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# Discipleship Process as a Catalyst for Mission Orientation in Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church

Tara J. VinCross

*Andrews University*

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ABSTRACT

DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS AS A CATALYST FOR MISSION  
ORIENTATION IN CHESTNUT HILL SEVENTH-DAY  
ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Tara J. VinCross

Adviser: S. Joseph Kidder

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS AS A CATALYST FOR MISSION ORIENTATION  
IN CHESTNUT HILL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Tara J. VinCross

Name and degree of faculty adviser: S. Joseph Kidder, PhD

Date completed: March 2014

Problem

A lack of discipleship of members in the local church contributes to insufficient spiritual vitality for missional involvement. This in turn plays a part in the plateau or decline of the church. The wide-spread problem of plateaued and declining churches in North America indicates that correct beliefs may not be enough for people to realize spiritual growth. This has been true of the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, which was plateaued and at times declining, over the last six decades since moving to its current location. An accessible discipleship curriculum focused on individual transformation in devotional life and missional involvement was needed. Developing a discipleship process which intentionally assisted members in their formation of how to

love God with all their heart and love others as themselves was of great missional importance for the local church.

### Method

A 12-week discipleship process was created and introduced during the spring of 2011. Its purpose was twofold—to increase the devotional life as well as the missional involvement of a diverse set of participants. An experiential learning model was used, which allowed for participants to actively engage growth in their relationship with God on the levels of knowing, being, and doing. The use of one-on-one peer mentoring, small groups, and group instruction fostered relationships and formed a close community. The discipleship process began with an all-day spiritual retreat, continued with 10 sessions meeting once per week for two hours, and concluded with a second all-day spiritual retreat. Sessions focused on the following four categories: Relationship with God; Living in Community; Ministry and Mission; and the Cost of Discipleship (Suffering). Curriculum success was assessed through a focus group at the end of the process.

### Results

Fourteen students enrolled in the Discipleship class, 13 of whom completed the 12-week process. All participants related that their devotional life had increased, in addition to their involvement in the mission of Christ. Participants expressed that the discipleship process helped them to: deepen their intimacy and trust with other believers, experience a greater frequency in their praise and prayer life, renew their devotion to God; slow down and spend time with God in His Word, change their perspective on facing trials and struggle, and to step outside their comfort zone to serve and bless others.

The main weakness of the curriculum was a lack of experiential involvement in mission as a group. The goal of the discipleship process was to structure space for the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in the lives of individuals. This transformation of the Holy Spirit was witnessed in the participants' lives as a result of the implementation of this discipleship curriculum.

### Conclusions

This project demonstrates that when local church leaders intentionally disciple members, devotional life and participation in the mission of Christ increases. As members learned how to follow Christ, they also learned how to disciple others in the same way. This finding suggests that intentional implementation of the proposed curriculum, or another discipleship curriculum, in the local church would have a positive impact on the devotional life and missional involvement of church members.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS AS A CATALYST FOR MISSION  
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ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by  
Tara J. VinCross

March 2014

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APPROVAL BY THE COMMITTEE:

---

Adviser,  
S. Joseph Kidder

---

Director, DMin Program  
Skip Bell

---

James Wibberding

---

Dean, SDA Theological Seminary  
Jiří Moskala

---

Boubakar Sanou

---

Date approved



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Personal History**

The moment I heard about Him, Jesus captured my heart. I learned of His desire to be with me, and this caused a reorientation in my priorities and a shift in my focus. I came to believe in and experience a God who sought, accepted, and transformed me. He became the Lord of my life and I wanted to do nothing other than to follow Jesus. At the inception of my belief in God, I was invited to live out ways that connected me to my Savior—prayer journaling, devotional reading, study of Scripture, witnessing, and time spent in stillness with God. Over the last two decades since coming to faith as a teenager, these practices have grown and deepened. The benefits of living in relationship with Jesus that I have experienced are peace of mind, purpose and passion for a life service, joy in the midst of difficult circumstances, and a sense of security in the love of God.

I desire for this experience to be one shared by all those who come into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, either by birth or conversion into the church. I want them to be led to discover a relationship with Jesus, learn how to live in God's love, and join God in the work of the Kingdom. Certainly, this has been the case for many members of our church. Unfortunately, there are others who have not experienced the sweetness of the Presence of Jesus and the gift of the invitation to join in

His work. These individuals came into the church because they were convinced of the truth, and knew they needed to follow it. While that was an amazing step in their lives, they were told little of where to go from there. They were never disciplined. They were never shown by example what it looks like to live in relationship with Jesus and join God in the work. This relational and experiential void may contribute to some members developing a propensity towards legalism and fear, while others grow *lukewarm* and complacent in their faith and activity, while still others leave the church altogether.

I became pastor of Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church on May 1, 2008. In addition to my role as senior pastor of this established church, I serve as lead pastor of a church company called REACH Philadelphia. Also, I serve as the director for a Pennsylvania Conference youth and young adult summer evangelism ministry called Pennsylvania Youth Challenge. In working with all three populations which represent various age groups from birth to 93 years old, I discovered my passion for creating space for people to experience for themselves a deeper relationship with God. Discipleship involves experientially modeling what it looks like to live in relationship to God and heed His invitation to join together with others in the work God is doing in this world. As I looked back over the years of ministry I had experienced up to that point, I saw that the most meaningful times in ministry were times I was engaged in this discipleship process. Becoming conscious of the desire to develop a more intentional approach to discipleship was the first step towards fulfilling the plan for this doctoral work, and moving to a deeper expression of my calling.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to create, implement, and evaluate a discipleship

process curriculum with a test group of participants from the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church. The premise of this research is that by focusing on the process of disciple making through a 3-month experiential learning curriculum, executed in the context of community, significant spiritual transformation would occur in the lives of participants. This change was signaled and measured by an increase in devotional life and mission orientation. In other words, it was seen that as a natural outflow of the inward transformation experienced through the discipleship process, participants lived more integrated and missional lives. It is believed that ultimately, this revival of discipleship would then affect the mission orientation of the local church as a whole. Heart transformation by the Holy Spirit through discipleship leads to a powerful expression of evangelistic focus in the church (see White, 1898; Wilson, Finley, Miranda & Page, 2011).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research indicates that over 70% of congregations in the Pennsylvania Conference are plateaued or declining, and the average age of parishioners is around 58 years old (Hartwell, 2009). Across North America, congregations are getting older and smaller as the communities around them grow younger and larger (see Beckworth & Kidder, 2010; Olson, 2009). This has been true of the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, which was plateaued and at times declining, over the last six decades since moving to the current location in 1947. According to church clerk records (1950-2010), the current membership, six decades later, is almost exactly the same as in 1950. This plateau in membership may reveal a lack of vision in regards to the mission of Christ, and a lack of involvement in the

mission on the part of the members themselves. A lack of discipleship in the local church leads to insufficient spiritual vitality for mission involvement.

Pastoral observation suggests that one of the contributing factors in this decrease of involvement is that for many members, Seventh-day Adventism has become a cognitive religion composed of a set of beliefs to mentally accept. The focus placed on *right* beliefs has overshadowed the importance of spiritual development and transformation brought about by a relationship with Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:22-25; Ezek 37:1-14; Rom 12:2). It is seen that members are able to *believe* all the right things, and yet remain unchanged in their spiritual life. Many times they are so focused on having *the truth* that they forget they are following the *Truth* in the person of Jesus Christ as His disciple. This failure to experience a vibrant relationship with Christ restricts intimacy in relationship with their Savior, which in turn arrests involvement in the missional and evangelistic ministry of Christ (see Matt 28:19-20; Luke 4:15-21). This in turn contributes to the plateau or decline in church growth.

### **Justification for the Project**

The wide-spread problem of plateaued and declining churches in North America (Beckworth & Kidder, 2010; Olson, 2009) indicates that correct beliefs, may not be enough for people to realize spiritual growth. There must be an intentional focus on Jesus and discipleship in the local church. This in turn will result in individual transformation and mission orientation development in members (see Acts 1 & 2; White, 1911).

Through the discipleship process, members engage in the experiential learning cycle—*knowing, being, and doing*. First, they learn information about Jesus—*knowing*. From there they move to experiencing an authentic relationship with Jesus, *being*, which

is developed by encountering the gospel and the devotional practices. Completing the cycle, they are drawn into *doing*—living a missional life in community as a disciple of Jesus. As members come in contact with Jesus, He captures their devotion and transforms their lives by putting love in their hearts for God and for those around them. This leads them to take action on behalf of those around them. The ripple effect of healthier members will subsequently lead to a healthier, growing, local church as evidenced by the early church in Acts 2:42-27.

This project discusses the need for a discipleship curriculum, develops said curriculum, embraces an experiential teaching process model, presents the results from a field test of this curriculum, and then provides suggestions for a wider implementation of these findings and this curriculum.

### **Expectations for the Project**

One of the primary benefits of this project is that it has helped me as a pastor to further develop the process of biblical discipleship and to understand how people experience change. This has resulted in a tentative model for how to disciple others towards inward transformation in a local church context. This project has also been instrumental in awakening spiritual growth in the lives of the church members who participated, as the Holy Spirit worked through this process to grow their lives. This inward transformation served as a catalyst for a shift in perspective and greater involvement in the mission of Christ.

It is hoped that this project may also provide a resource to assist other Seventh-day Adventist churches by providing an experiential process model for discipleship in the local church setting. This research and local ministry praxis may lay the foundation for

the production of a published discipleship curriculum for use by the pastor and/or local ministry teams.

It is the intention of this project to contribute to the development of Seventh-day Adventist models for biblical spirituality and discipleship in a local church setting, which are characterized by an experience of Spirit-led transformation in the context of community, and the subsequent increase in devotional life and mission orientation.

### **Delimitations of the Project**

This curriculum was developed to discover the answer to the question: Would an experiential, discipleship curriculum executed in the context of community increase devotional practice and mission involvement in participants from Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church? The goal of this study was to limit this project to the creation and application of an intentional discipleship process, and to discover if, by focusing on discipling individual members, they experienced a deeper devotional life in relationship to God and greater involvement in missional activity. It is the belief of this researcher that these two areas of growth in the individual life serve as a stimulus for church-wide growth, though that is yet to be expanded upon by further research.

Though this project was limited to the study of the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, I am hopeful that this research will be transferrable to other Seventh-day Adventist congregations across the North American Division.

### **Limitations of the Project**

As stated above, this study used a convenience sample of individuals who voluntarily signed up for participation in the discipleship class. Although this study



assumes this sampling to be a representative group of the members of the congregation it is recognized that this sample group could reflect a more highly motivated set of individuals. It is still suggested, however, that this research can be generally applied to the larger population of the church.

### **Definition of Terms**

This study includes the use of few technical terms. Even though each word is defined in its context, considering the meaning of the following terms may be helpful to the reader.

The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word μαθητεύω, which means follower, learner, apprentice or pupil. The term *discipleship* refers to the biblical process of making followers of Jesus. As Matt 28:18-20 points out, there is a biblical imperative to “make disciples,” baptizing and teaching others what Jesus taught to his original disciples, and consequently what is entrusted to the church today.

The word *process* denotes the method of approach to discipleship which is oriented towards a lifetime of growth and transformation. Process can be contrasted with an emphasis on “arrival” at a specific point of maturation or spiritual achievement.

The *experiential learning triad* refers to the process of discipleship which involves the participant the *knowing, being, and doing* elements of experiential education, for the sake of transformation.

### **A Proposed Discipleship Curriculum and Process Methodology**

The discipleship curriculum was developed from a foundation in the following three areas: First, theological reflection in the Gospels and the Book of Acts, with a focus

on examples of spiritual transformation that led to evangelism. Second, a sampling of current literature was examined, including books and articles on spiritual formation and discipleship models. Finally, four pastors from churches strong in biblical spirituality and discipleship were interviewed to assess their methods of instruction and approach to discipleship.

The pilot project participants were selected on a voluntary sign-up basis. Placement in the group was made in the order that people responded to the advertising flyers, video, website, and Facebook announcements. It was anticipated that through this method of open sign-up, a diverse sample group would be identified. The diversity in the sample group was attained, and diversity was seen in age, race, gender, and education. In addition, the group evidenced diversity in spiritual maturity, including newly baptized believers, members not yet engaged in ministry, and long-time members who wanted to grow in their relationship with God.

Growth in the lives of participants was determined through qualitative research methods. Participants were asked a series of questions in order to assess changes in two key areas: personal devotional life and missional involvement. This data was obtained during a two-hour focus group interview as the end of the 12-week discipleship process. Data collection through this approach eliminated misinterpretation of questions, allowing participants to clarify any misunderstandings, and gave the researcher the opportunity to probe participants for further understanding and detail regarding the change they experienced (Simon & Goes, 2013). The trustworthiness of the research is limited by the honesty of participants. It was therefore important to establish an environment of confidentiality and safety, which characterized the group from the first day.

## Curriculum Outline

A discipleship curriculum was created and introduced to a voluntary group of members from Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church. The target audience was anyone who wanted to experience growth in their relationship with God and missional living.

This group went through the 12-week curriculum written and led by the pastor-facilitator. This process included an all-day spiritual retreat at the beginning of the process, 10 consecutive sessions which met once per week for two hours, and concluded with a second all-day spiritual retreat. The 10 sessions and the two spiritual retreats explored subjects and lessons in the following four categories:

1. Relationship with God—the Gospel, the role of the Holy Spirit, the rule of life, life stewardship, and the devotional practices (spiritual disciplines)
2. Living in Community—necessity of, mentoring, accountability
3. Ministry and Mission—evangelism, spiritual gifts, and mission to the poor
4. The Cost of Discipleship—dealing with suffering, grief and pain.

The approximate number of sessions for each category were: Relationship with God—five sessions, Living in Community—woven throughout each section, Ministry and Mission—three sessions, and The Cost of Discipleship—two sessions.

The group classes took place in the main seminar room at the church. Each person was placed in a mentoring group of three-four people of the same gender that remained consistent throughout the discipleship process. Every class allowed for small-group time of at least 30 minutes each session, and also encouraged the small groups to gather outside of the class setting for the purpose of spiritual growth and accountability.

Participants were also placed with a spiritual companion of the same gender, which they journeyed with throughout the 12 weeks. At the start of each session there was an opening question for discussion between spiritual companions, which allowed them to grow closer with one another, allowing for peer-to-peer mentoring, support, and accountability.

Class sessions employed a combination of one-on-one accountability, small group process, teaching time, discussion, and personal devotional exercises. See Chapter 4 for a more complete description of the curriculum. Experiential assignments were also given at the end of many of the classes so that members were able to put into practice what they learned in the class session. Intentional community building was also incorporated into the process. This allowed members of the discipleship class the opportunity to gather in a social context, outside of the discipleship process setting, which is essential for developing a sense of community.

A focus group was conducted with the members of the group at the end of the discipleship process, to gauge spiritual growth and mission orientation. This focus group aided in evaluating how people experience change and transformation, taking note if members are more involved in devotional life and missional living after an intentional discipleship process. These results are explored further in Chapter 5.

### Initial Results

Fourteen participants initially signed up for the discipleship class. Thirteen commenced participation with the first class and remained active participants through the entire process. During the two-hour focus group that was conducted at the conclusion of

the 12-week process, the group reflected upon their own spiritual growth and commitment to mission. Every group member stated that they had experienced greater devotional life and ministry involvement (see Appendix for full transcript). Members were more consistent and fulfilled in their devotional life, and willing to go out of their comfort zone in missional involvement following the process. A full description of outcomes appears in Chapter 5. It is clear that the discipleship process curriculum demonstrated positive results in the lives of participants. In subsequent implementation of the discipleship curriculum, the class filled quickly and was positively received, based on the commendation of previous participants in the process.

### **Summary**

This project seeks to establish and measure the effectiveness of an experiential, community-based discipleship curriculum, which creates space for members to experience transformation in their lives. The primary indication of success is both an increase in the quality of devotional life and missional involvement of the member participants, as perceived by the participants themselves.

This project does not seek to establish quantitatively that discipling members leads to numerical church growth. It is only surmised that healthier, growing members, leads to healthier, growing congregations. Neither does it try to prove the primacy of an experiential curriculum, though that is also theorized as a result of the outcomes of this study.

The present study is outlined as follows: Chapter 1 discusses the need for a discipleship curriculum in the local church, outlines the curriculum, and previews the other chapters. Chapter 2 explores the theological foundation of discipleship, offering

solid biblical support for a focus on discipleship, as well as providing content for the discipleship curriculum. Chapter 3 looks at relevant literature to further explore the need for and content of the discipleship curriculum. Chapter 4 outlines the curriculum development and the implementation of the pilot group. Chapter 5 profiles outcomes of the project, as well as evaluates those outcomes in light of transferability to other contexts. It also offers areas for further research, to potentially increase the impact and effectiveness of the discipleship process.

The results of this study will be presented to the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist church board and the Pennsylvania Conference Administration Committee following the project defense.

The purpose of this project was to create and field test a curriculum that would effectively disciple local church members, increasing their devotional life and involvement in ministry and mission. The following chapters document this process.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING OF DISCIPLESHIP

#### **Introduction**

During the last six years serving as pastor of Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, I have come to realize that church members can have orthodox Adventist beliefs, yet remain unchanged in their heart and lifestyle. Being an Adventist Christian does not make them any more loving, joyful, kind, or long-suffering (Gal 5:22-23) than they were before they joined the church. As Burrill (1998) states, “They know the truth, but do not know the *Truth*” (p. 234). For some members, belief in Jesus seems to be a transaction which brings salvation, getting them into heaven someday, but does not develop into a living relationship. Still for others, Jesus is *one* of their doctrines, but not *the One* who is the foundation of all other doctrines and beliefs (Col 1:16-17). The church has been unsuccessful in leading them to see that a relationship with Jesus, and learning how to follow Him, is *the* central point of their faith.

With the majority of Seventh-day Adventist churches in the North American Division in a state of plateau or decline, the question must be asked: Has an emphasis on having ‘the truth’ resulted in the development of devoted disciples? Do people with the orthodox biblical information automatically become people who are Christ-like, living His love and mission in the world? Does the church have a discipleship strategy that is working? While some would say that the primary purpose for the existence of the church

is the transmission of right *knowledge*, scripture suggests that a healthy church lives and breathes through a love relationship with Jesus. It is this personal encounter, and not merely information about God, which in turn draws others to want to experience Jesus for themselves. The church exists to *be* God's presence in the world, teaching people to become followers who are in relationship with Jesus and with one another. Could it be that an over emphasis on *right* information, to the neglect of teaching how to have a relationship with Jesus, in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has caused members to become malnourished in the areas of spiritual development and growth? The fact that hearts and lives lack transformation is seen in the bitter fruit of lethargy and disregard for mission, among other fruits of bitterness, spiritual pride, and unforgiveness.

In recent years, I have begun prioritizing the invitation of Jesus to make disciples: the call to share my personal experience of learning to be His disciple with others (Matt 28:18-20). This inward journey has meant inviting others to participate in an intentional discipleship process by practicing the spiritual disciplines in the context of community.

It is the purpose of this chapter to explore the biblical fundamentals of a discipleship journey for the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. These fundamentals serve as a catalyst for deeper devotion to Christ, which in turn leads to an increase in mission orientation. Through defining the biblical understanding of discipleship in the life and ministry of Jesus, and the life of the early church, the imperative that emerges transcends the mere transmission of knowledge in disciple making. It means to invest time relationally with others who are learning how to follow Him in their everyday lives. In this study we also consider who is called to be a disciple, the vital context of community, as well as distractions to discipleship—such as



legalism, compartmentalization, and the fear of deception. Christ's appeal to the church from the Scriptures is to move beyond lukewarm religion and into an authentic discipleship relationship (Rev 3:14-20). It is to this theme that we now turn our attention.

## **Discipleship: Exploring a Biblical Understanding**

### Origins of Discipleship

The word *disciple* comes from the Greek word μαθητεύω which means follower, learner, apprentice, or pupil. In addition to the first disciples Jesus called to Himself (Matt 4:19; 9:9; Mark 1:17; 2:14; Luke 5:10-11, 27-28), the book of Acts later uses the title disciple for anyone who repented, believed, and followed Jesus through their testimony (Acts 6:2, 7; 11:26). Use of the word disciple in the New Testament is not exclusive to followers of Jesus. Examples include the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees (Mark 2:18; Luke 5:33; Matt 22:16), the disciples of Moses (John 9:28), as well as the apostle Paul who was a disciple of Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

The Jewish concept of discipleship emphasizes the relationship between the rabbi (master) and the disciple (student). The disciple was to seek to *know* what the master knew, in addition to *doing* as the master did. The Jewish understanding of discipleship centered around the entire life being devoted to the rabbi (Vander Laan, 2006). Although the word disciple occurs only once in the Old Testament (Isa 8:16), the Old Testament parallel to discipleship is the concept of the covenant relationship with God (Gen 12:1-3; 13:14-17; 28:12-15; Exod 13:21-22; Lev 26:12; Deut 29:1-29). God called Israel into a relationship, which necessitated choosing God over all others (1 Kgs 18:21) and serving God with complete devotion (Deut 10:12-13; 4:1-14; 1 Sam 12:14). In both the Old Testament (Isa 43:10), as well as in the New Testament (Acts 1:8), God empowers

human beings as witnesses. This relationship between God and God's people would showcase God's goodness, transform the people of God, and invite others into a covenant relationship (Gen 12:1-3; Deut 4; 1 Kgs 8:58-61). It is this relational pattern that the New Testament carries into the understanding of discipleship.

### Discipleship: A Call to be With Christ

God's relationship to us through Jesus Christ is highlighted in the title given to Jesus in the book of Matthew, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel, which means "God with us"" (Matt 1:23). In the deepest meaning of the Old Testament covenant, God had now joined in relationship with humanity through Jesus Christ (Elwell, 1996).

Jesus' ministry started with the end in mind. His purpose was clear: through His life, death, and resurrection He would bring abundant life to the world. Jesus knew that His time on earth was limited, and this informed His ministry. Immediately following His baptism, which signaled the commencement of His public ministry, Jesus called disciples to follow Him. In addition to sharing teaching, miracles, and ministry with the masses that would follow, Jesus chose to invest specifically in disciples who would follow Him everywhere He went. Jesus decided to pour Himself into the lives of these individuals, leaving them with the mission to reach the world through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

How did Matthew, John, Peter, Andrew, and the others become disciples of Jesus? Jesus invited them (See Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17; Luke 5:1-11; John 1:35-51). How were these ordinary men transformed to be like Jesus and carry the gospel to all the world? Mark recounts that "He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he

might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14). The first calling of the disciples was to be with Jesus. From being with Jesus, the disciples were transformed. Their calling was personal, for Jesus called each one of them uniquely. Their primary focus was to spend time in His presence, and in so doing, join Him in the mission.

What can be learned about the discipleship process through the lived example of Jesus Christ? The above teaching reveals that Jesus was not focused exclusively on the transfer of information from Himself to His disciples. Instead, the Scriptures show that Jesus spent three and a half years of everyday life with those chosen to follow Him. It is easy to ignore the significance of this fact. The disciples’ learning extended beyond the preaching and teaching of Jesus, to the time spent in His presence on an everyday basis.

The disciples were invited to practice preaching, performing miracles, and casting out demons, yet this was all done in the context of being in a relationship with Jesus. The act of being in a relationship with Jesus was the only way that the disciples were able to be transformed into His likeness in heart and in action (Luke 6:40; 1 Tim 4:7b; 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:1-2).

As present day disciples approach the Christian life and seek to help others become disciples of Jesus, this heart of the calling must be remembered. Tozer (1982) says, “The presence of God is the central fact of Christianity. At the heart of the Christian message is God Himself” (p. 35). Following Jesus is about spending time in His presence, and developing a relationship with Him.

White expresses the believer’s need of Jesus in words that make central this relational experience of the disciple. “The very first outbreathing of the soul in the morning should be for the presence of Jesus. “Without Me,” He says, “ye can do

nothing.” It is Jesus that we need; His light, His life, His spirit, must be ours continually. We need Him every hour” (White, 1991, p. 40). In Jesus is all the abundance of God—light, life, and spirit—and all that is needed to live a transformed life.

### The Focus of Discipleship is Jesus

The Scriptures insist that a relationship with Jesus must be seen as the center of the faith experience, the cornerstone upon which all other beliefs and doctrines rest. Jesus is Savior (Titus 3:4-7), Lord (John 20:28, 8:58), the only way to the Father (John 14:6), mediator (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15), friend (John 15:15), truth (John 14:6-7), and the one voice heard above all others (John 10:27-28). The author of Hebrews declares, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith” (Heb 12:2).

Jesus says it like this, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). The first calling of a disciple is to abide in Him as in the vine (John 15:1-11). Fruit will grow in the disciple as the disciple learns to remain in Jesus (Gal 5:22-25).

White speaks of the dependence of the disciple upon Jesus in this way:

The connection of the branch with the vine, Christ said to His disciples, represents the relation you are to sustain to Me. . . . The life of the vine becomes the life of the branch. So the soul, dead in trespasses and sins, receives life through connection with Christ. By faith in Him as a personal Saviour the union is formed. The sinner unites his weakness to Christ’s strength, his emptiness to Christ’s fullness, his frailty to Christ’s enduring might. (1904, par. 3)

In the same way the first disciples were called to be with Jesus and to live in dependence upon Him, so every disciple is called to do the same.

In the act of following after Christ, the disciple is called to rely on Him for transformation. Action and obedience are done from love and not compulsion or fear. In

John 6:68, “Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” Peter was compelled to follow Jesus because he found Jesus to be all that he wanted—the only source of life. The Apostle Paul declared that the primary goal of his life was to know Jesus, and to experience His sufferings and resurrection (Phil 3:10-11). This was his singular purpose and hope, which he pressed towards during the course of his life and ministry. “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). For Paul, knowing Jesus was everything.

It is important to clarify what is meant by *knowing*, referenced above. Tozer (1984) helps to define this understanding in his book, *Keys to a Deeper Life*.

When the apostle cried *that I may know Him*, he uses the word *know* not in its intellectual but in its experiential sense. We must look for the meaning - not to the mind but to the heart. Theological knowledge is knowledge about God. While this is indispensable it is not sufficient. It bears the same relation to man’s spiritual need as a well does to the need of his physical body. It is not the rock-lined pit for which the dusty traveler longs, but the sweet, cool water that flows up from it. It is not the intellectual knowledge about God that quenches man’s ancient heart-thirst, but the Person and Presence of God Himself. These come to us through Christian doctrine, but they are more than doctrine. Christian truth is designed to lead us to God, not to serve as a substitute for God. (pp. 30-31)

Tozer aptly points out that theological knowledge is essential to the Christian life. Without knowledge gained from the Word of God, the Christian would not have an understanding of this Christ they are following. Tozer also points out the parallel point that knowledge alone is not enough, it must lead the individual to a heart-knowing, a relationship with God. It is imperative that these two points be maintained in tandem, for with one or the other missing, the church will find herself lacking either vitality or stability.

This heart-knowing is seen in the Old Testament psalms. “As the deer pants for

water so my soul pants for you my God” (Ps 42:1). The psalmist describes the longing for God as something so basic as a profound thirst for water. This is the disciple’s need for Jesus, focusing on Him as the center of life. Again the psalmist declares, “My soul thirsts for you, my whole body longs for you” (Ps 63:1). In the life of the disciple, Jesus is their longing and completion. Jesus is the center which connects everything else in life.

### The Cost of Discipleship

Following Jesus is a costly venture. Indeed it requires everything. Peter declared, “We have left everything to follow you!” (Mark 10:28). Jesus replied, “No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life” (Mark 10:29-31). Being a disciple of Jesus demands all, comes with persecution, and is at the same time richly rewarding in both the present life and the life to come (John 10:10, Ps 16:11, Isa 35:10).

The cost of discipleship is described in Luke 14:25-33. In verse 27 Jesus says, “Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” In verse 33 He reiterates, “In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.” Jesus then goes on to caution the disciples to count the cost before deciding to following Him, for it will cost them everything (Matt 19:23-30). The call to become a disciple of Jesus is more than accepting Him as Savior. It is the devotion of the entire life to His will and His purposes.

A disciple’s sacrifices reveal the value they place on following Jesus. Like the person who found a pearl of great price and sold all they had to obtain it (Matt 13:45-46),

so is the person who forsakes all other priorities to follow Jesus, for they have found Him to be worth more than anything else.

White asserts that discipleship is seen in the everyday actions of the believer.

True religion means living the word in your practical life. Your profession is not of any value without the practical doing of the word. "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me." This is the condition of discipleship. (1923, p. 127.2)

As the disciple practices faith in day-to-day life they experience what it means to take up their cross and follow Him.

The call to be a disciple is both personal and relational. Jesus calls each individual by name and invites them to experience a living, daily relationship with Him. In response to this call, it becomes the paramount need of the disciple to focus on Jesus as the center of life and the spiritual journey. This calling is costly, for accepting the Lordship of Jesus displaces all the other lords in the life of the disciple. Yet, the disciple has found Jesus to be worth giving up anything for. This is the heart of discipleship.

### Discipleship in Community

A remarkable sense of community develops among disciples who are following Jesus together in mission. What binds the community of disciples together? First of all, each disciple has experienced the forgiveness of their sins in Jesus Christ (Bonhoeffer, 1937). It is this understanding of who they were before encountering Jesus, and who they are now in Jesus that characterizes the relationships between believers. All those gathered to Jesus know that without Him, they are without hope. Together they stand on common ground as they recognize that they are sinners saved by grace (Eph 2:4-6; 1 Pet 2:9).

Second, it is the shared commission to do Jesus' work in the world that unifies His people

together (Matt 28:18-20). God lives in His church (Eph 2:19-22) and is reconciling the world to Himself through His people (2 Cor 5:17-21). This binds believers even more closely together as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12).

For the disciple, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus changes how they interact with others. Notice that after Pentecost, the group of original disciples allowed Jesus to form their life around their relationships with God and the people around them. Acts 2:46-47 describes, “every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” As they were united together with Jesus and each other, He was able to continue to add people to the church. Church growth is spoken of in relational terms—between God and the believer, as well as among the believers themselves. As the church met, ate, praised, and enjoyed favor together, God was able to bring about growth. The community they experienced led to expansion of the community.

This does not mean that community comes easily or quickly. Genuine community comes about as people follow Christ together, and it is not something that humans can fabricate themselves. Not unlike the salvation experience, community is a gift that only God can give (Bonhoeffer, 1937).

It is God who drives all aspects of authentic Christian community. The disciple’s ongoing experience with Jesus’ extravagant forgiveness slowly transforms them into a person who forgives others (Eph 4:31-32). The disciple’s experience with God’s consistent love changes them into a person who shares love with others (1 Cor 13:4-7).



The way the disciple treats others is evidence of God's work in them. The outward fruit testifies to the inward transformation (Luke 6:43-45).

Why will spiritual transformation through an emphasis on discipleship make a more vibrant church culture? Disciples who have a living relationship with Jesus through whom they are experiencing His love, mercy, and joy, bear this same fruit in their relationships with others. For example, many of the spiritual disciplines center around listening to God. By learning to listen to God, the disciple learns to listen to those around them—both within and outside of the church. By listening more deeply to those around them, they are better able to reach them with the good news of Jesus and His love for them. In communicating the love of Christ, the disciple is accomplishing the mission.

It is the expression of Jesus' love in the life of the community that works to draw others into a relationship with Him (John 17:20-23). Jesus Himself said that it is by love expressed to one another that people would be able to recognize His disciples (John 13:34-35).

It is the love of Jesus that binds disciples together and prepares them for their work with Jesus in the world. White shares the winsome nature of this love in the following way.

The knowledge of the Saviour's matchless love for them (the disciples) was to *bind them heart to heart*, preparing the way for the Lord to anoint them with his Spirit. United by this love, they were to go forth to witness with convincing power to the divinity of their Leader. And their Christlike love for one another was to be the sign of their discipleship. (1903, par. 2, emphasis mine)

The Savior's love, unity in the church, and power in witnessing are all realized in the lives of the believers as they follow Jesus together on His mission in the world. Out of this fusion comes the divine gift of community and sense of belonging for the believers.

As noted above, disciples are established in Christ individually, but there is an aspect of the love of Christ that is not able to be realized outside of the community of faith. Only together with all the saints are disciples able to grasp how wide, long, high and deep is Christ's love (Eph 3:17b-19). There is a richer understanding of Jesus that is understood within the body of Christ. Community is essential to the formation of the follower of Jesus.

### **Discipleship and Mission: Joining Jesus in His Work**

The invitation to be with Jesus as His disciple is inseparable from the invitation to follow Him on His mission in the world (Mark 1:17-18; 3:14). In the Scriptures, discipleship and mission are an integrated calling lived out in the day-to-day experience.

In 2 Cor 5:17-21, Paul succinctly summarizes the interconnectedness of becoming a disciple and heeding the call to mission. He asserts that believers are reconciled to Christ, made into a new creation, and given the ministry of reconciliation. These three truths, which are often compartmentalized in church processes, are actually bound together in the Scriptures. The believer's sins are not counted against them (Justification), as they are experiencing God's reconciliation and recreative power (Sanctification), which enables them and compels them to share the good news of these realities (Evangelism). The disciple is called to appeal to others to experience what they are experiencing. This is the calling of every believer, not just a select few. The only qualification for belonging to the priesthood of all believers, spoken of in 1 Pet 2:9, is the experience of being called "out of darkness into his wonderful light." All who are called out of darkness by Jesus, are likewise called to live out the mission of Jesus, through the Holy Spirit.

## Discipleship and the Mission of Christ

God desires for salvation to reach the ends of the earth—to every person, tribe, and nation, not just the people of Israel. Even before His coming, it was foretold of Jesus, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6, NASB). The scope of the mission of Christ is immense. Christ came to earth with the mission to save the entire world (John 3:16, 17). Jesus gave life more abundantly through the sacrifice of His life (John 10:10). How did Jesus choose to live out this mission to save the world? He chose to call disciples.

As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Peter and Andrew fishing. Mark 1:17-18 recounts, “‘Come, follow me,’ Jesus said, ‘and I will send you out to fish for people.’ At once they left their nets and followed Him.” The disciples were invited to participate in the redemptive work of God in the world, through Jesus Christ. As they were learning to follow Jesus and how to imitate Him, He had them practice what He taught them and took time to process their learning and growth (Luke 10:1-20). As a result of their time with Jesus, Jesus’ love for the world gradually became internalized in the life of the disciples. Jesus sent them into the world to be among the people just as He had been (John 17:18).

In summary, the call to be a disciple is by nature missional, for the disciple is invited to follow after Jesus in His mission to the world. As the disciple spends time in Jesus’ Presence, His love for the world becomes a part of them. The disciple in turn then lives out this love in the world.

## Discipleship: A Divine-Human Partnership

Central to the message and mission of Jesus is the idea that God desires humans to partner with Him in His redemptive work to the whole world. Matt 28:18-20 shares the final words of Jesus to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. Jesus said:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

These authoritative words from Jesus, commission the disciples to go, make disciples, baptize, and teach all people to follow the way Jesus had taught them. The original disciples' willingness to heed these words is the reason there are disciples of Jesus today. At the heart of discipleship is following Jesus (Luke 9:23) and showing others what it looks like to follow Him (Acts 1:8); thereby having an active role in making new disciples of Jesus.

This same invitation has been a part of God's plan for humanity from the very beginning. From the creation of the world, God designed the human pair to cultivate and care for the world—land and animals alike. He brought humans into the process of tending what He had made, making them partners with Divinity. They fell, but through the sacrifice of Jesus, humanity has been made right with God again. "For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness *reign* in life through the one man, Jesus Christ!" (Rom 5:17, emphasis added). Through the gift of grace in Jesus Christ, humans are once again able to be partners with Divinity. God invites each person to be His disciple, to be a part of His amazing, redemptive work in the world.

In everything He did, Jesus was giving a living illustration to His followers so that they would learn how to do what He was doing. After He washed His disciples feet, in service and humility, He said, “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). Disciples are called to do the same: inviting people to surrender to the Lordship of Christ as expressed in His teachings and showing them what that looks like with their own lives, just as Jesus did (Mark 10:35-45; John 13:35).

### **Discipleship: All are Invited**

Throughout history, humans have made efforts to control and limit who is invited to be a disciple and become involved with God’s work. The list of qualifications changed depending on the pervading culture, and involved exclusion on the basis of gender, class, race, and education.

The situation in the time of Jesus reflected this human bent. There were defined ideas of who was allowed to participate with God’s work and who was not. In this environment, the actions of Jesus showcase that inclusiveness was a core principle of His life. Jesus called the *undesirables*, those whom others had decided were not permitted to join the work of God, to come along and join His kingdom work. Included in this list were:

women (Luke 10:38-42; 8:1-3; Matt 27:55)

foreigners (Mark 5:1-20; Matt 4:25)

sinners (Matt 9:10-13)

tax collectors (Mark 2:13-17)

Samaritans (John 4:1-42; Luke 10:25-37)

Groups of people that were formerly excluded were now included in the mission of Jesus Christ.

During Jesus' final words of instruction with His disciples, He commands them to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). In an imperative command, Jesus says, "Go, make disciples of all nations." He does not leave room for them to decide who is chosen, but He directs them to go, and specifically tells them to go everywhere—to all nations and all peoples. The phrase *all nations* knows no borders of country, language, gender, or race. For the disciples of Jesus, raised as God-fearing Jews, these orders stood in direct opposition to what they were taught and what was culturally acceptable.

After Jesus' ascension into heaven and days of prayer in the upper room in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit was poured out onto the disciples and they begin to speak in many languages (Acts 2:1-4). Peter addresses the confused crowd and quotes from the prophet Joel, linking the outpouring of the Holy Spirit with a special act of God during the last days. This outpouring of the Holy Spirit will be on all people—sons and daughters, men and women, young and old (Acts 2:17-21). Peter recognized that this was the beginning of the inclusive priesthood of all believers that Jesus' ministry inaugurated (1 Pet 2:9, 10).

A biblical theology of the call to discipleship emphasizes that an individual becomes a disciple from the first moment they accept Jesus' invitation to follow Him. A disciple is declared clean by Jesus—even as they are being made clean (John 8:11). This is in direct contrast with the idea of some that the individual has to get things together to be useful to God.

The call to discipleship is an inclusive call, extended personally by Jesus Christ to every human being. In spite of the ways humans try to exclude one another, Jesus personally invites each one to follow after him. His disciples are to reflect this same inclusion in the way they disciple diverse people groups. This same all-embracing call should pervade current day practice of discipleship, for in Jesus, all of the walls that divided and separated peoples are now torn down.

### **Summary**

The biblical study set forth in this chapter establishes the centrality of a relationship with Jesus to the understanding of discipleship. It is His call, presence, and invitation to partner in mission that is the definition of what it means to be a Christ follower. In Jesus, all other doctrines, truths and beliefs find their place in the life of the believer. The above study reveals biblical principles of discipleship that serve as the foundation for the creation and development of a discipleship curriculum for use in the local church setting.

### **Biblical Principles of Discipleship**

1. Discipleship centers on Jesus Christ and following Him as the foundation of all religious belief and practice (Gal 6:14). As everything in the church and the created world is held together in Christ, so He must remain the center of discipleship—all of our belief and practice (Col 1:15-20).
2. Discipleship is personal—characterized by a personal call from Jesus—“Come follow me” (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17).

3. Discipleship is relational—a friendship with Jesus himself—“He appointed twelve that they might *be with him* and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:14, emphasis added). Scripture affirms God’s desire is to be near His church, sharing an intimate relationship with His people (Jas 4:8, John 15:15, Rev 3:20, Rom 8:15).
4. Discipleship is demanding—costing everything—“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Jesus must be Lord in the disciple’s life, regardless of what persecution, challenge, or rejection may follow.
5. Discipleship must take place in the context of community—for love for one another bears witness to Him—“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up” (1 Thess 5:11). The call to discipleship cannot be separated from a call to become a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-14) for it is through the body that disciples understand what it looks like to follow Jesus. Paul instructed believers to imitate his example (1 Cor 4:16), as well as the example of God in Jesus Christ (Eph 5:1-2).
6. Discipleship is missional—following Jesus on his mission in the world—“I will make you fishers of people” (Matt 4:19; Mark 1:17). While the call is a personal one to be with Jesus, it is also imperative to be with Jesus where He is—on a mission to save the world.
7. Discipleship is inclusive of all people regardless of race, gender, or age—“Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19-20). Especially in the last days,



the Holy Spirit will use all parts of the body of Christ to proclaim the Good News and invite others to find salvation in Christ (Acts 2:17-21).

All of these characterize the path of discipleship for each believer.

### Foundations of a Seventh-day Adventist Approach to Discipleship

At this point, over a decade into the 21st Century, there are divergent definitions held by members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church regarding what is central to faith. The Adventist Church has a statement of 28 Fundamental beliefs, which describe in detail the breadth of Adventist doctrine as drawn from the Word of God. Doctrinal formulations, by their very nature, leave room for individual interpretation and practical application in the lives of individual members and local churches. As a result, there are many different interpretations of what it means to live a Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle.

Given these differing foci and interpretations of doctrine in the Adventist Church, is it possible to find a unified paradigm of discipleship at the local church level? The following application to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, based on the above biblical study, will be helpful in moving toward a common understanding of what is central to faith and the subsequent establishment of a process of discipleship in the local church context.

First, in defining discipleship, the Bible must be maintained as the absolute authority in determining the principles and practice of maintaining a personal relationship with Christ. The Bible is inspired by God (2 Pet 1:20-21) and testifies of Jesus (John 5:39), therefore the Word of God must guide understanding and be the authenticator of personal, heart experience. This, however, does not put the Bible in the place of Jesus, as

if we were worshipping the Bible itself or the knowledge received from study, but emphasizes that it is the only source for seeking the rule of faith and practice. The written Word of God exists to lead us to the Living Word of God, Jesus Christ (John 5:37-39; Heb 10:1). According to 2 Tim 3:15, the Scriptures bring understanding and knowledge, which in turn leads to salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, is the recognition that the Bible declares Jesus as Lord, demanding that the disciple must surrender all other things to His Lordship, including all beliefs and practices (Gal 2:20, Phil 2:9-11, John 14:6). This emphasis on Christ does not diminish the importance of other biblical truth—for the Scriptures makes it clear that *all things* are held together in Him—rather He puts these understandings in their proper focus (Col 1:16-17). As Jackson shares, “Christ is the center and substance of our faith” (Diversity Celebration sermon, November 2012). He is the fulfillment of the law and prophets (Matt 5:17). In Jesus, all doctrines make sense and become profitable in the life of the disciple (2 Tim 3:15-16).

Adventists hold in common a conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church was raised up to restore certain biblical understandings to the broader Christian church. Among these are the biblical Sabbath, what happens after death, and the nature of hell fire. While emphasizing these and other distinctive beliefs, the focus on discipleship and the imperative of having a relationship with Jesus is, at times, eclipsed. This relationship with Jesus then becomes secondary to the *distinctive* truths which the Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches from the Scriptures. Information is important, for it is through solid biblical teaching that individuals are able to understand who God is and what He is like. Nevertheless, information without the context of a living relationship with Jesus is

dead. In practice, value must be placed on a relationship *with* God, as well as information *about* God.

### Distractions to Discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

There are three primary patterns of behavior which often distract from the prioritizing of discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church: legalism, compartmentalization, and the fear of deception.

Legalism is a warped understanding that a human can control their own transformation and by their strength alone, they hope to alter their behaviors to be in alignment with the life of Christ. Instead of a position of trust in Jesus, the focus shifts from God to the person as they try to *do it right*. Relying upon Jesus and the work He is doing is uncomfortable and lengthy. In a church with high moral and behavioral standards, such as the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is easy for members to focus on their conduct as an indicator of their relationship to God. Sabbath observance, diet, dress, and acts of service, become proof of acceptance by God. As attention is fixed on external behavior, the believer is drawn away from the life-transforming inner relationship with Jesus.

Compartmentalization occurs when the believer views their spirituality as one facet of life, rather than as a radical shift that transforms the entire life. As with legalism, Jesus is not Lord, the individual is. Without examples in the body of Christ and relationships that show how to be a disciple—coaching, practice, and peer-to-peer mentoring—many believers continue to live out the same routines they have always had. The only difference is that they come to church on Saturdays. Their primary understanding and identification is not as a disciple of Jesus, but as a member of the

church. Faith does not affect the rest of their lives. An intentional discipleship process is essential for each local church to train people in how to surrender to Jesus and experience His transforming power daily.

Before moving on to the third distraction, it is important to acknowledge that there is tension between legalism and compartmentalization. Whether striving to keep the law or working hard at the spiritual disciplines, either can become legalistic in approach. Jesus, not the individual, must remain the primary focus.

The fear of deception is a growing and prevalent distraction from discipleship in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This fear of deception affects many aspects of the spiritual life by diverting the focus of the disciple from a relationship with Jesus to learning *truth* in order to avoid deception. Fear of deception paralyzes the disciple's pursuit of a personal relationship with Christ, and instead prioritizes correct knowledge as the source of security. This fear results in a form of evangelism which emphasizes the transmission of right information in order to safeguard the hearers from deception. Often this emphasis on avoiding deception ends up eclipsing the necessity of having a relationship with Jesus and inviting others to follow Him. The Bible confronts this emphasis on fear and deception. The Bible declares, "perfect love drives out all fear" (1 John 4:18), including the fear of being deceived. As the believer lives in relationship with Jesus, and submits to His will, they have nothing to fear. Again, the Scriptures emphasize, "greater is He who is in you than He who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The Lord provides protection in Christ and in the Word of God (Eph 6:17). As the disciple is rooted in Christ, so he or she is able to stand against deception. Paul's counsel to the Colossians is to "continue to live in Him" (Col 2:6-8), and later in his counsel to Timothy

he states that “God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love and a sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7). Jesus is the way to security in this life (John 14:6).

### **Conclusion**

Discipleship is God’s invitation to live in a transformative, covenant relationship with Him. Jesus pursues a love relationship with each disciple, and the disciple in turn responds in commitment. The disciple counts the cost and finds Jesus to be worth the sacrifice. In the context of this relationship with Jesus, the disciple is able to live missionally in the world. When obedience flows from being with Jesus, the disciple joyfully joins in the purposeful work of God. According to the Bible, all people—regardless of age, race, gender and nationality—are invited to be disciples of Jesus. As this diverse group of disciples is gathered, God performs the miracle of transformation in the community of the believers. This transformation leads to the transformation of others, thus fulfilling the central purpose of the church: making disciples by the authority and presence of Jesus (Matt 28:18-20). Legalism, compartmentalization, and fear of deception are powerful diversions from the integrated, passionate life Jesus wants to give through the discipleship journey. Discipleship leads to change, which leads to mission orientation. For it is from the inner transformation, a relationship with Jesus, that the external mission is lived out.

Considering the statistics of plateaued and declining churches mentioned in the previous chapter, some might conclude that more money should be spent on evangelism, training of lay members, or broadcasting the messages of gifted speakers. These things do all contribute to the life of the church, however the Scriptures maintain a clear imperative

that all members are called to be a part of making disciples. In fact, the only way for the church to truly fulfill her mission is through an emphasis on discipleship (Matt 28:18-20).

It is my hope that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will emphasize a relationship with Jesus and the importance of joining Him in making disciples as the central goal of the church and her members. We will now turn our attention to a careful review of the literature which expresses this focus of discipleship.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE RELATING TO DISCIPLESHIP

#### PROCESS DEVELOPMENT

##### **Introduction**

As the cultural landscape of 21st century North America grows increasingly secular and postmodern, people have tired of hearing *about* the good news of Jesus Christ and now want to *witness* the good news lived out in the day-to-day lives of Christians (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005; Henderson, 1998; McLaren, 2000; Moreland, 2007). Many ask, is the thinking, worldview, and approach of someone who is a Christian any different than someone who is non-religious (Dybdahl, 2008; Moreland, 2007)? As mentioned in the previous chapter, people in the church can attend services each week, profess a set of beliefs, and yet remain unchanged in their way of relating to themselves and those around them. Willard (2005) points out that people have discovered ways of being *Christian*, but not acting Christlike. As a result, Christians themselves are experiencing an emptiness in spiritual practice that can be described as longing (Barton, 2006), hunger (Dybdahl, 2008), burnout (McNeal, 2000; Swenson, 2004), and need (Foster, 1998). This emptiness can often be a call of desperation for meaning, leading people to fill their life with constant activity in hopes of peace. Anyone familiar with the pacing of this life should agree that there is a desperate need for renewal in Christian spiritual practice.

Discipleship is the practice of following Jesus by spending time with Him and

joining Him in His work in the world. Hull (2006) emphasizes that “the term *discipleship* [has] . . . a sense of journey, the idea of *becoming* a disciple rather than having been *made* a disciple” (p. 35). Discipleship is simply this: following Jesus and being changed by His presence and mission.

Discipleship is the answer to both the questions of unbelievers and the inward need of believers. It offers the disciple purpose and resolves the disconnect between belief and practice (Burrill, 1998). The call to discipleship is the clear invitation of Jesus to each Christian to incarnate the gospel in their everyday life (Gibbs & Bolger, 2005, p. 75; Kidder, 2011, p. 74; McLaren, 2000, pp. 178-179). Willard (2005) points out that this takes place as a result of being with Christ and learning to be like Him (see also Burrill, 1998). Discipleship or sanctification, spiritual growth or Christian formation as it is has been termed (Barton, 2006; Foster, 1998; Willard, 2005), includes many facets of change in the life of the believer. It is this change the world desires to see. Dybdahl (2008), Meyer (2009), and Foster (2001) describe this process as a metamorphosis that takes place in the believer’s life, transforming how a person relates to themselves, God, others, and the created world. Hence, discipleship is ultimately a work of heart, the process of becoming more Christlike (see McNeal, 2000; Willard, 2005).

The previous chapter explored scriptural foundations for discipleship and the biblical connection between discipleship, community, mission, and suffering. This chapter explores these same themes through a review of literature. This chapter will be divided into the following four sections: (a) the transformation of the disciple by focusing on Jesus as the center of life, (b) the importance of living a mission-focused life, (c) the necessity of community, and (d) the relationship between discipleship and suffering (i.e.,



the cost of discipleship). Ultimately, my goal is not to be comprehensive, but to form a context of literature demonstrating the need for a discipleship focus in the 21st century church as a whole, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in particular. From this foundation, key elements for a discipleship curriculum will be created and utilized in the local church.

### **Discipleship: Focusing on Jesus as the Center of Life**

The necessity of centering on Jesus in the Christian life is recognized by many (Barton, 2006; Kidder, 2011, pp. 70-81; McNeal, 2000; Dybdahl, 2008; Willard, 2005). People have grown exhausted with just *doing church*, or *going through the motions*. Barton (2006) calls this “CFS (Christian fatigue syndrome)” (p. 9). Moreland (2007) designates this living from “the empty self” (p. 141). Richard A. Swenson (2004) dubs the problem “marginless living” (p. 13). Whatever term is used, each of these authors is recognizing a commonly identified problem: religious experience has left church members empty, dry, and hungry for more. Martin (2009) identifies the resulting dissatisfaction as “sacred discontent” (p. 7). Martin is right in pointing out that this discontentment or hunger for more can be useful, even devotional, if it pushes us past superficial religion towards more of God.

Dybdahl (2008) explains that an empty religious experience, “results from the way we have defined religion as accepting certain ideas with the mind” (p. 13). The church has taught people doctrinal theology (how to believe), but has neglected to teach them moral theology and ethics (how to behave in society) and devotional theology (how to relate spiritually to God and others) (p. 14). The abandonment of teaching these three elements of theology, and the exclusive emphasis on the one element, doctrinal theology,

has left many Seventh-day Adventists longing for more.

A diverse set of influential individuals have come forward, inviting the church to come back to the heart of Christianity (see Barton, 2006; Claiborne, 2006; Dybdahl, 2010; Foster, 1998; Kidder, 2011; Martin, Bailey, & LaMountain, 2009; McNeal, 2000; Moreland, 2007; Mulholland, 1993; Willard, 2005). Authors from many different faith traditions urge the church body to return to a focus on a relationship with Jesus. The emptiness of institutional and programs-based spiritual practice has brought about a renewed interest in the process of discipleship and Christian formation in the church as a whole, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church (for Adventist examples see Blake, 2008; Bunday, 2002; Cooper, 2004; Dybdahl, 2008; Finley, 2010; Kidder, 2008, 2011; Martin, Bailey, & LaMountain, 2009; O'Fallon, 2004; Paulsen, 2001, 2003; Paulien, 2003; Tucker, 2005, 2007; L. Venden, 2004; M. Venden, 2009).

The first practical question that must be addressed is, *What makes the difference between someone who is a Christian and someone who is not?* Willard (2005) clarifies that the number one distinction of a Christian is that they are someone who is *with* Christ. A disciple (or apprentice or student) is one who is with Jesus and who is seeking to become like Him. They live their life asking the question: If Jesus were living my life, what would He do? (Willard, 2005). Burrill (1998) agrees that “to be a disciple . . . is to be living in a relationship with the One who is discipling you” (p. 16). Therefore, a relationship with Jesus must be maintained as the most important part of the disciple’s life. In summary, Bonhoeffer (1959), the great Christian pastor and martyr in Germany during the Nazi rule, distills this truth by saying, “The heart of the disciple must be set upon Christ alone” (p. 174).

Foster and Willard (2005) go on to point out that “spiritual formation in a Christian tradition answers the specific human question: what kind of person am I going to be?” (p. 42). Cymbala (1997) is right when he contends that it is not just important *that* Christians do good works, but *why* they do them. As Stearns (2009) points out, actions and good deeds must come from a deep love for Christ and acceptance of His love in daily life.

In examining this process of change in the life of a disciple, it is important to emphasize, as Benner (2002) exhorts, that becoming “more spiritual” must be grounded in becoming “more human.” He continues, “If embracing humanness was good enough for Jesus, how can we despise it? To become like Jesus and take on his character, we must—like Him—embrace our humanity and work out our spirituality within it” (p. 35).

How do disciples set their minds on “Christ alone,” as Bonhoeffer (1959) urges, while deeply connecting with the human experience, as Benner (2002) implores? Personal transformation through relationship with Jesus takes place in four primary ways: (a) the spiritual disciplines, (b) emotional healing, (c) understanding of oneself, and (d) developing the rule of life. These four ways of being changed by Jesus will be examined below.

### The Spiritual Disciplines

Kidder (2011), quoting James Rutz and the Gallup organization, says, “A significant number of ‘unchurched’ Americans feel there is not enough emphasis on spiritual experiences in the churches” (p. 67). Kidder goes on to note that Gallup highlights a key criticism of the unchurched in regard to religious institutions, pointing out that “churches have lost the spiritual part of religion” (p. 67). Dybdahl (2008) also

observes this, and calls it a universal hunger for the practice of spirituality. He sees that religion as a practice of the mind has dominated the practice of the heart, leaving people with a hunger for connection with God (p. 13). My experience in pastoral ministry over the last 12 years leads me to agree with Kidder, Gallup, and Dybdahl's assertion that people desire to see more emphasis on the practice spirituality. I have seen in many Adventist church members the breakdown in moving from faith as an informational understanding of a set of beliefs, to a relational practice that integrates truth into daily living. This has led them to feel unfulfilled and is, arguably, the most significant contributor to their restless search for answers and longing for greater depth of spiritual experience.

The most ancient of all recognized ways of transformation is through the practice of spiritual devotional habits or disciplines (Foster, 1998). The spiritual disciplines are the ways that God works in a person's life to transform them into who they are meant to be. By spending time in God's Presence, a person becomes someone with a worldview in line with the Kingdom of God (Moreland, 2007). The number and names of the spiritual disciplines vary depending on the source, but their purpose remains the same. The goal is to engage the believer in a transformational process that allows them to become more like Christ. They are intentional methods used to focus the believer's attention on Jesus. There are seven practices that are included in most lists: Prayer, Meditation, Study, Fasting, Solitude/Silence, Worship, and Service (see Barton, 2006; Dybdahl, 2008; Foster, 2001; Kidder, 2011; Moreland, 2007; Mulholland, 1993). These spiritual disciplines are often called the "classical disciplines" because they are central and foundational to the Christian life (Foster, 1998).

Willard, as cited by Moreland (2007), breaks down the classical disciplines into two categories: disciplines of abstinence (solitude, silence, fasting, etc.) and disciplines of engagement (study, worship, service, prayer, etc.). Seeing the disciplines within these two categories helps the believer to address sins of commission, things they are doing, and omission, things they are not doing (Moreland, 2007, p. 153). As the disciple puts into practice what they can do to connect with Christ, and what they can avoid to make space for more of Christ in their life, transformation takes place. The goal is to develop habits and routines that bring believers in closer contact with Christ.

Winner (2003) offers contemporary reflections from a Christian perspective on Jewish spiritual practices and disciplines. These include: Sabbath, mourning, hospitality, prayer, fasting, candle-lighting, weddings, and doorposts. She draws attention to the parallels seen in the practices of faith from the Jewish tradition and the classical disciplines mentioned above. Her work emphasizes the prevalent desire to develop rhythms and meaning in spiritual practice. Spiritual disciplines fill the need for structure and deepened connection.

As stated above, the purpose of devotional practices is for believers to experience God and be formed as disciples. These practices of connecting with God meet the need for spiritual experience observed by Gallup.

Yet, it is possible to practice the spiritual disciplines without the Spirit of God. Kidder (2011) draws needed attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in the process of change. He writes, “The shift in the disciples did not result from some seminar they took in leadership or evangelism, or from some sort of self-improvement course, but as a result of the presence of the transformational power of the Holy Spirit” (p. 75). Paulsen (2001)

agrees that it is only through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that spiritual growth takes place in the life of the believer.

As birth is a miracle, so the discipleship process is a miracle. It is the mystery of God transforming the disciple through the Holy Spirit's power (Barton, 2006; Benner, 2002; Kidder, 2011). The disciple is not able to control the process any more than a baby is able to control their own birth, but they do, however, see the effects of the miracle of transformation. The role of the believer is to bring themselves to Jesus with the full knowledge that they cannot change themselves (Barton, 2006). I agree with Barton's claim, and would also add that it is in acknowledging this very truth—the inability to change oneself—that the disciple experiences their greatest transformation. Hull (2006) admits that this giving up of control is often the hardest spiritual practice for the disciple.

Hull (2006) goes on to challenge that discipleship should be maintained as the focus of the entire church. "Discipleship isn't just *one* of the things the church does; it *is* what the church does" (p. 24). Willard (2005) likewise declares "[that] spiritual formation in Christlikeness [is] the *exclusive primary goal* of the local congregation" (p. 235).

### Emotional Healing

The emphasis on transformation through emotional healing developed in popular Christian culture during the last three decades. Seamands (1981) was one of the key pioneers in connecting emotions and the spiritual life, as were Cloud and Townsend (1992). As a minister, Seamands describes his experience of working with people with problems that were not being healed by prayer and faithful practice of the spiritual disciplines alone. Other authors affirm this link (McNeal, 2000; Scazzero, 2006;

Swenson, 2004). Scazzero (2006) fully endorses and extends this connection saying that “emotional health and spiritual maturity are inseparable” (p. 12).

Dybdahl (class lecture, February 15, 2010) sees ample evidence for this connection, however he differs from Seamands and Scazzero asserting that in the relationship between emotions and spirituality, popular psychology has eclipsed the role of spiritual healing in emotional issues. He observes that dependence upon psychology has led to a weakening understanding of the power of God working through the Christian community and the Christian minister. Though I find Scazzero’s (2006) and Seamands’ (1981) personal experiences of emotional healing to be persuasive, I support Dybdahl’s (2010) position that psychology has gotten more emphasis than the power of God. I would also go on to add that in the implementation of the discipleship process associated with this project, I was able to see that God worked miracles of emotional healing in participants lives in the process of seeking Him in a community of believers. I observed both the supernatural work of God and the human psychological support as essential for emotional healing. These authors all agree on the importance of both emotional and spiritual health and healing, however the primary area of discussion and divergence of opinion is concerning how this healing takes place.

Along with the call for Christians to recommit to focusing *on* Christ, there has been the much needed parallel call to honesty and transparency *with* Christ and in the community of believers who bear His name. Emotional health and healing can only take place when believers approach Christ as they are (Scazzero, 2006). Instead of compartmentalizing faith into one of the categories of life, discipleship is a call to surrender the entire life to Jesus, even emotional healing, and to face that process with

honesty (Seamands, 1981). This is best done in authentic, Christian community.

### Understanding of Self

As Christians center their lives on a relationship with Jesus, through practice of the spiritual disciplines as a way of connecting with Him, weaknesses and strengths will become apparent in ways not experienced before. Some may discover that they have difficulty practicing one of the spiritual disciplines, or that one discipline comes far more easily and is desired more deeply than the rest (see Goldsmith, 1997). In the process of coming closer to Christ, disciples understand themselves more deeply, and as they understand themselves more deeply, they find a deeper understanding of Christ (Dybdahl, 2008; McNeal, 2000; Barton, 2006; Moreland, 2007; Swenson, 2004; Willard, 2005).

In his work using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI), Goldsmith (1997) asserts that the better one understands oneself, specifically through the use of the personality types, the deeper the understanding will be of how one connects to God. He uses a personality test, the MBTI, to help individuals make sense of who they are and how to relate to God by way of the spiritual disciplines (Goldsmith, 1997).

Dick and Miller (2001) also make use of a Spiritual Gifts Inventory, which helps people identify their primary and secondary gifts from a list of 20 spiritual gifts derived from Scripture and early Christian writings (p. 6). Through this process of knowing themselves and how God wants to use them in the church and in the world, disciples of Jesus are better able to grasp where they should serve, how they work, and their unique way of responding to others.

A commitment to honesty in coming to God in transparency is essential (Barton, 2006; Cloud & Townsend, 2003; Scazzero, 2006). Kuhalampi (2011) shares his



perspective on Ellen White's view of the holistic nature of spirituality, and sheds light onto the interplay between one's relationship with God and awareness of oneself.

While defining prayer as "the opening of the heart to God as to a friend" she [White] expresses in a revealing way the essence of what Christian spirituality is all about: being undisguised in the presence of God, facing him openly and candidly. Whatever is within is confronted with the full awareness that God sees all: feelings, memories, ideas, intentions, motive, attitudes, relationships, experiences, etc. A person of this attitude must also be honest to the self and face all aspects of one's experience and inner life as well as every feature of one's personality and character. (Kuhlampi, 2011, p. 1)

To pursue Christ with "all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength," as God invites believers in Deut 6:5, necessitates increasing awareness of all aspects of the self, including personality, spiritual gifts, and learning style (Dick & Miller, 2001; Goldsmith, 1997). I would further add that it is this increased understanding that profoundly influences how people relate to: God, mission, community, and suffering.

### Rule of Life

The *Rule of Life* brings together the practice of the spiritual disciplines, the understanding of emotional health, and the knowledge of self, into a spiritual rhythm that encourages the process of change. Barton (2006) describes:

A rule of life is a way of ordering our life around the values, practices and relationships that keep us open and available to God for the work of spiritual transformation that only God can bring about. Simply put, a rule of life provides structure and space for our growing. (p. 14)

Scazzero (2006) summarizes the Rule of Life as "an intentional, conscious plan to keep God at the center of everything we do" (p. 196). The concept of the Rule of Life is a valuable way of reordering one's life to follow the ways and priorities of Jesus, instead of one's own, or those given by others. I agree with Barton (2006) and Swenson (2004) that this becomes even more important in the increasingly fast-paced world of today. The

focus must be structuring life around God’s priorities instead of those of the believer, making central a relationship with Jesus amidst the distractions of secular and religious life.

### **Living a Mission-Focused Life: Discipleship and Mission**

What happens after Jesus is the center of the life of the believer? Moreland (2007) notes that the problem of contemporary culture and the contemporary church is boredom (p. 146). The remedy he suggests is a call for people to live in the drama—the “historic struggle between God’s kingdom and all who oppose it” (p. 145). God’s people are called for a purpose and it is in living out that purpose that they find ultimate fulfillment (Hull, 2006). Warren (2002) adds that great purpose is discovered when individuals realize that this life, ultimately, is not about them.

Godin simply states, “People seek meaning. Will you offer it to them?” (p. 25). What Moreland and Godin clarify is that people realize the emptiness of what they are involved in and long to be a part of something bigger than themselves. They are asking the question Warren frames, “What on Earth am I here for?” (2002, p. 17). In other words, they want a mission (Warren, 2002). They perceive the self-serving emphasis of their lives, and sense that true happiness only comes from living out their purpose. People not only want a mission, but have been hard-wired for a mission (see Eph 2:10).

The life of a disciple stands in stark contrast to the self-serving life the secular world calls people to. This life centers on the individual’s goals, ambitions, dreams, and future (Warren, 2002, p. 17). Instead, disciples of Jesus are compelled to live for the sake of others. Willard (2005) says, “We also need to keep in mind the multitudes of people (surrounded by churches) who will *not* be in heaven because they have never, to their

knowledge, seen the reality of Christ in a living human being.” In a similar vein, Stearns (2009) shares,

It is not our fault that people are poor, but it is our responsibility to do something about it. God says that we are guilty if we allow people to remain deprived when we have the means to help them. (p. 123)

Some readers may challenge Willard and Stearns’ views, insisting that the thing that makes Christians unique is their belief in God, and not the action they take in the world. Others insist that the emphasis be placed on the way that Christians live—the outward changes of behavior that make them different from the rest of the world. Paulsen (2001) calls this a tension between “cerebral” and “practical” Christianity (p. 79). Christianity has become divided over which emphasis should have primacy: belief or what is done based on that belief. I agree with Stearns (2009) who says that Christianity must reintegrate faith and works. In other words, the *being* and the *doing* of Christianity cannot be divided. He goes on to say, “This does not mean we are saved by piling up enough good works to satisfy God. No, it means that any authentic and genuine commitment to Christ will be accompanied by demonstrable evidence of a transformed life” (p. 59). Beliefs and actions are inseparable in discipleship. The good news of the gospel must be shared in word *and* deed.

Most often, this expression of the gospel in word and deed is called evangelism and service. Foster (1998), in outlining the six traditions of the Christian Faith, refers to these as the Evangelical Tradition and the Social Justice Tradition (pp. 137, 187). These aspects of the mission of Christ which captivate the heart’s longing to make a difference in the world will be emphasized below.

## Evangelism

When it comes to evangelism, many think of big auditoriums, long appeal songs, and polished speakers. Humphreys and Humphreys (2000) challenge this picture and affirm that all are called to present the gospel through their everyday lives. In what is often called the faith chapter, Heb 11 shares a list of several of God's servants throughout time who utilized faith to make a difference in the world. Humphreys and Humphreys point out that of the names on that list, all but two were laypeople; not *professional* ministers, but everyday folks (Humphreys & Humphreys, 2000, p. 25). God's calling, they emphasize, is for every disciple of Christ to share the good news. McLaren (2002) defines evangelism saying, "God's people are blessed *instrumentally* - blessed in order to be a blessing to *others* . . . *evangelism* means 'spreading good news'" (p. 41).

Burrill (1998) takes it one step further in saying, "the Christian who is not reproducing by creating other disciples is not really a disciple. It is impossible . . . to be a follower of Jesus and not share Jesus" (p. 23). There is a clear imperative in Scripture for disciples to allow God to use them to make other disciples (Burrill, 1998; Chan & Beuving, 2012). The process of discipleship must emphasize the necessity of sharing the good news through everyday living, as well as partnering with God in the formation of other disciples. Imagine what it would be like if every member (disciple) understood the importance of their role in the ministry and mission of Christ to bring the gospel to the world, and lived out that mission? Jesus is waiting to do this through His disciples now (Burrill, 1998; Sweet & Viola, 2010; Paulsen, 2001).

## Service to the Least of These

In his paraphrase of Matt 25, Stearns (2009) encapsulates the call of Christ to serve the least of these.

For I was hungry, while you had all you needed. I was thirsty, but you drank bottled water. I was a stranger, and you wanted me deported. I needed clothes, but you needed more clothes. I was sick, and you pointed out the behaviors that led to my sickness. I was in prison, and you said I was getting what I deserved (p. 59).

As their hearts are being transformed by a relationship with Christ, disciples can no longer view the world, or the suffering ones of the world, the same (Stearns, 2009). Claiborne (2006) is a leader of a community re-imagining how Christians can respond to those with the greatest needs. He says they are creating “a community of people who have fallen desperately in love with God and with suffering people, and who allow those relationships to disturb and transform them” (p. 296). It is this service, no matter how disturbing and difficult, that is the mission given to believers by Christ. Stearns (2009) calls this tenacious focus on service “The Whole Gospel” (p. 24).

It is important for individual Christians, and the Christian community, to be aware of the hardship, poverty, and sickness that plagues the world, and to join together to make a difference (Stearns, 2009). This is an essential part of spiritual life and growth. By serving, the disciple takes on the heart of Christ. Transformation happens in the disciple as they pray for their heart to break for the people and issues that break the heart of God (Stearns, 2009). Through service and prayer, the disciple is changed by the Jesus seen in the suffering ones (Claiborne 2006; Stearns, 2009).

## **Necessity of Community in Discipleship**

For many years the church has encouraged believers to operate as if they were isolated from the world around them. Gallup, as quoted by Stanley and Willits (2004) states that “Americans are among the loneliest people in the world” (p. 22). In light of this, people are now realizing the necessity of community in the discipleship process (Barton, 2006; Benner, 2002; Claiborne, 2006; Dybdahl, 2008; Hull, 2006; McLaren, 2002; Stanley & Willits, 2004; Warren, 2002). Mega church pastor Keith Meyer (2009) has seen the power of spiritual transformation through seeking God in community. As studies began to show that mega churches were failing to produce changed lives, many leaders were willing to take the difficult challenge of assessing their approach and make corresponding changes to their church culture. Meyer was one of those leaders who were willing to begin the journey of connecting people in community.

The kind of change that takes place in community is one of the most powerful and lasting (Dybdahl, 2008). Cloud and Townsend (2003) conclude that since humanity is wounded in community, God uses the community, in the form of a small group, to play a key part in healing wounds. Both Scazzero (2006) and Seamonds (1981) first experienced healing and transformation through community themselves, before going on to write about the process for the wider Christian community. The goal of the discipleship process in the local church is to experience transformation together. Authors (Barton, 2006; Benner, 2002; Moreland, 2007; Stanley & Willits, 2004) encourage readers not to go through their books on discipleship on their own, but rather to invite someone else, or a small group of individuals, to go on the spiritual journey with them.

Many people feel a hunger for something more in their church interactions (Martin, Bailey, & LaMountain, 2009). Discipleship in community is a response to this need to *do life* together. Intentional discipleship brings “a layer of structure and intentionality to our otherwise random and unstructured friendships” (Stanley and Willits, 2004, p. 12).

### Accountability

An important aspect of discipleship and transformation through community is accountability. Accountability is often misunderstood. Cloud and Townsend (2003) assert that it is far more than just reporting your progress to others or having the experience of confessing to others that helps you bring about change in your personal life (p. 82). Healthy accountability is about the disciple bringing their whole self into the group (or community) and allowing the community to help with the growth and repair process that God is working in their individual lives. The group not only helps members to look at the external behavior, but also helps them plunge deeper into understanding the reasons behind what they are doing.

### Mentoring

Walking with someone down a path that you have already been down and aiding in their journey is an apt metaphor for mentoring. Mentoring can be a useful tool for experiencing transformation through community. It can be done in the group setting or with just one individual, and is the process of opening oneself to the input and wisdom of someone outside of oneself (Cloud & Townsend, 2003).

Community meets the needs of individuals in this connection-deprived society, while helping to restore the biblical paradigm for discipleship. Jesus set up an example in the way He called His first disciples to be with Him and with each other. It is this model that He desires for His church. As Jesus stated in John 13:34-35, His disciples are identified by the love they have for each other. People are able to see this love as disciples live in biblical community (see Burrill, 1998; Paulsen, 2002; Roxburgh, Boren, & Priddy, 2009). Biblical community in discipleship answers the loneliness experienced in this complex world.

### **The Cost of Discipleship: Discipleship and Suffering**

Many times, believers are not taught that part of the spiritual journey is accepting conflict and suffering in life. People assume that when they accept Christ, everything will get easy for them. The stories in the Bible contradict this expectation. In the Scriptures, challenges and trials come *because* individuals are making the decision to follow Christ (McNeal, 2000). As Burrill (1998) shares, “One who becomes a disciple of Jesus can be expected to be treated as Jesus was treated—misunderstood and persecuted” (p. 18). It is a challenge to face even the direct trials, persecutions, or hardships that come as a result of commitment to following Jesus (Bonhoeffer, 1959), let alone the everyday troubles that are simply a part of being alive.

Far from becoming easier upon accepting Christ, life can get harder. Scazzero (2006) points out that “Job was innocent. There was no connection between his sin and the amount of pain he experienced. This seems terribly unfair” (p. 138). Unfair and difficult to accept, but true. This all seems contrary to expectation, but Scazzero again emphasizes “the heart of Christianity is that the way to life is through death, the pathway



to resurrection is through crucifixion” (p. 140). He also adds a word of caution. “Remember, resurrection only comes out of death—real death. Our losses are real” (p. 152). The disciple must humbly come face-to-face with struggle, loss, and hardship—to die—before they can experience resurrection. Moreland (2007) affirms that this is one of the paradoxes of the Christian life: to find your life you lose it.

As a person who went through suffering in the name of God and conviction, Bonhoeffer (1959) appeals to us saying,

If we refuse to take up our cross and submit to suffering and rejection . . . we forfeit our fellowship with Christ and have ceased to follow Him. But if we lose our lives in His service and carry our cross, we shall find our lives. . . . Discipleship means allegiance to the suffering Christ. (p. 104)

Discipleship is a calling to experience a wide-ranging connection with Christ—participating in His resurrection and abundant life, as well as His sufferings. Burrill (1998) says that “part of the evangelistic process of making a disciple is to help that person develop a faith mature enough to withstand persecution and ridicule” (p. 19).

Grasping the relationship between discipleship and suffering requires a serious paradigm shift. It comes down to understanding the reality that God uses suffering in the discipleship process. Bonhoeffer (1959) shares that there is a cost—spiritually, mentally, physically, and emotionally—to follow Christ completely. It means that He takes center stage and first priority in everything, which can sometimes cause hardship (Burrill, 1998; Hull, 2006). Cymbala (1997) adds perspective, saying, “Trouble is one of God’s great servants because it reminds us how much we continually need the Lord. Otherwise, we tend to forget about entreating him” (pp. 57-58).

In his book, Swenson (2004) lays out four areas of life imbalance which Christians struggle with and offers *prescriptions* to remedy these deficiencies. The areas

he focuses on and offers remedies for pertain to physical, financial, relational, and spiritual health. For example, God desires each individual to have financial margin, which according to Swenson means increasing income and increasing savings (pp. 143-144). He seems to contradict himself, however, when he claims that “solving our suffering is not necessarily the goal of the Christian life; walking in righteousness is” (p. 140). I agree with the above statement, yet it seems to contract the premise of his writing. Swenson’s book, along with many similar works (Lucado, 2010; Meyer, 2010; Osteen, 2007) aid Christians in noticing areas of imbalance in their lives. While this is helpful, they often fail to appreciate the value suffering as a part of discipleship.

To center on Jesus is to look for God in any and every situation and to realize, as McNeal (2000) maintains, that discipleship is “heart-shaping” which sometimes happens by trial. As disciples are shaped by God through any and all circumstances, they seek to develop awareness of the mysterious ways God is forming them, especially through suffering.

### **Understanding a Seventh-day Adventist Approach to Discipleship**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has much to offer in the area of discipleship and spiritual growth. As a community of faith, the Adventist Church espouses core beliefs that encourage a rule of life, that elevate the importance of the Word of God, and that stress the necessity of personal prayer (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, 2005). Adventists emphasize that every member experience a weekly Sabbath as God commanded (Adams, 2011; Finley, 2009), a practice which many Christians are only recently rediscovering (see Barton, 2006; Scazzero, 2006). Even more importantly, as

Paulsen (2001) stresses, the Seventh-day Adventist Church emphasizes the changes that God brings in the life of a believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (p. 113).

Rather than a compartmentalized faith, Adventist doctrine encourages a wholistic view of human existence, recognizing that God wants to redeem every area of life (Kidder, 2011; Rice, 2004).

Amid these blessings, there are also difficulties. As a result of the emphasis on doctrine in the Adventist Church, people can feel that once they embrace new beliefs they have “arrived.” In reality, discipleship is a process that takes time and intentional focus. In his work centering on the mission of the local Adventist Church, Burrill (1998) points out that the word *disciple* “does not suggest a rapid conversion . . . but a slow process by which one is made into a disciple” (p. 17). Discipleship must be recaptured as a process rather than an event (Hull, 2006; Walshe, class lecture, 2011). It is imperative that the Seventh-day Adventist Church become deliberate about this heart-focused process.

Young people are especially adept at noticing the emptiness of religious practice. They can help the Seventh-day Adventist Church gauge effectiveness in these important areas of discipleship. Dudley (as cited by Martin, 2008) states, “It seems reasonable to believe that at least 40 to 50 percent of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North America are essentially leaving the church by their middle 20s. This figure may well be higher” (p. 5). Sahlin (2003) and other researchers agree (Gillespie, Donahue, Boyatt, & Gane, 2004; Tetz & Hopkins, 2004); the attrition of youth and young adults in the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues at a steady pace. I believe this is because of a failure to connect them with the heart of what following Jesus is all about: a relationship with Jesus (Paulien, 2003), joining Him in His mission (Martin, 2008), in meaningful

community (Martin, 2008; Tetz & Hopkins, 2004), while viewing suffering with redemptive perspective (Burrill, 1998). The Bible calls for discipling children in the way of the Lord, aiding them to stay on this path when they grow up (Prov 22:6). It is in everyday interactions that parents and other adults are called to disciple children, teaching them to see Christ as the one who holds all of life together (Col 1:16-17). The biblical mandate is to raise up faithful disciples in those who are young so that they understand what it means to follow Jesus, and see Him in all of life. While this does not guarantee that young people will make the decision to stay in the church as they grow older, it gives them a better opportunity because they will have seen and experienced first-hand the joys of following Jesus. One of the primary challenges of discipleship in the Adventist Church is prioritizing the discipling of young people in what it means to follow Jesus day-by-day.

The calling of each disciple is to follow Christ and be transformed to be like Him in doctrine, behavior, purpose, and relationships. Discipleship is about the integration of the entire life of the disciple, under the instruction of the Master, Jesus Christ (Burrill, 1998). It is essential for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to elevate the importance of intentional discipleship.

### **Summary and Implications**

The above review of literature is not exhaustive, but focuses on discipleship and Christian formation resources for the purpose of creating a discipleship curriculum for the local Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through works on centering the life of the believer on Jesus Christ, I was able to identify the need to incorporate the following into the discipleship process: the practice of the spiritual disciplines, an understanding of

emotional healing, the developed awareness of the self through the spiritual gifts, and the importance of a rule of life. It is also clear that a meaningful discipleship process will move beyond head knowledge to encourage the heart transformation of the member through in-class experiences and encounters.

According to sources reviewed, the connection between a vibrant devotional life and active faith sharing is crucial in a discipleship curriculum. People want to live for a purpose and need to be shown how, so hands-on experiences must be provided. It is essential that this experience take place in the context of community. Accountability and mentoring, both one-on-one and in a small group setting, must be integrated into the discipleship process.

Evaluation of current literature also highlighted the necessity of addressing the undeveloped theology of suffering in the life of the disciple. Rather than seeing suffering and conflict as set-backs or reasons to give up, discipleship participants will be taught that these are an integral part of the discipleship journey.

In conclusion, the prevailing theme in the literature reviewed was for a discipleship process in the local church that includes an intentional plan for growth in Christ, characterized by the following four qualities. First, it is centered on a relationship with Christ, and subsequent Christlikeness in the life of the believer. Second, it exhorts and equips disciples to live a mission-focused and evangelistic life. Third, it is connected to meaningful community, with appropriate relationships for spiritual growth. Finally, it intentionally teaches the role of suffering and conflict in the way of formation. These make up the framework for the discipleship process laid out in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS: BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN KNOWING, BEING, AND DOING

#### **Introduction**

Experiential learning models introduce the facets of knowing, being, and doing as inseparable parts of a process which leads to growth. As the learner experiences information (*knowing*), reflects on it (*being*), and applies it to their life (*doing*), the result is a richer integration of change into the life of the learner. This chapter explores the relationship between the experiential learning process—knowing, being, doing—and discipleship, as developed and implemented in a discipleship process at Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Jesus' invitation to His disciples was, "Come, follow me" (Matt 4:19), and learn from me (Matt 11:28-30). Jesus wanted His disciples to learn through an experience of life with Him (Mark 3:14). In this process, they gained experiential knowledge about Jesus' ways (Mark 7:17; Acts 4:13), reflected on a change of heart and attitude (John 6:66-69, 13:1-9), and took action—doing and applying what Jesus taught them (Mark 6:7-13; Luke 10:1-12). In light of the brief biblical evidence outlined above, Jesus placed importance on all three aspects of experiential learning in the lives of His disciples.

Nonetheless, it is easy for humans to focus on knowledge alone. In one interchange with the teachers of the law, Jesus says, "You study the Scriptures diligently

because you think that in them you possess eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39-40). Knowledge of the Scriptures is intended to lead to a heart understanding of Jesus, and the action of coming to Him, which leads to life. Knowledge requires action (Jas 1:22). Jesus desires that his disciples both hear and do. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt 7:24).

Knowledge of doctrine, that is biblical information about God, separated from a meaningful relationship with Jesus, produces that which is seen in the New Testament descriptions of the Pharisees and Scribes: self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and self-centeredness (Matt 23). However, in the context of an experiential relationship with Jesus, knowledge of doctrine becomes robust, leading to application in the context of life. An experiential relationship with Jesus leads to the gospel in action (2 Pet 1:5-9). As the believer learns to practice the ways of Jesus, they are kept from “being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:8). Jesus desires that knowledge lead to the experience of producing effective, fruitful action in the life of the believer.

Lyons (2010) urges believers “to recover the Gospel, to relearn and fall in love again with that historic, beautiful, redemptive, faithful, demanding, reconciling, all-powerful, restorative, atoning, grave-abounding, soul-quenching, spiritually fulfilling good news of God’s love” (p. 192). This falling in love again with Jesus is at the heart of the experience of the disciple. Discipleship, as Jesus modeled it, allows the knowing, being, and doing aspects of Christian faith to find their rightful place in the life of the

believer. In doing so, discipleship recaptures what it means to experience following Christ in the world today. In the following pages we will then turn our attention to the ministry context, possible obstacles to a discipleship orientation in the local church, the composition of an experiential model of discipleship, and its implementation as a possible solution.

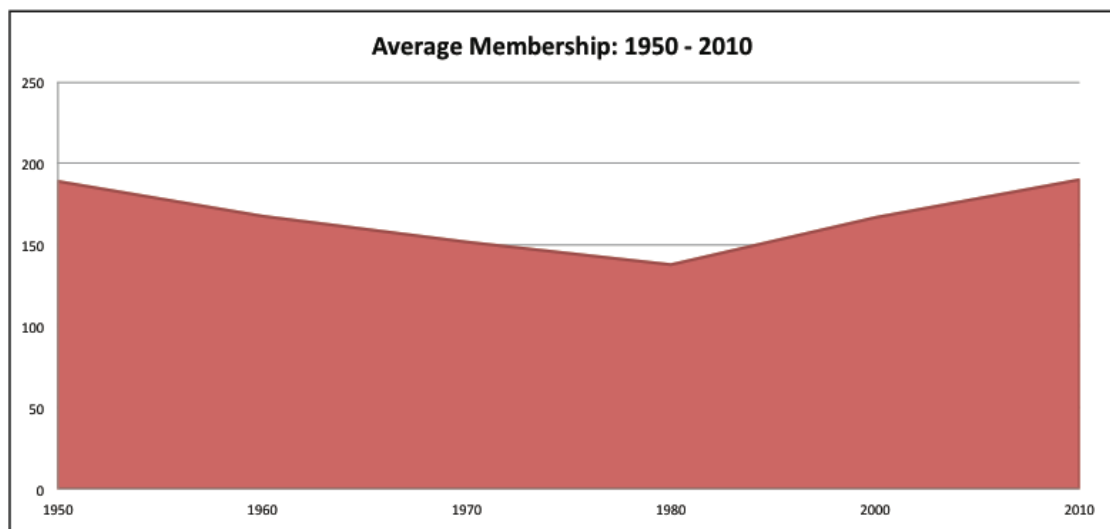
### **Ministry Context**

Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church is a friendly and diverse congregation which meets at 8700 Germantown Avenue, in the neighborhood of Chestnut Hill, in northwestern Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The congregation has been at this location since it began renting the church facility in 1947 and purchased it on March 10, 1950 (J. Weslotsky, personal communication, September 12, 2013). Chestnut Hill SDA Church is a part of the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, located in Reading, Pennsylvania. The Pennsylvania Conference is made up of 11,012 members, 106 churches, 14 schools, and employs 41 pastors (D. Reese, personal communication, November 7, 2013).

Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church was plateaued and at times declining, over the last six decades since moving to the current location in Chestnut Hill. According to Church Clerk Records from 1950-2010, seen in Figure 1, the current membership, six decades later, is almost exactly the same as in 1950 (Church clerk records, G. Mann, March 16, 2010). Church membership is, for the most part, consistent through the years. However, in a growing community and city, to experience a plateau in membership over a 60-year period seems to call into question the perceived relevance and lived out mission of the church. This is one of the forces behind this study. The thesis



of this study asserts that by focusing on a discipleship process in the local church, participants experience a deepening personal relationship with Jesus, which subsequently leads to a natural increase in mission activity. As a greater number of individuals are involved in the discipleship process, it is supposed that the church will grow numerically. Church growth is thus the fruit from the lives of healthy disciples who are making disciples.



*Figure 1.* Church clerk records from 1950-2010.

### **Realizing the Need**

Following the church service at Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church one Sabbath, a visiting member from another Adventist congregation engaged me in conversation. She talked about the current state of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and pointed to the lack of spiritual vitality of members and stated what she believed to be the solution to the problem. “I used to think we could talk about Jesus and His love for us from the pulpit,” she shared. “Now I realize we do not have that luxury. We must teach

our members doctrine. They need to know the doctrines and where to find them in Scripture” (personal conversation, October 13, 2012). According to this devoted member of the Adventist Church, the solution for the spiritual apathy seen in the church is for the members to *know* more information. From this point of view, a focus on Jesus and His love stands in direct opposition to emphasizing the distinctive points of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Another conversation is repeated when a position of leadership opens up or when nominating committee time comes around. Members of the church leadership team will often say, “We need to get more members involved! It’s only a small percentage of the people doing all the work.” There is an urgent need to get members involved in actively living out the mission of the church, to move beyond the aforementioned spiritual apathy.

It is experiences like these that have revealed the need for spiritual renewal. There are members who are completely committed to Jesus, sold-out on being His disciples, evidenced by a real relationship and mission involvement. Then there are other members who are *cultural* Adventists, those who participate in the life of the church community out of comfort, not a commitment to the mission. Many members acknowledge the *lukewarm* condition, distinguished by passivity, indifference, and lack of involvement in a relationship with Christ and the mission of the church. There are others who are driven to fear and legalism as a response to this void of discipleship. The church body needs a more cohesive understanding of what it means to be disciples of Jesus.

The result of this spiritual decline is seen in recent research in the Pennsylvania Conference, which identifies a trend across the state: dwindling attendance and older membership. In fact, conference president Ray Hartwell reports that over 70% of

congregations in the Pennsylvania Conference are plateaued or declining, and the average age in church is around 58 years old (pastor's meeting presentation, October 2009). This parallels other research done across North America, which found that congregations are getting older and smaller as the communities around them grow younger and larger (see Beckworth & Kidder, 2010; Olson, 2009).

This bleak picture points to a lack of discipleship in the local church. The question that must be asked is: Does the Seventh-day Adventist Church have a functioning strategy for discipleship? The formation and implementation of a discipleship process in the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church was birthed from a desire to address this challenge. Through a process of discipleship, knowledge about God (or doctrine) is experienced in the context of a relationship with Jesus, which leads to application in the individual's life. Through this experiential discipleship process, the participant develops a devotional and missional relationship with Jesus. As members encounter Jesus, His love and His calling, through the discipleship process, the result is compassionate, mission-driven action which springs up in the lives of members by the Holy Spirit. These two elements, passionate relationship and mission driven action, describe what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Being a disciple is about both identity and activity (Martin, 2013).

The primary role of the church, according to Jesus' Great Commission, is to make disciples of all people (Matt 28:18-20). The church is to be a nucleus of disciple-making activity—instructing and mentoring believers and unbelievers alike in what it means to follow Jesus.

In light of this, it is the hope of this project that a discipleship process implemented at the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist church will assist in moving members to embrace all three aspects of experiential learning: *knowing* the truth, *being* changed by the truth, and subsequently *living* the truth missionally. This is the fulfillment of the Great Commission of Jesus. Through an experiential discipleship process participants grow in deeper devotion to Jesus and see an increase in missional living.

### **Experiential Living: Knowing, Being, and Doing**

Jesus commanded the church to make disciples, teaching and baptizing all nations into the family of God (Matt 28:18-20). The portion of the text that has been emphasized in the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church is the teaching of knowledge about God. Certainly knowledge is a crucial aspect of this Great Commission from Jesus; however, oftentimes overemphasizing this point has led to the diminishment of the other textual foci, and subsequently a stunted understanding of discipleship. When the church centers primarily on disseminating information about God as the vehicle for making disciples, the result is that the relational *process* of disciple-making, as outlined in Scripture, is marginalized or altogether forgotten.

Building upon the experiential learning process introduced above, discipling centers on experiential learning—knowing, being, and doing—as imperative to growth as a disciple of Jesus Christ. This wholistic approach allows for a more full transformation in the life of the believer. The imperative for all three aspects of experiential learning in the discipleship process is found in the biblical text itself. “To make disciples” means to make learners who follow after and experience the pattern of living Jesus set out. This is further clarified by the next part of the text: “to *teach* them to *do* all things I have

commanded you” (emphasis added). The act of becoming a disciple of Jesus is, by its very nature, transformational and experiential. It is a complete shift in lifestyle.

Experiential learning is what discipleship is all about. As the Figure 2 outlines, one aspect of learning naturally leads to the other—knowing to being, being to doing, doing to knowing, and so on. As the disciple experiences knowing God and being transformed by Him, they will naturally do as He has commanded.



*Figure 2.* Experiential learning process triad.

An example of the difference between knowledge alone and experiential learning is seen in an interchange between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. In this interaction, the Jews press Jesus, asking Him to reveal if He is the Messiah. They have ample information about Jesus. They have seen the work He was doing. They have correct knowledge, yet they still do not believe. In response to this, Jesus says, “My sheep listen

to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish” (John 10:27-28). Knowledge and understanding are meant to lead to a change in heart and attitude, which in turn causes a change in practice and living. This cycle of growth is what following after Jesus really means. According to Jesus’ words above, there is a difference between identifying the Shepherd (knowing), hearing His voice (being), and following Him (doing) versus merely knowing facts about Him and refusing to follow in His footsteps.

The goal of a discipleship process is to create space for learning on all three levels—knowing, being, and doing—in order to allow disciples to experience the power and change of God in their whole being. Rather than compartmentalizing growth, this allows the disciples to be transformed by the Holy Spirit in every aspect of their lives through the disciple-making process. As the disciples are changed by Jesus, they are able to more faithfully and fruitfully serve and represent Him in the world.

### **Development of a Discipleship Process**

A transformational relationship with Jesus serves as a catalyst for evangelism. In the calling of His first disciples, Jesus invited them to: (a) be with Him, and (b) learn how to fish for people (Mark 1:17-18). The two callings went hand-in-hand. Many biblical examples could be cited to demonstrate this connection between relationship and evangelism. For the purposes of this study, three will be explored here: the Samaritan woman at the well, the disciples at Pentecost, and the conversion of Paul.

In the first example, Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well, and in this initial encounter He reveals to her that He is the promised Messiah. Jesus also shows that He knows who she is, and still accepts her. She cannot contain her joy and immediately runs

to the town to share the news with others. Many are converted because of her testimony (John 4:1-42). For this woman, seeing God and experiencing His love and acceptance, led to a missional witness. In the second example, the disciples are in an upper room waiting for the Holy Spirit before going out to witness about the resurrection of the Lord (Acts 1:4-5). When they experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their lives, they witness about Jesus and 3,000 join the church in one day (Acts 2)! The presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the disciples resulted in missional activity. In the final example, Saul who becomes Paul, experiences a dramatic conversion on the road to Damascus, where he meets Jesus for himself. From that encounter, he is changed from a persecutor of the church to an apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul begins witnessing and teaching others about Jesus from that day onward (Acts 9:19-22). Inward transformation became a catalyst for worldwide mission activity. The common theme in each of the texts cited above is this: An experience with Jesus leads to sharing Him with others.

In light of these biblical examples, one can note several practical features that must be included in a discipleship process for the local church. First, there must be an emphasis on a personal experience with God, which involves connecting in relationship with Him through the devotional practices. Second, time must be given for God to inwardly transform the life of the believer. Third, one-on-one mentoring (as Jesus did with the woman at the well), small group process (as Jesus did with the twelve apostles), and shared experience (as with the believers at Pentecost) must feature as prominent learning styles leading to inward change. The discipleship journey must also emphasize process and transformation, rather than solely learning content. Finally, the discipleship process must focus on both a relationship with Jesus and an active joining in His mission.

Time spent with Jesus leads to action in the world.

As outlined in the last chapter, current literature on biblical spirituality and discipleship models also note the importance of these emphases, which are outlined as follows: (1) focus on a personal experience with Jesus, (2) allowing consistent time for transformation, (3) process orientation and community context, and (4) join Jesus in His mission. We will now turn our attention to the above four features of a discipleship process.

### Personal Experience With Jesus

Every person who serves as a positive spiritual example in both the Old and New Testaments had an encounter with God that changed their life. In the Old Testament, Joseph, Moses, and David stand out as prominent examples of individuals who encountered God and had the trajectory of their lives shifted by Him. In the New Testament, Peter, John, and Mary all had life-altering connections with Jesus Christ that changed them forever.

This personal experience with Jesus must be the Source of transformation, strength, and action in the life of the believer. Jesus emphasized the necessity of abiding in Him, stating that apart from Him the believer is unable to do anything (John 15:5). A discipleship process in the local church must champion this emphasis, lifting Jesus up and allowing Him to draw people to Himself (John 12:32). In a world where many things compete for attention, the local church discipleship process must advocate for the primacy of a personal experience with Jesus for each individual follower.



## Time for Transformation

Jesus believed that He needed to spend time with His disciples in order for change to happen. In fact, Jesus spent approximately 1,278 days with His disciples, nearly every day of His life of public ministry. Surely the church must aim to do the same. The discipleship process cannot be boiled down into a pamphlet, tract, or even a book. Has the church lost something when she substitutes time spent relationally inviting others to follow Jesus with a focus on the transmission of information, apart from relationship?

Discipleship is learned in the context of relationship with God and other believers. Discipleship is the process whereby an individual allows God to transform their life through time spent with Jesus and the practice of what He has taught them. Knowledge is essential to the process, but the disciple must allow God to move them from knowledge, to reflection, to action. This takes time and is the process of yielding to God for the work that only He can do.

## Process Orientation

The Scriptures contain evidence that Jesus was process oriented with His disciples. For example, when Jesus taught His disciples something they failed to grasp the meaning of, He would often repeat the teaching in another way so they could understand. Jesus repeats the prediction of His death three times (Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). Jesus was patient with the lack of understanding the disciples exhibited (John 14:1-14), and there were times when the disciples did not understand a lesson until much later (John 2:22). In the Upper Room, as Jesus washed His disciple's feet, He told them clearly, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand" (John 13:7, 19). This reveals that Jesus was teaching with a process in mind that extended

beyond the current interaction. Lastly, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus encountered two disciples and taught them the scriptures (Luke 24:25-27, 44-45). These were disciples who had heard this instruction before, but still did not see the meaning. Jesus' response was to teach it again. Rather than moving on to new content, Jesus paid careful attention to their level of comprehension and adjusted His teachings accordingly. Jesus' teaching was typically grounded in the practical experiences which were taking place in His disciple's lives.

The primary goal of practicing discipleship in community is to create space for listening to the Holy Spirit and learning from one another. The goal is not to rush through content in order to make it through, but to go at the pace of the individuals involved in the process. Just as Jesus used process learning with His disciples, He also used one-on-one mentoring, small groups, and shared experience with the 12 original apostles to deepen the impression of the instruction He was giving them. With the discipleship process outlined in this project, believers do the same when they journey together as disciples, creating space for God to help them understand and practice more fully the teachings of Jesus. The discipleship journey involves learning in quietness, away from distractions. As individuals listen deeply to God, they also listen and become connected with the people around them.

In the discipleship process, there is no substitute for the slow transformation that takes place in the Presence of God and with one another. No pamphlet, no "how-to" guide, or DVD series can rush the molding of the Spirit, and the formation process that God directs.

## Relationship With Jesus and Mission

Disciples are those who are with Jesus and who make disciples. As stated above, Jesus invited the disciples to be with him and to learn how to “fish for people” (Mark 1:17-18). Both were essential to their role as disciples. In each of the scriptural examples given above, individuals met Jesus and proceeded to share Him with others. Essential to the discipleship process is an understanding of this emphasis and practical instruction in mission. Foundational to the process of discipleship is the fact that a personal relationship with Jesus always leads to mission orientation—the act of joining Him in His work in the world.

### **Evaluating Current Models of Discipleship: Four Pastors, Four Churches**

Four local church pastors with an emphasis in biblical spirituality and discipleship were interviewed to assess their methods of instruction and approach to discipleship in their church context. These pastors were chosen by individual recommendations made by Andrews Theological Seminary professors and North American Division leaders.

#### Church 1: Younger Generation Church, Arlington, TX: Dr. A. Allan Martin

Discipleship is woven into the core theology and practice of Younger Generation (YG) Church. The pastor, A. Allan Martin, identifies what discipleship looks like at YG Church: “Our members doing life together and intentionally mentoring and apprenticing someone younger than them” (A. A. Martin, personal communication, January 23, 2013).

The discipleship process at YG stems from the church mission statement, which is emphasized from the pulpit, in handouts, and on the website. “Our mission is to deepen

our devotion to Jesus Christ by: Pursuing INTIMACY with GOD ... Experiencing COMMUNITY with each other ... Inspiring those around us with the hope of GRACE” (YG Church website, [www.arlingtonadventist.com/ygchurch](http://www.arlingtonadventist.com/ygchurch)). These three points form the backbone of YG’s discipleship process. Dr. Martin identifies, “Our goal is to have people encounter Jesus—if they encounter Jesus, then miraculous things happen” (A. A. Martin, personal communication, January 23, 2013).

Three important insights were gained from the interview with Martin. First, the importance of tying discipleship and personal discipleship practices into the core mission and purpose of the church. Second, the necessity of focusing on making room for people to encounter Jesus. Finally, the concept of “de-mystifying” discipleship. If people understand they are ‘discipling’ all the time, then to disciple another person in the faith becomes something they can do naturally, without fear.

Church 2: Elmshaven SDA Church, Saint Helena, CA:  
Dr. Matthew Gamble

Though Dr. Matthew Gamble only recently became Senior Pastor of Elmshaven SDA Church (the Haven), he has been passionate about discipleship since beginning ministry in 1999. Gamble shares, “My conviction is that one of the greatest crimes in Christianity today is a lack of discipleship” (M. Gamble, personal communication, January 22, 2013). The mission statement of the Haven reflects this desire: “Sharing God’s love and Making Disciples of Christ” (M. Gamble, personal communication, January 22, 2013).

In the interview with Gamble, two necessities of a discipleship process came to the forefront:

(1) Develop a culture that makes disciples who make disciples. Discipleship must be the identity of the church, not a topic the church is learning about. (2) Keep the definition of discipleship simple: someone who loves God with all his or her heart, loves his or herself out of the value God places on his or her life, and loves every other human being with the love of God. (Personal communication, January 22, 2013)

Church 3: Narberth Presbyterian, Narberth, PA:  
Dr. Deborah Watson

Dr. Deborah Watson has served as Assistant Pastor at Narberth Presbyterian (Pres) for close to 20 years. “Discipleship is the air we breathe,” she highlighted (D. Watson, personal communication, January 30, 2013). The mission statement of the church is “Building disciples in the love of Jesus Christ—growing up in faith, growing together in fellowship, and growing out in service in the world” (Church website, [www.narberthpres.org](http://www.narberthpres.org)). Watson went on to explain, “Everything we do—all of our activities—have to pass through the filter of our mission statement. Do they help us grow up in faith? Do they help us grow together? Do they help us grow out in service and witness?” (D. Watson, personal communication, January 30, 2013).

Four significant points pertaining to a discipleship process in the local church context were gleaned from this interview.

1. The church that desires to focus on discipleship needs to be unwavering in its focus on making disciples, which requires the willingness to filter events and activities that do not fit with this singular mission.

2. The church must clearly outline what a disciple looks like in practical terms. For Narberth Pres this includes: worshipping on a regular basis, being involved weekly in a small group, and growing in witness and service.

3. It is important for the church to define a path of discipleship. At Narberth Pres, two repeated classes, offered three times per year, give people an opportunity to step into growing up in Christ and joining the membership of the body. One is aimed at those who are not yet Christians, and the other focuses on growing believers who have already accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord.

4. The church that utilizes visual tools and repetition will find discipleship concepts learned and understood by members. Narberth Pres uses the baseball diamond illustration to demonstrate what it looks like to grow in Christ.

Watson summarized, “We want all that God has poured into us individually and corporately to be poured out, so that all that He’s given us is used” (D. Watson, personal communication, January 30, 2013).

Church 4: Forest Lake Church, Apopka, FL:  
Pastor Sabine Vatel

“We want people to live the gospel,” says Vatel, Pastor of Discipleship at Forest Lake Church. A disciple is “a Christ-centered person who’s found their area of service within or without the church, and who then turns back and leads someone else with them” (S. Vatel, personal communication, February 8, 2013).

Five key ideas for a discipleship-focused church were garnered from this interview.

1. Christ-centeredness is essential to all of discipleship and mentoring.
2. Facilitating small groups in homes and a 7-8 week sermon series on the same biblical material is a way to introduce people to the vital connection found in small groups, when some might be intimidated to join otherwise.

3. View baptism as an ordination to ministry. Assign each person who gets baptized a mentor, to journey with them one-on-one.

4. Establish a *Ministry Counsel* for the purpose of calling new people into ministry, affirming ministry leaders, and assessing effectiveness. This wing of church governance meets monthly to focus on human resource placement, as opposed to the other wing which focuses on fiscal resources in the Finance Committee.

5. Focus on discipling children. One of the ways Forest Lake does this is that before a child is dedicated, the parents go through three classes where they are trained as the discipler of their children, and instructed on how to write a blessing for their children, which is shared at the dedication. The church then partners with parents in the discipleship journey of guiding their children.

### **Implementation of a Discipleship Process**

With the foundation of scriptural study, reading, and input from discipleship processes in other churches, a 12-week discipleship process was created and introduced to a class of 13 members from Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church. A class size of 14 persons was selected in order to allow for a larger class while still preserving the bonding afforded by a small-group size. On the first day, one participant withdrew and 13 people continued through the entire journey. Participants were accepted on a first-come basis through open invitation to the church and a voluntary sign-up process on a paper sign-up sheet or via an electronic form on the church website. A promotional video was created for advertising the discipleship journey. This was shown in the church on Sabbath morning approximately four weeks before the desired launch date, and was also placed on the church's website and Facebook page.

The target audience was anyone who wanted to experience growth in their relationship with God. The individuals that signed up were diverse in age, race, gender, and education. They also evidenced diversity in spiritual maturity, including newly baptized believers, members not yet engaged in ministry, and long-time members who wanted to grow in their relationship with God.

This group went through the 12-week discipleship process, which included an all-day spiritual retreat at the beginning, 10 sessions meeting once per week for two hours, and concluded with a second all-day spiritual retreat.

Within the class, each person was placed in a mentoring group of three to four people of the same gender, which remained consistent throughout the discipleship process. Most classes allowed for small-group time of at least 30 minutes each session, and encouraged the small groups to gather outside of the class setting for the purpose of spiritual growth and accountability. Participants were also placed with a spiritual companion of the same gender, who they journeyed with throughout the 12 weeks. At the start of each session there was an opening question that was discussed between the spiritual companions. This time of sharing allowed them to grow closer with one another—allocating time for peer-to-peer mentoring, support, and accountability.

The discipleship process began with an all-day spiritual retreat at a Christian retreat center about 35 minutes from the church. The retreat began at 9:00 a.m. with several worship songs and a time of prayer. The rest of the time was divided into three parts: God's leading in your past; God's leading in your current situation; and God's hopes and dreams for your future (Dybdahl, 2008). Each participant was given one hour to spend alone with God for each part, using only their Bible and their journal.



Participants were encouraged to trust God and come to Him in the silence, knowing and expecting that He is waiting to speak to them. After each hour alone, participants were then invited back to share for one hour in their small groups, allowing approximately 15 minutes per person to process what God had been speaking to them. A one-hour break was given for lunch and fellowship time. At the close of the day, the class processed the question: What was the most significant part about today? Each person had the opportunity to share with the larger group. The day ended at 5:00 p.m. with conversational style group prayer.

Following the all-day retreat, the class met once per week on Thursday evening for 10 sessions of two hours each at Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in the seminar room from 7:00 - 9:00 p.m. The sessions focused on the following four categories: Relationship with God; Living in Community; Ministry and Mission; and The Cost of Discipleship. In addition to the 10 sessions at the church, one at-home assignment was given for a Thursday evening session. The specific themes for each session can be seen in Figure 3.

Experiential activities were a part of each class, in addition to activity suggestions given at the end of each class so that members were able to practice what they were learning throughout the next week. Each class time involved a balance of time alone, one-on-one reflection with spiritual companions, mentoring groups of 3-4 persons, and larger group interaction. Content was taught, and then members were given time to experience and practice how the lesson connected with their current place in their spiritual journey. The discipleship class time focused on process and involvement, engaging each member in the experiential learning triad: knowing, being, and doing.

| <b>Date</b>                           | <b>Time</b> | <b>Themes</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|--|
| March 1, 2012                         | 2 hrs.      | Relationship with God, The Gospel, Holy Spirit, and introducing guidelines for Living in Community                                 |
| March 8, 2012<br>(at home assignment) | 2 hrs.      | Relationship with God, The Cost of Discipleship  |
| March 15, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Relationship with God, The Cost of Discipleship, Living in Community   |
| March 22, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Overview of Devotional Practices, Living in Community  |
| March 29, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Devotional Practices: Praise, Living in Community  |
| April 5, 2012                         | 2 hrs.      | Devotional Practice: Prayer and Meditation on Scripture, Living in Community   |
| April 12, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Relationship with God, Devotional Practice: Listening to God, Living in Community  |
| April 19, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Ministry and Mission - Spiritual gifts, Living in Community, Personal Mission Statement.   |
| April 26, 2012                        | 2 hrs.      | Ministry and Mission, Spiritual Gifts, Living in Community   |
| May 3, 2012                           | 2 hrs.      | Evangelism, Devotional Practices, Living in Community, and the Cost of Discipleship  |
| May 10, 2012                          | 2 hrs.      | Ministry and Mission - Evangelism and Spiritual Gifts, Devotional Practices, Living in Community, Dealing with Suffering and Grief |

*Figure 3.* Themes and time for each session.

After week one, a Personal Assessment (see Appendix A) assignment was given to each participant, with instructions to spend two hours exploring the questions. The next week, the spiritual companion groups spent the entire two hours together, praying and sharing their personal assessment.

Intentional community building was incorporated into the discipleship process in order to facilitate further relationship growth. This took place at lunch time on the two retreat days, and through a discipleship group fellowship dinner, which took place midway through the class at the facilitator's personal residence. The evening fellowship was from 6:00-10:00 p.m. on a Saturday night and included dinner, games, dessert, and conversation.

The discipleship process concluded with a second all-day spiritual retreat at the same retreat center. The theme was "Abide and Adore," and centered around John 15 (the parable of the vine and the branches) and Mark 14:1-9 (the woman who anointed Jesus at Bethany). This retreat opened with prayer and worship songs at 10:00 a.m. Scriptures from John 15 were set up on sign boards located throughout the garden area outside the meeting room doors. Participants were invited to take their journals and move around from verse to verse in any order they wished, as they were led by the Holy Spirit. Following this time, participants met with their small groups and shared how God had spoken to them. After lunch, each person was instructed to choose one of four characters from Mark 14:1-9—the woman, Simon the Leper, a disciple, and Jesus—and to enter the reading of the scripture from that unique perspective. After listening to God in the Word, they were then invited to share with one another in their small groups. It was powerful to witness and people really opened up to one another during this experience.

Transitioning from this time in the Word, the class was led to an art room with various supplies, including paper products, paint, clay, yarn, and markers. Participants were instructed to spend time in silence with God, listening to Him answer the question: Where do you, God, want to take me from here? They were instructed to use whatever art supplies they wished to share where God wanted to take them from there. Each person then shared with the entire class what they created and how God spoke to them. The revelations of God's direction were astonishing and beautiful. For many, using the art supplies in this process opened them up to share spiritually and to go deeper with God. The day concluded with the spiritual companions anointing each other with olive oil and praying for one another in affirmation of the specific direction God showed He was leading them in. The group gathered for one last time in conversational prayer before dismissing at 5:30 p.m.

On the next Thursday evening, following the final spiritual retreat, a focus group was conducted with the class participants in order to gauge their own perceived spiritual growth (*has devotional life increased?*) and mission orientation (*has involvement in ministry increased?*). This focus group helped shed light on the questions of how people experience change and transformation, and if members identify themselves as more missional after an intentional discipleship process. There was great discussion about how their lives had changed since they began the journey 12 weeks prior. The feedback given in this focus group will be part of the evaluation we will turn to in the next chapter.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

In conclusion, through study of the scriptures, current literature, and the experiential learning model, in addition to guidance gained through interviews with

pastors who emphasize discipleship, it is seen by the researcher that a discipleship process in the local church is most effective when it utilizes an experiential learning model which equally values the knowing, being, and doing aspects of faith development.

In summary, using this experiential discipleship process will:

1. Provide opportunity and freedom for individuals to connect with Jesus and build trust in Him. Through the devotional habits, the individual will learn to listen to God by connecting in personal relationship and being transformed in God's presence.
2. Develop community by teaching through one-on-one mentoring, small groups, and process orientation, which lay the groundwork for healthy relationships.
3. Coach, instruct, and inspire individuals to serve others and share Jesus in their sphere of influence.
4. Encourage individuals that transformation takes time—emphasizing the importance of abiding in Jesus throughout the transformation process.
5. Simplify the discipleship practice—by intentionally forming the devotional habits and teaching them to disciple others they know.

At the foundation of the discipleship process is the desire to create uninterrupted, distraction-free space for the Holy Spirit to work in the lives of participants. As each of the above points are included in the discipleship process, through prayer and the leadership of the Holy Spirit, individuals will experience change in their lives and will begin to live missionally in the world. Inward transformation leads to mission orientation.

The implications of this assertion are enormous. If the local church focuses on discipleship by intentionally creating a place for people to be transformed by Jesus, live

in meaningful community, and engage in service, individuals will naturally develop a mission-orientation which will move evangelism forward as their own faith becomes more vibrant.

## CHAPTER 5

### OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION

#### **Introduction**

When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart. . . . Love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30, 31). It is these two inseparable demonstrations of love that this discipleship curriculum has sought to uphold and teach in an experiential manor. The love of God seen in the devotional life, and the love of neighbor, as manifested in acts of mission and service to others. Surely, a study of this type has left more questions unanswered than it has provided answers. Still, it has been successful in obtaining the answer to the foundational question, namely, that intentionally creating and implementing an experiential discipleship process curriculum does increase participant devotional life and mission involvement in the local church.

From this point, more study remains to be done. Areas that necessitate further study include testing the length of the discipleship process, the size and make-up of the group, future hands-on applications to learning in the area of mission and service, applying the curriculum and teaching methods in other geographical contexts, and exploring other resources and materials for effectively training participants to in turn become disciplers of others.

A discussion of each of the above areas of further study will be addressed below, in addition to a review of the discipleship curriculum development process, exploration

of how people change, essential elements to a discipleship process, evidence of change among the test group, and change in the life of the pastor through the implementation process.

### **Project Summary**

During the process of creating and implementing the discipleship curriculum, which forms the foundation for this project, various methods of discipleship were considered for use in the experiential curriculum. The goal was clear: to engage participants from the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in an experiential discipleship curriculum in the context of community, with the desire to see an increase in devotional life and mission involvement.

A 12-week discipleship process was created and introduced to a class of 13 members from Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church. The target audience was anyone who wanted to experience growth in their relationship with God. The individuals that signed up were diverse in age, race, gender, and education. They also evidenced diversity in spiritual maturity, including newly baptized believers, members not yet engaged in ministry, and long-time members who wanted to grow in their relationship with God.

This group went through the 12-week discipleship process, which included an all-day spiritual retreat at the beginning, 10 sessions meeting once per week for two hours, and concluded with a second all-day spiritual retreat.

A qualitative research approach was chosen due to the fact that spiritual growth is primarily determined by the perception of the participant themselves. The two objective measures of growth—has devotional life increased; has mission involvement



increased?—were determined through subjective personal analysis on the part of the participant-reflection on their growth through the discipleship process. This information was obtained through a two-hour focus group interview as the end of the 12-week discipleship process. The data being attained in this way eliminated misinterpretation of questions, allowed participants to clarify any misunderstandings, and gave the researcher the opportunity to probe participants for further understanding and detail regarding the change they experienced (Simon & Goes, 2013). The trustworthiness of the statements made by participants was made more certain by the environment of confidentiality and safety, which characterized the group from the first day.

Even though the study was done with a test group of 13 participants from Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, this study holds potential for transferability to other congregations in a diversity of contexts. It is hoped that this curriculum will be applied in other contexts in the future.

This curriculum was researched, developed, and implemented to discover the answer to the question: Would an experiential, discipleship curriculum executed in the context of community, increase participant devotional practice and mission involvement in the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church? The answer is yes. Yet, the project's focus reveals that it does not answer several other important questions pertaining to this area of research. First, it does not show which curriculum is best for discipling members, but simply shows that the curriculum written and implemented worked to the degree expressed by the test group participants. Second, it does not allow for the pastor/facilitator to engage the participants in hands-on experiences in mission. Involvement in mission and service was done independently, outside of the classroom

context. Application in both areas of ministry and service in a supervised context are needed for future executions. Third, it does not outline the need of instruction that engages different learning styles, and how those principles might increase effectiveness in learning and retention of the experience, if applied to the discipleship process curriculum. Future implementation, for example, could make use of visual presentations and class handouts.

### **The Spiritual Transformation Process: How do People Experience Change?**

How do people change? This is an important question, particularly pertinent to the evaluation of a discipleship process. The only way that lasting change takes place in people's lives is through the power of the Holy Spirit. Kidder (2011) emphasizes the importance of the Holy Spirit's role saying, "The greatest need of the church today is not more programs or techniques or books or seminars—it is to be filled, guided, moved, and controlled by the Holy Spirit" (p. 75). The discipleship process is intended to intentionally assist individuals in their formation into Christlikeness, so that the individual life is spent in ways that God desires, being completely controlled by God. The ultimate goal of a discipleship process is to structure space for the Holy Spirit to bring about transformation in the lives of individuals. This work is dependent on God and cannot be manufactured or systematized. Are there essential elements which create an environment that facilitates change? Are there things the local church can do to aid growth in the lives of believers, and make space for the Holy Spirit to work in their lives?

## **Five Essentials for a Discipleship Process**

In the course of implementing this discipleship process, five elements emerged as essentials to a discipleship process that leads to transformation in individuals' lives.

These five are: (a) a focus on Jesus, (b) the experience of the leader, (c) a healthy community, (d) a closed group setting, and (e) a long-approach to the discipleship journey. These will be expanded on below.

First, in order to bring about change, the discipleship process must be centered on a relationship with Jesus, the Living Word of God, as understood through the written Word of God. The focal point of discipleship is Jesus. As with the original apostles, disciples of today are invited to follow Jesus and participate in His work in the world. In order for transformation to take place, the centrality of Jesus and a relationship with Him must be maintained as the focus of discipleship. The transformational process is one of a heart relationship with God, rather than a head knowledge about God.

A second essential component is the experience of the leader facilitating, -- setting the tone for the discipleship process. Leaders must go through the process themselves, before and during the journey with others, knowing they cannot lead someone else where they have not been. Hull (2006) rightly states that "the most powerful aspect of leading is modeling" (p. 238). Ogden (2007), quoting Richards (1975) states, "Neither coercion nor rewards shape human behavior as much as a 'motivated attempt to resemble a specific person'" (p. 11). The leader must be someone that realizes her own dependence on God and is willing to be a model, by the grace of God, of what the life of a disciple looks like. Rather than being a person with all the answers, the leader must be someone who is appropriately vulnerable with her own relationship with God,

and willing to sit with struggle, unanswered questions, and frustration on the part of participants. As the leader becomes more comfortable with not answering people's questions all the time, the participants can learn to trust in God themselves. This in turn requires the leader to form an even deeper trust in God in order to consistently point back to God as the only One to be sought. The leader also sets the tone for the safety of the environment, which determines to a large degree the growth that takes place within the group.

The third factor, the soil in which transformation grows, is healthy community. Community must consist of relationships characterized by honesty, vulnerability, and mutual accountability. Churches can often have a great number of people in attendance on a weekend, yet offer little depth of relationships, namely, because there is no time or place for substantial relationships to form. Still, what people are hungering for most is community. A discipleship process allows people to experience transformation in their lives, largely due to how the Holy Spirit works through the community it roots them to. As participants learn to be honest, vulnerable, and accountable to one another, they are able to carry those qualities into their relationship with God.

A fourth, and related, characteristic that assists in building transformational relationships is the discipleship group being a closed group; a group whose members remain consistent throughout the entire journey. Group members make up a covenant with one another to be present each week, and hold each other accountable to be there. One participant mentioned that the time spent with the same group of people allowed for the group to go deep, beyond the superficial. This intimacy in the group occurs when trust forms through sustained experience with one another.

The final feature of discipleship groups that influence change is that they instill in participants a long approach to the spiritual journey. Walshe (2011) aptly points out, “You cannot sit in the presence of God without being changed. You may feel like nothing is happening, but it is—even if imperceptible to you at the time.” A discipleship process is not a certificate to be earned or something to be checked off a spiritual “to do” list, but is instead an ongoing, journey-oriented approach to life. The participant is invited to walk with Jesus and join Him in His work, trusting that “He who started the work will carry it to completion” (Phil 1:6). This process-oriented approach encourages patience in the participant, towards themselves and others. It revitalizes the need to continue on in prayer, Bible study, and service, even if the participant cannot discern the difference it is making in their life. Change takes time, and patience.

In conclusion, the elements necessary for change and transformation through a discipleship process are: a focus on Jesus Christ as the center of the process; a leader who has experienced what they are seeking to facilitate; healthy community characterized by honesty, vulnerability, and mutual accountability; a closed group, and finally, patience with the change process itself.

### **Transformation in the Devotional Lives in Discipleship Group Participants**

During a two-hour focus group that was conducted at the conclusion of the 12-week process, participants were able to identify their own spiritual growth (*has devotional life increased?*) and rise in mission orientation (*has involvement in ministry increased?*). All group members stated that they had experienced an increase in

devotional life and ministry involvement (see Appendix B for full transcript). The question of mission orientation will be addressed more fully in the next section. It is important to note insights gained from their reflections and comments, which give evidence of transformation in their lives.

*Integration* : A 27-year-old male participant described his experience this way: “This just totally transformed my walk with God. . . . It was so good to have the creative expressions enter my devotional life. . . . I talk to God about everything now.” For this participant in particular, his life had been somewhat compartmentalized—a creative visual arts career, and his spiritual life remaining in separate categories. During the discipleship process he was encouraged to bring all of himself into his relationship with God, which for him included drawing his prayers, responding to God’s Spirit by creating with clay, and journaling his thoughts and experiences alongside sketches.

*Slowing Down*: A 53-year-old female participant confessed, “I’m always running around, but God really slowed me down through this process. It was wonderful to stop and reflect on the Scripture.” The taste of slowing down was sweet to her, and now she describes a greater longing for being alone with God.

*Suffering and community*: A 29-year-old female participant expressed the change in her relationship to suffering, and the church community. She describes that “there were trials in my life during this process, but I didn’t feel alone in them, I shared them with others. It actually felt like less of a trial, even though the circumstances didn’t change, because I had people that cared and I understood more about God’s care for me.” Through opening up to others, this person felt the burden was lighter, and she was more closely bonded to the community.

In response to the question, *What has changed in your devotional life as a result of this discipleship process*, one participant stated, “Now, when I surrender things to God I actually feel peace. Before, it was me telling myself that I am at peace, but now it’s God telling me that I am at peace.”

Another participant confessed, “A lot of my prayers before were focused on me and life, what I need to do. But this has helped me to focus more on praise in my prayer life. It’s great to have focus on God and who He is.” This shift in focus in the participant’s prayer life led to an experience of greater intimacy with God.

As participants reflected on their experience in the class, one factor that emerged as one of the primary catalysts for growth was community; the way the group members interacted and shared life together. Person after person confessed that a significant benefit of the process was the group itself. A 26-year old male participant stated, “I think one of the greatest blessings was the time I had with my spiritual companion.” A 65-year-old female participant admitted, “I fight against intimacy because I don’t like getting close to people. I don’t like getting close to people because I don’t like getting hurt. . . . This process just took all of that fight away.” She was able to realize the difference in her closeness to others and her reaction to them because of the community process.

Participants expressed feeling less isolated on Sabbath mornings when the church gathers, because they now knew people more closely, and were likewise known by others. Members were now more than smiling faces wishing them a “Happy Sabbath,” and were instead people with back stories and depth.

Participants responded with sadness that the group was ending after the 12 weeks together. They wanted the process to continue and many commented that they thought 12

weeks was a long time to commit at the beginning of the process, but after experiencing the group they now felt the timeframe was shorter than they desired. The group members who completed the 12-week discipleship process at Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced the transforming power of the Holy Spirit through community.

In summary, participants expressed that the discipleship process helped them to: deepen their intimacy and trust with other believers; experience a greater frequency in their praise and prayer life; renew their devotion to God; slow down and spend time with God in His Word; change their perspective on facing trials and struggle; and to step outside their comfort zone to serve and bless others. They got a taste of the sweetness of God's Presence. God used this process to strengthen their devotion to Jesus and relationship with Him. It increased their love for others, which resulted in a more missionally-oriented life. It is to this theme that we now turn our attention.

### **Defining Mission Orientation**

The three chief missional outcomes in the participant group that resulted from focusing on a process of discipleship are in the areas of: identity, belonging, and mission. Identity pertains to the character—attending to the transformation into Christ-likeness in the believer. Belonging relates to the connection between the believer and the body of Christ. Mission encompasses the foundational shift in priorities and focus in the life of the believer that comes as a direct result of personal metamorphosis, that is, the work of the Holy Spirit.

In the discipleship process, God does what only God is able to do in the life of the believer; God brings about change in identity and greater belonging to the body. As this transformation of character occurs, the participant becomes more Christ-like in their way



of living. Mission, then, is a natural byproduct of identity and belonging, as God teaches followers how to care for others as God does. God pours love into the heart of the disciple, and the disciple then develops a passion to make other disciples. The process of discipleship is the catalyst for change in people's lives, such that they are no longer Christians in name only, but instead truly become followers of Jesus Christ who are living out the mission of God's Kingdom in this world.

The core of discipleship is following the example of Jesus. In studying the life of Christ, His spirituality and missional living are seen in ways that 21st Century disciples are able to emulate through the discipleship process. At the heart of the Christian mission is the imperative to make disciples. Actually, the command to make disciples was the first mission given to the church by Christ. In applying that mission to the church today, Chan (2012) says, "Making disciples is far more than a program. It is the mission of our lives. It defines us. A disciple is a disciple maker" (p. 31). As the believer embraces their calling as a disciple of Christ, they likewise more fully live out the mission to make disciples.

### **Transformation in Mission Orientation in Discipleship Group Participants**

The question must be asked, as an outcome of implementing a discipleship process at Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, did a greater mission orientation occur as a natural result in the lives of participants?

Throughout the focus-group interview, discipleship participants expressed a change in their commitment to and participation in the mission of Christ. One of the most profound changes was in the life of a 72-year-old male, who recounted,

Before I started this discipleship process, I didn't pray in public. I guess I was looking at self. I promised God that I'm going to start praying in church. I've got to let God take complete control of my life and quit thinking that I've got to prove something to others—instead I'll just be myself and He'll do the rest.

This participant entered into a new-found freedom that he affirms, has persisted to this day, three years later. Certainly, discovering their spiritual gifts and affirming one another in those gifts was a highlight of the discipleship process. However, it did not stop with simply identifying their gifts. Many in the group went on to try new ministries where they could put into practice those gifts, including ministry coordinating, prayer ministry, media ministry, leading a class on how to give a Bible study, and hospitality ministry—applying missional living to their own lives and context.

The transformation in participants' lives is able to be further understood through the following encounter. Two discipleship class participants recounted that they were able to see the growth God had done in their lives through an occurrence that took place at the church about one month after the discipleship class concluded. There was an event at the church aimed at reaching those who are not a part of the church. The group was gathered together, and the person who was going to pray with the church volunteers before the program, as well as welcome and pray with the community guests to start the program was not there. Formerly, both individuals were afraid to pray with others, especially in public. Describing this incident, they said they looked at one another and said three simple words, "Remember discipleship class." Instead of leaving to find someone else, one of them prayed with the volunteers before the event and the other welcomed and prayed with the gathered community guests. This was a radical change in their lives! They knew that it was no longer about them, but instead it was about God,

and their closeness to Him meant they were more willing to be used by God in that moment.

As Hull (2006) summarizes, “Evangelism will result from proper discipleship. The lack of passion for the Great Commission comes from a lack of character—a lack of spiritual depth—rather than a lack of strategic vehicles for reaching others” (Hull, 2006, p. 233). It is the conviction of this researcher that as the church focuses on discipling members in the character of Christ, spiritual depth will increase, and a passion for the Great Commission will result, as has been seen so far in the lives of the sample group participants.

### **Transformation in the Life of the Pastor: My Story<sup>1</sup>**

In the process of implementing this discipleship curriculum, I realized my own addiction to seeing change in a short amount of time. For instance, at the first discipleship class I had prepared many pages of teaching notes and a long list of content to cover. As the session progressed, I discovered that I was approaching the discipleship process as if all that participants needed in order to experience change was the right information, *then* they would have a stronger relationship with Jesus! The key mistake was this: I was acting as if information about a relationship with Jesus would develop a relationship with Jesus in the participants. What God started to make clear 30 minutes into the first class, and affirmed in subsequent classes, was that transformation in the life of His followers’ takes place experientially, in a relationship with God and with other believers. This takes time. There are no shortcuts to the discipleship process. There is no quick and easy

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<sup>1</sup>Note: For the purposes of this section, the first-person voice will be utilized.

program to implement. Through experiencing a relationship with Christ and His followers, one-on-one, disciples are born.

God brought about dramatic change in my own life and ministry through this process. I would not say that I have it all figured out. In fact, I am now asking new questions while exploring what it means to focus on discipleship in the local church, and especially what my role is as pastor in this process. Still, even with more to learn, I can see that in heart and mind I have grown. Observable difference can be noted in the following areas.

*Delight in God:* I enjoy time in prayer and in the Word as one relating to a dear friend. I have loved God since the day I accepted Jesus as my Savior. Through this process, however, I learned new ways of relating to God that have made my experience with Him even richer. I love God and am even more rooted now in His love for me. One key is that I have a deeper understanding that God does not love me because of what I do for Him or how I perform. He simply loves me, and I am free to love Him in response. It is a privilege to bring this personal experience into the process of discipleship with others.

*Goals in ministry:* Clearly laying out what God put on my heart gave greater clarity to my ministry. The vision I wrote in my Ministry Development plan is now almost completely fulfilled, and that which did not exist, now exists: an internship for young adults, a church plant, ministry houses, and growth in the Pennsylvania Youth Challenge team. This was, in part, due to the clarity of vision facilitated by writing it all in detail. I can now see God made it happen! I found that my relationship with God rooted me so I was able to move forward in taking risks for God's Kingdom,

experiencing success and failure knowing that it is not about me, but about the greater purpose of God.

*Focus on Discipleship:* As a pastor, implementing a discipleship process provided a way to focus on discipling and growing people in Christ. Through this process, I became convinced that everything else I do will be forgotten—programs, sermons, and board meetings. Yet, those individuals that I have taught to connect with God, who have discovered how to pray, listen, and read the Word, who have discovered their spiritual gifts and put them into practice, will continue to bear fruit in their lives in the years to come. There are so many things pulling for my attention as a pastor. Discipling others and teaching them to disciple is what God commands me to do with my time. This process has brought focus, passion, and life to my heart and ministry.

*Blessed by Community:* More than ever before, this process revealed the importance of shared journey. The cohort study group which I was a part of was a place to experientially learn vulnerability and trust through the Presence of God with others. I had no idea when I started this journey the painful, personal suffering that would be experienced concurrent with this implementation process. Interactions with my spiritual companion, as well as time spent in the Doctor of Ministry work group were crucial for my spiritual health and healing. Through it all, God was faithful and constant in Presence, and ministered through the entire cohort. It was a profound and sacred experience to be used in other people's lives and to see how God used them to bless my life. Through this personal experience in community—one-on-one, in small group, and in the larger group—it became clear that it is absolutely essential that discipleship on the local church level be facilitated in the context of community. Community is how we grow, learn, and

heal. Through this difficult blessing of vulnerability and pain, I was able to recognize some ways to lead others where God is taking me.

*New Understanding:* There are many reasons for the inner strength that I possess. Chalk it up to a combination of God-given personality, emerging from a lineage of strong people, and going through tough situations. Certainly serving as a pastor in a denomination which does not fully recognize and affirm women in this role develops inner strength. Through this Doctor of Ministry process, God has been teaching me dependence, how to lean into His strength. This is indeed a great paradox, for strength and weakness are both gifts in God's hand. I am learning that since God directs my life, I do not get to decide when I am strong or when I am weak. The role of the disciple is to surrender self to God and let God decide what is needed for the glory of the Kingdom. I now define strength as surrender, in vulnerability, to God and to others. Strength is willingness to give myself with abandon to God and God's purpose and perspective. Whether that looks like steel-clad faith or brokenness is up to God to decide.

*No Shortcuts:* Through this process, I discovered my own desire for a short cut. As a pastor I was still searching for a 'magic bullet' that would rapidly change members into Christlikeness and grow the church numerically. I wanted transformation in a rush. God's invitation was for me to abide and let God do the work. There is no shortcut to growth. Change takes time. What matters most is making time in community for people to encounter the Living God, which results in transformation. This is something only the Holy Spirit can work in the life. I, as pastor, can facilitate transformation by creating opportunities where people can experience God; however, there is no shortcut to the slow

change that comes by consistently being in God's presence. I have discovered peace in God's promise to finish the work that has been started in each person (Phil 1:6).

The outcome of this journey was more lasting, deep, and life-altering than I expected. I set out to create an experiential discipleship process for the local church, facilitated in community that inspires an increase in devotional life and mission involvement. By God's grace, this was accomplished. In addition to this, I am changed, and deeply grateful for what God has been doing in my life, heart, and leadership through this Doctor of Ministry journey. I desire this change to permeate all aspects of my ministry as I continue growing and leading from a place of dependence on Jesus Christ.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several areas that this study has not explored, which are essential to understanding and implementing a discipleship process in the local church. This study has worked to verify the need for a discipleship process in the local church, and to measure the effectiveness of an experiential learning curriculum, nurtured in the context of small group community. Through this study, it was seen with the sample group that when an intentional discipleship process is facilitated, the devotional life and mission involvement of members does indeed increase. Study of program adjustments and areas of further research will be advantageous to the continued refinement of the discipleship process for the local church.

### **Curriculum Adjustments Following Year One**

This discipleship process was first implemented in the spring of 2012. One year later, a second discipleship process was facilitated at the church with a new group of

participants (spring 2013). A third process is currently scheduled to take place in the spring of 2014. In the year following the pilot Discipleship Class, there were three adjustments made to the implementation of the process. Subsequent years will continue to include evaluation and adaptation of the process as necessary.

First, the number of participants was changed from 14 to 12. Though a small adjustment, this was in an effort to increase the intimacy of the group size, and create greater accountability in attendance.

Second, the 2-hour small group meeting which replaced one discipleship class session was omitted. Instead of meeting off-site in their small group of four for the whole session, all participants met together and afterward broke into their small groups at a later point in the meeting. This aided in full participation by all members by encouraging timeliness, as well as provided a way for questions about process to be answered by the facilitator.

Third, more frequent e-mail reminders and text messages were sent to class participants to encourage continued engagement in the process throughout the week.

The final impact of these three changes has not yet been fully measured, however preliminary evidence is positive.

#### Areas for Further Research

The areas which necessitate further research and testing pertain to: the length of the process, the size and make-up of the group, the level of involvement in hands on-service, and how to train and release participants to become disciplers of others themselves.



## **Length of the Process**

The length of time given to the process will be further investigated and tried. The original 12-week length was selected for this discipleship journey as a manageable length of time that people can commit to, while still allowing for growth and depth of relationship to form among participants. Hull (2006) states that groups need to meet for longer than the average 40-day group trend in order to form together as a group (p. 228). The 12-week time doubles that 40-day time period. This length is also supported by the witness of practical ministry done by Watson (2013), whose groups average 10-weeks, and Vatel (2013) whose groups last for an average of 8-10 weeks (Watson & Vatel, personal communication). Of the groups run by Stanley and Willits (2004), one is a 13-week small-group environment called 'Starting Point', which is a discipleship group for new members or those just coming back to church. The 12-week length did afford a good amount of time for bonding, teaching, and forming new spiritual habits.

Though there was good reason for selecting the 12-week length for this project, other researchers indicate that a longer time as a discipleship group is preferred over the shorter length of time. Ogden (2007) recommends that discipleship groups stay together through at least a one-year of process with one another. In addition to the shorter discipleship group mentioned above, Stanley and Willits (2004) keep participants in their community discipleship groups consistent through an 18-24 month covenant. Hull (2006) recognizes that groups become most effective around six months, or at their twenty-fifth meeting (p. 228). With this weight of evidence, I would like to try a longer period of time for a later iteration of the discipleship process implementation to note any differences.

## **Size and Make-up of the Group**

The size and make-up of the group will be considered. Open invitation and voluntary sign-up for the discipleship group produced a beautifully diverse group for the first round of implementation. The group was varied in race, age, gender, and socio-economic status, as well as maturity of faith and relationship with Christ. Hull (2006) recommends that the optimal start to discipleship through small groups is through a prototype group, made up of individuals identified for their character, suitability, availability, and faithfulness (pp. 242-243), who are personally invited to be a part of the group, and subsequently considered as leaders for future groups. With this prototype group of potential leaders, the pastor is able to model what it looks like to lead in prayer, biblical discussion, and caring for needs in the group (Hull, 2006, p. 230). The desire is to maintain the diversity referenced above, while being intentional about recruiting leaders who would then be able to replicate the process of discipleship through small community groups. The leaders must experience this closeness and transformation through community themselves, going through the entire process led by the pastor before they are able to lead in that process with other believers. This is the approach that I recommend for further research in this context.

Regarding group size, the first discipleship journey in 2012 involved 13 members. The second discipleship journey in 2013 had 12 participants. These selections fall within the recommendations of Stanley and Willits (2004) who use groups of eight individuals or six couples (p. 120), 12 people. Ogden (2007) on the other hand, recommends groups of three to four as the best possible size for discipling. I recommend a prototype group of eight leaders be established for the next process to see if the smaller size will allow for

deeper bonding in relationship, and therefore greater change. It is believed that the smaller size will also contribute to a higher level of timeliness and faithfulness in attendance, because one person's presence is greatly missed at that size.

### **Hands-on Service**

By testing a longer process of discipleship, the group would then have time to become involved in hands-on service during the discipleship process. With the two previous implementations, participants were encouraged to get involved at a higher level in service and witnessing, however these opportunities were not done together as a discipleship group. For a future group, involving participants in hands-on service would be a benefit that furthers the experiential learning model into the area of service and participation in witnessing.

### **Disciples Making Disciples**

The best possible methods for moving people from participants in the discipleship process to disciplers of others must be explored and tried. As stated above, Hull (2006) recommends creating a prototype discipleship group made up exclusively of leaders. This group would meet together for a set period of time, which would be determined based on the length of time the groups will meet when they facilitate. If a 16-week group length will be used, then the leaders group will meet for 16-weeks. Following the discipleship journey with the leaders, they would each begin their own discipleship groups of 2-8 individuals. The pastor would then continue to meet with the leaders group, even as they moved forward with facilitating their own groups. It is believed this is a healthy model

that would continue to provide support to the leaders, while spreading the reach and influence of the discipleship process. Chan (2012) and Ogden (2007) have structured their recent books in a way that allows discipleship groups, or triads, to go through the book together, making the discipleship process structured and simple for the leader. The goal of each participant going through the process with at least two other individuals, is a plan that appears to be doable for future leaders.

The above four recommendations will allow further refinement of the discipleship process at the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church, and will potentially open the door for it to become even stronger.

### **Conclusions**

This journey began with the goal of establishing a discipleship curriculum for the local congregation that would both increase devotional life and increase missional involvement. The outcome of this journey was much more positive than even originally anticipated. In writing and implementing this curriculum, it soon became clear that though good content is essential to the discipleship process, discipleship curriculum does not have to be fancy or complicated in order to bring about change. In fact, the opposite is true: simplicity in applying the biblical principles of discipleship brings about a key factor of accessibility making the process all the more approachable for participants. The invitation of God through the Scripture is to form habits of seeking God in prayer, reading God's Word, worship, witnessing, and confession, among other practices, all in the context of the community of Christ. In short, the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) highlights the importance of developing the practice of being with God and obeying His voice, and teaching others to do the same. By its very nature, discipling is something that

is modeled and lived out in relationship as a primary way of teaching (1 Cor 11; Phil 3:17).

It is surprising, however, that even in the simplicity of the command to make disciples, it is often overlooked by the church. Instead, programs, events, and even information-packed discipleship Bible studies become substitutes for relational, experiential disciple-making. The church is in danger of missing the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) in favor of a “faster” route to church growth. The biblical witness and the experience of this research attest: true and lasting growth comes from the transforming power of God through the Holy Spirit, realized in the community of believers. The goal of the church, and more specifically local church leadership, is to create a space where people can come in contact with God.

In review, what is required to move a church toward a focus on discipleship? How can churches transfer the insights gained from this research in their context? First, it is imperative that a shift toward discipleship in the local church be unashamedly centered on Jesus Christ, experientially discipling members in both how to pursue an intimate relationship with Him and how to join Him in mission and service. Second, discipleship requires a focus on people. Discipleship is not another program of the church, something members can check off on their spiritual “to do” list. Instead it is the essential process of transformation into Christlikeness that takes place in relationship with God and other believers. Finally, the pastor and church leaders must be willing to think small, in order to see big change. Experiencing God in a discipleship process with other believers holds powerful, world-shifting moments for participants. Change does happen, and this change is a catalyst for Christ-centered living. However, this change takes time. Leaders must be

willing to take a micro approach as opposed to a macro approach to change and church growth. Think first about the individual. As one small group experiences change, the ripple effect moves on to affect the entire congregation.

The goal is to form disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples—spreading the passion, love, and service of Christ. Barna (2001) appeals, “When we get our priorities right, everything falls into line. True discipleship must be a priority within the church. In fact, without a heavy emphasis upon discipleship, there is no church . . . never, never stop molding people into Christlikeness” (p. 162). As Jesus Himself said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). The desire of Jesus was that His followers would become like Him, their teacher. Then, in turn, others would join the ranks as His disciples, believing in Him through their message (John 17:20), disciplined in the way of Jesus by other disciples who followed Him.

While there is much more to be understood about the best way to implement a discipleship process in the local church, this project lays an important foundation for future development. It demonstrates that when local church leaders intentionally disciple members, a devotional life and participation in the mission of Christ increases. Through the experiential discipleship process, members become more like Christ as they learn how to love God with all their heart and their neighbors as themselves (Mark 12:30-31). As they follow Christ, they learn to disciple others in the same way (Matt 28:18-20). This is what will change the world, one person at a time.

APPENDIX A

A DISCIPLESHIP CURRICULUM

**Discipleship Class**

Thursday, March 1, 2012

7:00-9:00pm

| Title                                  | Time    | Teaching Notes   |
|--|---------|--|
| 2 Worship Songs & Prayer over 2 people | 20 min. | Worship together as a group is essential   |
| Group Ground Rules                     | 5 min.  | Teaching about how to be in a group - confidentiality, trust, non-judgment                                       |
| Devotional Reading of Scripture        | 20 min. | Individual time with the Word of God   |
| Small Group Time                       | 20 min. | Time for groups of 4 to discuss what they've just heard from God and share what He revealed to them in His Word. |
| Spiritual Companions                   | 15 min. | Explain what they are and have the group choose their own spiritual companion.                                   |
| Preview                                | 15 min. | Explaining assignments for March 8 and 15. Introducing outline for the next weeks.                               |
| Prayer of Commitment                   | 5 min.  | Committing to be His fully.  |

**Teaching Notes:**

Introduction - Welcome

**Ground Rules** - Confidentiality, trust, non-judgment, not interrupting another person's process.

## Learning Styles

People learn differently.

You bring with you a preferred learning style.

This is why our experiences will vary, in order to engage different learning styles.

### 4 Different Learning Styles

#### Analytic Learner

Learns by listening and watching

Likes to be tested by answering questions

Likes books

#### Innovative Learner

Learns best in a warm caring environment

Learns through creative expression

Learns by being involved

Puts themselves in someone else's situation and acts it out

Loves role plays and simulation games

Like expressing themselves

Relationships are important

Favorite questions, why or why not?

#### Common Sense Learner

Learn best by talking about things

Discussion, Induction, Tension, Questioning

#### Dynamic Learner

Learn by doing things by trial and error

Learn by experience

Learn by serving others

Learns by awareness of gifts

They need to be aware of their gifts and thus the best way to serve God

They enjoy being involved in community service and outreach projects

They love simulation games.

We will embrace the experiential approach to learning

“I remember better when I do it”

One knows rather than knows about,

Experiences are inductive rather than deductive,

Learning is direct rather than vicarious,

Participants discover meaning for themselves and validate their own experience.

Experiential learning is a relational experience.

Experiential Learning Cycle:

Experiencing—Gather data: study, explore, examine

Sharing—Share observations and reactions from Phase 1



Processing—Systematic examination of the shared experience, focus on the process.  
Generalizing—Connecting structured experiences to practical everyday life.  
Applying—Learning impacting behavior. Applying it to actual life situation.

**Knowing** - Cognitive (knowledge, understanding) Level

**Being** - Effective (attitude, heart) Level

**Doing** - Behavioral (practices, skills) Level

So what is Discipleship?

**Spiritual Formation** - Christian growth, discipleship, sanctification, devotional theology, devotional life, spiritual disciplines are all synonyms

Adventists are Christians.

Christians are *centered* in Jesus and have a *relationship* with Him.  
God is personal & loving and active in human life through Jesus & the Holy Spirit.  
God desires close communion through the means He provides.

“Give me the mountains,” Caleb says.

You were made for growth. You were made for conquest. You were not made to play as a spectator. You were made to live.

Discipleship

Discipleship... as devotion

Discipleship...as journey

Discipleship...as intentionality

Discipleship...as relational

Discipleship...as new perspective

Discipleship...as ‘exchanged life’

Discipleship...as abiding

Discipleship...as ‘Spirit imbued’ (to inspire or influence thoroughly; to pervade; to permeate or saturate...to permeate or influence as if by dyeing).

Discipleship...as learning

Discipleship...as transformational

Biblical Basis

Repentance is: a. The basic message of Jesus.

New Birth: See John 3 and the story of Nicodemus. Read *Desire of Ages* chapter 17. He did not need theoretical knowledge but a heart knowledge.

Result of all this is Assurance (see 1 John 5:13). All of the book is to make sure people Know.

Other results are that sin is renounced and love, humility, peace, and joy come in (see *Desire of Ages* on Nicodemus)

Spiritual Growth arises out of salvation. It's not getting away from salvation or growing beyond it but continuing to embrace it.

It is out of relationship with Jesus these changes come.

Spiritual Growth can be turned into the new legalism. Devotional life is not about earning salvation; it is about getting to know my Savior.

Ask: “\_\_\_\_\_ (name), you are wonderful. I have a question, do you know Jesus personally?”

Conversion and Grace are often taught as one of “the doctrines.” It is a core experience with God, a conversion experience! Do you have this experience?

For Adventists, often their faith leads them to spiritual pride.  
We must sense our own brokenness.

The question is, Do I want to be proud or broken?  
Do you want to be right or human?

First question is personal: Is this a reality for me? Do I have this assurance? What is going on in your heart?

Assessment question #1: Where do I stand?

Real theology alters our behavior.

Without this factor, accepting others is impossible.

“**Perception Check**” - With someone else, talk about your “light bulb” moments, learning experiences thus far.

Illustration:

Continuum - 1 through 10 (physically placed in the room)

“1” is information, “10” is relationship

Where would you place the “x” for Adventism?

Most people place us at a number 3.

Three main questions of Theology

Does God exist?

Is He Personal?

Does He and how does He work (or exist) in the world?

## Devotional Reading

Active desire is to prayerfully encounter God through attending to scripture.  
Devotional reading of Scripture requires an attentive attitude.  
It is aimed more at a growing relationship with God than just gathering information.  
Prayerfully dwelling on a passage of Scripture (1-3 verses).  
Reading not to master the text but be mastered by it.  
Staying with one text until the Lord prompts movement to another.  
Reading for depth, not breadth.  
Reading reflectively.  
We grow most by encouragement and affirmation.

### Experience 1: Jeremiah 33:3

Transformation never happens through my work but through grace.

Hand out a blank piece of paper  
Fold into three sections  
Write on the top third of the page:  
“Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know” (Jeremiah 33:3)

We don't go home alone. We go with God.  
He promises that everyday when we call to Him, He will tell us things we don't know.

First Part:           the word from the Lord  
Second Part:       my response  
Third Part:          listening to God, write what He says

Spend time in praise and adoration first.  
Then sit with the verse.  
Respond according to what the Lord shares.

## Small Group Time

Time for groups of 4 to discuss what they have just heard from God and share what He revealed to them in His Word.

## Spiritual Companions

Example what spiritual companions are, from the following notes. Participants choose their own spiritual companion of the same gender. This spiritual companion remains the same throughout the entire discipleship class.

## Spiritual Companions

**\* The supreme gift that anyone can give another is to help them live life, more aware of the 'Presence of God.'**

Transformation comes from the presence of God.

Spiritual companions accompany people on a journey that is made spiritual - not by their presence, but by 'the presence of God.'

They help us be aware of His Presence

They provide a climate of support and acceptance

Spiritual Companions:

Give encouragement as much as possible

Advice, once in awhile

Reproof, only when absolutely necessary

Judgment, never (no condemnation)

We grow most by encouragement and affirmation.

## **Guidelines**

Attend-

Focused attention

Non verbals - especially body language and tone of voice

Remember: body language (55%), tone of voice (38%) and content (7%)

Listening -

James 1:19 (Amplified) – "Let every man be quick to hear, a ready listener."

What do we mean listening?

When we are listening to another person we are not thinking about what we are going to say when they stop talking. We are concentrating on what's being said without judgment.

Solution.....Understanding

Don't assume

Rephrasing or reflecting (repeat in different words)

Clarify feelings

Stay on their agenda

## **Questions to Ask Your Spiritual Companion**

Are there specific questions they want to be asked each time?

### **Question #1:**

What do you think God has been trying to communicate to you recently?

Discipleship Retreat  
ABIDE & ADORE  
May 20, 10 am – 5 pm

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| 10:00 - 10:30am | Opening Prayer, Worship Songs, Orientation   |
| 10:30 - 12:00pm | Abide in Me (John 15)<br>Time outside, with journal, reflecting on Scripture   |
| 12:00 - 1:00pm  | Small group time<br>What did God share with you?   |
| 1:00 - 2:00pm   | Lunch  |
| 2:00 - 2:45pm   | Adoration (Mark 14:1-9)<br>Time in the story of Scripture<br>Choose one of 4 characters  |
| 2:45 - 3:15pm   | Small group time<br>What was God speaking to you through this story of adoration?  |
| 3:15 - 4:00pm   | Where does God want to take you from here?<br>In this art room, using whatever supplies you want to use,<br>I invite you to answer this question about where God is leading<br>you in your future. |
| 4:00 - 5:00pm   | Group closing time<br>What would you like this group to pray for you about?<br>Anointing your spiritual companion in affirmation & prayer.<br>Prayer for One another<br>Group Prayer               |

Leader Notes:

John 15

Posters across the property with different verses and sections from this chapter.  
You are invited to take your journal and reflect on each one.

Mark 14:1-9

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

Time in the Story

Woman

Simon the Leper

A disciple

Jesus

1. Reflect on what it would have been like to be your character
2. Are there any similarities between you and your character?
3. Is there an invitation here from God?

**Discipleship Class**  
**Personal Assessment**

To be done March 8, 2012

8. Where do you stand with God?
  
9. Talk about three major areas of brokenness that you experience in your life.
  
10. Briefly describe your current devotional life.
  
11. Discover your Myers-Briggs Personality Type by taking the inventory at the following website: <http://www.humanmetrics.com/cgi-win/jtypes2.asp>

**Discipleship Process**  
**Pastor Interview Questions**

Tara J. VinCross

1. How does your church define discipleship?
2. What does a disciple look like?
3. Do you have an intentional process of discipleship?
4. Do your church members know this process?
5. Has your church prioritized distinct practices (disciplines) that relate to the discipleship process?
6. How does your church measure maturity?
7. Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important to the local church understanding of discipleship?



## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP

#### **Discipleship Process Focus Group Questions**

Tara J. VinCross

1. Why did you choose to participate in the discipleship process?
2. How has this discipleship process helped your personal relationship with God to grow?
3. How has the discipleship process helped your prayer Life?
  - a. Do you talk to God more often now?
  - b. Do you talk to God about more personal things now?
4. How has the discipleship process helped other aspects of your devotional life?
  - a. Do you read your Bible more now?
  - b. Is the Bible more meaningful to you now?
5. What have you found about how your time talking to God and reading the Bible make it easier for you to reach out and help other people spiritually or in humanitarian ways? Can you give an example?
6. How has your involvement in the discipleship process affected your involvement in ministry?
  - a. Do you have a better understanding of yourself and your spiritual gifts?  
Please Explain.
  - b. Do you know how to utilize those gifts in the mission of God? Examples?
7. How has your involvement in the discipleship process changed your understanding and experience with community? Please explain.
8. How has being a part of the discipleship process affected the way you feel about church?
9. How has being a part of the discipleship process affected the way you feel about going through trials and suffering?
10. What should your leader do differently in the future in how she teaches about having a strong relationship with God; about how to pray, read the Bible, etc.?
11. What aspects of the discipleship process most enriched your life? Why?
12. Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important about this project?

### Come Alive - Discipleship Class

| Date                                  | Time   | Topic  |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--|
| March 1, 2012                         | 2 hrs. | Relationship with God, The Gospel, Holy Spirit, and introducing guidelines for Living in Community                               |
| March 8, 2012<br>(at home assignment) | 2 hrs. | Relationship with God, The Cost of Discipleship  |
| March 15, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Relationship with God, The Cost of Discipleship, Living in Community   |
| March 22, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Overview of Devotional Practices, Living in Community  |
| March 29, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Devotional Practices: Praise, Living in Community  |
| April 5, 2012                         | 2 hrs. | Devotional Practice: Prayer and Meditation on Scripture, Living in Community   |
| April 12, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Relationship with God, Devotional Practice: Listening to God, Living in Community  |
| April 19, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Ministry and Mission - Spiritual gifts, Living in Community, Personal Mission Statement.   |
| April 26, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Ministry and Mission, Spiritual Gifts, Living in Community   |
| May 3, 2012                           | 2 hrs. | Evangelism, Devotional Practices, Living in Community, and the Cost of Discipleship  |
| May 10, 2012                          | 2 hrs. | Ministry and Mission—Evangelism and Spiritual Gifts, Devotional Practices, Living in Community, Dealing with Suffering and Grief |

**Come Alive  
Discipleship Class**

Dates:

Thursday nights, March 1 - May 10, 2012, 7:00-9:00pm

Two, One-Day Spiritual Retreats - February 26 and May 20

Discipleship Class Fellowship Dinner - April 28 @ VinCross Home, 6:00-10:00pm

Focus Group - May 17, 2012 - 7:00-9:00pm

| Date                                  | Time   | Topics Covered   |
|---------------------------------------|--------|--|
| March 1, 2012                         | 2 hrs. | Worship songs and prayer<br>Teach group ground rules, what is discipleship, learning styles<br>Bible study on salvation "Where do I stand?"<br>Illustration: Relationship vs. information continuum<br>Devotional reading of Scripture and small group time:<br>Jeremiah 33:3 (folding the paper into three sections)<br>Spiritual companions - teaching and selection.<br>Opening Question: What do you think God has been trying to communicate to you recently?<br>Close with group conversational prayer |
| March 8, 2012<br>(at home assignment) | 2 hrs. | Time alone with God with the following Personal Assessment questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where do you stand with God?</li> <li>• Myers-Briggs Personality Type inventory</li> <li>• Describing current devotional life</li> <li>• Share three major areas of brokenness you have experienced in your life</li> </ul>   |
| March 15, 2012                        | 2 hrs. | Session with spiritual companion. Open with Prayer. Share with one another from the personnel assessment.<br><b>Personal Assessment:</b><br>Where do you stand with God?<br>Myers-Briggs Personality Type inventory<br>Describing current devotional life<br>Share three major areas of brokenness you have experienced in your life   |

| Date           | Time   | Topics Covered   |
|----------------|--------|--|
| March 22, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Question with spiritual companion: Where do you fit in the birth order of your family? What was that like for you as a child growing up?</li> <li>• Small group exercise: Mark 10:46-52. Getting into the character and stories of the Word. Reflect on what it would have been like to be your character. Are there any similarities between you and your character? Is there an invitation here from God?</li> <li>• Characters: Pharisee, Blind Bartimaeus, Disciple, One in the Crowd not healed</li> <li>• Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ul> |
| March 29, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <p>Opening Question with spiritual companion: Talk about the key people in your life—the big people that have made a difference</p> <p>Devotional Habits overview: habits of engagement and disengagement. Engaging and unplugging. The difference between Eastern meditation and Christian meditation</p> <p>Video: Louis Giglio <a href="http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKMw1nd1-EY">http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKMw1nd1-EY</a></p> <p>Devotional habit of PRAISE activity</p> <p>Share in small groups</p> <p>Close with group conversational prayer</p>  |
| April 5, 2012  | 2 hrs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opening Question with spiritual companion: When you hear the name God, what comes to your mind? (two or three characteristics) What is your understanding of the word gospel?</li> <li>• Teaching time on devotional habits: prayer and meditation</li> <li>• Group experience: How to meditate on the Word.</li> <li>• Small group time: Alone time with Psalm 147:10, 11. Ask: What does this say? How does it connect with my life? Is there an invitation? Then share about these as a small group.</li> <li>• Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ul>      |

| Date           | Time   | Topics Covered  |
|----------------|--------|---|
| April 12, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <p>Prayer with Spiritual companions. Pray for something about your spiritual journey. Example: God soften my heart</p> <p>Content vs. Process illustration. Assumptions, norm, experiential learning.</p> <p>Perception Check: What is the difference between content and process? What light bulbs came on during this group process?</p> <p>In small groups - Invitation: What is the invitation that God is offering to you tonight?</p> <p>That scale of 1 (Information) and 10 (Relationship)—we don't want to go to one side or the other, we want BOTH! Write down where you are right now.</p> <p>Close with group conversational prayer.</p> |
| April 19, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflective prayer time alone. Take time to think and pray. Let God lead because He knows. Share with spiritual companions</li> <li>• Spiritual Gifts Inventory</li> <li>• Personal Mission Statement</li> <li>• Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ul>  |
| April 26, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Opening Question with spiritual companion: Is there any area in your life where you are saying no to God? Is this a new struggle? Did you hold anything back when you first surrendered?</li> <li>2. Reflect on John 17</li> <li>3. Spiritual Gifts Inventory Posters—work individually and in small groups</li> <li>4. Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ol>   |
| May 3, 2012    | 2 hrs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prayer time as a group</li> <li>• Opening Question with spiritual companion. What was spirituality (religion) like in your home as a kid growing up? Whether you grew up in a Christian home or not, what was your experience?</li> <li>• Scripture Memorization Lesson and Practice</li> <li>• Exploring sources of brokenness</li> <li>• Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ul>   |

| Date         | Time   | Topics Covered  |
|--------------|--------|---|
| May 10, 2012 | 2 hrs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Worship Song and Prayer</li> <li>▪ Time in praise with your spiritual companion for what God has done in your spiritual journey</li> <li>▪ Finish group affirmation of spiritual gifts posters</li> <li>▪ Share memorized scriptures</li> </ul> <p>Emotionally Healthy/Unhealthy Spirituality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions with spiritual companion:<br/> What has God been saying through this journey?<br/> What was his main point for you from Feb. 26 to now?<br/> Why did God put you together with your spiritual companion? Why did he choose this person?</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Close with group conversational prayer</li> </ul> |

## **Come Alive Discipleship Class**

### Dates:

Thursday nights, March 1 - May 10, 2012, 7:00-9:00 pm, two, one-day orientation retreats - February 26 and May 20, and a Discipleship Class Fellowship Dinner - April 28 @ VinCross Home.

### Content:

1. Relationship with God - the Gospel, the role of the Holy Spirit, stewardship, and the devotional practices (prayer, Bible reading, Bible study, fasting, service, etc.)
2. Ministry and Mission - evangelism, spiritual gifts, and mission to the poor
3. The Cost of Discipleship - dealing with suffering, grief, and pain.

### Target Audience:

Anyone who wants to grow as a disciple of Jesus and grow in their overall relationship to God.

I am hoping to have newly baptized believers, members not yet engaged in ministry, long-time members who want to grow in their relationship with God or prayer life, feeling that their prayer life is dry or dead, members who feel burnt out and desire to feel connected with God again.... The list could go on and on.

### Process of Group formation:

Open Sign-Up. I will be advertising this class and anyone who wants to commit to the 10 Thursday nights and 2, one-day retreats is welcome to be a part of this class.

### Group Size:

My goal is a group of around 15-20

### Class Style:

The class will be a mixture of teaching time, hands-on practice, and small group discussion. Here will also be assignments given for participants to do between classes to practice what they are learning.

**Discipleship Class Focus Group Transcript**  
**May 17, 2012, 7:00-9:00 pm**

**Tara:** “*So, tell me first, why did you choose to participate in this discipleship process? Why did you choose to participate in this discipleship process?*”

**Graz:** “I think, I think a lot of us, probably, were surprised because our expectations were of something else. For most of the people that I talked to, they said the same thing: ‘I didn’t think it was going to be like this.’ So, you know, everybody had their own perspective and view about what they thought discipleship was all about. So, you go around the room, you may get, you know, 17 different, 15, 10 different views on it, so...”

**Tara:** “*So, what drew you first? What made you want to be a part of this?*”

**Graz:** “The word disciple.”

**Tara:** “*Mmm.... Okay*”

**Graz:** “So, you know that was a term that I wanted labeled across my forehead.”

(Scattered laughter)

**Tara:** “*Praise God.*”

**Graz:** “And, I mean, it’s simple as that. I said, ‘I thought about the disciples,’ and I’ve said, ‘Well, I want to be one and this is a way to find out what it’s like to be one, and so, that’s what I wanted.’”

**Tara:** “*That’s awesome.*”

**Laura:** “Being a disciple with Jesus teaching them. I’ve always wanted to learn. I’m a late bloomer in this Christianity. I don’t know, there’s so much to learn of what’s in the Bible; what God wants us to hear, wants us to know, wants us to share and I just want to be a disciple of His.”

**Tara:** “*Hmmm. Beautiful.*”

**Laura:** “And the class is not what I thought it was going to be.”

**Tara:** “*Tell me about that. What did you think it was going to be?*”

**Laura:** “I thought I was going to be a kid going to high school, with my little notebook and pen, and just taking notes, exams.... I thought it was a ‘class-class’ because you said it was a discipleship class, but it’s nothing from what I expected, but I’ve enjoyed it.”

**Alessandra:** “I thought it was going to be more of a Bible study that would focus on discipleship and that’s what drew me to it. I didn’t expect it to be like this.”

Jesse: “I felt like I read the story in the Bible; all of the characters were different and I’ve always wanted to be a disciple so I thought coming to the class and not knowing who would sign up—I thought I would fit in. And as I’ve said before, the second night, I didn’t think I made the right choice - I wanted to leave and say I can’t do this - but I’m so thankful that it wasn’t about taking notes and some other things like that, but it’s hands on. Because it’s so wonderful! I came in to be with the younger people, and now it’s like a family. The thing that I’ve learned is that I’m not afraid now. When I read the scripture now I look at it with a different view, you know, like it’s actually talking to me. I have read the same scripture before but now when I read it’s like He’s directing it to me. I’m glad I came.”

**Tara:** “*So the question is again, how did you choose to participate in the discipleship process?*”

**Caleb:** “I knew something about it, not all of it, but I knew that I was going to be on a journey with other people from Chestnut Hill and I was drawn into the idea of a



community. And I knew that there would be connections, and getting to know people better. What really motivated me to be a part of this is the spiritual journey and that we would be together and getting to know people better than I normally do.”

**Deanne:** “For me it’s because I like to learn about things from the Bible and so when I heard about it and that I’d go on Thursdays, I thought, ‘Yea, I want to do it.’” And kind of what Caleb was saying, the only thing that I knew about it was that there would only be 12 to 14 spots and I really like that about it, because if it was like 40 or something then I would’ve thought it was a class. So I knew it was going to be a journey, community like things.

**Tiffany:** “I was thinking about it for a long time and what made me finally decide to want to do it was seeing the promo video and so the idea of getting out of the city, retreating and spending time with God—going on a spiritual retreat was very appealing to me. And I think at the time I was frustrated with understanding what God was saying so I thought that this might help me with that process.”

**Vivian:** “Well what made want to join was, I’m just fearful of groups, and when I realized that it was going to be small group...well I wanted to go home to pray about it. I felt that God impressed me to be here and I was fighting it, thinking: ‘You know how fearful I am Lord. It’s not going to work.’ And the Lord just kept impressing me and saying, ‘I want you there.’”

**Tara:** “*So when you shared John 1:1 with us last week, is that a typical thing for Vivian? Is that a typical thing that you would be comfortable with?*”

**Vivian:** “Yes, now I would, but not before. I’m so happy that I made that decision to be here because I couldn’t think of a better thing to do on Thursday nights than being here, and I really feel like I love everyone here.”

**Tara:** “*So how has this discipleship process helped your personal relationship with God to grow? How has the spiritual retreat, the 10 weeks of Thursday nights, how has it helped your spiritual journey, your personal relationship with God to grow?*”

**Jesse:** “It helped me to study more when I go home from work and I read more books than I’ve read before because I do have them in my home and it’s just been sitting there. It helped me a lot in how to deal with people because it’s what it’s all about. I learn how to take the bad and say God’s in charge of my life.”

**Graz:** “Sometimes you fight God and I do that on a lot of levels. Not in a way that most people would think. I pretty much follow a path towards God, but there are other quiet, silent levels or deeper levels like what Paul discovered about himself. He kept all the commandments, but the ones that could not be seen outwardly or inwardly. So I have battles like that. I was carrying those battles and fighting against intimacy because I don’t like that. I don’t like getting close to people. I’m a very friendly person on some levels, and sometimes I can become a very fearful person, but I don’t like intimacy and getting close to people because I don’t like getting hurt. And it was very interesting that when this injury came upon me and it sort of made me view and reflect on myself, on my attitudes towards other people, particularly people who have impairments or disabilities. When I see somebody walking with a cane I used to think to myself, ‘You know, why don’t you just put down that cane and walk? Just walk! Just go ahead and do it. Just do it!’ You know, that Nike attitude. And once I started walking with a cane I realized the face behind the pain. God gave me a view of other people suffering. It was pretty unique and that in conjunction in being here and fighting that war. You saw me the other night

and you said, 'You seem so peaceful,' and it's like somebody has given me a drug. This just took all of that fight away. So that was my journey."

**Jared:** "I think for me it taught me to listen more. Like listen to God more and spend intentional time listening to Him and using unconventional ways to do that. I thought it would seem obvious to me as a creative person, you know, using devotional time to draw and be artistic and allowing God to speak to me through that. It just totally transformed my walk with God. It's just been amazing."

**Tara:** *"Thank you for sharing that. For some of you this question might connect with the one you reflect on last week: 'What was God telling you what this was about—this journey?'"*

**Laura:** "I found using music ... at first I was thinking, 'No, I couldn't do this.' But now I'm finding it a little easier, I'm finding more peace within myself. Situations come up that I can't control and can't change. I go to God and I just leave it at that and I'm at peace."

**Vivian:** "I think the Lord slowed me down. I'm always speedy Gonzalez. I'm running here and doing that. I'm just always doing things on the go. Often I find myself, after I'm praying, zoom I'm running. And it's like you don't even take the time to listen to what God was saying. And it really helped me to be here because when you gave us the scripture and gave us time to reflect—that was so beautiful to me! And I just said to me, 'You know what this is wonderful because I need to slow down.' And I said, 'Lord, thank you for slowing me down.'"

**Laura:** "And I'd like to add to what you just said about taking that one scripture and take time to understand that whole thing. Now I can take the Word and break it down and understand."

**Nick:** "I feel sometimes there's so much going on in my mind and I try to have personal devotional or something like that ... like it's easy to be distracted by a lot of things that I need to do. But I think being here showed the importance of being ministered to as well. Because when I'm here I can't be working on anything and so I'm just here. The distractions that would normally be there aren't present when I'm here. So it was a blessing to be ministered to instead of focusing on stuff that I need to do, so that was a blessing to listen and share with Jared as my spiritual companion. Sometimes getting assignments is really helpful, because now it's on my to-do list and just saying that this time is set aside to just hang out with Jared to talk and listen. It was really beneficial to see that some of the struggles I've had he's there in the same way. I found encouragement from him and find it a joy to encourage him as well. So it was good to feel that give and take instead of just giving until you don't have anything to give."

**Deanne:** "Well two things. The first thing is that I feel that I learned a lot of tools, like what Jared was saying, just different ways to have worship that I would've never thought of myself. And just how you can hear God clearly in different ways is just really cool. I feel like the general theme of what God is trying to teach me in this, even from the first day at the spiritual retreat, through all the different activities: reflecting on the Bible, or sharing with people, or stuff like that, I felt like being in this class and having that space put aside to reflect on things and think about stuff.... I've been hearing what God was trying to tell me for a really, really long time. But it was really loud when I would be here. I would hear it in devotions sometimes but I would ignore it, but it would be so loud

just because it was so quiet here. So that's been my general theme throughout this whole process."

**Nick:** "It's starting to really stand out to me, the importance of community. Even in your personal devotions to like to feel that you have a community that is doing this with you and to not think you're the only one feels really good."

**Tara:** *"So the question is: How has this discipleship process helped your personal relationship with God to grow?"*

**Dana:** "I guess what everyone's been saying, too, from learning about different tools. For me, it really helped to enhance my devotional life and also to be more consistent just looking forward to it every day, and just having a really good time with God, and learning to listen and to interact with God, in a way."

**Twana:** "It helped me because I think I have the tendency to put God in a box, you know, like I can only have time with Him in a specific way. Or even when it gets really hectic, it's almost like I didn't create time and space so maybe it's not like you're there. So coming into the spiritual retreat, it was great because I was spending time talking with God a lot but I'm not listening to what He says, so it was actually a time to listen to God and see what he's saying into my life. Even when we were learning about the different devotional style, I don't describe myself as an artistic person but I try the devotional with drawing and things like that and Sierra was like, 'That's so beautiful.' And I'm like, 'That's what the Lord did!' because it wasn't me. The fact that I can hear Him saying something to me in that and that He's in everything and I have the tendency that He's only in a certain place or only be in a certain way. So that was really powerful in our relationship because no matter what's going on, He's saying, 'I'm Here.'"

**Tara:** *"Any final things on this question?"*

**Caleb:** "I resonate with a lot of things that you guys are saying. I get in sort of a daze through the week and so much of what I do I consider to be missional for the Kingdom and so I'm doing all these things. Having this Thursday time every week where there's sort of this community, this accountability, to sort of be here and it often felt like jumping into a pool of water or something like this is sort of a shock to just stop and meditate and looking at scripture. It made me realize.... I guess it's just a catalyst to get me back into the work where I often become comfortable not really being there much and now it's great. To wake up in the morning and read the Word again and I think this helped get it going again to be here every week intentionally. It didn't make me feel like I have to be here. It was just a natural process."

**Jesse:** "Last week, when I found out that this was going to be the last week, I was a little bit sad because I enjoyed this group. But I'm going to be real. Today, Satan don't give up no time. I had so much stress that I didn't know we were supposed to meet tonight but I'm thankful for my wife for reminding me. I was supposed to go to a meeting but I told them that I have to go a discipleship meeting and I felt good even though the lady was fussing me out, but I was smiling. Well you don't know what I know and I'm sorry. But I know that this is the place to be, so I'm thankful for you guys."

**Tara:** *"Okay, next question: How has this discipleship process helped your prayer life? I'm going to ask you a series of specific questions. Do you talk to God more often? Do you talk to God about more personal things now than you did before? Talk to me about that."*

**Jared:** “I talk to God about everything now. It used to be more focused on the negative aspects of my walk with Him, and honestly I did talk to Him about other things, but not much. The focus is definitely broadened and changed to, ‘What’s up? What do you want from me Lord?’ I start off asking questions about what He wants from me, instead of what I have on my agenda to talk to Him about.

**Tara:** *“That’s awesome.”*

**Laura:** “I do find myself thanking Him more than I ever have. Being here in this class, He’s shown us how to open up ourselves very humble to Him, and don’t hold back. Like I said to you, I’m at peace where I’m at, at my sewing machine. And I’m sitting there creating something and I’m thanking Him for that and for why I’m doing it. Thank Him for letting me be this way, thank you for giving me the strength, the patience, the desire to want to do for him. And so what have I been doing since I retired? I’m right here at Chestnut Hill doing whatever I can do and I enjoy that. And this group—it’s an inspiration. I’m just constantly talking to Him and thanking Him and I just feel like He’s just taken care of everybody.”

**Tiffany:** “I think it’s helped to bring more praise into my prayers. A lot of my prayers before were focused on me and life, what I need to do, and what needs to happen. But it’s great to have focus on God and who He is. I think that’s what I practice after we had that class about the attribute of God, like thinking of a different attribute each day. I think I practiced that the most of any of the ones we did. I guess because it made such a big impact on my life. That was great, I really appreciated that.”

**Nick:** “I would say that was the most impacting class as well. It is to have that focus on praise and then finding unique ways to express it. I just remember this excitement of thinking about God and who He is. Instead of whatever ... this is what we do. It was just exciting to see that God is worthy of praise, dependable, and beyond everything that we need. That was just really encouraging.”

**Jesse:** “Before I started this discipleship, I didn’t pray in public. I guess I was looking at self. Some people have a gift for praying, it just rolls off their tongue going on and on and I can’t do that. After talking to my partner (spiritual companion)... I’m so thankful for Caleb and we have so much in common. Well you know I’m a little bit older than him ... but I mean I know that it’s not the same for me anymore. I promise God that I’m going to start praying in church. I’ve got to let God take complete control of my life and quit thinking that I’ve got to prove something—instead I’ll just be myself and He’ll do the rest.”

**Tara:** *“All of you prayed in this group - Was that a new experience for some of you? Praying out loud in a group? Or was it pretty normal for all of you?”*

**Laura:** “I am not comfortable. I’m a loner. I’ve always liked being by myself. I don’t like to share myself. I don’t like to expose myself and when you pray in public, to me, you’re exposing yourself. It’s supposed to be your inner thoughts, your inner feelings, and whatever. So to be in a group, I feel like people judge you. They’re listening to what you’re saying. You know, I’m supposed to be praying but then my thoughts are what you’re thinking. I’m just not comfortable with that. But I just feel a tiny bit more comfortable with you guys. But I don’t know if I can ever get up in front of the church and say a public prayer.”

**Tara:** *“That’s not the goal for everyone but thank you for sharing.... Those of you who haven’t shared yet...”*

**Alessandra:** “Well for me, I wasn’t really taught that way. It was always silent prayer. Anytime that we did pray, it was a structured prayer that we always said it together. It wasn’t your feelings. I had a hard time with it.”

**Tara:** “*Has that changed at all as we pray in the group every night?*”

**Alessandra:** “I think its changed a little bit. I think I feel a little more comfortable with it. But even at home I don’t pray out loud. It’s always silent. Maybe because that’s how it’s always been, how I’m used to doing it.”

**Tara:** “*Thank you for sharing. The next question is: Do you read the Bible more now? Is the Bible more meaningful to you now? And how has this affected other parts of your devotional practice?*”

**Tiffany:** “I feel like I read the Bible more, but less of the Bible. Like instead of reading a whole chapter, I’m reading like a lot less. And then when I find a verse that’s really speaking to me I’ll just stop and it’s like there it was, that’s like my answer. Then, I’ll spend more time with that verse. Now with those 3 little verses I’m more appreciative of that instead of reading pages. It’s less but it’s more meaningful.”

**Deanne:** “I think that because of what we learned about God through this experience specifically about the attributes of God and praising Him and stuff, I approach reading the Bible with a different mindset. I don’t necessarily read more, but I come to it differently now. Like more expectant or something; in awe of who this is about, and who’s going to talk to me now.”

**Ranny:** “Reading the Bible, in the beginning anyways, it was just like stories. Like what Tiffany was saying, as I got into some of the different worship styles, I didn’t read more but I would dwell on a verse of two longer than I would a whole chapter.”

**Twana:** The connection with Sister Laura was a gift.

**Laura:** “I would like to give a testimony about what Twana just said—her reaching out to me. She reached out to me just like a daughter. And the first time she would check in on me: ‘Sister Laura, can I bring you anything. Are you okay? I don’t mind. Do you want me to do anything?’ No honey, I’m fine, but thank you. But she just constantly reaches out. It’s overwhelming because it’s something I don’t expect so it’s truly from the heart.”

**Tara:** “*Have any of the rest of you found that you reached out in a different way? Or how your devotional life with God translates into how you serve other people, or how you give?*”

**Nick:** “Yes, I was just thinking if you have a fresh experience with God, you always have something to share with other people. Like today, I was at breakfast with somebody and I just shared that verse from Revelation because he was wanting to know about Revelation. It’s like you’re ready. You have stuff and more stuff than you can actually use because God has a lot to share with you.”

**Caleb:** “I feel like for me this experience has helped me in the listening area. This answers the previous question. I tend to focus on what the Bible has to say and what God is saying to me and just my thoughts with God. While I listen, I think I’ve always listened to people, but this experience has helped me to listen more and help me to pay attention to what God is saying through other people. So as far as my devotion goes, I’ve actually never been into reading devotional books in the morning. I just always felt like wanting to read the Bible (which I think it’s great that other people read devotional books). But lately, I’ve been blessed with listening to what other people have to say. I’ve been reading commentaries and reading devotionals. It’s just this whole idea of the wisdom

that comes from a community of believers and that in the context of reaching out to other people I feel like there's an aspect of that too. For me, I've tended to think while someone is sharing something to me, at the same time I'm thinking what should I share with them. This experience has made me realize what God is saying to me through this other person and I think that that very act blesses the other person to be heard. It's helping each other. There are people everywhere that have something to say—kind of the community aspect is of emphasis to me.”

**Nick:** “I know that with what he's (Caleb) saying. To see how God is working in other people's life and also to realize that you yourself can be used is just really encouraging spiritually—to see that what God is sharing with me can make a difference to someone else, and at times, because of your relationship with God people see things in you, that you don't see in yourself. So it's important to have that sharing with each other.”

**Tara:** *“Beautiful. So, that leads into my next question: Do you better understand yourself and your spiritual gifts better as a result of what we did in this process? And what do others see in you? Talk to me about that.”*

**Twana:** “I think it was great to have things specifically defined that you can just go to. I was talking to one of my friends and she was saying something and I was like, ‘Discernment that's one of my gifts!’ Knowing your gifts and being more active with those things—it made the things that I'm doing more purposeful.”

**Nick:** “I think it's really important to recognize your own gifts and recognize the gifts of other people. A lot of times I get focused on what I can do than what I can't do. Actually today, I'm bringing this marker back because I signed Deanne's poster and I wanted to take some more time to do it. So I was signing it and just realizing as I'm looking at all these things that are her gifts—I realized that our relationship can really benefit if I lean towards her in this area of strength. Maybe I should listen to her more in the areas of her strength like discernment. And so I think just having that understanding in what other people are gifted in and what you're gifted in can really help you to operate better within the body of Christ.”

**Graz:** “Makes a good marriage too!”

**Tara:** *“Would you say you know how to utilize your gifts for the mission of God in a more clear way? Would you raise your hand if that is more clear to you? (All hands raise.) Would you share any examples during that process, or something that you read, or something that someone wrote, or something that surprised you about going through talking about your passion and spiritual gifts?”*

**Graz:** “Evangelism, that was a surprise because it wasn't on my first one (the inventory taken 3 years ago with Pastor Tara). I did this a few years back and that wasn't on there, but I've been interested in making other people understand what God is saying—particularly in prophecy. A lot of people are interested in that. And also people who are interested in, ‘Who is God?’ At work, I used to be afraid of mentioning God in a scientific setting and now I'm not. In fact, I'm pretty vocal, so they have to shut me down sometime. So that surprised me because of what I do now.”

**Jared:** “For me it was interesting to see what my secondary traits were, because I think it's obvious to me what my primary gifts are but some of these were a surprise.”

**Tara:** *“How has it been to be a part of this process? How has it change your perspective about going through suffering or trials? Has anything changed in your understanding about going through suffering or trials?”*

**Ranny:** “Even though this year was a roller coaster, it’s different from previous trials. Now, when I surrender things to God I actually feel peace. Before, it was me telling myself that I am at peace, but now it’s God telling me that I am at peace.”

**Jared:** “I don’t think it changed for me personally, but it encouraged me to see how the community would bind together during other people’s struggles. And watching everybody just rise up and meet other people’s needs, when they needed it. Like when Ranny was really worried about her NCLEX, we prayed for her. It didn’t necessarily meet her need but she was able to face her challenge through prayer and support. And to me that was something really cool to see.”

**Ranny:** “I didn’t tell you guys. I think I only told Dana. I actually really, really felt strong that day. Even though, I didn’t have confidence, I just felt like I had an army with me!”

**Twana:** “I don’t think it’s less suffering or trial, but I definitely feel less alone. The willingness to share and let others listen, because normally I let things to build up, and you can kind of tell what’s bothering me, but not really. Things weren’t really as much of trial because I was able to share with people. Not that it changed the circumstances but now I have people that care and I have an understanding that God cares.”

**Tara:** *“Do you mind if I ask directly? You went through a process of waiting for test results to see if your cancer had returned. With that trial and suffering-how was that for you, in conjunction with discipleship class?”*

**Alessandra:** “It was stressful. It was a struggle to see why did I have to go through this. But at the same time, the other part of me would feel the good things...and so it was a balance, especially after I got the test results. As I was telling you earlier today, it’s been a long while since I’ve been struggling with this depression and today is the first day that I actually feel good. And so I’m praying that it will continue and so I’m praying that He will continue working. Maybe I don’t understand or see how He is working but He is working.”

**Tara:** *“What should your leader do differently in the future in how she teaches about having a relationship with God, and how she leads through this whole process? What can she do differently?”*

**Graz:** “Handouts.”

**Ranny:** “I feel like it’s always rushed. I want more time. Maybe next time we can have more time in sharing.”

**Laura:** “Thought questions as an assignment. Like we’d have one question. We’d think about it and write on it then we’d come back and share our thoughts together.”

**Jared:** “I’d like to see more cross-group integration. I thought it was really cool that the ladies were really into their group with each other. But I think it would be cool to see some mingling between the genders.”

**Nick:** “I would like to have more assignments in a way. Because, sometimes I only think about the class on Thursdays or something that I would think about once a week. But I think if I felt like I was constantly involved in something that would be good. Maybe a little more accountability or maybe some reminders or something.”

**Tara:** *“What would accountability look like?”*

**Nick:** “I was thinking like text message reminders throughout the week or something. For me, that would make it easier. I really enjoyed when I got to go out and meet up with

Jared. Just something to keep me from feeling like I'm not just thinking about it on Thursdays."

**Graz:** "The one thing that I was a little bit disappointed with was in the beginning, you have gotten all of us together then you went to Andrews for class. In the beginning, I didn't think that was a good thing. So I would just say that, when you bring an intimate group together, that in being a leader, you sort of put us in a vulnerable state and then you just left. It's like a shepherd leaving the flock and that kind of disappointed me a little."

**Tara:** *"I value that thank you. (Took time to explain about scheduling). I can understand how that could be. I agree that was not ideal. One final comment before..."*

**Caleb:** "Maybe we could have a format like one main meeting and shorter meetings.... I'm curious to see what it would be like to meet more often during the week as sort of an immersive discipleship meeting. But as it is, I already don't want it to end. And I feel like this once a week has been totally awesome, and I'm just curious to know what that would look like."

**Tara:** *"I'm really wondering about this: is once a week the maximum that you can do? How many of you would be open to having this be more than once a week? Raise your hand and I'm going to say the number out loud. How many of you say that one time a week is the limit? Raise your hand first—7 people. And how many of you for more than one time a week if it was intentional process like this (cluster of people talking).... So you're saying meeting together as a whole group for that set amount of time, for the 2 hour meeting, but then having set your own time with your spiritual companion, or would you prefer that over your group of 4?"*

**Laura:** "Could we alternate?"

**Ranny:** "Yes I have always wanted to ... it's good to have 1 accountability partner, and don't switch that, but then switch around the groups."

**Tara:** *"Did you share more vulnerably in same gender groups than you would have if the opposite gender was there?"*

**Jared:** "Yes! I agree that it would have more vulnerability in same gender groups, but I was just saying to have the opportunity to have mixed gender discussion time and it would have to be appropriate."

**Tara:** *"So maybe next time, in your spiritual companion pair finds any other spiritual companion pair to discuss questions and there's a chance for you to mingle but you're saying the same gender vulnerability thing was good too."*

**Jesse:** "I'm just wondering, because I've been talking about the discipleship class to other people and I'm just wondering if we could just keep our own people?"

**Graz:** "I'm thinking about having 3 days or like a weekend retreat, like when we went as a church, may be also a doable thing, because we did 1 day and I feel like that was a little bit too short for me. A weekend retreat would be nice."

**Tara:** *"Is there anything I didn't ask about how this process has enriched your life that you'd want me to know? What was important about this process that I didn't ask you about?"*

**Graz:** "I think the next you have questions like that, you should give it to us in a week in advance, and I think we might be able to think better over them because then you'll go home tonight and you'll say, 'All the things I could've said.'"

**Tara:** *"I hear you on that.... Anything that you want to share but didn't get a chance to share yet?"*



**Jesse:** “I was just going to say that, when we read the book about all those questions to put the first things that came to your mind, well that’s the real you.... When I added all the number up—it was me and I didn’t know that about myself at the time.”

**Tara:** “*So if I could just go around the circle, and we’re just going to go straight, right one after another: What was the thing that most enriched your life about this group?*”

**Caleb:** “The intentional reflection combined with vulnerability.”

**Tiffany:** “An opportunity to listen to God and experience that.”

**Jared:** “Creative expressions in my devotional life.”

**Dana:** “Learning to trust in God fully and being more intentional about spending more time with God every day.”

**Deanne:** “I think reflection time that is specifically timed so that you have to sit there and think about what you’ve heard or instead of giving up like I don’t hear anything yet...waiting on God basically. The setup for reflection time.”

**Nick:** “I think the praise time like learning about praising and the spiritual companion. And also that time that’s set to just reflect on the text.”

**Ranny:** “Sharing, about the testimonies.”

**Twana:** “I think the intentional time with God and that intentional vulnerability with others.”

**Jesse:** “Being able to be around the young people and being able to have a male friend that I can share things to and being able to listen.”

**Graz:** “My best experience was to see the light shining in Ranny’s eyes when she discovered that I was her, just a little bit older. And she can see her future that it wasn’t abysmal and that it was going to be ok. That personal experience—that was God. That’s where God is at is when He can get you to look at someone else.”

**Laura:** “Learning how to open up and not be shut in with my own thoughts. And new friendship, renewed friendship.”

**Alessandra:** “Listening to what God has to say and sharing.”

**Vivian:** “Listening to God...and not moving/rushing around.”

**Tara:** “Thank you all for sharing.”

## **Discipleship Process**

### **Interview with Pastor Sabine Vatel, Forest Lake SDA Church**

February 8, 2013

Tara J. VinCross

#### **How does your church define discipleship?**

Formerly:

Teaching the Word of God, leading them to Jesus, and helping others to do the same.

We have transitioned to:

Teaching and living the gospel and helping others to do the same.

Walking with Jesus.

We don't know how this will happen—Bible studies, conversation, etc.

Leadership is often listening to what God is doing and translating that into something people can hear.

There was fervor to live what we hear.

“Living the Gospel” - the short synopsis

The challenge is: building the plane as you're taking off down the runway.

We want to establish a structure that allows them to step into Forest Lake Church and understand that they're on a journey and that I'm not here for myself. I need to take the next step in my calling.

New Member Orientation

Prayer is so important here.

#### **What does a disciple look like?**

A Christ-centered person who's found their area of service within or without the church, and who then turns back and leads someone else with them.

It looks like Barbara - baptized one year ago and went to a spiritual gifts inventory and found out she's got a gift in hospitality and decided to mentor people. She brought someone to church with her. She now has a flock that she mentors and loves each week.

It's like a picture: One of the media volunteers—Michael, a college student—with a young boy and sharing with him.

Michael was mentored by Patty (the media pastor) at the same age, now Michael is mentoring.

To share what you have.

To give the best part of what you have.

Share your passion with another person based on your own journey of Christ.

You've not a true disciple until you pass it along to someone else.

Discipleship must have a component in community—daring to ask, how is it with you and God?

It's not even just in small groups (2's and 3's)

Intentionality of how do I live the gospel?

Exposing them to the disciplines of pausing and listening to the holy adventure.

I used to think I would replicate me in another person but now I realize it's so individual.

It's intuitive, it's an art, it's humbling.

It's as varied and different as the people here but always Christ in the middle.

**Do you have an intentional process of discipleship?**

Yes, we have a beginning one. We've been working on this for four years. We have a new batch of people being baptized. It's all been because of friendship evangelism.

One of my responsibilities is Wednesday night. They learn on Sabbath and then apply it on Wednesday night.

One of the things we decided to begin with is the spiritual gifts process.

We focus also on prayer and Bible study.

Smaller group study - - - to joining a class - - - to leadership team

A. Spiritual Gifts—We had a whole library of ministry descriptions before we had a process - tag on the gifts associated with those responsibilities.

B. Prayer—Then we had a discipleship class - a prayer journey of listening and experiencing God.

C. Bible Study—small groups

**REAL**

**Reflection** - any activity that has to do with a prayer series (once per quarter - school of prayer), thinking about God's Word. All the classes asking questions, going back to the basics of Christianity.

**Experience** - Spiritual formation, personal Christian walk, not just theory.

**Application** - Anything connecting with other people in the community. Applying God's word in your relationship, finance, health. Applying your gifts. Health ministry, etc.

**Leadership** - The second phase of spiritual gifts. How to mentor and disciple another person. Spiritual gifts - how each person is aware of their gifts to bless the body of Christ.

If I have these elements in the calendar then I know it's balanced.

REAL Discipleship - it should affect every aspect of your life.  
The curriculum spans throughout the year.

What I've been missing, the connecting points.

Every person goes through a **new membership orientation**—introduction to the Forest Lake Church, done in small group cohorts. Mission, vision, ministry, discipleship, introduce the REAL curriculum, and then fellowship with each other. One Sabbath (11am - 4pm) from there we match people with members and then they get involved in avenues with classes, depending on their needs.

Huge ministry of discipleship in each ministry—kids, parents, teens—orientations in each of these areas.

Before kids are dedicated, the parents go through 3 meetings.

- introducing them as the discipler of their children
- 12. class to write a blessing on their children
- 13. Then the reception after the dedication

“You are called”—your baptism is your ordination to ministry.

The next journey is finding your calling.

Small team of mentors who are assigned to each person who is baptized. That took two years to get going.

Ministry Counsel—a group of leaders who look at ministries based on giftedness.

They call new members, affirm them, assess where the leaders are in their ministries, and get new people involved (they meet once per month).

There was resistance to this—assassinating the nominating committee! This is now a hybrid model - based on governance.

The board meetings decide on governance.

One wing focuses on finances (finance committee).

One wing focuses on human resources (ministry counsel).

Advancing a culture of calling and service—living the gospel.

Every third Sabbath we have a display of what's open - ministry openings. Welcome table! And invitations to the class.

12 teams - children, young adults, prayer, health ministry, quilting, etc.

Celebrate how people found their calling!

What you celebrate, you duplicate.

We celebrate the stories of how people find their calling.

There are 3-4 events per year that are outreach that include the multi-generational church doing ONE thing all together - that we connect with the community.

### **Serving the Public Schools**

300+ people came out

Example: Filling a backpack with food for the public school for kids who are in need.

We packed the bags.

### **Health Fair**

800+ people for a health fair

We included a prayer booth, the principals of schools, etc.

### **Social Services for the Homeless**

Largest # of children that are homeless in America in their zip code

Stations that offer help for people who are homeless

One of the outreaches

Pastor Barb with children's ministries—this discipleship class which focuses on discipling families is really amazing! An awesome number of people graduate from this class. Parents have the ability to disciple their children.

### **Small Groups - GREAT idea!**

To introduce people to small groups. This is one of those things that you launch and then people get discouraged. We said, how do we do this? This is the place where people come for the sermon. So what we did - this is the second year.

We did a 7-week series - preaching, then allowing people to study during the week in their small groups, and then eager to hear how the pastor is addressing the topic. We enlist leaders and hosts. 22 groups, 10-15 people per group. Over 1/2 of the groups stayed a group. It introduced people to the concept of people meeting in their home! People were thirsty for this type of connection but they didn't know how. Now we have a branch of families who are studying together with their children. Other people are now inviting people into their homes!

The way to change cultures is just to do it!

This is an introduction of people experiencing life together so its not so strange when we go to the next step.

The church put them together according to zip code.

When you get people from different walks of life - with the Word of God - in their homes  
- something happens! It was amazing!

It opened an avenue for discipleship.

Our rule is: Bible only

In training small group leaders, model what it looks like.

They have to know who is a resource person.

The pastor comes up with a theme - the Questions of Jesus (this year)

Then the other pastors get together, review, and write

Then the worship team gets together and creates the visuals.

I work with facilitators, hosts, and participants.

People sign up: <http://www.wufoo.com/>

Then we coordinate them.

You cannot disciple without the other—people and the word of God

Apply, lead, and interact with other people.

Monitor what's happening and then follow up.

Decide as a group if they're going to continue.

I have a curriculum ready for those who want to transition to the next phase of their  
group relationship.

Training is my emphasis!

4,000 members! People can feel rather lost.

**Celebrate this!!!**

**Do your church members know this process?**

The living the gospel people are really aware of it.

People are aware of the big things—the orientation, the beginning, and the end

The ministry counsel is working on communication of this to the members.

**Has your church prioritized distinct practices (disciplines) that relate to the  
discipleship process?**

Yes! See above.

**How does your church measure maturity?**

**Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important to the local church understanding of discipleship?**

What does it look like generationally?

How does the approach work for each generation?

Living the gospel, teaching the word, focused on Jesus, and teaching others to do the same. This is happening at each age group in our church.

Discipleship is in everything.

People's stories are crucial - someone shared this with me and now I shared it with them.

What does discipleship mean in multicultural contexts? A wide spectrum of Adventists, color, race, etc.

We disciple from the front. We model this in the church.

The strategies for integration is in context: How do we integrate or assimilate people into the body of the church.

Doctoral studies completed in 2010

spirituality within congregations

something beyond Sabbath morning - Wednesday night to introduce spiritual disciplines

Pray for Sabine -

New Member Orientation tomorrow

Help me to know what to let go of

I feel called to help people find their calling.

Discipleship means time and focus. I'm praying for that wisdom.

**Interview with Dr. Matthew Gamble  
Elmshaven SDA Church**

January 22, 2013

Tara VinCross

This may come out more below, but let me start by sharing a couple of observations re: discipleship. My conviction is that one of the greatest crimes in Christianity today is a lack of discipleship. In my journey, I can't really point to anyone that formally disciplined me. As a result it's difficult for me to even know what discipleship is. Please correct me if I'm wrong. All I know is that I'm really wrestling with what it means to be a disciple who makes disciples who makes disciples.

I've recently started serving as the senior pastor of the Elmshaven SDA Church (Sept 2012) on the campus of St. Helena Hospital in St. Helena, CA. The mission statement of the church is Sharing God's love and making disciples of Christ. I'm happy with this mission statement, but I haven't seen anything formally laid out that would qualify what this looks like or provide quantifiable data on how were doing with this mission.

Within the Adventist expression in particular, it seems clear that we've got at least part of the biblical framework for discipleship backwards. We teach people beliefs with proof texts that are quite impressive. The individual learns a lot of theology and solid Bible teaching, but all too often the experiential component that Jesus died for is completely off the radar. As a result, we create a culture within the local church that is filled with a bunch of people who subscribe to the same theological tenants, but they're not sharing in each other's lives. From my perspective this aspect alone is biblical benchmark for a healthy body.

If one were to Google "Adventist Evangelism" the first thing that pops up is this website: <http://www.adventistevangelism.com/>. If you view the content throughout the site, by and large there are some fairly obscure images that the vast majority of human beings that I associate with couldn't care less about. But for those people who are into beasts and glowing orbs, we do a great job of teaching them how to teach others theological truths that may indeed make someone smarter, but not necessarily more like Jesus.

I don't have it figured out, but we're on a journey together here at "The Haven" and we're committed to experiencing all that God, through Jesus and the Spirit, have to offer.

**How does your church define discipleship?**

Before we define discipleship, we start by acknowledging the Kingdom of God. Jesus prayed, "thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Jesus established a new kingdom that's over all earthly kingdoms. In His Kingdom, Jesus is King. Being a disciple starts when an individual chooses to change allegiances from self to surrendering all to Jesus. Once an individual is in correct alignment with Jesus, she or he will be lead by the Spirit of God that's been both birthed and continues to abide inside (Colossians 1:27 among many other verses).



**What does a disciple look like?**

I believe a disciple of Jesus in the simplest and purest form is a person who loves God with all their heart, mind and soul. And in so doing loves his or her self out of an understanding of the value that God has placed on them. And because of this alignment, a disciple loves and values every human being they come into contact with.

**Do you have an intentional process of discipleship?**

Not yet, but we're working on becoming a culture that makes disciples who make disciples. While they're will be elements of "intentional process" to be faithful to training and equipping the saints, we're after discipleship being who we are and not something that we're learning about.

**Do your church members know this process?**

We're experiencing significant growth at the Haven. We have at least twice as many guests as we do members each week. This has all happened fairly quickly and we're presently working on a process of assimilation to see our guests become members of the body that gathers at Elmshaven.

**Has your church prioritized distinct practices (disciplines) that relate to the discipleship process?**

I wish that I was answering this in a year from now because it's coming. We have several significant groups gathered strictly around prayer. We have several groups gathering around the Bible, confession, and accountability. We have opportunities for people to experience community regularly through the week. These are all disciplines that relate specifically to discipleship.

**How does your church measure maturity?**

At this point, we don't have a mechanism to measure maturity. I'm open to suggestions.

**Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important to the understanding of discipleship in the local church context?**

Not that I can think of. But please, please, please ... if you discover something or are experiencing something in your context that's working, by all means, let me know.

## **Discipleship Process**

### **Interview with Dr. Deborah Watson - Narberth Presbyterian Church**

January 30, 2013

Tara J. VinCross

#### **How does your church define discipleship?**

We have a basic model which is building disciples: growing up in faith, growing together in fellowship, and growing out in service in the world.

All of our activities have to pass through this filter. Do they help us grow up in faith? Do they help us grow together? Do they help us grow out in service and witness?

Everything we do is defined by this. Every learning opportunity. How does this embody growing disciples in the love of Jesus?

#### **What does a disciple look like?**

Someone who is excited about his or her relationship with the Lord Jesus and is actively involved as a worshipper on a regular basis, involved in learning opportunities (as a leader and co-learner), involved in the body other than weekly worship (small group - growing closer to brothers and sisters), and a person who is on the growing edge of witnessing through words, deeds, attitudes, and justice—with the congregation and with others. The goal is that we would all be uniquely ourselves before the Lord and other people. We want all that God has poured into us individually and corporately, to be poured out, so that all that He's given us is used, nothing wasted.

#### **Do you have an intentional process of discipleship?**

We have a path—people don't always follow it in order.

*Alpha Course* - introduction to the Christian Faith - 10 weeks. For people who may or may not have familiarity with faith in Christ. People may even be atheist. You can come and explore - whatever you think about God. We have a number of people who have come to faith through this program. They were even resistant to faith and came to faith. (once you're done with the class, you can come on as assistant leaders, helping other people go through the process).

*Explorers Class* - 6 weeks, two hours a week. We explore what it is to be a follower of Christ, what it is to be a member of this congregation, what it is to be a Presbyterian and what it means to live in this world as a Presbyterian member of this church. There are Shepherds who make this their ministry, there are new people, there are church members, and always Senior Pastor and Assistant Pastor. 3x per year (6-20 people, depending on the time). Baseball Diamond—Worship (pitcher's mound), Knowing Christ (1st base), Growing in Christ (2nd base), Service Outward/Sharing Christ (3rd base).

You can enter at any phase but the goal is to move around.

Deliberate “gateway” activities.

Kickball with the Pastor - Thursdays 4-5pm - Pastor always prays with the kids.  
Parents Night Out - Children's Minister welcomes the kids from 6:30-9:00pm  
Prayer, songs, stories from the NT.

Nursery School

Parenting Class - sponsored by Alpha, Christian in nature but many agnostics/atheists come.

After the Explorers and Alphas class.

Wednesday night gathering - meal

Then separating to - Children, Youth, Adults, Gospel of Acts teaching from 7-8pm, and all kinds of small groups and adult discipleship. Prayer, mens, encouragement, accountability Bible study (4-5 groups), Panera Prayer group, IHOP prayer meeting.

Older members provide support or hospitality for the new ones and invite them personally to small groups

"Fellowship Hour" - after church. Table with all the small groups advertised. Bible study, prayer groups, service opportunities.

*Service* - The next tier of opportunity.

Sponsoring a 6-week forum on human trafficking.

Orphan Ministry

Many families who have adopted.

We don't want people to be spiritually obese.

If you take in, you must give out.

We gave out cookies with cards telling about the church, and we gave them away at Christmas time. Cookie and friends evangelism to help people get their feet wet. There are people who walk around and pray with others in parks and on benches. Get out of your comfort zone opportunities.

Broad Street Ministries

Habitat for Humanities

Sister Violet - the Welcome Church

Rescue Mission

People go down and pass out sandwiches and fellowship and prayer.

This grows a heart in our people for people being warm, safe, fed, and healthy.

We've tried not to reinvent the wheel but who would welcome us to come along and allow us to help with what they're already doing.

The middle school and high school kids help with "The Philadelphia Project"

helping on people's houses and yards. They maintain contact with people.

We provide lots of opportunities for everyone - of all ages - to help and serve.

Care Packages - washcloth, soap, etc.

Educational packets for kids. Kid friendly packages with crayons, pencils, and a note from the kids themselves and a prayer for them.

Vacation Bible Club - in June. 150-180 kids who are all from the community.

Sixth grade on up get to help with Junior Leadership

### **Sunday**

8:00-8:45am Coffee and Conversation Sunday School Class (6-8 people)

9:00-10:15am (blended music style - organist, choir, praise band)

10:15-10:45am Greet people at the door - people go to the chapel to talk

10:45-12:00pm The service is the same as above - blended service

12:00-1:00pm Coffee, juice, water, pretzels - in the chapel

People are interacting with each other

Prayer Team designated at the front of the church to meet people for prayer

Men's singing group practice

-- Sunday School is during 1st and 2nd service --

Intergenerational Sunday School class happening during the 1st service

Church History and Christian Beliefs class - during 2nd service. What does it mean to be Christian? Truly human.

**\*\* Fellowship hour - pastries and hot drinks downstairs every week all throughout the morning \*\***

From 8:00 - 1:00 pm

People feel loved by eating homemade things.

**Do your church members know this process?**

We try to share this here and there and everywhere. Wednesday night teaching.

Early Church conversations. On Sunday morning. Other times.

A whole year of Life in the Holy Spirit is our teaching focus right now.

Knowing the Lord - first half

Becoming Like Christ - serving, witnessing

Yes, I do think most of the members do know.

They know our mission statement. It's everywhere.

What are we about as a church?

We grow disciples in the love of Jesus Christ -

Grow Up, Grow Together, Grow Out

It's a part of the air we breathe.

**\*\* Write your mission statement in 100 words or less.**

We published these.

This reminds us why we are here on earth.

**Has your church prioritized distinct practices (disciplines) that relate to the discipleship process?**

Already answered. See above.

**How does your church measure maturity?**

When we see people actively seeking out ways to grow.

When we've tried formal ways its been an awesome flop. People don't like being measured. They write down what they wish was true.

We try to know our people. We get antidotal evidence from other people. We see people becoming involved at more levels than they have been in the past.

"I started a Bible study at my law firm."

"I was away last week on a silent retreat."

We listen for things like this.

Dawn's Place: a place for women coming out of sex trafficking

*How do we measure maturity?*

Self Disclosure

Observation

Normal interaction with people

Members - 550

Active People each Sunday - 325-350

We also have fringe members we keep in contact with well.

Members who can't get out.

**Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important to the local church understanding of discipleship?**

Worship—this is so central to our discipleship

Prayer—this has been such an important hub in our church. We have people that pray each Monday night at 7pm and they pray for each of the leaders. They pray for anyone who shows up.

Email prayer line—24/7

They will receive requests by text or email. That has been so important to our church.

Prayer ministry - so important!

We have a counselor - Dr. Janet Moore. She has been teaching and counseling at Drexel Med. She sees clients and people from our church and she has been a blessing. We

believe in folks receiving encouragement and challenge and understanding from Pastors, leaders, fellow church members and also people outside our congregation. Through the confusions and possibilities in a therapeutic manner.

Dr. Janet Moore - first two sessions are free.

Kairos - [www.kairosounselingservices.com](http://www.kairosounselingservices.com)

We *pay* for people to have counseling because it's an important part of becoming whole.

## **Discipleship Process**

### **Interview with Dr. Allan Martin**

January 23, 2013 - 2 hr. interview

Younger Generation Church

Tara J. VinCross

### **How does your church define discipleship?**

The challenge in regards to discipleship is that we have notions that are very biblically based but are very foggy in our minds. We see discipleship as a form of mentorship or apprenticeship. Much in the way that Jesus did with the discipleship. Discipleship happens as people are doing life together intentionally. Here on the ground we see our discipleship as our members are doing life together and intentionally mentoring and apprenticing.

### **What does a disciple look like?**

An individual who is pursuing a deeper devotion to Jesus and has committed to being a follower of Jesus

Kyle Idleman - Fan and Follower. We use this comparison in our community. What does carrying your cross mean?

A disciple is an individual who is pursuing a deeper devotion to Jesus and has committed themselves to being a fully devoted follower of Jesus.

“This is YG” - a series right now.

This is the Church. To convict their members they are the church. Live out being YG in the mission field around them.

### **Do you have an intentional process of discipleship at your church?**

I would describe this as: Intentionally accidental. Multiple brush strokes to discipleship. We don't have the Rick Warren 101, 201, 301, etc. though we'd like to get there.

We're using the pulpit as the place for introducing these themes and topics.

Life group - every member involved in a life group

Mission statement - deepening devotion with Jesus through intimacy, community, and grace

14. Intimacy with God - *worship*, private devotional practices, etc.
15. Community - *fellowship*, urging people to be involved in small groups, social, loving each other well. “Forgive to live” series. Learning the complexity and beauty of loving others well.
16. Grace - *relationship*. The great commission. Every relationship is the chance to live out the salvation message. Outreach, feeding the homeless, evangelistic

meetings—these are all for the sake of building relationship to build a bridge to someone for the sake of salvation.

We have:  
New believers classes  
Baptism classes  
Doctrinal small groups

These are all a part of it but not discipleship per say.

Future? What would this look like?

I do like what Rick Warren has done with “Purpose Driven Life” - practical assessment is great. Though we would have things look different than this.

CREATION health assessment (Allan wrote this)  
Purpose driven life assessment (Warren wrote this)

You must know where you’re at in order to go from there.

More quantifiable process of transformation

Growing Disciples - Beagle and Bear  
Growing Fruitful Disciples - [www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com](http://www.growingfruitfuldisciples.com)

I would combine all 3 assessments for here.  
These are all subjective. They are very helpful for self-analysis and introspection.  
Help people to reflect - we need to give people a place to start talking about their spiritual life.

We cannot turn this into a science but we help people, and have something to measure, for their spiritual growth.

**Do your church members know this process?**

We have drilled in our mission statement to our members. I do a series every year that gives focus to the mission statement.

We have really given focus to discipleship through this mission statement.

It’s not about information. We are barraged with information every day. I don’t think it’s about people saying: Have you started in outreach? Are you doing this? Or doing that?

Last year:  
“I am YG” - and if I am a part of this, I do these things.  
This gives a sense of identity.



“This is YG” - This is yours God. Examples of people living out the Great Commission, Great Commandment, Great Reward, Great Celebration.

We must not leave one person behind.  
The emphasis is on the lost.

\*\*See YG Sermon Schedule.

These are disciples.

Being a disciple is a form of **identity** and a form of **activity**.

Both matter!

Mission and contemplation.

This happens at the first of every year: a 4-6 part series.

We must share this mission focus every year. The temptation is that we think they got it, but we need to keep repeating it.

One area of discipleship to explore: How do we support spiritual growth of people online?

### **Attendance**

350-400 in house

1,000 people watching later rebroadcasts during the week

150-200 people watching online - live streaming

Vision statement—“*To be the preeminent, Adventist young adult ministry in the world.*”

This is not competitive or comparison based. But we need to strive. We need to aspire to resourcing others.

Go beyond the 99. Lost. - reaching out to all.

JFK - “We need to go to the moon!”

The nation needed it.

It caused the dreamers to dream and the nation to vision.

Something beyond ourselves.

### **Has your church prioritized distinct practices (disciplines) that relate to the discipleship process?**

You can try to beat your congregation over the head with, “You really need to do this...”  
“Every morning at 6am we need to be there!”

We try to put options before them that they can grab hold of.

We try to put materials before them that are assessable.

Every leader is expected to be mentoring someone younger than them.

**Younger Generation Church - A reminder that someone is always younger than us. Whether you're 9, 19, or 90 - there is always someone for you to mentor.**

Rich Carlson at Union College has his organizational chart inverted. He is at the bottom. He's not trying to reach out to the students, but to mentor and encourage the lead team.

The lead team's responsibility is to have their own team of individuals (to do social events, outreach, community care, production, etc.) and it's their responsibility to disciple and mentor those team members. In their team, they are to minister, mentor, and disciple the congregation at large.

**I expect the lead team to be:**

*mentoring someone younger than them*

*doing life together* (worship director has prayer with those leading - we do life together. It's not just about what's on stage).

*do for one what you wish you could do for everyone*—we have a congregation of 2100+. For the longest time in my ministry I've felt like I had to be there for everyone. This is a helpful, freeing concept from Andy Stanley. IF this philosophy becomes pervasive throughout the lead team, and their teams, and their people, then everyone is doing something for someone.

Decentralize the movement of Christ.

We are the hands and feet of Christ. Live this out!

There's a great movement when people understand they are the church.

This becomes a contagious cultural characteristic.

Matthew 25 -

Acts 2 - people like what they saw, thousands were added to the movement from what they saw.

“The Holy Spirit can bypass us. She doesn't need us.”

Jesus and the disciples - casting out demons. They're not with us! “If they're not against us, they are for us.”

ILLUSTRATION—as a parent. You want to involve your child in the process. God says, “I want you to be the agent. I want to use you in this.” God put this in us. This desire to serve, love, etc. This gets enlivened in us - for us to be who we are.

We get to be a part of the process.

**How does your church measure maturity?**

How do you measure when someone is ready to be a part of the lead team?

We really don't have that. There is nothing formal.

I don't think any of us are ready.

I really rely on spiritual discernment. The gut feeling. As we do life together with folks - I say, let's do it! We try it and sometimes it doesn't work. Then we switch where they serve.

We have periodic "Lead Team Open House."

We open up our lead team sessions and we will have 20-30 people join us. It gives us a sense of people who are interested in ministry.

A Volunteer Sign Up Form - passed out to all members.

We have them sign up for being involved in everything we're doing.

Our members can say, yes, I really enjoy this and then we put them in and help them lead.

It's very flexible.

Concise answers:

In the context of community, with a willingness for trial and error, I use spiritual discernment to see whether or not this person is ready to be on the lead team.

As to maturation of faith, with the context of grace orientation here, the trajectory of this is that when they mature to a certain point, then they become conceited. We cannot measure faith this way - this person is immature or mature.

To the degree that they are finding themselves more passionately devoted to Jesus, to the degree that they feel they are relying on Jesus through the challenges, struggles, temptations and addictions, then they are finding maturity in the matrix of grace.

A deepening devotion to Jesus tells me they are heading in the right trajectory. Growing.

This is a measure of their maturity:

Our mission is to deepen our devotion to Jesus Christ by:

- Pursuing INTIMACY with GOD...
- Experiencing COMMUNITY with each other...
- Inspiring those around us with the hope of GRACE.

**Is there anything that I did not ask about which is important to the local church understanding of discipleship and how it's lived out?**

Discipleship - through sermon outlines. People can fill them in during sermons.

I do a 360 review at the end of the year.

- Sermons
- Leadership

Meeting with Allan - give good feedback about what's going on. With their leadership and in the life of the pastor.

**Recommendations:**

I think we need to de-mystify discipleship. Every day we encourage or discourage people from being fans of the iPhone, or soccer, or football teams. We influence people for or against things based on our opinions, attitudes, or relationships all the time. This is discipleship.

De-mystify discipleship—we are doing it every single day!

When you do have an authentic encounter with God, face-to-face, in the Word, through prayer, he will wreck your life, and change your priorities. Every time this happened in Scripture the individual was now on a campaign of discipleship in their life.

Woman at the well - sharing with the whole town  
Pharisees and Saducees - calling out to crucify Jesus

Our goal is to have people encounter Jesus. If they encounter Jesus, then miraculous things happen.

Jesus' method is not standardized, its personalized!  
He dealt with Nicodemus and the Thief on the Cross differently! Our fingerprints are all unique and he treats us uniquely.

Our main point is to introduce them to the little bit of Jesus we know. To share the Jesus that's transformed our lives, then Jesus can transform their lives too.

One beggar sharing with another beggar where to find bread.

Our target still remains young adults, but now there are concentric circles around that bullseye who are welcome to minister, worship, and invest. We need to provide support.

Intergenerational ministry is called for and needed.

This generation wants the wisdom of older generations and to mentor younger generations.

We move away from previous models of ministry.

We need all the different generations working together to accomplish the ministry.

**If we don't intentionally make an effort to disciple and make way for the next generation, our ministry 'grows' older in our focus.** Something that was a collegiate ministry is now a young adult ministry, and then it becomes a young professionals' ministry, and then it becomes a ministry to young families. The ministry changes.

At some point we need to move into our "Yoda" Phase. They need to be at the forefront and on the front lines, while we share the wisdom.

“Open Door Ministry” was a young adult ministry and is now a ministry to 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s!

It’s easy to identify the cohort, instead of the target.  
We need to move the next generation, even if it’s not efficient or convenient.

Young adults will make mistakes and be late.

It’s painful to do this - to transition to someone else leading.

Lead team retreat.

“Trampoline park” - this sounds so awesome!

I was done before they were.

Discipleship can be looked at from the Ericsonian phases of life - in developmental theory you move through the different phases. Making choices that are very specific to that stage, then you move into the productive stage. **Apply what we’ve learned from developmental psychology to discipleship.**

We must move into opportunities to build **legacy**. Move from the full contact sport of ministry, to referring other individuals to take on those roles. I am no longer at the center point of ministry production. They take the forefront role.

Using Lombardian illustration of football.

They watch.

You include them.

You watch them.

Then you’re not on the field at all.

You’re letting them lead.

Then there are times when it varies.

This is the challenge we have in organizational structure.

Once we come into power, too often the power overcomes us, and we don’t pass it on.

Different phases of mentorship - this happens automatically and naturally many times.

**Recommendation:**

Beyond the clerk - really invest in membership data management system.

Know where young adults are.

Keep updated information.

Sometimes we don’t have a problem with discipleship, we just don’t know where they are.

In Fellowship - data management system.

The City - Zondervan

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## VITA

Name: Tara J. VinCross

Date of Birth: May 9, 1980

Place of Birth: Sonora, California

Married: October 5, 2003 to Caleb A. VinCross

### **Education:**

2000- Clinical Pastoral Education, Huguley Hospital

1998-2002- Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Minor in Biblical Languages,  
Southwestern Adventist University, graduating Summa Cum Laude

2005–2007- Masters of Divinity from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological  
Seminary, Andrews University, emphasis in Youth Ministry

2010–2014- Doctor of Ministry in Discipleship and Biblical Spirituality at the Seventh-  
day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University

### **Commissioned:**

2010 Commissioned to Gospel Ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church

### **Experience:**

2008–Present- Senior Pastor of the Chestnut Hill Seventh-day Adventist Church

2002-2005- Associate Youth and Young Adult Director, Washington Conference

2000-2001- Taskforce Assistant Pastor of the Orcas Island Seventh-day Adventist  
Church

1995-Present- Involvement in Youth Challenge (Youth Colportering Program) as  
Canvasser, Group Leader, Assistant Director, and Director (2002-2005,  
2009 through 2013)