FAITH WORKS:
A MISSIOLOGICAL MODEL FOR
EDUCATION FROM JAMES 2:14–26

A Thesis
Presented to
the Faculty of
the Roy Fish School of Evangelism and Missions
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Theology

by
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May 2008
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FAITH WORKS:
A MISSIOLOGICAL MODEL FOR
EDUCATION FROM JAMES 2:14–26

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ABSTRACT

FAITH WORKS:
A MISSIOLOGICAL MODEL FOR
EDUCATION FROM JAMES 2:14–26

This thesis argues that mission begins in the believer’s daily walk of obedience to Christ when the believer puts faith into action. James 2:14–26 provides a strong biblical foundation outlining the believer’s responsibility to actively follow Christ in word and deed.

Chapter 1 introduces the Epistle of James by briefly examining the letter’s struggle for acceptance among scholars as a legitimate part of Scripture, its controversial assessment of law and works, and its message in James 2:14–26. The final section of Chapter 1 demonstrates James’ agreement with Paul in relation to faith and works.

Chapter 2 offers a call to obedience to Christians and details what is involved in that call. This chapter advocates an increase in commitment and discusses some contemporary challenges to growth in commitment. The discipleship process is then examined and an appeal for the centrality of Scripture is made.

Chapter 3 establishes the message of James 2:14–26 as foundational for missiological education. This chapter shows how the message applies to the believer’s life and how the church can help believers live as obedient, mission-enabled disciples who practice their faith. A model for missiological education based on the message of James 2:14–26 is provided. Chapter 3 concludes with a summary and application of the main arguments.
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<td>Christian Education Journal</td>
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<td>Currents in Theology and Mission</td>
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<td>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</td>
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<td>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</td>
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<td>Missiology: An International Review</td>
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<td>New International Version</td>
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PREFACE

This work would not have been possible without the leading of God and the support of others in my life. God began opening my eyes to the issues discussed in this thesis during my teenage years. He guided me through many experiences in my college and seminary years that developed within me a growing understanding and passion to lead God’s people to glorify his name through their obedience.

The person who has helped me the most in the accomplishment of this task is Sherry Christy, my mother, whose ceaseless prayers and self-sacrificial love have been an example to me and one I hope to follow. God also used my father in more ways than he could ever know to build my dependence on God, which was my constant source of strength in the writing of this work.

To my mentor, Danny Eddy, I extend my grateful appreciation because he was the first person who modeled to me what it means to put Christ’s words into action. He inspired me to commit to the study of God’s word and to make his word the measure of my life. His guidance helped me apply the message of this thesis to my life.

I thank the seminary faculty for their passion and commitment to excellence which played a key role in the development of my ability to write this work. I want to personally thank both Dr. John Moldovan and Dr. Russell Bowers. Dr. Moldovan’s example alone has been an encouragement to me. His kind words helped ensure me that I was doing the Lord’s work. Dr. Bowers graciously agreed to guide me through the process of writing this thesis.
CHAPTER 1

FAITH WORKS

Place of James

Apostolicity of James

Since James’ death occurred in 62 A.D., this paper will assume that the Epistle of James was written before that time. The lack of broad proliferation of the letter of James in the latter part of the first century A.D. caused the Early Church to struggle with affirming it as a part of the New Testament. The Early Church’s struggle of the apostolicity of James’ epistle indicates their concern about the integrity of the work and its worthiness to be included in the canon. Jerome writes that James may have been edited by another person and that it spread very gradually through the churches.

Many scholars throughout history have questioned if not outright rejected the apostolicity of James. Douglas J. Moo notes that James was labeled as “catholic” by the Early Church since the author seems to address a universal audience as demonstrated by the lack of solid identification of the author and the audience. The dissenting scholars’


3For the purposes of this paper, the apostolicity of James will be assumed.

concerns are based primarily on the message of James’ epistle, but they supplement their objections with historical evidence. They point out that the Epistle of James was not listed in the Muratorian Canon. While this is true, the Early Church does not seem to struggle with the letter’s theology as evidenced by the overall lack of its being mentioned until the third century. This is rather surprising, given the shocking content of James’ epistle and the raging debate it has caused since the Reformation.

Even during the early part of the fourth century, Eusebius classifies James as a disputed book. After Eusebius, Origen mentions James’ letter in his commentary on John 19:23. The Councils of Rome (A.D. 382) and of Carthage (A.D. 397, 419) chose to include James in the canon. Ralph Martin notes that James was widely accepted in the West as a part of the canon up until the time of the Reformation. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that Jerome’s aforementioned comments are supported by an examination of documents from the second century A.D.

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6 Ibid., 51.


10 Ibid.

The Context of James

While Luther argued that the Epistle of James was an “epistle of straw,” the Church has historically regarded this letter as a part of the canon. Luther’s condemnation can be appreciated, if not accepted, since James seems to directly contradict Paul in 2:24 when he says ὁ σεαυτόν ὄρθρον ἡμείς δικαιοσύνην ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον (cf. Gal 2:16; Rom 3:28; Eph 2:8–9). This apparent contradiction may be due to the meaning that James and Paul assigned to the words, or it may be due to the different audience and context of the argument. Gerhard Barth notes that the combination of faith and works in Ephesians 2:9, 2 Timothy 1:9, and Titus 3:5 may have led to a misunderstanding of Pauline doctrine; therefore, James may have encountered perverse applications of the Pauline writings and sought to make corrections. This would explain why James does not focus any of the content of his letter on the gospel; instead, James chooses to deal with the subject of obedient action and how it relates to justification. John B. Polhill argues that James’ intention is not to present the gospel even though James affirms it; rather, his intention is to make the behavior of believers the topic.

12 Martin Luther, Martin Luther’s Basic Theological Writings, ed. Timothy F. Lull (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 117.

13 The difference between Paul and James’ message is most likely due to context. The words δικαιόω, ἔργον, and πίστεως would have had the same general range of meaning since Paul and James were from the same time period, and both were from a Jewish background. Their context both within the letters and within the communities to which their letters were intended was different. Paul wrote to specific communities whose issues were well-defined. Paul was always targeting new areas to spread the message; therefore, his message would obviously deal with more basic content including the gospel. If James is to be taken as a part of the divinely inspired message, then one would have to assume that James affirms all of the Pauline doctrines, e.g. sola fide. Given this assumption, this author seeks to affirm the theology of James while adhering to Pauline theology.

of discussion. With this in mind, D. A. Carson includes James in a list of New Testament books written for the “purpose of undeceiving Christian readers.” Assuming that Carson is correct, the audience, targeted by James, was composed of Christians or people who were aware already of the gospel.

The differences between the messages of Paul and James could be due to the audiences to whom their message was directed. Johnson argues that Paul was speaking to a broad audience including both Jew and Gentile Christians, whereas James was focused primarily on Jewish Christians. Moo agrees that James directed his message to a Jewish audience and notes James’ use of the Old Testament allusions and references. Joseph B. Mayor points out that the Jews of that time were debating the relationship of faith and works.

The Content of James

During the Reformation, Luther strongly opposed James because he considered James to be useless in evangelism, devoid of “apostolic authorship”, and heretical because of its presumed works-based theology. Rudolf Bultmann, although puzzled by

17Johnson, The Letter of James, 59.
18Moo, The Letter of James, 30. Moo specifically notes the use of υἱοί γαλιлей in James 4:4 as a word that only those familiar with the Old Testament symbolism which relates “the Lord’s covenant with his people to a marriage relationship,” would understand.
20Martin, James, cv.
James’ reference to the law as the law of freedom, argues that “the idea of freedom is just as remote from the author’s mind as is Paul’s concept of faith.”\(^{21}\) Opposition to the trustworthiness of James is worthy of consideration due to the uniqueness of its message within James. Johnson notes that James refers to Christ less than any other book of Bible other than the third letter of John.\(^{22}\)

Both Paul and James show special reverence for the Law. James fondly refers to the Law as νόμον τέλειον τὸν τῆς ἐλευθερίας and νόμον βασιλικὸν (Jas 1:25; 2:8). The cause for concern among critics revolves, however, around the issue of the place of the Law in relation to the Christian faith. Paul and James both state that the whole law must be obeyed (cf. Gal 5:3; Jas 2:10). Both also associate righteousness with right action in accordance with the Law (cf. Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22–25). Moo points out that James only provides “two commandments from the Decalogue” and avoids the ritualistic rules that a more conservative Jew would provide.\(^{23}\) Donald Guthrie stresses that James uses works to refer to Christian acts of charity as opposed to legalistic applications of the Law.\(^{24}\) James’ avoidance of legalistic application of the Law does demonstrate an apparent belief

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\(^{22}\)Johnson, *The Letter of James*, 49. James’ letter refers to the Lord twice, whereas 3 John does not even mention him. Johnson points out that James makes no mention of Christ’s “narrative traditions” nor does he mention the “death of Jesus.” Johnson also lists other typical Christian themes that are missing in James.


in the law of grace. His affirmation of the importance of morality is in agreement with the elders and apostles in Jerusalem whom Paul and Barnabas consulted (cf. Acts 15:1–29).^{25}

**Meaning of James 2:14–26**

**Verse 14**

The theme of James 2:14–26 is that worldly faith is a heartless, intellectual faith, whereas true faith leads to godly behavior and decisive action. Wayne Grudem states James’ theme another way: “mere intellectual agreement with the gospel is a ‘faith’ that is really no faith at all.”^{26} Verse 14 begins this passage by stating the topic: the authenticity of faith without works. James then asks two rhetorical questions and uses μὴ which indicates that the answer to the second question is negative (cf. Matt 26:25; John 6:67).^{27} If the answer to the second question were positive, James would have used οὔ instead of μὴ. If the answer to the second question is negative, then a deedless faith has no saving power.

James uses questions and the previous argument to outline his concern for those who express their faith in their words but not in their actions. The second question in this verse provides James’ thesis, namely that faith that is not active is useless and devoid of saving power. While some argue that James’ second question seems to deny

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^{25}The message of the apostles and elders was for Antiochene Christians. Christians in Antioch were struggling with false prophets who were proclaiming the necessity of works for salvation. The false prophets were focused not on acts of charity and morality but on the ritual of circumcision. Nowhere in his epistle does James focus on ritualistic obedience. Instead, James’ message appears to be very much like the message of the apostle and elders in Jerusalem who warned Christians about εἰς ἅπασαν καὶ αἵματος καὶ πνεύμων καὶ πονηρίας.


the saving power of faith. Nigel Turner notes that the ἡ before πίστις is an individualizing article which points back to the same word in the first question of v. 14.\(^{28}\) James is referring to a deedless faith as seen in the first question as opposed to a saving faith. Additionally, the imaginary person that James puts forth in the first question only says that he has faith. James’ argument discusses a person who claims to have faith, not necessarily a person who has faith. James’ claim is now clear: A person with a deedless faith is a person with no faith at all. Peter H. Davids states James’ argument very emphatically: “There is no salvation for the person who stops short of discipleship.”\(^{29}\)

**Verses 15–16**

To answer the second question of v. 14, James sets forth in v. 15 a scenario where a fellow Christian (ἀδελφὸς ἡ ἀδελφή) is in need of basic necessities (James 2:15). The presence of εἰναὶ indicates that this is a future supposition.\(^{30}\) The scenario continues to unfold in v. 16 when another member of the local Christian community sees the fellow Christian in need and simply wishes him well while doing nothing to alleviate his suffering.\(^{31}\) Martin notes that this wishful remark which uses an imperative verb is similar to a “wish-prayer.”\(^{32}\) James then asks another rhetorical question with an implied negative.

\(^{28}\)Ibid., 173.


\(^{31}\)In sentences where either the masculine or the feminine pronoun is acceptable, the masculine pronoun will be used.

\(^{32}\)Martin, *James*, 84.
Verse 17

While the prayerful words spoken by the Samaritan in v. 16 had the appearance of saintliness, the words were not backed up with obedient action in keeping with God’s commands as James’ second question implies. As James states in 2:17, οὕτως καὶ ἡ πίστις, ἔὰν μὴ ἔχῃ ἔργα, νεκρὰ ἐστὶν καθ’ ἑαυτήν. James argues that faith and works are not independent of one another. True faith, though independent of right action in relation to salvation, is expressed outwardly through right action in the life of the believer. Faith that is not accompanied by deeds is not Christian faith, according to James.

Verse 18

In v. 18, James begins a hypothetical dialogue with an imaginary person who opposes his argument and maintains that authentic faith does not require action. The objection of the imaginary person is noted by the presence of Ἄλλα. Some writers suggest that Ἄλλα ἐπέτι τις identifies the imaginary person as an ally rather than an objector. Donald Verseput rejects this conclusion due to the “trenchant statement of the author’s thesis in vv. 14–17.” This imaginary person separates faith and deeds, whereas James combines the two. James’ response to this opposing view is a request for proof that deedless faith is authentic. Obviously, a person with a deedless faith cannot prove the reality of his faith since there is no outward manifestation of it. James then states that he


will demonstrate his faith through action. It must be noted here that any demonstration of faith would require the existence of faith before the demonstration.

**Verse 19**

James continues his argument with the person by first affirming his questioner’s belief in one God. He immediately follows by saying that the demons believe this as well. This has the effect of equating deedless faith with the pseudo-faith of demons. The pseudo-faith of demons is an intellectual acknowledgement that is by no means heartfelt. James also states that the pseudo-faith of demons leads them to tremble with fear, whereas James’ faith leads to obedient action.

**Verse 20**

James rebukes the imaginative objector by calling him foolish (κενός) in v 20. Davids notes that a fool is one who has moral deficiencies more so than intellectual problems.35 His usage of ὁδὲ in the rebuke, ὁδὲ ἄργῳ κενός, “suggests deep emotion”36 and betrays James’ passion for the objector’s need for authentic faith. By calling the imaginary objector foolish, James denounces his or her argument that faith can be present even if works are absent. The term ἄργος, used by James to modify a deedless faith, means “unproductive, useless, worthless.”37 James asks the question in 2:20: θέλεις ζωής δὲ

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This question introduces the following evidence in 2:21–25 which supports an affirmative answer.

**Verse 21**

In v. 21, James answers the question in v. 20 with illustrations from the Old Testament. The first illustration is the story of Abraham sacrificing Isaac. James asks rhetorically whether or not Abraham was οὐκ ἔξ ἔργων ἐδοκιμώθη when he obeyed God’s command to sacrifice Isaac. The implied answer to James’ question is positive as evidenced by the presence of οὐκ. At first glance, James’ assertion that Abraham is justified by works seems to go directly against the *sola fide* doctrine of Paul. The context however will reveal that James’ assertion is in agreement with Paul’s *sola fide* doctrine.

**Verses 22–23**

In v. 22, James continues to argue that Abraham’s faith was real because it was backed by measurable action. Most scholars define τελείω, used to identify the effect of works on faith, as meaning to complete or fulfill. James uses τελείω to declare that faith is completed by works. Genesis 15:6 is cited in v. 23 as further proof that Abraham’s faith was both active and obedient. James adds that Abraham, because of his obedience, was called φίλος θεοῦ. Curiously, James notes that Abraham was called φίλος a friend of God. James 4:4 equates friendship with the world with the hatred of God. By

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switching this verse around, one learns that friendship with God, like that which Abraham enjoyed, means hatred of the world and leads to right action as opposed to wrong action. From James 1:22–27, one learns that anything less than complete obedience is unacceptable. Tim Laato and Mark Seifrid add that real love (apart from which friendship would not exist) leads to “a complete work (1:4) as a fulfillment of the perfect law (1:25).”

**Verse 24**

James summarizes in v. 24 that ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοῦται ἀνθρώπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον. This statement seems to place James directly in contradiction to Paul who said in Romans 3:28: δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἀνθρώπον χωρίς ἔργων νόμου. Paul, however, was concerned about legalistic righteousness (ἔργων νόμου). James is focused on the obedient faith of Abraham. Previously, James’ use of πίστεως refers to the intellectual faith of the demons and the imaginary objector in the hypothetical argument. While James separates faith and works in his discussion with the objector and his statement about the demons, his end goal is to recombine them into a single unit.

**Verse 25**

James’ second illustration from the Old Testament begins in v. 25 and portrays Rahab the prostitute as possessing the same kind of obedient faith that Abraham had when she chose to assist the Jewish spies. James however does not explicitly refer to Rahab’s faith; instead, he chooses emphasize her works. Context reveals, however, that

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the biblical author was referring to works that originated from faith. A. T. Robertson notes the irony of James choosing Rahab, a prostitute, as his second example to support his thesis that faith without works is dead. But James’ use of a woman marred by a sinful past reveals James’ emphasis on works as acts of charity rather than ritualistic activities.

**Verse 26**

James draws his argument to a conclusion in v. 26 as evidenced by his use of οὐτως. With finality, he says that ἡ πίστις χωρὶς ἔργων νεκρὰ ἔστιν. Deedless faith is empty and hollow like a body without a spirit. It is devoid of life and meaning. He compares the closeness of the union between faith and works with union of the body and the spirit. To possess life, one must have both a body and a spirit. In the same way, faith and works must be united in the life of a person; otherwise, his faith is really no faith at all.

**Sola Fide**

*The Current Debate*

Scholarship has continued to struggle with the theology of James since the time of Luther. Günther Bornkamm, Rudolf Bultmann, and Sophie Laws, among others, have supported the claim that the theology of Paul and James cannot be harmonized.

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Those who oppose lordship salvation are uncomfortable with James’ insistence on the presence of works in the believer’s life.⁴³ Some would argue with Luther and his supporters by saying that Paul and James had the same position but were defending their common faith; however, they just used different starting points to begin their discussion.⁴⁴ C. Leslie Mitton and Alexander Ross agree with this view.⁴⁵

Paul’s discussion of faith is focused on the obtainment of it, as seen in Romans 3:28, where he argues that a person is saved by faith and not by works. In 2:24, James says that both faith and works must occur together if one is to be justified. Curiously, both Paul in Romans 3:28 and James in 2:24 use Genesis 15:6 to prove the validity of their argument. If one accepts the apostolicity of both the Epistle of James and the writings of Paul in the New Testament, then one must find how the arguments of the two apostles are based on sound doctrine. Historically, Protestants have followed in Luther’s steps and supported the doctrine of sola fide.

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⁴³Strict opponents to lordship salvation seek to separate faith in Jesus as savior and faith in Jesus as Lord. They argue that a true Christian can have intellectual faith and heartfelt conviction without the presence of works and still be saved through the merit of Christ. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Εστιν δὲ πίστις ἐλπιδομένων ὑπόστασις, πρεμιέτων ἔλεγχος σῷ βλεπομένῳ. If one truly has πίστις ἐλπιδομένων ὑπόστασις, then how could they not acknowledge Christ as Lord and act accordingly unless they still do not have πίστις? The opponent of lordship salvation would respond by distinguishing the free will of the believer from his or her faith. But in Eph 2:8, Paul calls faith a gift of God. Those who receive the gift of faith from God must receive the same active faith as that of Abraham and Rahab since God does not show favoritism (cf. Acts 10:34; Rom 2:11).

⁴⁴C. Ryan Jenkins, “Faith and Works in Paul and James,” Bibliotheca Sacra 159 (2002): 63–64. This paper will take the view that Paul and James were in agreement but were focused on different audiences. James does not undermine Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 2:8 that one is saved by grace through faith; rather, he merely defines faith. Other views listed by Jenkins include the argument from James that justification depends on faith and works. Another is that works are required for temporal deliverance. Both of these arguments run contrary to Pauline theology and are presumed incorrect for the purposes of this paper. Instead, the canonicity of James is accepted and therefore expected to be harmonized with Pauline theology.

Most scholars affirm the solid basis of the *sola fide* doctrine in Paul’s New Testament writings, but as mentioned previously, widespread disagreement exists on whether or not James affirmed this doctrine. A closer examination of James’ discussion in 2:22–23 reveals that James was arguing that works are a proof of salvation rather than a means of salvation. John Calvin states that the Lord “cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit.”\(^{46}\) As William Barclay says, a person is “not saved by deeds” but “for deeds.”\(^{47}\)

**The Nature of Faith**

*Active*

Much of the debate over the differences between Paul and James could be resolved by their understanding of faith. In Romans 10:8, Paul says that the proclaimed word is in his audience’s heart even though the audience is filled with believers and non-believers. John 1:1 equates God with his Word. From this alone, one could say that Jesus was in the heart and mouth of those present when Paul spoke since Jesus and God are one. To obtain the word that is in their hearts, Paul declared that they must confess “Jesus is Lord” and believe in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead (cf. Rom 10:9). Paul’s plan of salvation in Romans 10:9 is composed of two primary parts: confession with the mouth that “Jesus is Lord” and belief (πίστις) in the resurrection of Christ. But are mere words and πίστις enough? If one affirms *sola fide*, as this author does, then why does the Christian even have to make a confession if faith is all that is

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required? Has Paul added works to the requirements of salvation by arguing for the need of a confession? Is Paul’s emphasis on a confession any different from James’ emphasis on charitable deeds?

If Paul adds works to the requirements of salvation, why does he say in Romans 3:28 δικαιοσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρίς ἔργων νόμου? Paul’s conclusion that a person is justified by faith apart from works is the basis of the sola fide doctrine. Clearly, Paul does not wish to add the confession “Jesus is Lord” or anything else to the requirement of sola fide (cf. Rom 10:9). Like Paul, James does not wish to add charitable works, works of the law, or anything else to the doctrine of sola fide either. He certainly does not wish to add fruitless words to the requirement of salvation (cf. Jas 2:15–17). So why does James say ἡ πίστις, ἐὰν μὴ ἔχῃ ἔργα, νεκρὰ ἐστὶν καθ’ ἑαυτὴν in 2:17? So what does James mean in 2:24 when he says ἐξ ἔργων δικαιοσται ἄνθρωπος καὶ οὐκ ἐκ πίστεως μόνον?

James argues in 2:17 that faith cannot be καθ’ ἑαυτὴν, but must be accompanied by deeds. At first glance, this seems to contradict the doctrine of sola fide. However, the perceived contradiction can be eliminated depending on the nature of faith. Is faith active, inactive, or somewhere in between? If real faith is faith that leads to demonstrable, charitable acts of love like those of Abraham and Rahab (cf. Jas 2:21–25), then saving faith must be an active faith. Daniel B. Wallace supports this conclusion when he says: “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

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James seems to acknowledge that true faith is present before works and independent of works in v. 18 where he demonstrates his faith by his action. James could not possibly demonstrate his faith by his action unless his faith was present before his action. His faith precedes the action and stands independent of the action. Though faith is independent of action because salvation is based on the action of Christ alone, it is displayed outwardly in the life of the believer. As John F. MacArthur says, “Faith is by nature turned toward obedience (Acts 5:32; Rom 1:5; 2:8; 16:26).”

Bultmann however fails to see the presence of faith before works in James 2:14–26, and he hastily argues that James is claiming that faith only saves alongside of works.

To conflict with the sola fide doctrine of Paul, James would have to argue that a person was required to have works in order to be saved. James sees works as an expression of salvation rather than a means of salvation. Likewise, Paul also acknowledges works as an expression of true Christianity (cf. Gal 5:6; Rom 2:6; 14:12). Johnson notes that James, like all other biblical authors other than Paul, uses the term “works” to speak of a Christian’s morality rather than legalistic adherence to the law.

Moo disagrees with Johnson because he does not see the Christian morality theme in the illustration from the lives of Abraham and Rahab in v. 21–25; rather, he perceives their

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acts as simple obedience and servanthood.\textsuperscript{52} An examination of Paul’s letters reveals that he used \textit{ἐργόν} fifty out of sixty-seven times to refer to Christian morality, according to Johnson.\textsuperscript{53}

Paul, on the other hand, in Galatians 5:6 declares that following Old Testament rituals is not what matters; what matters is \textit{πίστις} that works through love.\textsuperscript{54} Calvin agrees by saying that faith and a “devout disposition” must occur together, and through this disposition “the Holy Spirit is a witness of [the Christian’s] adoption.”\textsuperscript{55} Calvin also adds that even faith itself does not justify, rather the merits of Christ alone justify the sinner who receives them by faith.\textsuperscript{56} Bornkamm warns against some modern trends in both Catholic and Protestant Theology that only give credence to “faith made perfect in love.” But the question must be asked: At what point in the justification process must love occur? Paul loved the churches and the Lord enough to endure much suffering in his day, yet before his Damascus experience he had set out to uproot the Church. Paul’s love for the Lord and for his people followed his salvation experience on the Damascus road.

\textsuperscript{52}Moo, \textit{The Letter of James}, 102. Moo’s argument that the stories of Abraham and Rahab do not seem to portray an example of Christian charity is somewhat stretched. Clearly, Abraham’s obedience of God displayed a charitable act toward God. Rahab’s charitable act toward the Jewish spies displayed the vitality of her faith. She took them into her home, gave them refuge, and provided them with a safe exit. Her love for God (faith in God) was proved by her care for God’s people, and Abraham’s love for God (faith in God) was proved by his willingness to sacrifice that which was most precious to him.

\textsuperscript{53}Johnson, \textit{The Letter of James}, 60.

\textsuperscript{54}Paul specifically mentions the Old Testament ritual of circumcision in Gal 5:6.

\textsuperscript{55}Calvin \textit{Institutes} 3:2:8.

\textsuperscript{56}Calvin \textit{Institutes} 3:11:7.
Love expressed through acts of charity, therefore, does not precede justification; rather, “justification is their precondition and the root from which they grow.”

Heartfelt

James states in 2:19 that demons have πίστις. Obviously, this type of faith is not the faith Paul refers to in Romans 3:28 when he says δικαίωσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον. Surely this πίστις of the demons is not the same as the active πίστις that James claims to have in 2:18. Packer suggests that James’ definition of faith, in this case, was merely intellectual assent devoid of action. Leon Morris notes that James’ faith, unlike that of the demons, is not an intellectual faith; rather, it is the πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργομένη mentioned in Galatians 5:6.

Scripture clearly shows that demons are aware of Jesus’ authority (cf. Matt 8:31; Luke 8:27). The demons were aware that their destination was the lake of fire according to Matthew 8:29. If the πίστις of the demons did not have saving power, what was their πίστις lacking? In Matthew 7:22–23, Jesus rebukes those who recognize him and do many great things in his name; he even refers to them as ἐργαζόμενοι τὴν ἀνομίαν. Recognizing Jesus (intellectual faith) and doing good works (right action) is

57 Bornkamm, Paul, Paulus, 153.

58 James uses πιστεύω, which is the verbal form of πίστις.


simply not enough, what is needed is a pure heart with an obedient spirit.\textsuperscript{61} True faith springs forth from a pure heart leading to an active expression in the life of the Christian.

**Justified**

In Romans 4:24–25, Paul uses δικαιώματος to discuss a believer’s persevering conviction in God’s provision of salvation through Jesus and not through works.\textsuperscript{62} Paul wished to combat Jewish legalism by focusing on a person’s faith in the merits of Christ. According to Moo, Paul was concerned about “pre-conversion works”, whereas James was focused on “post-conversion works.”\textsuperscript{63} So why does James in 2:24 say ἐξ ἐργῶν δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος?

Paul appeals to Genesis 15:6 to argue that the “initial step of faith” was the basis for Abraham’s being declared justified (cf. Rom 4:3, 9–10).\textsuperscript{64} James examines Abraham’s actions in 2:21–23 that occurred many years after his initial faith experience. The compatibility of Romans 3:28 and James 2:24 depends on their definition of justification. Pauline theology typically portrays justification as meaning the presence of a right relationship between God and the person through the person’s faith in Christ’s atonement assuring the person’s acceptance by God into his kingdom. Paul, however, strays from this definition of justification in Romans 3:4 when he uses the term to

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\textsuperscript{61} cf. Deut. 4:29; 1Chr. 28:9; 2 Chr. 7:14, 15:12; Psa. 24:4–6, 63:1, 119:2, 119:10; Isa. 51:1; Jer. 29:13; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb. 11:6.

\textsuperscript{62} Martin, *James*, 80.

\textsuperscript{63} Moo, *The Letter of James*, 100.

\textsuperscript{64} Morris, *New Testament Theology*, 314.
connote vindication. Packer argues that James defines justification in 2:24 to mean vindication. Mitton agrees that Paul’s view of justification focused on the salvation experience that occurs in the life of the believer upon his confession of faith (cf. Rom 3:24), whereas James focused on the Last Judgment. Carson, Moo, and Morris state that James could be referring to vindication before God or vindication before people.

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67 Mitton, The Epistle of James, 105.

CHAPTER 2
WORKING FAITH APPLIED TO THE CHURCH

Call to Obedience

A Call to Action

The church in America faces a plethora of challenges not unlike those faced by the Early Church. The one to be considered in the present discussion is that of transforming new believers into mature, committed Christians who act out their faith. This challenge intentionally surpasses the typical call to evangelize new converts. As W. Charles Arn observes, modern evangelism too often ends in “inhibiting the fulfillment of the Great Commission.”

In this section, the term discipleship will be favored over the term evangelism. Popular use of the term evangelism often refers to the process of leading one to make a decision for Christ, whereas discipleship refers to the process of active change in the lifestyle of the believer.

In 1994 Rwanda, “the most Christian country in Africa,” had a civil war that degenerated into a horrible genocide and led to approximately 800,000 deaths within a period of one hundred days. How could a country with so many Christian citizens


70 Ibid., 59.

71 Lee C. Camp, Mere Discipleship: Radical Christianity in a Rebellious World (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 15. Camp adds that ninety percent of Rwandans claimed to be Christian at the time of the civil war.
descend into such chaos? Had these Christians really put their faith in Christ? If not, what went wrong? To answer questions such as these, perhaps the best place to start is with the accounts of Jesus and his disciples.

As Jesus called on his disciples in the Gospels to follow him, they responded to his call obediently (cf. Matt 4:19–20; 8:21–22; 9:8–9). Jesus extended this command to follow him to every person (Matt 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23; John 12:26). Karl Barth labels Jesus’ call to follow him as a “call to discipleship.”72 This call to obedient discipleship from Jesus to the individual must be answered unconditionally as evidenced by Jesus’ rebuke of those who would follow with conditions attached (cf. Luke 9:57–62).73 The authenticity of their positive reply is evidenced by inward and outward change which is measured over a period of time. Obviously, people could have questioned the authenticity of Peter’s reply when he denied Jesus three times, but the test of time proved that his reply was genuine. On the other hand, time proved that Judas did not have a genuine faith experience. His lack of obedience was apparent in his betrayal of Christ and the obstinacy that he manifested thereafter. So if Jesus calls Christians to authentic obedient discipleship like that of Peter, what exactly is the nature of that call and how should Christians respond?

72 Karl Barth, The Call to Discipleship, ed. K. C. Hanson, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 1.

73 Ibid., 11. Barth argues that the call to discipleship is given unconditionally and must be received unconditionally. Jesus’ statement in Luke 9:62 affirms the second half of his argument. The first half, however, is debatable. A person coming to Christ must come as a sinner but must also repent and choose to obey (that is, to follow). Jesus made his choice at the cross, and he now offers free grace to all who follow him. The grace is free because none of the disciple’s effort affords it. The grace is costly, however, because the disciple must forsake all and follow Jesus.
A Call to Suffering

In Matthew 28:16–20, Jesus’ main directive is to make disciples (μαθητεύσατε is the main verb of Matt 28:19). Πορευέντες, βαπτίζοντες, and διδάσκοντες modify μαθητεύσατε. McIlwain notes that “the end product is to be disciples—not ‘decisions’ or ‘converts’ or ‘believers’ or ‘acceptors’.”

Disciples are those who actively follow Christ through their obedience to his commands. This obedience should be exhibited throughout the Christian’s life even during periods of suffering.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer states that a disciple of Christ is “under the law of Christ, that is, under the cross.” In other words, disciples of Christ should expect to suffer in some manner as they live in anticipation of their future in heaven. But this suffering extends beyond the daily sufferings associated with the average human life. It is suffering that is uniquely tied to Christ’s rejection by the world at the cross. It is suffering that makes a distinction between the Christian and the world.

A Call to Death

Bonhoeffer argues, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” The cross does not just portray the suffering and rejection of Christ, it also ends in the death of Christ. When Jesus calls the believer to follow him, he calls him to follow the same path that he followed. This path included a surrender of will where Jesus agonized

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over his own demise (cf. Matt 26:39). It also included the physical act of obedience which substantiated Jesus’ surrender of will. That substantiation was not only the death of Christ on the cross, but it was also the behavior which he portrayed during the experience. Like Jesus, believers are called to surrender their wills and to place God’s desires before their own. In this way, the believer’s old self dies because its desires are no longer primary, and the new self becomes alive in Christ when God’s desires become primary.

A Call to Discipleship

George W. Peters argues that churches “evangelize, make converts and church members, but fail to make disciples.” Jesus says clearly in Luke 9:23–24 that those who choose to follow him must take up their crosses and even lose their lives. This self-surrender is indicative of the Christian’s relating to Jesus as Lord and not simply savior. In Luke 14:27, Jesus says that one must follow (ἀκολουθεῖω) him to be his disciple. ἀκολουθεῖω means to follow after someone who is leading through compliance and obedience to his or her commands. Gerhard Kittel notes that ἀκολουθεῖω does not refer to imitations of Christ’s actions but to “fellowship of life and suffering with the Messiah.”

“Disciple,” in the singular form, occurs twenty-four times in the Gospels. It always refers to someone who had chosen to follow Christ and had demonstrated that choice through some form of action. In John 6:66, “disciple” refers to those who had


78 BAGD, s.v. “ἀκολουθεῖο.”; Liddell-Scott, s.v. “ἀκολουθεῖο.”

followed Jesus for a time, but then turned back. John 6:64 reveals that those disciples who turned back and no longer followed Jesus did not believe. With this in mind, an authentic disciple must possess both an active faith and an active commitment.80

Lee C. Camp cautions against the use of invitations that lead people to receive Jesus without calling upon them to join Jesus in his suffering at the same time.81 Hollis L. Green argues that the salvation process is more than “signing a card, being baptized, joining a church or shaking hands with the preacher.”82 Barth notes that there is no evidence within the Gospels that the disciples obeyed Jesus after a series of steps, namely, a confession, a decision to obey, and finally actual obedience.83 Instead, the Gospels account for only one step: Jesus voiced a command, and those who believed obeyed. The disciples would not have believed if they had not followed Christ when he had commanded them. Why else would they have left all and followed Jesus?

The first step is simply an act of faith that is taken in obedience to Christ. The first step may be responding to an altar call and making a declaration of faith before the congregation. It may be choosing to obey a command of Christ in one’s daily life. Whatever that first step is, the believer who takes that step has chosen in faith to obey the

80 While all believers should possess an active faith and an active commitment, it is clear from Scripture that believers can at times struggle in their faith. Peter and the original disciples abandoned Jesus in the days leading up to his crucifixion. Paul repeatedly corrects and rebukes various Christian communities in his letters. In Revelation 2–3, John reveals the Lord’s criticism of some churches. Clearly, the believer can struggle in his faith; however, an authentic Christian has been given the precious gift of faith by God that can never be taken away. That faith is active in the life of the believer to help develop an active commitment.

81 Camp, Mere Discipleship, 76.


83 Barth, The Call to Discipleship, 17.
command of Christ to follow him. The first step of faith is more than intellectual assent because if the letter alone were necessary, the demons would be recipients of God’s grace through Christ. John Sanders agrees and chooses to relegate the intellect to aiding in the assurance process; he argues that the first step of faith is simply trust. At first glance, many evangelicals might agree with his argument. However, the type of trust that Sanders is referring to is a trust in God apart from any knowledge of Christ. Inclusivists, such as Sanders, would incorporate an act of faith into this saving trust in God. For Sanders, the act of faith is no more than “a conscious decision for God” and “penitent humility.” This act of faith, proposed by the inclusivists, involves the will and some sentiment; real trust, on the other hand, is life changing because it is trust that was firmly placed in Christ. It is trust that receives the abounding grace of Christ which is capable of resurrecting and regenerating life in the present and in the future. It is a trust that was given by God and, therefore, comes with the life-changing power of God (cf. Eph. 2:8–9).

A Call to Free Grace, Not Cheap Grace

Even though a true believer makes a confession of faith through an act of faith, he is still saved by grace alone. This grace is free to all believers in that it costs them nothing and Christ everything. Jeremy Rehwaldt-Alexander argues that “the construction of grace as ‘freedom’ tends toward cheap grace.” Free grace is certainly not cheap grace

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84 John Sanders, No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 225–26.

85 Ibid., 228–29.

since it was purchased through the blood of Christ. Free grace purchases the true believer’s freedom from death and the power of Satan. Though it costs the believer nothing, it is certainly not cheap. Rather, it is cheapened when it becomes an excuse, or even a license, for sinful living. Cheap grace becomes the safe haven from which the so-called believer operates and the false hope on which they build their unfruitful, inactive so-called Christian lifestyles. 87

Bonhoeffer labels any shallow commitment to Christ as savior as cheap grace and blames the collapse of the church in his day on the practice of “making grace available to all at too low a cost.” 88 This is the definition of cheap grace according to Bonhoeffer:

Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate. 89

Churches that desire to develop mission-minded, mature disciples must not peddle cheap grace. They must preach that repentance must extend beyond mere sentiment into daily action that verifies the authenticity of the repentance. While the church must acknowledge that every true believer is a disciple, it must also understand that every disciple is engaged in the discipleship process. The church must hold members accountable to the teachings of the Bible. It must develop discipleship models that effectively transform new disciples into mature disciples. It must train and develop

88 Bonhoeffer, Cost of Discipleship, 54.
89 Ibid., 44–45.
leaders with a vision for spiritual and numerical growth. It must provide opportunities and support for leaders and laity to be active in their church, in their community, and beyond. Finally, it must demand action and not simply confession.

Increase in Commitment

The Challenge of Postmodernism

In the age of modernism, reason became the guiding light to all truth. As Leith Anderson states, modernism taught that if one has “the right teaching, [one] will experience God.” As communities broke up during the industrialization process, individuals became more isolated from social networks and began to rely more on their individual reason apart from the reason of the community. This secular view, supported by scientific rationalism and the successes of the industrialization process, embraced the idea that “problems could be solved by reason and through material means.”

Modernism aided by the forces of the industrial age led to a rise in individualism out of which postmodernism has developed. This new philosophy exalts the person’s experience of God over God himself. With this mentality, postmodernists base any sense of God merely on subjective evidence and reject all historical evidence such as the Bible. Thus, individual perceived needs become the sole basis of activity and the sole reason for commitment. No longer does the Western individual seek to find the appropriate action based on the community’s needs, rather the individual begins with

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what he or she desires and proceeds to meet those desires irrespective of the desires of others.

Many preachers, in a desire to be culturally relevant and to see numerical growth, have embraced a felt-needs gospel that seeks to make people feel good and avoid biblical topics such as hell, tithing, and sin which cause people to be uncomfortable. Since postmodernists, especially in America, are so focused on their present lives, these preachers deliver messages that speak solely about the present (also called the felt-needs gospel). Postmodernists are often attracted to Eastern religions and various occult movements in an effort to experience spirituality individually without making any commitment to any particular spirit being or to any community of faith.

The postmodernist’s desire for feel-good messages has led to rampant consumerism in the American church. In an effort to appeal to the widest range of consumers, some churches demand little if any commitment from their members. While many churches may have at least some basic requirements for membership, they have no way of knowing whether or not members are in compliance.

**The Problem of Tolerance**

The average American today does not experience the kind of persecution that was commonplace in the Early Church. This lack of suffering has caused tremendous complacency among some church members, especially since many members are unaware of the suffering of those in the inner city or those in foreign lands. Most people in America are unaware of the suffering of those around them because of the breakdown of traditional social networks as America has become more urbanized. This lack of awareness is compounded by a cultural norm that affirms tolerance of others (complete
acceptance) and avoids at all costs the risk of offending someone. While tolerance as defined by popular culture may mean complete acceptance, the *Webster’s New International Dictionary* defined tolerance in 1943 as “the disposition to tolerate, or allow the existence of beliefs, practices, or habits differing from one’s own.”92 This understanding of tolerance from the mid-twentieth century has shifted toward a more accepting tolerance as evidenced by the change in the definition of tolerance in the *Webster’s New Explorer College Dictionary* (2007) which defines tolerance as “a sympathy or indulgence for beliefs and practices differing from one’s own.”93

While it is important for American Christians to be aware of the postmodern culture that embraces an accepting tolerance, they must continue to uphold the standards of God and stay committed to the call. Unfortunately, as Marc Kolden notes, North American churches often peddle “cheap grace, in fear of offending anyone.”94 The cheap grace, peddled by these churches, is postmodern tolerance that affirms everything about the individual and does not challenge him to make changes nor commitments. This problem has led to an overall lack of productivity in the area of missions on the part of the local church.

In a society that embraces the God of love (the God of accepting tolerance), the God of holiness (and wrath) is often not presented. This God of love is the same God Hick had in his initial pluralistic conception of a God who “would not exclude anyone


Sanders, in his defense of inclusivism, argues that the God of love could not condemn those who have not heard the gospel without giving them some opportunity to attain salvation. Clark H. Pinnock, also an inclusivist, states that this God of love is a “self-emptying God” who limits himself in his attributes. In an effort to affirm God’s love for those who have never heard, Pinnock denies the immutability of God. If God’s immutability is denied, then the foundation of truth erodes, and Christian tolerance becomes accepting tolerance. At this point, the only foundation for truth left in individualistic American culture is the individual who is obliged to accept the beliefs of others as equally valid.

The end result of the accepting tolerance of postmodernists is a denial of absolute truth. Tolerance for the Christian must be in subordination to and in compliance with the truth of Scripture. Christians must not fall into the trap of simply stagnating and judging between the various concepts, ideas, and realities competing for the label of truth. As Douglas Groothuis states, the postmodernist’s preoccupation with judging between various truth claims indicates an affirmative belief in objective truth. Christians must go

96 Gabriel Fackre, Ronald H. Nash, and John Sanders, What About Those Who Have Never Heard? Three Views on the Destiny of the Unevangelized, ed. John Sanders (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1995), 21–22. Sanders’ understanding of God is very similar to the pluralistic understanding of God originally held by Hick. Both authors have a God whose overarching character quality is love. Neither has a God who requires an active obedience.
98 Pinnock’s argument for inclusivism denies the immutability of God because it affirms God’s love for those who have never heard but neglects God’s holiness. Since God’s nature does not change, a person must relate to God according to who he is and not according to who he may wish him to be.
beyond believing in objective truth (the faith of demons) and allow the life-changing truth of the Bible to restructure their lives in a manner pleasing to God who loves all people.

The God who loves all people is not the loving God of Hick, Sanders, and Pinnock, who is so focused on saving people that he neglects his other characteristics. Their God seems very similar to the tolerating God of those who are quick to forgive in order to avoid difficult issues and any potential conflict. Paul, on the other hand, seems quite willing to address the misdeeds of his fellow Christians and clearly lays out rules for holding fellow church members accountable in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul understood that Christians would fall into the trap of sin and become unproductive. He chose to implement individual and communal accountability as a way to accomplish the development of disciples with the local church. Paul and the God he proclaimed love people enough to hold them accountable and to discipline them if necessary (cf. Heb 12:5–11).

The Problem of Relativism

Modern American culture has widely embraced the idea that everything is open for question. Truth, in its understanding, is defined by each individual, and each individual’s truth can be different because truth is merely a social construct. As a social construct, truth is shaped by the culture and the experiences of the individual. Jim Leffel writes that truth, according to postmodernists, is simply “beliefs [one has] been

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between truth claims leads to an “intellectual apathy” where one may claim to have certain beliefs, but these beliefs are only “preferences.” This apathy, he adds, leads to a lack of passion and commitment.
conditioned to accept by [one’s] society."\textsuperscript{100} Truth, they argue, is not based on any solid foundation because there is no absolute truth.

\textbf{The Discipleship Process}

A call of obedience must go out to all who would follow Jesus. Unfortunately, the emphasis in many pulpits is a simple, painless call to accept Jesus Christ as savior with little or no mention of his lordship.\textsuperscript{101} Many preachers, though they may not intend on undermining Christ’s lordship, are so focused on getting non-believers to make small commitments to Christ that they never allow Christ to lead them to forsake all and follow him. Richard V. Peace warns about the prevailing preoccupation with conversion growth within the evangelical community that pays little or no attention to the discipleship process.\textsuperscript{102}

\textbf{The Two Step Model}

Some scholars suggest that there are two steps that one makes before becoming a disciple. Zane C. Hodges, citing Acts 16:30–31, argues that a person can believe and never perform any works.\textsuperscript{103} In this approach to discipleship, the first step involves

\begin{thebibliography}{100}
\item J. Herbert Kane, \textit{Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective} (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 109–10. He adds that a heightened awareness of Christ’s lordship among Christians would cause more to commit to missions. Even so, a doctrine should be urged because it is true, not because of what it does.
\item Zane C. Hodges, \textit{Absolutely Free!: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation} (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 167–70. A careful examination of Hodges argument reveals the presence of faulty conclusion based on proof-texting. He backs up his argument with Scripture without integrating his points with other Scriptures that at least seem to contradict his views.
\end{thebibliography}
simple conversion where a believer makes a confession but whose commitment to Christ is still quite shallow. Sanders, to support his inclusivist view, argues that those who have never heard the gospel but are nevertheless saved are “believers,” while those who know about Jesus and exercise faith in him are called “Christians.”104 For Sanders, the believers do not even hear the gospel nor do they have to have any measurable works, but the Christians have both.105 The second step to becoming a disciple, advocated by these scholars, is the step that involves outward life change due to a deepening of commitment. But where is the evidence that Christ ever acknowledged a person’s salvation when that person’s commitment was shallow?

These scholars seem to want to separate God’s call to salvation from his call to discipleship. Bill Hull separates the two calls when he argues that all believers are disciples even if they live their life in “spiritual slumber.”106 Though Hodges wants to secure the assurance of salvation for all believers, he neglects to assure the authenticity of the faith of the believer because demanding active obedience would be “disastrous” to the faith of believers.107

An offshoot of the two-step model of discipleship is proposed by Donald A. McGavran. He suggests that disciples are those who have been saved and are now in the

104Fackre, Nash, and Sanders, What About Those Who Have Never Heard?, 38.

105Sanders, No Other Name, 223–26. Sanders does not deal with the issue of Christians who are inactive. His argument of inclusivism, however, provides an excellent starting point for so-called Christians who desire an excuse to live a carnal, deedless life. Sanders’ argument could easily lead one to think that active faith is not needed for Christians, since it is not necessary for the unevangelized.


process of growing in their faith.\textsuperscript{108} His focus is on discipleship as a process which is certain affirmed by Scripture (cf. Eph 4:15; 1 Pet 2:2). Although McGavran’s model of discipleship is acceptable, perhaps more attention should be given to authentic conversion. Authentic conversion would certainly bring one into a life-long process of discipleship. McGavran seems too quick to accept the authenticity of conversion and chooses to leave the outward manifestation of authentic conversion to the future. If churches take the time to help believers feel confirmed and secure in their faith, then the converted believers will understand their faith and how it applies to their daily life.

**The One Step Model**

Another model of discipleship, which is supported by James 2:14–26, combines conversion and commitment into one step. That one step is an obedient act of following Jesus when Jesus commands the person to follow him. This model combines both confession and action. As Michael J. Wilkins states, “[G]rowth in discipleship [is] the natural result of the new disciple’s life.”\textsuperscript{109} Green also argues for the one step model of discipleship and adds that evangelism has not been completed “until the convert is made a disciple.”\textsuperscript{110} Anthony A. Hokema, citing 2 Corinthians 4:5, Colossians 2:6, and

\textsuperscript{108}Donald A. McGavran and Win C. Arn. *How to Grow a Church* (Glendale, CA: Regal, 1973), 80.


\textsuperscript{110}Green, *Why Churches Die*, 76–79.
Acts 2:36, rejects the concept of “carnal Christian” who accepts Jesus as Savior but not as Lord.\textsuperscript{111}

An authentic disciple, according to C. Peter Wagner, is not a “well-polished Christian.”\textsuperscript{112} A disciple is a person who has made more than an intellectual or an emotional decision and has committed himself to the command of Christ in an act of heartfelt faith. Evidence that the disciple can have many faults that still need attention is found in a study of the usage of $\mu\alpha\theta\eta\tau\eta\varsigma$ in the Epistles. Not once does this word appear in the letters that were written to Christians. As disciples, the Christians, to whom the Epistles were written, were in a process of maturation that required careful instruction and strong leadership.

**The Great Commission**

In the Great Commission, Christ commands his followers to make disciples as opposed to believers of all nations. Christ points to two separate categories of people: disciples and non-believers. The participles, $\pi\omicron\rho\omicron\epsilon\omicron\theta\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, $\beta\alpha\pi\tau\iota\zeta\omicron\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, and $\delta\iota\delta\acute{\iota}\acute{\omicron}\kappa\omicron\nu\tau\epsilon\varsigma$, used in Matthew 28:19–20, simply outline what the discipleship process entails for those who make disciples and those who become disciples.

\textsuperscript{111} Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 22.

The Centrality of Scripture

Carson states that the church in the West is becoming more focused on self, as evidenced by rising popularity of the prosperity gospel and the faith movement.\textsuperscript{113} The current employment of marketing techniques and terms by churches can shift the focus from God to the individual. Many of these techniques are designed to appeal to the latest perceived need of the potential convert. Besides taking the focus off God, these techniques often have the effect of making the individual the primary focus, as opposed to the community of the believers and the individual convert’s place within that community.

Instead of appealing to the perceived needs of potential converts, Carson argues for an approach to ministry that is determined by human needs outlined in the Bible as opposed to human needs defined by popular culture.\textsuperscript{114} He desires to restore the Bible and its teachings to the center of the preaching, teaching, and practice of the church. Craig Van Gelder agrees with Carson and challenges Christians to maintain a firm commitment to the truth of Scripture, while also dealing with the cultural issues that preoccupy postmodernists.\textsuperscript{115} By having the Bible as the starting point of preaching and teaching, the practice of the church both in ministry and in mission will be based on sound biblical doctrine. Also, the centrality of Scripture in the church will place the focus

\textsuperscript{113}D. A. Carson, \textit{Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 462–65. Concerning Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Kenneth Hagin, and Paul Crouch, Carson writes, “[N]o one with a scrap of theological smarts should consider them evangelicals in any useful sense of the term.”

\textsuperscript{114}Ibid., 477.

\textsuperscript{115}Craig Van Gelder, “Postmodernism and Evangelicals: A Unique Missiological Challenge at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century,” \textit{MIR} 30 (2002): 499–502. He adds that Christians must shift the focus of postmodernists away from intellectual defenses of the truth toward active obedience in their daily lives.
back on God and off the individual, and the truth back on a solid foundation and off the shifting sands of worldly philosophy.

**Effect of Discipleship on Mission**

### The Social Gospel and Proclamation

In 1993, Tom Steffen argued that the “new era” of mission requires the development of educational devices and delivery techniques that promote active obedience to the mission of Christ and “transform [the] character” of the Christian recipient. In some ways, the development of missiological education that empowers the laymen has been in the works for more than half of the twentieth century. The modern-day call for character transformation that expresses itself in action may have arisen from the twentieth century debates for and against social action and fundamentalism.

Those concerned with social action often adhered to the social gospel which sought to proclaim and establish the kingdom of God in this present world through social action aimed at driving necessary changes in society at large. The social gospel is widely embraced by postmodern Christians (that is, Christians who are more influenced by their postmodern culture than the truths of Scripture) who are trapped in a secular humanistic worldview that focuses on people and their experiences. The social gospel aims directly at improving the individual and communal experience with very little attention given to God and the hereafter.


While the social gospel focused on society and sought to redeem it in the present, fundamentalists placed their focus on the individual and sought to redeem him or her from the fallen present in preparation for a heavenly future. The primary vehicle used by the fundamentalists to cause life change has been and still is proclamation. To be sure, proclamation of the word of God to a gathering of people is certainly well-founded in Scripture. However, proclamation of the word to a crowd en masse allows each individual to remain anonymous and unaccountable for his choices following the proclamation of the word of God. The fundamentalist is often trapped in the recurring cycle of proclaiming the same word to the same people sitting in the same pew. These faithful listeners usually become nothing more because they are challenged to do nothing more than attend regularly.

While the intentions of fundamentalists may be seen as honorable by those who hold to a biblical theology, it must be noted that the attention of the fundamentalist is focused somewhat heavily on the individual at the expense of society at large. David J. Bosch states that the fundamentalist’s approach to mission causes his adherents to ignore the present needs of this world because all of their attention is on the future reality and on themselves.¹¹⁸ The fundamentalist’s emphasis on proclamation may also hinder missions in that typically proclamation is only done by a handful of trained leaders, whereas regular members simply continue to listen to the proclamation indefinitely. Norma Cook Everist agrees by saying, “When witness and service are not attempted, the parishioner, as it were, never leaves the pew, or never leaves the pew with the Word.”¹¹⁹

Quality before Quantity

The problem of character transformation that leads to mission-minded disciples is not limited to those churches and denominations that hold to a fundamentalist approach. Konrad Raiser points out that the “institutionalization” of tasks carried on by the laity historically has led to those tasks being incorporated into a tradition-based church structure where ministry and mission roles are filled by trained clergy. By placing all the burden of ministry on a select few, some churches have trained a gathering of disciples whose quality has not been developed through ministry and mission experience. So what changes must churches make to improve the quality of their discipleship process?

During the ministry of Christ, relatively few people became his disciples. Though he spent a large portion of his time proclaiming the kingdom of God to the people, he spent the largest amount of his time with the select few who made a costly commitment to follow him. Jesus’ focus on the Twelve demonstrated his concern for quality over quantity, while his focus on the masses demonstrated his concern for reaching the lost. Some might argue that Peter was successful in converting about several thousand people at the time of Pentecost and shortly thereafter. While this may be so, Peter’s crowd was well aware of the prophecies and no doubt had deep awareness of the Bible as well as the current events pertaining to Christ.

The people that churches are trying to reach today, especially in America, have little awareness of biblical history and often are not aware of some basic matters.

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pertaining to the Christian faith. When evangelicals focus too heavily on conversion growth in large numbers, they face a daunting task of discipling these new members. This task becomes even more difficult should the church decide to provide mentoring and supervised volunteer ministry and mission activities. Though churches should never neglect their individual and collective responsibility for evangelism, they must remember to keep their focus on discipleship just as Jesus modeled. Through discipleship, churches not only become more stable and therefore more capable for mission, they also become more able to evangelize their local community through the collective effort of every disciple.

To accomplish quality discipleship, churches must focus on the individual convert first. Robert E. Coleman makes the following observation concerning the need for placing a higher priority on discipleship:

Most evangelistic efforts of the church begin with the multitudes under the assumption that the church is qualified to preserve what good is done. The result is [their] spectacular emphasis on numbers of converts, candidates for baptism, and more members for the church, with little or no genuine concern manifested toward the establishment of these souls in the love and power of God, let alone the preservation ad continuation of the work.  

Coleman identifies a key problem of churches that focus solely on evangelism. As these churches gather converts, the converts are placed in large services and oversized small groups, given little or no mentoring from a more mature disciple, and left to become like Christ on their own. The converts are reduced to becoming listeners who often evaluate their success as a Christian based on their church attendance and their knowledge of the

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Bible. The church must learn how to develop people into doers who listen (i.e., disciples), not just listeners, if the church is ever to answer the call of Christ to mission.

**The Active Community**

The new model for mission, according to Shenk, advocates “a two-fold witness consisting of word and deed, proclamation and service.”\(^{122}\) To establish communities that practice their faith, John R. Seraphine argues against the traditional approach to the discipleship process and missiological education in favor of what he calls a “learning community.”\(^{123}\) This community is an association of believers who teach other members of the community by modeling the Bible’s lessons, not just by proclaiming the lessons. Seraphine notes that less mature believers tend to adapt the “character” of the more mature members.\(^{124}\) Like Seraphine, Douglass John Hall also advocates the formation of “small communities of serious Christian commitment” which would excel in providing support and accountability for those who join.\(^{125}\)

**Historical Evidence**

The Early Church was quite successful in mission as evidenced by its rapid expansion in the first four hundred years after Christ. However, the expansion began to slow after the state and the church merged through the efforts of Constantine. For the next one thousand years, the Church’s effectiveness in mission was comparatively small.

\(^{122}\)Shenk, “The Whole is Greater than the Sum of the Parts,” 69.


\(^{124}\)Ibid.

The reformers Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli were so focused on the massive task of reforming the existing church that they gave very little attention to the global mission. Luther, known for his *sola fide* doctrine and his discomfort with the Epistle of James, argues in the preface to his commentary on Romans that faith is not “a human imagination and idea that never reaches the heart” and never leads to action; rather, it is a “divine work” that makes it impossible for us to not bear fruit.\(^{126}\)

After the reformers, the Pietists arose to begin laying the groundwork for missionary activity. They were faced with a church where a wide gap had developed between the clergy and the laity because the clergy were expected to be active in their church responsibilities and the laity was only expected to agree with Church doctrine and to observe the sacraments.\(^{127}\) Their emphasis on the Bible counteracted the popular pseudo-Christian culture of their time which taught, according to Philip Jacob Spener, that salvation was a matter of confession without the need for behavioral changes, i.e. an “illusion of faith.”\(^{128}\)

Spener’s condemning portrayal of the practice of his day seems ironically similar to the modern American church:

> there are not a few who think that all that Christianity requires of them (and that having done this, they have done quite enough in their service to God) is that they be baptized, hear the preaching of God’s Word, confess and receive absolution, and


\(^{127}\)Arthur Wilford Nagler, *Pietism and Methodism or The Significance of German Pietism in the Origin and Early Development of Methodism* (Nashville: M. E. Church, South, 1918), 20–22.

go to the Lord’s Supper, no matter how their hearts are disposed at the time, whether or not there are fruits which follow.\textsuperscript{129}

In an effort to combat inactive confessional Christianity, Spener, during a sermon in 1669, admonished his listeners to form small groups centered around the study of Scripture.\textsuperscript{130} Like Spener and the Pietists, the Anabaptists of the sixteenth century also emphasized the authority of Scripture and their interpretation of it. Claus-Peter Clasen notes that the Anabaptists commonly held informal small group Bible studies.\textsuperscript{131}

In the First Great Awakening, George Whitefield was tremendously successful in attracting many new converts to the faith. But John Wesley brought discipline and accountability to these converts by increasing the expectations and holding the converts accountable within their individual small groups. According to Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, these converts went through “a six-month probationary period” where “membership cards were given and attendance was checked.”\textsuperscript{132} History confirms that Wesley’s policy of group accountability and high expectations caused great growth in mission as evidenced by the explosion of Methodist churches and their many evangelistic endeavors.

\textsuperscript{129}Ibid., 220.

\textsuperscript{130}Dale W. Brown, \textit{Understanding Pietism} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 12.

\textsuperscript{131}Claus-Peter Clasen, \textit{Anabaptism: A Social History, 1525–1618: Switzerland, Austria, Moravia, South and Central Germany} (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 91. Clasen comments about the widely held custom of the Anabaptists which allowed for multiple speakers to address the community during worship. Paul seems to support this practice in 1 Cor 14:29. Perhaps the modern church should incorporate this practice into their worship service. It could serve the purpose of training aspiring leaders as well as allow the minister to share the burden of proclamation with others who are called and gifted within his church.

\textsuperscript{132}Malcolm McDow and Alvin L. Reid, \textit{Firefall: How God Has Shaped History Through Revivals} (Nashville, Broadman & Holman, 1997), 196.
The Delegation Effect

In Exodus 18:14 (NIV), Jethro asked Moses, “Why do you alone sit as judge, while all these people stand around you from morning till evening?”\textsuperscript{133} Jethro noticed that Moses was overworked, and the people were idle while they waited on him. The whole community had stagnated because Moses had become a bottleneck that was preventing the flow of activity. Moses’ example seems eerily similar to that of many preachers and staff members today who work long hours and stay busy constantly while their parishioners attend service and wait for the next special program.\textsuperscript{134}

Jethro encourages Moses to appoint leaders over ten people, fifty people, one hundred people, and one thousand people. Jethro gave Moses a structure that delegated authority and activity to many people, enabling Moses to do the most important work. The apostles confirmed the value of Jethro’s advice when they told the local church in Jerusalem to choose seven people from among themselves to care for widows so that the disciples could focus on the ministry of the Word. Even the secular world confirms Jethro’s advice on delegation as evidenced by the presence of many huge corporations that can handle large responsibilities through the work of many under the guiding supervision of well-structured management.

The delegation of ministry responsibilities allows the laity to put into practice the messages that they hear in small group Bible studies and from the pulpit. As the church staff is freed up through this process, they can begin to give more attention to

\textsuperscript{133}The NIV translation will be used in this paper.

\textsuperscript{134}While programs are not wrong, they are often led by staff members who do the majority of the work themselves through the use of paid church staff.
guiding the activity of the laity to insure quality and holding the laity accountable in acting out their faith. As church members learn that they have a role in active ministry, they will become aware of their responsibilities to minister to their families, co-workers, etc., through their word and their deed. As church leaders supervise members in their ministry activities, the members will improve their ability to act out their faith in a biblical manner.
CHAPTER 3

MISSIOLOGICAL EDUCATION

Place of James 2:14–26 in Missiological Education

According to Arthur F. Glasser, the biblical basis for mission is more extensive than the historic, pietistic understanding which focused outwardly toward “the heathen” outside of Christendom and is often reinforced today through the use of the Great Commission as the sole basis for mission.135 Among other texts that form a vital part of the foundation of mission within the Bible, James 2:14–26 should be added to the list. While the Epistle of James has been the subject of much debate, the debate itself has overshadowed James’ contribution to the church, especially with regard to mission. Too often discussion on James simply ends in heated debate over the place of works within the Christian’s life. The presence of works, however, is necessary if the church and its members are ever to engage in mission.

The Place of the Church

In the era of the modern mission movement, the Great Commission has been the primary reference point for motivating the church to mission. Unfortunately, the emphasis is sometimes placed on going rather than making disciples. Since the average church member does not go on mission overseas, he is left to participate, so he thinks, only by giving. Even churches themselves sometimes become no more than fundraisers

and donors for mission. Their earnest desire should be to participate in mission in whatever way they can, yet they believe and, in many cases, have been taught, though often times not intentionally, that the only way to support mission is by giving and going.

Perhaps this view of mission participation is a by-product of the church delegating the responsibility of mission to a society. In effect this practice distances a large portion of mission activity from the church. Perhaps the use of the term mission within the Southern Baptist church to refer to the Home Mission Board or the International Mission Board and their activities has compounded the problem.

While mission societies are important to mission, Alan Neely notes that “the basic teaching and training unit for Christian mission is . . . the church.” The local church may not have the resources to send and support its own missionaries; it may not even have adequate resources to make a significant impact in the local mission. The local church can, however, participate in mission by developing mission-minded disciples who value mission and who collectively and individually support mission at the personal, local, and global levels through the cooperative efforts of individuals, churches, and mission societies.

Bruce K. Camp notes that churches today no longer view oversees mission service as the ultimate ministry; instead, he argues that they are seeking “to actively participate in the Great Commission” within their local community.

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mission activity should be practiced and encouraged, a balance must be reached between the two extremes where both local and global mission can be successful.

In a fairly recent publication from the IMB, a section on the church’s responsibility in mission mobilization challenged the church to pray, to give, to learn, to get involved, and “to nurture.” The church, however, often overlooks its nurturing role in an impatient effort to be doing mission. While doing mission is certainly a priority, preparing for mission and preparing others for mission is no less of a priority. The church’s role in mission, therefore, must include the development of fruit-bearing Christians who learn to apply the Bible in their everyday lives, who learn to live mission, and who make mission their foremost priority.

*The Place of Obedience*

Peters notes that church itself has historically been silent in mission and been satisfied to have only a few individuals and mission societies dedicated to the Great Commission. One reason for this, according to Peters, is lack of mature Christians who can handle the obstacles created by a church that is on mission. David Watson argues that the problem is a lack of authentic Christianity because “the vast majority of Western Christians… are not true disciples of Jesus.” This lack of mature mission-minded Christians is ultimately the responsibility of the church and its leaders. Christians need to

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140Ibid., 216.

be taught by word and deed to participate in mission first and foremost through daily active obedience to the commands of Christ.

Rick Warren states that most churches only challenge their members to “attend and give,” and asks, “What does it take to turn an audience into an army?” Warren has pointed out a major problem for churches and a major problem for mission. Churches and church members who desire to obey the Great Commission must do more than simply attend and give. They must individually and collectively apply mission in their everyday lives. To accomplish this task, the church must provide a biblical foundation for its membership so that they can understand how to be a part of Christ’s call to make disciples. Among other teachings of the Bible on mission, James 2:14–26 should certainly have a place in the church’s teaching of mission. Mission is about putting God’s word into action through obedience to Christ. Christians who are inactive and disobedient have no place in mission and no built-in discipline for mission.

Besides frequent calls to attend and give, many churches ask their members to go on mission through prayer. David Bryant states emphatically, “Prayer is action!”; he also identifies prayer as the “greatest impact” one can have on mission. While Bryant’s view of prayer may be well-intended, perhaps he and others who hold his view have exalted prayer while at the same time neglecting the importance of obedience. William Carey understood that prayer and obedient action must combine to sustain mission when he stated that one “must not be contented, however, with praying, without exerting

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Prayer and dependence on God are vital for mission to be successful because no mission is successful without the hand of God. But prayer must occur in concert with obedience if God is to receive glory from mission. Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, but his prayer was supported by his obedient submission to the will of God.

**The Place of Works**

While the church has emphasized salvation *sola fide* apart from works, many professed Christians have taken this teaching and perverted it into a license for an inactive lifestyle in regard to mission. While the *sola fide* doctrine is certainly a biblical truth that must be taught, other truths from Scripture must also be taught to combat its misuse. James 2:14–26 is perhaps the best Scripture for combating this perversion of the *sola fide* doctrine which serves to undermine mission. By embracing and advocating James 2:14:26, the church will provide a strong biblical basis for Christians becoming active in the Great Commission through their daily lives.

Shenk notes the missiologist is obligated to aid the church and its members to fulfill the Great Commission. So how can the missiologist and the local church leaders accomplish the task of building mission into the DNA of the average church member? Jesus himself did not start his teaching with the Great Commission. He started his relationship with the future apostles with the simple command to follow him.

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This group of future apostles was a small group which was intensely discipled by Jesus, and as a result they made a significant impact in mission that is still felt today. It all began, however, when they responded obediently with an active faith to the simple command of Jesus to follow him. Their obedience to this command initiated a discipleship process that lasted for several years. This process involved both giving and going, but more importantly, it involved the disciples learning to trust and obey the Lord.

For the disciples, mission began when they obeyed Jesus’ initial command, and it ended in their deaths. Mission was their calling, and it is the calling of the church today as the Great Commission clearly states. Mission was their lifestyle, and it is the lifestyle that modern-day disciples must adhere to in their daily lives. Mission was activated in their faithful obedience to the command of Christ, and it is still activated in the modern era when disciples choose to obey the command of Christ. Modern-day disciples must be expected to produce works which evidence the genuineness of their faith. These works collectively will make positive impact in the progression of mission in the modern era.

The Place of Character

To build mission into the life of an ordinary church member, missiological education must extend beyond the walls of the seminaries and the Bible schools. Missiological education must be attained in the discipleship process of the believer. Ralph D. Winter suggests that missiological education is “not merely a matter of the right curriculum but the right students.”146 Right students, according to Winter, are those who

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have proven their “giftedness.” Winter neglects to mention the issue of character within the student. The character required to be a representative of Christ especially within a mission context must be exemplary.

If seminaries, Bible schools, and mission organizations are to find the right students, care must be taken in the local church to develop disciples who possess Christ-like character. T. H. P. Sailer states that “true missionary spirit cannot co-exist with low spiritual vitality.” As Christians are challenged to grow spiritually through various means, they develop a servant’s heart and a servant’s awareness that are keys to mission and the character development of missionaries.

If the church is to be successful in the global mission, it must do more than simply help a few missionaries develop a mind and heart for mission, it must produce a mind and heart for mission within the average member. Carolyn Weatherford adds that the support of church members for missions is directly related to their maturity. Growth in Christ-like character requires social interaction leading to the formation of a value system. This value system must center around the truths of Scripture if the disciple is to develop Christ-like character.

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147 Ibid.


The Place of Experience

Missiological education has to be made personal within the lives of Christians. Giving money, going on short-term mission trips, praying for missions, and attending mission conferences are simply not enough, especially in the American culture which thrives on experience. While everyone cannot participate in long-term missionary service or even in short-term service, everyone can live an active life of obedience to Christ, a life whose end-result is mission because it is God’s missionary plan for that life.

Almost anyone can be involved in some form of social action that bears witness to Christ within his local community. This is not to say that social action is the ultimate goal of mission; rather, social action that bears witness to Christ is the result of life-transforming discipleship that produces mission-minded Christians. The social action of Christians and even the daily action of Christians has been adversely affected by the Western mindset which teaches the compartmentalization of faith and various activities as well as the mutual exclusiveness of faith and action. Social action should be encouraged by all, but it must not be divorced from faith by Christians. Faith in Christ brings even greater meaning and purpose to social action. These activities were unified, however, in the life of Jesus, in the obedient discipleship of his disciples, and in James 2:14–26.

The Place of Discipleship

Mass evangelism, though important, only gets the gospel to the masses; it does not ensure the development of leaders and Christians who practice mission in their daily lives. Unlike mass evangelism, emphasis on obedient discipleship has long-term implications for the future of mission. Obedient discipleship will not occur, however,
without the presence of obedient leadership. Jesus is clear that people are like helpless sheep without effective leadership (cf. Matt 9:36; Mark 6:34). While Jesus spoke to many in his earthly ministry, he focused on a relative few. But he knew that these few could become many through obedience to the mission.

Obedience to mission requires an active faith exhibited in deed, an active life within the church, an active role in discipleship, and active commitment to mission.Discipleship following mass evangelism or any type of evangelism has the effect of providing a new group of disciples dedicated to mission who can in turn lead others through word and deed to become dedicated to mission. Unfortunately, some evangelistic churches focus on simple conversion by confession and the things necessary to increase the amount of professed conversions instead discipling every believer.

**The Place of Confession**

In some cultures, simple confession is not so simple because of the negative reaction of the convert’s social network. This type of confession which brings immediate adversity to the convert is automatically put to the test of authenticity. In the American culture, however, the simple confession is, for the most part, not followed by adversity because Americans are accustomed to the Christian faith displayed by mere words. Since this is the case, new converts must be expected by the church to produce works in keeping with their confession. These works will become a witness of the genuineness of the convert’s faith to their social networks as well as a test of the authenticity of their confession.
A. R. Tippett provides the following four steps to conversion: “turning to the Lord, repenting, confessing, and believing.” The list, however, does not allow for authentication of the conversion nor does it guarantee that real conversion has occurred. True confession leads to true conversion which produces spirit-filled, obedient Christians who are empowered by God through the gifts of grace and faith. The disciples, who had been truly converted, were called to surrender selflessly to the Lord as evidenced by Jesus’ statement in Luke 14:27: “Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.”

Since true conversion leads to the formation of obedient, mission-minded disciples who actively choose Jesus, one more step must be added to assess the reality of conversion. That step is works. The works of the convert should be displayed in his faithfulness to teachings of Scripture and should steadily increase as he is made aware of more Scripture. This emphasis on works which verifies conversion should not be seen as an attempt to undermine the truth that conversion is an act of God’s grace. Works are simply the outcome of God’s grace which was poured into the believer’s life at the moment of conversion. They are not the means of salvation; rather, they are the product of salvation. The presence of works in the convert’s life and the church’s insistence that they be present provide a solid foundation of accountability with which to produce obedient, mission-minded converts.

The Place of Accountability

All Christians are called to a community of the faithful which lives in obedience to the Great Commission. This commission has been given to both individuals and communities. In an individualistic culture like that of America, it is tempting to look at the Great Commission as it applies to individuals. But churches must take ownership of the Great Commission as a community. When Jesus gave the commission, he gave it to all of the disciples present. He gave it to a community of the faithful. He expected them to obey collectively and individually. Within churches, individuals certainly need to live obedient lives which fulfill the Great Commission, but they also need to be challenged to mission by the church, led by faithful leaders, and held accountable to standards of biblical character.

Lewis A. Dummond provides a list of questions for churches who become an evangelistic church. His brief list of questions pertaining to discipleship is primarily focused on classroom-style educational experiences. He fails to mention anything about providing mentoring relationships and accountability to enhance the spiritual development of the laity.

The lack of accountability within some churches has a great impact on mission. This lack of accountability is the result of an individualistic society that has little regard for the importance of relationships. Through relationships with friends, neighbors, co-workers, and society as a whole, the authenticity of a person’s faith is tested. Relationships are also vital in the church. Through relationships with fellow Christians

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within the local church, the believer’s faith can be tested by and directed according to the truths of Scripture.

Barbara Hendricks and Thomas E. Clark note that the preparation of future missionaries from the worldly culture of a developed country such as the United States will require a less comforting approach involving “costly discipleship and profound cultural conversion, both creational and redemptional in character, which prepares the mission for impasse, conflict, and virtual martyrdom.”153 The anonymity of the large worship service, where the majority of Christians get their primary contact with the church, provides a discipleship opportunity which is perhaps too comforting for the American culture if it is the only discipleship opportunity in which Christians participate.

Participation in church programs, mission trips, and even Sunday School does not necessarily lead to the preparation of disciples who are engaged in a costly discipleship evidenced by an obedient lifestyle. While participation in various church activities can reinforce costly discipleship, it does not guarantee that this form of discipleship will be produced. With this in mind, what else aids in the formation of obedient disciples who are engaged in costly discipleship?

Jesus set the example for the formation of obedient disciples. He spoke to large crowds and certainly had a place in his mission for large gatherings, but he spoke intimately, frequently, and consistently with a small group of disciples. Perhaps the church today should place the same amount of emphasis on small groups. If they are to take account of the success of their ministry, perhaps they should count the number of

small groups that are forming obedient disciples whose works bear witness to their salvation. Jesus’ ministry would have gone nowhere if it was limited to the crowds; on the other hand, it sprang across the world through his intense focus and personal attention given to a relative few.

If the church is to be engaged in mission, it must develop an accountability structure within the local church which aids in the spiritual growth of converts. Simply teaching the endless truths of Scripture to them will no longer suffice especially in the modern Western culture where people are increasingly isolated from one another and left to their own devices. Converts must be held accountable by other Christians.

Tippett acknowledges that the believing community plays a vital role in the maturation process of converts. This vital role includes a responsibility to hold each fellow Christian within the local community accountable. By teaching and applying James 2:14–26 to individual Christians and the local church, confessing believers can be held accountable by examining their works. If churches are to apply James’ method, they will first have to place a greater emphasis on the growth of interpersonal relationships within the church. This is no small task, however, because it goes directly against the American culture and modern business management techniques used by church staff to oversee churches. With its emphasis on the individual, American culture sometimes exalts the individual and his or her pursuit of happiness with little thought given to the community within which this individual is to make this pursuit.

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The church, if it is to develop accountability as aid to spiritual growth, must teach the importance of community and the need of the individual for the community. While the church may continue to learn from modern business management techniques, it must avoid a top-down structure where the leadership is separated from the laity. Leaders and laity must be able to form meaningful relationships that provide sufficient opportunity for accountability to take place. Leaders must take the time to develop relationships with the laity so that they can be trusted to ask accountability questions and give direct admonition to the individual believer. Church leaders must also avoid the temptation to place the burden of the church on the backs of the staff while the members simply sit in the pew. Church members whose sole responsibility is to sit in the pew will have little opportunity to build interpersonal relationships through which accountability can take place.

Model for Missiological Education Based on James 2:14–26

While James 2:14–26 does not propose a model for missiological education, its thesis supporting the believer’s responsibility to actively follow Christ in word and deed serves as a fundamental principle in the establishment of a model for missiological education. This fundamental principle should guide the church to establish effective models of missiological education for its members. The model to be proposed in this paper is one way the church can work toward accomplishing its mandate of producing disciples with personal holiness and missional zeal. This model is designed for Southern Baptist churches in America though it could be adapted in other church settings.

Many evangelical churches are focused on the corporate worship service as the foundational component of their ministries. Jesus, however, never seemed to place his
main focus on a large corporate gathering for any length of time; instead, his focus was on a relative few. While the corporate approach may be effective in some areas at gathering a large crowd of seekers, reaching the masses with the gospel, and even teaching the new converts with elementary truths of Scripture, the church still has a fundamental obligation to disciple the believers and to help them put all biblical truths into practice so they can be engaged in mission as a lifestyle. With this in mind, a model must be designed that meets the evangelical church’s obligation to disciple the believers and to form obedient, mission-minded disciples.

A good discipleship model must have several components. First, it must move beyond the elementary teachings of Scripture into the deeper teachings. Second, the discipleship model must do more than simply educate, it must also be effective at leading believers to apply the teachings to their lives. Third, the effectiveness of a discipleship model in promoting life application is directly proportional to the intimacy among the members. This kind of intimacy cannot happen in a large corporate service where it is quite easy to remain anonymous; rather, it can only happen in small groups that offer interactive Bible teaching and accountability to ensure spiritual growth and faithfulness to the commands of Jesus. A discipleship model which emphasizes comprehensive biblical teaching, application, and group intimacy will be effective at bringing and applying the “faith works” message of James 2:14–26 and will produce mission into the believer’s relationship to the local and global society.

**Historical Foundation for the Model**

McIntosh states that Martin Luther advocated the meeting of small groups of “real Christians” in homes “to pray, read, baptize, receive the Sacrament, and do other
Christian works.” Many Protestants including the “Baptist[s], Moravian Brethren, Methodists, Quakers, as well as Lutherans” all made use of small groups within their model, but the Methodist “class meeting” stands alone in that it moved beyond simple nurturing toward an “emphasis on interpersonal relationships” which was built on an open accountability format. Snyder points out that John Wesley used small “class meetings” as an essential part of the Methodist evangelistic and discipleship process. He also notes that small groups were used effectively during “the Holiness Revival” during the nineteenth century.

The Need

Personal Interaction

As societies develop toward urbanization, people continue to migrate from the safety net of their large rural family structure into the anonymity common in urban areas. Nuclear families develop where contact with extended family members is limited by the distances between their dwellings. This lack of interaction, especially in the cities, has created a great need for people to form new connections with new people. Jesus understood that a small group was needed to make the discipleship process more effective.

157 Howard A. Snyder, The Problem of Wine Skins: Church Structure in a Technological Age (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), 40.
158 Ibid.
Small groups aid the discipleship process through interaction in a number of ways. First, they are able to offer interactive Bible teaching. Members are able to interact with the teacher and with each other as they cover the teaching material. This interaction allows the teacher to apply the lesson in meaningful ways because he or she is able to know where the group members are in the discipleship process. This personalization is impossible in large group settings. For this reason, evangelical churches must establish small groups. The interaction within the small group allows group members to learn from one another as well.

**Intimacy**

The interaction among small group members develops intimacy. Group members feel more relaxed around the other members as their relationships grow with time. They become increasingly willing to open up and reveal their needs and struggles with the group. This leads to the establishment of authentic community as group members become more open and honest with each other. The community within the group remains authentic so long as the Lord remains at the center of group life and mission remains the purpose of group.

**Accountability**

The intimacy and the interaction within the group allows group members to hold each other accountable for how they live their daily lives. Dettoni notes that “small groups help people think.”\(^{159}\) When the group members interact with the teachings of the Bible, they are forced to think about the application of those teachings to themselves.

personally. Unlike a large group which affords its members the ability to remain anonymous, the small group makes it all but impossible for a person to remain anonymous. This lack of anonymity helps a person apply the Bible’s lessons because he knows that the group members will hold him accountable. The accountability within the group can be direct, but it is usually indirect. Group members are challenged by the lives of other group members and feel challenged to follow the good examples. If the church upholds mission one of its purposes, the small group can be an effective tool for holding the individual members accountability for the priority they place on mission as evidenced by their daily lives.

**Structural**

A church structure that is more effective in its local mission will be more effective in its global mission. Any acceptable church structure must be capable of aiding the individual believers and the church as a whole with the task of obeying the Great Commission. As a part of the church structure, small groups serve several needs. They effectively close the back door of the church, at least to the extent that it can be closed. Warren concurs and states emphatically: “Small groups are the most effective way of closing the back door of your church.”

Evangelical churches tend to have the front doors wide open in that they attract large gatherings of seekers. While some of these seekers only come one time, some become believers and continue to return. At first, the discipleship needs are met by the evangelistic preaching in the large service because they know very little Scripture. After a

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160Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church*, 327.
while, however, they begin to sense a need to grow deeper in their relationship with God and a deeper need for mission. As they become aware of this, the evangelical church must have a structure that meets this need; otherwise, the new believers will leave out the back door and find another church to meet their need. Small groups that focus on discipleship can meet the believer’s need for spiritual growth and mission.

Another need that small groups fill within the church structure is the need to generate new leaders who have been trained in real-time situations and are, therefore, more effective in mission. Since these groups are small, it is impossible for the church to use its paid staff to facilitate them. The facilitators of the small groups are laypeople. Laypeople who lead these small groups tend to grow faster spiritually because the group holds them to a higher degree of accountability. As these leaders build their confidence, they are able to take on larger responsibilities within the mission of the church.

**The Structure**

**Organization**

Lewis states “the skeleton of a strong church is its organizational structure.”161 The small group system is organized with a pyramid authority structure with the senior pastor at the top. The senior pastor places a staff member over the small group system so that his control is primarily through delegation. The senior pastor decides the teaching materials to be used and the subject matter. He may choose to write the teaching materials himself or may have the staff member write them. Underneath the staff members is a network of small groups where every ten leaders have a zone leader and

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every ten zone leaders have a zone pastor. Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, advised a structure like this so Moses could be a more effective leader and the people could be better served by his leadership. This leadership structure allows everyone to get individual attention, support, and accountability.

The pastor, staff, zone pastors, and zone leaders are encouraged to not lead the groups for several reasons. First, they already have many ministerial responsibilities and need to avoid burnout. Second, they also need to have time for their families. While they should all be required to be a part of a group, they should be advised to avoid becoming “group experts” who would cause other group members to “feel inadequate.”

Another reason why these leaders do not lead groups is to establish a pattern of lay people being involved in church leadership. From the first time a new group meets, a lay leader holds the position of group leader. This incarnational example teaches all lay people that they can lead and take responsibility within the church. The leader’s obedient example will also teach group members how to apply mission in their daily lives.

Leadership with the small group structure is chosen from within the members of the group. A current leader recommends a particular individual for consideration as a potential group leader. After an interview with the zone leader, the person may proceed to leader training provided the interview went well. After training, the new leader becomes a co-leader and is mentored by a group leader. When a new group is formed, the co-leader may then become a leader with the approval of the leader and the zone leader.

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162 Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 129.
Types of Groups

Warren suggests the formation of “affinity groups” that are “built around different purposes, interests, age groups, geography, or anything else.” Additionally, groups should be formed based on the age of the children. Another issue is the level of maturity of those involved. While it is easier to design curriculum for groups that are at the same maturity level, groups more diverse in their maturity levels may be more effective in discipleship.

Multiplication

The ultimate goal of each group is to grow to the point of having to split to form two groups. With this in mind, group members must have a passion for reaching non-believers instilled in them. While the evangelical churches may use their worship service as the primary evangelistic tool, they can also use their groups as an evangelistic tool. Groups can grow as new members are reached through the service or directly through the group.

As groups fill up and reach the level of twelve members, the group will begin the process of splitting to form two groups. This process can happen several ways. Groups can be separated into two groups with equal membership, or they can choose to release a minimum of three people units (people units are individual singles and married couples) to form a new group.

163 Warren, The Purpose Driven Church, 325.

Since the church attracts a lot of new potential group members during the weekly service, a plan must be made to get these people involved in the small group ministry. Warren suggests that it is “unlikely that very many new [church] members will join existing small groups.” The church must therefore take new members and place them into new groups. At the same time, old members should be trained to constantly recruit new members from the service and from the community.

**Group Member Roles**

The group leader is a proactive shepherd who models Christ to his/her group members, teaches them God’s Word, encourages them, and works closely with the zone leader and church staff in all pertinent matters. As a proactive shepherd, he must minister to the sheep that are in his care. Dettoni notes that people need to be understood as “integrated wholes” who need their humanness affirmed through ministry to their “physical, cognitive, social, affective, moral, and spiritual” selves. Group leaders should also be servant-leaders who lead by serving others and lead others to do the same. Jesus modeled servant leadership when He washed the disciple’s feet.

Individual group members are also servants who learn to be so through the lifestyle witness of the leader. While group members are not required to be church members or church attendees, only members can hold leadership positions. Non-church members cannot be group leaders, but they can take on roles such as hosting, providing snacks, or coordinating other group activities.

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166 Dettoni, “Small Groups and Developmentalism,” 35.
All group members and leaders participate in the group meeting. The group leader facilitates the group by asking the questions that are in the Bible study materials. He also directs the flow of the group and keeps everything on track. The group members interact with each other by answering the questions and discussing the answers. The group leader directs the group to the biblical answer to the questions.

The Curriculum

While an outside source can be used for the curriculum, it is best if a staff member develops the curriculum so that it can be uniquely tailored for the church’s demographic. Each group should begin with a short prayer followed by an ice-breaker which helps the members open up. Finnell recommends the use of “simple and clear” questions as ice-breakers and suggests that only ten to fifteen minutes be allocated for this part of the group meeting.167 The passage can be read entirely at the beginning or broken into smaller sections throughout the study. The bulk of the lesson should be in a question-answer format to develop group interaction and intimacy. Davies notes that the Methodist’s class meeting used the question-answer format to build community through “self-examination” and “behavioral modification.”168 Spener, a protégé of Martin Luther, also advocated a question-answer format for small groups as a means for individual spiritual growth.169 Other Scriptures should be used occasionally to undergird major points. At the end of the study, some life application questions and points should be

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169 Spener, Pia Desideria, 89–90.
made. At this point, the group can have a worship time that includes prayer. It can also include other forms of worship depending on what the group desires to do. The lesson and the worship should only take an hour or so. Afterwards, group members can fellowship if they choose.

**Leaders**

The multiplication of leaders is one of the benefits of having a small groups system within a church. Many traditional churches in America revolve around a small group of leaders who serve under the leadership of a single leader. While leadership in churches is absolutely essential, many leaders fall into the trap of allowing the church structure to pivot around them. Cho, the leader of the largest church in the world that uses small groups, acknowledged that he fell into this trap. Cho eventually came to the realization that church growth requires mobilized laity who participate in all positions of church ministry including leadership.

**Training**

All potential group leaders who have been selected for training will go to a leadership-training seminar taught by the staff member in charge of the small group ministry. The training material will discuss the mission and the principles behind the small group ministry. It will also discuss the teaching material used in the small groups

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171 Ibid., 13–16.
and how to use it effectively. Cho argues that the pastor himself should teach the training session “so that [he] can pass on the pastor’s teaching” to the small groups.\footnote{Ibid., 113.}

**Qualifications**

Leaders are chosen based on five characteristics. First, they must have a commitment to Christ evidenced by church membership, mini-church membership, practice of spiritual disciplines, and a Spirit-filled life. Second, they must be committed to Scripture evidenced by their belief that the Bible is God’s word, and, as God’s word, it is final and authoritative in all matters pertaining to life. Third, they must have godly character evidenced by a growing relationship with Christ and a transformed life. Fourth, they must have compassion evidenced by a genuine concern for the needs of others. Fifth, they must have a can-do attitude evidenced by a positive attitude and a firm decision to trust God who enables the leader and supplies the power for success.

**Responsibility**

Leaders are expected to keep God first daily by having a daily quiet time with God including both prayer and Bible study. After doing a survey of group leaders, Comiskey noted that the daily devotional life of the leader is directly related to the multiplication of the group.\footnote{Comiskey, *Home Cell Group Explosion*, 33.} They should set goals for the group and encourage the group members to reach those goals. Leaders who have a co-leader are expected to mentor and train the co-leader so that the co-leader will be thoroughly prepared to be a group leader. Leaders are encouraged to make contacts with group members and potential
members. Leaders are expected to keep the group open by constantly reminding the
group members to bring relatives, friends, and neighbors.

Group leaders should always strive to have at least one co-leader who is being
trained to become a leader. The co-leader should be given opportunities to perform all
duties of the leader with the supervision of the leader. The leader should monitor and
encourage the co-leader’s growth in Christ. Like leaders, co-leaders should possess a
teachable spirit, a desire to grow spiritually, a commitment to the church, and a love for
people. The co-leader must participate in a leadership-training meeting before becoming
a fellowship group leader.

**Leader Care**

The army of God, like the army of men, cannot win a battle without structure
and support. Structure provides effective communication between the different levels of
leadership. With structure, people know where to go to have their questions answered.
With support, they know who to ask questions and who to rely on for counsel. Structure
and support keep God’s people focused on the purposes of the church so they can be
effective individually and collectively. Individual members must be able to rely on group
leaders for structure and support. Group leaders must be able to obtain structure and
support from a zone leader. Zone leaders can turn to zone pastors, and zone pastors can
obtain counsel from the pastor or a staff member.

**Meeting Place**

The groups will meet in the house of the member who volunteers his home to
be used by the group. Rainer argues that Americans are more open to attending small
groups in “homes and other ‘neutral’ sites as their first steps toward associating with
By meeting in the house, the group is automatically limited to a size that leads to multiplication through group reproduction. Another advantage of using homes for small groups, according to Warren, is that they are "unlimited geographically." The person who hosts the group in his home is never the leader or the co-leader so the host family has increased incentive to participate in a group. McBride suggests meeting in one house consistently instead of alternating houses because it leads to "confusion and poor attendance."

**Meeting Times**

The meeting time must be consistent. The group should meet at the same time weekly. The time chosen for the meeting should be obtained from the collective consensus of the individual group members. The amount of time designated for official group functions should also be consistent. McBride argues that the optimum amount of time appropriated for each meeting should be "one-and-a-half to two hours." This constraint can be altered slightly depending on the culture of the people involved. The group, once disbanded, will often continue to linger around for fellowship.

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178 Ibid.
Function of Small Groups within Church

Many churches are made up of a cluster of small groups where each group is considered to be a church within itself. The model that is being presented in this paper does not follow this pattern. These small groups are merely a part of the whole church that meets during the worship service. Since these groups are not individual churches, it is important to identify the place of the small groups within the ministry of the church.

The small groups are supported and overseen by the church as a ministry. The groups work to fulfill the purpose of the church by helping people become obedient, mission-minded disciples of Jesus Christ. While the church oversees all of the five purposes (worship, evangelism, discipleship, ministry, and fellowship), small groups serve to help fulfill those purposes in the lives of the members. Since the church has a corporate worship service that prevents personal support and accountability, the groups focus on discipleship and fellowship to build up and equip the members of the church.

While the groups do focus on discipleship, they do not provide deep Bible study. Individual members are encouraged to develop a quiet time and to participate in other discipleship ministries within the church to continue in their growth. Members are also encouraged to pursue ministry opportunities because the church believes that true spiritual growth only occurs when the information learned in the discipleship ministries is put into action. Above all, members are taught, encouraged, and expected to apply mission to their daily lives and to do mission in their daily lives.

The groups also focus on fellowship as a means to integrate group members into the life of the church. This fellowship should not be entertainment because the fellowship revolves around the serious study of the Scriptures. The fellowship within the
church serves the purpose of creating an atmosphere that challenges group members to make greater commitments to Christ in their service, quiet time, and daily choices.

While the primary focus of the group is on discipleship and fellowship, the group is still encouraged to make evangelism a priority during their daily lives. Gillmor argues that “the key to [Willow Creek Community Church’s] evangelistic effectiveness” is the inclusion of evangelism into every part of the church’s structure including the small groups. Group members are encouraged to invite unbelievers to the service and to the group as well as to witness to them through word and deed.

**Getting Started**

Many churches focus on gathering a large crowd, but only a few are good at developing those in the crowd into obedient, mission-minded disciples. Sooner or later, they will hopefully realize that a large service is simply not enough. Willow Creek Community Church excelled in growing a large service, but the staff eventually realized that the people involved in the worship service were not having “the chance to experience transforming relationship.” Once they realized their problem, the question of how to solve it came to the table. The Willow Creek staff chose small groups, and after surveying those involved with their small group “pilot ministry,” they were amazed at the affirmative response.

181 Ibid.
Getting a small group started in a Southern Baptist church with an established culture is no easy task because some Southern Baptist church members may dislike change and resist making new commitments of their time and energy. Though they may dislike change, there are some ways of overcoming that hurdle to establish an effective ministry that incorporates current members and future members. First, notice must be given to the membership of the impending change. This notice should include education about why such a move is necessary. An open discussion with the pastor should be offered to any who may wish to ask questions. Constant communication is absolutely necessary for the small group ministry to be successful in the early stages.

Second, good leadership must be chosen based on the qualifications listed in the leader section of this paper. Leaders who are already connected relationally to the church and have the respect of the members are often the best at this stage. If people are already following them, they will likely follow them into the small group ministry. If possible, co-leaders should be chosen from the very beginning as well.

Third, leadership must be given thorough training on the goals and purposes of the small group ministry. They need to know why it is necessary. They need to be made extremely aware of the authority structure so that they can know how to get their questions answered. Leaders need to be familiarized with the teaching materials and given some notes on how to use the materials effectively.

The fourth thing that must be done before the group can start is the pairing of current members with the trained leaders. Members should be assigned to groups that share a common affinity. Members should be given the chance to know which group they were assigned so they can make a request to change groups if needed.
Finally, when the group meets for the first time, it is important that the staff not be there to interfere with the group. The group needs to know from day one that they are responsible for themselves. After several weeks, the pastor and staff can begin visiting the groups to develop relationships and give advice to the leader on improving the group’s effectiveness.

**Other Issues**

**Children**

Stockstill acknowledges that property care and ministry to the children of those who are attending a small group is “problematic.”\(^\text{182}\) The Children’s minister will provide small groups with lessons to be given by a group member who volunteers to teach the children. Some groups may decide to make different arrangements for the children. All teenagers should participate in the group with the adults.

**Maximum Membership**

No more than fifteen participants on average should be in a group. When a group reaches twelve in attendance, it needs to begin the process of splitting. Stockstill notes that “the Principle of Twelve” is common throughout the Bible as a number for organizing people including the “12 patriarchs, 12 tribes of Israel, [and] 12 apostles.”\(^\text{183}\) Groups that reach twenty in attendance quickly become closed to new members; therefore, groups are not allowed to reach this number so that new people can integrate

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\(^{183}\) Ibid., 95.
into the life of the church. Vaughan notes that churches that form large groups cause their growth to cease and even to decline.\(^{184}\)

**Group Life**

Groups are challenged to grow numerically because groups that add members do not become stale. New people bring new challenges that help group members develop spiritually. Groups are expected to last from nine months to two years. They are expected to mature new leaders who form new groups so that the small group does not lose its effectiveness by becoming a large group.

**Small Group Inhibitors**

Small group inhibitors are factors that affect the overall success of the individual groups and the small group model. All staff and leaders must have knowledge of these inhibitors so that they can avoid potential dangers that threaten group health. If the danger cannot be avoided, knowledgeable leaders can at least recognize the symptoms and seek help from other leaders and staff members. The group inhibitors that leaders must be aware of can be found both within the group and without the group.

**Inhibitors Inside the Group**

Perhaps the most dangerous inhibitor that affects group life is self-centeredness. Groups must learn to focus on each other instead of themselves. Groups that avoid or overcome self-centeredness will face the struggle of avoiding a closed-group mentality. Another inhibitor affecting group life happens when the study materials

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become more important than the people for whom the materials were written. This inhibitor is basically a form of legalism that promotes truth without love. While legalism must be avoided, groups also must avoid the third inhibitor, universalism, which focuses people to the extent that the truth is bypassed and set aside. Groups cannot grow healthily unless they are on a solid foundation, and the only solid foundation in this world is the abiding word of God. The fourth inhibitor is allowing fellowship to become the dominant theme of the group at the expense of the time for prayer and study. While interaction is essential, it must revolve around the Lord.

**Inhibitors Outside the Group**

The primary inhibitor outside the group is an organizational structure that is rigid and ineffective. While the small group structure in the preceding pages is somewhat rigid, it is meant to aid the local Christian leader in the organizational development of a small group system that is well-suited to the local situation. Because of the fast-pace changes taking place across America, especially in the urban areas, the small group organizational structure must be flexible; however, it must also be consistent by providing a solid leadership structure. Group members and leaders, according to Martin and McIntosh, need to be able to answer this question: “Where does the buck stop?”

The structure, on the other hand, must allow every member the opportunity to be an active part of the mission of the church.

A second inhibitor that affects group growth and dynamics is curriculum that is not flexible. Curriculum must be standardized in that a certain passage is covered.

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Questions and comments should be provided as a part of the curriculum as well, but leaders should be allowed the choice of cutting and pasting questions, comments, and examples so that the curriculum can be personalized for the group.

Towards the Development of Mission-Enabled Disciples

The Western church, especially in America, is facing a crisis similar to that faced by the reformers during the Reformation. Luther and Calvin among other reformers have been criticized for their lack of attention to mission outside of Christendom. But Christendom before the Reformation was composed of many confessed believers who were taught to attend mass and hold the right beliefs. Discipleship and mission were given little if any attention. When the Reformation began, Luther and Calvin, as W. Stanford Reid suggests, had to focus on mission within Christendom. But these seeds of mission planted in Christendom by the reformers led to the seeds of mission being planted throughout the world by those who followed in the succeeding generations.

Like the reformers, Christians in America live in a worldly culture filled with many confessed believers whose lives bear very little fruit. While the current problem in America is not exactly the same one faced by the reformers, Southern Baptist Christians in America need to counteract inactive confessional Christianity just like the reformers by placing emphasis on the Bible’s teachings and by focusing the necessary amount of attention on discipleship within the local church. Mission began in Christendom during the Reformation; mission today must begin in the local church through the engagement of potential converts and discipleship.

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As the church engages potential converts, its leaders must understand that these converts are part of secular social structures that wield tremendous influence over their behaviors. As these converts become believers, the church must provide the type of community exhibited by Christ and his disciples and by the church in Acts. This community must provide more than an open door on Sunday morning. According to Jim Corson, it must provide each believer with “meaningful relationships” with other believers so that authentic community will result.\(^{187}\)

An authentic community must have God in the center of its life. It is ultimately manifested in the daily lives of the members through active obedience to Christ, i.e. participation in his mission. To become engaged and enabled in a God-centered community, Christians must first separate themselves from the values and goals of the world in which they participated before they converted. In America, the worldly influences of pleasure, money, success, etc., are the priority for non-Christians and the attainment of these things are the measure of their success in life. Clearly, this measure of success is contrary to the teachings of Christ; therefore, a community built on Christ’s teachings must have a different measure of success than that of the world.

Success in the Bible depends on one’s obedience to the Lord. Those who follow Jesus in word and deed like the disciples and manifest authentic faith unlike Judas Iscariot are successful. Paul in his epistles admonishes churches and church members to have authentic faith and to exhibit authentic community. To exhibit authentic community, the church must have boundaries (accountability systems) separating it from the world.

While the accountability systems of the world are established by traditions, legal codes, social structures, and power structures, the church’s accountability systems are established by Scripture. Those boundaries, defined by Scripture and applied by the church, are intended to aid the church in its mission, that is, in its call to obedience to Christ through active faith. Just as each community, whether secular or faith-based, has boundaries, every community also has to find a way to maintain those boundaries to ensure its existence as a distinctive community.

While sermons and doctrines have their place within the church, they only serve to establish the boundaries of the church; they do not guarantee that those established boundaries are being observed by the members. To ensure that established boundaries are observed within the church, the church must have accountability built into its praxis. Along with other accountability measures, the church must have small groups where each individual member can be taught, observed, and corrected regarding the boundaries of the church.

David H. Sutton states that “discipleship and the disciplined, accountable community life go hand in hand.”188 The church that desires to be effective in mission (obedience to the Great Commission) must also be effective in the making of the disciples. The making of disciples requires small groups among other things to insure that each convert is applying the teachings of the Bible to their daily life. People that attend small groups will be more likely to deal with the deeper (and uglier) truths within themselves because they cannot remain anonymous. As they encounter these truths

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through the conviction of the Spirit, they are called upon by God and held accountable by the small group to obey. While small groups are very effective in other purposes of the local church, they aid tremendously in the church’s task of making disciples.

The making of disciples must become a priority for all churches in America. Churches that focus solely evangelism must remember that Jesus has charged the Church with the mission to go and make disciples. Disciples are developed primarily through intimacy with Christ and fellow believers in a small group that encourages them to be obedient and mission-minded and holds them accountable. Disciples who learn Christ’s teaching and apply those teachings to their daily lives through the community’s help will become mission-enabled disciples who exhibit Christ to others both in word and deed.

James 2:14–26 outlines the importance an active faith that combines both word and deed. Through correct theology and correct practice, the disciple will be able to live mission in their daily life. Through the efforts of the church and its leadership, the disciple can be supported through direction and accountability. The guidance of the church will develop mission-enabled disciples who live Christ in word and deed.
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Books


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