MEASURING THE USEFULNESS OF THE DISCIPLESHIP

PATHWAY ASSESSMENT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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by

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MEASURING THE USEFULNESS OF THE DISCIPLESHIP

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

PREFACE

This project could not have happened without the support of so many amazing people the Lord has put in my life. I am eternally grateful for the community of people who surrounded me during this entire process. First, I want to thank my wife Alison for her steadfast love and encouragement throughout this doctoral program. This season was a full one, and she sacrificed many times for me to pursue this degree. She is a gift from the Lord that I do not deserve, and I am reminded of that daily. I love her.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Pastors and church leaders want to know if they are successful. They want to know if the ministry, resources, and effort they are putting their time into is actually leading others to grow in their relationship with Christ. In addition, spending the time and effort to know if a church is successfully making disciples is a great, healthy practice. Peter Drucker, the father of many of today's leadership principles, is often cited as the source for the old, business proverb, "What gets measured, gets improved."[1] When churches create measurements that can help them understand if they are successfully making disciples or not, they will be able to improve their effectiveness. Steve Kerr, former chief learning officer of Goldman Sachs and a highly respected researcher on leadership development, says, "Practicing without feedback is like bowling through a curtain that hangs down to knee level."[2] Doing ministry without measuring results and analyzing them with feedback is doing just that, bowling through a curtain. Many churches are practicing without feedback hoping they are successfully making disciples, but in reality they do not have measures in place to know if they actually are.

Most churches do track a few metrics, such as attendance and giving, but these metrics have been shown through research to not capture the full picture of what is actually taking place. This was confirmed by a research project conducted by Willow Creek Community Church. In 2004, Willow Creek in suburban Chicago undertook a three-year study to measure spiritual growth, called the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey.

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[1] Peter Drucker, quoted in Jacob Drucker, "You Are What You Measure," *Forbes*, December 4, 2018, https://www.forbes.com/sites/theyec/2018/12/04/you-are-what-you-measure/?sh=43b816bc2075.

[2] Steve Kerr, quoted in Geoff Colvin, *Talent Is Overrated* (London: Penguin, 2008), 74.

This initial research was shared with others through the book, *Reveal: Where Are You*.[3] Over the next six years, additional data was collected from over a quarter million people in well over a thousand churches of every size, denomination, and geographic area. The results from this study were summarized by Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson in their book *Move*. They write about churches not measuring the right metrics, and ultimately not capturing the full picture of what is happening in their church:

> Church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. More precisely, increasing church attendance and participation in organized ministry activities do not predict or drive spiritual growth for people who are in the more advanced stages of spiritual development. Church activities have the greatest influence in the early stages of spiritual growth, but things like personal spiritual practices, including prayer and Bible reading, have far more influence later in the spiritual journey.[4]

If church activity does not lead to or predict spiritual growth, then churches need to go deeper than these easy to measure metrics. They need to look at how people are engaging with their church. However, they cannot stop there. They then need to look if this engagement is actually leading to spiritual growth, not just leading people to be busy with church activity. Therefore, churches must combine all metrics with a measurement of the spiritual growth of those engaged with the church.

To help churches assess their discipleship process and the spiritual growth of their people, Lifeway created the Transformational Discipleship Assessment in 2012. The assessment has since been renamed the Discipleship Pathway Assessment. As stated on the website, "The Discipleship Pathway Assessment is an online assessment tool that provides individuals or groups with the ability to assess their current spiritual maturity

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[3] Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek, 2007).

[4] Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 18-19, Kindle.

using eight biblical signposts."[5] This assessment is a statistically validated online assessment tool built on exhaustive research.[6]

This project overviews the Discipleship Pathway Assessment (DPA) and measures the effectiveness of the assessment in local churches. This project interviewed local churches who implemented the DPA in their context and gathered qualitative research about their experience. This was done to help determine the assessment's perceived effectiveness to help churches evaluate if they are making disciples who are growing spiritually.

Context

Churches today are wrestling with the question of, "Are we actually making disciples?" The disruption COVID-19 brought into the world revealed that the two key metrics churches were using to base success upon, attendance and giving, were insufficient. Thankfully, this caused many churches to ask themselves some hard questions and evaluate how they are measuring success.

Measuring the ministry and tracking metrics of a church is not something one should do away with. Churches just need to make sure they are tracking and measuring the right inputs and outputs. Michael Gerber captures this idea well in *The E-Myth Revisited*:

> When you quantify everything, you'll become as familiar with your business's numbers as your doctor is with your blood pressure and pulse rates. Because without the numbers you can't possibly know where you are, let alone where you're going. With the numbers, your business will take on a totally new meaning. It will come alive with possibilities.[7]

As important as these numbers are, churches need to make sure they are measuring the

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[5] Lifeway, "About Discipleship Pathway," Discipleship Pathway Assessment, accessed May 2, 2022, https://discipleshippathwayassessment.lifeway.com/about/.

[6] Lifeway, "About Discipleship Pathway."

[7] Michael E. Gerber, *The E-Myth Revisited: Why Most Small Businesses Don't Work and What to Do about It* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 124.

metrics that matter. From 1970-2020, a trend in churches tended to focus on "nickels and noses" or "butts and budgets" to determine overarching success. These two metrics of attendance and giving essentially trumped everything else. Though, these metrics do not mean a church has accomplished the Great Commission. They do not reflect that the church is truly making disciples and those disciples are maturing in their relationship with Christ.

Instead of placing superior values on the metrics of attendance and giving, churches need to find methods to measure if their discipleship processes are leading their people into a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. Sadly, when someone attends a church, they can show up and passively consume and leave with no life change. In *Ministry Mantras*, Bob Hyatt and J. R. Briggs pointedly say, "How many people show up on a Sunday is about the least important thing we can count, and least likely to tell us how we are maturing as a community."[8] Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Community Church set the standard for the church growth movement and, as previously mentioned, completed their landmark Reveal study about the spiritual growth within their church and found the same to be true. Through this study they realized that the measurement of how many people are attending church, by itself, does not completely analyze and assess the overall calling of the local church. That metric is a good start, but it only measures what is easily visible. The Willow Creek team said that when it comes to spiritual growth, a church needs to be able to measure the unseen. One needs a glimpse into people's attitudes, thoughts, and feelings. The church needs words that reveal the heart of each person.[9]

Because the desired results of transformed lives, healthy congregations, and exercising faith, hope, and love are extremely difficult to measure, many churches settle

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[8] J. R. Briggs and Bob Hyatt, *Ministry Mantras: Language for Cultivating Kingdom Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2016), 131.

[9] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 261.

for measuring what is easily quantifiable: giving and attendance. However, when evaluating the effectiveness of a church based upon only these two metrics, one can end up having a church with many butts in the seats on Sunday mornings but when people leave, they can have a shallow faith the rest of the week. The church becomes a mile wide and an inch deep. It is a bloated church that appears large and healthy on the outside, but on the inside, it is unhealthy and not accomplishing the overall mission of the church, which is making disciples who are growing spiritually.

To help churches better measure the unseen and push past measuring only the easily quantifiable metrics, the DPA was created by Lifeway. Lifeway offers the DPA as a tool to help churches measure the effectiveness of their discipleship processes and pathways. As the website states,

> The DPA is an online assessment for individuals and churches to measure discipleship progress in becoming more like Christ. The DPA is a new improved version of the Transformational Discipleship Assessment (TDA). In fact, it reflects more than 30 years of research and testing. This assessment is a statistically validated online assessment tool built on exhaustive research. "Statistically validated" means that the patterns are consistent across surveys and groups surveyed. You can trust the numbers because they are reliable with the same kind of consistency like you expect from a ruler or a speedometer. This research measures eight signposts that reveal each person's spiritual progress on their discipleship pathway.[10]

The online assessment is a sixty-eight-question assessment that takes around fifteen minutes for an individual to complete. The questions are designed to grade an individual on the eight signposts of the DPA and basic doctrinal beliefs. To accomplish this, individuals are presented with a series of questions that involve beliefs, desires, and actions. These eight signposts were discovered through extensive testing by Lifeway Research as certain markers at work in the lives of believers who are progressing in spiritual maturity. The eight biblical signposts are Engaging the Bible, Obeying God and Denying Self, Serving God and Others, Sharing Christ, Exercising Faith, Seeking God, Building Relationships, and Living Unashamed. These signposts were created by starting with biblical descriptions of a disciple that were then shaped into question form and

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[10] Lifeway, "About Discipleship Pathway."

tested repeatedly. The signposts have been refined even more through theologian reviews, small sample testing in 1990, national testing and analysis in 2007, discipleship expert interviews, and national testing in 2011 and 2019.[11]

The assessment is designed to be used as an individual to grade oneself on the eight signposts while also designed for a church to see their overall trends and areas of strengths and weakness. If a church decides to use the assessment, the leader for a church using the DPA receives: average scores for each of the 8 biblical signposts, a detailed report showing how the congregation responded to each question, and guidance for taking steps to help the congregation where improvement is needed.

<div align="center">

Rationale

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The DPA is a proven tool to measure the spiritual growth of individuals and churches. However, a tool is only as good as its implementation. This project sought to explore how this assessment is helping churches evaluate their discipleship processes and helping them track their people's growth into Christlikeness. This project gathered information from churches who are utilizing this tool and to see how this assessment met their overall needs for measuring spiritual growth, informed their decision making when it came to their disciple making process, and what changes were made in light of what the assessment revealed in their local church. Lifeway can have a proven, statistically validated assessment, but if a church cannot easily utilize and implement it in their ministry, then it is not helpful. Also, if the assessment does not present churches with practical steps to know how to fix the gaps in their discipleship process and growth of their people, then it is just a diagnostic tool. This project sought to connect directly with churches who utilized this assessment and learn how the tool is currently serving them. Then, based upon the qualitative data, this project sought to learn how Lifeway can serve churches more effectively and serve even more churches with this online assessment.

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[11] Lifeway, Biblical Signposts," Discipleship Pathway Assessment, accessed February 10, 2023, https://discipleshippathwayassessment.lifeway.com/signposts/introduction/.

With over forty churches purchasing and using the assessment since 2019, This project evaluated how these churches are utilizing the DPA, how Lifeway can improve it, and any best practices the churches have found along the way. This project intended to evaluate the usefulness of this tool to help even more churches utilize the tool to evaluate the spiritual growth and maturity of their church.

Purpose

The purpose of this project was to measure the perceived usefulness of Lifeway's Discipleship Pathway Assessment in local churches.

Goals

To ensure this ministry project's purpose was achieved, the project was guided by five goals. The successful completion of these goals helped measure the usefulness of the DPA.

1. The first goal was to identify the need that churches were looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment.

2. The second goal was to determine if the assessment is useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation.

3. The third goal was to evaluate if the 8 Biblical signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people.

4. The fourth goal was to evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores and if they are useful.

5. The fifth and final goal was to determine areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches.

Research Methodology

The research methodology used to measure the successful completion of the goals is detailed in this section. The five goals determined the effectiveness of this project. The first goal was to identify the need churches were looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment. This goal was measured through quantitative research

by sending a survey titled the Discipleship Pathway Assessment - Survey[12] to ask church leaders to select between the following needs: measure discipleship strategy, establish a baseline of spiritual health in church, track spiritual growth before and after discipleship process, identify areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy, and find areas of weakness in our discipleship process. On top of quantitative research, qualitative research was gathered using video call interviews[13] with churches that allowed for further explanation of their needs and to hear the church's specific desires with the survey. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 6 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about the needs they were looking to meet with the DPA.

The second goal was to determine if the assessment was useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation. This goal was measured through quantitative research by sending the survey to church leaders asking to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment useful in measuring the spiritual maturity in my church." After they answered this, they were asked an open-ended question that allowed them to "share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help them measure spiritual growth and discipleship in their church." One of the last questions of the survey was a Net Promoter Score question. The question asked, "On a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend the Discipleship Pathway Assessment to another church?" This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 8, 22, and 23 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about the usefulness of the DPA.

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[12] 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.

[13] See appendix 4.

The third goal was to evaluate if the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. This goal was measured through quantitative research by the survey to explore the usefulness of the 8 Biblical Signpost categories. The survey asked church leaders to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church." They were then asked an open-ended question that allowed them to "share about what they found helpful or did not find helpful about the 8 Biblical Signposts metrics to measure spiritual growth." The survey then had eight statements for church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the usefulness of each signpost. On top of quantitative research, qualitative research was gathered using video call interviews with churches that allowed for further explanation of their experience with the Biblical Signposts and share their feedback. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 10 and 11-19 responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the questions about the 8 Biblical Signposts.

The fourth goal was to evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores This goal was measured through quantitative research by sending the survey that asked church leaders to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the suggested Next Steps offered after the assessment helpful." After they answered this, they were asked an open-ended question that allowed them to share about how you implemented the "Next Steps" in their church. On top of quantitative research, qualitative research was gathered using video call interviews with churches that allowed for further explanation of their experience with the Next Steps and share their feedback. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 20 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about Next Steps.

The fifth goal was to determine areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches This goal was measured through quantitative research by sending the survey that asked church leaders an open-ended question of, "What are 2-3 areas you think the Discipleship Pathway Assessment could be improved?" In addition to the survey data, video call interviews with church leaders allowed for further explanation of their ideas to improve the assessment based upon their church's experience. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 25 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about ways to improve the DPA.

Limitations/Delimitations

Two limitations applied to this project. First, the accuracy of the survey was dependent upon the honesty of the church leaders who filled them out. To mitigate this limitation, church leaders were asked to answer the survey in an honest manner. Second, the accuracy of the survey was dependent upon church leaders documenting the most helpful parts of their experience in detail. To mitigate this limitation, video call interviews were scheduled to spend more time discussing their experience in more detail.

Two delimitations applied to this project. First, I only contacted churches who had taken the assessment in the last three years, between the years of 2019-2022. This was for the purpose of collecting information from churches that was recent enough for trustworthy results. Second, the project only included churches who responded after being given the opportunity to do so three different times. This project was unable to force any church to participate, so only those who voluntarily opted in were included in the results.

Conclusion

In a culture where pastors are often heard asking each another, "How many are you running" to gauge how well a church is doing, churches can so easily drift to measure

success based only upon Sunday morning attendance and giving. These metrics are not enough to know fully if a church is successfully making disciples. The Bible does not call pastors to just grow churches numerically, but pastors are called to grow churches deeper spiritually first and foremost. If spiritual growth is the goal of discipleship processes, then churches need to know if they are actually helping their people grow spiritually and become more like Jesus. Unfortunately, spiritual growth is an unseen attribute that is difficult to measure. Lifeway's Discipleship Pathway Assessment is a statistically validated online assessment to help evaluate and analyze the often hard to measure spiritual growth within a church. The following chapters will show why there is a need for an assessment tool to measure spiritual growth while also compiling the research gathered to measure the usefulness of the DPA. Chapter 2 will focus on the biblical calling of a church to grow their people spiritually and chapter 3 will focus on the need for an assessment like the DPA and how the DPA was first created and then refined over the years. Chapter 4 will detail the planning, preparation, and implementation of the ministry project while also analyzing the results of the project. Chapter 5 will present an assessment of the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project, and concludes with suggested changes, and theological and personal reflections.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SUPPORT FOR A
CHURCH TO GROW PEOPLE SPIRITUALLY

One reality of life is that healthy things grow. This is true in all of life whether it be plants, children, businesses, relationships with others, and especially one's relationship with God. If these things are healthy, then they are progressing, moving forward, and changing. That is because healthy things grow and mature. When it comes to Christ followers, those who are spiritually healthy do not remain stagnant, but instead are constantly growing and maturing in their relationship with God. This is why many use the common phrase, "God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus."[1] The gospel is not just that God saves sinful people from their sin, but once someone is in Christ, God calls them to holiness and a life that looks like Jesus's life. Though, this is not some burdensome calling. It is the joy of the believer to pursue Christlikeness and spiritual maturity.

The calling on each Christian's life to grow spiritually and become more like Jesus is seen throughout the Bible. When someone is saved by God, not only do they become a child of God in identity, but they also become a child of God in fruitfulness, and they begin to live and act like their Father. A son or daughter of God does not remain the same. As Paul tells in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!"[2] The old heart is replaced with a new heart that desires to become more like Jesus.

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[1] Max Lucado, *Just Like Jesus* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 4.

[2] All Scripture quotations are from the Christian Standard Bible, unless otherwise noted.

So, their heart is changed, which means their actions and desires will be changed as well. Jesus himself says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me" (John 15:5). The evidence of a healthy and growing Christian is spiritual fruit. There is proof of spiritual maturity by the fruit of one's life. This means at a very basic level one can measure and evaluate if Christians are spiritually healthy. Churches can look to measures that will tell if there is inward change because there will be outward evidence.

In the same way that kids grow up and mature and become adults, Christ followers grow up and become more like Jesus. And what is seen throughout the Bible is that Christians are called to grow. Christ followers are called to mature. This theme runs through all of Scripture, but it is abundantly clear in Hebrews 5:11-6:3, 1 Peter 2:1-3, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Ephesians 4:11-16.

Hebrews 5:11-6:3: Go on to Maturity

The first passage highlighting the clear calling for spiritual maturity is Hebrews 5:11-6:3. This passage reads,

> We have a great deal to say about this, and it is difficult to explain, since you have become too lazy to understand. Although by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you the basic principles of God's revelation again. You need milk, not solid food. Now everyone who lives on milk is inexperienced with the message about righteousness, because he is an infant. But solid food is for the mature—for those whose senses have been trained to distinguish between good and evil. Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works, faith in God, teaching about ritual washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And we will do this if God permits.

The author of Hebrews is writing here to a church who is no longer making progress in the area of spiritual growth. They had become stagnant in their spiritual journey. The author himself uses the phrase "too lazy to understand." In the Greek the word for lazy is νωθροὶ which can mean "sluggish, dull, or stubborn." Therefore, in other words, this congregation had become hardheaded and developed hard hearts, which led to them stall in their spiritual growth. The author is concerned for them because at this point in their

journey with Christ they should be progressing, but instead, they "need someone to teach them the basic principle of God's revelation again" (v. 12). Many in this congregation should have been mature enough to teach but instead they were still infants in the faith and unskilled in the handling of the Scriptures and unable to "distinguish between good and evil" (v. 14).

In his commentary, Luke Timothy Johnson explains this lack of progress in more detail when he sets the scene about what is happening in this church: "Hebrews connects the difficulty to the disposition of his hearers. They have become—and the perfect *gegonate* suggests, still are—*nōthroi tais akoais*. The adjective *nōthros* means lethargic or careless. When combined with the dative of respect *tais akoais* ("in hearing"), it indicates a dullness or even a reluctance to listen."[3]

This description should remind one of James 1:22 when he writes that Christ followers should "be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves." Unfortunately, it appears that this group of Christians was deceiving themselves. As Johnson states, when one truly hears God, it leads to obedience. He is arguing that for the recipients of this letter their problem is not just simple laziness. Their problem was actually spiritual resistance. They are not wanting to follow Jesus and obey his teaching because they assume it will lead them into the same suffering he endured. So, they are lethargic and careless with the things of God while also having a dullness and reluctance to listen.

The author of Hebrews is writing out of frustration and concern because this is not the path for the Christian. He says they are "too lazy to understand," when they should be "mature enough to teach"; instead, they need someone else to teach them basic principles. This calling to be mature enough to teach others shows that all Christians should be able to teach what they have learned about Jesus. They should hear the

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[3] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 154-55.

teachings of God, apply them to their lives, and be doers of the Word, and then turn

around and teach what they have learned to others. In his commentary *The Epistle to the*

Hebrews, Paul Ellingworth states,

> Paul uses the noun διδάσκαλοι occasionally to denote a special office: μὴ πάντες διδάσκαλοι. In the Pastorals, διδάσκαλος is a distinctive title of Paul, 1 Tim. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:11. Hebrews' usage reflects a different tradition in which no mature Christian should need instruction from any human teacher. Behind this Christian usage, there is the conviction, widespread in the hellenistic world, that any mature person should be able to teach others.[4]

The author of Hebrews is basically using the words *mature* and *teacher* as

synonyms. This does not mean everyone is called to preach or even lead a Bible study

with a larger group of people, but this is a calling to discipleship. The author is not stating

they should be mature enough to be in a formal office of teacher or pastor, but that part of

maturing in faith is being able to teach others about the basic principles of the gospel of

Jesus Christ. Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester describe,

> The verse begins by suggesting that the addressees should "because of the time" (διὰ τὸν χρόνον), presumably the time during which they have been Christians, now themselves be "teachers" (διδάσκαλοι). This term is hardly evidence that the addressees were a special group within the church. The notion is quite general; anyone who is mature in the faith should be in a position to instruct others.[5]

Clearly though, this church is made up of men and women who actually needed someone

else to constantly remind them of the basic truths of their faith.

In his commentary on Hebrews, James W. Thompson writes about the failure

to mature to the point of being able to teach others:

> They need someone to teach them the elementary principles (5:12b; *stoicheia tēs archēs*). *Stoicheia*, which means "basic components" of something, was also used for the letters of the alphabet. The readers do not fit the ancient ideal of educational progress from elementary education to the higher education in philosophy and virtue. This indictment is especially severe, as the author suggests in the phrase because of the time (5:12a), for the readers have been Christians long enough to progress to the

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[4] Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 302.

[5] Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 158.

higher learning. Thus listeners who have been Christians long enough to have progressed to higher education are still pupils in the elementary school.[6]

So, in this passage the author is clearly stating that spiritual immaturity is a problem. He is saying the basic principles of Christianity are unbelievably important, but a Christian needs to build upon them as the foundation instead of needing to be reminded of them over and over again. If there was an official educational system for the Christian life, these Christians would still be in elementary school while their age would suggest they should be in high school. Attridge and Koester continue,

> It certainly has that sense in this complex of educational metaphors…Because the community has need of elementary instruction they have "become needful" (χρείαν ἔχοντες) of "milk" (γάλακτος) and not "solid food" (στερεᾶς τροφῆς). The change in construction from that of the same phrase earlier in the verse may be significant, implying that the community, by not progressing, has actually regressed to the stage of babes in the faith who can only consume easily digestible doctrine (milk) and not what is more difficult (solid food).[7]

Scripture is not saying that the basic truths of Christianity are not important, though it is telling Christians that they must build upon them. Spiritual maturity is putting the basics into action and seeing it change one's heart and the work of one's hands. Johnson writes about this imagery of milk versus solid food:

> Such an understanding is supported by the author's characterization of the "mature"— those who eat solid food. In contrast to the child's "inexperience in reasoning," they have their moral faculties (*aisthētēria*) trained (*gegymnasmena*) on account of practice or habit (*dia tēn hexin*). . . . In contrast to the immature, who are incapable of reasoning righteously, the mature are able to distinguish (*pros diakrisin*; see Rom 14:1; 1 Cor 12:10) between a good and a bad thing. Once more we see that, for Hebrews, perfection or maturity is understood in terms of human moral transformation. . . . The precise character of their immaturity in regard to discerning "a good thing from a bad thing" will be suggested by 6:6–8: not moving forward is the same as falling backward. Failure to grow is tantamount to regression.[8]

William Lane focuses on this connection between training and discerning between good and evil when he writes, "The presence of the participle γεγυμνασμένα,

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[6] James W. Thompson, *Hebrews*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 130.

[7] Attridge and Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 158-59.

[8] Johnson, *Hebrews*, 157.

"trained," seems to require that ἕξις be interpreted in the active sense as "exercise, practice, long use."[9]

From these commentaries, one can see it is not that milk, or elementary doctrine, is bad, but these believers should have added solid food to their diet by this point. They should have not just moved onto these items, but they should have had a desire to move onto meatier and weightier things. Simply put, they should desire to know their God more. However, the goal of moving from milk to solid spiritual food is not to just know more facts about God. The goal is for knowledge to lead to action and fruitfulness. John Piper captured this well in a sermon on this passage: "[Christians] need to learn how to take the milk—the basic truths of the gospel—and practice how to grow with them. The need is not to rebuild foundational facts, but to stand on them and live by them. . . . Their problem is not lack of foundational knowledge, but lack of fruitfulness in life."[10] Unfortunately, the same stunting of spiritual growth seen in the church being addressed in Hebrews is still a problem for many churches and Christians today. If churches are not careful and intentional, then they can believe they are making disciples in their church and ministries, when in reality they are just keeping infants in the faith busy rehashing the same basic truths instead of calling believers into the next step of discipleship. The good news is there is hope for churches today just like there was hope for the Hebrews back then.

The author continues to write starting in chapter 6 by saying, "Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ and go on to maturity." He has set up the problem in verses 11-14 and then transitions by using the word therefore (διό). He is saying, in light of everything I just said, here is what the Hebrews need to do to fix this problem. The hope lies in chapter 6. Ellingworth put it this way: "The conclusion,

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[9] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47A (Dallas: Word, 1991), 131.

[10] John Piper, "Let Us Press on to Maturity," Desiring God, October 6, 1996, https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/let-us-press-on-to-maturity.

introduced by διό, is that the readers should progress from the state of children to that of maturity. Just as elementary instruction was an essential part of their Christian initiation, so the epistle itself is intended to play a part in leading them to maturity (6:3)."[11] Lane writes along the same lines: "The warning expressed in 5:11–14 finds an emphatic continuation in 6:1–12. The chapter break is both unwarranted and unfortunate. The initial word διό, "so then," shows distinctly that the writer did not consider the members of the house church to be infants requiring a diet of milk."[12] The good news for the addressees and for all Christians is that spiritual maturity is possible. Christ followers do not have to live on a diet of milk, but they can move onto solid food. Thomas Schreiner sums up this solution to the problem:

> The readers should go on to maturity and not focus on the foundational elements of their faith, such as the need to repent and trust in God at conversion. The word "therefore" (διό) links the text with the previous paragraph. . . . The call to progress on to maturity (τελειότητα) is another way of saying they should hold fast their confession.[13]

The calling of the author to spiritual immature Christians is two-fold. First, they are called to "leave the elementary teaching about Christ," and then second they are called to "go on to maturity." Lane states, "When the writer urges his readers to 'leave standing' (ἀφέντες) the elementary Christian teaching, he is not dismissing it but regarding it as so well established that the urgent need is for a fuller appreciation and application of that teaching."[14] Johnson reiterates this point when he writes, "When he speaks of 'leaving behind the basic instruction about the Christ,' the author does not mean abandoning, but rather building on the earlier knowledge."[15] The author of Hebrews is not saying to leave

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[11] Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 311.

[12] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 139.

[13] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Hebrews*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 174-75.

[14] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 139.

[15] Johnson, *Hebrews*, 158.

behind the elementary teaching about Christ. Instead, he is saying they are incredibly important and are meant to be built upon. The teaching about Christ is the foundation of everything else that is to come, but one does not need to keep laying that foundation over and over again. It is time to build upon it and move on to maturity.

That is the second calling seen in the passage: "to move on to maturity." Attridge and Koester write about this calling:

> With the basics left behind the author urges "let us move on" (φερώμεθα) to "maturity" (τελειότητα). The verb can be used in the passive to mean "move" without any reference to the source or agency of this notion. The noun τελειότης picks up the contrast of babes and adults in the preceding verses and denotes that maturity of insight and commitment that Hebrews attempts to inculcate in the addressees. . . . The mature Christian is expected not only to "ingest" the solid food but also to follow Christ on that path to final perfection, whatever the cost.[16]

Lane summarizes spiritual maturity in this way, "The movement to τὴν τελειότητα, "the goal of spiritual maturity," "perfection," does not call for a progress away from a simpler form or content of preaching but for a personal surrender to God's active influence within the community."[17]

This passage in Hebrews is calling out the problem of spiritual immaturity and calling Christians to a mature faith that lives on solid food and not milk. They should be teachers of the faith, but instead they need someone else to teach them the basics. The author is clearly showing that Christians are called to not remain satisfied with the basic principles since they put their faith in Christ, but we are to grow deeper spiritually and press on to maturity, which leads to faithfulness and fruitfulness.

First Peter 2:1-3: Grow Up into Salvation

The second passage highlighting the clear calling for spiritual maturity is 1 Peter 2:1-3. This passage reads, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander. Like newborn infants, desire the pure milk of the word,

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[16] Attridge and Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 162-63.

[17] Lane, *Hebrews 1-8*, 139-40.

so that by it you may grow up into your salvation, if you have tasted that the Lord is good."

Peter writes a clear charge to Christians to "grow up into your salvation," and he gives a game plan for how to do so. The two-part plan is to "rid yourself of sin" and then to "desire the pure milk of the Word." John Bunyan summarized these two steps when he wrote this phrase in the cover of his Bible, "Either this book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this book."[18] This passage shows that when one comes to Christ, there is a strong desire to grow in one's walk with him. It is not something that has to be coerced, but it is a change of heart that leads to a passion for getting rid of sin and studying God's Word. Karen Jobes helps readers understand the context of this passage:

> After Peter has explained to his readers that their new life is generated by God's eternal word and is to be characterized by love defined as moral transformation, he continues to unpack the necessity of sustaining the vitality of his readers' new lives in Christ. This passage contains only one imperative: Crave the pure spiritual milk as infants crave their mother's milk.[19]

Peter starts out his argument by saying "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all slander" (ἀποθέμενοι οὖν πᾶσαν κακίαν καὶ πάντα δόλον). Peter is going to tell his readers to have a longing for God and his Word, but before he gets there, he tells them they need to get rid of the sinful practices of malice and deceit. J. Ramsey Michaels puts it this way:

> The participle is to be understood imperatively because of its dependence on the imperative ἐπιποθήσατε. Peter assumes that his readers have purified their souls in a general sense (1:23), but without knowing them personally he cannot say they have rid themselves of the specific vices he names. What is clear to him is that they have a responsibility to do so. ἀποθέμενοι is used not to evoke the metaphor of taking off clothing but more generally of rejecting certain evil attitudes and practices and so ridding oneself of moral defilement.[20]

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[18] Tommy Clayton, "How to Slay Sin, Part 3," Grace to You, February 24, 2011, https://www.gty.org/library/blog/B110224/how-to-slay-sin-part-3.

[19] Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 130.

[20] J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 49 (Dallas: Word, 1988), 84-85.

Lewis R. Donelson adds to this understanding of putting away or getting rid of sin:

> The language of "putting away" (*apothemenoi*) vices is frequent in the New Testament. The necessity of turning away from the former life of passion is crucial to the theology and sociology of 1 Peter. These Christians have rejected their former lives, and this rejection leads to abuse from their neighbors. . . . The imagery of "putting away" coheres with the overall social and theological situation of the recipients. They need to put away the old life, the old self, because they have been reborn (1:3; 2:2). In this sense, the language of "putting away" leads naturally to the language of rebirth in 2:2.[21]

From these commentators, one can see that a call to pursue spiritual maturity is getting rid of sin in one's life. Of course, a Christian's sin was paid for once and for all on the cross so that one can have a right relationship with God, but on this side of heaven, Christians are called to be holy and to become like Christ. Therefore, every day is filled with repentance of turning away from one's former self and former ways and turning to the new self and the ways of Christ. This putting away of one's sin is not able to be done without a changed heart through salvation, and it is also not anyone's default to do daily. Because of this, Peter moves on to the source of this putting away and repentance when he calls his readers to long for the pure spiritual milk and to grow into their salvation.

Schreiner says this about verse 2: "Peter's purpose was to say that all believers should be like infants in this sense—they should "crave" [*epipothēsate*] the "pure spiritual milk." The word "crave" is a strong one, used of the ardent desire believers should have for God in the Old Testament. Babies long for milk that will sustain bodily growth, and similarly believers should desire milk for growth in salvation."[22]

This word Peter uses for crave (*epipothēsate*) is the same verb the psalmist used in Psalm 42:1 when he wrote, "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so I long for you, God." Christians should long for, crave, have great affection for, and yearn for God's Word. Just as a healthy babies have an instinctive yearning for their mother's milk when

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[21] Lewis R. Donelson, *I & II Peter and Jude*, The New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 56.

[22] Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, The New American Commentary, vol. 37 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 99.

they are well, Peter commands Christians to intensely long for, to yearn for the pure, unadulterated milk of God's Word. Jobes writes about the Christian's craving for God's Word:

> First Peter 2:2 continues with the metaphor of an infant craving milk and thus plays on the theme of new birth. . . . He uses the metaphor to instruct them to crave the things of God even as newborn babies crave milk—instinctively, eagerly, incessantly. Peter sees milk as that which all Christians need in order to nurture their new life in Christ, so that they will "grow up" into salvation, deliverance from God's judgment when the Lord returns.[23]

One might think that following a list of things to put away in life, Peter would follow up with a list of things to add to life. However, Peter H. Davids reminds that simply adding a list of requirements on one's life is not the case: "Since in their conversion these Christians have repented of the evils, they should turn to the good. But now a surprise appears, for instead of a catalogue of virtues to replace the vices (as in Gal. 5), we discover a call to dependence on God."[24] Even though Peter does not follow up with a list opposite of the sin that Christians need to get rid of, he does give the reader a clue through wordsmithing that he is contrasting two items here. Davids also writes,

> This "milk" which they were to drink was to be "pure." The Greek term is the negative of the word translated "deceit" in the previous verse, so the contrast between the two is deliberate. In this "milk" there is no deceit, no watering down. It can be trusted. . . . Thus the Christians are encouraged to continue to steep themselves in the teaching about Jesus, not to leave it behind now that they have been converted. Indeed, it is by this that they not only came to birth but will also "grow up."[25]

Peter continues in this passage to say that there is a purpose behind the spiritual milk. He uses the phrase ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ, meaning "so that by it" one might meet an intended end goal. Michaels says this about the intended goal: "This clause makes it clear, if it was not clear already, that 'milk' in this passage is the spiritual food of all believers and not just recent converts. Milk is the means (ἐν αὐτῷ) of growth, but the end of the growth

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[23] Jobes, *1 Peter*, 131-32.

[24] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 81-82.

[25] Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, 82.

process is not adulthood or maturity but salvation."[26] David Abernathy writes, "The purpose of receiving the pure spiritual milk is growth, and the instrument or means by which spiritual growth occurs is the 'milk of the word.'"[27] This phrase is then followed by the subjunctive verb αὐξηθῆτε, meaning "that you may grow." This phrase means to thrive spiritually. It is an ongoing process. It indicates progress toward the goal of complete deliverance from sin and increasing in love. It is the natural outcome of spiritual nourishment; a continuation of the metaphor of birth, nurture, and growth toward the final goal of eschatological salvation."[28]

Of course, God's Word speaking about this topic is sufficient for Christians to believe it, but on top of this, research shows the necessity of engaging with the Bible to grow spiritually to be true in the life of Christians as well. Lifeway Research conducted a decade-long study starting in 2010, focusing on identifying how people actually grow as Christians. Their study revealed that there are eight signposts[29] in the lives of believers who were growing spiritually. Of those eight signposts, the most influential attribute they found was Bible engagement.[30] The Reveal study by Willow Creek referenced in chapter 1 found the same thing to be true when they stated, "Nothing has a greater impact on spiritual growth than reflection on Scripture."[31] If a Christian wants to grow, then he needs to spend time in God's Word and let it transform him. Transformation can be recognized when one's mind is sharpened by the Bible, perspective is shaped by the Bible, and actions are directed by the Bible. A healthy Christian needs to live on a diet of

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[26] Michaels, *1 Peter*, 89.

[27] David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Peter*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL, 2008), 65.

[28] Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 Peter*, 66.

[29] This project will define this in more depth in the next chap..

[30] Lynn Pryor, "What Are the Eight Signposts of Discipleship?," Lifeway, July 5, 2018, https://www.lifeway.com/en/articles/what-are-the-eight-attributes-of-discipleship.

[31] Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapid: Zondervan, 2016), 19, Kindle.

the spiritual milk that is the Bible, not just a diet of attending church and being busy with Christian activities.

Because the Word of God is the diet of a healthy Christian, the DPA is designed to measure this biblical signpost. The assessment is designed to assess how someone is engaging the Bible and then it continues on to measure the other seven signposts that will help reveal if that engagement of the Bible is leading to a transformed life that is lived out with Christ-like attributes.

Second Corinthians 3:18: Transformed from One Degree of Glory to Another

In 2 Corinthians 3:18 one sees the clear calling for spiritual growth. This passage reads, "We all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord and are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory; this is from the Lord who is the Spirit." This verse from Paul is crucial in understanding how the gospel transforms Christians and how Christians grow. The correlation Paul is making here is that when one beholds the glory of God, one is transformed. Beholding God's glory leads to being transformed into the image of His glory. This means that a church should want everything they do to lead people to behold God's glory. Churches need to have a foundational understanding that they can have the greatest strategy to move people to become active and participating in the life of their church, but if that activity does not lead to beholding God's glory, then it will inevitably not lead to transformation. Second Corinthians 3:18 shows that the output of spending time with God is being transformed from one degree of glory to the next. It leads to growth; it leads to a transformation into the image of Christ. Simply put, those who spend time with Jesus begin to look like Jesus. But it is by being transformed from one degree of glory to another. It is a process, and it takes time and intentionality.

In this verse Paul is revealing that the moment of spiritual revelation is followed by spiritual transformation. Once someone is in Christ, they are no longer looking at God

through a veil. For the born-again Christian, the veil has been removed, and they can now look boldly at Christ, who is the glory of God. Paul Barnett dives into this truth:

> Of great interest is the meaning of the verb (κατοπτρίζεσθαι), which occurs only here in the NT and which has been much discussed. . . . It is instructive to compare this verse with two others that will soon appear (4:4, 6): "*Beholding* as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same *image*" (Hebrews 3:18). "That they might not see the . . . *glory* of Christ, who is the *image* of God" (Hebrews 4:4). "The *glory* of God in the *face* of Christ" (Hebrews 4:6). In common are (1) the use of optical verbs ("beholding as in a mirror," "see"), and (2) the object of the optical verbs, "glory." Moreover, it is clear (1) that "the Lord" (3:18), that is, "Christ" (4:4), is the "image of God" (4:4; cf. 3:18), and (2) that the "image of God" (4:4) is found in "the face of Christ" (4:6). When these verses are read together, it emerges that what "we all behold as in a mirror" is the "face of Christ," who is "the image of God," radiant with the glory of the God.[32]

Paul is referencing Exodus 34 here which describes how the skin of Moses's face would shine after being in the presence of God, and his face would so radiantly reflect God's glory that he had to cover it with a veil to protect the Israelites from even the reflection of God's presence. As he states earlier in 2 Corinthians 3, God's glory was unbearable to the Israelites due to their sinful condition and hardness of hearts. Paul then describes that the only way for this separation between sinful man and God to be resolved comes solely through faith in Christ, not through arduous study of the law, attempts at obedience, or even through following the law. It is only in Christ that sin is forgiven once and for all, and it is only through Christ that the veil of one's hardness of heart is removed and those in Christ are allowed to see God's glory through the revealing of Jesus.

Through the Spirit, Christ followers can now see Christ for who and what he is. This act of seeing and understanding the nature of Christ and seeing the reflection of oneself in this mirror begins the process through which God transforms His children into the image of Christ. Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen describe this transformation Paul mentions, "And [we] are transformed into the same likeness," when they write, "This is the main part of the verse that receives special emphasis. The verb is

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[32] Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 205.

in the present tense and passive in voice, which means that transformation is a process with an implied agent doing this work in us."[33] Simply put, when one truly encounters God, they are changed. When one beholds his glory, it transforms them, and they are changed into his very likeness. The Fall of Genesis 3 tarnished that image and glory but not to the point it that it could not be restored. Through Christ and beholding his glory, it is restored.

This transformation back to the image and likeness of God is brought about through Christ and it is into his image that believers grow. George H. Guthrie notes,

> Initially, while in the earthly body, the transformation is internal: since Christians today do not shine outwardly like Moses, this transformation is inward (4:16) as God changes us in accord with the "new creation" (5:17), through transformation of the mind (Rom. 12:2), heart, and character. Outward manifestations of this inward transformation, in Christlike character and actions, certainly reflect the glory of God.[34]

This transformation takes place internally and is then manifested externally. When one is maturing spiritually, the actions of their lives will change. The fruit of their life will begin to look like the fruit of the Spirit. When someone beholds the glory of God and it is changing them, their actions begin to glorify God.

As Paul reminds his readers, the process of being transformed, or as many call it sanctification, is accomplished by keeping their eyes on Jesus and beholding his glory. Yet, even when they keep their eyes on Jesus, their sanctification is not linear. It is a process. Abernathy points out,

> The phrase ἀπὸ δόξης εἰς δόξαν (from glory to glory) refers to transformation progressing in degrees from one stage to another. The first glory is the glory seen in the heart through the gospel when a person turns to the Lord, and the ultimate glory is the glory of the Lord that will be revealed on the last day. The source or cause of transformation is glory, and the destination is glory. The glory of our transformation

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[33] Simon J. Kistemaker and William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 19 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 129.

[34] George H. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 228.

occurs as a result of beholding the glory of Christ. The glory of the Lord is what causes the progressive transformation from one degree of glory to another.[35]

So, if transformation is progressive and occurs one degree at a time, then churches should have a goal to move their people forward in this process. Many churches would call their process for this a discipleship pathway, or a strategy for making disciples. Unfortunately, though, churches often fail at tracking if they are accomplishing the goal of fostering environments that lead to this progressive transformation in their process. They feel accomplished because they can check off the box of having a plan in place to disciple their people, but they do not always know if it is working. This is a big problem for churches at large. A church should know if it is effectively accomplishing the task of making disciples, and through the Spirit's power, helping its people be transformed from one degree of glory to the next.

The reality of this problem is that spiritual growth is difficult to track and measure. Kistemaker and Hendriksen remind their readers of this while writing about the phrase, "Into the same likeness from one degree of glory to another." They write,

> Paul uses the Greek word *eikōn* (likeness, image) also in 4:4 with reference to Christ. . . . The term same likeness does not convey the idea that all believers are identical in appearance. Rather, all those who are led by the Spirit into joyfully obeying Christ are transformed to bear his image. They are the people who gradually go from one degree of glory to another.[36]

Ephesians 4:11-16: Mature in Faith

The fourth and final passage highlighting the clear calling for spiritual maturity is Ephesians 4:11-16. This passage reads,

> And he himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ, until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness. Then we will no longer be little children, tossed by the waves and blown around by every wind of teaching, by human cunning with cleverness in the techniques of deceit. But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ. From

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[35] David Abernathy, *An Exegetical Summary of 2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL, 2008), 138-39.

[36] Kistemaker and Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 129-30.

him the whole body, fitted and knit together by every supporting ligament, promotes the growth of the body for building itself up in love by the proper working of each individual part.

In this passage that is normally shared regarding the job of church leaders, Paul is also sharing about the life of every Christian. If one skims the passage again, then they will see three words keep popping up. Those three words are build, grow, and mature. Paul is repeating these words multiple times to get his point across: healthy Christians grow, mature, and build one another up for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus. Because of this, some of the most important questions that come into a Christian's mind have to do with spiritual maturity. Those who follow Jesus should ask themselves regularly questions like, "Am I growing?" "How am I growing?" "Is maturity evident in my life?" "Have I been consistently (even if slowly) becoming more like Jesus?"

As already seen, the Bible repeatedly teaches that Christians are supposed to be maturing in many ways, all of which enable them to bring glory to God and fulfill their purpose on earth. Scripture teaches that once Christians are saved, they are to imitate Christ (1 Cor 11:1), love others like Christ (1 John 4:7), giving themselves up like Christ (Eph 5:1-2), keep the commandments of Christ (John 14:15), grow in holiness like Christ (1 Pet 1:16), and even suffer like Christ (1 Pet 2:21). The Christian has to keep coming back to the simple question of: by the grace of God, am I seeing signs of Christian maturity in my life?

This is not just the job of the individual Christian though. The church, especially pastors and church leaders, should constantly ask, "Are there signs of Christianity maturity in our church?" Maturity is the goal of this passage from Paul. He says the job of pastors and church leaders is "to equip the saints for the work of ministry, to build up the body of Christ." It is easy to stop there, and oftentimes churches do, but Paul keeps going and finishes this thought by saying, "Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of God's Son, growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness." Paul has set the bar for maturity as high as possible by saying the measurement is Christ's fullness, which means on this side of heaven Christians will always have work

to do. Therefore, the job of the church, which is building, growing, and maturing its people into the stature of Christ's fullness, will never be complete. Charles H. Talbert says this in his commentary,

> The focus of the passage is on the church's inner growth rather than on its mission to the world. Verses 13–16 make this focus on inner growth explicit. Growth continues until we all attain unto (*eis*) the unity of the faith (cf. 4:5) and of the knowledge of the Son of God (cf. 3:18–19), unto (*eis*) a mature person, unto (*eis*) a measure of the stature of the fullness of the Christ (4:13). The thrice-repeated preposition (*eis*) indicates that the three phrases are parallel to one another. They are three dimensions of the one goal of attaining spiritual maturity. This maturity is defined as the Christ's full stature.[37]

The maturity Paul is speaking of, like has been stated previously, is not just knowledge of who God is. This maturity leads to action and service. Paul states the purpose of all the gifts given to the church and church leadership is to actually give the ministry away, and in turn to equip the saints to do the ministry; not just the paid staff. This equipping for ministry in and of itself is an avenue toward maturity. Harold W. Hoehner expound upon this idea:

> The task is to determine the relationship between the three prepositional phrases introduced by the prepositions *pros . . . eis . . . eis*. Most likely the first preposition gives the purpose to the main verb in 4:11 ("gave"), the second preposition depends on the first preposition, and the third preposition depends on the second. This signifies that the first preposition expresses the immediate purpose while the second and third prepositions signify the goal. The progression indicates that Christ gave gifted people to the church for the immediate purpose of equipping all believers with the goal of preparing them for the work of the ministry, which in turn has the final goal of building up the body of Christ.[38]

Once again, an inward transformation leads to outward expression. Serving in the church and doing the word of ministry is a means of spiritual growth. Those who serve God and others are growing in their faith and putting their faith into action.

This building up does not happen all at once. Paul is saying that the goal of maturity is to grow into the stature of Christ, which means the height of Christ. The

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[37] Charles H. Talbert, *Ephesians and Colossians*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 115.

[38] Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians*, in Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, vol. 16, *Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Philemon*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2008), 82.

phrase "growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness" in the Greek it reads, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Paul is using the word ἡλικίας for stature, which conveys the idea of maturity in years or size. It speaks of the "ripeness" of full age. For the word *fullness* in the English language, he uses πληρώματος, which speaks of a full measure with emphasis upon completeness. God wants every believer to manifest the qualities of His Son, who is Himself the standard for spiritual maturity and perfection. As Kistemaker and Hendriksen explain,

> One could also translate: "to an age-measure marked by the fulness of Christ." It does not matter whether the underlying figure is fulness of age or fulness of stature, for in either case it is a "fulness of Christ" that is meant. It is a fulness of him who completely fulfilled the earthly mission for which he had been anointed, and who is willing to impart to those who believe in him salvation full and free.[39]

The picture that comes to my mind for this idea is like that wall in one's house growing up where the parents kept measuring and marking the child's height with the date beside it. On that wall, one can see the growth in height and see the difference over the months and the years. One can track the growth throughout childhood, and all that growth happens over a long period of time. It is not one mark at the bottom and then one mark at the top. One does not just jump from three feet tall to six feet tall. Instead, there are marks all over that wall. One grows in spurts; it happens over time; it is a process. And what is helpful and probably even freeing for Christians to realize is that Paul is saying that Christians grow into maturity. Kistemaker and Hendriksen remind, "Marvelous growth in maturity, nevertheless, is certainly obtainable through human effort springing forth from, and sustained from start to finish by, the Holy Spirit."[40]

The Christian's calling is to "grow into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness," but this is going to take time and it will not always be linear. Individually, Christians must constantly evaluate where they are in their journey of

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[39] William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, New Testament Commentary, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 199-200.

[40] Hendriksen and Kistemaker, *Exposition of Ephesians*, 200.

sanctification. It also means that churches should constantly be evaluating if they are effectively helping their people further along in their own journeys of sanctification.

Conclusion

Throughout Scripture, especially in the New Testament, one can see the clear calling of Christians to mature into the image of Christ once they are his children. God gives his children a new heart that desires what he desires, and that includes holiness and becoming like Jesus. Hebrews 5:11-6:3 shows that Christians are called to maturity and that spiritual laziness is a sin. Believers should desire to grow upon the elementary doctrines of the faith and move on to the deeper things of the faith. First Peter 2:1-3 teaches that those who are in Christ are called to grow up into their salvation by fighting sin and spending time with God in his Word. For the Christian, God's Word is the primary vehicle for spiritual growth. Then, 2 Corinthians 3:18 reveals that spiritual transformation occurs when one beholds the glory of God. There is an inward transformation that is expressed outwardly, but this transformation is not instantaneous. It occurs a little at a time, or as Paul put it, "One degree of glory to another." Lastly, Ephesians 4:11-16 shows that Christians are called to mature and should ask themselves if they are making progress. The goal of the church is to equip saints to do the work of the ministry and put their faith into action. Spiritual maturity is a long journey and a process.

If this is the clear calling in Scripture, then Christians should deeply care to know if they are making progress in this area or not. Not only should Christians care, but churches, whose mission is to make disciples and equip them for the work of ministry, should deeply care about evaluating themselves in the area of discipleship and growing their people spiritually. Because of this biblical calling, churches should seek to find a resource that will help them evaluate and assess their process of making disciples and helping their people grow spiritually.

CHAPTER 3

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY
ASSESSMENT AND THEORETICAL SUPPORT
FOR THE EIGHT BIBLICAL SIGNPOSTS

One of the greatest questions a church can ask itself is, "How are we doing when it comes to making disciples?" When a new initiative is brainstormed and implemented to help reach people for Christ, a church has a clear, tangible measurement by counting those who made a decision for Christ and they can also count those who take the step of baptism. However, when it comes to a church's discipleship process, the measures to determine success are a lot less tangible and harder to measure. Even though these metrics are more difficult to get to, the church will be more effective when they can evaluate first where their people are collectively when it comes to spiritual maturity, and then how their discipleship process is working at helping their people grow in spiritual maturity. If churches want to grow in their ability to make disciples, then evaluation of their people and processes is key. Churches must constantly ask themselves, "Is it working," and "How do we know?" These are difficult questions to answer because what is easy to measure is seen while what is hard to measure is unseen. But just as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:18, "We do not focus on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." So, how can churches focus on the unseen and do their best to measure the spiritual maturity and growth of their people to better make disciples? To help answer this question, this chapter will provide a brief history of how the DPA came to be along with theoretical support from other resources affirming the 8 Biblical Signposts as useful.

The Need to Measure Ministry

In his book *The E-Myth*, Michael Gerber writes to small business owners to help them overcome the debilitating statistic that within five years, more than 80 percent of small businesses fail. One of the greatest pieces of advice he shares within the book is the idea of forming a Business Development Process. This process is formed through the cycle of innovation, quantification, and orchestration. He says businesses innovate and try new things, but innovation on its own gets one nowhere. Business leaders have to quantify, or in other words, measure and track the numbers, to know what is working. Gerber writes,

> On its own, Innovation leads nowhere. To be at all effective, all Innovations need to be quantified. Without Quantification, how would you know whether the Innovation worked. . . . You can't ask too many questions about the numbers. Eventually, you and your people will think of your entire business in terms of the numbers. You'll quantify everything. You'll be able to read your business's health chart by the flow of the numbers. You'll know which numbers are critical and which are not. You'll become as familiar with your business's numbers as your doctor is with your blood pressure and pulse rates. Because without the numbers you can't possibly know where you are, let alone where you're going. With the numbers, your business will take on a totally new meaning.[1]

This advice can be transferred to churches as well. Too often in churches, there is innovation to find new ways to reach new people in the community, get them plugged into a group, or create a discipleship pathway that helps someone connect to the church and grow in their relationship with Christ, but the quantification step is skipped over. Gerber notes, "The sad fact is that Quantification is not being done in most businesses. And it's costing them a fortune!"[2] The same can be said of churches. The measurement of discipleship processes is skipped over, and instead of costing a fortune, it could be costing churches producing more mature disciples.

Even though Gerber is not writing to churches, his idea can be transferable. For churches, pastors and church leaders have all experienced how setting numerical goals or tracking numbers in ministry can feel like a secular practice rather than relying on the

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[1] Michael E. Gerber, *The E-Myth Revisited* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 123-24, Kindle.

[2] Gerber, *The E-Myth Revisited*, 122.

work of the Spirit. Mike Bonem reminds in *In Pursuit of Great AND Godly Leadership* that "secular leadership principles are not inherently evil or contrary to Scripture. . . . In fact, you will find that a number of business principles are very consistent with the teachings of Scripture."[3] William R. Hoyt continues the argument for utilizing quantification in ministry in *Effectiveness by the Numbers*, when he says, "Statistics always tell a story. The doctor draws blood, the lab analyzes it, and sends a report back to the doctor. The doctor reads the numbers and can make educated guesses about your past. The numbers give him or her a clear picture of your current health status. And the numbers also predict the future unless changes are made."[4] So, the numbers and metrics available to churches can be utilized to help steward the ministry God has given them.

Unfortunately, many churches are only measuring items that do not tell the full story. Aubrey Malphurs wrote about this in *Advanced Strategic Planning*: "Some [churches] measure their offerings and their attendance, and that is helpful and good. But most churches do not measure the growth of their congregation toward spiritual maturity, which is so very important to every ministry."[5] For a lot of churches this means they spend a great amount of time coming up with a strategy to reach the lost and make disciples but then fail to set up a process to measure how that strategy is performing. This is a great problem. Strategizing without measuring if the strategy is working focuses on the innovation element without including the quantification element. Many churches are failing in measuring their disciple making processes. They do not know the state of the spiritual maturity of their people to tailor a process for them, in addition to not knowing if a person were to go through their process, if it would actually help them grow spiritually.

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[3] Mike Bonem, *In Pursuit of Great AND Godly Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 14, Kindle.

[4] William R. Hoyt, *Effectiveness by the Numbers: Counting What Counts in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 1, Kindle.

[5] Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 205.

Metrics of attendance, giving, and baptisms are absolutely helpful and should be tracked, but churches must know that these numbers do not tell the whole story. They are not enough on their own. In fact, they can actually tell a story contrary to what is taking place within a church. Based upon these easily tracked and seen metrics, on the outside, many churches look healthy, but on the inside, they are not stewarding the calling of the Great Commission effectively. Sadly, many of the fastest growing churches in America are not growing because they are winning and discipling new believers, but instead because they are importing believers from other churches. That is called shifting of the sheep; that is not disciple making. Robert Coleman reminds that growing an attendance roll and budget through giving is not the end goal of the church. Instead, in his classic work *Master Plan of Evangelism*, he explains,

> The great commission is not merely to go to the ends of the earth preaching the gospel, nor to baptize a lot of converts into the Name of the Triune God, nor to teach them the precepts of Christ, but to "make disciples, to build men [and women] like themselves who were so constrained by the commission of Christ that they not only followed Jesus themselves, but led others to follow him, too. . . . *The* criteria upon which any church should measure its success is not how many new names are added to the roll nor how much the budget is increased, but rather how many Christians are actively winning souls and training them to win the multitudes.[6]

In *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, Greg Hawkins and Cally Parkinson share insights from Willow Creek Community Church's three-year study to measure spiritual growth, called the REVEAL Spiritual Life Survey. After collecting data from over a quarter million people in well over a thousand churches of every size, denomination, and geographic area, this research revealed that church leaders can actually measure spiritual growth. As they put it, "What we really wanted to know when we conducted our initial survey was which activities produced the most spiritual growth. In other words, which activities were most effective in helping people grow in their love of God and love of others?"[7] This study provides insight into how people grow

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[6] Robert Coleman, *Master Plan of Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 104-5, Kindle.

[7] Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016), 16, Kindle.

spiritually and how many churches have a wrong picture of how discipleship happens. Through their research, they found that "church activities do not predict or drive long-term spiritual growth."[8]

This monumental research project led to the conclusion that tracking and measuring only the metrics of church activity is not enough. Churches must go deeper to track and measure items that can predict or drive long-term spiritual growth. As previously stated, church activity is easier to track than spiritual growth. Someone attending a church service, attending a small group, and giving to a church is easy to quantify. However, measuring if someone is growing spiritually is more abstract. It takes more work and intentionality to get to these types of metrics, but it is possible. While performing the research that led to them write *Move*, Hawkins and Parkinson found eight significant discoveries, the first of which they said was,

> It is possible to measure spiritual growth. Measuring spiritual growth is not something the REVEAL team set out to do. But in analyzing the results of our first survey in 2004, a framework emerged—based on how people describe their relationship with Jesus Christ—that predicts spiritual growth (defined by increasing love of God and increasing love of others).[9]

So, even though spiritual growth is more subjective and unseen than other metrics, it is possible to measure it within a church. However, even though it is possible, not many churches have a system in place to do so.

In his dissertation that eventually led to the book *Simple Church*, Eric Geiger performed research with church leaders that asked them to state their level of agreement with the following statements, "We have a clearly defined process for moving a person from salvation to spiritual maturity to significant ministry" and then "We have a system to measure how people progress through our process." Geiger summarizes this data:

> Of the growing churches, 6.6% strongly agreed (SA) with this statement, while 2.0% of the non-growing churches strongly agreed (SA) with this statement. Nearly 20% (19.9%) of the growing churches and 6.5% of the non-growing churches

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[8] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 18.

[9] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 18.

agreed (A) with this statement. Ofthe growing churches, 25.9% moderately agreed (MA) with this statement compared to 19.6% of the non-growing churches. Of the growing churches, 21.1% moderately disagreed (MD) with this statement compared to 21.6% of the non-growing churches. Of the growing churches, 21.7% disagreed (D) with this statement compared to 36.6% of the non-growing churches.[10]

Based upon this research, his assumption was that "growing church leaders agreed or strongly agreed three times more than the non-growing church leaders that their church has a system to measure how people progress through their process. The growing church strata was much more likely than the non-growing church strata to measure the execution of their process."[11] This led him to conclude this in *Simple Church*, "Church leaders should develop a system to measure how people are progressing through the process. Measurement allows the leaders to know if people are progressing through the [spiritual transformation] process."[12]

The Discipleship Inventory

From this research, it is clear that many churches have room to grow when it comes to measuring discipleship processes and knowing if people are growing spiritually in their church. Because of this need, Brad Waggoner conducted his dissertation in 1991, titled, "The Development of an Instrument for Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base of Southern Baptist Churches." Waggoner states in his abstract, "The Problem of this study was to develop a valid and reliable instrument that would accurately measure the degree which a given church member manifests the functional characteristics of a disciple."[13] To create a solution to this problem, Waggoner followed this procedure:

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[10] Eric Benjamin Geiger, "An Exploration of the Relationship between a Process-Driven Design for Church Ministry and Church Growth" (EdD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 119.

[11] Geiger, "Process-Driven Design for Church Ministry and Church Growth," 169.

[12] Thom S. Rainer and Eric Geiger, *Simple Church* (Nashville: B & H, 2011), 180.

[13] Brad Joe Waggoner, "The Development of an Instrument for Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base of Southern Baptist Churches (EdD thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991), abstract.

The initial step of the developmental process was to identify the functional characteristics of a disciple from literature in the field and to validate these characteristics using a panel of experts. Following this questions were developed to measure each functional characteristic and validated by another panel of experts. The questions were then organized into a properly formatted questionnaire and administered to a small test group.[14]

Waggoner describes the heart and purpose behind his dissertation, and the tool that would be the result of his research, years later in his book *The Shape of Faith to Come*:

We are familiar with the term IQ, short for "intelligence quotient." IQ scores are used in many ways, including as predictors of educational achievement and job performance. Working off of the idea of IQ, I have sought to develop an instrument that can quantify, measure, and benchmark the degree to which self-professed Christians think and act in accordance with biblical characteristics of a disciple of Jesus Christ. The Spiritual Formation Inventory, the survey instrument used in this study, was developed from extensive research. The foundational element of the survey design was a thorough analysis of Scripture and various articles, books, and commentaries written by many respected theologians and scholars relating to the nature of a New Testament disciple. With validation by a panel of experts, I identified twenty-one functional characteristics of a disciple. These are clear biblical expectations of any follower of Christ that can be observed and, thus to some degree, measured. Eventually, these characteristics are categorized by some common affinity into seven domains of spiritual formation.[15]

An assessment seeking to measure spiritual maturity is only useful if the basis of the tool is built upon a biblical definition of a disciple and how one is formed into a mature disciple. In Waggoner's case, the definition of a disciple of Jesus and the identification of the functional characteristics of a disciple undergird the validity of the whole assessment. In his dissertation, Waggoner documents in detail how he formulated the functional characteristics of a disciple:

The initial task was to determine the scope and parameters of measurement. For the purposes of this research, that task involved identifying the outcomes of discipleship training. These outcomes are referred to as the "measurable" characteristics or attributes of a functional disciple. Books, articles, and discipleship programs were analyzed for indications of measurable characteristics. A list of characteristics was compiled and categorized according to distinct domains. The domains selected were: 1. Attitudes; 2. Conduct/Behavior; 3. Relational/Social; Ministry Involvement/Skills; 5. Doctrine/Beliefs.[16]

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[14] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," abstract.

[15] Brad J. Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 15, Kindle.

[16] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 66.

The following are the characteristics categorized by domain:

For *attitudes*, a disciple is one who:

1. Possesses a desire and willingness to learn;

2. Has conviction regarding the necessity of living in accordance to biblical principles and guidelines;

3. Evidences a repentant attitude when violation of Scripture occurs;

4. Possess a willingness to forfeit personal desires and conveniences, if necessary, in order to seek the interests of others;

5. Possesses and demonstrates the character trait of humility;

6. Possesses and demonstrates the character trait of integrity;

7. Is willing to be accountable to others.[17]

For *conduct/behavior*, a disciple is one who:

1. Manifests a lifestyle of utilizing time and talents for God's purposes;

2. Possess a lifestyle depicted by intentional compliance with the moral teachings of the Bible and a practice of adapting attitudes and actions in accordance with biblical standards;

3. Maintains appropriate behavior toward those of the opposite sex;

4. Actively seeks to promote social justice and righteousness in society as well as to individuals.[18]

For *relational/social*, a disciple is one who:

1. Values and accepts himself as created in the image of God;

2. Has awareness of the reality and presence of God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit;

3. Experiences trust in God in times of adversity as well as in times of prosperity;

4. Seems to commune with and learn about God through the means of meditation upon Scripture and prayer;

5. Is consistently involved in the fellowship with other believers in the context of a local church;

6. Applies oneself to building meaningful relationships with other believers;

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[17] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 66.

[18] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 71.

7. Maintains a forgiving spirit when wronged;

8. Confesses or seeks forgiveness when guilty of an offense.[19]

       For *ministry/skills*, a disciple is one who:

1. Publicly identifies with Christ and the church when provided an opportunity;

2. Seeks and takes advantage of opportunities to share the Gospel with others;

3. Is involved in ministering to other believers;

4. Seeks the good of all men with a willingness to meet practical needs such as food, clothing, and the like.[20]

       For *doctrine/beliefs*, the five doctrinal issues measured in this study include

1. Eternal Security;

2. Salvation;

3. The Holy Spirit (the nature and role of);

4. The Eternal State (the literal existence of heaven and hell);

5. Scripture (the authority and reliability of).[21]

       After these characteristics were finalized, initial questions were drafted for each of the stated functional characteristics. These questions were sent to a panel of four experts in the field of item writing to test the content validity. Once the questions were drafted, Waggoner conducted a pilot test of the questionnaire with a volunteer church and a select group consisting of 100 people. This group of 100 was split into two groups of 50. Group 1 consisted of members who, by observation from their pastors, highly manifested the functional characteristics of a disciple. Group 2 consisted of members who appeared to minimally demonstrate the characteristics. These two different types of groups allowed Waggoner to split test and see how well the assessment would measure his assumptions. This first pilot test allowed him to go back and revise the instrument based upon data

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[19] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 73.

[20] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 78.

[21] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 80.

analysis. The questions that received discriminant analysis scores of .90 or higher were considered for deletion. In consultation with the Foreign Mission Board (now known as the International Mission Board), the decision was made to eliminate 37 questions. The Discipleship Inventory, as Waggoner was calling it at the time, went from 175 questions in pilot test 1 to 136 in pilot test 2.[22]

After all his research and testing, Waggoner concluded,

> Based on the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient from both pilot tests, it can conclusively be stated that the instrument developed in this research provides a reliable measurement of the degree to which a given church member manifest the functional characteristics of a disciple. Furthermore, applied to a broad representation of the adult membership, this instrument will provide a reliable measurement of the discipleship base of a given local church.[23]

In 2007, Waggoner began work on his book *The Shape of Faith to Come*, which was designed to utilize his previous research tool on a broader scale. The discipleship inventory he created for his dissertation was now branded the Spiritual Formation Inventory (SFI), and was used to survey a large group of Protestants to assess the overall sense of the discipleship state of the American church. Waggoner describes the 2007 study:

> The research that led to this book is substantial. First, it is substantial in its scope. We surveyed twenty-five hundred Protestants who attend church on a regular basis. It is also substantial in that it is a longitudinal study: repeated observations of the same items over a period of time. We surveyed our sample in May 2007 and then again in May 2008. Few studies of this sort are longitudinal due to the cost and difficulty. But this provides us with a unique perspective, especially when dealing with a topic like spiritual formation. We were able to see what, if any, spiritual progress participants made over the course of one year.[24]

During his work of creating the SFI and writing *The Shape of Faith to Come*, the functional characteristics of a disciple were categorized by some common affinity into seven domains of spiritual formation. At this point, these categories were labeled in the book as:

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[22] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 104.

[23] Waggoner, "Measuring and Evaluating the Discipleship Base," 118.

[24] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 7.

1. Learning Truth

2. Obeying God and Denying Self

3. Serving God and Others

4. Sharing Christ

5. Exercising Faith

6. Seeking God

7. Building Relationships

These seven categories were the starting point for what would later become the 8 Biblical Signposts, which make up the foundation for the Discipleship Pathway Assessment.

Eight Biblical Signposts

A few years later in 2010, the Lifeway team built upon the SFI, and "LifeWay Research embarked on another ambitious research project: survey believers about their spiritual lives and level of maturity."[25] The team used the SFI as a foundation and employed a multi-phase, mixed methods approach to determine overall categories for the assessment. They conducted qualitative interviews with Christian leaders from a variety of denominations,[26] surveyed one thousand Protestant pastors in the United States, and then surveyed four thousand Protestants in North America. Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation wrote in their book *Transformational Discipleship*, "The team built on the seven Spiritual Formation Inventory domains and added factors based on the expert interviews. Ultimately, the research revealed an eighth domain that points to spiritual health. We will refer to these as attributes of discipleship."[27] As part of this initiative, the tool was renamed to be the Transformational Discipleship Assessment and the categories

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[25] Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley, and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville: B & H, 2012), 12-13.

[26] See appendix 3 for the list of discipleship experts.

[27] Geiger, Kelley, and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 15.

were updated to be referred to as the 8 Biblical Signposts. The new category labels were as follows:

1. Bible Engagement

2. Obeying God and Denying Self

3. Serving God and Others

4. Sharing Christ

5. Exercising Faith

6. Seeking God

7. Building Relationships.

8. Unashamed Transparency

In 2019, the assessment undertook a name change once again and became the Discipleship Pathway Assessment (DPA). With this new name came an update to the signpost language. The 8 Biblical signposts as they are used today are:

1. Engaging the Bible

2. Obeying God and Denying Self

3. Serving God and Others

4. Sharing Christ

5. Exercising Faith

6. Seeking God

7. Building Relationships

8. Living Unashamed

To better understand the assessment, the rest of this chapter is a breakdown of the definition of each signpost, support for these signposts as useful based upon other discipleship resources, and the types of survey questions that make up each category.

Biblical Signpost 1: Engaging the Bible

The DPA website describes this signpost 1 in this way,

Transformation can be recognized when our mind is sharpened by the Bible, our perspective is shaped by the Bible, and our actions are directed by the Bible. *All*

Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Learning the truth is an essential signpost, but it cannot stand alone. In fact, overemphasis on it leads to intellectualism. Truth reveals a choice and our response should be obedience.[28]

In the Transformational Discipleship study conducted by Lifeway Research, they found biblical engagement to be a key attribute in discipleship. As believers grow in their faith, they should have a deeper longing to encounter biblical truth.[29] It was not the only study to find this to be true. The Reveal Study, mentioned previously that led to the writing of the book *Move*, found this category key to spiritual growth as well. Hawkins and Parsons write,

> Here's one simple yet profound fix that came from this survey. We learned that the most effective strategy for moving people forward in their journey of faith is biblical engagement. Not just getting people into the Bible when they're in church—which we do quite well—but helping them engage the Bible on their own outside of church.[30]

Clearly from the research, those who are growing spiritually are engaging with the Bible.

Donald Whitney agrees with this idea in *The Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, when he pointedly writes, "No Spiritual Discipline is more important than the intake of God's Word. Nothing can substitute for it. There is simply no healthy Christian life apart from a diet of the milk and meat of Scripture."[31] This idea of Christians spending time in God's Word and engaging with it is derived directly from the example of Jesus. Jesus modeled this for his disciples. Coleman writes,

> Another aspect of Jesus' life that was vividly portrayed to the disciples was the importance and use of the Holy Scriptures. This was evident both in maintaining his own personal devotion and in winning others to the Way. Often he would take

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[28] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," Discipleship Pathway Assessment, accessed February 10, 2023, https://discipleshippathwayassessment.lifeway.com/signposts/introduction/, emphasis original.

[29] Ed Stetzer, "Bible Engagement Impacts Spiritual Maturity," Lifeway Research, June 12, 2013, https://research.lifeway.com/2013/06/12/bible-engagement-impacts-spiritual-maturity/.

[30] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 10.

[31] Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 22.

special pains to impress on his followers the meaning of some passage in the Bible, and he never ceased to use the Scriptures in his conversation with them.[32]

From these resources and research, one can conclude that if one wants to grow closer to God, reading the Bible must be a priority. In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner states it this way,

> A major part of the spiritual formation process is to be a diligent student of the Word of God and to have a hungry, teachable spirit. To be a disciple means being a learner. Being a learner involves both attitude and behavior. Therefore, the Spiritual Formation Inventory contains questions allowing the respondent to describe perspectives and practices that will help provide a basis for evaluation. Here are the questions:
>
> - How much do you agree/disagree: I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do?
>
> - How much do you agree/disagree: I have made a serious attempt to discover God's will for my life?
>
> - How much do you agree/disagree: I tend to accept the constructive criticism and correction of other Christians?
>
> - How much do you agree/disagree: I am open to those who teach the Bible?
>
> - How often do you read the Bible? How often do you study the Bible (more in-depth than just reading it)?
>
> - Have you ever gone through a class for new Christians?
>
> - Have you ever been discipled or mentored one-on-one by a more spiritually mature Christian who spent time with you on a regular basis (at least once a month) for the purpose of helping in your spiritual development?
>
> - How much do you agree/disagree: A Christian should consider himself/herself accountable to other Christians?
>
> These questions are designed to measure both attitudes toward learning and behaviors that would lead to learning. Motivation is a central issue related to spiritual formation. It is easy to lean toward measuring performance. Yet we must be reminded that Jesus rebuked individuals who appeared religious and spiritual on the outside without a corresponding heart for God and love for others.[33]

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[32] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 73.

[33] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 59-60.

**Biblical Signpost 2: Obeying God
and Denying Self**

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Discipleship is the journey of obedience to the One who is in authority over you. Transformation can be seen when we progressively set aside earthly delights for kingdom priorities. *If anyone wants to follow after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me (Luke 9:23).* Overemphasis on areas of obedience can lead to legalism. While Scripture is full of specific areas in which we are to obey, there should be an underlying motivation of love for God. When love is one's focus, you naturally have an external rather than selfish orientation. You see and respond to opportunities to serve.[34]

J. T. English agrees with this category being important to spiritual growth

when he writes in *Deep Discipleship*,

According to Jesus, discipleship is not about self-actualization or self-preservation; it is about self-denial. You will know yourself the most when you are carrying your cross. . . . When we make discipleship about self-actualization, not self-denial, we fail to embody the way of the cross that Jesus beckons his followers to imitate. Matthew 16 shows us that the person of Christ cannot be separated from the work of Christ. It also shows that the way to follow the person of Christ is to carry the cross of self-denial, not the crown of self-improvement.[35]

Bill Hull also supports the importance of self denial in his book *The Complete Book of*

Discipleship when he states, "When my will conflicts with his will, self-denial makes

following his will possible. Jesus wants me to deny myself the right to be in charge of my

own life. He wants to lead and he asks me to follow. That drives a stake through the heart

of my will, my ego, and my desire to control."[36] Richard Foster uses the title of

submission for this category. He summarizes, "We surrender our body, mind, and spirit

into the hands of God to do with us as he pleases through the long darkness."[37] These

authors and the DPA research shows that those who are growing spiritually are growing

in their obedience to God while also growing in their denial of their selfish desires.

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[34] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

[35] J. T. English, *Deep Discipleship: How the Church Can Make Whole Disciples of Jesus* (Nashville: B & H, 2020), 27.

[36] Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship: On Being and Making Followers of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Navigators, 2006), 121-22, Kindle.

[37] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018), 122.

In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner states,

In order to assess the levels of obedience and self-denial among our sample of churchgoers, we asked the following questions:

- How much do you agree/disagree: A Christian must learn to deny himself/herself in order to serve Christ?

- How much do you agree/disagree: I try to avoid situations in which I might be tempted to think or do immoral things?

- How much do you agree/disagree: When convinced of sin in my life, I readily confess it to God as sin?

- How much do you agree/disagree: When I come to realize that some aspect of my life is not right in God's eyes, I make the necessary changes?

- How much do you agree/disagree: I feel sorrow and regret when I realize I have sinned?

- How much do you agree/disagree: Reading and studying the Bible has not made significant changes in the way I live my life?

- How much do you agree/disagree: I am generally a different person in public than I am in private?

- How much do you agree/disagree: When I realize that I have a choice between "my way" and "God's way," I usually choose my way?

- How often do you confess sins and wrongdoings to God and ask for forgiveness?

- Have you been baptized?[38]

Biblical Signpost 3: Serving God and Others

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Christlike transformation is evident when personal needs and even dreams are set aside for the needs we see in others. *Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me. (Matt. 25:40).* Jesus set an example for his followers by being willing to serve them. Our outward focus is not limited to other followers of Christ. We should also be sharing Christ with non-believers in word and deed.[39]

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[38] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 82-83.

[39] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

When one grows in spiritual maturity, it leads them to look outward. A. W. Tozer writes, "Fellowship with God leads straight to obedience and good works. That is the divine order and it can never be reversed."[40] This reversal is going from wanting others to serve you to wanting to serve others. Foster puts it this way, "The spiritual authority of Jesus is an authority not found in a position or a title, but in a towel."[41] Michael Wilkins shares how Jesus gave the example of servanthood for all believers:

> Jesus' pivotal pronouncement in Mark 10:45 underscores the depth of incongruity between Jesus' and the disciples' understanding of life and ministry: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." The issue centers on servanthood, a concept not expected by the disciples. This passage is important for us to examine because it is the key to understanding Jesus' perspective of discipleship. By comprehending the essence of Jesus' ministry as servanthood, the disciples will comprehend the essence of discipleship as servanthood, including their motivation, position, ambition, expectations, and example.[42]

Wilkins continues, "In the kingdom of God humble service is the rule, and Jesus is the perfect example of it, especially in his redemptive mission.[43]

In *Move*, the research found that the act of serving others is not just an attribute of disciples of Jesus, but is an act that helps grow disciples to become more like Jesus. While interpreting the research, Hawkins and Parkinson summarized the data with this implication:

> Serving is the most catalytic experience offered by the church. We'd also like you to notice that the top-ranked factors in all three movements start with the word serve. This is a consistent finding, but one that should not surprise us since our progress in the spiritual life is defined by increasing likeness to Jesus Christ ("For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others," Matthew 20:28 NLT). When we serve as his hands and feet, whether within a church ministry or outside the church, we grow to be more like Jesus. Interestingly, serving experiences appear to be even more significant to spiritual development than organized small groups, although small groups do show up as catalysts in the first two movements. . . . The implication for

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[40] A. W. Tozer, *Signposts: A Collection of Sayings from A. W. Tozer*, comp. Harry Verploegh (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1988), 183.

[41] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 128.

[42] Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 197, Kindle.

[43] Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 199.

church leaders is that we must encourage people to serve—in any capacity, in whatever valid opportunity their gifts and interests lead them to. Serving should be a high priority for our churches, since such experiences appear to be more conducive to spiritual growth than blockbuster weekend services.[44]

Both Scripture and research highlight that serving God and serving others is a key attribute of a growing Christian. Waggoner explains,

In this third domain we asked our twenty-five hundred churchgoers nine questions seeking to evaluate their perceptions, beliefs, and practices related to serving God and serving others. The first four questions measured the degree to which each person agreed or disagreed with statements relating to Christian service. The remaining questions focused on behaviors and practices.

Questions where "agree strongly" is considered the top or ideal response:

- I believe everything I have belongs to God.

- I regularly use my gifts and talents to serve/help people in need who are not part of my church.

- It is necessary for a Christian's spiritual well-being to give time on a regular basis to some specific ministry within his/her church.

- With reference to my values and priorities, I can honestly say that I try to put God first in my life.

Questions related to frequency of certain behaviors or practices:

- Pray for fellow Christians I know every day.

- Pray for my church and/or church leaders every day.

- Volunteer my time to serve in any capacity at my church.

- Give 10 percent or more of my pre-tax income to charities, church, or ministries.

- Have identified my primary spiritual gifts and am currently using them to serve God/others.[45]

Biblical Signpost 4: Sharing Christ

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Maturing believers know that speaking about the message is a necessity. Transformation is evident when we talk about Christ and the message of the gospel. *But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense*

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[44] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 116.

[45] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 114-15.

to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you. (1 Pet. 3:15). Living out the effect of the gospel means also putting it into words. This often comes through building relationships with non-Christians and showing them the relational community found in the local church. These external signposts require a foundation of faith.[46]

Spiritual maturity leads one to share the message of Jesus with others. It is an outcome of a changed heart. Hull states that sharing Christ is a result of discipleship: "Evangelism will result from proper discipleship. The lack of passion for the Great Commission comes from a lack of character—a lack of spiritual depth—rather than a lack of strategic vehicles for reaching others."[47] Whitney put it this way: "Jesus does not expect all Christians to use the same methods of evangelism, but He does expect all Christians to evangelize."[48] Not only is sharing Christ a result of discipleship, but it is an expectation for those who are in Christ. It is a matter of obedience. Coleman sums this up when he writes, "The Great Commission of Christ given to his church summed it up in the command to "make disciples of every creature" (Matt. 28:19). The word here indicates that the disciples were to go out into the world and win others who would come to be what they themselves were—disciples of Christ."[49] Those who are maturing in Christ are also sharing Christ with others.

In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner shared the design of the questions for this category in this way:

> In developing Domain Four, we designed seven agree/disagree questions and three questions related to the frequency of certain activities.
>
> Questions Related to Agree or Disagree Responses
>
> 1. It is every Christian's responsibility to share the gospel with non-Christians.
>
> 2. I have a personal responsibility to share my religious beliefs about Jesus Christ with non-Christians.

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[46] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

[47] Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship*, 233.

[48] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 120.

[49] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 104.

3. I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ with someone else effectively.

4. While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus Christ.

5. I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.

6. I am hesitant to let others know that I am a Christian.

7. Many people who know me are not aware I am a Christian.

Frequency of Activities

8. Pray for the spiritual status of people I know who are not professing Christians (how often).

9. In the past six months shared with someone two or more times how to become a Christian.

10. In the past six months invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at my church two or more times.[50]

Biblical Signpost 5: Exercising Faith

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Transformation is seen in believers when risk-aversion is set aside and our lives are characterized by faithful obedience to God's will. *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20).* Without faith it is impossible to please God. Rather than seeking any other type of security, a disciple seeks God himself.[51]

The very act of accepting Jesus Christ as one's Lord and Savior is exercising

faith, and once you become a disciple, you just keeps growing in those steps of faith.

Coleman gives the example of the first disciples' act of faith when he writes,

None of the disciples was asked at first to make a statement of faith or accept a well-defined creed, although they doubtless recognized Jesus to be the Messiah. For the moment all they were asked to do was to follow Jesus. Of course, clearly implied in their initial invitation was a call to faith in the person of Christ and obedience to his Word. If this was not comprehended in the beginning, it would be perceived as they continued in the way with the Master. No one will follow a person in whom he or

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[50] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 148-49.

[51] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

she has no trust, nor sincerely take the step of faith unless he or she is willing to obey what the leader says."[52]

The act of following Jesus is taking the step of faith; and as one spiritually matures, one grows in their ability to trust God more than themselves and exercise faith. In *Following the Master*, Wilkins writes,

> Jesus' call regularly included a demand for the listeners to count the cost of discipleship and to take up their cross. That demand took various forms, but in each case it meant the cost of allegiance to Jesus. Although entrance into the way of salvation and discipleship is found through faith alone, true faith meant having no allegiances that would hinder following after Jesus and carrying out the life of discipleship that would emanate.[53]

The Christian faith is not meant to be comfortable. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, " If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity."[54] The Christian faith is lived out in faith, and those who are spiritually maturing make decisions and exercise faith.

In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner shared the questions for the categories in this way:

> In Domain Five: Exercising Faith we asked five questions testing levels of agreement, and one question related to frequency of activities, related to faith.
>
> Levels of Agreement:
>
> - I believe that God has a purpose for all events in my life, regardless of whether I perceive each event as being good or bad.
>
> - I consistently give financially to God's purposes even if I am not sure I have enough money.
>
> - I express praise and gratitude to God even in difficult circumstances.
>
> - During difficult circumstances I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.

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[52] Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism*, 49-50.

[53] Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 110.

[54] C. S. Lewis, *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1970), 48.

- My life is often filled with anxiety and worry.

- In the past six months: I made a decision two or more times to obey or follow God with an awareness that choosing His way might be costly to me in some way.[55]

Biblical Signpost 6: Seeking God

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Transformation is seen when our desire is to know God more deeply and experience His work more fully. *But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. (Matt. 6:33).* This relationship with God desires to bring Him glory by responding to Him with a lifestyle of worship. Our mission and our purpose are shared with other believers. We become one as we build relationships with other believers.[56]

The idea of seeking God is a commitment to both a personal seeking of God and a communal seeking of God through community and worship. Wilkins points out this balance when he writes,

Jesus' form of discipleship included a complex balance of individualism and community. Jesus' invitation to follow him demanded that an individual count the cost and make a personal decision. Yet the concept of community is everywhere apparent, whether it is the solidarity of the Twelve with the plural term disciples , the spiritual family emphasis, the promise of the church or the relational responsibilities within the community.[57]

The research conducted in *Move* reached this same conclusion. Hawkins and Parkinson sum up the need to seek God: "Church activities have the greatest influence in the early stages of spiritual growth, but things like personal spiritual practices, including prayer and Bible reading, have far more influence later in the spiritual journey."[58] For many, it is easy to think of seeking God through worship as only the corporate aspect of worship. However, Whitney provides a different definition: "Worship is focusing on and responding to God. . . . It often includes words and actions, but it goes beyond them to the focus of the mind and the heart. Worship is the God-centered focus and response of the soul; it is

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[55] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 182-83.

[56] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

[57] Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 139.

[58] Hawkins and Parkinson, *Move*, 19.

being preoccupied with God."[59] So, seeking God is a both-and approach of being plugged into a community of believers and pursuing God in your personal life. Seeking God is focusing on him and being preoccupied with him.

In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner breaks down how the questions for this category in this way:

Domain Six represents the pursuit of the Triune God and the practice of worshiping Him. We asked our sample of churchgoers these questions:

Questions involving levels of agreement or disagreement:

- When I sing at church, my thoughts are usually focused right on God.

- I often express praise and thanksgiving to God for who He is and for what He has done.

- One of the main reasons I live my life the way I do is to please and honor God.

- The fruit of the Spirit (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, and self-control) is evidence of a genuine relationship with God.

- My Christian faith is important in my life today.

- I have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ that is still important in my life today.

- Often during the worship part of the church service (singing or prayer), I find myself just "going through the motions."

Questions about frequency of certain activities:

- Set aside time for prayer every day.

- Memorize Scripture once a week or more.

- Set aside time for private worship, praise, or thanksgiving to God every day.

- In the past six months: fasted two or more times."[60]

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[59] Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 104.

[60] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 208-9.

Biblical Signpost 7: Building Relationships

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Our faith is personal, but it is not intended to be private. Our horizontal relationships with other believers should develop just as our vertical relationship with God does. Transformation is occurring when relational maturity is evident in our lives. *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. (Acts 2:42).* Christ intended for us to follow Him together with other believers. This requires time and intentionality. As we find our identity in Christ, we identify with other believers and live unashamed of Christ.[61]

Throughout Scripture, Christians are called to gather together and be in relationship with one another. God's people are called to live in community, and spiritual maturity happens alongside relational maturity. In his book *Invitation to a Journey*, M. Robert Mulholland writes,

Our relationships with others are not only the testing grounds of our spiritual life but also the places where our growth toward wholeness in Christ happens. There is a temptation to think that our spiritual growth takes place in the privacy of our personal relationship with God and then, once it is sufficiently developed, we can export it into our relationships with others and "be Christian" with them. But holistic spirituality, the process of being formed in the image of Christ, takes place in the midst of our relationships with others, not apart from them. We learn to be Christ's for others by seeking to be yielded and obedient to God in the midst of our relationships.[62]

For the reason of community and building relationships God has given his people the church. He wants to connect his people to each other through relationships. Though, the relationships Christians are to build are not just with other Christians. Spiritually mature Christians desire to also build authentic relationships with those far from Christ so they can share the gospel with them in love. Sam Emadi writes in his book for newer Christians, "The mission of the church is to make disciples of the Lord Jesus. One way believers fulfill that mission is by faithfully speaking about Christ with friends, coworkers, family members, neighbors, taxi drivers, grocery-store clerks, and anyone else in their spheres of influence."[63] Christians who are growing in their faith will be

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[61] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts," emphasis original.

[62] M. Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 51, Kindle.

[63] Sam Emadi, *What Should I Do Now That I'm a Christian?*, Church Questions (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 43, Kindle.

building relationships with both Christians and non-Christians for the purpose of becoming more like Jesus and sharing Jesus with others.

In *The Shape of Faith to Come*, Waggoner shared how the questions were structured for this category in this way:

> In seeking to measure the health of our churchgoing sample, we asked eleven questions, seven of which sought levels of agreement or disagreement with statements about relationships. Four of the questions were aimed at the frequency of certain behaviors.
>
> Levels of Agreement/Disagreement
>
> - I have developed significant relationships with people at my church.
>
> - When I become aware that I have wronged someone, I go to that person to admit and correct my wrongdoing.
>
> - I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship and interact with other believers.
>
> - I am careful in my closest relationships to avoid people or situations that may negatively impact my Christian values and principles.
>
> - I generally do not share personal things, such as feelings, joys, struggles, and needs, with my Christian friends.
>
> - When I am wronged by others, I often have trouble responding with a forgiving attitude.
>
> - Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians.
>
> Frequency of Activities
>
> - Pray in a group with other Christians once a week or more.
>
> - In a typical month how often do you:
>
>   - attend a worship service at your church four or more times?
>
>   - attend Sunday school or Christian education classes at your church?
>
>   - attend a small-group Bible study, study group, or cell group?[64]

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[64] Waggoner, *The Shape of Faith to Come*, 234-36.

Biblical Signpost 8: Living Unashamed

The DPA website describes this signpost:

Transformation is evident when a believer is transparent and unashamed in presenting their own life as being aligned with Christ. *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek (Rom. 1:16).* Followers of Jesus Christ find their identity in Him, boldly share the gospel, trust Him, walk in His truth (not alone but in relationships with other believers), and serve others all from a desire to glorify God in love and obedience. Transformation by God's grace will be evident in these signposts as our beliefs, desires, and actions conform to His image.[65]

This signpost was added after additional research in 2012 in conjunction with the release of the updated tool called the Transformational Discipleship Assessment.

Lynn Pryor writes, "Lifeway's research into discipleship ministries and practices found that maturing believers felt it was not just appropriate but necessary for others to know them as Christians. When Christ is changing you, you want others to know about it."[66] Wilkins says,

Both in his gospel and in Acts, Luke emphasizes that entrance into the Way of salvation and discipleship is found through faith alone. Salvation itself is "the Way," a pattern of life revealed by God. As the believer enters the narrow gate to salvation, he or she is introduced to the Way of discipleship, a pattern of life following Jesus. Thus people must enter into and stride along that Way in the footsteps of the Master. . . . This idea of salvation as "the Way" leads in time to calling the community of disciples in Acts "the Way," an early designation or title for those known as "the church.[67]

When one comes to Christ and matures in Christ, they should be known by the Way they live. The early church set the example by being known for the Way they lived their life and boldly living out their faith in front of others.

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[65] Lifeway, "8 Biblical Signposts."

[66] Lynn Pryor, "Cultivating a Congregation That Lives Unashamed of the Gospel," Lifeway Research, June 21, 2019. https://research.lifeway.com/2019/06/21/cultivating-a-congregation-that-lives-unashamed-of-the-gospel/.

[67] Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 210.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief history of how the DPA came to be, along with theoretical support from other resources affirming the 8 Biblical Signposts as useful. With the research that was conducted and reconducted to create and refine the DPA, and with all the other resources referenced, one can find that the DPA is a proven and worthy tool to help churches measure discipleship in their church. As seen from the literature referenced, these categories are supported throughout discipleship resources and are in line with other experts' views on discipleship. The DPA has combined all this research into a proven, time-tested tool designed to help churches measure the spiritual maturity in their church.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter describes the project implementation and provides a detailed account of the five project goals and their results. The purpose of this project was to measure the usefulness of Lifeway's Discipleship Pathway Assessment in local churches. The project had five key goals: (1) identify the need churches were looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment; (2) determine if the assessment was useful for local churches to measure discipleship progress in individuals and the whole congregation; (3) evaluate if the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people, (4) evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores and if they are useful, and (5) determine areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches. This chapter will provide, in chronological order, the preparation, implementation, and summary of these five goals.

Project Preparation

Preliminary preparation for this project started in May 2022. The DPA is a tool created by and refined by Lifeway Research, so I started the project by reaching out to Scott McConnell, who serves as the Executive Director of Lifeway Research at Lifeway Christian Resources, to get permission to conduct research on behalf of their team. When speaking with McConnell, I shared the vision for the project, the overall purpose, and the goals I was hoping to achieve. He gave approval for the project and was willing to help refine the purpose and goals.

The next step was to put together the list of churches out of the assessment tool so I could contact them about their experience. In conjunction with creating the list of

church contacts, I began building a survey to help achieve the goals laid out for the project. As I spoke with Lifeway Research to learn from their experience and expertise, I decided upon a mixed method research approach and used both quantitative and qualitative research to accomplish the overall goal of determining the usefulness of the DPA in the local church. Lifeway Research was very helpful in this portion as they shared samples of previous quantitative surveys and topic guides that helped guide conversations of their qualitative interviews.

After I had written the initial survey, I began the *Applied Empirical Research* course. This course was very helpful in refining my survey to ask better questions to achieve the goals of this project. Through peer review and review from Joseph Harrod, I changed the wording of a few questions and added a section of questions focusing on the usefulness of each individual signpost. After feedback was received, the final survey included 25 questions and took about 10 minutes to complete. It included 5 demographic questions, 13 Likert scale questions, and 7 open-ended questions designed to collect qualitative feedback about the tool.[1]

Project Implementation

Project implementation began on January 12, 2023. After the customer list was finalized with contact information and the survey was built, each church e-mail address was contacted asking for their participation in the research project. The first initial e-mail was sent to the full list of 44 churches asking them to participate in the project by completing the survey. This e-mail resulted in 6 churches completing the survey and 1 church responding to let me know they purchased the assessment but were unable to fully implement it at their church. From these 7 churches, I followed up with 3 of them asking for a follow up video call to dive deeper into their results and collect qualitative research from their experience. All 3 of those churches responded yes, and I followed up with a

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[1] See appendix 1.

video call interview. The second e-mail was a follow up asking those who did not

respond the first time to consider taking the time to complete the survey. This e-mail

resulted in 4 more churches completing the survey. From those results, I asked 3 of them

for a follow up video call interview, and only 1 of the churches responded with a yes. I

followed up with that church with a video call interview.

<div align="center">**Summary of Project Goals**</div>

This project set out to accomplish five goals. Those goals will be explained

and evaluated in this section.

Goal 1: Identify the Needs of Churches

The first goal was to identify the need churches were looking to meet with the

Discipleship Pathway Assessment. To identify these needs, the survey gave the option to

select between the following needs: measure discipleship strategy, establish a baseline of

spiritual health in church, track spiritual growth before and after discipleship process,

identify areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy, and find areas of weakness in

our discipleship process. In addition to the survey data, video calls with churches allowed

for further explanation of needs and to hear the church's specific desires with the survey.

This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to

answer question 6 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be

interviewed responded to the question about the needs they were looking to meet with the

DPA.

Over the years, the name of DPA has changed from Discipleship Inventory to

the Spiritual Formation Inventory to the Transformational Discipleship Assessment to the

Discipleship Pathway Assessment. With each of these name changes, the way the

assessment was positioned to meet the needs of churches changed as well. This first goal

sought to answer why churches use the assessment. This goal was achieved through

quantitative research from the survey and from qualitative research gathered during video calls with individual church leaders.

Each of the 13 survey respondents were asked to select all the needs they were looking to meet that applied to their church, and their results are found in table 1. For the questions, the scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Table 1. Needs identified

Q6. What needs were you looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment at your church?	# of Churches	% of Churches
Measure discipleship strategy	5	38.5%
Establish a baseline of spiritual health in church	9	69.2%
Track spiritual growth before and after discipleship process	6	46.2%
Identify areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy	12	92.3%
Find areas of weakness in our discipleship process	9	69.2%
Other	0	0%

One church leader in Canada, who used the assessment over a three-year period, stated he decided to use the DPA because they "wanted to go deeper than just using anonymous metrics to know if their people were really maturing. Before the assessment, they were making conclusions based upon intuition or hearing from 3-4 people instead of making decisions based upon more concrete data about their people."

Another church leader in Florida stated that in 2020, when COVID forced them to stop meeting in person for a period of time, they started tracking next steps for their congregation. So, they had data if someone filled out a connect card, joined a group, or served on a Sunday morning, but the big question they wanted to answer was how to track people's spiritual growth.

A church leader in Kentucky stated he used the assessment in the first year of his new role at the church to establish a baseline for spiritual health in the church and then build out a discipleship plan based upon the results.

From these results, one can conclude that churches are looking to meet the need of discovering the state of their church's discipleship health more than the need to measure and track their discipleship strategy. This goal was successfully met and resulted in identifying the top three needs being "identifying areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy," "establishing a baseline of spiritual health in church," and "finding areas of weakness in our discipleship process."

One of the more common phrases in the results and in the interviews was that churches were "looking for a baseline for where people are in their discipleship journey." This is not how the DPA is presented to churches through the name and marketing on the website. With the name Discipleship Pathway Assessment, the need it is believed to meet is to assess the discipleship process at one's church. This tool does not tell which step of a church's pathway is weak or needs attention. Instead, it identifies the spiritual maturity for individuals, and in turn establishes a baseline of spiritual health in one's church. The focus on assessing the spiritual health in a church should change the way Lifeway speaks about, markets, and positions the DPA with churches. If they focus on these top three needs and how the DPA meets those needs, I believe it will help increase the usefulness of the tool because it sets realistic expectations for churches and helps them understand how to use the tool.

**Goal 2: Determine the Usefulness
of the DPA**

The second goal was to determine if the assessment is useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation. To determine how useful the assessment was for local churches, the survey asked the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found

the Discipleship Pathway Assessment useful in measuring the spiritual maturity in my church." After they answered, they were given an open ended question to "share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help them measure spiritual growth and discipleship in their church." One of the last questions of the survey was a Net Promoter Score question. The question asked the church leader, "On a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend the Discipleship Pathway Assessment to another church?" This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 8, 22, and 23 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about the usefulness of the DPA.

As documented in chapter 3, the DPA is a statistically validated online assessment tool built on exhaustive research and has been improved upon over the years. However, an assessment like this is only useful if it accomplishes the goal of the church that is using it. So, goal 2 sought to learn from churches' experiences to figure out if the assessment was helping churches and was useful in measuring spiritual maturity. To do this, there was a combination of quantitative research gathered from the survey results and qualitative research gathered from individual interviews with church leaders who used and implemented the assessment at their church.

Table 2 shows the results of the 13 respondents answering the 3 questions asked to accomplish this goal. For the questions, the scale ranges from 1 to 5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Table 2. Determining DPA usefulness

Survey Question	Mean
Q8. I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment useful in measuring the spiritual maturity in my church.	3.92/5
Q22. I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helpful to make informed decisions as a church when it comes to discipleship.	4.00/5
Q23. On a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend the Discipleship Pathway Assessment to another church?	8.23/10

As the results show, most churches agreed that the DPA was useful. When each church leader was asked to "share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help you measure spiritual growth and discipleship in your church," it revealed why they ranked the usefulness in the way that they did. The church leaders who strongly agreed or agreed that the DPA was useful said that it was because it gave them objective, tangible data about where their people were in their walks with Christ and highlighted strengths and weaknesses in their people's discipleship journey.

One church leader who strongly agreed with the assessment being useful wrote, "I gave it to my group leaders. Using our lowest scores (Share Christ) we have intentionally designed a new element for every group to employ for the month of February (praying for lost people by name + an opportunity to share that week)." Another church leader who strongly agreed stated, "The DPA helped measure spiritual growth by providing a benchmark or baseline as to 'where people are' in terms of the issues/qualities surveyed and recorded."

A church leader who answered a 4 out of 5 to the usefulness of the assessment wrote, "It was helpful to see how people evaluate themselves and what areas we might need to address." And another explained, "I think it helped us establish a spiritual baseline to evaluate future spiritual growth/discipleship." One church leader who answered a 3 out of 5 to the usefulness of the assessment wrote,

> I think it's more subjective because the person is evaluating their own spiritual growth and answering the questions based on their own thoughts and feelings—we offered the assessment twice in hopes to see if there was growth. The assessment was helpful in that way to determine if what we were offering to help people deepen their spiritual growth was really helping or not.

Another leaders stated, "It helped give visibility to many personal/unseen behaviors in followers of Jesus and tell a more accurate story about where the survey participants were on various markers."

These churches were hoping to establish the baseline of the spiritual health of their church, and when it came to meeting that need, they found the DPA useful. These

churches also found the DPA useful in making decisions based upon the results. For question 22, the survey asked, "How helpful the assessment was to make informed decisions as a church when it comes to discipleship." The mean for this question was 4.00, while the standard deviation was 0.91. No churches scored this question below a 3. In one interview, the church leader shared that they created a Back to School campaign centered around the DPA. During the months of July and August, they sent out the DPA to the whole church, and when someone got their results back, they then directed them to classes built based upon the 8 Signposts. This allowed them to identify a need and then immediately offer a way for their people to grow in the area of weakness. She also mentioned that seeing the results allowed them to know which types of classes they needed to create and add at a later time.

One of the best ways to determine how useful a church found the DPA was to ask if they would recommend it to another church. So, for question 23, the survey asked the church leader to complete a Net Promoter Score for DPA, which asked how likely they would be to recommend the assessment to another church. This question had a scale of 1-10. The mean was 8.23 while the standard deviation was 1.83, so the answers to this varied greatly, with the lowest being a 5. Overall, the church leaders would recommend it to others. One church leader wrote that they would recommend it because

> there aren't many resources out there to evaluate your church's spiritual growth/discipleship. I looked everywhere! This was the best fit because it was short, people wouldn't have to worry about taking a 30-45 min assessment, it was very clear, and made it easy to suggest a next step and evaluate the results. I think if nothing else it got people to be more intentional about their own spiritual growth.

Another church leader wrote, "I would recommend it with caveats. It could be helpful for smaller churches or communities, because it gathers data that cannot (that I know of) be gathered in other ways, and because we trust that the questions are research-based and vetted by experts."

With the results from these three questions and the open-ended responses and video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining that the

DPA is useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation. However, even though it is useful, just as one of the church leaders shared, it needs to be presented with a few caveats. There are definitely challenges in using the DPA.

One caveat is that the questions in the survey can only reveal so much, and even in what they reveal, church members may want to answer in a way that makes them look more spiritually mature than they are. The church leader who scored the usefulness as a 2 wrote, "I found most of our participants had areas for growth that were all similar. The assessment as structured is easy to anticipate where the answers will take you and thus, easier to 'nudge' toward or away from a more or less desirable position." This church leader was saying that the assessment could almost show the church member the desired answer and without even realizing it nudge them to answer in the way they think they should answer. The DPA is anonymous, so the church does not know how one answers the questions, but even when I am taking the DPA for myself, it is easy to feel like it is a test of my Christian walk, and I would want to score high on that test.

Another caveat is that a common theme brought up in the video interviews surrounding the conversation of usefulness was the ability to get church members to actually participate in the DPA. One of the best examples of this was Beulah Church who has used the DPA for over three years. They are a church of approximately 2,800 on a weekend, and in year 1 of using the tool, 310 people participated, in year 2 they had 165, and in year 3 they had 150. Even in the best year of participation, only 11 percent of their church completed the DPA. Church leaders shared the same challenge in each of the other interviews. One church leader suggested attempting to decrease the number of questions, so it is not as time consuming. Another mentioned moving it to a more intuitive and mobile friendly website to make it easier to access. This challenge needs to be considered when determining the usefulness of the DPA. An assessment tool can be research based and

biblically accurate, but if it is not easily accessed and garnering large participation from a church's congregation, then it is not useful.

In summary of these results and interviews, even with these caveats, church leaders found the DPA useful in their local church.

Goal 3: Evaluation of the
8 Biblical Signposts

The third goal was to evaluate if the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. To determine usefulness, the survey explored the usefulness of the 8 Biblical Signpost categories. The survey asked the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church." They were then given an open-ended question that allowed them to "share about what they found helpful or did not find helpful about the 8 Biblical Signposts metrics to measure spiritual growth." The survey then had eight questions asking the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the usefulness of each signpost. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 10 and 11 through 19 responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the questions about the 8 Biblical Signposts.

As documented in chapter 3, these signposts were created through careful research and testing, but once again, the categories are only as useful as the church finds them to be in accomplishing their goals. Goal 3 sought to learn from churches if these categories were useful in thinking about discipleship and measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. Table 3 shows the results of the 13 respondents answering a series of nine questions asked to accomplish this goal.

Table 3. Evaluation of biblical signposts

Survey Question	Mean
Q10. I found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.15
Q12. I found the first Biblical Signpost of Engaging the Bible helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.23
Q13. I found the second Biblical Signpost of Obeying God and Denying Self helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.23
Q14. I found the third Biblical Signpost of Serving God and Others helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.08
Q15. I found the fourth Biblical Signpost of Sharing Christ helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.23
Q16. I found the fifth Biblical Signpost of Exercising Faith helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	3.92
Q17. I found the sixth Biblical Signpost of Seeking God helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.08
Q18. I found the seventh Biblical Signpost of Building Relationships helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.23
Q19. I found the eighth Biblical Signpost of Living Unashamed helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.	4.00

For this goal, question 10 asked at a high level if the church "found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in their church." The mean for this question was 4.15 while the standard deviation was 0.90. As the results show, churches overall more than agreed that they found the 8 Biblical Signposts useful in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. When each church leader was asked to "share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help you measure spiritual growth and discipleship in your church," it revealed why they ranked the usefulness in the way that they did. The church leaders who strongly agreed or agreed found these signposts as biblical and practical categories to help them measure the spiritual maturity of their people.

One church who answered strongly agree, which was scored a 5, wrote, "I thought that the 8 Biblical Signposts provided a valuable range of metrics that helped

measure spiritual growth of an individual." Another wrote, "We have established the 8 Signposts as our guide for offering LifeCourses (Discipleship) on Wednesday night." One more wrote, "I found it helpful that they measured what is actually practiced, not just stated beliefs. I also found it helpful in identifying the 5 measures for spiritual maturity we will use as a church. Now I have a quantitative tool I can use to measure spiritual maturity church-wide (if we decide to use it that broadly)." So, when it came to the usefulness of the 8 Biblical Signposts, these churches used them to not only measure spiritual growth, but helped one church build out their discipleship curriculum on Wednesday nights and helped another church create measures and values on which their church would be structured.

Even with the usefulness of the signposts, this project identified areas to grow in usefulness. One church leader who answered a 3 out of 5 for agreeing with the usefulness of the signposts wrote, "They were clearly explained and biblical in nature. Nothing among them to strongly disagree with. At times they were a bit boilerplate and could've been more pointed and specific." The church leader who created classes based upon the signposts shared in their interview, "When creating the classes, it was difficult to determine what the class was supposed to be when it came to some of the signposts like Living Unashamed and Exercising Faith." The common theme arose that some Signposts were not as clear as the others, or as the church leader called it "boilerplate."

To help better explore this theme, this project evaluated each individual Signpost to learn more about how churches viewed its usefulness. When it came to the questions for each Signpost, four Signposts received the highest scores. The top four Signposts that received a mean score of 4.23 were Engaging the Bible, Obeying God and Denying Self, Sharing Christ, and Building Relationships. The signpost that received the lowest mean score of 3.92 was Exercising Faith. The Signpost with the second lowest mean score was Living Unashamed, with a score of 4.00, and it was the only Signpost to receive a score of 2.

All of the church leaders that participated in a video interview shared more about the two lowest signposts without being prompted. One church leader stated, "I feel the living unashamed could have different responses based upon where you live and the spiritual culture you live in." He currently lives in a more "churched" context where most people are familiar with the language of church, but he grew up in a less churched context and said the Living Unashamed Signpost would have been interpreted differently there. Another church leader who pastors in Canada said this along the same lines: "The language of the signposts are written in very 'churchy' language. In a highly secularized culture, the signposts would not be as accessible." Many of their staff voiced this concern too when discussing the assessment. One church leader stated the Signposts of Exercising Faith and Living Unashamed were "hard to create a class and growth plan for. It was difficult to understand exactly what these signposts were covering and measuring." A few church leaders suggested pairing down the Signposts to a lesser number. One suggested specifically going from 8 to 5.

With the results from these nine questions, one open-ended question, and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. In evaluation of each Signpost, it was determined the four most useful are Engaging the Bible, Obeying God and Denying Self, Sharing Christ, and Building Relationships, while the two least useful, or clear, are Exercising Faith and Living Unashamed.

Goal 4: Evaluation of the DPA Next Steps

The fourth goal was to evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores. To determine how useful the Next Steps that are offered are, the survey asked the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the suggested 'Next Steps' offered after the assessment helpful." After they answered, they were given an open-ended question

71

that allowed them to share about how they implemented the "Next Steps" in their church. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 20 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about Next Steps.

After an individual completes the DPA, they are given suggested Next Steps to help them grow in the 8 Biblical Signposts, especially those with the lowest scores. This goal sought to learn from churches' experiences if these next steps were clear for the individuals and the church, and if the next steps offered were useful to spiritual growth.

Table 4 shows the results of the 13 respondents' answers to the question asked to accomplish this goal. The mean for question 20 was the lowest mean across all questions asked about the different aspects of the DPA. After reviewing all the survey results and interview responses, I have come to the conclusion that most churches want the Next Steps customized for their context. The churches who found the DPA the most useful attached it to another initiative in their church as a Next Step. In all these cases, these customized Next Step initiatives were formulated on their own and not with the consultation of the Next Steps offered after the DPA was taken by their church. Because of this, even with the mean being 3.69, I would deem the Next Steps offered after the assessment as below average in usefulness.

Table 4. Clarity of next steps

Survey Question	Mean
Q20. I found the suggested "Next Steps" offered after the assessment helpful.	3.69

When asked to "share about how you implemented the next steps in your church," most church leaders revealed their churches either did not know the DPA offered Next Steps or they simply created their own Next Steps. One church leader wrote, "I made every individual to strategize on the concerned next steps. I also committed to individual

follow up with the two discipleship groups directly under me. For others I encouraged their group leaders to do the same." They created this next step on their own instead of using the one's provided in the tool.

Another church leader who scored the usefulness as a 4 answered, "We customized most of them to lead to specific next steps within our church like getting plugged into a small group, serving, becoming a member, etc." One other church leader wrote, "We customized the steps, adding some content, and deleting some, to tailor it to our language, cultural and ecclesial context and disciple-making strategy." These churches took their customized Next Steps for their people and added them into the tool instead of using the ones provided.

One church leader, who scored the usefulness as a 3, answered,

> This prompted our thought to offer groups and classes based on the assessment results–we categorized them so they were clear—and made it easy to take the next step to jump into that group—they were all offered at the same time, same night, children & student programs to help families succeed—and we promoted as a "Back to School" campaign and ran it in the early fall when kids were actually going back to school.

Another simply wrote, "we did not implement the next steps." One other leader stated, "I asked participants to develop measurable goals for growth based on their revealed next steps."

Only one church leader scored the Next Steps as a 2 when it came to usefulness, and they wrote,

> I already had in mind what I was going to do with this before I had them take it, so the "next steps" portion wasn't used by me. . . . I coordinated the release of the assessment to group leaders with a sermon series in February, a church-wide opportunity to "mug your neighbor," and a whiteboard exercise within small groups to write one lost person's name and pray for them as a group.

During the video call interviews, one church leader shared that the Next Steps are easy to miss and not easily findable. He suggested the Next Steps be pushed more in the design of the platform. Another church leader stated they wished there were more useful Next Steps for how churches can actually make changes based upon the

assessment results. They suggested compiling a Best Practices list for how churches have used results in making decisions in their church.

With the results from the one survey question, one open-ended question, and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining that the Next Steps offered by the DPA are below average in clarity and usefulness. From all of the research, this is the lowest scoring area and described as the least helpful by interviewed church leaders. Because of this, this portion of the DPA could be thought about again as an opportunity to share ideas and best practices for churches to create their own next steps and action plans based upon their church's DPA results. A place to start refreshing this portion could be by providing churches that are starting to use the DPA a list of ways other churches have used the DPA. Another opportunity would be to create a DPA consultant at Lifeway who could help churches interpret their results and formulate next steps and an action plan.

Goal 5: Areas of Improvement for the DPA

The fifth goal was to determine areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches. To determine areas of improvement, the survey asked the church leader an open-ended question: "What are 2-3 areas you think the Discipleship Pathway Assessment could be improved?" In addition to the survey data, video calls with churches allowed for further explanation of their ideas to improve the assessment based upon their church's experience. This goal was considered successful once all 44 churches had been contacted 3 times and been given the opportunity to respond to the survey and 13 churches completed the survey and 4 churches were interviewed over a video call.

Even though this project determined the DPA is useful for local churches to measure discipleship progress, there is still room for improvement. Goal 5 sought to learn from the experience of churches who have used the assessment and identify areas of improvement. With the results from the one-open ended survey question and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining areas of

improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches. Those areas of improvement are:

1. Updating the language of the biblical signposts to be clearer and more concrete while also not only being understood by a "familiar with church" audience.

    One church leader said,

    I think some of the categories were not quite as clear as the others—for example, I think the serving metric was super clear - relationships, clear, but things like living unashamed, seeking God—seemed a little harder to match groups/classes/next steps to, and really determine a more specific area of our lives where those categories show—like if you're not living unashamed, you're living ashamed . . . what do you do?

Another stated, "Exercising Faith and Living Faith were not clear to me. They seem to be the same thing, so what is the difference? I would suggest clarifying the categories with more concrete and clear language."

2. Moving the assessment tool to an easier to use platform that has less log in issues for church members and allows for mobile friendly access. This will increase the amount of church members who take the assessment and give churches more complete results.

    This improvement item came from feedback from a church leader who said, "There needs to be a more-mobile-friendly version or app, and we had a number of people experience login glitches and frustration." Another wrote, "The platform/design feels a little dated. Maybe hone the questions so there's less room for interpretation."

3. Updating the branding of the assessment and recreating the website. The branding and website currently highlight the research validity of the assessment without giving real examples of how churches can utilize the assessment in their context. This updated branding should share how other churches have used the assessment. The website could highlight the needs of churches found in this project of measuring discipleship strategy, establishing a baseline of spiritual health in church, tracking spiritual growth before and after discipleship process, identifying areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy, and finding areas of weakness in the discipleship process. One church could be highlighted that used the 8 Biblical Signposts and the results from their church's experience to create values and measures to come around as a church.

    One church leader said, "The assessment could use better branding and marketing. The packaging needs to be updated and more appealing to churches." This also draws from identifying the needs churches were looking to meet. The language on

the website does not currently reflect the specific needs churches shared they were
looking to meet.

4. Making the Next Steps more prominent on the follow up page so churches do not miss them. There should also be a Next Steps Best Practices created for how churches can utilize the DPA results in their church. In addition, Lifeway should highlight a Discipleship Expert on their team who would be available for consulting after the DPA is implemented in a church.

One church leader wrote,

The main improvement would be the Next Steps area. I doesn't not appear that it suggests any in the GROUP report section. Maybe I am wrong. It would be helpful to have thoughtful next steps leaders could take with their people to address the weaknesses and what to do with their areas of strength. Because much of that would depend on the local ministry context, you'd have to have experienced leaders serve as consultants to talk through applying these results.

Based upon the how the church leaders answered the "How can the DPA be improved" question, a list of recommendations was created. A "How to Implement in Your Church" section on the website that lays out a plan for a church to use the DPA would be helpful. This section should show case studies of churches who have used the DPA and share the benefits they found from their experience. A few of the suggested ways to implement in a church could be (1) establish a baseline of spiritual health in your church; (2) find areas of weakness in our discipleship process; (3) identify areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy; (4) garner interest in disciple making opportunities in your church; (5) assess a group of people's spiritual health before and after a discipleship course; and (6) assess prospective Group Leaders.

Conclusion

Each of the project goals were successfully met. First, the survey identified the top needs churches were looking to meet to by "identifying areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy," "establishing a baseline of spiritual health in church," and "finding areas of weakness in our discipleship process." Second, the survey results determined that the assessment is useful for local churches to measure discipleship progress with a mean of 3.92 out of 5 for church's answering if they found it useful, a mean of 4 out of 5 for

church's answering if the DPA helped them make informed decisions when it came to discipleship, and a mean of 8.23 out of 10 for church's answering if they would recommend the assessment to another church. Third, the survey results evaluated the 8 Biblical Signposts overall as useful with a mean score of 4.15. The survey results and video call interviews also determined that the four most useful Signposts are Engaging the Bible, Obeying God and Denying Self, Sharing Christ, and Building Relationships; while the two least useful, or clear, are Exercising Faith and Living Unashamed. Fourth, the survey results found the mean score for the usefulness of the Next Steps was 3.69, and in conjunction with the video interviews, determined that the Next Steps offered by the DPA are below average in clarity and usefulness. Lastly, the open-ended survey results and video interviews determined areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches.

CHAPTER 5

MINISTRY PROJECT EVALUATION

In this chapter, I will evaluate this ministry project, analyzing the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project. Next, I outline the changes I would make to the project. Finally, I detail my theological and personal reflections on the project and offer a conclusion for the project as a whole.

Evaluation of the Project's Purpose

The purpose of this project was to measure the usefulness of Lifeway's Discipleship Pathway Assessment in local churches. This purpose began with a desire to help churches better measure and evaluate if they are making disciples of those in their congregation and not just keeping them busy with church activity and thinking they are accomplishing the Great Commission. Through my work with Lifeway, our team interacts with churches of all shapes and sizes, and the ability to measure spiritual maturity is a problem I have seen with churches. Because of this overarching problem, I chose to better understand how churches are using the DPA and learn how it could be improved to be even more useful in their area of spiritual maturity.

The purpose of this project was consistent with what the Bible teaches about the calling of spiritual growth. A child of God does not remain the same once they are in Christ. As Paul tells in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!" First, Christians are called to go on to maturity (Heb 5:11-6:3). Second, each Christian is called to grow up into their salvation (1 Pet 2:1-3). Third, every Christian is being transformed from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). Finally, all Christians are growing into maturity with a stature measured by Christ's fullness (Eph 4:11-16).

Evaluation of the Project Goals

The project goals aligned with the project purpose and were effective for measuring the usefulness of Lifeway's DPA in local churches. The project included five goals: (1) identify the need that churches were looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment; (2) determine if the assessment is useful for local churches to measure discipleship progress in individuals and the whole congregation; (3) evaluate if the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people; (4) evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores and if they are useful; and (5) determine areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches.

Goal 1

The first goal was to identify the need that churches were looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment. This goal was measured by having church leaders who had utilized the DPA select all the needs they were looking to meet that applied to their church. The question allowed them to select from the following options and they could select as many as applied to them: measure their discipleship strategy, establish a baseline of spiritual health in church, track spiritual growth before and after their discipleship process, find areas of weakness in our discipleship process, and other. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 6 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about the needs they were looking to meet with the DPA. The results identified the top three needs as "identifying areas to focus on for overall discipleship strategy," "establishing a baseline of spiritual health in church," and "finding areas of weakness in our discipleship process."

Goal 2

The second goal was to determine if the assessment is useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation. This goal was

measured by having church leaders who had utilized the DPA respond to a few different questions in the survey. The first was to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment useful in measuring the spiritual maturity in my church." After they responded this, they were given an open-ended question that allowed them to "share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help them measure spiritual growth and discipleship in their church." One of the last questions of the survey was a Net Promoter Score question, which asked the church leader, "On a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend the Discipleship Pathway Assessment to another church?" This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 8, 22, and 23 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about the usefulness of the DPA. With the results from these three questions, the open-ended responses, and video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining that the DPA is useful for local churches to measure spiritual maturity in individuals and the whole congregation.

Goal 3

The third goal was to evaluate if the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. This goal was measured by having church leaders who had utilized the DPA respond to nine questions. First, the survey asked the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church." They were then given an open-ended question that allowed them to "share about what they found helpful or did not find helpful about the 8 Biblical Signposts metrics to measure spiritual growth." The survey then had 8 questions asking the church leader to rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the usefulness of each Signpost. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer questions 10 and 11 through 19 responded and all

those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the questions about the 8 Biblical Signposts.

With the results from these questions, one open-ended question, and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining the 8 Biblical Signposts are useful for local churches in measuring the spiritual maturity of their people. In the evaluation of each Signpost, it was determined that the four most useful are Engaging the Bible, Obeying God and Denying Self, Sharing Christ, and Building Relationships while the two least useful, or clear, are Exercising Faith and Living Unashamed.

Goal 4

The fourth goal was to evaluate if the assessment is clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores. This goal was measured by having church leaders who had utilized the DPA rank on a scale from 0-5 if they strongly disagreed or agreed with the statement, "I found the suggested "Next Steps" offered after the assessment helpful." After they answered this, they were given an open-ended question that allowed them to share about how you implemented the "Next Steps" in your church. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 20 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about Next Steps. With the results from the one survey question, one open-ended question, and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met and resulted in determining the Next Steps offered by the DPA are below average in clarity and usefulness. From all the research, this is the lowest scoring area and described as the least helpful by church leaders who were interviewed.

Goal 5

The fifth goal was to determine areas of improvement for the DPA so it is more useful in local churches. This goal was measured by having church leaders who had

utilized the DPA answer an open-ended question of, "What are 2-3 areas you think the Discipleship Pathway Assessment could be improved?" In addition to the survey data, video calls with churches allowed for further explanation of their ideas to improve the assessment based upon their church's experience. This goal was considered successfully met when all those given the opportunity to answer question 25 on the survey responded and all those given the opportunity to be interviewed responded to the question about ways to improve the DPA. With the results from the one open-ended survey question, and the video call interviews, this goal was successfully met by compiling a list of areas of improvement for the assessment so it is more useful in local churches.

Strengths of the Project

The first strength of this project was its emphasis on measuring spiritual growth from a biblical perspective. As chapter 2 documented, spiritual growth is a calling for every Christian, and churches should seek to help their people continue to mature in their faith. As chapter 3 documented, the DPA was built upon a biblical definition of spiritual maturity, and the functional characteristics of a disciple were researched extensively by a panel of experts through a biblical lens.

The second strength of this project was the ability to utilize Lifeway Research as a resource. From the very beginning of this project, they were excited that this research project was being done and were encouraging along the way. Even though it was extra work that they did not have to do, they spent time putting together the customer list for the DPA dating between 2019 and 2022. When I was doing research on the history of the assessment, they were able to point me to the resources that would answer my questions. Throughout the process, including creating the survey, they shared their expertise with me. They shared previous surveys they had sent to churches so I could learn from them as well as previously used Topic Guides to help steer the video interview calls. In all these ways, the resource of the Lifeway Research team was a strength to this project.

The third strength of this project is that Lifeway will be able to take this research and improve the DPA. As documented in chapter 3, Lifeway has spent a lot of time and effort creating this tool, so they want to see the DPA utilized by more churches and for it to be even more useful in measuring spiritual maturity. The Lifeway Research team is very interested in learning from this project and making the documented improvements.

The final strength of this project was the openness and willingness of church leaders to take the time to complete the survey and for a few of them to spend an hour on a Zoom call to discuss their experience with the DPA at their church. Thirteen church leaders chose to take 15-20 minutes to complete the 25-question survey, and four of those church leaders gave even more time out of their busy schedules to walk through a Topic Guide that was prepared beforehand over a Zoom video call. Two of the church leaders even shared documents with me detailing their discipleship strategy and the DPA results they put together in a report for their whole church. The fact that these church leaders gave me the opportunity to learn how they were actually using the DPA was incredibly valuable to the success of this project.

Weaknesses of the Project

The project had several weaknesses as well. One weakness was the number of churches who had taken the assessment over the last three years. When I decided to focus on the DPA for this project, I was expecting a much higher sample size to be able to reach out to and survey. With only 44 churches on the list, that presented a problem of having a small population size, which then led to an even smaller sample size made up of the number of responses to the survey than I would have liked. This weakness stems from the lack of promotion about the DPA in recent years. When the Transformational Discipleship Assessment originally launched in 2012, Lifeway put great marketing effort behind getting the word out, but over the last few years, the now Discipleship Pathway Assessment has mainly been discovered through word of mouth. This project probably

should have pulled more churches in from earlier time periods, such as 2015-2022, in order to send the survey to a larger population size.

The second weakness of the project was on the technology side of the DPA. To get the list of churches who had used the DPA, the Lifeway Research team had to manually pull that information, and it was time consuming. In addition, the backend software system did not do a good job of capturing personal contact information or church information when a church initially signed up and used the assessment. In a few cases, the system captured only the church name without an e-mail, but I was able to look up the church, go to their staff page, and still get in contact with someone. In other cases, the system only captured a personal name without an e-mail, so I was unable to reach out to those churches.

Another weakness of the project was the length of time elapsed between when some of the churches used the DPA and when they filled out the survey. A few churches responded that they would have liked to participate in the research but since it was three years ago, they did not feel confident in the answers they would be giving. The time gap also meant that a few of the contacts on the customer list had left that church and transitioned to a different church. This led to sending the survey to an e-mail address that was no longer active, and then having to contact someone else at the church to see if they were knowledgeable enough about their experience to fill out the survey or to share with me the initial contact's new e-mail address.

The greatest weakness of the project was the inability to get churches who had taken the DPA and were on the contact list to respond to the survey request and complete the survey. At the beginning, I knew this would be a challenge, so I incentivized participation by offering a Lifeway gift card to anyone who completed the survey. I shared about the gift card in the first e-mail, letting them know they would be given a gift as a thank you for their time, but in the end, after sending three e-mails over a three-week time period, only 13 of the 44 church leaders completed the survey. My original hope was to have 30 survey completions, which was probably an unrealistic goal. Even though it was

not the amount of churches I was hoping for, the 13 churches still gave a good view of the usefulness of the DPA and how churches are utilizing it, but as it is with all research, the more responses, the more complete of a picture the project would have given.

What I Would Do Differently

I believe this project could have been improved in three ways. One way to improve the project would have been to select a sample group of 25 churches who had not previously taken the DPA, share with them the purpose behind the assessment, and then allow them to use it in their context for no charge. This would have needed to be approved by Lifeway Research to give the tool away, but I believe they would have been open to this idea. This format for the research could have included a survey before the DPA was used and a survey after the DPA was used to see if utilizing the tool affected how the church leader viewed the discipleship process in their church and if the DPA was useful in measuring the spiritual maturity of their congregation.

Another way to improve the project would have been to ask the Lifeway Research team to spend more time tracking down and building out a more complete customer list. This would have been a time-consuming task that would have been a favor to me, but if given more time and more priority, better contact information could have been found. There is a chance this would not improve the project because at the end of the day each individual church leader had to choose to participate in the survey and they could have still chosen not to complete the survey. However, if the overall population size being contacted increased, then there would be a better chance of increasing the sample size as well.

The last way to improve the project would have been to extend the time period from three years all the way to the beginning of the DPA and the TDA usage. Even though churches may not be able to remember in detail all aspects of their experience, the survey could still gauge how useful the church found the tool to their disciple making strategy. This would also greatly increase the population that the survey would be sent out to and

likely increase the sample size from which to draw conclusions. If this was done, it would also be helpful to include a question asking the church leader why they did not use the DPA again after the first use.

Theological Reflections

Several theological reflections have come from my studies during this project. First, I began this project with a strong conviction that churches need to push past the easily identifiable metrics of church activity and move into the harder to measure metrics of the outputs of spiritual growth. Through my study of Scripture and through the study of the research conducted to create and refine the DPA over the years, I am convinced that spiritual growth is measurable by using the functional characteristics of a disciple that are now defined by the 8 Biblical Signposts. These metrics are a great resource to churches, but even if they choose not to use them, the conviction I started with has only grown stronger, and I believe churches should at least pursue some sort of measuring of the spiritual maturity of their people.

Second, the exercise of interpreting Scripture to support the purpose of this project was greatly beneficial in chapter 2. When I first wrote the chapter, I referenced commentaries that were more pastoral in nature, and after having my supervisor review the chapter, I learned about the need to reference technical commentaries in academic writing, especially at the doctoral level. Once I began interacting with more technical commentaries, I noticed how they delved more into the original languages of the passage and offered a more scholarly perspective. While reading and researching each of the passages in chapter 2, I was reminded how beneficial the original languages are when interpreting Scripture. My appreciation and love for God's Word was rekindled throughout the writing process of this project.

Last, discipleship and spiritual maturity are not always linear in measurement. One never arrives at the goal of being fully mature in a relationship with Christ on this side of heaven. While interacting with Scripture, I was reminded that discipleship is a

process, and a measurement tool like the DPA can help give an overall sense of where one is in their spiritual journey, or where the church is in their spiritual journey; there are always areas for improvement. In addition, one may measure high in the category of Obeying God and Denying Self in one year that they take the DPA, but then in a few years, by taking it again, could score poorly in this area. Growing in Christlikeness and maturing in faith is a journey and a process, and this caveat always needs to be held closely when trying to measure or grade these metrics.

Personal Reflections

This project caused me to reflect on my own relationship with Jesus and evaluate my personal discipleship journey. To research the tool and get as familiar as possible with it, I completed the DPA three different times. Each time I answered honestly, and I was always reminded I have room to grow in my spiritual maturity. When I took the DPA the first time, I remember scoring low in Sharing Christ. One of the questions asked, "In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian," I had to answer 1-2 times, while seeing the answer choices range from zero to 10+. This forced me to think about why that was, and over the next few weeks, I started praying for opportunities and was able to share the gospel with three people over the few months. As much as I was seeking to assess the usefulness of this tool, it in turn assessed my spiritual maturity, and for that I am grateful.

One other personal reflection was how this project taught me that I should make it a practice to reach out to other churches and learn from their experiences in order to grow in my own ministry. While speaking with churches who had utilized the DPA, I learned about so much more than just their experience with the DPA. I learned about how they handled strategic initiatives, how they thought about discipleship, how they made decisions, and even why they decided to use a tool like the DPA. This type of insight was invaluable, and I realized that it is accessible to me at any time. All I have to do is simply ask another church leader for their time and ask good questions.

Conclusion

This project succeeded in its stated purpose of measuring the usefulness of the Discipleship Pathway Assessment. This project also identified the needs churches were looking to meet with the DPA, measured the usefulness of the 8 Biblical Signposts, measured the usefulness of the Next Steps, and determined areas of improvement for the DPA so it is more useful in local churches. With churches given the task of making disciples, they must seek to answer how effectively they are accomplishing that task. Even with the areas of improvement identified, the DPA is a useful tool for churches to measure spiritual maturity.

APPENDIX 1

SURVEY SENT TO PURCHASERS OF THE
DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY ASSESSMENT

The following survey was sent to purchasers of the Discipleship Pathway

Assessment to measure the usefulness of the Discipleship Pathway Assessment in the

local church.

Hello and thank you for participating in this survey. Below are questions for a research project I am conducting for my Doctor of Educational Ministry in Executive Leadership degree at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. This survey has 25 questions and should take you between 10-15 minutes to complete.

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to help measure the usefulness of the Discipleship Pathway Assessment in your local church. This research is being conducted by Chandler Vannoy for purposes of a Doctor of Educational Ministry in Executive Leadership degree. In this research, you will describe your experience with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment. Any information you provide will be held strictly confidential, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.*

By your completion of this survey you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Demographic/Screening Questions:

    1.

Item	Response
Let's start with some basic information. What is your first and last name?	

    2.

Item	Response
What is your email address?	

    3.

Item	Response
What is your church name?	

4.

Item	Open Ended Response
What is/was your role at your church?	

5.

Item	Open Ended Response
What is the size of that church?	

Survey Items:

6.

Item	Measure discipleship strategy	Establish a baseline of spiritual health in church	Track spiritual growth before and after discipleship pathway	Identify areas to focus on for discipleship strategy	Find areas of weakness in our discipleship process	Other
What needs were you looking to meet with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment at your church? (*select all that apply*)						

7.

Item	Response
How many people participated in the DPA in your church?	

8.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment useful in measuring the spiritual maturity in my church.					

9.

Item	Response
Share about how the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helped or did not help you measure spiritual growth and discipleship in your church.	

10.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the 8 Biblical Signposts helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

11.

Item	Response
Share about what you found helpful or did not find helpful about the 8 Biblical Signposts metrics to measure spiritual growth.	

12.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the first Biblical Signpost of Engaging the Bible helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

13.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the second Biblical Signpost of Obeying God and Denying Self helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

14.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the third Biblical Signpost of Serving God and Others helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

15.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the fourth Biblical Signpost of Sharing Christ helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

16.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the fifth Biblical Signpost of Exercising Faith helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

17.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the sixth Biblical Signpost of Seeking God helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

18.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the seventh Biblical Signpost of Building Relationships helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

19.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the eighth Biblical Signpost of Living Unashamed helpful for identifying spiritual maturity in my church.					

20.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the suggested "Next Steps" offered after the assessment helpful.					

21.

Item	Response
Share about how you implemented the Next Steps in your church.	

22.

Item	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I found the Discipleship Pathway Assessment helpful to make informed decision as a church when it comes to discipleship.					

23.

Item	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
On a scale of 1-10, how likely would you be to recommend the Discipleship Pathway Assessment to another church?										

24.

Item	Response
Why would you recommend it? Or why would you not recommend it?	

25.

Item	Response
What are 2-3 areas you think the Discipleship Pathway Assessment could be improved?	

APPENDIX 2

THE DISCIPLESHIP PATHWAY ASSESSMENT

The following is the latest version of the Discipleship Pathway Assessment by
Lifeway Christian Resources.

Complete the Assessment

Please answer all questions on each page. For each question select the answer that best describes you. Answer in a way that reflects *where you currently are*, rather than where you would like to be, or where you think you should be.

Be honest with yourself! The goal isn't a perfect score. No one sees your individual results except you.

If time permits, complete the assessment in one uninterrupted session. It takes approximately 15 minutes. If you do have to stop, don't worry--your answers are saved after you complete each page.

When your survey is complete, your results will be available on the "My Results" tab above.

1. During difficult circumstances, I sometimes doubt that God loves me and will provide for my life.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

2. I feel comfortable that I can share my belief in Christ to someone else effectively.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

3. Throughout many of my activities I don't think about God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

4. I have several Christian friends who keep me accountable.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

5. A Christian must learn to deny himself/ herself in order to serve Christ.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

6. I make everything I own available for God to use.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

7. I am hesitant to let non-Christians know that I am a Christian.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

8. I desire to please and honor Jesus in all that I do.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

9. I have developed significant relationships with people at my church.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

10. When I sing at church, my thoughts are usually focused right on God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

11. If I go several days without reading the Bible I find myself unfulfilled.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

12. Each day I am overwhelmed by God's love for me.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

13. I am ready to live anywhere God wants me to live.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

14. I am ready to work in any job God wants me to have.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

15. Spiritual matters do not tend to come up as a normal part of my daily conversations with other Christians.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

16. I have committed my life to bringing glory to God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

17. The Bible has authority over every area of my life.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

18. When things happen in my life I can't explain, I typically doubt that God was involved.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

19. I try to avoid situations in which I might be tempted to think or do immoral things.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

20. I regularly use my gifts and talents to serve / help people in need who are not part of my church.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

21. While interacting with others on a normal, daily basis, I seek opportunities to speak out about Jesus Christ.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

22. I am intentionally putting my spiritual gift(s) to use serving God and others.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

23. Throughout the day I find myself thinking about biblical truths.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

24. When convinced of sin in my life, I readily confess it to God as sin.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

25. I am eager to talk about Jesus with people who are not like me in terms of ethnicity, income, or interests.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

26. If I go several days without reading the Bible I desperately miss the time with God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

27. I live as if I exist to praise and glorify God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

28. I intentionally spend time building friendships with non-Christians for the purpose of sharing Christ with them.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

29. I intentionally make time in my schedule to fellowship and interact with other believers.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

30. I sometimes doubt that God can change the lives of non-Christians I know.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

31. I intentionally try to be a peacemaker at church.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

32. I intentionally give up certain purchases so I can use that money for others.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

33. I regularly find myself meeting a need without being asked.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

34. I intentionally try to serve people outside my church who have tangible needs.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

35. I find myself praying at the spur-of-the-moment throughout the day.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

36. I intentionally spend time with other believers in order to help them grow in their faith.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

37. I don't think everyone I am acquainted with needs to know I am a follower of Christ.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

38. I consistently contribute financially to efforts and ministries that share Jesus Christ with non-Christians beyond my local church each month.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

39. Many people who know me are not aware that I am a Christian.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

40. I am generally a different person in public than I am in private.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

41. I intentionally try to get to know new people I meet at church.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

42. When I have the opportunity to serve someone I also try to get to know them better.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

43. When I realize my attitude does not please God, I take steps to try and fix it.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

44. I openly share about difficulties I am experiencing when I talk with Christian friends.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

45. Many aspects of who I am have nothing to do with God.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

46. I must have God's help to say no to worldly desires.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

47. I consistently contribute financially to my local church each month.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

48. God is just and sin has to be punished.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

49. If a person is sincerely seeking God, he / she can obtain eternal life through religions other than Christianity.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

50. The Holy Spirit is at work in every believer teaching, convicting of sin, and guiding.

○ Strongly Agree
○ Somewhat Agree
○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
○ Somewhat Disagree
○ Strongly Disagree

51. Jesus Christ's death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

52. Jesus was a sinner just like us.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

53. Jesus died on the cross and was physically resurrected from the dead.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

54. The fruit of the Spirit (love, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, etc.) is evidence of a genuine relationship with God.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

55. It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

56. The Bible is the written Word of God and is totally accurate in all that it teaches.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

57. Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their Savior receive God's free gift of eternal salvation.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

58. The God of the Bible is no different from the gods or spiritual beings depicted by world religions such as Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

59. Christ will return a second time to gather believers to Himself.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

60. There is one true God in three persons: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

- ○ Strongly Agree
- ○ Somewhat Agree
- ○ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ○ Somewhat Disagree
- ○ Strongly Disagree

61. Have you been baptized?

○ Yes
○ No

62. Have you discovered what spiritual gift(s) the Holy Spirit has given you?

○ Yes
○ No

63. About how often, if at all, do you personally read the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

64. About how often, if at all, do you personally study the Bible (more in-depth than just reading it)? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

65. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for prayer of any kind? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

66. About how often, if at all, do you personally set aside time for private worship, praise, or thanksgiving to God? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

67. About how often, if at all, do you personally listen to or read teaching about the Bible? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

68. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray in a group with other Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

69. About how often, if at all, do you personally confess your sins and wrongdoings to God and ask for forgiveness? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

70. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for the spiritual status of people you know who are not professing Christians? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

103

71. About how often, if at all, do you personally pray for opportunities to tell others about Jesus? Do not include any times that are part of a church worship service.

○ Every day
○ A few times a week
○ Once a week
○ A few times a month
○ Once a month
○ Rarely/Never

72. In a typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend a worship service at your church?

○ 4 or more
○ 3
○ 2
○ 1
○ Zero

73. In a typical month, about how many times (if any) do you attend small classes or groups for adults at church such as Sunday school, Bible study, small groups, Adult Bible Fellowships, etc?

○ 4 or more
○ 3
○ 2
○ 1
○ Zero

74. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, shared with someone how to become a Christian?

○ 10 or more times
○ 6-9 times
○ 3-5 times
○ 1-2 times
○ Zero

75. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, served someone who you knew could not repay you.

○ 10 or more times
○ 6-9 times
○ 3-5 times
○ 1-2 times
○ Zero

76. In the past six months, about how many times have you, personally, invited an unchurched person to attend a church service or some other program at your church?

○ 10 or more times
○ 6-9 times
○ 3-5 times
○ 1-2 times
○ Zero

77. Are you currently involved in ministries or projects that serve people in the community not affiliated with your church?

○ Yes
○ No

78. Do you currently have regular responsibilities at your church (for example: greeter, teacher, musician, etc.)?

○ Yes
○ No

APPENDIX 3

TRANSFORMATIONAL DISCIPLESHIP
EXPERT PANEL LIST

The following list of experts was consulted in developing the Transformational

Discipleship Assessment.

*Qualitative interviews included:

Jerry Acosta- evangelism coordinator with the Venezuelan National Baptist Convention

Francisco Aular- pastor in Canada and founder of the Latin American Baptist Discipleship Movement

Henry Blackaby- president of Blackaby Ministries and author of Experiencing God

Luis "Gary" Cesar- senior pastor of First Baptist Church Satelite

Marigene Chamberlain- professor at Samford University and former member of General Board of Discipleship, The United Methodist Church

Neil Cole- founder and director of Church Multiplication Associates

Robert Coleman- author of Master Plan of Discipleship

Hector Hugo Arias Contreras- leader at the Chilean Baptist Convention

Earl Creps-professor of leadership and spiritual renewal at Assemblies of God Theological Seminary and author of Off-Road Disciplines

Edgard Castano Diaz- senior pastor of Central Baptist Church, Bogota, Columbia, and former president of the Colombian Evangelical Council

Jon Ferguson- teaching pastor, Community Christian Church

Angel Mena Garcia- pastor and denominational leader with the Assemblies of God in Panama

Alton Garrision- assistant general superintendent, Assemblies of God

Billie Hanks- founder of Operation Multiplication

Alan Hirsch- founder of Forge

T. W. Hunt- author of The Mind of Christ and The Doctrine of Prayer

Mary Kassian- professor at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of In My Father's House

Larry Lee- executive secretary of Youth and Leadership Development of National Evangelical Christian Fellowship Malaysia

Aubrey Malphurs- founder of The Malphurs Group, professor at Dallas Theological Seminary, and author of Advanced Strategic Planning and Strategic Disciple Making

Robertson McQuilkin- president emeritus of Columbia International University

Jaime Riquelme Miranda- pastor and leader of the Chilean Ministers Alliance

Alexander Montero- director of Venezuelan National Baptist Convention

Steve Murrell- founding pastor of Victory Fellowship, Manila

Waldemar Morales Roca- director of Guatemala Baptist Seminary

Leonard Sweet- professor at Drew University and author of The Gospel According to Starbucks

Natan Velazquez- pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, Caracas, Venezuela

Victor Villanueva- leader at the Mexico National Baptist Convention and professor at Yucatan Autonomous University

Don Whitney- professor of biblical spirituality at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and author of Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life

APPENDIX 4

TOPIC GUIDE FOR VIDEO CALL INTERVIEWS

The following topic guide was used during the video call interviews with purchasers of the DPA.

1. Why did you purchase the Discipleship Pathway Assessment?
    a. What need were you looking to meet with the assessment?
    b. Did it accomplish that goal?

2. Can you tell me about your experience with the Discipleship Pathway Assessment at your church?
    a. What did you like?
    b. What did you not like?
    c. What were you hoping for?
    d. How was it getting your people to actually take the assessment?

3. Did you feel that the measurement and scoring helped you understand the spiritual health and maturity of your church?
    a. Did it help you measure the spiritual maturity and discipleship of your church?
    b. Were the measurements easy to understand?
    c. How do you use measurement, metrics, and data in your ministry?

4. Once the assessment was completed by the church, what was the conversation?
    a. What did you do in light of the results? (Did the measurement lead to action?)
    b. Where did you see the fruit of the assessment?
    c. Was the assessment clear about next steps to grow in the areas with lower scores?

5. Was there something that you expected to see that didn't happen?

6. Where did the assessment fall short?

7. What would you recommend to improve or refine the assessment and implementation in the Local Church?

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ABSTRACT

MEASURING THE USEFULNESS OF THE DISCIPLESHIP
PATHWAY ASSESSMENT IN THE LOCAL CHURCH

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This ministry project was designed to measure the usefulness of Lifeway's Discipleship Pathway Assessment in local churches. The chapters show why there is a need for an assessment tool that measures spiritual growth while also compiling the research gathered to measure the usefulness of the DPA. Chapter 1 explains the context, rationale, purpose, goals, and methodology of the project. Chapter 2 focuses on the biblical calling of a church to grow their people spiritually by examining Hebrews 5:11-6:3, 1 Peter 2:1-3, 2 Corinthians 3:18, and Ephesians 4:11-16. Chapter 3 provides a brief history of how the DPA came to be along with theoretical support from other resources affirming the 8 Biblical Signposts as useful. Chapter 4 details the planning, preparation, and implementation of the ministry project while also analyzing the results of the project. Chapter 5 presents an assessment of the purpose, goals, strengths, and weaknesses of the project, and concludes with suggested changes, and theological and personal reflections.

VITA

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