

THE CONCEPT OF CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN RELATION TO CHURCH GROWTH: A CASE
STUDY OF RIVERINE BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

The title of this research work is “The Concept of Christian Discipleship in Relation to Church Growth: A Case Study of Riverine Baptist Association.” The problem of church growth prevalent in most churches calls for urgent attention and action. This is because Jesus established the church to grow, and not to be stunted or die. The last instruction our Lord, Jesus Christ, gave to His disciples before His ascension to heaven, as well as His declaration that the gate of Hades will not overcome the church, is an indication of His intention for the church to grow (Matthew 28:19; Mark 16:15; Matthew 16:18). And it appears that the major tool for this growth is discipleship. This is what has informed this study. The researcher carried out a field work and elicited information from respondents in eight of the churches in Riverine Baptist Association of the Nigerian Baptist Convention through the use of questionnaires, based on the five-point Likert scale system. Data collected were analyzed and discussed using the Spearman’s Rank Correlation Coefficient. The research findings showed that discipleship and church growth parameters are closely related, and that this relationship is highly positive. Thus, the researcher advocates that, among other recommendations, church pastors and leaders should make their churches centres for discipleship, and concentrate on making disciples in line with the Great Commission. There should be structured discipleship courses at different levels, and every internal programme and activity should be planned and carried out in such a way that it is achieving the discipleship mission of the church. Ultimately, it is God that grows the church, but He does that through believers – His agents here on earth, which implies that discipleship is the very “heart” of church growth. Therefore, it must not be handled with levity.

5.2 Conclusion

As far as church growth is concerned, it should be every believer's business, especially pastors, church leaders and workers. This is because the Master Himself is highly concerned about church growth. He said; "...Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation" (Mark 16:15). Matthew 28:19 records it this way; "...go and make disciples of all nations...." The essence of preaching the gospel is to raise disciples for the purpose of church growth. This is what the Great Commission stands for. It is, therefore, expedient that everyone involved in the Kingdom business takes the subject of church growth as serious as the Lord of the church. Equally important are things needed to be done for the church to grow – church growth parameters.

It is very glaring from this study that there is highly positive relationship between discipleship and church growth parameters. This means that focusing on discipleship results in all round church growth. It appears that when Jesus said; "...go and make disciples...", He actually meant; "go and grow the church." Though, ultimately, it is God that grows the church, but He does that through believers – His agents here on earth. This suggests or implies that discipleship is the very "heart" of church growth. It must not be handled with levity.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings in this research work, the researcher, hereby, recommend the following;

1. Church growth, as meant in this study, should be the primary focus of every church pastor, leader and worker. Of course, this cannot be overemphasized. If God's primary concern is church growth (Kingdom growth), then our primary concern must be church growth.
2. Church pastors, leaders and workers should design their worship services in such a way that it is meaningful and life changing. Dynamism is an antidote to boring worship services and the key to create hunger and thirst for involvement among congregation.
3. Since leadership plays a major role in church growth, churches should invest in leadership training and development of leaders. This is very important because no organization grows beyond its leader(s). In the same way, no local church can outgrow its leader(s).
4. Having established that discipleship is the "heart" of church growth, church pastors and leaders should make their churches centers for discipleship and concentrate on making disciples in line with the Great Commission. There should be structured