titus 3:5.) Citizens of the kingdom have become a new creation by being born again and empowered to live through the Holy Spirit—not one's own devices (John 3:3-7; 1 Cor 2:12, 13; Eph 3:14-19). The Spirit guides and grows the believer (John 16:13; 2 Pet 3:18).

Therefore, understanding the kingdom of heaven and growing as a disciple requires students to have both knowledge of the important characteristics of the kingdom,

such as who God is, who they are, the importance of relationships, and the duty of responsibility. Knowledge and understanding of these truths, however, is not enough.

Citizens of the kingdom must also exhibit and strive to increase in the observable actions of persisting, pursuing, and promoting the King and His kingdom. Staff, in discipleship efforts at ODCS, must integrate the two to have instruction at the appropriate theological level. As James shares, faith or belief should be demonstrated by our actions (Jas 2:18) Failure to focus on the behaviors of faith not being coupled to knowledge will result in ill-formed citizens of the kingdom.

This project grew knowledge and awareness of the ODCS staff to the truths of the kingdom of heaven and how the truths connect to discipleship. An additional project component was the development of an inventory to assist students in understanding the connection between daily living and kingdom citizenship.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a biblically based framework of discipleship at Open Door Christian Schools that connects citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to discipleship.

Goals

Three goals will determine the success of this project. The first two goals address the growth and understanding of the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship by ODCS staff. The third goal focuses on the evaluation of an inventory intended for grades 5-12 students regarding the connection of the kingdom of heaven to daily lifestyle choices.

1. The first goal was to develop a professional learning session for ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13.
2. The second goal was to teach and assess ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13.

3. The third goal was to create a student inventory to assess understanding and provide reflection on the kingdom of heaven's connection to discipleship and the degree kingdom citizenship effects daily lifestyle.

Definitive research methodology in compliance with and approved by the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Ethics Committee measured when the three goals had been accomplished. The research methodology and instruments used to measure the success of each goal are detailed in the following section.

Research Methodology

Three goals were utilized to measure the success of this project. The first goal was to develop a professional learning session for ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. This session, entitled "Kingdom Connected Discipleship," was taught to staff at ODCS with the primary focus being on establishing a definition of the kingdom and the attributes evident of its citizens. This goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of two pastors from separate congregations, one ODCS Bible faculty member, and one ODCS school administrator. This panel utilized a rubric to evaluate the professional learning session material to ensure it is biblically faithful, and sufficiently thorough.¹ This goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion identified in the rubric met or exceeded the sufficient level. Should the initial feedback yield less than 90 percent, then the professional learning session was revised in accordance with the panel's evaluation until such time that the criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

The second goal was to teach and assess ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. The goal was measured by an assessment that tested the knowledge of the kingdom of heaven

¹ See appendix 1. All of the research instruments used in this project were performed in compliance with and approved by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary Research Ethics Committee prior to use.

and how the attributes of the citizens of the kingdom connect to discipleship at ODCS.² The assessment, named “Kingdom Connected Discipleship,” was given to ODCS staff after their participation in the professional learning session bearing the same name. The goal was considered met when a minimum of 90 percent of trained ODCS staff score 85 percent or higher on the assessment. Should the initial assessment results yield less than 85 percent on the understanding portion, then the professional learning session was retaught to staff not meeting the criteria until such time that the criterion of 90 percent passage of trained ODCS staff is met.

The third goal was to create a student inventory to assess understanding and provide reflection on the kingdom of heaven’s connection to discipleship and the degree kingdom citizenship effects daily lifestyle.³ The goal was measured by an expert panel consisting of two pastors, one ODCS Bible faculty member, one ODCS school administrator, and one psychologist, who utilized a rubric to evaluate biblical faithfulness, validity, reliability, and sufficiency of the inventory. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion identified in the rubric met or exceeded the sufficient level. Should the initial feedback yield less than 90 percent, then the inventory was revised in accordance with the panel’s evaluation until such time that the criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

Definitions and Limitations/Delimitations

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

Discipleship. For the purpose of this project *discipleship* refers to the process of making and nurturing genuine followers of the Lord Jesus Christ through prayerful,

² See appendix 3.

³ See appendix 5.

Spirit backed proclamation of the Word of God.⁴

Gospel. For the purpose of this project, *gospel* is identified as the message of God's grace in forgiving people who have rebelled against him through His Son who suffered and died in their place to establish the throne of the resurrected Jesus over a kingdom of perfect righteousness, and to bring those who are saved and redeemed by His blood into a new heavens and earth where sin will be forever conquered.⁵

Kingdom of heaven. For the purpose of this project, *kingdom of heaven* is identified as the reign and rule of God both in the present and future.⁶

There are no known limitations that apply to this project, but two delimitations applied. First, for this study, ODCS staff was narrowed to ODCS employees who teach or work with ODCS students. The narrowing allowed for a focused effort and evaluation toward the staff who directly disciple ODCS students. Second, the professional learning sessions for ODCS staff were confined to the staff who volunteered to participate during the initial teaching session offered in November 2022 to ensure that those who took the required assessment would complete the entire series of teachings.

Conclusion

The fundamental goal of ministry is to make disciples who make disciples, all for the glory of God.⁷ As such, the mission and responsibility of ODCS is to equip disciples through the process of education. Effective discipleship recognizes and tends to the needs of individuals based upon the level of receptivity of each person. The following chapters

⁴ Colin Marshall and Tony Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift That Changes Everything* (Youngstown, OH: Matthias, 2009), 151.

⁵ Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 115.

⁶ R. T. Kendall, *Understanding Theology* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 2:287.

⁷ Marshall and Payne, *The Trellis and the Vine*, 152.

demonstrate how identifying levels of receptivity based upon the parable of the soils enhance discipleship efforts at ODCS. Chapter 2 provides scriptural evidence for identifying disciples as those who recognize their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, how the citizenship is given, and the privilege of becoming citizens who pursue, promote, and persist in living for the King and advancing His kingdom. Chapter 3 focuses on discipleship being a teaching relationship that requires the Holy Spirit's ministry and employs strategies proven to be effective for learning. Chapter 4 describes the project implementation by providing a detailed account of the three goals and their results. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals.

CHAPTER 2

PURSUING, PROMOTING, AND PERSISTING AS CITIZENS OF THE KINGDOM

Jesus said, “Go, therefore and make disciples” (Matt 28:20).¹ Closing words matter, and Jesus’s words recorded at the conclusion of Matthew certainly are not an exception. This command to His followers was to go and make disciples. An essential question that stems from Christ’s command is “What is a disciple?” The answer is found repeatedly throughout Jesus’s teaching. Disciples are those who recognize their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, how the citizenship was given, and the privilege of becoming servants who pursue, promote, and persist in living for the King and advancing His kingdom.

Discipleship as Citizenship in the Kingdom of Heaven

To understand citizenship in the kingdom, an essential question emerges: “what is the kingdom of heaven?” George Ladd shares that the proclamation of the kingdom of heaven is Jesus’s central message found in the three synoptic gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.² Robert Stein writes, “The heart of Jesus’ teachings centers around the theme of the kingdom of God. This expression is found in sixty-one separate sayings in the Synoptic Gospels. Counting parallels to these passages, the expression occurs over eighty-five times.”³

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the English Standard Version.

² George E. Ladd, “Kingdom of God (Heaven),” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 1269.

³ Robert H. Stein, “Kingdom of God,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 451.

Perhaps there is no greater place to answer the question than in the Gospel of Matthew. David Turner notes that Matthew's central message characterizes the preaching of Jesus, John, and the apostles as being centered on the kingdom (3:2; 4:17; 10:7).⁴ Leon Morris reiterates Matthew's emphasis on kingdom by sharing,

Matthew uses the expression "the kingdom of heaven" most frequently (32 times), though he also has the expression favored in the other Gospels, "the kingdom of God" (5 times), as well as "the kingdom" (5 times), and once also (in prayer) "your kingdom." He uses expressions like "the kingdom of their Father" and "the kingdom of my Father," and he refers to the kingdom of the "Son of man" (13:41, etc.). Ten times he introduces parables with "The kingdom of heaven is like—."⁵

The Kingdom of Heaven Defined

Generally, the kingdom of heaven refers to the reign and rule of God both in the present and future. R. T. Kendall defines the kingdom of heaven as "the complete and total rule of God will come when, in the future, 'the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ' (Rev 11:15). But this total submission is to be experienced now by those who receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord."⁶ Stein shares,

Both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament the term "kingdom" (*malkut* and *basileia*) is understood as dynamic in nature and refers primarily to the rule or reign of a king. It is seldom used in a static sense to refer to a territory. As a result, in the vast majority of instances it would be better to translate the expression "kingdom of God" as the "rule of God."⁷

Craig Blomberg also notes, "The kingdom is not currently a geographical entity, but it manifests itself in space and time in the community of those who accept the message John and Jesus proclaimed and who begin to work out God's purposes on earth—personally,

⁴ David Turner, *Matthew*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 11, *Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 22.

⁵ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 8.

⁶ R. T. Kendall, *Understanding Theology* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2000), 2:287.

⁷ Stein, "Kingdom of God," 453.

socially, and institutionally.⁸ Stated differently by Craig Keener, “Although the English word *kingdom* may connote to us a place or a people, most scholars agree that the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek terms especially communicate the concept of reign, authority or rule.”⁹ For this project, the community to which Blomberg refers will be identified as citizens of the kingdom.

Understanding the kingdom of heaven also requires disciples to know that the kingdom is both a present and future reality. Stein points out,

The kingdom of God is both now and not yet. Thus the kingdom of God is “realized” and present in one sense, and yet “consistent” and future in another. This is not a contradiction, but simply the nature of the kingdom. The kingdom has come in fulfillment of the Old Testament promises. A new covenant has been established. But its final manifestation and consummation lie in the future. Until then we are to be good and faithful servants (Luke 19:11-27). . . . If the kingdom is both already now and not yet, the believer must be on guard against the danger of emphasizing one aspect of the kingdom at the expense of the other.¹⁰

Morris shares, “There is a sense in which God has acted decisively in sending his Son: the kingdom is here in his words and deeds. But there is another sense in which the culmination of the kingdom in all its fulness is a future reality: the best is yet to be. Both truths are important.”¹¹ Understanding that the citizens of the kingdom are also known as “children of God” proves beneficial to understanding the kingdom of heaven and what it ultimately means to be a disciple of Jesus as citizens in this kingdom.¹² Keener notes,

⁸ Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary, vol. 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 74.

⁹ Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), “The Kingdom of Heaven,” para. 2, Logos Bible Software.

¹⁰ Stein, “Kingdom of God,” 453.

¹¹ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 83.

¹² C. Hassell Bullock, “God,” in Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 293.

“Too many Christians do not understand that God’s kingdom became present in Jesus and that where the King is, his kingdom or reign is established among his followers.”¹³

When Matthew writes of the kingdom, he nearly always uses the language of kingdom of "heaven" rather than kingdom of "God," and this language is distinct among the Synoptic writers.¹⁴ What, if any, distinctions should readers observe with this difference of language? One common explanation given by older interpretation was that Matthew was writing to a primarily Jewish audience and thus "heaven" was a circumlocution to avoid offending his supposed readers.¹⁵ While this reasoning is certainly possible, modern scholars tend to see the language as fitting Matthew's distinctive theological goal of contrasting the kingdoms of "earth" and "heaven." Pennington argues that “While this expression (kingdom of heaven) denotes the same thing as the “kingdom of God,” it connotes many other things. Particularly, we sense that God’s (heavenly) ordering of life and society is radically different than the ways of sinful earth.”¹⁶ Regardless of a particular interpretation on why the phrase is exclusive to Matthew, defining the kingdom of heaven as the reign and rule of God in the present and future is generally acceptable and continues to serve this project well.

Matthew’s Structure Supports Kingdom-Connected Discipleship

Stuart Weber explains, “Kingdom (*basileia*) is a word and a concept at the very heart of Matthew’s Gospel, for he wrote specifically to the chosen Jewish people

¹³ Keener, *Matthew*, “The Kingdom of Heaven,” para. 5.

¹⁴ While the phrase “kingdom of Heaven” is unique to Matthew and appears thirty-two times, he does utilize the phrase “kingdom of God” five times (Matt 6:33, 12:28, 19:24, 21:31, 21:43).

¹⁵ Craig Blomberg, Walter Elwell, Michael Green, Leon Morris, Craig Keener, Leon Morris are several of many that would hold to the circumlocution argument introduced by Gustaf Dalman in 1902.

¹⁶ Jonathan T. Pennington, “The Kingdom of Heaven in the Gospel of Matthew,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12, no. 1 (2008): 50.

about the kingdom.”¹⁷ Matthew was written primarily to a Jewish audience, who, due to their history, would have no issue grasping the concept of a kingdom ruled by God. However, establishing the rightful ruler of the kingdom would require defense.¹⁸ Dale Allison states that the gospel of Matthew carries with it biographical overtones that illuminate the life of Jesus the King.¹⁹ This structure reiterates the thrust of Matthew which establishes Jesus as King. Weber shares, “If we were to pick out one verse that captures the main message of Matthew, it would have to be Matthew 27:37, ‘This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.’”²⁰

Far from profound is the truth that kingdoms have a king, citizens, laws upon which citizens are governed, values upon which citizens are expected to embrace, and a realm over which the king governs. The Gospel of Matthew illuminates the truth of each throughout its structure as it continually emphasizes Jesus as king or messiah and identifies how the citizens of the kingdom are expected to behave—to the degree of also establishing counterexamples of how citizens of the kingdom should not act. Charles Puskas and David Crump write, “Matthew focuses attention on genuine membership in the kingdom, warning that many take their membership for granted and are in danger of losing it unexpectedly (7:15-27; 8:12; 13:47-50; 18:1-7; 19:14; 21:43; 25:1-13, 34-46).”²¹ Charles Hodge succinctly adds, “And in the New Testament, those who acknowledge Christ as their king

¹⁷ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, Holman New Testament Commentary, vol. 1 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 4.

¹⁸ Weber, *Matthew*, 3.

¹⁹ Dale C. Allison Jr., *Studies in Matthew: Interpretation Past and Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 145.

²⁰ Weber, *Matthew*, 4.

²¹ Charles B. Puskas and David Crump, *An Introduction to the Gospels and Acts* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 93-94.

constitute his kingdom.”²²

Loyal subjects in a kingdom are ideally loyal both to the kingdom and to the king. Matthew establishes the basis for the kingship throughout his Gospel and continually turns attention to how citizens of the kingdom should live.²³ Perhaps there is no greater evidence in the Gospel of Matthew for this truth than in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1-7:28) discourse where the attributes of kingdom of heaven citizenship are provided through the beatitudes and then examples, both positive and negative, are then given as to how the beatitudes will reveal themselves in a relationship to the Lord and one another. Matthew details how to pray, fast, and give tithes as offerings of direct worship and reliance to the king. Matthew also provides evidence in Jesus’s first discourse (Matt 5-7) on how to treat one another by focusing on how citizens should handle anger, lust, divorce, and care for the needy.

Interpretive Schemas of Matthew

Two dominant interpretations exist related to the Gospel of Matthew’s structure. One focuses on the usage of “from that time” as a transitional statement and can be seen in the Gospel on three different occasions. Utilizing this approach, the structure of Matthew is understood as follows: the preparation of Jesus the Messiah (Matt 1:1-4:16); the proclamation of Jesus the Messiah (Matt 4:17-16:20); and the passion of Jesus the Messiah (Matt 16:21-28:20).²⁴ The second dominant structural approach focuses upon the five discourses given by Jesus to interpret the Gospel of Matthew. Blomberg shares,

Matthew, unlike the other Gospels, presents five major blocks of discourses of Jesus (we might call them “sermons”) in chaps. 5-7; 10; 13; 18; and 23-25. Matthew makes plain that these are important sections for his outline by including a summary

²² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos, 1997), 2:599.

²³ John MacArthur, *Parables* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), 40.

²⁴ Turner, *Matthew*, 11.

statement at the end of each (8:1; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1), which unites the sayings material of each discourse and moves the narrative along to a new segment.²⁵

Each of the five discourses described relate to the kingdom.²⁶ R. T. France writes,

In each case it concludes a major section of teaching by Jesus, after which the narrative is resumed, and these sections have therefore been identified as the five major discourses of Matthew. Each shows evidence of Matthew's editorial activity in bringing together various sayings of Jesus on a given subject (in each case on the basis of a shorter section of teaching preserved in Mark or Luke), and the result is a fairly clearly defined subject area for each discourse.²⁷

In either widely accepted approach, emphasis is given to the reception or rejection of Jesus being king of the kingdom of heaven. Keener explains, "The threefold chronological narrative structure and the fivefold discourse structure are not incompatible."²⁸ Each structure builds upon the identification of Jesus as king, addresses citizenship in the kingdom, and the truth of reception and rejection of citizenship by Israel.

The midpoint of the gospel, the third discourse (Matt 13), focuses on the reception and rejection of the kingdom of heaven's true King.²⁹ Green shares,

Perhaps the heart of the matter lies in chapter 13. It is the hinge on which the Gospel turns. It is the break in the middle of the book, and the emphasis thereafter moves from the crowds to the Twelve. It may well reflect the theme of the Gospel, too. For here in chapter 13 we see the different responses to the planting of God's seed in the hearts of men and women: it is both reflective and challenging.³⁰

The other discourses of Jesus also contain references to the kingdom of heaven. Throughout the first discourse (Matt 5-7) is a connection between citizenship and

²⁵ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 22-23.

²⁶ Weber, *Matthew*, 4.

²⁷ R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 63.

²⁸ Keener, *Matthew*, "Structure," para. 1.

²⁹ Weber, *Matthew*, 4.

³⁰ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 31.

placement under kingship. Placing oneself under the teaching of another is an essential component of discipleship. This is evident in Christ's teaching on how to pray when He says, "Your Kingdom come," as a prayer for those who would be in the kingdom. Citizenship and discipleship are also evident when he challenges those listening on how they should think about the affairs of this life by teaching that they should prioritize their loyalty to the kingdom of heaven above allegiance to the affairs of this world. Disciples, or citizens of the kingdom, must express their loyalty not only by what they say, but also what they do (Matt 7:15-27).

The second discourse (Matt 10) also aligns itself with citizenship and discipleship, but in a more pronounced way. Matthew shares in the opening narrative how Jesus calls, empowers, and instructs his twelve disciples. As they are empowered and commissioned, the thrust of their message is "the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (v. 7). This commissioning clearly establishes a link between discipleship and citizenship. In this second discourse one also sees the elements of discipleship being linked to receiving the good news of the kingdom as opposed to rejecting it. The disciples (or citizens) are forewarned about the rejection and ultimate persecution that will take place for those who are servants of the king due to the rejection of the king's message (vv. 16-39).

The fourth discourse (Matt 18) has a focus on the humility required of a citizen in the kingdom of heaven and how that humility will wash over to one's conduct with others. Humility will affect how one forgives, seeks after the needs of the vulnerable, and the urgency of removing sin due to the recognition of its consequences and of it having no place in the kingdom. Again, the discourse stresses the need for humility and to place oneself under the authority of the one true King.

The fifth discourse (Matt 23-25) speaks to the readiness of citizens for the culmination of the kingdom by expressing the continued need of diligence in attention to kingdom matters, the using of their abilities, and the truth of ultimate judgment.

There is a connection between the kingdom of Heaven and daily living in each of the five discourses. Each of the discourses has a focus, some discourses more apparent than others, on loyal citizens prioritizing the kingdom above all other things. The five discourses also clearly show the reception or rejection of King Jesus, which denotes citizenship in the kingdom.

Use of Parable to Accentuate Kingdom

Further evidence is provided in Matthew 13 where Christ uses parables to teach about the kingdom of heaven. In each parable, care is given to establish how discipleship is a lifestyle rather than knowledge. Christ's parabolic teaching in Matthew 13 illuminates the commitment to seek the kingdom, persist in the kingdom, and promote the kingdom above all things in life. In so doing, Matthew 13 and Matthew 6:33 share that disciples follow Christ as continual citizens who pursue, promote, and persist amidst adversity and above all things found in this world.

An important question to answer is, "why would Jesus use parables to instruct?" John MacArthur notes that a sloppy and shallow answer would exclusively lean upon Christ's desire for an ease of understanding by utilizing a then common illustration to illuminate a kingdom truth.³¹ However, this is only one element of proper understanding, and MacArthur goes on to note that parables serve to hide the truth from the self-righteous while revealing truth to eager souls who are hungry for righteousness.³² Likewise, Herman Hanko shares that the purpose of parables is one of revelation; specifically, the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.³³ Hanko also shares that the clarity of the parables present no

³¹ MacArthur, *Parables*, xiv.

³² MacArthur, *Parables*, xxi.

³³ Herman Hanko, *Mysteries of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free, 1975), 5.

way of escape from them.³⁴ Parables, according to Joachim Jeremias were never intended to placate. He explains that parables were “concerned with a situation of conflict. They correct, reprove, attack. For the greater part, though not exclusively, the parables are weapons of warfare. Everyone of them calls for an immediate response.”³⁵ To that end, Jesus’s words of the kingdom being at hand carry immediate significance. Parables force people into decision; decisions to accept or reject and decisions to explore meaning or stop short in knowing the truth. Parables reveal Christ’s elect in that they are illuminated to know and search for the truth. Blomberg notes, “Certain privileges are reserved for Jesus’s followers that are not available to everyone else.”³⁶

Connecting Kingdom Citizenship to Discipleship

Regardless of structural interpretation, the overall theme of Jesus as messiah or king is evident throughout the Gospel of Matthew. Equally evident is the focus on kingdom of heaven. What is also evident, while perhaps not as pronounced, is Matthew’s connection of citizenship in the kingdom to being a disciple of Jesus. Attention for the remainder of this section will focus on this truth.

Coupling citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to following Jesus (discipleship) is critical to understanding how that authentic discipleship extends past simply knowledge or a rote salvific prayer. Scripture clearly teaches that followers of God will, in both word and deed, live for and promote the kingdom by a congruent lifestyle of faith and action (Deut 6:4-19; Isa 1:2-17; Col 3:17; Jas 2:17; Rev 3:3). Support for this truth is found repeatedly throughout Christ’s Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:2-11; 13-16; 6:19-24; 7:21; 24-27). Pointed reference is available in Matthew 6:33 where Christ’s followers are

³⁴ Hanko, *Mysteries of the Kingdom*, 8.

³⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1962), 21.

³⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 215.

encouraged to seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness before giving way to the affairs and worry of the day. The focus on the kingdom of heaven reorients disciples to truths that must be lived and sought for rather than simply known.

Reception or Rejection of the Kingdom

The Gospel of Matthew carries with it a theme of reception and rejection of the kingdom. Allison shares that Matthew consistently points to the people of Israel rejecting kingdom figures.³⁷ The rejection or reception of the Messiah from Israel extends in later discourses to the similar opportunity given to the Gentiles as well.³⁸ This comes to a head in Matthew 13 and extends to what would be a healthy response and behavior from the church.³⁹ Throughout the Gospel, Jesus is presented as the rightful king who came not to destroy but to fulfil the law. This in turn creates a decision point for hearers to either receive the proclamation and subsequent information regarding the kingdom of heaven or reject the claims of Christ as laid out by Matthew.

Reception and rejection of the message of the kingdom is especially evident in Jesus's third discourse recorded in Matthew 13. In this discourse, Christ introduces seven parables that address the kingdom of heaven. The first parable (Matt 13:3-9; 18-23) serves to illuminate the distinctions of someone who is a true follower of Christ and one who is not.⁴⁰ The thrust of the parable falls upon how the variable, the soils, receives the constant of the seed brought forward by the sower. Charles Allen confirms by sharing, "The emphasis in Jesus's story is not on the seed, neither is it upon the sower, but rather the

³⁷ Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 139.

³⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 27.

³⁹ Allison, *Studies in Matthew*, 141.

⁴⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 214.

final determining factor is the soil upon which the seed falls.”⁴¹ Four types of soil are compared to four types of people. According to Jones, the first three soil types referenced in the parable reveal the hearer’s deserting from the truth, followed by the last soil type reflecting perseverance, despite the obstacles presented in the first three soil types, to produce fruit.⁴² The hard soil represents a group that heard and did not believe.⁴³ The second group, represented by the stony soil, deserts due to persecution and tribulation, and the third type of deserter, represented by the thorny soil, leaves because of worldly diversions.⁴⁴ The fourth soil is characterized by those who hear the Word, accept the Word and bear fruit.⁴⁵

Jesus expounds this parable by sharing that the Bible’s necessary reception and germination in one’s heart depends upon understanding. The initial three soil types have varying degree of receptivity and are explained by Jesus as people having no to limited understanding of the kingdom whereas the good soil fully receives the seed and produces varying degrees of fruit. Important to note is that the interpretation of the parable does not extend past what it allows or what one knows Scripture clearly teaches. A faulty interpretation of the parable of the sower could render a belief that man may will himself to understanding. However, this is not the case. Morris points out,

The doctrine of election lies behind these words. It is not a merit in the disciples that they understand where others do not; their comprehension is due to the fact God has chosen them and given them the gift of understanding. They have received a gift

⁴¹ Charles Livingstone Allen, *When the Heart Is Hungry: Christ’s Parables for Today* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1955), 77.

⁴² Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, 72-73.

⁴³ Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, 72.

⁴⁴ Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, 72.

⁴⁵ Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, 73.

that outsiders have not received (to you is emphatic), and the perfect tense signifies that the gift remains with them.⁴⁶

The believer certainly does nothing to become saved nor does the believer do anything to add to salvation. Jesus grants entrance, the Holy Spirit illuminates the truth of the kingdom, for none can be saved without such illumination, and He empowers to deny worldly lusts such as are evident in the first three soils so that one may not only grow, but also produce fruit (Matt 13:8, 23). Understanding is made possible by the illumination of the Holy Spirit as people have been given “ears to hear” and it therefore yields fruit (Matt 13:9-17).⁴⁷ While there are variations of growth in the first three soil types, none of the initial three soils are fruit bearing—the good soil alone produces fruit. Blomberg notes, “The first three kinds of soils are all inadequate. None of them stands for people who were ever true believers, despite certain outward appearances.”⁴⁸ Lack of understanding creates no ultimate evidence (fruit) of kingdom of heaven citizenship.

Responsible hearing is defined by Jones as hearing the Word, receiving it, and bearing fruit.⁴⁹ The good soil is directly equated to one who understands the message of the kingdom and lives according to its truth. Morris notes, “The seed that fell into good soil finds its meaning in the person who hears the word and understands it; this is not a careless and unheeding person, nor one whose life is distracted by other considerations. The person receives the word with intelligent appreciation and acts on it. The result is that he indeed bears fruit and produces.”⁵⁰

France also shares the importance of receptivity when he writes, “This parable,

⁴⁶ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 339.

⁴⁷ Hanko, *Mysteries of the Kingdom*, 10.

⁴⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 214.

⁴⁹ Jones, *The Teaching of the Parables*, 71.

⁵⁰ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 347-48.

with its four ‘scenes’, indicates that the response depends not only on the message (the same seed is sown in each case) but also on the readiness of the hearers to receive it.”⁵¹ In this parable, Jesus teaches the varying degrees of response with only one being truly fruit-bearing: The soil, or soul, who hears and understands the Word of God.

Self-Analysis for a Citizen in the Kingdom

As Jesus explains the reasons for a lack of fruit production, He also shows what would be evident in the soil that yields growth. Knowing the barriers to fruit production, disciples can learn much about their own walk with Christ by being introspective as to whether the opposite of the initial three soil types is evident in their walk with Christ. France shares, “Yet the parable is probably more often employed today as a call to members of the church to examine themselves in their response to God’s word. And this application, though secondary, is surely also within the parable’s intention, for the careful spelling out of the causes of the seed’s failure is surely not mere scenery.”⁵²

For example, the first soil type depicts one who hears the Word and rejects it altogether before the seed can even take root into the soil. One can easily surmise that this represents the stubborn soul who outright rejects the truth of the gospel. In similar fashion, a disciple can use this example presented by Jesus to examine whether they are allowing fleshly tendencies such as pride or stubbornness to fully allow God’s Word to produce the fruit He would desire in His people.

The second soil describes the person who hears, receives—even happily—the truth of the kingdom yet is not willing to suffer for it. The result being a withering sprout that never matures. The disciple can easily look upon this example to gauge whether they

⁵¹ Richard T. France, “Matthew,” in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1994), 921.

⁵² France, *Matthew*, 224.

are willing to suffer for the cause of Christ and the testimony of the gospel. The third non-producing soil is one that sees growth, yet the growth is choked by weeds. A disciple could easily assess their current state to see if the cares of this life are choking God's abundance for their lives.

The people described in the initial three soils fail to take hold of the truth of the kingdom because of a failure to persist, pursue, and promote the truths of the kingdom. Their lack of understanding due to an illumination of the Holy Spirit created the lack of desire to pursue the truths of the kingdom with the result being a non-receptive soil as described by Jesus in the first soil, and a vacuum of persistence as evidenced by the second and third soil as there is reception or understanding of the message but an unwillingness to persist in the face of opposition or against the cares of this life. In each of the first three soil types is also a lack of promotion to what should happen with the seed. The first soil does not permit the seed to grow at all while the second and third soil show growth without fruit. Each of these types of soils, or people whom these soils represent, fail to demonstrate, or promote, what the Word of God fully illuminated in a life yields. The lack of fruit from the seed does not promote Christ's kingdom.

Where each of these soils, or types of people whom these soils represent, fail to promote what the Word of God fully illuminated in a life yield, the fourth type of soil displays what takes place when there is persistence, pursuit, and promotion of the kingdom of heaven. In the good soil, the seed takes root, persists above the obvious barriers of the first three identified soils, and produces fruit. The fruit serves as evidence and therefore promotes the kingdom of heaven.

Once a disciple understands that the principles of promotion, persistence, and pursuit are essential for following Christ, he/she can then self-assess to monitor the degree of health in their walk with Christ. Living for Christ the King requires self-examination and self-denial toward allowing the Holy Spirit to continually grow Christ followers into

their head, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:13; 1 Cor 15:31; 2 Cor 13:5, Eph 4:15).

Persisting, Pursuing and Promoting as a Citizen (Disciple) of the Kingdom

As Christ followers understand that they are a citizens of the kingdom, they can monitor the degree of which they are persisting, pursuing, promoting the King and the kingdom. The remaining parables in Matthew 13 provide timeless truths for citizens of heaven to understand and live as they move the disciple past a momentary feeling to a re-orientation of life accepting of the gospel of the kingdom.⁵³

Persistence during External Opposition

The next parable in Matthew 13 also attaches the kingdom to an agriculture metaphor and is known as the parable of the weeds (Matt 13:24-30; 36-43). In this parable a man once again sowed good seed, or wheat, in his field, but an enemy sowed weeds in the same soil while the guards were sleeping. Upon discovery, the workers in the field asked how this happened to which the sower shared that it was the enemy's work. The workers asked if they should pull up the weeds upon which the sower gave instruction to let both the good and bad seed grow until the time of harvest.

In this parable one sees that the kingdom of heaven and its citizens face opposition to the kingdom's growth and purpose.⁵⁴ The challenge to persist as a kingdom of heaven citizen emerges even when the opposition is evident and growing alongside the fruit-producing disciple.⁵⁵ This parable also illuminates the characteristics of the opposing

⁵³ J. Knox Chamblin, "Matthew," in *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 3:738.

⁵⁴ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 156.

⁵⁵ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 350.

enemy as one that is opposed to God and subsequently His citizens.⁵⁶ The opposition often will plant in secret and against the king's rule. St. John Chrysostom shares, "And see from another thing also, the malicious craft of the devil. For he did not sow before this, because he had nothing to destroy, but when all had been fulfilled, that he might defeat the diligence of the Husbandman; in such enmity against Him did he constantly act."⁵⁷ The field had been set aside for growing good seed. However, the opposition intentionally sows seeds to thwart growth. It is not enough for the enemy to hope that the king's seed does not flourish. The enemy has an intentional purpose of sowing weeds that could occupy ground where good seed would flourish.

Jesus shares that the enemy of the good work not only sows under the cover of night where the enemy's work can initially go undetected, but also that the weeds that are sown blend in with the good seed for some period of time. Morris shares, "Nothing the intruder had done was obvious until the grain began to grow. When the ears of wheat began to appear and the plants produced a crop, literally 'made fruit,' it became obvious that some of the plants were not wheat. Before that the weeds appeared as wheat."⁵⁸ The opposition from the enemy is referred to in Scripture as a secret work with deceitful tendencies (John 8:44). Christ accuses the enemy as a liar who comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8). Paul shares that the adversary is one who is as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14). All this imagery gives emphasis to the purpose of the enemy and his stealth-like work. Furthermore, the

⁵⁶ John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople on the Gospel according to St. Matthew," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of Saint Matthew*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. George Prevost and M. B. Riddle, vol. 10 of 14, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), 288.

⁵⁷ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew," 288.

⁵⁸ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 349.

enemy seeks to intertwine with the good seed.⁵⁹ In Christ's example, He provides evidence that the enemy is at work, the enemy often works in secret, and the enemy will seek to intertwine with the good work of the kingdom.

With knowledge of such opposition, the citizen-disciple of the kingdom is also given not only an awareness that the work of the enemy exists, but also an approach in dealing with the tactics of the opposition. Jesus reminds the citizen-disciple that the outcome of the opposition is certain and that persistence should not include a response that is not God-ordained such as reckless weeding that would endanger the good crop. France shares, "A light infestation of darnel could be tackled by careful weeding, but mistakes would easily be made. In the case of a heavy infestation the stronger roots of the darnel would be tangled with those of the wheat, making selective weeding impossible."⁶⁰ The perfect work of the king of the kingdom reveals that a hasty removal of the enemy's work can do damage to the good seed. Rather, the persistent approach from a citizen is a watchful eye reliant upon the instructions of the king.⁶¹

There is a need to persist until such a time of harvest. Weber shares, "Both Jesus and Matthew felt a burden to help the faithful understand why they must tolerate evil for a time, and to give hope of ultimate justice and reward."⁶² At that time, the good seed will be separated from the bad seed with eternal destruction of the enemy's work. The desire to be removed from the bad seed and to thwart the enemy's work is apparent, but Christ warns that persistence requires patience until such a time of harvest.⁶³ In this, the disciple is

⁵⁹ Keener, *Matthew*, "The Enemy's Weeds (Matt 13:24-30)," para. 3.

⁶⁰ France, *Matthew*, 229.

⁶¹ John Chrysostom, "Homilies on the Gospel according to St. Matthew," 288.

⁶² Weber, *Matthew*, 198.

⁶³ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 219.

reminded that persistence is based upon a certain outcome and believing in the long-suffering and patience of the king to grow the good seed despite the enemy's work in the kingdom of heaven. The disciple must persist during the enemy's opposition with full knowledge of ultimate judgement and reward.

Persistence during Internal Opposition

While the parable of the wheat and weeds shares the external opposition that citizens of the kingdom face, opposition for the follower of Christ is not exclusively from external influences. Akin to the third type of soil in the parable of the soils, internal thoughts, and pressures from the citizens themselves can produce opposition or hindrances to the kingdom of heaven citizen. Paul, throughout his epistles, is inspired to comment on the danger of the flesh and its hindrance to the work of the Spirit in the life of the disciple (Rom 8:11-13; Gal 5:17). Christ, continuing in the third discourse, also gives weight to the opposition that can stem from within. The parable of the mustard seed gives evidence of the truth of internal opposition.

In this parable, one sees the danger of believing that a humble beginning represents insignificance.⁶⁴ An illustration from Jesus shares that the kingdom of heaven, although small in its beginnings, will ultimately culminate into a distinct and distinguishable kingdom that can sustain life. Morris shares, "The kingdom may be considered insignificant in its beginnings and was doubtless despised by many in Jesus' day because of this. But in the end its growth would be extensive; it would be a very great kingdom indeed."⁶⁵ Jesus uses one of the smallest seeds in Palestine and its transformation to one of the largest trees in a Palestinian garden as a measure of what the kingdom of

⁶⁴ Joseph S. Exell, *Matthew*, The Biblical Illustrator (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1952), 275.

⁶⁵ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 352.

heaven may look like in the beginning compared to what it will be in its consummation.⁶⁶ Jesus gives no intimation whatsoever that the growth will not occur. There is clearly noted growth and that of significance compared to other seeds that appear larger than the mustard seed at the onset and ultimately smaller when they are fully grown.

The challenge, therefore, is for the citizen of the kingdom of heaven to persist when seeing the meager beginnings and not yet able to see the full-grown tree that the tiniest seed produces. Blomberg reminds the kingdom of heaven citizen, “What may not look like much to the world will in fact fulfill all God’s promises.”⁶⁷ Scripture shares numerous instances when internal opposition within the believer creates tension. Elijah in the Old Testament thought he was alone during his kingdom struggle after the victory against the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 19:1-21). The children of Israel felt they were defeated amid the Philistine’s army presentation of Goliath (1 Sam 17:11, 24). John the Baptist questioned whether Jesus was the Messiah when imprisoned and numerous other examples demonstrate the inward struggle of believers as they wrestle with the flesh even though they are empowered by the Spirit (Luke 7:19).

The danger created by internal opposition largely stems from when a disciple attempts to look at the evidence of the kingdom of heaven’s significance based upon what is exclusively seen. Just as the appearance of the mustard seed, the disciple can be deceived in believing that the kingdom’s work is small and insignificant when only reviewing what is seen in real time and an exclusive location. However, reviewing the work of the Lord through his kingdom across time and location, the disciple can get a foretaste of the significance of the kingdom and what the kingdom’s culmination will be. Therefore, the seed remains alive from a humble beginning to become a fully mature tree. Weber writes

⁶⁶ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 352.

⁶⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 220.

that the citizen of the kingdom must remember “to keep up hope in the power of God to work through these humble instruments and small beginnings.”⁶⁸

Kingdom of heaven citizens must remember to persist when facing the internal voices that share the kingdom being insignificant due to optics that will ultimately fade away. The kingdom will grow and mature across both the landscape of time and location. France shares, “The point of the parable lies in the contrast between this insignificant beginning and the greatest of shrubs which results.”⁶⁹ The kingdom of heaven disciple must remember this truth. The message of the kingdom has spanned more than 2,000 years in the face of opposition and will culminate with a kingdom of every nation and tongue (Phil 2:9-11; Rev 7:9).⁷⁰

The next parable, the parable of the leaven (Matt 13:33) also addresses the necessity of persistence during times of internal opposition for the citizen of the kingdom of heaven and complements the parable of the mustard seed. Morris shares, “We should take this parable as making much the same point as the previous one; they reinforce one another.”⁷¹ France also notes, “The theme is again of contrast between the tiny quantity of yeast and the size of its effect.”⁷² Jesus reminds the hearer of the parable of the leaven that the truth of the kingdom will ultimately permeate across all dominions. However, there is a kneading or permeation of the leaven that takes time and effort.⁷³ Jesus explains the kingdom of heaven as leaven being kneaded into flour. The effort in kneading was to

⁶⁸ Weber, *Matthew*, 199.

⁶⁹ France, *Matthew*, 230-31.

⁷⁰ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 158.

⁷¹ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 353.

⁷² France, *Matthew*, 231.

⁷³ David Brown, *Matthew-John, A Commentary, Critical, Experimental, and Practical, on the Old and New Testaments*, vol. 5 (London: William Collins, 1871), 81.

the end that it permeated the entire loaf.⁷⁴ Several truths emerge for the citizen-disciple of the kingdom with Jesus's illustration.

The first is that kneading takes time and effort. Such kneading can create fatigue. This fatigue reveals the type of internal opposition that can come from weariness of labor. Paul confirms that weariness for the disciple can create opposition when he shares to not be weary in well-doing (Gal 6:9). The citizen of the kingdom who is following the king must recognize the duty to persist when the effort does not immediately seem to be connected to God's work. Morris shares, "The little group of disciples might be despised as preaching a kingdom too insignificant to be noticed, but as surely as a tiny piece of leaven had its effect on a large mass of dough, so surely would the kingdom have its effect throughout the world."⁷⁵ The citizen must persist through the eye of faith with the acknowledgement that kneading itself is a process and that leaven does not have an immediate result but will indeed culminate into a physical reality.⁷⁶

The second truth that emerges is that the leaven is the agent that creates the change. The leaven, not the woman, is what yields the difference in the flour. Disciples must always remember that their effort for the kingdom is their responsibility, but the change takes place because of the Holy Spirit's enactment on lives. Leaven is an external agent, altogether different, that transforms the dough.⁷⁷ Some water, some plant, but God alone gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6). This truth can assist the persistence of kingdom of heaven citizens as they recognize that the success of the kingdom is based upon the work

⁷⁴ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., "Matthew," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 2:51.

⁷⁵ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 353.

⁷⁶ Weber, *Matthew*, 199.

⁷⁷ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 353.

of Christ and not their devices, regardless of how clever they may be.⁷⁸

The third truth revealed in this brief parable is that the nature of leaven is that it is released to affect the whole of the loaf. The kingdom of heaven citizen must remember that God's kingdom, while an internal transforming work in the life of a disciple, will also ultimately have a visual representation that will be well-known. The transforming power of the kingdom begins hidden and culminates with an outward expression.⁷⁹ Certainly, seasons of discouragement emerge in a disciple's life because there appears to be no evidence of God's kingdom manifesting itself. However, the believer walks by faith and continues the work until "all was leavened." Christ's life is a testament of this truth. Christ, as a Jew, belonged to the exclusive people. He was rejected by His own people. The few who were attached to Him misunderstood His teaching.⁸⁰ After the resurrection, His kingdom became more visible. The hindsight that the Scriptures provide to the present-day kingdom of heaven citizen can lull into the falsehood that discouragement is unique and that internal opposition is different than Christ's original disciples. However, this ignores the truth that the same Spirit revealed the Messiah to them to the degree they had to jump across their religious traditions, populous opinion, and their continual initial misunderstanding of Christ's teaching. The kingdom of heaven citizen must persist with a belief that the kingdom will culminate to the degree that the kingdom of heaven's domain is clearly known.⁸¹ Just as the kingdom's king has had an internal work in the citizens' life that affects the whole of their life, so will the kingdom, "mould all institutions and tribes of men, and exhibit over the whole earth one 'Kingdom

⁷⁸ Weber, *Matthew*, 199.

⁷⁹ Exell, *Matthew*, 275.

⁸⁰ Exell, *Matthew*, 275.

⁸¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 221.

of our Lord and of His Christ.”⁸²

In these three parables that immediately follow the parable of the soils, one sees the reality of culmination and that reality’s effect on the disciple. The true follower of Jesus as King will persist in the face of opposition. Adversary, while defeated, continues to sow seeds that ultimately will be harvested for destruction. Weber notes, “Even today, when we look back on two thousand years of the gospel’s progress throughout the world, we can become discouraged because of the kingdom’s hidden nature. Consider what encouragement was necessary for Jesus’ first small band of followers, when the gospel was brand new and they were its sole custodians.”⁸³ However, the adversarial weeds are real as well as their planter and the disciple must persist amidst external opposition. Opposition will come from external circumstances, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12).

One’s need to persist also pertains to internal perspective. The parables of the mustard seed and leaven both present the kingdom with meager beginnings with an undeniable known effect. Jesus references the mustard seed as the smallest of seeds and leaven being small compared to the three measures of flour. These meager beginnings can create doubt and discouragement when their appearance to the disciple suggest that the kingdom is not at work. The disciple, however, must remember that the kingdom, as evident with both the mustard seed and the leaven, is performing as expected and will yield an outcome. France notes, “To them, and to us today who may expect God to act dramatically and without delay, Jesus points out that the full growth (harvest, mustard plant, leavened dough) is assured from the moment the seed is sown, however unpromising

⁸² Brown, *Matthew-John*, 81.

⁸³ Weber, *Matthew*, 199.

its appearance and whatever opposition it may meet in its development.”⁸⁴ Believers can find themselves in times of discouragement and doubt in seasons where perspective of the majesty of God’s kingdom dims due to the seeming lack of influence or significance that His citizens possess (Gal 6:9; 2 Thess 3:13; Heb 12:1-3). Jesus reminds the hearer and the reader that there will be a culmination if citizens of the kingdom persist through external and internal opposition. France notes, “So God’s work, the *kingdom of heaven*, may appear unimpressive at first, but appearances can be deceptive, and no-one will be able to ignore it in the end. In the meantime, the disciples must be patient. Human valuation misses the point; little becomes great when God is at work.”⁸⁵

Pursuit as an Attribute of the Kingdom Disciple

Persistence is not the only attribute needed for a citizen in the kingdom of heaven presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. Jesus also presents citizens as pursuers of the Kingdom. Two parables illustrate this truth (vv.44-46). The parable of the man who finds a treasure in the field and the parable of the pearl of great price. In both parables, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to something of great value.⁸⁶ Both parables speak to the significance of the kingdom demonstrated by one who finds a treasure, immediately recognizes its worth, hides the treasure, and sells all that he possesses to purchase the field. The treasure was worth pursuing to the degree of abandoning all else.⁸⁷

The parable of the pearl of great price has a similar refrain. In this parable, the man is a merchant who knows he is searching for goodly pearls. However, when he finds

⁸⁴ France, *Matthew*, 231.

⁸⁵ France, “Matthew,” 922.

⁸⁶ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 223.

⁸⁷ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 360.

one that surpassed the collective value of all pearls previously sought and bought, there was no need to search any longer. The merchant recognized the value and was willing to sell all that he had to purchase it.⁸⁸

In both instances, Jesus identifies citizens of the kingdom as those who recognize the value of the kingdom and are willing to sell all they possess to purchase that which was of more value than any of their other possessions.⁸⁹ Citizen disciples clearly re-orient their lives to the pursuit of being citizens of the king. In both parables, there is joyous pursuit of the purchase and acquisition because the value far superseded anything previously known to them. Such it is for the Christ-follower who finds the joy of salvation and entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Nothing else measures up to the worth of what Christ gives.⁹⁰ As a result, the citizen of the kingdom is willing to die daily, forsake all other things, and live exclusively for the king of the kingdom.

The two parables, while emphasizing a similar value of the kingdom, also reveal the pursuer as having different beginnings with a similar result of pursuit. Interestingly, in the parable of the pearl the man is searching for wealth, whereas in the parable of the hidden treasure, the man stumbles across it. As with the parables of mustard seed and leaven, Jesus is reaching out to every person in his audience. He calls the spiritual seeker as well as the apathetic atheist.⁹¹ In the first parable, the man happens to find the treasure in the field. There is no evidence of an inquisitive search; rather, the treasure seems to be an accidental discovery. Regardless, the accidental discovery produces a joy that was not known beforehand. The man may not have known what he was looking for, but certainly

⁸⁸ Weber, *Matthew*, 204.

⁸⁹ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 359.

⁹⁰ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 224.

⁹¹ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 224.

recognized the value as worthy of a complete reorientation of his life. The parable of the pearl of great price contrasts the discoverer as one who had knowledge of what he was searching for, yet the outcome remained the same. The merchant found value unknown to him before. In both instances, the kingdom of heaven is established as a value above all treasures to be sought.⁹² In both parables, the response is whole-hearted to the beauty of the discovery.⁹³ Such is the expectation continually found in Scripture and consistent with the greatest commandment of loving God with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength (Matt 22:37).

There also is a parallel with the initial parable of the soils. The last soil described by Jesus represents a person with an enlightened understanding that produces fruit, and such soil is declared good. The soil is rid of the imperfections known in the first three soils described by Jesus. When one understands the value of the treasure, great toil will be given to acquire it.⁹⁴ Disciples will understand that their citizenship exceeds the value of anything else and they will prioritize their life around this truth. Green shares, "These two little gems of parables go together. Both stress the incalculable value of the kingdom: it is worth any sacrifice. Both stress the cost of gaining it: it will cost all we have."⁹⁵ Regardless of how citizens discover the kingdom, they will recognize its value and be willing to sacrifice all previous objectives to claim it. People find the kingdom in many ways.⁹⁶

⁹² Weber, *Matthew*, 203.

⁹³ Weber, *Matthew*, 203.

⁹⁴ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 160.

⁹⁵ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 159.

⁹⁶ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 160.

Promotion as an Attribute of the Kingdom Disciple

The last parable found in Matthew 13:47-50, along with Jesus's concluding remarks illuminate yet another attribute that marks a true citizen of the kingdom.

Persistence and pursuit are accompanied by an active promotion of the kingdom. The last parable Jesus references is the parable of the net where the kingdom of heaven is described as a net thrown into the sea, which when drawn in gathers fish of every kind. This parable declares the universal nature of the kingdom in that it is thrown across the sea and gathers of every kind.

Two things should be noted about the gathering in of the net. The first being that the gathering in of fish of every kind does not automatically equate to being accepted. There is clearly rejection and reception taking place by the sorting of men once the fish are gathered to shore.⁹⁷ The second is that good and bad fish are not depicted as a certain kind of fish. Rather, all kinds of fish are gathered, and one can surmise that of kinds of fish, some are good and some are bad. These two truths combined illuminate the universal call of the kingdom to all kinds of people. Blomberg shares, “‘All kinds’ (v. 47) is, more literally, *all races*, a strange way of speaking of fish but a natural way of emphasizing the universality of God's judgment of people.”⁹⁸

The citizen of the kingdom must recognize that their duty is to actively promote or proclaim the message of the kingdom.⁹⁹ God then will give the increase and judge the result. The duty of faithful proclamation by kingdom citizens is to be extended to all of humanity.¹⁰⁰ While the judgement of good and bad is clearly not the domain of the

⁹⁷ France, *Matthew*, 233.

⁹⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 224.

⁹⁹ Exell, *Matthew*, 292.

¹⁰⁰ Turner, *Matthew*, 194-95.

citizen, faithful proclamation or promotion of the kingdom is. Levertoff notes, “The sorting out of the wicked from among the righteous is not their (the disciples) task, but that of God and His angels.”¹⁰¹ Acts 1:8 accentuates the duty of the kingdom of heaven citizen when it shares that the work begins in Jerusalem but ultimately ends across every inch of the globe. The message and judgement of the kingdom is universal, and the faithful citizen proclaims the kingdom’s truth of man’s need of a Savior along with God’s Son who is both Lord and Christ given to humanity for salvation.¹⁰²

Faithful promotion is also accentuated in the culminating words of Christ in this discourse. Debate exists as to whether Jesus’s closing words serve as another parable extended to his followers. However, Christ, parable or not, clearly accentuates the duty of faithful proclamation for those who have been trained as scribes for the kingdom. The job of faithful promotion of the kingdom is evident when Jesus tells scribes in training that their job is to declare the treasure of the kingdom. The faithful citizen actively promotes how both the old and new are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, the king of the kingdom. Blomberg shares, “Properly trained disciples may be compared with the Jewish teachers of the law in that they too are equipped to instruct others.”¹⁰³ Christ accentuates this when concluding with his disciples that it is their duty as faithful scribes who have been entrusted the truth of the kingdom to faithfully proclaim it to others (Matt 13:51-52). France adds, “Jesus is not merely describing them, but as usual in parables is challenging them to fulfil a role: they have received ‘treasure’ through his instruction; now they are to ‘bring it out’ in

¹⁰¹ P. P. Levertoff, introduction to *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture: Including the Apocrypha*, ed. Charles Gore, Henry Leighton Goudge, and Alfred Guillaume (New York: Macmillan, 1942), 3:163.

¹⁰² Levertoff, introduction to *A New Commentary on Holy Scripture*, 3:163.

¹⁰³ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 225.

teaching others.”¹⁰⁴ The disciples had the panoramic of both old and new treasures. They had been trained extensively by the King to be oracles of His message, and soon was their time to faithfully proclaim the truth throughout the world. They were to be the initial ambassadors of the King who persisted through obstacles, pursued the King, and promoted Him above all other things of this life. Likewise, citizens of the kingdom also must promote the King and His kingdom to others as they draw out of the enlightenment that comes from the Holy Spirit.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

One finds the truths of the kingdom in the Gospel of Matthew, and specifically that which Jesus unfolds in the parables found in Matthew 13. Hanko shares,

The Kingdom of Heaven is a royal commonwealth in which God is the sovereign King and his elect people are the subjects. As subjects of this Kingdom, the people of God bow in absolute submission to their heavenly and eternal King, acknowledge Him as sovereign in their lives, find their delight in doing His will, and make their lives conformable to His glory.¹⁰⁶

Bowing in submission represents the decision to persist. Acknowledgement reflects promotion and finding delight and making lives conformable reflects the citizen’s pursuit of the King and His kingdom. Citizens of the kingdom are disciples who recognize the privilege of becoming servants who pursue, promote, and persist in living for the King and advancing His kingdom. Yet, there remains one requisite that undergirds all discipleship efforts at ODCS yet may not readily be visible in this chapter.

Entrance into the kingdom is not gained by effort or reflecting upon the degree which a citizen pursues, promotes, and persists for the King. Rather, entrance is gained through believing in Christ the King. Throughout Matthew, Christ shares the necessity of

¹⁰⁴ France, *Matthew*, 234.

¹⁰⁵ Weber, *Matthew*, 205.

¹⁰⁶ Hanko, *Mysteries of the Kingdom*, 4-5.

faith, marvels at faith, and challenges lack of faith (Matt 6:30, 8:10, 9:2, 9:10, 9:29, 15:21, 15:28, 16:8, 17:20, 21:21,22). The parable of the Sower addresses the hearer's need to understand before bearing fruit. Such understanding comes through faith. The remaining parables found in Matthew 13 share traits of kingdom of heaven citizenship. However, they do not inform access. Entrance comes by faith and such faith compels the citizen a desire to pursue, persist, and promote the King and his kingdom.

CHAPTER 3

TRANSFERRING TRUTH FROM DISCIPLE TO DISCIPLE: THE ESSENTIAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND A COMMITMENT TO EXCELLENCE IN INSTRUCTION

Discipleship for the kingdom of heaven citizen is a teaching relationship that requires the Holy Spirit's ministry and should entail strategies proven to be effective for learning. Pointedly, in Matthew 13 Christ uses instructional practices in His discipleship that contemporary research proves effective. This chapter serves to identify and explore how Christ utilized these practices as a teacher.

Prior to reviewing teaching strategies Jesus employed, attention must be given to the work of the Holy Spirit in discipleship/teaching. The Holy Spirit is the divine teacher or discipler.¹ Kingdom citizens understand that the Holy Spirit illuminates sin and its resulting separation from God.² He provides guidance to magnify Christ and declare the present and future reality of Christ and His kingdom (John 16:13-15). D. A. Carson notes, "Just as the Son by his ministry on earth brought glory to his Father (7:18; 17:4), so the Paraclete by his ministry brings glory to Jesus: that is his central aim. His means is the unfolding of Jesus' person and work."³

¹ Roy Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 21.

² Randolph Crump Miller, "The Holy Spirit and Christian Education," *Religious Education* 57, no. 3 (May 1962): 178.

³ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 541.

Simply stated, His work is essential and far more important than any teaching strategy (John 16:7-15).⁴ John MacArthur writes, “No unbeliever will ever grasp the mysteries of the kingdom by filtering these stories through the sieve of human wisdom.”⁵ R. T. France explains that “natural insight is not enough; spiritual enlightenment is *given*.”⁶ Leon Morris additionally validates the need of illumination: “It is not a merit in the disciples that they understand where others do not; their comprehension is due to the fact that God has chosen them and given them the gift of understanding.”⁷ Morris states, “That it (God’s truth) is *revealed* takes away all suggestion of superiority. There can be no feeling of pride when it is clear that all is of God. Believers can claim no special skill or insight, only that God has revealed truth to them.”⁸ Modern commentaries echo what Chrysostom notes years earlier: “For as with these eyes no man could learn the things in the heavens; so neither the soul unaided the things of the Spirit.”⁹ Both the discipler and disciple must allow the Holy Spirit to lead in the discipleship relationship, as the Holy Spirit is the true discipler to the way of the kingdom. For He is the One who brings true eternal change in believer’s mind, heart and will.

⁴ Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 8.

⁵ John MacArthur, *Parables* (Nashville: Nelson, 2015), xxiii.

⁶ R. T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 227.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1992), 339.

⁸ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 7 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 61.

⁹ John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Hubert Kestell Cornish, John Medley, and Talbot B. Chambers, vol. 12 of 14, *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, First Series (New York: Christian Literature, 1889), 38.

The Holy Spirit works through human means (Eph 4:11-16), using teachers, preachers, and other Christians to bring about change. Christ noted the Holy Spirit's roles of Helper and guide, and the kingdom of heaven citizen must embrace His support in growing into Christ. Only by first recognizing the truth of the Holy Spirit's empowerment can the kingdom of heaven disciple focus on the responsibility to faithfully proclaim the gospel in a way that is optimal for learning. The discipler is to remain consistently aware that the Holy Spirit alone guides people into truth. As J. T. English notes, "biblically speaking, the Holy Spirit alone sanctifies and matures the believer."¹⁰ Therefore, careful attention must be given to ensure that the discipler does not supplant the work of the Holy Spirit in revealing the pathway to redemption.¹¹ According to Temesgen Kahsay, "Jesus Christ gave the church a mandate, which is to go and make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey what he commanded (Matthew 28:19-20). However, Jesus also knew that without the presence and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, the church would not be able to carry out its mandate (Acts 1:8)."¹² The discipler proclaims, but the Holy Spirit illuminates and guides. Frank Rogers writes that Christian education "must be wary of transmitting orthodoxy and nurturing conformity in place of empowering participation with the Spirit."¹³

The faithful discipler must always model the same need to be taught by the Holy Spirit as what is taught to the disciple. One of the most significant examples to be

¹⁰ J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 135.

¹¹ George R. Knight, *Philosophy and Education: An Introduction to Christian Perspective*, 4th ed. (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2006), 245.

¹² Temesgen Kahsay, "Theological Education in the Majority World: A Pentecostal Perspective: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Theological Education," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 2021): 97.

¹³ Frank Rogers Jr., "Dancing with Grace: Toward a Spirit-Centered Education," *Religious Education* 89, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 389.

given in a discipleship relationship is the active modeling of reliance and instruction towards a yielded heart to the Holy Spirit's work.¹⁴ Carol Hess explains, "Teachers are learners as well: learners with limits, histories, interests, and failings. This should not be hidden but allowed to become part of the learning environment."¹⁵ The faithful discipler has no authority or moral high ground. While the Lord calls leaders to equip the saints, the leaders never grow past the need of the Holy Spirit's illumination. The Holy Spirit convicts and guides the teacher in the same way that He convicts and guides the student. In so doing, the discipler creates an environment of community that is quite different from non-Christian settings as a Christ-following mentor also reflects dependence upon the Lord and interdependence upon the body of believers as a whole, including those being disciplined. Humble reliance upon the work of the Holy Spirit is a trademark for faithful leadership in a discipleship relationship. Kahsay notes, "The NT affirms that the Holy Spirit acted in the relationships among Jesus and the disciples, among apostles, the church as the family of God and the body of Christ."¹⁶

Discipleship as Teaching

Christian discipleship is a teaching relationship. Paul Helm defines a disciple as "someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way. . . . Yet clearly wherever there is a teacher and those taught, the idea of discipleship is present."¹⁷ Stated differently is G. H. Trever's explanation of disciple: "The word is found in the Bible only in the Gospels and

¹⁴ Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 3.

¹⁵ Carol Lakey Hess, "Educating in the Spirit," *Religious Education* 86, no. 3 (Summer 1991): 397.

¹⁶ Kahsay, "Theological Education in the Majority World," 97.

¹⁷ Paul Helm, "Disciple," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 629.

Acts. But it is good Greek, in use from Herodotus down, and always means the pupil of someone, in contrast to the master or teacher.”¹⁸ The term disciple, even in Scripture is not exclusive to Christians as this teaching relationship is also evident within the camps of the Pharisees (Luke 5:33) and John the Baptist (Matt 9:14.) The nature of discipleship is teaching, where one gives instruction and another receives it.

Christlikeness Is the Goal of Discipleship

Teaching toward Christlikeness is the distinctive and essential element for kingdom of heaven discipleship in that both the teacher and student understand this is their mutual quest (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18,19). Disciples learn and grow to be conformed to the image of Christ so that they can be examples to other believers and witnesses to the world. Hans Weder writes, “Teachers and students are bound together by a certain teaching and practice of life, and the student is recognizable in his imitation of the teachings and life of the teacher.”¹⁹ The apostle Paul affirms this truth when he shares that disciples, regardless of whether they are teacher or student, are to look to Jesus as an example to follow and grow into (Phil 2:5-8; Eph 4:15). The author of Hebrews encourages his readers to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith (Heb 12:1-2). George Knight also emphasizes the distinctive in a kingdom-based discipleship relationship: “That which Christian teachers are striving for in the continual improvement of their personal qualifications is the same as the goal that they are seeking for their students—a restoration of the image of God physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially.”²⁰

¹⁸ G. H. Trever, “Disciple,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr et al. (Chicago: Howard-Severance, 1915), 851.

¹⁹ Hans Weder, “Disciple, Discipleship,” in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman, trans. Dennis Martin (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 209.

²⁰ Knight, *The Philosophy and Education*, 220.

Paul captures Christlikeness as the goal of discipleship as well when he writes, “That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:8). This passage reveals the disciple’s willingness to become like Christ by willingly forsaking and reducing the significance of all other things. Richard Melick notes, “The advance in this statement is that a knowledge of Jesus excelled what Paul had before. The word ‘surpassing’ suggests something of more excellence than that to which it is compared. Therefore, knowing Christ was better than the combined value of his former life.”²¹

Willingness Is Essential to Discipleship

Following Jesus requires a willingness that is noteworthy in that disciples must be willing to receive instruction, willing to implement their learning, and willing to deny self (Matt 16:24; Luke 10:28; Rom 12:1-2). In Galatians 5:24, Paul writes, “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” This willingness, however, is born from a joyful desire that recognizes the gift from God that has resulted in a reoriented and transformed life (Rom 12:1-2; 2 Cor 5:17). Joachim Jeremias states, “The effect of the joyful news is overpowering; it fills the heart with gladness; it makes life’s whole aim the consummation of the divine community and produces the most whole-hearted self-sacrifice.”²² Michael Wilkins also notes the willingness of a disciple to surrender self and chase after Christ:

The response to the call involves recognition and belief in Jesus’ identity (John 2:11; 6:68-69), obedience to his summons (Mark 1:18, 20), and counting the cost of full allegiance to him (Matt. 19:23-30; Luke 14:25-28). His call is the beginning of something new; it means losing one’s old life (Matt. 10:34-37; Luke 9:23-25) and

²¹ Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary, vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1991), 132.

²² Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1955), 201.

finding new life in the family of God through obeying the will of the Father (Matt. 12:46-50).²³

Wilkins's words accentuate a willingness to obey, count the cost, and lose one's life. The citizen of the kingdom must be willing to submit to the will of Jesus, which will produce times of tension as Christ's will continually become their own (Matt 26:38; Phil 2:8).

Not only is such willingness essential to the nature of the learner in a discipleship relationship, but also of the teacher. Stated simply, citizens of the kingdom should delight in one another. Donald Whitney writes, "Any true delight is always a willing delight, not a reluctant one. Delight in the people of God cannot be forced into the soul any more than parents can coerce their single adult son to delight in a potential mate who holds no attraction for him."²⁴ Regardless of being a teacher or student, all are citizens of the kingdom and must be willing to sacrifice for their king. Morris writes of the citizen's relationship to the King: "To be the disciple of such a man might well be interesting, but it would be far from comfortable. The scribe's reaction is not given, but certainly the cost of discipleship is brought clearly before him."²⁵ Morris explains the apostle Paul's willingness to disciple: "But where no principle was at stake he was prepared to go to extreme lengths to meet people. Personal considerations are totally submerged in the great aim of by all means saving some."²⁶ Paul's willingness to minister serves as an example for all disciples.

Therefore, the teacher in a discipleship relationship must be willing to love others well by sharing and demonstrating kingdom of heaven attributes to those who are

²³ Michael J. Wilkins, "Disciple, Discipleship," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell, electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 176.

²⁴ Donald Whitney, *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2001), 85.

²⁵ Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, 201.

²⁶ Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 137.

learning. Teachers love to the degree that they realize they are agents being utilized by the Holy Spirit to stimulate growth in their students.²⁷ Commenting on Ephesians 4:11, Francis Foulkes notes, “The expression also ‘serves well to remind ministers that the gifts of the Spirit are not for the enrichment of oneself but for the enrichment of the Church’²⁸

There is no greater example of a willing mindset than Jesus Christ. Christ demonstrates a willingness to disciple during his time of earthly ministry by ministering to others despite times of fatigue—an example disciples should follow (John 4:6.) Borchert writes, “We, like the disciples in this present story, must learn from Jesus not to allow personal mortality and its needs to dominate our concerns.”²⁹ One additional yet significant way Christ’s willingness is presented in Scripture is in his description of a consistently willing teacher. The Gospels give Christ the title of teacher forty-five times.³⁰ Robert Stein explains that the “unanimous witness of the gospel tradition and the evangelists that one of the prominent functions of Jesus during His public ministry was teaching.”³¹ Jesus was a willing teacher who clearly had the ability to capture an audience by His calling, authority, and method (Mark 4:1; 6:33; 8:2-3.)³²

Connecting Proven Teaching Strategies to Discipleship

Having demonstrated that discipleship is a teaching relationship based upon

²⁷ Zuck, *Spirit-Filled Teaching*, 74.

²⁸ Francis Foulkes, *Ephesians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 123-24.

²⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, The New American Commentary, vol. 25A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 201.

³⁰ Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, rev. ed. (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 1.

³¹ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, 1.

³² Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus’ Teaching*, 7.

willingness and dependent upon the Holy Spirit, attention can now be given to reviewing strategies Jesus utilized that research has subsequently proven to yield significant results in learning. A disciple who faithfully proclaims the message of the kingdom should readily investigate and implement proven techniques and strategies that affords the best opportunity for learning to take root in the believer. In Matthew 13, Jesus utilizes several strategies that research demonstrates to be best for imparting and cementing learning to the student. Care will be given in the remainder of this chapter to look at three instructional strategies Jesus employed with his disciples. The three strategies are providing feedback, establishing outcomes, and identifying similarities and differences.³³

Timely Feedback

Several times in his discourse in Matthew 13, Jesus provided feedback to his disciples so that they may have a foundation to assess whether they truly understood his teaching on living as a kingdom citizen. Feedback, according to John Hattie, “is among the most powerful influences on achievement.”³⁴ Examples in Matthew 13 include Jesus providing explanation regarding why He instructs in parables, explaining the parable of the sower, and explaining the parable of the weeds (Matt 13:10-17; 18-23; 36-43.) In each of these examples, several essential components for quality feedback are evident. Prior to exploring the essential components, defining what is meant by feedback is important.

Generally speaking, Hattie refers to feedback as information provided by an

³³ Important to note is that these strategies are not intended to be a “teach like Jesus” or “must employ” for discipleship. The methods shared are not intended to be exclusive or a recipe for discipleship. Rather, the examination of the three strategies evident with Jesus’s discipleship (teaching) in Matt 13 are intended to provide a pause point of reflection to examine if proven methods are incorporated with their own discipleship efforts. Jesus chose to utilize these strategies and, as a result, attention should be given to Him along with proven research to ensure that teachers give the best opportunity for the seed of the kingdom to be received by the hearer.

³⁴ John A.C. Hattie, *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 173.

agent (e.g., teacher, peer, book, parent, or one's own experience) about aspects of one's performance or understanding.³⁵ Robert Marzano states that feedback is "the information loop between the teacher and the students that provides students with an awareness of what they should be learning and how they are doing."³⁶ Hattie notes one particular study by Phillip Winne and Deborah Butler (1994) that provided an excellent summary in their claim that "feedback is information with which a learner can confirm, add to, overwrite, tune, or restructure information in memory, whether that information is domain knowledge, meta-cognitive knowledge, beliefs about self and tasks, or cognitive tactics and strategies"³⁷ Ceri Dean et al. also note that feedback "should help students understand what was correct as well as contain specifics about what was incorrect."³⁸ These definitions of feedback provide valuable insight into Christ's teaching in Matthew 13.

Christ provided feedback in a timely manner. His answers were given almost instantaneously to the disciples' questions related to teaching in parables and explanation of both the parables of the sower and the weed/wheat. Providing immediate feedback can encourage students to practice and make connections between what they do and the results they achieve.³⁹ Marzano comments that feedback is most effective when given in

³⁵ Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 174.

³⁶ Robert J. Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree, 2017), 6.

³⁷ Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 174.

³⁸ Ceri B. Dean et al., *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision & Curriculum Development, 2012), 12.

³⁹ Dean et al., *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 13.

short turnaround from explanation or assessment.⁴⁰ The further away in time the feedback is from the instruction, the least likely it is to be effective.⁴¹

Another element of effective feedback stems from when feedback is provided from a learner's direct need. Hattie explains that feedback is most powerful when feedback stems from the student to the teacher, providing an opportunity for the teacher to directly respond to the student's inquiry or comment.⁴² Christ once again demonstrates effectiveness in his approach as his responses were given shortly after the disciples' questions, and in response to the pointed need of the disciples. He answered their questions directly. Christ exhibits this when the disciples' desire for further instruction on the purpose of parables (Matt 13:10) and the parable of the weeds (Matt 13:36.) In each instance, Jesus provided a timely and detailed answer to the inquiry. David Turner writes, "In response to the disciples' question, Jesus explained the parable of the weeds. His explanation of this parable is just as detailed as his earlier explanation of the parable of the sower (13:18-23), with seven key details interpreted."⁴³ Jesus's detailed and immediate response serves as evidence that a component of discipleship should be timely feedback driven from a disciple's need. Dean et al. share, "By providing students with feedback that is corrective, timely, and focused on criteria, and by involving them in the feedback process, teachers can create a classroom environment that fosters and supports learning."⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Robert J. Marzano, Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement* (Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001), 97.

⁴¹ Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 97.

⁴² Hattie, *Visible Learning*, 238.

⁴³ David Turner, *Matthew*, in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 11, *Matthew and Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 192.

⁴⁴ Dean et al., *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 11.

Establishing Outcomes

The adage that if “you aim at nothing, you will hit your target every time” certainly has connections in discipleship. Time spent in teaching settings without clear outcomes, even amongst believers, can be void of learning. There must be a goal-driven outcome for learning environments—including environments for discipleship. Goal setting, according to Marzano, is the process of establishing a direction for learning.⁴⁵ Stated differently, Dean et al. comment, “Objectives should have a clear and unambiguous description of instructional intent.”⁴⁶ While the setting and approach can certainly vary, teaching should have a purpose. The same is true for discipleship. Discipleship’s purpose or objective, as established previously, is to become like Christ and serve Him in His kingdom.

Christ demonstrates this truth by continually teaching kingdom citizenship through parables. Donald Campbell notes, “In interpreting the parables it is important to keep in mind that they all refer in some way to the kingdom of God.”⁴⁷ Beginning each parable with “the kingdom of heaven is like” in Matthew 13 sets forth a clear framework from which the disciples knew the learning outcome. The framing of the subsequent parable after the initial phrasing of “The Kingdom of heaven is like” afforded the disciples a focus on the purpose of the learning. They had an outcome (attributes of the kingdom) to which they were trying to learn. Clear objectives do not mean, however, ease of implementation. Christ’s outcomes during instruction were not simplistic. There

⁴⁵ Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 92.

⁴⁶ Kenneth E. Moore, *Effective Instructional Strategies: From Theory to Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2015), 183.

⁴⁷ Donald K. Campbell, foreword to *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth*, by Roy B. Zuck, ed. Craig Bubeck Sr. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1991), 204.

were expectations of the learner to which Christ believed they were capable of meeting.⁴⁸

Christ's clear intent during teaching is congruent with best practices in teaching and learning, specifically in establishing outcomes or goal setting. Marzano writes, "If students understand what they are to learn during a given lesson or unit, they are better able to determine how well they are doing and what they need to improve."⁴⁹ This research-backed truth could also be said of the process of making disciples. Affording disciples the opportunity to see themselves or others in the imagery of the parables allows the opportunity to reflect and ultimately grow in their knowledge and application of kingdom living. Disciples need to understand the purpose of being a kingdom citizen and need to be disciplined toward that end.

Appropriate goal setting should narrow the student's focus.⁵⁰ Framing the instruction in Matthew 13 with "the kingdom of heaven is like" clearly provided disciples with what they should be listening for during Christ's instruction. Knowing that objectives are essential for learning, care should be given, as was evident with Christ, to provide a goal that narrows what Christlikeness looks like in the life of a disciple. Such effort will have a far better result than simply sharing that the goal of discipleship is Christlikeness.

Research also bears out that goals should not be overly specific as they risk becoming overly prescriptive and regimented as opposed to constructive in application.⁵¹ Students must have the opportunity to connect meaning to previous experiences rather than simply being told what to do. This principle should also be employed in discipleship

⁴⁸ Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching*, 32.

⁴⁹ Marzano, *The New Art and Science of Teaching*, 11.

⁵⁰ Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 92.

⁵¹ Marzano, Pickering, and Pollock, *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 94.

relationships. Discipling fellow citizens of the kingdom should be toward the end of having disciples process and apply the learning to their daily practices. Challenging students to think deeply about truths presented (such as what Christ did during private conversations with his disciples in Matt 13:10-23, 36-43 and 51,52) and how such truth applies to daily practices, are essential for Christlikeness.

Identifying Similarities and Differences

The third instructional strategy observed in Christ's discourse in Matthew 13 is the utilization of identifying similarities and differences. Dean et al. write, "Identifying similarities and differences is the process of comparing information, sorting concepts into categories, and making connections to existing knowledge. Simply put, identifying similarities and differences helps us make sense of the world."⁵² Prior to discussing this instructional strategy in detail, an understanding of the educational theory of constructivism is critically important.

Constructivism builds upon the notion that learners attach new learning to existing knowledge. Kenneth Moore explains,

Constructivism is basically a theory about how people learn. It says that students will construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. When students encounter something new, they have to reconcile it with their previous ideas and experiences, maybe changing what they believe, or maybe discarding the new information as irrelevant.⁵³

In building upon prior knowledge, learners can take new learning and attach it to prior learning.

The constructivist methodology is evident when teaching in parables. Jesus attaches the new learning of the kingdom of heaven to existing knowledge of things

⁵² Dean et al., *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 119.

⁵³ Moore, *Effective Instructional Strategies*, 10.

familiar to the hearer. The parables in Matthew 13 alone liken the kingdom to such things as soil, wheat, fishing, seeds, and commerce. If the hearer, through illumination of the Holy Spirit, had “ears to hear” or “eyes to see,” then the prior knowledge schemas would present foundation for Jesus’s new teaching regarding the kingdom to take root. New learning takes place by comparing and contrasting prior knowledge to new information. Dean et al. note, “Comparing is the process of identifying similarities between or among things or ideas. The term contrasting refers to the process of identifying differences; most educators, however, use the term comparing to refer to both.”⁵⁴ David Sousa comments, “A student makes sense of new learning when the teacher presents it in a way that the student understands it, and it fits in the world as the student knows it.”⁵⁵ James Lang also adds, “A piece of knowledge that we understand thoroughly, however, and that we can reflect deeply on and apply to new contexts and more, will have connections to lots of other neuronal networks. It might have come in from the teacher, but then we recognized how it related to something we already knew.”⁵⁶

Christ’s methodology as teacher often moved his disciples to compare new learning to their existing beliefs. His use parables that draw from previous experiences to illuminate new knowledge could easily be presented as a constructivist approach. Christ’s use of parable certainly connects previous knowledge to new. Green states,

Such a teaching method has enormous advantages: storytellers are popular all over the world, and Jesus was the world’s greatest master of the short story. It holds the attention, enables people to see themselves, and, while dealing with the well-known,

⁵⁴ Dean et al., *Classroom Instruction That Works*, 118.

⁵⁵ David A. Sousa, *Engaging the Rewired Brain* (West Palm Beach, FL: Learning Sciences, 2016), 50.

⁵⁶ James M. Lang, *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning*, (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley, 2021), 95.

it always introduces that extra, subtle twist that fascinates and makes the hearer reflect. It is a brilliant instrument in skilled hands.⁵⁷

Story telling via parables provides an excellent opportunity to compare, as Green writes, parables are “the comparison of two subjects for the purpose of teaching. It proceeds from the known to the unknown.”⁵⁸ In the parables written in Matthew 13, Christ presented truths that hearers were likely well aware of and others that were new. Louis Barbieri writes, “They knew about a kingdom over which Messiah would rule and reign, but they did not know it would be rejected at the time it was offered. They knew the kingdom would include righteousness, but they did not know it would also include evil.”⁵⁹ Barbieri’s words reveal how Christ was adding new learning to the disciples’ existing schemas. Hence, Jesus’s explanation of the disciples’ need to bring forth both the old and new was to restructure previous learning with the new learning (Matt 13:51-52).⁶⁰

As noted previously, the ability to identify similarities and differences is one of the most important strategies a teacher can utilize to develop deep understanding. Fred Silver notes that five goals can be accomplished by the teacher when creating instruction that incorporates the use of comparing and contrasting. Comparing and contrasting strengthens student memories, develops higher order thinking skills, increases student comprehension, enhances student writing, and develops student’s habit of mind.⁶¹ These goals have clear benefits to the process of kingdom-discipleship. Duane Elmer and

⁵⁷ Michael Green, *The Message of Matthew: The Kingdom of Heaven*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 153.

⁵⁸ Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 152.

⁵⁹ Louis A. Barbieri Jr., “Matthew,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 2:52.

⁶⁰ Noteworthy is the complementary nature of effective teaching strategies. Identifying similarities presented in the parables, such as farming, coupled with Christ providing timely feedback, maximized potential for new learning regarding the kingdom.

⁶¹ Fred Silver, *Compare and Contrast: Teaching Comparative Thinking to Strengthen Student Learning* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2010), 7.

Muriel Elmer write, “The more we connect life experiences to God, the good and the bad, the stronger our ‘altar’ of worship and the more likely we will resist erecting false altars.”⁶² The quest of instruction toward making disciples is to make the learner consistently aware or conscious of the presence of God and how such presence will affect daily living as a citizen of the kingdom.⁶³ Elmer and Elmer explain, “The brain waits to be stimulated with new material that connects with other content from past learning already stored there.”⁶⁴

While on the surface comparing may seem simplistic, the act of comparing in a learner’s mind is essential to making the learning their own. One may be able to know information through rote memory, but deep learning happens when the learner takes new information, attaches it by identifying similarities and differences to prior learning, and therefore creates a new schema, or category, to process information. Elmer and Elmer explain, “In the same way, our learners, to make any sense out of content, need connection points to pre-existing content or experiences already imprinted in the brain—the “meaning” function.”⁶⁵

In the closing words of his discourse, Jesus asks if the disciples first understood new learning and then declares that scribes trained (or taught) for the kingdom of heaven bring forth both old and new treasures (Matt 13:51). The discourse began with Jesus’s teaching that had disciples using prior knowledge and then transitioned to what he wanted them to learn of the kingdom of heaven. Their old learning at first presented as a fuller understanding of the kingdom, yet was actually intended to be a scaffold to a new treasure.

⁶² Duane H. Elmer and Muriel Elmer, *The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2020), 35.

⁶³ Elmer and Elmer, *The Learning Cycle*, 35.

⁶⁴ Elmer and Elmer, *The Learning Cycle*, 36.

⁶⁵ Elmer and Elmer, *The Learning Cycle*, 36.

Jesus explains similarly in Matthew 9:17 when he describes that his entrance is the ushering in of something new that cannot be contained by something old. The new needed a foundation by which the disciples could construct meaning. Jesus's approach in using parables did so.

Conclusion

The Holy Spirit is the primary discipler who brings illumination to a man's heart (John 16:8; 1 Cor 1:23.) However, one who disciples should refine practices and implement proven techniques to create an optimum environment for which the Lord can minister. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit does not need any such environment. However, the discipler's ability to discover and use proven methods of instruction speaks to a commitment as a kingdom of heaven citizen who does everything with excellence toward the glory of our King (Col 3:17).

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation by providing a detailed account of the three goals and their results. The purpose of this project was to develop a biblically based framework of discipleship at Open Door Christian Schools (ODCS) that connects citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to discipleship. The project had three goals: (1) develop a professional learning session for ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13; (2) teach and assess ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13; and (3) develop a grade 5-12 inventory to be given for the purpose of assessing understanding of the connection between citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to daily lifestyle choices and affording reflection on their personal receptivity to the gospel in terms of pursuing, promoting, and persisting in the kingdom. Implementation of this project began on January 9, 2022, and the project continued until November 22, 2022.

Project Promotion

Promotion and recruitment for the project began on September 25, 2022. Four pastors from three different churches, two principals, one faculty member, and one psychologist were invited via email and informal conversation to review the lesson plans for the learning sessions and the student inventory. Promotion of the kingdom-connected discipleship (KCD) learning sessions began on October 4, 2022, with an announcement given to ODCS faculty, staff, and administration attending the staff's spiritual retreat. This announcement was followed by an additional announcement given on October 24 to

ODCS staff present for morning prayer time. An e-mail was sent on October 28 to ODCS faculty, staff, and administration inviting each of them to take part in the learning sessions. The invitation provided dates of the learning sessions, the objectives of the learning, the incentives for participation, and the commitment required from each participant. Two additional announcements were given on October 31 to staff: one to those present at morning prayer and an e-mail to all staff. At the application deadline of November 2, twenty-four agreed to participate, exceeding the minimum number of fifteen participants sought to implement the learning sessions.

Learning Session Development

The first goal was to develop a learning session for ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. The learning session consisted of eight, forty-five-minute lessons. The overall objective for the learning was to define the kingdom of heaven, connect discipleship to citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, and introduce three attributes needed for citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. On September 30, the learning session lessons were given to a four-person expert panel who reviewed them over a two-week span using a rubric.¹ The panel consisted of a pastor with a specific responsibility of discipleship ministry as defined by small groups and class development; a pastor with over twenty years of ministry experience who had a specific focus on small groups and missions; the Bible Department Chair of ODCS who is responsible for curriculum design and oversight for Bible instruction in grades 7-12; and an ODCS school administrator with over twenty years of experience, and five of those years were as a curriculum director.

The rubric covered four specific areas designed to ensure the project would be successful: biblical accuracy, scope and sequence, pedagogy, and practicality. A minimum

¹ See appendix 1.

score of “3,” or “sufficient” on a four-point scale was required for the lesson plan review. If any element did not meet this minimum score, then the curriculum was to be revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of “3.” All four expert panel members found that the lessons plans were sufficient (3) or exemplary (4) in every category (see table 1).

Table 1. Lesson plan evaluation results

Criteria	1 (insufficient)	2 (requires attention)	3 (sufficient)	4 (exemplary)
Biblical Accuracy				
The sessions are sound in their interpretation of Matthew 13.				4
The sessions are faithful to the theology of the Gospel of Matthew			1	3
Scope				
The content of each session sufficiently addresses each issue it is designed to address.			2	2
The kingdom of heaven is clearly taught in each session.				4
The content of each session clearly establishes and/or connects the essential attributes of pursuit, persistence, and promotion for a disciple.			1	3
Pedagogy				
The sessions contain a primary objective for each lesson.				4
The sessions are focused.			1	3
Adequate review of previous learning is given during each session.			1	3
Practicality				
The sessions extend the content into practical application.			4	
At the end of the course, participants will be able to understand the kingdom of Heaven and its connection to discipleship.			1	3

Staff Training

The second goal of the project was to teach and assess ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. This goal measurement required each participant to complete an assessment and attend a six-hour professional learning course given over two days on the kingdom of heaven's connection to discipleship as identified in Matthew 13. The course was comprised of eight sessions taught on November 14 and 15, 2022.

For all sessions, participants were provided a one-page Cornell note template. Each template identified five key terms, three key points, and one big idea. The key terms were defined during the class sessions, yet definitions were not explicitly provided within the notes for the participants. The three key points for each lesson were either directly given in the notes or by a beginning thought, which the participants had to complete once provided by the instructor. The one big idea for each lesson was provided at the end of each lesson in sentence form with students needing to complete the big idea statement by filling in key words in blanks. Key concepts were reviewed and informally assessed at the beginning and conclusion of each lesson. Twenty-four ODCS staff members agreed to participate. All participants completed and signed a commitment card documenting their willingness to participate.²

Session 1

In the first session, participants were introduced to Christ's central message of the kingdom of heaven by providing the kingdom's definition, importance, and general use in the Gospel of Matthew to its specific use in Matthew 13. The desired learning outcome was that participants would be able to define kingdom of heaven and disciple, and explain how being a disciple is being a citizen in the kingdom of heaven, and identify

² See appendix 3.

three words that serve as attributes for a disciple (pursue, persist, and promote.) The big idea for the session was, “Christ’s disciples are to serve as ambassadors and citizens of the kingdom of heaven where they actively persist, promote, and pursue the kingdom of heaven seeing that the kingdom is the rule and reign of God in the past, present, and for all eternity.”

Session 2

In the second session, participants reviewed the definition of the “kingdom of heaven” and the guiding attributes of pursuing, persisting, and promoting the King and His kingdom. Following the review, participants learned of the two overall responses to the message of the kingdom, which are reception or rejection, as identified in the Parable of the Sower found in Matthew 13:3-9 and 18-23. During this session, the role of faithful proclamation of the gospel message by citizens of the kingdom was explained along with the essential role of the Holy Spirit for illumination and receptivity to the gospel message. The session also afforded time to describe several reasons given by Christ from the parable that reveal rejection and reception of the kingdom message. The goal for the session was for participants to describe the two overall responses to the message of the kingdom, reasons for rejection or reception, and how receiving the message of the kingdom will be reflected in a citizen of heaven’s pursuit, persistence, and promotion of the King and His kingdom. The conclusion of the session required participants to work in groups to list the two types of responses to the kingdom of heaven, provide the types and causes of rejection noted in Matthew 13, and explain how fruit-bearing citizens of the kingdom persist, promote, and pursue the King and His kingdom. The big idea for the session was, “There are two types of responses to the kingdom of heaven: receive or reject. There are degrees of rejection, but rejection nonetheless, that are linked to a person’s understanding of the kingdom. Disciples understand the message of the kingdom

and will bear fruit (at varying degrees) by persisting, pursuing, and promoting the kingdom of heaven.”

Session 3

In the third session, participants began with a review of previous content, and an introduction to the topic of persistence during external opposition as found in Matthew 13:24-30 was introduced. Session 3 focused on the reality of opposition to the kingdom of heaven, the definition of opposition, how growth for the disciple is still possible despite opposition, and how the kingdom will ultimately be victorious. The goal for this session was that participants would be able to articulate the principle of opposition to the kingdom of heaven and provide examples of present-day opposition to the kingdom message. The big idea for the session was, “Understanding the kingdom of heaven faces external opposition that will ultimately be revealed and defeated assists the believer in persisting in the midst of opposition.”

Sessions 4-5

Sessions 4 and 5 focused on opposition, yet with a different focus—the opposition that comes from internal struggles in the life of a kingdom citizen that emerge when they cannot readily see the kingdom’s growth. Lesson 4 focused on the mustard seed found in Matthew 13:31-32, and the illustration that humble beginnings do not diminish the final assurance of Christ being the King of Kings and His kingdom being the kingdom of kingdoms. Lesson 5 continued with the concept of persistence by sharing the Parable of the Leaven and its permeating effect (Matt 13:33.) Care was given to illuminate that the yeast’s work is not always evident, yet its permeating effect is ultimately undeniable. By using this parable, participants were reminded that believers’ efforts are not futile, and that the kingdom ultimately permeates across all dimensions of life. Care was given in lessons 4 and 5 to connect the reality of the kingdom’s

culmination, whether shared as a fully mature tree or fully leavened bread, as a means of hope during believers' internal struggle. The big idea for the sessions were, "The kingdom of heaven began with the appearance of humble beginnings, yet it will fully reveal itself one day as the largest of all kingdoms. Understanding this truth will result in a believer persisting when doubting about the kingdom of heaven's significance and strength," and "The kingdom of heaven's work may appear hidden, but its message transforms and permeates both the world and the kingdom of heaven citizen. When permeation is understood, believers will persist when the appearance of the kingdom's work is not immediately evident."

Session 6

Session 6 discussed how a kingdom of heaven citizen recognizes and pursues the King and his kingdom because the superior worth is greater than any other pursuit or possession (Matt 13:44-45). Biblical truths of salvation, eternity, and devotion were explored to provide evidence of the surpassing value of the kingdom of heaven. Emphasis was placed in the truth that a believer who understands the value of the kingdom of heaven will pursue the kingdom as greater than all other things. The parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the pearl of great price were used to illuminate that a kingdom of heaven citizen will pursue the kingdom when the value is recognized—whether the kingdom is discovered through what appears as happenstance or due to a search born from knowledge. The big idea for the session was, "A citizen who understands the value of the kingdom of heaven will recognize its worth as far superior to anything in their possession and therefore pursue the Kingdom as greater than all other things."

Sessions 7-8

Sessions 7 and 8 concluded the teaching sessions by focusing on the kingdom of heaven citizen's promotion of the kingdom. Lesson 7 addressed the parable of the net

and fishes found in Matthew 13:47-50. Specifically, emphasis was given to the net being spread to gather fish of all kinds. Some of the fish were good while others bad, but the net was cast to collect them all. This denotes the kingdom citizen's responsibility to cast the gospel net far and wide. The duty of faithful proclamation, first introduced in lesson 2, was emphasized during this lesson. Lesson 8 continued the emphasis on promoting the kingdom by reviewing the discussion held between Christ and His disciples found in Matthew 13:51 and 52, where Christ challenged them to share as scribes that have received both new and old treasures of the kingdom. Knowing Christ and His kingdom rule should result in active promotion of the King who rules both now and in the future. Emphasis was given on a scribe's role and how that equates to discipleship at ODCS, specifically how promotion of our King is not optional and must be done with both lifestyle choices and gospel proclamation. The big ideas for the sessions were, "The Kingdom of Heaven's message and judgment is for all people and will result in a believer's pursuit, persistence and promotion of the Kingdom of Heaven's message," and "A citizen of the kingdom of heaven will become a faithful disciple who promotes in word and deed its message to others therefore permeating its truth to what they come in contact."

Assessment

A thirty-eight-point assessment of the learning sessions was distributed digitally on November 15 and was completed individually and in one-sitting by November 17. Participants were allowed to use class notes while completing the assessment. The assessment consisted of short answer, multiple choice, and check-box responses. All staff scored 85 percent or higher on the assessment with the average score being 37.13, the range of scores being from 32 points to 38 and the median score being 38 (see figure 1).

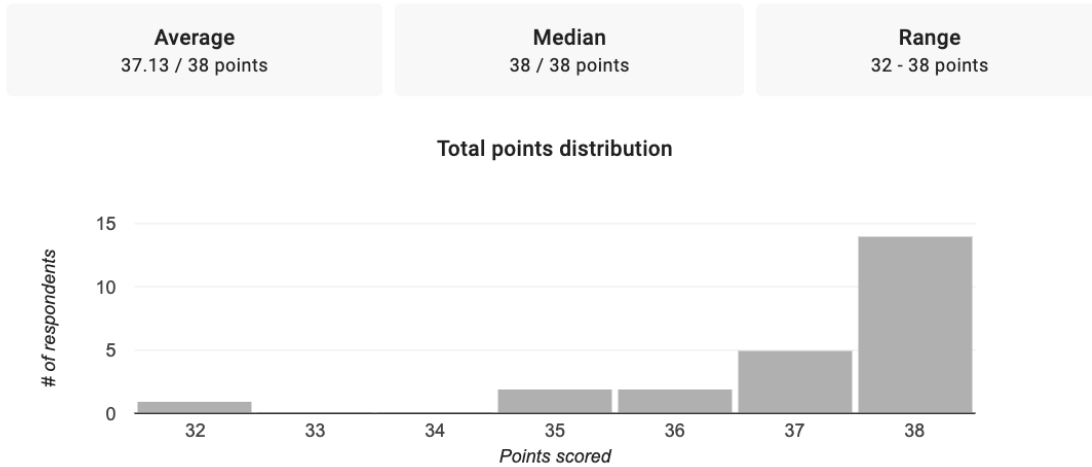


Figure 1. Total point distribution

Create Student Inventory

The third goal was to create a student inventory to assess understanding and provide reflection on the kingdom of heaven’s connection to discipleship and the degree kingdom citizenship effects daily lifestyle. On September 30, the inventory was reviewed with an approved rubric over a two-week span by a four-person expert panel. The panel consisted of a pastor with over ten years of pastoral experience and a PhD in Church History; a licensed school psychologist with over twenty years of experience; an upper school principal with over ten years of educational experience with grade 5-12 students; and a pastor with over ten years of experience that encompassed all age groups from his congregation.

The rubric design ensured that the inventory would be a support to students in understanding the connection between daily practices and kingdom of heaven citizenship. The rubric assessed clarity of directions for taking the inventory, alignment to the pursuit, promote, persist terminology stemming from the kingdom of heaven lessons taught from Matthew 13, suitability for the target audience, opportunities for extended learning/discussions, and the overall promotion of discipleship.

The initial results of the inventory did not meet the criteria needed for successful goal completion. The inventory needed several revisions prior to resubmission. The first revision included defining the terminology of the inventory. The second revision entailed defining the duration of time for which the students were reflecting upon their life choices. The third revision necessitated that several words in the instructions be changed to ensure suitability for the target audience. The fourth revision added more explanation of the inventory’s objectives. The fifth revision required that the inventory be narrowed to grade 9-12 students as opposed to the original intention of grade 5-8 students. Three of the four evaluators expressed concern over the suitability of the inventory for grade 5-8 students. One reviewer required the session lesson plans identified in goals 1 and 2 to further understand the discipleship direction and connection to the kingdom of heaven. Upon making the revisions and providing further clarification with the submitted plans, the goal met the identified criteria necessary for success with 100 percent of responses being at either the sufficient or exemplary level (see table 3). Marking as 1 was “insufficient”; 2 was “requires attention”; 3 was “sufficient”; and 4 was “exemplary.”

Table 2. Initial “My Life and the Kingdom” inventory results

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Are the directions for taking the inventory clear?		1		3
Are the objectives of the inventory clearly explained?		1		3
Is the inventory aligned to the kingdom of heaven attributes of pursue, promote, and persist identified in Matthew 13?	1			3
Are the inventory questions and vocabulary suitable for 5 th – 12 th grade students?	1		2	1
Is the inventory length appropriate for 5 th – 12 th grade students?			1	3
Does the inventory assess knowledge of the kingdom of heaven?	1		1	2
Is the inventory visually clear and uncluttered?			2	2
Does the inventory connect to a student’s personal experience?		1		3
Does the inventory foster meaningful dialogue and extensions outside of the inventory?		1		3
Overall, I believe the inventory, when executed will promote discipleship at ODCS.	1			3

Table 3. Final “My Life and the Kingdom” inventory results

Criteria	1	2	3	4
Are the directions for taking the inventory clear?				4
Are the objectives of the inventory clearly explained?				4
Is the inventory aligned to the kingdom of heaven attributes of pursue, promote, and persist identified in Matthew 13?			1	3
Are the inventory questions and vocabulary suitable for 9 th – 12 th grade students?			3	1
Is the inventory length appropriate for 5 th – 12 th grade students?			1	3
Does the inventory assess knowledge of the kingdom of heaven?			2	2
Is the inventory visually clear and uncluttered?			2	2
Does the inventory connect to a student’s personal experience?			1	3
Does the inventory foster meaningful dialogue and extensions outside of the inventory?			1	3
Overall, I believe the inventory, when executed will promote discipleship at ODCS.				4

Conclusion

This project was implemented through forty-two weeks of preparation and implementation that developed the KCD curriculum, trained ODCS staff to understand the connection between discipleship and kingdom of heaven citizenship, and designed an inventory intended for grade 5-12 students to reflect on the relationship between daily choices and kingdom citizenship. The request to participate and commitment cards were effective in the recruitment of ODCS faculty and staff. The ODCS professional learning evaluation rubric used by the expert panel ensured that the sessions were biblically accurate, practical, and constructed appropriately. The student inventory evaluation rubric used by the expert panel ensured the inventor was age-appropriate and connected to daily practice. My prayer is that the developed curriculum, staff learning, and student inventory will all serve to promote discipleship at ODCS.

CHAPTER 5

EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

Christ's charge make disciples is often decoupled from his overall theme of the kingdom of heaven being at hand. This project created a meaningful connection between being a disciple in the kingdom of heaven and being a disciple of Jesus Christ. They are one in the same and understanding the connection affords the opportunity to view citizenship as a present reality that can be distilled into three characteristics of faithful discipleship/citizenship: pursuing the King, promoting the King, and persisting for the King. This project developed and implemented professional learning for staff at Open Door Christian School on the connection between kingdom citizenship and discipleship, introduced three characteristics of kingdom citizenship, and prepared an instrument to be utilized for eventual student reflection on how congruent their daily life activities are to being a faithful kingdom citizen.

This chapter seeks to evaluate the efficacy of this project, its purposes, and to reflect upon the goals established at the beginning. I also present the strengths and weaknesses of this project, which provide insight into what I would do differently in future work. Finally, I provide theological reflections as well as personal thoughts about the project with a concluding summary.

Evaluation of the Project Purpose

The purpose of this project was to develop a biblically based framework of discipleship at Open Door Christian Schools that connects citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to discipleship. In so doing, the faculty, staff, and students at Open Door Christian Schools (ODCS) would have a greater degree of prior knowledge, specifically the meaning

of citizenship, to aid in understanding the responsibilities associated with being a disciple. Community, national and global citizenship is referenced much in educational settings. Students at ODCS routinely receive direct and indirect instruction related to responsible citizenship. To list a few, students recite the Pledge of Allegiance daily, honor veterans at Veterans' Day activities, and learn of famous Americans who have demonstrated responsible citizenship of which they should to emulate. Guidelines are continually referenced for developing and maintaining relationships within the school with the hope that they will translate into how students behave/treat others in their local community as well. Students at ODCS learn what it means to be a contributing citizen at the local, national, and global level. Connecting students' prior learning of citizenship is a constructivist approach that deepens understanding that citizenship in the kingdom of heaven also has duties and characteristics that should be evident from its citizens.

The discipleship framework referenced throughout this project utilized the parables in Matthew 13 to define the kingdom of heaven, equate citizenship to being a disciple, and provide three characteristics of being a disciple/citizen that can be easily communicated to school stakeholders. The three characteristics for responsible citizenship in the kingdom of heaven are pursuing the King and His kingdom, persisting for the King and His kingdom, and promoting the King and His kingdom. Once understood, students should be able to identify the attributes of responsible citizenship, and if believers, be able to reflect on the congruence of their daily choices to attributes of kingdom citizenship. God willing, leading them to seek the Lord's empowerment through the Holy Spirit to refine, build or correct choices that are not in congruence with kingdom citizenship as identified from God's Word.

Evaluation of the Project Goals

There were three necessary goals for the purpose of this ministry project. These goals reflect a progression of the steps taken to grow ODCS staff and ultimately

students in their understanding of the connection between kingdom citizenship and being a disciple of Jesus Christ. This section offers an evaluation of each goal that guided this project and sought to make it meaningful and effective.

Goal 1

The first goal was to develop a professional learning session for ODACS staff on the kingdom of heaven as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. Chapter 4 details the development and approval of the curriculum at ODACS. The eight, forty-five-minute professional learning sessions were designed to increase the understanding of the kingdom of heaven, connect being a disciple of Jesus Christ to kingdom citizenship, and introduce three characteristics of kingdom citizenship that could be used as anchors for evaluating daily lifestyle choices as kingdom citizens and ultimately mentoring students to do the same. On September 30, the lessons were given to a four-person expert panel who reviewed them over a two-week span using a rubric. The rubric covered four specific areas designed to ensure the project would be successful: biblical accuracy, scope and sequence, pedagogy, and practicality.¹ A minimum score of “3,” or “sufficient,” on a four-point scale was required for the lesson plan review. If any element did not meet this minimum score, then the curriculum was to be revised and resubmitted for review until it attained the level of “3.” All four expert panel members found that the lessons plans were sufficient (3) or exemplary (4) in every category.

While the lesson plans met the established criteria to utilize for instruction and did not call for re-submission to the panel, the feedback was helpful and prompted the addition of greater opportunities for practical application from the learning. Specifically, expert panel comments suggested that more illustrations or opportunities were needed in the lesson plans to apply the content. To this end, greater effort was given during the

¹ See appendix 1.

teaching to ensure practical examples were given in each lesson. Additionally, greater effort was given during each of the lessons to describe or facilitate conversations amongst participants on how positive and negative examples of the objectives covered in the lesson may manifest in the lives of students. Reflection questions were also added at the end of the lesson for individual and group reflection. The intention was to create tangible extensions of the learning for the staff's personal growth and ultimately their ability to disciple such truth to the lives of students.

Goal 2

The second goal was to teach and assess ODCS staff on the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship as presented in the parables found in Matthew 13. Chapter 4 details the teaching and assessment of the professional learning given at ODCS. The class was comprised of eight sessions that were taught on November 14 and 15 of 2022. This goal measurement required each participant to attend a six-hour class given over two days on the kingdom of heaven's connection to discipleship as identified in Matthew 13, and to complete an assessment from the teaching.² Twenty-four ODCS staff members agreed to participate. The goal was considered met when a minimum of 90 percent of trained ODCS staff score 85 percent or higher on the assessment. The goal's success necessitated the participant's proficiency of the kingdom of heaven's connection to discipleship so that they could serve as a mentor to students in a discipleship framework that emphasized the kingdom. Following the final session, participants took a thirty-eight-point assessment for the learning sessions that was distributed digitally on November 15 with the instructions that the assessment be completed individually, with notes and in one sitting. The goal was considered successfully met as 100 percent of trained staff scored 85 percent or higher on the assessment.

² See appendix 3.

There are several observations worth mentioning for this goal. The overall performance of participants on the assessment was high. The assessment yielded a median score of 38 and average score of 37.13. Fourteen participants (58 percent) scored a perfect score on the assessment. Only one participant scored at the minimum threshold of 85 percent (32 points), which was permissible before reteaching would need to take place. Although reteaching was not a requirement due to the high success rate of all participants, each incorrect response from a participant's assessment received an explanation of the correct response.

Open notes for the assessment were deemed essential for the comfort of the adult learner and culture at ODCS. Staff surveys given outside of this project consistently reveal a positive working environment where the staff trusts the senior leadership. I have regular and ongoing relationships with the faculty; however, I do not serve as the direct supervisor of any staff or faculty member. I regularly speak at professional learning opportunities provided to staff yet not primarily in a teaching role. My role is typically inspirational, strategic, or devotional in nature. All this context to share that there was a degree of performance anxiety for the participants. They neither wanted to be perceived as ignorant by the president or colleagues during the sessions or assessment. Affording participants the opportunity to take the assessment with their notes lessened anxiety, known by numerous anecdotal responses given by participants during the class, and allowed the participants to engage in the learning.

Two items on the assessment revealed either poor item construction, poor instruction, or both. The first question being, "From the lessons, what is primarily lacking for each of the first three soil types?" The intent of the question was to assign a primary characteristic of the three instructed kingdom citizenship characteristics of pursuit, persistence, and promotion to each soil type. I instructed that some of the soil types could have numerous characteristics not evident (i.e., the thorny soil demonstrates a lack of

persistence to survive due to competing weeds and lack of promotion in that there is no demonstrated fruit), yet the focus of the lessons had a primary emphasis identified for each. Although the scores remained high with 83 percent of participants noting the correct answer, the lower performance compared to the overall performance of participants clearly revealed a need to better emphasize the primary characteristic during instruction or change the question from multiple choice to short answer on the assessment to allow for explanation.

Additionally, “From the lessons, check the boxes that identify the two parables in Matthew 13 that address the reality of opposition that can occur within the life of the believer,” yielded lower scores than the average overall performance. Two reasons for the lower performance come to the surface. One is poor item construction in that I did not limit choice selection to two responses (as a result many recipients chose three responses) and the second is that I did not use the language of “within the life” during class, but rather continually referenced “internal opposition.” Changing the assessment question or creating better linkage during instruction would have improved performance on this assessment item.

Finally, the overall recruitment process for the class provided knowledge that can be utilized for future sessions. Numerous anecdotal responses from participants clearly revealed a desire for additional Bible study opportunities to be offered at ODCS. Such opportunities have not typically been offered due to the leadership team’s perception that we offer Bible studies required for teacher certification, nor did not want to be burdensome to staff who are committed to their local church and have numerous family and work responsibilities. However, the expressed sentiment from numerous participants clearly reflect a desire for more opportunities. I believe that this is in large part due to providing the lessons in a concentrated time frame of two sessions, providing a continuing education unit credit for participation, and providing a small stipend—all of which honored the

commitment of time given by the learner. I will seek to employ similar strategies in the future. I also cannot dismiss the genuine joy of learning together that was evident during the sessions.

Goal 3

The third goal was to create a student inventory to assess understanding and provide reflection on the kingdom of heaven's connection to discipleship and the degree kingdom citizenship effects daily lifestyle. Chapter 4 details the evaluation procedures used to examine the suitability of the inventory for grade 5-12 students at ODCS. A four-person expert panel reviewed the inventory with an approved rubric over a two-week period. The goal was considered successfully met when a minimum of 90 percent of the evaluation criterion identified in the rubric met or exceeded the sufficient level. Should the initial feedback yield less than 90 percent, then the inventory would need revision in accordance with the panel's evaluation until such time that the criterion met or exceeded the sufficient level.

As detailed in chapter 4, the initial review by the expert panel deemed the inventory as not meeting the criteria necessary for successful goal completion. As a result, several revisions were made prior to resubmission. Upon making the revisions, the expert panel assessed the inventory as meeting (and therefore the goal) the identified criteria necessary for success with 100 percent of the panel's responses being at the sufficient or exemplary level.

Strengths of the Project

Several strengths of this project are worth highlighting. The first was that the project connected discipleship, a common term used in Christian circles, to being a citizen in the kingdom of heaven. Discipleship entails following and becoming more like Christ. To do so, one must continue to learn who Jesus is. The project sought and accomplished,

based upon the assessment scores of participants, to remind and cement the truth that Jesus is both our Savior and the King of a kingdom that is both a present and future reality. Participants unanimously affirmed in their assessment that being a disciple of Christ was the same as being a citizen in the kingdom of heaven. They also affirmed that the kingdom of heaven is a present reality and not just one for the future.

An additional strength of this project was its focus on three characteristics that foster responsible kingdom citizenship. The expert panel overwhelmingly affirmed that the content of each session clearly established and/or connected the essential attributes of pursuit, persistence, and promotion for a disciple. The performance on the assessment given to participants also clearly demonstrated that there was clear connection to the three characteristics. The evaluators of the inventory, which will eventually be given to students, also affirmed that the inventory was aligned to the kingdom of heaven characteristics of pursue, promote, and persist as taught from Christ's kingdom parables in Matthew 13. Not only is there evidence of the strength of using repetition of the three characteristics found throughout the project, but there is anecdotal evidence as well. One such example was an unsolicited text sent by a participant several days after the session. The participant wrote, "Doing my Bible study today and found myself applying the pursue, persist, and promote to my study of 1Thessalonians 2:10-19 as it fit perfectly with your lesson." The aim was that the common vocabulary of pursue, promote, and persist would "stick," and provide staff and students a set of terms that could assist them in their pursuit of being like Christ.

Additionally, participants were able to connect their prior knowledge of what responsible citizenship means in their local, national, or global community to their responsibilities as citizens of God's kingdom. Participants have numerous examples of positive and negative citizenship to draw upon from their lives. Such experiences can transfer to some degree to a better interpretation of responsible kingdom citizenship. By

drawing upon prior knowledge, participants can apply a known concept of citizenship to an often over-spiritualized term of discipleship. Connecting the prior knowledge of participants also affords reflection on their own citizenship and submission to the King and his kingdom.

Weaknesses of the Project

Some notable weaknesses of the project also exist. The teaching sessions were long. Two back-to-back sessions filled with content of three hours in length taught after two full days of work was certainly less than ideal. As noted earlier, class participation was considered strong throughout the two classes; however, learner fatigue was evident the last day. The volume of content and tight time structure also did not allow for the dialogue that I typically desire. As such, quality formative assessment strategies that can be used by the instructor when participants are discussing content were largely absent. The structure of the sessions also caused my instruction to be primarily in a lecture format. Less time than desired was given for conversation between participants, participants to instructor, and individual reflection. The lecture-driven format did not allow me to understand to the degree desired how the curriculum affected each participant individually.

An additional weakness of the project was that I primarily focused on writing a curriculum as opposed to teaching the curriculum. Teaching strategies to formatively assess and instruct were not given the attention I typically afford due to my focus being primarily on ensuring that the curriculum was biblically sound. There is a significant difference between writing and teaching a curriculum and I mismanaged and under-prioritized elements needed for quality instruction. As a result, lessons lacked the flow desired and there was a heavy emphasis on lecture and the provided Cornell notes outline than facilitative instruction that would have been optimal for this type of professional learning.

The proposed inventory was originally intended to be given to grade 5-12 students. The inventory produced two notable weaknesses. The overreach of age band for

the inventory produced a notable weakness along with not receiving any student feedback of the proposed instrument. All members of the expert panel questioned the suitability of the inventory for the proposed age band. Comments from the panel consistently addressed narrowing the focus only to high school students. The weakness was fortunately caught and addressed prior to actual implementation to a large group of students. Upon identifying the appropriate target audience for the inventory, a select sampling of students to engage and review the survey should have been utilized. This step must be employed prior to implementation at an all high-school level.

What I Would Do Differently

If I were to begin this project again, I would incorporate several revisions and refinements to strengthen the project's sustainability. These changes would primarily be based upon the assessment of the ministry project's previously noted weaknesses. The refinements would include lengthening the teaching sessions, incorporating the term *sanctification* in the curriculum and teaching sessions, refining the student inventory, and utilizing a sample set of students to assist in the assessment of the eventual curriculum and inventory.

Adding two days of training would be a primary area of refinement. The current implementation had two sessions of three hours in length. I would lengthen the time commitment to four sessions of two hours in length. This would create opportunities for greater dialogue between participants and from participant to instructor rather than the lecture-driven format of the existing project. The added length would give opportunities for formative assessment so that more could be gleaned of the participants by the instructor. This would assist in my ability to better disciple the participants taking the class. The added time would also serve to reduce learning fatigue stemming from the length of teaching sessions being past what is optimal.

The additional time would also afford the opportunity to emphasize sanctification. The current ministry project discusses what a kingdom citizen does but does not emphasize growth as a citizen. The eventual student inventory will accomplish this by noting if the frequency of thought on key concepts of citizenship changes for better or worse over multiple experiences with the inventory. However, the inventory does not assess nor does the curriculum explicitly teach growth in the Christian life. This should change moving forward.

An additional revision would be a change to the inventory. Upon reflection and from the advice of the expert panel, I would narrow the inventory to grades 9-12. Upon identifying the appropriate target audience for the inventory, a select sampling of students to engage and review the survey should have been utilized. This step must be employed prior to implementation at an all high-school level. I would also create an additional inventory to be reviewed by the expert panel specifically intended for middle school students. Doing so would acknowledge the developmental characteristics specific to each age group.

The last significant revision would entail the inclusion of students in the evaluative process for both the curriculum and inventory. The teaching sessions were designed for the ODCS staff who serve as the primary mentors of students when in school. While this remains true, recognizing the profound impact students have on one another should have resulted in the inclusion of a student population who could have experienced the curriculum and assessment, and offered feedback. Likewise, I would include an additional step of a beta group of students who would take the student inventory to glean feedback from the age group who eventually will be taking the inventory. The panel assessed the inventory on many essential facets of which students lack expertise, yet the expert panel cannot readily provide feedback on how the high school student interprets

and experiences the survey. The student group would offer insights after the expert panel assessed and approved the inventory.

Theological Reflections

Never the same—this will be true of me due to the hours spent praying, thinking, and writing about Christ’s teaching through parable about His kingdom. When I first began this project, it was from a good intention yet poor interpretation of the Parable of the Sower. I had believed that the parable could be an excellent tool of self-reflection by classifying what type of soil a person, believer or not, most identified within a given time. My thinking had significant errors which needed to be corrected for the project to be successful. The first was the allegorical approach to interpretation of the Parable and the Sower. I had typecast the four types of soil from the parable into exclusive categories upon which a person, believer or not, could flow in between. The second was an attempt to argue from silence by interpreting more than what was written. I focused much of my energy on looking at what the gardener, not even mentioned, would need to do for each soil. While true that believers struggle with hard-heartedness, worries about persecution, and cares of life, the text does not permit that interpretation of the parable. The doctoral process at SBTS challenged my thinking and stretched me to a greater understanding of parable interpretation and led me to learn of God’s kingdom. I most certainly see now what I did not see initially. God used the professors and doctoral process to minister and grow me toward a life-changing view of God’s kingdom. I will forever be grateful for the process, and specifically my supervisor for patiently listening and teaching me “the way of God more accurately” (Acts 18:26.)

My work in chapter 2, while exhausting and overwhelming at times, gave me tools to which I will continue to use in personal growth and discipleship opportunities the Lord provides. I now have a discipleship framework upon which conversation about responsible kingdom citizenship can take place. I now have a better understanding of my

role to faithfully proclaim the Word along with a greater dependence upon the Lord for enlightenment of both myself and who I am ministering. This creates greater urgency to attend to the spiritual disciplines to ensure that I am dependent on the Lord while simultaneously creating a greater desire to rightly understand and teach His Word. This process challenged me to study Scripture at a depth never experienced previously. The lessons learned and sources gleaned greatly impacted my Bible study.

My goal as the leader of ODCS will be to take what the Lord has shown me and further deepen practices at His school that demonstrate greater reliance upon the Lord while also affording opportunities to learn how to study the Bible correctly. I look forward to ministering more to those who daily minister to students and whose example students are most likely to remember. As a matter of course, next steps will include greater emphasis on prayer and additional opportunities to learn together. May the Lord find me faithful in my individual persistence, pursuit, and promotion of His kingdom and may He also find me faithful in leading others to do the same.

Finally, this discipleship project caused me to realize that this training could be of benefit to the greater Christian community. The response from the adult participants clearly demonstrated a desire of adult learners to learn their place in Christ's kingdom. Individually reflecting on the citizenship attributes of pursuing, persisting, and promoting Christ and His kingdom would prove beneficial to all believers regardless of the number of years spent serving the King. Therefore, I will look for ways not only to introduce the content at ODCS, but also in the church where I am privileged to attend.

Personal Reflections

My faith has always been one where I have striven, certainly not always with success, to apply. To echo the sentiment of James 2:17, Faith without works is dead. I have also sought in over twenty years of ministry to model and proclaim that a love for Christ will have accompanying action toward God and others. What I have not done is connect a

believer's walk to their citizenship in Christ's kingdom, and how their citizenship should be a catalyst to live a life consecrated to the King. My emphasis has primarily been on actions born from loving well. However, the Lord used this project to add responsible citizenship born from a love for Christ, my Savior and King, to my personal growth. I will be forever grateful for how the Lord used the doctoral process to sharpen my thinking and distill healthy and active citizenship to three simple words (persist, pursue, and promote) that I can use to reflect on my love for Christ and His kingdom.

My father, a pastor of over forty years, often shared a short yet expressive statement when asked by church members why he did not spend more time in some of the harder to understand books/passages in the Bible. The witty pastor, who did not possess a seminary education or even a high school diploma, would smilingly share, "I haven't even got out of Matthew yet." As often as I heard this testimonial, I had no idea that my life for the past several years would be focused not only in the Gospel of Matthew, but specifically Christ's parables of the kingdom found in Matthew 13. As this season comes to close, I echo my father's words realizing there is so much to learn as I grow to become more like Christ and become a more responsible citizen in His kingdom. I have learned more related to the Holy Spirit's role in my work at ODCS and my duty of faithful proclamation than I ever could have imagined prior to beginning at SBTS.

Finally, the totality of the doctoral program stretched me in ways that are difficult to put to print. The way the Lord revealed Himself to me through conversations with my supervisor and professors was humbling to say the least. Humbling not because of the way I was challenged, but humbling in that it revealed how much there is to learn as I serve the King. I echo Paul's sentiments in Philippians 1:3 where he shares that he thanks God for every remembrance of the church in Philippi. I feel the same toward the SBTS faculty who took the time to minister to me. The Lord used them to further imprint Himself on my life. I will be forever grateful for this phase of my journey.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to develop a biblically based framework of discipleship at Open Door Christian Schools that connects citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to discipleship. The Lord's faithfulness afforded the opportunity to develop and implement a discipleship curriculum from Christ's instruction on the kingdom of heaven specifically found in Matthew 13 that facilitates a lifestyle of responsible citizenship in the kingdom of heaven where disciples persist, pursue, and promote the King and His kingdom. The approval of the curriculum, inventory, and overwhelming statistical success from the assessment given after instruction have left me encouraged and strengthened for the next steps of implementation at ODCS. I look forward to seeing the Lord assist ODCS in communicating the message of responsible kingdom citizenship kingdom to the students entrusted to our care at ODCS. May the Lord be glorified in this endeavor, and may He expand it past what I think, ask, or imagine.

APPENDIX 1

“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP” PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SESSION RUBRIC

The following instrument is the “Kingdom Connected Discipleship” rubric that was utilized by an expert panel to assess the professional learning session’s content for biblical accuracy, scope, pedagogy and practicality.

**“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP” PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING SESSION RUBRIC**

Name of Evaluator: _____

Date: _____

Directions: Place an **X** in the box that most accurately reflects your assessment of each of the presented criteria. Comment when needed.

Kingdom Connected Discipleship Professional Learning Session Rubric					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Biblical Accuracy					
The sessions are sound in their interpretation of Matthew 13.					
The sessions are faithful to the theology of the Gospel of Matthew.					
Scope					
The content of each session sufficiently addresses each issue it is designed to address.					
The kingdom of heaven is clearly taught in each session.					
The content of each session clearly establishes and/or connects the essential attributes of pursuit, persistence, and promotion for a disciple.					
Pedagogy					
The sessions contain a primary objective for each lesson.					
The sessions are focused.					
Adequate review of previous learning is given during each session.					
Practicality					
The sessions extend the content into practical application.					
At the end of the course, participants will be able to understand the kingdom of Heaven and its connection to discipleship.					

Other Comments:

APPENDIX 2
“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP”
ANSWER KEY

This appendix is the answer key for the “Kingdom Connected Discipleship” assessment given to evaluate staff understanding of the kingdom of heaven and how the attributes of the kingdom connect to discipleship at ODCS.

“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP” ANSWER KEY

Item #	Type	Correct Answer	Point Total	Answer Chosen	Notes
1	Short Answer		2		Two-point scale: 1 point for referencing correctly either the rule of God or time of His reign 2 points for referencing correctly both the rule of God and time of His reign being both the present and future.
2	Multiple Choice	C	1		
3	True/False	True	1		
4.a	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
4.b	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
4.c	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
4.d	Matching	Reception	1		
5.a	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
5.b	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
5.c	Matching	Rejection of the word	1		
5.d	Matching	Reception	1		
6.1	Matching	B	1		
6.2	Matching	A	1		
6.3	Matching	D	1		
6.4	Matching	C	1		
7	Multiple Choice	B	1		
8.a	Multiple Choice	A	1		
8.b	Multiple Choice	C	1		
8.c	Multiple Choice	C	1		
9	Multiple Choice	A	1		

Item #	Type	Correct Answer	Point Total	Answer Chosen	Notes
10	Short Answer		2		2 points 1 point for referencing any of the following: work in secret, rebel against God, seek to harm 2 points for referencing two of the following: work in secret, rebel against God, seek to harm
11	Short Answer		1		1 point 1 point for referencing God's ultimate victory over opposition
12	Checkbox	Leaven Mustard Seed	2		2 points 1 point for selecting either leaven or mustard seed 2 points for selecting both leaven and mustard seed
13	Short Answer		2		2 points 1 point for correlating similarities between leaven and mustard seed 1 point for articulating how that the parables can point to internal discouragement
14	Check boxes	Treasure Pearl	2		2 points 1 point for selecting either treasure or pearl 2 points for selecting both treasure and pearl
15	Short Answer		1		1 point 1 point for articulating worth of Kingdom/King correlating to prioritization of life choices/activity
16	Short Answer		2		2 points 1 point for being able to explain the universal nature of fishes of every kind 1 point for being able to explain the net being cast and gathering fishes of every kind
17	Short Answer		2		2 points 1 point for being able to define scribe and the duties the job entailed 1 point for correlating scribe to being a disciple
18.a	Multiple Choice	C	1		
18.b	Multiple Choice	C	1		
18.c	Multiple Choice	C	1		
18.d	Multiple Choice	A	1		
18.e	Multiple Choice	A	1		
18.f	Multiple Choice	B	1		
	# Correct				41 total points possible
	% Correct				#correct/41

APPENDIX 3
“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP”
ASSESSMENT

This appendix is the “Kingdom Connected Discipleship” assessment that evaluated staff understanding of the kingdom of heaven and how the attributes of the kingdom connect to discipleship at ODCS.

“KINGDOM CONNECTED DISCIPLESHIP” STAFF ASSESSMENT

Agreement to Participate

You are being requested to participate in a study designed to reveal your understanding of the kingdom of heaven and its connection to discipleship. This research is being conducted by Denver Daniel for the purposes of doctoral project research. In this research, a person will participate in eight different lessons given over two sessions and will take an assessment based upon the questions listed below. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported or identified with your responses. *Participation is strictly voluntary, and you are free to withdraw at any time.* By participating in the sessions and completing this assessment, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this project.

Date: _____

Name: _____

- 1) What is meant by the phrase “kingdom of heaven?”
- 2) The kingdom of heaven is substantiated as the central message of Matthew by:
 - a) the frequency of reference in the gospel of Matthew
 - b) the reference of the kingdom of heaven by John the Baptist, Christ, and disciples
 - c) both a and b
- 3) A disciple of Jesus Christ is a citizen in the kingdom of heaven.
 - a) True
 - b) False
- 4) Check whether the soil described in Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23 reflect rejection or reception of the Word.

Type of Soil	Outcome
4.a Path	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
4.b Rocky ground	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
4.c Thorn and weed-filled ground	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
4.d Good soil	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word

- 5) Check whether the receptivity of the hearer described in Matthew 13:1-9 and 18-23 reflects rejection or reception to the Word.

Receptivity of the Hearer	Outcome
Hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
Hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
Hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word
Hears the word and understands it	<input type="checkbox"/> Rejection of the word <input type="checkbox"/> Reception of the word

- 6) Match the letter of the statement that best corresponds to the type of soil.

Type of soil	Choice	Outcome
1. Path		a) "My friends make fun of me when I read my Bible. Following Jesus is just not worth that grief."
2. Rocky ground		b) "I just don't understand why people want to follow Jesus."
3. Thorn and weed-filled ground		c) "The joy of knowing Christ is far greater than anything this world can offer me and therefore, I am committed to pursuing, persisting and promoting the King and His Kingdom of Heaven."
4. Good soil		d) "There is just so much going on in my life right now to spend time with Jesus."

- 7) Of the choices below, what is the MOST significant to a person having "ears to hear" and "eyes to see"?
- faithful proclamation of the Word
 - the Holy Spirit providing understanding
 - increasing personal knowledge and understanding of scripture

8) From the lessons, what is primarily lacking for each of the first three soil types?

Type of soil	Outcome
8.a Path	a) pursuit of the kingdom b) promotion of the kingdom c) persisting for the kingdom
8.b Rocky ground	a) pursuit of the kingdom b) promotion of the kingdom c) persisting for the kingdom
8.c Thorn and weed-filled ground	a) pursuit of the kingdom b) promotion of the kingdom c) persisting for the kingdom

9) What type of opposition is evident in the parable of the weeds and wheat?

- a. External
- b. Internal

10) Provide at least two identifying characteristics of those who actively oppose the kingdom.

11) How does knowing the ultimate result of external opposition assist citizens in the kingdom of heaven's ability to persist in being faithful with their citizenship?

12) From the lessons, check the boxes that identify the two parables in Matthew 13 that address the reality of opposition that can occur within the life of the believer?

Parable	
Leaven	
Wheat and weeds	
Mustard seed	
Treasure in a field	
Pearl of great price	
Net of fishes	

13) How are the parables of the “mustard seed” in Matthew 13:31,32 and “leaven” in Matthew 13:33 to be equated to internal opposition? Explain your answer for each parable.

14) From the lessons, check the boxes that identify the parables in Matthew 13 which illustrate the value of the kingdom and the pursuit of it.

Parable	
Leaven	
Wheat and weeds	
Mustard seed	
Treasure in a field	
Pearl of great price	
Net of fishes	

15) How does understanding the worth of the kingdom of heaven create a desire to further pursue the King?

16) How does the parable of the net speak to the disciple’s responsibility to faithfully promote the kingdom of heaven?

17) How does Jesus’ use of the word “scribe” in Matthew 13:51,52 speak to the disciple’s responsibility to promote the King and His kingdom?

18) From the lessons, what is the primary attribute of a kingdom citizen needs to demonstrate for each parable?

Parable	Answer	
18.a. Leaven (Matthew 13:33)		a) pursuit of the kingdom b) promotion of the kingdom c) persisting in the kingdom
18.b Wheat and weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)		
18.c Mustard seed (Matthew 13:31,32)		
18.d. Treasure in a field (Matthew 13:44)		
18.e Pearl of great price (Matthew 13:45)		
18.f Net of fishes (Matthew 13:47-50)		

APPENDIX 4

“MY LIFE AND THE KINGDOM” INVENTORY RUBRIC

The following instrument is the rubric used by the expert panel to assess the quality of the inventory identified in goal 3 that will be given to students in grades 5-12 to assess understanding of the connection between citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to daily lifestyle choices and affording reflection on their personal receptivity to the gospel in terms of pursuing, promoting, and persisting in the kingdom.

“MY LIFE AND THE KINGDOM” INVENTORY RUBRIC

Date: _____

Name: _____

Inventory Rubric					
1 = insufficient 2 = requires attention 3 = sufficient 4 = exemplary					
Criteria	1	2	3	4	Comments
Are the directions for taking the inventory clear?					
Are the objectives of the inventory clearly explained?					
Is the inventory aligned to the kingdom of heaven attributes of pursue, promote, and persist identified in Matthew 13?					
Are the inventory questions and vocabulary suitable for for 5 th – 12 th grade students?					
Is the inventory length appropriate for 5 th – 12 th grade students?					
Does the inventory assess knowledge of the kingdom of heaven?					
Is the inventory visually clear and uncluttered?					
Does the inventory connect to a student’s personal experience?					
Does the inventory foster meaningful dialogue and extensions outside of the inventory?					
Overall, I believe the inventory, when executed will promote discipleship at ODCS.					
Other: Please share any additional comments that you have that could improve the quality and appropriateness of 5th -12th grade students.					

APPENDIX 5

“MY LIFE AND THE KINGDOM” INVENTORY

The following instrument is a draft copy of the “My Life and the Kingdom” inventory that will be given to project reviewers to examine for the suitability of future administration to students in grades 5-12 for the purpose of assessing understanding of the connection between citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to daily lifestyle choices and affording reflection on their personal receptivity to the gospel in terms of pursuing, promoting, and persisting in the kingdom.

“MY LIFE AND THE KINGDOM“ STUDENT INVENTORY

This inventory is intended to help you understand how much your relationship with Christ actually affects the decisions you make on a daily basis. In order for this survey to be meaningful for you, please be honest and genuine with your responses.

No one will see your results, but your responses will be added to the responses of all students in grades 9-12. This will help us to look for patterns that we can then use to design topics of interest for you during small group sessions and chapel.

When you finish, review your score, and identify one or two areas that you would like to discuss further. Plan to share your results with a with a trusted Christian friend and/or mentor. This inventory is for you to use and will be anonymous unless you choose to share your scores with a trusted Christian friend and/or mentor.

Directions: Next to each statement below, check the box that would best describes your typical response this past month.

Glossary:

Never: At no time do I believe this statement describes me.

Rarely: I hardly ever believe this statement describes me.

Occasionally: From time to time, I believe this statement describes me.

Frequently: I regularly believe that this statement describes me.

Always: I believe this statement accurately describes me at all times.

1. I recognize that salvation is given to me by God. I can never earn it.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
2. I recognize that salvation transforms my life and therefore my life as a disciple is not only about my momentary actions but also how I think.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
3. I recognize that there is a struggle between my personal desires and the Holy Spirit which abides in me.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
4. I understand that being a disciple is the same as being a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
5. I am easily discouraged and feel like giving up when I see so many opposing Christ.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
6. I have a difficult time connecting the ultimate victory of Christ and spending eternity with Him to the daily choices I make with my life.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
7. I recognize that Christ's victory over sin is not always readily visible.
never rarely occasionally frequently always

8. I am willing to persist when others are making fun of me for living as a citizen of the kingdom.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
9. I routinely struggle to prioritize my relationship with Christ above all other activities I am involved in.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
10. The opinions of my friends are more important to me than my relationship with Christ.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
11. Opposition from other people regarding my faith in Jesus causes me to give up instead of remaining firm.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
12. Heaven has little to no influence on how I live my life today.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
13. I make choices that reflect I am an active member of the kingdom of heaven where Jesus is my King.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
14. I readily receive instruction related to being a disciple.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
15. I am reluctant to hear from others about how I can grow in my relationship with Jesus.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
16. I take time to reflect on my daily choices to examine if I am living as a citizen in the kingdom.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
17. I view Jesus as my king and submit my life to Him.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
18. I make decisions that prioritize Christ above friends and activities.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
19. I recognize that growing in Christ requires effort to become closer to Him.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
20. I actively pursue opportunities to grow in my relationship with Christ.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
21. I am willing to ask questions when I do not initially understand something in the Bible.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
22. I readily declare that I am a disciple of Jesus Christ.
never rarely occasionally frequently always

23. I recognize that my life should have evidence, more than only my words, that I have chosen to follow Jesus.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
24. I recognize that salvation is a gift intended to be shared with others with both my words and actions.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
25. "My friends make fun of me when I read my Bible. Following Jesus is just not worth that grief."
never rarely occasionally frequently always
26. "I just don't understand why people want to follow Jesus."
never rarely occasionally frequently always
27. "The joy of knowing Christ is far greater than anything this world can offer me and therefore, I am committed to pursuing, persisting and promoting the King and His Kingdom of Heaven.
never rarely occasionally frequently always
28. "There is just so much going on in my life right now to spend time with Jesus."
never rarely occasionally frequently always
29. "I don't believe that it is any of my business to talk to others about their relationship with Christ."
never rarely occasionally frequently always
30. "I can't talk about Jesus with my friends because they will choose not to hang out with me."
never rarely occasionally frequently always

APPENDIX 6

“MY LIFE AND THE KINGDOM” INVENTORY EXPLANATION

The following instrument is a draft copy of the “My Life and the Kingdom” explanation given to project reviewers to examine for the suitability of future administration to students in grades 5-12 for the purpose of sharing results and providing next steps to growing in areas that are identified from the “My Life and the Kingdom Inventory” as lacking.

Understanding Your Inventory
 Review your score for the Knowledge, Pursue, Persist and Promote categories and find where you score on the continuum.
 Read the descriptions of the category below along with action steps for further assistance.
 Review your results with a trusted Christian friend and/or mentor to help you plan next steps.

		Urgent	Struggling	Surviving	Growing	Thriving
Score:	0	1-30	31-60	61-90	91-120	121-150
Knowledge	0	1-4	5-8	9-12	13-16	17-20
Pursue	0	1-13	14-26	27-39	40-52	53-65
Persist	0	1-8	9-16	17-24	25-32	33-40
Promote	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25

Categories:

Knowledge:

This area is intended to measure your understanding of salvation and the basics of the Christian life. A score in the urgent, struggling, or surviving area should be discussed with your mentor prior to reviewing the other categories.

Pursue:

The pursue category speaks to your commitment to actively seeking to live a life as an ambassador of Jesus and His Kingdom.

Persist:

The persist category speaks to your commitment to withstand pressure, either internally or from others, to your relationship with Christ.

Promote:

The promote category speaks to your willingness and activity to speak boldly about your relationship with Jesus Christ.

Rankings:

The rankings below are not intended to be a measure of whether you are or are not a Christian. Rather, they are intended to share a level of attention that you should give to the categories to ensure that you are growing in pursuing, promoting, and persisting in your relationship with Jesus Christ. The ratings should be reviewed with your Christian mentor and/or friend to devise a plan for your next steps.

Urgent:

Immediate attention and/or conversation should be given to this category as the results indicate that there are significant barriers to growing in this category.

Struggling:

Discussion should be held with your Christian mentor and/or friend as there appears to be some weak areas that if left unattended could lead to this developing into an urgent area of need.

Surviving:

Conversation with your Christian mentor/friend should focus on how to make your Christian life more meaningful and “alive.”

Growing:

The fruit and willingness to walk with Christ is apparent. Care should be given to continually nurture the growth. Conversation should focus on what you are presently “doing” in your walk with Christ to achieve this growth.

Thriving:

You are growing and are an example to others in this area. Conversation with your Christian friend and/or mentor should focus on safeguarding the growth and looking for additional experiences to grow others in this particular category of strength.

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ABSTRACT

DEVELOPING A FRAMEWORK FOR DISCIPLESHIP AT OPEN DOOR CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS IN ELYRIA, OHIO

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The purpose of this project is to develop a framework for discipleship at Open Door Christian Schools (ODCS) that connects citizenship in the kingdom of heaven to discipleship efforts. Chapter 1 presents the history and ministry context of ODCS and the goals of this project. Chapter 2 provides a biblical basis for connecting discipleship to the kingdom of heaven by defining “disciples” as those who recognize their citizenship in the kingdom of heaven, exploring how citizenship in the kingdom is given, and the responsibility of being citizens who pursue, promote, and persist in living for the King and advancing His kingdom. Chapter 3 explores how Christ uses instructional practices in His discipleship that contemporary research validate. Chapter 4 describes the project implementation by providing a detailed account of the three goals and their results. Chapter 5 evaluates the efficacy of the project based on completion of the specified goals. This project seeks to develop a discipleship framework that connects discipleship to being an active citizen in Christ’s kingdom.

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