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Doctor of Ministry Final Portfolio
Addressing the Lack of Explosive Growth at The Crossing Church

Submitted to Dr. Gregory Faulls
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the Doctor of Ministry Degree

Department of Christian Leadership and Church Ministries

by

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Abbreviations

DMIN	<i>Doctor of Ministry</i>
URL	<i>Uniform Resource Locator</i>
LUSOD	<i>Liberty University School of Divinity</i>

CHAPTER 1: MINISTRY PROBLEM AND JUSTIFICATION OF MICRO PROJECTS

Introduction

The student chose the discipleship cognate and these Micro Projects to satisfy his curiosity about whether people have been able to describe a mature disciple and then develop proven methods to create an effective disciple-making ministry.

It has been a lifetime passion of the student to develop effective solutions to the problems presented. The student has been a member of Southern Baptist churches for most of his life and served as a deacon before being called into ministry as a pastor. He has heard discipleship described and preached about many times. However, the student has observed that there is not agreement on what defines a mature believer, and there do not appear to be universally agreed-upon metrics that measure whether a person is a “mature believer.”

Another observation of the student is that over decades, he has witnessed a decline in the frequency of attendance of many church members, moving from gathering whenever the church doors were open to coming only once per month. The student theorizes that this indicates a lack of interest in what the church is offering. If people choose to come to church based upon their self-interest, then it would appear their devotion to God is waning. For instance, a disciple could be expected to gather with the body in order to serve others.

This Portfolio Project will present the student’s research on what people in the local church believe about being a disciple and how culture has changed the definition of a disciple. The student will address that information in a series of videos presented via a YouTube channel and build and publish a website that provides video and written content.

In this chapter, the student provides the ministry context of the local church he serves, the ministry problem he is addressing, and an explanation and justification of the Micro Projects chosen for this Portfolio Project.

Ministry Context

The student serves a church called The Crossing Church located in Tampa, Florida, that is defined as a mega-church, having more than two thousand attendees each weekend. This church operates on three physical campuses as well as an online campus. The church is the result of two separate churches merging seventeen years ago. The two original churches were Southern Baptist churches, and over time, church leadership moved toward a Spirit-filled theology. This theology mainly entails encouraging believers to engage with the Holy Spirit and pursue a relationship with Him as the third person of the Trinity. The leadership explains that this engagement should always align with what is presented in Scripture.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the church had plateaued in growth at the primary campus. A new building was constructed for the second campus, which had the effect of relaunching that campus in the community where it was located. Moderate growth occurred, and the church leadership launched a third campus in a neighboring city. That campus had a strong start of around three hundred people. Then, the pandemic struck. The church elected to shut down weekend services for five months at all campuses. Thankfully, the church had a solid online streaming ministry already in place, and leadership pivoted to enhance that platform and add additional daily content. The online campus had averaged thirty-five hundred viewers each weekend before the pandemic and grew to an average of over six thousand viewers. Once the governing officials approved the gathering of individuals in churches, the church reopened its physical campuses with a reduced schedule. Instead of four services at the largest campus, the

church started with a 10:30 am service on Sunday and later opened a 6:00 pm service on Saturday. The other two campuses provided only a 10:30 am Sunday service. At present, physical weekend attendance is about sixty percent of pre-pandemic numbers, and staff has observed that the majority of these individuals are new attenders.

This dynamic environment highlights the critical need that the church has to develop mature disciple-making disciples. It is difficult for church leaders to identify disciples who strategically invest in others, even amongst church staff. As the student witnesses a significant portion of the church body choosing to forego gathering, the need to create a united, passionate, Great Commission-focused group of believers seems apparent. The church will see new believers come to know the Lord and needs a cadre of disciples ready to aid these individuals in their journey to maturity, ultimately becoming disciple-makers as well.

Ministry Problem

This portfolio of Micro Projects seeks to resolve the problem that the multi-site mega-church where the student serves does not exhibit the exponential growth that the early church experienced. The student believes that the root cause of this deficient growth is a lack of spiritual maturity among the believers and their lack of awareness of how to progress toward the spiritual maturity of a disciple. The church corporately needs to develop a method of consistently equipping new believers to become competent and prolific disciple-making disciples. This proposed solution would also address the evangelism problem that most churches experience, as these disciples would reach those closest to them and minister to them as trusted friends and family. As their influence transforms these individuals to become disciples, the circle of influence would expand, and over time, our region would be significantly reached for Christ.

The student is part of the leadership at this church and knows that leadership has the desire to reach the community, aid people in becoming followers of Jesus Christ, and then disciple them towards the maturity needed to become disciple-makers. The church leadership has attempted several different strategies to build disciples but has not yet found one that has proven effective at developing mature disciples. Even in the best of times, the church seems to maintain its size, losing as many individuals as are gained. The student desires to discover what it will take to change that dynamic and empower God's people to pursue Him and serve Him well.

Explanation and Justification of Micro Projects

The design of the portfolio project requires a doctoral student to design and implement four Micro Projects that investigate the ministry problem. Each Micro Project considers a different ministry question and is expected to offer potential solutions. The student prepared for the portfolio project by studying the discipleship cognate and using that area of study as the focus of the Micro Projects. The student used the Micro Projects' research to develop and offer solutions to help a believer become more effective in making disciples.

These four Micro Projects were selected so that the work of each would contribute to the overall ministry problem solution. The information gathered in the first two projects informed and refined the ministry problem's solution that was presented in the third and fourth Micro Projects.

Interviews and Analysis Micro Project

The Interviews and Analysis Micro Project required the student to interview a group of individuals to investigate the ministry problem. The student sought to identify and include mature believers and others that would be identified as developing disciples. The interviewees

were selected from the staff of the student's church, as well as one non-staff elder and his wife. These interviewees were selected as they are the church's key leaders and provide guidance and leadership to the congregation. The interviews and analysis sought to determine if these leaders had clarity about the need for devotion to God, the importance of biblical community, and the mission presented by Jesus to His disciples. The student hypothesized that many of the pastors and senior leaders lacked strong convictions about the importance of these concepts and had not internalized them as foundational to their lives. The work done in this Micro Project provides relevant data to show how culture has impacted modern-day believers and points out the need for awareness and a process of change to be developed.

These individuals were asked questions regarding their understanding of discipleship and what qualities a disciple should be expected to demonstrate. The questions developed by the student inquired about how they came to be believers and how they experienced spiritual growth. The student asked the interviewees to express their opinion on the current state of discipleship in the local church and their thoughts about changes that might be made.

The Micro Project addressed the biblical precedence for the proposed ministry problem's solution. The project considered how the interviewees perceive the direction given in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-5),¹ the Great Commandment and the New Commandment given in Matt 22:36-40, and the Great Commission given in Matt 28:28-30. These verses provide the foundational imperatives that set an individual's path toward becoming a disciple. In addition, other questions considered John 15:5, where Jesus indicated that no spiritual work can occur apart from Him, as well as Jesus' repeated calls for unity within the body of Christ. Other questions yielded

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

information about how the interviewees perceived the Holy Spirit's role to direct, empower, and support them as they seek to minister to others.

The student has been a believer since the age of seven. The student has consistently witnessed God being active in the student's life as well as calling him specifically to serve His people. The student has experience teaching virtually every age group within the context of the traditional model "Sunday School" and in attractional model "home groups." Those experiences have led the student to believe that churches are not generally aware of how to build biblical community or how to develop disciples. There is an over-emphasis on knowledge transfer rather than teaching people how to activate God's Word in their lives. The student worked as a turnaround specialist in the corporate world and has a talent and passion for fixing broken organizations. In the student's opinion, the church appears to be somewhat broken but is worthy of all his attention and effort to help restore it back to the way it operated during its time of exponential growth.

Articles Critique Micro Project

The Articles Critique Micro Project investigated which conditions are leading to the lack of vitality in disciple-making in the American churches, as reported by academic writers. The student considers the article writers' thoughts about causes for current conditions and suggestions for modifications to improve disciple-making efforts. The Micro Project contributes an academic voice to the overall solution to the ministry problem that is being addressed.

This Micro Project aligns well with the discipleship cognate. It allows the student to consider how culture has changed in the most recent generations and what impact those changes will have upon creating disciples of Jesus.

The student researched articles that describe how people view devotion to God, as well as articles that explain how modern believers and non-believers are developing their worldviews. Other articles were selected that explained how the concept of biblical family was displayed in churches. The final area of investigation was to read articles that addressed the state of unity among believers and how church leaders have sought to develop a stronger bond.

YouTube Channel Micro Project

The student created a YouTube channel to communicate the ministry problem that churches are not exhibiting explosive growth of disciples and suggestions for how believers can change our discipling paradigms to return to the early church models. This project utilized the work that was done in the first two Micro Projects for content and developed the platform to bring people to the website/ministry plan to be created in the last Micro Project.

This Micro Project aligns well with the discipleship cognate. It allows the student to reflect upon church leaders' current thoughts and practices as they attempt to develop disciples and consider how the current discipleship models are transforming from previous models. This project proved exciting for the student, as it involved creating a method to connect to a broader audience to transmit what has been learned in prior Micro Projects and convey workable solutions to the issue.

This Micro Project had a focus on Personal Engagement. The student presented videos that describe the current state of the church's disciple-making effectiveness and explain how God gives direction to disciples in the Shema (Deut 6:4-5), the Great Commandment and the New Commandment given in Matt 22:36-40, and the Great Commission given in Matt 28:28-30. The videos created speak of a need to establish devotion, unity with other believers, and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to become effective disciples.

In recent years, the student has been a student who utilized online courses to pursue higher education degrees, and also serves as the president of a Bible college which offers its courses online. This has required the student to create video content weekly and deliver coursework digitally to both his professors and his students. The student has a love of the process of learning and engaging with others to share the truth that God provides to us in His Word.

A YouTube channel is an exciting project to create and to utilize as a ministry tool. This platform allows the student to convey his thoughts by his voice rather than in a written form. This form of communication can communicate the student's excitement for the topic as well as his concern for the viewer. The ultimate plan is to continue adding video content to the YouTube channel to inform and assist viewers in developing themselves as disciples. The prior two Micro Projects helped inform the student as he developed content for the videos uploaded onto the YouTube channel. The continued development of the YouTube channel will aid the student as he works to communicate discipleship concepts to the believers in the church where he serves.

Website Micro Project

In the fourth Micro Project, the student chose a Website Micro Project. The student created a website designed to help others utilize what was learned in prior projects and aid the viewers to implement similar solutions to ministry problems they are experiencing. A website is a fantastic way to convey information to others in a manner that is not time- or location-restricted. It also allows a great deal of knowledge and data to be shared very easily. The format of the webpage allows information to be supported with graphics, photos, and videos to successfully convey the messages and information analysis that the creator wishes to share.

The student needed to develop the skills to create a well-designed webpage during this Micro Project. In addition, the student invested time learning how to optimize the structure of the

content so that the major search engines that people utilize would bring that website up in priority on their search results. Prior Micro Projects researched the church's condition, analyzed articles that explained the current cultural conditions that believers are experiencing, and created a YouTube channel of teaching videos aimed at helping the current-day church imitate the early church practices.

The student has a life-long love of problem-solving and spends his idle time contemplating how to address the various issues that have his attention. The student has already applied his operational skills and his previously-mentioned talent and passion for fixing organizations to his local church. The church is now very stable, which provides an excellent foundation to operate from. While the active process of improving the operations of a large church is well-suited to his giftings, merely maintaining such operations provides little interest for the student. The student desires to see the local church be an outpost that continually expands in impact. The student's wish is for God's people to experience the abundant life He has for them as they serve others in His name. The student is not satisfied with the local church being large but not growing. The student's studies have clarified that there are clear instructions in Scripture that describe what Christian maturity involves, yet has not observed many individuals living lives that exemplify what Scripture encourages us to do. This project will provide clarity for the student to share the need to embrace devotion, biblical family, and Spirit-led action to minister to others.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the student provided the ministry context of the local church he serves, the ministry problem he is addressing, and an explanation and justification of the Micro Projects that were chosen for this Portfolio Project.

The student has a deep love for God and His children. The problems that are identified in this Portfolio Project are not insurmountable. To set the stage for problem definition, the interviews and analysis micro-project allowed the student to gather data that shows that existing leadership lacks clarity on the topics of devotion, biblical family, and the disciple-making imperative given in the Great Commission. The articles critique Micro Project provided more data to show how cultural influences have impacted believers and prevented them from developing as disciple-makers. The YouTube channel Micro Project provides a communication platform for the student to engage those who are interested in enhancing their disciple-making skills. The Website Micro Project provides another platform for communication and is enhanced by the videos hosted on the YouTube channel. This multi-layered approach provides several tools for the student to use as he seeks to assist the believers at The Crossing Church to develop into active and prolific disciple-makers. Their development will enable the church to realize the explosive growth of the Early Church as disciples pursue the Great Commission, united as a biblical family that is solely devoted to God.

CHAPTER 2: MICRO PROJECT ONE

Introduction

The first Micro-Project this student conducted to address the ministry problem was an Interviews and Analysis Micro Project. This Micro Project sought to investigate the spiritual condition and understanding of key leaders at The Crossing Church. The interviews with the Church's spiritual leaders proved informative, as well as aiding the development of a "testing" methodology that can be used by others who wish to ascertain the beliefs of any group regarding what it means to be a disciple. This Micro Project will be the basis for further defining the ministry problem and proposing solutions to address those conditions in subsequent Micro Projects.

Biblical Precedence

The student proposes that three issues seem to limit the growth of new believers. Those three issues can be described as a lack of devotion, a lack of unity, and a lack of presence. The lack of devotion is identified when one considers the "*Shema*" in Deut 6:1-9, referenced by the Great Commandment in Matt 22:36-40. Jesus pointed out to the Pharisees that a believer's thoughts and actions should focus on loving God. In a world of constant distraction, most people cannot bring sufficient focus to their relationship with God. Even believers who have professed to be Christ-followers for many years do not exhibit the devotion that Deut 6:1-9 describes. Indeed, the answer is not rituals that demonstrate adherence to a doctrine. The challenge is for mature believers to establish with their attitudes and lives that they are devoted to God and love the things He loves. Relationship with God is what empowers disciples, and their actions reflect their devotion. As one considers this issue, it is essential to understand that this is not about

working harder to be good. A disciple should “be” in a relationship with God in a real way. A disciple should be able to “hear” God and respond to Him with thanksgiving, obedient actions, and love. Sadly, this has become unusual within the body of Christ. As a disciple becomes fully devoted, they hunger for time with God and are not easily distracted from the voice of God speaking to them.

The lack of unity has been caused by a cultural shift that has led to the family’s disintegration. It is unusual to find couples who have remained in marriage relationships for greater than thirty years. As marriages break apart, the hurt and consequences impact all of the immediate and extended members of the families and their friends. A current trend is that younger generations are delaying marriage. This student believes that they are responding to a fear of marriage, seeing it as a place where hurt will come to them rather than blessing.

Another common situation is that most American families have been taught by prior generations that children should leave home at age eighteen. At that point, they are expected to establish their own homes and pursue their dreams without the boundaries previously provided and enforced by their parents. This presumption has the unfortunate consequence of the young person being cast adrift into society, equipped with the basic foundation of their parents’ instruction, but without ongoing guidance and familial support that can only come from those who are more mature. In many cases, the young person has not received enough training and is ill-equipped to stand alone, resulting in hardships that can be emotionally damaging and create physical difficulties. This rigor is not something that builds familial loyalty and closeness but instead leads people to become individualistic and hardened.

As these individuals become part of the Church, they bring this individualistic nature with them. They have a hard time embracing the concept of what it means to be a member of the

“family of God” because they do not have experience with being devoted to family or having a family that is devoted to them. Certainly, this discourse is painting an extreme picture of the lack of unity within families. Still, it is apparent that family unity is on the decline in America, and this does have an impact on churches and the unity within the family of God.

Hellerman describes how the early Church’s family structure was key to providing a base from which the Church could proliferate. In addition, Hellerman explained that the Apostle Paul’s teaching on the concept of “spiritual family” could be organized into four categories: affective solidarity, family unity, material solidarity, and family loyalty.² Affective solidarity is described as the societal norm taught to people regarding how important certain relationships should be in their lives. Family unity describes how siblings should interact with each other. Material solidarity is explained as the willingness to provide resources to each other generously and supportively. Finally, family loyalty was promoted by Paul as he encouraged believers to shift their traditional loyalties to their spiritual family and be committed to this new family in all matters. Modern churches will have to teach individuals what it means to live as a “family” according to the biblical model, as it is not the norm in American culture.

The lack of presence issue results from the lack of impact that salvation has upon many contemporary believers. Dietrich Bonhoeffer brought forward the idea that many in the Church had adopted an attitude he described as “cheap grace.”³ He explained that people acted as if they knew they would be forgiven for their actions, so they did not attempt to resist sin. Bonhoeffer argued that God would not be mocked in this way, and the people were deluded to believe they

² Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family* (B&H Publishing Group, 2009), Kindle Edition, p. 105.

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* DBW Vol 4 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works), (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, Location 1102.

were living as ones who had been regenerated by the Holy Spirit.⁴ Bonhoeffer wished for believers to be motivated to devote their lives to Jesus because of the tremendous gift of grace that has been given to them. He felt that one who understood that gift of grace would be sure of their salvation and would be able to live free in the world while knowing they were citizens of heaven.⁵

In the same vein of logic, Jesus reminded believers that He was their source of power. Jesus stated in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” This direct statement explains why believers can find their ministries struggling to achieve the desired results. A close relationship with God provides access to the power of the Holy Spirit, who indwells believers. A believer should be transformed into a new creation through regeneration and operate with the confidence of an adopted heir in God’s family. This concept needs to be implanted into new believers and nurtured by those mature believers who guide them in their development into disciples.

A solution to these issues will result in an increase in the number of mature disciples. The proposed solution would also address the evangelism problem that most churches experience. These disciples would reach those closest to them and minister to them as trusted friends and family. As their influence transforms these individuals to become disciples, the circle of influence would expand, and, over time, our region would be significantly reached for Christ.

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* DBW Vol 4 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works), (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, Location 1250.

⁵ Ibid., Location 1243.

Peer Review

The original scope envisioned by the student sought to include thirty (30) interviewees in order to have a valid statistical sample of the population of ministry staff and high-level volunteer leaders at the Church. Given the time restraints, this scope had to be drastically reduced to nine (9) participants.

Dr. James Zabloski provided two key insights. The first was that the interviews themselves should be limited to sixty (60) minutes. His experience showed that “people shut down long before then.”⁶ The second thought he shared was that “most people will accommodate a second short interview.”⁷ It is the hope of the student to continue this study and conduct additional follow-up interviews at a later date. These insights will be utilized as the new project is developed.

As this project was subjected to a peer review to justify the validity of the project, Jim Battle proposed several excellent questions. Battle proposed that it would be helpful to “communicate the entire context behind your project.”⁸ In future work, answering this question would certainly help define what efficacy exists in current discipleship practices. This project aimed to validate that a problem exists that is affecting the growth of the Church. Battle’s question resonates with this student and is worthy of further development.

⁶ James Zabloski, “Discussion Board Post – Collaborating and Advising Peer Review”, Liberty University, November 19, 2020.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Jim Battle, “Discussion Board Post – A Defensible Micro Project Peer Review”, Liberty University, October 29, 2020

Another question Battle proposed was, “Are your planned questions too narrow and directive?”⁹ This question was certainly a concern for the student. The project was undoubtedly open to discovering that the interviewees were very aware of the need for a close relationship with God, the need for unity among believers as the family of God, and the mission that has been given to all believers to reach the lost and teach them to become disciples. The questions were developed for an audience of paid ministerial staff and high-level volunteer leaders.

Based upon that understanding of the audience, the student did rely upon the interviewees’ current status as “active” in ministry to develop questions that covered topics that were somewhat narrow in scope. In addition, the student assumed this audience could read a passage of Scripture and relate the concepts spoken of in the passage to other guidance provided elsewhere in Scripture. The questions were directive, and the intent behind the questions should be readily perceived by those reading the Scripture. The response by many of the interviewees indicates that they were not familiar with these Scriptures and the concepts that relate to those passages. Battle’s question illustrates that the student will always need to consider refining the questions if the audience were to change.

Battle encouraged analyzing the data by stratifying the data into three categories: mature believers, developing believers, and new believers.¹⁰ This project did not allow sufficient time for this stratification, but the concept should be incorporated in the future expansion of the project. This student concluded that the existing questions were not appropriate for a new believer and would be frustrating for them to attempt to answer. Since the audience was

⁹ Jim Battle, “Discussion Board Post – A Defensible Micro Project Peer Review”, Liberty University, October 29, 2020

¹⁰ Ibid.

comprised of individuals already working in ministry, the student believed that there would be no new believers in the sample of interviewees.

Evaluation of the Project

The student developed twenty-seven (27) questions to pose to a group of nine (9) interviewees. The interviewees were selected from church ministry staff, both pastors and ministry assistants, as well as a non-staff elder of the church and his wife. These interviews were meant to be conversational in their flow. The student attempted to limit giving any affirmations to answers, either verbal or non-verbal. The interviewees understood the need for this lack of response and engaged well with the questioning process. As a group, they admitted that they were slightly apprehensive about being questioned about biblical topics by a senior-level executive pastor.

These questions sought to ascertain if the staff has an awareness of key Scripture passages that describe how individuals should interact with God and how they should interact with each other as disciples. The questions were designed to look into three significant beliefs and assess how the pool of ministers and high-level leaders describe their understanding of those concepts. The first belief to investigate was how they would define a disciple and what attributes they believe a disciple will exhibit. The second group of questions attempts to get the interviewee to describe their understanding of what it means to be a member of the “family of God.” The third set of questions attempts to gauge their perception of how well The Crossing Church is helping people become disciples and impact the community as an active group of disciples. The fourth set of questions deals with whether the interviewees are being discipled themselves.

With the permission of the interviewees, each interview was recorded. After the interviews were completed, the student converted the audio recordings of the interviews into a text form and analyzed the results. The term “omitted” was used on any questions where the interviewer did not ask that question of the interviewee. Most of these instances were simple oversights.

Demographic Information

The first two (2) questions sought to gather demographic information. The interviewees ranged in ages from twenty-one (21) to sixty-two (62). All confessed to being believers in Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives. Most of the interviewees had accepted Jesus as Lord in their early twenties or thirties. These individuals serve in ministry-related positions where they routinely minister to others by meeting others’ needs or providing biblical counsel and teaching. Five of these individuals serve as pastors, one as an elder of the church, one as an elder’s spouse, one as a key support ministry leader, and two as ministry interns at the Church.

Personal Discipleship Experience

When asked about the manner in which they were discipled, most of the group described that a pastor had helped them by discipling them. These interactions did not appear to be ongoing or long-term for most of the respondents. Two of the group shared that their parent discipled them, and one shared that no one had discipled them, but they learned from group activities. In general, they expressed that they had not engaged in an ongoing discipleship process.

Devotion and The Great Commandment

Questions four and five sought to explore whether these individuals understood the idea that the most important thing for a believer to understand was that they should be whole-

heartedly devoted to God. The questions asked them to describe what Deut 6:1-9 and Matt 22:36-38 mean to believers. Three of the interviewees felt that Deut 6:1-9 was encouraging them to love God and have a relationship with Him. Six of the interviewees described the passage as defining rules, seeking performance, requiring obedience, or encouraging them to be a learner. Their responses to Matt 22: 36-38 expressed knowledge that they should love God. Two mentioned abiding in Him or having a relationship with Him. None commented upon the passages' encouragement to devote every part of themselves to the relationship with God.

The Ideal of Being a Disciple

Questions six through eight sought to determine what the interviewees thought defined a disciple and what attributes a disciple would demonstrate. Additionally, they were asked if the Bible specified what defined a disciple. The most common response from the interviewees was that a disciple would exhibit the “fruits of the Spirit” that are mentioned in Gal 5:22-23. The second most common response was that disciples would obey God’s commandments. Other responses included that disciples would show love toward others, have a healthy fear of the Lord, help others grow in relationship with God, and assist others’ walk with Jesus.

The interviewees were not confident in their answers as to whether the Bible states what it takes to be a disciple. Most answered affirmatively that the Bible provided this answer, but they did not elaborate. Two replied with a “maybe” comment. One referenced the Great Commission in Matt 29:18-20 but was not sure of that answer.

The Ideal of the Family of God

Questions nine and ten were created to determine the interviewees' understanding of the concept of the “family of God.” Most of the interviewees described the family of God as being

comprised of believers in Jesus. Some narrowed that grouping of believers to the context of the local church. The interviewees seemed uneasy with their definitions of the family of God. When asked about the attributes of the family of God, the interviewees responded that family members would love each other, be unified, have clarity of mission, be full of life, exhibit honor, have common care for each other, work together serving others, and be Kingdom focused. The student found it interesting that they were able to list the attributes of the family of God more easily than they could find words to describe being a disciple.

Biblical Unity

Questions eleven and twelve were focused on discovering the interviewees' perceptions about biblical unity. The interviewees described biblical unity as being unified but not necessarily acting with uniformity, demonstrating a lack of divisiveness, being willing to compromise with each other, and evidencing Godly submission. When asked how well The Crossing Church demonstrated biblical unity, the interviewees were divided. One person felt that unity was well demonstrated, while most of the respondents said they saw some good evidence and some poor evidence of unity. None of the interviewees related this concept of unity back to the ideal of the family of God.

The Great Commission

Questions thirteen through fifteen sought to assess the interviewees' understanding of the Great Commission given in Matt 28:18-20, its applicability to disciples, and the current application of the Great Commission by believers at The Crossing Church. All of the interviewees agreed that the Great Commission applies to all believers. The interviewees were generally able to express that disciples should evangelize, baptize, and pour into others so that

they could make disciples. Only one mentioned teaching the disciples to obey all that Jesus commanded. When asked if the people of The Crossing Church embrace this commandment, the interviewees did not believe so.

The New Commandment

Questions sixteen through eighteen delved into the interviewees' understanding of the New Commandment, its applicability to disciples, and the status of how believers at The Crossing Church applied this commandment. The interviewees were consistent in affirming that a believer should love others as themselves and that no limitations were set on who should be loved. The majority of interviewees did not think that the believers at The Crossing Church embraced this commandment.

State of Discipleship at The Crossing Church

Questions nineteen through twenty-one asked the interviewees to evaluate the condition of discipleship at The Crossing Church and express how they have been aided in discipleship by the Church. The interviewees did not think discipleship was being successful or effective for most believers at The Crossing Church. More of the interviewees had a higher opinion of the Church when they reported on the effectiveness of discipleship for themselves.

Vision of Discipleship

Questions twenty-two and twenty-three asked the interviewees to share their thoughts about how the Church might change and what impact it might make if healthy disciples were developed who adhered to the passages being discussed. The interviewees were able to express a hopeful perspective of a powerful body of believers that would be impactful in the region of the

Church. They spoke of evangelistic success and blessings to the community. They also spoke of increased attendance at the Church as the vibrant community of believers attracted people.

Preparedness to Disciple

Question twenty-four and twenty-five gathered information about whether the interviewees were prepared to disciple others, and any changes they might wish to have experienced in their own past discipleship journey. All of the interviewees professed to have experience with discipling others. Most related discipleship experiences within their own families. They did not speak of a common method or training they had experienced that aided them in developing others to become disciples. Most of them described how they would have appreciated having a one-on-one relationship with a trusted person to teach them and hold them accountable as they were discipled. Some described specific areas they wished they had been trained in, such as the power of grace, how to approach significant life decisions, and how to be a father or a husband.

Disciplers/Mentors

The final two questions, twenty-six and twenty-seven, sought to understand how important personal reputation and a trusting relationship was to discipleship. All of the respondents declared that having trust in a mentor was very important in a discipling relationship. One of the respondents pointed out that having a mentor rooted in sound theology was key. When asked if they had experienced a relationship with a trusted mentor or were currently being mentored, those who were in the Crossing Church's intern program described having a mentor, but only one of the others shared that they had ever experienced a mentorship relationship.

Analysis of Interviews

The analysis of the interviews provided meaningful results, which appear to generally support the hypothesis that was proposed. The hypothesis listed three contributing causes that degraded the health and effectiveness of the disciples at The Crossing Church. The first cause is the lack of devotion to God by the disciples of The Crossing Church. The student proposes that God expects the complete devotion of a believer. In the Ten Commandments that God gave to Moses, the very first commandments related to the fact that God described Himself as a jealous God (Exo 20:8) and that His people should have no other gods beside Him (Exo 20:3). This concept was reiterated in Deut 6:1-9, which encourages a child of God “to love the Lord your God with all your heart and will all your soul and with all your strength.” This command was repeated and highlighted by Jesus as He answered the Pharisees when they asked Him to point out the greatest commandment in the Law. These verses speak of loving God with all that comprises a human being. Nothing is held back in that definition of a person. This kind of devotion is radical in today’s culture, but God clearly stated that He expected it of His people. The responses from the interviewees did not indicate a passionate devotion to God above all other things.

This group of interviewees demonstrated in many ways that they are willing to serve God and have taken unusual steps to be used by Him to serve others. As such, it is reasonable to expect that they would speak of their devotion to God and awareness of the need for devotion when they reflected upon what these verses meant to them. This is an important point since these interviewees can be considered thought leaders within the Church. If this thought of devotion is not a high value in their minds, then it is likely to be spoken of less frequently. The less any topic is discussed, the more likely it is to move down in priority among a group of people. In fairness,

answers given during an interview on a certain date do not completely confirm that the group has a severe lack of devotion to God. However, the observations by the student of multiple churches over several decades affirm that the congregations observed did not show intense devotion to God by their words and behaviors. In view of that, the remarks by the interviewees seem to confirm a weakness in devotion to the Lord in the interviewees' lives, which can be extrapolated to also apply to the people of The Crossing Church.

The second cause relates to the lack of awareness of what the "family of God" should mean for believers. The interviewees could not easily describe the "family of God" and were generally unsure what attributes would be evident in this "family." Among the many concepts that Jesus shared with His followers was a challenge to move their loyalties from their earthly families to their "family in Christ." Jesus' statements were challenging for those He spoke to during those days, as they went against firmly held beliefs about familial loyalty in their culture. Hellerman describes how the people in Jesus' day adhered to ". . . a strong-group culture, the individual is embedded in and draws his personal identity from, the group to which he belongs. And the well-being of the group—not the individual—comes first when a member of the group is faced with life-changing personal decisions."¹¹ This viewpoint differs significantly from the individualistic perspective that most Americans ascribe to. Americans struggle with the idea of placing the group's well-being as a higher priority than their individual interests.

Hellerman continued to explain how families in antiquity viewed their devotion to their families. Hellerman says, "The priority of sibling relations and unswerving family loyalty surfaced as two fundamental characteristics of ancient family systems."¹² This idea that sibling

¹¹ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, (B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition), p. 74.

¹² Ibid.

relationships were perceived as closer than the husband-wife relationship is difficult for Americans to understand. Jesus understood this dynamic in the culture and challenged his followers to be willing to shift their loyalty from their blood relatives to the family of God. Even though this was a tremendously difficult concept for them to embrace, the idea highlights how Jesus expects His followers to relate to each other. They are to view each other as blood relatives and be willing to sacrifice for each other, as they would have done with their biological families. Jesus was affirming the culture and inviting both his earthly followers and current-day believers into a new “group.” Hellerman points out that “As Jesus evaluated the cultural institutions of His day, He strongly affirmed the “group comes first” orientation of the society in which He lived. Moreover, He did so intentionally.”¹³ Dempsey affirmed this same thought when He shared, “The epistles emphasize a relational community where disciples are developed in the context of a body of believers. They discover and use their spiritual gifts to love and serve each other and non-believers. Disciples are developed as the body grows in maturity and as each part does its work (Eph. 4:16).”¹⁴ A lack of understanding of the unity that should exist among disciples weakens each disciple. It collectively makes them less than they could be if they operated as a biblical family. Such unity is not commonly displayed and will require significant effort to operationalize in the Church; however, the gains available are so vast that a concerted effort should be exerted to realize this paradigm.

The last of the three causes relates to the lack of God’s presence in disciple’s lives and understanding their role in engaging with the Great Commission. A believer should be in close communion with the Holy Spirit and be directed daily toward God's purpose for that individual.

¹³ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family*, p. 74.

¹⁴ Rodney Dempsey, “What is God’s Will for My Life?”.

The one specific purpose that Scripture describes for each disciple is to be active in fulfilling the Great Commission given by Jesus in Matt 28:18-20. The directive given by Jesus is very specific. He directs His followers to make disciples as they go by leading them to a saving knowledge of Christ, baptizing them, and teaching them to obey all that Jesus has commanded. Individuals who walk closely with God are aware of this imperative and seek to engage others in their sphere of influence. The Holy Spirit encourages and prods a believer to engage with this directive, as it is life-giving for the disciple as well as those to whom they seek to minister. Unfortunately, the modern church culture has morphed into a place where believers consider that it is others' role to evangelize and disciple. The gradual and largely unconscious effort to move the laity to a passive position in the church and elevate the role of the clergy has convinced many that it is enough to be faithful attenders who merely witness the efforts of clergy, and either applaud or critique them.

The interviewees provided testimony that described how most of them had not received individual discipling by a mature disciple. They had attended Bible studies and small group meetings and heard many sermons where they learned more about God. These individuals moved beyond being spectators and became active in ministry. Yet, they did not progress under the watchful eye of a committed disciple who encouraged them and corrected them as they grew in ministry. Since they did not have an example of a discipler/mentor in their lives, they would not easily step into that role for others. This student would assert that it will take a concentrated effort to present a new paradigm to these leaders and prepare them to be the disciple-making disciples that God intended.

The positive responses provided by the interviewees regarding the effect of applying the Scriptures in Deut 6:1-9, Matt 22:36-40, and Matt 28:18-20 to disciple's lives proved to be very

encouraging. Collectively, they believed that the Church would surge in its effectiveness in growing disciples and ministering to the community if the people came to understand and embrace the concepts provided in these passages. The challenge for The Crossing Church will be to develop a way to prepare mature believers to disciple individuals in a one-on-one manner, rather than using classroom gatherings, which is the most familiar teaching method that the Church has utilized. The interviewees' affirmation that a relationship with a trusted individual who would disciple them was of great value provides a solid goal to work toward to meet this discipling need.

An interesting observation to point out was that the younger interviewees had a more positive opinion about the performance of the Church compared to those who were more advanced in years. Their optimism is refreshing and provides good opportunities to work toward a new paradigm. The older disciples are more direct in their assessments, which is also helpful in defining problems that need to be addressed.

The interviewees recognized that the Church has not yet created a healthy discipleship model. This awareness is positive, as it will create a hunger in these leaders to seek something better for themselves and those they serve. As the Church learns to embrace the concept of the “family of God,” they will be better able to support each other in their ministry to their spheres of influence outside the Church.

The project was aided by the use of relatively new software platforms. Several of the interviews were conducted using video conferencing software provided by Zoom Communications and Microsoft Teams. These platforms not only allowed the interviewer to converse and see the interviewee in real-time, but also allowed the discussion to be recorded into

an audio file. The ability to schedule interviews and connect via the internet was very beneficial to both the interviewer and the interviewees.

The audio file was uploaded to Amazon Web Services and processed by AWS: Transcribe. This software created a data file that was subsequently converted into a text file. This software proved to be quite accurate and greatly aided the speed of transcribing the interviews. Utilizing these software platforms expanded the interviewer's awareness of what could be accomplished by using such tools and has led to new solutions being proposed for ministry at the Church. For instance, the AWS: Transcribe's ability to do real-time transcription will be utilized to provide closed caption transcription for live and recorded messages to serve the deaf community.

The interviewer learned that it would be very helpful to print out a checklist of questions that could be "checked off" as the questions were asked. The conversational flow of the interviews led to several instances where the interviewer inadvertently skipped questions that should have been asked.

At the conclusion of the interviews, the interviewer noted discontent in some of the interviewees. They were frustrated that no solutions were presented to the problems that were identified in the questions. While it is true that they were the ones who identified problems, they seemed to be in need of proposed solutions. As this study progresses, the interviewer should provide a printed resource that illustrates actions the interviewees might take to enhance their discipleship experience.

As a final thought, it is important to recognize that this report critiques The Crossing Church's discipleship methods. The analysis of the individuals uses blunt language to describe current conditions. It is essential to recognize that these individuals represent the best of those

who are serving The Crossing Church. This report points out that there is a better future ahead for these individuals and for the congregation as the Church leadership focuses on enhancing the discipleship methods that are utilized. Each believer is under-going the process of sanctification, which continues until the person is called home through death or experiences Jesus' glorious return.

Conclusion

This Micro Project was developed to aid in the creation of a healthy discipleship ministry at The Crossing Church. A good starting point would be to arrive at a definition of a disciple that all Christians would agree is consistent with what is revealed in Scripture. Modern believers seem to adhere to the idea that their act of voicing belief in Jesus as Lord is sufficient to assure their salvation and induct them into the family of God. In fairness, this concept has been taught to them by the clergy for many years. Willard described this concept as follows: "Being a Christian in evangelical terms came to be a matter of professing belief in time-honored tenets of traditional Christianity, with a few additional points about the nature and authority of the Bible and about eschatology."¹⁵ Willard continues by defining this type of belief as nominal Christianity, as the behaviors of believers do not show any statistical deviation from the practices of non-believers.¹⁶

This researcher has learned to value simple constructs or "creeds" that help group thoughts together cohesively. As a young man, the researcher learned the Boy Scout Oath and

¹⁵ Dallas Willard, *Discipleship*, (Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology, edited by Gerald McDermott, 2010), Accessed on June 29, 2020, from https://learn.liberty.edu/webapps/blackboard/content/listContent.jsp?course_id=_628058_1&content_id=_40817707_1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Law. These simple concepts provided a basis to “validate” that one was behaving as a Scout. In a similar way, linking the passages in Deut 6:1-9, Matt 22:36-40, and Matt 28:18-20 provides a believer with a creed that can be helpful as they seek to live the life of a disciple of Jesus Christ. Scripture provides so many important concepts that many believers struggle to organize the information into a helpful set of information that can guide their daily life.

The Great Commission, provided to believers by Jesus in Matt 28:18-20, offers great value as it specifically clarifies the purpose of disciple’s lives. The mission of a disciple’s life is presented in just a couple of sentences. This purpose is not rigidly defined as a singular pathway that all disciples will follow. Each disciple can use the points that Jesus shared to plan each day and minister in the context of their daily lives. A plumber’s purpose to minister to those around him can be very similar to that of a pastor, even though they work in very different environments.

Another powerful reminder arose from the interviews regarding the importance of relationships to successful ministry. Each of the interviewees declared that trust in a mentor was vital in a discipleship relationship. The interesting point was that many of these same interviewees had never had a mentor. The group’s declaration speaks to the inherent need for each person to connect with a person who deeply cares for them. Any form of discipleship must recognize this deep-felt need. Developing classroom materials to study discipleship will not meet this felt need and generate disciples. Simply put, discipleship is experiential, as well as cognitive.

CHAPTER 3: MICRO PROJECT TWO

Introduction

The second Micro Project this student conducted to address the ministry problem was an Article Critique Micro Project. As preparation for this phase, forty peer-reviewed articles from academic journals were read, and ten were selected for this Micro Project. The intent was to gather information from highly credible sources commenting on how culture has changed in the most recent generations and what impact those changes will have upon creating disciples of Jesus.

Specific focus was given to understanding how people's worldviews have changed, the impact of technology upon individuals' behavior and thought processes, and the tendency in individuals to move toward materialism and consumptionism. This self-seeking modality turns people's hearts away from the truths in God's Word to establish themselves as the "best" authority in their own lives. Articles were sought which indicate how these types of thought processes come into play and how society is driving this kind of paradigm.

Information was sought that describes how changing mores are impacting the view of family, as well as the importance of family in determining truth boundaries and what authority is placed upon the views of the family.

Finally, articles were also sought to assess how others view the *Shema* from Deut 6 and what impact those considerations have upon a person's religious perspectives and views on the authority and work of the Holy Spirit in influencing and protecting truth standards. This portion of the research was targeted to evaluate how people understand devotion to God and how likely they are to align with His precepts for their lives instead of their own definitions of truth and proper behavior.

Historical and Current Practices

This Micro Project has been very instructional to the student as he has come to understand the intense challenges that exist to aid an individual in growing as a disciple after being influenced by the current American culture. It appears to be normal to be self-absorbed, self-seeking, consumptive, and individualistic. It is essential to understand what our people's condition is so that we can develop appropriate responses to aid them.

It is not the first time culture has moved people away from devotion to God. Nor is it the first time that the clergy have behaved in a manner that caused people to move away from the church rather than into an increased closeness with God. In view of that, I am encouraged to know that God can use His people to change cultures and live God-honoring lives before those who do not know him. These articles encourage that a response is needed, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to reach and disciple the many who are far from God.

The historical practices of the traditional church and the more recent attractional church models have proven to be deficient on their own. A church seeking to be effective in discipling the church members will need to develop a hybrid method that will provide proper biblical encouragement and inspiration. The ministers will need to develop methodologies that will convey the need for people to be devoted to God as a priority in their lives. This message can not be minimized, but rather, must be clearly demonstrated in the lives of the ministers. In addition, the people will need to be taught the meaning of biblical family and the behaviors that one devoted to God's family would be expected to exhibit. Understanding the concept of living in the presence of God at all times will aid the people in seeking the Holy Spirit's direction each day and becoming adept at hearing His voice, as well as following the directions that He provides.

A minister who has an awareness of the impact of contemporary culture will be more effective in developing apologetics that address the misleading messages of the culture, gifting people with the truths for abundant living provided by God's Word.

Peer Review

As the student prepared for the Implementation phase of this Micro Project, he interacted with classmates to learn from their experiences and perspectives. The student explained to them that he was concerned about properly describing his research findings. The student also emphasized that this Micro Project was not about proposing a solution to the defined problem but instead focused on painting a picture of how our churches' current circumstances came about due to their past practices and describing how the current cultural environment is challenging our current practices. The student felt that this part of the overall project is about providing a perspective that there is a root cause to our diminished effectiveness as disciples. The student asked classmates whether his thought process of painting the picture is correct, or if he should be considering another goal for the Micro Project?

Travis Meadows gave excellent counsel as he shared his methodology for doing article critiques in a prior term. He suggested doing a summary of the key points in the article, followed by a critique that outlined the pros and cons of the article as it related to this student's ministry problem. Meadows also encouraged focusing on the analysis in the implementation phase and see what thoughts arise as the student completed that phase. The "painting the picture" could happen in the culmination phase based upon the data the student discovered in the research.¹⁷

¹⁷ Travis Meadows, "Discussion Board Post – A Defensible Micro Project Peer Review", Liberty University, February 9, 2021.

Mary Clare was very supportive in her suggestions that the student remain focused on gathering information to explain what is happening in our churches and describe it well as he “paint the picture.” Clare commented that she had witnessed the decline in growth in her own church experience and the turning away of society from God to other pursuits.¹⁸

Evaluation of the Micro Project

The student reviewed ten articles pertaining to how culture has shifted since the days of the Early Church and how those changes impact believers' understanding of being a disciple. Each article contributes to describing these changes and allows the reader to consider appropriate responses to these changes.

Who is Influencing Whom

Article Summary

Samuel Baker currently serves as the Christian Ministry & Intercultural Studies department chair at Corban University, located in Salem, Oregon. Baker earned his EdD at George Fox University and an MA in Christian Education as well as a BA in Psychology from Biola University. Baker has served churches in multiple states and a variety of ministries.¹⁹

The author addresses the significant changes in communication technology and how it affects early adults regarding their interpersonal relationships. Baker contends that technology is causing culture change and states “it continues to reshape a variety of frameworks: individual,

¹⁸ Mary Clare, “Discussion Board Post – A Defensible Micro Project Peer Review”, Liberty University, February 9, 2021.

¹⁹ Corban University, “Dr. Samuel E. Baker”, Accessed February 9, 2021, <https://www.corban.edu/faculty/dr-samuel-e-baker>.

social, and ecclesiastical.”²⁰ Baker describes how increased use of communication technologies (smart phones, Facebook, etc.) impacts familial relationships and creates a state that is described in the article as “post-familial.”²¹ This state is distinguished by how family members can be alone together as they interact with each other and those outside the family through their smart devices. Baker poses the question, “What is an appropriate theological response to the shaping effects of technology in the lives of emerging adults?”²² The author warns of the tendency for ministers to hold “dystopian views of digital engagement”²³ and encourages the readers to develop their own “integrative approach to a theology of technology” if they are to be effective in providing holistic guidance.”²⁴ Baker concludes that those seeking to influence others spiritually need to be aware of technology’s influence to help early adults not be conformed to the world and adopt a “crowdsourced” view of God.

Article Critique

Baker introduces an interesting discussion on a culture change that is certainly having a significant impact on how individuals interact daily. He describes how these technologies degrade social interaction from what it has been in the past and suggests that people need to be aware of how it will change family discourse and engagement. Baker’s call to action is very pertinent to ministers in the current environment as their congregants are not following

²⁰ Samuel Baker, “Who’s Shaping Whom? Digital Disruption in the Spiritual Lives of Post-Familial Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Youth and Theology*, 16, no. 2 (2017), 117.

²¹ Ibid., 118.

²² Ibid., 119.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 120.

traditional family behaviors. It is wise to recognize that the assumptions used to engage in relational ministries will have to adapt to the new cultural norms. A well-thought-out theology of technology will provide a minister with convincing arguments to persuade the impacted individuals of the degradation that has occurred in their family relationships and aid them in recovering those healthy relational interactions.

Baker attempts to find a space between techno-utopians and those with a dystopian view of the impact of technologies upon our lives. Baker tended toward a dystopian viewpoint when he discussed users of electronic displays for reading instead of using printed texts.²⁵ Baker's bias should give a reader pause and encourage them to consider that all of the data analysis is not complete on the full impact of technologies, and a reader should remain open-minded until further research is available.

Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity

Article Summary

Thomas E. Bergler teaches in the Ministry and Missions Department at Huntington University, located in Huntington, IN. The author earned his Ph.D. in American Religious History from the University of Notre Dame, an MA in Theology and Church History from Wheaton College, and a BS in Chemistry and History from the University of Michigan.²⁶ This article considers the traits of Americans whose birth years would categorize them as "Generation Z" and how to develop appropriate strategies to guide these individuals toward

²⁵ Samuel Baker, "Who's Shaping Whom", 134.

²⁶ Huntington University, "Tom Bergler", Accessed February 10, 2021, <https://www.huntington.edu/meet-the-faculty/tom-bergler>

spiritual maturity. The author presents an explanation from Scripture of what traits a mature believer should exhibit, then presents his analysis of the challenges Generation Z individuals will exhibit to those who invest in them to help them gain spiritual maturity. Bergler declares that “When it comes to religious beliefs and practices among Generation Z, the minority who are committed Christians are doing reasonably well, a less committed middle group that identifies as Christian is not faring as well, and the minority who profess no religious affiliation is growing.”²⁷

Bergler explains that attempting to reach Generation Z individuals should reflect upon the research that shows that the methods used for biblical teaching are not proving to be very successful. Bergler references studies conducted by the Barna Group in 2018 and the National Study of Youth and Religion conducted in 2005; the number of Millennial teenagers who qualified as “devoted” was 8% in both the 2005 and 2018 studies.²⁸ Berger highlights the need to help these young people “catch a vision for spiritual maturity and pursue it in community with other disciples of Jesus.”²⁹

Article Critique

The author presents an argument regarding the imperative in Scripture that encourages mature believers to help develop new believers and the need for new believers to pursue growth toward spiritual maturity. The author explains that a mature believer must address the cultural influence a new believer has experienced and address their specific misconceptions. He explains

²⁷ Thomas E. Bergler, “Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity,” *Christian Education Journal*, 17, no. 1 (2020), 79.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 90

common traits those in this age group exhibit, such as a slow-growth strategy, intense use of social media and mobile technology, mental health struggles, risk aversion, and a desire for material things to power their life goals.

The author encourages mature believers to spend extra effort “on apologetics and on learning activities that involve the affective and volitional domains so that these young people will take greater ownership of their beliefs.”³⁰

The author references “The National Study of Youth and Religion” in this article but does not footnote the study nor reference the specific publication from which he asserts a statement based upon this study. It appears to have been a project of the University of Notre Dame and included surveys from 2003, 2005, and 2008.³¹ The author relies upon other writers for several of his observations that point out the characteristics of the Millennials in the test group.

The Church as Family

Article Summary

Tobias Brandner serves as an Associate Professor at the Divinity School of Chung Chi College in Hong Kong. Brandner earned his ThD and MDiv from the University of Zurich.³²

Brandner discusses the importance that family relationships have upon the Chinese churches and the leadership structures within them. He describes how traditional Confucianism

³⁰ Thomas E. Bergler, “Generation Z and Spiritual Maturity”, 87.

³¹ University of Notre Dame, “National Study of Youth & Religion”, Accessed on February 10, 2021 from <https://youthandreligion.nd.edu/research-design>.

³² The Chinese University of Hong Kong, “Tobias Brandner”, accessed on February 13, 2021 from <https://www.theology.cuhk.edu.hk/en/academics/teaching-staff/tobias-brandner>.

aligns well with defining the need for solid and supportive families, which the Christian church in China can promote to the believers in the churches. Brandner continues by explaining that the church leadership structures benefit from the expectation of having a “family feel.” Brandner states, “. . . the family paradigm of the Christian church creates closely knit communities. The closeness and reliability of relationships contrast with the anonymity and individualization of modern urban life and give churches great relational and perhaps more importantly financial strength.”³³

Brandner explains the efforts that the central government has exerted over the decades to erode familial relationships and transfer individuals' reliance to the government for support and approval. Brandner points out that the efforts have had a significant negative impact upon families. However, people do not find the government to be a good substitute for family relationships, thus creating fertile ground for the church to provide a community for relational support. Brandner asserts that the Chinese government sees the churches as challengers to their influence and will continue to encroach upon that influence.

Article Critique

The article provides a glimpse into one aspect of what has been the most successful evangelical outreach in the modern age and how familial closeness can withstand intense outside pressure. The author's observations of how the evangelical church is prospering in China allow the reader to consider how vital the “church family” will be in other nations and cultures. The fact that people seek out the church for a “sense of belonging” speaks to the inherent need of people to have that connection with each other, especially within the family of God. Also, it is

³³ Tobias Brandner. “The Church as Family,” *Theology Today* (Ephrata, Pa.), 76, no. 3 (2019): 218.

interesting to see the author's comments about how the Chinese governmental leaders have a pattern of describing themselves as "Fathers" to the Chinese people. Brandner mentions that this practice is ". . . echoed by the present leader, who is styled as father and popularly celebrated as 'big daddy Xi'" ³⁴ by the party propaganda ministry. Brandner continues by describing the family church paradigm's strengths that allow flexibility and resiliency under pressure and weaknesses that can cause internal divisiveness among the churches.

The article does not explain how familial closeness is developed within these churches among members who were not blood-related families. Brandner does describe how the families are often closely knit because of the familial bloodlines but does not explain how the churches minister to those who are not part of the genetic families. The author simply asserts that the churches view themselves as a family in general without providing a context of what behavior and thoughts support such a view.

Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism

Article Summary

Piotr Kopiec serves as the Chair of Protestant Theology at John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, in Lublin, Poland.³⁵ Kopiec engages in a conversation regarding how culture and economies have evolved into a state of consumptionism in individuals. He presents that consumptionism was by the industrial revolution and urbanization. Kopiec decries the effects of consumptionism and asserts it has reduced mankind's values, as it reduces all

³⁴ Tobias Brandner. "The Church as Family," 222.

³⁵ Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, "dr hab. Piotr Kopiec prof. KUL", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from <https://pracownik.kul.pl/piotr.kopiec/kontakt>

relationships, to transactions that feed further consumption. Kopiec suggests that a person should consider the rise of consumptionism in two forms: socio-economic and psychological.

Kopiec describes how the industrial revolution, coupled with the spread of democratic governments, gave rise to the rapid advancement of consumer society. Kopiec shares, “In a democratizing society, the consumer society has an inherent potential to unfold itself, and consequently the conditions making its proliferation possible.”³⁶ The author describes the psychological form as a consumer cycle of thought. Kopiec says, “A consumer lives in the consumer cycle, which consists of the sequence desire–purchase–consumption(use)–disappointment–new desire.”³⁷ The author contends that the consumer will not stop looking for new experiences.

Pope Francis shared in 2013 how the idolatry of money and consumption could be equated with worship of the golden calf in Exo 32:1-35.³⁸ Mankind’s increased reverence for the acquisition and consumption of products and experiences overwhelms their desire for meaningful relationships with others or with God.

Article Critique

This article clearly defines the journey that modern man has undertaken to seek personal comfort and satisfaction and explains how the existing governmental and economic environment has made consumptionism available to many people rather than just a few elites. The amazing

³⁶ Piotr Kopiec, “Consumer Society: Its Definitions and Its Christian Criticism,” *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 3 (2020), 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

prosperity that modern economies provide has led to a significant worldview shift. While people decry the non-stop marketing efforts of the marketplace, the same people feverishly pursue and consume the products offered to maintain their status and comfort within their societal relationships. Men have always tended to observe others and mimic those who have things perceived as valuable.

The article explains that many in the world are unable to access this lifestyle yet yearn to be like those who live such a lifestyle. The pervasiveness of television around the world exposes the American lifestyle to far-flung groups and incites them to crave what is not available to them.

The article's title suggests that it will be a Christian criticism, yet it is predominantly a criticism made by the Catholic Church. Even though the thoughts proposed by Pope Francis will resonate with evangelical Christians, this article would be enhanced by the inclusion of more Christian voices.

Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character

Article Summary

Steven L. Porter teaches theology and philosophy for Talbot's Institute for Spiritual Formation at Biola University. Porter earned his PhD from the University of Southern California, an MPhil from the University of Oxford, an MA from the Talbot School of Theology, and a BA from Biola University.³⁹

Porter highlights the importance of understanding the role of the will as a key driver in a person's spiritual formation. He raises the priority of the human will in spiritual formation by

³⁹ Biola University, "Steven Porter", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from <https://www.biola.edu/directory/people/steven-porter>.

relating how Jesus spoke to His disciples about proper and improper prayer. In His examples, Jesus pointed out that a person who performed for others or who sought to manipulate God was misguided and only received benefits that their minds granted, rather than blessings from God. Porter states, “The ability we have to originate a course of action, to set our minds on this rather than that, to do one thing and not another, is what contributes to who we are and who we are becoming.”⁴⁰ Being actively aware of their motivations and choosing to pursue a relationship with God requires an act of the person’s will.

The author references ineffectual prayers identified by Jesus in Matt 6:5 as opposed to effectual prayers in Matt 6:4, where the individual hides themselves away in private and seeks the Lord without anyone else being a part of the conversation. This recognition of the importance of the relationship with God demonstrates a believer’s understanding of God as a person rather than a formless entity. Porter encourages believers to see, “it is loving of God to direct his children to approach himself in a manner that frees them from false views of themselves, of himself, and of the Divine-human relationship.”⁴¹ Porter reminds the faithful that it takes an act of their will to value God properly and approach Him as God has encouraged.

Porter describes the four stages of progression toward complete identification of a person’s will with God’s that were expressed by Willard. The four stages (surrender, abandonment, contentment, and participation) will serve to align a person’s will with God’s and allow them to enjoy fellowship and directed purpose in the service of the kingdom of God.

⁴⁰ Steven L. Porter, “Will/Heart/Spirit: Discipleship That Forms the Christian Character,” *Christian Education Journal*, 16, no. 1 (2019), 83.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

Article Critique

Porter makes a compelling argument as he advances these concepts to aid the reader in understanding the process of spiritual formation and recognizing how vital the will is in determining the individual's progress in their formation. His conclusion states how a disciple who is learning to do all that Jesus commanded (i.e., the Great Commission) needs to understand this concept to establish a basis of care for their will. Along with Dallas Willard's comments, Porter's assertions point out the need for an individual to purposely set their will to pursue relationship with God and acknowledge His Lordship in their lives. Without this active recognition and submission, the cultural influences each person experiences will be more effective in steering the believer away from spiritual formation.

Porter concentrates on expressing his thoughts and those of Dallas Willard. His other citations are relegated to definition support, not allowing those other voices to contribute significantly to the conversation.

The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusian Exploration

Article Summary

James V. Spickard earned his PhD from Graduate Theological Union, an MA from New School for Social Research, and a BA from Stanford.⁴² He currently serves as a professor at the University of Redlands, Redlands, CA.

Spickard presents an article that examines the concept of religious individualism through the lens of Herbert Marcuse, a scholar with the Institute of Social Research who wrote a series of

⁴² Academia, "James V. Spickard", Accessed on February 11, 2021 from <https://redlands.academia.edu/JamesVSpickard>.

books from 1940 to 1972. Marcuse presented the idea that individuals submit, without realizing it, to the established order. Spickard and others have built their premises upon this thought, and Spickard focuses on discussing how a person's choice for religious individualism will lead them to submit to the "status quo" of the existing culture. Spickard says, "Marcuse would see contemporary religion as not independent enough from the status quo to provide a source of critique."⁴³

Spickard's article argues that religious individualism has resulted in organized religion losing its voice and being dismissed by the culture. Spickard points out how the sexual scandals in the Catholic church have had a significant impact upon the credibility of all organized churches in the American culture. He explains that individuals define religion for themselves and believe that God requires little, and the church is a helpful community filled with nice people. Spickard voices, "Individualized religion specifically does not focus on structures of oppression. Nor does it focus on communities. Instead, it focuses on personal development: an "I'm OK, you're OK" spirituality that emphasizes living a good life and helping others while accepting the status quo, which is okay. Individualized religion is also a source of personal identity. Like other consumer goods, it is a means of self-expression."⁴⁴

Article Critique

Spickard's discussion provides a credible argument of how the seeker-sensitive movement in churches can lead to individualistic behavior in the realm of religious thought. His description of people seeking comfortable happiness is well stated. Marcuse primarily presented

⁴³ Spickard, James V. "The Dark Side of Religious Individualism: A Marcusean Exploration," *Critical Research on Religion*, 7, no. 2 (2019), 136.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 136.

observations on non-religious matters in the 1950s. However, his thoughts do amply describe how individuals within the church who do not have a strong identity in Christ have been impacted by the culture and have modified their expectations of what their religious life should look like. Spickard points out that religious voices have lost impact as they have been attached to other meanings by the masses. Spickard says, “And yet, the issue is not just whether religious voices speak on issues of injustice; it is whether they are heard. Though the Religious Right has considerable influence in the United States, it largely concerns itself with the famous culture wars, not with structural critique.”⁴⁵

Spickard’s article attempts to describe how religious individualism is not equipped to effect meaningful action on culture, which does not seem an appropriate conclusion considering what was presented. The conclusion that would make more sense was that religious individualism tends toward narcissism and a consumptive lifestyle rather than providing a meaningful impact on society.

An Appropriation of Psalm 82

Article Summary

Lodewyk Sutton serves as a professor of Old and New Testament Studies at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. He earned his PhD in Old Testament Studies, an MDiv, a BTh and a BA from the University Of Pretoria.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Spickard, James V. “The Dark Side of Religious Individualism”, 139.

⁴⁶ Academia, “Lodewyk Sutton”, accessed on February 12, 2021 from <https://ufs.academia.edu/LodewykSutton>.

Sutton explains that the Fourth Industrial Revolution began around the year 2000 and was initiated by the advancements in computers, networks, advances on the internet, nanotechnology, and robotics. This revolution aided a change in individuals' perceptions and moved people in America toward an individualistic society rather than a group-oriented society. Sutton described one of the "GenMe" attributes as "This is a generation that was born after the cultural mainstream of self-focus was already established and therefore they are a generation this is not familiar with a world that would put duty before the self."⁴⁷ These individuals do not rely upon groups for their answers of truth but are more likely to define truths for themselves and expect others to do so as well. Lodewyk states,

one of the negative factors of the digital age is that it sustains an individual society that can lead to extreme forms of self-obsessiveness and even narcissism. The church, therefore, needs to be familiar with the generation that functions primarily in this Fourth Industrial Revolution and with how this society differs from ancient biblical societies.⁴⁸

Sutton continues by referencing Psalm 82, providing the perspective that God is the sole provider of truth and can be relied upon for that truth. The author argues that the church needs to acknowledge the thoughts of the current audience and act as a change agent that is active in interpreting how to respond to the changes within society. He argues that rather than teaching them to be group-oriented, the church should attempt to point individuals to seek God as the appropriate authority for truth and direction.

⁴⁷ Lodewyk Sutton, "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Christian Church as a Change Agent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 2 (2020), 3.

⁴⁸ Lodewyk Sutton, "An Appropriation of Psalm 82 against the Background of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Christian Church as a Change Agent in the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 76, no. 2 (2020), 2.

Article Critique

Sutton speaks clearly of the individualistic nature of Americans and offers an interesting perspective that allows a believer to approach an individual in a manner that has a greater chance of being received well, given their worldview. The author explains that a believer should not assume a person will have a group-centered consciousness and believe it is their duty to do something for others. Sutton shares they will need someone to explain to them the benefit of having an absolute authority that provides trustworthy guidance rather than a value that pretends every individual's perceived truth is factual truth. The chaos in the world demonstrates that not everyone's truth is, in fact, truth, and logic demands this argument should be set aside.

Sutton makes his argument that authority lies solely with God, which is accurate; however, his proposed solution does not do much beyond providing an individualistic person a starting point to appropriate a biblical lifestyle as proposed by Jesus and the Apostles. This topic can be very expansive and will require believers to invest in relationships with others to spend adequate time to help them understand the value of surrendering control and allowing God's Word to provide them with trustworthy guidance.

Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism

Article Summary

Jeremy Uecker earned his PhD in Sociology and MA in Sociology from the University of Texas at Austin. Paul Froese earned his PhD and MA in Sociology from the University of Washington.

The authors report upon their survey and calculations that sought to determine if a person's adherence to religious individualism correlated to their moral progressivism. In almost

every case, those who identified that they placed high reliance on religious organizations and the leadership of those organizations were more conservative in their viewpoints on contentious matters. Those who placed greater reliance on other cultural authorities were more likely to be described as morally progressive. The authors' research pointed out that there is an increase in moral individualism, where an individual "is more likely to be influenced by cultural trends which champion individual choice and question the legitimacy of traditional norms and prohibitions."⁴⁹ The authors describe conservatives as people who "draw not on moral individualism, but rather from religious teachings, texts, and traditions to combat progressive trends . . ."⁵⁰

Their sample identified that 51% of the individuals were some form of non-religious individualists, 31% were religious institutionists, and 18% were religious individualists.

Uecker and Froese concluded that those with individualistic sources of religious authority have a robust association with progressive attitudes. Not surprisingly, the secularists discounted religious authority, but religious individualists appeared to be moving away from religious conventions of the past.

Article Critique

The methodology used for analyzing this sample appeared well constructed and adhered to prior studies which had been peer-reviewed and accepted as valid. Understandably, it is difficult to measure a person's beliefs along so many scales or to easily organize individuals into

⁴⁹ Jeremy E. Uecker and Paul Froese, "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism: How Source of Religious Authority Is Related to Attitudes About Abortion, Same-Sex Marriage, Divorce, and Premarital Sex," *Politics and Religion*, 12, no. 2 (2019), 284.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

subgroups. The authors' efforts should be applauded, and they admit that more research should be conducted to clarify the data.

The authors point out that many religious individualists have several instances of progressive thought that do not align with the traditions of their religions. They also point out that people surveyed "hold progressive moral attitudes because their understanding of morality comes directly from their personal understanding of God rather than an institutionally prescribed understanding."⁵¹ This comment seems to indicate that a person categorized as a religious individualist may be operating as an expressive individualist based upon their desire to define God's thoughts themselves, apart from Scripture or a religious institution.

The authors pointed out that their methodology did not discern the degree of importance a person placed upon making moral decisions based upon religious principles. This could have skewed the number of people reported as religious individualists rather than properly identified as expressive individualists or utilitarian individualists.

The Spirit and the Law

Article Summary

Henco van der Westhuizen serves as a senior lecturer in historical and constructive theology at The University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.⁵²

Westhuizen has written a very interesting article in which he explains how theologian Michael Welker analyzed the fundamental purposes of biblical law presented in the Old

⁵¹ Jeremy E. Uecker and Paul Froese, "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism", 288.

⁵² Academia, "Henco van der Westhuizen", accessed on February 14, 2021 from <https://ouvs.academia.edu/HencovanderWesthuizen>.

Testament. Welker continued by considering how the Holy Spirit's influence moves to empower that law to become more than a guide to moral living, but to something "beyond morality."⁵³ Westhuizen explains that the law provides a "security of expectations," which helps a person know proper boundaries that they can count on. Welker defines security as "referring to "certainty, assurances, reliable promises, firm expectations, trust, and trustworthiness."⁵⁴ Welker describes three codes: the legal code, the mercy code, and the cultic code.⁵⁵ The legal code in God's law allows a believer to understand God's character. The mercy code enables a believer to relate to those who do not yet know God as it reminds them of their own need for mercy from God. The cultic code in the law highlights the fact that God is accessible to man. Westhuizen points out to the reader that Welker's work reminds mankind that God's law is meant to aid them, not simply result in condemnation. The article points out that mankind tends to twist and redefine morality, and God's law establishes a plumbline that can be referenced to determine true morality.

Article Critique

Westhuizen explained Welker's thoughts clearly and provided a convincing dialogue of the theologian's arguments. His explanations help a reader understand that it is a work of the Spirit to transform law from a punishing framework to a revelatory framework of God's character and love for mankind. Welker's work seems to be a bit mechanical in the way he describes the Spirit's work in the three categories of law, but that can be understood in that he is

⁵³ Henco van der Westhuizen, "The Spirit and the Law," *Verbum et Ecclesia*, 40, no. 1 (2019), 7.

⁵⁴ Henco van der Westhuizen, "The Spirit and the Law", 2.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

attempting to create a simile to describe how the Law of God can establish boundaries and bring forth an abundant life for the believer.

Welker describes how the knowledge of God and mercy requires the Spirit's involvement to keep the intent of the Law from being misapplied by mankind. He argues that the Spirit of God pours out upon all mankind, rather than just one people. This application aids a reader in understanding that the Spirit of God is at work in all men to bring blessing to them if they choose to abide by God's law.

Westhuizen often quoted Welker in German but did not clearly identify if he was directly translating those statements. In some instances, German was used in quotes, and there was no subsequent translation. Since this article was published in English, it seems reasonable to have expected all German quotes to be translated.

Symposium on the Shema

Article Summary

Zaas has compiled three presentations made during the Symposium on the Shema that occurred in 2017. Three scholars who represented Islam, Judaism, and Messianic Judaism were asked to reflect upon the Shema. Roberta Sabbath, representing Islam, explained why the Shema was important to Muslims and how it had been slightly transformed to highlight that there is only one singular God. Interestingly, she described how this passage was etched onto the outer walls of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and how it was also written on the interior of the Dome. The interior message has a more specific refutation of Jesus as being in any way divine.

Kenneth Hanson described how there is a move of reformation within the Messianic Judaism community to explain that Jesus was a Jew and would not have elevated Himself to the

level of the divine as He quoted the Shema.⁵⁶ Hanson does describe this as a splinter movement and not the opinion of most Messianic Jews, who would be more easily understood to be Christians who are Jews. These reformers seek to remove the Trinitarian concept that arises when Jesus is viewed as the incarnation of God. Hanson concludes by suggesting, “a fresh look by messianic Jews at the Jesus of history might well pave the way for an expression of their faith that would in no way be in tension with the essence of Jewish monotheism.”⁵⁷

The final scholar was Zev Garber, who represented Judaism. He spoke of the Jewish belief that there is only one God and no others. He argued that Deut 13:1 describes a commandment to not add to what God has stated nor diminish it. His argument is that there is no room for adding two more members to the Godhead according to Scripture.

Article Critique

This article is very useful to gain perspective on how other major religions consider this passage and the arguments those who represent those religions would make against a Christian interpretation of the Shema. It also provides insight into how they would seek to rebut the challenging thought that God chose to send His Son, the Word, in the flesh to save mankind. Each of these scholars approaches this topic from their own presuppositions and makes reasoned arguments that explain away the deity of Christ so that their religious view can rise about the assertion of a Triune God.

Each scholar presented arguments that are obviously sufficient to them to deny that there could be a Trinity in existence. The statements of Garber show a deep-seated distrust of any offering of another “god.” Garber states, “hence Yeshua/Jesus, worshipped as truly God and Man

⁵⁶ Peter Zaas,. “Symposium on the Shema,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin*, 48, no. 3 (2018): 133–47.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 142.

(and other Messianic belief articles) is totally unacceptable and incompatible to (Rabbinic) Judaism.”⁵⁸

The article did not include a Christian viewpoint that was not associated with the Jewish community. It would have been useful to have a Christian scholar presenting a well-reasoned argument from that viewpoint to be included in this dialogue of scholars. These scholars were all speaking to refute Jesus as God, and it would have represented a more balanced discussion if the key focus of their discussion had been properly represented and the “gospel” shared in a manner that explained how God acted and acts, in all of the unity of the persons of God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

Analysis of the Micro Project

The critiques selected for this Micro Project were chosen to help explain how the contemporary church has experienced declining results from historical ministry practices and consider how the current ministry practices in use might be modified to achieve favorable results. Three areas were considered for these selections. The first dealt with the consideration of how devoted individuals are to God. The second area considered how individuals view unity. The third area of study considered how individuals view the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Devotion to God

Bergler’s article expressed that Generation Z individuals are not very responsive to the historical methods of biblical teaching. His article does not provide a roadmap to success in this area. However, it is essential to consider this research and use it as a motivation to study the issue and develop new methods to communicate God’s principles effectively. The ability to help

⁵⁸ Peter Zaas, “Symposium on the Shema”, 146.

the younger generation understand God's love for them will enable them to develop their devotion for God and become willing to submit to His lordship.

Porter's article leads a disciple to consider the importance of aligning their will with that of God. Porter reminds the reader that it takes a concentrated effort to submit their will to follow what the Lord directs them to do so that they grow in their spiritual formation process. His key point was that this kind of spiritual alignment does not happen just by hearing the correct information but through a conscious choice. This information confronts a historical practice of preaching to a group of people without spending the time to know each person individually, sharing pertinent Scripture that speaks to their current issues in life, and encouraging them to seek the Lord for daily instruction as a disciple.

Spickard explained how the seeker-sensitive movement could enable individualistic behavior as an individual considers religious matters. Spickard concluded that religious individualism tends toward narcissism and a consumptive lifestyle. As the church seeks the most effective methods to disciple believers, a strong need will exist to provide clear and focused direction back to God's Word and lovingly telling them how to apply that truth to their lives, even as that truth conflicts with the current cultural norms.

Sutton provided a strong argument about how the continued evolution of the Industrial Revolution is causing people to become more individualistic, self-important, and self-absorbed. He continues that thought with the statement, "This is a generation that was born after the cultural mainstream of self-focus was already established, and therefore, they are a generation this is not familiar with a world that would put duty before the self."⁵⁹ This lack of understanding of the value of submission to God is a significant challenge for the church. This article provides

⁵⁹ Lodewyk Sutton, "An Appropriation of Psalm", 3.

clarity for ministers to understand that devotion and submission to God are far from the norm for most of the individuals they encounter on a weekly basis.

Uecker and Froese's study explained that culture is enticing people toward moral progressivism. This pressure to conform to worldly views is evident within the church community as well as the general public. The authors reflected that many people "hold progressive moral attitudes because their understanding of morality comes directly from their personal understanding of God rather than an institutionally prescribed understanding."⁶⁰ This desire to make their own judgments outside of the established church is common. It demonstrates how ministry needs to be grounded in God's Word to bring validity back to the exercise of ministry and common thought among disciples of Christ.

Zaas' article was a good reminder that God's Word is powerful and influences humans even as they pursue other religions. Islam, Judaism, and Non-Trinitarian Messianic Jews all find value in the simple devotion shared in the *Shema* in Deut 6. It is interesting to consider how each scholar describes how their religion sees the value of devotion, yet they each twist the focus of their devotion to turn people away from the God of Scripture. The article described how they focus on debunking Christianity based upon their view of monotheism and their denial of the existence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The work of Satan to draw people away from God has been effective, and Satan is still active in his work to separate people from devotion to God.

Sutton, Spickard, Uecker, and Froese's writings give evidence that modern culture is leading people to behave in an individualistic manner that can be expected to be demonstrated by modern believers. Bergler and Porter challenge the historical methods of teaching discipleship.

⁶⁰ Jeremy E. Uecker and Paul Froese, "Religious Individualism and Moral Progressivism", 288.

This student agrees that a more concerted effort needs to be established by churches to engage mature believers individually with those who need discipleship. Relational teaching in small groups or one-on-one will prove to be more successful in developing disciples. Zaas' work highlights the basic need of those seeking God to be devoted to Him. This student recognizes that this article was not focused on raising people's awareness of the need for devotion to God, but he believes it shows how Satan is actively working to lead people away from knowing God and being devoted to Him. Such actions help to highlight the importance of devotion in a believer's life.

Unity

Baker's article describes how the increased availability of technological tools has led to a decrease in interactions between family members, especially among young adults. Baker encourages ministers to consider the appropriate theological responses to the challenges that these young adults will face. Baker describes how ministers will need to avoid speaking negatively of technology from a dystopian viewpoint but instead express the value of healthy family relationships and the benefits of developing that kind of closeness.

Brandner's article focused on the value of family relationships in Chinese churches and how the Chinese government invalidates the value of family relationships by trying to subvert existing families and redirect the people's loyalty to the government. Many people can conceptually understand the value of family relationships in their lives, but they have not experienced those relationships themselves. This article provides encouragement to ministers to spend the effort to teach, define and assist people in understanding biblical family so that they can experience the unity that Jesus commanded His people to pursue.

Kopiec described how the industrial revolution has led to a psychological construct called consumptionism. This construct follows a cycle of “desire–purchase–consumption(use)–disappointment–new desire.”⁶¹ The author explains that people have become relentless in the pursuit of objects and experiences. This focus in their lives leaves less room for contemplation and seeking character development. Another side effect of this lifestyle of consumption is that it leads them to a focus on self-gratification, which results in less involvement in the community. Ministries seeking to grow will need to understand the mindset of consumptionism and speak directly about the negative consequences of such a lifestyle.

Spickard’s article reminds the reader that a mature believer needs be aware of how their character is displayed to others. Spickard described how organized religion is losing its persuasive voice as many scandals have been reported to the populace. According to God's Word, a disciple who lives uprightly before all men will attract others to such an amazing lifestyle.

Kopiec’s discussion of consumptionism seems to the student to explain why many families have lost the closeness that the Early Church families demonstrated. The desire to have more comfort and wealth leads people away from investing in others simply because they love them. The intense drive for material things reduces people’s capacity for loving others. Brander’s article shows how the Chinese churches utilize familial closeness to serve and work together. He also points out how the worldly government in China attempts to use the same platform to build solidarity for its ideas. Spickard explained how individuals learn best by observing others, how upright living can be persuasive, encouraging people to model that

⁶¹ Piotr Kopiec, “Consumer Society”, 4.

behavior, and how immoral living by believers discourages others from following God's Word. Mature believers must embrace living as God commands to influence those that are looking to be disciplined. This student believes that a discipling movement can break out in many churches as the mature believers begin to invest relationally with those they seek to disciple. The student believes Baker's article reminds believers that to be relational, they must be flexible in adapting to the use of technology. The younger generations are adept at using technology to relate to others, and older disciples will need to add to their skillset to relate to these believers effectively.

Empowerment of the Holy Spirit

Porter's article brings clarity to a believer's need to focus on their relationship and communion with the Holy Spirit. Porter states, "The ability we have to originate a course of action, to set our minds on this rather than that, to do one thing and not another, is what contributes to who we are and who we are becoming."⁶² Being actively aware of their motivations and choosing to pursue a relationship with God requires an act of a person's will.

Westhuizen expressed the theologian Welker's thoughts on how the knowledge of God and mercy require the involvement of the Spirit to keep the intent of the Law from being misapplied by mankind. This article reminds a believer that a close relationship with the Holy Spirit is required to pursue a God-honoring lifestyle as well as to find direction for each day's journey.

This student felt that Porter accurately pointed out the need for individuals to choose to actively engage in a relationship with God to respond to the direction He provides to believers as they commune with Him. Westhuizen builds upon that thought and explains that a believer who

⁶² Steven L. Porter, "Will/Heart/Spirit", 83.

focuses on living according to God's Word will experience greater direction from God through the Holy Spirit. This student believes that believers who become convinced of this will hear more clearly from God and will find themselves more powerfully used by God as they engage in His Great Commission.

Conclusion

The articles reviewed provided many insights into how the changing culture has influenced believers over time to become more individualistic and less reliant upon the Word of God as the primary authority in their lives. As people have become more self-focused, they have become more isolated and less tolerant of others' opinions. This behavior is damaging to relationships and has led to the breakdown of the nuclear family as well as extended family relationships. The need to develop a focus on devotion to God, valuing others as God does, and selflessly allowing God to minister to others through them will set believers onto an invigorating path that will aid in their development as disciples.

CHAPTER 4: MICRO PROJECT THREE

Introduction

The third Micro Project this student conducted to address the ministry problem was a YouTube Channel creation Micro Project. The student created a series of videos and uploaded them into a newly created YouTube channel to communicate concepts that will aid believers in Jesus as they consider their purpose as a disciple as described by Jesus. The student explains the justification for the project, comments and responses to peer critique on the project, the implementation process utilized, and an analysis of the project after implementation.

Personal Engagement

The student chose the discipleship cognate as the focus of the study. As a member of Southern Baptist churches for many years, the student has heard discipleship described and preached about many times. However, it has been observed that there is no agreement on what it takes to be a mature believer. There are no commonly agreed-upon metrics that have been developed to measure whether a person is a “mature believer.” Scripture describes what Christian maturity involves, yet modern churches do not have many individuals that live a life that exemplifies what Scripture encourages.

The student created a YouTube channel to communicate the problem that churches are not exhibiting explosive growth of disciples and suggest how paradigms can be changed to return to the early church models. This project will utilize the work done in the first two Micro Projects for content and provide the platform to bring people to the website/ministry plan created in the last Micro Project.

The ministry problem that these works seek to address is that the multi-site mega-church where the student serves does not exhibit the exponential growth that the early church experienced. This lack of effectiveness in the modern American church is rooted in a lack of spiritual maturity among the believers and their lack of awareness of how to progress to achieve the spiritual maturity of a mature disciple. The student has served as part of church leadership that has sought to create several strategies to build disciples but has not yet found one that has proven effective at developing mature disciples.

This Micro Project aligns well with the discipleship cognate. It allows for engagement with other believers to challenge church leaders' current thoughts and practices as they attempt to develop disciples and consider how the discipleship models can transform from previous models. This project provides an exciting platform for the student. It allows for connecting to a broader audience and enables transmission of the concepts that have been considered and ways that modern believers can bring a workable solution to the issue.

This Micro Project focuses on Personal Engagement. The student presented videos that describe the current state of the church disciple-making effectiveness and explained how God gives direction to disciples in the *Shema* (Deut 6:4-5), the Great Commandment and the New Commandment given in Matt 22:36-40, and the Great Commission given in Matt 28: 28-30. These verses provide the direction of foundational imperatives that set an individual's path toward becoming a disciple. The videos created speak of a need to establish devotion, unity with other believers, love for others, and empowerment from the Holy Spirit to pursue the objectives given in the Great Commission to become effective disciple-making disciples. Love for others and unity is vital, as described in John 15:5, where Jesus indicates that no spiritual work can occur separately from Him, and in Jesus' repeated calls for unity within the body of Christ.

It has been a lifetime passion of the student to develop practical solutions to problems that are presented. The student has taught virtually every age group within the context of the traditional model “Sunday School” and in attractional model “home groups.” In recent years, the student has been a student who utilized online courses to pursue higher education degrees and serves as the president of a Bible college. These experiences have required the student to create video content weekly and deliver coursework digitally to professors and students. The student loves the process of learning and engaging with others to share the truth that God provides to us in His Word. A YouTube channel will be an exciting project to create and to utilize in the future as another ministry tool.

The Micro Project was designed to progress through four phases. Those phases included an organization phase, elaboration phase, implementation phase, and a culmination phase, which are described in the following:

Organization Phase – Investigate at least five YouTube channels that seem to address the proposed problem statement and write a one-page analysis of each, including the pros and cons of each, as well as their URLs.

Elaboration Phase – Write an analysis of why the proposed YouTube channel will address the ministry problem in a way that other channels have not addressed. Report on various options available for starting and building a YouTube channel.

Implementation Phase – Prepare at least one video and post it to the YouTube channel that has been created. The video should be engaging, unique in content and presentation, and have related to the ministry cognate. The channel should have a title, credits, introductory music, and other enhancements.

Culmination Phase – A report will compare the new YouTube channel to others, citing the pros and cons of each and describing peer review comments. The paper will also document information regarding the creation of the YouTube channel and its efficacy for ministry. It will address how the channel addresses the ministry problem, explaining its content and its mission. This paper will be presented according to the formatting guidelines provided in the course materials.

The student identified a concern regarding the number of videos required to cover the scope of the project, expecting that the work required would exceed the time available for this Micro Project. The student planned to craft overview videos about the key topics to address the ministry problem and create more content after completing the Micro Project to achieve the full vision of this YouTube channel. The other area of concern was regarding the creative aspects of the video. The student had excellent tools available to do this work but was stretched to use the right tools in the right way to make these videos engaging.

Peer Review

As part of the Micro Project process, the student presented the Micro Project plan to other doctoral students before enacting the implementation phase. The student described the vision for the Micro Project and the methods that were to be utilized to record the channel videos.

Randall Zeigler, a fellow doctoral student, affirmed the need to address the ministry problem when he shared, “I believe your ideas for a YouTube channel on church growth is an important one. Many churches are not growing today, and they are either stagnant or receding in

many cases. The research you are doing should be able to help many who have this problem. As I said, it seems as you are headed in the right direction.”⁶³

Zeigler encouraged a dedicated effort toward making the channel videos “professional quality.”⁶⁴ His encouragement was based on his experiences of viewing YouTube videos. He reflected that “As a millennial, there is nothing that will keep me from watching anything more than it being low quality.”⁶⁵ This recommendation is fundamental. A great message that has been created and labored on for long hours will not be engaged for very long by viewers if it does not meet their quality expectations. Zeigler further developed this encouragement as he shared, “. . . as I search through Bible Study materials for my students, I skip over anything that looks low budget or out of date; therefore great quality will lead to more viewer(s). If no one is watching the videos, no one will hear the information.”⁶⁶

Zeigler provided another suggestion which was to be creative. He described that creativity as an essential element in the production of video content. He declared, “Creativity makes the videos interesting and keeps the listeners around till the end.”⁶⁷ Zeigler points out an important issue. Many videos do not have more than a few seconds of use because the viewers quickly evaluate the quality and decide if it is worth their time to view. Since it is easy to load videos to YouTube, there is a vast quantity of content available. The perceived quality of the video content will determine the viewership that a channel will attract.

⁶³ Randall Zeigler, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/68327/discussion_topics/515467, May 1, 2021.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Zeigler inquired about the technical details of how the videos would be created. He specifically wished to know about the quality of the camera and the type of microphone to be utilized. These questions are crucial when creating video content. The camera can limit the options that a video producer can consider and can produce inferior recordings if the quality level is not sufficient for the task. Likewise, audio recording is vital when producing video content. Ambient noise, low decibel recording, and problems with synchronization with the video tracks are all variables that a video producer should consider. Zeigler also questioned whether other individuals would be called upon to assist in shooting the videos or as guests in the video shots. The student has chosen to create the videos without other's involvement in the Micro Project.

Zeigler also questioned how the setting of the video would be created. He advised that the setting should be chosen to enhance the video and raise the viewer's perception of the creativity involved in producing the content.

These comments were constructive in the development of the video content. They helped raise awareness of the value of quality and creativity when connecting and communicating with an audience via video.

Evaluation of the Micro Project

This Micro Project purposed to create a YouTube channel where a series of videos would be hosted that would discuss how the early church operated and had such a world-changing impact upon the civilization of their day. The YouTube Channel can be accessed by going to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCRWErups9AWKO-7lXuUVEOw> or by searching YouTube for the "Early Church Vibe" channel.

This Micro Project seeks to address the ministry problem to determine why the modern church does not have the same impact in the current culture and present concepts that would enable a modern-day believer to become a change agent in ministries where God has placed them. Five videos were created that addressed a series of topics.

The first video was an introduction of the problem and proposed that there was a solution that could be implemented. The video host presented his life experience as a senior leader in multiple mega-church-sized ministries and reflected upon his observation that those churches did not exhibit the sustained exponential growth that the early church experienced. The host expressed that these churches have amazing resources available to them, yet exponential growth did not occur. He described how the early church did not have a codified Bible, few paid clergy, no dedicated buildings, and limited financial resources. Nevertheless, that group of believers spread quickly and overwhelmed the Roman empire with their beliefs in just a few generations. The host describes how we can analyze their behaviors and beliefs. After processing that information, believers can implement the early church members' concepts into their ministry contexts. This first video had a playtime of five minutes and thirty seconds.

The second video recaps the problem of the lack of growth in the modern church and presents the idea that a disciple's mission is provided by Scripture in three areas. The first is in Deut 6 (the *Shema*), the second in Matt 22: 36-40 (the Great Commandment and the New Commandment), and the third in Matt 28: 38-40 (the Great Commission). This second video focused on devotion to God as was clearly described by Jesus as He spoke with the Pharisees in Matt 22:36-40. Jesus was quoting Deut 6 when asked what the most important commandment was from Scripture. The host explains to the viewers that all growth in spiritual maturity is

predicated upon living a life of devotion to God. The second video had a playtime of ten minutes and one second.

The third video discusses the need to love others as God loves. Jesus gave a New Commandment in Matt 22:38-40 and described how we need to love others as we love ourselves. The host describes that as a person learns to love God well, they begin to understand what it means to love others. This selfless love that develops is a reflection of God's love for each person and mankind in general. The host explains that man's selfish nature keeps them from demonstrating *agape* love to others without the empowering of God in their lives. When a person embraces this concept, others will see them significantly impact the world around them. This third video had a playtime of six minutes and thirty-one seconds.

The fourth video raised the idea that we should be adept at communing with God, live a life empowered by the Holy Spirit, and pursue the Great Commission as directed by Jesus. The host points out that this pursuit of the Great Commission is supposed to be active in a disciple's life. The host explains that many have been taught the imperative to "go" and make disciples. He redirects them to understand the imperative is upon making disciples, and the original Greek should be interpreted to say, "as you go." This small change allows the disciple to understand that they are not exempt from disciple-making, as they can do it in their current context. The host asserts that many dismiss themselves from disciple-making because they are unable to pack up and "go" somewhere else as a missionary. The host recommends a book that Dave Early and Rod Dempsey wrote and called *Disciple Making Is . . .* for viewers to learn more about these

concepts.⁶⁸ He also encourages them to “grab ahold” of the Great Commission and make it their own. The fourth video had a playtime of six minutes and thirteen seconds.

The fifth video recapped the preceding four videos and explained how the prior concepts all worked together to give a believer clarity about what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. The host challenges disciples to journal what they hear from God as they listen to Him and take action upon what He reveals. The host explains that each disciple is a minister for God and that the clergy have the challenge to prepare and assist them in ministry. The host also challenges the viewer to purpose to love those close to them so that they can become more adept at loving all men. These actions have the secondary impact of improving unity among believers as Jesus directed. The host proceeds by encouraging the disciple to develop their interaction with the Holy Spirit and allow His empowerment to enable them to become effective in ministry to others. This active ministry mindset is needed to engage the Great Commission properly. The host recommends that the viewers read Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s book *Discipleship* to learn about the concept of “cheap grace” and work to avoid such a mindset.⁶⁹ The fifth video had a playtime of thirteen minutes and fifty-three seconds.

The videos were created with cameras that recorded in 4K resolution. The student used the video editing program Adobe Premiere Pro. The videos were edited to include consistent opening graphics, graphic overlays to provide names, Scripture references, and end graphics that provided links to other videos and the playlist on the channel and a subscription link. Third parties created these graphics and are available for licensing and use from a company called Envato. Each video must have a license to use the moving graphics. This license is granted after

⁶⁸ Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey, *Disciple Making Is . . .* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2013).

⁶⁹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Discipleship* DBW Vol 4 (Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works), (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), Kindle Edition, Location 1102.

paying an annual fee, which allows the licensee to utilize any of the tens of thousands of graphics and audio files that are provided. The files were downloaded from Envato's website, and then the student had to engage with training videos to learn how to install and utilize these files in the Adobe Premiere Pro software platform. Finally, the student sourced and added an audio soundtrack that underlaid the video.

High Relevance YouTube Videos

The first challenge in developing a YouTube channel involved analyzing what was currently available to viewers on YouTube.com. The student chose to create a set of search phrases to determine if other videos were available that addressed the ministry problem that was advanced in this project. The search phrases developed were "What is a fully devoted follower of Christ?", "How to be a disciple of Jesus," and "What did the early church look like." The student limited the analysis to the top five videos ranked by relevance and view count. The student watched thirty videos and determined that the search phrase "What is a fully devoted follower of Christ?" ranked by relevance gave the best comparable results to the topics to be addressed in the video content to be created in this project. Based upon this analysis, the student concluded that there was no video content on YouTube that addressed the same content that this project sought to present.

The highest-ranking video was called "What Is A Fully Devoted Follower of Christ?", located at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PeiNNdGdWbg>. This video was hosted on the YouTube channel called "Real Truth, Real Quick" and showed to have had seven thousand, nine hundred eighty-three views since November 30, 2015. The channel displayed that it had eighty-two thousand, eight hundred subscribers. The video was hosted by Rick Smith and Todd

Wagner, who represented Watermark Church, located in Dallas, TX. This video had an overall time of five minutes.

The video sought to provide Scripture and explain what a fully devoted follower of Christ should look like to others. Wagner explains that a disciple denies their own agenda in favor of God's, commits to developing themselves to be of better service to others, and focuses on learning more from God's Word to be able to apply the principles to their life competently.

This video has an extremely professional presentation and engaging hosts. The pace is fast, and a great deal of information is transmitted in a short amount of time. This video is a terrific source of Scripture references that enable a viewer to find and process on their own time.

The primary host is a skilled communicator and speaks clearly and convincingly to the camera as he makes his points. The set is visually appealing and conveys the message that this is a quality presentation put together by credible experts on the topic. The supporting elements all "make sense" in how they are utilized and engage the viewer in multiple ways throughout the video. The set was professionally constructed and utilized several technologies to enhance its quality. This video set an extremely high bar for quality presentation of information.

The information delivered comes at a pace such that a viewer would have to watch it several times to process all that is shared. Due to the nature of the time restriction, the hosts are not able to unpack the ideas shared in Scripture in a way that people could process the information to apply to their lives. This speed of transmission of concepts falls within the expectation that is set by their "real quick" channel definition. This video leaves room for another channel to provide additional information to a viewer in a different presentation format.

The second video that was analyzed was titled "How to develop faith and love for God," which is located at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQ3M929BpKQ>. This video was hosted

on a channel named “JKYog.” The channel had one million, nine hundred ten thousand subscribers. The specific video analyzed had forty-four thousand, five hundred, and thirty-seven views since June 9, 2018. The host is Swami Mukundananda, who represented JKYog.org, located in Dallas, TX. This video had an overall playtime of ten minutes and two seconds.

The Swami proposes that one must develop humility to be able to have a love for God. We must develop a value for God, which develops our faith in God, and then we fall in love with God. He suggests that our problem is that we do not have faith in God.

The host’s storytelling style is comfortable and seems to draw his audience as he shares “wisdom” in his fables. Storytelling is a powerful method of knowledge transmission, and the Swami is skilled in his presentation. The host communicates with a smile and does not raise his voice at any point to assert his points. He conveys an attitude of a patient grandfather talking to those around him.

The video quality is good, but the lack of movement by the host makes the video a bit stale as the video continues. The graphics are not appealing, and the teaching style would not be attractive to a western audience. The host wears orange robes, and the curtains behind his couch are purple and yellow. Again, this setting is not appealing to a western audience but does convey the “otherness” of his message. The video is low energy and does not clarify what god the Swami is referring to in his lesson. As he is Hindu, there is quite a variety from which to choose.

The third video analyzed based upon relevance rankings was “Are You Devoted to God?” which was accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1ooFos1fwE>. This video was hosted on the channel called “Living Church of God,” which showed to have eight thousand two subscribers. The video displayed that it has had eleven thousand, five hundred twenty-four views since December 9, 2016. The video was hosted by Wallace Smith, who represented the Living

Church of God, Charlotte, NC. The overall playtime of the video was seventy-five minutes and seven seconds.

The host describes how maturity of faith is required to have God invest more into a person's life. A person must be devoted entirely to God to have the ability to grow to maturity in faith. A believer needs to be utterly devoted to God's will for Him to be devoted to them.

The audio is clear and easily understandable. The host's demeanor is one of a reasonable conveyor of information. Still, he loses focus on his key points and creates a message that is extremely broad and difficult for a viewer to pinpoint what message he is trying to deliver.

The length of the video is very long for the YouTube format. Most viewers would likely stop viewing far before the end of the sermon, possibly not even engaging for more than a few seconds. The video format is lackluster and not interesting. The lack of other camera angles and other elements in such a long video is fatiguing to a viewer. The video does not supply any visual information for Scripture references in banners or slides, which would assist the viewer in reading along with the Bible quotations that the speaker consistently used in his presentation. The presentation is brought forward as a long monologue. The presenter does not provide key points or summaries to help the viewer manage the volume of information that is shared. His introduction is too broad for a person to manage their expectations of what they are about to hear.

According to relevance, the fourth video analyzed was "What does it mean to be devoted to God?", located at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hsj4AJCaYj0>. The channel that hosted this video was called "Dan Marler." The channel did not display any subscribers, and the video showed that there had been one hundred nine views since December 6, 2017. The host's name is

Dan Marler, and the hosting organization was the First Church of God, Oak Lawn, IL. This video's overall playtime was three minutes and six seconds.

The host explains that a person who is devoted to God has strong feelings for God and a strong commitment to God, such as a vow. The host shares that devotion has a connotation of actions that are consistent with wanting to grow our relationship with God. He asserts that a devoted person would love God, remain committed to doing what God asks, and engage in practices that continue to develop their relationship with God.

The video presents a fun guy who wants to share what he thinks about the subject. If a person has a relationship with this person and values his friendship, they will likely enjoy this quick video and overlook the poor quality of the recording.

The poor quality of the video is quite distracting, and most viewers would likely click away because it does not appear that much effort went into making this video. The host makes assertions but does not support any point he makes beyond alluding to Christians' common beliefs. If a person did not already have a reference point to what the speaker was discussing, they would not be able to follow his argument.

Marler seems to have utilized a cellphone as his camera, but his camera does not appear to have the ability to provide a full-screen recording format. The video shows up narrowly on a computer monitor, with large black frames on each side. His framing of the shots presents an unflattering view of his office, which does not raise the viewer's opinion as to his credibility. This lack of planning undermines his messaging.

The final video analyzed based upon relevance was called "Devoted to God // 1 Timothy 6:1-2" and was hosted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUz4EmT59M8>. The video was presented on the channel called "Legacy" and displayed that the channel had seven thousand,

three hundred sixty subscribers. The video showed to have been viewed two hundred thirty-nine times since July 5, 2020. The hosts' names are Josh Thompson and Ricky Gonzales, and they represent Legacy City Church, Studio City, CA. The video had an overall playtime of thirty-eight minutes and twenty-five seconds.

The host begins by emphasizing the importance and reliability of Scripture to their lives. He explains how 1 Tim 6:1-2 speaks of devotion to God but relates this devotion to how to resist racism and slavery mindsets. The host explains that resisting a worldly mindset helps a believer be more effective in ministry to those around them.

The quality of the recording invites a viewer to engage with the video. The lack of formality and setting is appealing to a large audience. The introduction is well done and likely helps add to their subscription numbers. The camera quality is excellent and displays an excellent level of creativity and professionalism.

The primary host spends a lot of time looking down to read his notes on the iPad, reducing engagement for the viewer. The video's title appears to be tangent to the real message presented by the host, which is to speak against slavery and racist mindsets. This kind of misdirection will likely lead to many who were searching on the devotion topic to click away from the video since it does not address what they might have been seeking. The end of the video does not have a closing transition to talk about the channel or invite subscription, making the video's ending seem abrupt.

Creation of a YouTube Channel

YouTube has become a trusted platform where over one billion hours of video is watched each day.⁷⁰ According to Nielson Research, YouTube reaches more adults age eighteen to thirty-four in the United States than any cable network.⁷¹ As such, this video platform has the potential to connect with a vast audience. Bell and Leonard comment that “Sites such as YouTube provide a platform for multimodal storytelling, using film, graphics, photographs, and audio recording in combination.

Each of these communicative modes can be used to realize a different communicative purpose, but together, they constitute an integrated whole.⁷² The functionality of YouTube provides users the ability to search for any topics that they are interested in studying. The same functionality provides access to those with a ministry purpose to inspire and educate those who are seeking answers from Scripture.

The student had already established a Google account several years ago. Google owns YouTube, so the student’s Google account allowed him to create a new YouTube channel. The channel was named “Early Church Vibe” in an effort to communicate the intent of sharing the practices of the Early Church with a modern audience with the hope of allowing them to operate according to the same vibe as members of the early church.

The setup process was very intuitive and allowed for the easy uploading of videos into the channel. The tools provided allow a user to identify if the video should be protected from

⁷⁰ Rob Ciampa, Theresa Go, Matt Ciampa, and Rich Murphey, *YouTube Channels for Dummies*,. (Newark: NJ, John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2020), Accessed May 1, 2021. ProQuest Ebook Central, 27.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷² Emma Bell and Pauline Leonard, “Digital Organizational Storytelling on YouTube: Constructing Plausibility Through Network Protocols of Amateurism, Affinity, and Authenticity”, (Journal of Management Inquiry 27, no. 3, July 2018), 339–51.

underage viewers. Initially, the student did not select this protection. Interestingly, the automated review tools that YouTube uses issued a notice to the student and advised that putting restrictions on the channel would be required. The student put the recommended restrictions in place but has set up a task to research this to see if this is an automated form of religious censorship. The channel provided other tools that allowed the student to create a playlist and then linked that playlist to the end screens of each video. The playlist allows viewers the opportunity to select the next video in the playlist or subscribe to the channel and return when they are ready to watch other videos. The subscriptions also allow a viewer to be notified when any new content is added to the channel.

The channel creator is provided with a dashboard that allows them to monitor how much viewer traffic is coming to their channel. The tool provides a count of total views and total subscribers, along with the ability to filter those totals by specific date ranges. In addition, the dashboard shows click-through rates, time spent viewing the videos, and how many viewers completed the videos. This information is vital for the channel manager to understand how the channel performs and reaches the YouTube audience.

The platform provides several opportunities to the student to grow their audience. There is an ability to target specific videos and allow the student to host “premiers” to publicize a specific date and time when a new video will be “released.” The platform allows the creation of a chat channel where people can post their impressions, and the creator can interact with the viewers in the chat channel. The student is provided a unique name “tag” that identifies them as the video creator. This kind of promotional activity can create excitement among the viewers and encourage them to invite others to view the channel.

The channel also provides search engine optimization. This software will analyze the content uploaded and suggest keywords to include in the search engine optimization fields. The student can also include keywords that they feel would be helpful. These keywords allow the videos to be suggested to viewers who are searching for specific types of videos. These tools greatly aid new content creators as they place their video content on YouTube and begin to build an audience.

Challenges Presented in the Micro Project

As the student edited the video projects, the audio tracks proved to be extremely difficult to manipulate. The target expectation was to begin each video with an upbeat soundtrack that would slowly fade to an audible background level but did not detract from the host's dialogue. The tools provided in Adobe Premiere Pro allowed for the editor to set a volume at each break in an audio track but did not allow for a smooth fade down in volume or up in volume. The audio editing proved to be one of the areas where a great deal of time was spent to get the audio close to what the student had envisioned.

A similar challenge arose as the student searched for audio tracks to utilize for the projects. The offerings that professed to be free of cost proved to use bait and switch tactics consistently. The files would be free for development, but all required a subscription and license to be added for each use of the file in the creation of a video for YouTube. Moving graphics also required licensing. One source provided an extensive library of moving graphics and audio tracks for an annual subscription. The student concluded it was best to pick one vendor to provide these files and provide the licensing. Licensing must be maintained to keep the videos playing legally on YouTube, so an ongoing communication strategy must include a budget to subscribe to a provider of graphic files and audio files.

The student struggled to find settings that would allow the underlying soundtrack to play on an endless loop. The workaround that was utilized was to stack the audio tracks, one after another, to create the impression of continuous performance of the soundtrack song.

The student chose to record the videos at his home on an outdoor lanai overlooking a river. This setting proved to have occasional audio intrusions from boating traffic that would move by on the river. These intrusions created multiple re-takes to allow the engine noise from the boat traffic to move away.

While visually appealing, the outdoor setting provided another unforeseen challenge as small gnats would occasionally make their way through the screening on the lanai and would swarm the host as he was recording. In most cases, the host was able to ignore the wildlife. In some cases, the aggressive insects would bite or invade an ear, which required the host to spot and deal with the nuisance.

The student planned to have multiple cameras running so that different camera angle shots could be edited together while the soundtrack played without interruption. Multiple video recordings create an editing challenge in which the editor must synchronize the videos to the audio voice track. Lack of synchronization is very distracting to the viewer, so precise editing is crucial. This work is not extremely difficult if thought is given to identify starting times on each camera. The student had purchased two identical video cameras that could be started using a remote control. The remote control allowed the cameras to begin recording simultaneously, which significantly aided video and sound synchronization.

However, the plan to have multiple camera shots did not prove to bring the value that had been hoped for in the videos. The student learned that having an offset angle less than ninety degrees would have been preferable to what he initially attempted. Also, the side-shots showed

items in the background that had been overlooked and proved to be distracting to the viewer. The student ultimately decided to remove the camera shots taken from other angles.

The purchased cameras proved to lack the crispness of video recording that the student had hoped to see. The cameras had the ability to record in 4K quality, but the student observed that a Samsung 20 cellphone recorded with greater clarity than the cameras. The student chose to utilize the recordings made by the video cameras but intends to re-record the video in the future to enhance the perceived quality of the recordings.

The recordings also required the editor to change the color settings in the editing software in an attempt to present a consistent balance of colors in the videos. As the daylight changed throughout the day, the host's image became darker in the videos. The editor learned that it was necessary to write down the settings for one video that had good color balance, then used those settings to edit the other videos to present the videos in a similar manner.

Efficacy of a YouTube Channel for Ministry

Audience

This Micro Project was designed to enable the student to communicate through the YouTube platform to a wider audience than would otherwise be possible. It will allow the student to minister to others and experience personal engagement with others beyond his immediate proximity. The content is specifically targeted to those who are already regenerated believers in Jesus. Christian denominations in the United States are in a season of decline in numbers, so one would expect individuals associated with these denominations to seek ways to be effective in their ministries and reverse the current negative growth trends. There was no attempt to limit the channel's content to a specific denomination, but rather, it is meant to be helpful to anyone who seeks direction to become a mature disciple of Jesus. YouTube videos

have become a valuable training tool for many believers. The channel created is the beginning of an ongoing attempt to equip and mobilize believers across the United States to become mature disciples who endeavor to make disciples wherever the Lord has placed them to minister to others.

The videos are not targeted solely at clergy, but clergy is certainly one of the primary target audiences. Effectiveness in ministry is highly valued by those who serve local congregations. The desired outcome is that clergy members will gain insights from this channel that will assist them in communicating the need for a new approach to personal missions to their congregations.

Intent of Videos

These videos share three key concepts that are taken directly from God's Word. Those concepts can be summarized as devotion, love for others, and engagement in disciple-making. Culture's move toward self-centeredness has influenced modern believers. Most believers have lost the understanding that they are meant to be the ones who share the gospel with others and bear the responsibility to disciple others. The centuries-long effort to empower clergy and disenfranchise laity has led to the conditions that exist in the modern church. The modern church needs to help the congregants understand that they are the solution to spreading the gospel throughout the Earth. Breen suggests that God's people should be described as "Disciples who are radically committed to the mission of God."⁷³ The videos are the beginning of an effort to communicate an empowering paradigm to a modern congregation of a mega-church, with hope

⁷³ Mike Breen, *Multiplying Missional Leaders*, (Crowdscribed, LLC, 2014), Location 355.

that this message will be persuasive to many other churches across the United States and ultimately around the world.

Structure of the Videos

The videos were designed to open with stating the purpose of the video and a brief summary of information presented in prior videos in the series. Students Beutemps and Bresges conducted a survey of YouTube users to determine the most important features in the presentation of a video. Beutemps and Bresges shared, “The structure of the video is most important for the respondents. More than 85% of the respondents say that the topic should be mentioned at the beginning of the video, while almost 80% of the respondents say that a conclusion at the end of the video is important or very important to them.”⁷⁴

Tone of Videos

Because the message is meant to be encouraging rather than cajoling or condemning, the student has chosen to relate ideas conversationally. The host of the videos seeks to speak directly to the viewer without referring to notes. The dialogue is intended to be flowing and casual rather than formal. The vocabulary utilized is meant to be everyday language with few theological terms utilized. The idea behind the messages is to provide encouraging statements that move a believer to refer to God’s Words and apply them to their own lives. These changes will be significant for many, so the host attempts to phrase the encouragements to communicate that any believer can appropriate the concepts.

⁷⁴ Jacob Beutemps and André Bresges, “What Comprises a Successful Educational Science YouTube Video? A Five-Thousand User Survey on Viewing Behaviors and Self-Perceived Importance of Various Variables Controlled by Content Creators”, (Frontiers in Communication, vol. 5, April 1, 2021).

Quality of the Audio

The student focused on producing an excellent recording of the host's voice for the videos. Audio is vitally important to the viewers, as indicated by the research of Beutemps and Bresges, who said, "The visual quality was seen as much less important to the respondents than the auditory quality."⁷⁵

Tone of Background Music

The student intentionally chose upbeat acoustical guitar music to create a feeling of happiness and openness. The guitar refrains are relatively simple rather than complex and are meant to make the viewer feel relaxed as they listen to the dialogue. The upbeat nature of the music will communicate positivity, as opposed to using solemn or heavy music. Those kinds of music can communicate reverence or awe to a viewer but were avoided in these videos. This background music in this series of videos was meant to support the feeling that encouraged a person to consider that a loving God wishes to have a closer relationship with them.

Style of Dress

The host of the videos was presented in casual clothing. This style of clothing was chosen to communicate that the viewer is being invited into a relational conversation where one person is sharing from their heart what they wish to impart to another. The lack of formality is meant to lower any perceived barriers a person might feel toward clergy, so the focus can be on the biblical concepts being shared. The student intentionally chose dark colors so that the background colors would be enhanced, and his face would stand out on the video screens that were being viewed.

⁷⁵ Jacob Beutemps and André Bresges, "What Comprises a Successful Educational Science YouTube Video?"

Location Chosen for Filming

The location chosen for the backdrop was meant to be interesting visually while also communicating that the host was inviting them into his life. Many people have very few experiences of being invited into another person's home. This setting was meant to feel like a person had joined the host on his porch and was engaging in a discussion about how to serve God and develop a closer relationship with God with a fellow believer.

Visibility to the Internet

This YouTube channel is easily accessed using the YouTube search tools on that website; however, the same is not true when a conventional search is performed using Google, Bing, or DuckDuckGo. Those search engines need more information to pull up the videos. The student will have to invest time to enhance the search engine optimization fields associated with video addresses. This work to enhance search engine optimization will be facilitated when the videos and YouTube channel are linked to a website where that type of optimization work has been completed.

Overall Effectiveness

The YouTube channel and the associated videos are an excellent beginning to creating a teaching and encouragement platform that communicates the need for God's people to clearly understand what it means to live a life of devotion to the Lord. As with any new project, data will need to be gathered from a sample of viewers to see if the assumptions underlying the creation of these videos are accurate. For this channel to have a meaningful impact on a large audience, considerable effort will need to be expended to expand awareness of the channel. The student can visualize having a far-reaching impact with such a platform; however, the primary

goal is to affect the thought processes of the local congregation. The opportunity to influence the local congregation is easily within reach of the student. It should enable the opportunity to gather accurate information about the effectiveness of these videos in transmitting the concepts described in the videos.

The skills that have been gained in developing this channel will allow the student to expand into other opportunities of communicating with others effectively. The initial responses from individuals who have been invited to view the channel have been very positive. Their critiques will aid in enhancing the current videos and providing meaningful standards to target in the development of future videos.

Conclusion

The student believes that creating the YouTube channel and the accompanying website will provide a terrific tool to reinforce concepts that will be taught in one-on-one interactions, from the church platform in sermons, and in small group discussions. The student plans to rely on God to empower the teaching and encouragement, and will be delighted to aid any believers at the church he serves in growing in their devotion to God and to each other. The student hopes these believers will feel empowered to share the gospel with their friends as they go through life. The Micro Project provides a platform for continuous development and will be useful in ministry for years to come.

CHAPTER 5: MICRO PROJECT FOUR

Introduction

The fourth Micro Project this student conducted to address the ministry problem was a Website Creation Micro Project. This chapter presents the Culmination phase of the fourth Micro Project, which purposed to design, build, and publish a website to communicate the concepts developed in the portfolio project. The portfolio project addresses a defined ministry problem and supports the arguments the student has developed to assist believers as they consider their purpose as a disciple of Jesus. In this chapter, the student presents the justification for the project, comments and responses by peers regarding the project, an analysis of the project after implementation, and recommendations for future use of such a Micro Project.

Recommended Engagement

The student utilized the knowledge gained in the discipleship cognate to develop the website content. This focus was chosen to answer the student's curiosity about why there does not seem to be a consistent and effective method in today's churches to develop disciple-making disciples. The student's experiences serving in senior leadership roles in churches provided the opportunity to see firsthand the decline in many congregants' attendance from gathering whenever the church doors were open to coming only once per month. Attendance is not the sole defining characteristic of a disciple, but declining attendance does indicate declining interest in gathering with other believers. The student wanted to gain a broad perspective of the issue but also conduct an in-depth study of discipleship to identify where our local church should focus to reverse this trend.

In this Micro Project, the student created a website to help others understand and utilize what was learned in prior projects. A website is a fantastic way to convey information to others in a manner that is not time- or location-restricted. A website also allows a great deal of knowledge and data to be shared very easily. The format of the individual web pages within the website allows information to be supported with graphics, photos, and videos to successfully convey the messages and information analysis that the creator wishes to share. The website viewer can then use this information to implement similar solutions to problems they are experiencing in their own ministries.

The ministry problem addressed is that the student seeks first to understand why the mega-church he serves does not exhibit the explosive growth that the early church experienced and second, to recommend a solution to that problem. Since it is reasonable to expect that a church filled with disciple-making disciples would exhibit explosive growth, this project aligns well with the discipleship cognate of the student.

Prior projects included researching the church's current condition, analyzing articles that explain the cultural conditions that the church is experiencing, and developing a series of teaching videos that communicate to viewers what the student believes must change in order to adopt the practices of the early church that fueled their explosive growth. A YouTube channel was created to host these teaching videos. The final project involved developing a website that supports those who wish for a more in-depth look into the student's arguments and ways to implement them into their own ministry contexts.

In the website's content, the student explains that the modern church has moved away from an understanding of and emphasis on devotion to God. Deut 6:4-5 calls God's people to pursue God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength. This single-mindedness includes a

passion for knowing God by reading His Word. Jesus explained that everything we do as we relate to others should align with Matt 22:36-40, where He told us to love others as God does. He makes this thought more poignant by saying we should love others as we love ourselves. Finally, believers will be reminded of the Great Commission in Matt 28:28-30, where Jesus directs His followers to make disciples. That includes reaching them by sharing the gospel with them, then teaching them to obey all of Jesus' commands.

The student has a life-long love of problem-solving and has spent countless hours contemplating how to address the various issues that capture his attention. His strong operational skills have been at work within the church he serves, which provides a stable foundation from which to operate. The student wishes to see the local church be an outpost that continually expands in impact. His desire is for God's people to experience the abundant life He has for them as they serve others in His name. It is not acceptable to the student that the local church is large but not growing. The student believes that healthy things grow, so he has sought to scrutinize the local church, looking for areas that can be strengthened, equipped, and mobilized to give the people of the church a vast array of opportunities to influence those around them and serve our community.

The Micro Project was designed to progress through four phases. Those phases included an organization phase, elaboration phase, implementation phase, and a culmination phase. In the Organization phase, the student researched credible sources on building a website and considered what features should be included. The student identified three poorly executed websites and described their deficiencies, followed by three excellent websites and explained their strengths.

In the Elaboration phase, the student justified the format and layout of the website. The student also considered potential design elements and which software editing program would be used to create the website. In addition, the student identified the content to be included in the website.

In the Implementation phase, the student took the knowledge gained in prior phases and put that knowledge into practice. The student built a website with the preferred features, published it, and has it operating live on the internet with a reputable hosting company.

In the Culmination phase, the student reflected upon the experience of building and launching the website. The student also evaluated whether he achieved the goal of providing useful information to website users in the form of ideas they can implement to help their people adopt new attitudes and a passion toward ministry that will allow them to experience the growth seen by the early church.

Peer Review

At two points during the Micro Project development, doctoral students provided feedback to one another regarding their projects. At the first measurement point, the student presented the justification and vision for the intended project.

Richard Moore expressed his assessment that the project addressed "the investigative questions who, what, where, how, and when."⁷⁶ He continued by sharing from his own life experience, "In law enforcement, we always added one more interrogative to this list, which is what else, by what else in this context, we ask what I have missed or what else a witness or

⁷⁶ Richard Moore, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/80381/discussion_topics/614757, May 19, 2021.

subject may have omitted discussing."⁷⁷ Moore suggested that the student explore creating a marketing process that serves the local church and, ultimately, the world at large. Moore shared, "I think your problem is not just domestic but global."⁷⁸

Moore encouraged a plan that would seek to move beyond the use of technology and would serve those without access to the internet. He suggested using surveys and brochures to expose non-technical audiences to the ministry problem. In addition, Moore suggested finding an outside party to assist with surveying congregants in a manner that exposed them to the problem and helped them understand their condition related to the problem.

Moore's observations highlight that it is unlikely that the ministry problem can be addressed simply by providing a website filled with helpful information to the local congregation. A significant "ground game" will have to be enacted to connect relationally with believers and assist them as they seek to absorb the concepts shared in the website content. This call to action is appropriate and should not be overlooked.

At the second feedback point, Moore shared the things he learned from his experience in completing his own website Micro Project. He validated that it was essential to start working on the website early in the term and quickly secure a webhosting partner and commended the student for having already completed those action items. He explained that his research had called attention to the value of creating the website to meet the needs of the viewers rather than merely broadcasting a message. Another item of importance that he noted was for a student to

⁷⁷ Richard Moore, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/80381/discussion_topics/614758, June 8, 2021.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

have a plan to promote the website.⁷⁹ Moore offered that he thought a page should be incorporated that explains "why the modern American church is declining in numbers and clarify the attitudes that have led to this condition."⁸⁰

Another doctoral student, Michael Peoples, expressed that the use of visual storytelling with the images selected on the website was an excellent tactic to utilize. Peoples said, "When it comes to the visual design and storytelling regarding the website, I feel you are taking the right approach because most consumers are captured first by what they see rather than what they know."⁸¹ Peoples felt that a new page that explained why the modern church is in a state of decline was needed.

In view of this feedback, the Micro Project website development plan was amended to include a page highlighting the "problem" in the modern American church according to the student's opinion.

Evaluation of the Project

This Micro Project focused on creating a website to communicate the ministry problem and proposed solutions to a larger audience. A website can be an effective tool to aid in communication and engagement with viewers. However, there are many technical aspects to establishing a website that should be considered. First, a webhosting vendor must be identified that will load the website onto their servers. Essentially, they provide access to the website by the

⁷⁹ Richard Moore, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/80381/discussion_topics/614758, June 8, 2021.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Michael Peoples, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/80381/discussion_topics/614758, June 12, 2021.

viewers and allow the website student to rent storage space for the files needed for the website to call up as needed.

These hosting firms can provide website development tools at no cost to a new website student. These tools simplify the process of web page creation and allow the student to load content into "containers" that the web page can pull up. The content can be video files, graphic art files, .pdf files, and written content. The web tools also provide the opportunity to add movement to the page as the user clicks on certain links. This movement can appear to make the page swipe away, slowly fade out, or have a spinning motion as it narrows to a point. These kinds of animations can create visual interest and a bit of a surprise to keep the user engaged. There are many options like these available, and the student must rely upon their creativity to present the content well.

Another key consideration is for the student to consider their audience. Different groups of people react differently to the design of web pages, and a student should choose designs that will be most effective for their audience. A student needs to be aware of the continuing changes in website development and have a plan for the lifespan of their website. Websites can become ineffective if they are not maintained or updated in a timely manner. Technology continues to evolve, and people are changing how they access websites.⁸² A few years ago, people began to choose to access websites using their smartphones. This trend has gained momentum to the point that major search engines have changed their priorities to seek mobile-friendly websites before recommending desktop-only websites. A wise student will keep this in mind when they develop their website so that they are highlighted by the search engine companies.

⁸² Lee Wilson, *30-Minute Website Marketing: A Step by Step Guide*, (Bingley, U.K: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2019), 7.

Another tool to utilize that aids the student in finding an audience for the webpage is to consider appropriate keywords to achieve search engine optimization. This practice allows the student to insert keywords into their website infrastructure that will cause the major search engines to recommend their website during viewer searches.⁸³

A website has a story to tell and must have an appealing design to engage with the viewer and draw them into the content. Part of the challenge is using webpage development tools well, but another is being aware of what design choices must be made to enable voice searches as well as desktop searches to drive traffic to the website. Design considerations must be limited to allow the website to be presented on mobile devices since that is a rapidly growing segment of viewer searches. In addition, the student must establish a schedule for periodic review of the website so that the content remains relevant and functional.

Analysis of Existing Websites

The project guidelines required the student to identify three websites that rated highly in the student's opinion and three websites that rated poorly. This rating was based on the perceived effectiveness of the website, the quality of the presentation in design and functionality, and a determination of the maintenance requirements of the website.

The first website identified was called Real Truth. Real Quick., which may be accessed at <http://realtruthrealquick.com/>. It was created by Watermark Community Church, a mega-church located on the upper north side of Dallas, TX. This innovative church places a strong emphasis on sharing and explaining God's Word to others, and this website works in conjunction with the YouTube channel they have created and the iTunes podcasts they have developed. The format of

⁸³ Peter Kent, *SEO for Dummies*, Seventh edition, (Hoboken, New Jersey: For Dummies, 2020), Chapter 6.

the website provides a landing page, a features page that provides links to chosen video content, a response page where videos that were developed from viewers' questions are presented, a questions page where the students seek questions from their viewers, an archive page which provides links in list form to all content available going back to 2013, and a question and answer page where people can post a question and get a posted response that others can either view or respond with their own answers.

The positive elements identified were that the graphics on this website are very basic and have a clean look to them. The logo for the site is used throughout their content which identifies that it belongs on their site and provides cohesion and continuity as the viewer moves from page to page.

Their intent is primarily to deliver video content, and they aid the viewer by providing a timeline that indicates the three most recently posted content items. Each video is delivered on a separate page and includes a descriptive title, date posted, show notes, questions considered, links to other resources and engagement items for feedback, and solicited responses to questions. The negative elements that were identified related to the upkeep of the website. There is wisdom in keeping things simple; however, the colors used on the website seem a bit boring. In a similar way, the fonts and graphics are somewhat plain. The content delivered in prior years was very well done, but in 2020, the volume dropped considerably, and nothing has been posted in 2021. This is probably related to the COVID pandemic, but it would be more impressive if the students addressed that seeming lack of focus with an explanation.

The second website identified is that of Grace Baptist Church, <http://www.growingatgrace.com>, a church plant established in Brandon, Florida.

The student considered that the positive elements of the website were that it presented a very clean look with large panels of colorful and high-quality pictures, with text placed around or upon them. The website's purpose is to introduce viewers to the church and help the viewer visit a physical church service or watch a service online. They also seek to gain contact information from the viewer so that they can follow up with that person. The staff pictures support the idea of a younger leadership, which will be appealing to some, and they are well presented. Transitions between pages are well done and interesting to view.

The negative elements identified relate to congruity. There appears to be a disconnect between what is presented on the website, which shows beach scenes and palm trees, and what the viewer would experience if they attended. The targeted audience seems to be younger viewers, and it is possible that the church staff were concerned that a viewer would not choose to visit them if they presented an image of their actual location, a seventies vintage building that appears to be a converted home. This disconnect could be jarring to a visitor and should be addressed on the website with an encouraging explanation.

The web pages have good transitions, but when a viewer clicks on the "donate" page, they are not provided with transport buttons to take them to the other web pages within the site. This orphans them on the donate page and does not provide an obvious path to continue within the website.

The third website analyzed was named First Baptist Church – Wichita Falls, <https://www.fbcwf.org>. First Baptist Church of Wichita Falls, Texas, is a multi-site mega-church located in a community of approximately one hundred and fifty thousand people. This website serves to introduce the church to new viewers, communicate the church's many ministries, and

provide information to help members be aware of events and times for activities that are ongoing at the church.

This website had several positive aspects. The website was professionally created by a consulting firm. The transport button to the home pages is the logo in the upper left corner of each screen so as to provide easy movement back to the home page and access to the over forty pages that are serviced by it. The home page has a large graphical picture showing worship teams that vary from students, young adults, and senior adults, which communicates the diversity of ages in the church. That same graphic communicates the worship times for the three Sunday services and the format that each uses. There is a menu button on the upper right corner of the page that delivers a pull-down menu of the twelve main pages of the website.

The website features video clips behind sections that provide visual movement, links to sermons, links to archived messages, and teaching from different pastors in different ministry areas. This website appears to provide a one-stop location to see everything that the church is offering to the community.

Complexity and the volume of information shared defined the negative aspects of this website. The website can appear vast to an outsider, and it is easy to get lost in all the offerings. Visually, the landing page is good at providing information, but the banner graphics on the top of the page lack energy. It appears to be targeted at the internal audience rather than an external audience. However, the first graphic is describing worship times and presenting the diversity of ages of people. That seems to be targeting an external audience but is not supported by the information immediately following.

Organization is the area this website should focus on improving. A landing page could be created as an externally focused webpage, with links for the internal audience to get to what they

want to reference quickly. Another option is to provide a separate landing page accessed through a different URL that members could easily memorize (i.e., members.fbwf.org).

It was noted that a few pages contained outdated information that did not align with the current information presented on the landing page. One of the challenges of providing lots of webpages is to keep the information accurate, and this website could use some upkeep.

The fourth website analyzed is called Bruce Ashworth, Attorney at Law, <https://www.bruceashworth.com>. This website is simply constructed and uses uninteresting images behind text. The website presents a professional attorney but does not present the man himself or provide any connection to him with the website, besides providing contact information and a form to fill out. The site provides a list of areas this attorney has expertise in yet does not provide any testimonials to support the wall of text on the website.

The website appears to be a boiler-plate type website, developed by a professional firm that an attorney can purchase and insert their personal information. The website does present multiple pages and provides a variety of pulldown menus with additional general information about legal services. Unfortunately, the website has the obvious appearance of a boiler-plate presentation. Any attorney's name and contact information could be inserted, and this would become their website. That lack of personalization is apparent to any viewer and reduces the perceived value of the website, and by association, the attorney. The lack of a video with the attorney attempting to connect to the viewer and the lack of any pictures makes the website uninteresting, and users will be likely to click away in search of something that presents better.

The fifth website analyzed was named Camp Langston RV Resort, <https://www.camplangston.org>. This website supports a recreational vehicle resort located outside of Mt. Pleasant, TX. The owner has created sixty RV sites and is marketing the location

as an entertainment location. The website has six pages, and the landing page includes a video that allows the viewer to see what the property looks like through drone footage and edited video. This use of technology is excellent. The landing page provides a map that shows the layout of the resort and indicates where the lakes and trails are available around the property. There is a colorful photograph behind the map panel that is very attractive. The subsequent pages provide additional information about pricing and other uses of the resort.

The creator does not appear to have finished their work on this website. The banner at the top of the page is blank. The appealing picture on the landing page shows people on four-wheel recreational vehicles driving along a lakeshore and a tractor on the right side of the page. However, that picture does not communicate to a viewer that this is a resort center. The drone footage and video do not have any voiceover to describe what is being viewed. In addition, this website would be more impactful if there were testimonials from people who had stayed there expressing their admiration for the property, amenities, and the resort's management. The fonts used on the informational page are difficult to read and too small for normal use.

The sixth website analyzed was named JR's Lawncare Service, <https://jrs-lawncare-service.business.site>. This website is meant to promote a lawn care business in the Gibsonton, Florida area. The website is a single page, contains a form for viewers to leave contact information, a form to request a quote, a link to call, and the owner's physical address. The webpage conveys that the business is open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Other than providing the name of the business and ways to contact the owner, this website is a detriment to this business, in the student's opinion. The owner most likely considers the website to be a substitute for a phonebook advertisement. Unfortunately, today's consumer is likely to expect more from a business. The website does describe the service to be provided in

the name of the website. It also implies that the business is owned by someone named JR. This website highlights a focus on simplicity.

There are no images on the website beyond an embedded google map that shows where the owner lives. The webpage is mostly a plain white background with the company name in a colored font and simple text in black. The website does not explain what the business does and whether there are any limitations to the services or area that it serves. It primarily is a location to ask for service and presents a phone number to call for assistance. The URL name is not easy to remember, and it is unlikely anyone would stumble upon this website in a general browser search.

Purpose

In this implementation phase, the student created a website located at <https://earlychurchvibe.net/>. This webpage is hosted through Squarespace and is managed through their services as well.

The website was constructed to transmit the message that a modern believer can adopt the early church's attitude and experience a greater connection with God and the people He brings into their lives. The website has both written content and links to video content on the "Early Church Vibe" YouTube channel that was developed in a previous Micro Project. The targeted audience is those who are seeking ideas on how to become more effective in impacting the lives of their friends and family with the gospel. This website will serve as a platform to bring content to those who want to become disciple-makers, fulfilling the charge given by Jesus in the Great Commission.

Squarespace

This project utilized software provided by Squarespace. This company provides a closed and curated approach to web page design and provides hosting for the newly created website. This software as a service (SaaS) allows the student to spend most of his development time on content rather than investing time learning how to code. It also simplifies the process of setting up hosting services for the website. The student used several of the integrated themes that Squarespace provides to students, which gave a clean and sophisticated look to the web pages.

Pricing for Squarespace is higher than a barebones implementation of WordPress, another commonly used website creation platform.

Once the webpage was created, it was published, and because Squarespace also hosts the website, it was immediately available on the internet. The student can easily log in to the Squarespace website and unpublish the website or make changes as needed. This functionality is very helpful in maintaining the website and keeping the content from becoming stale.

Layout and Design

The student chose several different premade templates provided by Squarespace for the layout of the webpage. These layouts provide a clean, uncluttered look and allow for the use of photographs, which add a non-verbal element that enhances communication of the website's message. In addition, the templates have well-designed transport links that will be intuitive for most web browser users. There was a reasonable learning curve involved with learning how to layer background graphics, choose text font sizes, and insert videos into the individual pages.

The original design concept was to provide a landing page, a key concepts page that addressed three key concepts, a vision page, a problem definition page, and an "about" page.

Future implementation plans originally included the concept of adding a FAQ page as well as a page that provides recommended resources.

As the project progressed, the student decided to add the resources page now rather than in the future. This page includes two primary resource areas, one for recommended reading material and the second for helpful self-assessment tools. The first area is represented by an image of a "Kindle" reading device; clicking on this image takes the viewer to a page with images of book covers with embedded links. Clicking any book image will direct the viewer to the Amazon webpage that offers the respective book for sale. These Amazon pages give brief summaries of each book and other pertinent information such as page count, publisher, publication date, author information, and readers' ratings, as well as the opportunity to purchase the book. The second resource content area is represented by an "under construction" image labeled with the words "How To's." Clicking this image takes the reader to a page offering a personal growth self-assessment.

The student also chose to address two questions that a viewer might ask as they consider what is presented on the landing page: What is the ECV, and what is the problem being addressed?

The student desires to include a large number of resources on this website in the future and plans to deliver that content through a FAQ page that will be added to the main transport bar of the website. As well, the resources page will eventually include another page with links to the web pages of respected theologians such as Dallas Willard along with articles they have posted on the internet, but this feature was not included in this initial phase of development. Certain website elements are currently disabled but will be kept in place for future use. One of these is a blog page that can be added to provide ongoing engagement on the webpage.

Images

This website aims to encourage devotion to God, unity among believers, and excitement about following the expressed will of God as provided in the Great Commission. The student chose images of people embracing each other, talking at tables with each other, and cresting ridgelines as a group to convey the idea that the "ECV" prioritizes people and relationships. There was a conscious choice to show a diversity of races in the images to convey that God's love and attention are for all mankind. The student chose a variety of settings and color palettes rather than sticking to one consistent presentation. Vibrant colors were used on some pages, while others were darker and monochromatic. That choice was partly to support the ability of the viewer to read the white text that overlayed images on a few of the pages. A feature of Squarespace includes a library of available images with the licensing of their product. This access to licensed images significantly simplified the student's use of those images. The images are professionally created and properly formatted for use on a website.

Content

The initial build of the website includes a landing page that briefly communicates the purpose of the webpage. Several pages can be accessed from this landing page that provide more detailed discussions of critical topics, while other pages provide links to recommended books that are relevant to the topics discussed. Throughout the website, embedded videos link the viewers to the YouTube channel that hosts videos created in a prior Micro Project. In the future, there will be an additional page that will provide links to external websites addressing the same issues and a blog page where posts will highlight current thoughts about the issues and solicit feedback from blog followers.

The primary pages were populated with written content that explains how to apply the key concepts advanced by the website; namely, devotion to God, biblical unity as the family of God, and clarity about the mission that Jesus gave in Matt 28:19-20, known as the "Great Commission." As content was added to the website, it became apparent to the student that an additional page should be included that defines the problem that most disciples are facing. The student researched recent articles that describe the decline in church attendance and church membership. These declines began long before the global pandemic of 2020, which only accelerated the decline in numbers. In addition, content was added that describes the pervasive lack of unity among believers and how there appears to be a lack of purpose within the American church. Information was also provided that shows an ongoing decline in the number of annual baptisms that the Southern Baptist Convention has reported over the past ten years.

Search Engine Optimization

The next task was to optimize the website so it will "show up" in internet search results. After all the content was uploaded and edited, the student began the process of identifying keywords that would need to be woven into the website titles, header fields, page descriptions, and page content. The student used tools provided to webmasters by both Bing and Google search engines. These tools identify keywords that other websites dealing with similar content use to reach web-searchers querying topics such as devotion to God, the Great Commission, discipleship, and disciple-making.

Those tools pointed out errors in the initial draft of the website that would raise error messages, negatively impacting the search efficiency of the major search engines. Those errors, if left unresolved, would result in fewer web searches finding the website. The webmaster tools provided good training documents that enabled the student to find the source of the errors and

resolve them by either making changes to page setup or modifying content. The student utilized the concepts presented by Peter Kent⁸⁴ to drive internet traffic to the website. More traffic will provide a greater opportunity to engage with others in conversations about how to develop their effectiveness as disciples and provide tools to teach others how to be a disciple.

Interestingly, the Squarespace tools provided space for a four hundred character description on each page, but the Bing development tools suggested that a description over one hundred twenty-six was considered excessive, and those fields would be flagged for revision. The student was able to identify other websites that address topics related to the focus of this website. The student reached out via email to those site owners to ask permission to provide links on this website to their websites and build traffic between the various sites. The student was encouraged to be able to join into the conversation with other students who are interested in this topic in order to bring solutions to those who are seeking to become more effective at disciple-making.

Challenges Presented in the Micro Project

As mentioned previously, the creation of the URL and engaging a hosting vendor was extremely easy to complete. The real challenge to any website is developing a clear vision of what the website is to convey. The student spent a good amount of time deciding which elements to include. Several items appeared to be useful but were not ultimately implemented due to the concern that the webpage could become too complex for users to navigate or that the work required to build the pages did not seem feasible during this particular project period. Those

⁸⁴ Peter Kent, *SEO for Dummies*, Seventh edition, (Hoboken, New Jersey: For Dummies, 2020).

items were noted, and placeholders were inserted into the website but were toggled to be hidden until they are ready to be developed and deployed.

The licensing environment for photographs and graphic elements is confusing for a new student to navigate. In this Micro Project, the student utilized what had been learned during a prior project and only selected resources that professed to be freely licensed for use. The webpages developed were not the exact product that was envisioned by the student, but the time and financial resources available for the project set limits to what could be implemented. This provided a good learning experience for the student and will inform future website development decisions.

The technical challenge of doing search engine optimization well proved to be another area of challenge. The Google Analytics tools and the Bing Webmaster tools indicated there were errors in the webpages that triggered error codes, but the tools were not sufficiently descriptive to aid in resolving all the errors. The student will have to continue researching these error codes and find potential fixes from knowledgeable sources. These errors can cause decreased traffic on the website, so it is important to find and correct them. Identifying and utilizing appropriate keywords was also a significant challenge. The text in the webpages covers a spectrum of content, so there were numerous keywords that could have been selected to draw attention to the website. The student chose a few keywords to begin with and intends to monitor the activity and see which of those keywords are directing traffic to the website. Armed with that information, the student will swap out keywords to increase the utilization of the effective ones in each of the pages of the website. That increased usage should raise the score in the search engines' algorithms, which will result in increased traffic.

Efficacy of the Website Micro Project

Audience

The website Micro Project is intended to be a resource to the student's local church as well as provide information to those who are asking similar questions as they minister in their own communities. The targeted demographic profile is a person who is a believer in Jesus as Lord and Savior who is seeking to learn how to become a disciple-making disciple or someone who is seeking "more" as they seek to develop into a disciple as described in Scripture. This person is not a member of any specific denomination but would most likely identify themselves as an evangelical believer. The profile is defined this way because the information conveyed does not provide an in-depth description of who Jesus is or give a useful meta-narrative of Scripture to the viewer. Instead, the student has assumed that the viewer will have a basic understanding of the gospel as they consider the content provided.

Tone of the Website

The student sought to present the Early Church Vide in a positive manner and wished for the overall tone to be upbeat. The recognized need to define that problem created a unique challenge. The information in the challenge does not read or feel positive. The student attempted to provide commentary on other pages that encouraged a viewer to be encouraged that whatever perceived challenges they might identify can be overcome as a believer lives in close fellowship with God.

The student has an intense love for the church, the body of Christ, and is very sensitive to doing anything that would communicate a negative opinion of the church. The problem webpage proved to be problematic in that a reader might interpret the issues described as criticism that the church is seriously broken. While the student has no wish to defame the church, he does

recognize that there are some behaviors that God's people should address and improve upon. It is the hope of the student that increased awareness will instigate needed changes that enable believers to live the rich life that God intends for them to live, as opposed to the self-focused life the culture is championing.

Structure of the Website

The website, as presented, has six transport links on the home page. In addition to those, there are three links that convey key concepts, and the resources page has two links that direct viewers to recommended books and a self-assessment. There is certainly the opportunity to add many more pages and links, but the student is concerned that a viewer could quickly become overwhelmed with the amount of information presented. Therefore, the student surveyed a few close friends, and they agreed that limiting the amount presented until there was a need for more content requested by viewers was a wise choice.

The videos that were created in a prior Micro Project proved useful in their ability to communicate information as well as conveying the heart of the student. These videos provide interesting content, energy, and social interaction and help connect the YouTube channel and website audiences. The student plans to continue to generate videos that address the Early Church Vibe, which will keep both the YouTube channel and the website energized with new content.

Conclusion

This website Micro Project has been a wonderful challenge for the student and has made the student aware of another way to communicate God's message of love and hope to people who are invited into the student's sphere of influence. The ability to utilize the information discovered

through research, personal reading, and personal reflection into a vehicle that easily conveys those ideas to others is simply amazing. Of course, this technology does not meet everyone's needs, so other communication methodologies will still need to be utilized, but it would be irresponsible to ignore the potential of publishing useful websites.

This project used the research gathered in prior Micro Projects and the video content created in a prior Micro Project to populate a website that will hopefully aid the student in sharing their excitement and faith experiences with others.

CHAPTER 6: ASSESSMENT OF THE PROJECTS

Introduction

The four Micro Projects were created to address the ministry problem of The Crossing Church not experiencing the exponential growth that the early church demonstrated. This chapter presents the student's assessment of each Micro Project's success at addressing the ministry problem and provides an overall assessment of the combined effectiveness of the Micro Projects upon the ministry problem. The student will discuss challenges that arose, new skills learned, and reflections on what his peers provided as critiques of his Micro Projects.

Interview and Analysis Micro Project Assessment

As the student reflected upon the Interviews and Analysis Micro Project, the skills learned through using technology such as video conferencing and transcription software make this type of project more manageable, facilitating conducting a greater number of interviews in the future.

The student was pleased that his initial hypothesis was supported by the interviews conducted, providing a good base to build upon as the student defines potential solutions. The interview process was very enjoyable, and the student was pleased to see that the interview questions began to create movement in people as they started discussing what had been asked in the interview.

The student purposed to work toward defining how best to aid the people of The Crossing Church to become healthy disciples of Christ. His cognate was discipleship, and he felt that he had gained clarity about the attributes a disciple needs to develop. The student's observation was that the church is quite effective in attracting people to hear God's Word but far less effective in

helping people to become disciple-making disciples. Because of this weakness, the church has demonstrated a pattern of losing as many people as are attracted to the church each year. This has not been due to a large number of transient members or an unwelcoming environment. Rather, the student believes the root cause is that people come looking for not only personal enlightenment and development but also a community to join, and they fail to find that. The large size of the church allows people to comfortably hide within the masses and observe what is happening from the sidelines. After a period of time, they become dissatisfied because they find the challenge of applying the truths that are presented difficult to accomplish, and they suffer from a lack of connection with those who could help them.

The challenge is to gain acceptance of the ideas that the student has developed and to implement a practical training method that people will adopt. The church leadership has developed several training methodologies to assist believers in the process of sanctification. The interviews in this Micro Project pointed out one of the areas where church leadership has not successfully strategized to build a solution. Helping mature believers move forward to discipling at least one other person will prove to be a successful solution, in the student's opinion. It will take patience to allow time for the disciplers to do their work, but the student believes the results will be stunning.

If the church can successfully develop healthy disciple-making disciples and create an atmosphere that develops relationships that exhibit the family of God bond, the student believes that the church will become explosive in growth and impact on its community. Once a strong prototype becomes functional, it could prove to be very useful to other Kingdom outposts throughout the country. The current conversation about missional churches indicates that this concept would be foundational to their underlying strategies, but the student desires to

implement such ideas specifically in the context of existing mega-churches. It seems counterintuitive to take a church that is attractational to the lost and completely re-tool it to become small and intense. Therefore, a transitional plan seems wise, and the hybrid church models seem to be the correct manner to move toward a better discipling environment in the future.

There were a few areas in this Micro Project that the student felt needed additional investigation. First, the student would still like to do additional interviews with the church staff. The student was not satisfied that enough people were interviewed, but time simply did not allow for speaking with more interviewees. Also, the student has some concerns that the language used in the interview questions did not communicate clearly to this culture, as the “family of God” phrase seemed to confuse some. Additionally, the student had hoped to identify some who had experienced solid discipleship themselves and were engaged in an ongoing mentoring relationship. The interviewees sampled did not have that experience. The group of interviewees seemed aware that this discipling was missing from their lives, but thought that was a normal state for most individuals.

The student certainly saw the need to use a checklist in future interviews to enhance thoroughness and accuracy. He would also wish to utilize a neutral party to conduct the interviews to eliminate any feelings of intimidation or concerns the interviewees had about being forthcoming with their answers. The student felt that more time to prepare the questions and analyze the responses would have enhanced the project results. The student is convinced that church leadership needs to develop mature leaders who can mentor one person each. The interviews showed that everyone wants a mentor who loves and cares for them, so why not work to make that happen as best as is possible in our churches?

The student felt that he worked hard and fast to pull the project together. The student certainly did not try to skim over the issue. His reflections indicate that due to time constraints, he missed some opportunities to craft better questions. Additionally, the student would like to have had more research to support the hypothesis from other sources. The student felt that it might have been wiser to do the discussion panel or article review Micro Project first to build that academic foundation before doing practical research with interviews. The student realized that his sense of urgency to bring constructive change to the church impacted his Micro Project development. He feels that it would be good to develop useful tools and processes, but having a well-reasoned argument for change is vital to convincing the many who will fight to retain the status quo.

The comments of fellow students were helpful to consider and allowed the student to look at the problem from another perspective. The student does not believe he did a good job asking questions in the peer review activities. The student felt that he merely defined concerns rather than asking if anyone had ideas about how to resolve those concerns. The student will undoubtedly solicit further outside comments as he continues to expand these Micro Projects as he seeks to deliver impact at The Crossing Church.

Articles Critique Micro Project Assessment

The student found that article research takes an enormous amount of time. Searching through the various online databases is a unique skill and one in which the student hopes to increase his proficiency in the future. The insights that can be gained are significant, and the student believes he will be able to utilize them for significant impact as he continues working on this ministry problem. The student really enjoyed the discoveries he made and had to rein himself in to keep from following the breadcrumbs of interesting topics that presented

themselves in the research searches.

The student also discovered that reading articles is an acquired skill. The methodology, terminology, and etymology he found were challenging to make his way through; however, it became easier as the student read more. Certainly, such an exercise will increase his vocabulary in several areas as he becomes familiar with the language used to describe other areas of study.

The student reflected that he had struggled in his master's studies when asked to critique an author's work. The student felt that he did not have adequate expertise in the author's subject areas and was unsure how to approach the critique. This project gave the student a great perspective on how to perform critiques more effectively. He learned it is best to view the article from the perspective of the topic the student is trying to address and look for the strengths and weaknesses of the article regarding the targeted topic. This approach allowed the student to have a plumbline to judge the articles and discern his thoughts about their writing.

The student has witnessed what he believes are changes in the perspective of both people attending churches and also the general population. He chose the article review Micro Project because he wanted to see what others thought about these changes. This project was very helpful in helping him understand what he had been viewing and provided some additional insight into the problem he had identified.

This project confirmed that ministers face a significant challenge in convincing people that the pervasive worldview they have adopted is active in their lives. Baker and Brandner pointed out that adopting an individualistic worldview allows people to receive information from outside sources and then accept or reject the ideas presented based upon their valuation of the idea's applicability to their lives. This migration of worldviews has put pressure on familial closeness, as people no longer necessarily adopt their parents' beliefs. This creates a very

subjective basis for truth, and the American culture is advancing this behavior. People sense that relational dynamics are changing, and they are disturbed that moral character seems to be generally in decline. However, they are unable to discern that they are contributing to the decline by not aligning themselves with God's Word and becoming comfortable in this world's ways.

This Micro Project will bring focus to the importance of speaking out against worldly wisdom and highlight the need to align ourselves with the truth that God has given. The student felt that Bergler's, Porter's, and Sutton's articles highlighted the need for mature believers to invest themselves in individual relationships to convince people of the truths in God's Word. Spickard pointed out that the seeker-sensitive movement, when coupled with religious individualism, tends to move people toward narcissism and a consumptive lifestyle. Uecker and Froese's study pointed out that the cultural pressure to conform to worldly behavior results in moral progressivism within the church. The student agrees with this analysis and has witnessed it as well. This trend toward religious individualism also emphasizes the need to more highly value relationships between believers and spend time listening to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These are simple topics to state, but it will require significant effort to convince the modern believer to prioritize them.

The student believes this project has defined the problem accurately and identified underlying causes that have weakened the effectiveness of the church. He did not come across articles that provided clear guidance or successful case studies where others had approached this problem and saw a drastic change. The student had hoped to find several articles with those activities documented so he could glean ideas that might be applied in his local ministry.

The student was frustrated that he did not have more time for additional research to find other articles that spoke to the issues he was investigating. The student is confident there is much

more to learn, but the time limits of this project did not allow more in-depth research. The student intends to reopen this investigation after completing the overall project to increase his knowledge on this subject.

After the culmination phase of the Micro Project, the student solicited his peers to review the document and offer critiques. Zeigler shared,

I would like to encourage you when it comes to reaching Generation Z just share the gospel. Do not hear me wrong, I am all for doing things to get them there to hear the gospel but, the gospel never changes and God's Word never returns void. Make it enjoyable for the students but don't compromise the Word. They need the truth no matter how hard it is to hear. Be genuine with them lead by example and those students who live a life worthy of the gospel will have a huge impact on those around them which is what the Bible calls us to do. Lead them to Christ and teach them how to live that life and they will have an impact.⁸⁵

The student agrees with Zeigler's comment and will make sure that his encouragements to others are based upon Scripture and the good news of Jesus.

The student believes the research that has been done so far indicates that convincing a large group of people to fundamentally "renew" their minds is a massive undertaking. For instance, Kopiec's description of how the Industrial Revolution led to consumptionism is a useful construct to explain how our culture has moved away from God's principles over time. The student believes this project has equipped him to describe the problem well and communicate it in a loving way to a congregation. The student is also certain that most will not be able to act on that information without a personal guide to help them. The project has clarified that people will need to be disciplined "individually" and not en masse. Given what the student has learned, addressing these issues will require a multi-pronged strategy to aid people in turning from the effects of an individualistic mindset.

⁸⁵ Randall Zeigler, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/67106/discussion_topics/448089, March 5, 2021.

YouTube Channel Creation Micro Project Assessment

Like many new endeavors that people attempt, the student discovered a new area of expertise that a person might specialize in. The effort to build a YouTube channel requires a person to have a pretty clear vision of what they wish to communicate. This exercise was very helpful in bringing clarity to the student about what he intended to communicate to a wider audience and how that message should be broken into pieces that other people could process.

YouTube is a powerful medium that allows a message to reach a vast audience. It requires the creator to consider how to “market” the channel by using appropriate tags. Working in this way to connect the channel with the broader audience is vital.

The project provides a terrific platform to deliver a video message to a viewer. YouTube is easy to access on a computer as well as with mobile devices, and it allows a person to easily find and consume the content they seek out. The preferred format is to provide short videos that allow the viewer to grab a bit of information when they have time.

The student’s messaging is meant to convince believers to change their fundamental understanding of their role as a disciple. He suspects that many will need to hear the message multiple times to process what it means for them and resolve their objections. Providing a series of messages on YouTube allows a creator to not only provide ready access to members of the local church, but also to spread their content far beyond the local church body.

The platform also allows a viewer to become a vision-bearer if they agree with the concepts presented by the student. This allows the viewer to influence those they know and to become agents of change as they discuss the concepts with the other believers. The student’s vision is that the church he serves will see significant change as these ideas become a norm. Also, it is motivating to envision that other believers could do the same thing in the ministries

they serve and see more “fruit” in their lives from how they interact with others and with God. The limited feedback the student has received provides hope that people will consider personal change as they process that they can accomplish more in God’s Kingdom if they set aside their personal agendas.

This project reminded the student of the need to be proactive in communicating. The student recognizes that he has a tendency to allow others to speak while he focuses on technical issues and building support structures. The student believes that this message will require him to allow God to use him to speak lovingly and convincingly to believers. Building communication platforms falls within the student’s skillsets, and he will need to work harder to become skilled at speaking to the camera in a relatable manner. The student has learned to speak in a manner that feels natural and not worry about matching anyone else’s methods. The student finds that creating teaching videos has increased his capacity to speak to others about God’s truths with greater confidence.

The student identified that he needs to learn more about mixing sound so the soundtracks swell and fade properly. He also has not yet learned how to promote the channel in a manner that would attract thousands of viewers. The student understands that such viewership is hard-won, and he will need to continue to create content and release it on a continual basis to attract new viewers. The student learned a moderate amount about what it takes to create content in the project, but he has much to learn about planning a series of themed messages that will deliver content over several months. In addition, the student did not feel that he developed excellent graphics in support of the video. The student believes that eye-catching graphics and a memorable logo will connect well with viewers. During the scope of this Micro Project, the student was unable to find any graphics that he thought would connect well. The student

determined that he needs to learn where to source such items and have a plan for periodic updates.

After the culmination phase of the Micro Project, the student shared that document with his peers for critique. Clare suggested, “The background scenery was beautiful and soothing; I enjoyed the water, blue skies, and palm trees. A negative, however, was the sounds of the boats in the background. I am not sure how you can control that. The only other minor issue that I found when I first logged on was that all of the episodes were not chronologically listed in the order that you recorded them.”⁸⁶ The student took that helpful critique and searched out solutions to manage the audio. He determined that it was possible to record the background in one video and use “green screen” technology to overlay his image onto the background. “This allowed the student to eliminate any background audio and only have his voice and the audio track in the edited videos. The student also discovered a way to specify the order videos are presented in the YouTube channel and activated those settings.

Another peer, Thomas Thompson shared,

The first observation had to do with your video background and the audio. It looks like your video shows high definition, but it still appeared grainy and wavy for some reason. I'm not sure why that would happen, but I would say that if video content is going to be a large part of your ministry, it really does pay to invest in some basic essential equipment, so ensure you hit the mark on quality. On a positive note, I was literally mesmerized by the flowing trees and wind noise. It was so calming. And, you have a soothing voice. Despite the video quality, I was enjoying your subject and the ambiance. Great choice of background. It also sounded like some acoustical guitar background music started playing about halfway through the video. That was nice but probably should have run throughout the entire video.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Mary Clare, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/68327/discussion_topics/515466, May 12, 2021.

⁸⁷ Thomas Thompson, Discussion Board Response, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/68327/discussion_topics/515466, May 12, 2021.

The student believes that he will need to invest in better cameras as well as some indirect lighting devices. The cameras that were utilized did not provide crisp enough recording quality. The student felt that the videos were a bit dark, and they required work to adjust the color balance. If the student could get multiple shots with the clarity desired, he could create more movement in the videos to keep the viewer interested. The student believes the videos will be enhanced if he can bring another person into the videos and have a good “back and forth” conversation on the topics that are presented. The student thinks the viewers would enjoy having a person represent them with pertinent questions. The student’s responses could illustrate how to apply the concepts to various cultural challenges that people will present.

The YouTube Micro Project has provided an extremely powerful communication platform to the student. This platform allows for clear communication that can be delivered easily to a large population of people on a daily basis. The opportunity to explain to others the common shortfalls in their spiritual development and provide a pathway to become an effective disciple-maker is of tremendous value. The student believes that this tool will help communicate the need to the church the critical need to develop disciples.

Website Creation Micro Project Assessment

This Micro Project was a practical exercise in designing and building a website and publishing it for active use on the internet. For several years, the student has been part of the senior leadership of large corporations and churches that utilized websites. He has been part of teams that considered what should be highlighted and how pages should interconnect to deliver content or help someone purchase a product. This project allowed the student to use that prior knowledge to good effect, yet it challenged him to move into a more tactical role of the developer.

The student learned that a relatively small group of companies host webpages and that they compete with each other for new clients. He learned that each web-address name costs about twenty dollars per year to own, and that these names can grow in value based upon how popular they become among users. The student also learned that a basic website would cost approximately one hundred dollars a year to maintain, and costs escalate from that point based on the host and the features one chooses to use.

The process of building a website aided the student in clarifying his message by forcing him to prioritize what would be shared on the landing page. If too much information was included, users might be overwhelmed and simply click away. If they don't find something of value, they would quickly move on. The student was encouraged to learn that websites are very adaptable, and if something built does not get traffic, it can be modified and reintroduced on the website. This process is reminiscent of the process of fishing. If a fisherman is not getting any action, he should change the bait and see if that is more attractive to the fish. The science of search engine optimization was fascinating. The student feels that he has only barely begun to understand the complexities involved in fine-tuning a website.

The most significant benefit to this website Micro Project is that it provides a platform to share these concepts with a large audience. The student often interacts with other pastors who are leading mega-churches, and a common theme to our discussions is to share our best ideas. Each of these pastors want to help their people, and they are willing to learn from anyone. The website enables the student to quickly provide a point of access that they can refer to whenever they have time.

The process of building the website forced the student to consider the conversation that he was joining. The challenge of discipleship is one that others are also considering, and the

student learned a bit about the common language they use. Interestingly, the search engine optimization practice of studying keywords helped the student find other websites that discuss disciple-making, and from them, he learned which buzzwords are being used to describe different tactics and strategies.

In view of what was learned, the student plans to join the conversations that are underway on these websites and learn as much as possible from the individuals there. Anyone who has led a church knows that what works very well in one place may not work in another ministry context; however, many great ideas can be tweaked to work in the student's ministry context. The student plans to continue developing the website and add other features. One needed feature is a blog. The student would like to write twelve articles and post one per month. The goal would be to encourage interaction with others and assist them as they become disciple-makers as well as learn from them.

As mentioned above, the student was forced to engage in search engine optimization, and the student feels that he has not yet learned enough to be effective with those strategies. The website that was built has been up for a few weeks, yet it only has around three hundred hits from people searching the internet for content similar to what the website provides. The student is a bit discouraged by this result but is aware that the website is still new; more study and practical experiments will eventually achieve the right mix of keywords to drive traffic to the site. The same is true for the YouTube channel the student developed in a prior Micro Project. These media platforms require ongoing work to be powerful tools, and the student is aware of the need to work on them.

The student reached out to his peers during the course of this Micro Project to solicit their critiques and advice. Moore suggested,

I believe you have covered reason number one because you have clearly focused your website on others considering the topics you have chosen (spiritual formation, discipleship of others, and leadership). I believe developing a page explaining why the modern American church is declining in numbers and clarify the attitudes that have led to this condition is essential. For those of us who are experiencing such a decline in this COVID19 era, this information would be pivotal to identifying a solution. However, I agree with making this a special page to not detract from your main objectives listed previously (e.g., spiritual formation).⁸⁸

The student considered Moore's advice and added another page to the website that provided recent articles noting the decline in the number of baptisms over the last decade in a large denomination as well as content that discussed the problem churches are experiencing in discipling believers.

The student can see that he will need to develop a very practical set of lessons on how to draw near to God. He plans to build a series of videos in which he shares concepts from great resources and then models exactly how to put those concepts into practice. Communion with God is foundational to being a disciple, and the student does not believe the local church's worship service methodologies teach new believers how to engage with God practically. In the ministries the student has served, the staff tends to teach classes that are book-based. Many people do not learn well from that method and can better imitate someone that they see doing something. Discipleship is primarily about imitating Jesus. The student considers how Jesus thought and what He did and will attempt to do those things as well. In most ministries, people are not used to working toward becoming a disciple in any way beyond a classroom format. The discipleship process requires someone to assume the role of the disciple-maker and model being a disciple to their mentee. The videos the student plans to create will illustrate that process and hopefully assist those willing to become disciple-makers.

⁸⁸ Richard Moore, Discussion Thread: Collaborating and Advising Peer Review, (Liberty University, 2021), Accessed from https://canvas.liberty.edu/courses/80381/discussion_topics/614758, June 8, 2021.

Overall Impact of Micro Projects on the Ministry Problem

The student feels that the Micro Projects were completed in a manner that created a synchronistic connection with each other. The information gained in the first Micro Project confirmed the problem and helped establish how church leaders felt about their church and whether there indeed was a problem to be addressed.

As he searched through academically peer-reviewed articles in the second Micro Project, this previously-gained information guided the student by providing topics that seemed causal to the problem the church members and leadership were experiencing. The student found it interesting to gather information from other schools of thought that corroborated his impressions formed by observing people in his ministry context. The authors provided unique insights into the changing worldviews that people are adopting, and the student found those explanations helpful as he created scripts for the videos that would be made in the next Micro Project.

The third Micro Project relied upon the life experiences of the student as well as the research that he had done in the prior two Micro Projects. The student felt that he knew what information should be shared to explain the need for change in an individual's life and how a group of disciples could operate similarly to how the early church worked, enabling them to change the pagan culture of their times.

The final Micro Project utilized the work completed in the prior three projects and added written content that is appropriate to share in a video on the YouTube channel. This website provides a platform that will allow the student to invite others into learning the concepts he is presenting and engaging in a process to develop the skills needed to become a disciple-making disciple.

The student does believe that this Portfolio Project will serve to address the ministry problem in his local church. The tools and concepts that have been created will allow the student to share these thoughts with many others and enlist their support in doing ministry by investing in relationships with individuals. One key concept is that a disciple-making movement begins with one person discipling another. This thought is simple but requires a significant change in how a mega-church operates, as it moves from a knowledge-based model to a relationship-based model. The student has already seen his colleagues at work begin to connect more relationally with a few and seek to invest in their lives. Others are quoting thoughts that the student has shared, and the thought process is beginning to spread among the staff. The student is hopeful that he will be able to share these thoughts with others outside of this local church and see these changes begin to take root in many churches around the nation. That dream is only viable if God works to enable such a movement, but the student will do his best to communicate what he has learned and demonstrate with his own life what it means to be a disciple-making disciple.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented an individual analysis of the Micro Projects as well as a comprehensive analysis of the Micro Projects' overall impact on the ministry problem. The chapter discussed lessons learned and challenges that arose during the creation of these Micro Projects and peers' comments about enhancements that could be incorporated into the Micro Projects.

The student does not believe that the ministry problem has been solved by these Micro Projects but considers this work to be an excellent start to create a disciple-making movement at The Crossing Church.

CHAPTER 7: MINISTRY NEXT STEPS

Introduction

In this final chapter, the student presents the steps that will be taken to continue to improve the impact of the Micro Projects upon the ministry problem that was defined previously. Each of the Micro Projects has additional steps that must be completed to build upon the structural foundation that was established in this Portfolio Project. The student will discuss how he intends to expand the projects to aid others who are seeking to develop disciple-making ministries in their ministry contexts and return the church at large to the exponential growth of the early church.

Interview and Analysis Micro Project Enhancements

The student identified that additional interviews were needed to create a statistically sound sample of the population of church leadership at The Crossing Church. Those interviews will help illuminate additional data and potentially support or refute the conclusions the student proposed in the Interview and Analysis Micro Project. In addition, the student would like to refine the questions and methodology and publish the format so that other ministries can easily utilize it. The student would invite other leaders to conduct these interviews and submit their results to an online dataset that he would establish. This will allow the student to determine if other churches yield comparable results and potentially determine other areas to investigate as this data is analyzed. The student is reminded of the book, *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, which described the results from the REVEAL Spiritual Life survey

conducted by Willow Creek Church in 2004.⁸⁹ That survey was initially conducted among their own congregants and later expanded to include over one thousand other churches. The results were determined to be consistent among the population of church attendees and provided the astounding conclusion that the longer a person is a part of a church, the more likely they are to be dissatisfied with their spiritual growth based upon the efforts of that church. Even though the results were shocking, the church leaders embraced that information and considered changes to help their people. Such information is very useful to church leaders and can aid them in developing new ministry strategies, and the student is hopeful that such information can be derived from this study over time.

The student will also seek out successful discipling individuals and interview them as to their methodologies and the ethos they operate with to disciple others. As pertinent information is gained, the student will seek ways to present this information within the church or using the platforms developed in these Micro Projects.

Article Review and Critique Micro Project Enhancements

The student's work during the Article Review and Critique Micro Project was fascinating and increased the student's desire to investigate more articles on the subjects covered in the articles reviewed. The student intends to develop the discipline of reading five articles per month on subjects related to disciple-making and to writing summaries of key points that the authors provide. The articles that are determined to be useful will be added to a webpage, which will provide a quick summary of their relevance to disciple-making and the bibliographical information required to locate the article.

⁸⁹ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson' *Move: What 1,000 Churches Reveal about Spiritual Growth*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2011), 16.

The student will also write two articles per year related to disciple-making and attempt to have them published in academic journals. His initial research indicated that there not many academic articles are being written on the subject, and he wishes to add his voice to the conversation that is ongoing. The student intends to promote the readership of the articles by posting short teaser posts on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and TikTok. This effort will also bring more people into contact with the YouTube channel and website that were developed in other Micro Projects.

YouTube Channel Micro Project Enhancements

Sadly, there were several areas that needed to be re-worked on the YouTube Micro Project. The underlying musical soundtrack did not properly swell in volume and fade as planned. The student plans to access individuals with more training to assist him in properly editing the soundtrack to behave as desired. There was ambient noise from the river traffic in the background that needed to be eliminated. The student has learned how to use “green screen” technology since the original recordings were made and will overlay the speaker’s image onto a background without having to combine the audio soundtrack of the speaker’s voice and the ambient river traffic noises. The quality of the video clarity was not crisp enough, and the videos should be re-recorded to correct that issue. The student now has access to better equipment to record the videos and verify the recordings' quality prior to editing. The student believes he can enhance the flow of his presentation and will do so when he re-records the video. Minor adjustments can be made to the video graphic overlays to make them more visible against a bright background. Cumulatively, these changes should provide an excellent experience for viewers and decrease the number of people who might click away from the videos because of a negative quality assessment.

Since the launch, the student has been monitoring the traffic on the YouTube channel and has noted that the number of views has dropped significantly. The initial traffic was mainly from word-of-mouth advertising. The traffic drop can also be attributed to the fact that search engine optimization still needs additional work. The site is currently ranked as forty-seventh on the Google search engine results when displayed for a viewer. The student intends to work on search engine optimization and targets a goal of being in the top ten results provided by Google on pertinent keyword searches.

The student also intends to continue creating new videos to post on the YouTube channel that address developments in disciple-making and discipleship overall. These videos will comprise multiple series that will allow viewers to learn practical ways to apply what the student is presenting.

Website Creation Micro Project Enhancements

The website creation Micro Project proved to be very successful. The Google analytics show that the majority of traffic that has come to the webpage has been from mobile devices. This was one of the major assumptions the student made when creating the website, and he sought to make sure the website was designed to perform well when viewed from a mobile device. As with the YouTube channel, the search engine optimization needs to be improved so that the website will be in the top ten results presented by the search engines. The student intends to keep adding features to the website as more information is gathered. He intends to add a page for an ongoing blog. The intent of the blog is to present a new article each month that highlights the need to adopt the “early church vibe” and seek to develop disciples. The student intends to comment upon developments in disciple-making as well as cover spiritual formation topics.

The student will also sub-divide the resources page to group recommended books together and place recommended articles on a separate page. He also intends to create subpages with links to other pertinent websites. His desire is for the website to become a tool for those seeking to learn how to disciple others and a place where they can contribute success stories about how they have been able to invest in others. This effort to provide links to others will require the student to routinely conduct internet research to find other websites that are presenting useful information. Each page of content on the website will need to be reviewed monthly to see if it needs to be updated with new information. Specifically, the page titled “The Problem” will need to be updated with new article information as it is published.

Other Actions to be Taken

Beyond these actions to enhance the Micro Project results conducted during this Portfolio Project, the student will be meeting with the lead pastor of The Crossing Church and the executive team to determine how the concepts identified could be best used to serve the people of the church. Successful implementation will require agreement from the lead pastor and modification based upon his analysis and the direction he hears from the Lord.

The student desires to continue his doctoral studies and investigate the spiritual formation cognate, biblical studies cognate, and the expository preaching cognate. The student remains hungry to understand God’s Word more fully and to learn from others how to minister effectively. As he studies these areas, the student also desires to document the one-on-one discipling method he utilizes and refine it to be most effective. After he has confirmed that the methodology is effective, the student plans to write a book or ebook that describes his thought process, the structure utilized, and his methods to aid future generations of disciple-makers and disciples.

As his circle of influence grows and he discovers others with similar interests, the student will develop a habit of routinely interviewing these individuals and their disciples to discover new effective methods and identify common mistakes. He plans to present this information as written content on the website and as short videos on the YouTube channel.

The student will partake in another project to properly document key measurements as he begins to implement the initiative to create a disciple-making culture at The Crossing Church. This information will provide the opportunity for reflection and show the growth pace and progress of the church as the disciple-making culture takes hold.

Conclusion

The student has presented the enhancements that he intends to add to the Micro Projects that were created in this Portfolio Project. Each Micro Project has an opportunity for improvement, and the Micro Projects are key assets in the student's effort to create an effective disciple-making culture at The Crossing Church. The Micro Projects were developed to aid The Crossing Church in experiencing the explosive growth of the early church. The student has concluded that the development of mature disciple-making disciples is the key to that explosive growth. The intent was never to shift all of the efforts of the church to focus on this specific initiative. The Crossing Church is a vibrant and growing church, and a complete shift would likely stall the progress of the church in the near term. The student desires to birth the disciple-making effort in the current environment and allow its success to draw the church members toward the concepts that are presented on the website and YouTube channel. The student also intends to continue to pursue knowledge of God and develop his devotion to God to a greater level, all while seeking to invest in those that God so dearly loves.

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